

Interviewee(s): Robert Ian Cowe (RC)	Interviewer(s): Shirley Swinton (SS)
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REGION	East Lothian
TOWN/VILLAGE	Macmerry

Running time: 01.16.35

0h 00m 00s

SS: This is Shirley Swinton. Today I am interviewing my brother, Robert Cowe, who I've previously interviewed on the 10th of September. We spoke about his early life at school, right up until the time he left school and joined the police. So, Robert, would you like to introduce yourself?

RC: Yes, I'm Robert Cowe, I'm sixty-five now and what I'm going tae talk about today is my experiences joining the police in the east of Scotland and... I hope it's interesting.

SS: Ok [*laughter*]. So, Robert, tell me again, what motivated you to join the police?

RC: Em, my father had been in the police. He had been in the police in Fife, but due to the poor wages and the conditions of the... Mid to late fifties, they were very poorly paid, housing accommodation was very, very poor, so he left. However, he did tell stories about the time that he was in the police and probably, different from today, we knew all the local policemen and women in Haddington, where we stayed, because their children were in our classes at the school and we knew who their dads were, and they used tae speak tae us when they were out on the beat, and... They used to speak tae me quite a lot [*laughter*].

SS: Why?

RC: Aw, riding ma bike on the pavement, whizzing in and out of old ladies on the pavement, no lights on my bike, cycling where I shouldnae be cycling and shooting lamp posts wi an air pistol [*laughter*].

0h 02m 14s

SS: Ok [*laughter*].

RC: And they always used to say, they knew everybody, and 'I'm telling your dad'. And... Dad was, at that time, a long-distance Lorry driver, so he was away in London and I knew that he'd be coming home probably Friday afternoon and, as it was in these days, he would get washed, shaved and cleaned up and away down the Gardener's pub, where he would meet the local policemen [*laughter*]. And obviously got told about how many times they had spoken tae me in the week [*laughter*]. But yeah... I thought it would be an interesting job. I didnae think, at the time, oh, I want to join it tae help people, as what the stock answers used to be. Ye know, I think it's great... It'd be great for society, if I came along and helped them. It wasnae really like that. I liked the police shows that was on the TV at the time: *Zed Cars*, *No Hiding Place*, things like that, and I thought I could do that. So, I thought right, I'm going for that, spoke to Dad, he says 'yeah, if you think you can do that, well there ye go'. So, I applied, went into Albany Street in Edinburgh, which was the headquarters of Lothians and Peebles Constabulary-

SS: Mmhm.

RC: -which covered East Lothian, Midlothian and West Lothian, and parts of Peebles.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: So, that was the local force.

0h 04m 00s

SS: So, that was Lothian and Peebles?

RC: Lothians and Peebles Constabulary.

SS: Mmhm. Ok.

RC: Friends of mine who were in my class at the school, and friends from the school – a couple had already joined.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: My friend George Kirkpatrick, he had joined Edinburgh City police.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And... Em, Steven Daly and Rudolph Reshensky...

SS: Mmhm?

RC: They were in the process of joining Lothians and Peebles Constabulary, which is the county force. And a couple o other people that I knew were applying to join the police. Evelyn Lamb, later joined the police; she was in my class at school. So, there was quite a lot of us, em... were going to join the police. So, I sent- I went into Albany Street.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Took the bus into Edinburgh and I went to the headquarters, where I sat the entrance exam, which I thought was really hard *[laughter]*. It was really hard *[laughter]*.

SS: What sort of questions-?

[phone ringing]

We'll stop recording for the phone.

[pause in recording]

This is Shirley Swinton resuming the interview with Robert Cowe, after a slight interruption. Eh, Robert, you were just about to tell me what sort of areas you had to answer questions on to, em...

RC: The entrance exam, well, there was no way of finding out, in those days, what it was like or what you were expected to do. The recruiting department had said... When I spoke to them on the telephone, that it was- you would need to be O-level standard English, maths, reasoning...

0h 06m 10s

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Which I didnae ask what it was.

SS: What's that *[laughter]*.

RC: Cause I didnae want to feel stupid *[laughter]*. Oh yes, uhuh... A good knowledge of English and ye have to be a nice, neat writer. So, I thought, ok, I can deal wi that. I had been spending time reading *The Scotsman*.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Em, because the punctuation was all- was... What I would say was 'correct'.

SS: That was your standard, was it?

RC: That was ma standard, aye. I was reading *The Scotsman* and, basically, my writing's good anyway, so my English was not too bad. So, I was armed wi that, away in. The only thing that worried me was reasoning, and I couldnae get anybody to tell me what reasoning was.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: But anyway, off we went, and there was probably about fifteen, mebbe twenty other candidates sitting in the depths of the headquarters on Albany Street. And we started and English was basically as it was, em... You had to put in punctuation marks in a typed passage.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And then there was dictation by the training sergeant, and I always remember it because it was talking about the Bolshevik Revolution [*laughter*]. So, there was plenty Bolsheviks, Trotskyites and Leninists, and obviously, that was checking to see if ye could spell [*laughter*].

0h 08m 06s

So, I managed to get through that, then there was another passage in English. Then it went on tae maths, which was... Ye know, it was just the maths at the time, so...

SS: Does that mean arithmetic based and...?

RC: Arithmetic based, yeah. A bit algebra, a wee bit geometry. So, done all right wi that. Then, we had to write oot a passage oursel and then came the reasoning. And it was [*laughter*]... It was a train travelling from Edinburgh-

SS: Uhuh.

RC: -and passing the train coming from London, where would they pass? So, luckily I had a wee bit better knowledge of how to dae the time and distance and speeds and I think I must've got them right, aye.

SS: Yeah, I suppose it's just applying your skills-

RC: Skills.

SS: -to problems and...

RC: Aye, and I had-

SS: Aye.

RC: They had diagrams of machines wi cogs.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And one arrow in the middle of the cog pointing one way, and then you were to put the arrow in the top cog correctly. So, ye had to work that out which was pretty simple, if ye knew how to do it, but I can remember looking at people around me who were on the same question as me looking at it, aghast. Yeah, there were quite a few of these, some algebra stuff, some geometry... More basically questions about making ye apply your mind to work out wee problems, so, yeah.

SS: So, obviously you-

RC: I passed.

SS: You passed.

0h 10m 00s

RC: Yeah.

SS: And I suppose dictation would be quite important because ye have to listen carefully to what people are telling ye.

RC: Well, yeah.

SS: And... In the police-

RC: Yeah.

SS: -and, in those days, write it down.

RC: I mean, the... I didnae think of that at the time.

SS: Mm.

RC: But obviously, later on, when you're actually transcribing what somebody's saying to you-

SS: Mmhm.

RC: -it has to be accurate.

SS: Yeah.

RC: It has to be absolutely accurate.

SS: Was there any physical element of the...?

RC: Not at that time, no.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: I expected a sort of fitness test.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: I went home and mebbe a week later, the- we got a letter from the headquarters student department, saying I had passed and had been accepted, provisionally accepted as a constable, but it was dependent on a medical.

SS: Aw right, mmhm.

RC: And I could go to ma own doctor but they would prefer me to go to the local police surgeon which was Dr MacLean in Haddington.

SS: Oh, who stayed across the road-

RC: Who stayed across the road from the police station.

SS: -from the police station, at Hilton Lodge.

