

Interviewee: Janette Millar (JM)	Interviewers: Alison Fabian (AF); Craig Fabian (CF)
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TITLE	<i>Craig and Alison Fabian interview Janette Millar for Kirkcudbright Artists Remembered.</i>
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SUMMARY	<i>Craig Fabian and Alison Fabian interview Janette Millar as part of the Kirkcudbright Artists Remembered project. Janette talks about the town's numerous artists, and how it has changed over the last 80 years. She talks about her family business in upholstery and about her schools days also.</i>

CF: Craig Fabian; AF: Alison Fabian; JM: Janette Millar

[00:00:00]

CF: This is an interview for Kirkcudbright Artists Remembered, on behalf of the Harbour Cottage Trust. The fieldworkers are myself, Craig Fabian and also Alison Fabian. We're recording on Friday 9th of February 2018, and we're at [REDACTED] in Kirkcudbright. We're going to be interviewing Mrs. Janette Millar, who was born in 1938, at 80 High Street in Kirkcudbright, and lives today at [REDACTED] in Kirkcudbright so the recording is at Janette's home. So, Janette, thanks very much for taking part. Can we begin by you just telling us a little bit about where you were born and your early years, what you remember, of your background and what you've done in Kirkcudbright over the years.

JM: Right, well I was born at 80 High Street, 1938. Haven't much recollection of the first two or three years, But, my Dad went to war when I was about 3 or 4, and didn't see him for four years. Very fraught time for my mother because he was invalided twice, and captured twice, and she didn't know where he was, a lot of the time. But as children, with no television or anything like that, we were shielded from all that. So you weren't unhappy. It was a community that was very much this end of the town, and we all knew one another. And the school was just up the road.

CF: What school did you go to, Janette?

JM: Kirkcudbright Academy, primary department, which was fee-paying at the time, 2/6 and week.

CF: Oh, really? And what was it like at the school? What was the regime like at the school?

JM: Very disciplined, but good. The only thing I didn't like about it was the milk.

CF: Why didn't you like the milk?

JM: They sat it... they had it in little bottles. And they made you drink it, because during war time you were supposed to get all the vitamins you could back into you. And they kept it next to pipes, which made it warm. And they made me drink it all the time, and I usually threw it back up at them, so they stopped doing that.

[laughter]

[00:02:43]

JM: But the other thing I didn't like about that school was the school dentist who came in a caravan, and pulled all my back teeth out.

CF: Oh, dear.

JM: Just for practice I think because there was nothing wrong with them, I've still got the rest of my teeth.

[laughter]

JM: The teachers were all well known to us, which is not the case nowadays, teachers don't seem to stay in the town anymore. Whether they're scared, I don't know.

[laughter]

CF: Did most of the teachers at that time live in the town?

JM: Oh, they did.

CF: Yeah.

JM: They were part of the community, and they, after school hours, did other things to help the community, which doesn't happen anymore, most of the time.

CF: Did you ever get in trouble at school?

JM: Talking, yeah. All the time.

CF: And what happened?

JM: Got lines to write, "I must not talk in class." I got the belt, I got sent to the rector.

CF: Oh my word.

JM: But he was a lovely man and he gave me the 23rd psalm to write out 20 times or something.

CF: So I bet you know that very well now.

JM: Not really. It's one of the things that you don't like, and you forget about - goes into that bit at the back... of your mind.

CF: So what did you do after school? When you finished school? And what age were you when you left school?

JM: I was 15, I went to what was lovingly called "the commercial college," in Castle Douglas. Up a close and up a stair. An excellent teacher, a gentleman who taught us short hand, typing, bookkeeping. And we had a year's course there, which my granny paid for. And when I finished that I got a job right away with Williamson & Henry, which consisted of Mr. Williamson and Mr. Henry.

CF: And where was that, in the town, at that time?

[00:04:47]

JM: At the Sheriff Courthouse, because Mr. Henry was the procurator fiscal part time as well as his firm, and it was a very interesting job - I loved what I did. People said I would be bored, but I wasn't bored at all. It was everything. Procurator fiscal had to deal with sudden deaths and all that sort of thing. And in those days, you had to use your shorthand a lot, because they didn't have the machines. And Mr. Henry was a lovely man, he always shielded me from the worst murders and things like that. And the photographs were all in black and white, so you didn't get the same horror as you do nowadays, with the colour. But we did have murders and things.

