



## Oral History

Interviewee: Rob Farrer RBV  
Interviewed & recorded by: Paul Quayle  
Date recorded: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2017  
Topic: A conversation with Rob Farrer RBV about his life at the heart of metal detecting, field walking and archaeology on the Isle of Man over the past forty years.

*This is transcription of the interview has been lightly edited for ease of reading.*

PQ: My name is Paul Quayle, I'm at the home of Mr Rob Farrer in Peel. The date is the, Tuesday the 31st of October 2017. Do you want to just give your full name, Rob, and a few personal details?

CF: Ok, Paul. My full name is Christopher Robert Farrer. I'm 64 years old, and I've had this passion for metal detecting, archaeology and field walking for the past 40 to 45 years.

PQ: And how did you, how did you first get into metal detecting and archaeology?

RF: Metal detecting was my first legal business. The first time I came across archaeology and history was going to Port Grenaugh, and there's a site there called Cronk ny Merriu, which is the Hill of the Dead, a fascinating site and wonderful for hands on when you're there. I used to go down with Dad to the, the Port Grenaugh cove to collect the crabs.

PQ: Right.

RF: And it was full of crabs, Port Grenaugh, in those days, in the late 50s, early 60s. He'd been in the War, in Burma, and hadn't touched a crab, so when he come back the stocks had been, gone, they'd got very sizeable. So they had wonderful for cachets of crabs to take home. He used to take them home and mother used to put them straight in the boiler. Well I'd never tasted crab meat, and I was about 22, but that, that place holds many good memories, Port Grenaugh, for the crabs and the archaeology.

PQ: So did you start detecting there with your Dad then, on the beach?

RF: No, Dad, when Dad come back he was working at the local quarry, and then he was working on this high roads, and he had a nice rise in the wages during, I think, the early 60s, and he was able to buy things. I didn't realise the skill, to wire the packs, the radio packs, and putting model packs, putting them together. I don't know where he learnt this skill, but I presume it was out in Burma.

PQ: Oh.

RF: And he, he bought a, a Japanese metal detecting kit, and put it together, and that was back in about 74, in the early 70s I think, yes, early 70s, and that, that could not detect a coin on the surface, it was that poor, the machine. So they hadn't, they hadn't got it quite right at that time.

PQ: Right.

RF: And later, a couple of years after, the Seascope was a big English firm in Essex, which started up. I bought one of their machines first, and that was a, that was a good machine. And Dad said we'll go to, we'll go to an area in Port Grenaugh, he says, that's where we all used to sit when we were kids. And the very first I sat on, that I detected on, and quite a number of pre-decimal coins from the 40s, 50s, came out.

PQ: Right.

RF: Nothing of, nothing of value, nothing with real history, a bit of social history, the gathering of the lads who used to sit there, the little Santon lads used to go down there, and used to sit there. But, as I say, it holds great memories, Port Grenaugh.

PQ: And that Port Grenaugh area became a place where you became involved with archaeological digs then, eventually, as well.

RF: Yes. I would not, I would not touch an archaeological site, but Campbell, Malcolm Campbell managed to find an Edward the First coin quite close to the site at Cronk ny Merriu, which put the dating a bit further on. It seems they did the dating there seems to run out in the 14th, early 14th century.

PQ: So you were involved with the digs there that Peter Gelling did, were you?

RF: Peter Gelling's round battery dig at Peel Castle, that was back before the big dig took place in '79, at the Millennium, so it was a few years before. He was doing the half and the round battery, and I went and saw him and he said yes, I don't mind you testing the spoil for us. And there were quite a number of finds. There were two what they thought were retainer badges, medieval, and they're in the museum, and they've, the lead badges. And I don't think they've possibly identified them, but they think they're retainer badges, where the Lord's own side-kicks, you know, somebody with a title, probably, had knights under him, who he used as retainers, and the badges as such.

PQ: So were you the first person to, to use a metal detector on archaeological digs over here then?

RF: Yes. I was invited, I went and saw Peter, Peter Gelling was the first chap, but I went and talked to quite a few of them, and they let me on, and they saw the benefit of actually having a metal detector on site.

PQ: Yes.

RF: The hardest thing to see in your sieve, you saw on an archaeological site, the hardest thing to see is a small hammered coin. But the detector can find it, and then of course there's a lot of grey slate, and the coin is grey, so we found a lot of, lot of hammered coins which would have gone on the spoil heap, left on the spoil heap if it wasn't for the metal detecting. And there's such a detectable item.

PQ: Was it standard practice in England at that time then, to use metal detectors on sites?

