

Interviewee: Joseph Sassoon (JS)	Interviewers: Tania Gardner (TG); Flora McDowall (FM)
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TITLE	<i>Joseph Sassoon interviewed by Tania Gardner and Flora McDowall</i>
REGION	<i>Dumfries &amp; Galloway</i>
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COUNTY	<i>Dumfries &amp; Galloway</i>
TOWN	<i>Kirkcudbright</i>
DATE OF INTERVIEW	<i>27 March 2018</i>
INTERVIEWER	<i>Tania Gardner and Flora McDowall</i>
YEAR RANGE	<i>1926 - 2018</i>
SUMMARY	<i>Joseph is the son of the artist David Sassoon and tells how his father and mother came to live and work in Kirkcudbright. David married in 1926 and Joseph was born a year later. Joseph talks about his early days living in Kirkcudbright and when the family spent the summers in a hut at Carrick beach. He discusses with Tania (his daughter) and Flora the artists who came and worked at Kirkcudbright, the setting up of the Summer School and the modern artists who continue to come and work in the area.</i>

00.00.00

**FMcD:** (Softly) Usually get the wrong thing.

**TG:** (Softly) Right.

**FMcD:** (Softly) Are you ready to go?

**TG:** This is an interview conducted in Kirkcudbright on the 27th March 2018 by Tania Gardner and Flora McDowall with Joseph Sassoon. He is the son of the artist David Sassoon and I am the granddaughter of the artist David Sassoon. David Sassoon's story is told in good, well documented really in Haig Gordon's book the *Tales of the Kirkcudbright Artists* and it says that Pa was introduced to Kirkcudbright by Joe Simpson. Did he meet him at art college?

**JS:** No, he met him in the trenches in the First World War.

**TG:** Did he?

**JS:** Yes.

**TG:** And did Joe Simpson belong to this area?

**JS:** No, he, he came from Cumberland.

**TG:** Right, so what do you think?

**JS:** That he came here to paint.

**TG:** Right, so he must've had a connection with somebody within the Artist Colony then at that point.

**JS:** Well probably.

**TG:** Yeah.

**JS:** He was a lecturer more than anything else.

**TG:** (Softly) Right.

**JS:** But he was a war artist in the First War.

**TG:** And so was Pa and some.

**JS:** No.

**TG:** No.

**JS:** Not, not officially.

**TG:** Not officially.

**JS:** No.

**TG:** No. So when they came to begin with they would probably go into a B&B or something of that nature?

**JS:** When my father came here first?

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**TG:** Ah-ha with Joe.

**JS:** Well I'm not sure that he even came with him.

**TG:** Oh I see! Oh well Haig's got that bit of it [unclear].

**JS:** He stayed with the blacksmith at Sandyhills first.

**TG:** Ah-ha.

**JS:** And then he gravitated to Kirkcudbright and he lived with McClune's at 1 High Street. And meanwhile he'd bought the house and the studio in Castle Street.

**TG:** Which end of Castle Street's that?

**JS:** It's that, it's down the Close next to Osborne's shop.

**TG:** Oh right, yeah, right. Right up at the top?

**JS:** Or the bottom.

**TG:** It is really, yeah or the bottom. At the Gordon House end of Castle Street. Yes.

**JS:** Yes.

**TG:** So he had bought that originally? Or was he renting that?

**JS:** No I think I don't.....no I think he rented it actually.

**TG:** Yes ah-ha.

**JS:** But I've no, I've no knowledge of that, but meanwhile he, he bought 3 High Street and 3 High Street was supposed to be ready for occupation when he brought my mother here after they married in, in 1926. Of course the house wasn't ready and I don't know how they camped in that studio because there was no facilities. I guess they would use, I can't remember the name of the lady, she used to give me ginger snaps, but my father used to go there to, to work [unclear] easels and I can still smell the paint, you know.

**TG:** So he kept the studio there although you were living in High Street?

**JS:** Yes, it.

**TG:** Because you weren't born until '27.

**JS:** No, that's right. But he, no he kept it, that was just chance I think he probably wanted the studio separate anyway. But in an excess of zeal at the beginning of the war he, he gave up the studio and then he used a room in, at that time he'd already bought 5 High Street, and he used a room in 5 High Street as a studio and my mother used to do her weaving in there too.

**TG:** In, on the mezzanines landing?

**JS:** Yes.

**TG:** Ah-ha.

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**JS:** And the.

**TG:** She, I didn't realise that she worked in there I thought she worked in the top in the, in the attic.

**JS:** No. Well she did eventually yes. And there was an attic, I mean, these houses there are different levels, but there was an attic in 5 High Street and he made that into a workshop and I can't remember what he made there. But, but he used it, he, is that a well-equipped work, workshop. I've still got a bench in, in our garage came from there and most of the tools came from there as well.

**FMcD:** (Softly) Fantastic.

**JS:** And then.

**TG:** So what do you remember of him, so you obviously went round to the studio in Castle Street it, when you say you remember going there and the lady with the ginger biscuits?

**JS:** Yes, but not, not often though.

**FMcD:** No.

**TG:** He would escape there like a man's shed.

**JS:** Maybe. He, he wasn't that kind of person.

**FMcD:** No.

**JS:** Because he enjoyed the garden too and he grew carnations in a little greenhouse.

**TG:** When, he, when they, they, he opened up the studio area within number 5 High Street do you remember him having a pattern to the day about painting or?

