

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

‘TIME TO REMEMBER’

Interviewee(s): Mrs Jo Kenna nee Boyd

Date of birth:

Place of birth:

Interviewer(s): David Callister

Recorded by: David Callister

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Topic(s): Spring Valley houses
Gas lighting and dry toilets
Children’s Radio Programmes
Flooding in Spring Valley
Belle Vue
Randle’s Accumulator
Grocery deliveries
Early school days
Drinkwater’s Field
The Quarterbridge Hotel
Nook Café
Entertainment at Douglas Head
Father’s travels

Jo Kenna - Mrs K

David Callister - DC

DC Mrs Jo Kenna, Josephine – well, it’s your birthday, is it?

Mrs K *(laughter)* On Sunday.

DC Formerly Jo Boyd – Josephine Boyd, and born in Demesne Road in 1933. Right, well now, what your – I mean, some of your best memories are really when you are just about five years old, or in that area, and when you were living in Spring Valley.

Mrs K Well, not my best memories – I do remember from when I were five, but I’ve got other memories when I went back again, when I was about nine or ten.

DC Yes.

Mrs K But what I am trying to tell you, is, the earliest ones I can remember.

DC And that would be of Spring Valley?

Mrs K Yes, yes.

DC Yes, where you were living, presumably, at that time.

Mrs K Yes.

DC Is that, is that where you were living first of all, or where you living somewhere before that?

Mrs K Umm, well, I was born in Demesne Road, and my father was in the Navy, and we used to move around with him. So when I came back again, I would be five, ‘cos I started school in Demesne Road and I came back and started school in St Mary’s here. And we went to live in the old Spring Valley.

DC Now, what was old Spring Valley like at that time?

Mrs K Right. As you go down to the Quarterbridge you turn down into old Spring Valley. And it was owned by – most of the buildings and houses and everything were owned by Mr McCartan and, as you turned in, on your left hand side, would umm – Richard Cain lived there – a very portly, charming gentleman. I

think he had something – a Director or something of Castletown Breweries. On your right hand side, where the garage is now, was the whole of Mr Dudley's gardens. And he grew everything that he sold in his shop. I think he had on Windsor Road – he did have later on, and his son had it there. And as you moved down into Spring Valley, on your left hand side was a massive big building, which I think is a health club, and they were flats – not as we know them, but as two rooms and there was lots of people living there. And we just knew everybody and everybody was nice. They all helped each other and moved in and out of each other's flats. And as you go further down, you turn down to your left, into a sort of a horseshoe, and there was a lot of houses down there.

DC What sort of houses – what were they like, those houses?

Mrs K Umm, well, they ...

DC Where they cottages?

Mrs K All cottages. In fact, they were either one up or one down, or one down – a big long room – and two rooms upstairs. Now that's what our house was like – *Hayden Cottage*. You went through the door, and you went straight into the sitting room, and kitchen and dining room and everything else. Now we had a fireplace, and a sink – big stone sink there, and garden – door at the back-end that led into the garden, well, yard – stone yard. And that's where the toilet was, which was a dry one, which got emptied every week.

DC Emptied every week?!

Mrs K Yes. It didn't smell nice at the end of the week, but well, you know, that was it. *(laughter)* We had gas fire – gas lighting, I'm sorry.

DC So there were mantles?

Mrs K Well, me mum used to buy a mantle – it's like a little white net thing that you used to put on and turn, and then you lit the gas – used to pull the wire at one side and lit the gas, and pull the other one and it went out.

DC That would be luxury compared with some people just using lamps, I suppose.

Mrs K Yes, we were lucky, actually. But it was a lovely cottage, and most of them round there were like – I know it sounds extravagant, but it's like roses around the door, and everybody looked after it, and fuchsias, and the net curtains – they were all very proud of their little cottages, actually, even though there was nothing to them.

DC Was it a made-up road outside the house, as well?

