

Interviewee: David Mitchell (DM)	Interviewers: Vivien Scott (VS); Fiona Smith (FS)
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TITLE	<i>David Mitchell interviewed by Fiona Smith and Vivien Scott at Laundry Cottage</i>
REGION	<i>Dumfries & Galloway</i>
SUBJECTS/KEYWORDS	<i>Cultural life.</i>
COUNTY	<i>Kirkcudbrightshire</i>
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DATE OF INTERVIEW	<i>17 February 2018</i>
INTERVIEWER	<i>Fiona Smith and Vivien Scott</i>
YEAR RANGE	<i>2018</i>
SUMMARY	<i>David tells of how it was rumoured that Edward Hornel removed stones from the grounds of Dundrennan Abbey for use in his garden at Broughton House in Kirkcudbright. Although the police had been informed when Hornel's trailer carrying the stones had collapsed no action appears to have been taken to stop the removals. David's grandfather worked for a Mr Osbourne, an upholsterer, and one day Hornel requested that a wing chair from his house required recovering. David's grandfather made such a good job of it that Hornel complimented him on his fine work. Mr Osbourne was quite put out as he had recovered the same chair some years previously and had not received such praise. David also tells of how Jessie M King painted all the tableware for the John Paul Tearoom and EA Taylor designed the furniture. While working at Osbourne's David and his father packed a Jessie M King vase for shipment to Canada. A number of years later the same vase turned up at Drambuie House in Edinburgh and was found by David while collecting items for an exhibition in Kirkcudbright. David relates the story of the only time he saw the "light" of Kirkcudbright!</i>

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FS: We are now going to hear from David Mitchell; [REDACTED] and I'm Fiona Smith and Vivien Scott is here as well and we're going to hear David's recollections of, mainly of his grandfathers about the artists in Kirkcudbright. David?

DM: Well they are mostly memories that my grandfather passed on about the, the artists in Kirkcudbright in his lifetime. He remembers well (Edward) Hornel who he always said most people in Kirkcudbright lived in fear of Hornel because of the power he had and when Hornel was constructing his garden, which is in Broughton House obviously, lovely garden, it was

always rumoured that he was robbing stonework from Dundrennan Abbey. And he had a, a gardener and a man who worked in the house seemingly. And one particular morning Hornel's car was half-way down Gillroanie Hill the trailer; he put that many stones in the trailer it had collapsed and there was some troughs from Dundrennan Abbey in it as well. And of course it was brought to the police's attention that, you know, this was theft, but nothing was ever done about it. Hornel got off with it and continued his forages to Dundrennan Abbey seemingly. My, my grandfather worked for a man called Osbourne and Osbourne had, he was an upholstery business and cabinetmaking and they did removals and things, therefore they did quite a lot of work for Hornel at Broughton House. And, you know, he was quite strict, he was very, you know, quite precise in what he wanted and how it was to be done and it had to be done right or it was not accepted. Anyway there's a, a wing chair in the gallery at Broughton House that was taken to Osbourne's workshop to be upholstered and my grandfather got the job of it. And it was there for a few days and Osbourne kept saying to my grandfather "Now John you'll have to make a good job o' that chair because the last time it was recovered it was me and he was delighted with it". So my grandfather took great meticulous care and upholstered the chair and before it was to be delivered Osbourne, sorry Hornel, wanted to come and see to make sure it was up to standards. So he climbed the stairs to the workshop, which is now where Williamson & Henry's office is on the corner, the property gallery, and came into the workshop and had a look at the chair and hummed and hawed and hummed and hawed and Osbourne's standing fretting, my grandfather's quite nervous and he turned and said to Osbourne "Wonderful job Osbourne, far better than last time it had been upholstered here" and walked out; Osbourne was absolutely furious. But the, the; Hornel actually was a great benefit to the town really and he was quite a character and brought a lot of money in to the town, you know, through employing people for work and things like that. I don't think he, he ever, you know, mixed with that many people out with the artists' colony.

VS: Did he, did he en, encourage the artists to come to create [unclear].

