

Interviewee(s): William Wislon (BW)	Interviewer(s): Janis Macdonald (JM)
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REGION	East Lothian
COUNTY	Haddingtonshire
TOWN/VILLAGE	Haddington

TITLE	<i>William McAlpine Wilson interviewed in the John Gray Centre by Janis Macdonald</i>
REGION	<i>East Lothian</i>
SUBJECTS/KEYWORDS	<i>Family life; education; social life; working life.</i>
COUNTY	<i>East Lothian</i>
TOWN	<i>Haddington</i>
DATE OF INTERVIEW	<i>22 May 2019</i>
INTERVIEWER	<i>Janis Macdonald</i>
YEAR RANGE	<i>1956 – (2019)</i>
SUMMARY	<i>Bill tells us of his early childhood in Port Seton, attending the primary school and joining the Cubs and Air Cadets. As a youngster he loved television his favourite programmes being Doctor Who, Bewitched and the wrestling. His father was a fisherman at the time when the fishing industry at Port Seton was at its height. His father would bring fish home and fillet it. Bill says it was lovely fish but his mother would use it all week. When his father retired from going to sea he bought a van and established a business selling fish. Bill did not like school and for a while he worked in Brunton's Wire Mill in Musselburgh then as a general labourer with Miller Homes. He went to night school and after he married he studied Information Management at Queen Margaret College and graduated with honours. He worked at Scottish Provident then in the Ormiston Library as senior assistant. He then got his favourite job, local history officer at the John Gray Centre. As an addition at the end of the interview Bill describes what the Cockenzie and Port Seton gala days where like.</i>

00.00.00

**BW:** (Whispers) the rise.

**JM:** This is Wednesday the 22nd of May. I'm Janis Macdonald I'm here at the John Gray Centre with Bill Wilson.

**BW:** My full name is William McAlpine Wilson and I was born in Edenhall Hospital in Musselburgh 9th October 1956. The Wilson actually comes from my mother's side she was the MacAlp, the McAlpine comes from her side that was her maiden name. In actual fact her father's name was William and she also had a brother called William McAlpine so that's really keeping it in the family.

**JM:** Scottish naming pattern?

**BW:** Oh aye typical.

**JM:** Yes. OK. And you're the, the middle of three sons so maybe later we can ask you about things that you and your brothers maybe got up to when you were growing up. Before we do that your parents and grandparents - can you tell us about their occupations or memories that you might have?

**BW:** My father's parents, clear as day, my father's father, my dear grandfather or grandpa as we used to call him, he worked all his days for Wiles' Buses. He used to drive the buses he didn't even pass the test. He, he'd been driving for so long that he just kept on dri, they gave him a licence I think. And he drove the buses for Wiles' a lot o' the time he would drive the miners from A to B whatever mine they were going to or drop them off. He spent a lot o' time on that. And when we went to our grandpa's and grandma's for our lunch my big brother and I more often than not after we finished lunch we'd nip oot and play on the bus which was parked outside it was our spaceship or whatever we used to have a great time then.

**JM:** So did he take the bus home with him?

**BW:** It didn't take long because he, they lived in Thomson Crescent which is just a few streets away yes.

**JM:** Is this Cockenzie or?

**BW:** This is Port Seton.

**JM:** Port Seton?

**BW:** In Port Seton yeah. So yes that was vivid. My grandmother she was always, well she was a housewife and I, I love my grandparents dearly. My mother's family, yes, I think my papa as I used to call him, he, I don't know if he worked in one o' the pits. If he did he would probably be in an office. I never really got the impression of being welcomed with open arms when we went to see them up in Musselburgh. If, I think if we made too much noise we had to go outside and play in, in the corridor, play in the hall. And there was always a dear old lady downstairs; I think it might've been Mrs Spence, and we were always threatened "If you make too much noise Mrs Spence will be up to speak to you". So yes welcome to Musselburgh, so.

**JM:** So what sorts of games did you play in the corridor?

[00.03.09]

**BW:** Very few, we had a ball we used to roll up and down there's a bit linoleum, you know, the carpet in the middle and it, you know, and you didn't play too much. What I do remember of, of my mother's parents if we went to, and it was usually on a Saturday, went up to Edinburgh the big treat was to go to Woollies, Woolworths on Princess Street. And I always remember every time my brother left there he'd take away a bag of salted peanuts and they were hot, and it'd be sortie, it was a sortie greasy poke. And we'd go home in, in the car to Musselburgh. But on the way there we'd stop at a fish and chip shop to get chips. We'd go up to my parent's house, we got settled in and watched William Hartnell as Doctor Who, black and white which used to scare the bejesus outa us.

**JM:** Could you remember any of the stories that were particularly scary?

**BW:** I think ah I'm, right at the beginning I think when he, he was in a, I think he was in a scrap yard it started off. But it, it was always it was it was the Daleks it was. And there were no special effects, it was somebody daein a thing wheeling up and down but just the voice of it was, it was, it was exciting stuff.

**JM:** You didn't watch it from behind a cushion or through your fingers?

**BW:** Oh no, no, no, no, no. It was a long, long, long, long time ago but. No I think I was more fascinated it, but it, but it was exciting. But I can also remember my mother's grandmother because sometimes we'd go up to Musselburgh to see nana and papa and this ancient lady would be sitting in one of the chairs. And I can't remember which, I canny remember if it's my nana's mother or my papa's mother but yes I can remember her and I remember there was photographs of my parents wedding and she was, looks like she been helped to the front to be photographed. She'd dressed in black, Victorian a black flat cap.

**JM:** Was she always dressed in black?

**BW:** (Sighs) probably, probably quite a formidable woman. I can't remember a voice I can't remember what she sounded like but yes and, and when we; now when my brother was born . . . my mother took us up on the bus from Musselburgh and I always remember it was two and two halves to Levenhall that's what she asked for every time we got in the bus. And we'd get off at Levenhall and there's a pathway kinda, it's almost like a short cut, instead of going to the roundabout and turning left up the hill it was like a wee path you go round the back and you come out to near where there used to be whale jaws over a farm entrance.

**JM:** Right is this along Pinkie Road or another direction [unclear]?

**BW:** No, no, no it's just heading up to, yeah. It's, it's headin up to Wallyford way. Macbeth Moir's Road it's where they used to, aye it was 108 Macbeth Moir Road. It was the top flat they stayed in and she used to do lots, lots of times, you know, we used to do that. And my pa, I always remember the two of them were they were ill one time well woe betide her when she got up there they could be dead, they coulda been dead. (Very softly) Who's living? (Cough) But yes but I can't, they were always pensioners when we met them. I always remember my grandpa was still working with Wiles' and used to cycle down with one o' these big black sit up and beg bikes. Yes they used to have.

**JM:** You had one kind of active grandparent and one grandparent that was older.

[00.07.24]

**BW:** He was there, yeah, yeah and yeah. I actually remember my grandmother was the cleaner in the bank. I don't know about when it was at Cockenzie but when it was the new bank at Port Seton she was the cleaner there. And I used to get up and I used to go along, go down with her to the bank and I used to, I didn't get to play, you know these big mops for polishing the floor.

**JM:** Yes.

**BW:** I used to get a shot o' that.

**JM:** So you were in the bank helping to clean it?

**BW:** Yeah, yeah. Aye not clean it out but clean it.

**JM:** No but you were in the bank.

**BW:** Yeah, yes I remember that.

**JM:** Where?

**BW:** And that comes up, you know the, the bank thing comes up later on many years from when I was doing that it, it remerges it's quite comical but yes.

**JM:** Yes. So do you think did your mum have a lot of responsibility in looking after her parents and they had the responsibility of [unclear]?

**BW:** Yes because she had there was Davy, Jim, Willie, Peter four brothers and she was the only girl, right. And she was, she, I remember her telling me there was no room at the table sho she ate her meals on the fender stool at the fire.

**JM:** We have second class, gosh.

**BW:** And then, yeah. When they were really older she was given the job, you know, well you're the women you know you'll look, look after them. So, yes its wee things like that I have, you know, I remember unfortunately so.

