MANX HERITAGE FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

‘TIME TO REMEMBER’

Interviewee: Mr Arthur Corkill
Date of birth: 18th June 1925
Place of birth: Victoria Road, Douglas
Interviewer: David Callister
Recorded by: David Callister
Date recorded: 14th February 2005

Topic(s):
- Memories of grandfather and father
- Early school days
- Working in father’s smithy
- Dangers of a Farrier’s work
- Working for Gelling & Cowin
- Joining the Royal Navy
- Horse racing at Belle Vue and jockey Tommy ‘Tightener’
- Local characters, shops and hotels
- Working as a Police cadet
- Sitting Certified Chartered exam
- Working for The Palace & Derby Castle Company
- Palace takeover bid by Sir Dudley Cunliffe-Owen
- Aborted idea for building casino at Clay Head
- Financial difficulties for The Palace Company
- Near demolition of The Gaiety Theatre
- Getting fired from The Palace Company

Arthur Corkill - Mr C
David Callister - DC
This is Arthur Corkill, we’re at 14 Norwood Drive, it’s the 14th February 2005 and you tell me, Arthur, you were born in 1925 – 18th June 1925 ... umm ... but you come from, really a family tradition of blacksmiths, because your father before you and your grandfather were both blacksmiths in Douglas.

That’s correct, yes, they were.

Do you remember your grandfather?

Oh yes, I remember him very well, very tall stern man, he was. I used to call him ‘Sir,’ (laughter) because he frightened me a bit ...

Yes. (laughter)

... but he was a good grandfather.

Yes.

... but I remember him very well.

Was he still working the smithy then when you saw him?

Oh yes, he used to work in the smithy, but he’d more or less semi-retired, because he was a Town Councillor ...

Oh, right.

... and 1931, I think, he became Mayor of Douglas ...

Right.

... and, of course, he had a lot of duties in the Town Hall, so he’d more or less stopped working in the smithy then.

So your experience in the smithy was mostly with your father, then?

Oh yes, yea. Well, I, as I said, I used to go – Hanover Street was my school, it was the only formal education I had, and I used to spend more time – as much
time as I could in the smithy with my father, because it was a kind of ‘Mecca’ for all the lads in Hanover Street school ...

DC      Right, yes.

Mr C    ... and I used to think it was marvellous. In fact, all the lads from Hanover Street school used to congregate outside the smithy door, particularly in the winter, because it was cold, the smithy was warm, the good fire going, and Mr Taggart, who was the Headmaster of Hanover Street school, used to come into my father and say, ‘Mr Corkill, could you chase the boys away at nine o’clock, because they’re late coming into school. And I’ve got to hold up assembly, waiting for them to come in.’ And me father used to say, ‘Oh, I’ll do that, Mr Taggart, certainly.’ And he did chase them, but they’d filter back ...

DC      Right. (laughter)

Mr C    ... because they loved watching him shoe horses and making shoes, and it was warm ...

DC      Yes, of course, yes.

Mr C    ... and three or four times he’d chase them and three or four times Mr Taggart came in complaining, so one day my father said, ‘I’ll fix them.’ And he used to chew tobacco – *Cooper’s Twist*, from the tobacco shop up on Circular Road, he used to send me up there for half an ounce of *Cooper’s Twist*, (laughter) and it was like dynamite which I found out much later on! (laughter) And me father – well, all the men who came in the smithy, all used to chew tobacco and spit.

DC      That’s right, they did.

Mr C    It was amazing. In fact, sometimes when I hear – I don’t know whether you’ve heard that Victor Borge?

DC      Oh yes.

Mr C    ... and phonetic punctuations – when I hear that, it reminds me of the smithy, ‘cos that’s what it sounded like, with all these fellows spitting ... tobacco. (laughter)
Well let me just get to where this smithy was, and what age you’d be when you first went there, ‘cos you’d be pretty small when you first went there.

Mr C Oh, when I first went there I would only be – oh, seven or eight, that’s all, you know.

DC Seven or eight, yea. Well where was the smithy then?

Mr C Well, the smithy was then in Hanover Place.

DC Yea.

Mr C Now Hanover Place – you used to come up from Hanover Street school, up Barrack Street, Hanover Place was the first turning on the left. It was a cul-de-sac ...

DC Right.

Mr C ... it’s underneath the multi-storey car park now.

DC Car park, yes.

Mr C It’s gone. And the smithy was up there.

DC But it wasn’t the only smithy in Douglas, was it?

Mr C Oh no, no – Mr Joughin had a smithy back Strand Street. But those were the only two.

DC Right.

Mr C The only other blacksmith I remember was a Mr Kay, who had a blacksmith’s shop forge up at the Cooil ...

DC Oh aye.

Mr C ... but I don’t remember anyone else, but those were just the two.
DC Now, so you’re seven years old, then, you get in there, in the blacksmith’s shop, what can you – can you do much for your father then?

Mr C Not really – just getting in the way, (laughter) mainly. But he used to give me little jobs to do. They burnt coke on the fire, and he used to give me little jobs of pumping the bellows.

DC Oh, the bellows, yes.

Mr C The bellows, yes.

DC For the forge?

Mr C Yea, for the forge. And sometimes, as I got a bit older, I had long hair – it was the fashion, you know – and I’d be pumping away at the forge, and me hair would fall down over me eyes, and I had to brush it back up so that I could see what I was doing …

DC (laughter) Yes.

Mr C … and you most probably know, if you leave a bar of iron in the fire too long, it starts to burn – catches fire …

DC Yea.

Mr C ... and it spars like a sparkler …

DC Umm, that’s right.

Mr C (laughter) ... and this one day I’d left – me father was making shoes, ‘cos we had a horse in, and sometimes he had to make the shoes, and he was making shoes for this horse and this bar went on fire, ‘cos when he came and pulled it out of the fire so it was sparkling, it was no good, he had to hurl it in the cooler and he was as mad as could be with me. He says, ‘I told you to keep your eye on that – why don’t you?’ I said, ‘Well, every time I bend down to pull the bellows, me hair falls in me eyes and I can’t see.’ – I had to make some excuse! (laughter) And afterwards he said to me, ‘Right, you come here.’ And he got a pair of scissors and he cut it all off – it was like a fringe – it looked like one of
the Tudor kings.

DC       But you could see what you were doing afterwards! *(laughter)*

Mr C      I could see what I was doing, yea.

DC       So all these horseshoes, I mean, they’re made – the blacksmiths made all the horseshoes, then?

Mr C      Oh yes, oh yes, they were all made.

DC       Was, was it iron they used for that or was it steel?

Mr C      Oh no, iron.

DC       Yes.

Mr C      I’m not sure what kind of iron it was, but they were all made – some of them were made ’specially for horses he knew, and some were made just on spec – a horse might come in.

DC       And how did they get the nail-holes into them then – was it ... punched them in, did they?

Mr C      Well, the routine of making a shoe was first of all the heat it up, and then the blacksmith would form it into the shape of a shoe ...

DC       Yes.

Mr C      ... like that one down there ...

DC       Yea.

Mr C      ... and then, I mean I know this is radio and not television …

DC       I think they will know what a horseshoe looks like though.

Mr C      Yea.
Mr C  And then, he would have to put the heel piece on, and a kind of a toecap, and then he would have to – if he was putting out a sort of concave groove in it, he would do that, then he had to punch the holes in for the nails ...

DC  Right.

Mr C  ... and that was – used to tell me, that it took three men to make a proper set of shoes.

DC  Really?

Mr C  One man to pump the furnace, the blacksmith to make the shoe and a striker to put the holes in.

DC  Oh!

Mr C  Yea. I can always remember saying to him one day, ‘What’s going to happen when I get called up?’ ‘cos I was getting near 18 ...

DC  Yes.

