

**MANX HERITAGE FOUNDATION.**

**ORAL HISTORY.**

**PORT ST. MARY**

**Interviewees:** Mr. Bobby and Mrs Edith Bridson

**Interviewed & recorded by:** Mr. Adrian Cain

**Dates recorded:** 11<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> December 2002 - 4 Tapes.

**Topic:** Crofting life

**AC** Why were you born at Balladoole then?

**Mr. B** Well, my father, in those days, after he come back from the First World War and all, well, he was farm labouring, you see, and Moores were in Balladoole, so, there's cottages opposite Balladoole, there's two cottages on the left hand side as you come over Fisher's Hill ...

**Mrs B** It's made into one big house now, have you seen it?

**AC** On the top of the hill?

**Mrs B** Taylors, yes.

**AC** Well, you see, that's where my Uncle Arthur was born.

**Mrs B** Yes, probably. His father was - Eddie - you see he was a farm labourer too.

**Mr. B** Aye, well, he'd be – he probably went to live in that house maybe after we went out of it.

**Mrs B** Yes, quite likely.

**AC** Yes, probably.

**Mrs B** Yes, because Arthur's the same age as Dougie – Arthur Crawley.

**Mr. B** Yes. Well, then you see, from November '26 to November '36, Mike had one brother, and father and mother, and my father took a little croft right up the top house in Ballakillowie, well, we were up there for ten years, you see. And he kept a cow and a couple of calves each year, and there were seven sheep and my mother kept hens, you know, and it's amazing some of the animals, and the hens, how tame they would get. And there was one hen, we called her Imp, and one year my mother put a sitting of duck eggs under her. Well, she hatched the duck eggs out all right, but she couldn't understand, like, she was going round in circles, and the ducks were swimming in this little pool, you see, and she didn't know what to make of that. But she became very tame, that hen, you could stroke her. And in the winter time the cow would be lying down in the stall in the cowhouse and Imp, the hen, would jump over the half door to go to the back of the cow, and Flo, the cow, never took any notice of her. Imp would jump up onto Flo's back, walk right up over her, down over her head and lay the egg in the straw in front of the cow. Now the cow never touched the egg. But my mother always knew when Imp had laid an egg, she'd come out cackling, and she'd come right round to the house and walk straight in through the front door into the house for food. You know, there was comical things like that happening, you know.

**AC** So describe to me the croft then, can you?

**Mr. B** Well, the croft, it was seven acres and there was a cow house and one or two useful sheds there as well, you see. And my father would have, maybe, half an acre ploughed up each year with one of the neighbouring farmers, and you know, he would set all the spuds there, you see, for the coming winter and all. Well, then, he was keeping the seven sheep and they would have lambs. Now the rent of that place per year, not per week, the rent of that croft was £20 a year. And it was people in Douglas that owned it. And the sale of the lambs every year paid the rent off, which was very good, you know, because even £20 those days was quite a lot of money, but - and the cow then, would be grazing out in the field. Well, naturally we had surplus milk, but Willie Corrin, just below us, he was the farmer, and he would buy any of the surplus milk in the spring and summer time, you see, because he had a milk round in both Port Erin and Port St. Mary, you see. I can tell you some time again about all the milk rounds that came into the south, you know, there was at least nine, you see. Well, then - that's right, we left Hillcroft ...

**Mrs B** You had a pig up there too.

**Mr. B** Oh, yes, we'd a pig every year, too.

**Mrs B** I can understand that - tell him about the poor pig.

**Mr. B** Aye, we always called him Tommy and he was a little feller, then he'd grow up and every year old Lowey from Colby here, Lowey the pigsticker they called him, he was going round killing pigs for people you see. And each spring my father would have this pig killed, Lowey would ...

**Mrs B** Called Tommy, and they were calling him Tommy every year ...

**Mr. B** ...and Lowey would come up like and cut - kill the pig out in the field and my brother and I - all we were waiting for was the bladder, and we would blow it up for a football, you see. And then the pig would be quartered and some of it salted and some of it given away to relations and all, you know, but it was always very good bacon - because some of the people who kept pigs, they used to feed them in the summer time with the swill that come out of the boarding houses, well, that tasted the bacon a bit, you see. So my father always fed the pig on buttermilk and oats and that type of thing, you see, and the bacon was very, very good and wholesome. There was no flavour of anything of it like that, you see. So with Mother keeping hens, she would usually have enough eggs to sell, for people round about who wanted a dozen or so, you know.

