

Interviewee: Alastair Dallas (AD)	Interviewers: Hilary Alcock (HA) and Flora McDowall (FM)
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SUMMARY	In this interview Hilary and Flora talk with Alastair Dallas about his life in Kirkcudbright and the work and life of his parents, the artists Anne Dallas and Alastair Dallas. His parents had a studio/shop in Kirkcudbright with a gallery at the back. His father sold a drawing of a sketch he had done of the Loch Ness Monster when he was young, from something he had actually seen in the water. Alastair Sr. also made and sold many things from his shop including easels he had made himself and made and printed colouring-in 'outlines' for children. He was also involved in art supplies out-with his own painting career. Alastair's mother Ann was a very fondly remembered painter who painted intricate watercolours and who had had a teaching career beforehand.

HA: So this is Alastair Dallas being interviewed at -

HA: [REDACTED] Kirkcudbright on Tuesday July the Thirty-first interviewed by Hilary Alcock and Flora McDowall, so Mr. Dallas please will you tell us a little bit about your childhood and when you came to live here in Kirkcudbright?

AD: A lot of my early childhood was spent in Auchencairn or at school in Perthshire, I came to school there because my mother got a post of art teacher and part of her fees was my education but when she became ill I stayed on.

FM: Which school was this?

AD: It was called Naemoor, it later became Lendrick, it was a boarding school on the borders of Perth, Kinross and Clackmannanshire, we used to have a walk that took us to into all three counties, it was about an hour's walk.

HA: That's amazing!

AD: When we moved to Kirkcudbright I was eleven and I wanted to go to the Academy but for some reason the old man was against it, an' he told me for whatever reason something that I later found out was not fact, but by then it was too late.

HA: So why do you think they came to live in Kirkcudbright?

AD: Oh, because they got the house the house that I now live in, the house I sold and the garden for three hundred and sixty pounds.

HA: So even then that was a reasonable price?

AD: Even then that was a reasonable price. I have liked Kirkcudbright I have never seen any reason to leave it, I've no desire to rule the world like so many seem to have.

HA: What do you like about Kirkcudbright so much?

AD: It's just a friendly place and where my friends are.

03:12

HA: And why do you think your parents wanted to live there besides the price of the property?

AD: I think they would have moved to anywhere in Dumfries and Galloway or even further afield if they had got a property at that price, but they walked happened to walk down the close the very day old Mrs. Milroy decided to sell, Katie Milroy, and basically clinched the deal there and then.

HA: Do you think they were aware that there were many artists living in Kirkcudbright?

AD: Oh they knew about them, they knew all of them.

HA: Did they?

AD: Oh yes, they were showing pictures in what used to be the Conservative Club the Constitutional Club in St. Mary's Street, not St. Mary's Street, St. Cuthbert's Street it's beside what is now the Co-op.

HA: Right, yes, I know [it].

AD: Well it's down from the Co-op. I remember coming in quite often in the van loaded with pictures to be displayed and hopefully sold, most of them actually were sold.

HA: Who do you think bought them, was it local people or did people come from far and wide?

AD: Oh no we had them from far and wide, my father had a great friend Gerald [Stonley] from London and he bought quite a lot, I've never seen the pictures he bought he will be now pushing up daisies I suppose.

HA: Yes, probably. So what can you remember what other artists exhibited there with your parents?

AD: Vera Alabaster, the Johnstones - the Nesbitts came later they had a house up at Tongland, no, Fred Murray was an art dealer, sold art equipment - when he left the scene my father took that over, he didn't take over Fred's business he started one up on his own, he was quite successful.

HA: And did he run that from home?

AD: Yes, it was the front shop now beside the Tolbooth.

HA: And he would sell easels and paint and - ?

05:55

AD: Anything, he could get anybody anything, within quite a short space of time and he actually made easels.

HA: Right.

AD: He bought one and simply copied it! [*Laughs*]

HA: Very good, so did he have a workshop?