RF: No, it's a, it's a matter of the archaeologist, his thoughts and there was a law you couldn't use them on there without a license. But I signed waiver forms, and that waived all rights to any treasure trove, and everything went into the, into the thing. But I was able to mark, the students would come back with the buckets, and they'd put the bucket down on the spoil, I said 'hold on', I'd pick out a find, I'd say 'that's come out of that bucket there that you just brought back', so they were able to pinpoint a number of items. Because otherwise they would have ended up on the spoil heap.

PQ: Yes. And that's, I mean that's standard practice these days. When you watch Time Team or something, the detectorists are always in on the spoil heaps, aren't they, and you see that all the time. But, but yes, back then that was, that was different. I'm just going to ask you too what other digs did you work on now, over the years, then Rob?

RF: For the Museum, I brought objects into the Museum, and I met Doctor Larch Garrad, who's second in command at the Manx Museum. And she is one of the greatest influences on my life of archaeology, historical facts, and metal detecting. It's her, her that's led me to what I became, a fanatic in Manx archaeology. And the digs I took place on Larch had a few rescue digs here there and everywhere, and I went along with the machine, and not much came out. The interesting one was Rushen Abbey, before it became a full archaeological dig. They decided to build a, a coal cellar on the back of the hotel, which as you've seen the hotel and the buildings of the Rushen Abbey, and I'd got permission of Marshall Cubbon to test the soil when they take them out. And he said we don't expect to find anything there. And then in the process of detecting round there I noticed a charnel pit, full of human bone.

PQ: Oh right.

RF: And a wall, which turned out later to be a chapel. Insider the chapel was a chap who was buried with his clothes on, and a nice medieval buckle, lying on his waist, that I was able to locate.

PQ: Wow!

RF: But that was one of a number of the small digs that I was involved in. I got involved first, the first big one, was, was with David Freke, at Castletown Stores, and Castle Rushen. And I was able to locate a lot of datable objects there. Castle Rushen was quite interesting. The walls have been lowered, some of them have been lowered in between the keep and the outer wall, in the 20s, had been lowered two metres, and thank goodness. And we undertook

an archaeological dig on there, up against the wall, and there were many interesting finds. But on the very last day, in the gravel at the bottom of the keep, one of the team, called Buster, brought a bucket back to me, of soil, put it on the soil and I said 'hold on', and there was a coin. And that coin was probably lost at the time that the castle was being put together, being built. And they lost that coin in the cleaning process that I saw later.

PQ: Really.

RF: At the British Museum.

PQ: Oh dear.

RF: But we, I've heard since that there's a parcel of coins from the Isle of Man, which have appeared and been found in the Coin Department of the British Museum. So I'm keeping my finger crossed that one of them coins is this datable coin for the, for the building of Castle Rushen, which tends to be thought of as around 1250, because there's mention in the Chronicle there, but this, within 10 years this would put a more clearer date on it, if the coin is in good condition.

PQ: Wow! Yes, Castle Rushen's often a place where the range of dates for the construction is massive, isn't it, that you hear. But wow, so yes, one single coin find can change all that then.

RF: The other interesting coin was I was helping out at Rushen Abbey, I helped out at various digs there, probably about six or seven. And one they were looking at the night stairs, which were an internal part of the Abbey, right next to the Treasury. And they dug a hole in the 1870s, to look at the night stairs, and they re-dug the hole, and I was asked to put the head of the metal detector in. I said 'there's a reading down there in the corner'. And he says 'I thought they hadn't dug it out properly.' So they dug a bit more, out popped half a coin, a John, John who was datable to 1210. So it shows you that the internals were being done a lot later than people think, about 1210, they think it is about 1270. So there's 40 years later before they're putting the night stairs. I'm sure it was lost when they were putting the night stairs in, probably the mason's, the brickies, were probably all on a cut-half every week, or a cut-half every day, I wouldn't know.

PQ: Right, yes.

RF: But 1210 was a, between 1205 and 1210, so it was, the internals could have been built up until 1215, they think. The cut half was in good condition, of that coin.

PQ: So that, that's really interesting how coin finds can, can help to pinpoint construction dates and things for, for major, major archaeological sites, and now visitor attractions as well. So, yes.

RF: It's a clearer date than pottery. Pottery can either way in 40/50 years, a coin usually within 5 or 10 years, which is what this is. It's much better. It's how they dated, when they were digging up the Thames on the Smithfield Fish Market site, in London, on the Thames, and they were dating the levels by the coins that were being taken out by the metal detectors. So it's good in that sense. They are useful, a very useful tool, in metal dating sites.

PQ: Right. Moving on from, from coins maybe then, what, what else have you found with the metal detector? I know you've found some spectacular things over the years. Maybe you can tell us a bit about them.

