

Interviewee: Hugh Reid	Interviewer: Nancy McLucas
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Mr Reid, you said there was a murder in the Backrampart, was this when you were a boy?

A boy, yes. Well, this man wis the rent collector and here he went a-missin an they didnae know who done the murder, but years later on these people in the Backrampart - they were Irish people - and they more or less got the blame o killin him, but they couldn't prove it. And when this Irishman died, the horse and the hearse...came doon the Backrampart and they put the coffin in the hearse an the horses wouldn't pull it. The horses went down on their knees. So Andy McClelland, he took the horses back out and he marched them to the top o the Backrampart and then marched them back down again, locked them back into the hearse, but still they refused it. After that, I don't know how - ah, mean A wis young then - they got him away, or took him away. But later on, my father...and mother stayed up in one of the rooms with my Uncle Alec. And here, one night - he worked on the oyster boats, my father - he woke up in the bed. And he'd only my brother at the time, Robert, and here he felt th[is] weight in his legs an he got up [...] an here, it wis the man that hid got murdered. It was his ghost, or spirit or something. So, he never said anything. He said, 'I couldn't say anythin to your mother because we hid no place to go, because we'd hae cleared out'. So, he says, '[I used to be up at] night-time and I watched him walkin from the mantel-piece to the door'.

The ghost of the murdered rent collector?

Yes, he used to walk back and forrit. And, he said, my mother was telling a lady one time about one of the girls [...] of the same family, and she hid been in the room across fae where they lived and she was chased out of the room...by the ghost of the man.

Was this before you were born?

No, no. I wis only about seven years old at the time. And, my father's brother used tae come up for him at five o'clock in the morning, for tae go down tae the boat. So this morning he come up and he got crushed in the stairhead. He telt me father, he said, 'I'm not coming back up here again' he says, 'Whoever got me gave me an awful squeezing on the stair head'... So this man John Higgins, he'd been comin up the Backrampart an the same thing happened to him. He got crushed too. And they have a good idea who done the murder but they couldnae blame it on the person. But they knew, my mother and my father, they knew who done the killing.

Is that building away now?

I don't know if that building is away or not, down there at the Backrampart. There used to be a big stone at it. I used to hear them talkin about the big stone.

Did anybody every call the police or the doctor or anybody like that?

Well, in them days...they wir desperate days. I heard my father talkin about them. They made a law o their own. There was a man called Stuart...and they all carried guns. Old poachers. And they made their own law... But, the police wid come mibby...they weren't the same as this present day. They hadnae the same thing to protect murders and they were more or less jist policemen, they werenae detectives.

And when you were a wee boy, did you every feel this ghost about where you were living?

It niver bothered me, anyway. There was only one [it bothered], my father. It didn't bother with our family.

...It didn't bother your mother?

My mother used to tell me about when my father had a good drink in him an he used to mainly lie out on the street, at the door. And as just as far as my memory cries me back, a woman called Melanie Higgins...she said she could hear this thing dancing round about ma father where he was lying [there]. This thumping about wi a boot. And she said, many a time she thought he'd be kicked to death. She had been lookin at him in the morning, an he was alright... Whatever this thing was that danced round about him and you could hear the thumpin about. And we thought...lyin drunk, there he'd be kicked tae death, but he wis alright. But the spirit never bothered our family but it bothered the other family, the Irishmen. It bothered them.

Have you any idea why he was murdered. Was it because he was the rent collector [and he had money]?

Yes, he was the rent collector ... and he had the money. That's what it was...

...And, was the rent collector a local man?

I believe he was. I heard his name an all...I don't know if it wis McClelland they called him, or something.

There must have been an investigation?

Aye, there wid be, yes, but they never found out who done the murder anyway. But the people that lived there, they had a good idea who done it. Because the ghost was there anyway, the spirit was there. And still my Uncle Alex lived in that room, it never bothered him. An he lived there for years. An he saw it umpteen times, and it niver bothered him. After my father got another house and it still lived in the house, and it wouldn't leave the house - and it never bothered him.

Now you know some other ghost stories?

