

MANX HERITAGE FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

'TIME TO REMEMBER'

Interviewee(s): Mrs Josie Margaret Milson Ellis

Date of birth: 15th December 1926

Place of birth: Hall Green, Birmingham

Interviewer(s): Elizabeth Ardern-Corris

Recorded by: Elizabeth Ardern-Corris

Date recorded: 8th February 2012

Topic(s):

- Early childhood and parents
- Fathers work
- Moving to Leeds
- WWII
- Attending Leeds College of Art
- Singer Frankie Vaughan
- Fashions
- Obtaining Art Teaching Diploma
- Moving to the Isle of Man
- Exhibition at Laxey Woollen Mills
- Inspiration for art works
- Husband's illness
- Interests and hobbies

Josie Ellis - Mrs E
Elizabeth Ardern-Corris - EA-C

EA-C My name is Elizabeth Ardern-Corris, it's the 8th February, 2012 and I'm interviewing Mrs Josie Ellis at the Laxey Woollen Mills. Mrs Ellis, can you tell me your full name, please.

Mrs E Josie Margaret Milson Ellis is my full name.

EA-C And where did that middle name come from?

Mrs E From my mother's family, in Liverpool.

EA-C When were you born?

Mrs E Where?

EA-C What date – when were you born?

Mrs E Fifteen, twelve, twenty-six.

EA-C And whereabouts were you born?

Mrs E Hall Green, Birmingham (*laughter*) – central Birmingham, I think.

EA-C Can you tell me a little bit about your childhood and your parents.

Mrs E Well, what I remember is going to live in Shirley, Shirley, not far from the Stratford Road. And going for walks with my father on a Sunday morning and looking at the lovely countryside of Warwickshire, and going towards the ... there's a lovely canal with barges there, and a drawbridge for the barges to go underneath, and there were horses with the barges and the bargee people on the barges, they would have probably been carrying coal, either from Birmingham, further along, and there were several of them all going along on the canal. And it was very beautiful along by the canal and the little path with flowers everywhere, and that was Warwickshire at its most beautiful then. And a little shop quite near where we always had stone ginger beer, which was in a stoneware pot, which you don't see now, but it was lovely from this stoneware pot – it was very cold ginger beer. (*laughter*) And so the memory of Shirley, lovely big, long garden, and hedges of *Margarites*, because we couldn't control them, really, they were wonderful, they flourished and rambler roses around the

French door and lime trees in the road, like an avenue of lime trees. But they were just nice, smallish, three bedroomed houses, semi-detached, and it was just a very nice, beautiful place, not much traffic around then, at all, because there was very little petrol, and not many buses or anything. It was the late 1920s to '30s, you know, at its quietest. But, towards ... the Midlands, towards the end of the 1930s, there was a lot of life, really, that was around ... outside the Bullring in Birmingham, there would be these chestnut roasters and roasting potatoes and there would be jugglers and all sorts of people along the road, you know, performing. And then the people would go into the big market that it was then, and there were little kittens and puppies in cages which I know I saw them and felt anxious for them, but the centre of Birmingham was bombed and of course all of that has been replaced. But towards Stratford on Avon, we would go there on a Saturday, and there was this Stratford Mop – the Stratford Mop was a medieval street market, and all out in the open, and the river passed the ... it was one of the early designs of the Stratford theatre, they redesigned it after, and I think a lady architect redesigned it and it's modernised now, but it wasn't modernised then. I've got an old postcard, really, of the Stratford Theatre as it was, and I believe at that time, about Christmas, I heard that they had fairies that flew into the audience and back again, and I thought, 'What a lovely idea!' But our own money was a bit tight, and we never went to the theatre which I was sad about, but I did, for Louise, when she was little, a little fairy doll that joined onto the lights, and it blew in the draught of the door. And that was the time when, first of all we lived in Horsforth after which ... but I'm skipping ahead then, because what happened was, in Birmingham, my father worked for the Ministry of Works and Buildings, and then it was known that the German armies were moving, you know, towards Poland, and invading the boundary, and my father's job moved him to Bridge End in South Wales, and the reason was, they were going to build a colossal armament factory there, and it was being transferred from the London – Fulham, where the arsenal was there, to South Wales, to be safer. And it was an enormous area that they planned. Father was on the design of the huts that would be for the making of bombs and bullets and guns and goodness knows what. It would be almost like from here to Baldine, of huts that were to manufacture all the bombs and everything for the war, there in Bridge End, and by great luck, although the Germans said they were going to fly that night to bomb Bridge End, they never found it. And a sea mist would come up in that particular position in South Wales and cover up all the places where the huts were, and they would be sunk a bit as well. And the aircraft went over to bomb Swansea and the oil wells at Swansea, and when

