

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

Running time: 01.23.41

00.00

SS: So this is Shirley Swinton I'm in [REDACTED] in Ormiston I'm interviewing my brother Robert Cowe. I've previously interviewed Robert on the 18th of September where he spoke about his early life growing up in Haddington and leaving the school and I spoke to him on 18th October where he told me about his very early career in the police. So this is interview number three. So Robert before we start speaking today there's a couple of things I wanted to ask you about.

RC: Yeah?

SS: Would you like to introduce yourself, sorry?

RC: Yes I'm Robert Ian Cowe Shirley's brother and I was born in 1954.

SS: There you go. So when I spoke to you on the 18th of October you spoke to me a lot about your early experience in the police.

RC: Yeah.

SS: And your, your training and your first posting which was to Prestonpans in East Lothian.

RC: Yeah.

SS: Now you mentioned something and I just wanted to ask you about it. You, you spoke about the levels of poverty that you saw in some of the homes in Prestonpans?

RC: Yes that's right.

SS: And what I was wondering about that was when you were doing your initial training because you said it was a shock to you.

RC: Yes.

SS: And when you're doing your initial training did you receive any sort of input from the police or any other organisation about the different social conditions that you would maybe encounter in the police?

RC: At the police college

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the instructors certainly described what you would meet in towns where there were poverty. But they didnae tell you how you would deal with that and some officers went to nice towns where they never saw that, but we got no input other than being told that you will find that.

SS: Right, OK. So in circumstances where you might come across a situation; I think one that sticks in my mind was, you know, you were in a house with a young girl with a baby and she's obviously, well I can't say obviously at all I can't make a comment on that, but she with a pile o' soiled nappies in the house, you know, you might think to yourself this person's struggling and I'm sure you would've come to other situations where you think well this person's needs help.

SS: So what, what would you have done what did you?

RC: Well . . . as a human being you would obviously see these people they, they, they were needin' help. They were, they werenae getting the help from their families, partners, husbands, whatever. They were just getting no help and you could see that they were absolutely struggling. The only people that we could sorta contact at that time we knew that that the social work department would deal with that. However you had little or no contact with them; firstly you had to inform your shift sergeant what you had saw, what *your* thoughts were and he would advise you to phone the social work department. You would fill in a social work liaison form basically

[00.04]

telling the rest o' the officers what you had done and why you had done it, you would contact the social work department by telephone, you'd tell them. What they did after that we don't know there was never any feedback from them.

SS: Right.

RC: We knew that we could phone them, but we didn't know what happened because there was no, there was no liaison really between them there wasnae a multi-agency report.

SS: So, so. Approach right.

RC: Approach it's, it's what they have nowadays. There was just nothin'. And then the only way you could find out is, is go back and ask the people who were needin' the help.

SS: If anything had happened or?

RC: And nine times out o' ten nothing had happened.

SS: And I suppose as well . . . that there's the trust obviously you're the police.

RC: Yeah.

SS: What're you doing comin' in here?

RC: Exactly, aye.

SS: It's my business. But also I think maybe possibly a, a fear of social work and what might happen to the children.

RC: Yeah. Yeah I think, I think I know, I know that in, in, in other cases that we were involved in had there been house searches for stolen property, house searches for wanted criminals if there were children in the house at the time that you were carrying oot the search and possibly one or both parents were arrested then the, the they were actually the, the kids would probably be taken to the police station as well to wait for a social worker to come and take the kids away.

SS: That's quite hard so and, and as you say today's quite different because there maybe been more involvement in what was happening and.

RC: Its total, it's totally different. A lota involvement but there was virtually no training possibly for oh at least ten years into my service before we got detailed trainin'.

SS: Because what's actually just cropped into my mind now as well is child protection.

RC: Exactly,

[00.06]

yeah I mean when I, when I joined the police the, the policewomen's department was a separate department from the men. And the policewomen at that time they dealt with most of the child protection cases, sexual offences.

SS: Right, OK, OK, right.

RC: They had the contact with the social work department and they knew what was happenin' but however the . . . and I think it would be 1975, maybe possibly '76, the policewomen's department was done away with and they became street cops. There was no policewomen department so and then they got paid the same as men, they done the same duties as men which was fine. That's the way it should've been to get paid the same as men, however we lost a huge . . . thingway knowledge of what happened and what do you do with kids because they dealt with them.

SS: So that wasn't real, at that time that, that's interesting so at that time they had this department and whether it was women or not they had a department that dealt with circumstances or situations where children were involved.

RC: Yes. Yes.

SS: So was there anything at all that replaced that?

RC: Nothing, nothing within the police. Not until years, years later where they, they, they would be in, investigatin' crimes *against* children.

SS: I, I, I can remember was; I'm, I'm thinking of a person called Ian Morrison.

RC: Yes.

SS: And he used to be the village policeman in Gifford.

RC: Gifford, yeah. [00.08]

SS: And he became a; was he called a juvenile liaison officer?

RC: Liaison, liaison officer. That's right.

SS: So he must've well I'm just surmising perhaps I shouldn't but.

RC: Well he did aye they, they, they, the, the, there were Ian Morrison was one I'm trying to remember who I think most stations had a senior man who was the juvenile liaison officer and you had any problems with children, children that you had come in contact wi' either through criminal means or just by chatting to them on the street and having a chat with them and listenin' to what they were saying you would pass the details through them.

