

**MANX HERITAGE FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT**

**‘TIME TO REMEMBER’**

**Interviewee(s):** Mr Charlie Corkill

**Date of birth:** 4<sup>th</sup> March 1928

**Place of birth:** Douglas, Isle of Man

**Interviewer(s):** Elizabeth Ardern-Corris

**Recorded by:** Elizabeth Ardern-Corris

**Date recorded:** 21<sup>st</sup> March 2012

**Topic(s):** Family and early years  
Conibears the fruiterers  
Childhood friends and mischief  
Early school years and discipline  
St John Ambulance Brigade  
WWII and Air Training Corps  
Lab boy at Douglas High School  
Convalescing after appendicitis  
Trainee with Sea War Transport Commission  
Royal National Lifeboat Institution rescue  
Douglas Harbour and boats  
Shops and local businesses  
Travelling by bus and train  
Emigrating to New Zealand  
Returning to the Isle of Man  
Sons’ seafaring careers

**Charlie Corkill** - Mr C  
**Elizabeth Ardern-Corris** - EA-C

**EA-C** I'm Elizabeth Ardern-Corris, it's the 21<sup>st</sup> March 2012. I'm at the home of Mr Charlie Corkill in Peel.

**Mr C** Yep.

**EA-C** Mr Corkill, can you tell me when you were born and where you were born please?

**Mr C** Yes, I was born, according to my birth certificate, on the 4<sup>th</sup> March 1928 at the Jane Crookall Maternity home in Douglas, but my parents at that time were living in Castletown so I consider myself Castletown, you know, my birth place.

**EA-C** What were your parent's names?

**Mr C** My father was Charles William Corkill and my mother, Evelyn. Evelyn, yea, Evelyn Dudley, yea. And both born in the Isle of Man. My father, of course, his father was also Charles Corkill – he was then the Coroner for Rushen Sheading, amongst other things, yea.

**EA-C** So your name, Charles – Charlie ...

**Mr C** Yea ... Charles Edwin.

**EA-C** ... has been handed down throughout the generations?

**Mr C** Yes, that's right, yea.

**EA-C** It's a tradition?

**Mr C** Yea, yea ... my great grandfather, I believe, his name also was Charles, but there's no record of him. We ... the Family History Society and other people have sort of tracked him down to being a police constable in Liverpool. I've never tried to verify that, except that a friend of mine, Phyllis Watterson, has got a document for a burial for somebody and one of the witnesses at the funeral was Charles Corkill, retired policeman from Liverpool – that's somewhere I can investigate I suppose, yea.

**EA-C** Do you come from a large family?

**Mr C** On my father's side, no, there was just my father and he had an adopted sister, Auntie Margaret, she was a lovely person. But on my mother's side, the family wasn't big, so much as huge! My mother was number fourteen of fifteen ... siblings. And the ones on either side of my mother, I know ... Doris – she's still alive, living in Tromode Park in Douglas, and the one on the other side, the fifteenth ... I can't remember her name now ... but she's ... or was, the last I heard of her, in a rest home in Douglas somewhere. But other than that, I know I've got cousins all over the place in the Isle of Man and Britain and elsewhere, you know.

**EA-C** Can you remember as a child having lots of family gatherings?

**Mr C** Oh yes, yes ... not so much in Castletown because, as I say, I was the only one, and ... but when we went to Douglas, quite often on the buses, road service buses, met up with me mother's family and there were hoards of us. And my grandparents, then, had *Min-y-Don* at the far end of Strathallan Crescent, Douglas Promenade – big hotel with a great big front garden, and we used to have great parties – for us kids, anyway – you know, playing in the lawn there, and across the road onto the rocks and the sea shore. And then, shortly before the war started, grandfather and grandmother Dudley retired, sold *Min-y-Don* and they moved out to Abbeylands to a place which they called *Burrowdale*, and it was a typical Manx farm, you know, central door and two living rooms downstairs and about six bedrooms upstairs. And granddad then developed a couple of huge greenhouses which, as it turned out, came into being very, very useful because of the war, he was able to grow all sorts of things, you know, to help the food out, you know – tomatoes and cucumbers and lettuces and things like that – all year round, sort of, you know. And there was about what, ten – fifteen acres of land there, right alongside the stream – alongside the river, and in that river, that's where I learnt to swim, there was a bathing hole there. And again, the cousins of that era – we had a great time, yea, we had that many sprained ankles, you know, grazed arms and that sort of thing – falling out of trees and ... we had fun, yea!

**EA-C** Did you spend all of your younger years in Castletown?

**Mr C** Up until the age of about six. Yes, I can remember being in this flat where we lived in Mount Havelock ... this flat in Mount Havelock – we lived there for a couple of years because I remember spending my eighth birthday there, and that

my mother and father had great problems trying to remember how to spell the word 'eight' so they could write it on the birthday card! *(laughter)* Yea, so ... yea ... I can remember that. And I had a bedroom overlooking Finch Road itself, and I can remember now at night-time watching the light from the lighthouse that used to light up my bedroom ... yea, used to be six every thirty seconds or something – all these different flashes ... and that fascinated me, you know. And the lighthouse itself, I can remember, you know, when I was about nine or ten spending lots of time just going down there to have a look at this wonderful white building, the lighthouse – Douglas lighthouse.