**JS:** No he, I think by this time he'd turned that room into a studio he wasn't doing much painting. A little, but he was doing more book binding.

**TG:** Yes, maybe that's what the workshop was for then as well.

**JS:** No the workshop was nothing to do with that, the workshop was [unclear].

**TG:** And that, so he was doing printing as well at that, block printing.

**JS:** Well yes it was part of the book binding though, but he came to book binding later and I can remember he'd, gold leaf is very, very thin and he used that gold leaf to put the embellishment and write the titles on. Mostly what he did was family albums of photographs which are up in our rogues' gallery.

**TG:** Yes. So where you aware that the visitors and friends who came around the house or that, or who he met were artists at all?

**JS:** No not particularly just were people, I mean . . . I . . . not, not that many came.

**TG:** No. Well I was just thinking about for example Cecile at, at that, in, in, my childhood came along.

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**JS:** Ah yes. Yes well Cecile didn't appear until much later. She used to come and by that time they were living in 5, 5 High Street, we were in 3. She use to come and she and Pa used to chat, talk about art all the time. Mother got a bit fed up with them I think but. But they enjoyed the chat.

**TG:** You were in. You were in number 3.

**TG:** Did, when Pa was painting, you, I remember you telling me he didn't like to drive, but he did like to go out into the countryside. Did he, he, he took notebooks?

**JS:** Well yes I've got sketchbooks he had. These Loch Doon oils I think were, were started, started off either as sketches or watercolours and worked up in the studio.

**TG:** And did, so did he go out on jaunts to, to paint or?

**JS:** Yes well he, he must've driven all the way to Loch Doon.

**TG:** And did you go on these adventures?

**JS:** No, no. And, I mean, if he, all these watercolours round Carrick watercolours have to be painted fairly quickly really. He thought of them as sketches up which would then become an oil. Not all of them did.

**TG:** You've mentioned Carrick can you remember when they acquired the JJ hut?

**JS:** Oh . . . early 1930's . . . maybe.

**TG:** So not long after they came then?

**JS:** Well when you think about it no I, I hadn't thought about it that way. No I can remember them putting us in the car and driving out on a, on a kinda adventure, because we didn't know what was going on and there we were at the hut. And then they put an extension on the hut so that the boys could sleep in there and my parents got, slept in the main hat, hut.

**TG:** Did you spend lots of time out there, did?

**JS:** Yes I did, my parents use to go there in January . . . well they had a Valor stove to heat the place. It heated up quickly, but it got cold quickly too. And they, they spent a lot of time there because it was school holidays and so on.

**TG:** So, were there many other artists out there?

**JS:** No.

**TG:** No.

**JS:** I mean.

**TG:** I thought the Johnstons had a hut?

**JS:** Well they, they appeared later [unclear] and they had their own hut well and (TG McGill) Duncan, you know Duncan?

**TG:** Yeah.

00.09.49

**JS:** They came and stayed in the tin hut and then he, he bought the hut that he put up further along.

**TG:** Yeah.

**JS:** And then these people Dodge came and camped at Carrick. He was an art teacher in Edinburgh.

**TG:** I can remember.

**JS:** And oh yes.

**TG:** Oh go on.

**JS:** Flore, Florence and Robert Thomson isn't it?

**TG:** Yes.

**JS:** Yes there a.

**TG:** She's Florence Jamieson.

**JS:** Jamieson. Oh she was Florence.

**TG:** She's Florence Jamieson.

**JS:** She, she came to the exhibition in the Town Hall.

**TG:** Yeah, the Glasgow Girls.

**FMcD:** Oh yes, yes.

**JS:** Yes and.

**TG:** That was so nice.

**JS:** But that's a marriage that broke up, but they were quite chummy with them.

**TG:** But they came, how did they come and how did they calm.

**JS:** Motorbike with a sidecar.

**FMcD:** Cool.

**TG:** They loved it there but.

**FMcD:** I saw a lovely photograph. I went to see Niall Duncan a little while ago and he showed me a lovely photograph of them, you know, him and his brothers, his boys and you were in the photograph as well. And it looked like the most wonderful place then.

**JS:** [Unclear] I don't know I've been trying to think how many other kids there were. I mean . . . oh God, the Dodges had two daughters . . . I can't remember the name of the elder one; the younger one's called Valerie. And she lived or lives in Edinburgh now, but I've lost contact with her, but and the Duncan's they had two boys. But it seemed to me that we, we just ran wild at Carrick. It didn't matter what we did or where we went and the, we had a canoe and a boat and they had a boat too.

00.11.55

**FMcD:** It sounded like something like "Swallows & Amazon" actually.

**JS:** It did yes.

**TG:** It was.

**FMcD:** You're saying once a week, you know, the ice, the, the ice cream or the sweetie van would come and the crowd would come up "It's the van!"

**JS:** Well we.....

**TG:** We had to fetch water from, from the stream.

**JS:** Yes we'd fetch water. I got fed up fetching water.

**TG:** And the postman came on a bike.

**JS:** Yes, but the post, I don't, I don't know how it worked, but the post, some of the post was directed to Kirkcudbright and the postman used to edit it and.