Oh yes, aye. Well, I tell you the truth this was what happened to my father. He was courting ma mother at the time and it was up where the Galloway Creamery is now. It was just barren land then - that was before my time. And he worked on the oyster boats and he always carried a big knife then, for openin the oysters. And that this night they were lying on the bank across fae the old nursery... There was a nursery up there, where the big grocer's shop is now. Jist wild country, and they were lying on the bank and he seen this fellow comin across from the nursery an he said, 'I looked at him. I thought he had been watching me, what I was doing'. So, he says, 'I got up and walked forrit and [this man] walked across the road and I kept followin behind him.. An just when I got to the hedge, I was gonna put the knife in him' Oh, yes, in them days they didn't care. They aa carried knives and guns. An then, he said, as he got to the hedge, [sound of the wind whooshing] a whoosh of wind. 'I knew then what I'd tackled' he says. 'I happened to [have] this half bottle o whisky...had in my pocket and drank it' he says. And, he says, '[I] and knew I'd tackled something beyond my means', he says.

And had he any idea who this person was?

He never said who it was, but he said it was unearthly anyway.

But not somebody he knew...like the rent man?

No, nothin like that. At the same place years ago, I was thirteen or fourteen then, George McMillan and me wir poachin wi dogs an we killed a few rabbits an that. And we used to hide them an then go back at night-time an get them, ken, tae avoid the police. So this night, here's a man about forty or fifty years of age, and, we went

away out to get these rabbits an come in... An when we come in we walked down past the Creamery, just the same bit, an here we heard this chain rattling. [George] said, it must be one of the farmer's dogs who'd broke away [an] it wis trailin the chain behind it. So, anyway, when we got down a wee bit further this chain got closer and closer tae us till we got to near where it stopped. I jist remember it was a dog, about that height, an its eens were blazin. An this man and me, he said, 'Run for your life, if you run tonight'. And we ran right down to Pritty Mill Close and he told his wife about it, what we'd seen, this dog. It wis the size o a cuddy... I had an idea it was the devil, that's what it was. It was unearthly. It was a bad place the Galloway Creamery. They said that, up there at that nursery there. I've heard men saying that before.

So where the Creamery is now was a place that was haunted? ...Had something happen[ed] there that made it a bad place?

I couldn't say if anythin happened there before, or no. I wis workin with [a] man called Willie Pirrie, an he was kinda [foreman] for the toon, and he heard me telling this story to some chap when we were workin up there. And he said, 'Who told you that?' ...I says, 'Ma father'. And then he believed me, because he'd seen the same thing...at the same place.

Any more?

Yes. Well, one night there wis, Malcolm Hughes, [...] Tunnock and myself an we were poaching. An we'd been in the Approach there, early, at six o'clock at night and we came back out again.

The Approach?

Yes, Culhorn. And we got a good few rabbits. And we came out there at the Wee Aird, Loves of the Wee Aird. There were no houses or nothin else then, just the barren ground. So Malcolm went in tae get a flask, an somethin tae eat. So this chap and me, we went to the back of hedge...it was a cold night. So I said, 'Give me a knock when big Malcolm comes out'. So I was lying at the back o the dyke. He went, 'Hey. Hey'. 'What?' 'Look at this', he says. Comin up McMasters Road, this lady wis dressed in pure white, jist walked right up the road, about from here to the window. Passed us there, right round the Loves of the Wee Aird and away down by Cairney's Corner. And I said... 'Don't tell to Malcolm when he comes out. He'll say we're scared, we're feart'. So we never mentioned it to him. So, we got on to the bikes, Malcolm came out and we went down to the shore and up round Archie Douglas's farm, up the hill, an we went in to Balker...to poach. An here, this chap, when we're pittin the nets out, he says, 'Mind thon woman we seen?' 'Aye'. 'When we went through Archie Douglas's farm there', he says, 'She passed between your bike and mine, right through the farm'. He says, 'I seen her again'.

Who was this?

I don't know, don't know who she was.

So you've seen quite a few apparitions?

Oh, yes.

...are you the seventh son of the seventh son or something like that?

No. I don't know what I am... Ma brother...he was a man like that. He could hae seen things. He could have told you any place where there wis evilness.

There were never good ghosts then?

