

Interviewee: Dorothy Bell (DB)	Interviewer: Caroline Buck (CB)
Date of Interview: 22 October 2014	Ref: DG35-4-1-1-T

TITLE	DG35.4.1.2
REGION	Dumfries and Galloway
SUBJECTS/KEYWORDS	Moat Brae; Nursing; Family; Post-Office and shop;
COUNTY	Dumfries and Galloway.
TOWN	Lockerbie
DATE OF INTERVIEW	-
INTERVIEWER	Caroline Buck
YEAR RANGE	2000-
SUMMARY	<p>This interview focuses on Dorothy's early life growing up as a member of the family who owned and ran the village shop and post-office. Initially run by her grandmother, Dorothy and her family also lived in the accommodation adjoining the post-office. After doing well at school, Dorothy's father wanted her to go into a secretarial type of career. Dorothy felt a great pull towards nursing though and eventually her father saw how keen she was. She discusses how she worked in the local pharmacy as a 'Saturday girl', going on to become a cadet trainee nurse at Moat Brae. Dorothy talks about what was involved in this training and the daily routine of a cadet, living and working on site.</p>

DG35.4.1.2

Caroline Buck (CB)
interviewing
Dorothy Bell (DB)

CB: I'm here to interview Mrs. Dorothy Bell at [REDACTED], Lockerbie. Mrs. Bell where were you born, and if you don't mind when?

DB: I was born in Nineteen forty-five, and I was born in Glasgow.

CB: Where did you grow up?

DB: I grew up in Hightay a little village in Dumfries and Galloway.

CB: Where did you live in Hightay yes?

DB: I lived at the post-office at Hightay.

CB: Yeah and can you describe the house?

DB: The house was when mum and dad took it over from my grandmother it was two houses it was a house and a shop, but my parents changed it all and extended out the back and it was a very busy shop in the village.

CB: So everyone in the village came and ye knew everyone in the village.

DB: Yes, oh yes, it was the post-office as well and they had the local papers I collected them at the war memorial from the bus which arrived about half-past seven in the morning, so I would collect the papers for granny and granny did the shop then and then of course mum and dad took over when she retired. It was a very very busy shop it was the hub of the village but of course things changed with no public transport, people commuting had cars, there was a school there then which had three classes whereas now they only have I think about twelve or fourteen pupils.

CB: Yes yes, and did they also run a paper delivery service?

DB: Yes uh huh, they had paper boys and I was one of them! And we delivered papers throughout the village yes and the bread man came in the morning very early about five o'clock and people came in for their morning rolls.

CB: Indeed and so what would you set out on the paper round?

DB: I would set out about eight o'clock but had to be finished for half-past eight obviously to get to school.

CB: To get to school yes, and what age would you be when you?

02:35

DB: I would be about twelve it was just prior to going to secondary school that I did the paper round, yes, and then of course the bus came at half-past eight to collect us to go to Lockerbie Academy.

CB: Yeah indeed, so you went to school at Lockerbie Academy and what did you study there?

DB: [Sighs] Everything English, just secondary education English Maths Domestic Science Geography, the sciences, we took then it was o'levels they don't call them O' levels now I don't think?

CB: No they, yes it's GCSE's or standard grades I think in Scotland, it's all changed a lot. I mean did you have a career in mind when you were still at school?

DB: Yes I always wanted to nurse but my father wanted me to go into secretarial work so I didn't get a lot of encouragement about nursing, until he decided that you know I really had made up my mind that this was what I wanted to do.

CB: And then he was supportive?

DB: Yes, yes, so I worked as a Saturday girl at Laidlaw's the chemist in Lockerbie which was supposed to help me I suppose think about medicine and one thing and another.

CB: Yes learn about the drugs.

DB: That was just a Saturday girl, but very much a junior obviously.

CB: Yes yes but were you allowed to make up prescriptions?

DB: Yes, you were allowed to count the tablets and so on and so forth but Mrs. Noble was the pharmacist and very old school and very very strict, I suppose you had to be for everybody's safety but I really enjoyed that it was a bit of independence and yes I really enjoyed that.

CB: And would you be allowed to label the?

DB: No they were all hand written then and the pharmacists all did that. You literally got things off the shelf or if it were tablets that were being counted you would count them in the bottle but she would always check them very much so or you'd get a

packet off the dispensary shelf and put them beside the prescription ready for her to administer.