CF: Sure. And how long did you work there for?

JM: Nine, ten years.

CF: And then what came next?

JM: Well, I got married first, and then we bought this house - which was separate from the shop, at that point.

CF: So this is [REDACTED], was separate from the shop?

JM: Yes.

CF: Right.

JM: And, the people were emigrating to South Africa, he worked in a bank. And we bought nearly all their furniture, which was good because Gavin had just started business and we didn't have much money at the point, and when the old man who had the shop decided to retire four years later he offered us the shop without advertising it.

CF: That's good.

JM: And then gave us a loan to help to buy it. People did that in those days.

CF: And what was Gavin's occupation?

JM: Upholsterer.

CF: And where did he learn his trade?

JM: With Osbornes, further up the street there. And it was an old man who worked there who taught him his trade. Now they don't do that sort of thing, it's just funerals they do I think. And he was very proud of what he - he liked... he loved his job.

CF: So the shop next door opened as an upholstery shop?

JM: Not really. We carried it on as a - it was a new china shop, sold new china for some time.

CF: From the very beginning?

JM: Yeah.

CF: Ah, interesting.

JM: I was very heavily pregnant at the time, not a good time to start.

[laughter]

CF: What year was this?

JM: Third child... 1965.

CF: Right.

[00:07:30]

JM: And we bought the shop, when I had my son in the November I had a week to recover from that - back in the shop. But, as I say, everybody was so neighbourly at that time.

CF: People helped out, people helped each other out.

JM: They did, they did.

CF: Yeah, yeah.

JM: My son spent his days in his pram at the front of the shop. People took him for a walk, brought him back, parked him.

CF: Ah, isn't that lovely. Yeah. Okay so, tell us a little bit more about the shop itself and how that developed over time.

JM: Well, people stopped buying new china. They got them... transport became available. They went to Dumfries to shop. We had been doing second hand furniture anyway down at Millburn Street where Gavin's workshop was, and he also had a secondhand store there, with big furniture in it. But, we decided we'd sell smaller furniture and secondhand glass, china, etcetera - collectables. And it just all grew.

CF: And you've done very well, haven't you? Yeah.

JM: Yes.

CF: So how long's this shop... Just bring us to today, your retirement and, you, just bring us right up to date.

JM: Well, you adapt. Whatever was sellable, you bought. And then when Gavin couldn't lift heavy furniture, we started downsizing a bit to smaller furniture. But, he liked do it up and sell it, and he did upholstery almost until he died. So, there wasn't so much upholstery done then because... very labour intensive job. You have to give people an estimate, about what it's going to cost. Does you a lifetime when you get it done but, people are not prepared, unless they've got antique furniture that needs restoring, and he loved doing that.

CF: And then you retired, I think is the next step of the journey?

JM: Well, it was forced upon me.

CF: Tell us more about that.

JM: We were thinking about retiring last year anyway, but Gavin took unwell and hit sort of... he didn't want to stop, but. Stopped. Shut the shop. Looked after him until he died, just a few months, and then had a big sale - everything half price, and it went like snow off a dyke, as they say in Kirkcudbright.

CF: So that's brilliant, thanks very much for that. So now let's move towards your memories of the artists, and let's go right back to the earliest memories. And first of all, just for the record, if you could just tell us the artist you can remember from your earliest memories - so what, we'll be talking about the early forties I guess when you were first school age.

JM: Well, Jessie M. King of course, who was not as well known to me. Bit scary. And I can remember her very well. But just the look. But they did come to the school and teach us. The Hotchkis sisters I remember and I can remember their house in particular, which I think has now been 'B&Q'd', you know what I mean?

[00:11:20]

CF: I do. Whereabouts is that? Can you recall what house that is?

JM: Greengate, down Greengate.

CF: Oh right, okay. Yeah.

JM: And I think most of the little houses down there, they all painted or drew in their living rooms, when we went.

CF: Tell us more about that. Tell us what you knew, if anything, at that time about their circumstances. Were they renting those houses? Or just...

