

ORAL HISTORY.

TIME TO REMEMBER.

Interviewee: **Mr. Alwyn Collister**
 Born 31st March 1939
 Postman in Castletown

Interviewed & recorded by: David Callister.

Date recorded: **5th September 2000**

Topics: **Telegram Boy on bike – recalls flights to UK , had to
check in at The Crescent, Derbyhaven**
 **Problems with dogs for postmen – badly designed
letter boxes, National Service**

 **Working in Regimental Cinema – at Jurby with
band – allowed to go home at night.**

 **As local Castletown Commissioner and Member of
the Department of Education.**

DC This is Alwyn Collister, Tape No. 1. Let me begin at the beginning, you are actually a Castletown boy, but you were born, I suppose, like everybody else in those days, in Douglas.

Mr. C Yes, I was born in Douglas, you could, at a later time, be born in Victoria Road, there was a nursing home in Victoria Road, but in my time it was Douglas and the Jane Crookall, which is still the Jane Crookall, but part of Noble's, was the place where one was born. Not as modern as it is today, of course, and of course you didn't get past the door if you were a husband or anything, your wife was left at the door and that was it. 1939, it seems a long time ago but it isn't, I suppose.

DC Really a few months before the outbreak of the Second World War in fact.

Mr. C That's right, yes.

DC So you'd be too small to recollect anything of those war years, would you?

Mr. C No, no, I'm not, I remember distinctly the aircraft training and they used to use the Castletown Methodist church spire, Langness lighthouse and the control tower, and they would do circuits at night, And I remember waking up one night and there was an awful noise going on and I got downstairs and my parents were actually outside watching these aircraft going round the chapel tower, and I think they were more worried about the tower being hit and it would come down on our house, because we lived in 40 Malew Street. And I recollect that.

DC Well, they would be flying fairly low as well, wouldn't they?

Mr. C Very low, very low at night, they were. And they would do a circuit's training at night in the dark. That's what I can remember. I can still actually remember also, getting a plane at Derbyhaven the check-in place for flying was 11 The Crescent, Derbyhaven, and if you wanted to fly to England you went to Der-

byhaven and you got on a scale in the house, the last house in The Crescent, in Derbyhaven, you were put on a scale, you were weighed, and depending on your weight you were told where to sit in the plane, because they had to balance the plane. I can remember that.

DC Is that so, really.

Mr. C I must be that old, I'm not that old, David.

DC It's quite a long time ago, isn't it?

Mr. C Yes, but when you think about ...

DC So you were actually weighed and went on a flight, did you?

Mr. C No, I don't think I ever went on a flight but we had relations that used to come regular from England and of course my father, he didn't have to go to the war because he was so busy with the haulage business which he had, building, he did a lot of transporting of the men to Jurby to build the Jurby airport, so they would be gone at half past six in the morning. And between that and unloading coal boats and I was brought up with wagons and taxis and, because my father had horse and carts to start with and that's going back a long time. And my recollection is when the coal boats were in and my uncle used to work on the boats, there'd have to be a tea, tin of tea for me at 10 o'clock as well as the men.

DC Oh, right.

Mr. C And I had to have my tea at the boat in these billy cans as they call them, white lid ...

DC Oh, yes, I remember them.

Mr. C ... and you'd pour your tea in and everybody – and everybody as black as a rook and I'd be clean.

DC Yes, tin mug for tea.

Mr. C Tin mug for tea. And I'd be sitting down on the quay watching the *J.B.Kee* come in or the *Thie Vane*, and all sorts of boats in the days when Castletown harbour was busy with timber boats and all sorts of things.

DC Oh, of course timber boats would be ...

Mr. C Oh, timber boats were a great activity, when Qualtrough's had a timber boat in.

DC Well, would it be just after the war then that the airport was laid out down here?

Mr. C Well, the airport, they took over after the war, yes, they bought – the Government bought the airport for a very – well a nominal fee, I think it was – and that's where it was. There was a lot of talk at the time that the airport should have been at Scarlett.

DC Really?

Mr. C Oh, yes, because the approach to Scarlett is far better than the approach to 2 6 runway. The main reason it wasn't, it was the fact that they would have had to put a new road in right through from Castletown, round Castletown, to get to Scarlett, because they couldn't have used Queen Street.

DC Would it have been ...

Mr. C But they could have approached ...

DC Would it have been big enough for runways then?

Mr. C Oh, yes, much bigger than where it is, yes.

DC Really.

Mr. C Scarlett area here is quite flat but there was so much of the runway made at Ronaldsway they stayed there, it was too much to give up.

DC Even despite claims that it should have been in Jurby as well, I think.

Mr. C Oh, well, no, I don't agree with it being in Jurby, that is too far away from the town, from the city centre. But it is – has grown immensely. I remember the original, well the traffic hall in 1948, being built, and it looked massive from inside, because we were there with taxis and my father – there was an old taxi office that we had and an old bell that used to ring if anybody wanted a taxi from out of the airport. There was no radio taxis in those days. And taking a look one night with a Mr. Griffiths, who was the director at the airport at that time, inside this massive hall, it looked big from what they used to have at

Derbyhaven, and then a nissen hut, and now, look at it now, it's nearly – it's an airport to be proud of.

DC Oh yes, well, it is, it is.

Mr. C It really is, although I criticised the main entrance and the garden, I still think the garden should have been pushed a little bit further back and two lanes of traffic on that through traffic sign I still think it's congested there, but that's my personal opinion. It was unfortunate that when they did it, it was Christmas time and it really did cause havoc for that one Christmas. But it looks more like an international airport now.

DC That's right, it is, it's excellent.

Mr. C It's nice for visitors to see, because I am sure they are impressed when they arrive.