CB: Right. And can you recall what the medicines of that day what were the most popular?

05:06

DB: Yeah a lot of the medicines that are used now antibiotics lots of creams and potions but she made them up on a marble slab you know she would get two or three different creams and made up her own prescription, or the doctor would write the creams on the prescription and she would make them into one final cream.

CB: Oh interesting yeah.

DB: Whereas now you just get them in a tube she did them all manually, and cough mixtures she would mix up from a tincture and add this that and the other, yes.

CB: Yes 'cause I remember you know pharmacist there and in the windows they had these coloured bottles yes.

DB: Yes she had was quite an old-fashioned shop in the back very, I think she would be there a long long time. It was called Laidlaw's the chemist but she was Mrs. Noble, who to me then always looked old but whether she was or not I don't know she always looked very old! But a lovely lady.

CB: Yes you mentioned that your parents were supportive latterly about being a nurse were your teachers at school supportive and did they give you any career advice at school?

DB: I didn't no I can't remember getting career advice at school at all. I was, I always had good grades in the domestic sciences and the sciences, and history, English was my poor subject, but yeah I was always in the first sort of three in the class.

CB: Good good, but yeah so careers advice wasn't part of what they did?

DB: No not at all.

CB: Indeed, you know so where did you do your training when you left school?

DB: I worked in Laidlaw's the chemist for a short while and then I went to Moat Brae. At Moat Brae I was a cadet and we did basic assistant nursing you could call it it was the very basic, making beds changing beds attending to patients needs as in you know drinks and food and you were always supervised by a sister.

CB: When was that when did you go to Moat Brae initially?

DB: Early Sixty-one, yes I think it was February Sixty-one I went there.

CB: So you've said that you did kind of a lot of things under supervision but can you perhaps go through describe a day in the life of a cadet nurse?

08:08

DB: Yes, we lived in Twenty-six Castle Street we would wander round to start work at eight, we, on arriving the trays were all set for breakfast we would go down into the kitchen and get the food for breakfast it was already pre-ordered what each patient would be having and we would deliver that to the patients. We would help the patients if they needed help with their food, you know stand by them and help them, clear the breakfast tables away and just do all the normal things that you would do in nursing now, help to wash the patients and tend to all their needs. Theatre days there was always one of us in theatre, we would be scrubbing instruments very much in the background. After theatre we would have to scrub the walls and clean up in theatre, under supervision pack the tins for autoclaving you know for the next day and generally tidy up, of course all this was done under the supervision of the trained nurses, trained nurses were called sisters, they were possibly two of them on duty one upstairs and one downstairs every day, certainly yes on every shift. At lunchtime we would serve meals, just help with the everyday looking after the patients. We did some clearing up in the bed you know we would dust in the lockers and replenish the water jugs and after lunch we had a break and we would have our lunch about one o'clock patients would have theirs at twelve, we had our lunch downstairs in the dining room. We had a break either between ten and twelve or two and four and if you were an afternoon break you would have to go shopping for whatever needs there were you know whether it was matron or the patients needing something, although we were off duty we still had to do this, and we'd come back in the afternoon in time for afternoon tea we would serve afternoon tea. The patients had silver teapots and water jugs and we used to have to clean them out, a job I dreaded one of the patients had a canary we had to clean out this canary cage it was a dreadful job.

CB: [Laughs] And she had the canary in her room?

DB: In her room yes she loved this canary and it just made such a racket and it was not one of my favourite jobs!

CB: Can you remember what the canary was called?

DB: No, I was never interested enough to find that out!

CB: And you know so what about the laundry?

DB: The laundry was done by the night by the cadets at night, we, it had already been washed and dried in a drier but we would do the ironing on a roller iron and some patients didn't have anyone to do their personal laundry so we did that as

well. Yes it was quite hard on night-shift, you did quite a lot of domestic work really, again if there was theatre the next day we would do some preparation for theatre.

CB: So on day shift you started at eight in the morning and finished?

12:21

DB: And finished at eight at night.

CB: Eight at night right and night shift?

DB: At eight at night and finished at eight in the morning. But you didn't have an official break on night shift obviously you rested when you'd done your jobs but you were actually always on duty, you know if the bell rung you attended to all the patients needs. And especially after theatre day it was very very busy because the sister obviously was looking after the patients who would have their surgery or investigations that day so it was really very busy.