JM: Yes they were all renting them, as far as I knew.

CF: Yes, uh huh.

JM: Yeah.

CF: Yeah.

JM: Most people, I mean the whole of the High Street I think would be rented, apart from some of the bigger houses, and like my grandpa's. There were three people, three lots of different families in them, some of them.

CF: So who else do you remember from those days?

[whispers, unclear]

JM: E.A. Taylor I can remember only because of his hat. He wore a sort of trilby type hat.

CF: Yes.

JM: But artists all wore hats. Except the Hotchkis sisters didn't, for some reason. But ladies of that age wore hats anyway when they went out.

CF: What kind of hats did they wear? Were they big formal hats or?

JM: Usually sort of soft things the you pulled down with a brim. Jessie King's always had a brim. She had a wee chest full of these sorts of things. And dressing up clothes.

CF: Were you ever allowed to go in there and dress up? Tell us a bit more about that. What kind of things did you do?

JM: Oh just, generally did what they were asking, and sometimes they would draw people, you know? Sketch people. But, haven't eh, that much memory of that, it was such a long time ago.

CF: Sure.

JM: I remember being in and out of the close - Greengate Close. And all the rest of the closes, we were up and down - as I said. People just expected you to open the door and go in!

CF: Did you think of the artists at that time as a grouping? Did you think of them as a group people? Or were they just part of the community like anybody else?

JM: Well, they were a group of people and they were a wee bit different from the rest of us.
[00:13:49]

CF: Yeah.

JM: They were the hippies of their day.

CF: Were they? And how did that show itself? Presumably the way they dressed, for example?

JM: They all nearly dressed in black.

CF: Did they?

JM: This years Candlemass Ball I see in the Galloway News the wee girls are all dressed in black.

CF: Uh huh. And what was everybody else wearing at that time? How were they distinctive from other people at the time?

JM: Hand-me-downs, mostly. Most people wore... there were quite a few seamstresses in the High Street who mended and altered clothes. And my grandfather was a tailor who actually made clothes for the...

CF: And where was he based?

JM: 25 High Street

CF: Was it 25 High Street? Thank you. So they were the hippy generation?

JM: They were.

CF: Tell us more about how they behaved. Did they behave collectively, together as a group very often? Or individuals? Describe more about how they...

JM: They were all individuals, but when they needed to be a group, they were a group.

CF: What kind of occasions brought them together as a group?

JM: Well if we were having a pageant, everybody helped. Or did their own thing. Jessie M. King was a great one for pageants.

CF: And did they help out with the design, the staging?

JM: Yes.

CF: Costumes?

JM: Yes, yes.

CF: Oh very good. Let's go back to how you used to play - you described being in and out of the houses. Can you talk more about how your friends, your group, what kind of games you played, how the artists interacted with you.

JM: We played a lot hopscotch. Balls against the wall. One, two, sometimes three, I think the police would be called nowadays if you did that.

[laughter]

JM: In the winter, which were very hard winters - the winters that the milk came rising out of the bottles on the doorstep, so frosty. And if you had a fall of snow, we had the most wonderful slides up and down the High Street.

[00:15:52]

CF: Yeah. And what other games did you play involving the artists?

JM: Not really very much apart from drawing.

CF: Uh huh. So where they were actually working in their living rooms, you would literally just go in while they were all working. And were the living rooms set up as studios? Can you describe what they were like, in their living rooms, generally?

JM: They were... they weren't interested in what was there, apart from their working materials. They wurnae like people are today who want everything to look just so.

CF: They weren't, kind of, house proud as maybe we'd call it today you mean?

JM: No way.

CF: Yeah. They were just working studios?

JM: Yes.

CF: Is that right?

JM: That was the purpose of the living room, I think.

CF: So you would go in and chat to them and watch them working, would you? And they would interact with you? Would they play with you, play games? Or...

JM: Well, I presume they sent us off sometimes, got a bit fed up of us, but if we'd nothing better to do, that's what we did. We ventured quite far. I say quite far - our reach was Sandside. We took a bottle of water and a piece of bread and if we're lucky if there was a piece of jam on it or something. And went down there for the day. When the tide was in or when the tide was out. Where Davie Collins stays, you know?