DC Of course even the previous one, the previous old hall that you are referring to, looked quite good in comparison with certain small airports in the UK, I mean, Blackpool for instance.

Mr. C Oh, far better, far better than a lot of airports.

DC That's right.

Mr. C And if – I was in Acapulco the other – two years ago – I couldn't believe how poor it is. They get thousands of people through. It's so bad that they checked the people in on the quay in a big shed.

DC Really.

Mr. C Yes, the airline companies came to the dockside when the cruise boat came in and they checked them in and gave them their tickets. And we couldn't understand this and when we got to the airport, we were on a later flight, there was no arrivals board, there was no departures board, there was no information whatsoever, and I thought to myself, they're back in the year dot, and I thought the Americans were all well ahead there, but not at that place, it really wasn't.

DC Let's get back to schooldays, then, you went to school in Castletown of course.

Mr. C Yes, I went to Victoria Road School, thoroughly enjoyed my Victoria Road School, but you always say you don't enjoy school, but I did enjoy school and I was there, Mr. Qualtrough and then Donald Hastie, he was the headmaster, and he was very keen on the Manx Music Festival and he used to enter us for all sorts of things, choirs, and he was a very musical gentleman, and we did a lot of plays there too, and I suppose I got used to performing for shows at an early age. My mother trained me in elocution, she had never had any lessons but she was determined to give me a bit of elocution and it certainly helped me.

DC She didn't want to keep that, sort of, old Manx accent, perhaps?

Mr. C No, no, I don't want the Manx accent, although I ...

DC You have a certain amount of it.

Mr. C I have a certain amount of it, but not a great deal. And I don't speak Manx I'm afraid, well, I'm not afraid because my views on the Manx, I think there are – children need to learn English and Maths preferably before learning Manx and some of them, they can't do their English well enough and they're still trying to learn Manx and that's not really good, because what good is it to them when they leave the Isle of Man?

DC So there was no Manx taught at schools in your time, of course.

Mr. C It was an after-school function if you wanted to do it.

DC Oh, was it?

Mr. C And I think that's what it really should be now, but that's another subject. Yes, you could do it, but not very many people did.

DC And then you'd go on to Secondary School, where would that be then?

Mr. C I went to Castle Rushen where Godfrey Cretney was the headmaster, it was the second year of Castle Rushen, I wasn't in the original intake, as they call it. They had problems and they'd got around their problems in the first year and we were in Castle Rushen and I thoroughly enjoyed being at Castle Rushen, it was different and I was never in any trouble, I have to say that. I think the only time I was ever in any trouble was I was caught with a jam tart in my mouth in the kitchen, and I shouldn't have been, by Mr. Cretney.

DC Who were the teachers who will have influenced you most at either school then, would you say?

Mr. C Walter Collister, yes, it was a joy to go to a science lesson, I enjoyed that every minute, and the weather forecasting was a school activity on a Friday afternoon, and I was in that weather forecasting group with him until I joined the orchestra, until I became part of Harry Pickard's team of musicians, and if you played an instrument you had no choice but to go to orchestra.

DC What did you play?

Mr. C Well, I played the flute in those days, I still play a little bit, but not enough now, there's no time. And I think one of the highlights of school time was being asked to join the Sixth Form, after about the second year there, in a play and that sticks out in my mind, I'd – the Brown boys and all the top class in the school were all in this play. And I was just asked to report to the head one day and I thought, oh, I'm in trouble here, and that was what it was for. They wanted a younger person, one young person in this play and of course, I suppose, that started me off with, eventually with the Choral Union where I've been for – 37 years in the Choral Union.

DC Have you?

Mr. C Now a life member, which I'm very proud of, a badge, and my – I've also got a medal in memory of the late Mrs Wilkinson, that's – her daughter provided badges – medals for life members and that was an honour too.

DC So when you left school then did you know what you wanted to do?

Mr. C No, my mother wanted me to be a mechanic, she wanted me to go to Ramsey Motors in Douglas, and that was in Demesne Road, because I was always meddling in the vehicles in the yard, you know.

DC So you had an interest in it then?

Mr. C Well, yes, I did, and she thought that would be a cheap way of getting her vehicles fixed.

DC And did that happen?

Mr. C No, a knock came to the door one day and it was about the second week in March and I was of age to leave school at the end of March, the last day of March, I was all set up to go to Liverpool on a holiday with the school, with Walter Collister's group, the science group and we were going to the Dunlop factory, we were going to the Mersey to see the Mersey works, the tunnel, we were going down a coal mine and all this, that and the other and I was really looking forward to it, till this day this knock on the door came. And I went to the door and there's a gentleman standing there, 'is your mother in?' I said, 'yes, my mother's in'. He said, 'can I come in?' I said, I knew who it was, I said, 'yes, you can come in'. So he came in, he sat down, he said, 'I'm looking for a telegram boy to start work in the post office as soon as possible and', he said, 'I know that your son is of age in three weeks time, is he interested?' And I was flabbergasted, I just didn't know what to say. My mother didn't know what to say either. The first thing I said was, 'well, I'm going on holiday and I'm going on holiday in a fortnight's time', whether you want me or not.

DC I'm sure, yes.

Mr. C So, of course I never went back to school, came back from my holiday and started in the post office as a telegram boy. In those days there was a lot of telegrams because people didn't have telephones and they relied on telegrams

and I started in the post office, 9 am, and I distinctly remember it, we had two shifts 9 o'clock till 2.10, and you had to come back at 4.45 till 7.30 at night, that's the service we gave for telegrams.

DC So you'd have some days, would you, when you wouldn't have a telegram at all though, would you?

Mr. C Oh, no, never had a day without a telegram.

