

Interviewee: Alex Anderson (AA)	Interviewer: Tania Gardner (TG)
Date of Interview: 7 April 2014	Ref: DG13-12-1-1-T

This interview with Jean Anderson's husband is a very interesting to listen to in tandem with her own story, showing insights into how work and married life panned out for a couple of their generation. Alex talks a bit about his early life as an only child, and his private education followed by university. He moved around with his work as a civil engineer, and tells some amusing tales about his time in employment. The main thread of the interview is his occupation and he had a hand in building some major local bridges. They discuss his interests outside of work particularly with the Antiquarian Society and also amateur dramatics. They touch on changes in the county boundaries and in local to centralised government.

TG: This is Tania Gardner, interviewing Alex Anderson, on Monday the Seventh of April Two thousand and fourteen, in Kirkcudbright. Now, we had a very interesting chat with your wife the other day, and lots of information about local, but you weren't born and brought up here, though your roots are here?

AA: Yeah. Well I was born in Edinburgh, but my father came from Maxwelltown.

TG: Outside Dumfries.

AA: Yes. It was outside Dumfries then, before the takeover!

TG: [Laughs]

AA: And, his father was a tailor, and he stayed in Dumfries well he was at school till he was fourteen, and then worked in the bank, and was sent to Dalbeattie, he was in the army...well at the end of the First World War but never went abroad because it was...War was finished before that happened.

TG: Oh right, he didn't actually...

AA: Well he actually went to Germany for occupation purposes, but not...

TG: Not to fight?

AA: No. no fighting.

TG: You would be glad about that really?

AA: Yes, well, I'm sure he was!

TG: Yes.

AA: Anyway, he used to tell a lot of stories about things that happened when he was young. My grandfather was very musical, he played the church organ at one time,

and he used to have the family playing a sort of band, just privately to amuse themselves!

TG: How many were in the family then!

AA: Oh maybe four or five people, it was a very big family, and actually one member wrote a book about it!

TG: Who would pay for that tuition, or would they just learn from one another?

00:01:55

AA: No he just told them...got them what to do, my grandmother could not read music but she had a thing called an auto harp, I'm not sure what it was but it played notes anyway, and she couldn't read music so he just wrote 'one two three four four three two one', or whatever number the keys.

TG: Really! But they all learnt, and they were able to make a band?

AA: Well, so he said!

TG: [*Laughs*] And he travelled from Maxwelltown to Dalbeattie to be in the bank?

AA: No he started in the bank in Maxwelltown. I don't know if it's still a bank but it became the Clydesdale Bank just on the corner at the bridge. So he used to tell me odd poems that they learnt well some of them couldn't be repeated! There's one very interesting one, and I don't know how it started but [somethin' like] 'can ye knock a hail in one out o' an auld wife'. And then it goes on a sort of chorus, 'He rummel't her he tummel't her, he gave her suc' a blow, oot jumped the Heilan' man ? ?]. And the only thing in that that makes any sense was that Heilan was out in [?], 'cause that would be Gaelic for 'come here'!

TG: So where on earth did he...was that just amongst his pals?

AA: It probably is away back, no doubt to the...bein' a Highland-man in Maxwelltown a very unusual thing of course and the children would probably be racist the whole lot o them. And they must hae been teasing him and he just lost his temper I think!

TG: And you've remembered that all these years later!

AA: Yes, mm hm. And, oh there was a whole lot of things like that, can't quite remember them all.

TG: Did he go to school there in Maxwelltown?

AA: He went to Glasgow Street School, which is no longer there, but curious enough I worked in it later, when it was no longer a school.

TG: Right!

AA: I sat in the headmaster's office! And then he went on to Dumfries Academy, and left at fourteen though.

TG: Yes but that was kind of usual wasn't it?

AA: It was usual yes.

TG: Uh huh, but he was going to be a tradesman, he was going to be...

00:04:22

AA: Well, he was in the bank.

TG: The bank yes uh huh, but he would do his training with the bank?

AA: Oh yes.

TG: A lot of people did an apprenticeship or a traineeship didn't they?

AA: Well I don't know if it was as formal as that, but certainly...and of course in those days the bank manager was called the agent, because he was usually a local lawyer or some'dy like that. And that was the case when he started because I think it was actually Walker and Sharp who are still around as a firm, were the agents for the bank.

TG: Interesting. And did he stay...he then moved on obviously.

AA: Well he stayed in lodgings in Dalbeattie, and then well afterwards, after the War was over, he was moved to Edinburgh.

TG: Through the bank?

AA: Through the bank yes, and he got married there, and they lived in Queensferry Street and then Hillside Crescent in Edinburgh. So I was brought up a short time in Queensferry Street and then in Hillside Crescent.

TG: Now I don't really know where...I presume Queensferry Street could be on the way to the Bridge!

AA: Well, it was just near the West End actually, it was a rented flat there and they had to move out o' it because it got dry rot started, and the owners...I think it was owned by McVities Guest the bakers, they had a shop at the bottom of the tenement, so they moved to Hillside Crescent which was a flat, two stories up, and there we were until...well there I was until I more or less left home, I'm not sure about when.

TG: How many of you were there, your parents...?

AA: Just my parents and me, and I had a very sheltered upbringing they were very [protected] of me. Didn't let me go out to play or anything like that.

TG: Was it a rough area then!

AA: No, it's just the way they looked at things.

TG: Uh huh. So they would take you places, you wouldn't really be independent?

AA: No no, every Sunday they went to the zoo.

00:06:27

TG: Oh right, you were lucky!

AA: There was that.

TG: And did you go to the park?

AA: No, the Princes Street station and watched the trains.

TG: Oh right Did you collect engine numbers?

AA: Well for a time yes I did later on yes, mm hmm.

TG: Did that make you interested in journeys at all?

