Interviewee: David Steel (DS)	Interviewers: Gordon Cowan (GC); Sheena McKay (SM)
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TITLE	David Steel
	interviewed by Gordon Cowan and Sheena McKay
REGION	Dumfries & Galloway
SUBJECTS/KEYWORDS	Cultural life; family life.
COUNTY	Dumfries & Galloway
TOWN	Gatehouse of Fleet
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INTERVIEWER	Gordon Cowan and Sheena McKay
YEAR RANGE	1917 - 2018
SUMMARY	As a child David lived in Gatehouse of Fleet and he tells us of his family's link to Jessie M King. He describes the many other artists that over the years have frequented the area to live and paint. He also tells us that, as a child, he sat for Cecile Walton and Vivien Redpath (nee Chapman). He also speaks of his research for the website In the Artists' Footsteps and of the creation of the new gallery in Kirkcudbright built to house a collection of the work of many of the local and visiting artists who found Dumfries and Galloway an inspiration for their work.

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SMcK: That's you.

GC: Right. Well David it's very kind of you to invite us this morning and I think it would help if we just sort of as it were with a few broad brush strokes set the scene. You've been connected with Kirkcudbright, Gatehouse (of Fleet) virtually for all your life; paint the picture as it was when you were very young if you would and we'll take it from there.

DS: Well I was brought up in Gatehouse, went to the Gatehouse school before being sent away to school and I was really brought up knowing about the ...

GC: Yeah.

DS: ... the artist community because my, my grandmother was a cousin of Jessie King's and my grandparents were living in Paris. They weren't artists but they were, they were living in Paris before the First World War at the time that Jessie King and EA Taylor were living there. And there's correspondence in the Kirkcudbright Museum between them, so obviously they did know each other well and my mother was born very much at the same sort of time as Merle Taylor, Jessie and E A's daughter. I have a, a photograph here in the house of me being introduced to Jessie King when I was a baby and of her coming over and visiting - and she's dressed in her cape and her silver buckle shoes and Breton cap. So, though I don't obviously remember that, people who talked about how Jessie King was and riding round Kirkcudbright on her bicycle with the flowing cape, it's something, it's something that we have in the, in the family memory as well. And during the First World War 1917 my mother was sent to stay at the Greengate, Kirkcudbright and she was given a copy of The Little White Town (Of Never-Weary) which was a ded-, which was, with a dedication by Jessie. And my, the family where very, they were close to the, the King family in general, but particularly to Jessie's sister Adah who taught abroad and as the grandparents were living in France a lot, Adah knew them very well and in fact Adah was with my grandmother when she had a heart attack and died in Vichy in the, I think, 1930. And, and also my grandfather was very friendly with (Percyval) Tudor-Hart who was a colleague of EA Taylor in Paris and I have a, a drawing that he did of my, my grandfather. So that was a kind of background. So as a child I was taken over to Kirkcudbright occasionally to see these artists so they, all the different names like Anna Hotchkis and Vera Alabaster - and others were quite, Cecile Walton and others, were quite familiar to me. I think I'm too - I was too young probably to remember them well though I do remember being taken to see Dorothy Rey at the Green, at the Greengate and I remember she was famous for looking after wound, people would bring her wounded birds and there would be a, a Jackdaw flying about or some other sort of bird which she would nurse back to, to health. And the, the gardens at the, at the Greengate the foot of the garden which was of Italianate garden that was because the family had Italian relations and Jessie went to Italy to, to visit the relations in Italy and that, talks about that in her diaries which are in Glasgow University Library. So I was kinda brought up with these reminiscences or memories really. A completely separate thing is the connection with John Faed. We have a portrait, its of a scene from As You Like It of Rosalind Senior and Orlando, it was painted in 1851 in Edinburgh, which one of the characters is said to be my, another great grandmother who was brought up in, in Edinburgh. The picture was bought by my great grandfather I think shortly after. So some of the family wonder whether it was because it looked like my great grandmother or whether it was indeed my great grandmother, but certainly the family have had that picture since 1851. And when we had the John Faed

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exhibition in 2002 the cousin who then owned it felt it should be back in Scotland, so that picture is here. So that's really why I've been interested in the Faeds who, John who lived just a couple of houses away from where we are sitting at the, at the moment. So I think it was, I mean it was perhaps not surprising that it was decided that I should have my portrait painted by Cecile Walton - and Cecile Walton - she did two portraits of me which I have here. There's one, a wee cowboy and.