**JM:** Did your mum get the same opportunities at school as your brothers or was she encouraged to leave earlier?

**BW:** No I don't think so I remember she got a job in a pharmacist up in Edinburgh, I think it was along the west end but she also had a job in the chemist Harley & Harper's in the main street in Musselburgh. I always remember it, I can't remember when Edinburgh but yeah that's where it just seems to me that's the two jobs that she had.

**JM:** Right and once you guys came along that was her time taken up [unclear].

**BW:** Yes yeah she was a full time housewife permanently. She never had any, you know, right you're out o' high school I'll go and do this. There was a bit of a gap between myself and my wee brother because Ian was born in Edinburgh, I was born in Musselburgh and my wee brother was born in the front bedroom in 25 Castle View, getting closer to home so, yeah.

**JM:** Do you remember that, did the midwife...?

**BW:** I, I was, I was.

[00.10.25]

**JM:** What can you remember about that?

**BW:** Am there's a bit of commotion up the stairs and I was down the stairs and then it didn't seem to be very long after that and I was told I got a brother you know now go out and play.

**JM:** So the midwife came to the house or a doctor or, you don't remember?

**BW:** It's a long it's a long time ago. Oh I can't, it probably was just a midwife I should image for situations like that. But yeah I always remember that, Edinburgh, Musselburgh, Port Seton.

**JM:** Yes. Bedroom.

**BW:** 25 Castle View.

**JM:** Yes well.

**BW:** So yeah.

**JM:** So, growing up then what's the, what's the gap between your new younger brother?

**BW:** I can't remember the, I'm hopeless in years if you say to me what event when did that happen so I can't remember. Does yeah there was, is a bit of a gap between myself. What I'm 63 in October, he's late 50's, he's not 60 yet.

**JM:** OK. Right.

**JM:** So how did you help look after him? When he was a baby did you take him out or?

**BW:** No, no.

**JM:** Did you not have any input at all as the, the older brother?

**BW:** No I went out and played. My big brother, no my brother and I we went out and played and my mother looked after Alistair, yeah.

**JM:** Right.

**BW:** No I can't remember ever taking him for a walk or whatever. There was what I do remember there was, there was a girl who lived just up the street, same age as my brother, she used to take him for walks. She'd come down and say "Will I take him for a walk?" "Yeah sure there's the pram." There's the big pram, the big was it Cross?

**JM:** Silver Cross.

**BW:** Silver Cross pram, yeah. So yeah and so Sheeeeeila, I think her name was Sheila. Yeah so she and my mum was quite "Well sure on you go." I mean my mother really brought up three boys. She brought us up on her own because I saw my dad, if I was lucky, I saw my dad on Friday night and he would leave on Sunday night.

**JM:** So your dad was a fisherman?

**BW:** Fisherman. All his days and that, that's when I'd see my dad. Yeah.

**JM:** What memories do you have of the, the fishing industry and your dad's work? Were you on the boats and you must've spent time on the boats?

[00.12.43]

**BW:** It no. I mean people look used to say to me, people used to say to me “You’ll be a fisherman when you leave school.” No. It was a hard, hard, job and it was the days before the, I mean there was no Gore-Tex clothing. They, there was no fridge/freezer on the boat that was no toilet on the boat. So it was pretty hard going my dad, they, they, the fishermen never wore gloves I mean you were a big Jessie if you, you would never even think about wearing gloves. My father’s hands had big hacks in the joints o’ his fingers but . . . I can’t remember seeing them raw. And he also had a thumb which eventually went a sort of green colour just being permanently wet. There was no way I was going to do something that, mind you he was a fisherman to the days it was big money. That was your one reward you went out in hellish weather, but you could come back with a good wage for that week and they were paid weekly as well. I do remember a lot of fishing boats in Port Seton harbour because it was the heyday of the fishing in Port Seton. And there were always doubled up, the boats were doubled up there was not single boats, fishing boats round the edge of the harbour.

**JM:** No visiting even?

**JM:** So for the purpose of the recording can you explain doubled up?

**BW:** There would be one, one fishing boat be up against the, the pier itself and because there was no space it would come in, the next one would come in and just tie up, up against the one that was up against the pier because there was no space because it was that full, it was that busy. It was the heyday of Port Seton fishing. And when they would come in they would tie up and on Saturday mornings, big treat, we’d go down with my dad to the harbour and there was the net shed. Awe if you go down to Port Seton harbour it was on your right-hand side just as you go down it was at the harbour itself. And all the crews would go into the net shed. The skipper would come in with a lump sum o’ money and it would all get divvied up there and then. And you can smell the nets I can smell the nets now, nets and diesel fuel. But mainly nets I used to have a great time we used to run there you used to launch yourself off and land on these nets because it was basically a big cushion.

**JM:** You must’ve been stinking of fish.

**BW:** I didn’t matter there’s no fish there’s no there was just a, it was just a.

**JM:** Salt water smell.

**BW:** I don’t know what it was just a, yea just called it a net smell. It was just the smell o’ the nets it was a, I couldn’t, I couldn’t say but it, it was good. And then there was the, the fishing authority’s office just across from it and I don’t know why but they used to have bottles of juice. It was wooden crates with small bottles of juice, the sort o’ Coke-a-cola size, right and you could go and get one. And it was, it was, it was flavours you never get now, it just it was great and you got a straw and didn’t, you got a straw. And more often than not the fishermen said “Here’s a wee something for you son.” You know that’ll be a sixpence if you were, you know really, you know, a shilling? That’s kinda pushing it and you always got a handful of sweets as well. So that was a big event. When we got into the high school one o’ the things I remember is my grandmother always used to give us the, it was a, a comic The Valiant it was called and she used to give us a packet of chocolate flakes, Cadbury’s chocolate flakes. It was sweets so that’s what she gave us. My dad had a brother the one brother Jack and his wife Florence. My uncle Jack was at one point he was an insurance man, he used to go round

[00.16.56]

houses and one good thing he used to come back with a bag of war stories there tiny and thin wee comic books, Commando and War Stories.

**JM:** Are these the little booklets that'd be about six inches square?

**BW:** Yeah, about that size.

**JM:** Yes.

**BW:** And I, I would devour them I loved them I couldn't get enough of them. Yeah, and I liked my uncle Jack he was a really nice guy so easy going and I always remember he had at an original Mini. In a fact when we used to have lunches at my grandparents in Port Seton if he was there, and I loved it as well, he had a Lambretta scooter and it was white and it had one o' the, the screens at the front. So my, if he'd take us to the school on his scooter so my big brother would sit on the seat at the back, I didn't mind, because I was drive, sitting in the pit in front of my uncle Jack.

**JM:** Really!

**BW:** And holding it and we'd go round to the school. It was the only good thing and I remem, I liked about the school going to it. I didn't like it after that, yeah.

**JM:** How old were you when you did that?

**BW:** Oh primary school age I don't know what, what age that'd be I mean what primary six, primary yeah something like that. It's great I loved it.

**JM:** How did you friends react to that?

**BW:** Oh probably jealous but I didn't care I lapped it up, yeah. I mean school wise I can't remember my first day at school. The thing about the school at Port Seton it was in two parts, there was the original part which eventual which I always remember as the big side. I started off on what was the extension on the other side o' the road which was the wee side. So you started off on the wee side and when you reached a certain age you would go over the road to the other side which, which was the big side which is next door to Cockenzie House that building there. I think it's now businesses.

**JM:** Yes.

**BW:** Yeah. That was the original Cockenzie School.

**JM:** Right.

**BW:** The extension was across the road which I think is where the surgery, Cockenzie and Port Seton Surgery stands on that's the ground that the, the wee extension was built on to. So.

**JM:** Right.

**JM:** So you started as an infant in the, the extension.

**BW:** Yeah and then when you.

**JM:** Did you go to nursery? Were there nurseries no?

**BW:** No.

[00.19.42]

**JM:** No playgroup?

**BW:** The nursery was my mother.

**JM:** Yes and playgroup?

**BW:** No, no. My mother did that as well.

**JM:** Yes so.

**BW:** And we used to take the bus from Port Seton to the school. And one of the things I always remember was the women that would fillet the fish along at Cockenzie, there's fish shops along there, and the women would go there and I'm they would sit opposite yea on the, they bench seats on the bus and they were covered in scales, they were all dried up scales, fish scales on the bags because that's when people had message bags. You never had polythene bags, plastic bags women would go to the shops with a message bag and you filled up your mess-age bag and you went home you didn't wait on a taxi to take you home and I always remember I think the, the women's name was Thomson so like Thomson keeps coming to my head, yeah and I always remember all these dried fish scales stuck to their 'message' bags as their going along to work at the fishmongers.