they bombed the oil well the sky was as black as those seats there – black with the oil that they had bombed. So there was a spy who was known about, later, probably, he would have been an Englishman who worked as a spy on behalf of the Germans called Lord Haw-Haw, and if Lord Haw-Haw said, you know, where the German aircraft could find Bridge End, he would have done his best to describe, but even with his help, it was never found. Just as well, because my school was quite near to the arsenal – we just hoped for the best. So everybody was issued with garden shelters, one between two houses, which would ... each *Anderson* air raid shelter would accommodate five people, so that would be a tight squeeze. But it would be covered up with turf, and the floor was wooden and there was a piece of heavy carpet over the round door – not a door, just a round space where you got in. And when the wind blew, you know, the carpet blew as well. And it was so cold, the metal *Anderson* air raid shelter, it absolutely dripped from condensation from people who were breathing – you know, tough people. One lady was a policeman's wife, you know, and neighbours were crammed in there and you could hear the German aircraft going over, and you kept your fingers crossed, but they went across, as I said, to Llanelli and Swansea, and they would either be shot down, but there would be search lights looking for them all round; and blackout everywhere – you couldn't have a torch, not in the *Anderson* shelter, nor you couldn't go down the path with a torch, so you'd got to hope that you didn't fall. But if the church bells, if they ever went – they never went during the war – it meant there would be an invasion, so everybody hoped they never heard the church bells, which were big, from a steeple across in Bridge End, and from Newcastle Church, which was on a hilltop, but they never went, because fortunately, they thought an invasion would happen because there was about four miles of endless sand dunes down to Porthcawl and Ogmore, and it would have been so easy and there would have been the invaders coming, and it's quite true, from the television film, that the men-folk, like my father, would have had pitchforks, because these invading men would have probably come bedraggled and over the fields from the farm, and they would have had to have been intercepted, so the men would have got the pitchforks to corner them, you know? I mean, it was, you might say, living drama, it was ... (*laughter*) very frightening – in the pitch black! And not much fire, and my grandmother wouldn't go to the *Anderson* air raid shelter, she had a bed downstairs, and said she would rather die in her bed with the dog. And she stayed back in the pitch black, (*laughter*) and hardly any fire because they'd very little coal or anything like that. You'd just got to wrap up warm and protect the area under the stairs for an immediate safety area for

the family to go under the stairs quickly, you know, if the aircraft came over.
(laughter)

EA-C Just tell me a little bit more about your parents. What did they do?

Mrs E About my parents? Well, I mean, father was one of inventions. He was trying to invent things, certainly to ... immediately strengthen under the stairs, that was the first invention – make the little window really safe, under the stairs for everybody. And so there were things he ... oh, he was working on a hedge-cutter and things that would be useful, and drawing up sketches and sending them up, because he had probably a lot of inventive ability. *(laughter)* So mother would have been knitting and sewing, so would my grandmother, and my grandmother probably taught me crochet and knitting and early stitching and then there was the knitting of scarves for the soldiers and the knitting of socks, so grandmother was very good turning the heels of the socks, you know. And they were made of oiled wool for the soldiers who would be up in the arctic, probably, and very cold conditions. So there was a general feeling of the importance of knitting at home to work for the forces – very important in making little edges to the scarves that would be like a bit of a fringe, probably *(laughter)* similar attitude towards material. So then, of course, from 1942, father was directed again, change of place up to Leeds, and so he went up first and found a house for us, a semi-detached house the other side of Headingley, Leeds, you'll have heard of Headingley and the cricket ground; and towards Adel, and we went up, my mother and me and my grandmother, on a crowded train, from eight o'clock in the morning, and it was crowded with service men with great big packs on their backs, and hardly any room to move, you know. But the thing is, if the train stopped in the middle, suddenly, in the middle of nowhere, you didn't know where you were because there were no town signs. They'd been taken down because the Germans would have known where they were, so the train passengers didn't know where they were, either. But if the train stopped, you knew there was an air raid warning somewhere around, and we went from Cardiff up to Birmingham, and that, of course, was a heavily bombed area, Birmingham, so it was very risky there with the train because it could be machine-gunned, you see. And so you hung on, hoped for the best, changed trains in Birmingham and went up through Sheffield, which had been heavily bombed as well. And all the factories up there, and the great high chimneys, the black smoke as it was then in Sheffield, heavily industrial area, I thought, from the Vale of Glamorgan, what are we going to ... what's it going to be like, living

