

Interviewee: Jim Henderson (JH)	Interviewers: Hilary Alcock (HA); Flora McDowall (FM)
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INTERVIEWER	Hilary Alcock and Flora McDowall.
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SUMMARY	In this interview Jim Henderson talks about his family and in particular his grandmother the celebrated artist Christian Jane Fergusson. He talks about her background and her art education at Glasgow School of Art. Unlike many other female artists of her time she was able to carry on painting after her marriage and also to exhibit and sell her work. Jim and Hilary and Flora discuss the hurdles women artists faced during her time. Many of the other Kirkcudbright artists who were contemporaries of Christian J. Fergusson are mentioned in the interview for various reasons such as friendship or artistic acquaintance. Christian J. Fergusson, or 'granny' as she is to Jim painted mainly in Dumfries. He talks about his mother, also a painter and the legacy of being in a family of artists. Even though he himself does not paint he is an avid collector of art and has created an amazing archive of his grandmother's personal items and reviews.

HA: So, this is May the 3rd, 2018, and it is Hilary and Flora interviewing Jim Henderson at [REDACTED], Edinburgh.

JH: Which is in North Edinburgh.

HA: North Edinburgh.

JH: Near the Botanic Gardens.

HA: (Right now so I'd just like to give you that sheet because that's for you to read afterwards, which just tells you and enlarges a bit more on the Kirkcudbright Artists Remembered project), so if we could start off Jim - would you tell us please what your connections are with Kirkcudbright?

JH: Well I'm a good friend fortunately with Ian and Sarah Steele in Kirkcudbright 'cause I was at university with Ian Steele and I was at the wedding, I've known Willie Henry a long time 'cause Ian after being up north he actually came and worked with Williamson & Henry and he knew Mrs. Henry.

HA: Williamson & Henry is that the - ?

JH: Williamson & Henry are a solicitors firm in Kirkcudbright and Willie Henry was a partner in that firm, he was a very good partner, he was a little bit ahead of me but he was at university in Edinburgh and he is an expert in agricultural law, he now lives in Edinburgh and he's coming along here at four o'clock or four fifteen to drive you back to -

HA: Oh, that's fantastic.

JH: And he knows a lot more about Kirkcudbright artists than I do because I never did live in Kirkcudbright apart from visiting Ian and Sarah, I used to go to Dumfries to visit my granny with mum.

HA: Who was your granny?

02:02

JH: My granny was Christian J. Fergusson with two s's, and she died in Nineteen fifty-seven aged eighty, she lived in a house in Dumfries in Maxwelltown, Dumfries because her husband, my grandfather David Fergusson, who I never knew because he was dead before I was born was a lawyer in Dumfries and a very nice chap by all accounts and he was the secretary of the Dumfries and Galloway Fine Art Society, In fact right there is the minutes which he probably wrote which are signed by E. A. Taylor and E. A. Hornel and other people.

HA: So why was he so interested in art?

JH: Well he married, he was he married to my grandmother and my grandmother went to Glasgow School of Art. She was from a bourgeois Dumfries family but she was kicking over the traces a bit, she went to art school and she went to an art school in London and then in Glasgow, and at a very interesting time because it was the time of the Glasgow Art School and Arts and Crafts and all that sort of stuff, and when she and my grandfather got married they designed - they didn't have any money - but they designed a house which is the house that I used to go and stay in, much much later, which and they got married in Nineteen eight and -

HA: Was that house in Dumfries?

JH: The house was in Maxwelltown, Dumfries - Rotchell Road - and it was designed by my great uncle who was an architect in London and who was brother of David Fergusson, my grandfather, and we've still got some of it in the desk a lot of correspondence between my

grandparents about what sort of chimney pots and what sort of bits and pieces, er, and the house is still much the same even though unfortunately it's been gutted and all the lovely old fireplaces were deeply unfashionable in 1960 when it was sold, so they were torn out.

HA: Oh, how sad.