SS: Right.

RC: And they would obviously contact the, the, the social work department.

SS: Right.

RC: But before that it was, it was the policewomen's department that dealt wi' everythin'.

SS: That's interesting well I just wanted to clear that up because it was worrying me.

RC: Aye. Aye, aye.

SS: Right. And for you when you joined the police in 1994, '74 actually sorry that's my mistake 1974.

RC: Aye '74 aye.

SS: I know that you had an interest in what was going on the world around you so you want to give a wee bit of context to what was happening in Britain at the time you joined the police to give it a wee bit ae contact, context?

RC: Yeah. Well the, the, the, the early '70's was possibly a, a, a good time to be alive I suppose at that time. We'd sorta come out the '60's there was no . . . or there was new technology coming on. We were hearing stories about computers and the fantastic things that they could do never thinking that nowadays everybody's got one, they carry one wi' them a' the time.

[00.10]

But '74 the, the, the Troubles in Ireland had been going for six years or so. There was people getting blown up in Ireland every day, shops where getting blown up, soldiers were getting killed. There was a three-day week working in the early part o' '74 because ae sorta recession . . . and people where working three days and then no' getting paid for two. There was electricity shortages, fuel shortages just everything seemed to be going nowhere in Britain at the time.

SS: That just all adds to the difficult circumstances some people found themselves in I suppose.

RC: Well that's right, I mean the police werenae certainly no' working three day weeks. We were working I suppose harder than, than, than ever. But I mean the, the, the things that happened that year were, were shocking. The, there was . . . oh the IRA blew up Gilford pubs, there was the Birmingham pub, pub bombings which just went on and on and on and turned out it wasnae the people they had arrested, but they've never ever brought anybody to, to justice for that.

SS: You're talking about the IRA that's the Irish Republican Army?

RC: Republican Army, yeah. And I know that there were absolutely frightened that the IRA would start bombing the mainland in Scotland other than just attacking targets in England, attacking parliament . . . it was, it, it was an, an interesting period at that time; there was two general

[00.12]

elections that year.

SS: God, right.

RC: I remember I think one at the . . . one at the beginning o' the year and one later on in the year and I think Edward Heath in the Conservative government tried to form a coalition wi' the, the Liberals then which was led by Jeremy Thorpe who in later years turned out to be a really bad person.

SS: Well allegedly?

RC: Allegedly. My so that.

SS: Yes, so a lot going on that gives what's going on in the, the, the communities maybe a wee bit o' context as the people are getting on wi' their lives and, and I suppose you don't know the impact that this may have had on people.

RC: Aye. Aye. That's right, aye. No. Nut.

SS: So we left you in Prestonpans as a young police officer, what happen to you after that; that's a very big question so take it a step at a time?

RC: That is a big question. A step at a time, well af, after that, after I was there for pos, possibly up until 1975, early '75, and then I got posted to Dunbar. Dunbar had just had a brand spanking new police station built. It was big, still four men per shift but . . . it was a really, really big police station and . . . didnae know why. It had more cells than any other police station.

SS: Really?

RC: Aye, and it had bomb-proof . . . windows; I always remember being shown round the station by the senior man on the shift I was goin' to be working with, it had bomb-proof windows unbreakable windows as well.

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And I thought that was quite strange and it had offices everywhere. And it later turned out they obviously knew that they would be building Torness Nuclear Power Station further down the road.

SS: Aaah right OK. Right, so I think making preparations for that?

RC: Yeah, I think so.

SS: And actually in, in view of what you've just said though 1974, you know, IRA maybe targeting the mainland and, and suddenly you've got a police station with bomb-proof windows.

RC: Aye. Yeah. Aye, well. That's right well, that, that was the sort of conclusion that the guys that I was, was working with at Dunbar that's what we thought it was for.

SS: Ah.

RC: And we thought it possibly could be; you see or you did see on the news that they were mostly in London and Manchester that if IRA suspects or any other terrorist organisation suspects they were always taken to specific police stations.

SS: Yep that's right, ah-ha.

RC: And the police station or the divisional HQ at the time would be Dalkeith which was just a, a group o' old buildings.

SS: I was about to ask that, so Dalkeith that was the; you've mentioned before that that was the divisional headquarters but it was in an old.

RC: They were, they were in, they were in old buildings it was.

SS: Can you remember where?

RC: Yeah I can remember where, it's were there's a block o' flats now it's opposite, it was opposite the garage just down from were Tesco's used to be.

SS: And is that?

RC: On the main street and it was there was the police workshops, there was one, two, three, four . . . five, six police houses

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that were being lived in behind the station and the CID (Criminal Investigation Department) was in one police house upstairs, downstairs was the collator's office, the intelligence officer's, office.

SS: Right.

RC: The traffic department were in the downstairs of the next house and upstairs was the road safety department.

SS: Right, so that's the main road going through Dalkeith as, as you go out to the A6?

RC: Yes, go out to the A68.

SS: 68.

RC: It was on the left.

SS: Right.

RC: And it was, it was, it, it looked like it had been an old . . . not quite stately home but a, a, a, big house basically.

SS: Right.

