Magdalen Cookson Interview Attended the Harris between 1951-1953

Duration 1:10:52

Interview conducted on 29 February 2024

At Chandler Building, UCLan, Preston

Present

MC Magdalen Cookson

KV Keith Vernon

HH Helen Howell

Other: JM Jodi McCombie

[Looking at photographs and documents.]

HH I can see your name here…

MC Yes, I’m in that lot…

HH The high jump?

MC Yes. I don’t think I won anything. Obviously, my mother would be too busy with a two year old running round to write anything down, but she came to this one. I don’t remember whether they came to…there must have been one the year before, I’d have done two [sports days], wouldn’t I, between ‘51 and… ‘cos, when was sports day, does it say on there?

HH Yes, it’s got a date on it – 25th June 1953.

MC Oh well that’s when I started here, it would be September wouldn’t it, when they started, so that would be the second one.

HH ‘Riverside Playing Fields,’ so that’s down Avenham Park, [MC Yes] across the tram bridge?

MC We didn’t go across the tram bridge… we went passed what was the Art School, along an avenue - I’ve not been for years - a beautiful avenue, with trees on either side. But we got changed onto our sports gear in the Harris Art School, in the actual theatre, with all the steps down. We come in summer, we only had a top, then we just got changed in there into shorts and whatever, they were just like skirts.

HH A uniform?

MC Yes, uniform, and walk down and definitely didn’t go over the tram bridge anywhere, it wasn’t there.

HH Right, ok.

[JM brings in cups of tea.]

MC Yes, so we went in…I remember that particularly because my little sister came, you know. The other two must have been at school, my brother, and Veronica, how old would Veronica be? She might just be at school, yes she would be…

KV Did you do all these different sports during the year?

MC Yes, I think so. The things I remember most, because I enjoyed them the most, was doing PE and stuff in the gym, and I cannot remember the name of the lady who was a gym teacher. She seemed very old to me at the time, but she’d probably be only about 30 or something, and I cannot remember her name, you would think she would be one of the people on here, wouldn’t you [indicating the sports day pamphlet], but I can’t remember her name and she use to do demo to us, I liked to shin up a rope, in these window things, up and down. I was skinny, quite thin, and going in and out and up and down these windows, going over the horse, doing short arm balance, I remember…

HH What’s that? [3:39]

MC Have you done gym, I suppose, at school, have you?

KV I don’t remember.

HH Short arm balance? How do you do that?

MC You’ve a pommel thing, with handles, you jump on it, and you do a handstand, holding your arms like that…

HH Oh! Sounds quite hard.

MC Well, I could do it, I was quite energetic.

[JM popped in for a moment]

MC I’d walked to school from five years old til the taxi started when I was eight, and that was two and a half miles each way.

HH Was that in Goosnargh?

MC Yes – well now, you’ve got a bit of background off Veronica [Magdalen’s sister, who was interviewed before Magdalen]. We went to Hill Chapel, or St Francis, Hill Chapel, a little school near the Horn’s Inn if anybody knows, that’s still going. The school’s still going. Oh yes, it’s a very good country school, Catholic school, and … going to school, at the age of five, I think I didn’t start until about October, a lot had been in September, because I’d been in hospital [5:00] with Scarlet Fever, they put you in hospital in those days, in isolation hospital, and I was only four. I can vividly remember being carried downstairs by an ambulance person. They’re not like they are now, the ambulances, because they’d picked up another girl who was ten, and I was picked up, I was four, coming up five in September, I’d just be five, you know, so I don’t know how long I was in the hospital, but I can vividly remember being in there, in the isolation hospital, Fulwood, it’d be. Nobody could visit. And I was in there, then when I came out, I started school, didn’t I, and walked it, and since I’ve had my own children, and they walked to school, and it was only round the corner, the school was across the field, I could see them, I could wave to them, and I’ve wondered how on earth my mother and my dad, could let me go, probably a mile before I met up with any other children that were going. We went through fields. Has Veronica told you all this?

HH No, she hasn’t.

MC We met the other children coming out of Goosnargh school, C of E school, coming the other way, and get a bit of…

HH Oh yes – a bit of rivalry?

