

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

‘TIME TO REMEMBER’

Interviewee(s): Mr George Victor Harris Kneale CBE

Date of birth: 12th January 1918

Place of birth:

Interviewer(s): David Callister

Recorded by: David Callister

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Topic(s): Growing up in Myrtle Street
Living conditions
Taking visitors in
Early schooldays
Cable cars in Douglas
Music and entertainment for visitors
Childhood games and cigarette cards
Pocket money and running errands
Summer job on Isle of Man Steam Packet boats
Apprenticeship with *The Times* Office
Local characters
Poverty and ‘Little Hell’
Sunday School picnics
Scouting

Victor Kneale - Mr K
David Callister - DC

DC George Victor Harris Kneale, born on the 12th January 1918, and he's going to tell me about his memories of childhood days in Douglas. And I suppose your first memories are going to be back in the early 20s, really?

Mr K Yes. I was born in 5 Myrtle Street, and in those days there was eleven houses in the street, all on one side and at one end, No.1, there was a family called Kelly, and the head of the household was a baker who worked for Sayles on Broadway. Now he was a – breed canaries and budgerigars and the whole of his attics were covered with cages where all these birds were in. He also had a green parrot and a grey cockatoo, and they had three dogs, a greyhound called *Needle* and then two smooth haired terriers, one called *Prince* and the other *Nellie*. Now in those days, the bakers used to work during the night, and sort of get the bread ready when the shops opened, and Phil Kelly would come home, walking sometimes through *The Villa Marina* grounds and up Finch Road, and if it was a fine day, the parrot and the parakeet used to be put out in the garden on a little table. And as soon as Phillip come round the corner, at Prospect Hill, these – the old parrot would start shouting, 'Here's Phil, here's Phil!' And the parakeet would be jumping up and down and screaming (*laughter*) and the three dogs used to come out of that house and rush out to meet him. And all the canaries and the budgies up in the attic would all be chattering, so everybody knew when Phil Kelly was arriving home from work.

DC Did he keep all these dogs and birds away from the bakery, though?

Mr K Oh, he did, but they were quite a care – quite a character in the street.

DC Yes. You were born at number five, you say?

Mr K I was number five – we were virtually in the middle.

DC Small houses?

Mr K They – well, they were fair sized houses. There was two storeys in them. Going in through the front gate, there was railings there, a small garden. You went up a couple of steps and then there was the vestibule. You go into the hall and the stairs were going straight up in front of you. On the right-hand side in our house was the dining room, then there was a bit of a bend in the hall, and there was the kitchen then, and then, what everybody used to call – they always had a back-

kitchen as well, that's where the cooking was done. And there was a boiler built into the corner, which you lit a fire underneath. The only lighting in the place was by gas light and that was only on the first floor; there was no lighting at all in the bedrooms, it was all candles that you went to bed with.

DC You went to bed with your candle, yes.

Mr K And in the kitchen there was a range where there was an oven on one side, and a thing on the other side for heating water, and when you think of the fire hazards in those days, especially at Christmas time, when you'd always have a real Christmas tree and the lights would be on with little candles in holders, and we, as kids, would make chains from coloured paper and dangle these all round. And when you think of the fire hazards, and yet there was less fires then than there have been since they brought in electricity.

DC Yes. I mean even the thought of people carrying candles to their bedroom now would give people a fear of it, wouldn't they?

Mr K Well, in the summertime, most of the houses took visitors in, and you could never be sure how many visitors were going to arrive. It was the same people that seem to come year after year in the same weeks when the various wakes were on, and the majority came from Lancashire or from Scotland and they became more like friends than visitors. But the work involved by your parents running these places 'cos most of the visitors would buy their own food and bring it in. They would have a cupboard each and your mother or father would be cooking this for them.

DC Yes. Did you take people in?

Mr K We took people in. Sunday was always the day when they all had a sit-down meal and it was a communal effort then – half a crown a meal and maybe tuppence for the condiments. When we, as kids, our job would be peeling the potatoes and shelling the peas 'cos you bought the peas by the peck in those days, which was like a great big can and they filled this up, and you would be there on a Saturday peeling these ready for the Sunday's dinner.

DC Right.

Mr K Another job we had was cleaning the candlesticks. Making sure there was no loose wax on them, and they would be put out on the table for the visitors going to bed, and that was it. There were no hot and cold water in those days either. There was just jugs of water in all the bedrooms, so it was a spartan existence for them 'cos it was cold water.

DC Yes.