SMcK: Oh. How old are you?

DS: Well I think I must've been about I think about five or six then and I think she died in 1956, so I look older. I look about [unclear].

GC: Yeah. So these are both Walton's are they?

DS: These are both by Cecile Walton, this one's signed here. I don't think she was very; this was very much in the last years of her life so I don't think she was very well. So I do have some memories of the, being painted; I don't think I enjoyed being painted very much. But remember there's this one here and there's this big red pillow so I think I was sort of, you know, made to sit up.

GC: I don't remember that one.

DS: Straight. Well I remember that one better, but that one, there's a, there's a story about, more of a story about that one. But we've always had that one and it's only recently that we got this one because, no, no I'll put that.

GC: (Whispering)

SMcK: (Whispering) OK.

GC: (Whispering) Yeah.

DS: The, well I'll just put that there. I went to interview Morag Aitkenhead at Kilquhanity about ten years ago to talk to her, this was after John had died, John Aitkenhead her husband, to talk to her about the Polish artist Jankel Adler who'd come to Kirkcudbright I think really there was a connection with Kilquhanity because the Margaret Morris dancer had some sort of summer school I think at Kilquhanity before the war, perhaps into the war? And for whatever reason . . . Adler had been there and I was, think it was through John Aitkenhead and EA Taylor that he'd, he found space in Kirkcudbright. They painted in Kirkcudbright before going down to London then having a big exhibition in London when, when he got there. And I was talking to, to Morag Aitkenhead and she said that I was, I was mentioning that I'd been painted by Cecile Walton and, because she was talking, she remembered going to this studio in Kirkcudbright and I said that I remembered being painted. Anyway she, she took me to see this picture and it was really quite a strange experience because obviously I hadn't seen this picture since I was about five, but it brought back really vivid memories because I must've had one of these little, you know, kinda Woolworth's cowboy jerkiny things with my sheriff's badge. But Cecile Walton decided that in order to be a cowboy I'd have to have cowboy's gauntlets so she gave me these, I think there sheepskin gloves or leather gloves that Cecile had, and I don't think I was very happy with wearing this old ladies gloves to be a cowboy. But I think it, it, they look quite like cowboy's gloves.

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SMcK: (Whispering) It's wonderful.

DS: But Morag Aitkenhead said that, I think Cecile Walton had sold this picture to the Aitkenhead's, that, that Cecile had said that she'd done these two portraits, but thought that my mother would prefer, wouldn't like the cowboy one so much. But she must've seen the, the cowboy one, but anyway that was the, the story. But it really; you were strange to, to.

SMcK: Rediscover you by your own self.

DS: It'd completely gone out of my mind, but when I saw the gloves then that really sparked the, the memory there. And they, the sort of cowboy outfit and I mem, I do remember, I remember going to the studio in Kirkcudbright by the, by the mill.

SMcK: The mill one.

DS: The mill one there and I don't remember the details but kinda going up the stairs into Kirkcudbright. But another, an anecdote about being painted by Cecile Walton at the time that that was, that was just when I think John Halliday was about 16 or so and he was visiting Cecile Walton and I think she was advising him to, to go to art college and so he has quite a vivid memory of that pair of.

SMcK: (Whispering) Yeah.

GC: (Whispering) Sure.

DS: Cecile painting then has, you know.

SMcK: (Whispering) Yes.

DS: If I've seen him from time to time he does remind me, that's whether I was particularly naughty or whether she talked about painting a child or what I, I don't know. But anyway John did that kind of, it, it sort of ties it together at that time.

Yeah. I mean you've painted a very clear picture of, of your life as a very young child and, and the family's connection with these artists - particularly with Jessie M King for obvious reasons. Not through your own experience because you were possibly too young, but from memories of your relatives; what sort of impression did you have of the, the artists as a group, did they talk to each other, how were they accepted by society? I mean they led a fairly, by our standards even today, a fairly bizarre life a lot of them.