**TG:** Fergie.

**JS:** I mean I didn't know what they looked for bills or what, but he didn't, he, he didn't send all of it to Carrick and our infrequent visits to High Street collected the mail.

**FMcD:** Oh gosh.

**TG:** Were the MacLauchlan's in the farmhouse at that time?

**JS:** Yes.

**TG:** Jessie and Jimmie.

**JS:** Yes I know, but before them there were people in it; I can't remember their name, but I think they it is up the, that cottage to make it a bit more habitable for them.

**TG:** And did you go for milk the way that we use to?

**JS:** Oh yes I sometimes went for milk a bowl in the garden. I don't know why.

**TG:** It's halfway.

**JS:** There's a distinction.

**TG:** Yeah. I think there might've been some rabbits eaten as well, where did they come from?

**JS:** Oh we didn't eat the rabbits, but the rabbits kept the grass cut.

**TG:** What about fishing do you remember fishing there?

(Background noise then door is closed)

**JS:** Not much I had no patience but . . . we used to put out steak, line out as far out, out and we'd catch flounders and that. I think the Duncan boys were a bit more astute at that than I, than we were.

**TG:** And why, how did, what did Granny and Pa do with their time?

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**JS:** Oh he would go and paint I suppose a little bit and I don't know what they did the rest of the time.

**TG:** You weren't there to see what was going on, you were elsewhere.

**JS:** [Unclear] I'd go and play in the traffic then. But I don't know what, what they did, I mean, I really, I don't know.

**TG:** No. Let's come back to town.

**JS:** I'm enjoying the Carrick with pleasure.

**TG:** Yes, I know, it was, well we've got, all got happy memories of that. We spent a lot of time there when we were children as well.

**FMcD:** Sound's like a charmed existence somewhere where you don't get any bills.

**TG:** Well it was, it was, it was good in, in some ways. I'm sure it wasn't great for Mum trying to work with fetching water and boiling up water.

**JS:** No. We fetched water for, for the house, but I, I think she got fed up by spending all her time with children sometimes. And sometimes her friends came and visited.

(Background noise stops)

**TG:** Yes that's right. If we go back to the High Street can you, apart from Jessie M King and EA Taylor at the far end at Greengate, were there any other artists between you and them, you being at number three?

**JS:** Well (Charles) Oppenheimer.

**TG:** Ah-ha.

**JS:** He rented 14 High Street from (Edward) Hornel . . . I can't think of any others around, any other artist along there.

**TG:** Nope.

**JS:** Not that they weren't there, but I can't think of them.

**TG:** So, with Pa friendly with Oppenheimer then or?

**JS:** Yes he was.

**TG:** And, of course, there'd be the garden did they have a shared interest in that?

**JS:** I suppose so.

**TG:** They didn't paint together Pa didn't paint with others did he?

**JS:** No, no. I remember one occasion, I think, he went with (William) Robson to Brickhouse to paint and I don't know what. Anyway Robson was painting in oil on the canvas and he went to get something from the car; when he came back the cattle had licked all the paint off the canvas.

**TG:** And you told me that Robson used to have little drinks parties or whatever at the.....

00.16.37

**JS:** Yes.

**TG:** But did Granny go as well as Pa?

**JS:** No she.

**TG:** No she didn't go.

**JS:** No, I mean . . . no he went no she didn't go to the Robsons, but she's friendly enough with them.

**TG:** And then when you went round the corner were any of the Closes at that time used by anybody; was, were they used as cottages for people to rent out by that time or were they still being used?



**JS:** Well, well most of the other Closes people lived in them, and Malloy's had a lodging house which never changes. But the artists came to the Greengate Close, people like Mary Thew and Anna Hotchkis and Dorothy Rey.

**TG:** Yeah, well she was living there.

**JS:** Yes, yes I guess she did a lot, good for her, because she was a, a niece of Jessie M King. And who else I don't, I, I can't think of, there might have been others, but I can't think who they were.

**TG:** Most of these, that group, the Kirkcudbright Artists as they're called at that time would be coming here on; because of Jessie M King's connections and because of (Robert) Burns who was the art, lecturer in art at the Art School in Glasgow.

**JS:** Yes I think so they were encouraged to come here for various reasons and (Samuel) Peploe used to stay in that big house that Bill Clint lived in.

**TG:** In Castle Street?

**JS:** Yes, but they, they were, I don't know what the system was, but the people in the house kept rabbits in the garden for their fur.

**TG:** Oh?

**JS:** But they'd nothing to do with Peploe.

**TG:** No absolutely not! So these people, do you think they were coming in, in the summer holidays or was?

**JS:** Yes.

**TG:** Mainly that would be the way it was.

**JS:** Yes I think so they'd come in season anyway.

**TG:** Yes.

**JS:** I mean . . . yes they would. They'd come and go.

**TG:** Were you aware of them in, in; as a child did you see them parked at the harbour or on the Moat Brae or with their easels?

00.19.05

**JS:** No. No I'm not aware of that.

**TG:** No. And, and of the artists that were coming, you know, that you said about Mary Thew and Agnes Burton, you obviously knew of them.

**JS:** Yes I did. I mean we weren't on, we weren't on friend, we weren't, we just..... people went their own gate.

**TG:** Yes.

**JS:** Mostly, I mean, I don't know particularly who my parents socialised, not very closely. They used to have a party every year, but all kinds of people got invited to that.