RC: Hilton Lodge, that's it. And so... I walked down, made an appointment and he told me to come back two days later at half-past seven at night [*laughter*]. And em, I went and got it. Basically, he measured just about every part of ma body.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: And the whole length of my arms and [*laughter*]... The size of my hands and my feet. Stood me on a cold marble step out- just in the hall, and then looked at the imprint of my footprints-

SS: Oh right.

RC: -on the...

SS: Oh, very clever.

RC: Aye.

0h 12m 00s

SS: To find out if you had flat feet.

RC: Got flat feet, aye, which I didnae have. Took some time listening to my chest, measured my normal chest, then as much as I could expand my chest. Lifted weights, and I'm thinking mm? But anyway, I obviously passed that and he sent it off, and he says 'yeah, you've passed'.

SS: Ok.

RC: He says 'well, I'll send that off'.

SS: And was there any other physical requirements like height or-?

RC: Yeah, the... The height requirement was between five foot- you had to be over five foot eight for a man.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: And... I think women had to be over five foot...

SS: Four, I think.

RC: Four or five foot five.

SS: It was five foot four when I joined.

RC: Was it?

SS: Yeah.

RC: Five foot four, yeah. I remember at the time that, I'm sure, Edinburgh City police it was six foot.

SS: Oh my.

RC: I'm sure it was six foot. I can't remember... Or mebbe five foot ten, or six foot was- cause I had looked at Edinburgh City police but I didnae fancy having to travel intae Edinburgh every day.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Or find accommodation.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Because George, who had joined before me, he was living in accommodation in Edinburgh.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And I didnae fancy that.

SS: Ok. So-

RC: But he was six foot, I'm sure George was six foot. Was he? But anyway, I knocked Edinburgh on the head – I didnae fancy that.

SS: Mm. So, you're still staying at home wi your parents at this point?

RC: Yes.

SS: And how old were you?

RC: Nineteen.

SS: Nineteen, ok. And was that another... What was the age that you could join the police?

RC: Nineteen.

SS: Was it nineteen?

RC: It was nineteen at the time, I think.

SS: Right, ok.

RC: Not eighteen.

SS: Cause it was lowered, then.

RC: Aye.

SS: Because when I joined, it was eighteen.

RC: Was it? Aye. Cause nineteen was the minimum age... Em, minimum age was nineteen... I'm five foot ten, so I was two inches above the... The height that you required. Obviously, I had the physical...

0h 14m 18s

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Em, presence and... Reasonably intelligent [*laughter*].

SS: [*laughter*] Even if ye say so yerself.

RC: Even if I say so myself, yeah. Aye, I was quite- actually, I was quite proud of mysel, actually, passing that exam, because I did find it very difficult... Because I had left school wi no qualifications.

SS: Well, good.

RC: And, so anyway, I got a date where I had to... Think it was the week leading up to the 10th of April, I had to go in, got measured for a uniform: hat, gloves, a gabardine raincoat, a rubber torch, a greatcoat...

SS: A greatcoat is a big... A big woolly coat?

RC: It was a great big woolly coat, aye. I had that for years and wore it for years, especially when I came down here to work in Dunbar because this is one of the coldest places in the world [*laughter*]. Em, and got some shirts and they were blue shirts at that time, a pale blue. Clip on ties, pair o white gloves, pair o black leather gloves, a baton – there was no handcuffs, which I was disappointed in. We don't carry handcuffs – and a wooden baton which felt like a piece o balsa wood. Em, I hauled all this stuff into my car; I had a car at the time, so I was quite lucky. Dad helped me buy that, Mum and Dad helped me buy that car.

0h 16m 00s

SS: What type of car was it?

RC: It was a Ford Anglia.

SS: I can't remember that.

RC: Aye, KSS99C, a grey Ford Anglia.

SS: I can remember the...

RC: Morris.

SS: Morris.

RC: Aye.

SS: Thousand.

RC: Morris 1000.

SS: So, did ye have that after the Anglia?

RC: Aye. Yes, because Dad used the Morris 1000, which was mine, and his old car he traded in too, and he went bought himself a new car. So, I ended up wi no car [*laughter*]. And, em, he says, 'I'll help ye buy a car when ye need one', I went 'no thanks'. But when I had been accepted for the police, Dad says 'you'll need a car' and I went 'I havenae any money'. I just had, really, just a few pounds-

SS: Mmhm.

RC: -that I had managed to save up. And he went round tae Rev Wallace's garage-

SS: Which was in...?

RC: Hopetoun Drive.

SS: Hopetoun Drive.

RC: Aye.

SS: That's right, the-

RC: Which is now the Vauxhall dealership.

SS: That's right.

RC: Used to be Ian Glass but it's got a different name now.

SS: Tunstane?

RC: Tunstall, or something like that.

SS: Something like that.

RC: Aye. So, he went round and here was a two-door, 1200cc Ford Anglia, grey in colour, KSS99C. I wish I still had that number now.

SS: Wow, yeah.

RC: And it had a radio in it.

SS: Wow.

RC: Wow. But... To be honest, it was mebbe about ninety quid he paid for it and I said I would pay him back, which I did eventually [*laughter*]... In dribs and drabs. So, next again day, we were told to be at headquarters at 0730 hours – oh right, ok.

Oh 18m 00s

So, we're now being official now so... Intae Edinburgh, parked the car – there was no problem parking the car in those days in Edinburgh – everybody met at half-past seven at headquarters and away we went to different places. And that day would be- it was the 10th of April, 1974 and we were... Taken to the mortuary was the first place we went to and we were going to be shown dead bodies by the training sergeant and, as luck would have it, there had been a terrible fire in Edinburgh two days before.

SS: Oh dear.

RC: I can't remember if it was a guesthouse or an old folks home but there was about six or seven... Mebbe, aye, five or six really badly burned bodies-

SS: Mmhm.

RC: -from that fire, and were still in the mortuary. So, that's the first thing he went for and there was mebbe six... I think there was eight of us.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Six men and two women and... I think the idea was to shock us, pulling the bodies out and...

SS: Mmhm.

RC: But, yeah. Mm... Showed us how tae fill in the books-

SS: So, sorry to interrupt.

RC: Aye?

SS: Had you seen a did- had you seen a-

RC: A dead body before?

SS: -a dead body prior to this?

RC: I had actually. Yeah, I had. Dad and I were driving along the bypass in Haddington and we came upon an accident where a patient from the local mental hospital had jumped out in front of a truck.

SS: Oh dear.

RC: And it ran over his head and we were just sorta there.

SS: Did you see it happening?

RC: Yeah. We didnae see it happening but-

SS: Just came across it?

0h 20m 00s

RC: We came across it, and the lorry driver was out. There was, obviously... There were nurses.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: A couple of nurses obviously had been looking for him or chasing him.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And the police just arrived mebbe five minutes after that, and he was obviously dead because his head was under the wheel.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And blood everywhere.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: I think I'd be about fifteen at the time.

SS: Oh god.

RC: And that was... That was the only time, then, I had saw a body. So... I really wasnae sorta... scared of seeing the bodies.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: But, ye know, when ye start seeing, ye know, ten bodies at a time, it was quite, em... It was quite an experience, but none of us fainted and none of us were sick.

SS: Do you think that was... what was expected, ye know?

RC: Yes, aye.

SS: You're saying it was to get a reaction or-?