JH: And some Sixties things were put in their place, but you can still see - I've been to the house a few years ago and you can still see the traces of Arts and Crafts, and it's semi-detached because they didn't have any money, as far as we know, and they presumably financed the building of the house by selling off the other side of it. And my granny when she was a very old lady, when I stayed there, was still living in a house which had been designed since Nineteen eight.

HA: And did she have a studio in the house?

JH: She did, at the top of top of the house and it had a wonderful view of Criffel Hill in the background and it was full of paintings because she was a serious artist, she was a good artist but she was a serious artist and she sold a lot of paintings in her lifetime and was quite well known before World War Two in Scotland, but it was quite difficult for women to get themselves the - she was a suffragist at Glasgow School of Art - but it was quite difficult for women to be recognised in their own right, as artists or any profession

05:30

it was most easy and the battle was won in the art colleges before it was won anywhere else.

HA: Yes.

JH: But not many artists were recognised by the learned societies. I used to be, a long time ago, I was the secretary of the Society of Scottish Artists which was founded in 1890 in opposition to the Royal Scottish Academy, which was terribly establishment, and it was founded really to kick over the trace a bit, and it's still there - but Anne Redpath, who was a friend of my father's who I knew when I was a little boy, she was the first RSA that I know of, she and Mary Armour probably.

HA: Yes, they were both -

JH: They were both recognised - and Joan Eardley who I do remember meeting once a long time ago when I was about nine. They were recognised artists but it was quite difficult for artists if you were a woman to be on the same level with men, you just have to read the minutes of that book which are there to see that Mrs. Fergusson and Mrs. Taylor and Jessie M. King were the prime movers at that society, but it's not recorded as such. You can read in-between the lines, you can see that they're doing all the work -

HA: And they were still viewed as second-class citizens.

JH: They were still viewed then, I mean that was then this is now, and my sister Christine has a hat box full of love letters between my grandparents, written between Nineten three and Nineteen eight from between Dumfries where my grandfather was and Glasgow where my grandmother was studying, all about their wedding and it's amazing it's like a daily, and I ploughed through them all when I was writing a little book about granny twenty years ago, and they're mainly sort of lovey-dovey stuff you know - how's your cold dearest and things like, that but in-between them in amongst them there are the politics of Glasgow School of Art and also the suffragist movement and there is a difference between suffragist and suffragette, because after Nineteen ten the suffragists became much more militant and started chaining themselves to Buckingham Palace railings and blowing up Lloyd George House and things like that, and throwing themselves under the King's horse famously - but before that the suffragist movement was peaceful and constitutional, and my grandmother was at Glasgow School of Art at that time and so my sister Christine, in Kelso, still has a hat box full of love letters and the hat box probably comes from Kirkcudbright because in Nineteen five my grandmother, when she was still unmarried and recently had been awarded a diploma one of the first from Glasgow School of Art,, she taught at Kirkcudbright High School for a year, art, and as a very young person and she also she wrote some of the letters from there to my grandfather so we know that, and she was staying with her maiden aunt Lizzie Stark, who lived in a house and had a milliners house, shop, and a hatters shop in Kirkcudbright.

HA: Oh, do you know where that was, which street or anything?

09:15

JH: Well I didn't, I thought it was Saint Mary's Street but in fact Ian Steele who is very helpful, a very helpful fellow has managed, and perhaps Sarah Steele too, has managed to identify the house - the street which runs between where they live in Saint Mary's Street, Saint Cuthbert's Street and going down that street that leads towards the High Street Gallery in Kirkcudbright, you know Mary Brook's place?

HA: Yes.

JH: So, and it's still there but it's not a shop any more, but I'm pretty sure that granny when she was very young she would have stayed with her auntie, her maiden auntie, and auntie was running a milliners business - hats and so on - downstairs and the flat would be upstairs.

HA: And your granny bought one?