Mr K There was one toilet in the house, and that was in the back yard, it was like a big 'thunderbox' – it was a big box with a wooden lid on.

DC Was it a dry toilet, then?

Mr K No, no – it was a ...

DC A flush toilet.

Mr K ... a flush toilet, but it was in a little room in the yard and there'd be a space at the top of the door and holes bored in the bottom so as to allow ventilation. No bathrooms in those days. You bathed in front of the fire in a big zinc bath, and when it wasn't in use it was hanging on a nail out in the yard. (*laughter*) And altogether it was a spartan existence. The house – it had two floors. You went up the first flight of stairs and there was an outlet straight ahead and two small bedrooms – you had to go through one to get to the other. Then on the next floor there was three bedrooms, one going at the back of the house and one which had, obviously when the house had been built, had been one room and probably was the drawing room then, and then there was three attics ...

DC Oh, right.

Mr K ... but in the attics, the only lighting was from skylights, and when the visitors would come, at the beginning when there was only a few, we would be up in the attic sleeping. And in the summer it was mighty hot up there under the eaves.

DC So who would go up there? Would your mother and father go as well?

Mr K Oh, we'd all go up.

DC And who else was in the family beside you, then?

Mr K Oh, there was me brother and I. We did have a sister, but she died when she was two and a half, but err ...

DC So in the attic you all went, then.

Mr K All up there, but when there was more and more people arrived, and sometimes, on one occasion there was two girls had booked and five of them turned up, and of course there was no really room for them, but they decided they could sleep – there was a big bed there – they could sleep across the bed instead of length-ways. And by this time we were on a mattress down in the kitchen or the living room. And that was the way most people did. They had to make their money in the few short weeks, and when you think of the few shillings they charged the people in those days, it was virtually just enough to pay the bills and maybe buy you some new clothes at the end of the summer.

DC Yes. So there was no big profits made in those days?

Mr K No. But Myrtle Street, on the other side was the St Mary's Church, and it's still there – if you notice there's a sloping outcrop at the back of St Mary's. One of our favourite tricks was to get up on this slope with our back to the wall and see how far we could walk along before you fell off! (*laughter*) There was also an outcrop door – the backdoor of the church, and it had a little place above it and a little wall round it, and there was a handy drainpipe and this was a good hiding place to skin [sp ???] up down behind this little wall.

DC (*laughter*) Yes.

Mr K Alongside the church was Shimmin's Salerooms where they sold old furniture and stuff like that, and that was right opposite our house, and we could run through that and go down into Hill Street where there was a cattle market. And further along Myrtle Street was Collinson's Ice Works, 'cos again, there was no refrigerators and the butchers and the fish mongers and others that needed to preserve food, they came and collected these huge blocks of ice – they were about three foot by two foot by one foot.

DC They'd take a bit of carrying.

Mr K Oh they did, they were really heavy, and they would, they had a platform which was just about the level of the carts that came for to collect, and they would be dragging these, the big blocks of ice along, the men, tow this here with a big pair of pincers, and then if they wanted to cut them in two to load them, maybe on a carrier bike, they had like a great big *Trident* which they cut the ice with and loaded it on. And we kids would be hanging round there and as soon as there was – there were lots of chips of ice about, we would be in, grab these chips of ice to suck.

DC Yes.

Mr K But there was a more interesting one at the other side of this ... the works, was where they made the ice cream. And when they were delivering the ice cream, it was in round containers, and they would bring the empties back and leave them in the yard at the back. And the minute we saw any of these going in, we were down, up with the lid, because there was always little bits of ice cream left in it (*laughter*) – scoop it out before Mr Bell, who was in charge, come out and give us the stoom [sp ???].

DC Now where did all these ice blocks go to then, who was taking them away and what were they using them for?

Mr K Well, the butchers would be taking them away, and they would chop them up small and sort of pack them round – the fish mongers especially, pack them round the fish, and you'd see the fish in the windows laying in among the ice ...

DC On cold slabs?

Mr K Yes.

DC Yes. And would the boarding houses need ice?

Mr K Some of them probably would take it, but it was mostly tradesmen that come there.

DC Aye – they'd have to come every day for it wouldn't they?

Mr K Oh yes, yes.

DC What happened then, when you went to school, because – what, your nearest school would be at Tynwald Street, would it?