Mrs K Yes.

DC Not just a soil type road.

Mrs K No, it was made-up. On Saturday morning, *Nab Farm* came, Mr Cannell, and we used to all go out with our jugs. I was sent out many a time for a pint of milk or whatever it was. And he used to measure it out and give it to us, and we'd pay him. And then on a Saturday morning we used to have Randle's Accumulator's [Shop] come. Now, that was like a car battery – a little one, that we have nowadays, and that went in the back of our wireless so we could have the wireless for the week, and all the news and whatever.

DC So did they come more or less every week, did they?

Mrs K Every Saturday he came. And we used to watch – listen to 'Children's Hour' every night at five o'clock.

DC Did you?

Mrs K Yes.

DC What do you remember of that? 'Uncle Mac' or something, was it? Or was it before 'Uncle Mac's' time?

Mrs K No, I think so. I always remember the things that they used to say, 'cos it was 'Larry the Lamb' and things like that.

DC (*laughter*) That's right.

Mrs K And they used to have lovely Christmas programmes on, you know, telling you

tales about mystery. And I think you use your imagination more than anything – than you do now.

DC Well, of course, that is true, that is true.

Mrs K Yes.

DC Yes. And so this was a Spring Valley area with quite a few cottages there, then, quite a number of them?

Mrs K Oh yes, yea – there must have been 15 to 20, all round.

DC Yes. Were they private properties, were they, in fact, then?

Mrs K Mr McCartan owned them, and he was a nice man, he made us – you know, the people – keep their places nice, and he would go round making sure of it. And if you had any complaints, he would see to it – really nice man.

DC How close were they to the river, then?

Mrs K Very close, because nearly every winter we all got flooded. But it was nice – it was just a lovely area and everybody seemed to help everybody, and you know, people having children, and everybody would go over and help them – well, I think so, because I just knew they used to go from house to house, you know ...

DC Yes.

Mrs K ... and in the, sort of, river at the back, my brother used to sit there for hours, pulling eels out like nobody's business, for hours. And there was a lady who lived next door to us, a very nice lady with family and everything, and one day my brother was pulling these eels out and he says, 'Doesn't your dog look like you?' to this lady. Well, me mother was ashamed! She didn't know what to do, but the lady laughed her head off, and it was the most ugly looking little dog you've ever seen in you life! (*laughter*)

DC So these are eels, then, it's amazing, but was there any other fish – did he catch anything else – did he catch anything worth eating?

- Mrs K** Oh gosh, no.
- DC** No, just eels?
- Mrs K** Yes – dozens of them he used to catch and only with string and a pin and some bread.
- DC** Did the flooding go across *Belle Vue* as well?
- Mrs K** No, because that was higher than our side.
- DC** Oh, was it?
- Mrs K** Yes.
- DC** Oh, right. So you were guaranteed flooding, were you?
- Mrs K** Well, most winters, when it came up, you know, it came in. And umm ... but it didn't really do much harm, nobody ever complained about, it just cleaned it all out and sorted it and that was it again. But I loved living there.
- DC** Yea, yea – you're still fond of it now. If that cottage was there, you'd go back and live there.
- Mrs K** I would, actually. I named one of my sons after *Hayden Cottage*, 'cos it was a happy time.
- DC** Oh, right. So those properties are virtually all gone – presumably all gone now, are they?
- Mrs K** Well, I went down a little while ago, because I was telling me daughter about it, and she had been, when they were there, but they'd been knocked down, then, you know.
- DC** Yes, yes. And then, the milk, of course, was just, as you say, in a jug from the churns on the ...
- Mrs K** It wasn't pasteurised, or anything like that, I think it came straight from the

cow, you know.

DC Did he – did he come in a van?

Mrs K No, he came in a horse and cart.

DC Oh, right.

Mrs K Accumulator people came in a van, so he must have had lots of money!
(laughter)

DC Yes, right. Where would get your groceries from, for instance, and food stuffs and so on?