JH: Well certainly that hat box is still there and I believe the lady who owned the seat that you're sitting on was a friend of granny and was the bridesmaid of my mother, and she went to visit my granny when she was very old and ill at Dumfries and Galloway Infirmary, and she visited her on the day that my granny died of a stroke and she wasn't very saying very much before then, but I do remember Miss Corrie was her name - a very nice lady - said that she remember the last conversation she had with my grandmother was suddenly my grandmother sat up in bed and said 'A new hat!'

HA: [Laughs]

JH: And that was keeping her going and that was very much the style, Anne Redpath who we used to meet in Edinburgh [...] she always cut a dash by having a new hat the Paris spring fashions in hats, and she was a flash of - streak of - colour in an otherwise grey city in the Nineteen fifties.

HA: Yes I'm sure! So did your grandmother have any friends among the artists in Kirkcudbright?

JH: Yes she had studied with Jessie King and had been, all the prizes are in the desk actually there, designed by Jessie King - and they were obviously friends she obviously knew a lot of other people but I don't know, she was taught by Francis Newbery - Fra Newbery - and she refers to Fra Newbery in her letters to my grandfather, but to no other artists really, she obviously - Hornel (or Hornel) knew of her, because he wrote a piece in Nineteen five or Nineteen six in the Kirkcudbright newspaper about having judged the prizes in the town hall in Kirkcudbright, the Kirkcudbright Academy pupils, and he commented on the fact that the standard of work had greatly increased since Miss Fergusson - or Miss Stark - had come to teach in Kirkcudbright Academy and it was outstanding that there was an exhibition in Kirkcudbright Town Hall.

HA: Why do you think she left the school 'cause you said I think she was there for a year?

12:51

JH: Well she went to Glasgow High School as the head of art and then she got married, because it was very important to get married, and she'd been engaged for - since Nineteen three - to David Fergusson, who was a nice fellow and was getting on a wee bit and obviously thought that granny Fergusson would be the girl for her, for him, and he also was very supportive he became the secretary of the Fine Art Society, the Agricultural Society, he was the burgh prosecutor, he was the session clerk, he was a general factotum in Dumfries and he knew the Taylors - and I don't want to repeat hearsay, but when my father said that not only - I think it was the time that he talked about Dorothy L. Sayers and having tea with her in Kirkcudbright when he was no doubt courting my mother - but he said that oh the Fergussons' were very nice people, but E. A. Taylor used to call in on David Fergusson and see him, and the rumour was that he had a mistress in Dumfries - that's the real reason why he was visiting Dumfries.

HA: Ah!

JH: So he had a slightly freewheeling marriage with Jessie King and I don't know whether that's true, I'm repeating hearsay.

HA: A bit of a smokescreen there!

JH: So, and my granny was not impressed by Victorian sentimentality, she didn't like the Faeds for example, Thomas Faed.

HA: What their style of painting?

JH: She thought that was exactly the sort of thing that they should be rebelling against and all her furniture was either very old Georgian furniture (there's some of it next door) and, or very new, and she had been brought up in a Victorian family with lots of Victorian attitudes and she didn't like any of that, and she didn't like sentimentality.

HA: So was she more influenced say by the colourists or the Glaswegian School?

JH: I think the colourists were hardly on the scene and the Glasgow Boys would be there, but the Scottish colourists - Peploe and Cadell and Fergusson - who she (there's a photograph there of her with Fergusson) who she would know in later life because of her interest in contemporary, then contemporary, Scottish art she wouldn't be very influenced by them - she might have been influenced by the Glasgow Boys - and one of them Bill Smith (who's a very nice fellow who was on the board of the Printmakers Workshop with me, he now lives in England, but he's written books about D. Y. Cameron and E. A. Hornel) and he said of E. A. Hornel, he didn't think anything of E. A. Hornel's work after Nineteen hundred and eleven, and that's when he stops writing about him if you look at the book very carefully - because he thought that his later work was revoltingly sentimental.

HA: Yes. And he changed his style, didn't he?