RC: I think they expected to shock you, to get a reaction.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: To see how you reacted. You were asked tae touch them, as well-

SS: Mmhm.

RC: -which wouldnae happen nowadays.

SS: Mmhm. So, where was the mortuary?

RC: The mortuary- well, that...

SS: At that time?

RC: That, it was the Cowgate.

SS: So, it was in the Cowgate?

RC: It was the Cowgate, yeah. And his- I always remember, I used to say it many times, mysel, passing it but the training sergeant had just come intae the dead centre o Edinburgh. This is the dead centre [ae] Edinburgh. Aw right, ok. And I always think of that when I pass that place. And it was a really big mortuary-

SS: Mmhm.

RC: -because, obviously, it covered, mostly covered, the city.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And he said, at that time, it would be unlikely that you would ever be at that mortuary because we were county corps.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And there were mortuaries in Haddington and some of the wee county stations had a mortuary, either attached to the station...

0h 22m 00s

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Or there was a mortuary in most of the graveyards.

SS: Oh really?

RC: Mmhm.

SS: So, where... Right... Where was the... Was there a mortuary in Haddington or...?

RC: Em, yes. The... If I remember right, because I only worked the odd shift in Haddington, at the time.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Cause I was then sent to Prestonpans; that was my first station.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And there was two wee mortuaries at Prestonpans. One was behind the police station.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: A wee building, wi basically just one flat table in it, no windows, and a lockable door.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And there was a town council mortuary which the police had keys for, at the entrance to the cemetery in Cemetery Road, Prestonpans. So, you could use either or. Em, the station sergeant would tell you 'don't use the mortuary out the back'.

SS: Of the police station?

RC: Of the police station. 'Use the county one' [laughter]... 'Why?', 'don't want any mess in there' [laughter].

SS: Oh god, oh dear [laughter].

RC: 'It's better if you use the county one', which we did.

SS: Ok.

RC: So... Aye, so later that day after the bodies in the mortuary, [we] went someplace for coffee, chatting, 'what did ye think about seeing the bodies?'

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Ye know, most of us, ye know, it's something we're going tae have to deal with.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And he says you- 'if you stay in the police, you will see some of the most horrendous sights you could ever imagine'.

SS: Mm.

0h 24m 00s

RC: 'So, that's something ye have to think about, but you will see some horrible things'.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And not really knowing what we were actually going tae see during ma service, that was fine.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: The next thing we went to Edinburgh Sheriff Court-

SS: Oh right, yes.

RC: -where we were formally sworn in.

SS: Oh right, and where was that located?

RC: That was in the Lawnmarket, the- which is now the High Court.

SS: Right, ok.

RC: The High Court was across the road, in those days.

SS: In... Behind the market cross?

RC: Behind the market cross, that's right. That was the High Court but it's now the Court of Session.

SS: Ah, right, ok.

RC: So, the High Court was in there.

SS: Right. So, the Lawnmarket- so, the Sheriff Court was in the Lawnmarket-

RC: Lawnmarket, yeah.

SS: -where the High Court is now.

RC: Yeah. Now... The... It was Edinburgh Sheriff Court.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Bearing in mind that Edinburgh City and Lothians and Peebles were two separate forces and they were two separate sheriffdoms.

SS: Right.

RC: Because I thought that we would be appointed at Haddington Sheriff Court-

SS: Uhuh.

RC: -being the sheriffdom of the court that we were working for, but he said 'no, doesnae matter who does it. I've arranged, it's going tae...'

SS: Mmhm.

RC: I can't even remember his name, but Sheriff whoever... And we all filed into one of the courts in the Sheriff Court building, where he individually swore each officer in.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: And we said the oath to keep the Queen's peace in Scotland and he told us that we were now appointed and we are now police constables in the Lothians and Peebles constabulary. So, we were officially cops then.

0h 26m 00s

From there, we went back to Albany Street headquarters and spent the afternoon filing bits o paper [*laughter*]... And being shown around headquarters; we got shown the radio room and the control room, where they controlled the cars. We got shown the courtroom records department where the police reports would come in. They would sort them out and send them to the various courts. Em... back down to the training and we were filing police reports.

SS: Can ye remember the names of the training people at all?

RC: Yeah, Ian Stuart. Sergeant Ian Stuart.

SS: Mmhm. Ok, yeah.

RC: And Sergeant... I think it was James Sneddon – he actually came from Haddington.

SS: I remember him, Sneddon.

RC: Uhuh. His son was Ian Sneddon.

SS: Ah, and he had a daughter, Gillian.

RC: Yes.

SS: Who was in my year at school.

RC: Aye. Well, he was...

SS: Ah, so he was a training sergeant?

RC: He was a training sergeant, then. Ian Stuart, I think, was one as well and... I can't remember. I remember in the control room, well, we weren't allowed to speak because they were obviously speaking on the radio to the cars and that.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: I remember the chap sitting- the civilian sitting in the chair was actually Alastair Loney.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And... He came off, when he came off the radio, he introduced himself: 'I'm Alistair Loney, I stay in Dalkeith'. Alright. And well, eventually Alastair came to work at Dalkeith and I remembered him but Dalkeith was a different division, in those days.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And then, later on that day, a chief inspector came to see us.

0h 28m 06s

SS: Mmhm.

RC: I can't remember his name, but he said that we were to report to various stations.

SS: Oh right. So, that's where you found out where you were?

RC: That's where you found out.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And I... He had told me 'Superintendent Danny Jamieson from Haddington'-

SS: Mmhm.

RC: -which was a subdivision of headquarters, at the time, 'wants you to go to Haddington, would like you to be in Haddington'.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: So, I thought, well, that's fine. I didn't know Superintendent Danny Jamieson, at the time.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: But he said, 'you're going to be stationed in Haddington, which, I know it's your hometown, but he asks that you go there'.

SS: That is quite unusual, in those days.

RC: That is- it was quite unusual.

SS: Uhuh, uhuh.

RC: I don't know why, whether- I know that a lot of the local police officers, cops, would know who I was...

SS: Uhuh.

RC: Having spoken to me many times before [*laughter*]. So, I came home and I said 'I'm starting at Haddington tomorrow'.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: But later on that night, the phone went and Mum comes through and said 'that's the police on the phone for you'.

SS: *[laughter]* Gosh.

RC: I thought, well, that's unusual. 'Hello?', 'hi, it's...' I don't know who it was, inspector from Haddington. Em, 'there's been a change of plan'.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: 'You're going to be stationed at Prestonpans, and you're starting at six o'clock tomorrow morning' *[laughter]*.

SS: *[laughter]* Oh gosh.

RC: And, aye, well... I didnae think it was ma place to ask why *[laughter]*. I said 'ok, inspector, I'll be there'. So, I went off and when I arrived at the police station at six o'clock in the morning-

Oh 30m 03s

SS: Uhuh.

RC: -the night shift said 'you're no supposed to be here 'til nine o'clock'.

SS: Aw.

RC: I says 'I was told six o'clock'. 'Naw, nine o'clock; you're nine tae five for the next fortnight'. Alright. So, I just waited in the station 'til nine o'clock came. But I got introduced, I met the chaps who were night shift.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And at nine o'clock, one o the station's sergeants came in, old Bob Walker, and... He says 'right, have ye had a cup o tea?' 'no'... Em, 'right, put the kettle on. Can ye make tea?' I went 'yeah' *[laughter]*... So I made a cup o tea, he took me up to his office and basically introduced himsel and then proceeded to tell me what I was going tae be doing the next fortnight. He says 'I've got a Tulliallan date for you', which is the police training college.

