MANX HERITAGE FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

‘TIME TO REMEMBER’

Interviewee: Mrs Evelyn Fraser

Date of birth: 

Place of birth: 

Interviewer: David Callister

Recorded by: David Callister

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Topic(s): Early school days
Royal visit by King George and Queen Mary
Various modes of transport
The Guild
Laxey and Douglas Town Bands
The Brushworks factory
Chapels and Sunday School anniversaries
Laxey Glen Gardens
Laxey Mine
Working for Manx Electric Railway
Laxey bay and harbour
Laxey Woollen Mills

Evelyn Fraser - Mrs F
David Callister - DD
DC This is Mrs Fraser, Evelyn Fraser, or Evelyn Fraser, which do you prefer, Evelyn or Evelyn?

Mrs F Well, I prefer Evelyn, but they know me as Evelyn.

DC Evelyn, so it would be better to say Evelyn, would it?

Mrs F You can do.

DC Aye, okay.

Mrs F The Manx call me Evelyn.

DC Oh, right, okay. So we’ll start off with schooldays I suppose, or the earliest things you remember.

Mrs F Yes, when I was five years old I went to the Infants’ School at the bottom of what was called the ‘Co’ hill. At the top of the hill there was a Co-operative, and it was known as the up-Co, and the down-Co was the shop at the bottom of Minorca Hill, so those of us who went to the national school, we trailed up the glen – home for lunch, up again, in all weathers, five years old, to the Infants’ School.

DC Where was that?

Mrs F At the bottom, where it is the church hall at the bottom of the hill. And there were two teachers, Jennie Crowe and Miss Cain from Douglas. And I remember at five years we went on the tram to welcome King George and Queen Mary in off the royal yacht, standing at the pier head waving little flags and a big black car swept past us.

DC Was this in Laxey?

Mrs F Douglas.

DC In Douglas?

Mrs F Yes. I don’t know what time of year it was but I remember that. And I
remember going on the tram with my mother, to Douglas, many a time, and to Kirk Maughold, where we had relations and the Manx Electric Railway was Laxey and Laxey was the Manx Electric Railway, because so many of the men found employment there and it was the only mode of transport before the coming of the Manxland buses, the red buses. And then the Manx Motors came, they were yellow buses, and then, two or three years after that, the Isle of Man Railways put out a fleet of buses, the blue buses and all three buses ran together, they would start off from Laxey, from *The Commercial Hotel*, better now known as *The Mines Tavern*, now, and they’d all start off together and rush to South Cape to pick up the passengers.

**DC**  
So they were competing, were they?

**Mrs F**  
They were. Well, then, in due course, the schoolchildren going to Douglas to school, the first year I went to the High School we travelled on the tram. Well then the second year the buses had the contract so we went by bus and it was Manx Motors, Manxland had vanished and Manx Motors were there and the blue buses. Then we transferred to the blue buses, one sort of bought the other one out ...

**DC**  
Oh, right.

**Mrs F**  
... so it was by bus. But I will say that at the – when the second snowflake had fallen the buses went off the road, but the old Manx Electric Railway kept going.

**DC**  
Tell me about school then, I mean what was the school like, what were the desks like, what were the lessons like?

**Mrs F**  
Well, we learned parrot fashion our ABCs – ‘A B C D E F G, little robin redbreast sat upon a tree’ and so-and-so and so-and-so. Then we went to the big school. It was called the National School, and in my day there, it had three names. It became the Laxey Glen Board School, then it became the Ramsey Road School, and education today, well, enough said.

**DC**  
It’s a bit different, isn’t it?

**Mrs F**  
It was parrot fashion and I remember it.
DC  So you had to learn your tables?

Mrs F  Tables – Standard 1 was Mrs Eddison from Leeds, an uncertificated teacher, we had to call her, ‘Yes M’am, no, M’am.’ Well then we went into Standard 2 and 3, one teacher in a great big room, Standard 4 and 5, one teacher, Standard 6 and 7, one teacher, and then they talk about big classes today.

DC  Did you have desks?

Mrs F  Oh, yes, we had long desks and inkwells and ink and blotting paper.

DC  So sometimes the children, would the children be given a rota to fill the inkwells or did the teacher do that?

Mrs F  Monitors.

DC  Monitors, yes.