Mr C  ... and he said, ‘Well, I don’t know,’ he said, I’m not thinking about it at the moment.’ I said, ‘Well, would he be able to make shoes on his own – on your own?’ And he said, ‘Well, if I was a b***** octopus I could!’ He had a good wit, but I was telling you about the boys going into school, Hanover Street, and I said all the men chewed tobacco ...

DC  Hmmmm.

Mr C  ... and the boys wouldn’t go, and one day me father said, ‘I’ll shift them.’ And he had some iron in the fire to make his shoe, and he was chewing tobacco, and he spit on the anvil, and he put the white hot – red hot iron on the anvil, then he hit it with his hammer, and there was a tremendous explosion as the spittle vaporised ...

DC  *(laughter)* Really?
Mr C … and there were sparks flying – a lot of lads took off and they had one of them, used to keep their eye out, and if me father was chewing, this lad – I forget his name, I think it was Quirk – used to shout, ‘Mr Corkill’s chewing!!’

(laughter) And they’d all take off.

DC (laughter) Keep away!

Mr C Aye, yea.

DC Well, they were tough men, these ... umm ... blacksmiths, though, weren’t they?

Mr C Oh yea. Me father, I mean, me father was about six feet tall ...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... and he had immense arms...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... and he weighed, I think, about fifteen stone …

DC Under the spreading ... under the spreading chestnut tree, the village smithy stands, the smith, a mighty man is he!

Mr C And he was, too, he had arms like tree trunks.

DC There was no chestnut trees down in Douglas, of course. (laughter)

Mr C No, no. There was a tree up the lane a bit.

DC Was there?

Mr C Yea. But if I could just tell you a little story about me father’s height. He was really a terrific example specimen of manhood ...

DC Hmm.

Mr C ... and he really was. And I was down at a farm, down in the North – few years
ago – and I was bird watching ‘cos I took that up ...

DC    Yea.

Mr C    ... and the farmer’s wife was talking to this chap who’d arrived in a van – fairly elderly man – and she was talking to him, pointing at me. And I was up the top of the street, you know, away from the farmhouse. And a little while later this chap came up to me and he said, ‘The farmer’s wife tells me that you’re a son of Big Billy the blacksmiths from Douglas.’ And I said, ‘That’s right,’ I said, ‘me father was Billy Corkill, the blacksmith from Douglas.’ And this chap took a couple of paces back and he looked up – eyed me up and down – he said, ‘My God, you’re a poor replica of your father!’  

DC    Apart from the forge and the bellows, the most important things to your dad would be hammers, then, would they?

Mr C    Oh yes. I was never allowed to – not until later on was I allowed to help him make shoes. But the main job I had was blowing the bellows and crushing coke ...

DC    Yes.

Mr C    ... and the coke came from the Gas Company – was big chips and had to be crushed, but not down to ash – not down to powder ...

DC    Smaller pieces.

Mr C    ... had to be crushed to smaller pieces, and if I crushed it too much, me father would be angry because he couldn’t use that – it had to be chucked away. And if I didn’t crush it an awful lot, it was too big, so it was a fine art, even in crushing coke ...

DC    Right.

Mr C    ... and of course, crushing was done with a pole with a heavy weight on the end ...

DC    Right.
Mr C ... and when you were standing crushing coke, like that, you had to be careful you didn’t crush your feet.

DC *(laughter)* Yes. Would you be in trouble if the fire went out, then, would you?

Mr C Oh yes. But mind you, the fire was easy to light ...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... but it wasn’t allowed to go out during the day.

DC No.

Mr C It had to be kept going.

DC Did they have these long-handled tongs?

Mr C Oh yes. There was times when they would – when me father used – finished with them, they used to be put at the end of the anvil – you know, the pointed bit ...

DC Yes.

Mr C ... with the handle down and the hot bit he used, up ...

DC Oh, right.

Mr C ... and many a time I’ve touched them *(laughter)* ...

DC You’ve jumped!

Mr C *(laughter)* ... two big blisters, one on me finger and one on me thumb ...

DC *(laughter)* Oh dear!

Mr C ... but it wasn’t ‘til much later when he was on his own, that I used to help him make shoes ...
Mr C  ... but I couldn’t use the big, the big heavy sledge hammer.

DC  Right.

Mr C  ... I don’t know how much it weighed, but I couldn’t use that, and he had to get me a smaller one ...

DC  Right.

Mr C  ... and I used to help him when he was making the shoes – particularly when he was punching the holes in for the nails. And he used to say to me, ‘Come on, hit it! You’s [you are] about as strong as a small rum!’ (laughter)

DC  ‘Cos you did need some power to deal with that metal, didn’t you?

Mr C  Oh yea, well, provided the metal was fairly hot, not white hot, but red hot, it wasn’t terribly difficult, but the secret of it was aiming – hitting the thing properly.

DC  Yes, hitting it in the right place, yes. (laughter)

Mr C  And when they were making – when was striking, and me father was making shoes, it was kind of musical, it was kind of a symphony ...

DC  Yes.

Mr C  ... because it was a heavy sledge hammer, then the hammer – the hand hammer, and then occasionally there’d be a tap on the anvil. I never figured out what that was for, but it was like music ...

DC  Yes.

Mr C  ... and I used to love that rhythm ...

DC  Yes.
... like the rhythm of a huge orchestra playing the ‘Bolero,’ or something like that. It was marvellous! I used to enjoy that.

Well when you left school at fourteen, you wanted to be a blacksmith, but your father had different ideas.

Oh yes, well, he said it was not future in it, ‘cos horses were disappearing. You see there were so many horses about then ... umm ... the Steam Packet had horses – big Shires. Clinches Brewery had Shires. Heron & Brealey’s and Okells, the Gas Company – and they were all big horses, eighteen hands high. Well, eighteen hands – you’re not supposed to say ‘high,’ ‘cos eighteen is high ...

Eighteen hands, yea.

... now eighteen hands is about six – just over six feet ‘cos it was measured from the hoof to the shoulder, and they were big horses. And Steam Packet had Shires, and the Isle of Man Dairies, of course, they had about twenty or thirty small horses, ponies – I think they were called – the breed escapes me – I think they were called Ardennes ...

Yes.

... umm ... and then the – all the bakers’ carts were all horses – pulled by horses.

Yes, that’s right.

The only people who didn’t have horses, as far as I can remember, are the – were the butchers but all the bakers, like Elders, and ... umm ... Quirks – they all had horses.

Yes, in fact some of those horses were still pulling milk-floats and so on into the early ‘60s, weren’t they?

That’s right, yea, yea. There’s Mr Jenkins was the manager of the ... umm ... of the dairies – Isle of Man Dairies and he liked horses, and all those horses were so well kept – I think the stables ... was it Spring Gardens? ...
DC  Yes, I think so.

Mr C  ... up there somewhere and, and those [that’s] where they kept the horses, you know.

DC  So there was no shortage of horses to shoe, then.

Mr C  Oh, no – well all the farms – surrounding farms had horses. See Christian Kirby had horses ... umm ... Moores, Port-e-Chee had horses, Cowins, Middle had horse ... umm ...

DC  Hmmm.

Mr C  ... I read in the paper that Harvey Briggs used to bring horses down from Onchan to me father to be shod ...

DC  Yes, right.

Mr C  ... oh, there was lots of horses. There weren’t many – what I call thoroughbred horses. You know, horses – there’s lots of thoroughbred horses now. But I only remember two coming on the smithy. One was Mr Eric Fargher, he was an advocate, and he had one arm, ’cos he’d been seriously injured during the First World War, and he used to ride this horse, and that was eighteen hands – huge thing! ...

DC  Right.

Mr C  ... and his daughter, her name – what was her name – Doreen, well she became Mrs Brian Mylchreest ...

DC  Right.