CB: Yeah, so how many nurses were there, sisters and cadets and?

DB: Cadets there were five cadets one on night-shift and four on days, and we rotated you worked four days four weeks on days and one week on nights so every fifth week you were on nights. The sisters there was a permanent night sister and the other sisters worked day shift there was one downstairs one upstairs and usually one would be between but always two sisters but sometimes three depending what was going on and how full the house was.

CB: So where did the cadet nurses stay?

DB: We lived in Castle Street in a dormitory there was four beds in a dormitory on the first floor. The ground floor was the gynaecology rooms where the consultants would see patients prior to possibly needing theatre or whatever. And on the basement was the caretaker for Moat Brae a man called Mr. Bratt, and he made sure that we were in on time etcetera because it was a time limit we had to be in at ten o'clock at night. And two sisters actually lived in, if you were a night shift you were on the next floor so that you got quietness during the day, to sleep.

CB: And what range of medical and surgical patients were there can you remember?

DB: There was lots of gynae ops, amputees, appendicitis, gallbladders, all lots and lots of different minor surgeries and some major surgeries. Some patients came in post-strokes and some were in long term, who were no longer able to look after themselves, yes.

CB: Yeah and the gynaecological part of it were babies born there?

DB: Not while I was there, no, I think in years before that had happened, my husband actually had a cousin who was actually born there but she is now not with us, but she was well in her eighties.

CB: Yes so that was some time ago, yes.

16:00

DB: So it was a long long time ago.

CB: So the gynaecological they wouldn't be doing caesarians there, no?

DB: No, no they did hysterectomies and D and C's and those sort of things.

CB: Indeed. Can you describe the layout of Moat Brae private hospital in the Nineteen sixties?

DB: Yes you come in the front door which had two pillars at either side big sandstone steps, as you entered the hallway on the right was a four bedded room, next to that was a five/six bedded room, next to that was matron's office then the lift shaft, a little ante-room prior to theatre and when you come back out of theatre there were four steps down, into a sort of long conservatory as it were, one side had I think two rooms where the domestic staff had the mess room on the other side it was like a wrought iron glass framework out through the end of that little corridor was the mortuary which was a wooden hut thing. Coming back to the front door on the left hand side was the sluice room and a little mess room. When you went forward in the hallway upstairs, quite a bend in the stairs to the right there was one room and then a sluice room and then a two or a three bedded room and then it was a door up to the next floor on that floor was matron's office and the domestic staff in-house domestic staff lived there. Beyond that door there was a tiny little corridor which was a little cupboard come little ante-room beyond that a further room which looked over the river, and in there we prepared teas, there wasn't a cook or anything but you know boiled kettles and things there come out of there and there was rather a big a large room, and two smaller rooms and then you're back to the stairs. Down in the basement there was a huge kitchen with a big incinerator as you walked in on the wall facing you to the right was a large incinerator and then a stove I don't know if it was an Aga or not but it was a large stove and coming back from the kitchen lots of storage space as I remember it on the left hand side.

CB: And was there a place downstairs for the nurses to have their meals?

DB: Yes, on the right hand side we had a dining room which was literally just a big table and chairs around and a trolley, we had all our meals there, breakfast lunch and supper when you were on duty when you were off duty if you were still if you hadn't gone home or you were still resident you would still come across for your meals at that time.

CB: Ah right right, and the laundry was downstairs as well?

DB: They laundry was downstairs but it was carried upstairs into the little nurses rest room if you like and there was a roller ironing autoclave thing that we did there.

20:18

CB: Did the ironing there. I think so the meals were made the cook was downstairs you know making the meals in the kitchen, so how were the meals delivered to the patients?

DB: We would go down and carry them up they were covered with a metal dome and we would cover them up and they would be covered up in the kitchen and we would carry them up to the relevant floor.

CB: Oh right so you weren't allowed to use the lift to take the meals up?

DB: No, no the lift was for patients.

CB: Keeping fit yeah keeping fit. How did the garden differ in the sixties from the present day?

DB: The garden as I recall was never used, Mr Bartt used to cut the grass and you often saw him with bits of hedges and things but I can't remember the garden being used as a flower garden or even as a productive vegetable garden I can't remember that at all, the only recollection I have of the garden is picking holly from a tree and I can remember going up the ladder to pick the holly and that was to decorate it near Christmas time.