Mr K Tynwald Street was the main school and we went to the infants' school there, and boys and girls were all in the infants together. I can remember Mrs – Miss Goldsmith was the Head Teacher, and for the kindergarten, the young ones, there was a room where they had some little cots, where if you got too tired, you could go in and have a sleep. There was one teacher there, a Miss Bridson – she was in the top form, and she was a very good teacher. I can remember her. And from there we went – the boys went up to Demesne Road. The girls went into the girls' section at Tynwald Street, but the boys went to Demesne Road where the Head Master was an Ernest Shimmin. My days there, I went into a class with a Miss Skinner, and I was in Standard Two. Then we moved to Standard Three where there was a Miss White. Miss White, she was a real fierce one. She had these ... her hair done in rolls like earphones on each side of her head, (*laughter*) and a real bad tempered one. She must have frightened me, because I only did one term with her and I got promoted to Standard Four, and then I went into Standard Five the following year and I got a scholarship up to the High School when I was ten, so I moved up to St Ninian's in 1928.

DC Right. You hadn't far to travel to school when you were living in Myrtle Street, or in the town, there – bit further to the High School. Presumably you still walked, I suppose, did you?

Mr K Oh you walked when it was fine. But you could get scholar's vouchers, which were a halfpenny each, to ride on the cable cars that were going up and down Bucks Road. These went from York Road, right down towards the Jubilee Clock, and they consisted of a cable down under the ground on each side of the road – you could actually see it through the slit in the road, and there was a sort of hook went down from the tram attached onto this. When you were in Myrtle Street at night, and had gone to bed up in the attics in the summer, and you'd be listening, and these here cars would be rallying down the hill – they sort of skipped the cable and rallied down, and they would be clanging all the way down. But on the way up, they were getting pulled and they were creaking and groaning. (*laughter*) Now we had these scholar's vouchers which were a halfpenny each, to ride when we were going to school, but most of the time we skip on the running board, and if the conductor come, we'd just run round and get on the other side! (*laughter*)

DC Did they have a bell clanging on it frequently?

Mr K Oh yes.

DC Yes.

Mr K There was one boy in Princes Street, Charley Turner – he actually had an accident, was run over and lost a leg

DC Through this business of running round?

Mr K Yes, and that was quite an interesting experience with them.

DC It was a great system to put in that, though, wasn't it, for the town?

Mr K Oh, it was. And you know such a long, complicated cable to pull it all the way up there. It's the best part of a mile and a half to two mile I suppose, from the Jubilee Clock up to there.

DC And there was no overhead apparatus at all, was there?

Mr K No, it was all underground. And, as I say, the winding gear was up at York Road, and the cable cars were kept up there. But the things you remember about the summer was how happy everybody was. They didn't have much money then, and they come on their – these people had come on their holidays, but they would always be well dressed. The girls would be dressed in nice cotton dresses or, I think it was called, 'Macclesfield Silk.' And the boys, one of the favourite things in the 20s was the 'Oxford bags' – this is the trousers with the very, very wide bottoms. But everybody seemed to be well-dressed. And there was no question of relying on the pubs for their entertainment – they seemed to be able to make their entertainment, and the number of people who would be going round the streets singing. There'd be banjos and ukuleles and real big groups of young people really enjoying themselves. And going down the promenade they'd be linked up right across the promenade pavements and they'd go along happy. But the girls always seemed to bring, among their kit, a dance dress, and the dancehalls were great. There was a whole string of them from *Derby Castle*, *The Palace*, *Villa Marina*, *Palais de Dance* in Strand Street. And you'd see them dancing – there would be four thousand people at *The Palace* Ballroom.

And of course the feller that was in charge there, the Master of Ceremonies, patrolling up and down the centre of the dance floor making sure that people kept on going round anti-clockwise, and it was just like looking at a river moving to see them all going. And they would be singing to the music as well – singing softly to the music. They were absolutely great days.

DC Yes. And as kids you'd be happy, as well, then. Where did you go to play though?

Mr K Well we played in the streets. There wasn't many motor vehicles, they would have hardly been seen on the roads. The bakers would be coming with their horses and carts ...

DC So it was still mostly horses and carts, was it?

Mr K Oh yes. The milkman come – two wheeled float with a big milk can stuck in the middle, and they would be dishing out the milk into jugs you would leave for them – pints and quarts and half-pints. And of course, you had these little gardens in front in Myrtle Street, and there was always a good supply of manure from the horses, and the first to see it was the first out with the shovel! (*laughter*) And of course we played with the top and whip in the streets. And there was one that we used to call, 'Window Breakers,' because these particular tops had a bad habit when you hit them, the string of the whip would get round them and shoot them up in the air and you never knew which way they were going.