DM: Yes he did. I think it was really though Hornel and one or two others that everybody else came. They, they, you know, there would be friends of people like Hornel, (Charles) Oppenheimer, you know, et cetera and there'd be off spins of that would come, you know, like Miles Johnston and Dorothy Nesbitt they would come through friendship I think it was with Hornel or maybe Oppenheimer. Miles Johnston I remember him as a boy and his wife; they stayed down Castle Street just opposite you Vivien. And they had a wee shop there and it was, I think it was called the Craft Shop, and it had all lovely wee wooden cut-out figures o' painted animals and bits o' pottery and watercolours of animals and what, what my, my father and my grandfather always called watercolours of Kirkcudbright which were really pot boilers they called them, because he could turn them out three or four in, in a day.

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VS: Yes.

DM: Say of a view of Castle MacLellan, Castle MacLellan from a different angle, you know, and put them in the shop for sale because that was really their only source of income. They didn't, they didn't work at all they just lived off what they could and, you know, by sales of, of things like that. And of course I think nearly every house in Kirkcudbright at one point would have bits of Miles Johnston and Dorothy Nesbitt and Jessie M King, you know, you, you, she, she and EA Taylor they came from France to Kirkcudbright. They had been working

in France and they, they had no money - Mrs Murdoch from the Paul Jones actually fed them and in turn Jessie M King painted all the, the, the, the tableware for the, for the, the Paul Jones Tearoom.

FS: [Unclear]

DM: And, and EA Taylor designed the furniture and, you know, helped create the Tearoom into what it was.

FS: Yes.

DM: But that's all gone now, but I remember when I just started work there was a; when, when Mrs Murdoch died there was the biggest piece of Jessie M King that I have ever seen and it was a strange colour it was a brown vase, stood about maybe oh maybe four feet high and it was really intricately decorated. And Jessie M King had obviously given it to Mrs Murdoch and one of Mrs Murdoch's sons lived in Canada and he got, was given the vase, he was left the vase. And my father got the job of shipping it out to Canada, so we had to build a crate for it that would withstand, cos it was fairly fragile, withstand, you know, the shock of being loaded and unloaded in a fairly rough way. Anyway it duly went off and we never heard anymore. And it would be oh, it was one of the first big exhibitions that Kirkcudbright had and I got the job through David Devereux of going round Scotland collecting lots of things. And I'd to go to Drambuie House in Edinburgh, their main office building, which was a lovely old Georgian house and I drove up the drive and I got there and it was to collect a piece of Jessie M King. Well I couldn't believe it when I got there, it was the vase! From Canada. And I said to the girl at reception I said "That I helped to pack that and that vase went to Canada" "Oh no, no, no, no" she said "It's, you know, it's definitely not" I said "I'm telling you it was". So she got somedae from Drambuie House to come out and speak to me and they, they said "No, well ach I'm sure it was bought at Bonham's in Edinburgh". But when I took it back after the exhibition had finished in Kirkcudbright the receptionist said "Now such, Mr such and such wants to speak to you". And he'd done some research and he said "You're absolutely right". It was sent back from Canada when this man died and put into an auction in Edinburgh and Drambuie bought it and it's still with Drambuie House now, as far as I'm aware.

FS: Do you know how much it cost and who paid for it?

DM: No I don't, no, no I don't, but it would be a lot o' money.

VS: Yes, yes.

DM: Aye, aye. Pure coincidence, I couldn't believe it.

VS: Interesting.

00.08.29

DM: But I; the two or three times that I did collect art for the exhibitions in Kirkcudbright like the *Home Coming* and things like that I couldn't get over how all over the country people were specialising in Kirkcudbright artists. I remember going to a council flat in Falkirk, a really rough area, you could hardly get in the door of this council flat it - was a couple that collected Jessie M King memorabilia. And the house was full of pottery, books, paintings, cards; it was fascinatin'. And I, I said to them, you know, "How, how, how do you keep it secure?" And the gentleman said "We never go on holiday, we can't leave the damn house