Mrs K Ah, Cretney's, and they were on the Quay. And they delivered it, and they never charged you anything for delivering, and they delivered everything for you. Now, I can't remember whether it was Winkles [Bakery] – I have a feeling it was, who delivered the bread and cakes, because my mum used to get trays of cakes for us.

DC Oh did she?

Mrs K Yes.

DC Oh, you were well treated for that, then.

Mrs K I remember there's a lady who lived in Pulrose – she used to come – her son used to come, and he'd have a tray of cakes, and they were all mince pies – the most beautiful pastry ever tasted in your life – and she used – her son used to come round selling them all when we lived down there, as well.

DC Yes, yes. Well, you'd be going to school in Douglas at this time, then, when you were five. Which school was that?

Mrs K St Mary's. Now that is at the back of the Government Buildings – that's where it was, you know.

DC Right.

- Mrs K** I got the cane many mornings for – sorry, strap – for being late.
- DC** The strap?
- Mrs K** Yea, oh yea – big, thick, wide strap – Mr O’Hanlon had them.
- DC** On your bottom?
- Mrs K** No, no – your hand.
- DC** A strap on your hand?
- Mrs K** Yes.
- DC** Oh, that would be pretty sore.
- Mrs K** Well, I was always late.
- DC** *(laughter)* Why? Did you walk to school, then?
- Mrs K** I can’t remember – I think we must have got a bus – must have done. But I’ve always been lazy, anyway.
- DC** *(laughter)* Right! What about school meals, what were they like?
- Mrs K** Right – well, what we did, we used to go along Circular Road, and where the library used to be – is – was an insurance hall, and everything – that used to be called Noble’s Hall.
- DC** That’s right.
- Mrs K** And hundreds of us – not just the poor children – but we all went, and we used to go there and have our lunch there, and ...
- DC** Well, what was it like?
- Mrs K** Well, we used have stews and dumplings, and puddings, and – what do you call these ... ‘Spotted Dog?’

- DC** Oh, a ‘Spotted Dick,’ or something, yes, yes.
- Mrs K** ‘Spotted Dick,’ and, and – oh, the dinners you used to have were tremendous – and it was all free!
- DC** And all vast numbers of people going?
- Mrs K** Oh, there used to be piles of children, from all schools, ‘cos there was Tynwald Street School, and there was Demesne Road School, and there was St Mary’s School, so – I mean, there was a lot of schools all round there.
- DC** Yes. Now your schooling was – kind of happened all over the place, wasn’t it, because, with your father being away a lot, sometimes you were there with him, sometimes you were back here.
- Mrs K** Well, the only time we came back here was when he went off to China, and that’s when I came here at five. And then we came back when I was about nine or ten. And that’s when he was in America.
- DC** So Spring Valley – we’ve talked about the houses, we’ve talked about the living conditions, we’ve talked about the old, dry toilets that you had to use and so on but what about – what happened in this area – was there anything in particular from your memory that stands out?
- Mrs K** Yes. As you go up the road from Spring Valley, up onto the Castletown Road, you go down towards the Quarterbridge. On the right hand side is the NSC [National Sports Centre] as we know now. And opposite there is a gateway going in to the Drinkwater Fields, and we used to sit on the wall and watch all the horse and carts and carriages, with traps and single horses and double horses and ... full of people all going in to the horse racing.
- DC** Horse racing?
- Mrs K** Yes – it was in the Drinkwater Field. They had marquees, they had, you know, fairs and things all there, and the people sitting, and picnics and they were dressed – a lot of the ladies were dressed in, sort of, long coats, because they were on carriages. And the men were in tweeds and tweed hats and – they weren’t racing, because they had proper people from – I think they were coming

from Ireland and England and – all to this horse racing.

DC Is that field big enough for a proper racecourse, then, because the river runs through there, as well, doesn't it?