**EA-C** Were you an only child?

**Mr C** Err ... no, my sister, Sylvia, she was born ... how old would I be? I'd be about nine, I think, 'cos it was when we first moved from Mount Havelock, we moved to Brisbane Street and that's where my sister, Sylvia, was born, yep. And she lives in Bury in Lancashire now, and we exchange birthday cards and Christmas cards and all that sort of thing, but we don't live in each other's pockets.

**EA-C** Can you remember your feelings when you had a new sister?

**Mr C** Ah, yea! Because I was given the job quite often of looking after her, you know, and I was as proud as Punch, yea. And ... oh, right up until she was at school, actually, you know. We was never very close because of the age difference, you know, yea. Her friends were toddlers, you know, when I was a teenager, you know. I wasn't going to ... *(laughter)*

**EA-C** What did your parents do? Did your father work?

**Mr C** Yes, yea, he was very industrious, was my father. He was a registered plumber and associated thing like your gas fitter and coppersmith and that sort of thing, and he was extremely clever with his hands. And he could turn his hand to anything in the domestic line – building, brick-laying, roofing – that sort of thing. And the only thing he didn't like was anything electrical. But when I was born his occupation on the birth certificate was cycle mechanic – something else he was good at. And I was forever falling off my bike, buckling the wheels and he was muttering under his breath and straightening the wheels out for me so that I could ride back to school again on my bike, you know. And eventually he had his own business as a plumber – plumbing contractor, and moved across

to Liverpool to live. And he converted a big old Edwardian house into a commercial boarding house sort of thing, you know, commercial hotel for travellers more than anything, you know. And they made a fortune out of that and retired from there back to Port St Mary, and that's where they were when my father died – suddenly – of a heart attack, yea.

**EA-C** When you were young, would your mother have stayed at home?

**Mr C** Oh, mother was home a lot, looking after me. I can remember her pushing me all round the place in Peel ... I will say Peel – in Castletown in the pushchair, and she had part-time jobs as and when required, sort of thing, at the then *Derbyhaven Hotel* – it's not a hotel anymore – and also at *The Golf Links Hotel*. She used to help out, mainly in the kitchen, you know, even washing dishes, cooking, changing beds and all that sort of thing. And when we moved to Douglas, she used to work again as required, at peak times – Christmas times, Easter time – for Conibears, the fruit and vegetable merchants. And ...'cos I can remember me dad taking me down to the promenade, late evenings in the summer, to meet me mother after she'd shut up the shop and – the Conibear shop under *The Villa Marina* Arcade, yea ... oh yea.

**EA-C** Who would have looked after you when your mother was working part-time?

**Mr C** My grandparents – I spent a lot of time with me grandparents in Arbory Street, and ... I think I spent more time there with them than I did at home with my parents, you know, because ... well, there was nobody at home, you see. And me grandmother was always in the house, either her or my Auntie Margaret, yea, their adopted daughter. Granny – that's who looked ... and I spent a lot of time, of course, next door but one, because me cousin Ivan was almost the same age and we used to get into mischief together, you know! (*laughter*) Yea ... yea.

**EA-C** What kind of mischief would you have got up to?

**Mr C** Ah ... we'd be chasing gulls – oh, we used to do horrible things ... catching crabs – I can remember once we caught a crab down at Langness and we hit on the idea of putting a candle on the top of it – a little short candle – and putting it in a rabbit hole. And of course the crab scurried down, and that was the last we saw of the crab, but we saw lots of rabbits! (*laughter*) Oh, that was fun, yea – don't know what happened to the poor old crab ... yea, yea – that's the sort of

mischief thing we got up to, yea.

**EA-C** You'd have had lots of friends, then, down in Castletown ...

**Mr C** Yea.

**EA-C** ... but also friends up in Douglas.

**Mr C** In Douglas, yea, but I had more friends in Castletown, actually.

**EA-C** Can you remember some of their names?

**Mr C** In Castletown? There's Flaxenly [sp ???] Stowell – Flaxenly [sp ???]; now he made a name for himself. He lived in The Crofts ... Arden Cannell of course, and the Cannell family ... who else? I can't remember names, that's the thing, yea ... Flaxenly I remember, yea.

**EA-C** Well, tell me a little bit about school – where did you go to school when you were living in Castletown?

**Mr C** I used to go to the Board School, they called it the Castletown Board School, and I don't remember very much about it because the ... except that the seats were awfully hard and uncomfortable and we had those great big long bench seats and they raked, you know. And we were taught by rote – you know – two times two is four, three times three is ... (*laughter*) all that sort of thing. And there was one day I got into awful trouble because we moved into another classroom for some reason or other and this classroom had inkwells ... and I went home with rows and rows of inky marks down the front of my shirt (*laughter*) – yea, that was another scalping – I was sent up to bed without any supper, you know, (*laughter*) – I can remember that! And the playing field – we used to go out and play at playtime – it was awfully dusty, I remember. But the weather seemed to be good. There was always sunshine, I don't remember it raining ... hmm ... then I can remember playing with boats – used to make little boats out of paper of all things, and put them in the river just above the Apostle ... you know the Apostles Bridge in Castletown? It's called the Apostles Bridge because there are twelve piers. Yea ... and we used to put these boats up and they'd drift along on the tide and we used to try and catch them before they disappeared over the rocks down under the bridge, yea. Ah ... now we used to