AD: Yes.

HA: Where was that?

AD: Down the back, I used it while working to repair my chainsaws. Now there's one story about the shop - he was a keen gardener among other things - and one day he bought a tray of seed potatoes an' he put them in the shop window, and he was sitting in the shop waiting for customers when he heard some schoolgirls outside saying, 'Oh we'll be seeing a pile of bricks in there next!'

[*Laughter*]

HA: And did your father think that was funny or was he cross?

AD: No he thought it was funny, he appreciated it.

HA: The humour, yes!

AD: Because that was at the time of the Tate Gallery's multi-million pound purchase of -

FM: Bricks!

AD: Bricks!

HA: Bricks on the floor yes!

[*Laughter*]

FM: That's Kirkcudbright, everyone's a critic!

HA: Absolutely!

AD: It wasn't a critic, it was just girls being girls.

HA: But so appropriate!

07:30

AD: Yes.

HA: And did your father ever put his paintings into the shop to sell?

AD: Oh yes!

HA: And your mother?

AD: He sold both, the big room at the back where the [teepees] now entertain people and have their kitchenette was an art gallery for many years.

HA: Really?

AD: And he was in one day when some rather officious ladies arrived wanting to borrow his art to take round schools, of course it'll be insured, but no offer of payment, so they were disabused of the fact - and he had another wee quirk, when we were printing, there's plenty of his stuff about, printed both both my parents' pictures, he used to put the printing ink on a piece of hardboard just with a pallette knife an' he made, well, designs with this old ink and one day some folk came in and said, oh we're looking for something a wee bit more modern you see, so he held up this thing an' he says, '*Confucius Contemplating the Iniquities of the Monied Classes*, twenty-five thousand pounds'. 'Oh no, that's too dear!', so he turned round and said, '*Three Horses Grazing in the Field*, two hundred and fifty!'

[*Laughter*]

HA: He had a good sense of humour!

AD: And they just stormed out - they hadn't!

[*Laughter*]

HA: So what sort of paintings did he generally paint, were they landscapes?

AD: That, both in oils and watercolour, he wasn't very great at portraits - that was basically my mother had a monopoly on that among the two of them. I think he got he was ... I remember him crowing to me one day about getting a commission for a portrait because they didn't like the one my mother had done, but that was the only time I knew [that] he'd done a portrait.

HA: And did he go and paint outside or did he - ?

AD: He was a great one for the camera but it was the early days of colour and black and white, there's one he did I've got I've yet to find the plate, but I know I've got it, of the Loch Ness Monster.

10:47

HA: Really!

AD: It was on Border Television I think about the year before he died, they paid twenty-five pounds for a print. I printed them off took me half an hour to do two hundred!

[*Laughter*]

FM: Nice work if you can get it!

AD: I literally turned the handle.

FM: And what was his story about the Loch Ness Monster?

AD: It was 1936 he was doing a commission for McAlpine who were doing the new road along the north side of Loch Ness and the previous artist they'd commissioned simply would not paint what was there, he liked swirling curves on a road McAlpine has spent hundreds of thousands of pounds making dead straight!

[*Laughter*]

AD: So McAlpine wanted a picture of what he had done, where these pictures ended up I have no idea, but the old man had a hut assigned to him by McAlpine where he stayed for weeks at a time - this was before he got married of course, this was before the war and the one of the Loch Ness Monster was in his sketchbook, he hadn't painted it or anything like that, and he found it one day and he got it made into a plate and he had me print it off for him 'cause he was too busy doing something else. As I say, Border bought a copy and they

did a wee interview with him for twenty-five quid but that was quite a lot o' money in those days.

FM: And he was really convinced he saw the Loch Ness Monster?

AD: This drawing I don't think looks as if it was drawn invented, eh it's too detailed.

FM: It's amazing isn't it?

HA: Yes.