DS: I think . . . my mother, my mother was brought up in France, less so aunts and uncles, another aunt used to go to Kirkcudbright quite a bit and, as I say, they were, they knew the people in Paris in the 1910s or so. And when they lived in the south of France I know some of the artists came to see them there, like . . . it's gone out of my mind at the moment, but I'll remember in a minute. If you stop the machine for just a second does that, I'll try and remember the.

SMcK: I think it's actually better if we keep running. You just try and remember. We'll come back to it when we can.

DS: [Unclear] Come back again [unclear]. So . . . I think perhaps the, the family, you know they would've been, they would've been - and I think my mother loved people with different characters and you know.

GC: Yeah.

DS: And people that . . .

GC: Slightly exotic life.

SMcK: Bohemian was fine.

DS: I think it'd be Gregorieff (spelling?) that was, Anna Hotchkis.

GC: Oh right!

DS: Was that not one?

GC: I don't know.

DS: But anyway some, you know, sometimes they had there was, might have been a Russian connection, or the Chinese connection.

GC: Yeah.

DS: These were colourful people that I certainly, you know, the family liked to, to mix with and like Bill (William) Robson with the Italian...

SMcK: Oh yeah.

GC: Oh that [unclear] next door to.

DS: ... connection another, another of my aunts was very much.

GC: Yeah.

DS: You know, in to the . . . strong connection with the Italian relations and the Italian relations used to come and stay and things, so yeah they, I know that.

GC: So they were attracted by this slightly exotic way of life?

DS: So they're quite comfortable with...

GC: Yeah.

DS: With that whether they approved of them or not that I've, I've no idea.

GC: But the town generally, would they?

DS: I, I don't, I know that we had a, there was a grocer in, in Gatehouse called Jack McKee (spelling?) who was brought up in Kirkcudbright.

GC: Yeah.

DS: He, I suppose in the '30s, and he said that Jessie King said that everybody had an aura. And so you were given a yellow aura or a blue, you know, so she was a fascinating character I think.

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GC: Yes.

DS: So whether they, I think young people, whether they thought, you know, with the, whether she, they thought this was a witch or what they, what they thought. But I think they had a, what's the word; they were 'weel-kent' in Kirkcudbright.

GC: Yeah.

DS: But I don't, I don't really know.

GC: No it's, it's just that obviously they, they seemed to be accepted.

DS: The, well they were.

GC: Tolerated? Accepted?

DS: They were very much part of the, of the community and I know that because of the art research I, I've done for the (In the) Artists' Footsteps website they had strong links to the community. They . . . they, you know, if they would . . . they would have to get their cars repaired and things like that. And they were, they often didn't have very, I don't think they, I think it was difficult in the '30s in particular because, you know, there just wasn't the money around. And if you read in Dorothy Sayers' (The) Five Red Herrings which came out in 1931 it says that they were painting these ten bob pictures for the tourists.

SMcK: Yes.

DS: And we've got quite a number of EA Taylor drawings they've got ten shillings on the... So again that was, you know, that was what you were getting for something that if you go to a gallery today costs £400 or £500 I suppose.

GC: Yeah.

DS: But the, I know, you know, from talking to people in Kirkcudbright over the years quite a lot garage owners and people like that ended up with pictures.

SMcK: They were paid in kind.

DS: [Unclear] Paid and I, I think this would have applied to other things. And I know that Alastair Dallas was one of the ones who, who, who clearly had to have his car mended and I think it was . . . was it Jack McMurray?

GC: Yeah.

DS: Said to . . . or Dallas said "Could you repair my car?" and he said "I'll paint you a picture" and he, he said to Dallas "It'll hae to be a bludy big yin". So, so there was that, but I think the, you know, quite a number of the artists they, and, and Jessie King was the, if somebody got married or there was a birth or something they would give them a, a souvenir or a cup or a plate with...

GC: Yeah.

DS: One.

SMcK: Yes.

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DS: The, decorated and...

GC: So, so they were completely integrated into the...