AA: Well possible...no because we never went anywhere on the train! Except that every year, up to the War, the Second World War, they went to Budleigh Salterton] for their holidays. Now the background to that was my mother had, although she was adopted, we had her parents in Glasgow, she spent an awful lot of her childhood down there, she couldn't really get the place out of her system she retired there in the end.

TG: Where is Budleigh Salterton?

AA: South Devon, about five miles to the east of Exmouth.

TG: So she'd come from there to be in Glasgow?

AA: No she was actually born in London, and adopted there, and because her parents had two children who had died and I think they realised that they couldn't do it. So they came to Glasgow, and various places, we used to say that if you ever became famous they would run out o' plaques to put up to say where she stayed!

TG: Really! But was she with the same family or...?

AA: Yes the same family right through.

TG: Until she was married?

AA: Yes.

TG: That's good. So your dad, did he get promotion within the bank, was he managing it?

AA: No he was never a manager he became head teller but I think tellers were a bit higher up the scheme than they are nowadays. It was the chief office in Edinburgh it was the Clydesdale Bank which had its head quarters in Glasgow.

00:08:26

TG: Right. And did you go to the local school then from Hillside?

AA: No, because they didn't like the idea and eventually I was sent to Heriots, which was the normal sort o' thing in Edinburgh I think. It's a thing doesn't seem to happen very much elsewhere.

TG: It's a city thing isn't it, too?

AA: Yes, yes.

TG: And so they would be paying fees for you then?

AA: They did until I started getting bursaries.

TG: Oh right. And was your mum working at the time?

AA: No she stopped work when she got married which was the normal thing, if you could afford it.

TG: Yes absolutely. So I presume that when you were in primary she would take you and fetch you and...

AA: Yes that's right.

TG: ...'cause you said that you lived a protected...

AA: Yes that's what happened.

TG: I don't suppose there were out of school activities in those days, to the same extent.

AA: Oh there were but I wasn't involved in them. At least not to begin with, later on when I was in the secondary school, I was in the Literary Society and...well it was called the Literary and Dramatic Society, it did both, it held debates and lectures and that sort of thing. They also produced plays, and I got involved in stage carpentry, which was a sort of main hobby for quite a long time actually, even after I'd left school.

TG: That's interesting. And did you enjoy the release of school, the opportunity to be mixing with others.

AA: I can't remember that it affected me very much that way, I was always the odd one out I think. I did make some friends, but...

TG: An only child it's often...

00:10:01

AA: It was very difficult.

TG: So when you came home in the evening then it would be heads down to homework, or...?

AA: It was, yes, and there was an awful lot of homework sometimes.

TG: Of course because it was a private school. And it was only boys?

AA: It was only boys, yes that was another thing which I think was a mistake, but...

TG: Yes, and so you were there...you stayed on to do your exams I would imagine?

AA: Yes.

TG: Right through?

AA: Right through tae sixth year, twice over actually because I was too young to go on, and I went to the university.

TG: In those days they wouldn't let you go when you were too young?

AA: Well they would, but everybody thought and I agreed myself I was too young.

TG: Yes. And so then, you moved on to university to college?

AA: Yes, Edinburgh University, Civil Engineering. Three years there, and that in those years was considered enough, it isn't now. And then, what they called 'practical experience', at a civil engineers firm in Edinburgh.

TG: Was that easy to get, a placement?

AA: It was then, because they didn't pay ye very much, some firms even asked you to pay them, but I was lucky...

TG: Really. Did you have a grant to go (sorry to interrupt), did you have a grant to go to university?

AA: Yes, there were grants and bursaries and things.

TG: Yes uh huh, sorry I interrupted, so then you didn't get paid very much when you were doing your placement?

00:11:30

AA: No, well it was just during the summer holidays, I worked for nothing, and then [it was] two years and I wasn't paid a lot I was paid two hundred pounds a year, no how that compares with everybody else then I don't know it was pretty far down.

TG: What kin' of year was that Alex? You would be...

AA: Now, Nineteen forty-seven, was it? Yes it would be Nineteen forty-seven I left school, Nineteen fifty I finished the university and went to work for two years, and it was two years because that was...because National Service was going and you only got two years before they wanted to call you up anyway.

TG: Ah right.

AA: So that and nearly two years in the Royal Engineers, doing building construction mostly, and then...

TG: That would be a shock to the system was it not, because suddenly you were totally away from home and...?

AA: Yes it was. But well I survived.

TG: Did you go with people that you knew, or were you recruited as a...?

AA: No no well in the Royal Engineers you wouldn't be, 'cause it wasn't a local regiment. No, it was just whoever was there.

TG: And did you find that because you were with like-minded people you probably had better relationships with them, was it easier to make...?

AA: I think so yes because everybody there was...they were either a tradesman or they were university level or something like that, it was one or the other.

TG: Yes uh huh, so...it would be easier to get on with...

AA: It was yes.

TG: And where did you have to go to do your training?

AA: A week at Elgin and then down south to Hampshire, and then to Chatham. And then across to Germany of course after that.

TG: And what were you just on sort of...I don't know what kind of duties would you do?

AA: I was what was called a deputy clerk of works, looking after buildings. Supervising new building sometimes.

00:13:49

TG: Right. And so you would be going out and about...?

AA: Oh yes, yes.

TG: And that would broaden your horizons.

AA: Oh yes we certainly saw quite a bit of the place. And I was moved from one town to another as well in the middle of it, so that spread things out a bit too.

TG: Uh huh. So did you go as a group and work on projects or...?

AA: No no. It was a very small unit, there was only about half a dozen in it. I mean nowadays it's done by the Civil Service. Before it was convenient to have...National Service was a really enormous organisation.

TG: Were you nearly at the end of the recruitment.

AA: Yes I think it stopped about two years after I came out.

TG: So you had to do two years doing...in that then?

AA: Yes it was two years.

TG: Compulsory?

AA: Yes, it started off as eighteen months, by the time I got into it it was two years. And then it just stopped!