AD: And there was a guy up in Loch - beside - Loch Ness he used to take people around an' ah sent him a copy by email and he did a thing on his website about it, but this Loch Ness Monster I think he genuinely saw what it was and he simply didn't take a photograph because he didn't have his camera with him, he'd gone down to the loch-side for somewhere quiet to have a cup o' tea an' a bun!

FM: Well lucky he could draw!

14:05

AD: Lucky he could draw. I have some of these prints still - they're not in really good condition because the last few they were running off the ink was beginning to catch where it shouldn't and when I said, will I clean it, an' he said, no two hundred that's enough.

HA: So your father, I was reading about your father and he travelled a lot didn't he?

AD: Mainly in Scotland, his travelling days stopped with the Second World War. He was up on a fishing boat the Noreen-Mary and the lucky thing is he got back and the Noreen-Mary was sunk by the U-boat on the next voyage.

HA: Oh my goodness.

AD: He was only a replacement cook, he wasn't the - he was one o' these people the Ministry o' Supply or whatever it was could call upon to fill a gap if somebody was off, that was the last war activity he did. I don't know if he was at Dunkirk or not, I suspect he was because he wouldn't talk about it.

HA: Yeah, a lot of people won't speak about their war experiences.

AD: He was into boats in those days, he had a boat at Kippford called [?] and when he and my mother were away somewhere some vandals got in and put it beyond repair.

HA: How did he meet your mother, did they meet at art school?

AD: No, they met at the youth hostel up in the north, they met in the youth hostel I'm afraid I can't remember.

HA: No, it's a long time ago isn't it.

AD: Yes, they met before the war, how long before the war I don't know but they got married in Forty-six, Boxing Day.

HA: And when they came to live down here what did your mother do, did she teach still?

AD: No, she - by the time she came here she'd stopped anything like that. They both had positions at Kilquhanity when I was five, when I turned five, it's now a children's village or something they call it.

FM: Were you a pupil at Kilquhanity for a while?

AD: Yes.

FM: That would have been an interesting thing.

AD: It was school, one and one's two! A.N.D is and!

17:15

FM: Oh really, 'cause I thought Kilquhanity had a fairly unusual regime you were allowed to pick your classes and you had a lot more choice than if you went to conventional schools?

AD: Ah no, that's latterly.

FM: That's later on, yeah, okay.

AD: No, I got taught by a woman called [Bet Kelso] and basically when I went to Naemoor ye couldn't tell the difference. She was just a primary school teacher and she taught primary school children.

HA: You mean she taught traditionally?

AD: Yes.

FM: So it really was one and one is two, A.N.D is and?

AD: Yes.

FM: Right.

AD: The only thing about John Aitkenhead was he allowed us to build huts wherever we liked, including on his front lawn!

FM: Sounds like a good sport!

HA: Because afterwards the school I think was run on lines A.S Neill's lines of open education and then free choice and -

FM: I knew a few people that went there and they seemed to have quite a lively time.

AD: I only knew one pupil that's been there and he's now in Japan teaching sport, I can't remember but his father was a member of Kirkcudbright Chess Club here when it existed and the boy used to come in with his wee brother.

HA: So what was it like growing up in a family of parents who were artists?

AD: They didn't press, they did spend some time with me, but I didn't have the knack and they let it go. I would do what I would do.

HA: That's good, isn't it?

AD: Yes, you see I never knew how my parents voted, none of my business, my vote was my own, what I did with it was my business.

19:16

HA: So did they believe in the fact that children were seen and not heard?

AD: No.

HA: They encouraged you to speak up?

AD: Yes, they did.

HA: Did they take you to look at paintings and visit galleries?

AD: Only if they were going for something themselves, they didn't bundle me into a car to visit a gallery. The only gallery I ever was at when I was still at school was the McLellan Galleries in Glasgow where a Kirkcudbright artists exhibition was coming to an end and I was employed to help fill the van and used my father's return ticket to get back to Edinburgh!