DS: And here, here in Gatehouse Alick Sturrock, this in the '20s and '30s.

SMcK: Yeah.

DS: He, he was the, he was the captain of the golf club when Dorothy Sayers had Strachan in, similar kinda name, as the secretary of the golf club. And he would give like a golf club prize of a picture or gain folk look so other people in Gatehouse who have Sturrock pictures of. So they, I can't speak for the, you know, people in Kirkcudbright haven't knocked on their doors, you know, there will be people who have these pictures that are either commissioned or were given or whatever. So I think though, I think they, I can't say how they were, I wasn't living in Kirkcudbright so I don't know.

GC: No. But I mean (Charles) Oppenheimer for instance was captain of the Kirkcudbright golf club.

DS: And there're pictures of him playing golf with Sturrock.

GC: Yeah.

DS: And . . . some of them were town councillors and I think Oppenheimer was often [unclear].

GC: Yes he was yes. Provost.

DS: On and the police board and so playing a prominent, (Edward) Hornel was very involved in the.

GC: Yes. What about Hornel do any . . . stories or reminisces?

DS: I, I think there all as to, as to whether his sister finished, finished off the pictures I think that was the one of the memories, but I don't, I, I think it was earlier times [unclear].

GC: Yes, quite.

DS: I think he was very the; nothing to do, again from my history, you know, research that there are, there's a lot of stuff like bankruptcy records at Broughton House so I think there must've been like a clear out at the Sheriff Court and it all found, these things found their way to Oppenheimer there're probably going to be thrown out. But, you know, he collected all sorts of stuff which has been [unclear] Kirkcudbright.

SMcK: Right. Yeah.

GC: Yeah.

DS: But I think that probably Jessie King's, she'd, she may have had a greater influence on more artists because of, of owning the, the whole of the Greengate and so many people coming down.

GC: Yes.

SMcK: She would invite them down.

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DS: And I've people like Dorothy, Dorothy Johnstone and when he, she married (David M) Sutherland the, you know, the, the there was a whole range of people who, who came.

GC: Yes, a coterie.

DS: To stay at the, at the, in the cottages there and then would have [unclear].

GC: It was a sort of colony wasn't it? Yeah.

DS: And so it was quite a colony there.

GC: So, any, any other artist that we haven't mentioned. What about, what about Robson next to 50?

DS: Yes I don't [unclear].

GC: The Italian wife.

DS: Yes, yes I never have any particular memories myself.

GC: No, no.

SMcK: Vivien Chapman?

DS: And Vivien Chapman, well Vivien Chapman's son Alec or Toshie as he was called as a boy, they, they lived at Anwoth, the old schoolhouse at Anwoth here in Gatehouse, and I remember her quite, quite well; again she was quite a, a colourful figure I think. And she drove around in a little old fashioned car when she first came to Gatehouse and we have a picture of Anwoth, the old school there with Sam the dog. I kinda remember the dog's names [unclear] the people. But when I was I think [unclear] look it's about 1920 she'd moved up to Balmaclellan when she married Kim Redpath - and he just died the other, the other day. And I spent a lot of time being painted by Vivien Redpath which I enjoyed and it's interesting to really to just to see how the, the painter worked and you know got lots of perhaps different expressions which then overtime became a, a finished portrait. So I think it, I don't know if it was in a, a university summer of . . . or before university, one or one or one or the other but then. And we also knew quite well Kate Nicoll who had retired to Gatehouse; I think she'd come up to Gatehouse cos her son was an agricultural student and they lived at Low Barlay Farm. And then I, I think probably she'd really sort of taken up painting again and flower pictures were her, I think, she painted in particular.

GC: So it'd be fair to say that obviously this background in the art and artist has had quite an impact on your life one way or another?