MC Rivalry, yes, so that was that, so I put that down to being quite energetic, and cycled everywhere eventually, and my dad got me a bike, cut down, it was wartime you see. The taxi started when the war finished, when I was eight. [6:50] I was not quite two when it started, so yeah, I’d be about eight – ish. We got chance to go in a taxi, to school.

KV A taxi?

MC A taxi, which was an old ambulance, converted, all we did was we sat opposite one another, a seat either side, and it was my dad’s cousin, who’d come back from the war, as a dispatch rider, on a motor bike, and he started up a taxi service. He started off taking people on back of his motorbike, and in fact he was Veronica’s godfather actually, him and his wife, godparents. And yes, so he started it, he was based at my grandma’s on the farm, where my dad worked, and his brother, and just about, not quite a mile down the road from us where we lived. We lived at Chingle Cottage, which is at the end of the lane to Chingle Hall, which is, used to be quite famous for being haunted.

HH Is it still open to the public?

MC No, no. It was playground round there for us, actually, so, school days, that’s why I put myself down…I suppose all the children of that generation were pretty fit, because you didn’t get all this sweet stuff, you know. Anything with sugar in, and toffees, you just didn’t get them. In fact, when I was in hospital when I was four, we got…I was in a cot, can you believe it? One of those dropped side cots, and they gave you rice pudding, which I hated, but they put dolly mixtures on top, so I ate it. So that’s early days. So coming here, I failed at Hill Chapel. I was put in for this exam. We’d never had any, as far as I can remember, we’d never had any exam practice, so doing an exam against the clock, which you had to do, was, so, basically, when they say ‘put your pencil down’ I’d done about three when I should have done about twenty…Did you do any exams like that, when, what do they call it, scholarships or the eleven-plus?

HH I didn’t do the eleven-plus, but I’ve done timed exams, yes.

MC I have done since. I have done since quite a lot, but in those days…so, I failed, so they must have thought I had a brain in here, and put me in for this but it was like two years later, more or less. [10:00]

KV Did you stay at the same school, between 11 and thir…

MC Yes, you would stay from five to fifteen, when you left. In those days, fifteen was the leaving age.

KV But it was the same school – you just stayed at the same school rather than…

MC All the way right through, until you left, yes. They’ve done very well, a lot of the contemporaries within the few years, one way or the other, all went into business, and done extremely well. One of whom was my brother’s year, two years behind me, is Alston Dairy, Alan Forshaw, yes, which is actually a distant, well a half cousin to us on my dad’s side, and she’s got cousins at Little Town, down the road from us. They’ve all done well, they’ve all been taught at that school. They’d only two teachers, an infant teacher, as I remember a Miss Gillow, from the Gillow family, who did all the furniture, she was a junior teacher, well infant teacher when I started school, and there was somebody else…you’ve got me going now, sorry!

HH It’s alright!

MC There was a teacher, I can’t remember her name…I had dimples in my…I can remember, they used to let you have a nod when you started school, put your head down, have a sleep, on your desk. I don’t know whether they do that now..

HH I think, when I was in the infants, they had like a quiet time in the afternoon, and you could fall asleep, and they’d read a story to you, it wasn’t for long, and I think it was only in the infants, you know…

MC Yes, I had dimples, I can remember, I had little chubby hands with dimples, yes I can quite remember this. They had an old-style fireplace in the school, this is at Hill Chapel, with an iron fireplace, [illegible] a big fire, and we got school milk, and that was warmed up in the winter. She made cocoa, this teacher, and a coincidence, that I obviously left and came here, and got on with my life, and never saw Miss Gillow again, until, my husband and I were celebrating our 40th wedding anniversary, and we went back to that, we were married at that church, at Hill Chapel, and we went back, and it happened to be the weekend that, and we went to the Sunday Mass, and the Priest made a bit of fuss of us, we were on the front bench and that, and in Church, part way through, you greet one another and say ‘Peace be with you’ basically, and shake hands, or something, and I turned round, and who should be behind me but Miss Gillow, and somebody had brought her, her nephew had brought her, to that – I don’t know whether… it was just coincidence…she’s buried in the graveyard there actually, with her brother, Terry. So that was a bit of a coincidence in my life, but, to see her again, she was delighted. I’m going totally off…

HH Well, how old were you when you went to the Harris Institute?