FM: You were making yourself useful!

AD: I was made to make myself useful! But there was during the day when the exhibition was on I was allowed to wander around, I can't say I was terribly impressed. The only galleries ever impressed me were in Hook of Holland, yes, the Hook of Holland where I found some quite remarkable galleries - I never thought of the Hook of Holland before then as anything other than a harbour. My mother was quite impressed that I had found the place.

HA: Well done you.

AD: She knew about it, but she didn't know where it was and I was wandering about and I never bothered asking her if I could go anywhere I just went, of course I was seventeen at the time, and I found this gallery and I thought she would be impressed - and she was.

FM: That's quite adventurous at seventeen.

AD: I don't know, my cousin was wandering about London at eleven.

FM: That's goes beyond adventurous, that's crazy! Really, eleven?

AD: No, he was staying with my aunt also his aunt and uncle in Epping and he would just say, I want to go somewhere, and they'd say, 'Right, we know where you're going, fine'. He was wandering about London at eleven. I mean, I don't know if I would have wandered about London at eleven but I was in London at ten, but I was with my mother and aunt all the time.

FM: What were your parents like, I know it's hard for a child of someone to say, but what sort of personalities did they have?

AD: My mother's was a bit more outgoing, my father seemed to find difficulty making friends in Kirkcudbright, he made friends outside Kirkcudbright. I actually got a contract because I

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was my father's son, cutting trees in Gatehouse who my father was a great friend of, a guy called Ebenezer Longfield.

FM: That's a great name, that's a name for a novel, you know you could be in a Thomas Hardy or something! Yeah that's a brilliant name!

AD: I got a week's work out o' him because simply I was my father's son and he knew I worked chainsaws.

HA: So your mother and father weren't strong friends with other artists?

AD: My mother, oh she was friends with other artists, she was friends with a lot of other people - she was even friends with probably the late now Lady Hope Dunbar, and I was working on the Isle Estate when I was sixteen and because I had welly boots on I was asked to drive through this sunken dyke, it was a drain, it wasn't a dirty drain it was just rainwater and Hope Dunbar came along and he says, 'Dallas, take this hare', and his mother couldn't look at me and her face was bright red.

HA: Oh dear!

FM: 'Cause a lot of people we've spoken to have remembered your mother very fondly.

AD: Yes, as I say she made the friends, ma father didn't he was inclined to fall out wi' people.

HA: Why do you think that was?

AD: Stirred him up the wrong way, quite easy, people have stirred me up the wrong way but I just ignore them after that, but why ...?

FM: It's just people's personality isn't it, we've all got different personalities I guess.

AD: Yes.

HA: Your mother was certainly very popular, her name cropped up again and again.

FM: Well I think also, I mean the people we're talking to are remembering back into their childhood, so she must have been good with children I suppose as a teacher as well?

AD: I get the same, I get grown folk comin' up to me and sayin', hello Alastair. I haven't a clue who they are because the last time they met me was with daddy, when they were this high!

HA: Yes, wasn't there a memory when one of them said Mrs. Dallas taught me how to hold a pencil?

25:28

FM: It was actually, I think, Kathryn King who was saying she taught her how to sharpen a pencil, she said, oh she taught me how to sharpen a pencil - you know she remembered these things -

AD: Is that the jewellers?

FM: Yes, she had very distinct memories of this as a small child you know!

AD: Yes, I've got a painting of - well it's not a painting it's a Christmas card - she made of Susan and John King in a tin bath.

HA: Oh how lovely!

FM: Was it your mother, or your father, I think it was your mother who did lots of cards and commissions of houses and villages and things did a lot of them, really beautiful?

AD: No they didn't make commissions, they would see something and draw it. I've copied most of them on to my computer, I've still got the collection and it's by no means complete, I mean some of them probably sold out before they realised it and in the early days each colour had to be put on separately, it's not like today's modern printer where -

FM: Yes, whack!