DC Really.

Mr. C And sometimes a lot.

DC And you'd have a bike, would you?

Mr. C Oh, a bike, I'm saddle sore, I'm still stiff, saddle sore, that was – I could ride a bike. I remember being asked 'could you ride a bike?' And of course I did a paper round so I was well and truly used to the town, and in our days, you know, my days, when it was a paper round, the papers came on the boat from Liverpool, 11 o'clock, 3 o'clock into Douglas, you'd get them in Castletown about ten past four.

DC Really?

Mr. C Yes, and you couldn't then take any activity after school because the paper shop wouldn't employ you if you had something to do after school, because your paper round would be late.

DC Aye, that's right, yes.

Mr. C And of course in the winter, we would be waiting sometimes for the boat till 6 o'clock, you'd still have to put the papers out.

DC Still have to put them out – how many people would you deliver to, do you think, then?

Mr. C Oh, I had a fairly big town round, probably ...

DC You'd get to know all the streets pretty well then.

Mr. C Oh, yes, well I knew the streets.

DC Even the people you'd get to know.

Mr. C I knew everybody then, and then of course the advantage of me joining the post office was that half the town I knew before – so I didn't need to be told the people that lived in the houses. I remember arriving at the Buchan School one night, November 5th, and some of the girls that are there, that were there then still live on the Island and they can remember this, because I was reminded about it a few months ago, that I arrived, of course November 5th the boat had to be late, didn't it, and we got the papers at 6 o'clock and I got to the Buchan School ...

DC This was your bonfire night wasn't it?

Mr. C Yes, I got to the Buchan School with the papers and they were just about ready to set the fireworks off and they were stuffing fireworks in my paper bag to set off after they'd gone back into school and in the end – I started setting these

fireworks off and the head came out and said, 'I think we've had enough now, Alwyn, we'd better leave – I think you'd better finish your paper round'. Well, actually that was my last call, the Buchan School, luckily, and I still remember that quite clearly.

DC What would you get paid as a telegram boy then?

Mr. C Oh, I don't know, less than a pound a week, I think.

DC Was it?

Mr. C When I got married I only got £3 a week, when I got married.

DC Really?

Mr. C Yes.

DC So pay was low in the post office in those days.

Mr. C Oh, yes, yes, you had to rely – the older gentlemen in the post office had to rely on the overtime to make up their money.

DC How many staff would there be in Castletown post office?

Mr. C There was about seven of us there then, yes, seven of us, I think.

DC But a telegram could come through any time then?

Mr. C Any time, up till 7.30.

DC After that no chance of getting one delivered.

Mr. C And next door, then, if it was something urgent it went to the police station and the police would have to go and tell somebody if it was a death or something like that.

DC How much traffic would be on the roads in those days then?

Mr. C Not a great deal, no, not a great deal. And I got fed up of fixing punctures, I know that much. And every time, on a Monday morning, not when I was a telegram boy, if you were a telegram boy we had our own bike, so if we got a puncture on our bike we had to fix it and in those days the patches used to sit – you could fix them on the inner tube – these days, I don't know, they don't seem to stick so well as they used to when you're fixing a puncture. But it wasn't so bad if it was a front wheel but if it was a back wheel the blooming chain ...

DC Oh, the chain had to come off, that's right.

Mr. C ... oh, it was an awful mess – there was no gears on any post office bike, no. There is now, the modern post office bike has gears and cable brakes and disc brakes, so they're really modern. Because in a wet day you didn't have brakes on a post office bike, you just got your foot down and tried to stop.

DC Is that so?

Mr. C Yes, yes, because the brakes ...

DC They just weren't holding.

Mr. C The wheel got wet and that was it. And then the policemen were more particular in those days, if you went over a halt sign you got shouted at.

DC You'd have to have lights on at night I suppose.

Mr. C We had lights on, yes, they were lights, but they really didn't show much light, the red light on the back of the bike, yes. And we had a leather pouch with the telegrams in and you had to show your pouch when you went off duty to make sure you'd not forgotten any.

DC Did people have to sign for telegrams?

Mr. C No, no, I can't remember them signing, now.

DC You didn't have to wait for replies?

Mr. C You did.

DC You did?

Mr. C Yes, we had to carry a form with us and work out how much it would be to send a reply.

DC Oh, right.

Mr. C And take the money.

DC And take the money?

Mr. C Yes, and bring it back.

DC You had a responsible job all of a sudden then.

Mr. C Sometimes you would have a reply paid envelope so that the person that sent the telegram had paid for a reply to go back and the form would be given to you and then that would be for so many words, twelve words they'd be allowed and if they put over that you'd have to ask them for the extra money.

DC You saw the end of the telegraph service really, telegram service rather?

Mr. C Yes, telegram service, it reduced in number, probably more so after I came back, well, we didn't have telegram boys in the end, they just cut them out and the postman had to deliver them when there was somebody available. And they would go out on delivery or they would go out when someone came in, they would have to go out with a telegram.

DC So you graduated then from telegram boy to postman, did you?

Mr. C Well, very early on they asked us to do a little bit of delivery. A gentleman called Eddie Wheeler, who was nearly retirement age and he had a very bad chest and they said, 'look, there's not so many telegrams, can you start helping him on the second delivery', because there was two deliveries in those days. And I would start off at Lorne House and make my way along Douglas Street, Bowling Green Road, Shore Road, to the Promenade and that would relieve him of that early part of his delivery for the second delivery. It also got the second delivery out earlier for people. And that was the start of it and I then, I

can't remember when I – I couldn't drive a van, this niggled me, I had to be a certain age to drive a post office van. I was driving lorries, I was driving taxis, and of course I was riding my bike, but I couldn't take a post office van out of the garage. And sometimes there would be a post office van in there and they would make me do the round on a bike ...