DC So you could break a window then?

Mr K Oh yes. And a few had been broken with them.

DC Aye – you'd be in trouble then!

Mr K Hoops were another thing.

DC Of course. Now where would you get the hoops made?

Mr K Well, you could buy them or find them.

DC Yes (*laughter*) – find them!

Mr K You know, any old thing that was round, and you would be, with a bit of wire bent, you knew how to drive these things round, and you could – used to play TT races, of course. In those days the riders and the teams used to go to the small garages, and the *Sunbeam* Team, in the 1920s, Charley Dodson and Alec Benard, they were in Circular Road. In the early 1920s, where the council houses are now in Circular Road and going up into Westmoreland Road – that was where Hills House was.

DC Yes, ‘cos this was the Hills Estate wasn’t it?

Mr K The Hills Estate. People get it mixed up, where it was, but it was on that plot where these houses are built now.

DC Now, who was Hill though?

Mr K Well, you’ll need to look up the history book to find the full story, but he was one of the beneficiaries of the Island, a well-known figure of the time.

DC Hmm, did you see this man then, or had he passed on then.

Mr K Well, I can’t remember him – all I can do is remember the house and remember it getting pulled down.

DC Yes. And that was on Circular Road?

Mr K That was on Circular Road, the stables went up Westmoreland Road and round into Princes Street. Alongside that was a big building and it had a couple of gardens on each side and a garage underneath, where the Athol Garage had an area. Alongside that was Corlett’s Knitting Works in the other part of the building. But as I say, Charley Dodson and Alec Bennett, they were in there, and we, as kids, used to go and be looking at them and run messages for them, and at the end of the races we would get their number plates and we’d stick these on our chests and tied on with string and then we’d start ...

DC Out with your hoops.

Mr K ... racing round and round the block, and we'd run round all day long. *(laughter)* We'd be trying to do a hundred laps round the lane in Myrtle Street, and by the time you'd finished, you know, you were just about on your chinstraps. But it was all part of the excitement.

DC And these, as you say, were mostly horse traffic. When would you see a car? I mean, you would see motorbikes about, but there would not be any cars at all then, or what?

Mr K Very few. I can – another thing we used to make – very few of us had push-bikes because we didn't have the money, but we'd go out to the tips and often enough you'd find an old frame and handlebars, and as long as you had that, you stuck a bit of wood through the place where the peddles normally go, *(laughter)* get a couple of pram wheels, and maybe with a couple of six-inch nails in order to fit them up, and then you would go along treading your way along until you come to the hill – great fun going down the hills, no brakes ...

DC No brakes. *(laughter)*

Mr K ... you stick your feet down on the ground, and we all wore pretty hefty boots in those days, and it was a good job, because you would soon be wearing them out if you had some of the footwear they've got these days ...

DC Yea?

Mr K ... but, as the summers got hotter and the pavements be hot, we'd take our boots and stockings off and run round barefoot for a lot of the summer.

DC Yes. What were the roads like then?

Mr K Well, the roads were pretty rough, and again, here, they would be tar spraying every year, and among the stuff that they put on is the top dressing, the gravel, there was an awful lot of lead, and we would be there, digging these pieces of lead out of the road surface to use them as weights on our fishing line *(laughter)* which we'd make, and 'cos down on the shore was a favourite place. My brother and I, we were collecting cigarette cards, and we used to go down on the promenade on a Sunday morning, and start at one end and go right along right up to Onchan Head, and looking for empty packets, and anybody who dared

bring a packet of cigarettes out, you were up there, ‘Got any cigarette cards, mister?’

DC Oh, I see – scrounging them!

Mr K And you would get hundreds of these cards in the summer. And we would go to one end and back again, rush home for dinner, down again, spending the whole of Sunday galloping along. Now we had our ways of earning money – extra money, ‘cos we had our penny pocket money each week, but then you could run messages – Mrs Kelly at No.1 was always a good touch for to run a message and get an extra penny, but we would go down the shore, and when the tide was out, and we’d make pictures in the sand with shells and bits of orange peel and all the rest of it, and seaweed, and then start shouting to the people to give us a penny, you know, for the picture. And you would carry on until either the tide came in or a policeman arrived, (*laughter*) then you would do a bunk.

DC Yes. Where was the police station then?

Mr K The police station was on Police Station Hill, you know, between Athol Street and ...

DC The one that was there for many years, yes.