AD: Yes, and if something was sort of slow to sell or something they never bothered with a reprint because it was so onerous getting each colour and getting it matched. The old Multilith they used seemed to have a way of its own in deciding to shift things, ye had to screw it up with a screwdriver to get the roller in the exact position ye wanted and it was really more work than it was worth.

FM: So all the cards the lovely - I think it would be your mother who did them - the birthday cards, I mean there's a lovely one of a little girl down on the harbour with the Shore House behind, and there's a wee boy holding -

AD: More likely to be ma father.

FM: Was it your father? But they were all printed in house across the road?

AD: Or at Glenhead outside Auchencairn.

FM: But printed by them?

AD: Yes.

FM: It wasn't outsourced to somebody else to do?

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AD: No.

FM: So they were real original works really.

AD: They are real original works, latterly after my father died, the printing machine we had broke down. I was too busy, he asked me to try and repair it but I was too busy woodcutting and when I came home at night ah was just shot, there was no way ah could and that was the end o' the printing. Ma mother got some stuff done at a place called Copycats in Dumfries, it doesn't exist any longer, it was basically just scanned and printed by the computer like we can all do nowadays - and she did get some small cards printed by somebody else which she painted up, cards o' Brig House and Santa Claus and things like that that were Christmas cards, but the paintings original - but by then we'd no printing machine and I hadn't yet got into computers.

FM: It's a different ball game once you get into that, isn't it?

AD: It is, ah made Christmas cards myself on the computer.

FM: It's a wonderful thing though, to think that they went out saw something drew it made the design, made the cards, I mean it's quite a big business when you take all the skills into it?

HA: It's an industry isn't it a process.

AD: A lot o' the early work was actually done on an Adana.

FM: What's that?

AD: It's simply a printing press you press the handle an' a block puts an image on the paper.

FM: So what's the block made out of? It's not a carved block?

AD: They got the blocks, that's about the only thing that was ever outsourced was the making of the block, because they were aluminium on wood.

FM: Oh I know the sort of thing.

AD: They did try doing it with linoleum, but it didn't really work.

FM: So these are like printers letters the way they used to have the printers' letters when they set up the letter press, but except it's one image?

AD: Yes, ah've still got quite a lot of the blocks.

FM: Gosh, what a wonderful thing.

30:25

AD: Ah sold the Adana to Kim at the Kirkcudbright Working -

FM: Press.

AD: 'Cause it was, I would never use it, an' ah'd seen a similar thing in their shop and ah asked if they'd like it and they said, oh yes, and I could not see the point in holding on to something I would never use.

FM: I'm sure they value it and they're producing some of the cards and things again, are they?

AD: They have produced some of my parents' work, I have yet to be paid for it.

FM: Well, that's recorded for posterity!

[*Laughter*]

AD: I know that's why I said it!

[*Laughter*]

AD: But the really little point, it'll not be a life changing amount of money.

FM: I don't suppose so, but they have great ideas I mean the colouring-in books and that sort of thing, I know that [?] -

AD: Ma father did that, ah've still got envelopes he made up of - he used to sell them at I think for about two-and-six for a packet of 'outlines', what he called them, for colouring by children.

HA: They were very entrepreneurial weren't they? I mean there was a commercial side to it?

AD: Aye, that was quite a money spinner, he also did a lesson in how to paint a picture using three different colours – red, yellow and blue - and he printed these off on his printing machine and then he printed one using the three colours to show what the result should be.

FM: That's really interesting.

AD: And that was quite a money spinner.

FM: Gosh, I hope you've still got a stash of all this stuff.

AD: I have got some of it, when the house ah sold the front house I had to let a lot of stuff go because it would hae cost me a bomb to clear the place, but the guy who cleared the place cleared it for what he could get out of it and ah wanted to sell it, ah could do nothing with, it ma father had always plans to do something with it, but basically he was past it and I

33:03

was earning my living, and when I came home at night I was past it, been swinging a chainsaw around all day.