SS: Oh right.

RC: 'So, that's in a fortnight's time'.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: 'So, up until then, you'll be working nine 'til five here...

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Eh, until you go.

SS: And sorry to interrupt, but Tulliallan, that's just outside... Alloa? No...?

RC: No, it's outside Kincardine.

SS: Kincardine.

RC: Yeah.

SS: And it's now Police Scotland headquarters?

RC: It's now the headquarters of Police Scotland.

SS: Ok, mmhm.

RC: So, that was the training college, and he asked me 'do you need a travel warrant to get there?'

SS: Right.

RC: And a says 'no, I've got my own car'.

SS: So, what would a travel warrant be?

RC: A travel warrant was what there was- I later found out it was a book of small- it looked like bus tickets-

SS: Mmhm.

RC: -that you could issue to army, navy and air force personnel, should they lose their money, their tickets or whatever. You could issue them wi a travel warrant.

0h 32m 04s

SS: Oh right.

RC: And that would allow them to travel on the bus and the train to allow them to get back to their camp.

SS: Right.

RC: But... Apparently, it was used by the police as well, which I didnae know. He says 'do you want, do you need money to get there?' I went 'no'-

SS: Gosh.

RC: -which was quite strange, but I says 'no, I've got my own car', 'oh, have ye? I've not got a car'.

SS: Oh my.

RC: He says 'you're quite lucky you've got a car' and I suppose I was, at that time.

SS: What was this, nineteen...?

RC: '74.

SS: '74.

RC: 1974. And he says 'I don't have a car, but I do live in a nice house next to the police station' [*laughter*]. Em, no he didnae have a car, he did buy one eventually, aye, but he didnae have a car. So, basically, for two weeks I just went for rolls, they said to walk up and down the High Street from one end to the other.

SS: On your own?

RC: On ma own, aye.

SS: Wow.

RC: I was handed a set o radios, told what my call sign was...

SS: Uhuh?

RC: And tae go down for a walk, which I thought was quite strange because I had no idea what ma powers of arrest were or anything was.

SS: Hoping that ye didn't see any crimes committed [*laughter*].

RC: And I was thinking... Luckily nothing happened, I don't know why they did that. I think... Later on, I think it was to get you used to be out on the street in a uniform-

SS: Yeah, ok.

RC: -and everybody looks at you.

SS: Uhuh, uhuh.

RC: I mean, I did find that everybody did stare at you.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: And you thought that everybody was staring at ye and then ye realised, yeah, they are staring at ye. It's not like seeing a- nowadays, ye could see somebody wi, ye know, pink hair.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: You would look at them once.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: You wouldn't look at them again.

0h 34m 00s

SS: Mmhm.

RC: But people, when they see policemen on the beat, they did in those days anyway, they would watch you, 'what is he doing? Where is he going?'

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Obviously, aye, they're interested in what you were doing. I found it quite strange because I'm thinking am I walking past... Crimes that are being committed and I'm no seeing them? And I thought it was quite a strange thing to do and then come back after, ye know, an hour, right, then they would show ye different files.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: How tae deal wi lost dogs, lost property.

SS: Oh right.

RC: Em... How tae take a complaint at the counter from members of the public, make tea, continually, go for rolls...

SS: So, was Prestonpans, at that time, manned twenty-four hours a day?

RC: It was manned twenty-four hours... It was manned twenty-four hours a day, like most of the stations were.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: Haddington was the subdivisional headquarters, at the time. The divisional headquarters was Dalkeith.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Which was in a different division then, cause it was in Midlothian.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Prestonpans, Tranent... In fact, all the stations in East Lothian were manned twenty-four hours a day, four men per shift.

SS: Men? Were they all men...? At the start?

RC: They were all men at Prestonpans, yeah.

SS: So... So, does that mean that there was somebody in the station?

RC: There was somebody in the station, at the top.

SS: All the time, or-?

RC: There was a- there was two typists.

SS: Right.

RC: One seemed to work a eight 'til four shift.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And the other one worked a sort of ten 'til six shift.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: On occasion, we had a batch of typists who obviously typed all the reports, who'd use a personal radio to get in touch wi us if anything came in.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And they dealt wi the counter.

SS: Right, ok.

0h 36m 00s

RC: But most times on backshift, which was two in the afternoon tae ten at night, you sometimes had to deal wi it yourself. So, one of you was left in the station-

SS: Right, ok.

RC: While the other three would go away and...

SS: Patrol?

RC: Patrol.

SS: Guard watching patrol.

RC: Guard watching patrol, and preserving property. Yeah, that's right. Em, aye, it was... An interesting fortnight which I thought was a complete waste of time, walking up and doon the street, buying rolls, getting papers...

SS: But it seems like you were useful and...

RC: Aye, you felt a bit useful. I was good at making tea... And basically, I think it got you used to walking about in your uniform because it was quite a strange feeling, for the first time stepping out in uniform where ye might have to do something.

SS: Yeah. I suppose walking down the street in yer own clothes, nobody would give you a second glance.

RC: Well, that's right.

SS: And also, it's not in your hometown.

RC: No.

SS: Yeah.

RC: It's not in your hometown. That's right. People would look at you because you're new, obviously. They get to know their local cops. So, a fortnight later I'm away to Tulliallan.

SS: And how long were you there for?

RC: Eh... Now, I think initially it was a month.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: I'm sure the first stage training was a month.

SS: Ok.

RC: Em, residential course – we lived in dormitories.

SS: Right.

RC: In the police college at the time, old-style dormitories, with... They had wooden partitions between the beds and ye had a wardrobe, a set of drawers and a desk to do yer studying. I forgot to mention that we had been issued with two big books: the road traffic book-

SS: Oh right, uhuh.

RC: -and 'The Aberdeen Manual' – it was known as.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: But it was *Grampian's Police Manual*, which covered the law.

0h 38m 06s

SS: Right.

RC: Scots criminal law.

SS: Ok.

RC: We were given that, and I was very lucky the book- the one that I had had a... Had been fully amended up to date. Whereas, a couple of the guys who had arrived at the college, they had piles and piles of amendments to stick in the books.

SS: Oh, that's right. I remember the books were held together with big screws-

RC: Screws.

SS: -like bolts-

RC: Aye.

SS: -and ye had to take them out.

RC: Take them out, and then-

SS: Take the-

RC: -take pages out and replace pages, replace individual sections, and then sign it as you've amended it on such-and-such a date.

SS: That's right.

RC: I was lucky I was given a set that was fully amended.

SS: That's very good.

RC: So, that was good. I arrived at the police college, signed in, got told where my dormitory was, who my class instructor was going to be and was shown where my dormitory was, I was early and... My name was already on my bed. I looked around, there was... That was still in the days of the old forces, so there was cops from the Scottish North Eastern and Counties.

SS: Gosh, right.

RC: Which was obviously the Aberdeen Grampian area.

SS: Mhm.

RC: There was one cop who was opposite me and I looked and it was Zetland Police.

SS: Zetland?

RC: And I thought where's Zetland? I had no idea where Zetland was.