Mr K It used to be great to see the policemen. They would all be going out on duty, and they would all be in a procession, lined up smart in their uniform, and taken and put to ... it was like the soldiers going on sentry duty and put them all ...

DC Sent to their various points. And you say pocket money was what – a penny a week, you said?

Mr K Oh, a penny a week, that was, that was ...

DC What would you get for that, then?

Mr K Well, you could get quite a lot. I’d say you could get lollypops, and of course, there was one chewing gum – penny a packet and you got five bits of *P.K.* chewing gum. And Bircham, who had a shop just in Bucks Road, at the end of the Circular Road, facing along Circular Road, and he got a new machine there

with the *P.K.* chewing gum in, but he didn't keep it long, because we found out how you could empty the machine with one penny! (*laughter*) And that was a great attraction. But that machine didn't stay long. We also knew how to get bars of chocolate out of the machines on the promenade, but I'll not tell you that because that's a trade secret! (*laughter*)

DC (*laughter*) Right – anyway, you didn't do too badly for sweets, then.

Mr K No. And again, there was gob-stoppers and liquorice strips and all these kind of things. You could get a quarter of *Lucky Charm* toffees – chocolate covered toffees for tuppence. So there was plenty of things.

DC But it gave you an incentive to try and get extra money one way or another.

Mr K Oh yes, yes. Plus most of us had little jobs in the summer. There was no question of work restrictions like there is now. And I often think it was a good thing, 'cos it kept us out of mischief, and I used to go down with a friend, Jimmy Rogers, whose father had a greengrocers shop down at the bottom of Broadway – just turn round on the corner on the promenade – there used to be a row of shops there, and he used to go down there with the 'bogey' which was a big wooden box with a couple of wheels fixed on to it and a couple of handles, and we'd deliver the groceries round to the houses down there, and you'd get a bag of apples or something like that. And that was all good payment. I know me brother worked for Quarries and he would get a bag of oranges as his payment. (*laughter*) But then when I was 12 in 1930 I went to work on the Isle of Man Steam Packet boats selling magazines.

DC Really? Who would be employing you for them – the Steam Packet themselves?

Mr K No, it was Brown & Sons, *The Times* office – they had the contract for it.

DC What magazines would they be, Victor?

Mr K Oh there was *Picturegoer*, *Picturegoer Weekly*, and then there was – they were tuppence each – *John Bull*, *Answers* – things like this. And then there was summer annuals – sixpence – and remembering there was 240 pence in the pound, so to get to sell a pound's worth, you had to sell 120 of the tuppennys or the equivalent and the others, and we got paid ten shillings a week for this and

then a shilling in the pound commission.

DC In fact you were doing quite well with that then.

Mr K Oh, you were doing okay. And at the end of the summer year you collected all the commission in one lump. But you would have started on *The Mona* and *The Peel Castle* and *The Rushen Castle* and then worked out to *The Mona's Isle*, *Victoria*, *Ramsey Town*, *Viking* ...

DC So did you have something like a little shop on the boat then, or what?

Mr K Well, you had a basket that you carried round, round your neck ...

DC Oh yes.

Mr K ... and as you got older and were on the bigger boats, you'd have a big hamper with all the books in, and a bigger basket as well.

DC Right. Were they delivered to the boat for you?

Mr K Well you collected them yourself, and you trundled them down ...

DC Oh right.

Mr K ... and there was usually the handcart would bring the hampers down. There was the porters with the handcarts would be there ...

DC Yes, yes.

Mr K ... so they would get a porter to take us down.

DC Did you get any tips on that?

Mr K Well, you would – you had all sorts of little rackets ... (*laughter*) err ... to make extra money. As soon as the boat landed you'd be round the decks to see whether there was any clean magazines left. You'd also get round the bunks down in the lounge – especially if it had been a rough passage and the passengers had been laying down because it was surprising how many coins fell

out of peoples' pockets. (*laughter*) And you would pick sixpences up and occasionally a half crown. It was a rush between you and the buffet boys who got round first! You would get your meals provided on the boats, and ...

DC That would be a summer job, really, wouldn't it?

Mr K It was a summer job. But you haven't lived unless you've worked on August Bank Holiday.

DC It would be crammed solid, would it?

Mr K Solid, though now they restrict how many people go on, they used to – as long as they could stand up, they seemed to pack them on, and there would be thousands of people on there – travelling on the boats.

DC (*laughter*) You'd have a job to get round, then.