FM: Yes, enough!

HA: Yes, that's tiring, heavy work.

AD: It wasn't sort of tiring at the time, but by the time you'd driven home you were ready just not to do anything unless you went to the pub to play darts - which is what I really wanted to do.

[Laughter]

FM: Yes, I can see the appeal would be greater than sifting through old bits of paperwork! So you have happy memories obviously of your growing up here?

AD: Yes, nothing's wanted to take me away.

FM: Were your parents involved at all with the summer school, we've heard quite a lot about the summer school but not that much detail about it it's quite intriguing?

AD: No, but when the summer school was on they would put a great display in the window of home-made easels and things.

HA: It was a good time to sell things.

AD: There was displays of artists' watercolour and students' watercolour, the two are different, students' watercolour is not fixed it's for students to show what they can do, but with the artists' watercolour it fixes better - but the trouble with watercolour is unless they're looked after properly they fade.

FM: You see so many that have, you know, people are so ... they're their treasured thing and they've hung them in a really nice sunny place so they can see them, and they're just like disappearing before your eyes! Shame.

AD: Yes I remember ma mother took some pictures to the Gracefield and she asked me to look round, ah think it was a hope I might get interested, but I found one of her paintings under a skylight in brilliant sunshine, so I went out an told her about it she went into the building and raised hell!

[*Laughter*]

FM: I like the sound of this woman! So she was quite a feisty character?

35:37

AD: Yes, she wouldn't appreciate someone putting a watercolour under the skylight with brilliant sunshine. I mean I went to Bowes Museum and they wouldn't let me use the flash on the camera! I could take photographs, they didn't mind that, but my god keep your flash - and see with that camera I can put it so it doesn't use the flash, that's why I brought it in, but the picture you've taken of that is -

HA: Is brilliant, yeah, really good.

AD: Ah can't fault it.

FM: Yes, that's these Apple people you know.

HA: Yeah, they're fantastic.

AD: Yes, they are.

HA: They are brilliant aren't they.

AD: You see this has got a - see that if I took a picture and you put your iPad to that the pictures would transfer from the camera to your iPad.

FM: Oh my word, I don't even begin to understand how that can work.

AD: No, but that's Wi-Fi. Ah did it with a friend who came to stay [and Margaret Gregor] well it was her son, came to stay he brought his -

HA: Where did you learn all these technical skills?

AD: You buy a camera and ye get a book along with it!

HA: And you just play around with it?

FM: We women don't understand, because we don't read instructions obviously, we just throw them away!

AD: An' then again I can phone up Nikon if ah've got a problem, an' they'll talk you through it for nothing.

FM: That's amazing service.

AD: It is an amazing - and of course that camera there -

FM: That's an investment piece.

AD: Yes, I think it was the guts of eight hundred pounds.

37:34

FM: [*Whistles*]

HA: So do you do a lot of photography?

AD: No, the stuff I do is for myself, occasionally I've been putting stuff on the internet but a lot of it is scans from my old thirty-five millimetre days. If you go to Kirkcudbright, you know, What's On you'll see some of the stuff I've put on it.

HA: So you've always been interested in photography then, have you?

AD: Yes, I think I took my first photographs about six or seven at Glenhead with an old black and white Box Brownie.

HA: Yes, I remember those, you used to hold them down here!

AD: [?]

HA: Yes, the shutter you used to pull it up!

AD: And no, ah didn't even have that, you had a window for horizontal and a window for vertical -

FM: That was it!

AD: That was it!

HA: And the button to press!

AD: The button to press, the lens and everything was just fixed, you couldn't alter the lens. There's a picture I took it was the four siblings, my mother her two sisters and brother, but she'd got one of these totty-wee cameras - ah think [they're] about a centimetre film, and I wished I had my own camera at the time because it doesn't print very well.

FM: Yeah, that is tiny.