TG: Then it just stopped?

AA: Just after that yes.

TG: So suddenly you're back on civvy-street, how does that pan out?

AA: It panned out all right because I got married!

TG: Who on earth did you meet...have time to meet your wife?!

AA: Not immediately...well it's a complicated story she's actually my second cousin, and being a sort of relative...I think she sort of took pity on me! Well, having had such a sheltered life really. It was actually three years after that I got married, but I was engaged when I came out anyway.

TG: Right. So you were ready to settle down?

AA: Yes, yes.

00:15:45

TG: And what kind of job opportunities were there in those days?

AA: Now where have I got to...in three years I was with various firms, as I was still having to qualify finally, as a chartered engineer, which took me...I think another couple o' years. So I was with a consulting engineer in Edinburgh and then I went and worked with contractors in Perthshire in hydro-electric schemes. And I was married in the middle of that, so Jean and I started off in a caravan in Glen Lyon.

TG: Did you! I'm sure there were lots of people started off like that!

AA: At that time yes.

TG: Maybe not in Glen Lyon, but in a caravan somewhere.

AA: Yes, of course caravans were the normal accommodation for these jobs.

TG: Yes...but that meant she came out of nursing, didn't it?

AA: Yes, she finished it altogether. So I was on hydro-electric schemes and then, well Christine was on the way, well we didn't know it was Christine 'cause ye didn't know in those days.

TG: No you didn't!

AA: So, we moved to Glasgow, and I was there for two years, and I didn't like the job.

TG: Did you not!

AA: It was a firm which was run almost on Victorian lines. We were workin' to all hours, it was normal to work to about six o'clock at night, although officially [we] finished at five. This was sort of thing, and oh it just went on.

TG: And can you remember what you were working on then?

AA: There? Oh...(at crouch and Hogg), water tanks and water mains in Orkney, and Kincardine. We did get out to some of these jobs, not so much the Kincardine ones but the Orkney ones. And oh just various odds and ends like that.

TG: But that meant that your wife was at home...

AA: She was at home.

TG: ...with wee one?

AA: With the wee one.

00:17:47

TG: You wouldn't really be liking that aspect of it?

AA: Well ye didn't work...you weren't there for long periods you'd be sent there for a week and back again into the office.

TG: Did you fly up to Orkney?

AA: Yes.

TG: Was that a novel experience?

AA: It was novel then yes, I've never done it since anyway!

TG: And did you have time while you were in Orkney to explore or were you there just to work?

AA: Not a great deal no, you were working pretty hard for as long as there was daylight. And if you went up there in winter there wasn't very much daylight.

TG: That's right, uh huh. So have ye...I'm jumping the gun but did you ever go back to Orkney?

AA: We have been back to Orkney once, yes. Since then. It was quite interesting going back. Some of the things were still there!

TG: They'd stood the test of time then!

AA: Yes. So then there was that, and then, I was sitting one day...now my mother-in-law stayed with us Jean's mother stayed with us. And sitting looking at the Scotsman one day or...I think it must be the Scotsman, looking at the jobs and I said, 'How would you like me to get a job in Kirkcudbright?' Sort of as a joke, but everybody jumped up and cheered! So I applied and I got it.

TG: Right, so you came to Kirkcudbright itself, in what year?

AA: That was in Nineteen...oh now let's get this right.

TG: Well, Christine was a baby.

AA: Nineteen sixty.

TG: Nineteen sixty.

AA: The Second of October I think, was in October anyway, Nineteen sixty. And I was interviewed in August, somewhere about the middle of August and then on the Twenty-sixth of August there was a tremendous storm, and four bridges got washed away and there was others damaged.

00:19:40

TG: Where was this?

AA: Here, in Kirkcudbright. In Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, yes. Twenty-sixth of August Nineteen sixty, that was the name o' the file, and...so although I had been sort of taken on as a water engineer, I ended up...started off with bridges!

TG: Gosh! So you were right...straight in to this...

AA: Three of us came down, one man, who had a long experience of bridges and he sort of got us on our way, and we kept on designing bridges after that. We had four to actually replace completely.

TG: Can you remember which four they were?

AA: Well the ones I did was the Grey Mare's Tail Bridge, between Newton Stewart and Galloway.

TG: Right.

AA: Charlie McLean was the experienced chap on bridges, he did Penkill Bridge at Minnigaff. And there were two others, another man did...the name escapes me it's the one at Kendoon Youth Hostel anyway.

TG: Kendoon Youth Hostel.

AA: The one beside it...and one away out in the wilds just at Fingland I think, beyond that.

TG: beyond that, and was there a huge...had we had a deluge of rain or...?

AA: Yes, it was very heavy rain, and flooding, that caused this trouble. And they just got washed...the foundations got washed out.

TG: So had there been a department here in Kirkcudbright before you people came?

AA: Oh yes yes.

TG: Had these people gone...moved on and they were replacing them?

AA: Oh no, I don't know the money must have been quite good for local government at that time, they thought they'd better expand a bit I think.

TG: So were there any...were you all, if you like, incomers? I'm not being rude but...

AA: Now, Peter Shaw wasn't.

00:21:42

TG: Oh right no he's local. He was my cousin.

AA: Was he?

TG: Yes!

AA: Lesley Rutherford.

TG: I know him, yes!

AA: And one or two others...Ian Wright, I don't know where he is now if he's alive, but he'll be in Castle Douglas if he is.

TG: So, this was an expanding department, and Kirkcudbright was still the county town?