**JM:** Can we go back to when you said about the, the women did the filleting of the fish? What, what can you remember about that where they on the side of the harbour and?

**BW:** No it, it was shops along Cockenzie end but if we're talking about filleting I'll get back to my dad.

**JM:** Right.

**BW:** Because when he came back on Friday or Saturday morning he always bought a bag o' fish beautiful lemon sole it was the best o' the best. And probably much to my mother's disgust the sink was the fill, you know, and he, he would get this bang and put them on the sink and he'd fillet them. And maybe a day or so later you'd find this sort of wee red lump of innards at the back of a tap or something like that, you know. But I can eat that fish, if my father filleted that fish there would be no bones in it and it were beautiful fish. However, because he brought it home every weekend my mother used it sensibly through the week, but it kinda got to the point where it's like "What's for tea mum", "Fish" "Good" (sigh). And I don't know if that's what actually put me off fish, I'm not a great fish person. But again it was in, in Castle View there were the two, you know the two big white sinks.

**JM:** Was there a deeper one for the laundry and a shallower one.

**BW:** The big.

**BW:** I don't if, maybe it was deeper.

**JM:** Did you put a mangle between the two?

**BW:** And I helped with the mangle.

**JM:** Yes.



[00.22.27]

**BW:** It was almost a treat, I don't know why, but it was a treat because yeah it one of the washing machines one would take it out once it stopped put it in there that sink and she would feed it in and I would turn the handle and we do that a few times. The, the sheets were quite a, a treat cos she always folded them over and it's beautiful it's likes and it was like pasta going through the machine and coming out. And then we got a, a washing machine with a mangle attached to it which I didn't believe, think it was that great didn't really squeeze all the water out. Yes it's wee things you remember. I also remember getting coal in from the bunker in the back garden. It was a coal bunker which and it had a, a lid on it which never really stayed attached and yeah I used to get the coal bring it in and usually gave it to my mother to put it on; I eventually got, I got the treat of putting it on. And I always remember starting the fires up. She'd get it going but she put, made sure she put a sheet of paper over the over the fireplace and you'd hear it draw, I think drawing is that the, drawing away and then she'd take it away and that was it going. And here.

**JM:** Yes.

**JM:** It's quite a knack isn't it?

**BW:** Oh timing's essential. Another thing I remember is when we didn't have any hair dryers. My mother would use was it Palmolive soap or something to wash my hair, I hated it cos when that stuff gets in your eyes it burns and then she'd rub my head and I had to put my, my you know, comb my hair and I was lying down in front o' the fire. I put a towel on the, the bit in front and just lie there and she'd tell me every now and right turn over right get that bit done and that about so that was the hair dryer.

**JM:** Yeah.

**JM:** That's brilliant isn't it? All these things that we take for granted now and never think of lying in front of the fire to dry your hair.

**BW:** Yup. Oh yeah. Nut. That's, that's, that was it that's what we did.

**JM:** Can you remember you've, you've got really great memories about all the fishing industry can you remember anything about the fish, was there a fish market at Port Seton as well?

**BW:** No, no.

**JM:** Nothing so the boats came in with the fish what happened to it?

**BW:** I think it went, I think there was there was a lorry a fisherman, a fisherman's association lorry.

**JM:** Right.

**BW:** I can't really remember much o' that part. But I definite, I remember there was a lorry and I don't know if that, that lorry took it up to Granton, the big fish market at Granton which is no longer there.

**JM:** Right.

**JM:** And then would it come back down to Port Seton to the shops or would the shops keep some [unclear]?

**BW:** Either.

[00.25.17]

**BW:** No they, I mean the shops probably would keep some there. He would also go on to Eyemouth where there is a fish market. So it would be sold there and then and I always remember bits of paper that they put on to the, the fish when they were buying them, was it Star, Star of Hope that was one o' them the boats that my dad was on.

**JM:** My father was a fisherman from Eyemouth and he was on a boat called the Good Hope and one called The Ariel but he wasn't, wasn't at home with us at all.

**BW:** Yeah I mean he, he, my dad said he, he didn't mind the rain but he didn't like the wind. Right no, I was never going to be a fisherman.

**JM:** What do you think took him into it though because was there somebody in his family that [unclear] to be from what you said?

**BW:** No-no, no. when he was a young, young lad there was a, a naval ship berthed out in the Forth. And what they, the boats came in and they took them to the ship for a, a visit. It was like an, an open day, Navy day or whatever. They took him out to it and he was smitten and later on World War II he joined up the Navy. He was in the artic convoys, the end of the war he was taken off HMS Zephyr, a small destroyer, and sent to of all things an aircraft carrier, HMS Ocean and I think it was too big he just didn't like it. When he came out the Navy he toyed with the idea of the Merchant Navy and that just never materialised, that was never going to happen, and I suppose the next thing for the sea was the fishing. And he started off in a really small boat, the bed was a bag o' hay and they would go way, way down south. I don't know if it was the herring but there was, there was a wheelhouse for the one person to stand in to steer it. I don't know if it was line, he must've been line fishing you know just pour the, the net of the anyway to hang and they'd go in a circle and pull it in. Cos trawling came on the scene a lot later on but yeah, the sea was in his blood. He couldn't do anything else and even when he retired from the fishing, I think that was reluctantly, he took up a fishing, he got a van and he went to the market up at Granton, bought some fish and second hand scales and I remember my mother and I standing in the house in Johnston Terrace by this time worried sick we were thinking is he going to coming back with a van full o' fish. Was gud he sold the lot on the very first day out; he eventually he kept buying more and more and he built himself up a really good fishing ring, you know business. And he's so he wouldn't spend a thing the battery he used to bring in every night and charge up overnight, just in case something happened you know and it was a bloody heavy battery carry anything out to the van so yeah so. It, it, I think it was like the sea or nothing else. He, he, he actually worked for a wee while building the power station at Cockenzie, but that wasn't for him.

**JM:** Can you remember the, the building of the power station at Cockenzie? I'm I right in thinking that the land was reclaimed? Some of it?

**BW:** Some, some, some of it.

**JM:** Can you remember anything about that?

**BW:** No I just remember . . . a street called South Seton Park getting built. Cos there was a North Seton Park and then there was the 'The Park', Cockenzie and Port Seton Park, playpark. And then there was North Seton, some North Seton Park but they built it's what everybody called the white houses in it was I think that was going to be the staff of Cockenzie Power Station.

[00.29.52]

**JM:** OK.

**BW:** If somebody was staying in the house “Oh you work at the power station?” “Yeah.” But as for the construction of it . . . I can’t remember it really. I think I know now more of the construction and I’ve seen photographs of the construction, but I don’t want to say I have personally seen the construction of it.

**JM:** No I just wondered if you being so close to it.

**BW:** What I do remember about the power station was; I don’t know if they had to do or what, I mean a lot of people didn’t want it. It was going to be a blot on the landscape and you know I think there was this fear of what if it blows up; it was never going to blow up. But they used to let of pressure, this pressure used to go off, and it blasted out and you could hear this noise far and wide. And it was funny because I think when it goes it kept getting its life span extended. But eventually it was a case of it’s coming down, it’s getting closed; it’s coming down. And when I went to see the two chimneys coming down mixed emotions it was kinda the chimneys, you knew, you looked around there’s the chimneys there so we go in that direction. When you’re coming home in a plane from your holidays the first thing you looked for the chimneys. So yeah when it came down it was sad, however, as I said to the guy that did the explosives it was poetry, it was a work of art. You can actually watch it again and again its fabulous.