SS: *[laughter]* It sounds German.

RC: *[coughing]* Yeah... *[coughing]* Excuse me. There was nobody else there at the time... *[coughing]*.

SS: Are you alright?

RC: Aye. I looked about and then found one other Lothians and Peebles Constabulary cop.

0h 40m 00s

SS: Mhm.

RC: Who was in the dormitory. It was Glasgow and Edinburgh City Police, Ayrshire Burgh Police... I think there was about sixteen of us in the...

SS: Ok.

RC: In the dormitory. So, basically ten, twelve different small wee forces...

SS: Uhuh.

RC: Everybody started tae arrive. We were told to get intae uniform – eh, shirt sleeve order, roll your sleeves up and proceed to a class and we were given a rough idea where the class was, it was in a portacabin outside-

SS: Oh right, uhuh.

RC: -our class. And we were told that we were... starting right away.

SS: Ok.

RC: So, after filling in forms saying who ye were, writing a note and putting it on your desk wi your name on it, we started right away: Scottish criminal law, common law, powers of arrest – by the first day.

SS: Wow.

RC: And at the end of the class, the instructor came up and said 'PC Cowe?' I went 'yes?' 'Do you know where PC so-and-so is?' I went 'no, I don't know him'. 'Well, he's from Lothians and Peebles Constabulary. His cases are there and all his clothes are there, lying there, do you know where he is?' I said 'no, don't know'.

SS: So, so this was in the dormitory or-?

RC: In the dormitory, aye.

SS: Right.

RC: The guy that I had- well, I hadnae met him but-

SS: Yeah, but you had...

RC: I noticed that his name was on the door.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: He was LPC so he was from my force.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Em, didn't know him and... The instructor said 'come wi me'; everybody else was going away tae get their tea.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: I was away wi the instructor. So, back to the dormitory, and, right enough, there was two suitcases, a jacket lying on the bed... And the instructor says 'I'm going tae open this, if it's open. You're going tae witness it'.

0h 42m 12s

SS: Uhuh?

RC: 'Right, ok'. Opened the suitcases and it's yeah, the police uniform, clothes, civilian clothes, nothing else. Fine, locked it up. Says 'right, pick up the cases', so I picked up the cases, took them downstairs to an office, which I assume was a training office-

SS: Mhm.

RC: -left them on the floor, and was sent away tae get my tea, walked in tae get my tea, got a row for being late – a bollocking for being late as soon as I walked in through the door! Found where I was sitting and had ma tea. I later found out that the guy had ran away frae the college.

SS: Was that before class or?

RC: That was before class.

SS: It was just...?

RC: I think- I never, ever met the guy, and I did find out later who he was-

SS: Uhuh?

RC: -because, em... Once, ye know, I got tae know lots of the cops in the force, guy's who'd...

[*phone ringing*]

SS: Em, stopping recording.

[*pause in recording*]

This is Shirley Swinton resuming the interview with Robert Cowe... [*laughter*] Phone is now on silent.

RC: [*laughter*] It's alright.

SS: So, you found out who he was?

RC: Yeah, I found out who he was and... He just decided that dormitory life, police life, was no going tae be his and he never gave it a chance. He actually got picked up by Stirling- or, it'd be Stirling and Clackmannan Police.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: Walking down the motorway, going home.

0h 44m 00s

SS: Oh my god.

RC: And I kinda thought, well, he's nae even given it a chance.

SS: Yeah... Mebbe quite overwhelming...

RC: Aye, it did-

SS: The whole...

RC: The whole thing seemed a bit... I was a- I was lucky – I'd been away from home before.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: Aye. So, it didnae bother me and then possibly think it, ye know, it could've been his first time away from home, realising that... That this is going tae be a serious job.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: This is no just, ken... Any other job.

SS: Yeah, yeah, uhuh.

RC: This is really different, because you're part of a huge machine.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: You're part of a big system.

SS: Yeah.

RC: I never classed it as being part of the establishment.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: But ye did feel ye were part o a big... A big organisation, a big machine.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: And it was quite a serious machine-

SS: Uhuh.

RC: -because when ye realised the actual power that ye had-

SS: Uhuh.

RC: -what ye were expected to do...

SS: Uhuh.

RC: And I suppose that that could have been quite overwhelming because you're... You have the power over people, in as much as if they commit a crime, you're arresting them-

SS: Mmhm.

RC: -and you're sending them tae court. Obviously, their crime affects their life-

SS: Mmhm.

RC: -but your actions affect their life, as well.

SS: Mmhm, mmhm.

RC: And then, obviously, the power o life and as much as you're ending up going to serious accidents, trying tae help people...

SS: Mmhm, mmhm.

RC: Em... People collapsing on the street.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Sudden deaths... Em, I suppose, when you think of that, it could be overwhelming.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: But didnae really think of that, at the time.

SS: And when you speak about a sudden death, what do you mean?

0h 46m 02s

RC: Well, a sudden death- all deaths in Scotland are investigated by the police.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Which I don't think a lot of people realise that.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: But if it's marked as suspicious or the person who's died has no medical history of being ill, then it's investigated by the police. If they, say, were really ill, then you'd get the local doctor to come along, preferably their doctor, and they'd sign their death certificate, and if they signed their death certificate then there was no further action that the police would do.

SS: Mmhm, mmhm.

RC: But if the doctor didn't give a death certificate, then there would end up being a post-mortem-

SS: Mmhm.

RC: -and an investigation by the police.

SS: And who would you report that to?

RC: The procurator fiscal.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And then, obviously, the procurator fiscal would then...

SS: Decide what's-

RC: Decide, aye.

SS: Decide what's next.

RC: Em, then... I think, once I left college after a month, fully armed wi all my police powers [*laughter*]... I had a wee bit more understanding of what we were actually expected tae do, I went back to Prestonpans and within, possibly, em... A month...

SS: Mmhm?

RC: I think I dealt wi four or five deaths.

SS: Oh gosh.

RC: The very first road accident I went tae was a fatal road accident.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Where a wee boy from Glasgow got knocked down and killed.

SS: Aw.

RC: And he was staying at the camps in Port Seton.

SS: Mm.

RC: Which were, or it was, a holiday destination from Glasgow and, to look at it, there was old sheds, old garages-

0h 48m 02s

SS: Mmhm.

RC: -old train carriages...

SS: Oh gosh.

RC: That people actually came to live in.

SS: It's very different from what it is now.

RC: Well, now it's a proper holiday park-

SS: Mmhm, mmhm.

RC: -wi a swimming pool and aw the rest of it. Then, it was just huts...

SS: Really?

RC: Sheds, old railway carriages that the people rented.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: And they came to be beside the sea.

SS: And what happened to the wee boy?

RC: The wee boy had, em... He had ran across the road in front of a car tae get tae the beach.

SS: Was this just outside-?

RC: Just outside the- where these camps were, where the holiday place is now. And he got hit wi a car and we got sent. And in those days, the ambulance service were in the process of changing from sort of scoop and run, where they just picked the person up and then drove away...

SS: Mmhm, mmhm.

RC: The ambulance service from the various health boards around the country were changing from actually doing something...

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Applying basic first aid... It was long before paramedics came along-

SS: Uhuh.

RC: -but the ambulance drivers, as they were-

SS: Mmhm.

RC: -that's why they get known as drivers, because they just came along, lifted the ill person, and took them to hospital.