No, no... Well I'll tell you a story about my brother, an his wife an all knew this was

the truth. This is no lie or nothing. Him and me had a good drink, it was Hogmanay time. And we came up tae his house, and the two brothers, McDowalls they called them - the one was dead and he was great mates with him - and one stayed his self. So he left his wife and me together, and he said 'I have to go along and wish Peter a Happy New Year now'... They lived along John Simpson Drive. Here, he went along and [when] he come back, he was due sober. His wife said, 'Be God, you weren't long sobering up, boy.' 'Jean', he says, 'I'm gaun tae my bed, an don't waken me the night, please.' She said, 'That's funny. There must be somethin wrong wi him. I don't know, Hogmanay an gaun tae his bed.' So a long while after it, I asked Jean, did he ever tell ye what happened that night. She said, 'He did, and you ask him an he'll tell you the same thing.'... 'He said he went along to see the brother an when he went in, he sat down beside the brother and they had a drink. And, he said, they had two or three drinks and he said, 'You know, about ten minutes after it the other brother was sittin beside me, that was dead.'... It sobered him up. He could...see death. He could tell you anything, he was gifted that way. He was very strong. He went once into my brother's house tae drink...and he went in the door. He says 'I'm not comin into this house, boys.' He said to my brothers, 'This is an evil house boys.' Evil - I thought they were goin tae fight. 'Don't tell me that my house is evil.' Well, his wife was an awful woman for cursin an swearin. His wife said some terrible things. I didnae like her. The language that she used, ye ken, was bad... This woman up the stair, her daughter worked in the George Hotel, and she said they heard the row last night down there 'with your brothers, your brother telling them it was an evil house'. But, she said, 'That's funny, for my daughter was going out at five o'clock in the morning, goin to her work, and she said when she went out a little lady walked up the steps with her - to the road - and [so] she turned and came back and battered on the door to get back, in again.

And who was this?

I don't know, couldnae say who it was. My brother...he could have told you something, he seen things. Sometime he scared me myself. I said, 'Don't start that again, boy.' Well, this is true. He was in the Navy, and he was in the...convoys going to Archangel and he was in the first trip, and he was in the second trip. He wrote a letter to his wife from the ship and told her he was goin to be torpedoed at a certain time. [The] night he wid be torpedoed. And he wrote the letter and sealed it and said to all the men, 'I'm gettin all my clothes ready for whenever we're hit.' She kept the letter, and on that day and date, that night, he was torpedoed. ...He survived [and] they fished him out of the water. But he knew the day it was going to happen, and she kept that letter for a long time, and showed it to people. How did he know the night he was going to be torpedoed? An he knew, he told the men in the boat, he said, 'We'll get hit at a certain time.' And they just laughed at him, and they did get hit.

You never were tempted, in that case, to put money on the horses...if your brother could see what was happening.

No, he wasnae a gambler. He never bothered with horses or gambling or playing cards...He might have took a drink and that. ...

It was really unpleasant things that he saw.

He was a great man for a joke an that, but...he seemed he could feel where there was danger some places. He had that kin o inclination, that there was danger about

some place.

Have you any more stories?

Ma faither...in his day there wis some evil things done. My mother used to tell me about these things that people [did]. There was a man called Stewart and that, and they just took the law into their own hands, an they all carried guns. They mair or less made their own law. An he was sayin one night, he wanted to do a bit poachin about the Dochra moor. And he had to walk up the railway line, and he had the dog with him for chasin the rabbits into the net, [the dog] didn't catch them it just chased them in. And he went up onto the line at the Galloway Creamery to walk up the line to come out at the viaduct... He had to walk up the viaduct then, and out to get tae the woods to poach. An, he said when he was a good bit up the line he heard this man walkin, comin down the other way. And he thought maybe it was a surface-man. He said the dog was on that side...and the dog was very vicious. If anybody [did anythin] he would have went for them. The man was walking in the middlest sleepers, so you could hear them being tramped down. He said, 'The man passed me by and I never even seen him'.

Now this would be on the old Portpatrick line?

Yes, that's right. He says, the dog never noticed or touched him. If he'd been a gamekeeper the dog would have went for him right away. The dog just ignored him... He could hear the footsteps. He thought it was maybe the surface men working on the railway line. He said, 'I never saw anybody'. [That wis] at the same bit, at the Creamery again.

Now there is some story about Cairnryan Road?