**TG:** Uh-uh everybody.

**JS:** Yes.

**FMcD:** Yes.

**TG:** You were telling a story before the start of this about Agnes Burton.

**JS:** Agnes?

**TG:** About her, the studio up by the Park.

**JS:** Yes. Brun..... Brunton, Mabel.

**TG:** Brunton.

**JS:** Mabel Brunton.

**TG:** Oh whatever, sorry Mabel Brunton.

**JS:** Yes, yes. She lived quietly on her own. I never thought her as being reclusive, but I do remember going to visit her now and then if my mother [unclear] took us out for a walk.

**TG:** And is she the lady with the, who made the, the cabinet?

(Background noise resumes intermittently)

**JS:** Yes, quite a big cabinet and she painted pictures on the sliding doors.

**TG:** And did you, how long did you keep that? Did, but should I remember that no?

**JS:** Well we were; I think we got rid of it after we were married, because it was absolutely riddled with worm.

**FMcD:** Shame.

**TG:** And Mary Thew was obviously somebody you knew?

**JS:** Yes well she, she made our wedding ring.

**TG:** Did, was she just here on holiday?

**JS:** No, I think she, she lived there down the Close. We provided the gold, some of it was [unclear] gold for the ring.

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**TG:** Oh yeah that's very interesting. She's become quite collect....., collectable nowadays.

**JS:** Well the ring won't be but.....

**TG:** No not that ring, but.

**JS:** No, but we've got other things that she made and sold too.

**TG:** (Softly) Yeah, that's good.

**FMcD:** Will I shut that to try and keep that noise out, the, the whizzing noise?

**TG:** I think it's coming from [unclear].

**FMcD:** There's a window open at the back would it be too hot if I closed it?

**TG:** No just (noise of something being closed).

**JS:** Do you want to go in there?

**TG:** No it.

**FMcD:** There we go that'll help. So these were the real Glasgow Girls making all sorts of things.

**JS:** Well Mary Thew made jewellery with semi-precious stones, brooches and things like that.

**TG:** And were they exhibiting while they were here or.....?

**JS:** They must've done.

**TG:** Where there exhibitions of their work so that?

**JS:** Not, not particularly I think they must've, she must've existed on commissions.

**TG:** Yeah commissions rather.

**JS:** I think, well I think so, I mean, the Taylors, well Jessie M King used to have an annual summer exhibition in the Constitutional Hall. And all the artists showed paintings there which were for sale. But it was really, the purpose of that was for her to sell her work.

**FMcD:** Quite right!

**TG:** Do you think that they were affiliate; some of these people would be affiliated to galleries elsewhere?

**JS:** Well they would yes, I mean, there, there was the Dumfries & Galloway Fine Arts Society I think. They held exhibitions in Dumfries, my father sent paintings there.

**TG:** At Gracefield or?

**JS:** No, this was before Gracefield.

**TG:** Oh right uh-uh.

**JS:** But he got fed-up sending pictures all that way because they never sold. And he, and he got....., he stopped sending pictures, submitting them to the, oh I cannae mind Edinburgh because they were always rejecting them.

00.23.38

**TG:** Oh! Well he wasn't all that desperate to sell them.

**JS:** No. No, no it didn't hurt his feeling very much.

**TG:** So, so do you think in, in, in some ways when you look at the group or know about the group they weren't, very few of them actually needed to sell their work? Most of them would have private means?

**JS:** Well some of them I think. They, they; the Taylors needed to and so did Bill (William Miles) and Dorothy Johnston.

**TG:** Yes.

**JS:** Definitely and I don't know whether, but I can't imagine Mary Thew living very high off the hog and that goes for [unclear] as well.

**TG:** No. A lot of.

**JS:** Oppenheimer sold his pictures, but I wasn't conscious of them being rich or poor or whatever.

**FMcD:** No.

**TG:** But Kirkcudbright is a bit like, has always been like that hasn't it?

**JS:** Ah-ha.

**TG:** Nobody really, there's, people have a value of in themselves rather than of, of their worth really.

**FMcD:** [Unclear]

**JS:** Yeah.

**TG:** But then the Johnstons had a, a very nice situation in Castle Street didn't they?

**JS:** Yeah that came later though.

**TG:** Where did they start, did they start somewhere else?

**JS:** Well they first came and stayed in the Close and then..... I can't remember when they took at that shop had been a tailors . And then they took that shop and was a good outlet for his work and he made very nice little wood carvings of animals.

**TG:** Yes absolutely.

**JS:** My father always thought he should've devoted his life to depicting animals and things 'cos he was very good at it.

**TG:** Yes. And, but she didn't get, wasn't so involved in the art.

**JS:** No, well I think she was a wife, you see.

**TG:** Yes, but she did teach later on, she took classes didn't she?

**JS:** I don't know.

00.25.52

**TG:** Well I think that's I got drawn by her.

**JS:** Oh yes that's right she, she taught. We used to go to an evening class, she did that.

**TG:** So that, that would bring in some money.

**JS:** Some.

**TG:** So they, if you like, were the fir., were one of the tourist's shops. And then where would Jessie M King and EA Taylor be selling their ....., would they, did they sell things through shops in the town?