DC While the van was sitting there.

Mr. C ... because I wasn't 21.

DC Oh, right, oh, you had to be 21.

Mr. C I think, it's either 18 or 21 – I can't just remember, I know there was a period of time, of quite a long time, it seemed to me a long time, that I couldn't take a van.

DC The post office always had its own rules regarding ...

Mr. C I even had to take a post office test, although I'd been driving for two or three years they made me take a post office test to drive a post office van. It was a bit ludicrous at the time I thought. And I remember the test was done, not by, it was done by a post office engineer from Douglas, yes, it wasn't the ...

DC Was it, not an examiner?

Mr. C No, no, it was a post office engineer and he came and he said, 'this is a sheer waste of time', to me, and I said, 'well, I've been saying that', he said, 'well', he said, 'right ho', he said, drive out up Arbory Road, so we were going up Arbory Road, and he said, 'right, I want you to turn round and go back', and I

think he was trying to catch me out to see whether I would drive into Castle Rushen drive, and of course I reversed in, and he said, 'oh, drive back to the post office now, that'll do'. And that's as far as I went.

DC That was it, was it? Is it possible then for somebody to take a post office test and pass that and not be required to be examined?

Mr. C It was at the time.

DC Was it?

Mr. C Yes, if I hadn't had a licence to drive I would have gone to the post office in Douglas for a week, intensive driving for a week, and then another examiner would take you for your test and that was all right. You didn't have to pass the other test then.

DC But that changed then?

Mr. C That's changed now, that's changed a lot.

DC So then eventually you did get a van but presumably you were still biking around as well, were you?

Mr. C Oh, biking everywhere. We used to hate Thursday afternoons.

DC Why?

Mr. C Well, Thursday afternoons Ballasalla sub-office was closed and there was a place called the Arragon Hotel at Santon, well-known for weddings, Geoff

Duke had it at one time as you know, and it was a long cycle ride from Castletown to the Arragon Hotel, I've done it that many times I hate to think about it. Young people wouldn't do it now, you know. They would not do it. And when you think the postmen used to cycle up Ballamodha Straight and up to Solomon's Corner and down, that used to be a post – a bike duty. Now we couldn't carry things on the bike that we have to put out there's so much more mail. But we used to go to the Arragon Hotel on a Thursday. Now we had one P&TO, postal and telegraph officer, who was on the counter and he would take telegrams and he would sit in a little cubby hole in Castletown and take these telegrams and sometimes the people would be queuing at the counter waiting for him to come off the phone and they'd have two or three telegrams for a wedding. And you'd set off to the Arragon Hotel and you'd think, now, what time is the wedding, is it 2 o'clock or is it 5 o'clock tonight. And when you'd get to the Arragon Hotel, I used to always ask 'what time is this wedding?' And they'd say 'oh, it's not till 6 o'clock, you needn't have come till later'. And you'd get back to Castletown office and there'd be another there.

DC Another one.

Mr. C And you'd have to go again. It wasn't – you're laughing, it was no joke.

DC I bet it wasn't a joke.

Mr. C No, it was no joke. And then of course eventually I was called up for the RAF, by half an hour.

DC By half an hour – what, that's all the notice you had, you mean?

Mr. C No, I was called up by half an hour. Now, I'll explain that to you, you look at my date of birth, it's the last day of March, '39, and people on the 1st April were never called up.

DC Oh, really.

Mr. C Yes. Unless they'd been deferred for to do university or a trade, the 1st April never called up.

DC So that was the date when service ended?

Mr. C National Service finished. We went for our medicals at the Tromode Drill Hall, January, February, March of '39, April, May and June, we were all there for our medicals. I opted for three years because the post office allowed you to go for three years and they guaranteed you a job when you came back. I opted for three years because two years was National Service, three years was a regular, so you got paid three times as much, as you probably are aware.

DC That's right, I remember it well, because I did the same thing.

Mr. C Well, that's what I did, not for the money but just because I think that National Service should never have finished, I think that everybody should have really had to do a year, it would have done some people good. And we were half way through our training and it came on the news that night, 'the government have decided not to bring the next call-up for National Service, the final call-up, except for those deferred for university, will not now take place'. And the bil-let nearly went in a riot that night, because we were there, only just started, just starting, it was the best thing all out. I remember Hut 49 at Bridgenorth, that's where I was at the time, Shropshire ...

DC In the RAF.

Mr. C ... in the RAF, yes. Thoroughly enjoyed my time there, spent most of it in Anick, in Northumberland, RAF Boulmer, and I was only there last week looking at the premises and it's changed, it looks like, oh, well, luxury accommodation from what we had. We had nissen huts.

DC That's right, yes.

Mr. C Nissen huts with four in each room, the two senior men got a room to themselves and the corporal was in a room on his own. Eventually I had a room on my own, which was nice. I threw myself into a lot of activity up there, because you couldn't get home, you know, you couldn't get home like everybody else would go off for the weekend ...

DC A 48 hour was no use.

Mr. C Well, it wasn't very good. If you think about it, it's a long way home from Northumberland to the Isle of Man and your cheap weekend pass started at midnight on Thursday night but the train went at 10.20, right, to Newcastle, so you couldn't get that cheap ticket, £1.30 it was, to Liverpool.

DC Was it?

Mr. C Return.

DC Right, return!