up here with these industries and the chimneys and the smoke? And I thought I wished very much to stay where I was, ‘cos my friend had a very big farm and that was lovely indeed, and made me very happy, but Leeds, when we arrived at the big central station, hardly any light around, just like the light only, of an oil lamp, would be all that would be allowed for people to come through the station, and father was under a little lamp and he’d got, I think, his dog with him, but we had got a cat in a basket as well, (*laughter*) and ... so we went onto the Leeds tram. And the tram – it would cost about tuppence from West Park by tram into the centre or back again, and tuppence the other side to Roundhay, so for four pence you could go, really then, all round Leeds, which of course shows you the difference in the value of money. (*laughter*) So everybody bundled in, you know, and we were taken back to house father had found, and hadn’t seen it before, but it appeared to be very nice, and no smoke or factories about, so we were happy with that. (*laughter*)

EA-C Did you attend college while you were at Leeds?

Mrs E Yes, I went to ... 1944, the first year of Leeds Art College, and from 1944 to ’46, it was the intermediate course with the intermediate exam, and I took pottery as a main subject there. But it was general arts, and that’s when my designs were on the bottom row, and then gradually they did go up a little bit, and ... (*laughter*)

EA-C What do you mean by that? Your designs were on the bottom row?

Mrs E There were 80 students you see, in the lecture hall, and there were so many rows that the tutor put all the work on, about ten rows of eight, and he would select what he thought was the best work, put it on the top row; middle sort of row; and the down to the bottom which wanted a lot of improvement; and if you were on the bottom row, it wanted a great deal of work doing. (*laughter*) So to climb up, you know, there were no names, you’d got to just hope that it would be recognised as being ... suitable to climb ... up ... higher. (*laughter*)

EA-C Did your work ever make it to the top row?

Mrs E It took a long time, then probably it just did, and the tutor said, ‘Well, you know, when you put in a lot of effort, Miss Lewis, it’s rewarded!’ (*laughter*)

EA-C Were there many women attending college while you were there?

Mrs E There would have been, I think, probably half – half, and so of course the younger ones were not old enough to be called-up. The men would have been called-up over the age of about sixteen, so they would have missed their training then, and come back to do it. But the women students went straight ahead. But ... I think that there was the ... tutor who was very inspired, had the Rome Scholar, then he went to work in the ... live with the Monastery, and then we had a very conventional tutor who taught sculpture, from the Royal College of Art, and he had red hair, an auburn beard and he said very little. The other man had been very, very talkative, but this man, he knew what he needed to say and he said very little. And he quite quickly made himself a studio in the yard at the back, and he believed that the mature students would learn much more from watching him and his work outside in his studio, and then he would just pop back, morning and afternoon, and see them, the work they did, and he just said, 'Have another go at that,' and in the afternoon, 'have another go at that,' and he would put a cross on the clay and that was the limit, really, of his teaching. And I'm not meaning to be dreadful about him, because the work he did himself taught us a great deal. But the one who was helpful, but not a teacher, was a Polish man called Stefan, and it was said that he had walked across Europe and somehow arrived in Leeds. He'd hidden under hedges, daren't say he was Polish, and had carried all his possessions on his back – crossed over, got up to Leeds. And because he was such a wonderful craftsman, they employed him as a craftsman. He could carve shells and make cameos; he could set the cameo in silver or gold; he could do jewellery; he could do engraving – you name it, he could do everything. Understood pottery – but he wasn't a teacher and he spoke broken English and he was there to help, to guide people with the making of big armatures for the clay models, and because he was Roman Catholic, he got to know of a commission to do a sculpture, life-sized sculpture, of a bishop. So ... photographs and everything, and this was a great big project, the life-size bishop was to be modelled on a great big heavy table and it stood about eight feet high or more, and the young men helped him with the tons of clay, building it up from photographs, (*laughter*) and it would have to be cast, and so I presume then it would be made into bronze for an ultra-modern Roman Catholic church the other side of Leeds. And so it was very successful indeed. (*laughter*)

EA-C Did any famous people attend Leeds College of Art while you were there?