MC Thirteen.

HH Did you say you’d gone to night school? [before the recording started]

MC Yes, I did, afterwards.

HH That was afterwards, was it? [14:04]

MC Yes. I think so, I think it would be. We didn’t go to night school as part of the education there, I don’t think. So I came on the bus, and it was so new to me because being brought up in the country, and basically, I know my dad and my grandad had a car, we travelled a bit in a car, you know, to another church they went to, otherwise it was either bike or walk or bus. So, we came into Preston, and I walked down Edward Street, lads went underneath, and we went up top. I was in B. There’s 1B and 2B, I don’t know whether they segregated you for education wise or what. There was one lad in our class, and when they started, the very first, or one of the very first registration when they shouted out your names to mark you on the register as present, you’d to say ‘present miss,’ or ‘present sir’ very methodic it was. They shouted out ‘Mary’ and I’m looking for this ‘Mary’ ‘Where’s Mary?’ Everybody has to look round [illegible due to sound of a siren going past, possibly ‘I didn’t know anybody with that name’]… not a soul. So it was quite an adventure coming here. So, eventually, I’m always called Magdalen you see, my second name, so that was one little incident. Otherwise, I sat next to a girl called Mabel Ratcliffe, she lives in Blackburn, and we were the only two from north of Preston, all the rest came from round Penwortham area, and obviously Preston. I’d a lot of friends really.

KV How did you find…presumably you took an exam to get here, so who put you on to the exam? Did you know anything about the Harris before you came here?

MC No not a thing, I really think it must have been somebody…the headmistress at Hill Chapel because I will have stayed there til I left school otherwise [16:39]. Mrs [Gribble-Deston?] her name was, she was the headteacher, and that’s what I say, I think they must have thought I had a brain cell in here somewhere. ‘Cause there were one or two of lads came. George Gornall came in my year and went into engineering, he ended up as a builder…passed for this. They didn’t teach you beyond long division in maths. I was always pretty good at English, I didn’t seem to have a problem with English, but maths I wasn’t very good at. Well, we didn’t get taught beyond long division, no decimals or fractions or the usual maths subjects, so my auntie, my dad’s brother’s wife, a school teacher, she taught at English Martyrs, boys section, I don’t know whether she did it then or not but she got me up to speed with the maths, with fractions and decimal points and stuff like that, so I don’t know what sort of, how well I went, how I did, but obviously I passed. You know when you’re a child, things are going on round you but you’re not privy to it really, they’re not telling you, are they? The parents are…my god mother was very good, my dad’s sister, she was excellent at…when I’m thinking back now, to how I was brought up, and probably the rest of the family as well, they weren’t just the parents that looked after you, your god-parents, and your aunties and your uncles, virtually brought you up, as well, and the grandparents. I hadn’t all my grand…my mother’s father had died before they got married. My other grandparents, you know, you were right in there with them, in the family.

KV Did Veronica say something about an aunt?

HH Yes

MC Nan? [19:14]

HH She said that your aunt had got her into All Hallows, no Martyrs School.

MC Did she? She might have had something to do with me getting here.

KV What did your aunt do? Had she been…

MC She went…she was working on the farm, she was doing war work. She was feeding the…at Broughton where the ambulance place is, somewhere round there…I can remember going with my auntie, when I was quite small… she worked on the railway as well. She was doing war work, and she, what I call dustbins, and they were cooking for the forces I think, outside, I can remember going somewhere in like a wood with her, and doing some outdoor cooking probably when they were on exercise I don’t know. You don’t ask, do you, when you’re little, just go and watch and take note, and she also – Nan Kitch…Annie, she was called Annie and she liked to be called Nan I’m pretty sure, and she was only about, she was younger than my dad, by about two years, so…when I were born, me dad’d be about…26, something like that? So my auntie were a couple of years younger than that, and of course, when you’ve got nephews and nieces, you take a lot of notice of them, don’t you. She took us all over. What did Veronica say about her then?

HH She said that she had gone to the Head, or gone into the school at English Martyrs saying that she was actually Veronica’s godmother, when she wasn’t actually, because she was your godmother, and somehow arranged, got permission, for Veronica to go to English Martyrs, without the parents having to do that for her.