Mr. C Return, right, £1.30 return from Longhoughton to – or from Alnmouth, actually, Longhoughton was our station, we could – it didn't stop at the – the last train didn't stop there, but from Alnmouth it was £1.30 to Liverpool. I remember, they brought this rule in that they wouldn't issue the ticket until midnight, so what you had to do was you had to buy a return to Newcastle, and the train from Newcastle was after midnight and they would issue you with it, they would issue the cheap ticket to Liverpool, but it still cost you £1.30, so you'd spent nearly a quid to get to Newcastle, which was most annoying. So this particular night I thought, oh, blow it, I'm going to try this, so I went to the ticket desk, and I said, 'I'd like a return to Liverpool please, cheap weekend'. And he said, 'you know I'm not supposed to issue them till after midnight'. So I said, 'oh, but I've got a long way to go and unless I can get this train now', I said, 'I won't get home, it's not worth going home'. So he said, 'where do you live?' I said, 'the Isle of Man, and', I said, 'I've got to get a boat tomorrow, it's 11 o'clock from Liverpool'. So he said, 'where do you live in the Isle of Man?' I said, 'Castletown'. So he said, 'who's your doctor?' And I thought that's an awful strange question, this is a third degree here, so I said, 'Dr. Rolfe'. 'Oh, yes, right, you can have the ticket any time, he's my relation'. And that's as true as I sit here, David, that's the truth.

DC Really, yes.

Mr. C And he said 'if anybody asks, you're a special case'. And there was only two of us on the camp from the Isle of Man and you know who the other was?

DC No.

Mr. C Ian Cannell.

DC Oh, right.

Mr. C Ian Cannell from Peel, and that's where I met Ian. When I arrived at Boulmer somebody said, 'oh, there's another queer feller from the Isle of Man arrived', and he said, 'yes, three legs of man, there's another ...' and of course Ian then came to look for me, he'd been there some months before me, so we got very, very pally then and he was our best man eventually, is Ian, and it all stemmed from there and we went to the local church together because we were both Methodists, strong Methodists, and we had to walk home from Anick back to Boulmer, you'd have to walk four miles home from church, and then they started a youth club for us afterwards, so that we could wait till the 10.30 bus, save walking all that way, because it was a road that, there wasn't the cars on it – you'd walk ...

DC A long walk, four miles, isn't it?

Mr. C Well, it was at, you know, 8 o'clock at night, after the church service, it was a very, very quiet road, quiet road indeed.

DC So National Service then went relatively smoothly, and were you in UK all the time?

Mr. C No, no I wasn't. I spent a lot of time in London actually for, it was Fighter Command headquarters and I'd go down for various things, then I got very much involved with the cinema on the station where I was, and partly because I used to help Harold Hughes in the Castletown Cosy cinema.

DC Oh, did you?

Mr. C Oh, yes, I was always – photography and films was always interesting to me, I've been caught with a blank screen in the Cosy cinema before today, got so interested in watching what was coming on we'd forget to change over, because it had to be done manually, you know.

DC The reels, yes.

Mr. C Yes, the reels, and you'd watch the dot on the top right hand corner, start up the next machine and then pull the levers and oh, I used to that with Harold, every Tuesday night was Harold's night when the projectionist, it was a Mr. Kelly who was the projectionist, had his night off, or was on holiday and I would go up to the Cosy and help Harold re-wind the film and had to watch he didn't over-wind it and it'd go down in a bucket of water because there was water for fire precautions, because it was carbon rods, you see, in those days, with a DC current. We're getting side-tracked again, David, aren't we?

DC We are, but it's interesting that.

Mr. C So I got the cinema going in the RAF station because nobody was interested, everybody wanted to go home, you see, and I remember showing TT films and all sorts, I'd get from the Tourist Board. They'd send me some Manx films and the races and even in those days – and we would show a full length film in cinema, I got the cinema altered to cinemascope.

DC Did you?

Mr. C Cinemascope in those days was ...

DC Where did you get the movies from, how did you get them?

Mr. C They had an RAF library.

DC Oh, did they?

Mr. C We sent to Kingsway House in London and they sent me on a – I'd been doing the job for about, oh, two or three months, but I hadn't my little card to authorise myself to be in the projection room, so they said, 'oh, we'd better send you on this course'. So they sent me to London for a week to learn how to strip these French Debre projectors, they were really superb. You could split the whole thing down, if some part of it broke down you could take it apart and it was so modern. In those days it was modern because it had a oil system like a car, it had a pump, and the oil was dripping down all the time through a glass tube to oil all the parts as the film was going through. And the oil wasn't getting on the film but it was getting on all the bearings and this little oil system which I'd never seen before because I used to have a church 16mm projector which was that heavy you could hardly lift, bought by Dibby Jones, who was the superintendent of Castletown Methodist Sunday School, bought from a church in London and flown over by British Airways, BEA in those days, and we used to have these religious films at church service at night if we couldn't have a preacher. So that's how I got involved with that. So the cinema really took off.

DC So what were – were you showing 32 mm films in those days?

Mr. C No, they were all 16mm, yes they were all 16, and we had two projectors, so I could go from one – except two projectors but only one cinemascope lens they'd give me, so every time we changed the reel I'd have to whip the lens off one and put it on the other camera, it was either that or I had to stop and re-

thread, well, I could change the lens over much quicker, and these massive lenses, they spread out the picture and it really was, really good.

DC Technically then, cinemascope wasn't a problem to project it, was it?

Mr. C No, no, no, it wasn't.

DC It had been filmed with three cameras I think, hadn't it, the movies themselves?

Mr. C I'm not sure how they did it now.

DC Yes, I think it was three cameras.

Mr. C It was the early days of cinemascope and of course it looked enormous when we altered the screen, because when I – it was only once – there was only a small screen and I said, 'oh let's get a cinemascope screen' and they said, 'oh, we can't do that'. And I remember taking over the cinema and I was there about two months and everything was in one plug, right, so there was two projectors, a wall heater, a fan, the turntable to project – music, before people came in, with an amplifier, and all these plugs were in one 15 amp socket ...