Mr C  ... and she had a horse, and I’m not sure now, but I think the breed of that was a Hanoverian ...

DC  Yes.

Mr C  ... and the reason I remember that was because Hanover Place is where the
Mr C  ... she used to bring her up, but those are the only two that I can remember weren’t working horses ...

DC  Oh right, of course, yes.

Mr C  ... but some of the – like Clinches Brewery and Heron & Brearleys and Okells, kept their horses beautiful.

DC  What, would they be queuing up with their horses, then, or what?

Mr C  Well, sometimes, yea, sometimes. Me father used to send me over to Clinches Brewery – you know, on the North Quay, and he’d say, ‘Pop over to Clinches Brewery, see Mr Keig,’ – he was the manager – Dick Keig – I didn’t call him Dick, I called him Mr, ‘and ask him if Mary,’ whatever horse name, ‘was ready for shoeing and if so, bring it back.’ So I’d go and see Mr Keig and he used to call to the drayman, ‘Bring Mary out, Mr Corkill’s ready to give her – to have her shod.’ You see. And the drayman would come out with the horse, and it was huge, I mean I was five feet four, this was six feet one or two, before its head (laughter) ...

DC  (laughter) Right, yes.

Mr C  ... and I’d say – grasping at the halter – and the drayman came with me. But I would take the horse along the South Quay, round Quine’s Corner, across Lord Street, up Horrock’s Street past Hanover Street school, into the smithy ...

DC  Yea.

Mr C  ... and me father would shoe it, and the drayman would wait there. When it was finished, one of the jobs I had to do was paint the feet – used to put something on the feet – I’m not sure whether it was creosote or some kind of a thin tar – just like boot polish ...

DC  Yes.
... and one of the jobs me father used to give me was putting – painting the hoof. And of course, I had to bend down, being five feet four or something, and this great big monster up there – I’d be down at the hoof, which seemed huge …

Massive, yes.

... painting this stuff on, and the horse was up there – ‘Oh, I hope it doesn’t kick me!’ (laughter)

So you never shod a horse yourself then?

No, I never got to.

Was that a kind of specialist thing?

Oh yea – you had to be in the smithy for years to do that.

Oh aye.

You had to be very careful putting the shoe on, because the hoof was just like your fingernails …

Yes.

... you know if you cut your fingernails too deep, it hurts. Well, those nails had to go in properly …

Just to the right … yes.

... just at the edge of the hoof where they didn’t go into the ‘quick,’ I think it was called, of the horse ...

Yes.

... so I never ever got to do that.

No. I’ve seen a blacksmith shoeing a horse, many a time, but they would take the horse’s leg between their legs and do it. Is that the way your father …
Mr C  Oh, that’s … well, the front legs he would put up on a tripod, but …

DC   Ha, yes, right.

Mr C  … but he’d have the leg between his leg to take the shoe off. But when it came to rasping and making the hoof – manicure the hoof, it was up on a tripod …

DC   Yes.

Mr C  … but the back legs, he had to put it on his lap …

DC   Oh, on his lap?

Mr C  Oh yes, and some of the horses were dead lazy, and especially the Gas Company horses, and they weighed – I don’t know what they’d weigh, but it would be one and a half – two ton …

DC   (laughter) Yes.

Mr C  … and they would lean on him …

DC   Right. (laughter)

Mr C  … once he’d got the hoof on his lap, they would lean on him …

DC   Right!

Mr C  … and he couldn’t move …

DC   No.

Mr C  … ‘cos if he’d have moved his leg – he’d have broken his leg …

DC   Really?

Mr C  … so he just have to sit there, and he used to put his hands on his knees, and the whole weight of the horse was on his thigh bone, and the sweat would pour off him …
DC  Really, yea?

Mr C  ... used to pour down his face and drip off his chin, and then when the horse straightened up and took its weight off him, me father used hit it such a clout with the flat of his hammer (*laughter*) – nearly knocked the horse over.

DC  Did you get some horses that took against shoeing?

Mr C  Oh yes.

DC  How did you cope with them, then?

Mr C  Well, they were very difficult. One – believe it or not, one of the difficult horses, well, it wasn’t a horse – Harry Winter’s donkey …

DC  Oh right! (*laughter*)

Mr C  ... do you remember Harry Winter’s donkey?

DC  Yes. (*laughter*)

Mr C  Well, Harry Winter used to give his donkey beer …

DC  Yes.

Mr C  ... a bucket full of beer …

DC  Right.

Mr C  ... and when Harry Winter’s – me father used to make little shoes for the donkey and when he brought the donkey into the smithy me father used to say, ‘Is this before his beer, or after his beer?’ (*laughter*) ‘Cos if it was after his beer, me father wouldn’t shoe it, because the donkey used to kick …

DC  (*laughter*) I can’t blame him!!

Mr C  ... and buck all over the place. But some of the horses used to frighten me …
... you know, it was so kind of – bucking and rearing – but most of them, especially the big ones like the *Shires*, they were gentle as lambs most of them. But some of the other smaller horses like the dairy horses, ooh, they weren’t careful ... you know, I used to think they were like spiders looking for you – if they saw you in here, they’d lash out. *(laughter)*

They had their own temperaments, didn’t they?

Yes.

Yes. Well, the horse business, then, will have dropped out to a large extent, so did the blacksmith have other jobs – he couldn’t have only been shoeing horses?

Well, the Farrier didn’t have any other jobs.

No.

Me father used to do some work for the Corporation, but that was just sharpening picks the men used on the road ...

Right.

... but there was nothing else.

So there was no farm implements to deal with, or anything like that?

Oh well, sometimes you’d get a set of harrows in ...

Yes.

... and he’d sharpen the harrows, but it was very – that was very minute kind of work, doing much of that. The horses just disappeared.

Oh aye.
Mr C And that’s all that happened, because …

DC So the trade disappeared as well, then?

Mr C Oh yes. Well, you see, all the farmers started getting tractors. And all the tradesmen in Douglas, all the tradesman, the Steam Packet, Clinches and Okells, and they all got – started getting little vans and wagons …

DC Yes.

Mr C … so they all disappeared as well …

DC Yes.

Mr C … and of course, me father eventually got down to just me father and I in the smithy …

DC Yes.

Mr C … and I used to go there whenever I could.

DC You were only really working part-time there?

Mr C Oh, just part-time there … part-time in the office …

DC Yes.

Mr C … and … umm … excuse me … umm … I’d worked in the office – Gelling & Cowin – for oh, must have been – fourteen until I was about sixteen …

DC Yes.

Mr C … and one day there was – yea, it would be about two years – and one day there was a real kafuffle outside the door of Mr Cowin’s room …

DC Yes, this was a lawyer’s office, wasn’t it?

Mr C … a lawyer’s office where I worked. And Miss Pickard, who was a kind of
senior clerk, said to me, ‘Albert,’ – I’d got all different names – me father called me ‘Joe,’ me mother called me ‘Arthur,’ Mr Cowin called me ‘Albert,’ pals at school used to call me ‘boy.’ (laughter) and some other people used to call me ‘Little Billy,’ so I don’t know who I was half the time. (laughter) And Miss Pickard said, ‘Go and see what’s happening out in the corridor in case I’ve got to call the police.’ So I went and opened the door carefully and peered out, and in the corridor was a cow!

DC  (laughter) Oh, really!?  

Mr C  I shut the door quick. And Miss Pickard said, ‘What is it – what’s happening?’ I said, ‘It’s a cow, Miss Pickard.’ She said, ‘Don’t be silly, don’t be stupid.’ She said, ‘You’re always saying silly things, stand out of the way!’ So I got out of the way and she went out and she pulled the door open and in came the cow (laughter) defecating all over the place (laughter) and Miss Pickard took off into Mr Cowin’s room, the other typist, Miss Poulton, was standing up on her desk and I was up on top of the filing cabinet – this cow walking round in circles, defecating like mad! And then the door burst open and in came two drovers …

DC  Oh right.