CF: Yes I know it, yes, yeah.

JM: That was the nearest... it was a bit muddy but the nearest until I got my bike.

AF: Can I just ask you, you talk about a group of friends, do you remember who it was that you played with?

JM: Yes.

AF: And what sort of ages they were?

JM: Yes, yes. In fact one in the Galloway News today - it'll be their diamond wedding anniversary. And they've made a big error and they've put 1858 instead of 1958.

[laughter]

CF: Oh dear.

JM: And they were there the Davidson girls who lived in the house on the corner, opposite the Tolbooth. Kathleen, who's wedding anniversary it is this week - her father was the janitor at the Academy. He also rang the bell for the 6 o'clock curfew.

CF: Tell us about the 6 o'clock curfew?

JM: This was just a tradition which the bell... there was a rope.

[00:18:20]

CF: Uh huh.

JM: And we all had a go at that, when her Dad wasn't there, they got the job of doing it. And we all went to help, pulled it down, got dragged up to the very top. Great fun.

CF: So everyone had to be in after 6 o'clock?

JM: No, it was just... I don't know why it was there, maybe you'd be able to find out, I never did find out.

CF: But that was every day was it?

JM: Yes. They automated it a while back. I don't know whether it still rings or not. I can't hear as well as I did.

CF: Sure, uh huh.

JM: But they automated it, and it rang for a while, but I don't know whether it still does or not.

AF: Are the Davidson girls around about your age?

JM: Yes, one came back to Kirkcudbright just recently, she was the oldest and she just died. But Kathleen lives in Millburn Street, and Ona, the other sister, lives in Atkinson Square. They would have all the same memories as me. In fact, when her sister died I sent to Kathleen a card to say "I'm sorry, it's just full of memories of us all in the street." You know we played a lot outside, because our little house was only two rooms.

AF: Any other friends apart from the Davidson girls?

JM: Sheila Semple who lived down Steeple Close, which is the one right next to the Tolbooth. Sheila McGlaughlin she was, and she still lives in the town. The rest are all gone. But there were young people in the High Street then - not so much now, I don't think. Same with Castle Street. 'Course, Kirkcudbright's full of old folk now! Myself!

[laughter]

AF: So how many kids would be playing out in the High Street altogether at that sort of time.

JM: Well, I was an only child but there was three next door to me. In another... where the title artist shop is? There was three children, rabbits, cats, and dogs, and the Mum and Dad in two rooms in there.

CF: Good grief.

JM: After I had been out playing with them, my mother laid newspaper on the floor.

CF: And brushed you off?

JM: And did the nit thing. Which people are still doing, aren't they?

CF: Yeah. Still do it at schools don't they?

JM: And, we were all out. And down the next close, Canon's Close? There was a dysfunctional family down there, who didn't feed their children. One boy was completely mad, the other one was so bright, he was almost completely mad, but he left home under a cloud when he was a little boy. Well, just when he was growing up, because he got into a feud with a girl or something. And they used to not feed him... my mother used to give him food. And next door, above Maureen Briggs, there was a family of Catholics, who took in Catholic children who probably had come down during the war. And they were always in the close outside our house, crying, because the people were not nice to them. My mother used to feed them a well, I don't know how she managed it.

[00:22:11]

CF: What did your parents do?

JM: My Dad was in the army, when he came back from the army he got a job as a store man at the range, you know the military range?

CF: Yeah.

JM: He'd been a quarryman before that. I didn't know him when he came back.

AF: Did your Mum work?

JM: Yes, she was obliged to when my Dad went to war. She was a post woman for those years. And I stayed most of the time with my Granny in 25, when she did her work. And it had to be all in the dark, when it was dark, because you couldn't show a light. You know, no torch?

CF: This is the blackouts?

JM: Yeah.

CF: Yep.

JM: She had the nasty job of delivering these telegrams.

CF: Oh, of course.

JM: She had to go on her bike from here to Borgue or Dundrennan, in the dark.

CF: Good grief.

JM: She was always coming in with skint knees. It was hard, it was hard. And then of course she lost that job when all the men came back from the war, which upset her terribly. Because that was her independence.