Mrs F  And first of all after prayers, ‘Six ones are six, six twos are twelve,’ right up to your twelve times table. Oh, I forgot to say in Standard 1 there would be a big piece of blue paper on the wall with spellings, ‘D E S K, desk,’ I don’t know what the next one was but I know it was, ‘B O X, box, B O X, box,’ all the way down. There was the modulator for singing, ‘Doh ray me,’ and so forth. Well then, Standard 2, after prayers, the tables and then, ‘Twelve pence, one shilling, eighteen pence, one and sixpence, twenty pence, one and eightpence,’ and so on.

DC  So this was all the basic things that you needed to know, weren’t they?

Mrs F  Oh, yes, very often there was a book between two and in Standard 2, I remember reading, ‘Great big beautiful wonderful world, with the wonderful water round you curled,’ that is a Shakespeare ...

DC  Quotation?

Mrs F  ... sonnet. Yes, I’ve got a book of Shakespeare there, the whole works.

DC  And they taught you poems as well, didn’t they?
Mrs F  Oh, yes, when we got upstairs, ten years old:

_Edinburgh after Flodden:_

_News of battle, news of battle,_
_Hark, 'tis ringing down the street,_
_And the archways and the pavement_  
_Bear the clang of hurrying feet._
_News of battle, who hath brought it,_
_News of triumph, who should bring_  
_Tidings of our noble army,_
_Greetings from our gallant King._

e tcetera and it ends up –

_What, can this be Randolph Murray,_
_Captain of the city band,_
_Round him crush the people crying,_
_Tell us all who tell us ..._

I can remember a lot of it. Another one was, ‘The burial of Sir John Moore at the Battle of Corunna:’

_Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note,_
_As his corpse to the ramparts we carried,_
_Not a soldier discharged a farewell shot,_
_O’er the corpse where our hero was buried._
_We buried him darkly at dead of night,_
_The sods with our bayonets turning,_
_By the straggling moonbeams misty light,_
_And the lantern dimly burning._

I can remember more of that. There was another one about a dog who’d stayed by his dead master in the fells. There was the one, ‘The Solitary Reaper:’

_Behold her, silent in the field,_
_Young solitary highland lass,_
_Reaping and singing by herself,_
_Stop here, or gently pass._
**Alone she cuts and binds the grain,**
**And sings a melancholy strain.**
**Oh listen, for the vale profound**
**Is overflowing with the sound.**

Now that was learned.

**DC**
Yes, it taught you language, it taught you the use of words as well, of course.

**Mrs F**
The headmaster there was deaf as a post, a Yorkshireman, he was – he had a hearing aid with a battery in his pocket. He was a wonderful elocutionist, and a wonderful musician, his name is Charles Edward Boland, and he used to put us in for the Guild. I remember the songs – they were national songs, and songs about the country, the old country: Parry’s ‘Jerusalem,’ ‘Land of Hope and Glory,’ ‘Creation’s Hymn,’ ‘The Children’s Song,’ ‘Summer Song,’ ‘The Mermaid’s Song,’ ‘Strawberry Fair,’ ‘Nymphs and Shepherds’ – that sort of thing, the Guild songs.

**DC**
Yes, there was a piano in the school, was there?

**Mrs F**
There was and Mrs Morty Williamson, one of her daughters lives in Laxey, I don’t know her name – she was a teacher there until she got married, her name was Miss Quayle, and she came to practise us for the Guild. Well, when she had her family, a lady called, her name is Ruby Kissack; she’s the mother of Marilyn Kissack who teaches piano, Ruby Clague, she came to play. Now her father was Ferdy Clague, who conducted Laxey Band.

**DC**
Right, yes. So the band was here when you were a child as well then, was it?

**Mrs F**
Oh, Laxey Band, and Ferdy was the conductor. My husband played in that in due course.

**DC**
Oh, right.

**Mrs F**
And he also played in Douglas Town and latterly in Salford Symphony and Salford Military Police.

**DC**
And you were a bit of a musician, weren’t you?
Mrs F Oh, I played the piano in Laxey Glen Wesleyan Sunday School when I was twelve years old. I’d had six lessons by then and I was taught by a Miss Ruth Orr, who was born in Colorado, of Manx parents, and she married the elder brother of Noah and Norah Moore, Clemence Moore.

DC Really, oh, that’s a musical family.

Mrs F Yes, he was a church organist. And I played the American organ in Laxey Glen Wesleyan Sunday School and I’d had six years then. Well I had ten altogether, you see, I latterly went to Mrs Reynolds, but the person who took over playing the organ from me was Florence Kermode, the eldest sister of Laura Briggs.

DC Oh, yes, right.

Mrs F Yes, and I played piano concertos and operatic arias and slow blues.