**JM:** Would you like to explain it for the recording?

**BW:** It’s the way they positioned the explosives the way they, they took away some o’ the base of the chimneys and they were, the holes were opposite each other. So when the explosives went off they collapsed together they, yeah they just came together and dissolved. And they left this beautiful plume of dust in the image of a person, a man and everybody was in awe of it. It, it, it was a spectacular event and its funny because BBC Radio Scotland interviewed me not long, I mean right after it about they, because it was a case of the fishing died off, the fishing was, it was going and then they built the power station so again a lot o’ people were employed locally. There was the fishing, it was dying off, the power station they went in there the fishing has more or less died off people were for prawns. And that’s about it really. The power station’s gone but it kinda got to the point where it was a satellite for Edinburgh, people just commuted to Edinburgh and it got to a point where I think a lot of people are happy it has gone. They’ve got a nice bit of ground, however, there’s this fear of what is going to take its place. So there is a flat bit o’ ground time will tell as to what gets in there.

**JM:** Yeah, I’m not aware of anything that’s been decided, no.

**BW:** No, no which is probably a bit uncomfortable for some people.

**JM:** Well depending on how close you are, yeah. I think you’ve got fantastic memories of, of just everyday events Bill it’s terrific, it’s terrific.

**BW:** Preston School. School?

**JM:** Yes. School then so when you went on to school can you remember how, how starting school in class sizes, where you in a big class or small class did you wear uniform?

**BW:** It was, it, it, oh yes school cap. That’s when, that’s what you had a school cap, shorts and.

[0034.04]

**JM:** Did you have shorts all through primary school or did you or where you, where you allowed to graduate to long trousers.

**BW:** No, no I think when, when you sort of graduated to the big side o' primary school that's when you got your long trousers. There were one or two, you know, stayed with the shorts and they were obviously school children, ridiculed. But Miss Sheridan was my first teacher, tall slim, fair haired woman, how can I remember that?

**JM:** Well yes. She obviously had a lasting impact.

**BW:** But I always think about a tweed suit, skirt and jacket. And it was . . . I think I took to it OK in the beginning and I think I had school meals which were delivered in large metal containers and you had your.

**JM:** What was your favourite?

**BW:** I don't know if I had a favourite quite honestly.

**JM:** Tapioca pudding?

**BW:** There's other school meals which I remember in secondary school yeah, but of course there was the gym hall which became at lunch time where you went for your meals. I always remember there was a, a, a tractor used to come with a big grass cutting think trailing at the back of it. We used to all run at the back of it and we could've been dead, one wee trip and you're mince. But yeah it was a big green it was a big expanse of grass it seemed big it was there was a big tree at the end of it. And the toilets were outside and one, one.

**JM:** Where you allowed to go out to the toilet whenever or were you restricted to break times? Do you remember?

**BW:** No. No. I do remember one day the bell rang and I walked in to, to stand in the line and there was a funny feeling in my head. So I put my hand up to my head and brought it down and my hand was covered in blood. So, scream, scream, scream and taken, I think I was taken to the, I was taken to the somebody to wash down and get, so what happened is a guy'd been, a lad who'd been at like the toilet site there's a wall separating him from the rest o' the playground and he'd taken half a brick and sort of lobed it over. I don't know what he was expecting but I ended up being the receiving end. So yes there was that.

**JM:** What about playground games, was it all?

**BW:** Ah we just chased each other round and round a big bit o' grass.

**JM:** Chased the tractor?

**BW:** It wasn't, yeah chased the tractor. It wasn't till we got to 'the big side over the road' . . . it was yeah I think used spent most of your lunch break or play time walking around singing "Who wants a game at Japs and British." And you did that all lunch break then the bell went and you went inside or you, you, you there, there might have been a ball for a game of whatever you'd called it football you kick the ball up and down. And the girls would have, you know, the balls up against the wall and they would have times was it oh there was skipping as well. But if I can there was another injury. When we stayed in 25 Castle View it was, it was just at the top o'

[00.37.49]

that street they started to build more houses. And there was a building site there and there was a, a watchman. He was a, he was an old man and I remember he used to wear this big long coat a bunnet he wore glasses and we always called him, I don't know if it's his name, where it came from, Mo McCrindle. And we used to go up the, up the flats there was no, there was no floorboards down and everybody's running across them and me I would be hands and knees creeping over to get to the other side only for everybody to say "Mo's coming, Mo's coming" and they'd turn and run away a skip down and I'm turning round and gingerly going back across the, you know, the battens.

**JM:** Is this you playing in the building site?

**BW:** Yeah if you did. And, and another instance that I remember vividly and I always will it was a trailer which was being used as a see-saw so you run up one end slam down, run up the other end slam down. And where you attached the trailer to a lorry, a van or whatever, there was this big bolt, big old rusty bolt sharp edges on it, right. And I always remember my brother saying "Bill you're standing too close" "No I'm not" thump. So this came down and it just grazed my head. So I was taken to the doctors.

**JM:** Were you OK?

**BW:** Yes aye yeah ah-ha. So yes so you kinda got on first name terms with the doctors because . . . I think it was when I was in high, high school.

**JM:** Do you ever see the one doctor?

**BW:** Doctor, Doctor Bolton, doctor oh.

**JM:** And was there just the doctor's practice was it one doctor in the practice could you?

**BW:** It was. I think it might have been. It was a horrendous place to go. It was opposite where; it was on the corner and across the road now I think there's, there's still a, a chip shop or a Korean take-away or something like that. And I used to go in and it was always, it always seem dark and there was, there was two rows of chairs in the middle facing out the way and I think there was a fire, an actual fire and I didn't like going on my own because you had to remember who's in front o' yea or who came at the back o' yea because they would come and say "Next" and yea had to if nobody's going to move oh it must be me. But yeah Doctor Bolton big whiskers, big moustache, small man but yeah he fit. And then there was another time . . . I don't know if I was in primary school primary seven or, or early secondary school I had no sports, hobbies or anything, my main attention was based on 'The Television'. I used to come home have my tea sit in front o' the telly. I don't know if that's got anything to do with it but at one point I was watching the television and I started to twitch and eventually I think I passed out. And then I was diagnosed with epilepsy. So that's another wee expedition I remember going up to Edinburgh those times I'd be good. It was it was a bit of a treat oh I don't have to go to school, because I was hopeless at school, hated school. So it's, you know, I'm going up to Sick Kids in Edinburgh and I used to get these brain graphs? Sounds like a, a bathing cap strapped on my head and it's like they put this sort o' like saline solution on my hair and they would, they would basically, you know brain activity. And I always remember the two nurses. What I had to do I had to close my eyes brew ha and open my eyes. So it was a case o' "Close your eyes William. So anyway I got these blinds and I think there're really nice look to well in the living room and open your eyes William." And that was the sort o' thing

[00.42.13]

that went on. And then afterwards they'd take this thing off and I'd spend the rest of the afternoon picking the salt out my hair which was not a great thing. So yeah I had . . . yeah I had epilepsy for quite a while and then one new doctor came on the scene "You don't need these tablets we'll take you off them." So I was really pleased so not long after that I took another wee fit. It, it was a French expression it wasn't full blown epilepsy I would go into a deep sleep. Eventually on one o' the days I went up to the Sick Kids in Edinburgh the doctor said "Well there's not enough medication in your system to prevent you from having it so we'll take you off it." And that was me I no longer had epilepsy. So I kinda grew out of it.

**JM:** Right. Yes.

**JM:** Oh that's very positive isn't it?

**BW:** Yes.

**JM:** It's really interesting to hear about the different stages of treatment.

**BW:** Yeah. Ospolots and primidone tablets.

**JM:** Oh gosh. It's obviously a lasting memory is it?

**BW:** Write that down. It did yeah because it kinda curtailed some o' the things I was in the, I was a sergeant in the Air Cadets. However I couldn't go on planes.

**JM:** Now the Air Cadets can you tell me something about that?

**BW:** It was, it I mean before that it was the Cubs, used to go to the Cubs which it was along in a hall at Cockenzie. It was it was where Johnny Di Caccia's [check spelling] shop was. I cannae I think it was like a café on one side with booths, small. On the other side was I don't know if it was a chip shop but if you went down the right, the left side of Johnny Di Caccia's there was a wee hall down there and that's where you went the Cubs met there. And Akela, I won't say her name but she was I thought she loved screaming and you know it was "Pack, Pack, PACK!" And if you didnae get it right she jus, I think she just loved doing that shouting and screaming. I used to come up, they used to let me go into Johnny Di Caccia's to get a wee bar of chocolate or something, and I remember at some point you had to run back from Cockenzie along to Castle View to sit in front o' the telly to watch Bewitched, the program I loved it, loved it. ...