CF: Yeah. And did she do anything else? Or did she...

JM: She started cleaning houses then.

CF: Okay.

JM: And she didn't like that.

CF: No fun.

JM: But she liked the money so... She needed the money so she had to do it.

CF: Yeah, sure.

JM: But she took a while to recover from not knowing whether my Dad was alive or dead. And years later she had a nervous breakdown because of that. There were months went by when there was no communication. You didn't know...

CF: What was happening?

JM: What was happening. She went to meet my Dad at Dumfries railway station, and I stayed with my Granny that night. When I come down in the morning there was this strange man sitting having bacon, two eggs. And I said to my granny, "why have you given that man two eggs? I only ever get a dip in somebody's."

[00:24:32]

[laughter]

JM: I got to know him again.

CF: Mhmm. And had you literally forgotten him? What age would you have been at this time? I've just lost my arithmetic for a moment.

JM: 1938 I was born, so he was away about from 42 I think it was.

CF: Oh okay. So you'd just forgotten all about him, essentially?

JM: I had, essentially.

AF: Did it take you a little while to get used to having him in the house?

JM: Oh absolutely, yes. Yes. Cause I'd had my Mum to myself for years.

CF: Yeah.

JM: Uh huh. And then this strange man's sitting eating two eggs.

[laughter]

CF: What's special about him? [laughter] Very good. Tell us a little more about schooldays. So the playing, you're describing, in and out of the closes where the artists were, is very much presumably pre-school, when you were younger, you're talking about?

JM: Yes, yeah.

CF: How did things change when you started school, going to school full time?

JM: Not a lot really. Life was a wee bit more structured.

CF: Sure.

JM: But the teachers were all well known to us anyway because they lived nearby.

CF: Yes.

JM: In fact, my sewing teacher lived opposite my Grandpa. At the house next to Broughton House.

CF: Uh huh, yeah.

JM: She couldn't understand why this stupid girl couldn't sew, because she had this grandfather who was a tailor.

CF: Who was a tailor, yeah.

JM: I have never sewn anything in my life that was worth anything, just got a mental block.

CF: Just not your thing.

JM: Not my thing.

[00:26:05]

CF: Did your Granny get involved in the tailoring business as well? Did she work...

JM: No, she just tried to collect the money that nobody would pay. She was a lady's maid, she was his second wife. She worked at Argrennan House, you know where that is?

CF: Yes, yes.

JM: Well they had their summers there, and their winters in Edinburgh. And she found it very difficult when she married my Grandad, because she lived the life of, almost, a lady. I looked after her when she was dying, and all her clothes had to be put in the wardrobe with pads underneath them. Mine were all lying about the floor in my bedroom, her's were all neat and tidy.

CF: So did the artists get involved in your school life at all?

JM: Yes, they came to school to show us how to draw, sometimes. Mr. Jeffs used to come as well. And Tommy Lockhead, water [unclear]. And he did night classes later on as well.

CF: And did you get involved in this yourself, personally? Did you enjoy drawing, did you enjoy... do you remember...

JM: I loved it, I loved it.

CF: Did you?

JM: Yes. And I would really like to start again.

CF: Well it's never too late is it? You should, give it a go. Which artists can you personally remember doing drawing lessons with?

JM: Mostly Lena Alexander.

CF: She was a Sunday School teacher as well, is that right?

JM: She was.

CF: Yes, uh huh.

JM: And she had the dress shop. And then she had a cafe.

CF: So, was it the Rendezvous Cafe it was called, I believe? Is that right?

JM: The?

CF: Rendezvous Cafe, it was called, I believe?

JM: Yes, further up the street.

CF: Mhmm, okay.

JM: I can't remember the name if it, was that it?

CF: I believe so, I've read that somewhere.

AF: Did the dress shop become a cafe, or was it two separate...?

JM: No, the dress shop was one door down.

CF: Right.

JM: The window that she put in is still there.

AF: Yes, so the cafe was a separate place to the dress shop?

JM: Yes, two years... two or three years later.

CF: So the dress shop is what's now the volunteer services office, isn't it?

JM: That's right.

CF: With the window either side of the front door.