RC: Lots o' things added to it obviously. Cells were put in it and the chief superintendent and the superintendent o' the division they worked from there and the cops worked in fae Dalkeith.

SS: Right, OK so we have diversified slightly but I, I just thought that was interesting talking about I, I didn't realise that Dunbar police station was built at that time. You can tell by looking at it, the style of the building.

RC: Yes. Aye. Aye. It's still looks quite modern now, it still looks a wee bit modern.

SS: So just for people listening Dalkeith police divisional headquarters that moved eventually to a new site.

RC: A new site, yeah.

SS: What would you call, what's that called?
RC: It was . . . it was next to the Jewel and Esk Valley College.
SS: Right OK.
RC: On a bit piece o' land there and it started to get built round about 1979 . . . no 1978 and it was opened in 1980.
SS: OK.
RC: A great big modern looking building with lots o' cells, bomb-proof.
SS: Right.
RC: Gates,

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car parking whatever. All the departments where, where put there.
SS: So get. And this is getting built in this kinda protected building really.
RC: Yes, yeah protected, aye.
SS: So jumping back, where was the police station in Dunbar do you know where the police station was then before?
RC: Back. Before, I believe it was.
SS: Its present location is on the West Port isn't it, yeah uh-hu?
RC: On the West Port, before I think it was in the, next to the town hall.
SS: Oh right ah-ha, it's on the High Street.
RC: I believe on the High Street although was never in it, but it was just a, a, a horrible poky old building.
SS: Right.
RC: Part of the, the town hall where it had basically a, a front desk, an office wi' a, with a front counter in it and a coupla rooms at the back and, and I, I don't think it even had a cell.
SS: Right, OK that'd [be] quite interesting to look into that actually. So you're at Dunbar, lovely new station, how long were you there for?
RC: Aye. Yeah. I was there up until 1978.
SS: Right.
RC: And . . . it, it was a nice place to work Dunbar it was a fishing town . . . there was a lotta big agricultural farms surrounding Dunbar, lotta farmers and the cement works was working at the time; still there but I mean it, it.
SS: Was that Blue Circle?
RC: Blue, it was Blue Circle at the time.
SS: At the time. Is it called is it Lafarge now?

RC: It's Lafarge now yeah. It was Blue Circle they were big employers, big employers. Even, even, even the farmer, the, the farms round about they were big employers because of the, the, the good soil that surrounds Dunbar.

SS: And you mentioned

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Torness Nuclear Power Station where you based in Dunbar when that was being built or . . . later?

RC: No but that, when that was being built the . . . I was there when it was announced it was goin' to be built and there were compulsory land purchases much of the wee small holdings round about where it was built. There was a lotta controversy about that, people refusing to move and didnae really get involved in that because never had any trouble wi' them there wasnae a really a police matter it's a civil matter. And there were surveyors and diggers.

SS: Right.

RC: Moving about. But just never really had much to do wi' that. But they built a, a village near Innerwick for the workers. There was apparently goin' to be up to 4 and 5,000 workers comin' to live there.

SS: And that's near Innerwick?

RC: That was near Innerwick that's now the, the, the caravan site.

SS: At Thurston?

RC: At Thurston.

SS: Oh right ah-ha.

RC: It was . . . it would be a coupla years later by this time I was, I had been sent to Edinburgh on attachment to the traffic department.

SS: OK.

RC: So myself and two other . . . guys from the county were sent intae Edinburgh to do a traffic attachment because there was no vacancies at Dalkeith or Livingston. So's two from, two from A division which was

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East Lothian, Midlothian and one from F division which is West Lothian and we had to go into Edinburgh.

SS: So did you apply for that?

RC: Yeah I applied for that.

SS: OK.

RC: I got the choice to wait; it could be months and months, possibly even coupla years before I would've got a traffic attachment at Dalkeith or I could go now and work in Edinburgh. So I thought well I'll, I'll have a go at that. And we were the first county cops that went in and

where treated as the county muppets as they called us, but however very little contact wi' them really at the time because we had a three week intensive driving course to pass.

SS: OK.

RC: To see if we would be good enough to, to actually drive the big, powerful patrol cars.

SS: What did that entail your course?

RC: The course was . . . basically driving to a traffic system, a, a tried and test system that the police use. And it would basically be classed as an intermediate driving course. You had to pass that it had; you had to be a good driver, you had to have good mechanical knowledge of vehicles and you had to especially have a good knowledge of road traffic law.

SS: Right.

RC: And . . . what, the, the, the three of us passed and we were assigned to different shifts.

SS: Right.

RC: To work alongside a, a, a senior man and by a very, very quickly became we were the muppets because these guys they just didnae know how to write reports.

SS: Ah so there's a different skill set will we say

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instead of.

RC: It was yes it, yeah there was a different skill set because the vast majority of them . . . if you got a criminal report you took him to the nearest station and handed him over to the, the bar sergeant and the sergeant would ask you questions and he would write the report.

SS: Ah right. Yeah, that's, that's worth mentioning actually because that was a very different system from Edinburgh *City* police or.

RC: City, aye. Any city would've done that, yeah.

SS: Ah-ha. Who, who exactly as you say you just took them to someone else and they did all the paperwork whereas you as a.