CB: Right, so what was the food for both the patients and the nurses like at Moat Brae?

DB: The food for the patients was very good really, obviously a lot of patients had theatre so you know there was two or three days that the food had to be addressed to their needs but the food for the patients was adequate our food was, there wasn't a lot of it but it was fine it was ok.

CB: Did the junior nurses get up to mischief behind the sisters and the matrons back?

DB: Yes more in the nurses home because they were very strict you had to be in by a certain time and we used to not stand on the third step because it creaked, you walked up two steps and missed a step so's that nobody heard you.

CB: You could sneak in!

DB: One of the sisters was getting on in years and was very Victorian I think you could say she was quite strict whereas one of the other sisters was very modern and yeah you could.

CB: So what when you were sneaking in at night where did you normally go in Dumfries?

23:13

DB: We used to go to the Unionist Rooms to dances and apart from that we didn't go out a lot 'cause you had your two days off so you were at home and you used to socialise when you were at home really, you were just so tired when you come off duty at eight o'clock.

CB: After twelve hours.

DB: You know you really, we made our own enjoyment you know in Castle Street in the home really.

CB: Yeah so what did you do of an evening when you?

DB: We used to play cards and dominoes and tell stories about what we'd done on our days off and how difficult things had been in that day you know, how many tellings off we'd had for not getting the right tray to the right patient!

CB: [Laughs] Was that a common occurrence sort of being told off because you hadn't done yes?

DB: Yes things had to be done properly there was no nothing was slapdash nothing it was, looking back it was very good training for your nurse training because there was a right way and a wrong way and it had to be done the right way.

CB: Yeah, and they were checking all the time were they?

DB: Oh yes yes. I meant the sisters had different ways of checking, you know a sister one of the sisters the younger sister would say well I think we should do it this way whereas the older sister it was very you do it this way and only this way there was no compromise at all. But very good grounding for anyone well usually all of us were going on to do our training so it was very good grounding for that.

CB: Yeah. So where did you go subsequently after your training at Moat Brae?

DB: I went to the Crichton to do my psychiatric training. I worked as an assistant nurse until I was old enough to start my training, that would be about four or five months.

CB: Yeah so you did your training at the Crichton?

DB: The Crichton yeah.

CB: Are there any other recollections from your time at Moat Brae, indeed any memories of your interesting life you would like to share?

DB: We were quite a family really, you depended on one another quite a lot, we didn't get a lot of pay so towards the end of the month we were quite hard up

26:02

and yes you obviously warmed to some more than the others but yeah it was, we were all friendly to one another you know there was no arguments or, you were living quite close together but we all got on yes.

CB: You remember it as a good time of your life?

DB: Oh yes.

CB: Can you remember roughly how much you were paid?

DB: Seven pounds something a month I think it was. I can remember near the end of the month we wore nylons then and I can remember near the end of the month you would have to repair them you would have to sew them which was very difficult, you couldn't darn them!

CB: To make them look right!

DB: Very stiff collars and starched aprons and you know the aprons had to be just so.

CB: And on your heads?

DB: On our head we had a hat which was made out of a piece of material like a pillowslip and you had to fold it into all different.

CB: Wow gosh and had they have to be fresh every day or would they?

DB: The hats if you were very careful they would last two days but we had clean aprons morning and afternoon, yes.

CB: Wow, changed times indeed.

DB: And you had cuffs as well, and very stiff belts with studs and studs on your collar, a stiff collar with a stud on it.

CB: Were you aware of it being uncomfortable?

DB: If you were in theatre scrubbing yes it was you know if, you had to work hard in theatre it was, yeah it was.

CB: Full on.

DB: Yes they could be very hot then because obviously when theatre was going on we were very much in the background we were working but we were very much in the background you weren't near the patient or all the goings on you were in the background making sure that as the instruments came you washed them and then they went to be sterilised.

28:34

CB: And presumably you had to be very quiet doing that?

DB: Yes. I can remember once we didn't have a swab count as you do now there was a big plastic a rubber sheet, and you had to count the swabs and I can remember somebody asking how many swabs were there and I said I think there's thirty-four and I was severely reprimanded you don't think you make sure, so after that I always made I never used the word think!

CB: *[Laughs]* Well that was really really interesting thank you very much for sharing all of that thank you.

29:25