DC Oh, slow blues, yes?

Mrs F Oh, ‘Basin Street,’ ‘Buddy can you spare a dime,’ ‘Georgia on my Mind’ – I’ve got them all there on record, all the – and I gave my music away to a pianist when I sold the piano and Marilyn Kissack came with a pupil of hers and this pupil – with the mother – and they bought it. I couldn’t sit up to it any longer and I couldn’t see the music and I had my life’s supply of music, it was like that.

DC A mountain of music really, was it?

Mrs F It was, piano concertos, all sorts, popular songs of the day.

DC Were you playing these mostly for church events, were you?

Mrs F Oh, no, I just played for my own benefit, but I did play in an orchestra when I lived over there ...

DC In England?

Mrs F ... for a while. I didn’t much like it.
DC  We’re in Laxey and it’s about 1920 or thereabouts, and you, I think you told me that there was a brushworks in the village.

Mrs F  Oh, yes, now I – it must have been during the First World War, I’ve heard my mother say, oh, she used to work in the brushworks. Now more than that I don’t know, but it was where Bob Corlett, the builder, had his builder’s yard, next to the chapel.

DC  So they may have been making brushes in Laxey at one time?

Mrs F  They may have done, yes.

DC  Because there were lots of pubs, weren’t there, and still are?

Mrs F  Pubs, oh, yes, it says in that cutting I’ve got that the miners, when they walked to Snaefell, they had to climb down ladders a thousand feet below sea level, so they always had a thirst when they got to the top.

DC  Yes, they would have. And what about chapels then, how many?

Mrs F  Oh, chapels, well, the Sunday School Anniversaries, well I know the Glen and the Old Chapel at Ballabeg, they would have stages outside for the afternoon and evening services and it always seemed to be beautiful weather, and oh, it was a wonderful thing. We had new dresses every year to go on the stages and the organ, the little organ was brought up onto the stage, and forms brought out for the congregation. And those who couldn’t find a seat, they just sat on the grass. And our anniversary was at the back of the Sunday School, and that field at the side where the police station is built today, was a swamp.

DC  Yes, yes, it was wet there, wasn’t it?

Mrs F  Oh, yes. I don’t recognise Laxey today, when I – the few times I manage to go down I do not recognise it and it is only about a quarter of the size, and small as it was in those days, it was divided. The children from the Glen never came down to the beach to play, the children from Minorca didn’t, the children from the New Road played together, the children from out by the wheel – it was sort of segregated.
DC     Oh, really?

Mrs F    Yes.

DC     So you played mostly on the beach here, did you?

Mrs F    Oh, yes, I belonged to Old Laxey, yes.

DC     So you lived down there, did you?

Mrs F    Yes and there was the Cape school where most of the children went. They could play football but the standard of education wasn’t very good, but the people from Old Laxey who were more particular sent their children up to the other school. And each school was allowed, per year, two scholarships. Well I remember once the standard being so high that the National School had four.

DC     Really, yes, yes.

Mrs F    And the Cape School never got any, no.

DC     No. Now this area that you lived in, then, right down on the front there, what were the dwellings like, what were the facilities like, was there water, there wouldn’t be electricity, of course, would there?

Mrs F    No, oil lamps, and a lot of them had toilets outside, water outside and some of them had to share a tap. The tiny cottages – we were lucky, we had water inside and a flush toilet and as were many others, of course.

DC     What do you remember of the Glen Gardens when you were a child?

Mrs F    Oh, the beauty spot of Mona, it was called, and the charabancs with hoods that could be put up and down went round the Island, it took them all day, the first stop was the Laxey Glen Gardens, and then about a quarter to eleven, when it was playtime for our school, we would sit on the hedge and the charas [charabancs] would come and we would wave to the people. I remember there was one, Pride of Mona, The Highlander, Happy Days, there were three called Peel Castle, white ones, belonging to somebody called Duggan. And there were no motor cars, of course.
DC So there were no cars owned in Laxey then?

Mrs F No, we used to do drill out on the main road, form fours, form two deep, and so forth, and then when we’d finish with that there was Morris dancing.

DC Really?

Mrs F Oh, yes.

DC As part of your education?

Mrs F Oh, yes, drill once a week and em ... but there again the standard of education, we learned the verb, to be, and [unclear] was be, been, and being, the personal pronouns. I know, he, she, it, we, you, they, them, our, your, it on its own, parrot fashion. Good grammar!

DC Yes, and it stood you in good stead, did it?