AD: It was tiny, but she just had the camera with her, mine would be in the car that's what -

FM: That's how life is!

AD: That's where my camera sleeps, it sleeps in a paper bag that no-one would associate with a camera, I don't have a fancy camera case.

HA: You're ready for the Loch Ness Monster when it comes!

AD: I don't wish to be mugged.

39:51

FM: No absolutely not.

HA: No absolutely not.

AD: I went into that firm that went bankrupt, they had a shop in Dumfries, and I took my camera out of a plastic case 'Oh it's a poor camera in a plastic bag!', Who's goin' to mug me for a plastic bag that may have nothing else but bananas in it!

FM: Tell me this, when your parents were painting did they do it like a job. I mean did they get up in the morning have their breakfast, go off painting, or what was it like - what was their routine?

AD: It's difficult, my mother got a lot of commissions about Kirkcudbright, she'd simply get on her bike go down to the harbour and make a drawin', come home an' paint it - but for all she got for them, her detail, she might as well used a camera.

FM: What you mean there was too much detail?

AD: Oh, ah think most of her – oh, - people love it! But for the prices she charged she was doing too much work, she would ask me what I thought the picture was worth and I'd tell her and then I'd find that she'd sold it to someone for half the price or even less - and she'd say 'Oh the poor old buddy couldn't afford it', well if she can afford a picture she can afford the price I mentioned! She was too ready to let herself be talked down.

FM: What about your father, was he the same or was he a bit sort of sterner?

AD: No, if you didn't have his price tough.

FM: It stayed with him, yeah!

HA: Did he ever sell through dealers?

AD: Yes, he did, both of them did - Aitken and Dott in Edinburgh was, I don't know if they still exist or not.

FM: They're the Scottish Gallery now, I think they're part of all that they got taken over or consumed.

AD: Are they? Anyway they used to do leatherwork as well and ma father had a lathe he used to make stuff for Miles Johnstone. Miles Johnstone painted his pictures on my father's napkin rings and wooden plates, because well - I won't say it was outsourced - but he simply sold the stuff to Miles Johnstone to do what he would with, he didn't expect his name to appear on it you know like 'Napkin rings made by'.

FM: It was just another thing he could very easily turn his hand to, by the sound of it.

42:52

AD: Yes.

FM: He was obviously a fantastic maker of things, you know if you can knock up an easel and you can turn all these things.

AD: Yes, I think he was a wee bit disappointed that I didn't get involved but as I say by then I had my own -

FM: Life!

AD: Life, to get on with, and he just accepted it.

FM: One of the things that I saw was Felicity Gelder showed me some little roundels that your mother had painted of the family dogs, which are they're really fun things of the period, in little round frames - and I'm just wondering if your father made the frames, would he have done?

AD: Yes, he turned them out on the lathe. I've still got the lathe ah never use it, ah did give him a hand wi' the chisel if it was a wet day and I wasn't going to work - he would sometimes get me to take the rough bits off, but I can't say I ever made anything on it.

FM: That's interesting.

HA: So did your father go to art school?

AD: Yes, after the First World War every soldier was given all the school leaving certificates that existed.

FM: How d'you mean? When they were demobbed you mean?

AD: Yes.

FM: They were just given them?

AD: They were just given them, so he went to Edinburgh University first of all to study engineering, I suppose at the behest of his father, the ex-minister of the Free Church and he was spending too much time making drawings so they suggested he swap.

HA: He did technical drawings, for engineering?

AD: No, it was technical drawing he was doing, well engineering and then but he was doing too much -

FM: Not technical drawing!

45:07

AD: Not technical drawing - and so they suggested that he went to the art school, whether it was part of the university or not I don't know.

HA: So did he study painting there?

AD: Ah've no real idea what he studied, I just know he went. It was, as ah say, there was things that he would talk about he just assumed that you either knew or was none o' your business.

HA: And your mother went to art school?