Mrs K Well, if you go through the gate, the river is quite a distance on your left hand side. And as you went through, it's a massive field – really massive. And they had marquees there, and they had the fencing where the horses used to run round and it really was big. And a lot of people there – hundreds went there in their carriages. We didn't stay there all day and watch it, but ...

DC So you'd sit on the wall and just – this was your amusement for some hours, then.

Mrs K Yea, yea, from – you know, watching the horses go by, and all the people, and I should imagine there were very rich people going in there. But they came from everywhere – farmers, you know – rich people and everything – it was very nice.

DC But the Drinkwater Field was a place to keep out of, wasn't it, although, I think, kids did sneak in and out of there from time to time, didn't they?

Mrs K Well, if you notice, there's a bridge going across as you go down to the Quarterbridge. By the side of the river there, all of us gang, that was in the Spring Valley, we used to go along, and, we used to go once a year, so we used to go for a swim.

DC A swim?

Mrs K Well, there was a swimming pool there. And it had sluice gates, and one at a time you opened it up and it filled up, and the other one emptied, so we used to bring our buckets and spades and let all the water out and then clean it from top to bottom, with all our brushes and scrubbers and everything, and as soon as we would let all the nice fresh water in again, and it was all clean – we got chased.
(laughter)

DC You didn't get your swim!

Mrs K Every year we did it, and every year we got chased. I think they used to wait for us to clean it before, 'cos it belonged to his daughter – Drinkwater's daughter. So he didn't have to clean it, did he?! (*laughter*)

DC As you went down the road to the Quarterbridge you came across the railway, of course, then, didn't you?

Mrs K Yes. There was the railway lines going to Peel. And on your right-hand side as you go down, there's a stone building there, alright? And it was – there used to be a man in there – I think his name was Howard or Howarth – and he had one leg. And he was a very charming man. He had the fire going – we used to go and sit in there in the winter, and he was always nice. And he was a shoemaker – sorry – he was a cobbler, and he used to fix shoes and make them up and everything.

DC What, in that little hut that he had there?

Mrs K Well, that was a little business. And he used to open and shut the gates, of course, but that was, his shoes was his business as well. But he also lived in Saddle Road, opposite the wishing stone, there.

DC Oh, right.

Mrs K Yea, in a house there, but he was always a very nice man.

DC Yes. Now the Nook Café was just round the corner. Did you spend any time there – was it a café at that time, in fact.

Mrs K No. Mr Cowin who owned it, was an elderly man, and he – I think he had opened it at one time, but he was married to a young Irish lady who was a nurse, and they had two little children. And everything was still there – the ice-cream dishes, and we used to play for hours in there – really nice. And then, across the road from there, was *The Quarterbridge Hotel*, and where the Quarterbridge car park is now, was a field. Now the Peel Road was smaller – a lot slimmer than it is now, and they had the railway lines on the other side that went to Peel, so that it was a very long field there, with a pavilion in, which was wooden banisters, veranda, tables and chairs, and ice-cream dishes and all sorts. And we played in there again.

DC Well, what was that for, then?

Mrs K Well that was a cricket field.

DC Oh really?

Mrs K It had been – I didn't see cricket played there, but the pavilion was there, and the big long field was there as a cricket field.

DC Yea. Then, of course, looking across the railway line, at the back of that what we knew as *Belle Vue*, they'd be sports fields developed at that stage as well, were they? I mean, mostly used by schools or something in those days?

Mrs K Well, I do remember different things and things played on there, but the most I remember being on there was when I came back at ten or eleven and all the Army and the Navy and the Air Force used to play down there. And they used to have marquees and we used to go over there and they used to feed us with all sorts of things and give us pop and that – it really was – because we lived by the side of the river, we used to just go across and they accepted us, and they used to be waving to us. But they were very good to us all, the Forces, there.