DC Really.

Mr. C ... a great big thing with all these adaptors stuck on. And I said 'that's terrible, that's just illegal, you know, and if anything goes wrong how do I know which has gone wrong'.

DC Yes, how do you know which.

Mr. C And of course the inevitable happened, didn't it, I was asking for this to be done, 'no, no, there's no money to do it', and I said, 'well', I said, 'something's going to go wrong one night and I'm going to be in a mess', and of course it had to be something the CO was at, wouldn't it be? We were running, I'd been in about three months, three or four months by then, we were running a film for the lifeboat, Boulmer lifeboat, and we were well into the second part of the film and all of a sudden there was a hell of a bang, and everything went off, everything. And of course I didn't know where to start, I said something's blown up but what it is, two projectors there with transformers, and I didn't know where to start, so I started by going to my billet to get another flex, another long cable which I happened to have ...

DC You couldn't even play any music for them.

Mr. C Couldn't play anything, the lights were on in the building, because there were dimmers, the dimmers still worked so I got the lights back on straight away and I tried, I grabbed a plug, a cable from one projector and I put the lead in through to another plug in the hall, damn if that went bang too, so I said, 'right, that cable we're not touching'. So I grabbed another cable and I said 'I'll have to go for an extension lead' and while I was away – and I said to the CO, I said, 'just give me ten minutes, give me ten minutes', and I came back and by that time he'd told everybody to go home and I got the other projector going then, one projector going.

DC Yes, you actually found ...

Mr. C The lead, the lead across the transformer had cracked and it was short-circuiting right across. I had five plugs in by the end of the week.

DC Right, solved the problem anyway.

Mr. C Five plugs, everything was individually – because he came in, he said, ‘well, what’s the problem?’ I said, ‘look, that’s my problem,’ I said, ‘I don’t know where the problem is’, I said ‘the problem is in that plug somewhere, I’ve got five things coming in there and I don’t know which has gone wrong and I’ve no way of finding it, it’s trial and error’. I had all my plugs. It’s like, another incident which was really good in the RAF, was you never – you ask for volunteers in the RAF and nobody volunteers but I volunteered, when I was at Bridgenorth, to join the band and they said, ‘oh, no, you shouldn’t do that, you shouldn’t do that’. Anyway we did, and cutting a long story short I used to come to Jurby to play in the passing out parades, Bridgenorth Band would come to Jurby for the officer cadets passing out. And I came off the boat, the very first time I did it, I came off the boat and I thought can I go home, can I go home, you’re not supposed to be home, you know, not being in the RAF very long. So my mother was at the boat to say hello and I said, ‘hello’, I said, ‘goodbye’, and we went up to Jurby and I got in the queue to get the bedding and I got to the head of the queue and this flight sergeant said, ‘I’m not giving you bedding, you can home’.

DC Oh, that was good.

Mr. C It was good. Jack Bridson it was, Flight Sergeant Jack Bridson, remember him being in the Commissioners at one time?

DC No.

Mr. C Well, and what could the officer say, all he could say was, ‘well, if you can get back for parades and rehearsals you can go home’, so that was fine. My own car of course was still in the garage at home, which I’d never sold when I went to the Forces, which was an Austin 7, it used to give a lot of trouble in those days, if you ever lent it to anybody, the clutch was terrible, it was very sharp, well known for that, you could break a half-shaft very easily on it, oh, terrible. I only lent it to anybody about twice and each time they broke a half shaft, the clutch was so gentle. But anyway I exchanged it for an A35 for £50 and the car is now worth £8,000 and it’s still on the Isle of Man. Yes, no, don’t laugh, you think about the things my father threw away, too. Because he had motor bikes, Ariel four squares, and old wagons which we put in Billown tip which we thought would never be any good and some people are just restoring them now, and making, oh, making them look really marvellous, you know, it’s just unbelievable.

DC You never know what to keep really, but there we are.

Mr. C I spent a short time in Cyprus too in the RAF, that wasn’t very nice, it was a bad time.

DC Were you in the band there?

Mr. C No, no, it was when Makarios was in, war conditions, and I’ve never been so scared in my life as there, some of my colleagues were killed in Limassol because they were going into areas they shouldn’t have been, you know, being silly, chancing their luck, and we were glad to get back from there and back to my camp in Boulmer. I was actually rather ill with peritonitis while I was there and was lucky in really some ways to survive it. Because they always try to think you’re pulling their leg and you’re not ill and it was appendicitis to start

with and of course they told me to come back, the doctor's not here till tomorrow, come back tomorrow, and I was pretty ill by the next day and managed to get home just before Christmas after spending about six hours in Leeds with fog, couldn't see anything, and the train was just delayed. And I got home and my father told me when I got off the boat that the Chickens Rock lighthouse was on fire. That was the time.

DC Oh, that was the time.

Mr. C That sticks out in my mind, 'the Chickens Rock's on fire', he said, 'it's in a bad way'. I said, 'oh'. Because my father was involved with carting spares from when the lighthouse boats came in, he would do the haulage to bring stuff for the lighthouse, so, you know, he was most upset about this Chicken's Rock. So I came back from the Forces eventually and took up my post in Castletown office again with – a chap called Hammond was the postmaster then, because they would change around, you know, it was a Crown office in those days.

DC Of course it was, yes.

Mr. C And it should always have been a Crown office, Castletown, the ex capital of Man, Ramsey managed to keep their Crown office at the same time – they tried to demote Ramsey at the same time as Castletown and Castletown Commissioners were a bit naive then, they should have objected to it like Ramsey did, and they managed to keep it a Crown office at Ramsey for quite some time afterwards.

