

Interviewee(s): David Chalmers (DC)	Interviewer(s): Melanie Chalmers (MC)
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REGION	East Lothian
COUNTY	East Lothian
TOWN	Longniddry

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MC: This is an interview with my dad David Chalmers and Melanie Chalmers-Gibson on the Twentieth of February Twenty-twenty, so we're here just going to be talking a little bit about farming with my dad's dad my grandfather and a little touch on Dad's grandfather as well so, hello dad again, little interview going on here, what we were wanting to talk about today 'cause obviously we're at Lochhill Farm at the moment where we're talking at the moment and we know we talked in the past about you moving here in the Nineteen sixties, Sixty-five was it?

DC: The early Sixties.

MC: Early Sixties and what's interesting around the ground here is how it's changed an' I just wondered why it was because we know that it was dairy farm before you came along but you were focusing as a market gardener because of the way you grew up, can you tell me a little bit about how you came to know so much about market gardening and what sort of things you were growing and where the history of this came from?

DC: Well the back [side] of the family is that my grandfather was a market gardener in Falkirk, back in the early part of the last century an' my father was - left school and went to work in the Carron Ironworks at Falkirk, at the end of the First World War where he made patterns for shells and grenades and he went on to serve his time in the Ironworks as a

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pattern maker and after the War and he had qualified as a pattern maker he had decided to go abroad to get work but my grandfather at that time was a market gardener in Falkirk and -

MC: Was it Chicago that he was going to be going to which I find - ?

DC: Well the first job I think as far as I understand he had applied for was in New Zealand.

MC: Gosh!

DC: But the firm went bust in New Zealand so he an' his friend decided to apply for a job in Chicago and were accepted for a job in Chicago and it was at that time that my father as well as working in the ironworks played football for [Cameron] Juniors and on the week he was due to go to Chicago he broke his kneecap playing football obviously his friend went off to Chicago and my father had to stay at home.

MC: And that was the beginning of the market gardening career, so this was it?

DC: That was when he was at a sort of spell in life where he was undecided what he was going to do it was at that point that my grandfather heard of the small market garden that was coming up for rent at Dalkeith and he then put it to ma father and said, well how d'you fancy having a go at growing vegetables? It was a complete change in life from workin' at the iron foundry to going to grow vegetables.

MC: Now grandad your dad must have grown up working and helping his dad

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and growing the possibly the correct vegetables that you would grow through in the Falkirk area did he grow the same sort of vegetables as his dad did when he was in Dalkeith?

DC: Well ah think at that time anyone like ma grandfather would grow a whole range of vegetables because most of the produce would be just to supply local markets and at that time I can remember -

MC: Would that be the local markets in Edinburgh or would that be shops in - ?

DC: Oh no that would just be round Falkirk area it would only be a sort of small it wouldn't be lorry-loads o' stuff going out it was just supplying local wholesalers and shops and that sort o' thing in the Falkirk area.

MC: So grandad when he came to Edinburgh was he supplying the Edinburgh market or was it local?

DC: Well when my grandfather asked my father how he fancied comin' through to join him in the small market garden that was comin' up for rent at Dalkeith, was at a stage where he thought well we'll give it a go, an' that's what he did so he then they went through to Dalkeith had about thirty or forty acres it wasn't a big lump of not many fields -

MC: Good land?

DC: It was good market garden land.

MC: They could tell the difference.

DC: Oh aye an' in fact it really upsets me today when I go through Dalkeith an' I see all the fields where ah started working [wi'] my grandfather an' my father were working and seein' it all built an' solid in houses an' covered in concrete

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and it's the best land you've ever seen I mean I can remember it myself 'cause that's where I started working myself.

MC: So for quite refined the market gardening rather than the - you know to have the right soil to grow certain - ?

DC: Well it had been market garden and growin' crops, vegetable crops for generations.

MC: So give us an example of what when you're talking about market gardening in the [?] what would be grown there what do you think grandad kicked off with?

DC: Well they had every kind of crop you could imagine, we had our own spring cabbage in fact we saved our own spring cabbage seed we grew our main crop was really cauliflower but we grew sprouts an' leeks and spring onions, fruit -

MC: What do you mean you got your own spring cabbage seed?

DC: We saved all our own cabbage seed, we grew the cabbages an' selected -

MC: So tell us what is selecting the seed how - ?