**JM:** Can we come to television programmes in a minute can I first ask you a wee bit more about Cubs. Did you do interest badges or play games or?

**BW:** I mean sorta we played games.

**JM:** Or go to camp?

**BW:** No.

**JM:** No?

**BW:** No. There was, it was, it was I think it was a Monday night I'm sure it was a Monday night. You went along there ran about got exhausted which I think suited Akela at the time and now I can't ever really remember doing much.

[00.45.12]

**JM:** And what was your uniform?

**BW:** Oh I had the, had the, the cap and I had the, the wee, it was I always remember it was the neckerchief but it was a leather.

**JM:** Toggle.

**BW:** Yes thingy and a green jersey. But I cannae remember getting any badges no.

**JM:** Did you take part in parades, for Armistices or anything like that? Was the church a big part of, of, of your life?

**BW:** Church.

**JM:** You know, because there's always sort of a big connection usually between the church and the fishing industry or I'm I missing completely.

**BW:** Yes, my parents were never church people. They were not religious in slightest. So how we came to go to the 'Red Tile' church in Cockenzie I'm no quite sure. But my big brother and I used to go along with this other couple, people, I'm sure they were nice, we used to go along to the Red Tile church which is next to; God it's I think the buildings still there, but it was, we didn't stay, we didn't go to it for very long and I'm kinda glad in a way because the men went in their black suits, black coats, black trilby hats and the women had their hats on and their handbags they would hold them quite. I never really felt comfortable there and so I'm no quite sure how we, you know, how we started.

**JM:** How you went with some friends?

**BW:** Yeah, yeah. It, it was like, I don't, I don't want to say we were passed off, you know, "Yes, yes you can take them to church they'll enjoy it". But yeah we went there my brother you know it was just my big brother and I. The two of us went. I don't think my wee brother was on the scene just as yet. But that was it really. No I never went to church.

**JM:** Because there were superstitious and things around the [unclear] and fishing industry as well.

**BW:** Oh yeah. We used to go in, we used to go runs in the car and there were just words you didn't say like nuns, right penguins right nut.

**JM:** Why?

**BW:** Cried I was superstitious it was a long tail fella it wasn't a rat it was a long tail fella, curly tails pigs, pigs.

**JM:** I knew you shouldn't be a rat.

**BW:** Pigs, right. Really superstitious I knew my dad and my mum kinda got, my mum was from Musselburgh and there was Fisherrow but she was never, she was never, never from the fishing community but she got dragged into it as well you know. We went somewhere and my dad mentioned two or three really bad luck birds and she said, it was some, the car broke down or something like that you know, "Told yea. Yea would say thay things. There yea go that's what happened". It was a lot o' nonsense.

**JM:** Oh but not if you believed in.

[00.48.26]

**BW:** Unfortunately I didn't you know, it was just you know, God's sake no.

**JM:** Will we move on to television programmes because television by your own (laughs) was good.

**BW:** Oh yeah, yeah. I don't know if it was a pay, it was a big influ well it was a big.

**JM:** Was it black and white by the way?

**BW:** Yes.

**JM:** Do you remember?

**BW:** I remember, I remember.

**JM:** Do you remember getting it or was it always there?

**BW:** It was there, it was always, I now think . . . we had a television which had doors on the front. We would open up the doors and there was the screen which was later converted into a rabbit hutch.

**JM:** Well isn't that really good.

**BW:** Upcycling, yeah, yeah. And I remember what was the test card remember the card with the girl sitting there in the middle?

**JM:** [Unclear]

**BW:** And at the end of it; I, I remember when you came to the end it switched off you know "Good night." And that was it there was no twenty-four hour television. And again it's crazy but it was what you did when you were young. When, there was that, that, that continuous bleep and there was a tiny wee white dot and you'd go across to see if you can see through the dot to see if there's anything on the other side.

**JM:** I never did that personally.

**BW:** I did it a long time ago when I was very young and very silly but.

**JM:** What a good idea.

**BW:** Yeah there was lots of black and white programmes.

**JM:** Did you have to wait for your television to warm up we had to wait for ours.

**BW:** I think yeah and you thinking back you know you had to get off the seat and go and change the station all, what was it two of them. And I remember if we were at the grandparents at lunch time the One O'clock Gang with Larry Marshall that was.

**JM:** What was this?

**BW:** It was . . . it was sort of I don't know, Scottish slapstick. It was, it was in a studio and there was always the classroom scene with these adults where dressed up as schoolkids and it was, it was a comedy thing. But I don't know why, you know if I reckon if you look back you think my god what a lot of rubbish but we, I mean I loved it. And on Saturday afternoons if I was along at my grandmother's it was ITV and it was the wrestling. Oh the wrestling I really liked the wrestling it was, I knew all the tag team names as well. That yeah I liked that. But then there

[00.51.06]



were things like obviously there was Blue Peter came along and there was, there was a programme called Tom Tom. But it just got to the point o' the day you know it's grown up programmes I'm no interested.

**JM:** But Bewitched was the favourite.

**BW:** It was.

**JM:** Can you describe Bewitched?

**BW:** It was this, this bloke married this woman and unknown to him she was a witch. And his stepmother was a witch as well. So it was a case of by a twitch of the nose she could do magic.

**JM:** Could you twitch your nose?

**BW:** No I cannot twitch my nose.

**JM:** Did you try?

**BW:** No.

**JM:** I bet you did.

**BW:** Well I might have, I might have foolishly at the time but yeah.

**JM:** But you tried.

**BW:** Yes, but yeah. And of course there was always Doctor Who it was, it was always there. And I can, I can always remember the change overs of the, you know, who the next Doctor Who was going to be. But there just comes a point in times like no I'm no interested in it any more.

**JM:** So after TV then what did your interest move on to? Because you'd be a bit older were you then going to the Air Corp? Tell us about that.

**BW:** Yes it was somebody I think it was the high school it, it, it came somebody mentioned that they're doing Air Cadets down at, is it Longniddry, and it was, they called it a detached flight, cos 297 Squadron was based at Goose Green up at Musselburgh. That was 297 Squadron. We started, it, these guys started one up it, at north, at Longniddry so that's 297 detached flight. And we all sort of went there and we, we went to Musselburgh Goose Green were we were measured up for our uniforms. And I mean it's something I've known and I've had to put up with for some occasions I have a larger than normal cranium and I was really ridiculed at school and it, it really I mean I was sure I was in two or three fights because of it, however this gentleman was measuring me up for my uniform. He measured me for my beret, he measured it up and he very kindly says "Well you know this in all my" he emphasised the all "ALL my years measuring up uniforms I have never had to order a beret that size, that's unbelievable" you know. Thank you very much for reminding me o' that you know.

**JM:** What was the uniform?

**BW:** It was dark Air Force blue. It was the trousers, you know, hairy it was, it was okay to wear, but it was really rough trousers, jacket, shirt, tie and beret. And the, the jacket was buttoned to the trousers with the buttons you could, sort of it was, you could take your jacket off. And I used to, we used to play games and you had to do some things, I, you took a airplane, you

[00.54.36]

chose an airplane and you built an Airfix kit and you wrote up something about it. And then I was promoted I was promoted basically cos I was the oldest one there I'm making Sergeant Wilson and.

**JM:** How old would you be?

**BW:** Third year at high school.

**JM:** About fourteen?

**BW:** Maybe. And there was a, another person there who I think became instantly jealous of me. There were some other corporals were, you know, promoted to corporal. Of course I've know how to drill a squadron for many years it was second nature to me, not. So when we went to Turnhouse, the Royal Air Force Turnhouse, for the Wing parade I was there in my uniform looking very smart only to find out there was no, no one higher than me to take the parade. So there was different squadrons all round this parade ground and there was this individual in the middle who you could barely see his face with a big stick a big measuring stick shouting out, you know "Flight Sergeant 297 Squadron", that was no me. "Sergeant 297, 297 Squadron." I'm standing sort of waving my hand to try and get his attention you know. "Sergeant" and then he saw me "Get your squadron over there." I'm thinking (softly) how? So I turned round and faced them and somebody, some very kind teenager in the front, says "Five paces forward" and somebody else says "Shut up leave him." The bastard (softly) saw right five paces forward right. So it's left turn hup and then it's right march, so we're marching round left wheel I'm doing great, however there's another squadron heading towards us. So had "Squad stop no awe just keep going". So eventually I went to see somebody I say's "Look I have no experience in this I haven't a clue what to do." Someone else took over and I stood at the back o' the stage were that is fine so. And they very kind we used to go shooting at Gosse Green at Musselburgh and I remember one.