DC How did it differ after the war then as a postman?

Mr. C Well, we had more vans because we were doing Colby and Ballabeg deliveries from Castletown and I did Colby and Ballabeg in an early run for quite some time. And before we had the vans, an interesting thing was that you'd have to cycle on a certain duty, the early duty, you'd have to cycle to the lighthouse.

DC Which lighthouse?

Mr. C Langness lighthouse.

DC Oh, Langness.

Mr. C Yes, from Castletown. You'd start off at Rushen Motors, which was Mylchrests Garage in Douglas Road, up to Brookfield Avenue, into the College, all of Derbyhaven, the Golf Links came in for their mail, that was something, and then out to the lighthouse. Now if it was blowing a howling gale, a hooley, as we call it, you'd have to walk to the lighthouse. Now I remember one occasion I walked to the lighthouse, I delivered the mail to the lighthouse and the darn wind changed while I was there and I had to walk back again. It was no joke, David.

DC Very strong winds.

Mr. C Oh, you couldn't walk, you couldn't ride against it in the middle of winter, and you – not only then you had leggings and cape on, but you'd be sweating inside because of the heat.

DC Yes, of course.

Mr. C Trying to cycle against the wind and then you couldn't, you'd have to get off and walk if it was really blowing, coming up the Derbyhaven Road. Another interesting thing used to make the local people a bit of a joke actually. At half past two every day we put a mail on the 3 o'clock plane to Liverpool, it was what they call a supplementary mail, to Liverpool. So all the south mail came in on buses, twenty to two, from Ballasalla and ten to two from Port Erin, Port St. Mary, taken off at Castletown, re-sorted, and off to the airport for the 3 o'clock plane to Liverpool. Now the cut off time for the bike weight was 23 kilos, and it sticks out in my mind, 50 pound, 23 kilos. If it was over 23 kilos you had to have a second postman, for the weight, you weren't allowed to have. So there had to be two or three of us always available at half past two, and you wouldn't know whether you were going to the airport or not until the last minute. At Christmas there'd be five bikes going up towards the airport, all in column of route with the mail for the plane. And that was the good old days because then that mail went away at 3 o'clock and if there was any bad weather came in, 5 o'clock or later, fog came in, sometimes the next mail didn't always get away. And the mail coming to the Island used to come in at twenty to nine from Liverpool on the BEA plane. Now we have a charter plane going off the Island at ten past eight every night with about 5 ton of mail, that's how much it's increased.

DC That's right.

Mr. C We used to get, what, oh, thirty or forty bags off the morning plane, now it's in the hundreds.

DC Is it?

Mr. C Oh, hundreds.

DC And I mean has the sorting system changed very much on the Island?

Mr. C No, it hasn't really, no. We haven't modernised like we should do, and maybe we will in the future.

DC Does the postman, I mean did you have to do that as part of your work as well, the sorting or is that someone else's job?

Mr. C No, we sorted, we sorted, in Castletown we sorted. We had a dispatch at Christmas, we had a dispatch to all parts of England, when it was a Crown office. When it stopped being a Crown office we lost that which was a detrimental step in a way. The way it works now where everybody is together at the airport, that's probably better, but there's – the local people still think that the mail in the south should go straight to the plane from the south, and that's still a bone of contention. We were given to understand that this would happen when we all moved to the airport sorting office, down by Strix it is, by the railway line. That didn't materialise, so the mail is all taken to Douglas and all brought back again to the airport, that's not a step forward, is it?

DC You wouldn't think so, no. What about this postman's problem of dog bites then?

Mr. C Oh, dog bites, oh, I've had some bad ones.

DC Have you?

Mr. C Oh aye, yes. I had a rottweiler got me once in Colby Glen Road and took a right chunk out of my leg and my thigh and people are silly, you know, it al-

ways happens when the people are there. They will either not shut the inside door to keep a dog in, or they think they've shut it, or they'll open the outside door and the dog will come out between their legs and get you. And that's a bad one, that was the really bad one and I was really, really sore.

DC Did you have to have hospital treatment?

Mr. C I did, yes, I've had tetanus a few times. I only had a tetanus a few months ago, my tetanus had run out, because it's ten years now, and I was walking down a drive and this woman said, 'oh, it won't touch you, it won't touch you', and the next thing it had me, and that's always – they don't go in again, they've had it then. That and letter boxes, oh, blooming heck.

DC What about letter boxes?

Mr. C Oh, letter boxes are a pain in the neck some of them, people don't think.

DC When you get your hands trapped, you mean?

Mr. C Yes, the vertical letter boxes that lift with a hinge at the top, the world's worst. They won't, the letters get bent, you can't get your fingers out, right, and the next thing is that the letter boxes with these draught excluders behind stop you putting things – they put them so close together you can't get the mail through, you know. Somebody said to me, a classic example is when people volunteer to deliver literature for people for elections and they say, 'who'd be a postman, the letter boxes are terrible'. I said, 'don't tell me the letter boxes are terrible, I know they're terrible, but I've got used to them, I know the bad ones'.

DC Yes, you know where you're going.

Mr. C Some of them now have these letter boxes on both sides, right, to stop the draught, that's what it's supposed to be, but they have a lip, on the inside of the letter box they have a lip, right, so when you push a letter through it catches on the lip and it won't go anywhere and you spend a lot of time trying to get a letter through.

DC And some of the slots would be too small for the mail these days as well.

Mr. C Oh, some of them are thin, you see, and you can't even get photographs through with a film, because a lot of these firms send photographs with a free film.

DC Yes, and the older ones are thin strips, aren't they?

Mr. C They are, yes, especially in some of these PVC doors.