DC: Well when you're planting a field of cabbages you go round and you know what you're looking for in a cabbage, it has to be a certain shape an' type, not a leafy sort of thing you want a nice tight-hearted cabbage an' it had a certain keeping quality an' all that sort o' thing an' what we did was we had when the cabbage was cut we could see the cabbage when it was cut when it was mature we dug the roots out of the ground and took them and planted them

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in frames an' we let them go to seed an' then I can remember -

MC: So frames are the long greenhouses that would be -

DC: Just glass frames and then we selected the best of the crop and even cauliflower we did as well and some growers did leeks. I mean, growers were doin' their own thing and through experience and selection they had selected the type of crop they wanted and what they did was the crop ah can remember as a laddie we still were saving our own cabbage seed when we came to Musselburgh an' they were all planted along in part o' this garden isolated and then once they seeded and the seeds set they were all cut down an' bundled up an' tied up

an' hung along fences along walls to ripen off an' then they used to just hand [?] draw them out in the shed on big sheets an' selected all our own seed.

MC: Wow I mean you shouldn't have brushed over that you used to do your own seeds that's a huge operation and absolutely brilliant.

DC: Well we finished up sellin' the seed back to the seedsman.

MC: That's incredible!

DC: We were sending them back to the seedsman. 'Cause we were selling the stuff we had was better than the seedsman was selling us, but we had every kind o' thing I remember because we were supplying local wholesalers in Dalkeith area we grew

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blackcurrants, fruit, rhubarb every kind of vegetable you can think of.

MC: So that's a lot of intricate work maintaining the neatness the sort of all the rows you've got to string them all up haven't you and - ?

DC: Well when you bear in mind that the crops at that time weren't sown with a tractor with a seeder on the back they were sown with a hand-pushed barrel, it was a lot o' work.

MC: That is a lot of work and did you have many people working - do you think you and dad - ?

DC: I can't remember how many they had but there was quite a number of workers at Dalkeith when I started workin' at that time and I can remember in fact I can remember when I started school durin' the War, coming out as a young laddie an' watchin' the men takin' the horses out the shed an' the German prisoners of war standing ready to start working.

MC: Wow.

DC: They were standing there an' I always thought they were a cheerful looking bunch because they all made all these toys and as a school laddie when I was five or six year old an' ah come out an' ye saw these guys with all the toys an' things like that they were makin' -

MC: How amazing!

DC: But at that time we probably had we had several quite a lot o' men there was quite a lot o' women as well workin' at that time and -

MC: So then moving on to when your dad so you mentioned rhubarb as well so you had a real array of vegetables and -

DC: Ma father was a very practical man he built some of the sheds and amongst the sheds that

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were built there I can remember as a laddie I was quite intrigued by what was this shed here for because it had ... an earth floor and that was a rhubarb forcing house and what they do is the rhubarb is all put out in the fields and then every so many years five years or so it's lifted and split just the same as you're doing a herbaceous plant in the garden you cut the side pieces off it an' keep two or three eyes an' then you replanted it all you fed it a lot of muck and dung in the ground and you replanted the field up an' the young rhubarb was put there an' the rhubarb roots that were surplus were built back in the shed this forcin' shed an' the rhubarb was all forced in the shed. In fact, today ah was watchin' the television an' there was a programme on an' they called it the 'rhubarb triangle' in Yorkshire and there was a place there where all this rhubarb was forced an' it was a famous bit for forcin' well we were doin' that at Dalkeith at the time.

MC: I wonder where he learnt that he must have been taught that from his dad and so on and so forth?

DC: Well they knew about the rhubarb forcin' and so they had things like that but they did the whole gamut of crops everything you could think of that you could grow from carrots and onions and all that sort o' stuff, spring onions all sorts o' cabbage, winter cabbage Savoy's, sprouts, kale anything at all they grew the whole lot.