RF: In 1978 I went to search a field called 'The Money Field', on Ballaslig in Braddan and the farmer told me that these five lots of people had been on before me, and the reason that I found it, I was looking in the maps for another particular site, and I picked up the map with Ballaslig on, and an X marked another spot, and it said 'medieval coins were found here'. And I decided I must have a look at that. And I went up to the farm and he said 'good, carry on'. So me and Kevin Robinson, a friend of mine, walked right up to that field, and then in the opposite corner to where, where the mark was, we found the hoard. I reckon it contained probably up to 500 coins originally. It could have been part of the, the Abbey Treasury, because the Abbey owned that particular farm. It was right next to the Nunnery, and I think there's an access way from the old medieval bridge, which the monastery put up to Douglas. So I think that hoard, it's in the time of trouble, that's not a personal hoard, I'm sure it's a treasury hoard, and the coins are stuck together. Because we had coins stuck together, and the coins shiny front and back in the centre, so I think they're all stuck together, in a Polo shape for the Treasury boxes, which they sent away to Rome. So, and we had 176 coins on our first furrow up there, and eventually I found out the dating of the find was. The dating was 1842 by a chap called, I can't think of his name now, but he lived in Ballaslig, and because they said he was off the Nunnery, he was only the tenant of the Nunnery, the tenant was, the tenancy of the Nunnery was a prestigious job to have, and they said he, he found it on his own land. He didn't own the Nunnery, but he owned Ballaslig. I think 1842 is the definite date of the finding of the hoard, so it looks like they found a couple of hundred then. Yes, the footnote to the find at Ballaslig, that particular hoard was buried in 1330, or thereabouts. I think that was the Mandeville's first, second raid on the Isle of Man, which led to that being buried. The first raid was on the Abbey lands back in 1305, I think, or earlier was it, was it 13, I'm not sure. And I think that particular raid there was a revenge that was actually given to Robert the Bruce in his raiding in 1313. Yes, it was 1313 he first invaded the Isle of Man. He didn't touch the Ward's lands, but he certainly gave the Abbey a pounding, and tortured people and probably killed people, and look, they was looking for the silver, because they were well paid, I think, the tenants of the Abbey lands.

PQ: I've heard you mention this before, about Robert the Bruce and the Nunnery.

RF: Yes, he had a, he had a thing about saints, Saint Finian, he had his bones at the Battle of Bannockburn, which was the year after he came to the Isle of Man. And what, the reason he was at the Nunnery, I'm sure, was St Brigid, I'm not sure if her bones are there, but her water was there, her well, which had curative powers, and I'm sure that's why his army camped, for protection around St Brigid's well, and St Brigid's chapel at that time. That can't be proved, that, but that's what I think. Because he had a, like a lot of Scottish, Scottish royalty at that time, they wanted, they thought the saints had great power, so they took their relics into battle with them.

PQ: Right. Do you think Brigid was an important dedication over here then?

RF: I'm sure she was. I'm sure she, she was one of St Patrick's followers, and I'm told she's buried with St Patrick at Downpatrick, in Northern Ireland. And she's one of about ten

dedications over here, probably more, probably more dedications than anywhere else. And she's well known in the Isle of Man. And she's, Bride is her parish.

PQ: Yes, I was going to say, Bride, the parish church and all there, where there's a very unusual sandstone carved stone from the medieval period, isn't there, the Adam and Eve stone.

RF: Yes, it's one of about six or seven, I think, in Britain, that's a very rare stone.

PQ: There's not many, is there?

RF: No.

PQ: And that one's unusual because the serpent is missing from the tree of life.

RF: Yes.

PQ: So, yes, interesting.

RF: It's very interesting.

PQ: Yes. So was the, so that's the Ballaslig coin hoard.

RF: I found objects over the years that I was detecting. I've been detecting over 40 years, and I've found a number of objects, and they've gone to the Museum. The most startling object, and probably the find of my lifetime, is the sword pommel from Ballaugh. It's on Bishops court land, it's on the boundary, and the, there's only the pommel left. The blade has rotted away.

PQ: Yes.

RF: But the handle tells you that whoever owned this was a man of very high importance, probably could be royalty. A very similar pommel has been located in Oslo Museum, probably by the same, same maker. So he, whoever it is, it looks like he's come from Oslo, looks like he might be royalty. And Bishops court was, Reginald, I think, handed over the Bishops court estate to the Bishop. And it would have been a royal estate before he handed it over. He was wanting the castle so he gave him a piece of land, which it must have been one of the royal estates, the royal palaces, I think, down there. So that sword is, it's anybody's guess who it belonged to, but very important. Right on the edge of the estate, right next to the main road, which is probably an ancient road.

PQ: What year did you find that then?

RF: About 6 or 7 years ago, it could have been 2002 or 2001.

PQ: And where's that now then? Because I know it's been to a lot of exhibitions away, hasn't it, in different museums.

RF: It's back at the Manx Museum. It's waiting to go away to a brand new museum on Liverpool waterfront.

PQ: Oh right.