Mr K Most of them would be sitting on their suitcases because there wasn't enough seats for them. And you'd be trying to get round there and invariably August Bank Holiday was rough, and I used to do, as I got older, six trips between Friday four o'clock and Sunday morning – that's three double journeys, and we would earn quite – I carried on even when I started to trade as a photo processor here. I carried on going away for the weekends in the summer, selling.

DC When you were 12 years old, then, were you allowed to keep this money for yourself?

Mr K Oh no, that was all part of the household money. You were ...

DC You'd keep your tips, would you?

Mr K Oh well, we managed to keep a few extra 'cos nobody knew what extra we'd getting. As you got used to the trips and got a bit older, you could see that people were looking for packs of playing cards, if there was a little group of them, so you'd go to Woolworths and you'd get a pack of playing cards for sixpence and you could sell it on the boat for a shilling.

DC Yes – that was a good profit! (*laughter*)

- Mr K** Oh, that was a good profit, and sixpence was a lot of money in those days.
- DC** Yes. Were you encouraged to save by your parents?
- Mr K** Yes – we had our own little Post Office accounts, but I say, when people are talking in thousands now, we were talking in odd pounds ...
- DC** Of course, of course.
- Mr K** ... and this is – remember, a tradesman’s pay was about three pound a week, a labourer’s was about two pound a week. I started work at *The Times* office to serve me trade, and I was already turned 17 and I had a five years apprenticeship.
- DC** Yes.
- Mr K** Prior to that I’d been at the unemployed school, which was in the Drill Hall in Peel Road, and you got five shillings a week for attending there.
- DC** Oh aye – what did you do there?
- Mr K** Well, they had woodwork and metalwork classes in the actual Drill Hall, and they also had a house in Belmont Terrace where there was a Mr Kidd in charge and he took arithmetic and English and things like that just to give a bit of extra tuition to people. I was in the main, making lino cut blocks, because we had a magazine there and I was making these to illustrate the magazine.
- DC** Yes – well that would be right for you because you needed the artistic touch for that didn’t you, really.
- Mr K** And then the vacancy come in *The Times* office for an apprentice process engraver, and I got the job there.
- DC** Now just going back, then, to these days of your youth – there were a lot of characters around Douglas in those days, wasn’t there?
- Mr K** Oh a terrific number. There was one Johnny Cubbon who was known as Johnny ‘Putty Nose’ and his mother had a little shop just on the quay on the corner of

Queen's Street there, and he'd be shuffling round selling the papers, and as he'd be going along, he'd be shouting, almost under his breath, 'Big boat in the bay, big boat in the bay.' And then, anybody that looked at him, he would pull a face and stick his tongue out at you. (*laughter*) And then there was Fallerio [sp ???] who had the hurdy-gurdy ...

DC Oh yes.

Mr K ... and his monkey, and the hurdy-gurdy was on a stick and this on the top ...

DC Yes, it was just a little box on a stick, with a handle, wasn't it?

Mr K Yes. And he had this little monkey and, my memory is, he had a green jacket and a red hat on, and the monkey used to go round with the little cup to collect the pennies. And then there was another fellow – I think his name was Teare, and he had a sort of barrel organ on wheels, pulled by a donkey, and he was quite a sloppily dressed fellow and quite heavy, and he would sit on the shaft of the cart, and his son would be dangling on the back, and the two of them – this little donkey pulling the two of them along!

DC (*laughter*) Yes, yes.

Mr K And there was Harry Winter who went round selling vegetables. And again, he had a donkey in the cart, and when they got to *The Raglan* the donkey wouldn't go past *The Raglan* until they got a pint of beer for him.

DC Yes, I've heard that story before – and he was the donkey in the film, 'No Limit,' wasn't he?

Mr K Yes. So again, he was a character. There was another fellow – a blind man who used to play the violin on the promenade, under the arcade, and his daughter used to bring him down there and leave him there, and he would play and collect whatever people would give him.

DC Yes, and in old Douglas, then, which was still there, presumably, there was some rough characters, wasn't there?

Mr K Oh, 'Scale' Loughlin, 'Peg-leg' Caley – they were real characters. You can

remember them down round the quayside – it used to be a right rabbit warren there, were the car park in Lord Street is now. Dozens of little lanes and houses and there they would be down there, from Shores Brow going down into Barrack Street and where Quine’s Corner is now, that was known as ‘Little Hell.’

DC Yes. That would be area of the greatest poverty would it, I presume?