SS: Gosh.

RC: They didnae do anything.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: So, that hadnae... That hadnae sort of came to this area. They were still basically just lifting the person ontae a stretcher, putting them in the back of the ambulance and driving them tae hospital. And there was only one ambulance driver there that day. I was told to... He was still alive, the wee boy.

SS: Mm.

RC: I was told to go and attend to him.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And we had been taught basic first aid at the college.

SS: Right.

RC: And... I thought well, I'll go and see. He was heavily bleeding in the head, from his ears, from his mouth and from his nose, and I remember a woman running up and she was an A&E nurse-

Oh 50m 06s

SS: Oh gosh.

RC: -from, eh, Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. And she began, obviously, trying to help him, keeping his airways clear, whatever, and trying to keep the blood away from his nose, and he was still alive, as I say. And the ambulance driver was a poor, old chap, who was an old man, who lifted the stretcher out, put it on the ground and asked me if I could put the wee boy on the stretcher.

SS: Oh.

RC: Which I did, and as I lifted him onto the stretcher, he obviously died.

SS: Mm.

RC: And... Ye know, his body just went totally limp and the nurse had said 'I think he's died'.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Em... I still remember that.

SS: Mm.

RC: I still remember him. He would be... He would be in his fifties... Well, he would be forty-one now.

SS: Aw.

RC: And basically, it was just put 'em in the ambulance and away they went.

SS: And what about... What- was his relatives at the scene or...?

RC: His relatives eventually came, somebody must have ran away – some other kids ran away-

SS: Mm.

RC: -and it was his granny and granddad and possibly an auntie...

SS: Mm.

RC: Loads of kids. And I was wi Gibby Meikle; he was the senior PC at the time. Gibby done- started taking all the details and asking me to take statements because it was... We were in this old train shed, and it was gaslight, there was no toilets and they had sewn together blankets for sleeping bags.

SS: Aww.

RC: And this was their holiday.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And that always struck me as being, ye know, to them this was great.

0h 52m 00s

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Coming from the slums in Glasgow.

SS: And they had come from Glasgow?

RC: Yeah, aye, come from Glasgow to Port Seton, just to be beside the beach, fish and chips...

SS: Hm.

RC: Nice clean pubs, as they said.

SS: Gosh.

RC: And that struck me as being... Oh, different social... thing altogether.

SS: I suppose that's... a thing about the police that I think most impacted on me, that, as ye grow up in yer own home, ye think that everybody's like you and everybody's got a nice house and a mum and dad and...

RC: Exactly.

SS: Ye know, just... obeys the law.

RC: But that... that's exactly right. That's exactly right because I remember Prestonpans was... It was regarded as a really rough place-

SS: Mmhm.

RC: -nicknamed 'Dodge City'. It was really rough. High crime, high deprivation. And the poverty that I saw in the first few weeks was unbelievable.

SS: Mm.

RC: And just as you said, I never, ever thought that people actually...

SS: Mmhm, mmhm.

RC: Live like this.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: We'd go intae houses where... The smell was overpowering... There- particularly one house that I remember going intae, dirty terry nappies had been thrown in a pile...

SS: Mm.

RC: Eh, in a corner of the living room.

SS: Mm.

RC: And they just seemed tae build up and build up and build... It was huge; it was higher than the back o the settee.

SS: Oh, my goodness.

RC: And the smell was horrendous. And I'm looking at this girl who is roughly the same age as I am-

SS: Mmhm.

RC: With two kids...

SS: Oh gosh.

RC: And living in this, and I'm thinking, how have you been brought up like this?

0h 54m 05s

SS: Mmhm.

RC: How did it come to this? But ye couldnae ask them.

SS: No.

RC: Ye couldnae say to them, ken, why are you like this?

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And that bothered me for a long, long time. I kept on asking the senior men 'why are they like that?', ye know.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: I still today dinnae understand it.

SS: Mm.

RC: I always put it down tae their parents must have been the same.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Virtually nobody worked in that town. There were workers.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: It was a mining town.

SS: Mmhm, yep.

RC: The miners got picked up in buses early in the morning and then in the afternoon to go and do their shift. But it was a very hard town, there was constant fights in pubs... Em, really high crime and-

SS: What sort of crime?

RC: House break-ins.

SS: Right.

RC: A lot o house break-ins, a lot [ae] shops getting broken intae, particularly food shops, alcohol, shops that had alcohol, pubs were always getting broken intae, massive assaults... Unfortunately, they had an... An Orange Lodge...

SS: Mmhm.

RC: In Prestonpans, at that time, and the Orange Lodge had a massive social bar function there-

SS: And where was that about?

RC: It was right opposite the... The catholic church.

SS: And where's that about?

RC: That's in West Loan.

SS: As you come in...?

RC: As you come in, aye.

SS: Oh, right, ok.

RC: Aye.

SS: West Loan.

RC: It's now new houses on the right-hand side.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: And it was a massive... It looked as if, mebbe, it had been a really big stately home.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And it was an Orange Lodge, right opposite the catholic church and the catholic hall and there was constant fighting there.

0h 56m 06s

SS: Mmhm.

RC: The Orange Lodge was known as 'Billy's Bar' – it was Billy's Bar, right, because of King Billy, etcetera. It was known as Billy's Bar. Ye were sent tae fights at Billy's Bar... There was constant fights inside that place because everybody went there. It was cheap alcohol, dancing and on... Now I cannae remember what nights... Saturday and Sunday nights... and Friday night, possibly... Em, possibly mass at the catholic church, coming out late.

SS: Mm.

RC: Pubs got kicked oot at ten o'clock at that time.

SS: Oh right.

RC: I think the mass finished at that time.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: So, there was always constant fighting in the street between catholic and protestants. Again, that was something I didnae understand either.

SS: *[laughter]* Yeah.

RC: I just didnae understand that. Em... That was... That was a huge part of their... There was always Orange walks there.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: They were coming from Northern Ireland, the west of Scotland... There was always Orange walks in the Prestonpans area, starting sometimes at four o'clock in the morning, six o'clock in the morning... These flute bands, drums...

SS: And were they policed?

RC: They were policed, yeah. They were policed. They were policed in as much as there were police officers walking with them.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And us probationers, the trainee corps, were mostly on points duty.

SS: Mm, uhuh. That's traffic control.

RC: Traffic control, yeah.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And it basically turned out traffic covered crowd control because you got... The catholic side of the town coming and it was... Shouting, screaming, swearing, throwing things, throwing stones, flute bands playing and again, I'm thinking 'why would they allow this?' Why do they allow this, ken? 'Come on sergeant, tell me, why do they allow this?' 'It's the law. They're allowed tae march'.

Oh 58m 12s

SS: Right, ok.

RC: Peaceful protest... But it didnae turn out very peaceful. And that went on for years.

SS: Yeah.

RC: Years and years and years. Absolute nonsense. If it had been up tae me they would have been banned right away. So, it was quite a rough place. Woah, the poverty was... That struck me. Used to come home and... I remember, the night that that wee boy died, I went home and... It was pretty late, we were supposed to end at ten o'clock and it must've been about... Ooh, eleven, half-past eleven I went in and Dad was still up.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And... He obviously realised there was something wrong and he says 'what's wrong? What have ye been doing today?' So, I told him. I says, ye know... I cannae even describe how I feel; I felt empty.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: I suppose 'empty'. Somebody actually dying in my arms, especially that kid.

