

Interviewee: Sam Kelly (SK)	Interviewer: Mike Duguid (MD)
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TITLE	Sam Kelly interviewed by Mike Duguid
REGION	<i>Dumfries and Galloway</i>
SUBJECTS/KEYWORDS	<i>Art; artists; Kirkcudbright Artists Colony; portraiture.</i>
COUNTY	<i>Kirkcudbrightshire</i>
TOWN	<i>Kirkcudbright</i>
DATE OF INTERVIEW	2nd February 2018
INTERVIEWER	<i>Mike Duguid</i>
YEAR RANGE	<i>1945 - present</i>
SUMMARY	<i>Sam Kelly recalls the artists of the Kirkcudbright School who lived and painted in the town throughout the 20th century. He recounts his personal experiences of artists such as Tim Jeffs, Lena Alexander and Miles Johnston, amongst others.</i>

SK - Sam Kelly.

[00:00:00]

SK: My name is Sam Kelly. I was born at 51 St. Cuthbert Street, Kirkcudbright, and brought up at 26 High Street. I have a vague recollection of Jessie M. King being affectionate to children playing on the street, and birling them round and round as she met them. I must have been about five years old because she died in 1949.

As I grew up I knew Greengate was a place of interest to artists. Mrs Rae was the only one of interest to me in these days because she was well known for nursing sick animals back to health. It was the unofficial animal hospital down Greengate Close. If you found an animal or bird in distress, Mrs Rae's house was the place to take it; she would nurse it back to health.

At the other end of the High Street was Tim Jeffs - I remember him as a smiling, jovial man. He had a quick step when he walked, as if he was always on a mission. His wife Mary was also very pleasant and always smiling and happy. In 1953 when Kirkcudbright quincentenary was being celebrated, it sticks in my mind of Tim and Mary taking part in some of the festivities. I remember them dancing on the stage in the middle of the Harbour Square, after competing in a car treasure hunt. I think it was a Highland Fling they had to perform as the last task of the treasure hunt. Tim was also a crew member of the Kirkcudbright life boat. It was a good house to call on Halloween night . We were always welcomed in to perform our party piece, and then be awarded with some goodies. Tragically,

Tim was drowned on a boat trip on Loch Ken in 1975.

[00:02:04]

The Dallas's lived next to the Tollbooth. They were known in the town as a right eccentric couple. I remember Alastair as a serious but friendly man, and also thought Ann, his wife, lived in his shadow. As an artist I think she was the better of the two. She had a bicycle with two bags strapped to it and could often be seen darting about the town. I used to clean her windows and was always asked inside to do some small job for her - hang her curtains she could not quite reach, or move a piece of furniture for her. She always related to me things artistic that she'd experienced through the years. A story was confidentially told to me by a friend that was a police officer: one evening Mrs Dallas phoned the police station, and asked if a police officer could come at once and intervene between her husband and son who were having a terrible argument, and were uncontrollable. An officer entered the house, he was surprised to find it very quiet, father and son sitting quietly saying nothing. When asking what had started the row, one said "It was his fault, we were arguing and he pushed me and my supper landed on the floor."

"Yes, what else happened?" said the police officer. "

He threw my supper away."

"And where did he throw it?" said the officer. All eyes went to the ceiling where food was stuck to and dripping off. It took the officer all his time to stop laughing. Yes, they were a right eccentric family.

[00:03:50]

Castle Street was where the craft shop was situated, and Mr. Miles Johnston worked. I can remember as a small boy gazing at the rows of plywood cutouts of birds and animals in the window. Looking for a present for my mother with half a crown in my pocket, into the shop I would go. I asked if I could have the large group of birds on the top shelf. I was told they were too expensive for me, but I could buy a smaller group on the bottom shelf. Mr. Johnston was a smiling, quiet and kindly man. He taught me at the Sunday school and was very interesting to listen to; he was a good storyteller. I've a picture painted by Miles Johnston, which my mother gave to me as she knew I liked it. It is a scene of what locals would call "on the way down to the lake", as you turn off the main road to head down to the lifeboat station. As well as being a nice picture, it has sentimental value to me; my mother told me my father proposed marriage to her on that spot on a Sunday afternoon's walk.

I remember Lena Alexander as a quiet woman who always wore dark clothes. She was a good portrait painter, and her pictures of roses in her style were easy recognisable. Her legacy on Castle Street was bow windows which were on the ground floor. Where the Stewartry Council offices are now, was Alexa's dress shop, mainly run by two friends. Lena lived above the shop and further up the street which is now a private flat she opened the Rendevous Cafe. She installed a bay window in that property also.

Jack Hastings and his wife Nina lived at 20 St. Mary Street, above the fruit and vegetable shop. Jack was well known for making funeral lace. They had two sons - Roland and John - who I was very friendly with. I knew Mr. Hastings more of a shopkeeper than an artist, he was an ordinary down to earth man. We three boys used to watch him paint scenery for the Kirkcudbright choral events. And I remember visiting him when he was painting a large Kirkcudbright logo, of the saint standing on the boat, which was situated on the grass on the opposite side of the harbour. That was in 1953 when the quincentenary celebrations were on. Mr Hastings was a church elder in St. Cuthbert's Church. Hastings' shop has been a Chinese takeaway for twenty-five, or maybe more, years. But I still remember as young boy standing watching a stonemason decorating the frontage of the shop with shore stones, which is now still a striking feature.

[00:06:53]

As boys we used to go into the old mill at the bottom of Millburn Street and watch Mr. Lockhead working, making pots. He was a very quiet thoughtful man, and I remember him as not so quiet as a preacher. Two or three of his friends used to stand preaching the gospel on the streets on a Sunday. I think the Selkirk memorial at the crossroads was their favourite position. They were Plymouth Brethren.

Mrs. Livingstone, a teacher at the Kirkcudbright Academy was a very accomplished portrait artist. I did not get taught by her at school, but in later years I cleaned her windows. Age had taken its toll on her and she had difficulty trying to sketch. Her husband Lackey had also been an Academy teacher and used to try and encourage her, but it was sad to see the frustration was setting in, and her sketching days were over. I've a few portraits my mother commissioned Mrs. Livingstone to sketch - my wife and new baby daughter, and my two sons - which I appreciate and glance at every day, often thinking of Mrs. Livingstone. There were other numerous artists in the town I knew and recognised, but never came in contact with them.