RC: As a county cop you had to do everything yourself, there was handwritten reports that you submitted to your sergeant, he read it over and obviously by this time you were submittin' reports that very rarely needed any corrections or amendments. And he would pass it to the typist, the typist would type them up, type all the copies. You'd get it back read it through to make sure there was no typing errors and sign it or sign a' the copies and give them back to the typist and she sent them to court and records, one, one in the station, one somewhere else, one somewhere else.

SS: Procurator Fiscal.

RC: Procurator Fiscal yeah, court and records got one . . . one in the station and I always kept one myself in a file just to make sure that I could remember what I had done.

SS: Right OK.

RC: But, but the Edinburgh City cops at the time, even wi' a drunk driver, which really surprised us because we dealt wi' a drunk driver from the initial breath test at the roadside right to the pol, right to the police station either taking blood,

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urine or gettin' a doctor to come.

SS: That would be a doctor that'd take the blood though.

RC: Oh yes, aye.

SS: Just, just to clarify.

RC: Aye, aye, aye, aye we werenae allowed to take blood. But, I mean it was the, we could take the urine samples that was easy. But and then complete a' the paperwork and there was quite detailed paperwork to complete, seal up the, the blood samples that the police surgeon had taken or the urine samples, seal them up properly and send them away to the lab. And the results would be sent back to you and you done the report and . . . arriving in Edinburgh finding that guys of quite a lot o' service didnae know that.

SS: Right.

RC: Because they just took the, the, the, the, the suspect in to the nearest sort o' divisional station to where they had caught the drunk driver and passed it over to a, a senior off, a, a senior PC [police constable] or the bar sergeant. Stood and explained a' the circumstances the sergeant would note a' the details and the sergeant and the office man would do the, the rest o' the procedure and you walked back oot the door.

SS: I, I suppose I'm just thinking about this . . . as in a way in the county you're dealing with a bigger area.

RC: Yeah.

SS: Where in the city it's quite an intense area, oh population wise, so I suppose maybe.

RC: Yes it's to get, it's to get the men back on the street.

SS: Uh-hu, uh-hu, or women.

RC: Or, or women, aye but it's to get the cops back on the street. And everythin', they had a department for everythin', accidents . . . up to minor to serious accidents . . .

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you would arrive, obviously organise an ambulance for the seriously injured, get them away you'd have a' the details you'd fill in a booklet and you would hand that in to your sergeant at the end o' your shift. But that booklet was sent away to whatever division the accident had happened in and there were cops there who were specifically deal with a traffic inquiry.

SS: Right.

RC: They did a' the follow ups, they did a' the charging and they, they, they did it in Edinburgh like that whereas in the county you done everythin'. You charged them, done the measurements, drew sketches . . . followed up wi' people who were injured . . . filled in the, you know, submitted the report for the Procurator Fiscal, sent it away. But in Edinburgh it

was dealt with by different departments. But it obviously worked and worked in, in, in a' the major cities for *years* like that.

SS: And I suppose it must've had an impact because working in the county and you're following a, a traffic incident from the beginning to the end virtually. At the end there may be a court case and therefore would you not be required to go to court?

RC: Yeah you went to court the; when we did go to court the, the sergeant had submitted a statement for you.

SS: If you were in Edinburgh do you mean?

RC: If you were in Edinburgh he had already submitted a statement for you. There was no signature on it it was just your name and basically what you had told the sergeant; I was drivin' along the road I suspected the driver in front was a drunk driver, stopped him got his details, smelling strongly o' alcohol, gave him a breathalyser

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he failed, he was arrested, taken back to the station with the relevant times and that was your involvement in the city.

SS: At. So in the city would, would you then also be required to go to court to say that?

RC: Yes.

SS: Right OK.

RC: You were yes, yes. However, in the county you, *you*, *you* did that you, you, you, you, you know sorta collated the evidence, done all the reports, done the complicated paperwork that drunk drivers, drunk drivers were and still are probably and they had to be exactly right.

SS: Right OK.

RC: So it was, it was a bit o' a culture shock in a sense because it was our, our chance to ca' these guys who're, you know, 20 and 25 years' service, you know, image no' bein' able to dae a report like that no. I worked, I worked there for possibly comin' up two years. But I had my name in to transfer back to E Division to work in the county.

SS: Right OK.

RC: I wanted to come back.

SS: And did that happen?

RC: That happened.

SS: Right.

RC: About 1979 came back and started in the traffic at Dalkeith which covered East Lothian, Midlothian and some nights, parts o' the Borders as well.

SS: OK. So the whole, so you were in the traffic division?

RC: Ah-ha.

SS: And your area was?

RC: Yeah that the East Lothian, Midlothian; East Lothian, Midlothian. Some nights it would be parts o' Peeblesshire.

SS: Right.

RC: Other nights it would be right down from East Lothian right doon to the English border because the Borders patrol car would be in its bed [unclear].

SS: Right, so just.

RC: It just went to its bed in the

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and it just wouldnae make, there was no, no traffic cops doon there. There wasnae very many in the Borders.

SS: Right.

RC: And if the Eyemouth car which covered the, the A1 and round about Duns right to the border; if the car was in its bed then we had to cover.

SS: Did that mean there was nobody on duty to?

RC: There's nobody on duty so we had to, we had to do that.