MC: That's something that I just seem to remember

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from childhood is the word syobees, that's a word that was [*Laughs*] -

DC: Well at that time ah mean it's a totally different age because I can remember the reason I came in to vegetable growin' was 'cause I knew my father was wanting me to come in an' grow vegetables with him and I still remember when I left school and we had one teacher she was a really clever maths teacher, Teeny Burns they called her, an' I can still remember she interviewed each member of the class because we were all going to leave school and go to college or university, and I can still remember at that time sittin' - I can remember it like yesterday - sittin' in the classroom in the school at Dalkeith an' she said, well Chalmers what do you think you're - what sort of career do you think you'll go for? And I had been told that we were to have this interview the day before and I wasn't sure what I was goin' to be asked an' ah can remember goin' back home an' ah said to ma father, we're gettin' interviewed tomorrow to find out what we're all goin' to be doing when we leave school, an' ma father just turned round an' said, you just tell her you're gonna be a market gairdener like yer faither. An' ah still remember well I wasn't as uncouth that I was goin' to go back and say, I'm gonna be a market gairdener like ma faither, and I can still remember she was asking me, well Chalmers what do you think you'll do when you leave school? Oh, I said, I was thinking of going to agricultural college and

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then if I get a degree I'll come out an' I was going to start working with my father, an' I still remember this little teacher leanin' across to me an' she said, you know Chalmers if you're half as successful as your father you'll have done very well, an' that really was all the encouragement I've ever needed 'cause ah thought how does she know, how is ma father known at the school as a vegetable grower but everybody knew who he was and how well he had done in actual fact, he worked he was a very very diligent man, I know it was difficult maybe to understand it in a way 'cause he was just reserved.

MC: I wish I could have known him, not through the older eyes as he was then.

DC: An' when ah left school then ma brothers left school we all started and that's when we expanded.

MC: Yes so you all - that would be going into what era would that be the Fifties/Sixties?

DC: Well I passed my driving test in Nineteen fifty-seven an' once I'd learnt to drive I could drive the lorry the next day! So I was driving through to Glasgow an' I can't believe that when I was driving through to Glasgow I could drive right through from Musselburgh to Glasgow Fruit Market right through the middle of Edinburgh Princes Street Haymarket Corstorphine right to Glasgow and never stopped once.

MC: Not even for a coffee dad?

DC: No but we never had to stop all the way with the lorry to Glasgow, we never had to stop 'cause there was no lights in fact I've driven along Princes Street and I've said it before, people

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don't believe you that you could actually drive right along the whole of Princes Street an' never see one person or one vehicle.

MC: That's 'cause you were the early bird.

DC: No! Wasn't so much that it was just they were so quiet.

MC: So at that stage you were obviously the eldest and the one that was driving but by this stage all the boys would be kind of helping on the weekends and in and around school so you'd all start to learn all about market gardening.

DC: Oh we all worked at night time on the market garden and that's when we started bunchin' sybees an' we used to bunch thousands an' thousands and thousand of bunches o' sybees and we had a pickup that we could load every mornin' an' take a whole load o' sybees through to Glasgow Market.

MC: Right so you would all be doing that.

DC: An' we'd all be doin' that.

MC: An' through my eyes that would be obviously you did a stage of expanding all the farms kind of along the coast really you went from where you grew up on Goshen Farm by that stage and then you were St Germain's and Seton East an' then Lochhill.

DC: No well in the early Nineteen fifties ma father bought Goshen and that was the first land he ever owned and we market gardened at Goshen and well in Nineteen thirty-eight/thirty-nine my father lived down at the Buccleuch Estates in Dalkeith away beyond the restoration yard there and that's when ah was born an' brought up there, ma father was walking up to his work

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with his father at Gibraltar Market Garden when he passed Mr Ormiston who was the factor, on his way to work in the morning and Mr Ormiston said, did you know [Thorne Hall] Market Garden's coming up for rent, he said, do you think you might have been interested in that? My father said, oh aye I'd be interested in that a'right, then an' he just said, right we'll get that sorted out, an' that was how we rented the market garden it was done like that on the passing [to] his work in the morning.

MC: Which is incredible isn't it and then you did Goshen and then as the boys and you were all sort of growing up and getting married and what not the farm land expanded to suit all of you with that stage and was the land all the land along here did you feel that it was all just good land for market gardening is the - ?

DC: Well that was one o' the things that I always remember when I was at college, one o' the professor's I had when I went to college was a Cambridge man and he asked me where I came from and I said, I come from a market gardening at Musselburgh, and I can still remember his reply he said, well you know there should be a complete ban on any development of the land along the coastal strip of East Lothian from Musselburgh right down to Dunbar the coastal strip, he said, because it's the most productive land in Scotland an' it's the only bit of Scotland that comes anywhere near my Home County in Cambridge, an' he said that an' he said that an' he said, you should be no development here, an' that's why even to this -

MC: So it was known something about the

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possibly the lie of the land with the weather conditions, something about the soil?