AA: Yes it was, that's right. And it...the County Council of the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright was its full title, and I was in the county surveyors and engineers department. As county surveyor you were in charge of roads and bridges, that was Mr Gilmour, and as county engineer I was in charge of water supply and drainage. But the department did both, and I did both, Kippford drainage. And all sorts of things like protecting roads along the coast and that sort of thing. Because we had a big tidal surge in Nineteen sixty-two, and various things got washed away, and one curious result of that is a small granite chair that sits on the shore at Kippford, it's made out of an old kerb-stone and various bits and pieces. 'Cause we were putting in

big stones to revet the banking there, and the man who was looking after it, he was rather more than a road-man, he did all sorts of other mechanical jobs and that. He found these odd stones that were left over and they suddenly appeared built up as a chair! [Laughter] So nobody asked too many questions about how they got there! They're still there as far as I...

TG: They're still there! With a little plaque no?

AA: No, no, nothing to say how they got there.

TG: No, but that's interesting, uh huh. So it was...the work was very varied then?

AA: Oh it was, [there was the] sewers, water supply, bridges and roads. And flood prevention.

TG: In the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright?

AA: Yes.

TG: So that meant you were stopping when you got to Dumfries?

AA: Yes and stopping when you got to Newton Stewart.

00:23:58

TG: Newton Stewart, and you stopped at the...

AA: Above Carsphairn.

TG: Above Carsphairn, so that was the remit?

AA: Yes.

TG: And was the...was this in the new building behind the museum?

AA: Yes that's right, yes that's right, it was.

TG: Was that pretty new? I don't know when that was built.

AA: It was fairly...it was just after the War, I believe they intended to put up four Nissen huts originally, but they managed to scrape some more money together or something, and so they redesigned the buildings and it's simply the design of four Nissen huts put together, with a sort of tower in the middle. And whatshisname, the Laird...what was it?

TG: Hope Dunbar?

AA: Hope Dunbar yes. He didn't like it all of course he owned the Selkirk at that time, and he sent a letter to the County Clerk The Odeon Kirkcudbright!

TG: The Odeon! He thought it looked like...! I suppose it does in a way, it's of its time though isn't it?

AA: It's of its time yes.

TG: Yes, I'm sure it's got the leakiest coldest windows in the world.

AA: It possibly has. We were in the old bit, in the High Street, which was just joined on to it.

TG: Claverhouse is next door to it?

AA: No I think that was Claverhouse, was it Cannonwalls?

TG: Cannonwalls uh huh.

AA: I can't remember what oor bit was called.

TG: And there would be actually a huge staff in there?

AA: There was, I mean the place was fully occupied, plus staff outside various places.

00:25:28

TG: And who did you have...in those days I think you had a reception...not a receptionist but a...someone who answered the phones and...?

AA: Well the telephone operator was Jim Thompson who was blind, and he was a marvelous man for...he could remember telephone numbers, which he couldn't look up.

TG: No.

AA: And all sorts of...his memory was marvelous, and one time somebody...there's this chap Gerry Storrie, he used to come from Edinburgh, from the Scottish Development Department, 'cause a lot of work was done...it was grant aided or even done completely financed by them a lot of it, so he had to come down and check what was going on. And we told him about Jim, and some'dy said, "Just pick up the phone and ask if he can put you through to Gerry Storrie," I think we'd have [done] the telephone number in Edinburgh he'd have got it straight away, so he picked up and asked to speak to Gerry Storrie and Jim came [back] "I think you'll find him up in the drawing office just now."

TG: He never! Of course his ear would be tuned in.

AA: Yes.

TG: So, we were very inclusive here?

AA: Yes.

TG: That's good. And was there a good working atmosphere I mean did they socialise, did you mix with your workmates?

AA: No there was to some extent it's...we all lived to begin with in Merse Croft, the three of us who came, plus some had been there before, we were all housed in Merse Croft.

TG: Right because of course that was all council houses.

AA: It was all council houses eventually we moved out of it.

TG: At that time would Merse be all rented?

AA: It was all rented, yes.

TG: Yes, when you came here in Nineteen sixty. And that was great because you knew that when you came here with your family you were going to have...?

AA: Yes that was quite common at the time, to offer a house. In fact it was the only way they could get engineers to go out to some of these places.

00:27:40

TG: And did you have...well you would need to have a car if you were...?

AA: Yes we did have to have a car, what we called essential users. They had to provide a car.

TG: Had you had a car in the city?

AA: No. I had learnt to drive but I'd given up the car in the city, because it was pretty useless really.

TG: So suddenly, life was very different here?

AA: Life was very different indeed, yes.

TG: And was your wife very happy to be near home?

AA: Yes, and so was my mother-in-law. She was from Dalbeattie of course. So that was...

TG: And did you feel...I don't know just more settled here quickly because everybody was comfortable?

AA: Yes I settled very quickly, because my father was from Galloway, and I didn't like Edinburgh, I didn't like Glasgow either, I wasn't overly fond o' the Highlands at that time either! ['Cause I thought] Galloway's [?] and eventually I decided, well I'd better be a Gallovidian. And I think I've achieved that 'cause at least rather more than half my life's been here.

TG: Yes. Now what about your own parents then, what happened to them?

AA: Well, my father died while we were living in Glasgow he died at Fifty-nine, had a heart attack while he was in hospital for an operation.

TG: That's sad.

AA: My mother...of course she had been brought up with all her holidays, and it was the school holidays the whole length of them I think, in Devon, so she decided to retire to Devon. We tried to persuade her not to, because there was no way we could keep coming and visiting her.

TG: No it's a long way.

AA: And we just couldn't afford it at that time. And that was a bit of a problem, but she went down there and she was there for...well she went in Fifty-nine and she died when she was...now work this one out...Nineteen eighty-five or eighty-four actually. So she was there for a very long time.

00:29:42

TG: She was, uh huh. But then, if you like you felt as if you'd come home, she obviously felt very comfortable down there.

AA: Yes she felt as she'd come home too.

TG: Yes, absolutely, everybody seems to find a place.

AA: Yes.

TG: So, you were happy to bring your family up here, were you more of a hands-on dad, did you allow your children more freedom than you?

AA: Oh they did get it yes!

TG: 'Cause you were probably aware of the...?