That was a story that was a story that was told to ma father. ...My father was a fisherman and...my mother's mother had told her about this man Dr Orgle, who was a doctor. And he always went oot at night time, and the horses were shod wi rubber and the coach was shod wi rubber, so you couldn't hear them. And they said if there had been anybody on the road...they would have picked you up and you were took to Dr Orgle, and he experimented on you. An he said that they were coming back from the fishing, and they had to leave their boats at Ballantrae and had to walk back into Stranraer. You see they were sailing boats in them days. And he said he met this stallion driver with the horse, and he kent my father and his brother. He said 'Will you be passing by the house, Joe, the night.' 'Aye.' 'I wonder if you would go in and see if the daughter is alright.' He says, 'She wasn't just keeping [the best of health in] her head and all that'. And his wife was dead. So [they] said that [they] would call in and see her. So they went and knocked on the door and she was there, the girl. They went in and she made them a cup tea and they weren't long in till the coach drew up at the door. [They] heard him. And, he said, 'If we hadn't been in they would have got their hands in, but [they] flew back up the road with the horses. Dr Orgle.

Dr Who?

Dr Orgle. Dr Orgle they called him. She was telling me once what her mother had told her. Paddy Cooke and [them] they used to play cards. It wasn't for money, it was for hens, at Whitelees. She said we had to go and look for Paddy, and we got him and fetched him back. And we came into the town and seen the coach, and she says to Paddy, 'Paddy, son, if you've ever run in your life - run tonight.' An they ran down into Princes Street, and if they hadn't have gone into Princes Street they'd

have got them too. Seems the same as Burke and Hare you see. I always remember the name, Dr Orgle...

And did he live in Stranraer?

...Yes, and the coach worked in Stranraer too. It was shod with rubber and the horses feet were shod with rubber too, [so] that you couldn't hear them.

Did nobody ever do anything about this?

I couldn't say, mistress, to tell you the truth. But, ma mother told me things that her mother told her, and you couldn't really believe the things that really happened.

Because they made their own law, she says.

...Now we are in Mr and Mrs Jack Findlay's house and Mrs Findlay has remembered another ghost story that her father told her. Annabelle?

Right, this happened round about the time of the First World War. In Hanover Street there was a shoemaker and his son went, I think he went around the beginning of the First World War, and he was subsequently killed. Now, my father told me that people would not walk past that shop at night because they could see the image of this young man on the screen of the shop inside. The shoemaker had taken on an assistant and, because there was a basement in the building, the young man went down into it and came back up and protested that [the shoemaker] already had someone employed. When he described the person in the basement, who at that time he saw him was wearing uniform, the old man said that was his son who had been killed, I think, probably about a year before. But, it was a well-known story in Stranraer because the majority of people of my father's age were too frightened to go past.

Thank you. And you have another story?

When I worked in the telephone exchange, latterly I trained girls. And I was up in this room at the top of the building training girls, and when they finished their day's work they would go and I would be left to clear up all the paraphernalia. Now, I knew about the ghost [McGibney's ghost] but it had never bothered me. I never thought anything about it until this day in winter which, by that time it was dark. I heard heavy feet on the stairs, thought nothing of it, and saw the door handle turn, and I thought, 'Right, okay, who's coming to bother me now.' And I went over to the door and opened it and there was no-one there at all, no-one on the stairs. [I] went down to the exchange, and when I said to them, no-one had left the switchroom. So I must have experienced a ghost. It was a creepy experience.

Now back to Mr Reid.

Mrs McMillan and me, we were great friends with her husband and we visited them a lot. She had a son on the boat, David McMillan.

This is the Princess Victoria?

She was always complaining about her hands being cold, Mrs McMillan, and I said 'I'm going to buy you a pair of gloves.' I was going to buy these gloves at all costs, they weren't dear in those days, but I would get her a pair of gloves for her hands. So I went away to some place and I got the gloves, black gloves, and I said 'There's the gloves I got you.' So she put the gloves on and I thought on after. That's when the *Victoria* went down, a fortnight after it. And she lost her son on it. And that was a coincidence, me buying the black gloves. I thought on it after that...now there you are, me buying a pair of black gloves for her and there's her son David drowned on the boat. Now, what made me buy her a pair of black gloves.

And any other colour would have done.

I thought on it after it, I never mentioned it to her, there you are. I went and bought that woman a pair of black gloves and there's her son lost on the boat, David. It was a kind of coincidence...me buying a pair of black gloves, never bought her anything else but a pair of black gloves, the lady. She lost her son after it on the boat, David.