DS: Well it, this was when I, I, I came back to, to Gatehouse - came home - after from working in, in Brussels in 1999 at just the time really that they were getting going on thinking about a gallery in Kirkcudbright. And my, the thought that I had really was that if they were going to have this gallery it would be a good thing if they knew who'd painted in the area and I think it, I thought it was important that it should be wider than Kirkcudbright. So with the archive service from the library I suggested that we should do a, a, a study of the, the people who had painted here. So that was really the background to researching the *Artists' Footsteps* website which now has over a thousand landscapes of; we really looked at, decided to look at landscapes because that was one big category. It was, it would've been too much to do

every type of art. I know that, I think it must've been about 2005/6 when it was completed, oh no not when it was completed, but when it was put online, and I, I suggested that they should have, they should have a launch. But the council were very scep, oh they didn't, you know something arty like this was not something they should be publicising. Oh but we got this, the grant from these at ... and support from the council to, to do it. But quite soon after it came onsite, came live, the council had a, an email from the Sheriff saying how much, how much he'd enjoyed the website; so once the Sheriff had said, given his [unclear].

GC: There's a sea change was there?

DS: There was, I think, the, they realised this was something that would, could be of value.

GC: Yeah.

DS: Certainly, I mean I've found over the years that talking to people in art galleries or universities that teach art, that it's really become quite a valuable resource and our aim was to, to look at paintings of Dumfries and Galloway wherever they might be. Whereas there's been quite a lot of research done or publications of what's in the Tate Gallery or what's in any other gallery. And then since then there's been the big the Art UK project to look at paintings in public collections. But that project only deals; I mean it's a huge and wonderful project, but only deals with oil paintings. So's we've collected pictures in whatever medium it still, it remains a, a valuable resource, a resource. And we've also, we've received images from lots of private individuals so there's, it's a lot wider than just what's in the public, but it goes very well with things like the Art UK resource.

GC: Yeah, so the creation of the gallery must be very gratifying?

DS: Well I'm, I'm delighted that they've, you know that it's nearly there, my...

GC: Reservations?

DS: No, no I, I, don't have any, well I, I, one of the things that I sort of said, thought they should; I work, I work for the, the European Parliament and each year the European Parliament bought a picture by a European artist, didn't spend a lot of money. But over the, the 50 years of the European Parliament they built up quite a collection and some of the pictures are really quite valuable. But I think perhaps the local authority could've, I know that in the, for the, the gallery there are some, there are some sort of, there a gaps obviously they, there's, there's a good, there's the Stewarty collection and the Gracefield collection and others. But they don't necessarily have a good example by painter A or, or B and it's a, you know I think perhaps more could have been done over the, they've had 20 years planning more could've been done to buy some pictures. But I was delighted when I, I drew, I think it was David Devereux's attention at the time or oh no it was maybe Anne had become the curator of Kirkcudbright, Anne Ramsbottom, to The Rabbit Catches by John Faed and I said you know it would be great if this picture which is the picture on the cover Mary McKerrow's book on the Faeds like it's an iconic Faed picture and it's of Sandy Ingles such a really recognisable character, this could be bought by the gallery. And I was really delighted when, you know, the response was yes, we could do it! And I said, you know, if you need any help with the finance well we, we'll do that and they, they got I think, say I imagine it was three-quarters of whatever of the finance and then we had contacted people round about to generously

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gave money to complete the, the purchase. Something similar had been done with the portrait of John Faed in old age so there I think they've got, you know, a couple of excellent...

GC: Yeah.

DS: Faed pictures for the, or John Faed pictures for the start of the chronology.

GC: Yeah.

DS: Of Kirkcudbright. I, I, I don't know where they've, they've got gaps but they've said that, you know, I've heard that they, there're open, artists they would like to have other examples of.

GC: So what direction do you like to see the gallery going, I mean visiting collections and building up its own indigenous?

DS: I, I think, I think as there planning I think to have . . . examples of art of Dumfries and Galloway and whether that's through the permanent collection or through visiting ones.

GC: Yeah.

DS: Because it's surprisingly the number of artists who've painted in this part of the world, you know, from JMW Turner to Oskar Kokoschka and people just wouldn't necessarily know.

GC: No, they wouldn't associate.

DS: Associate that with, with Galloway. Adler for instance . . . and I think to continue as there has been up to now these visiting exhibitions which would've been opportunities when galleries have been modernised, the McManus in Dundee or Kelvingrove, they've been able to bring the impressionists pictures or the Dundee pictures so that a wide range of pictures has [unclear].