[00:28:31]

JM: That's right. Wonderful shop, she had the most wonderful sales. She slashed everything - there was queues at the door when she had her January sale.

CF: Really?

JM: Yep.

CF: And that's local people, mostly, was it?

JM: Oh yes.

CF: Yeah.

JM: And I benefitted from that, because the few pounds they'd left, I had a sale at the same time.

CF: That's a good plan. And while you were in... Just going back to your school days, just thinking about the artists' involvement in the school and the town - Were you very conscious of tourists at that time? Had tourism started in those early days?

JM: I wasn't conscious of it, but there must have been...

CF: Yes, so it didn't really enter your life as a schoolgirl?

JM: It didn't, it didn't.

CF: No. Okay. Good. So let's go back to the individual artists. You spoke about Jessie King and you spoke about she was a bit scary. Tell me more about your specific memories of Jessie. We'll talk about each of the artists individually now rather than how they were as a group. Let's just go through each of them, Jessie M. King first of all.

JM: Well she was quite a scary lady, but she seemed to do quite a lot of good in the community. She had a daughter that my father was at school with, and he knew her quite well. But I don't remember that much

about her. I think she was out and about more than the rest of the artists in the Greengate. The other ones always seemed to be there when you went... Down the close.

CF: In the close?

JM: Yes, uh huh.

CF: And what about E. A. Taylor?

JM: E. A. Taylor I can only remember his hat.

CF: Oh, you mentioned before, the hat.

JM: And I barely remember seeing him at all.

CF: And the Hotchkis sisters?

JM: The Hotchkis sisters were just... they were like the Three Degrees I think. You remember them in threes.

CF: Mhmm. How did they dress, what kind of... what was their... Were they hippie-like like the others?

JM: The clothes people wore in those days wurnae very memorable at all.

[00:30:51]

CF: Just fairly plain?

JM: Yes.

CF: Mhmm, okay.

JM: You'd have thought, being artists, they'd have been a bit more flamboyant, but Jessie King herself was always in black.

CF: And what about Dorothy Rae?

JM: Dorothy Rae was younger. And I can remember her dressed in floral dresses, and she was the lady to go to if you had a bird dropped out of a nest. That was another excuse to go down Greengate, she would help to bring this bird back to life.

CF: And she painted the birds, presumably?

JM: She did.

CF: Yes, uh huh. Did you ever have an injured bird yourself?

JM: No, I didn't, I regret that.

CF: Yes.

JM: And I regret not having an Oppenheimer one, because he was still about. In fact my husband delivered Oppenheimer's newspapers.

CF: Really?

JM: He got the Manchester Guardian. Because that was where he came from I think.

CF: So we're just still focussing on these earlier years, and so preschool and school years. Just thinking a little bit about how Kirkcudbright is today compared to there, what are your observations about how things have changed? For people around about that age?

JM: It's just the passage of time - communities have changed considerably. People worked near where they lived, in those days, that doesn't happen anymore. People were always very helpful. People, nowadays, are reluctant to go in and out of other peoples' homes. In those days it was more common. Much more common.

CF: And how's the town changed physically? You spoke earlier, before we started the interview about the closes running through the town... Has it changed very much physically, in your memory?

[00:31:01]

JM: Just the fact that everybody's all locked up, not wanting interaction with their neighbours anymore. I don't know why this is, are they scared? Or just they want to be left alone, I don't know. Maybe we didn't have any distractions in those days - you've got your television and all the rest of your bits and pieces, modern technology nowadays. People are... although in Kirkcudbright you could be out every night at something, if you wished.

CF: Talk a little bit more about the entertainment in your school days, compared with now. What kind of things did you get up to, that you'd call entertainment? With no telly?

JM: We did dancing classes. Theatre groups used to come to the town, and play in the town hall, and that was quite an event. Everybody went, everybody went.

AF: Do you remember any particular performances?

JM: Yes, I can remember the chap that played in... Oh gosh, my memory's going now. That horrific film they made years later...

AF: Oh, umm...

CF: Oh, Red Herrings?

JM: No, remember that one too. That was down the Greengate, they used that a lot.

AF: When they filmed it, yes.

CF: Yes, oh The Wickerman?

JM: The Wickerman. Now the chap...