...Another story?

This was the murder caused...through in Black's pub at the Cross yonder, Petrucci's got it now. And they were all in joking. They were all poachers, with their guns an their dogs. And one happened to say to Jimmy Douglas, 'They tell me your father is leaving the house to Jock.' 'Oh no, he cannae leave the house to him, I'm the oldest son.'... 'Well' he says, 'he's leaving the house to him. He's the man getting the house.' 'Oh, well. I'll see about that.' So he went up [to see] and the old man, [who] was in the house. He says, 'Father, what about this house?...They tell me you're leaving the house to Jock.' 'No, son, I'm no leaving the house to nobody. I never mention these things'. He says, 'If anybody gets it, you'll be the yin.' 'Oh no, father,' he says. An he took the gun like that, out, an blew the old man's head off. And then he just stepped back, like that, and below his own chin - and blew his head off his self. And Jock, he cleared out to Drummore, never came back. That was the murder in Glebe Street.

When was that?

Oh, that was before my time. My father knew all about it. And the old house, when we were boys we were used to this man coming in and it was only just the ruins. It wasn't worth any money, it was just ruins of a house in them days. He used to come in and red it up, and clean it up, and tidied it up - the old ruins - and then he walked away back to Drummore.

That's some walk.

Aye. He thought nothin of it.

[31m29s]

Mr Reid, you had some experiences with poaching when you were younger. Tell me about it?

Yes. Well, when I was a boy in [Lowe] Street the old men came back from the First World War. They came back to nothin, but they were poachers before they went tae the War and I used to go the messages for these three brothers, who were poachers. And through time I grew up, I was fourteen and we shifted up to Murrayfield Gardens and the same men moved up into the new houses, and one was called Pat Halliday. He was a great poacher, and the other brothers were poachers. So, I thought I would start the poaching too. So, I asked Pat if he would learn me the poaching and he said, 'Certainly, I'll take you out tonight'. ...So I went with Pat out that night and he showed my how to run a net out. The net was 120 yards long.

Was this in the loch?

No, no, in the fields, rabbiting. ...Aye, we run the net out 120 yards long, and he showed me how to put the gibbs in and how to put the pins in. And after we had it all pinned up we went down into the field an we chased the rabbits in. And Pat showed me how, when the rabbits was in the net, how to take them out, how to keep their heads clear...and then break their necks and then take them out and lay them down with their bellies turned up white. So I went in...and I had the bag and I was carrying

the rabbits and putting them in the bag, and then Pat showed me how to take the pins out after we got the rabbits out. So we went on to the next set and we did the same again... We got about sixty rabbits anyway, for the night. He showed me how to gut them, and we hid them. You see Pat couldn't ride a bicycle, he had to walk. Well, but I had a bicycle, and I fetched the net in and I went down to [REDACTED] the butcher in the mornin and I told him I had so many rabbits. And then he run me out in the van and we lifted the rabbits up and came into town wi them. [REDACTED] weighed them and he gave me the money for them, an a list what they come to. So I went up to Pat, and Pat was in his bed, and I told him, 'That's the money for the rabbits, Pat.' Well Pat would count the money out, he would give me 7/6d and he kept 2/- off for his nets. And I would go home and give my mother five shillings and I kept the other because I wanted to buy a net of my own, for I'd get a fair share then. So at the finish up I got a net of my own, and Pat and me would work on the two nets then, and [so] we're getting more rabbits. And things were going fine there, and I was doing well with a night's poaching, because there wis no work. I wis always handin in money to the house, to keep the house going. To keep us living. But the risk was with being caught. You knew you were going to get the jail.

Where did you do this?

In the [Mark] road. After we got the two nets we were hunting in the [Mark] road and then wherever the winds took us. Maybe inside the Inch there, inside Balker hills there, or the Cairn hills, or the Chlenrie hills, or Dunskey at the Port. After that Pat took ill, Pat died. So I got in tow with another two chaps, George McMillan and Tommy Cope. So these fellows weren't caring where they went. So this night we went on to Dunskey with the three nets, and we had the three nets. I knew all the ground, with Pat showing me where we were working. So, we put the nets out that night, three nets, and we had the most rabbits I've had. We'd nearly 400 rabbits that night. We were getting sixty and seventy in each set, that was wi three nets, of course.