Mrs E Well, the quiet man in the lecturing room was Frank Abelson, and Frank Abelson – we didn't know he had talent with singing, we didn't know much about him – very quiet and he was very keen on football, and he did a college variety show at *The Leeds City Varieties*, and was discovered – he was Frank ... what's his name?

EA-C Frankie Vaughan.

Mrs E (*laughter*)

EA-C Frankie Vaughan?

Mrs E That's the one, Frankie Vaughan ...

EA-C Yea, yea.

Mrs E ... was Frank Abelson – Frankie Vaughan. And so they put him in touch with film people, and he went from strength to strength. And later, in the school, I taught his niece, Stella, and heard about the family, and they were lovely family and dedicated to building up people to always be there, to welcome Frankie Vaughan wherever he went, they had a great number of people who would welcome him and give him a lot of umm ... do they call it 'hype' or something? To make him well known before the town knew him. And they would cheer him as he appeared, so his name became known, (*laughter*) and his singing!

EA-C Henry Moore, I believe attended ...

Mrs E Who?

EA-C Henry Moore attended Leeds College.

Mrs E He did – I never met him, but I heard of him and my friend wrote to his mother who lived part of Leeds that she knew, and he was very ... Leeds College was very proud indeed of him, and his new designs, really, of sculpture, but ... there was a new shift in people doing artwork there and it went down more to St Ives in Cornwall, and famous artists and painters gathered down in St Ives in Cornwall, and got to know other well-known people down there, probably.

Barbara Hepworth and people went down there and exchanged ideas together – and a nice place to be! (*laughter*)

EA-C What was life like, generally, living in Leeds in the ‘40s and the ‘50s?

Mrs E Well, the ‘40s – 1944, it was still the war, of course, and 1945 was the end of the war and the ... it was something ... it was like the whole of the city came out with excitement when they heard the end of the war. And they crawled all over the trams, the trams couldn’t move for the crowds, and everybody was dancing and hugging one another, it was something – you don’t want a war to have that experience, but it was beyond description, really, of the wealth of happiness that people felt at the end of the war. And then there was terrible austerity, then, and not many buses and many of the things that were heavy came on wagons up from The Calls in Leeds with probably four dray horses pulling tons of coal on the wagons, and every so often, every three hundred yards, there would be where the horses could drink there, ‘cos they’d be exhausted getting up the hill from the centre of Leeds – what do they call it? The ... where they drink? Made of bronze ... wonderful, outside Leeds University, out higher up, outside Leeds Girls’ High School, outside West Park, the horses would be getting tired, you see, they’d want a long drink. Then they’d got to get the coal up to Lawnswood [School], up there, and ... because there were no wagons and because of the lack of petrol, so yes ... (*laughter*)

EA-C What were the fashions like?

Mrs E Well, the fashions during the war were ‘squared.’ Looking very military and tweed, and tough, thick stockings and thick boots and, you know pull-on hats and so on. But when, after the war, there was suddenly a change of fashion, with softer lines, Raglan sleeve, tighter waist – you know. Big ... big skirts, even, to coats – flared – and a small sort of cape, you know. And a kind of a pull-on bonnet hat that tied under there ... and they would have to go by tram, as well, because of lack of buses, and so the ladies were holding up their coats, you know, as they got on the trams. (*laughter*)

EA-C After you attended college, what career did you pursue?