Mr C  ... I know one was a Mr Moughtin, ‘cos he was a friend of me father’s. And they had an awful job to get this cow out ...

DC  Of course, yes.

Mr C  ... and they eventually got it out, and there was six steps from Atlas Street up to the corridor ...

DC  Yes.

Mr C  ... they got the cow out and off they went, but there was such a mess.

DC  Who had to clean it up?

Mr C  I did!
Oh aye!

I was sent to three or four offices nearby – Leigh & Leigh – that was Howard Leigh, the High Bailiff, and there was two or three of us had to go and get – ask them for mops and buckets, *(laughter)* clear it up and then go and get the two ladies who clean the office to come and help ...

Right.

... and eventually we got it all cleaned up. And I went down the smithy and me father was always asking me, ‘Anything exciting happened in the office today?’ And I said, ‘Yea, there was a cow broke into the office.’ He kind of looked at me as much as – you know, the fellow’s been hit in the head by a horse shoe or something. He said, ‘What?’ I said, ‘A cow broke in – was one of McKnight’s cows, I think, from up at Saddle Road, and it was being taken by the drovers down the abattoir,’ which was on Lake Road. I said, ‘One of them broke loose and came into the office.’ I said, ‘We eventually got him out,’ and me father said, ‘how long was the cow in there, then?’ ‘Oh,’ I said, ‘Well, he must have been in the office a good fifteen, perhaps twenty minutes.’ *(laughter)* He goes, ‘My God, he’ll get a big bill from Harry Cowin for that!’ *(laughter)*

It’s a good job you didn’t have to shoe cows, then.

Yea, but he had a good sense of humour, my father ...

Yea.

... but when the horses disappeared, and he couldn’t afford to pay Jimmy Bell, so he was ... it was me and I ...

When it was at its best, then, what would you – what would somebody pay to get a horse shod?

Well, when me father was shoeing horses, for a full set of horses for a Shire horse, was 12/6 – sixty-two and a half ‘p.’ I’ve got a cousin, now, a nephew rather, whose wife and daughter are horse mad, and it costs them between fifty and sixty pounds for a ... to have a horse shod ...
DC  Oh aye, to have a horse shod, yes.

Mr C  ... and that’s a thoroughbred, not a big working horse.

DC  So your father never made a fortune, did he?

Mr C  Oh no. The man who made the money in the coals was me grandfather, in the First World War, because he had about twenty men working for them, night and day from what I’m told, making horse shoes and shipping them off the Island to the army ...

DC  Oh aye, yes.

Mr C  ... and then them going to France ...

DC  Yea.

Mr C  ... and I believe he was getting a pittance profit on each set of shoes – perhaps a half penny, but he made a lot of money – that would be the height of it.

DC  Where would, where would they buy the iron or the metal for the horse shoes?

Mr C  Oh, the iron came from a firm called Collins in Birkenhead ...

DC  Oh aye.

Mr C  ... and it was shipped over by the Steam Packet, and the Steam Packet delivered it to the forge, to the smithy.

DC  But what did it come in, in long strips?

Mr C  Oh, big long strips, yea, they must have been – oh, thirty feet long, I should imagine, yea.

DC  Really? Quite a job off-loading them then?

Mr C  Yea, they had to be cut up ...
DC  Yea.

Mr C  ... they had to make the shoes ...

DC  Right.

Mr C  ... but, as I say, when the horses start going altogether, and I was called up – 24th August 1943 – I had to go away – I was called up, joined the Royal Navy, as I say, I said to me father, ‘Can you make shoes on your own?’ He said, ‘If he were an octopus I could!’

DC  Oh, right! (laughter) So when you came back, then, was the business more or less finished, was it?

Mr C  When I came back home, the first leave I got, me father closed the smithy ...

DC  Hmmm.

Mr C  ... and he’d gone to work with the Isle of Man Constabulary, as a Special Policeman ...

DC  Oh right, yes.

Mr C  ... but the smithy was finished.

DC  Right. What happened to all the old horse shoes? There must have been a lot on the wall.

Mr C  Oh, there was a lot on the wall. I think – I’m not sure, but I think Gelling’s Foundry took them and shipped them out, but I’m not sure ‘cos I wasn’t here.

DC  Oh, right.

Mr C  I often wondered what happened to all his tools, you know, his tongs and his hammers and this thing called a ‘pritchel’, and all of those things, ‘cos I would have liked to have had them ...

DC  Yes.
Mr C  ... I’d have had them chromium plated, and had them at home for ... in memory of me dad, you know?

DC  So if you were living your life over again, would you have been a full-time blacksmith, you reckon?

Mr C  If I hadn’t been such a poor replica of me father (*laughter*), yes.

DC  You’d want a bigger body, would you? (*laughter*)

Mr C  Oh yes, yea, I would have been, because …

DC  But you enjoyed all of it, didn’t you?

Mr C  Oh yes, it was marvellous. Well, to hear all the men talking. I mean …

DC  There was a few characters about, wasn’t there?

Mr C  Oh yea. There was a chap used to go in there, called Tommy ‘Tightener,’ and I used to say to me father, ‘why do you call him Tommy ‘Tightener?’ Well, you won’t remember the race course at Belle Vue?

DC  I’ve heard of it, yes.

Mr C  Oh well, me father used to shoe horses there, and I’d only be a little lad, ‘cos I don’t know what year that was closed, but me father would take me with him to *Belle Vue*, he’d shoe whatever horses he had to do, and then we’d go and – he would take me and we’d go and sit on the rail and watch the race …

DC  Yes.

Mr C  ... and he’d sit me near the winning post, and I’d see the horses starting off, up the far corner of the course, come tearing round, and then they’d go whirling past and there’d be sods and grass and mud and everything all over the place.

DC  It was all flat racing, wasn’t it?

Mr C  Oh yea – all flat racing, no fences or hurdles…
DC       Yea.

Mr C    ... and then there’d be screaming and shouting from this little grandstand and
the bookies would be shouting and I can remember that, and this was the most
exciting thing in the world to me – couldn’t get over that ...

DC       Hmmm, yes.

Mr C    ... but this fellow, Tommy ‘Tightener,’ was a jockey at Belle Vue …

DC       Oh yes, yes.

Mr C    ... and they used to call him – I asked me father one day, ‘Why do they call him
Tommy ‘Tightener?’ It was when he was a jockey – you know the jockey has to
make sure that the – I think it’s the girth band – goes from the saddle
underneath the horse’s belly …

DC       Oh yes.

Mr C    ... the chappy has to make sure that that’s tight enough so that the saddle doesn’t
come off, and he used to – apparently used to say to Tommy ‘Tightener,’ ‘Is it
tight enough?’ And he says, ‘No, no, tighten her!’ ...

DC       ‘Tightener’! (laughter)

Mr C    ... and that’s where he got the name Tommy ‘Tightener.’ And there was another
fellow who was a good swimmer, but he had a defect in his [unclear] and he
couldn’t say ‘Ps’. He used to say, ‘I’m going for a trunge,’ – what he meant was
he was going for a plunge – in the baths. Used to call him ‘Trunge,’ ...

DC       (laughter) Really?

Mr C    ... and there was another fellow – used to call him ‘Buster.’ His name – I don’t
know if his name was ‘Bell,’ but they used to call him ‘Buster,’ and I used to
say to me father, ‘Why do you call him Buster?’ and me father says, ‘I’ll tell
you when you’re older.’ (laughter) But I remember one day asking me father,
‘cos I’d heard the men talking – some farmers and some of these people – asked
him what was the difference between a stallion, a mare and a gelding ...
Manx Heritage Foundation: Time to Remember: Arthur Corkill

DC Right. *(laughter)*

Mr C ... and he used to say to me, ‘I’ll tell you the third Sunday after Epiphany.’ *(laughter)* And that was his stock phrase.