MC I don’t think my mother was very pushy in that respect. My dad was busy earning a living I think. He was farming. He didn’t go into the…he didn’t get called up because of his farming. His younger brother was too young. He was only about 15 or something like that when I was born, and yes, we were very fortunate to have our father with us all through the war, but you don’t know at the time [22:00]. You don’t know at the time, because you’re just a kid, aren’t you? You don’t know the rest of it, you don’t know anything really. So, my auntie Pauline worked at English Martyrs, I wonder if she was there when Veronica was there? Might have been. All four of us, I’m the eldest of four, I came here, my brother went to St Ignatius, Veronica obviously went to English Martyrs, and my younger sister went to Brownedge St Mary’s. So none of us went to the same school, but we all got out of Hill Chapel.

HH Is it the little Chapel on the main road in Goosnargh?

MC No, that’s the Wesleyan…my cousin and his wife are quite busy there with that. He’s a Catholic actually, but he married a Methodist and they are well into…they do a lot of good work there. So, to go on with experience of this place, I really enjoyed the gym, and doing all sorts of stuff on a couple of ropes. Did you ever do that when you were at school?

HH I wasn’t very good at gym though. But we did have a gym room with the bar… like wooden…

MC Window things?

HH Yes the window things! That you climb up!

MC Yes, and they go in out,

HH And a beam would come out with the ropes hanging off that...

MC Yes, I just enjoyed that, and my dad said to me…I was saying I can shin up a rope, and the rope were that thick with a great big knot at the bottom…and he said ‘Right,’ he said, ‘Show me!’ and they had a great big thick rope, and they thew it over beam, in the barn, at the farm, and said ‘right go up that,’ and I did, and I sat on the beam, and it was very high. I was strong enough to do that.

HH How did you get down?

MC Well you just come – oh you were shown not to slide because you’d burn your hands. You did it either like that, or, very slow, I don’t know, I can’t remember, but I got down without doing any damage. From here, did they take people round to the mills, the pupils to look in the cotton mills? This is 1951-53. I have a memory of going into a cotton mill, and seeing all this cotton. Also, the other memory is of going to the Public Hall, to a concert, and it was either one of these Sir…Malcolm Sargent, or somebody like that, I think it was the Liverpool Philharmonic, or something like that, you might have records of stuff like that.

KV We’ve not come across it, where students were taken out to places as part of a course. That chap we were talking to earlier in the week, in Guild year, in 1952, the public could come in and have a look around.

MC Oh yes, I remember that. I was typing away. I was in the typing pool, in the typing room, typing. Now that’s one of the very best things, that I’ve ever been taught, apart from driving a car. For the most useful – touch typing…on an ancient Imperial – have you got any of these in a museum anywhere in your…? These old typewriters.

KV I’ve seen them in museums but…

MC Imperial, and what was the other one? Olivetti or something was it? Oh, they were newer perhaps. Because I went up the road and I was typing there eventually, yes…so, I was in one, on an open day, sat in, typing, and the people were coming in and watching me type, and do you know how they taught you to…be quite, I don’t know what it was, I suppose *even* with your…[mimes fingers on a typewriter]…while you were doing it. The Royal Air Force flypast march was played. The one I remember, because it comes on Remembrance Sunday things, doesn’t it, on television…[mimes typing to the beat and hums the tune] – that speed! To get us to type! And I can’t remember the typing teacher’s name – [27:40] who taught us typing…I think it was a lady…it was a Miss somebody or other…anyway what else, so that was another thing. Has anybody else told you that, about the music?

HH No, but Pam and Bunty, because they were interviewed together, they said that they weren’t allowed to look down…

MC No, that’s right, they were covered! The keys were covered! They had little covers.

HH …and they were looking up at something, I seem to remember, but they didn’t mention the music I don’t think.

MC Maybe they didn’t do it then. She was the year behind me. They might have stopped it, or the record got broken or something. Well I think it had all come from military. Some of these people will have been in the military, won’t they? The teachers… and….

KV You said about the maths teacher, what other subjects did you do?