AA: We knew of the problems and we tried to avoid them. And there was no question of private schools or anything like that, even if we could have afforded it, we just didn't agree with it.

TG: No. And then there would be a very mixed community over at Merse, lots of families.

AA: Oh yes yes.

TG: Plenty of company.

AA: Some of them are still there!

TG: I'm sure! So, you had gone to the zoo every Sunday, what suddenly were you able to do with your family when you were living here in Galloway?

AA: Well, that's difficult to say, we went holidays of course locally, sometimes, at Carrick.

TG: Did you take a hut at Carrick?

AA: Yeah we had a hut at Carrick one year, and we'd go into a farm up near Barrhill in Ayrshire. That wasn't very good, but we did it, and one at Port Logan, we had these sort of holidays.

TG: So you were exploring the area.

AA: Yes. And of course we couldn't go to Edinburgh 'cause nobody there then, she'd gone down south.

00:31:26

TG: And did you feel that you were more involved with your children's school and their social life, than your parents had been with yours?

AA: Oh yeah, I think so, well I was very involved with my parents of course, that was it. But no, Christine and David had a much more independent existence.

TG: Yes. And of course your wife had had a very independent...or she'd had a different upbringing from you, so she would be encouraging that.

AA: Yes, oh yes.

TG: And you've obviously become extremely interested in the area, and at what stage do you think...is it in retirement that you've become more focused and more

interested or...?

AA: No, what happened was, while I was working with various firms, I think when I got to Crouch and Hogg which is a Glasgow firm, well the one I worked for in Edinburgh, he was a sole partner, and he was very proud o' the fact his father designed Talla reservoir.

TG: Talla, right.

AA: And we were never allowed to forget this!

TG: Oh dear!

AA: And you know it was quite a long time ago it was back in the...I can't remember when it was the end of the nineteenth century sometime, I think. So it had quite a history and when I got to Glasgow, [where the firm was started] was the building of St Enoch's Station, so there's a bit of a history there, then I got to Kirkcudbright and I discovered the history was enormous! The roads department might be said to have started in Seventeen ninety-six!

TG: And where does this come from?

AA: Well I just started to find these things out, and Jack Ross, one of the clerks of works, he showed me that they had a pile o' books that had been saved from...salvaged during the war, the minute books o' the road trustees. And I started...now this would never be allowed nowadays, takin' them home, often on the back of a bike.

TG: Yes!

AA: Nowadays...

TG: You're not allowed to take them home.

00:33:45

AA: And you've to request them very carefully, you're not allowed to photocopy them, they're brought to you on a cushion! Then that's what happened, and I started index[ed] them to see what did happen. And eventually I got a sort of history o' the thing and I joined...now, where are we? Aye, [?] moved to Dumfries now.

TG: Oh right!

AA: 'Cause that was the next stage of things. Anyway [?] history ye know, I got to know Alf Truckell, in Dumfries, he was the museum curator.

TG: Alf Truckell?

AA: Yes. Now quite a character and a big influence on a lot of people. I think he encouraged people to do things. And he encouraged me to eventually write papers on the Stewartry roads, which I've been doing ever since, odds and ends. When we moved office I joined the Antiquarian Society there.

TG: Right, so you moved to Dumfries for a job?

AA: Now I was moved to Dumfries...the local government reorganisation in Nineteen seventy-five, and the job I got then was with the water and sewerage department, so that was the ends of roads and bridges, more or less. Not that I was particularly worried about that, 'cause I'd always really wanted water and sewerage rather than roads and bridges. So, I was area sewerage engineer, which was not the sort of job you talk about [?] table!

TG: [Laughs]

AA: But a necessary job I'm afraid.

TG: Yes!

AA: For three years, and then I got moved to the new works department, I was in charge of it until I retired. So we were doing all sorts of things there.

TG: So you moved the family to Dumfries?

AA: So we moved to Dumfries, and we were there we kept on the west bank of the river, so we were still in Galloway, just, by our toenails.

TG: So you had got to know the curator at the museum Mr Truckell.

AA: Yes, Mr Truckell. And I joined the Antiquarian Society and done various jobs with them. I was president for three years, which is the normal term, and I organised excursions and various other jobs.

00:36:24

TG: Mostly local excursions or...?

AA: They could go quite far, but within Dumfries and Galloway mostly. Occasionally...we got to the Roman Wall and things like that.

TG: And did you find that to begin with it was more to do with local and then, people's interest expanded where you went and what you did and what you researched?

AA: No no it was local, I mean it is a local society, and that's...and it mostly does research in Dumfries and Galloway. There are other societies over the border and various places there's certainly one in Carlisle and there's one in Ayr.

TG: And one of their jobs is to prepare and publish papers, on research that local people have done.

AA: Yes, and it covers a wide area. The natural history, some of it, I mean I took part in a rook survey! And going back, researching old history of course, and old buildings, archeology, anything really [like that] it's a pretty wide field they cover.

TG: Absolutely. And then I presume you have to have somebody who cajoles you to put pen to paper and...?

AA: Well, Alf Truckell was that, yes, he was good at that, and [?] got into the habit.

TG: And so did he develop the museum, was he there as it grew?

AA: Yes, I think so. I don't think he actually saw the big extension of it I can't remember if he was still there or not, I think he died just before or retired just before that.

TG: And did you have your meetings there to begin with?

AA: No, they were always somewhere else either in the school, or eventually and well I think they still are now in the day centre, the old gasworks building.

TG: Yes. You had a tremendous focus in that from your work point of view, you had access to these books that you took home on the back o' yer bike.

AA: Yes, oh yes, and other things like that, yes.

TG: And so you would...were generally records available to you, the way that they are now?

AA: Well they were because they were in the building. Now I think now are more organised.

00:39:02

TG: Like a library did they have a library in the county buildings?

AA: No, they did have other records which were kept in the convener's room, but that was the even older stuff that'd go back to Seventeen thirty or something.