**Mrs B** And she'd get visitors.

**Mr. B** Yes, she'd get visitors - that was comical. She kept visitors up there and there was one year there was a man and woman, they were only in their twenties, they came up, you see. And they enjoyed it and they thought nothing of walking down to Gansey beach or Port Erin or Port St. Mary. Well, they went home to Liverpool way and they told, I don't know whether it was his auntie and his grandmother - oh, what a lovely holiday they had, you know, at Ballakillowie, you see. So anyway the grandmother and the young one, they decided they would come over. Well, my brother and I went down to Colby station to meet them, help them with their cases, and this woman, oh, she was very heavy, and oh, she was tired, so I said to her, well, I said - she said, 'Where is the house?' 'Well,' I said, 'you've got a two mile walk from now'. Well, she nearly collapsed with that. But anyway I remember that there was a chap in Colby with a little lorry and he took the cases and they got a ride up, you see. Well, when the old lady got up - oh, there was a little boy with them too - when the old lady got up - these young ones that went back had said, 'oh, the beach is quite near', and the young feller was running out across our gate into the field shouting, 'where's the beach?' I said, 'there's the beach down there', you know, pointing down to Gansey, you see. But comical things like that happened. Then the old lady said, 'Well', she said, 'I'm sorry, at my age I can't stay up here', so I think they paid up for the weekend and up to Monday and they went into Port Erin to finish their holiday, you see. But the young ones never thought about the old ones unable to walk that distance, you know.

**AC** Yes. So how did she get to know about your father's croft, then?

**Mrs B** How did your mother advertise?

**AC** Yes, that's right.

**Mr. B** Oh, let me think, well, actually I'm not sure but my father had brothers in Liverpool and I think a lot of the holidaymakers would come over by word of mouth. But I think she must have advertised somewhere maybe in the paper in Liverpool or round about there. But there was never any scarcity - she was very limited to the number we could take, you know, but they always got - well, most of them had full board when they were up there. Well, the cooking facilities in those days, you see, it was just a paraffin oil stove with burners under, and my mother had to do all the cooking and that and all that preparation and you see there was no bathroom and then the visitors all accepted it but it was just an outside dry toilet. And none of them complained at all.

**Mrs B** No, because they didn't expect anything else when they went up in the country.

**Mr. B** No, and they all seemed to enjoy their holidays, you know. Well, then ...

**AC** What about - what did you do for water?

**Mr. B** Well, we used to go down to the farm, it was 100 yards down the road, and pick - get water there. Well, eventually my father persuaded the landlady to sink a well up at Hillcroft. But the unfortunate part about that was they sunk the well, they found water, put the pump there. Well, they were down in the rocks and unfortunately they should have went deeper because for about six to eight month in the year after the well was dug it was dry, so we still had to go down to Preston's to get the water, you see. Well, Alfie and I, we were schoolboys then, and we would cart enough water up in buckets to keep the trough in the field full for the cow and drinking water for the house, you see. So we were very fortunate that the farmer always allowed us to take water out of the well, you see. So that was very handy.

**AC** Were there many other people like your father in that similar situation?

**Mr. B** Oh, yes, there was an awful lot of crofting in those days, yes, up in Ballakilpheric and Earystane and Surby. It's amazing the small farms and crofts there were around then and people more or less - well, it helped them with their living, you know. It wasn't sufficient, the man of the house usually had to go out to work in the daytime, like, you know, to earn a bit of money, but it was quite useful if you had lambs for sale and calves of a year old for sale, you see, it brought a bit of extra money in, you know, and that was quite useful.

**Mrs B** And he could afford it, couldn't it?

**Mr. B** Pardon?

**Mrs B** Your father could afford it.

**Mr. B** Yes, in those - but you see money was scarce. Now right up, even to 1940, we were out of it then, I believe it was even till after the war, and the people that owned this croft in Douglas, it was up for sale, £500, the house, the buildings and seven acres. And there's a lovely view, you're looking straight down to Port St. Mary. If ever you go up Ballakillowie by car it's the last house on your right hand side.

**AC** Is it still there then?

**Mr. B** Oh, yes.

**Mrs B** It's called Hillcrest.

**AC** Hillcrest, it's the one on the right hand side?

**Mr. B** Yes, it's the top house.