MC Well we did maths, English language, English literature, shorthand typing, commercial correspondence, geography, did I say history? PE and games, as far as I can remember, but all of it was new to me, because we did games at Primary School but most anything else, and the maths, and I’ll tell you what, another thing, my mother thought you were lazy and not working if you were reading a book. Opposite to now, isn’t it? So, I studied ‘Prester John’ story, and it was somebody in South Africa in the mining industry. Whether it was a story or a kind of a - somebody’s story, I’ve no idea, but I can remember that it was at Kimberley mines – diamond mines I think. Or gold, I don’t know which. And I didn’t understand half of it. And the other stuff we had to read, we did a bit of Oliver Goldsmith…oh plays! We did plays! And some of the lads were in…obviously…and I don’t think I took part in any of the plays, but we were watching them, and there was ‘She stoops to Conquer,’ do you know that one? [KV yes] Is that Oliver Goldsmith, or somebody?

KV It might be… So you were performing the plays?

MC Somebody was performing them, yeah and we were, I was watching them, but we’d to know it, for some reason. [30:54]

KV But not like a drama club or something in…

MC Well, I can’t remember that, I think it was part of the English literature, probably, side of it. Did nobody mention that?

HH If we were studying a play in English literature, we would go and see it, maybe it’s that sort of thing?

MC Well, it was in here, in school, as far as I know. Is there a theatre here?

HH Were they, the performers, were they students?

MC Yes, lads and er... I can see them on the stage now, and it was something called ‘She Stoops to Conquer’ which was way above my head, somewhere, all very new to me. But English language, I didn’t seem to have a problem with. We were taught to oh, Commercial Correspondence! And we got books, they must have been books from before the war, stuff with really flowery, you know, ‘Your servant’ and all that sort of thing, what did they call it… ‘Your something servant’

KV ‘Your obedient servant…’ [32:12]

MC Instead of saying ‘Yours sincerely’ or ‘Yours truly’ or whatever. We didn’t put ‘truly’…‘Yours faithfully.’ French, I’ve forgotten French. I didn’t know French. Mrs Bairsto? She taught French. Do you remember her name? Did anyone else mention her?

HH Yes, because I’ve looked her up, and there’s no ‘W’ on the end, so it stuck in my mind – Mrs Bairsto…

MC Oh, on there? She was working here before she married, as far as I know.

[32:49]

HH Oh right.

MC Have you ever had any…Vera Nowell was…I think I did a three-legged race with her, whatever they called it.

HH Is that the Siamese race? [indicating an entry on the Sports day pamphlet].

MC Siamese, yes. They wouldn’t call it that now.

HH No, they wouldn’t would they? But, no, I saw it written down on here and I thought, what’s that?

MC It were three-legged race to me. You were fastened to…your two legs together, and off you went.

HH Yes – ‘V Nowell and M Kitching’ [read from sports day pamphlet.]

MC I can’t really remember some of these others. Some of them…one or two I think went up the road as well, to Askews [33:35]. I worked there for best part of eight years til I got married, and when I did get married, I came back for a bit, because our farm wasn’t ready. We were doing up the farmhouse, and landlords, and I’d moved in, we’d gone to live with his…with my in-laws because our house wasn’t ready for a few months, so I asked if I could come back to work, because I was twiddling my thumbs, and I came back for a few months, and I was like a dogsbody, any little job that wants doing, and I still got the same wage, at Askews. [34:16]

KV So, how did you get the job at Askews, because some people have said that employers came in [MC Yes they did] but others don’t remember that.

MC I do, because I got a job at I think it was a bathroom company, Webbs was it? Was there a Webbs somewhere around this area of Preston? Not very far away. I think they did bathrooms. They wanted a little girl to, in office, you know, office little [bod?] and I went for an interview with two other girls from here, and sat there, and a chappy, we were told to sit opposite one another, three of us in a row, and this man interviewing us, and he was asking – I’ve never forgotten this, because it was so unusual – asking us questions, and he looked at me, he looked at each other, and he looked at me and asked me a question, and the girl next to me answered, and I sort of went [grimace] and I didn’t interrupt her, and it happened more than once. She must have been nervous, jumping in, you know. Well I was, but I tend to go quiet, and who should get the job? Me! But it was about…it was very little money. Obviously…I think it cost, I don’t know how much it cost on’t bus, because we got school ticket or something with school. I don’t know how it got paid really. I think it was the parents sorted that. I didn’t have any input to that. The teacher, and I can’t remember which one it was, probably the Head, looked at the wage on offer, and he said by the time you’ve travelled from Goosnargh, and paid your bus fare, it’s not enough, so he turned it down for me.