AF: Edward Woodward?

JM: Edward Woodward, I met him because he used to come and play in plays at the town hall when he was a young actor. And when he came back to do this he was very very nice - talked to everybody. He made a recording of a song he did, Morning Has Broken, in the little church there; I happened to be walking the

dog when I heard him doing it, we walked in on it. And the other leading lady was an absolute horror, what was her name? Nude, she was nude. What was her name?

AF: Oh, in The Wickerman are you talking about?

JM: Yes.

AF: Oh...

CF: Bridget Bardot ,was it?

AF: No, it was Rod Stewart's ex-wife. It was one... She was blonde.

JM: Thats right. She was the star.

CF: And you knew it?

[laughter]

JM: They used Maureen Briggs' little shop which was a sweetie shop at that point, as the shop. And they came to me to hire stuff from the shop to make it look like an ordinary home, and a little shop. So...

[00:36:09]

AF: So some of your items are in the film?

JM: Yes, my knitting was in there too!

CF: Oh, very good.

JM: They wanted knitting to sit about. And I watched it three times I think looking for my knitting, I've never seen it yet! I remember the Red Herrings being filmed here as well.

CF: What was that like?

JM: Quite exciting.

CF: Mhmm.

JM: Because we'd nearly all read it as a child at school and we all knew the story. The BBC were here for quite some time doing that one. In fact one of my children went to a fancy dress, dressed as Lord Peter Whimsey.

AF: Just going back to the rep companies that used to come and Edward Woodward came when he was a young man, do you remember any other actors that would have played at Kirkcudbright?

JM: No, No.

AF: No.

JM: No.

AF: And do remember any specific plays that you went to see?

JM: No, I can't remember, no, no.

AF: No.

JM: They all went in... When television began they all went into television and you recognised one or two of them, you know?

CF: Yeah, yeah. Any other events at the time? The pageants, what else happened in terms of community events that you remember?

JM: We seemed to be always having some sort of thing in the Harbour Square, presentations of some sort, especially after the war, when folk were getting recognised for what they did.

CF: Yes.

JM: Pipe bands, and soldiers and things like that.

CF: And what about the shop around the town? Have they changed very much? Are there more shops? Fewer shops? What do you recall?

JM: When we came to live in Castle Street first, we had a butcher, a bakers, two grocers, a hairdressers, a chip shop, a bike shop, a baby shop, a restaurant. You didn't need to go out the street.

CF: Big change then, big change compared to today.

JM: Yes. Before Miles Johnston come next door, I can't remember it, but my granny said it was a jennie aathing. You know what a jennie aathing is?

CF: Mhmm.

JM: A sort of wee shop that sells everything.

CF: Oh, I see right, uh huh.

AF: Going back to your dancing classes, what sort of age would you have been when you went to dancing?

[00:38:54]

JM: I started about three.

AF: Right.

JM: Granny paid for everything because we were so hard up, we hadnae any money, and Granny paid for them as well.

AF: What sort of dancing was it?

JM: Well, in those days it was very classical. Mostly ballet.

AF: Mhmm. Do you remember the teacher's name?

JM: Yes, her husband is still alive teaching country dancing, and he must be about 100. Little, Mrs. Little.

AF: Mrs. Little.

JM: She gave you... we had a dancing display each year, and she gave you a little typewritten piece of paper with instructions, on how to make the things. "Take a length of ribbon," doesn't say what size. We all arrived, we were doing a French dance once, with this French hat, all arrived with different hats. And I kept all my children's dancing things cause they went to the same lady's class. And nearly every year someone would come - "Have you still got that?" Cause she did the same dances each year.

AF: So, did any of the artists go to see the performances at all? Or would they have gone to watch any of that at all or?

JM: Well, I don't know, I expect they would. They maybe have helped with the things that we had to wear.

CF: Good. I'm conscious of the time.

JM: Am I rattling on?

CF: You're doing great, you're doing great. So have we... Do you think... Just thinking about those earlier, remember we're still focussed on the school years at the moment. You've done some preparation prior to the interview. Any other things that come to mind that you remember from those years?

JM: I told you about the rights of way, where we all used.

CF: Just explain that a little bit more for the interview?