TG: Right. And so, when you were involved in your bridge, your first bridge, over at the Grey Mare's Tail, that road at that time, what was it like?

AA: Sixteen feet wide. You scared the daylight out of the tourists when you overtook them!

TG: Yes! And was it used a lot from Newton Stewart over to New Galloway?

AA: Oh yes it was well used. It was a bit winding, it's straightened out in a lot of places now. And widened. The Grey Mare's Tail is probably simply by accident is the first bit of widening and straightening. And I say straightening, I mean a curve of larger radius!

TG: A curve with a large radius, I think that's an excellent way...! And is it Hogg the Shepherd who was born and brought up there?

AA: No not Hogg.

TG: Who was it then, sorry.

AA: Murray, yes. The Grey Mare's Tail bridge is just beside Murray's monument.

TG: That's Murray's monument yes. And there's a little cottage?

AA: A cottage over the other side of the valley.

TG: What was that, I mean seriously that is now sort of got a sign against it, in those days were you aware of that?

AA: Oh yes yes, well the monument was impressive enough, and it was put up in the Nineteenth century I think.

TG: Yes, uh huh, a great place for monuments.

AA: Oh yes.

TG: And wild goats up there as well?

AA: The wild goats, they roamed free at that time, then the Forestry Commission fenced them in.

00:40:57

TG: That's right, and then now there's a red deer.

AA: There's red deer, that was put in later too, yes. Put them all in there.

TG: And Clatteringshaws has just developed as well they've just opened a new visitor centre.

AA: They have, yes, that's right.

TG: Did people walk as much then, across the hills and across the forest roads?

AA: I suppose they did...there was a lot of hillwalking went on, and that's another thing I started to do earlier on, because when I was in Perthshire, I was put on surveying work to begin with, and it was what you might call professional hill-walking! Because ye had to go to the top of a mountain and set up instruments and take readings.

TG: Really?

AA: Yes. This is to put in a tunnel actually.

TG: Right, in Perthshire?

AA: Yes. So I certainly did a lot of hill-walking there!

TG: Gosh yes, in all weathers, or did you wait for a nice day?

AA: No, that was a bone of contention with the chief engineer, he would say, "Why aren't ye out workin'?" I said, "'Cause you can't see a thing in front o' ye!" And he had done his training on a power station in the south of England, a site half a mile square and dead flat! And he just didn't have a clue what about what we were doing.

TG: What you were up to! Did you find that a fun challenge, or...?

AA: It was a bit of a challenge yes. 'Cause we had...we borrowed rucksacks, and they could be pretty heavily loaded. One time I had an apprentice out with me, we always went in pairs of course doing these jobs. And he said to me, "That rucksack you've got looks pretty heavy," and put his hands underneath and just lift it see the weight and I fell flat on my face!

TG: You were balanced! [Laughs] Did you see that job right through then, did you see your tunnel built?

AA: No it was built later, and they broke records on it I believe but no I moved to another firm, and we were still up in the hills but not quite as high up!

00:43:08

TG: So did you start hill-walking when you came down here, did you walk here?

AA: Well no, I used to...even when I was young in Edinburgh we used to walk in the Pentlands. So, that started then. But I never went in for munro bagging though, or

mountaineering. Only been up one munro and I'm never very sure whether I really made it or not because there was a thick mist!

TG: Oh dear, there's nothing worse than getting to the top and being able to see! But we've got such beautiful countryside here.

AA: Yes, well I always wanted back here really. So anyway, I got shifted to Dumfries, and that was more or less what happened. And we managed to make a good garden there, at the back, which has unfortunately has been cleared out by the people [who've] moved in.

TG: Ah right, yes, because to establish a garden...was it a new house that you moved into?

AA: No it wasn't a new house, it was just a drying green at the back and something of a garden.

TG: Yes, but that was your project?

AA: Yes.

TG: But it's a pity. So you chose to come here to retire then?

AA: Well, Christine, our daughter, said that she was...what it was, Jean had a bad accident in Two thousand and nine. Broke both legs and has never been right since with her walking. So, Christine got a bit worried about us and eventually she was able to let us use this house.

TG: Yes, but it's at times like this that family are...it's nice to have family close by.

AA: Yes, well, they were twenty-eight miles away and they couldn't do much about us really.

TG: No. It gives everybody peace of mind. So you've reconnected with Kirkcudbright then?

AA: Oh I think so, yes. I've not many folk left that we knew then, one or two.

TG: And how do you think that you know the council offices...I mean it hardly exists here in Kirkcudbright anymore.

AA: No, no. It's all run from Dumfries I suppose now.

00:45:32

TG: And people travel back and forward across the county, and it's the whole Dumfries and Galloway now, it's not...

AA: Oh well when I was working in Dumfries I travelled from Stranraer to Langholm.

TG: That was your remit, was the whole area.

AA: Yes.

TG: So a lot of your day would be travelling.

AA: A lot of my day was travelling, yes.

TG: Along that horrible road?

AA: Yes.

TG: So when you look around all these wee country roads now, do you still go up and down and back and forward along the back roads?

AA: Oh yes, we do, when we get a chance.

TG: And do you pinpoint all your projects or...?

AA: Well I know where they are! I mean the biggest one as far as I'm concerned wasn't actually the biggest one was probably Ramhill Bridge, but as far as I was concerned, the one I took most pride in I suppose, was widening Fleet Bridge and Gatehouse.

TG: Oh yes! That must have been a project and a half.

AA: Aye, which was done Sixty-three/Sixty-four.

TG: Was the weighbridge still there? Was the small bridge that you used to open was it still existing then or not?

AA: The one further down the river?

TG: Towards Port McAdam.

AA: Yes, it was below Port McAdam there was an old swing bridge there, which I think it was out of action.

TG: It was still there though?

AA: It's now been removed.

00:46:55

TG: Because it doesn't exist. I think the piers exist, but there's no actual bridge across.