RF: Because it's a very important item, and everybody keeps asking about it. It's been to Chester, and it's been to York. It was in a York exhibition, a major exhibition at the Jorvik.

PQ: Yes.

RF: It would have gone to the British Museum, but York had it first. It went down to Falmouth for an exhibition there. It's gone over to Welshpool, and it's coming back to Liverpool, as I said, it's on its fifth exhibition this year. It's great, great finding an object, and the object wasn't cleaned by us, we left it to the curator of the museum to clean it, but finding that object was a great joy, finding something that's so rare, and so skilfully made an item. It's got the Borre style of decoration on it, it's an absolutely object.

PQ: Borre, so what, is that 10th century is it?

RF: Borre. 10th of 11th century, I think it will be more likely 10th century.

PQ: Right, yes. So just thinking, Rob, for people not familiar with the way it works for a find being deposited in the Museum, could you just explain a little bit about the dynamics of that, and how that works between yourself and the curators and things?

RF: Yes, I think most of all the Museum is not particularly interested in anything in the last 200 years, unless it's of exceptional quality, you know, quality. But over the years detectorists have handed in a lot of material from the Bronze Age, the Roman and the Medieval, Viking/Medieval, they've handed a lot of objects in, which they had free of charge. There's been a few inquests in the time, that's the law, traditional law, any gold and silver must be, go before the Coroner to decide whether it's treasure trove or not.

PQ: Yes. Just re-clarifying things in my mind to you here, Rob, when, when you go detecting somewhere you get permission from a land owner, and the arrangement, is it, is it just a customary thing to split the money with the land owner, then, or is that,

RF: It's actually very informal. It's a, we would say 50/50, and the point of treasure trove is it's making sure that the objects are coming before the Crown, and a chance for us to get them into the Museum so that they can be seen. In then, in the 1800s, when the Athol's family died, I think they died, I don't know, they gave the Isle of Man Lordship away, when their family left the Island, for the next 60 years treasure trove was getting hidden. It was getting hidden by the likes of H. Looney. He had a museum, it wasn't getting declared. And it was only when the Manx Museum was finally created by P. M. C. Kermode, and the laws of treasure trove were, were used in their proper manner again. But in the meantime six or seven hoards had gone, had gone off the Island. It was Rachel Looney, and they, some, they managed to acquire some of them back, but there are those 6 complete hoards, they're not complete because you don't know what happened to them.

PQ: So if you are detecting and you find something you are legally obliged to inform the Museum about that.

RF: Yes, you can either inform the police or the Museum. Modern objects we go to the police station and register them with them, in case somebody is looking for a lost object recently,

PQ: Ok.

RF: and can identify it and take it back. After a few weeks they hand it back to us, the finder. But treasure trove, ancient treasure trove is quite different. I was on a farm at Greeba, back in 1981, looking for a farm part with a club, and we were digging all kinds out of this field, Manx coins, bits and pieces, no sign of the actual farm part, but I knew the site was probably the burial place in Manx.

PQ: Ok, yes.

RF: There was a keill sat in the garden of the house nearby, and there was a nice stone which was an altar stone in the Museum. I'd seen those, and I thought this, this must be part of the burial ground, the bottom half of this field. And I was there one Saturday, there was only two of us, loads had gone off, just left us to square up. So we were sitting down for a cup of tea, and Colin Gough, who was the other chap with me came over and I said 'have you found this farm part?' He said 'no, I've found these two, I don't know what they are.' He said 'I think it's a battery top.' I said 'oh no, that's a medieval coin.' And the next thing he put a piece of gold in my hand. I said 'oh my goodness', I said, 'that could have been lost yesterday.' And we brought it down into the museum, and the gold caused a blooming stir to start off with, and then Marshall come and thought it might have come from the Australian gold fields. But Larch Garrad said 'can I take it this afternoon and give it a clean and have a look at it, and look around at a few books.' And he said 'yes'. So we came back later, and Larch came back with a book, and the object and he 'Marshall, it's Viking, it's a Viking finger ring, 10th century or 11th century'. I thought 'oh my goodness'.

PQ: Wow.

RF: And it is one of the most wonderful objects. After she'd cleaned it you could see 8 bands of gold wrapped around each other, to create that, so it must have been quite a feat on its own to do that, that ring. And it's wonderful, it's probably 90, 92% gold, a wonderful shine on it. I've had gold before, gold does stay untarnished in the ground. Well that stayed untarnished for 1000 years. It was totally unbelievable.

PQ: Wow. So that would be a pretty high status item then?