**JM:** Actual rifles?

**BW:** Yeah 303s rifles. Oh sensible (softly), I remember this flight sergeant or somebody or this guy I say's "You're one o' the lucky ones" I say's "Oh how's that?" "Well because the annual camp's coming up soon you don't have to apply. You can just go, you know, you'll be there first thing." Well I'm sorry to say the thought of me going to a barracks to have a 'good time' it didn't really seem so that interesting. So I automatically said "Och I'd really like to go however my parents have booked the holidays for going abroad." "Aw it's a shame that." "I know it's a shame I'm gutted." I wasn't cos it just it was a great pastime the Air Cadets but it just seemed, I didn't mind authority but there was an awful lot of shouting going on, I didn't like the shouting (softly). Yeah so yeah so then we went away abroad again it seemed a lot more interesting.

**JM:** Well you mentioned about your dad getting a car then that was sort of holidays abroad from then on so did you drive from here?

**BW:** Yeah.

**JM:** That must've been [unclear].

**BW:** It, it, it was the same my, my uncle Jack and aunt, my uncle Jack and aunty Florence they went to Pietra Ligure on the Adriatic coast and so yeah it, it was unbelievable. They went there and

[00.58.49]

(voices in the background) it was a case of he said, he passed his test the first time and he said to my mother "Do you want to go to Italy?" "Yeah, aye, how?" "Drive there" "Oh OK." So my mother started to collect food, I mean it was like a Red Cross parcel, Fray Bentos bake-o-fry Knorr packets of soup right and the bowls we had were Tupperware bowls. And we bought two gas stoves you know two rings gas stove and that was that. We had our own sleeping bags our beds were lilos and more often than not you woke up in the morning and it was only two rows that were inflated. And yet we never had a tent. What we did was we'd drive down to Dover. (Door shuts and background voices cease.)

**JM:** What kind of car are we talking about, quite a roomy car with five people and somebody else?

**BW:** A Vauxhall, a Vauxhall, a Vauxhall Victor or was it the, a Ford, I think it was actually a car that he bought from his brother-in-law, my uncle Peter. Oh what was that, it was a white car was it. He had a Zephyr I mean he got; my mother looked after the money so it was almost every year they got 'an-other' car, it wasn't a new car it was another car. I remember a grey Zodiac, but yeah we used to, used to just pile everything in.

**JM:** How long would it take you to drive to Italy? Do I take it you would go down to Dover?

**BW:** Three. Oh yeah down to Dover in a one. Oh and we'd stop off obviously and then we'd go down to Dover and picked up the tent. It was Townsend Thoresen Ferries so we hired the tent from the same company and it was what was it the Freedom of Enterprise (possibly the MS Free Enterprise I or the Herald of Free Enterprise) or something like that. Remember when it one ship sunk at Zeebrugge it was the same company. And so we went down; the first time we went down we stayed the night in Mr and Mrs Dowel's Bed and Breakfast. And we slept in beds which had nylon sheets, static the place used to light up with static electricity, and in the morning we piled into the car and went down to docks. And my dad went down just to find, you know, what do we do next. So we're in this queue and we just kept moving forward to find so the guy just "Right just go in the ship". My mother was not ready, "I'm no ready wait, wait hang on I'm no ready to go yet, no ready to go". We just went on and it, we, we, we winged it. We had the AA Road Book of Europe. It was a book, it wasn't a map, it was a book and my mother navigated us to the, you know, to Italy this time. And we this is like the days before, you know, the motorways the big motorways. And it was exciting because it was like my mother would tell my dad how far to come out before he overtook.

**JM:** Yes. Yes. Brilliant!

**JM:** It's kinda scary isn't it?

**BW:** It was it was unbelievable. But yeah we got all the way down and we always used to leave, it was the Orange Walk the Orange Lodge Walk we always went on the same, the same day every because it was school holidays we're away. And my grandpa, God bless him, used to come along and wave us off quickly he would take his big hanky out and wave us off. And we used to collect these summer special comics and we'd finish them by about Berwick and boy you'd get bored until you get to Dover, you know. And we'd get, there was, there was no campsites you get now it was, the grass was about three feet tall. And I'd said "I'm gonna go look for the toilets". Welcome to France, you know it was just a row of holes in the ground! But it was, it was never a holiday, it was off on an adventure.

**JM:** It sounds, it sounds a marvellous experience actually.

[01.03.02]

**BW:** And we just, we did, we did it every year somewhere different. I've been to most o' Europe through my parents.

**JM:** Just lets go.

**BW:** My mother used to sit my wee brother on her lap, its unheard of now, and we used to sleep in the car at, you know if it's late we used to just sleep we'd stop off somewhere. I remember.

**JM:** Did your mum drive?

**BW:** No. But eventually yes ah-ha three tests later she passed.

**JM:** Never to tour.

**BW:** No, no but she was oh she was a terrible sailor. Oh god I remember carrying her off the boat at Dover she was a terrible, terrible sailor.

**JM:** She was obviously a fantastic navigator.

**BW:** Oh yeah, there was a number of times my dad used to say but [she'd] say "Keep going, keep" maybe but eventually there were big motorways and you know we're on that. My dad used to take away a thing called Gun Gum and it was for an exhaust bandage. I don't know why but nine times out o' ten something would go wrong with the car. And he would also take wire coat hangers which he could dismantle and turn into things to hold the exhaust on to the underneath of the, the car.

**JM:** I think there amazing experiences to have.

**BW:** Yeah.

**JM:** I think we maybe need to move on to your career and although your now local history officer perhaps you would like to fill us in a little bit on how you got here?

**BW:** My career. I don't know if I would call it 'my career' I never had a career when I left school. I was all set to join the civil service. I went for an interview, I think there was about five stuffed shirts lined up in front of me to interview me and I think I made some sort of impact because I was conditionally accepted and it was up to my qualifications. Sat five failed five so obviously I wasn't going to the civil service and I remember my mother coming to the house one day and she said and, and you hear these things these stories and this actually she says "Right I've got you a job as an apprentice joiner go down to Seton Decorators & Joiners on Monday." I, I wasn't quite sure how to feel. It was awe, it was always said I was good with my hands. I like woodwork cos it was one thing I, I got a reasonable mark in. I remember going to the, the, my mum and I went to the careers officer and she says "Right well he's got" I thought it was maybe a C in woodwork but she says "Ah it's no really a qualification", thank you. So I went and I started with Seton Decorators & Joiners. I lasted a year because I always remember nine times out o' ten the, the boss would say "Right Wullie get your putty pot" and I knew I was going to repair a pair of gla, a sort of pane of glass. I used to go home stinking o' linseed oil and blood. I didn't like it and I was it after about a year they asked me over to the, the office which looked over the Port Seton harbour and he said "You know well just to get [...] you know you've been here a year now your no exactly you know" I says "I'll tell you what I'll save you time and money" and I just walked out. (Voices in the background) And that was me

[01.06.50]

I was finished with an apprentice joiner. One of my friends said "I can maybe get you a job in an office in a place called Brunton's Wire Mill in Musselburgh." So I went up and I don't if you'd really call it an interview he spoke to me he said "Right can you start then, immediate". This was in days you could do that. "After six months" he says "You'll get promoted up the stairs." So I've done nine months I thought I'd make enquiries as to the possibility of getting a new job up the stairs only to be told "Well actually due to the decline in the steel industry, no. But if you're interested there's a job on the shop floor as a wire drawer."

**JM:** A wire drawer?

**BW:** A wire drawer. (Voices in the background cease) It was taking a coil o' wire at one end and through a number of drums it drew through, it was called dies, it was sort of cone shaped inside this die so it would drawn from one size down to another size down to another size and at the end it would, the diameter of the wire would come completely different.