Did you sell them?, to the butcher?

Yes, [REDACTED] the butcher got them.

He must have known they were poached?

Oh, he knew they were poached. He knew they were poached rabbits. But he wouldn't care, as long as he got the rabbits, what way they come. Because he was buying all the poachers' rabbits. ...The farmers in them days, they knew a poacher wouldn't touch their hens. If ever you stole the hens from the farmer that was a blot against you with the poachers. They knew if poachers were round about the farm they never lost anything. A poacher would never kill a man's hens, or [steal] from him. They were honest in that way. They got what they wanted, the rabbits. The farmers knew that from poachers [then]. In a way they were happy too, because round the [rigs] the rabbits were eating an awful lot of the corn...

But, what we used to do then, maybe I'd hae went to maybe some place to harvest... A big estate, the likes of Dunskey. I went up there, and my brothers would have went to some other place. And we got to know the lay of the ground, you see. But if we'd ave went ourselves, on a bicycle through the day, the keepers [would ave] seen us and they [would] know we were spotting the ground. But when we were harvesting there, then they would expect that. We knew all the ground, we knew how to get in and how to come out. At the turn there that's up at the Chlenrie,

we were up there one night - poachers with three nets - and we had nearly 400 off it too.

Did you get rid of all 400?

Yes, they couldn't get enough rabbits in those days. You only got...about 6d a piece for a rabbit, a shilling a couple. That's all they gave you, but still it was a lot of money. Because in them days, when you were working the fields there, you were only getting about 5/- a day. But you see, if you had ten rabbits there that was always a days' pay for you. But we never went to the extent to go too far. We got what done us and we always had the risk of getting off the ground quick you see. If you had waited too long on the ground, you could have been caught.

Were you ever caught?

No, never caught, I was lucky. I was running clear the whole time.

Did you ever go for things other than rabbits?

Yes, we went for fish and everything, salmon. And we went for pheasants, but you had to have a gun. But I was never inclined to go with these men with guns, because [there] were desperate men with guns. And they would have shot people and thought nothin o it. Because they were wild men. Stewart there was a wild man. Stewart there was a man with a gun, he was a gun man. And he always carried it in his jacket, a sawn-off shotgun. And he had been at the Port, Portpatrick, at a ploo in match. And Stewart was a well-known man, and [a] desperate man. An the farmer's told Stewart this day at the ploo in match, 'Stewart, you had better watch today because there is a man coming down here...he's from the north of Scotland, and he's goin to take you...in bits'. Stewart said, 'No keeper'll ever take me'. So, my father told me this, the ploo in match started and any hares that caught under the ploo, Stewart shot them. Well, as he did this, this keeper stepped out, 'Ha, Ha', he says, 'I've got you at last, boy.' 'Got me? Get out of the road or I'll shoot you too', Stewart said. My Uncle Joe said, 'For God's sake...don't touch him. If you dae shoot him, you'll be took for murder. You'd be hung.' 'Alright' he says, 'You've saved him'. [But Stewart] turned round and got the butt o the rifle, and he smashed the keeper's head in with it... He nearly killed the man! And the man came out after about six months in the hospital, and he was coming down past The Cross and most of the poachers were standin there. They knew him. And he came down - Stewart got eighteen months of the jail for that - an when the man come down past he seen ma Uncle Joe and he said, 'Boys, I must thank you for saving my life...I never thought he was a man like that,' he said. ...He sat down and he thanked them, and he said, 'If that's the kind of man you've got in Stranraer poaching I'm going back home to where I come from.' And the man cleared out. But the thing that Stewart did there, was desperate...

So you didn't want to be involved with the shooters?

No, not wi guns, because I got entangled wi a fella, [REDACTED] Logan, an I was out wi him. We were goin tae shoot something anyway, rabbits or pheasants, whatever you could get your hands on. So we went oot an it wis at the Red Brig out there, and here there was a peewit or something in the field. And who came down the road but the gamekeeper...Allison the gamekeeper, on a bicycle. And he knew Logan. And, he said, 'Right Logan I'm taking the gun off you.' And [Logan] held the gun up at him. And this chap, McMillan, came doon past [then], with his horse and cart and his wife. He was a dealer - a hawker, and he knew me. He said, 'Right boy jump into

this cart come on, come away out of that.' He thought [Logan] was going to shoot the gamekeeper. But I don't think he shot the gamekeeper, because I was away. But it could have been murder, he would have shot him. He was a tailor to Provost Dyer, this man. He'd one leg, he was on crutches, an he used tae poach with dogs. He never poached wi long nets, but he poached with dogs. Catchin rabbits. He done it more or less just for sport, ken, he had a good job.