SS: OK, OK.

RC: And, and some nights you were, you were away doon the Borders dealing wi' fatal road accidents, serious accidents, high value thefts, stolen cars . . . so it was really, really busy.

SS: Right OK, so that brings me to the, the, the range of; you've already told me about, you know, people driving under the influence of, of drink and attending accidents so just sort of expand a wee bit on the range of.

RC: Aye. Aye, yeah. Aye. Aye, long but the, the purpose was to; the main purpose was free flowing traffic, had to keep the traffic flowin'.

SS: Right.

RC: So at that time, right up until well in to the late '90s the A1 had a terrible rep, reputation for fatal accidents and that, that was the case. Some, some shifts you'd be back-shift for a week you would have at least three fatal accidents . . . on that road . . . during your back-shift week, they'd be three in a week.

SS: Wow that's a lot.

RC: And then maybe the next again week you'd have one during the day, one at night. It was just constant.

SS: And what was the . . . I suppose you've identified an area that.

RC: Aye.

SS: High accidents so what was the,

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the problem?

RC: Well the problem was you had high, you had high accidents on the A68 goin' south.

SS: Right OK.

RC: The A7 goin' south, the A702 goin' sort of west and doon, doon the Borders that way. All the main roads had fatal accidents up and then you had your fatal accidents in towns, pedestrians gettin' knocked doon and it was constantly dealing with serious and fatal road accidents. And these are apart from the total tragedy of what you were, of what happened obviously, sometimes it was one person in the car sometimes it was whole families in the car and just absolutely traumatic every single time. And our responsibility was deal with the accident. Luckily bein' in the county the divisional cops who worked at the stations they would come and help and they would help us deal with the bodies; take the bodies away for us. But then at one point we had to obviously . . . go to the families, get a family member, go into the mortuary show them the bodies to identify the bodies. And, on the odd occasion then, depending on the circumstances, you were called back in to the post mortem. And we took photographs o' the accidents the vehicles were taken back to the workshops in Dalkeith where we stripped them down if possible to find out what, possibly if there was any, any mechanical defects.

SS: So that was you or was there, was there mechanics there to do that?

RC: That was. No that was us.

SS: Oh right.

RC: The mechanics, the mechanics werenae allowed to touch it.

SS: Right OK.

RC: It had to be us.

SS: Right.

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RC: So that's why you needed good mechanical knowledge.

SS: Right.

RC: And just to make sure a lotta guys *were* ex-motor mechanics who were in the police, but we were a' sent on courses to Stevenson College for . . . one is . . . police inspection. It was a City & Guilds it was police, Police Officers Inspection Certificate and the other one was being able to . . . strip . . . engine parts or brake parts completely down, completely in bits build them back up, be able to take photographs o' them and accurately describe what was wrong wi' them.

SS: Right.

RC: Or if they were OK and that went on for years and years and years.

SS: And so did the courts obviously accept that, you know, you've got you qualifications and?

RC: Yeah, we,... Because you had the qualifications and the experience traffic patrol officers were regarded as expert witnesses.

SS: Right OK.

RC: There were few; few police officers in the police were regarded as expert witnesses. Some CID officers were classed as expert witnesses because o' their experience and the job that they did, police photographers, fingerprint experts, traffic officers were expert witnesses and that was . . . a horrible part o' the job. We also dealt wi' a lot of industrial accidents on different sites, accidents on the railway, because at that time British Transport Police took so

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long to come. We were just told to hash on and do it. And the way that it worked is . . . one o' the things I remember; most of the divisional sergeants, at different stations, would specifically ask for traffic officers to come to deal wi' railway accidents and any sort of horrible industrial accidents because the cops that they had on duty where either very young probationers and had never dealt wi' anythin' like that so they wanted us to deal wi' it.

[REDACTED]

SS: you, you, you're tell me that affects you, but the police did they offer you any counselling or?

RC: No there was nothing at the time in the, the first time I did encounter that was after ten years of being in the traffic we were subject to tenure of post which meant you've been there ten years we would like you to go somewhere else.

SS: Right.

RC: Right. And it was an, it was an English thing tenure of post . . . and it's basically to give other officers a chance to get intae the department.

SS: Oh OK, OK.

RC: And us to go somewhere else. So but I couldnae, I couldn't have asked to go say alright I want to go to CID . . . because I couldnae go to another specialist post.

SS: Alright, so it'd be back.

RC: So the only, the only place I could go was back on the beat. So . . . I went to Musselburgh, but; aye I went to Musselburgh but before that actually.

SS: So as a beat?

RC: As a beat cop.

SS: Oh right.

RC: But I shoulda mentioned that in 1992 they set-up a specialist unit in Haddington and put six men and two patrol cars to patrol the A1.

SS: All right.

RC: Because the amount of fatal accidents were happenin'.

SS: In 1992?

RC: 1992.

SS: Right.