**JS:** No I don't think so.

**TG:** No.

**JS:** I think, I think they; Paul Jones was a good advertisement for her, but.....

**TG:** So people could go to the studio?

**JS:** I guess so, I mean, she; stuff she painted, the china that she painted there was lot of it about, but it wasn't sold in any shop round about.

**TG:** No.

**JS:** Not even sure she sold in that shop in Castle Street. Didn't last very long 'cos it, the, the blanks she bought within the first five were blanks and, and they broke.

**FMcD:** You might say that was very clever, to get new ones.

**TG:** Yes.

**FMcD:** Can I ask a quick question cos I'm fascinated by Jessie M King because, in one way she seems very sort of floaty, fairy, you know, oh wafty-wafty, but then in another way she seems very canny. I mean she's got some really smart ideas and she has, she's, you know, she's producing these books and ceramics and she's doing the tea rooms and she's doing this, that and the next thing and she seems very commercial. But was she, which was she, was she airy-fairy or was she very commercial?

**JS:** Very fairy. Yeah.

**JS:** No she, she to the extent she needed to be, because they needed the income, I mean I never thought of them as being hard up or needing to paint and, but they, they needed the income from their artwork. And yes she was pretty good.

**TG:** Think she was very astute in that to read Haig's book she, she bought the Greengate with all its accompanying cottages before things went wrong in Europe.

**FMcD:** Yes.

**TG:** So she was already, they already had a home to come home to. She was then able to rent it out to people so she had all of that, but she, but she enjoyed the, from the, the interviews that I've done the, the girls liked her.

**FMcD:** Ah-ha.

00.28.39

**TG:** But the boys couldn't really.

**JS:** I used to hide from her.

**FMcD:** Is that funny?

**TG:** Because?

**JS:** She was still bicycling around once, after we were married and she, she described Bethany and she used to call her purple. I can't remember whether she was a purple person or whatever.

**FMcD:** Oh she sort of saw auras or something?

**TG:** I think she would imagine she saw auras.

**FMcD:** Maybe she did.

**TG:** I think, well they were very involved in, in doing in, in the town. I think, I think she was a strong character, but she could play act. It's a drama.

**JS:** Oh yes.

**FMcD:** It's, it's so interesting, yeah. It's so interesting when you read the book, you know, and it says she, you read that little letter back and it explains how she bought the house with all the cottages and in the summer she'd move into one of the little cottages and rent out the big one. You know she, she had so much nonce you'd think she should've had money squirting out of her ears, but you say she never really, you know, they were never really financially terribly well off.

**TG:** I was asking that, I asked you.

**JS:** I never thought about that.

**FMcD:** Yeah.

**JS:** One way or the other.

**TG:** But, you know, you, you actually said the other day they weren't characters, but she was.

**JS:** She was yes.

**TG:** But all of the others.

**JS:** She was very flamboyant.

**TG:** But the others, not any of the others walking along the street would you have noticed?

**JS:** No.

**FMcD:** No, they just got on with the job.

**JS:** Well I suppose Robson was a bit flamboyant too. He used to wear tweed suits, I thought of them as being orange in colour. And he, he always had a, a game bag over his shoulder, but I don't know what he had in that maybe sketchbooks and things like that.

00.30.32

**FMcD:** And didn't he have a huge car?

**JS:** Who?

**FMcD:** Robson.

**JS:** Don't remember that.

**FMcD:** My mother always says, she said "Oh he had this amazing", what she calls a shooting brake which I didn't quite what that is it might be an estate sort of car. She says "Oh he's, he's" she's, she remembers him as being quite a character.

**JS:** Don't remember the car. I remember encountering him on the street and going to the house as well. His wife was an Italian girl and she spoke . . . Italian-English. She used to, my

mother said in the winter she just hibernated and I remember going to visit her in her bedroom upstairs the wonderful white bed linen and she held court there.

**FMcD:** Poor woman.

**JS:** Yeah.

**TG:** Yeah. Talking, I, I think I've, I've become very aware thinking about this about how tourism was starting in Kirkcudbright at that, they, these were the original tourists.

**JS:** Yes they were.

**TG:** They were.

**JS:** Yes.

**TG:** They came, they brought, they came and lived here and they, they tried to be part of the community.

**JS:** Yes.

**TG:** But they would be shopping here and, but they were using the town and looking at it and enjoying the town.

**JS:** They never, they never thought of themselves as tourists.

**TG:** No.

**JS:** They just came here.

**TG:** But also they were bringing family and whatever so the.

**JS:** The next generation appeared too I suppose.

**TG:** Yes, I think that it sort of grown from there and then, of course, Tommy Lochhead was selling his pottery and everybody else was, the Johnstons were selling their bits and pieces so that was the beginning of the tourist industry. But the next thing, we're trying, we were trying to think about the Summer School. And in Haig's book it said that Dorothy, Dorothy Johnston and Lena Alexander had been integral in setting that up. There was also a piece that said about (James Gunyeon) Jeffs had to increase, to in, help his income had been, he

00.32.55

started to put about, provided weaving. Now can you remember anything about how it developed down at the school at those buildings down near,...at the back of the tennis courts?

**JS:** Well.

**TG:** They seemed to be used in the Summer School.

**JS:** Yes, because they were available I suppose. There was the woodwork room and the cookery room, but and I guess they used, they've used the cookery room as a, as a base I suppose.