do the usual knocking people's door and run like hell, you know. *(laughter)*

**EA-C** Did you have a favourite place where you'd play?

**Mr C** Umm ... no, everywhere was a favourite. Possibly the flats – at the back of Arbory Street in those days there was what we called the flats. They were like gardens belonging to the houses in Arbory Street, and at the back of the far end of the flats was a cornfield, and that used to be a popular place except when there was corn growing, you know. And then we didn't have much further to go before we were on the beach.

**EA-C** When you were attending school, did you have a favourite subject? Did you excel in anything in particular?

**Mr C** No, I used to excel at looking forward to going home time – I was not a good scholar, no, until eventually I ended up in Murray's Road School.

**EA-C** In Douglas?

**Mr C** In Douglas. After the Board School in Castletown, my next school was Tynwald Street, which was very rough, and I had many a bleeding nose and a black eye from that place. And ...

**EA-C** Tell me more – why would you have a bleeding nose and black eyes?

**Mr C** Well, as I say, the place was rough. And the kids there considered me posh, 'cos I used to have clean clothes on and that sort of thing, and I used to go to school wearing the school tie – unheard of at some of those ... youngsters down there, so they used to take it out on me, you know. And then my parents moved to live in Brisbane Street and of course I changed schools to Murray's Road School – what a transformation! Yea, I enjoyed every minute at Murray's Road.

**EA-C** What age were you when you went to Murray's Road School?

**Mr C** I'd be ... about eight, yea, 'cos I was about two years at Tynwald Street ... a year at the Board School, two years at ... yea, I'd be eight when I went to Murray's Road, to the junior – the primary part, and I can remember the teachers there, with one exception, they were all lovely people. The person nobody liked was

Doug Barcroft – I remember his name now. He growled and he was ... (*laughter*) a horrid person. (*laughter*) All the other teachers – there was Miss Teare, Miss Cubbon ... and there's Miss Faragher, Miss Taggart ... I had Miss Cubbon for two years because as she ... as I moved up a class so she took ... she was promoted and took the same class. Ah, she was a lovely person, yea, yea ... always smiling, always happy and very, very helpful indeed, yea, yep.

**EA-C** All the teachers sound as if they were single ladies.

**Mr C** All single ladies, yea. There was one married master, what was his name? He was teaching there, awaiting call-up to go into the army – what was his name? Mr Hanson, I think. But yes, all the ladies were all single. That must have been a requirement in those days, because eventually I ended up in the Douglas High School for Boys, and the lady teachers there were all single until I was in about the third form which was half-way through the war, and all the young masters had all been called up, and their place was taken by ladies who'd married and had to give up teaching but were called back to teaching, yea. I can remember there was Mrs Upton, there was Mrs Scarlett ... there were two or three of them, yea.

**EA-C** What was the discipline like in the schools that you attended? Did it vary?

**Mr C** Umm ... it was firm, you behaved yourself, you know, because if you did something wrong in class, you were sent out of the class to wait outside the door until the teacher thought you'd been out there long enough. And if another teacher happened to come along and see you standing there, they knew you sent there for some ... you know ... so you were reprimanded twice, then, you know. So that was at Murray's Road School. Yea, and at the High School discipline, again, was fair but firm. Yea, I was very ... I wasn't a brilliant scholar by any means – I was always nearer the bottom of the class than I was towards the top. But my memories of school days were all very, very happy, yea. And mother always wanted me to do well – my father was totally uninterested, yea. He couldn't have cared less whether I went to school or not. But my mother was the one who prodded me and kept me going, yea. But there again, it was during the war and full of fervour and patriotism along with a couple of pals of mine we joined the St John's [John] Ambulance Brigade as cadets. And that turned out to be extremely valuable, extremely useful and we used to meet regularly in an empty shop under *The Villa Marina* Arcade which was the headquarters of

the SJAB [St John Ambulance Brigade] at that time. And once a week we attended parade, lectures, instruction and then, usually at a weekend, we would take part, you know, big exercises with the adult members of the Brigade and that sort of thing. And then, of course, they introduced the Air Training Corps and along with a couple of mates of mine we enrolled in the Air Training Corps. The minimum age was fifteen years and three months, so we all suddenly got three months older and said, 'Yea, we're fifteen years and three months.' So we were signed up and then the Air Ministry eventually found out that we'd cheated a bit, so they docked three month's seniority off us (*laughter*) some years later! Ah! But the Air Training Corps, it was serious in those days, as you were part ... when you wore that uniform you were part of the Air Force – you were under Air Force discipline. You saluted and had to ... expected a salute in reply when you saw an officer. And you were ... used to go on training camps, weekend training camps and about two times a year we'd go on a full week's training course at one of the Aerodromes under rigorous Air Force discipline ... yea ... and I achieved the rank of corporal, and then go away to sea! (*laughter*) Yea.