Mr K Yea, well there was a lot of poverty there, but it was just a lot of drunks and, but you’ve got to remember there was some good people among them, but ‘Little Hell’ – one of our favourite tricks as kids was to take a dare to run down ‘Little Hell’ on a Saturday night (*laughter*) and I can remember one occasion my father had taken me brother and I to the pictures and we were coming back up Police Station Hill, when a drunk come across the road and had a – took a swipe at me father, a bad mistake he made, ‘cos me father just give him one clout and laid him out on the road, on the steps of the police station and just said to us, ‘Hurry along boys,’ and just left him there. But that was err ...

DC But I mean, the ‘Little Hell’ area was somewhere you were told to keep away from, wasn’t it?

Mr K Oh yes, so that was good enough for a dare to go there.

DC Who were the poorest people in the town then, I mean, there was no – was there a pension still then in those days for people?

Mr K There was very little – there was the Poor Relief, and then there was the soup kitchen.

DC Where was that?

Mr K In Myrtle Street – my aunt actually, and me brothers – me father’s younger brother’s wife run that. He was a painter with the Steam Packet Company, but she used to make the soup there, and darn good soup it was, too! And she’d be cutting the vegetables up and there was no question that because it was the poor people that were getting it – they’re going to get anything dished in. She diced all the vegetables up, they had the best of meat went in, and there was the ladies who were on the committee who were the Deemsters’ wives and people like

that, they would come along to inspect them, and there would always be somebody there each day.

DC And what sort of demand was there in the soup kitchen?

Mr K Oh, a lot of demand. The people would come with their jugs and their cans, they come up the lane – there was a back entrance to the soup kitchen and they would dish it out there.

DC And this was a charitable thing, presumably, was it? I mean, it wasn't Government money or local authority money or anything like that?

Mr K I think it was a Henry Bloom Noble one – one of his efforts, and the fires under the boilers – me uncle died when he was 57 and I used to go along then, on the Saturday morning, and chop the wood for her. And it would be old telegraph poles and things like would be cut up by the prisoners and sent down and then they needed chopping up into sticks. And I used to do that to light it, because my aunt was a very good cook and I always stayed for the lunch with her or dinner with her.

DC Everybody in the town had a fireplace, I suppose, and most would have two. They'd have to have firewood to light their fires with. In the country it wouldn't be a problem, but where did they get it for the townspeople?

Mr K Well, you would either get – borrow boxes, you know, persuade one of the grocers or somebody to give you a box, or they would have to buy the sticks.

DC Yes, because there wouldn't be – it would mostly be wooden boxes for the grocers and people.

Mr K You could buy a penny bundle of sticks ...

DC Yes.

Mr K ... because the food in those days was basic – broth was a great thing. In fact I think we were all brought up on broth. You'd get six penny's worth of potherbs and six penny's worth of pieces and you could make a big pot and see you through the week.

DC Potatoes and a bit of meat, yes. And then you'd have – presumably you'd have herring and kippers a bit as well, would you?

Mr K Oh the herrings, the fishmongers would be going round with the carts, usually pulling them, and, 'Fresh herring, fresh herring, 20 for a bob here.' And they'd be round the lanes and they would be bought in in the summer when there was plenty about, and usually all the houses had a crock they kept under the stairs where they would salt the herrings and put them down for the winter.

DC Hmm. When you went to Douglas High School, then, the Head Master – Head Teacher would be Bill Sykes, I guess.

Mr K Bill Sykes, yes, yes.

DC Did you ever come across him – I mean he'd be a bit remote from the boys, I suppose, would he?

Mr K *(laughter)* Come across him? I've had my ears belted by him many a time. *(laughter)* His err – he taught French, and languages were foreign to me, and still are. And he would – I can remember we had to learn some plays – 'Monsieur and Madame Dupont in Paris,' and we were set these for homework, and he knew darn well that I wouldn't have learnt much, but he would always call me out to perform and I would start with a few lines and then dry up. And he would sort of prompt me, and I'd say what he'd prompted me and then dry up again, and then all of a sudden, 'You silly fool, you silly fool!' And his two fists would be going round your head, bang, bang, bang! But he didn't knock any sense in as far as French was concerned *(laughter)* ...

DC *(laughter)* No.

Mr K ... because when I left the High School I was still as far away from learning French as I was when I started.

DC But did you find your aptitude for art there then?

Mr K Well, it was all through the school that I picked up me art. A Mr Chissam was the art master there and he was very good. People sort of – they say, 'All we were drawing was cones and balls and cylinders and things like this.' If they

realised – that’s the whole basis of everything. You just look at your own body – what have you got? You’ve got a ball on the top, you’ve got a cylinder for your body, you’ve got cylinders for legs, cylinders for arms and if you learnt to draw these ...