AD: Yes, and not only that, she taught at Morpeth.

HA: Oh, in the northeast? The northeast of England?

AD: It was where she came from, she was born in Newbiggin-by-the-Sea just north of Blyth.

HA: Right, on the Northumbrian coast.

AD: Yes and she spent most of her life in Blyth before she got married, an' then when they got married they lived in Kippford for a while an' then Glenhead on Auchinleck Farm came up and they stayed there until I was eleven, then we moved to Kirkcudbright here.

FM: And did they both keep painting right to the end of their lives?

AD: My father stopped, my mother, ah have got a painting the last painting she did the year she died, and ah had thought of offering it to you, but if you've got plenty work in the gallery ...?

HA: I don't know what there is in the gallery, to be honest.

AD: It's nothing special, but it's a picture of Ross Island but you will never find where it's painted from because a lot of the foreground came out of her sketchbook.

[Laughter]

FM: Yes, good reference material there!

AD: Yes it was a picture painted without her actually going and sitting and making a [sketch], by then she was passed it.

FM: Yes so she was looking back through her books. That's interesting, that's a nice thing to have, you should hang onto that.

AD: I am hanging on to it, I can't remember the last picture ma father painted I suspect that's it.

47:50

FM: Oh right, that's interesting.

AD: All I can say, I have other works of his, but I knew that they were - there was one of a black cottage up in the Highlands somewhere but he liked it so much he was hinging on to it.

FM: It's nice to have a Galloway or a Kirkcudbright painting.

AD: Ah can't remember, he might have painted stuff and sold it that I didn't know about, ah mean quite often I would come home from work and find someone in the shop and here's me covered in [glass] serving them! Because for some reason he had left the shop -

FM: And gone off!

AD: No, he hadn't gone away, he was down the back somewhere doing something!

HA: More interested in what he was doing than selling!

AD: Yes.

FM: They were both obviously very, very productive quite driven people. I mean they produced a lot of work.

AD: 'Cause I used to help him on a Saturday morning, I could do something in thirty seconds that took him half an hour to do.

HA: Because of his impractical nature or - ?

AD: No because it was of a heavy lifting -

FM: Oh I see, it was of a heavy lifting nature, okay!

AD: I mean I remember I was helping him one Saturday morning when a guy came in an' he says oh I hear you sell free-range eggs? We had six hens and they were pretty prolific, they certainly laid more than a hundred eggs each a year and anyway he came in an' he wanted a dozen eggs so I got him a dozen eggs, and then he came back told this funny story, an' I said when it was ready he says, oh no names no pack drill, I says, that sounds awful like Mrs. so-and-so from Muncraig, and [you should have seen]!

[*Laughter*]

AD: I cannot remember the woman's name - but they assumed I was cutting wood in woods, they did not know I was meeting farmers and their wives! I mean I even met Lord Sinclair, in spite of his title he was a gentleman. I was cutting on his estate and I was havin' my dinner and taking pictures of swallows on the line and out of the corner of my eye I saw him freeze, in his own backyard.

50:26

FM: That's nice.

AD: And he was also quite au fait when I knocked on his door one morning and said 'Good morning sir, I've just put a tree through your power line'.

[*Laughter*]

FM: Well that's a true test of a gentleman!

AD: And his son was no different, I remember us sitting on a pile of logs with me having ma dinner swapping dirty stories!

[*Laughter*]

HA: That's going down for posterity too!

FM: Very good!

AD: He was just a nineteen year old boy who I think was quite fed up with his own kind or my kind either slagging him off or kow-towing to him, and he got neither.

FM: Very good.

HA: Well thank you very much indeed, that's been great hasn't it?

AD: I think that about covers everything.

FM: That's been completely brilliant, thank you very, very much - and thank you for bringing the painting, that's also terrific thank you.

HA: Gosh wouldn't Lizzie Ann have liked to have seen that!

FM: Yes, she would.

51:43