GC: So do you believe that Kirkcudbright for instance deserves . . . accurately the, the name the artist town for instance?

DS: Yes.

GC: Or do you think that's a bit contrived?

No I, I, I think what's been very good is that since they started having the annual exhibitions and so public money I suppose being put into Kirkcudbright then quite a number of private galleries have opened, the Wasps Studios in Kirkcudbright. And it's always, you know if you were, if you were living in Kirkcudbright in the '30s or the '50s or . . . at the time it's a jolly different, at, at the time to say this contemporary artist is really good or famous or, or will be. But I think that some of the people associated with Kirkcudbright at the moment have a, a, high reputation. So the, there, there was I think after the war when the Jessie Kings and Oppenheimers when, had died then there probably weren't the new artists coming. But with the Wasps studios and I mean, people like Lizzie Farey has a really...

GC: Yeah.

DS: ... Wide reputation and no doubt there are others [unclear].

GC: So there's a sort of renaissance?

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DS: So I think, I think, I think, I think there is [unclear].

GC: Yeah.

DS: I mean the fact that the, those studio, as far as I know those studios are fully occupied. Must mean, you know, people are looking for artistic spaces in Kirkcudbright and perhaps.

GC: Yeah. And there are selling galleries which.

DS: And a lot of, you know, several galleries.

GC: If you go to other parts of the UK you don't necessarily get as many selling galleries.

DS: And you've got, you know if you go to the Selkirk Arms they've got lots of pictures that there for sale [unclear].

GC: Yeah. Yeah. So, so turning the clock back as it were, were we started from . . . the town of Kirkcudbright and the surrounding area in, in many ways is changed out of all recognition, but is there a sort of theme running through it at all do you think? . . . Like the galleries and the artists and . . . I don't think it appe, artists any longer try to trade their pictures with garages for instance.

DS: Well you never know!

GC: I must try it!

DS: I mean perhaps, aye perhaps when they did perhaps, perhaps the garages realised that they were getting something that, you know bartering system.

GC: I wouldn't recommend it with Tesco's.

DS: Local exchange . . . I mean I don't, I don't live in Kirkcudbright.

GC: No I know it's an unfair question.

DS: [Unclear] People are, you know you read the paper sometimes people are, they moan about art galleries and things.

GC: Yeah.

DS: And too many of them. But I think it's nice to see, I mean it's nice to see . . . the High Street or St Mary or whatever streets . . . there aren't too many gaps, you know.

GC: No.

DS: The, the shops are occupied so that's, you know positive. I think there, there could be more hotel accommodation in Kirkcudbright I think you know.

GC: Yeah.

DS: I don't know what - and the Johnstone School try to get [unclear].

SMcK: Positive.

DS: So that thing you know things are, things are happening.

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GC: Well that's been very helpful.

SMcK: Very.

GC: Is there anything else that?

DS: Well if, if you can think of any one that we might also want to speak to?

DS: Anybody you'd want to speak to . . . Alex (Alexandra) Wolffe at the Toll House.

GC: Oh is he?

DS: Antony Wolffe's wife, she would remem.

GC: Didn't he die recently?

DS: He died a couple of years ago.

GC: Isn't he, wasn't he the father of the...

DS: The Lord Advocate, James Wolffe.

GC: Lord Advocate, yes.

DS: Yes and Andrew Wolffe but . . . but she was, she'd certainly remember . . . Vivien, I think she'd remember, certainly Kate Nicoll, I don't know if she would. I mean she's a, she's a graduate of Edinburgh College of Art herself.

GC: Oh right, yeah.

DS: I remember going to Tommy Lochhead's pottery once or twice when that was.

GC: Oh yeah.

DS: Probably lots of people did that.

GC: Yeah.

DS: Got a chance to put some clay on the wheel and.

SMcK: Hopefully they'll be in the gallery as well.

GC: Yeah.

SMcK: Be represented.

GC: Yeah. Right!

SMcK: Shall we?

GC: You're to switch that off are you?

SMcK: Yes. Thank you very much.

DS: I'll show you the Vivien Chapman.

GC: Yeah and.

DS: Walk.

00.36.45