Mrs F All my life and all my life the fact that I went to the Douglas High School for Girls, oh, yes. Great big passages of English prose, French, I can quote it today, off by heart. A most wonderful Geography mistress, born in Kansas city, of Yorkshire parents, she lived in Roslyn Terrace, I think it was the house with the palm tree in, Miss Amy Faith Green, and of course there were the Haslers, Miss Grace taught Latin, which I lapped up, Latin, Geography, History, English Literature, all the rest you could keep.

DC Right, right. Coming back to Laxey then, if there was no cars, there were buses, as you say, there’d obviously be a few horses and carts around as well, was there?

Mrs F Yes, horses and carts, they went down to the boats, the boats came in with coal, little 200 tonners, the Ben Veg, the Ben Varrey, the Ben Voar and the Texer [sp ???] and there was a little schooner came in called the De Wadden [sp ???].

DC Were these on – where did they come into?

Mrs F Came into Laxey harbour, there was a harbour master, oh, yes.
DC     And then of course the spoil from the mines ...

Mrs F  That went away.

DC     ... that was being removed, wasn’t it?

Mrs F  And also the deads – the waste stone that came out of the mines, at the bottom of Dumbell’s Row, there was a great mountain of it and there was also one opposite, at the top of Laxey dock, where the boats are pulled up there.

DC     It took them a long time to remove those, I think.

Mrs F  Oh, it did, it did. I was away of course and when – I remember it when there wasn’t a promenade there.

DC     Oh, right.

Mrs F  There was sand right up to the road.

DC     Was there?

Mrs F  Oh, yes, and then, whether it was the tides or what, the changing of the tides, but the sand receded, but now it’s coming back again.

DC     Saturday night was a specially busy night in Laxey, was it?

Mrs F  Oh, yes, the men were paid Saturday dinner time and people went to do their shopping, it was shops from top to bottom.

DC     A lot of shops in Laxey.

Mrs F  Oh, yes, about 20.

DC     So could you get almost anything you wanted in the village?

Mrs F  Anything you wanted, yes, yes.

DC     You’ve also got a family connection with the football, Laxey Football Club,
haven’t you?

**Mrs F** Oh yes, four generations. My father played rugby and got a cap and gold medal, along with other lads from the village. Well, coming after him there was his son-in-law, Frankie Kinnish, he re-seeded the ground although he was never a player. Well then, his son, Peter, was born into it, couldn’t escape, and Peter has given his life to it, and now Peter’s son is a player.

**DC** The Manx Electric Railway, you mentioned that, of course, as being very important to Laxey, but when you came back here in the ‘60s you actually worked for the MER, didn’t you?

**Mrs F** Oh, yes, yes.

**DC** What were you doing?

**Mrs F** I was the only woman with all the men, the only woman connected was Miss Jean Thornton-Duesbery, vice-chairman of the Board, and they were all men on the payroll in the summer. There were over 100 and in the winter about 80 and when Sir John Paul came to visit us one day he said, ‘I believe you’re the only lady here, Mrs Fraser.’ I said, ‘Yes, Your Excellency.’ He said, ‘And do they spoil you?’ And when I hesitated he said, ‘Perhaps they put on you?’ I said, ‘Yes, that’s more like it!’

**DC** Oh right. Were you working in Douglas for them, were you, or here at Laxey?

**Mrs F** Down at Derby Castle.

**DC** At Derby Castle.

**Mrs F** Oh, yes, yes, that was the head office. There were seven of us, we had no union, we were not civil servants, the government would not take us in, no.

**DC** You’ve travelled on the trams a few times then, have you?

**Mrs F** Oh, yes.

**DC** Did you go to work by tram those days?
Mrs F Oh, no, I lived in Onchan, I hiked down Summerhill, or latterly I got a bus down.

DC One of the things that is notable in Laxey now are the feral goats out at the headland there. Did they have them in your childhood?

Mrs F No, never, I was surprised to see them from my nephew’s bungalow a few years ago. Never anything like that.

DC Did you get out on that area of the cairn?

Mrs F Oh, I did, there was a path up there, and on Sunday nights the sun was always on it and we always remember good weather in our young days and people would go up and sit on there. Oh, no goats. But the fields adjoining are solid with gorse now, and there were cattle in those fields, yes, we picked blackberries and mushrooms there.

DC Right, quite different now, isn’t it, really?

Mrs F Oh, yes.

DC And there was quite, there was a couple of major fires in Laxey, wasn’t there?