What was the difference between nets and dogs?

Och, well, they just kept the dogs, well mibby tae get a rabbit there for the pot. You kept a good dog there, maybe on a Sunday or that, for a bit of sport. But you couldn't make a living off a dog. Some of them just kept them to get a rabbit for the pot, something to eat you see...

Tell me about the salmon poaching?

Aye, well, the salmon poaching was a different thing altogether there. I was only there three times but when you were caught at it you knew you were going to get a long stretch in the jail. And there was no excuse if you were caught, because the gamekeepers there, they weren't caring what they done. And if you put up a fight there, they could have killed you. But, John there he was a great man for the salmon, my brother John. And, John, I remember, he went too far. He's away down in England now. They went out and they never stopped. When they maybe got ten or twelve salmon, they wanted one hundred salmon, greed. And then they come and...handed one into the house and he would tell me how many he got, and these other three chaps along with him. But, you see, with the salmon, you had to go into the water and you had to get across there, and it was a risky business too.

Where did they do this?

At New Luce. There was the Minister's Pool. And that big pool at the viaduct at Glenluce, in there too. John knew all the holes right up that bank there. And some of the chaps went down as far as Ballantrae, to the rivers Stinchar an that. John and them, they went oot o place with it because they got in tow with these men and, here, they were away out this night and they got about twenty-four or thirty salmon that night. And here, they had them in the house, and they set off to go in to [REDACTED], at Newton Stewart. He bought the salmon, [REDACTED]. And their wives and aa in the car. And when they got to the viaduct, somebody had seen them carryin the salmon out of the house, and when they got the length of Glenluce the police was waiting on them, and they were all caught.

What happened to them?

I just forget how they got on but I knew they were all caught, an they lost the lot.

Did your father ever do anything like that?

My father, no. He wouldn't go in to the poaching. He worked on the boat. He was a sea-faring man, but he always told me, 'If ever you are caught mind you boy, don't look to me for help.' He said, 'You don't need to do that.' But I was daen alright at it, and getting a shillin or two. And I just kept at it, because there was no work.

How long did you carry on doing this?

I carried right on till the War started, and then I was called up for the War. And after I came back from Burma I started back up again at the poaching, an that was with George McMillan and Tommy Cope... We just carried on then till myxomatosis came in and we had to stop.

Is that what stopped you poaching eventually?

Aye. We would never have stopped poaching, because it was easy money for us, ye ken. An when I started at first it was very strict, the gamekeepers watched a lot. But at the last, they hadn't many keepers on the estate. They wouldn't pay them to do the work.

So, tell me, and without giving anything away, are there people still poaching?

No...I don't think there will be anybody poaching now. Because, if there is anybody at the salmon the now, they know what's in front of them. It's a severe stretch in the jail. It's two year or three year. So I don't think that they bother doing it now.

And they don't poach rabbits any more?

No...but I know, I don't want to go into details, but I knew people that wis poaching salmon. And I could have got them all the jail, and they were well-to-do people...because they were farmers. And, I just, unexpectedly – ...I was workin, wi Stair Estates at the time – and I seen a thing that I shouldnae hae seen. ...I happened to open this freezer. I couldn't believe it, it was packed full of salmon. And I knew that if Lady Stair had knew that, they had been doing that, they wouldn't have been five minutes on the farm. They would have been out. They werenae worried about rabbits, as long as you didn't touch the pheasants or the salmon. It still went on in the country.

So you did the salmon two or three times but you just didn't like it?

No, the only thing in its favour was getting a stretch in the jail, you could get about two year. Oh, no... The men that tried you there was most of the men that was buying the rabbits... In my opinion they didn't want you in the jail. They wanted you out working for them. You got more out working for them, because they were buying the rabbits.

Was it not very dangerous?