- RC: And that lasted up until Police Scotland started.
- SS: When was that . . . police?
- RC: 2013 I think.
- SS: Police Scot. Right OK.
- RC: So that, that, that was, that was, that was my main job then it was patrolling the A1.
- SS: So were you in Musselburgh before that or after that?
- RC: No, no before that.
- SS: Before that, for how long?
- RC: That's right no after I was 1992 I think it was 1999 I got, no 1998 I got tenured and went to Musselburgh.
- SS: Ah right.
- RC: Right . . . so.
- SS: How'd you feel about that?
- RC: Well, to be honest, I wasnae very happy because the amount o' qualifications that we had, the traffic had, they lost that and I wasnae allowed to use any o' these qualifications on the street.
- SS: Yeah. Right.
- RC: Ma, I had, I wasnae allowed to use any o' the photography skills we had been taught, any o' the vehicle examination skills apart from basic, no inspection skills, no measurement skills, no sketch skills nothing at all. You're back to bein' basically just a, a foot soldier. And I thought what a complete and utter waste o' money, I mean they spent . . . the, the, the driving course, the advance driving course that you did at Tuliallan it's a month and it's a month intensive, fast drivin'. And . . . then after you do that you go back and do another months, another month called the traffic patrol officer's course which is legislation, pure legislation; and it's a horrible course. But it, you know, you're, you're taught a' these things, you know, and you're, you're regarded as an expert witness when you go to court now, no you're no'.
- SS: Right so then what happened; so you're in Musselburgh?
- RC: Yeah.
- SS: In 1998?
- RC: Yeah, about 1998.
- SS: And then what happened?
- RC: Roughly, it was roughly about that time I would reckon there were . . . PC's and sergeants from each division were taken away and taught to be counsellors for . . . incidents.

SS: Oh right.

RC: And the first time I encountered one o' these counsellors was . . . durin' a night shift;

[REDACTED]

and I think the next time we were day shift, which would be so many days and rest days later, we were told to meet in one o' the meeting rooms at Musselburgh Police Station and a

[0.43]

PC from . . . C Division which is west o' Edinburgh came and spoke to us about what we had saw, how did we feel about it. That was the first time I had any sorta counselling and . . . it was, it was hard tae say how we felt at the time because once he had went away, I mean he, he was a fellow cop, he was doin' his job and we thought "Mmm that's a strange thing" why are, you know, why have they introduced this.

SS: After 24 years.

RC: Aye after a' this time so I don't know whether it came as part o' the Health and Safety at Work Act, I don't know. At that time well they had, everybody had their own ways o' dealin' wi' things. Didnae really . . . I didnae think it helped me any.

SS: Right.

RC: But thereafter any, any sudden death, any traumatic incidents that you were at and fatal accidents . . . somebody would come along and counsel you; it got quicker.

SS: Right as people, maybe, got better.

RC: Sometimes. Aye it, it came and then I think they, a department was created where they had proper . . . men and women who were not cops, but they were trained psychologists and whatever they came much the same. And cops just, they had to go you had no option where before you had the option nah I'm no' goin' tae that. But I'll, I'll go and have a cup o' tea while youse are all chattin' away about how that person died.

SS: Right, OK. Right, OK. Right OK. Yeah.

RC: But it became compulsory, you had to go. Did it help? I, to be honest I don't know, I don't know.

SS: Well

RC: Who knows?

SS: Aye who knows, yeah, and I suppose it's a, a duty of care or?

RC: Who knows? It, it yeah, aye a duty it may, it may have helped and could have helped with young cops who had less service and never seen a lot a these things.

SS: Yes I see yeah, yeah.

RC: And then as they were gettin' sent to these things, gettin' counselled it probably would've helped them to deal wi' it differently than how we did because we did it ourselves.

SS: Right, yes.

- RC: We did it ourselves as you know, as you know you did it yourself.
- SS: Yes. Yeah but there might always be people, I don't want to even talk about it and maybe that, I, I don't know that's the danger.
- RC: Yeah. Aye I know. I mean I was lucky because in a sense when dad was alive I spoke to him, but, Valerie, she had worked in the police operations room so she would know of the incidents that she was sending the cops to.
- SS: Right, OK.
- RC: And I could sit and chat to her, what happened.
- SS: So there was somebody, yeah I suppose that's, yeah.
- RC: There was somebody here so that had a wee bit added advantage. Some other, some, some other police officers were married tae, tae, tae cops so they could, they could talk amongst themselves.
- SS: Cops yeah.
- RC: And you would chat to the firemen there after the incident, the paramedics if they were still there. Odd occasion you'd have to go and speak to the paramedics to get statements or get statements fae the firemen, you would chat about a' I remember you, aye you were daein' this you were daein' that [unclear].
- SS: So there's that sort of group and support really. It's almost doing therapy yourself in the, in the; you're talking about it and that.
- RC: A group support aye, aye. Self, aye yes you, you learned how to deal wi' it. If you don't then you suffer.
- SS: Yeah ah-ha.
- RC: You do suffer. As, as I said the last time, you know, the guys who came back and the girls who came back from Lockerbie some o' them were in a hell of a state.
- SS: And Lockerbie

[0.47]

obviously was the Pan Am flight that was blown up over Dumfries, Dumfries? Well aye.

- RC: Yeah, yeah. That was yeah. Dumfries. And I don't think, aye I don't think there was any, any sorta counselling done for them. A, a lot o' them had to go; I know a lot o' them were telling us that they, they had to go and see their own doctor and their own doctor would send them, you know their doctor would realise "There's a problem here" and send them for help. And they weren't, they weren't afraid to tell you, you know, "This oh you wouldnae believe what this ken what I done, what I seen" and (pew). And I was, I was thankful I that I wasnae there.
- SS: Quite hard, yeah.
- RC: I mean my, my (coughs) excuse me; my Lockerbie was workin' double shifts at home which was hard enough.
- SS: Why was that?