DC If you tried to cross Peel Road now – especially at the Quarterbridge area there, where the roundabouts are to go to the Nook, you'd be taking your life in your own hands, and yet, as children then, it wasn't a concern much to parents – there wouldn't be much traffic about, would there?

Mrs K Well, no, because, as I've said about the horses, it was mostly horse and carts, and things like that, and it wasn't the traffic. I mean, we were allowed at five, seven and nine and that just to go around there. I mean, I told you we'd been to the Nook, and we'd been to the pavilion cricket field, and we were over at *Belle Vue*, and I mean, there was never any trouble, or any thought of anything wrong when we were over with all the armed forces. And we used to play, and we used to go in – I mean, they'd have pavilions with drink in, but we'd have pop, and food and all sorts there, you know?

DC It sounds like a very happy youth, then.

Mrs K Oh, it was just lovely, it was.

DC So, once you got out of this home area, I mean, if you had a real treat, what would that be for instance?

Mrs K Well, I do remember one time, which I thought was the most memorable. We went to Douglas – I can't remember if we went on a bus – we must have done, and we went to St Matthew's Church on the quay, and on the other side of the road was Cretney's, the grocers shop – they used to deliver to us. And opposite there was stone steps going down to the water, and we got – I don't know whether it was a rowing boat or a ferry – but we got it across to the other side of Douglas Head, across the water. And then we went off along the quayside and right down to the pier, and it had all stalls and shows and things down there. And as you went up the hill, there was the café there, which I believe in recent years has been a restaurant or something, and we had our tea there, and we went around and we – around the corner, past there, onto the Marine Drive, then went to a show, which was, 'The Black & White Minstrels' ...

DC Oh yes.

Mrs K ... which was a lovely treat.

DC In the old open-air theatre there?

Mrs K Yes, yes – lovely day it was, at Easter.

DC They used to go round and collect the money after – if you sit down there, then they ...

Mrs K Yes, yes, and they collected the money – you never paid to get in.

DC *(laughter)* That's right.

Mrs K I remember that round building that you used to go in, and you used to go in and you used to see all over Douglas Head – all the different pictures, and ...

DC Yes, right – Oh you're talking about the Camera Obscura?

Mrs K Yes, yes – and that was wonderful to see, because you could see all over Douglas Head, there, couldn't you, you know.

DC That's right, you could. *(laughter)* Yes, so you'd see that first as a child, then really, yes?

Mrs K Yes, yes – I did see it later, but I don't think it's there now, is it?

DC It's boxed in at the moment ...

Mrs K Oh, right.

DC ... waiting to be refurbished, at the moment.

Mrs K It is a shame, because it's wonderful.

DC Well, that was a happy memory, then, of childhood days, and the fact that you were dodging from one country to another – you sort of picked up on the Isle of Man – you sort of take up where you left off, would you.

Mrs K Yes, well, as I said, we lived in *Hayden Cottage* when I was five, and then we went off, and we lived in Chatham, and then we came back again, and we moved back into the same house again. There was different other people came to live in Spring Valley, which I mean, Gilbert Harding who had the bicycle shop, and all his sons and daughter as well.

DC So what – did you just say to your friends, 'Well, we're back again!' You'd meet up with your old buddies as well, would you?

Mrs K No, there was different families there.

DC *(laughter)* Oh, right – you'd have to make new friends?

Mrs K Oh, it didn't matter – I was used to that, anyway. And we weren't – I was there for a while and then we moved off again – when me father went to America, or China, or whatever. But if he was just in England, we'd go and stay with him, you know.

DC Yes. And, have you got photographs of this Spring Valley as it was? Have you got pictures or any memories of that, or is it all just in your head?

Mrs K No, it's all in me head, because I don't think very many people had cameras and that, and the money to do all that kind of thing. I know that we had photographs taken when I was away in England, but I haven't got any of them of the old Spring Valley at all, but wonderful memories.

END OF INTERVIEW