Mrs E Well, I did the art teachers’ diploma, and so we were allocated certain schools, so I had a junior school in Kirkstall Road, that’s just up from Kirkstall Abbey,

and it's what you call, 'downtown' Leeds, really, but it's very near to the big power station, and there was a very inspired art teacher there with the junior children, and because of the big power station, great big five or six big blocks of white power ... that had the steam coming – what do you call them? And so the lady – that was really the children's background, so she got them to paint lovely coloured evening skies against the background of these cooling towers – or dawn, with an odd tree in front of the cooling towers, you know, and they made lovely pictures, really, of their own environment. So then I went ... I was allocated Leeds Girls' High School, and then the City of Leeds Training College, because I was given, as everyone else, a different sort of age group. So Leeds Girls' High School was very formal – the teacher very formal – taught formal pencil drawing, which was absolutely correct for the exams, and they passed. And they always, in the afternoon, the weaving of scarves, so the girls would be weaving away on these small looms and using colour, but the young teacher there said quietly to me that the mature teacher didn't shift from her lessons, but the young teacher did have more imagination than the mature one! *(laughter)*

EA-C What educational purpose does art serve?

Mrs E Well, it was in the lectures, you know, the great value of art's in the community, in hospitals, in prisons, and it's to be noticed now that the Duchess of Cambridge is recommending art rooms in busy areas for people to exercise their imagination and be creative, and that is something she's encouraging. And it probably is a good thing for people to be not bottled up and aggressive, but they can work out their feelings and so ... that's probably the best ... best thing to be done. *(laughter)*

EA-C Can you tell me what brought you to the Isle of Man?

Mrs E John's parents came, and so it seemed as though it was just quite the natural thing to do, to follow on. And so my father then died, and I had to ... we had to sell his house and then it was very fortuitous that there was a little shop available at old Laxey where I took it over, belonged to Michael Billington, and he promised his father he'd always look after his mother, and so the rent was very minimal if I and the ladies who took over what is the other half of the restaurant down there, they sold knitting machines and sewing machines in the window. So a great number of holiday makers went down towards the beach,

they were attracted to the knitting machine, and they and I looked in at Michael Billington's mother to see she was alright, because he sometimes had to go away to Hollywood, because he was understudying ... who was that?!! (*laughter*) – you understand me? – one of the famous actors out there. And so people would then come from looking at the knitting machines, they would drift in to what was the butcher's shop. The butcher's shop was covered in, as you can imagine, white tiles – was all white – with a tiny little kitchen at the back, so I thought, 'I've got to do something with this white shiny tiles, I had a little bit of money to spend to get two wooden rocking chairs, and a central table, and put coloured cushions in the rocking chairs and decided to do something colourful, which may be why I did that big one of the village, there, to cover up the white tiles. And smaller ones along the wall, so that people weren't horrified and would think, 'Well, I remember this as a butcher's shop!' (*laughter*)

EA-C Well, we're here in Laxey Woollen Mills. It's your first major exhibition of all your works. Can you tell what the purpose of the exhibition is at this time of your life?

Mrs E Well, undoubtedly, I've had two experiences, so to speak, of seeing something that caused my ambition, or imagination, to take a leap forward. And they had, in showcases at Leeds College of Art, a big display of Swedish embroidery; and I looked at this closely, and I thought, 'That's wonderful!' Because it wasn't the fine work of work done for church alter pieces, which are fine, silk work, but it was of coarser material which is more manageable for the average person's eye. And then, on one occasion, I went with my son to see the train museum in York, as we did from time to time, and doubled back to York Minster before we caught the train back to Harrogate, and there was a wonderful exhibition of French tapestries in York Minster, and the organ playing, and we sat still ... I thought, 'That's the most wonderful new modern approach to biblical scenes or objects mentioned in the bible,' and coloured-in wonderful vivid colours and woven in France – I think it was Aubusson – is that a place? But there, my mind went forward, so to speak. And there was another inspiring man who was in prison of war camp in Germany, and he'd been in the merchant navy, but to keep himself sane, he carved old broken legs of tables, and he would carve anything then, afterwards, he could carve it as he sat down – just as the Polish man could sit and have a coffee and could be carving cameos, and he would sell the cameos to jeweller's shops, mounted in silver, and the other man would be doing the wood-carvings. But we had a wood carving teacher who was, one

might say elderly, he was over seventy, probably, who came to Leeds, and he was not a teacher, but he came to teach his craft. And he said, ‘If I don’t teach you students about wood carving,’ he said, ‘it’s going to die with *him!*’ So we learnt what we could, you would go with the grain, and not cut across the grain, and people learnt a great deal from him about letter-cutting, and he spread the knowledge of wood carving from the night school at Leeds, and again about usefulness of art, we had a man who came up at night school and he was blind, and came up the steps with difficulty up stairs, the first floor, with his dog for the blind. And he sat this dog, a black retriever, on a bench and he modelled this dog by feeling the dog, and made a wonderful replica of the dog by feeling it. And you see, it was quite happy, he created something which was a very good likeness to the dog, and away he went into the depth of the city with his dog, and he’d been very happy up there, learning with the others in the modelling department. (*laughter*)

EA-C How many pieces of your work are on display?