RC: Because a' the men were away, men and women were away from the stations so you were covering.

SS: So were they sent to Lockerbie from?

RC: Lockerbie. Their, their home stations.

SS: Right.

RC: From, from [unclear].

SS: And, and, and obviously that would've been Dumfries and Galloway Police?

RC: Dumfries, Dumfries and Galloway, aye.

SS: So, so, so it's an example of forces helping each other out in a, a huge incident like that.

RC: Aye. Mutual aid, aye, a sorta mutual aid. I mean it was a massive incident, I mean Dumfries and Galloway is just a tiny wee force I think it was the smallest force at the time. So we were workin' double shifts and.

SS: Right, OK. Right. Right, so very busy so Robert again spoken quite a lot.

RC: Aye.

SS: When did you retire from the police?

RC: 2004.

SS: 2004 and, and what post were you in then?

RC: Well we, the, the police had realised they had made a huge mistake wi' tenure o' post.

SS: Right.

[0.49]

RC: Because it takes at least five years to train a traffic cop to get a' the certificates that they, that they require and they were ending up finding that they, they couldnae operate the traffic department.

SS: Oh right.

RC: And they found that to their cost in a sense because they were losing court cases, they were, they were; down south they were terrible because the, the, they were losing departments, motorcycle departments were lost, motorway units they lost and they never really got it back. So here they asked "Would you like to go back".

SS: And what did you say?

RC: I said "Yes please".

SS: So when was that, when did you go back?

RC: 19 . . . 19, the end o' 1999 and I stayed there until the end o' my service back at Haddington.

SS: Doing the A1?

RC: Doing the A1.

SS: Patrol.

RC: Patrols again.

SS: That's a long career. I'm going to ask you cos we're going to have to stop soon, you've, you've spoken a lot and I think, you know, recounted a lot o' difficult situations and thanks for that.

RC: Aye. Aye.

SS: So, looking back on your career . . . what, what; was there any incident that gave you sort of a uplifted feeling, a that's great, that's, you know, instead in contrast from the, the many horrible incidents?

RC: In contrast to that, yeah there was many, many, many good incidents. We used to . . . borrow motorbikes from Force headquarters, do the festival parades round East Lothian, we used to love doin' that, kids loved it, we

[0.51]

loved doin' that, Fishersman, Fisherman's Walk.

SS: In Musselburgh?

RC: (Coughs) In Musselburgh. (Coughs)

SS: Are you. Are you alright?

RC: Aye just a, a tickly throat. The EU (European Union) Summit we done when Britain was the.

SS: Oooh, the host?

RC: The host and it was carried oot in Edinburgh.

SS: Was that the G8?

RC: No, well the G8 came later. This, this was actually the, the EU Summit and it was done in December on bikes.

SS: No? Ah right, right OK it was the EU Summit. So when, when was that do you think?

RC: Oh . . . when now when was that . . . I cannae remember. It was, it was, it was in I would say mid '90s possib mid '90s (1992), I, I would really have to Google that. But, I mean that was great because we were, we were the motorcycle outriders and there, there were all sterile routes in Edinburgh, I mean the roads were closed off the public couldnae use the roads.

SS: Right.

RC: It must've caused an awfae congestion in Edinburgh. And we had to learn all the hospital routes for emergencies, we had to learn the Queen's route from, comin' from the airport to Holyrood and there's a number ae different routes that you go and they tell you what route you're doin'. But bear in mind this in the wintertime and ken you're zoomin' along on a motorbike ken at x miles an hour through the city. And we actually stayed in Edinburgh when that happened; it went on for aboot three, three - four days, worked really long shifts. The longest shift I've worked was 19 hours.

SS: So where was the actual summit held?

RC: The summit was held in Holyrood Palace.

SS: Aaah I see, right.

RC: We were divided up intae countries,

[0.53]

my country was Luxembourg and although Luxembourg's a tiny, tiny wee country it's a really, really rich and it has an awfae influence in the EU. And the, there was four of us per car so they had the Prime Minister or President o' Luxembourg, cannae mind what he, I'm sure it was the Prime Minister o' Luxembourg; behind him was the Finance Minister the most important person, behind him was.

SS: In separate cars?

RC: In separate cars each wi' four bikes so there was eight o' us on the two cars then behind that there was a Special Branch car and behind that there was a traffic car, a marked traffic car. And we had to leave Fettes in the mornin', go to the hotel by a specific route.

SS: And where were they staying?

RC: They, they were stayin' in the George Hotel in George Street, right . . . pick them up in convoy, pick them up and take them to Holyrood Palace and there was one or two routes that you would, you would go, (coughs) talkin' too much. The (coughs) Special Branch car.

SS: Do you want to go and get a drink of water?

RC: Yeah (coughs) yeah. (Recording pauses).

SS: This is Shirley Swinton resuming her conversation with Robert Ian Cowe on the 25th of October the time is now . . . 3:10. So just resuming you were telling, you were just telling me about the EU Summit.