JM: Rights of way were always there. The Coxons of the lifeboat's sister who lived at the end of Castle Gardens used to walk right down there to see them open while she was still alive. When the Mitchells come to live next door I told them about this and they were appalled. And it meant the one from Tanpits Lane, they were all joined together, it was all shortcuts. You know? But people don't like people walking past their gardens now.

[00:41:32]

AF: So these are all back alleys, or?

JM: Uh huh.

AF: Routes through? What did you call those lanes?

JM: Closes.

AF: They were all called the closes?

JM: Yes.

AF: Right.

JM: All closes. I mean you've got so many on the High Street, and if you've noticed they're all opposite one another. When somebody was... This I was told early on in my... Early on. When Kirkcudbright was invaded by sea, a siren of some sort went off at this point. And all the men of the town came up the closes and down towards the sea to the repel the invaders.

CF: Oh that's interesting. Very good. Good, good.

JM: That was what I was told.

AF: But now some of the closes have been closed off?

JM: Everybody who comes in now puts doors on, all sorts of things.

CF: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Any other memories from those early days?

JM: People were very poor. We didn't think we were poor because we hadn't known anything else. Police were local, knew the local bad boys, took them up a close and told them on no uncertain terms, what they were doing wasn't good. Did them the world of good, I always thought anyway. Tradespeople were always used by their goodwill, nowadays people look for the cheapest.

CF: Oh, I see. By goodwill you mean their reputation?

JM: Yes.

CF: And the quality of the work that they did?

JM: Yes. In fact when you used to buy a business long ago you paid a sum for the goodwill.

CF: You'll remember that from your legal days.

JM: Yes.

AF: Cause there's quite a lot of tradespeople, now, who are working, who are still working in their father's or grandfather's business.

JM: That's correct, yes.

AF: Do you remember any of the names of the businesses that might still be going today?

[00:43:52]

JM: Well, there's the Swan boys who have the yard down there, make headstones - masons. Andy Campbell, in fact Andy Campbell lives down the close where his ancestors stayed. Where we were in fact. His Grandpa lived at the bottom of the close, where our toilet was and he kept hens and there was this enormous great cockerel. Every time I went to the toilet my mother had to take me because it was a terrible... it bit people. It pecked people. And I never knew what happened to that cockerel, it disappeared one day. Peter McAdam, who's now in Merse House has the most wonderful recall of these things. His mother lived in High Street, and he said that that cockerel knocked down a child, at least a child fell, and then started to peck at her face, and Grandpa Campbell came out and got it by the neck and swung it against the...

CF: Wow.

JM: The wall. People were so kind, when I... Another Mrs. Campbell, not related, had the sweetie shop, where Maureen Briggs is now. And when I was ill with the mumps she allowed me to use her toilet to save me going down - that's what neighbours were like. She gave me a loan of her radiogram, she only had one record - Keep Right on to the End of the Road.

[laughter]

CF: Good.

JM: I played til everybody was... You couldn't mix in those days with mumps. I don't know if... Mumps has disappeared hasn't it?

CF: Pretty much, I think. We don't hear so much of it nowadays.

AF: You don't hear so much but there is still Mumps around.

CF: Still there? Good. Well listen, I think we should close the interview there, I think that's plenty for one day, but we'd love to come back and talk more about Miles Johnston.

JM: Any time you like.

CF: And just talk more about that later era of artists. But unless there's anything else, any final thoughts from that earlier period, I think we'll call it a day.

JM: I don't think so. I've told you about all the shops there were in the street.

CF: Yes, yep.

JM: In fact, before we came, there was that baby shop that was there when we came - it, in the century before that, had been a hat shop. And up at the top of the street where the police houses are there were old buildings there which they knocked down.

AF: That's right.

JM: There was another hat shop!

CF: As you say, everybody wore hats in those days.

JM: They did.

CF: Yes. Good, very good.

AF: Okay.

CF: Lovely. Well, thank you very much indeed that was absolutely brilliant, thank you.

AF: It's been an absolute pleasure, really really good, wonderful.

JM: You must have a terrible time editing this.

AF: Oh, we don't even get involved in the edit so that's absolutely fine.

[00:47:18]