**EA-C** What was the first job you had after you left school?

**Mr C** Was at school – I went along to the headmaster one day – this is after ... after school certificate, and we'd left school, and I was writing to all the shipping companies, you know, asking for vacancies for apprenticeships, and a lot of them replied saying, 'Yes, would you ...' you know, ... 'would you please send a character reference,' and all that sort of thing, so I went up to Bill Sykes – Mr Sykes, our Headmaster, and asked him for a character reference, you know, so I could join the merchant navy, and he gave me a beautiful reference. And he said, 'What are you doing now?' And I said, 'I'm not doing anything – why?' He said, 'Well, there's no laboratory attendant at the school.' The lab-boy – what was his name? Great big fellow – he'd joined the Air Force and of course there was a vacancy, so he said, 'If you're doing nothing, you could come and work for the school.' So I did, and I earned a fabulous fee of a pound a week, which in those days was quite a ... quite a heap of money, you know. A pound a week!

**EA-C** What would an average man's wage be, then?

**Mr C** About £3. 10s a week – the average – that’s what my father used to get. And there was me, going back to school, getting a third of his pay, you know – he didn’t like that very much, yea. But that was very useful because they used to have a shilling in the pound scheme in those days if ... for every pound you earned, you put a shilling into a hospital fund and I’d been twenty weeks at the High School working as laboratory attendant and had paid twenty shillings into this fund, and I end up appendicitis which burst and became peritonitis, and I was in hospital for ages, for about six weeks, I think, but it was all paid for by this shilling in the pound scheme, provided a minimum of twenty weeks had been earned, and I’d earned twenty weeks! (*laughter*) So, yea.

**EA-C** And did you resume your work there at the ...

**Mr C** No, while I was there, in the hospital, Ellerman Line sent for me – oh it wasn’t Ellerman Line then, it was the Sea War Transport Commission, sent for me to join a ship belonging to the Ellerman Line in Liverpool and of course I couldn’t, I was in hospital. So they wrote to me and said as soon as I was discharged as fit, I was to approach them and be appointed to a ship, you see, and that’s what happened. I was quite a long time in hospital – I can’t remember exactly – and I was convalescence for about two months. And that was a waste of time for me, you know. (*laughter*) They insisted on this two month’s convalescence. And then the doctor gave me this certificate of fitness. I sent that off, got the reply from Sea War Transport Commission – the war was drawing to an end by this time, ‘cos it was 1945, and I got a letter from the Ellerman Line inviting me to attend for an interview. And they also said as hotel accommodation in Liverpool was scarce, not to worry about finding accommodation, there would be several of their ships in port and accommodation would be found for me on one of these ships while I was attending the interview. So right, I packed me bag and my mother stepped in and said, ‘You are going to sail. They won’t say, ‘come and spend your time on board one of our ships and have an interview.’ They are going to say, ‘Can you sail tomorrow morning when ship’s sailing?’ So you’d better be prepared to go away to sea.’ So instead of having a small weekend case, I had a bloody big suitcase full of all me gear and I went, yea. And I had my interview with the man who came to be known as Mr God – Mr Furley, the Managing Director of the Ellerman Line in Liverpool, ooh ... very high up. And produced all my documents and Mr Sykes’ character reference and all the rest of it, and he said, ‘Are you ready to sail?’ And I said, ‘Yes, sir.’ He said, ‘Oh, that’s good, because you’re on *The San Torch* – *SS San Torch* [sp ???] and

that's sailing tomorrow morning for Swansea – can you stay?' 'Yes sir, I can indeed.' My mother was right! And, there was I, all in civilian gear, going away for a twelve month voyage, nothing to do with the sea. I wanted uniforms and text books and working clothes and all that sort of thing. My mother gave me a blank cheque ... she says, 'Try and keep it down below £110.' This is 1945, she says, 'Keep below £110, because over that, I've got to go into an overdraft.' So right, and a member of staff of Ellerman's took me round all the outfitters and the technical school and all that sort of thing, I was enrolled in a correspondence courses and given cadet's uniform and all the rest of it. Totted it all up and the bill came to about £109. 10s. So I cashed it for £110, kept ten bob for myself (*laughter*) and off to sea I went! And that's when the seafaring career started, right.

**EA-C** Was anybody else in your family involved in the sea before you joined up?

**Mr C** Err ... my grandmother had brothers who were marine engineers, but of course I never knew them, never met them, 'cos my grandmother was Scottish and of course they were all Scott's engineers, you know. And I never got to meet them, but that's the only sea-faring side was on me grandmother.