DC So he never got round to telling you that.

Mr C No, ‘cos I remember once, going down from the office down to the smithy, and two of the secretaries had been talking about an Affiliation Order, well I’d never heard of that, I mean, I didn’t know what that was ...

DC No.

Mr C ... I got down to the smithy and said to me father, ‘What’s an Affiliation Order?’ ‘I’ll tell you that the third Sunday after Epiphany.’ But he never told me ...

DC No.

Mr C ... but there used to be a retired Police Sergeant ... umm ... Bridson’s his name – used to come in the smithy. And he was a nice man, he was, I think he was what they call a Police Cordmissioner [Commissioner?] – he used to look after the people who’d been released from prison …

DC Right.

Mr C ... and he was an awful nice man to talk to – most interesting. And I said to him one day, ‘Can you tell me, what does … what’s an Affiliation Order … mean?’ And he sort of looked at me quizzically, you know, and he said, ‘How old are you?’ and I said, ‘well, I’m sixteen and a half – nearly seventeen,’

DC Yes.

Mr C ... he said, ‘well, an Affiliation Order is a term of law and it usually arises when a young lady has taken an unnecessary risk.’ And that was it! *(laughter)*...

DC Well put, that.

Mr C ... and I didn’t even know then what he meant. It was years later that I figured it
DC
Yes.

Mr C
Yea.

DC
Yes.

Mr C

... and it was still, round about where the smithy was, there was Caleys the bakers, that was just a bit further along Hanover Place; there was Ewan Foster – that was a cobbler – that was Robert Foster’s dad who was the Headmaster of QE2, there was, just a bit further up was ... umm ... a saddlers – I don’t know whose that was. Now a bit further up was the Adelphi Yard, and The Adelphi Hotel, and The Adelphi yard was where the farm workers used to gather on Hollantide Fair Day – to be hired...

DC

Of course, yes.

Mr C
I can tell you a funny story about – not a funny story – about the fire station – the vet, Dougie Kerruish, who was the vet, had a little surgery built in the
corner of the smithy ‘cos people in Douglas used to bring their pets there and Dougie Kerruish left, and he went to become the Government Vet, and his practice was taken over by a man called ‘J C Naylor’ – he was J C Naylor MRCVS – and he had his surgery there, and he used to dispense two medicines, I can remember, and one was called ‘wooden tongue’ – I’m not sure what that was for – and the other one was this horse liniment ...

DC  Yes.

Mr C  ... well this horse liniment was marvellous stuff, and if a horse was arthritic or bruises and that, you rubbed some of this on and it used to ease the pain and stress. And he used to – it smelt of aniseed – he used to make big bottles of this ...

DC  Really?

Mr C  ... and me father used to dispense it for him and one day Mr Naylor said to me, ‘could you just pop this bottle of horse liniment over to the fire station.’ And I thought it was a funny place for it to be going. And he said, ‘See Mr …’ – I think the Chief Fire Officer’s name was Cackerty [sp ??], but I’m not sure – may be wrong – ‘Give it to Mr Cackerty [sp ??].’ So I went over to the fire station with this big bottle of liniment, and into this little room at the back, and here were all TT riders, and ... umm ... there was a masseur there, and Cackerty [sp ??] gave this liniment to him, and he proceeded to put some on his hands and – and these were all TT riders, or Grand Prix riders, who’d fallen off the machines ...

DC  Oh yes.

Mr C  ... and had bumps and bruises and sprains and strains, and this horse liniment was used for that – they used it to massage them, to make them fit again, you know ...

DC  Really?

Mr C  ... and this used to happen during Grand Prix fortnight and TT fortnight ...

DC  Oh aye.
Mr C  ... and me father used to dispense this liniment for Mr Naylor the vet ...

DC  Yes, yes.

Mr C  ... and I remember saying to him ... this would be around about 1937 – 38 – just before – post war – I remember him saying to me one day, ‘That liniment I dispense for Mr Naylor,’ he said, ‘do you realise,’ he said, ‘if it hadn’t been for that, there most probably wouldn’t have been any TT races in 1937/38, or Grand Prix.’ And he coined a phrase which Michael Caine made famous years after – he said to me, ‘Not many people know that.’ (laughter) And I often think about it – with the sayings, you know.

DC  But the smithy, then, was a place where people would just drop in for a chat as well, was it?

Mr C  Oh yes, there was always people in there ...

DC  Yea?

Mr C  ... and policemen used to come – well, do you remember policemen used to do point duty at the bottom of Prospect Hill ...

DC  Yes.

Mr C  ... opposite the Westminster Bank? Well, in the wintertime it was a cold spot, and they were standing on a manhole cover, and they used to get frozen from their toes to their knees, and they did three quarters of an hour on and three quarters of an hour off, and when they were off they were supposed to go down on what they used to call ‘two and three beat’, which was down Richmond Street, along the market …

DC  Oh yes.

Mr C  ... around there, you know, do their patrol, but they used to come into the smithy, because they were cold ...

DC  Yes.
Mr C ... and they used to stand by the forge to get warm, until they thawed out. But you know, in the police they had a Station Sergeant and a Section Sergeant. The Station Sergeant, of course, was in the station, but the Section Sergeant was out with the men – keeping an eye on them – don’t think they trusted them (laughter) and this – there was one Section Sergeant – forgotten his name now, but he always used to be keeping an eye on the men coming into the smithy for a warm ...

DC Yes.

Mr C ... and I – me father would send me to stand down the bottom of ... umm ... Hanover Place and if I saw this Sergeant coming I had to run like billy-oh back to the smithy and the policeman would disappear out through a side door onto Nelson Street somewhere.

DC Wouldn’t dare get caught in there?

Mr C Wouldn’t dare get caught, no. But there was all kinds of people used to come in. Lots of people used to come in with their pets ...

DC Oh?

Mr C ... and umm ... to see Mr Naylor ...

DC Oh yes, yes.

Mr C ... and I remember one day, this shepherd – I think he came from, what they call Kate’s Cottage now, but in those days it was called Tate’s Cottage ...

DC Tate’s Cottage, yes.

Mr C ... and he brought in this old sheepdog, which was obviously had its day, you know. And Mr Naylor said to him, ‘Just leave it there.’ And this old fellow bent down and he put his hand out and the dog put his paw up in his hand, and he shook hands with it and he said, ‘Goodbye old boy, and thank you for everything.’ And he turned round and he walked out and the tears were streaming down his face ...
DC   Oh aye.

Mr C   ... and so were they on mine – terrible – that upset me so much, you know.

DC   And what did Mr Naylor do – take the dog away?

Mr C   Oh no, he used to give them an injection of ... umm ... what was it called ... umm ... I can’t remember – it was prussic acid ...

DC   Right.

Mr C   ... and he used to inject them just near their heart ...

DC   Yea.

Mr C   ... they’d be dead in a second.

DC   The dogs knew they were going, did they?

Mr C   Oh, I think some of them did.

DC   Yea.

Mr C   There was a woman who used to live down on the quay. Her name was Mary Weidig [sp ???] ...

DC   Oh I’ve heard of her.

Mr C   ... well, she had an antique shop, or a second-hand goods – I can’t remember, but she had a St Bernard dog – it was huge! It was huge, it was as big as a pony, big as a Shetland pony – bigger! And she brought it up to the smithy one day, and Mr Naylor had a conversation with her – the dog must have been in pain and suffering, ‘cos I heard her saying to Mr Naylor, ‘Well, can I keep it another week?’ And Mr Naylor saying, ‘But one week, then you bring it back, ‘cos the animal is in pain,’...