16:17

JH: He did and the early work with George Henry, in particular in Japan, was impressive - very impressive - and I wouldn't decry him for a moment, but I think he Hornel sold out a bit and I've got photographs of him with granny and Robert Dickie Cairns, who is now forgotten about, and E. A. Taylor and there is in this book - there's a book here about granny, which I wrote in a terrible rush in Nineteen - a long time ago, that's when I looked at the letters and this book has got that picture which comes from that desk, I'm thinking of my father's desk, and it's now an established image.

HA: Thank you.

JH: It's we gave it to the Stewartry Museum in Kirkcudbright and it was copied and it now appears in all the books and sometimes it doesn't bother to name all the artists.

HA: Was she very friendly with Charles Oppenheimer?

JH: Well, Oppenheimer was - she obviously knew Charles Oppenheimer because of the Dumfries and Galloway Fine Art Society - there is reference in here to Oppenheimer being at various exhibitions and at various meetings and presenting his apologies. Mr. [?] here we are Nineteen forty-seven, (I hope that I'm making some sense), and there we are - there's a Nineteen thirty-eight picture - there's my granny and Tim Jeffs and E. A. Taylor and all sorts of other people, Benno Schotz RSA, the distinguished sculptor it says here.

HA: Oh he's the [sculptor] yes.

JH: But that's granny.

FM: That's fantastic.

JH: And there's E. A. Taylor, and so all these things are here and they were carefully pasted into the minute book.

HA: So would you say that they were part of her social whirl, her friends?

JH: I think so, but I think the difficulty from my grandparents point of view and Kirkcudbright is that Kirkcudbright was quite a long way away and you know, in those days I remember when I was a little boy, we never went to Kirkcudbright because it was too far away.

HA: Yes.

JH: We went to Dalbeattie, I remember driving down to Kippford with my mother and with Johnnie Maxwell in Nineteen fifty-five or thereabouts, 'cause my mother was at art college in Edinburgh with Johnnie Maxwell and my father had known Johnnie Maxwell as well when they were students in the Twenties and Thirties, and it's extraordinary that Johnnie Maxwell who I only met that once was obviously catching up with mum in a big

19:32

way and he smoked incessantly - he died of lung cancer shortly afterwards - but he was a good artist and he was highly regarded then and a bit of a rebel.

HA: Would he have been one of the Dalbeattie artists?

JH: He was, he lived in Dalbeattie. His parents had a lot of money they had a cinema and butchers business in Dalbeattie and he taught at Edinburgh College of Art for a while and then went back to Dalbeattie and painted, and he was a friend of Gillies and Gillies used to visit Dumfries and Galloway to visit John Maxwell I think, and Gillies was a friend of my father's and was teaching - he was a little bit older than dad - but he was taught at Edinburgh College of Art and used to go round the Highlands, my father - it's not generally known - that my father went off on various painting expeditions with Gillies in the Twenties.

HA: So your father was painting too?

JH: My father painted too, but he gave up, he taught at Edinburgh College of Art he wanted to get married he went to David Fergusson for some reason and asked for his daughter's hand in marriage and David Fergusson being very Victorian and business-like said 'And how much are you earning?' and my father had to say 'A hundred pounds a year' and David Fergusson said 'Well come back when you're earning three hundred pounds a year' so my father resigned from the art college and went into secondary education and taught at the

Royal High School in Edinburgh - and that was the death knell. To be taken seriously as an artist you have to suffer in a garret and you know, money was not the thing it was, that three hundred pounds was] a lot of money in those days, and it's - I mean when I was a partner in a law firm, in Brodies, and I never told my father how much I was earning because I know how much he was earning when he retired, and he was the head of department, and it was ridiculous, compared with the money values today have changed radically.

[*Clock chimes*]

HA: So what about your granny selling her paintings, did she have exhibitions did she have commissions?