RF: It went for treasure trove, and it was declared treasure trove. Colin Gough and the land owner were paid half and half off that find, and it's a wonderful find. If you go into the Museum you'll see, on the wall you'll see that gold ring with two other gold objects from the same site. And you'll see Andrew, Andy Whewell Glenfaba hoard, which is 650 coins, and a bangle and 25 ingots, I think there are, in that hoard. And you see my objects. There was 3, 3 lots of finds, which would still be lying in the ground and still getting damaged, if it wasn't for the initiative of people metal detecting. Mine was out of a ploughed field. Andy's was out of a field being cultivated. And the same with the Eary Lhane They would never have been found only we've located them. And if they continue to lie in the ground, they continue to be damaged or corroding, but the, the sword pommel will still continue to, would have continued to be damaged. It was in a fragile state, but it's secure now.

PQ: And you are talking there about going detecting with other people. Is this, was this part of the metal detecting club, that you were part of?

RF: No, when I found the Viking pommel it was only me and Dan Crowe.

PQ: Yes.

RF: And I said to Dan 'I've got a sword pommel here', and he came over and my eyesight wasn't that good, and he says 'It's not only a sword pommel, it's light and it's got interlacing on it.'

PQ: Oh right.

RF: It was a beautiful, a beautiful object. What happened, I found two axes, one a small axe from Kirk Michael, and that was a nice object, maybe 3 or 4 inches in length. And that could be a votive, find, rather than a practical find, I think.

PQ: Yes. With regard to the metal detecting clubs, I know you were part of them getting set up initially, weren't you?

RF: I put the, I got the information and I got the club together to start it off with, back in the '80s.

PQ: Yes.

RF: And in the '90s they was thinking of just changing the, also the old club disappeared. They were going to change the law in the '70s, and I thought we've got to make sure it's in favour of the bona fide people of the Island, bona fide metal detectors of the Isle of Man, so I formed a club, so that we could take part in the discussions on how the change in the law could be made. And we got the National Council who were kind enough to come in, and through that we got a reasonable, a very reasonable bill put through the House of Keys. It sort of follows the English and Welsh acts, which has been in for a number of years. It's had a few little sort of teething problems, but we got the benefit of putting that into the books, so all thanks to Allison Fox, and everybody else at the Museum connected with that.

PQ: Yes. And I always get the impression there's a good working relationship between yourself, other detectorists and the Museum.

RF: I tend to talk to all detectorists, whether they are members of our club or whether they are solo artists, and most of them are, I think 99% of the people are acting within the law.

PQ: Yes.

RF: But I get people to keep their finds and show me, they probably describe them as rubbish things, some of the rubbish turns out to be quite interesting. But it's, the metal detecting and the field walking have been absolutely amazing in the last few years. Alan Skillen is probably one of the greatest field walkers we've had this last century.

PQ: Who has recently passed away, of course.

RF: Yes, poor Alan, but he was an amazing character, and he had an amazing knack for finding wonderful sites, and I found a few sites of my own, a few sites with Alan. But it was quite interesting, we were looking in areas where finds hadn't been made before, and the Forestry had decided to cultivate big areas, for the planting of trees, and we had an opportunity to walk on those areas. And we had some fantastic finds. We had at least three major sites, one at South Barrule, I was there with the Deputy Head Forester, and a good spread at Black Mountain. Black Mountain was about 1000 ft, and South Barrule was 800 ft.

It just shows the height that these Neolithic peoples were living. We found burials. We found probably the cross-over between the Bronze Age and the Neolithic, because we found both sites very close to each other, as if they are on the old site, the Neolithic site, to the Bronze Age. And they were certainly looking for bronze ore on the hill, then, you see, because we found areas of broken white quartz, with mauls and pounders they were using to break the white quartz up with.

PQ: Yes, and the field walking also led to some, another remarkable discovery of your lifetime too, didn't it?

RF: Billown, that was, and that was amazing. Back in the '80s I was field walking around the quarries which are there today, they've expanded since, since the work. But I was walking around and I picked up a small number of arrow heads. And it didn't occur to me at the time that they were anything important, I thought they were just hunting/gatherers, or people hunting around that particular area. And then, when they decided to ask to extend the quarries, the Museum looked at the, what they found in the past, and they said we must to an archaeological survey of the site. To cut a long story short, it led to 10 years, 11,000 articles being found, and it was a wonderful find, and absolutely amazing material that came out. That was a small part of the site, because the bigger part of the site had been destroyed by quarrying.

PQ: Which goes to show the value of field walking then.

RF: Yes, it's a pity that the laws don't allow, and they will do in the future, allow for the watching brief on sites where soil is being taken away, and see what's there. You can't know where everything is, but the Isle of Man is such, so thick on the ground, archaeology, anything that's touched by a spade or a JCB or a bulldozer must be looked at.

PQ: Yes. Do you think there needs to be law changes there then?

RF: Yes.

PQ: Yes. And do you think there needs to be more archaeological focus on field walking, possibly?