KV The Head here?

MC Well, whoever it was here in charge of the er [KV OK] yeah – turned it down for me so I didn’t go. In those days ten shilling was a lot of money, and if you lost a note, or any money like, it was a big issue. Money was of more value than it is now, a lot more, a lot more value. So, I didn’t get it, so I ended up writing letters. I could always get a reply to me…the Evening Post, they was always looking for juniors, and of course as soon as they found out I come here, you were in, basically, it was a good…I didn’t realise that at the time. I got a lot of ‘Sorry, you’ve been…’ you know, somebody better than me got the job, so I spent the summer with this auntie Nan, that Veronica’s mentioned. She was working at Fulwood school, Cadley Causeway, a school there, and they did dinners for all the outlying country schools in those days, as well as for their own pupils, and so in that summer, this auntie of mine, my godmother, took me there. Because obviously I’d finished, I’d left, but they were still in school, and so I spent quite a lot of happy times, because I got my dinner, serving up dinners to schoolchildren, you know, and helping in kitchen, with these big containers full of spuds boiling. So that’s what I did, and then, same auntie, must have been looking round for if somebody wants an office girl, here at Askews, whether she knew the lady that interviewed us, called Miss Crag – fierce woman – it was still like in school, more, you know, you were brought up to do as your told basically by your elders [illegible]. I got that job because of my handwriting, because they wanted a…and it was what they called follow up papers, from orders, from librarians. They sold to librarians all over the world, well all over the Empire, I suppose, Africa and all over, I can still remember the names of places, and obviously, my auntie took me for this interview, and I felt like, I was still a schoolkid, what was I fifteen? and this lady looked at my hands, ‘Well you’ve got clean fingernails, have you got a clean hankie?’ I had a clean hankie in my pocket, [‘a pocket one’?], tested me on my handwriting, and I got the job! This was probably September, Oc…it was getting later in the year, or July, I don’t know exactly when I started now. So I was coming to the same place almost [Askews was on the same road as the Harris Institute] but I started pushbiking it, and parked my bike in, there’s a door, I think it’s still there, on, what road is that? [40:06] Marsh Lane, isn’t it? And I used to push my bike in there, in [‘like the canteen’?] and I’d pushbike it here everyday and pushbike it back. And sometimes, I stayed to do Night School, I come here, to do typing, to get a bit better at typing and shorthand and stuff. I did that for a bit, then I went to Glovers Court and did Basketwork, which was a bit of a nice thing to do, but the typing – also I think it made my fingers really strong, ‘cos since then, I was quite old when I started learning piano. I’d already been learning piano for – I used to go to a dancing class, Veronica went as well, to a ballet and tap, at Broughton, and the teacher, the lady that played the piano, Glynis, she was a piano teacher, and I liked the classical music she played for us to do ballet, and I went to her for a bit, till I started going out with lads and then, in my teens, and then that went, but, I’ve thought about it since, ‘cos some people can’t move all their fingers, can they? They’re not as dextrous or something, so the typing, I think, doing these really hard, you really, you were only thirteen, with these machines….that’s just a thought. I do a bit of piano, but not much now, not done any for about a year. I got to grade 5, [illegible]. So that’s another sideline. I’ll have a look what I’ve written…[examines a prepared sheet of paper Magdalen brought with her.]

KV What did you think of the uniform? [42:11]