together". And, and then I then went to Bearsden and I think he was a dentist that man or a doctor and he had the most fascinatin' beautiful Jessie M King paintings that was all he specialised in was paintings. They were absolutely stunning paintings. And I think he'd over, I think he'd between 30 and 40 of them hanging all over the house. He took me round and showed me them all and they were, they were lovely. But no the, the exhibition really opened my eyes to how much Kirkcudbright artists are collected; past artists. And, and, you know, what, what a following that they have, but back to some o' my grandfather's memors; he always maintained when the artists when they all congregated into Kirkcudbright and came and lived here they were a bit promiscuous and they were a bit opened minded about things, as old Kirkcudbright didn't really understand I don't think. And he always said that, that during the summer they all went down to Lady's Bay which is just past the Lifeboat Station and some o' the Kirkcudbright fishermen in these days, which were mostly lobster fishermen, they, they used to be skinny dipping; all of them swimming in the sea naked. And, and lots of allegations about what else was going on the sub, going on the beach. And it was rife gossip for quite a long time about, you know, the wild parties they had at each other's houses and, and whether it was true or not I'm not sure. My grandfather never, he said "Unfortunately" he said "I was never invited so I never got to find out" he said.

FS: Was it, was it lobster fishermen that were spying on them? Yeah.

DM: Well yeah it was aye as far; I, I think he said that but then course when word got out half the town was going down to see if they could witness any shenanigans going on.

VS: [Unclear]

DM: Aye, aye. But they . . . yeah the, the Miles Johnston and his wife, as I said before they lived in Castle Street, I remember as a boy my twin sisters who're three years younger than me they had a, my father bought them a, it was a twin tricycle. And they could get up to horrendous speeds in it, up and down the pavement in Castle Street. In these days there wasn't so many cars and people coming out their houses, specially older folk, were in great danger of getting knocked over by this two wee girls of about five or somethin' tearing up and down Castle Street. And I remember Miles Johnston went to my father and said "Look you'll have to stop them, you know, it's not safe to walk on the pavement".

VS: [Unclear]

DM: Aye, aye. But they, they were a lovely couple, I remember them cos I used to go into the shop and they were really nice, course they were very old then. But they, they were really nice and he, he did, he gave me a couple o', I think he gave me a heron and I can't remember what else he gave me the wooden cut-out figures of animals. And then of course over the years through my job I collected quite a lot of things from Miles Johnston; I've got a lovely watercolour of a deer, a roe deer of his. But still quite a lot of his work still turns up. In fact I

00.12.59

was down in Lincolnshire at, at one of its biggest antique fare in Europe, and I was walking down the rows and rows there's 3,000 dealers at it.

VS: Wigtownshire, really?

FS: Lincolnshire.

DM: No, Lincolnshire.

VS: Oh Lincolnshire.

DM: Ah-ha and I happened to see a Miles Johnston hanging off the side of this van and I said to the guy "How much is Miles Johnston" and it was of Kirkcudbright harbour from the Stell. And he, he said "Oh its £30" he says "How many more do you want?" and I said "Have you got more of them?" he says "I've got about eight". And I got all eight for £30 each and they were lovely pictures. Aye, so there you are and I asked him where he got them and he said "I don't remember, can't remember".

VS: And when did you see these?

DM: Oh that was, that'd be maybe 15 years ago.

VS: Yes.

DM: Aye, aye. But no, they, they were there was a lot of characters; Oppenheimer when the new bridge was being proposed for Kirkcudbright seemingly.

VS: Oh dear.

DM: Oppenheimer drew his vision of what the bridge should look like and it was rejected obviously, because he, he didn't have any power to decide on what should be built and what shouldn't. But the powers that be built the bridge that's there now and he hated it so allegedly every time he painted one of his famous scenes from the Stell looking up the Dee towards Kirkcudbright he painted his version of the bridge which wasn't the bridge that's there now; as a mark of, you know pure rebellion.

FS: Yeah, I'll need to look more closely.

VS: Yes and that's the bridge that looks like the Loch Ness Monster [unclear].

DM: Yep, ah-ha, yep, yep. But that, that seemingly was yeah he aye. Now I can't remember who it was but I think . . . it was one of, it was Hornel, I can't remember now . . . but . . . somebody criticised, one artist criticised another's, another artist's piece of work and they'd been best friends all their life and they never spoke again.

FS: Yes.