DC What happens when you can't get mail through the letter box, do you have to just leave it on the step or ...

Mr. C Well, don't ask me that question.

DC I won't ask you that question.

Mr. C I'm on a duty that I'm permanently on, what they call I've been put out with the sheep at Cregneash, I've always been in Castletown until recently but then I was ill about three years ago and I was told I had to take a – supposed to be a lighter duty, but it's no longer lighter because there's been extra houses been put on the round and you don't think of the number of houses that get built on

a round, but they are, you know, going back 25 years ago, you never had a house built in the Isle of Man, you could go along Colby and there wouldn't be one built for years. Now they're sprouting up overnight, some places. So I'm at Cregneash permanently, so at least I know everybody individually and they know me and there's – it's good for some things, that you know if somebody's away and that's not right, something's wrong there, or somebody might be ill, or you know, it's a good idea to have somebody that knows you well.

DC So were you a carrier of news and gossip as well?

Mr. C No.

DC No, some postmen were, I think, weren't they? Probably country postmen maybe.

Mr. C Well, probably more so when I was on the Ballabeg round and the good old days when you knew ...

DC The skeet.

Mr. C Well, yes, when you did have time. The problem is now it's a race to get finished, there's not the local community talk to people, you don't have the time, people are ringing up if you are late, you'd be surprised, you know, you get an exceptionally busy day, people are on the phone, 'why is the mail an hour late?' And it can fluctuate, you can't do nothing about it at the moment. One day it would be very heavy and if you have a bank holiday, look out, two or three days later it's terrible, and you really are late. There's still ...

DC Well, you've fitted in all sorts of other things into your life I know but I mean you've spent a good number of years as a member of the Castletown Town Comissioners. What got you started into that then?

Mr. C I don't know. The post office encouraged you to take an interest in the local community, this is the English post office, and I thought it might be nice to join. I think there was one or two things that annoyed me at the time, what the present Board had done at that time, I won't mention who, because that wouldn't be fair, and I was stood with Mr. Tony Brown and we both turfed out, or removed, sitting members of the Board, which caused a bit of a – because we were young in those days, both of us, that's going back to '76, '77, you know, and my wife encouraged me to do it and without her help at times – it's a chaotic house this, because I can come in, I can come in and be gone within eight minutes to another meeting from work. And I have to say the post office has been very generous to me for allowing me to get to meetings. And that was policy, that was an English post office policy that anybody in civic affairs had to have time off to do that.

DC It's strange, of course, a lot of the members of the Douglas Council were postmen or postal workers, weren't they?

Mr. C Because they finished early too, that was handy, they finished at 1 o'clock and the meetings were in the afternoon. And I couldn't do a lot unless I was finished early. But the Board of Education I've found very, very rewarding, very frustrating at times, but very rewarding and very hard work. And I became involved with that because my wife said, you know, there's going to be a vacancy, Mrs Kelly was retiring because of her age, and you've always been involved with the schools, with PTA and various things, and I knew I could do it with the time, finishing at 1 o'clock most days, and I have thoroughly enjoyed

it. I'm on the governing body for the primary schools, Castle Rushen, Ballakermeen, the Isle of Man College and I'm a Trustee of King William's College, so that's ...

DC Presumably people are constantly calling, or have been calling on you for help in one form or another as well, have they, either as a commissioner or maybe educational work?

Mr. C Both really, yes, both. It seems to come in phases, you can get nobody for a long time and then all of a sudden you'll get a lot of complaints about something that might be niggling a lot of people and I think my biggest worry is housing for people in the town. We don't have the houses for them and we are at a stage now where we have a group of houses in Coronation Terrace where we're going to have to empty to get them to be modernised. So we're going to have to find places for those people to go, if you understand me, so we will not have any houses to allocate until we've removed them and we must have them out of those houses by next April. Because Coronation Terrace, unfortunately, is one of the longest built in the town and yet they've not been modernised and they should have been, they should have been done but they knew it was going to be a big job and we've – it's going to cost a lot of money. Of course Farrant's Park is a housing estate which has given us an awful lot of problems and I did say, and it goes on record, some ten, fifteen years ago, take a block down and start again, and I am still of the opinion that's what should have happened fifteen years ago because we're still pouring money into Farrant's Park, or the government is, and it's not always the best way to do it. You might not think it – we had to pull houses down in James Road and start again and they were better off for it.

DC Yes, but a newly built house today is immensely costly, isn't it, really?

Mr. C Well, how does a young couple get started nowadays, no, it's unbelievable the cost, the way it's gone up in the last few years, the last five years even, and I'm really sorry for young couples trying to start on the ladder. You've got to get on the ladder and unless you get on the ladder you're getting nowhere. I've been lucky here, we're 33 years in this house, it was an open field when we came down to look at the plot, my wife and I, and the house has changed a lot since we actually moved in but it's convenient for town and there's more possibilities of houses being built in the area, we've got Malew Road which I hope will be allowed to be built on, and we had a building, well, 8 houses built in Malew Street, unfortunately they were purchased by one person and that wasn't – we didn't anticipate that happening and that's upset a lot of people that wanted to buy them, first time buyers, and that's what's happening now in other places where someone's coming and buying a whole block and either renting them or selling them off at a profit, it's – I don't know what the answer is.

DC And houses run by the local authority then, have you got some in – as part of the government's plans, for that.

Mr. C Well the percentage ...

DC Or have you got land for it?

Mr. C I'm more interested in first time buyers' houses in Castletown. We have a lot of council houses in Castletown, between Janet's – well, LGB houses and commissioners' houses, there's a great number, and the balance at the local school is well over, is about three-quarters of the children come from council houses and a quarter from private, that's all.

DC Really, is that so.

Mr. C That's right.