**EA-C** When you were a young boy, growing up in Castletown, and in Douglas, you were never very far from the sea ...

**Mr C** Yes, that's true.

**EA-C** ... is that where your love for the sea came in?

**Mr C** I think so – especially in Douglas. Douglas to me was a fascinating place – the harbour – I used to go down there as often as I could. And because I was always there, I got to know a number of the commercial fishermen. The Swindlehursts – I remember them. There's John Swindlehurst, John Reedshaw – he was a real character – I used to go fishing with him, you know. And I had my first trip in a lifeboat, and RNLi [Royal National Lifeboat Institution] lifeboat because of that, because I was friendly with these fishermen. 'Cos I happened to be down on the ... round about the Battery Pier, the breakwater, and it was the middle of winter, about six o'clock in the evening. It was dark already and I was going home, and the maroons went off – the ... in those days they called the lifeboat by firing two guns – *Bang! Bang!* you know. And all the crew of the lifeboat,

no matter what they were doing, they would drop it and off – hell-bent for leather down to the lifeboat station. And, right, so I knew the lifeboat was going to be launched, so I'm down there to see this, you know. I was aged about, what, I'd be about twelve – twelve, thirteen – I was at the High School, so I'd be about twelve. And (*laughter*) I can remember this John Swindlehurst had been in the bath when the maroons went up there, so he was running along the quay and all his family – all his kids were with him there, fastening up his underpants and his vest, (*laughter*) and he's getting dressed as he's running along to get to the lifeboat station, yea! So I saw them launch the lifeboat and off they went. It was a small private fishing boat belonging to a doctor. Its engine had failed just round the corner, not far away from Douglas Head lighthouse, and it was drifting onto the rocks. So it was only a short call-out, and this Reedshaw – John Reedshaw was one of the launching crew, so he enrolled me to put the tackle out to heave the lifeboat back up the slip. So they towed this broken down fishing boat in – about three or four people on board – and they just hauled it back up the slip and a motorbike messenger comes from *HMS St George* – the holiday camp where there used to be the training during the war for boy seamen. Apparently the commanding officer there thought that the boat, which this fishing boat had been towing, could be a hazard to shipping, 'Please go out and rescue it.' So using the lifeboat again, and a lot of the crew said, 'Oh, I'm not going out to get an empty boat,' you know. So they got a scratch-crew together to go out to look for this blooming rowing boat, and of course Charlie Corkill gets volunteered to be on this launch and this volunteer crew, you see. So I'm told what to do, and I'm the ... I was stuck up in the bows, I was the bowman to keep a lookout – everybody else, of course, was in the little wheelhouse – I'm out in the open! (*laughter*) And down the slipway we went, and we went chugging round the corner, past the lighthouse, and it wasn't me that was supposed to have seen it, but the other lads, the more regular crew, said, 'Oh, there it is – it's on the rocks, being smashed up.' So we turned round and went back and told the Navy, you know, that the boat is being smashed, you know, no hazard to shipping. So back we went, and again I gave my hand to pull the lifeboat back up on the slip and closed the doors and that sort of thing. I was wet through by this time, but never mind. I got home at about ten or eleven o'clock at night, and of course mother wanted to know, 'Where on earth have you been 'til this hour?' and I said, you know, 'The lifeboat.' 'Don't tell stories like that!' (*laughter*) Alright – 'Off to bed!' No supper or anything, yea. 'Take your wet clothes off.' And the next day – of course, in those days we had *The Isle of Man Daily Times* – a daily newspaper,

and then it came out, you know, that the lifeboat had been called out last night and all those who were there, helping, you know (*laughter*) down at the bottom of this list was a young fellows, whatever his name was, whatever his name was – Charlie Corkill and somebody else – there was about four or five of us young lads, you know, had gone out, so I got an apology from me mother, but not from me father, you know. (*laughter*)

**EA-C** Can you tell me a little bit about your memories of what Douglas harbour used to be like – was it a very busy place?

**Mr C** Yes, particularly during the summer with ... oh, there must have been a dozen Steam Packet Company passenger ships coming in. Not only from Liverpool but from Fleetwood, Heysham, Belfast, Dublin, Ardrossan, and then there's the regular mail, you know, at nine o'clock in the morning, there was always a ship going to Liverpool. And then there were the cargo ships; there was the Steam Packet Company's own cargo ship, *The Peveril*, she was an unusual ship, too. And then there was all the coal-boats – the power-stations were all powered by coal, everybody's house was coal-fired, and there was the Ramsey Steamship Company, *The Ben* boats, they used to bring coal in. And Thompson's of Glasgow – I got to know all these names when I was a boy, you know. Yea, and then there was the local fishing boat fleet, there were about four or five boats; *The Mannin*, *Fisher Lass*, *Sea Fisher*, *Peveril* ... I can remember all these boats, yea. And err ... yea, then there were ...'cos ... there were three unique ferries; *The Rose*, *The Daffodil* and *The Thistle*, I think they were called. They were square – or rectangular in shape, and they had a most unusual engine arrangement. They were steamers – coal-fire steamers – and they had two engines, one on each side, and they were compound engines, two cylinders powered by steam and they had four propellers because they had a propeller shaft running the full length of the ferry and a propeller on each on each engine. So they were the most manoeuvrable ships ever. And they used to chug across – it used to cost you 2d – a penny for children or something – to go across from the Victoria Pier to the end of the breakwater pier, near the lifeboat station, and they just go straight alongside because the captain (*laughter*) just juggled these four propellers, you know. And the ship used to almost go sideways – yes, I remember those. And nobody thought a thing about them, but they were really intriguing pieces of marine engineering.