Mrs E Sixty? I umm ... with wood carvings and things ... umm photographed and things which are simply done, because I think other people would see how the simpler ones are done for them themselves to learn from. (*laughter*)

EA-C Do you have a favourite piece?

Mrs E I probably like the blue woodland there, really, so ... but I’ve always ... Julia knows, you know, because we’re Sagittarian – that we are the archers, and we’re always aiming for things. So if we have an aim, we do better! So I did the first piece of work for the house I went into, the second piece of work for Louise’s bedroom five years after, and for Ian’s bedroom six – seven years after. And so to have an aim, I think, is very helpful thing and Julia agrees – we ... the archer! (*laughter*)

EA-C Can you tell me about some of your work on exhibition here please?

Mrs E Yes, I did this fire screen when I was first married and there was a blank fireplace there. And I’d seen a book about shadow embroidery and did it on organdie with satin, and put ... we put a light behind it, it made the fireplace look a bit brighter. Otherwise the empty house was looking rather plain. But that gave a bit of warmth in that particular room. This was for a showcase

outside the door of St Peter's Church, Harrogate, and the showcase had models which were to demonstrate the message more than perhaps the wayside pulpits in print, because the models would perhaps have appeal to children as they pass by the central church, and the parents would be going on their way to Marks & Spencer and the steam trains, and hopefully the showcase caught their eye as they continued up the main road. (*laughter*) It's terracotta which is fired, and it was very difficult to fire because of the size, but ... and it didn't buckle, it was done ... not really fired by me, but done successfully, and it is 'Christ in Glory,' which was put in the showcase for Easter Sunday and it had a yellow background in the showcase and was, I'd hoped, eye-catching. (*laughter*). 'The Viking Ship,' after seeing the Peel Viking Festival, I think 'The Viking Ship' has been at the back of my mind for quite a time. But knowing more about the Vikings from my friend, Eileen, who knows ... read the book about the Vikings, it took shape, really. I went to John Wood's woollen mill and saw the green tweed, which I could fringe the edge of, and the Viking ship looked as though, on the tweed, it could be on a rough sea. And it sort of happened, really, with the colours. This was particularly interesting because the second time a Viking ship took my eye and my mind was ... what I hadn't seen first, but after, there was a Viking ship outside a big shop in Ramsey; and it was on ... when I was on my way to see Paddy McQuaid, that from Ramsey, I had gone up to Paddy's house, having seen a Viking ship on a big shop in Ramsey. And many ideas come together, and they did when I saw the tweed in the woollen mill and it was all together because of seeing the weaving at Paddy McQuaid's when she's using blues and yellows and purples in her scarves. I used to visit Paddy McQuaid regularly and know the lovely house on the corner of the hairpin, and I remember seeing her weaving in a side room, given over to all her wool, and the colours of the wool for her scarf, and I believe that she definitely did design the original Manx tartan with the idea of what she saw locally through the windows – the blue sky, the green hill – she went down to the sea, saw the yellow sand and the purple on the hilltop of the heather.

EA-C Do you have a favourite medium that you prefer to work with?

Mrs E A favourite medium ... well, I suppose I remember early days of modelling in *Plasticine*, so I suppose modelling is what I like, although it's a bit ... it has problems, you've got to cast it or have it fired or something. And it's a bit messy and dusty, but I think it gives me results, anyway. If it goes wrong, you can re-build on top. (*laughter*)

EA-C Do you have a workshop at home?

Mrs E I've got a garden shed, yes, in the summer! (*laughter*) It's a bit cold at the moment in the shed.

EA-C Are you still producing works?