JH: She did, I don't think she set out to sell her paintings but there was a family schism in the Nineteen twenties I understand, really through my father telling me very late in life, and it involved the Barbour's who I was speaking about earlier - and my granny's brother William Stark was a lawyer, but regarded as rather unsteady and my grandfather took him into partnership in Dumfries and [William John] and by this time his father, his father-in-law - my great-great-grandfather James Arthur Stark who was a lawyer in Dumfries - had died, and [Willie] Stark after World War Two, no doubt for excellent reasons, invested the burgh rates of Maxwelltown (of which he was the collector) in French canals to try to avoid any repetition of the German invasion of France across - you know, and it was a complete scam, and he lost all the money and there was no insurance in those days so - and my grandfather who's an honourable man - Willie John went off rushed off to New Zealand and was never seen again, but my grandfather who had taken

23:38

him into partnership for reasons of family pleading of his in-laws, felt obliged to pay it back and sixteen thousand pounds was worth about two million pounds today, so it's quite a lot of money.

HA: [*Gasps*] A lot of money.

JH: And so, and my mother never received any money she got these lots of paintings and furniture, but no money 'cause there was no money to be had, and the Barbours fell out with the Fergussons because my great aunt Nancy who was married to Douglas Barbour refused to help, allegedly, it's Nineteen twenty-two - it's a long time ago and I don't really know anything about it - it was a hundred years ago, but as a result of that my granny felt she must contribute to the family income and she started selling her paintings that's the point I'm trying to get at, and she started painting more in Nineteen twenty-four/twenty-five/twenty-six and you can tell that suddenly there is more, that the Royal Glasgow Institute catalogue and the RSA catalogue show that suddenly she's painting more and she painted well, but she wasn't doing it for her own pleasure so much as for commercial reasons and so she sold that painting and various other paintings on the market and we still - there's a website I don't know if you're aware of it - Dumfries and Galloway Artists it's run by David Steele of Gatehouse?

HA: Yes.

JH: And if you look very closely at my granny's entry a lot of the paintings I have never even seen, I've never seen physically, because they come from America or Australia.

HA: So they're in private collections?

JH: They're in private collections there and occasionally we get emails from people in Los Angeles saying we bought this painting twenty years ago at an auction or at an antique shop and where is it of, is it your grandmother? And I look at it and of course it is. So then I ask them if we could have permission to reproduce it in the website and there are quite a few paintings which I've never ever physically seen which hang on walls in America and France and Germany and so, she did sell a lot of paintings.

HA: She was very successful and you have quite a lot of her paintings, so are you sort of buying paintings back, are you trying to amass the collection of them or - ?

JH: No, when mum died in Nineteen eighty-four, the top of the house was full of paintings because they'd come from Dumfries when granny died and my parents didn't have any time or inclination to do anything about them and they were absolutely filthy, that one there was covered in grime, and I must have been at university and when granny and my mother died and I took a sponge to some of them and found that there were lovely vibrant colours underneath.

HA: That's so beautiful that one.

27:09

JH: So and that was one of them, and quite a lot of them that was another one, my brother had that and he swapped it for one I had of boats and Whithorn, the Isle of they Whithorn, and it's been there ever since and my brother David has the watercolour I think of that one.

HA: So did she go out and paint in the open air or did she - ?

JH: She did a lot of watercolours and she could do five or six a day and if they didn't work she'd just rip them up and start again 'cause the whole thing about watercolour technique is to have wet paper and to put the paint on and not touch it [touch it afterwards] otherwise it loses it's spontaneity, and the if they worked she would take them back and she would turn them into oil paintings in her studio in Dumfries in Maxwelltown and -

HA: And she went out to Kirkcudbright quite a bit and painted in the area around didn't she?

JH: She did she painted all over the place, but she mainly painted round about Dumfries because that was the most accessible place [for her] and she'd paint anywhere that she happened to be and that painting there is Pittenweem, an' I know that they were in Pittenweem in Nineteen twenty-three on holiday, so and she would paint and she went to the summer school run by E. A. Taylor and Jessie King in Arran, as did my parents, and she

would paint pictures of Arran so - and she was persuaded by father to go to Berwickshire in the Thirties and she painted there, but mainly her most successful paintings, her best period, was the Nineteen twenties and thirties in and around Dumfries and Galloway.