DC The basics, in other words.

Mr K You’ve got it, and people, they’re too inclined to want to be painting masterpieces before they’ve learnt the preliminaries.

DC That’s right today. Then you’ll have come across Archibald Knox, will you, later?

Mr K Well, I didn’t, but he taught me wife, Thelma, and err ...

DC Did you go to the School of Art at one time, then?

Mr K No, I never went to the School of Art ...

DC That surprises me a bit, really.

Mr K ... until I became a member of the Education Authority, and I only joined then because I was wanting to check up on the activities of the then Principal – I’ll not go into any detail about that! (*laughter*)

DC Now, so childhood days, then, you – looking back on them now, they were pretty happy days, were they?

Mr K Oh, they were good days, there’s no doubt about it, and I say when you read T E Brown’s poem about it, the childhood days, they’re telling the true story, ‘cos you got up in the morning, then you run round all day long, and memory is a bad thing ‘cos all the days seem to be fine days. And we used to wonder – there was no question of fearful about being abducted or anything like that, from very early age we were wondering out to the Kewaigue and beyond Kewaigue out to the Fairy Bridge.

DC Yes, that’s a fair way, yes.

Mr K And we'd be out there the whole day, bring sandwiches, light a fire – we had a cave cut into the side of the banks out there. When I think about it, it was all sand, we had this cave – the whole darn lot could have collapsed on us, but we were having fun falling in the river. That would seem to be one of the main things that we did and we'd come home and you'd be sitting on a chair, your trousers would be wet and your stockings would be wet and you'd be tramping round trying to pretend that there was nothing wrong.

DC When would you get out to far places like Peel and Ramsey, Castletown and so on, then? Would you get on a train, or would you – that didn't apply?

Mr K Didn't apply. You went as far as you could walk and no further. If you had to rely on the Sunday school picnic for to go anywhere ...

DC That was just once a year, was it?

Mr K Yes, and we went to St Andrew's Church, which is just round the corner from Myrtle Street, and the Sunday school picnics were there, and we stayed there through the infant's section, junior, senior and then you seemed to drift away when you were round about sixteen. The scouting was my main life. I joined the Cubs when I was six and three quarters – you weren't supposed to get in until you were eight, but me brother was eight, and if he was going in, I was going in as well, and I wouldn't go home, so they said to me father, 'Well, you'd better get him a uniform, 'cos we're not going to get shot of him,' and they haven't had shot of me yet! *(laughter)*

DC And just on the Sunday school picnics, did you have a favourite place to go to – which was the best place for a picnic would you say?

Mr K Silverdale was the main place that you went, and you can still remember the sloppy jelly and the limp lettuce leaves, but you'd have a sports meeting then, up in the fields above Silverdale and have a good time. The boating lake was the great attraction.

DC Yes.

Mr K Glen Wyllin was the other favourite place.

- DC** Right, and you'd have a train journey for that.
- Mr K** Train journey for that.
- DC** Yes. And just around where you were living – Myrtle Street, Tynwald Street and all that area, presumably the Hillside Avenue houses didn't arrive 'til ...
- Mr K** They were in the '20s – late '20s I think.
- DC** So what was there before then, then?
- Mr K** They were all allotments, small allotments. The whole area was covered in them and lots of people had their little area and all nicely kept.
- DC** Yes.
- Mr K** They went right up, and of course, a lot of the buildings – there was no Nurses Home, the extension on the hospital had not been put on, so there was more nurseries round there. They were more commercial efforts up there. We used to go up there to buy flowers for the tables for boarding houses, sixpenny bunches of flowers and you would get *Gladioli*, *Sweet William* and the *Dog-daisies* and the likes of this – get a big bunch for a sixpence.
- DC** Did you ever have the doctor call to the house?
- Mr K** Yes. And in those days the doctors seemed to be a lot more attentive. The family doctors were really part of the family, and they come out at all sorts of hours ...
- DC** Yes.
- Mr K** ... but now it's – I don't know whether the parents had to pay in those days for their visits, but whenever there was any trouble, they seemed to be there.
- DC** It was a case of the ones who could afford it – yes, yes. But you never had trouble yourself?
- Mr K** Never had trouble.

DC Didn't come off your bikes bad enough?

Mr K No – we usually had – ‘cos we were running around in short pants, and your knees would invariably get rubbed off, and err ... that was all part of the joy of growing up.

END OF INTERVIEW