RF: Yes, field walking is, you should use the combination of field walking, geophysics, and that RADA, that new way of looking at aerial photographs, because we can't dig every site, but we can certainly mark down every site. One of the, the sessions I had with the Centre for Manx Studies was field walking a kilometre of a parish, that was Santon parish. I got permission off all the farmers to walk this kilometre, and there was a team from the Centre for Manx Studies, and we located 30 standing sites, which hadn't been recorded. Goodness knows what was hiding underneath the soil, but we had 30 sites which hadn't been recorded. 22, 220 kilometres in the Isle of Man, you can imagine what is, what is still to be found.

PQ: Yes. Yes, this was something highlighted in a recent report as well, actually, wasn't it, by the DEFA Upland Strategy emphasised the need for the uplands to be, full archaeological surveys to take place in the uplands. Publicly owned, government land, which as you say contain who knows how many archaeological features and sites.

RF: There's dozens of sites, I would think, thousands,

PQ: Yes.

RF: nationwide.

PQ: The Centre for Manx Studies did, someone Myerscough, didn't they, years ago, and they, again they found loads of sites unrecorded. So,

RF: Well one of the interesting, the Forestry working and coastal erosion are the two greatest, and obviously ploughing, are the three ways of finding objects which are brought to the surface. But coastal walking, the last coastline, from the Cronk to the Killane, he put a defence in on both them rivers, and I think the Commissioners put one in at the Cronk, and the was a private one put in at the Killane. That caused the cliff to move inwards over a period of a number of years, and we had amazing finds from there. The most amazing find, I thought, was a, my wife and myself, we, she lived out at the Garey, and we used to go for a walk there most days when the tide was out after a heavy storm, and one day after a heavy storm we were walking along between Killane and the Cronk, from the Cronk end, and I said, as we walked past, we walked back again, and I said 'what's that on the face, the cliff face?' And there was 100s of flints, and we discovered the remains of a Mesolithic pit, which contained 100s of worked flints, hammer stones, and a big sandstone block, a working block right at the bottom of it. Two thirds of the pit had gone, so we couldn't, we collected all that material, went into the museum, but the next day it was gone, that, the tide, the weather had taken it away.

PQ: Wow, really.

RF: That's how quick it was.

PQ: So yes, so that's another area, keeping an eye out after big storms then.

RF: Yes. Coastal erosion, I think we should be keeping an eye on. Last year the erosion between the top and Ramsey, I've never seen it as bad, and it uncovered the old prehistoric forests. I was the first to point that out, that it was uncovered again. I shouldn't have done, because it went public and people took what they could off the beach. It was only there for the short time. But it was interesting because there was charcoal, and there'd been fires there, which they reckon the lands reaches 10,000 years old when it disappeared, and there was, it looked like deer prints, the deer prints turned out to be boar prints, small piglets, and their mark. That, there was a reason for the, for the fire pits that we see around the north there, the pits they dug to cook the food, throwing in wild boar, killing wild boar.

PQ: Yes, and how far out did they reckon the coast line would have extended in that period, Rob? I mean,

RF: About 2 miles they think has been lost off the top of the Island.

PQ: Really?

RF: Not the very top. The very top is gaining, the Ayers and round that piece there, that's gained. And then going down from Jurby down to Peel, it's lost, it's lost 2 miles in areas, and probably the same between the top, the Bride, and Ramsey.

PQ: Wow, that's a lot, isn't it?

RF: It's an awful lot of coastline. Last year the Bride/Ramsey section took a real hiding, and there's a lot lost of that. Some of the forest was uncovered again, as I said.

PQ: So you think there'll be, there could be lots more interesting things to come from those coastal areas?

RF: Well what you hope for is Viking burials on the Jurby side. I'm sure there's more of them to be uncovered. They've been probably eroded as far as to the top of the grave pit and left, so they'll come through. They won't be coming through as a man, they'll be coming through as the remains of a boat coming out.

PQ: Oh, right.

RF: And deers, deers that have been found in the, in those sink holes. It's quite a number to be found in sink holes. One of them will come out again, one of those big red deer, enormous deer. Do they call them an elk? I think it's a red deer they call them.

PQ: Yes, that's, that's covered a lot of ground archaeologically. I was just, I was thinking we could maybe move on and talk about the social history side of things, maybe, a bit more again, and your involvement with the Leece Museum in Peel, which I know you've been involved with for many years now, haven't you?

RF: Yes, I'm afraid I've got Parkinson's disease now, it's a condition which takes your mobility away, and it gradually gets worse. I've had to pack in the Leece Museum, but I've still got a great hunger for knowledge, and the things you learn through social history are amazing. We, in the Leece Museum we've got the birch. I always heard the story about the birch being used on young lads for minor offences, and I thought is that, is that for real? And we happened to get the Court book for the Island, and there was lads, young lads, of 11, 12 and 13, getting sentenced to 25 strokes of the birch for stealing apples, scrumping apples, or stealing biscuits. Pretty savage at the time. And then it was later used for attacks on, unprovoked attacks on people.