**JM:** Right. OK.

**BW:** So the process that's what you did.

**JM:** So it's like stripping the wire down.

**BW:** It's pulling it, its pulling it to a different size.

**JM:** Stretching it right?

**BW:** Yeah. I hated it. This is my first taste of shifts. What was it five till ten and then I was given a job in sort o' like the big wire drawers. I sort of I just think it's funny talking about wire drawers, but it was bigger machines bigger wire and it was night shift. And I, this was before I had a car, last thing at night you're sitting in the bus going up to your work and your mates are coming "Oh hi where you going?" "I'm going to my work." And Saturday would consist of sleeping. So yeah then I was going to get made redundant he says "But you can get a job as a brickie's labourer" again still with Brunton's Wire Mill. "OK fine." In all I think I was eight years with the brickie's labourer, as a brickie's labourer, in the Wire Mill and the individual I worked with I simply loathed and detested him, he's basically.

**JM:** You worked for eight years?

**BW:** Yep. Because, because of my probably lack of qualifications and experience in anything to do with 'inside'. I looked, I did look . . . There was also another incident as a brickie's labourer. We were down at a place near Musselburgh Racecourse it was called Gilby (check spelling) Brunton's a sort of subsidiary of Brunton's main wire mill and there was an engineer there and he was stripping out some beams some big metal beams and unfortunately one fell on my foot. So I was taken to hospital and where I was told there was a pretty good chance I was going to lose the big toe on my left foot cos it turned black, gangrene set in. And I did lose it. It was amputated. So much to the disgust of this brickie who I basically lavished gifts on to keep his face straight, but yeah I got better unfortunately I should've stayed working with electricians cos that is what I did after the accident. I went back to him I'd no idea why it's a stupid thing to do because I just continued to hate him until fortunately, oh fabulously, I was made redundant. It's one good thing at last. I was at Brunton's for about oh it's either 16 or 18 years. Nobody liked any part of it.

[01.11.13]

**JM:** It's a long time to stay when your heart is not in it isn't it?

**BW:** Yeah. And when I left there again the same person got me a job in the office got me a job with Miller Homes. So I was just a general labourer I was there for about four years and strangely enough I actually enjoyed it. A really nice bunch of guys if it wasn't for the, you know, the weather it was pretty grim at times, but it was OK, it was, it was OK.

**JM:** And where were the houses being built?

**BW:** It was there all up in Edinburgh. One of the good things about it there one time the fork lift driver was off ill. So seeing a wee niche I approached one o' the bosses and said "You know do you have someone else to step in?" "No, no would you like to do that son?" "Yes I would very much like to do that". So I went on a course and learned to drive a fork-lift truck. So that was great. While I was working as a brickie's labourer, as a labourer, a general labourer with Miller Homes I started to go night, night classes. And I went to is it the Jewel I think I went to do Maths, Arithmetic and English, I thought I'd start somewhere. There wasn't enough people to go to the Arithmetic class so I was encouraged to go to the Maths class. Na I don't do numbers I don't, I was at one point I was bottom o' the class at Preston Lodge. So I went, I went one day, one night to night classes and I never went back again. I kinda stuck with the English but at one point I thought this, I'm not, I not doing too good here and I gave up on that as well. So at one point I thought I'd go back and see the class to wish them good luck with the exam. So I went for a drink and somebody says "Look you've paid for the class, you've paid for it. Turn up sit ,you know, do it." "Right OK I'll do that" so I sat it and I passed. I got it was a C but for me that was pretty dam good.

**JM:** And you hadn't been to the classes.

**BW:** That sounds even better. So that was the start of me really taking an interest in studying, took a long time. So it was then that my met my dear other half. I was actually chasing another woman I was at night classes and she said "I'm looking for some bricks". So I thought OK I'll get you bricks. So she invited me up to her house and said "This is taking a long time why don't you bring the house, the bricks up to the house?" Super, so when I got up there there was somebody else and I thought I know you so we just started chatting and the person I was really basically after I ignored I mean I maybe see her "Yeah yes, yes I'd like another coffee". And I found out this girl, this woman, was actually the bank manager's daughter who my grandmother and I cleaned [for], up in the bank.

**JM:** Yeah.

**BW:** So and my granny used to babysit her two brothers as well.

**JM:** So is this the bank story that you mentioned earlier the connection. What was the connection?

**BW:** Yes, yes the connection came round. So we just sat there and chatted away for ages. And I, I never had much luck with, with females I had two girlfriends that, you know, I, I just I was always a bit shy with girls, then, not now. So, so we chatted away and I got this, the g, we didn't know at the time but we were being set up. The girl that I initially was after, she was setting the two of us up.

**JM:** So she wasn't interested in you either?

[01.15.33]

**BW:** Well I don't like to think about that way but probably not cos actually she, she was having an affair with somebody else.

**JM:** Naughty.

**BW:** Busy, so yeah, I mean this girl she says "I've to give you this wee letter you know so you'll enjoy getting out". And her phone number was underneath. So come this December we've been together for 30 years. And it was like at the time we thought she was divorced wi' two kids. So I think I had indigestion you know the build up like, oh am I doing the right thing, she's got two kids, could this go wrong, what's going to happen. But yeah I mean her kids have got children as well now so yeah. And at one point she said to me "Look you're either going to have to get a profession or go back to studying". The, the thought o' studying terrified me but I did it. Packed in the Miller Homes as a labourer and started off at Stevenson College, there was a course called the Headway Course and it was basically getting back to studying again. I then went on to an access course on arts and social sciences and it was while I was doing that six months into that I was sitting with a tutor one day another tutor came in and said "Do any of your students you think are interested in this course" and it was information management. Now I've always had this thing about information it was a great thing that's why bought a lot of books. And I sat there "Well actually yeah I would" "Right, if you go across to Queen Margaret College" as it was then "And talk to a Bruce Thomson" who became my personal tutor writes to the course when I was at Queen Margaret. So I went over I spoke to him and I say I've done this, this and that and he says "Aye you'll be fine OK". And it, it, it was I went to see him then it was one night I had to get to go home to talk to my other half and say "Veronica this, I've got a chance of doing this it could mean four years and it's like there'll be lectures, there'll be note taking and stuff like that". You know it for somebody who was bloody hopeless at school this comes along and she's "Well if you want it go and do it". So I did it and four years later I graduated with honours from Queen Margaret College.

**JM:** Fabulous. That's fabulous though you know and a real inspiring story for people who perhaps feel that school's not for them. It doesn't mean that you close the door on things.

**BW:** Yeah, yeah. I mean it's funny because when, even when I was at Stevenson College, yeah Stevenson College I never felt I was going to fail. Even then I thought yeah I'm looking forward to putting my robes on to graduate. So then it was funny because it was the last exam I got a lift along to the station at Waverly and I got out the car said cheerio to my friends and I stood there I thought what am I going do now, I've got to get a job. So it was quite, I don't know it was actually quite frightening because you'd been at that lovely wee place, that.

**JM:** How old where you?

**BW:** Well as I say it was one o' the years I, I was 40. Was it the second year maybe, was it '93 I started because it was IN3, think it was '93 when I started 1993. So I was a mature student and it was I remember second year I went to get my results and the secretary she said "They're no bad they're average" I says "I don't want average I don't want average results". In the third year it was my, my work placement I did, I think it was with the civil service, and for one of the modules I did I got an A. I never in my entire life had an A so I was gob-smacked. I got so aye yeah, I, I was almost embarrassed cos other people would say "You know I got what did you get?" "You know if I got an A" sheepishly handing it over "I got an A". I got an A, for somebody's was bottom o' the class at high school to get an A. I was never made to study

[01.20.32]

there I was, I was never academically minded then it was in later years. So it was though it was kind of a let-down after I graduated because through an agency I got a job data entry at Scottish Provident. But while I was there I was also the Saturday morning boy at Longniddry Library. I, I was doing Longniddry in the library [unclear] I, I did cover work when I started Stevenson College. So I'd been doing it all the time make up a standing anywhere. In Ste, one o' the tutors at Stevenson said "Yeah but you're not going to end up in a public library are you". "Oh god no heaven forbid." So while I was at Scottish Provident, I wasn't there about four years maybe, not long, it came to my attention that there was a brand new library being built in Ormiston. It's part-time job it be senior assistant in charge. Because it was part-time I was never sure about it. Eventually I sat the interview and I was given the post. So I handed my notice in at Scottish Provident. I started off there at Ormiston and I used to walk away and stop and turn round and thought I'm in charge o' that building. And there was somebody else who well I suppose I was her boss you know, I, I had staff, I had responsibilities. Unfortunately 11 years later I couldn't get away from it quick enough. I had my eyes opened up as to public library demands and management which I won't go into in detail.