SS: Mm.

RC: And he looked at me and he says '...Well, you'll get a lot more o that'.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: He says 'you're actually lucky' and I says 'how do ye mean?' He says 'well, it happened in your first couple of months'.

SS: Oh god [*laughter*]...

RC: He says 'it's happened in the first couple a months' and he proceeded to go into the cupboard and pour me a whisky, and gave me a whisky... And he says... He says 'some police officers in different towns will never see that for ages'.

SS: But then are they lucky?

RC: Well, exactly, are they lucky? And he says 'you're now...' He says 'you'll have to learn how tae deal with that'. And I always remember Dad saying 'you will remember that wee boy the rest of your life'.

01h 00m 04s

SS: Mm, and that's interesting that he said 'you'll have to deal with it' -

RC: Yeah.

SS: -because, in those days, there... What type of support was there?

RC: There was none support. There was no support. You were expected to just crack on, carry on wi the work...

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Write the reports...

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Being the trainee on the shift, it was four men on the shift, eh, Jimmy Sutherland had six months service; I had two.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Tommy Davidson, possibly two years.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Gibby Meikle would be, possibly ten years...

SS: Mmhm.

RC: At the time. So, I, being the junior man on the shift, I done everything. Make tea, made the breakfast, made meals, ran aw the errands, filled the car, went tae Haddington to fill the car wi petrol... I was allowed tae drive cause I had a drivers' licence-

SS: Uhuh.

RC: -and I'd passed ma test, so I was allowed to drive the police cars. No test. Ye know, no...

SS: Really? So, ye had- obviously, ye had passed your civilian test but-

RC: My civilian drivers' test, aye, and I was allowed tae drive the police cars, although they said 'don't put the blue light on' [*laughter*]. I was not allowed to drive-

SS: [*laughter*] Don't draw attention to yourself!

RC: Aye. Aye, basically. Don't drive fast, right. Stick to the speed limit.

SS: Well, fair enough.

RC: Alright, ok. And used to go to Haddington to get fuel.

SS: Whereabout in Haddington?

RC: At the police station in Haddington they had fuel tanks and ye'd draw yer fuel there, sign the logs and sign the station, and basically pick up mail for the station-

SS: Uhuh.

RC: -in the mailroom. Em... Have a chat, usually got a cup of tea – the sergeant would get you a cup of tea... It was Tom- Tommy Murray. I think it was Tommy Murray, at the time.

SS: Mm. Would be.

RC: Eh, inspector was Kenny Whiton.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Kenny Whiton was the station inspector. As I say, the superintendent's office was upstairs. Cannae mind who the chief was... No, I think it was Jake Cornwall was the chief inspector, and then Danny Jamieson was the super.

01h 02m 12s

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Em... So, aye, we were basically... Although ye had a few months service, ye were basically 'ye know what yer doing, ye know what yer powers are – get out there and get it done'.

SS: Yeah, mmhm. Get on with it.

RC: And... I mostly worked wi Gibby Meikle, but occasionally I would work with Tommy Davidson-

SS: Mmhm.

RC: -cause they were the senior men. But anything that happened, you wrote the report.

SS: Yeah, I was just about to ask you there, did you have a mentor, officially?

RC: No, no, they never said he was a mentor.

SS: Aye, yeah.

RC: They didnae come roond... Ye were basically told that they will help ye.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: They will show you how it's done. He says 'you'll find it very different from the training college. It's not as straightforward as you're arrested and write the report and away it goes. There's a lot more involved'. But... This went on for months.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And I was getting snowed under because it obviously was a really busy place.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: On the day shift, ye know, ye got time to write your reports. When it was quiet ye had to sit and write aw these police reports that were handwritten, proper paragraph, proper dots and commas and...

SS: And they had a layout, a specific layout.

RC: Aye, a specific layout. It was handwritten and it was given to the sergeant and he would correct it wi a red pen, either correct where the punctuation should be or he would completely score it out wi a big red line, right across the page and send it back to ye wi a nasty wee note saying 'do that again' [*laughter*]. And then, but this is, ye know, the... the senior man had already read it after I had written it and said 'yeah, that's fine'.

01h 04m 10s

SS: Uhuh.

RC: So, this was obviously part of the training, of getting it chucked back at ye, 'do it again' and... Only one did I write it exactly the same as I had written it before and send it back and it got passed [*laughter*]... And it was obviously part of the system; it was training ye. And then, I remember one day saying to Gibby Meikle, my senior man, I says 'how- how long does this go on?' He went 'how long does what go on?' I says 'me having tae write all these reports!' I says 'I'm absolutely snowed under, I cannae keep up wi them'. He says 'well, it stops now... Because you've asked'.

SS: Really?

RC: Mmhm, 'it stops now'.

SS: He was just seeing how much ye'd take?

RC: Basically.

SS: And if ye'd stand up for yourself, mebbe?

RC: Yeah, aye... He says 'aye, that's fine, aye'. That's it. And then, just oot the blue, you were just doing the things that you done.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: Not what everybody else done.

SS: Oh, my goodness. So, they were obviously... Uhuh.

RC: Part of the test. And you know, they were all... I remember the test, as well. You were sent out on your own, on the nightshift tae empty the pubs, on your own.

SS: Oh, my goodness.

RC: Right? And I had always been nightshift with another cop.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: A couple of times ye come in, there's probably two of yous because ones on annual leave, or he was off sick, or they were at court. So, it's just the two of yous. And the nine tae one sergeant, who used to sit in his cardigan and his slippers at the back of his station, and tell ye what to do. And he says 'right, you'll hae to clear the pubs tonight, Robert' and there was no Bob, cause everybody else used to call me Bob but it was Robert. 'Have you done that before?' I says 'well, I've basically been in the pubs wi Gibby and...' 'Ah right. Well...'... It was Jimmy Sutherland. 'Jimmy Sutherland's going tae do the west end, you do the east end'.

01h 06m 24s

SS: Uhuh.

RC: Right, and there was only mebbe three pubs. There was the Railway Tavern- no, The Forth Tavern which is just down the road from the police station.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: And then ye had to go in the car and drive tae Cockenzie and go tae the Thorn Tree Pub.

SS: Oh, in the High Street, uhuh?

RC: In the High Street. The other one was The Wemyss and The Ship.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: So, there was three, four. By the time ye got to Longniddry, The Legion had shut. Ye didnae need to chuck that out. So, I get ready, right. He says 'just walk down into The Forth Tavern'. The owner, Tommy... He says 'now, listen tae me, right?' and I'm 'yeah?', 'now, listen tae me, right? You go in there and ye get everybody out, right? If they dinnae go oot, ye arrest them and bring them back here'. Right, so... Ok. And I didnae want tae say 'just mysel, right?' Aye, obviously, just yoursel. The owner, Tommy, nice man, right, he says he'll out half a pint o beer on the counter and ten cigarettes. 'Do ye smoke?' I didnae think I smoked at the time; I went 'no'. 'Right, well, what ye do, ye drink the half pint of beer-

SS: Oh my god.

01h 08m 00s

RC: -and if ye don't smoke but ye'll bring the cigarettes back and give them to somebody that does smoke'.

SS: Uhuh, uhuh.