PQ: And you've got the actual one in there, have you?

RF: We've got the actual one, yes.

PQ: Right.

RF: And there's not much left, and I think it's been misused since. I say that in a fun sense.

PQ: Yes.

RF: Inside that Museum we've got the, the bits about Knockaloe, Knockaloe was a fascinating story, 5 years and the amounts of goods that they managed to make in them 5 years. They are still coming to light. There are vases out of cow bone which look like ivory, but they're actually cow bone, are fascinating. They carved them into flowers, going down the front of the, so they're thin type vases, absolutely amazing. Some of the photographic albums and the snakes and other goods are totally amazing.

PQ: And so do people from the area still turn up with these artefacts?

RF: Yes, they still do. Every month there's something coming into the Museum.

PQ: Wow.

RF: Somebody passes away and they find a box in the attic of photographs or goods, or cups, they'd like to donate. It's done all the time.

PQ: That's a real community museum in Peel then, isn't it?

RF: Yes, it is. Peel is an amazing place. I'm born a Santon man, but Peel, I count myself as a Peel man nowadays. In 13 years of being here I've had nothing but tremendous support, through my illness, and just in general day to day activity.

PQ: Yes, I've always found Peel a very friendly place, and you've been one of the people who've made that the case for me really. And you're a constant inspiration, and have been for many historians and archaeologists, I'd say, over the years.

RF: One of the, the two items that have made my life, was winning the Reig Bleeaney Vanannan award.

PQ: Yes, I wanted to talk about that. 2009, was that?

RF: Yes, I think so.

PQ: 2008?

RF: Yes, and that's by my peers, it was awarded by my peers. And then the names on that are amazing, people that I've known. Some of them have passed on, and some of them are still around, but they're amazing people on that, on that award. Alan Skillon was on that award, and that was thoroughly deserved. But when I got the award I was, to say I was chuffed is an understatement. I felt honoured to get that award. And I've had since another people's award for the Leece Museum, I was awarded by the people of Peel, and that had the same effect. There was two, they're voted by their peers, not by the Government or what have you, that's what makes them more appreciative.

PQ: That's interesting, yes. No, well, congratulations on both them, I've probably never said that to you before, but I can't think of anyone more deserving of either of those.

RF: But the thing about the Isle of Man is you cannot hold, people cannot work alone any longer, because we need to find out all that information, and encourage more people to go and research. There's lots of areas to be done. The Roman one is the one which, I can't see the Romans not being here. There's a site out at Maughold which is a circular ditch, it's been used as a watch and ward in recent times. But the experts, the Roman experts have looked at it, and think it's a single station. And that means that they're, they cut a ditch, they higher the inside up, and they put a tower up so that they can set a bonfire off as a, for indicating that there's a problem. And when you stand at the one on Maughold you can see the English coast, the Ravenglass Roman fort is only a short distance away, that's the big fort on the Norman coast, and you can also see Scotland, you can see Ireland, you can see the Irish Sea basin, and you can see the northern plain. And the Romans would not have had sites down that coast line unless they knew what was going on here, because they could hide, and harassment by Irish pirates was at its height in the first and second centuries, and I think they would have had a marking tower to tell them when there was a problem. And I think that was always a possibility of a Roman site. And other Roman sites, until we actually dig these sites

and find Roman material we won't know. But we have found obviously 40 or 50 Roman coins on the Island. People say trading, but what are they trading for, and what was the locals using the currency for? But the more interesting one are the broaches. The girl was looking at the broaches and they seem to be of northern Britain or Northern Ireland workshops. So that's quite interesting, and that would prove something was going on. We talk about the Anglesey as being 'Mona', and where the druids first landed, and you've got say they've got many Roman sites on there, obviously Roman sites. We haven't got them, but I'd assume the druids were based here as well, on the Isle of Man.

PQ: So, yes, there's every, there's, do you think it's possible there could have been similar sort of events, like what happened on Anglesey, with the druid massacre maybe even happened here?

RF: My feeling is that there was a land grab by the Romans, that they treated the head of the Icenii tribe with disrespect, and then they took all the best troops. I think they were going to the sites in Wales, the copper mines in Wales and Ireland and the Isle of Man. I think that whole situation I think was a, was a big thing to claim grab as quickly as possible while they thought the southern Celts would fall under their spell. And when they got there they found they'd sacked 3 of their cities and destroyed them. They had to go back and sort it out.

PQ: So if, if not Roman occupation of the Isle of Man, possibly a military presence here then, in terms of controlling the Irish Sea.