**JM:** OK.

**BW:** We're coming to the end of my ca, my career I mean I real, I consider this to be the start of my career, because I was given the chance to take up the post of local history officer at the new John Gray Centre which opened in 2012. It was said to us he says "You might want to think about it cos it's a grade lower". I said "I'll take it". And when I went home told my partner I says "Look, it's a grade lower but I'm taking it". Because I've always had an interest in history, I've always been interested in the, the past. It's always been the Romans, the Vikings, the Aztecs, if somebody said to me though "What about local history?" It would probably be a case of "Mmm ah no there's no' much there". However, since 2012 I've had my eyes opened as to what is on your doorstep. The real history, the social side of it what's happened round about and it's fascinating. And it's sad to say at this point in the interview that I've got, I've only got two years and four months before I retire. It's sad that I found my favourite job my one and only job which I've loved because I work with some fantastic people as well. It's taken so long to find it.

**JM:** But probably this job didn't exist before then.

**BW:** Probably not, probably not. I, I stood in a couple o' times when the local history balcony, for want of a better description, was in the old library in Haddington. And when I started here the other local history officer was Craig Statham and he used to say to me "Right I'm going for my lunch now" "Oh do you have to? Can you open it here and sit beside me? Can, you know somebody might come and ask me a question, a local history question". But now I just I, when you see somebody coming in its quite exciting cos you think where I'm I gonny go this time, what's the question gonny be. And it's so satisfying when you find something for somebody that comes in asking about their ancestors. It, it's, it's, it's, it's disappointing when you can't find something, you feel you've failed them. But then again when you, you find a few more relations, relatives along the way if you can find where they lived and if you can point out on Google Maps that's where they lived, that's where they stayed. If you can take them, a couple of times I've taken them down the, the side entrance to show them there you go that's where your people that's where your ancestors lived. It's, it is so rewarding and as you say it's a shame that it only appeared at this time in my life but I've loved it, most of it.

[01.25.41]



**JM:** And I know from, from my grandson that you're a real hit in school as well going and talking to school parties and, and sharing your knowledge there and I, I would image that at first that was maybe a little bit of a daunting thought to go and speak to groups as well.

**BW:** It was. One of the things when I was at Stevenson College you had to research something and stand up and discuss it. This was in front of the class. I always remember there was two females who were physically ill at the thought of doing that. Twice I've stood in front of Customer Services at Brunton's Hall doing a sort of a, a talk thing. If I know what I'm discussing that's no problem I can do, I can kinda do without notes. What comes up on the screen I can look at it and say right this, this and this. So I have been asked to do; in fact I'm gonny to do a talk this afternoon at the John Bellany Day Centre so again I can, I'll just wing it cos I think I've got enough knowledge to do, you know. The one time I had notes I muffed it and it was across the road in the, the Town House. It was Haddington History Society and I put a lot into it but it, it was; I actually deleted it from my memory stick it was that bad, I'm not doing that again.

**JM:** But sometimes as well though go you not find that if you've got notes you rely on your notes and you feel that you've got to almost read them whereas your winging it is much more natural. Yeah.

**BW:** That's what I was doing. I was, yeah, I was, I was reading it from my notes and I was reading it from the screen and it did get to the point I got lost in my notes. And I did actually say "Speak amongst your selves just now while I sort my notes out". And yeah but yeah I don't, I don't feel; they actually want me ba, they said "When you retire you'll have to come back to do any talks you know school talks".

**JM:** But your recognised and it's wonderful that when people come into this Centre you're always there and always helpful and.

**BW:** There was a funny incident I was at the front desk, at the museum desk, talking to a couple there and this chap came in from one of the other offices to, to do some electrical thing and he looked up and says "Your Bill Wilson aren't you" "Yeah how, how do you know like" "Ah no I've, I've heard your name bantered about".

**JM:** That's nice to be recognised.

**BW:** Oh God I've [unclear] a thirst.

**JM:** So well before we finish is there anything that you would like to share that we've not touched upon?

**BW:** I, I don't know, I sometimes felt that I should really have got to know my parents more because, I mean, if you want your tea, go home your mother makes your tea and that's it and you go out to play or, my dad I saw, I, I almost saw him at weekend because once he got the golf bug you know he was away. So and it's through him I would sit and listen to what he used to talk about his, his youth; his youth which was actually during the war on the ships. I think maybe because I was interested in history, I enjoyed sitting beside him listening to him. And the few things I remember about my mother I remember that as well, but not enough as far as I'm concerned. So yeah I'd like to've been grown up enough to talk to them to know more.

**JM:** I think we probably all feel a bit like that don't we but. Well I'll end it here and I'll say thank you very much and.

[01.29.58]

**BW:** Yeah. It's been a pleasure.

**JM:** I'm still at the John Gray Centre with Bill Wilson we're just going to add a bit about the galas.

**BW:** The galas, the Cockenzie and Port Seton galas, where looking back then they were a wonderful big event and you always seemed to get really good weather it was really nice. All the fishing boats would come back to the harbour and it, it, it was they would be covered in flags. Everybody seemed to help putting it together they, the mothers would look after the, the queen and all the girls that were taking part in it. (Voices in the background) And you would, you would, you would go to the, the lorry with the big white boat on the back of it would go round all the houses picking up all the people that were involved in the gala, the pages, the heralds, the champion and all the ones that were actually gonny go up on the stage to take part in the actual presentation. And my big brother was the crown bearer, I was the crown bearer, my wee brother wasn't though. But yeah it used to go round and you'd go to Cockenzie harbour. You'd come off the boat off the ship which was on the back of the lorry and go on to the fishing boats. And the public could get in the fishing boats as well. It was great there just seemed to be all these fishing boats going out from Cockenzie harbour. There was one, it's usually a small boat, which had the pirates on it and they would launch off flares to make it look like they were attacking the, the other, the, the, the queen the gala queen's boat. And then they would get into Port Seton harbour, they'd all climb off the boats, they would get on to the lorry and then go from there round to where the Pond Hall used to be and where they'd be a stage built. And that's where it'd take place there would be dancing, there was always a maypole, once that was finished you got back on the lorry if you part there you're taken up to the cut, up to the park you get off there and basically that was the end of it. There, I can't mind if there was.

**JM:** You said about getting a wee box. When did you get the wee box?

**BW:** The box. It was, people would come round selling tickets to the houses and that got you, it was it, they still do the white cardboard boxes inside it you would get a cake, a sandwich or two and you always got it was always a very watery orange juice and you got a straw. And you would see these people that were dressed up as pageboys or heralds walking up and down with cakes in their hand and a wee carton of juice. And it, it, yeah there it was a big, there seemed to be so many people in the park. Sadly I've never seen it again since I moved on, but it was always beautiful weather and there was there's still one or two photographs we've got showing my mother's parents with myself. And I remember when I was the crown bearer I always used to talk about my wee green cult, my wee green cult (kilt) and I've actually got a photograph on my phone, somebody sent it to me, because there was always 'the photograph' the queen in the middle and the pages, the heralds all round about, her entourage. And right in the middle there's the wee crown bearer, Mr Bill Wilson or.

**JM:** How old were you to be the crown bearer?

**BW:** Oh old enough to walk and talk I think.

**JM:** All right so not, not the same age as the queen.

**BW:** It was, it was the primary school at the beginning. Oh no, no, no. Oh the queen was primary seven.

[01.33.56]

**JM:** Right.

**BW:** That was the, the big ones you know the real grown-ups if you like. But yeah and they were, they were great days they were really enjoyable. But then again I suppose everybody says that about their youth. The sun shone longer the summer holiday was, were longer but, but then there was a lot more fishing boats and it was a lot more taking part in it. Yeah it was great. Thank you very much, that's the finish now, thank you bye.

**JM:** Thank you.

[01.34.29]