RC: I went 'what? You're joking', 'No'. I says 'but we're not allowed to drink on duty...'

SS: Mmhm.

RC: 'And we're not allowed to accept gifts'. 'Naw, naw' he says, 'this is the real world we're in now, Robert, right. Do as I tell ye'.

SS: [*gasp*]

RC: And I remember I'm walked out the door and he says 'I'll tell ye something right now, Robert'. He says 'don't trust anybody if they don't drink on duty, right? Remember that: don't trust anybody who doesn't drink on duty'.

SS: Oh, my goodness me.

RC: I was... Taken aback. I was taken aback [*laughter*]. So, anyway, I walked down the street and I kinda walked about a bit thinking ken, if I... Just leave it a wee bit longer – cause they had to be oot by ten past ten.

SS: Right.

RC: And ye know, we had started at ten so it was now about half past ten, so I thought there'll no be anybody there and I'll just walk in and say hello, naebody there, and then leave. But I walk in and the place is full: drinking, smoking...

SS: Oh gosh.

RC: And I'm thinking right, so... 'Right, everybody it's time, out ye go' and everybody dropped their drinks, got up and walked oot. I was... [*laughter*] I was pretty shocked.

SS: [*laughter*]

RC: So, they all walked oot, muttering, moaning, mmmmm, ken... Never even finished their drinks, just got up and walked oot and I just sorta turned roond and right enough, the owner was standing there. 'You're new' he says to me, 'yeah, that's right, yeah'. He says 'where do you come from?', 'Haddington', 'aw right. What's your name?' I says 'PC Cowe'. 'Cowe, aye. That's a local name, that. Is your dad in the police?' I says 'yeah, but not here', 'aw right'. Anyway, and he proceeds to pour half a pint of lager.

01h 10m 08s

SS: Oh god.

RC: And he went- and obviously, they're sold in pubs, and pulled out ten embassy and stuck the half pint and the ten cigarettes next tae it and I think, bloody idiot, right.

SS: Ooh, a dilemma, aye.

RC: Mm, yeah, a bit of a dilemma, bearing in mind what the sergeant said and I'm thinking what dae I do? Ach well, I'll have to be like everybody else. So, I drank the half pint, put the cigarettes in ma pocket and said 'goodnight' and he said 'goodnight, see ye tomorrow night' [*laughter*], and away I went and I thought I dinnae believe that. And I'm thinking what have I done? Is this a test? Should I have left it and walked back, and I thought 'nah, he was quite serious'. So, I walked back into the station and 'how did ye get on?' 'Aye, fine, aye'. By that time, I had cleared the rest o the pubs, no incident.

SS: Mhm.

RC: No more drink, no more cigarettes.

SS: Uhuh?

RC: Thankfully. And by the time I got to the- drove down to the ones at Port Seton and Longniddry, the other towns that we covered, they were shut. If they were inside, drinking, wi the doors shut, I don't know. I didn't care [*laughter*]. And I went back to the station, sergeant's got the tea ready, 'how'd ye get on?' 'Aye, fine, aye'. 'Well, what did they gie ye, lager or special?' [*laughter*]. And I said 'it was a half pint of lager', 'aw right. Who have ye given the cigarettes to?' I says 'I'll just give them to Gibby' – cos Gibby smoked.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: 'Aw right' and then he never said anything. And I thought that was just, ken... This is the real world. But Jimmy Sutherland came back- I put the cigarettes in Gibby's dookit and Jimmy Sutherland came back and says 'did that happen to you?' He says 'aye, that happened to me as well'.

01h 12m 02s

SS: And did it happen again? Ye know, if ye went in another time to clear the pub? It was just the first time?

RC: No, no, it was just the first time. Again, an old-fashioned test because...

SS: Yes, sounds like it, doesn't it?

RC: Aye, an old-fashioned test. And the only other time I had drink on duty was at a serious house fire.

SS: Mm.

RC: The inspector opened the pub, which he was allowed tae do under the liquor licensing laws, he could open a pub and give his men drink. And that was in Danderhall, it was three kids badly burnt in a fire-

SS: Oh no.

RC: -and we were there... And, em, the inspector on duty went round to The Maulsford pub, opened it, got in touch wi the owner, opened the pub and all the cops who were there were given double whiskies.

SS: Was that... Eh, when was that?

RC: That was... I was in the traffic then, so that would be about 1979. That was- there was three kids burned tae death in a fire in Danderhall.

SS: Oh.

RC: And we went there wi the premise of... Danderhall was a one-man station and there was one man there.

SS: Mm.

RC: I forget his name but he had actually fought his way three-quarters of the way up the stairs.

SS: Mm.

RC: In this ferocious house fire. The fire brigade hadnae arrived... but, I'm saying they hadnae arrived, they hadnae arrived as of yet.

SS: Mm.

RC: It was a ferocious house fire and he had fought his way up the stairs and he could hear the kids screaming in the...

SS: Oh, it's horrible.

RC: In the wardrobe, of all places.

SS: Aww.

RC: And he knew they were there and he couldnae get to them. And we were outside, we were outside at the front door and... I'll never forget those screams. And... Well, the whole street was oot. Em, all the women were crying and the mother was in an ambulance. The fire brigade had arrived and they were putting the fire out. They were away into the fire and obviously, left the kids there until the CID arrived to deal wi it.

01h 14m 12s

SS: Mm.

RC: But that was... I remember the inspector at the time ken, 'right everybody, ken, round to The The Maulsford'. And he had phoned the owner of The Maulsford pub and the guy came along and the inspector said 'I'm officially opening this pub'.

SS: Sheesh.

RC: And we all got a double whisky.

SS: ... Ye can understand...

RC: Aye.

SS: Yeah.

RC: And I actually went home that night and read the liquor licensing laws to make sure he was right, but he was right.

SS: Yeah.

RC: He...

SS: But again, in the lack of counselling.

RC: Mmhm.

SS: However, that's how people...

RC: That's how it was dealt with.

SS: That's how they dealt with it.

RC: Aye.

SS: In that way. And I suppose he's acknowledging that this is horrific and...

RC: Aye.

SS: Here ye go.

RC: Aye, and especially for the cop who had tried to fight his way up the stairs.

SS: Mm.

RC: He was the local cop. The guy was an absolute hero. I forget his name now; I can picture his face but... He was the local cop. He lived in the police house in the village-

SS: Mm.

RC: -and he knew everybody... And, as I said, by that time, I had been... I had been in the traffic. I had joined the traffic in about 1978.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: I had been eventually moved from Prestonpans to...

SS: Aye.

RC: To, eh, Dunbar.

SS: Right. So, Robert, I'll stop ye there because ye've told me a lot today.

RC: Mmhm.

SS: And I know that ye've got a lot more to say, and thanks very much for talking to me today because this has been really interesting.

RC: Aye.

SS: And it'll give people an interesting insight into just... an ordinary... experience of a...

RC: Yeah, yeah.

SS: A cop in East Lothian.

RC: Mmhm.

SS: So, if you'll agree to speak to me again?

RC: Yeah, yeah, I'll do that.

SS: So, basically ye've covered your initiation.

RC: My initiation, yeah.

SS: So, mebbe next time ye could tell us more about where you worked and your experience in the traffic.

RC: Yeah, yeah.

SS: Another volume.

RC: Another time, aye.

SS: So, thanks very much. Thank you.