DC: Well it just so happens that this is the driest and it's also the least frosty part of the whole of the East of Scotland and it lies on the - just the lie of it but that's why you very

rarely got any vegetable growing when you go over to the other side o' the A1 you'll not see vegetable growin' away up Pencaitland and all that way there'd be small maybe greenhouse growers an' that sort o' thing but nobody would grow we'd never try and grow vegetables away over there we would go up as far as Gladsmuir and right down we had vegetables at North Berwick, Drem and down to Saltcoats at Gullane all that sort o' thing but we'd never go beyond the other side of the A1.

MC: You see it just starts to go to turn into corn and barley.

DC: 'Cause over by Haddington is a sort of frost pocket once you get over there, oh you can grow some vegetables there but you couldn't grow the range of vegetables that we had here an' that's why for years we supplied vegetables and cabbage the winter cabbage that we over-wintered we could sell them not only to all over Scotland but Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Worcestershire and Herefordshire every year, we sent hundreds o' tons o' cabbage down there, [?] Rimmer in Lancashire, Mike Morris down in Herefordshire and in fact the growers in Lincolnshire which is the biggest vegetable

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growers in Britain, party of them came up to find out how it was that we could grow cabbage and send it down to them when they couldn't grow it.

MC: I mean that is really interesting this little pocket of land -

DC: Aye I can't even now to this day drive round East Lothian I avoid going past all this massive development at Blindwells and I can remember how productive all that land was that was [Lowe's] that were in there at Riggerhead, Fullerton's all that was vegetables all the way up there an' when I look at it now it's all just a great big - well I look at it as a midden ah just think it's sacrilege what they've done to it an' they're doin' the same at the back of Longniddry I mean they could built the house they're not forward lookin' at all because they're gonna need all the food they can to supply this massive growin' population and [what] they gonna grow it? You can't grow it across you go away up in the hills you don't grow cabbages up at Gifford.

MC: That's like what you've just been saying. I'm going to have to stop here on this one but I think it's a conversation to have the next time we were going to talk about the lay of the land as far as the aesthetics thinking about how beautiful the stone buildings are that used to be on farms and farm lands and the sort of troughs and the whole layout I'd like to talk to you about that next time and how you changed with the times with the farming through the time here -

DC: It's one aspect of modern farming that I in a way I still retain

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an' mainly because it's not only an interest but when I look round about the farm we all work nowadays in computerised and everything's just a number, fields are all just numbered

but I can still go right round the farm here an' I know the names of every field, an' it's pertinent to what you have, the field behind the cottages is called Well Park and that's because the wells were there that's where the men got their water for their houses, there was a well in the middle o' the field there when ah came there's a well still there, an' there's the one down here is [Peckington] there's Peebles Hill and Peebles Hill is called Peebles Hill because the farm here was part of the estate of Lord Elibank who lived in Ballencrieff House an' he had Mungoswells, Lochhill, Ballencrieff Mains and Ballencrieff Farm was part of his estate and so and then he moved to his (like Gosford Estate has down at Peebles) Lord Elibank if you go down from below Walkerburn you pass the stretch of river there's an estate in there it's Elibank and that's where Elibank came from and that's why that would be called Peebles Hill.

MC: Right oh because of that? That information will be lost -

DC: It's the history o' the whole thing. And then the other one above that is called Crammond, then the one at the crossroads is called Longriggs, an' it's called Toll Park because that was Toll Road for everyone wanting to go to the harbour at Aberlady to load the boats.

MC: Wow.

DC: When Aberlady was

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a - and that was a toll road from Haddington down to Aberlady and that was Toll Park the one above it's called Cow Park the one at the top's called Clinkie it was all part - and I often wonder why the one at the very top up there's called Crammond but they all had a name [Peckington], Orlage, an' ah know them all but historically you can go back an' you can pin it all together.

MC: Which would be fascinating to do. I'm sorry dad we're gonna have to stop here today but I could carry on as always it opens up more and more interesting stories and things that I find out and I've loved having this chat today and we'll carry on another time, thanks a lot.

DC: But we grew vegetables at that time on demand you know if people wanted onions we were selling onions down I was selling beetroot to Lancashire.

MC: Beetroot as well? On that note we're going to stop here thank you dad.

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