**EA-C** Do you know how many people they would carry?

**Mr C** Oh, they used to carry hundreds. Up to about two hundred, and at peak times they used to have somebody playing a piano, yea, as you went across there, you know. People used to go, especially on ... at weekends, yea, the holiday times, playing the piano, yea. And then there was another ferry – a rowing-boat ferry – used to carry twenty people and that was a penny. The oarsman used to stand up and push twenty people on board – it used to take ages to go across the harbour, but that was quite popular, too – going for a sail across the harbour, yea. Yes, they used to spend lots of time down there. And then there was *The Glen Strathallan* – that was Colby Cubbon’s yacht – that used to spend a lot of time there. That was a converted fishing vessel – converted trawler, yea. And *The Edith May*, that was a coal-hulk, a schooner-rigged ... and it used to go to sea once a year, just outside the harbour, so that it could be classed as a ship, and come alongside and they used to unload coal and ... just a coal-hulk, a coal-store – *The Edith May* – I don’t know what happened to her, but she was years old, that thing, yea.

**EA-C** Can you remember any of the shops or businesses that would operate around the harbour-side?

**Mr C** Yes. There was an antique shop which used to fascinate me, and ... I can’t remember the name, but it used to sell all sorts, the most outlandish things, and ... on this glass ... she used to peer through the window and my late wife, Annette, she used to go down there and she used to buy things. Actually, in the bedroom at the moment I’ve still got one or two things that she bought from this antique shop. What else was there there? A newspaper shop, and there was a petrol station up near to the railway station end of the North Quay, and it was unusual in that cars wanting petrol used to have to drive in, they’d fill up with petrol and pay, and they used to have a turn-table, used to turn the car round on this table, and you drove out! (*laughter*) Nobody thought a thing about it, you know, I think that was unique, yea. And then my auntie, Auntie Miggs, one of my mother’s elder sisters, Miggs Joughin, she had this sweet shop and tobacconist and newsagent at the end of the stone bridge, and it was the only shop on that South Quay, and it overlooked the archway that led up to The Howe, and it was during the war, and sweets and things were all on coupons and rations and that sort of thing. And that was a favourite place, too, because George Joughin and I became great pals and George also deserves a book about him. He became famous – the last time I saw George was about two years ago and he was then as cheery as ever he was, and he said his doctor was annoyed

with him. And I said, ‘Oh, why, what happened?’ He said, ‘I fell off the roof.’ And I said, ‘What were you doing up on the roof?!’ He said, ‘Oh, I was fixing some slates.’ – He’s only got one leg!!! (*laughter*) ‘What were you doing up on the roof with only one leg?!’ ‘Well, somebody had to do it!’ He was an – he went away to sea in the merchant navy about a year before I did, as a deck-boy. And the war ended and all the excitement went out of sea-faring, so he joins the army, doesn’t he? And he spent time in Kenya fighting the Mau Mau, he fought in Korea – spent a lot of time in Korea. He comes home on leave and enrolls in a rugby match, the Isle of Man Services v the Isle of Man Ex-Services, and they played a vigorous game of rugby where in George breaks his leg so badly it had to be amputated, and a grateful government gave him a pension, BSA’s [The Birmingham Small Arms Company Limited] gave him a motorbike which he could control entirely by hand, one of the motorcar companies gave him a car, which could be controlled with one leg, and the army rehabilitated him so that he could, you know, get around with an artificial leg and all that sort of thing. And it didn’t bother him a bit! He’s as happy as the day is long, and as I say, the last time I saw him about two years ago the doctor was unhappy with him because he fell off the roof and hurt his leg (*laughter*) – he’s only got one! That’s George Joughin – he who lived in this sweetshop on the quay, yea. Yea ... there’s not so many shops actually right on the quay – lots of pubs! (*laughter*) Lots of pubs I remember, yea.

**EA-C** Can you remember some of the pubs – their names?

**Mr C** Oh ... there’s *The Clarendon*, *The British Flag* ... what other ones were there? I can’t remember them now ‘cos I was too young to be a customer of them in those days, yea. There was this jeweller’s shop ... that’s right, there was a jeweller’s shop, there was Lewthwaite’s – that was just up the street a wee bit – newspaper and magazines and cigarettes and sweets and all that sort of thing – Lewthwaite’s shop. And of course there was a lot of building work going on, ‘cos they knocked down all the old part of Douglas around about that time and places like Fort Street and Matthew Street they all disappeared, you know. They made that huge car park which is there now – and the bus terminal, yea. Aye.