Mrs E I've got an idea, and I've got to get down to it. And when ... my husband had prolonged illness and he was at home most of the time – then he had cancer and was treated in Clatterbridge and came back cured, which was wonderful, and I was then, to prevent getting worried so much about him, there was no more we could do, he was taking the right tablet, I came down frequently to see the coloured tweeds that John had, and he did small off-cuts in nice big bundles, you know. So that was the start with the background – a metre of tweed that would fringe and the small bundles that John had then of colour. That kept me going from being over-anxious about John, who was likely to fall, and he was afraid to be left because he had breathing difficulties, so I had a piano where he was living ... where he was staying, and he didn't mind if I practised the piano so long as I was with him, because he was afraid of not being able to breathe. We'd got oxygen standing by, sort of thing, and so then he moved up to the top room because he wanted to be level with the bathroom, and he couldn't tackle the back stairs, so he agreed to a Yamaha electric piano up there, so that I was with him, you see. So that he didn't feel alone, and he could go just into the garden which was lovely, so again, it was creative. And if you played tapes and records and re-play them, you know, that ... it occupied him with his hi-fi, and also listening to Radio Three and the lovely music, he would talk about it, was wonderful background. And ... anyway, I'm glad to say he lived to be 78, and the doctor said it was a miracle that he had lived as long as that, because any cold that he had, went down ... before the days of antibiotics, it turned to pneumonia and he survived pneumonia so many times. His mother burnt an oil lamp in the bedroom at night to ease his breathing and so on, and that's it, really, the doctor was right, it was a miracle that he survived! (*laughter*)

EA-C Do you have any interests outside of art?

Mrs E Well, I love wildlife and birds – yes, I do love birds. And I have not been travelling around at all because, married in 1953, John's job anchored him and ... he travelled around about two-thirds of the world in the merchant navy, and

he was glad, really, to be anchored in a small dispensary, so I was also, so to speak, anchored as well. But if you put your disadvantages, if you turn your disadvantages round to become advantageous, I think that is helpful, and explore some ... could be reading and writing and poetry, you've got time to explore different things, and I found that very helpful, coming down to the mill, and John and his father would be working at the loom. (*laughter*) And then I wrote long letters to a couple of pen-friends and they would write letters to me, and that was ... and then the one came over and I brought her to the mill as well. She was fascinated with the mill in Laxey, and we called on Eileen. She came from California. So I made a wonderful trip across. Her surname was Lewis, the same as mine, that's why she felt that really perhaps some way back, perhaps, the Lewis family had all been one, and they'd gone to America. (*laughter*)

EA-C Where would you say your main source of inspiration was for your work comes from?

Mrs E Now that's ... I ...well, I think, there's no doubt about it, really, I think I found a different postcard at home and I'd done a drawing of the inside of different flowers. And then I'd embroidered the inside of the flowers onto a background, so I think it's birds, flowers, natural things, shells probably, and the lovely things around that can be transferred into different shapes and forms into colour and embroidery and wood-carving, really. The man's head was half a tree trunk, under a tree, but when the bark was stripped off, he suddenly took shape. (*laughter*)

EA-C Do you have a favourite colour?

Mrs E I don't know that I do, really, I think it's a blend of colours that go together, that one offsets another.

EA-C What advice would you give to an aspiring artist?

Mrs E Well, I think there's no doubt about it, you've just got to press on, really, and not despair. And if you have got the feeling strong enough, you know, you won't let any obstacle stand in the way, you know, you would try for scholarship or you'll try and present your work. And I tried, in Harrogate, to join the National Embroidery Skill, and I went to York of all wonderful places. No, I was not taken on there. They said, 'Well, we think you're confident with

design, but, oh, the stitching!' So I was turned down there, and I thought, 'Well, there is what they call in Yorkshire, The Yorkshire Guild of Craftsmen.' So I joined them, and they issued a little booklet that they posted round to working craftsmen, the work that they did, they took photographs and issued those to other people who were working, and it was a link. And coming to the Isle of Man, it was a similar idea, Mr and Mrs Hallgrave [sp ???] worked with the Douglas High School, and they gradually formed the Isle of Man Craft Association, which had a little leaflet. (*laughter*)

EA-C Thank you so much for sharing some of your inspiration for your work.

Mrs E Thank you very much indeed for listening – for such a long, drawn-out rigmarole (*laughter*) but I've enjoyed being interviewed. (*laughter*)

END OF INTERVIEW