DM: But I can't remember who it was now, but I'm sure that'd be in a book somewhere.

FS: Hm-mm.

DM: Aye.

VS: (Very softly) I would [unclear].

00.15.21

DM: (Very softly) Hey? (Normally) It they.

VS: Did you, your grandfather was, I mean, how far back does your family go in living in Kirkcudbright and having this lovely long line of memories and?

DM: Well quite a long way probably; well my grandfather probably about 1920's.

VS: (Very softly) Right.

DM: Aye, aye probably about then.

VS: Yes.

DM: Aye, because he came back after the Second World War and started work for Osbourne, aye. I think I did I, I.

VS: At the heyday of the particularly exciting group of artists that would be what in between the wars?

DM: I think so yes aye, aye. Yeah the, the, the, the, the more prominent artist would, they would come then.

VS: Yes.

DM: Hornel would bring them then and, aye. Yep.

VS: I was trying to think of other names. Because they went over to France quite a few of them did and, but came back.

DM: Ah-ha.

VS: It seems, Cecile Walton was she one?

DM: Yes, yep. Oh there was I should've done more research cos there, there was an awful lot and quite a lot of them came to Kirkcudbright for the summer.

VS: Ah yes.

DM: And then left, you know, they didn't stay here but they came, you know, for maybe four and five months o' the year. Just to paint in Kirkcudbright and surrounding area. And, you know, you, you hear folk saying about "It's the light in Kirkcudbright".

VS: I was going to ask you about that.

DM: Now I never understood what that was really all about until it was one Sunday we were on the Ross Island (Little Ross) and we decided to walk up to the lighthouse as you do. And we're getting up the hill and I can't remember who it was in the group was looking towards Kirkcudbright and they said "Look at the light". And we all turned round and it was, it was absolutely unbelievable and, and I'm standing there then thinking that's what they mean by the light, you know it was.

FS: Was it kinda sparkling?

DM: It was aye, it was, it was split I've never, I've never seen it since.

FS: Clarity.

00.17.42

DM: It was really the, aye the clarity of it and the way the light was streaming down. It just made everything so bright and aye. Aye, so, no?

VS: Beautiful, beautiful.

DM: Yeah.

VS: [Unclear] Yes the light. Somebody else has touched on the light already, but you used to go out to the Ross a lot were you, as a small boy?

DM: Well my father fished lobsters so.

VS: Ah.

DM: Aye. We did we went a lot.

FS: Was he one of the ones then going down to Lady, Lady's Bay? [Unclear] Yeah.

DM: No, no, no, no that's, that's far later aye, aye. There wasn't so many of them there then when my father was fishing lobsters. Aye, no. And of course what Hornel he, he used quite a lot of the young girls from Kirkcudbright for models, you know, at, at Brighthouse and other various bits, aye.

FS: Down at, down here as well [unclear] yes.

DM: Down the Isle aye. There was a lady Rose Moffatt (spelling?) who worked for my mother and Roses' mother was one of the girls, Mrs Johnstone (spelling?) and she, she was fairly prominent in most of them, Hornel's pictures of that era, you know, when [unclear].

VS: Could you tell, or your father or grandfather could they tell which she was?

DM: I never really asked them that Vivien, no I didn't, but, you know, she, she was certainly in most of them, aye. I can't remember the other two, I think one, one of them might be her sister but I'm not sure. But I know that Mrs, well she was latterly Mrs Johnstone.

VS: I've also heard that in fact it was his sister who created the garden at Broughton House.

DM: Quite possibly, quite possibly she would maybe be the, the creative gardener.

VS: Yes.

DM: Aye. Horn, Hornel just did the stealing for it! Aye, no the . . . I can't mind the.

VS: What was the name you brought up, somebody you're going to see who brought up names that actually didn't mean anything to me?

FS: [Unclear] Not now.

VS: Oh right. (Softly) Time to stop?

FS: I mean that's great what you've given us if, if that's all that's fine we can.

DM: Right. OK.

FS: So thank you and.

00.20.20

DM: Not at all thank you.

FS: Right OK thanks it was brilliant.

VS: Oh absolutely, I mean, it's wonderful.

00.20.26