**EA-C** Would you have travelled round the Island on the buses when you were young?

**Mr C** Yes – especially to Castletown – until I was about fourteen and fifteen when I used to cycle everywhere. I used to cycle, and I made friends with Griffins at

*The Sound Farm*. I don't know how I came to be friendly with them, but I used to go down there, spend weekends and Easter time, actually at *The Sound Farm*, you know, cycling, you know. But I travelled by bus, by train to Ramsey, yea, through Foxdale and ... yea, thought nothing of it in those days, yea. Going up to Andreas to see Auntie Bella and Uncle ... I think his name was Harry Kneale, but I wouldn't swear to it. Anyway, it was Auntie Bella that lived at Andreas and during the summer we used to go up there quite often, as I remember, with my grandparents – or even just my grandmother. And that was an adventure because we had to walk from Arbory Street, down The Crofts and down Castletown Road to the railway station, get the train into Douglas where we got the Corporation bus from Douglas Station to the Peveril Square at the root of Victoria Pier, where we used to get the horse tram which took us all the way along the promenade to Strathallan Crescent where we got the Manx Electric Railway tram up to Ramsey, by which time the time is clicking on, and we got to Ramsey and then we got the *Safeway's* bus from Ramsey and they used to set off and go up the coast road, past Dog Mills and round to Bride and then across to Andreas and then Jurby and that sort of thing, which was quite an adventure. And it always seemed to be warm or hot – it never rained or anything in those days. 'cos I can remember somebody pushing me in the pushchair – it might have been me mother, it might have been me grandmas – but we used to go for picnics down at Cranstal Beach. Well, there was a big concrete ship driven ashore and used for assault works – again, you thought nothing of it, you know. Used to get pushed all the way down there on a sweltering hot day, then we'd have our lemonade and sandwiches and whatever it was, we'd go for a paddle in the sea and all the way back again to Andreas, yea. And these ... when I went upstairs to bed, I didn't go upstairs, I went outside, 'cos there were two cottages together (*laughter*) and there was no room for a little fellow like me in the left-hand cottage, so I had to go out (*laughter*) into the next door and upstairs there – ah, yea – great fun!

**EA-C** Can I just say, Mr Corkill, you don't have a Manx accent.

**Mr C** I'm not surprised. I left the Isle of Man in early 1945 to go away to sea. In 1952, I got married ... to a Liverpool girl, lived in Liverpool, picked up a bit of a Liverpool accent. From Liverpool I went to Holyhead to live for a year, picked up a bit of a Welsh accent you know, isn't there? [Spoken in a Welsh accent] And then from Holyhead I went to Harwich for the cross-channel ships there, and I was there for ten years – the sort of East coast, East Anglian accent, which

I can't imitate now; and then, 1966, off to New Zealand, and for the next forty-odd years lived in New Zealand, so it was all a bit of the kiwis and a bit of the Maori, aah, yea ... '*Kia ora, Tena koutou,*' yea.

**EA-C** What does that mean? (*laughter*)

**Mr C** Oh, '*Kia ora*' – is your health good, you know. '*Kia ora*' – good day. Yea ... a very common greeting in New Zealand – you hear the radio announcers coming on, you know – '*Kia ora*' – good afternoon, you know. And it's just, 'How are you?' you know. How do you do? – '*Kia ora?*' Over here it's the name of a soft drink! (*laughter*) Yea.

**EA-C** What eventually brought you back to the Isle of Man?

**Mr C** Very long story, yea. Briefly, my second wife, Annette, was a Cringle from Peel, and her mother was a Moore, Margery Moore, related to all the Moores in Peel at the moment – Moore's fish shop and Moore's kippers and all the rest of it, so Annette was very ill, she was dying and she wanted to die in familiar territory with her family, so that's why I came back to Peel. And we had three very happy years here in Peel, yea, before she eventually passed away. Diabetes – all her organs packed up one after the other, you know, and her very last words, I had them engraved on her headstone, 'I'm happy, happy, happy.' 'I'm happy, happy, happy,' – yea.

**EA-C** And have you had a happy life, Mr Corkill?

**Mr C** Very much ... very much, yea. I've had three immensely sad occasions, which resulted in ultimate happiness. First of all was when Adrian died ...

**EA-C** That's your son?

**Mr C** That was my – our eldest son. It's because of Adrian passing away we ... Olga and I decided to start off again in a new life, and where better than in New Zealand. Adrian's last words to me was, 'I'm going to have a great good sleep now, dad.' And he laid back in the bed in the hospital and that was it! And a little Negro nurse who was looking after him – she disappeared for about ten days, and the police were getting worried, and they found her in Cambridgeshire or somewhere, sleeping rough in a hedge, she was so upset, because she ... you

know, she'd nursed Adrian for about a fortnight I think, before he died from when he went into hospital, and this little Negro girl, she was from Nigeria, trainee nurse, it upset her so much that she took off, yea. Anyway, we went out to New Zealand, and then of course I lost Olga – cancer of the lung – and she and Annette were friends, they wrote letters to each other and exchanged birthday cards and that sort of thing, and Olga said to me on one of her last lucid days, she said, 'When I've gone, you've got to go and see Annette, things aren't as they should be with her. You've got to go and see Annette.' And I said, 'Oh, don't talk nonsense.' She said, you know, 'I know when I'm going, it won't be long now.' And about two or three days after that we took her to the hospital and about ten minutes after she was admitted, she passed away. And her very last words are, 'Ah, at last I understand!' A doctor had just explained why they wanted blood tests, because Olga said, 'Not another blood test, I've had so many.' And this doctor, he was an Indian, or a Pakistani, explained, he said, 'What we do, we take this blood test and we lay it alongside the results of all the other blood tests and we can see how things are developing, whichever way they are developing.' 'Ah,' says Olga, 'now I understand.' And she just lay back and died – just like that! So, after a few months, I followed her advice and I came to Douglas to see Annette, and yea, we had seventeen very happy years. Most of those photographs are our life out in New Zealand, yea. There's a few there of Olga, but I wasn't so mad on cameras in those days, yea. I've been very, very fortunate ... very fortunate. Here am I, 84, still alive, reasonably fit, yea. And three ... three tragedies, three lovely people ... yea.