MC I thought it was quite nice. I liked the pattern, the material for the girls’ dresses. My mother made the dresses with a white collar. And, I’ve to try and get round my brother, he lives at the…everything is in there, in that house where we…Chingle Cottage ... he’s a single man, and I’m trying to see if I can get in there to look if there’s anything, ‘cause when my mother was the last one to die, there was a lot of stuff going on and we really didn’t get to go in to get…we were supposed to get a lot of stuff out of the house at the time but it didn’t happen, and er, you know – all your history is there isn’t it. So this is the sort of thing [indicating the sports pamphlet] where my mother’s decided that she doesn’t want that and chucked it out to me, otherwise I’d – I didn’t really know I had that until I had a rummage. So it’s stood me in good stead, coming here actually, cause I don’t know where I’d have been if I’d passed the eleven-plus. I’d have been at one of the convents I think. I know they sent me to, I think it was my auntie again, it might have been my auntie Pauline who taught me maths, as well. She was my auntie by marriage, a school teacher. They got me a – they did a lot for me really, when I look back. I was entered in to the Reverend Mother’s exams at, I don’t remember if it was Winckley Square or Lark Hill or both, but again, I was not an exam person. I passed everything since then any exam, I passed since. I’m not a swelled head but you know. You learn, I think it was here, I got at one of my night classes…did I go here? I went to Preston College to do more English, I got an O Level since in English Language, and then I went for an A Level but I came out with an O Level in English Literature, obviously not my best bit. But they gave me an O Level. And they gave me a leaflet, I think I have it somewhere, a booklet, on how to address exams. How to get yourself…how to do exams. That was very useful. So, I’ve done all sorts, I’ve brought…we farmed for eight years after we got married, with my husband [‘he’s still my husband’? illegible]. Well you know, we’re getting to that age, aren’t we.

HH What kind of farm is it?

MC Dairy Farm. It was a relative of Bill’s dad, my husband’s dad, who’s farm was coming up for let, and he put our name down before we even got engaged. We must have looked like we were together, mustn’t we? In those days, you didn’t obviously, live together before you were married, and we went to look round it one Saturday, actually the Saturday we got engaged, we got told we could go and have a look round this farm at Thornton Cleveleys, yes. That’d be fine – lovely house. The style of house that children draw – window window window window, door in the middle, chimney. Just like that. The door was yellow, which I liked, and, it wasn’t ready when we got married. It should have been, but it wasn’t, so I didn’t move into it until about 4 month after we got married, 4 or 5 month. But he’d done it up, and it was like modern inside. Took the gas lamps out, the gas lights. Fire places up to the ceiling, took them out, don’t know what they did with them, and put tiled fireplaces in, one at each end of house, living room, sitting room. It was a dream and an adventure, you know, and we started off with no cattle but one. My father-in-law gave us a Jersey cow that was in calf, and Jersey milk, in those days, was premium for the cream, and it was *cream* cream. I’ve noticed cream isn’t cream anymore, is it? The colour.

HH Oh yes, paler isn’t it?

MC Have you ever noticed? It’s white. I don’t know what they do at it. Well cream is the colour, isn’t it? And obviously, we’ve had enough to remember when it were like that. So yes, it was…So that was nice, to go into that…and we’d three children while we were there, one were born in Blackpool. [47:56]

[49:08] I had my next one at home. That was nice, having your baby in your own house, and Bernard, my eldest lad, was walking, He walked at nine months. It was very handy that, because I hadn’t to carry him. And then my next second daughter was born in that same house. And we were only in there for maximum five years, so when it came up to four years, we were looking for somewhere else, we got one at Claughton on Brock, right on the roadside, on the A6. And we farmed that, dairy farm again, we had a milk round in Thornton, we built up ourselves, and I used to go round with baby in carry cot collecting money on a Friday. [50:00]

KV Did you use the things that you learned here, in helping on the farm?

MC Yes, very much so. The Commercial Correspondence, the bookkeeping and accounts, and we had a very good young fellow that had just trained up as an accountant, and he helped as well. He said how to work with cheques and that. He kept record of anything and he, you see, we never made any money. We never got to pay tax, in all the time we were farming, so that tells you something. Yes, all that came in useful. ‘Cause me husband didn’t know, he knew how to farm, but he didn’t know how to pay the accounts, and I’m still doing now, oh yes. But all that, yes very much so. If I hadn’t have come here I don’t know where I’d have been, I’d have been probably in a factory somewhere, you know, weaving, or doing whatever.

KV I think you said you came back to do…

MC I think it was shorthand…

KV Oh, so you carried on?

MC I carried on for quite a bit, and I can’t think who the teacher was, it was a lady…

KV Is this when you were at Askews?