DC   Yes.
Mr C ... so off she went, and a week later, sure enough, she brought this St Bernard back. But Mr Naylor wasn’t there, so me father took the dog and he brought it in the smithy and he tied its lead round a vice ...

DC Right, yes.

Mr C ... on a workbench – had to wait for Mr Naylor to come back ...

DC Yes.

Mr C ... and then he had to go out for something. And he said to me, ‘Just keep an eye on that dog, but don’t you go near it.’ ‘Cos it was bigger than me, it was huge. And I goes round it, ‘cos I wanted to go to the toilet, and the toilet was in the back, and every time I went to go near this dog it stood up – like the Hound of the Baskervilles! (laughter) I had to wait about two hours ...

DC Oh dear! (laughter)

Mr C ... but then Mr Naylor came in, and I think he must have injected that dog – he injected it with the prussic acid ...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... umm ... what was it ... SO ... I’ve forgotten the chemical formula for it, anyway, SO ... SO$_3$ or something, anyway he injected it about – he injected once and the dog collapsed, but wasn’t dead – he had to inject it a couple of times, you know, but it was a huge animal.

DC Right, yes.

Mr C But it was funny, it was another day, this, surprising things coming back to me mind now …

DC (laughter) Yes!

Mr C ... me father used to like his pint ...

DC Oh aye.
Mr C  ... because in the summertime the forge was hot and if a horse was leaning on him like I described, sweat was rolling and he’d become dehydrated, and he had to get some liquid back in his body …

DC  Would he send you off with a can, would he?

Mr C  No, no – he’d go down to The Albion …

DC  Oh, would he?

Mr C  ... Tommy and Bertha Cannell were the proprietors. He’d go down and he’d sink a couple of pints of Okell’s bitter …

DC  Yes.

Mr C  ... and that would just put the fluid back in his body …

DC  Of course, yes.

Mr C  ... and one day, Mr and Mrs Cannell came into the smithy to see Mr Naylor, and it was winter time – she had this beautiful fur coat on, and they came in and they spoke to Mr Naylor – I don’t know what for – but when they’d gone, my father said to me, ‘See that lovely fur coat she was wearing?’ I said, ‘Yea, by gum, it was lovely.’ And my father said, ‘I paid for most of that!’ (laughter) With his pints, and it was six pence a pint in those days …

DC  Yes, of course.

Mr C  ... six pence a pint.

DC  Oh aye, yea.

Mr C  But it used to be sad, sometimes, people bringing in their pets in. I used to – I didn’t like that – especially this man from Tate’s Cottage – seeing him shake hand – the dog putting his paw up – it upset me for years, that.

DC  Really?
Mr C  Yea, yea. But then, as I say, when I came home from the Navy, it was 1947, most of the horses had gone anyway. I think some of the farms, like Christian Kirby, still had some, but Clinches had gone, and Steam Packet, and Okells and all those big horses had disappeared. I think even the dairies – most of the dairies horses had gone.

DC  What is the difference, then – is there a difference between a blacksmiths and a Farrier?

Mr C  Now well, a blacksmith – a Farrier is a – it comes from a French word and all it means is a man who looks after, either medically or puts shoes on horses – that’s a Farrier.

DC  Oh yes.

Mr C  A blacksmith is a man who will do anything like sharpening harrows or picks or making garden gates, or, or …

DC  Right. So what – your father was a Farrier?

Mr C  He was a Farrier.

DC  But he was a blacksmith as well, was he?

Mr C  Well, he used to do the occasional blacksmith’s work, yea, but his correct term – name was a Farrier.

DC  But he, then, had realised, back in 1939 that you shouldn’t be in this business at all …

Mr C  Yes, yes.

DC  ... and he got you into …

Mr C  Gelling & Cowin.

DC  ... finance and accountancy and so on.
Mr C  Yea, yea, yea. Well I worked in Gelling & Cowin ... umm ... until one day, I’d been there a couple of years – this was …

DC  It wasn’t the cow that got you the sack, was it?!! *(laughter)*

Mr C  No, *(laughter)* this [unclear]. One day Miss Pickard said to me that she thought it would be better if I looked for another job – because something happened in the firm, I’m not sure what it was, it was some legal thing. So I had to look for another job. Well there weren’t many jobs going then. And there was an ad appeared in the paper one day for police cadets – they wanted police cadets. Well, a police cadet was in name only – all they were was glorified message boys. So I applied for one of these jobs – had to go to the police station for an interview and sit an exam, but there were only four of us and we all got the job as a police cadet. But we weren’t police cadets – we never got a warrant, because the Chief Coroner was Major Young, J W Young, and he couldn’t allow – he wasn’t allowed to permit policeman to leave, join the forces, unless he gave permission. And of course, the older constables didn’t want to leave, but all the younger ones did – they wanted to go and do their bit. But he couldn’t release them until he had some replacements to do the sort of menial tasks, so they took on four cadets, but we were policemen really. I mean, we weren’t allowed to work at night, ‘cos you know, the three – the shifts the police is ten till six – whatever it was – two till – I’ve forgotten now. But there was three shifts and cadets weren’t allowed to work outside at night, so at night times you worked inside on the switchboards …

DC  Oh yea.

Mr C  … that was your job …

DC  Yea.

Mr C  … and then, other days, like your friend Mr Kelly the butcher, we used to have to go on a Saturday morning and collect all the skin books.

DC  The what?

Mr C  Skin books. Now skin books were all the butchers shops …
DC

Yes.

Mr C

... and they had to keep a record of – I think they must have all slaughtered their own animals …

DC

Yes, yes.

Mr C

... because they had to keep a record of how many animals they’d slaughtered and what they’d done with the skins.

DC

Oh!

Mr C

We used to collect – we had all the butchers in Douglas …

DC

Yes.

Mr C

... a smelly job, collecting these skin books and taking them back to headquarters of the police station (laughter) and they’d keep a record of what had been slaughtered …

DC

Oh, right.

Mr C

... and where the skins had gone; and then in the afternoon we had to take them all back to the butchers, you know.

DC

Yea, oh!

Mr C

But they were all kind of menial tasks, you know.

DC

How long were you there with the police, then?

Mr C

Yea, yea – I was there from 1941 – about the middle of ’41 until I was called up in August ’43 ...

DC

Right.

Mr C

... when I went away to the Navy …
DC  Oh aye.

Mr C  ... and then I was demobbed, I came home, as I say, I had nothing to do, and I did – I was determined to go back in the Navy – I was walking through Strand Street one day, still enjoying me demob leave, I bumped into a girl called Margery Shimmin, and Margery said to me, ‘What are you doing?’ And I said, ‘Well, I’m thinking of going back in the Navy.’ And she said, ‘Well, Uncle Tommy ...’ – that was her uncle, T C Craig, who was a success to a firm called S C Craig – ‘... is looking for somebody to start – would you like to go and see him?’ ...

DC  Yes, yes.

Mr C  ... and she says accountancy and the like. So I went off to see him and he was a nice man, you know and he said, ‘Well,’ he said, ‘I’ll give you three months trial – see if I like you, if you like me,’ ...

DC  Yes.

Mr C  ... ‘if then, we’ll discuss and see what ...’ So I stuck it out and I quite enjoyed it. So he said, ‘Okay, well, we’ll make it permanent then, as long as you’d like to stay.’ And in those days ... umm ... they had what they called a Resettlement Office,’ ...

DC  Oh yes, yes, yes, yes.

Mr C  ... Government office, where ex-service people could go and be interviewed. There was John Bolton, a fellow called Jack Lace, who was the accountant at the Electricity Board, and another man who was a lawyer – I can’t remember him – his name; but then they interviewed you and if they thought you were a suitable person, they would give you a grant ...

DC  Oh yes.

Mr C  ... towards studying ...