**EA-C** Have any of your children inherited your love for the sea?

**Mr C** Yes, yes – Julian – he's the kiwi of the family, you know. He was born in Christchurch shortly after Olga and I arrived there. And as I say, I was going to make sure that neither of my lads waste their time going away to sea, so Julian – he wasn't a scholar – he was doing his school certificate examination – still have school cert out in New Zealand – and half way through the exam he said, 'This is an absolute waste of time.' So he got up and he walked out. He was fifteen, you know. So he got up from the exam and he walked out and he said, 'It's a waste of time, I'm not going to get anywhere.' At that time I was rather friendly with the director of a big trawler company – Fletcher Fishing – in Dunedin, Harry Smith was the name of this director. So Julian goes along to see Harry Smith and said, 'Have you got any jobs? I've just walked out of the ...' you know. And Harry Smith said, 'If you can get down to *The Atago Galliard*

[sp ???] tomorrow morning, with a sea-going kit, you're away – you're a deckie learner.' So, (*laughter*) he comes home, I'm at work in the office, and he goes home to see Olga, (*laughter*) yea – words were exchanged, (*laughter*) yea, so Olga, with a Liverpool Jewish accent, you know – so gave Julian the rounds of the kitchen, and gave him money to go and buy dungarees and overalls and sea-boots and all that sort of thing and he goes down, kits himself out, and he signed up on *The Atago Galliard* [sp ???] as a deckie leaner and apprentice trawler-man. As I say, 'None of my kids are going away to sea,' and the hardest job of all is being a deep-sea trawler-man. So err ... away he goes. His four years were up, his four year training, and he got himself a qualification, as a qualified deckhand – a trawling deckhand – and altogether he spent, I think it was ten years – eleven years on fishing vessels from little ones, little coastal boats, to great big ones like *The Atago Galliard* [sp ???] and *The Buccaneer*, which were about the size of *The Ben my Chree*, you know, with a crew of eighty – factory ships, you know. And it was on one of those, when he's – I think he was a boatswain or senior deckhand or something, and they're in a storm in the Southern Ocean, you know, way down near Antarctica, and the doors, the trawl doors – great big things which keep the trawls open when they broke adrift. And Julian with his mates, goes down to secure it, the darn thing takes charge, wallops him in the back, and they weigh two tons, so the ship had to turn about, they landed him at the nearest lands, which was the Chatham Islands – about six hundred miles from New Zealand, they land him there, they get an air-ambulance which flies him to Christchurch, he's a few months in there and he's transferred to Dunedin for a few months, and he's told he must never go away to sea again. He'd injured his back. They'd repaired his back, and he was at a ... you know – at a loss what to do. They ... he went through a civil service exam, was taken on, and given a job as a forestry inspector to check – 'cos we've got possums in New Zealand which are a curse – and he had to check that the contractors who were supposed to kill these possums was in fact doing their work. He was given a four-wheel drive car to go around. And he gave that up after a week. He said, 'I'm not doing anything – there's no work involved – I'm not doing anything. Well, that's no good to me, I want to work!' So he gets a job with a pal of his at the same time, they went through a contractor in Waihola, just a few miles south from Dunedin, general contracting, road building, ditch digging, drain laying and all that sort of thing, and now, at this moment, as we sit here, he is undergoing a course, a three-month course, to become a registered drain-layer, because his occupation is officially skilled labourer, but ask Julian what he does for a living, he says he

plays with man-sized *Tonka* toys! (*laughter*) My other son, Colin – he was born in Harwich, yea, although he started off by being a farming cadet, I was told he would never be a farmer, so he goes away to sea as a cadet – sea-faring cadet, and following in father’s footsteps, much to his disgust, ended up by being a Master on New Zealand ships, Master on Australian ships, and to obtain Australian nationality, he joined the Royal Australian Naval Reserve, and he was a reserve naval officer for several years, and now holds an Australian passport, in addition to a New Zealand passport, in addition to a British passport. And when the Australian line folded up, he eventually ended up with this Norwegian company which services all the oil rigs and gas rigs around the Australian and Tasmanian coast. And currently he’s Master of the *Lady Gerda* – a sort of general purpose tug-towing, general purpose supply ship for the oil rigs. And I believe *Lady Gerda* and one or two of its sister ships are registered in Douglas – so there! So he’s got a Manx connection already! (*laughter*)

**EA-C** Thank you very much Mr Corkill for sharing some of those wonderful memories with me today.

**Mr C** Yea – oh, it’s been wonderful, yea, lovely!

**END OF INTERVIEW**