**TG:** But you, can you remember anything about how that started, was it?

**JS:** No.

**TG:** It was just maybe, it maybe just grew a bit like Topsy.

**JS:** Well they did, I dinnae ken, they kinda drifted into it I suppose and then it became a fixed event. And it suited the Simpsons and Dorothy Johnstone and I suppose I, I never thought of Lena having all that much to do with it.

**TG:** No.

**JS:** And it suited Jeffs too.

**TG:** Can you remember anybody else who was involved, I mean, were the art teachers at the school involved in, in doing art classes?

**JS:** One of them might have been. There was a Mr Mann who taught art. I think he might have, but I'm guessing.

**TG:** So who, who would've done maybe silversmithing because I remember that jewellery making; can you remember any of the tutors?

**JS:** Well Mary, Mary Thew was a.....

**TG:** Maybe they came back as tutors?

**FMcD:** Uh-uh maybe.

**TG:** But, well I'm looking back into the '50s I can remember the town being very, very busy with these people and they were painting all over the place.

**JS:** Yes I suppose.

**TG:** You know there were gangs of them lined up in the Moat Brae and in the harbour.

**FMcD:** When you say very, very busy I mean do you mean there were 30 people do you think or 50 people or?

**TG:** Oh I would think.....

**FMcD:** Really!

**TG:** Yeah a big number.

00.34.55

**FMcD:** All painting away?

**TG:** Well maybe not all painting, but there were group pain, maybe ten of them painting and then there would be others.

**FMcD:** That's really quite something, that's quite a number.

**TG:** Just sitting about, you know *en plein air* as they say.

**JS:** Around the harbour.



**TG:** But I mean we only were aware because we were wandering about the town, but I, we were aware that they were down at the school, but I don't, we weren't actually involved in going to these things.

**FMcD:** Yes. All the bed and breakfasts must have been nice and busy.

**TG:** Well I was going; they must've been really happy.

**FMcD:** Yeah.

**TG:** Absolutely. So I presume the bed and breakfast, Gordon House and the Royal, places like that would all be busy.

**JS:** I suppose so.

**TG:** And people would come year on year.

**JS:** Well I think you you're taking up [unclear] your mother when you talk about lots of them thousands of them. And there were more than three [unclear] thousand.

**FMcD:** Not prone to exaggeration at all.

**TG:** Oh I wonder what, what ever happened to those people and were there..... whether they, I don't remember them ever having an end of term show or anything do you?

**JS:** No I don't think so.

**TG:** Nowadays that would happen.

**FMcD:** And do you think it was organised just by the artists themselves or were the Council involved or?

**JS:** No I think it was themselves, but from, for economical reasons, economics they might've, the Council might've been involved because it might've helped to pay them. But I've no idea. That's the rain.

[Unclear]

**TG:** Well that, that group have now gone, but we've, we've been an artist town..... it didn't stop because they finished being here or working here and there's been a huge number of people who've come through . . . as artists, as makers or craft workers or whatever. I, I presume, can you think, who can you think of as being the next generation of the Kirkcudbright Artists, I mean?

**JS:** People like Jane Gibson?

00.37.14

**TG:** Yes. Bob Little.

**JS:** Yes.

**TG:** Alistair Sinclair.

**JS:** Yeah, well Alistair Sinclair taught technical and I don't think he would think himself as an artist.

**TG:** No.

**JS:** And Bob Little drifted into it because it, it was something he could do.

**TG:** Yeah. I notice that Justine's not really mentioned either in the book is she?

**JS:** Well she's in her parent's shadow I think.

**TG:** Justine Jeffs we're talking about now.

**FMcD:** Right uh-uh.

**TG:** And then the Dallas's (Alastair and Ann Dallas) came.

**JS:** Yes.

**TG:** Teddy Robertson.

**JS:** Yes.

**TG:** And then we go on to Alison Livingstone and.

**JS:** Yes.

**TG:** And if we go further afield we've got people like John Davey.

**JS:** Yes.

**TG:** Archie Sutter Watt, William MacGeorge, you know it.

**JS:** That's about it, I mean there was.

**TG:** That's the kind of.

**JS:** These, yes well these were artists that came to Galloway I suppose.

**FMcD:** Yes.

**JS:** And John Maxwell in Dalbeattie.

**TG:** And (Sir William) Gillies.

**FMcD:** Not so much in Rhone.

**TG:** Well this is something that's coming again in my thinking. People were coming here.

**FMcD:** Yes.

**TG:** And what, what I was trying to see was how, I mean there are plenty people here, but I, what I really discovered is that the people who were artists, artisans and I think that's

00.38.47

something that we forget that the indigenous population were, I think of Margaret, you know Mrs McClune next door at number one who was sewing and making all the time to sell at jumble for money, jumble sales or whatever for funds for the bowling club. Some of the art, painters who did a wee bit of painting or the art, the teachers who did a bit of, that was their hobby.

**FMcD:** And if you think of the furniture making and that side of things, cab, cab, cabinetmaking really more than furniture I suppose.

**TG:** Yes well this is it that people like Gordon Belford.

**JS:** Yes.

**TG:** What a fantastic artist he was.

**JS:** He was just a tradesman though.

**TG:** He was a tradesman, but he had worked, he had done fitting out on the big boats down in Birkenhead.

**JS:** Birkenhead yeah.

**TG:** And come back here what a, you know so talented, but . . . they don't feature in this grand scheme of, you know the Kirkcudbright Artists, but they were there nevertheless.