AA: No, it's away. I don't know why it was there, but it was anyway! It wasn't a council bridge.

TG: It wasn't?

AA: No. I don't know its history.

TG: No, I wonder if it belonged to Port McAdam then?

AA: It might have belonged to Caley Estate?

TG: Mm hmm. Well also the farmer would have been able to come over...towards Cardoness from there?

AA: Well, it may even have gone in when the whatever of Fleet was straightened, which was somewhere about...well toward the end of the eighteenth century. I can't imagine they put a steel bridge in then, they wouldn't! There used to be a ford there certainly, in historical times, at Cardoness.

TG: I think that's a very...super part of the road if you're going down there and looking out into the bay, it's a lovely...and the castle up on the right, going down from Gatehouse towards Creetown area. It's a beautiful view out, into Fleet Bay.

AA: Yes.

TG: And it survived any tidal...it doesn't seem to have had any problem with tidal surge, although Kirkcudbright had problems with a tidal surge this year.

AA: Yes, I suppose they're slightly higher in Gatehouse, it only takes a few feet.

TG: Yes, uh huh. But the damage down here has been quite intense, it's strange. That bit of road, I think again they put in these bollards or big stones...what d'you call that when you reinforce the road like that?

AA: Well that's actually riprap or revetment, or depends what it is.

TG: Because the way that the river came, it came right up almost alongside the road, but at a higher level, so it was driving everything, on the shoreline, up the road.

AA: Well they had something like that at Kippford and Rockcliffe of course, this last time. And that was the second time in my experience, because they had it in Nineteen sixty-two. And there was a lot of road washed away at Rockcliffe, and we more or less rebuilt round the bay. And then at Kippford there was some

smaller bits that's when that wee chair appeared, and at Carsethorn, in timber revetments.

TG: Right. Are you glad that you're out of working life?

AA: I'm glad I'm out of working life but I'm still interested in it.

TG: And d'you find that your Antiquarian Society is also still an interesting group to be part of or are you finding...

AA: Well it is, it's not in a way 'cause I can't get to it now, at least it's not easy, they're having a meeting this Saturday in Castle Douglas, that happens once a year.

TG: And have they got a younger generation coming along too?

AA: Well they're younger than me! But they're not tremendously young, but it keeps going.

TG: Absolutely, but you're very much part of our...you come always to our...the History Society in Kirkcudbright, we've had some amazing speakers as well.

AA: Yes.

TG: I was interested in the architect who did a talk on the Dumfries buildings.

AA: Was that before my time?

TG: Maloney? He was looking at some of the buildings along the river. Were you aware...I was trying to remember those buildings by the river, by the bridge, he showed photographs of how it had been, and also the buildings he would like to preserve.

AA: Well, there's different opinions on that of course!

TG: Absolutely, well a lot of it'll be to do with finance too.

AA: And it is very much opinion whether things should...this or that should be preserved. Oh there's certainly a lot of old stuff but I mean Alf Truckell used to say archeological excavations in Dumfries were difficult because you started off with twelve feet of Victorian rubbish!

TG: Yes, twelve feet of Victorian rubbish! Before you got to anything.

AA: Before you got to anything.

TG: Have you ever been involved with any archeological digs?

AA: No, no I mean I've seen them, [I've even] visited them, but never actually done anything.

TG: And did you try to encourage your children to go along to see all their history here?

AA: Oh they did, when they were a bit younger.

TG: Because there's so much here, and we've now got a local archeologist who's come back...working here in the area as well. The Caver's boy, he's been doing work on brochs over in Wigtownshire.

AA: Oh yes, I didn't know there were any brochs in Wigtownshire.

TG: It's nice to know that there's a local guy that's interested in what's going on. So do you think that your generation were brought up to be more interested and to take part and to write the history?

AA: Some of just think that way I suppose. I don't know, everybody doesn't do it, we've all got our different hobbies.

TG: Yes it was your hobby.

AA: Yes.

TG: Well it's interesting. Is there any of the projects that you worked on that you would like to tell me any more about?

AA: Well Fleet Bridge I suppose, although it's well recorded because, in the museum here they've quite a few papers on it that I managed to get to them. So that is pretty thoroughly recorded, but, very roughly it was in Sixteen sixty-one was the first record of it, it appears to have been rebuilt twice and widened three times.

TG: Since Sixteen sixty-one!

AA: Yes! Sixteen sixty-one or shortly after, it was rebuilt, so there must have been something there before. Just before Seventeen twenty-three it was a timber bridge that was washed away, and the first part of the present bridge was done in about Seventeen twenty-three, by John [?] He must have been contracting quite a big way for this area, he did other jobs too, fairly large. And then sometime in the middle of the Seventeen hundreds, it was widened, and then in Eighteen eleven it was

widened again! And one arch was removed or what used to be three, in the Seventeen hundreds widening, and then Sixty-three/Sixty-four we widened it again.

00:54:45

TG: A long time after.

AA: Yes.

TG: A long time after.

AA: But to do lots of the widening, the last widening, we had to dig everything out, down to the back of the arch. So there was a bit of archeology there!

TG: What did you find?

AA: Dogs' teeth, buttons, pieces of iron...nothing of great importance.

TG: No. And bits of...old bits of the old bridges.

AA: Well they cleaned it off down to solid masonry. So again this is all in the museum there's photographs of it, and records of the thing. So that was filled in with concrete and the widening on the top.

TG: And a very simple bridge.

AA: Well it's not simple now!

TG: No but it looks simple, it looks very smooth and sleek.

AA: Oh yes.

TG: Not ornate as it may have been in the past.

AA: It was never an ornate bridge, I mean I can remember it pretty well before that of course, when it was just a two arch bridge, in rough stone work.

TG: And we've got our problems here with our Kirkcudbright Bridge now.

AA: Well it's much...it was Nineteen twenty-five it was done. I was involved in that too, we had a firm in investigating it.