HA: Did she ever teach again?

JH: She did, she taught although my grandfather was a session clerk of a Presbyterian church and we are a Presbyterian family and such as we are she was a friend of the mother superior of the Benedictine convent in Dumfries where my mother went to school and she taught art there, and apparently she was a very good teacher according to what I was told, a lady who came to see me in Dumfries in Kirkcudbright a long time ago twenty years ago and she taught, she was a friend of the mother superior. There was no suggestion of them and us about growing up in Dumfries in the Twenties and Thirties and they were Presbyterians her, his grandfather, his father was a Church of Scotland minister in the Borders so - and they had no difficulty being friends of the Catholic the Roman Catholic mother superior of the Benedictine convent which is the building is still there in Dumfries if you look across the old bridge.

HA: Yes ,I know where it is yes.

JH: It's in Maxwelltown and I think that my mother went there partly for financial reasons because there would be no money when she was growing up because my grandparents would be trying to pay off this debt, and partly because it was a good school.

30:45

HA: Yes, yes, absolutely - so I mean Kirkcudbright now is The Artists' Town, so what do you think of this idea of them having a big - almost a national - gallery there?

JH: I think it's a good thing an' I think Kirkcudbright which is a wonderful place by the way , it's unique in being a place not on the way to anywhere but it's a place of its own right, you know it exists, you've got to make a special effort to go there and it's not on the way to anywhere you know that's what I'm saying.

HA: No!

JH: But I think it's a good thing that an' I think that credit should be recorded to those initially involved in the idea of setting up the Kirkcudbright Art Gallery and that is Bill Smith who we've talked about earlier, Patrick Bourne, John Halliday who I know is a difficult man but he's a living artist he lives in Kirkcudbright an' he's a good artist and he was very much involved with the initial stages, he's a very difficult man.

HA: Do you have any of his paintings?

JH: I do I've got three in the room next door.

HA: Oh, you'll have to show us!

JH: But not of Kirkcudbright and the other person was Hugh MacDougall, who's also a very difficult man, he was the secretary of the Kirkcudbright Two thousand -

HA: Who was that?

JH: Hugh MacDougall, you've never heard of him.

FM: I haven't I've never heard of him, no, is he a Kirkcudbright man?

JH: He lived in Kirkcudbright -

FM: Oh I do know who he is actually, it's come right back to me, he lived at number three in the High Street didn't he?

JH: That's right but he lived with a lady whose name I've forgotten.

FM: Yes, I know exactly who he is and I've met him.

JH: And he's a very difficult man, but these people were instrumental in setting up the Kirkcudbright 2000 exhibition, it wouldn't have been started without them and Patrick Bourne who produced this book, which is actually not a very satisfactory book 'cause it's full of mistakes, but you know it was produced in a hurry and the main thing is it's got wonderful illustrations, er, the trouble about going to print if you make mistakes is that mistakes are recorded for all time and they are repeated ad nauseum because of the

33:10

difficulty of being sure, so you've got to be very certain of your facts when I was writing this book (I don't know where I've put it now).

HA: This one?

JH: That one there yeah, about granny, I went through that. I was given three weeks to write it an' I went through that desk and tore things apart and I didn't write anything that I wasn't sure about, because it's very easy to speculate about things.

HA: Yes and once something's in print...

JH: Once something's in print, fortunately this went to two editions, there's my grandfather and my mother by granny and this is the painting that Bill Smith wanted to have -

HA: It's gorgeous.

JH: Well my brother Hugh has got that, it's a watercolour it's beautiful and it's very symbolic, but Roger Billcliffe it was wouldn't have it because who's heard of Chris J. Fergusson, I haven't?

HA: They turned it into postcards and I bought loads of them, I thought it was lovely.