**JS:** Well people had to make things. I mean all Gordon did was repair and make furniture for hospitals.

**TG:** But he could make.

**JS:** Oh yes he, because he'd had a good apprenticeship.

**TG:** Yeah. So I don't. It's, it can, it grows but people are still coming here; there's a magnet that pulls people here and everything.

**JS:** Well I think.

**TG:** They like it here.

**JS:** People realised it would be good for the tourist industry here like Kirkcudbright 2000.

**TG:** It makes the town vibrant though doesn't it?

**JS:** Oh yes I think the community complain about visitors, but not so much now.

**FMcD:** Be very quiet without them.

**JS:** Eh?

**FMcD:** It would be quiet without them. Now, oh my goodness you've got a pheasant! Surprise . . . yes for the purposes of the recording a pheasant has just tapped on the window.

**TG:** Are there any other wee stories that you have for us Dad?

**JS:** No, I think the, the artist painters as they, as they drifted away and died I think the craft people did come in, people like Cameron Smith for in particular I think.

00.41.33

**TG:** Yes.

**FMcD:** Yes.

**TG:** He's been a huge asset to the town.

**JS:** Yes well he is and I, I can't, I can't think of the others so much. Well Jeffs really, I mean he made these . . . things for (Dwight D) Eisenhower and others.

**FMcD:** Yes.

**JS:** He was, he was a good craftsman, he could draw too.

**TG:** Yes, there's loads of people that we haven't mentioned, you know Phyllis Bone who's internationally renowned, you know.

**JS:** Yes.

**FMcD:** But not really ever thought of very much here.

**TG:** No.

**FMcD:** Never, I always think I wish I could find some Phyllis Bone in a sale because nobody ever thinks anything about her and, and she's so unsung.

**TG:** Yes.

**JS:** Yeah.

**FMcD:** Yeah.

**JS:** When, when she was still working she lived along there.

**TG:** Yeah.

**FMcD:** Did you know her at all; was she, was she a nice person, interesting?

**JS:** Yes a nice gentle person.

**TG:** Quiet lady.

**JS:** I, I mean I could, I can't remember much about her but.

**TG:** Just. They were just, that was their job or the.

**JS:** Yes [unclear].

**TG:** What they, what they did and that's I suppose that's a bit like it still works that way doesn't it? You don't know; people come here buy a house sit down and get on with stuff. You don't really know what they're doing behind the scenes.

**FMcD:** Yes that's true. It's very interesting then that the Spring Fling is on, you know and there's all these open studios all over the place. It's amazing how many people there are closeted away.

**JS:** Yes it is.

00.43.08

**TG:** The arts and crafts in Kirkcudbright which is really focuses it more on the town as well makes you aware of this.

**FMcD:** It's also massive.

**JS:** [Unclear] There's another artist Pauline Saul.

**TG:** Yes.

**FMcD:** Yes.

**TG:** This is it. There's, you know that the list is endless Dad when you start to think of Hazel Campbell and that, that Ann.

**JS:** Dallas?

**TG:** No, no, no, no Steven Campbell's partner.

**JS:** I don't remember her name.

**TG:** You know the, the, the people who've been here quite a long, long time now really that who're still working.

**FMcD:** I suppose the thing was when we're talking about the Kirkcudbright School or the Kirkcudbright Artists, there was a clan, a collection that were in Kirkcudbright doing things that they were selling to people visiting Kirkcudbright, but then there was another level of artists who were nationally renowned weren't they really.

**TG:** Well.

**FMcD:** I mean people must've; Oppenheimer was selling outside of this area.

**JS:** Oh yes at the moment.

**FMcD:** And Jessie M King and EA Taylor and obviously Hornel and, I mean there were, there were people at that sort of [unclear].

**TG:** But they were affiliated originally to Glasgow in large so really they were, they were a Glasgow group who just happened to be here. But their affiliate, you know their, their base for getting, for exporting it or for getting into the, into the know wasn't here, it was there.

**FMcD:** Yes, yes. Yes.

**FMcD:** No. No but they were the ones that sort of drew the next lot here and I suppose the second lot are what are still attracting new people to come, because as you say not very many of these people are Kirkcudbright people.

**TG:** No.

**JS:** No.

**TG:** No.

**FMcD:** Incomers!

00.44.56

**TG:** Well exactly, I mean really when I started to look at the list I was quite . . . you know they didn't even come from very near. I think Tommy Lochhead was from Dumfries.

**JS:** Yes they were farmers.

**TG:** So he was kinda near but.

**JS:** I think they're still are farmers.

**TG:** Yes they are well David's still up in the hills . . . you know the, I, I don't really know how to describe it.

**JS:** Well I think there's a, there's a difference that the, the real [unclear], the real artists were professional artists. They'd been to art school they weren't amateurs they weren't gifted amateurs. They might not have been gifted artists either, but.....

**FMcD:** They were trained.

**JS:** They were trained, yes.

**FMcD:** And what do you think if at all, the impact of having this sort of artists' colony and, you know, so many artists out and about and exhibiting makes to the town? Do you think people in the town are conscious of it, proud of it; does it make them more interested in art?