RC: The EU Summit, yeah.

SS: And your . . . duties as a police motorcyclist.

RC: Aye, a motor, a motorcyclist, yeah. Aye it was, it, it was fun; really it was fun,

[0.55]

it was good, a lota funny incidents happened. We were well looked after obviously the, the, the EU Commission fed us really well, we were accommodated in the hotel in Princess Street, but hardly got there because the longest shift I worked was 19 hours sittin' on a bike, that was a bit sore. But it, it, it was, it was interesting it was good fun we met as I say we met the Prime Minister o' Luxembourg and the Finance Minister and I actually had a drink with Dick Spring who was the Irish Finance or Foreign Minister at the time, in this hotel he was stayin' there as well; a few o' us had a drink wi' Dick Spring. very nice guy really, really funny. But, aye it was, it was good, I mean things like goin' to school, goin' to schools meetin' the kids showing them the patrol cars; great fun loved it the kids loved it, we loved it. A' the fetes that you used to go ae take the bikes doin' Musselburgh Races on the bikes these were good days. They were days that, you know, felt ach ken nothin' is goin' to happen the day hopefully. But aye it was, it was a great time, great time.

SS: Good.

RC: Some o' the funniest, funniest things that ever happened to me happened when I was in the police. And every police officer that you'll meet has got loads and loads o' funny stories and I'll just tell you a wee quick funny story before we go. We mentioned that Dunbar was a brand new police station at the time. It was brand, brand, brand spanking new and it had cells in it like a sheriff's office.

SS: Like a cowboy film.

RC: Like a cowboy it had the gates it had cells like that in it as well

[0.57]

had ordinary cells, but it had these cells and everything was red tiles and it was really ken really smart lookin'. Well mysell and another cop were working night shift one night in Dunbar and it was the middle o' the week, it was a Wednesday and Dunbar is usually sleepin' by half past eleven. So we had done all the property checks walkin' up the High Street and we met the drunkest man in the world, he was really drunk. And he started shoutin' and swearin', shoutin' swearin' and, you know, after bein' told several times to get away home he just wouldnae go; he wanted to go fightin' and we thought right we're no' havin' this. So he was duly arrested and taken back to the police station totally drunk and incapable and . . . when we searched him he had no ID just a big handful ae money in his pocket; didnae know who he was and he wouldnae tell us. So he was duly; got his shoes taken off his belt taken off and he was locked up and he was put in one o' these new cells. And he was still shoutin' and swearin' and shoutin' and swearin' really drunk so, because there was just the two o' us, it was quiet, we had phoned Dalkeith and said "We've got D and I, a drunk and incapable, do you want us to bring him up" and they said "No' really, if you've done a' your checks just stay there wi' him". So we couldnae leave him obviously so we had paperwork to do so we carried on doin' that. And then about; we were due to finish at seven in the mornin' so we thought about five o'clock

[0.59]

that right we'll get this drunk charged now because he's bound to sobered up a bit and, it was in the days before you had to take them to hospital get them checked wi' nurses and a' the rest o' it, but you, you obviously had to wait until he was capable o' understandin' what you were sayin' to him. So, a' night he had been shoutin' and swearin' and shoutin' and swearin' and he just wouldnae tell us who he was "No, no, no I know my rights I'm no' tellin' you" "All right, OK". And five o'clock we went through, but the cop that was with me was in his probation and he was a Cockney, came from "Landen", right. And in his locker, and I don't know where he got this or how he had it, he had a City of London police helmet . . . right and he says "I'll speak to him" "OK". So we went through and he had his Lon, City o' London police helmet on, opened up the cell and the guy looked at us astounded. And he said to him "What you doin' down here mate?" The guy went "What?" "What you doin' down here" "What do you mean down here, down where?" "You're in bloody London mate". And he went "What!" "You're in bloody London, you're on the mail train" and he went "The mail train?" "Yeah from some bloody Scotch place" he went "Oh no" "Yeah, yeah bloody London mate, you ain't got no money" "Oh no" and he absolutely burst oot crying.

SS: Oh no!

RC: And I mean he howled and howled and howled "Yeah

bloody state you were in mate" you know. [Unclear] I had to turn away and the guy was cryin' his eyes out; oh what a state he got himself into "Come on get you a cup of tea and then you're out the door". "But how am I going to get home?" "I don't bloody know and I don't bloody care mate get out the bloody station". So we, we put his money in an envelope and "Get your shoes on" and Neil done a' the talkin', know. "Get your bloody shoes on mate, come on get your bloody belt on, now get out o' here you Scotch git". And he was cryin' a' the way from, from the cells through the police station and out the front door. And he was cryin' wi' his head down walkin' down the police station car park until he looked up and realised where he was. You should've heard the language that came out o' him. Oh dear what, what a laugh.

SS: Oh dear.

RC: And he pled guilty as well.

SS: So I take it you got his name?

RC: Aye, we got his name and that, aye Neil got his name "I'm from Dunbar my wife will kill me, how am I goin' to get home".

SS: That's a, oh well.

RC: There was lots o' stories like that in; so, great days, fantastic.

SS: Good, well thanks very much for your recollections.

RC: That was a pleasure.

SS: It's been good listening to you, thanks very much.