DC  Oh, right.
Mr C ... and John Bolton said to me, ‘Well, you seem to be interested in accountancy, so we’ll give you a grant, pay for your studies, pay for you to go to Liverpool University for the exams, pay your travelling and all that,’ ...

DC Yes.

Mr C ... which I did. And I was sitting for what they call now the Certified Chartered, and it was just Certified, then. And that’s where I started off. But I was with Tommy Craig’s and Tommy was ill – I could tell he was ill – and he died. And I thought, well, it’s no good me staying here ‘cos I’m not going to have a job. And W H Walkers, and they were a Liverpool firm of ... umm ... accountants, had come to the Isle of Man when Dumbells Bank went smash, they were advertising for staff, so I went to see Mr Crowe, and interviewed him, and he seemed to be satisfied and said, ‘Right, now when can you start?’ And then I – and that’s when I went to work in there ...

DC Yes.

Mr C ... and Jim Cain was the other partner ...

DC Oh yes.

Mr C ... the former Speaker ...

DC That’s right, yes, yes.

Mr C ... the House of Keys ...

DC Yes, yes.

Mr C ... and I worked for them, and they had a good system. They had teams. There was about four or five qualified Chartered Accountants and each of them had a team ...

DC Oh yes.

Mr C ... and you were put on a team and then you worked with the team, and then, after a while, four or five of you’s – you would get jobs of your own to do ...
Oh yes, yes.

... and one of the jobs that was given to me was *The Palace Derby Castle* audit ...

Right. *(laughter)*

... I used to go and do that ...

Yes.

... and that’s where I got to know *The Palace* Company. And the General Manager there was a man called D F Barlow ...

Fred Barlow?

Fred! ...

Yes.

... a very nice man, Fred, and every time I went over to start the audit – I had to ring him up first, tell him we were starting on Monday ...

Yes.

... and every time I’d go, I’d have to go in his office and have a cup of tea and a biscuit with him, and he used to say to me – after about four or five years – he used to say to me, ‘How would you like to come and work for us?’ And ... umm ... I was, ‘Well I like where I am, thank you Mr Barlow.’ ‘Cos I did, I loved Walkers ...

Yes.

... lovely – and this went on for years and years, and I used to get fed-up of it. And I thought to myself, oh, I’ll stop him asking me, ‘cos I used to do all the salary audits as well – I knew all the salaries that were on – so I thought, I’ll tell him that the salary I want is twice as much as he’s getting …
Yes. *(laughter)*

... I thought, that’ll finish it ‘cos there’s no way they’re going to pay me that! ...

Yes. *(laughter)*

... so I told him. And to my horror and amazement, about two weeks later I got a letter from the secretary to say would I come – the Directors want to interview me …

*(laughter)* Yes.

... I nearly died! So I went over. There was Gerry Manderson [sp ???] – Jerry’s just died – Alec Davidson, Bobby Stott – that’s Dursley’s father – Arthur Kitto, that was all …

Yea.

... so I went to see them, and when I think back on it now, I go hot and cold, ‘cos I was so rude and hostile.

Really?

Yea! ‘Cos I didn’t want it …

No.

... and that was it. And I went out and I thought, well, that’s me, cooked my goose …

*(laughter)* Right.

... to me amazement, about a couple of weeks later, I got another letter – they’d accepted my terms and when could I start – that’s why I started there! ...

Right. *(laughter)*

... but the strange part was – if I could just tell you this – I started work on the
Monday, as the accountant to *The Palace & Derby Castle* Limited. On the Friday, the then Secretary went on his holidays ...

DC  Yes.

Mr C  ... he went on holiday for about three weeks and I was appointed Acting Secretary while he was away …

DC  Yes.

Mr C  ... the next Monday, one of the receptionists came into my little office and said, ‘There’s some gentlemen here that want to see Mr Cubbon the Secretary, but I’ve told them he’s on holiday and they said, ‘well, is there an acting one?’ And I said, ‘Mr Corkill’s the Acting Secretary,’ and they said, ‘well, could we see him.’ So I said, ‘Who are they?’ She said, ‘Well, there’s a Mr Luft, there’s a Sir Dudley Cunliffe-Owen, there’s a Timothy Holland, there’s a Captain Black, there’s a Mr Poor and there’s … umm … another … a Mr Stone,’ ...

DC  Yea.

Mr C  ... so I said, ‘well, show them in,’ so she showed them in. Well, I knew Arthur Luft from when I’d worked at Gelling & Cowin ...

DC  Right.

Mr C  ... and he said, ‘Well, I know Mr Corkill.’ And he introduced me and I sat them all down and got them a coffee. And Arthur Luft produced this big envelope …

DC  Yes.

Mr C  ... and he said, ‘I’m here on behalf of Mr Poor, Sir Dudley Cunliffe-Owen, Mr Holland, Captain Black and Mr Stone. These are take-over documents, Avenue Finance are going to make a take-over bid for *The Palace & Derby Castle* …’

DC  Right.

Mr C  ... ‘and I have to serve them on you, seeing the Secretary proper is not here.’ So Mr Luft – he was a nice man, too, said, ‘Do you know what to do?’ I said, ‘Oh
yea, I know what to do ... call a Board Meeting,’ ...  

DC     Yea.

Mr C    ... so they disappeared and I called a Board Meeting ...

DC     Yes.

Mr C    ... and when they came in and I said ... the Directors got the shock of their lives ...

DC     Yes.

Mr C    ... but anyway, the takeover didn’t succeed – ‘cos I was registrar of the company as well ...

DC     Right.

Mr C    ... register all the transfers. The only good about – I think they offered – I think was two pounds twelve and six [£2 12s 6d] per one pound share – stock ...

DC     Yea – right.

Mr C    ... and there was Preference shares as well, but they didn’t succeed – they only got about four or five percent of the shares. The Manx people more or less gave them the ‘on your bike’, but then they did something, David, which they wouldn’t be allowed to do now – they’d finish up in jail – they went on the open market – started buying shares – and they were paying eight and nine pounds a share for some of the shares. They got control, what this Timothy Hall had said – came into me one day and said, ‘Mr Corkill, we have control de facto,’ (laughter) ...

DC     Oh, right.

Mr C    ... and that was it ...

DC     Yea.
Mr C ... and they told me to call a Board Meeting, and I knew from the share register they did have control – they had more than 51%, so I just had to call a Board meeting ...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... then Jerry Manderson [sp ???] turned up; Bobby Stott, Alec Davidson, Mr Kittlo – oh, and Fred Barwell had been co-opted onto the Board …

DC Oh yes.

Mr C ... and they were in the Boardroom, and then Sir Dudley and the others arrived, and I – the Board had told me to show them in. So I showed them into the Boardroom, and I said to the Chairman, ‘Do you want me to stay?’ He said, ‘No, I think you’d better wait outside.’ So I went back to my little office ...

DC Yes.

Mr C ... and then, about two minutes later, the Boardroom door opened, and out came Jerry Manderson [sp ???], Alec Davidson, Bobby Stott and the rest of them all trooped out (laughter) and Jerry Manderson [sp ???] saying, ‘We’ll be seeing you,’ – they’d gone! ...

DC Right.

Mr C ... and then Sir Dudley came out, and he said to me, ‘Would you come into the Boardroom?’ So I went into the Boardroom, and he said to me, ‘What salary are you on?’ And I think it was about £1,000 and ... it was a good salary for those – it was about £1,950 …

DC Right.

Mr C ... so I mean, it was a good salary. And I told him and he said, ‘Double it!’ ...

DC Really? (laughter)

Mr C ... and he said, ‘Now, we want you to be the Secretary of this company. Are you prepared to do that?’ I said, ‘Oh yes!’ (laughter) That’s how I got in ... I just
happened to be there!

DC  *(laughter)* That’s was a pretty good [unclear], wasn’t it?

Mr C  Yes ... I just happened to be there at the right time ...