RF: There are probably forts there. There's still a big problem with that one at Port Grenaugh. I said, I go back to that, it was the first place I looked at as a child. And I thought it's a, it's a nice defence against 1, 2 or 3 locals. But I don't think the Romans, they wouldn't have stood up to the Romans. The Romans used lead shot, and sling shot, and they'd have slipped over and taken anybody behind the fences. I think they were more there as a, as a warning post against the Irish. I'm sure the tribe that was here was probably in cahoots with the Romans, and they might have been protecting the Irish Sea. Because Manannan is recorded in the Irish legends as a great pirate and a great seaman. So I think he might have been, that may be a tribal name, rather than one particular man, and that particular Manannan tribe was keeping the seaways clear from the Romans getting attacked from the Irish.

PQ: And this is something that stays throughout history, isn't it, right up until certainly when the Spanish Armada is knocking on the door of England, the fear is the Armada, using the Isle of Man into England, via Ireland.

RF: Yes.

PQ: And so control of the Isle of Man is necessary to control England then maybe is an idea that's coming through here.

RF: Yes, it might well have happened. Great storms happened that day, or those few days, and the ships got blown into the Irish sea, blown out on to the landed coast, little islands, and I don't think any of them actually come here, but I think we've got a Spanish connection with the, the Neolithic. Some of the art work that we get with the Neolithic is the same as it is on the Iberian plain, between Portugal and Spain. And I think it's noted that a lot of the Manx has a percentage of Spanish in them. It's not from the Armada, it's from a lot earlier times.

PQ: Yes. You were, and I've heard you say about this before, and this was from a pot that was excavated at Ronaldsway, was it?

RF: This was at Billown.

PQ: Billown, sorry, yes.

RF: I forgot to mention that at Billown, there was about 12 pot, burials, Ronaldsway burials that were taken out of Billown.

PQ: Yes.

RF: They weren't touched for quite a while. I decided to photograph one of them, before they moved in to do some work on it, and what the photograph highlighted was that there was 3 colours of decoration on the pot, red, black and white, and done in the same way as is done on the Iberian, Iberian peninsula. All our pots could have had paint on them, but because they're so fragile, paint's so fragile, they say once they clean them they clean it off. I think that's what's been happening before, without actually noticing. If they were glazed pots and medieval, then they quite clearly see the glaze. But these have been very fragile colours, I would have thought, that were put on, on the pots, but they must have been lovely pots, with decoration on them.

PQ: And is this something that modern technology is now only able to pick up on, that...

RF: Yes, it's quite a recent innovation. They looked at one, and I presume the same results on all, I know there's 12 of them, 10 or 12 of them. It should be interesting to find out.

PQ: Yes. And do you, thinking about modern technology, do you think in the future, you were talking before there about geophysical surveying, do you think the technology will keep on getting more and more...

RF: They're counting on not having to dig, but I think digging is still an important part of it.

PQ: Yes.

RF: But we should have the lot of them together. We should have aerial photography, geophys, field walking and archaeology all put together in one go, like they do with Time Team. We should be doing something like that, but with more, more time, because they're in a rush to do everything. We could do that, and concentrate on very small areas of archaeology, after everything else has been done.

PQ: Ok, the next thing I want to just ask you about, Rob, was what do you think about the present state of Manx studies, and all that?

RF: It's a pity the Centre for Manx Studies is not operating with a full unit on the Isle of Man. Culture Vannin are doing a great job, but we need more archaeology. Mitchell Crellin was developing a project, fascinating, but you could do with a lot more than that. And I hope to see more money put into archaeology, more money put into the study of documents in Rome concerning the Isle of Man, and the British Museum and the Scottish records. Because that gives a bigger insight into what's gone on before. I always encourage young people who are doing degrees in history and archaeology, all these potential sites. And we have got a lot of sites on the Isle of Man, like the Myrosough project, that priory up in the north. And

there's some still there, the foundation is still there. They didn't notice it in 19th century, and it was gone the 20th century, but I think the foundation will be still there in the ground.

PQ: Right.

RF: And there's a lot of missing items, people should take on board, the Quern quarry at Granite Mountain, the brickworks at Red Gap, the site of the possible Manx pottery site, Manx micaceous ware at Braddan. That's just to name a few. There's plenty of scope, if they just had the imagination and read between the lines. And history, written history is not an immovable plot, that can't be changed, it can be changed, and we should attempt to look in different ways at the past. It's not just archaeology, we could do geophysics and aerial photography. That might bring to light more sites and I just hope this will continue on.

PQ: Well yes, there's plenty of scope there for thought in the future. So, well that's, that's a pretty good, we've had a good run through lots of different things there. It's been absolutely fascinating, it's a pleasure as always to talk to you, Rob. Thank you very much.

RF: Thank you, Paul.

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