TG: Investigating the problems?

AA: Its strength actually, that was away back...must have been before I left here, Nineteen seventy-four maybe or thereabouts.

TG: And was that because it...carrying heavier loads?

AA: Well yes because loads had become heavier and they decided to restrict them a bit. It was the early days of reinforced concrete and the thing they did was they tried to do in reinforced concrete whatever had been done before in

00:56:39

steel. So it's build to shape, it's shaped like the old bridge that was there, or any other steel bridge that size, and that happened quite commonly the bridges on the Glencoe road are like that. [?] of Civil Engineering Institution once, I had to write a wee bit to sort of guide what they were going to see, and I pointed out, well this wasn't necessarily a bad idea because the Greek temples were built as if they were on timber but they were stone! So they were just building with the ...reinforced concrete as if it was steel and the most ridiculous case...there was a ridiculous case, was a suspension bridge at Montrose in reinforced concrete, I don't think it's there now!

TG: [*Laughs*] They were so proud of the new material and they wanted to make the use of it.

AA: Yes, but of course it wasn't fully understood and it wasn't quite up to standard I suppose, which is why there's a restriction on it now.

TG: Yes absolutely. Well, we'll hope that it gets fixed. Well Alex is there anything else that you would...?

AA: I'm trying to think. (Let's see what's in notes here) There's various churches but nothing unconventional about them. And one time I was involved in amateur dramatics of all things, not as an actor, as a stage carpenter.

TG: But a stage carpenter that's interesting, because a very important part, in the background obviously, but you would be working together you'd be planning...

AA: Oh yes it taught me a lot of civil engineering really, 'cause you had to get very organised tae change a scene, and ye maybe had six men. And everybody had to know exactly what to do.

TG: Yes, in a short space...they had to wheech!

AA: A short space of time yes!

TG: Good. And have you carried that on that interest, do you still like to go?

AA: No, eventually I got, well a bit fed up with it really.

TG: So did you never tread the boards it was always just shiftin' the scenery?

AA: Only once at school when I was got up as a cowboy! No, no I was always treading the boards round the back.

TG: An important part to play. And I'm sure that going to watch your own children in concerts and things like that you'd be watching the scenery in great detail!

00:59:30

AA: Oh yes.

TG: Nowadays I'm sure it's all made of lightweight materials and...

AA: I don't know what it is now it used to be wooden frames with canvas stretched on them. But they may have something different now I don't know.

TG: And so do you still like to wield a hammer and a screwdriver?

AA: Oh yes yes, I do that whenever I can. I always said if I couldn't have been a civil engineer I'd like to have been a joiner.

TG: Yes. And that's a tremendous skill isn't it, and it gives you so much pleasure. But then your dad had been a paperwork man really hadn't he?

AA: Yes, he had, and so had my mother, I mean she was a typist in the bank.

TG: Right, so that's a different...not a trade.

AA: Well no, it's a profession I suppose well so's civil engineering of course.

TG: Well we've all seen so many changes haven't we?

AA: Yes.

TG: And it's good to reflect on how things were and to know how things were, so I really very much appreciate you telling me about your experiences and the things that you were involved in here in the area, have been tremendous. So keep writing your papers, and keep being interested, that's the...

AA: I tell you one thing [?] just mentioned it I'd forgotten it, the roadmen? You don't get roadmen nowadays.

TG: No, tell us, they worked independently didn't they?

AA: Well they pretty well did, and they were always accused of being lazy or...but they couldn't help it they were left very much to themselves, and they did lean on their shovels quite a bit. But they'd a lot to do they actually had to maintain the roads, they didn't do the tarring or anything well they did of course but they did it in

a gang. On their own they maintained the drains at the side and cut the grass here and there and reported things that needed something they couldn't deal with. They even had odd wee jobs with planning applications they were asked to look at this or that. And then if we were doing any jobs we had to survey them first and we went out with the roadmen of course to do that, so I got to know a lot of them quite well.

TG: And so really now there won't be such people working independently?

00:01:48

AA: No I think they always work in gangs now.

TG: Yes, uh huh. And even now when they dig a ditch, they take that digging machine, they don't take a shovel.

AA: Oh no shovels are not...! Well, they must still have them.

TG: They used to be...there were areas that they knew flooded so as soon as the rain came on they were out there makin' sure...

AA: They would be yes that's the sort of things they did, 'cause there were drains cut across the verges, still are, I presume.

TG: So you think...again I don't mean to be rude, but some of these people were not the brightest tool in the box but they were very able to go out and do that job?

AA: They had to be pretty bright to do it really, yes. No you couldn't do it wi' fools. It was quite a responsible job actually. They weren't paid much, they were paid less than a contractor's labourer, but it was an independent existence for them of course. They often had other hobbies or other jobs even.

TG: Really? And they would still be responsible for the whole of the road infrastructure in the Stewartry then?

AA: Yes, I don't know how many there were, there'd be a road foreman in charge of various districts. They were just promoted from being roadmen of course. And one or two specialist chaps like Charlie Milligan who drove around in a wee truck with an air compressor...well he was the one that made the chair at Kippford!

TG: So they were characters as well.

AA: Oh they were certainly characters, that's one thing you can say about the roadmen.

TG: And also they would meet everybody on the road, so there would be a lot of chat.

AA: Yes. Yes there was. Oh I know you probably could have got the local news from them!

TG: Yes, they would be as good as the postman probably, who was going back and forward on what was happening.

AA: Yes.

01:03:53

TG: There's big changes now aren't there. Everything's centralised, and smaller groups of people, so, but the local government gave you a good living?

AA: They did, yes, I've no complaints about that.

TG: You were there at the right time.

AA: The right time yes it'd be the wrong time now I think.

TG: Yes absolutely. Be glad we're past that!

AA: Yes!

TG: Indeed, thank you very much indeed that's great, thank you.

01:04:29