DC  Yes, yes.

Mr C  ... but there was some ups and downs – it was a real ‘mare’s nest’.

DC  Well, were they buying something that was really worth spending all that on, because *The Palace* could be – was running downhill from then on?

Mr C  Oh, but *The Palace* Company had a – owned a lot of money – had a lot of money in the bank ...

DC  Yes.

Mr C  ... and it also owned a lot of properties ...

DC  Oh, right.

Mr C  ... I mean, there were thirteen operating units, and they owned half of Strand Street.

DC  Did they have all the cinemas then, as well, would they?

Mr C  Oh yes.

DC  Yes.

Mr C  And it was – they owned half of Strand Street ...

DC  Really?

Mr C  ... and most of Castle Street *(laughter)* ... and most of those houses on Lock Promenade ...
DC    Right, yes.

Mr C    ... and they owned the Crescent, Derby Castle, The Palace Ballroom and Theatre, The Gaiety, The Avenue Cinema Onchan, The Strand Cinema Port Erin ...

DC    But since then, all of those have been sold off, haven’t they?

Mr C    Oh aye – that’s what they did – they were asset strippers, and they wanted the money to build a casino ...

DC    Yes.

Mr C    ... ‘cos the casino was going to be built out on Clay Head ...

DC    Oh that’s right, yes.

Mr C    ... Baldromm...

DC    That’s right.

Mr C    ... and the owner were Callow – Callow brothers – and they were paid a certain sum for that land, and then, at a whim – and it was purely a whim – it was decided that The Palace Ballroom and Coliseum would be demolished and a casino was built there ...

DC    Yes.

Mr C    ... and the field that had been bought off Callow brothers was rented back to them for a peppercorn rent, and one of these Callow men used to come in the shop to pay the rent – into the office and pay the rent. He used to say to me, ‘Strange fellows, these London fellows, these English London fellows.’ I’d say, ‘Why’s that Mr Callow?’ He said, ‘To give me all this money for a field, they don’t want it, they give it to me back and they ask me to pay five shillings a month or somethin’ – strange men!’ (laughter) He said, ‘They’re not Manx businessmen.’

DC    What happened in the end to the field ... are they still ...?
Mr C  Oh, it went back to him ...

DC  Yes?

Mr C  ... he got them back, they just gave them back to him.

DC  Right. *(laughter)*

Mr C  ... yea, that was the end of it.

DC  Even after buying them?

Mr C  Yea.

DC  Really?

Mr C  And they paid a lot of money for those fields, according to values those days.

DC  That was a crazy idea going out to Clay Head, wasn’t it?

Mr C  Oh, it was nuts – yea, it was nuts. But it was changed to *The Palace* site, just like that ...

DC  Right, yes

Mr C  ... I mean, that was done, you know, just on a whim ... umm ... I don’t know why.

DC  Were you still there when *The Lido* was pulled down, or not?

Mr C  Oh yea, yea it was demolished ... *The Coliseum* and then, of course, *The Crescent* ... umm ... the – what was sold?

DC  The *Picture House*?

Mr C  No, all the property in Strand Street was sold, all the property in Castle Street was sold and all the property in Loch Promenade was sold ...
DC Yes.

Mr C ... then other properties were sold as well ... umm ... but not The Picture House in the Strand, or The Crescent ...

DC No.

Mr C ... but then, of course ... umm ... there was quite a lot of money in the bank, and that was taken and that was used – they were asset strippers.

DC Dividend, yes?

Mr C No, that all ceased. And it all went to Avenue Finance in London ...

DC Oh!

Mr C ... which they paid McAlpine’s to build a casino in another town.

DC Oh, yes, yes.

Mr C You see, part of the stipulation of the Act, when it was passed, was what that the concessionaires should build a hundred-bedroomed hotel ...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... and that’s what they had to do. It didn’t cost them a penny – The Palace Company paid for all that ...

DC Right.

Mr C ... all the properties went. And then, of course, The Gaiety was within an ace of being knocked down.

DC Does The Palace Company own anything much now?

Mr C No.

DC They own that Palace Cinema still, don’t they?
Mr C  No, it’s not *The Palace* Company. Everything went, you see, it was a real wheeler deal for – change of ownership happened so much. First of all the man who became – you see, the company got in awful difficulties because of the gambling.

DC  Right.

Mr C  They used to have these ... umm ... parties come over from New York …

DC  That’s right.

Mr C  ... I’ve forgotten what they were called – but they were all gangsters, (*laughter*) and of course, the company lost hundreds of thousands of pounds in the casino ...

DC  Yes.

Mr C  ... and ... umm ... the company got into a hell of a state. Overdrawn at the bank – it was pretty rough. And then this show that was put on – and the bank had an overall charge on all the assets – but this show was put on at *The Gaiety* called, ‘The Happy Holland Minstrels,’ and it was a show that was booked from Holland – a television show – and it was absolutely awful ...

DC  Right.

Mr C  ... I mean ... every night *The Gaiety* was empty …

DC  Yea.

Mr C  ... and *The Gaiety* was in a bad state anyway. It just had to drizzle and all the rain came through the roof ...

DC  Yes.

Mr C  ... terrible! And of course, when the results came out at the end of the summer, Sir Dudley Cunliffe-Owen, who was the Managing Director, was furious – lost so much money. In fact, the loss on *The Gaiety* nearly absorbed all the profit that had been made on all the other units …
DC  Really? Yes.

Mr C  ... so he wanted it down …

DC  Yes.

Mr C  ... and it damn near went, as well …

DC  Right, yes.

Mr C  ... damn near went.

DC  Yes.

Mr C  It was only a bit of – well, lots of good luck, really …

DC  Yes.

Mr C  ... and ... and ... umm ... the fact that some of us on board, like Sir Ralph Stevenson when he was the Chairman, he was as Manx as me …

DC  Right.

Mr C  ... and ... umm ... but, but most of the directors, after Crockfords [sp ???], they were how we first took over, they were just ciphers, they weren’t directors, really, just numbers.

DC  No, no.

Mr C  Dudley was the boss …

DC  Yes.

Mr C  ... what Dudley said, went.

DC  Did you get a ‘golden handshake’?
Mr C No. I was fired, eventually.

DC Were you?

Mr C Oh yea, but the company changed ownership – first of all it was a fellow called Tom Whipp who lived out at the Barony, Maughold – he had control …

DC Yes.

Mr C … then it was a fellow called Alan Fairley …

DC Yes.

Mr C Alan Fairley was Mecca ‘Come Dancing’ man. Then – before him was Judah Binstock …

DC Oh right.

Mr C … he acquired all the shares.

DC Oh did he?!

Mr C Oh yea …

DC Yea.

Mr C … and then, from Judah Binstock – no, Judah Binstock went to Tom Whipp, and then Tom Whipp eventually did a deal with Sir Douglas Clague, and he owned it …

DC Yes.

Mr C … and … umm … then … I don’t know how many different – I was – when I was sacked there must have been eight or nine different Chairman …

DC Really.

Mr C … and there was certainly seven or eight different Board of Directors …
DC Yea.

Mr C ... and then the last one was when Sir Douglas Clague acquired control and I just – then he had his own men, which is normal, natural, you know, well I just couldn’t get on with the men who he’d appointed to run the firm. And I thought I was stronger than I was …

DC (laughter) Yes?

Mr C ... I thought that most of the Board would support me, (laughter) but then they didn’t! And it turned out, Sir Douglas Clague’s men were stronger than I was …

DC Right.

Mr C ... so I was given the…

DC Out you go!

Mr C ... ‘out you go’ sign.

DC You had a good run, though.

Mr C Oh yes, and I enjoyed every minute of it. It was exciting, and it was challenging and I saw the whole thing develop, and it was … I enjoyed it very much.

END OF INTERVIEW