JH: Well it was David Devereux who that's the other person who deserves credit, this is a painting that turned up, I've never seen it it turned up in Los Angeles and it may have been bought I've thanks to Ian Steele's help I've managed to identify where it is, it's quite near Dumfries, it's Locharbriggs. Lochfoot - and but we have been speculating that it landed up in the United States it was bought it's exhibited in the fine art the Glasgow School of Fine Art Society, whatever, in Nineteen forty-six and we think that it was probably bought by an American G.I. going back to America and wanting to -

HA: Have a sort of souvenir, yes, of his time in the UK.

JH: And he died, he died and then it was sold and it's Forty-six the Blackburn Lochrutton - forty pounds she got for it – and, but that's pure speculation, I mean it's just a notion that I got and it may be right it may be wrong, so you can't really record it as fact.

HA: No, why did you say you thought John Halliday was a good painter? What is it about his paintings that you feel - ?

JH: I think he's a good painter, he takes himself very seriously, he works - it's mainly oil paintings and he works them to death - but he's a good painter. He has produced some very good representative portraits of people and some trompe-l'oeil which the National Trust bought, he's mainly painted elsewhere. He was brought up I think in Kirkcudbright and the he's very proud of a portrait by Cecile Walton of himself done when he was a little boy.

36:30

HA: Yes.

JH: And there are a lot of his paintings, I think it's difficult because partly people don't really appreciate his work, he thinks that he should be more appreciated than he is, but lots of artists have suffered from that.

HA: Absolutely. So have you bought them at auctions or exhibitions?

JH: No I bought one in Edinburgh in an antique shop quite near here and two from him himself, and I went to visit him because I'm one of his trustees I should declare that interest, and I went to visit him with Ian Steele and Mr. Halliday is notorious for being difficult about selling his paintings, and [REDACTED], but I did buy the paintings from him directly and he was prepared to sell them, and Ian Steele was very surprised that I managed to buy them but they're in there.

HA: He must have been impressed by you I think, mustn't he yes?

JH: Well he was impressed by granny, 'cause he did know granny and -

FM: That gave you credibility!

JH: It gave me credibility as a buyer and Donald Watson was a lovely man, he was a client of Ian Steele's, and I went and visited Donald and his wife Joan when they were alive in St. John's Town of Dalry, and we became good friends and he had been a painter at Dumfries and Galloway Fine Arts Society when he was a young man he's now dead sadly, but he was a good bird artist probably the most distinguished bird artist at that time in Britain, and he lived in St. John's Town. He was as poor as a church mouse, lovely, he didn't bother about money except that he was wanting his paintings to sell for more than fifty pounds or a hundred pounds because he had to exist and there are paintings next door by him.

[...]

FM: He was wonderfully popular - he and his wife, Mr. Watson.

JH: Oh Donald Watson was lovely.

FM: People absolutely loved him, I know, up in the Glenkens he's terribly well-known and terribly popular - there was a scheme at one point of trying to turn his house into something?

JH: Absolutely, his family -

39:08

FM: Has that run aground?

JH: It's run aground. Roger Crofts, who I know separately and for other reasons, has a house in St. John's Town of Dalry - now he's never met he never met Donald Watson in his lifetime but he piloted a scheme whereby that the family, who were prepared to give the house, which was a lovely house a bit ramshackle but absolutely Donald Watson to a tee, and Joan - and he was prepared, they were prepared to give the house to become a sort of ornithological museum if you like or a centre, because of Donald's commitment to hen harriers and he wrote a book about hen harriers. So Roger Crofts has tried very hard, but I think it's run aground because there was not enough money.

FM: I think so, I was part of the group that was looking into that originally and we went up round there with Roger and the house was amazing because it was Donald's studio - it looked as if Donald had just gone out for a cup of tea, or gone to buy the paper, because everything was exactly -

HA: Set up.

FM: You know he could have walked back in and picked it up!

JH: Joan was ill, but Donald showed me round his studio and when he was coming downstairs he had to sit down because he was out of puff, but he was very pleased that anybody could be interested in his work and Joan was absolutely lovely, but they were both ill.

FM: Yes.

HA: Oh how sad.