**JS:** I don't think so, but you might find that lots of people, ordinary people in Kirkcudbright have got pictures by the Kirkcudbright Artists.

**TG:** Yes.

**JS:** Lots of them might have.

**TG:** Yes.

**JS:** But I don't know what the community thinks about them. I think they quite, they've, they've come to quite like the idea in the sense that for economical, economic reasons.

**TG:** But I think that's what, what one of the things that we picked up earlier was that you don't, Kirkcudbright is a very all-encompassing place, you're not judged by who you are or what you are, it's by who, you know, just we know you and we're friends, friendly. And there are, you know, all my life I've known so many people and I still, some people I actually still don't know their names, but I've always know them.

**FMcD:** Yes it's a [unclear] place.

**TG:** And a welcoming place and as long as you're nice I think you're accepted; doesn't matter who or what.

**JS:** I don't think Kirkcudbright welcomes them, but when it becomes unobtrusive, you know, they, they think vis, they come, people come here to live. They find they get a welcome from the shopkeepers and so on, all smiles after they learn the names. But and not much out I think they find themselves withdrawn because after they settle in because there's, they don't have the social focuses.

00.47.48

**FMcD:** It's interesting that talking to somebody else about this in Kirkcudbright and they were saying well, you know, people aren't really divided this way they're divided this way up and down by their interests, you know, it doesn't matter if you're the, if you're the, the, the baroness or the barrow boy if you're interested in boats you're all friends, or if you're interested in painting you're all friends it doesn't matter. And that's sort of more how the, how things work here.

**TG:** Yes.

**JS:** [Unclear]

**FMcD:** Which is really nice.

**TG:** Yes and its still, and its, has stayed that way.

**FMcD:** Yeah.

**TG:** Yeah. And I was also; the other thing that I was trying to think of was who had gone to art college from Kirkcudbright who's now making a name in the world.

**JS:** Donald Rudd.

**FMcD:** Well there's John Halliday.

**TG:** Well John yes.

**FMcD:** He's, he's done all right. He's been out and about all over the place.

**JS:** I mean I, I don't know what it's like anywhere, anywhere else because I've lived here all my life.

**FMcD:** Yes.

**TG:** And yet when I did your interview we decided that we were incomers. We'd only been here a hundred years.

**FMcD:** That's nothing!

**TG:** It's nothing here. Anyway are we, I think we've.....

**JS:** I think we've been longer in Kirkcudbright than [unclear] were at Ashley Park.

**TG:** Probably, yeah probably.

**FMcD:** There you go. Well I, we see all the houses you've been in you've been around the town that's for sure. Can I ask you one quick question; somebody was mentioning there was an artist, an American artist, who had an association with the Sassoon's and, it was Hilary she thought there was a painting by an American; you'd done an audit of the paintings in the Harbour Cottage and there's a painting there by an American she was wondering if it's the same person, but she couldn't remember the name. You don't know who that would be an American who stayed with your parents for a couple of years and came and painted in Kirkcudbright and then disappeared?

**JS:** No, [unclear].

00.49.52

**TG:** I don't even remember that on the list.

**JS:** I mean people came and went, but I can't remember . . . I mean people make a big thing about Ronald Searle, but.

**FMcD:** Yeah.

**TG:** But I don't remember anybody ever staying . . . an American, I don't, look that would've been big, a big deal.

**FMcD:** Yeah. I know it must've been a confusion.

**TG:** I think so because I don't even remember an American on the list of the inventory for the Harbour Cottage . . . if that's where she meant.

**FMcD:** I think that is where she meant.

**TG:** (Softly) I don't think so. You know we've got links with other parts of the world and, and people who painted, but I don't know.

**FMcD:** What about in your family I mean obviously you've got Jenny who's a fantastic maker.

**TG:** And her brother's an architect.

**JS:** Yes.

**FMcD:** Well he's an architect.

**TG:** Jackie he's a linguist.

**JS:** Yes.

**TG:** Diff, people different talents. Granny was great with her fingers she would, she could; she made tiny little things didn't she, just bits of pieces of thread and materiel and she'd make little characters.

**FMcD:** It's amazing, it's amazing how these things though once they're in the family making things pops up.

**TG:** Yeah well that's it Jenny learnt from Dad with the woodwork.

**JS:** Yes it was.

**FMcD:** She's marvellous, she really is.

**TG:** Yes just, but again that's a lot come from my Mum too so that's.....

**FMcD:** Yes.

**TG:** And that's a very different background. Yep, you don't have any famous art people? Can't think of anybody else who's .....?

**JS:** Well [unclear] Shotts.

**TG:** Oh yes.

00.51.48

**JS:** But you see I think when people came here to live they lived here and so the like of them the Shotts they lived in Glasgow and so there wasn't much toing and froing. I think my brother spent more time with them. I think they thought, they have a daughter, I think they thought my, there would be a romance there with my brother.

**TG:** He's still a bachelor.

**FMcD:** OK. That wasn't going to happen.



**TG:** No. Well I think we've, we've, we could probably go on for ever about little bits and pieces, but I think for now we'll round it up and if there's anything else that you want to tell us in the future we then, we can take note. Thank you very much indeed.

**JS:** That's enough.

**FMcD:** That, that was terrific, thank you very much.

00.52.40