No it wasnae dangerous. The only danger ever I seen was the chap, I wasn't there, an...there was three of them. And they mostly worked about the Inch poachin, but never worked about the Portpatrick side. And they'd begun to do this set anyway with the nets, there was three of them. And they always used to carry this big pin pocket, for your pins for your net, inside there [close to the body]. Well, this night this chap, it was a high bank, and he jumped over, and the pin went right up through there...through his neck and the side of his face. The pin was all pointed, and it went right up through his chin. And they had to rush him back to the Garrick Hospital to get the pin taen oot. ...He survived it, he got over it. [But] you had to be careful with the pins. You couldnae [be] jumpin here or jumpin there wi them in your pocket. If they'd gone out through you they could ave killed you.

Where did you get the stuff to poach with? [The nets and the pins.]

We went out there tae a wee place at Cairnryan, the glen there. It wis hazel pins we used, you cut them the length of your arm. We measured them and cut. And then after we cut them, we pointed them. And you always had plenty of pins and then you put them up the side of the chimley and it hardened them. And they never broke, these hazel pins, but you always had plenty of pins. Plenty of pins to put in the nets.

So you made your own?

Yes, we made our own, but the nets that we bought came from Kilburnie. ...30/- it was then for a net, a long rabbit net. Setting 120 yards, so that would give you ten yards for slack, the slack to run it back in again. If the rabbit net was tight the rabbits

hit it an just bounce back off it, but when the slack was regulated right they got entangled in it and just lay there till you took them out, ye see. [laughter] It wis a great life, the poaching.

...These poachers...they all stuck together. They were loyal tae one another. An when one got the jail - there was no such thing as handouts. And when he got the jail his wife and his children was punished too. There was no food for them, only the poorhouse. But the other poachers always stood by one another. And the wives would have took over pots of soup, and maybe potatoes, different things. They never starved. But they were all loyal to one another. And what they had they were quite willing to share. And maybe for coal, the poachers went oot an stole the coal, they would have got the coal... They wouldn't have cared. They made them comfortable. They never regretted when their husbands was in the jail, because their husbands knew that they were bein looked efter. That was one thing. There was nothing, but what they had they halved. And they were very loyal to one another. When Christmas time came round and night come on they would say, 'Right'. Well, two of the poachers went out there, and they would maybe have killed about forty or fifty rabbits. And they came round the doors handin a pair of rabbits to this woman and a pair of rabbits to that woman, and never charged them anything for it. They always seen they had a Christmas dinner. And if you were out with the van there, lifting the rabbits, I won't tell you the man's name in the van, but if you were near the place where there was potatoes or turnips, we always made sure we got two bags o turnips, and put them in the van. Then, maybe before Christmas, we would get two bags o potatoes, an we would have had them in the van. And the man liftin the rabbits wasn't too pleased about it because then if he was caught, he would be caught for stealing turnips an all. We had them all in the shed, and when it come Christmas time they all come with their basins and they got to have a basin of potatoes and a turnip and a pair of rabbits. They all got that... And we helped one another, and it never cost them anything. They were never hungry. That was one thing, they were all loyal to one another. If they had nothing, we would have given them somethin. And that's the way they worked. If ever they got into trouble they knew their wives and their children was safe, they'd always help them. So that was the loyalty of the poachers...

This chap that I poached wi... Well, it was a very severe winter. ...They used to call him Ton Halliday, for a nickname, they called him Ton. So Ton got a job wi a man called Tom Johnston, workin the horse and cart. Cartin coal from the station down to the gas works. And, here, Ton would be coming down Rose Street and folk would be complaining about the coal, they'd no fire, an they'd no money to buy coal. And Ton said, 'Don't worry ladies, I'll get ye coal. Dinnae worry.' The first cart o coal he fetched down, he fetched it down to Rose Street, and he tipped it up in the middle of the street. And the folk were runnin with bags and cans gettin it. Ton got sixty days in the jail for it. That's how he was cried that name. He dumped a ton of coal right in the middle of the street for the folk. That belonged to the gas works, and he got the jail for it. But he was a poacher too, and that was the way they helped one another. ...He said, 'I'll get your coal today'. And then he dumped the ton of coal off, in Rose Street.

And that's how he got his name?

That's his name, Ton. He was called after a ton of coal...