Mrs F Oh, yes, twice Corlett’s Mill, once The Station Hotel and once the, what we call the down-Co, the Co-op at the bottom of Minorca. The first night after electric light had been installed.

DC What, at the Co-op shop?

Mrs F Yes, it was burnt down.

DC Oh, right. But the fact that the mill would be burnt down would be a major shock to the village, wouldn’t it?

Mrs F Well, I was very small when that happened, it probably did stop for a while. In the days when Fleetwood was a thriving fishing port, in the winter the trawlers would come into Laxey bay to shelter and they would be all lit up, it would be a wonderful sight, yes. And there was a fisherman who lived at the end of the
promenade, he would go out in his boat and bring the men into the local hotel, yes. He was quite a character really, very good with a boat, but couldn’t swim an inch, so I’m told.

**DC**  
We don’t think about boats coming into Laxey, very much, do we, now?

**Mrs F**  
Oh, not now, no, there was a harbourmaster there, a Mr Lawson, then a Mr Wales, and Mr Hewin, who went to Castletown, then I went away and there were several in between and then they stopped having a harbourmaster. But small boats would come in, I think I’ve told you the names of them, haven’t I?

**DC**  
You have, yes.

**Mrs F**  
And they would bring Indian corn in and that would be hoisted up on a hook into the warehouse and coal would come in. Outside the yard where they put the stuff out of the mine, there was a weighing machine, a big iron thing, in the ground, and it was connected to a machine in a little hut and the horses and carts would be weighed on there and then when they picked the coal up from the boat they’d be weighed again so that they’d get the net weight of the coal. The Salvation Army had a floor of the warehouse once for their services and then they had to get out of there and the only place they could get was a room over a stable where there were cows underneath.

**DC**  
That’s got a nice religious touch to it, hasn’t it, a room over a stable.

**Mrs F**  
Yes, they weren’t there very long until they got into the place where they are now. That was called the old chapel and I think it must have been the chapel before Minorca Methodists was built, because that little hill between the Tent Road and Shore Road was called the Chapel Hill.

**DC**  
What’s the Tent Road, now?

**Mrs F**  
Yes, the Tent Road, opposite, at the top of the dock, where the boats are pulled up now, in the old days there was a fair, and there were tents there, and that’s were Tent Road got its name. And there are these newcomers who like to call it Harbour Road, it is not Harbour Road, it is Tent Road.

**DC**  
Its real name is Tent Road, is it?
**Mrs F**  
Tent road, oh, yes.

**DC**  
The other place in Laxey that’s so well known, of course, is the Woollen Mills, isn’t it?

**Mrs F**  
Yes, Holroyd’s Woollen Mill – ‘From the mountain track to the wearer’s back,’ and it was called, they were called Ruskin Homespuns, and the man was a Mr Holroyd, well, that is a Yorkshire name.

**DC**  
Yes, it is, and it was John Ruskin, of course, the connection.

**Mrs F**  
Oh yes, of course it was, to John Ruskin, yes.

**DC**  
Let’s just try and remember what you recall of Laxey Station, the Manx Electric Railway Station, because it’s still very much used today, isn’t it?

**Mrs F**  
Oh, yes, I have never seen such a beautiful little station. I have been on the highest railway in the world in Peru, I have been on railways in Norway and many, many times in Switzerland, now all these countries – oh, and I’ve been on a railway in Canada – and all these countries have got an abundance of fir trees, etcetera, but I have never seen such a lovely little station. We have all the trees, the rustic buildings, the lawn, and the little church.

**DC**  
Well, you have done a considerable amount of world travel, I know that, and I know you like to fly, can you remember your first flight?

**Mrs F**  
I certainly can. I was so fed up with being seasick, I had to come home here to my sister’s wedding and it was October, so my husband said, ‘Fly!’ ‘Oh,’ I said, ‘no,’ because I had once been up in an aeroplane on a 10 shilling flip at Blackpool and spent the rest of the day on a form in Stanley Park. However I decided I would have to fly so I booked a flight, £4 5s. from the centre of Manchester, return, to Castletown, and that included the coach out to Ringway.

**DC**  
So we would be back in the 19 ...

**Mrs F**  
46 years ago ...

**DC**  
Oh, 46 years ago.
Mrs F  ... that was, approximately. And they were little Dakota planes and they had little curtains on the windows and there was one male steward.

DC  So you could open the curtains and look down, was that it?

Mrs F  And I’ve never looked back from there because I’ve flown over the pole, you name it, up and down the Andes, Africa, never looked back.

END OF INTERVIEW