MC Yes, yes. I did quite a lot at night school for a long while, because I just felt I, I felt I should know more, if you know what I mean. It’s kind of a continuation. ‘Cause two years when you weigh it all up isn’t very long is it, in which to learn French for example? French come in handy! I couldn’t speak a word when I came out of here, but I knew all the verbs, and I could write letters in French. We had to write commercial letters, you know, in French. We were doing a bit of translating backwards and forwards French and English, but after that, I never ever used it, French, until, well long after - my kids were grown up, and I got the opportunity to go on holiday with one of my sons and his wife and kids, in France with a caravan. It’d be around 1999, 2000, it’s not that long ago, and I thought right, if I’m going to France, I’m going to have to…my husband doesn’t know French, my daughter-in-law did, she’s very good at French, but she could, she wasn’t happy speaking it very much, but she could, well she was quite – we complemented one another. She could do all the writing, she did all sorts [illegible], and I went for some lessons in Garstang with somebody doing conversational French, and I was in a class with young-uns and old-uns, a lady again, teaching them. I went in daytime, and learnt how to ask for a glass of beer, and stuff like that, that was fun. So when I went with them, we broke down. We’d a toddler and a baby, their two kids, and Belinda says to me ‘You go and ask for Emergency Services, or for Breakdown’ – you’ll have been to France won’t you? We were on a main road, it was red hot weather, two caravans and car, and I crossed over to the other side where there was these things like they have on ships, phone was in them, Emergency phone, and I asked, I picked it up, and somebody went ‘Bonjour...’ down bloomin’ phone, right loud, and I thought ooh God, and I managed! I couldn’t do it now, I’d have to go back and revise. It was good fun, and I told them where we was, cos there was a number on the place, you know, we knew where we were, and what had happened, and between Franglais and a bit of French, they said they’d be with us, and they come really quick, and took us to where our campsite we booked, and we were the entertainment for the afternoon that day. But you see, there again, I wouldn’t have known French, because they didn’t teach us at the primary school, and I’d have no reason basically, to go down that route. But the other one, I don’t know if it was, my youngest daughter, became a nanny and went to work in Belgium and in France, and while she was there, I was working at the time, I had a part time job, she rung up one day and said ‘Mum, my family’s going off,’ I think they were going to America, Americans, ‘and they wanted me to have a holiday next week, and I said it’s a bit short notice to be booking a holiday, can my mum come?’ And I’m thinking ooh yeah, and I’d just got my passport, to go with this auntie, Nan, this godmother, on a cruise, somewhere with her, oh yes, she was a good auntie to have I can tell you!

HH She’s a legend isn’t she!

MC And I’d only just got a passport, so I said to her ‘When is it like?’ and she said they were only going for a week, the family were taking child with them you see, something going on in America with their parents, so Ruth was, I said right I’ll see what I can do, and I managed to, we’d just got the Daily Mail, I’m going off at a tangent now aren’t I? We’d just started buying the Daily Mail, and it had a big thing in, you could book for three months ahead, for very little money, travels to anywhere in Europe, basically, and so I got – I don’t know if that was the first time or the second time, I went to Belgium first, of course, they are part French there aren’t they, and that came in very handy, again. I was accused of being a local! I know! I was in a shop, trying to use your… my daughter had learned German and French, so she could speak a bit of, she didn’t use it that much. I was in a shop in somewhere in, I don’t know if it was France or Belgium now, and these two visits, I went twice, similar thing, short notice, one was when she was working in Brussels and the other one was, she was working in Paris, and so my French came in handy, but this shop, I was asking the price of some nice thing I wanted to buy [58:10] and this man, it was a man serving, and he told me the price at such a speed I couldn’t take it in, so I said ‘Parlez-vous Anglais?’ and he says ‘Oh I thought you was a local!’ That’s another little story, some of my Lancashire French. [all laugh] Yes French came in handy, in fact anything that you learned here came in…it kind of makes you, doesn’t it.So what have I forgotten [consults papers]. Yeah, Mr Griffiths, did he do history? And Mr Cobham did maths, Mrs Bairsto was French, I don’t know who the typing teacher was or who the shorthand teacher was [59:11]. I don’t know whether the shorthand teacher was the one I went back to at night school. Did a bit at night school, and they’re on here now. Who’s the headteacher? [consulting papers]

HH Was it Mr Naylor?

MC Mr Naylor. Yes. I wonder if he was the one that took maths. I thought it was Mr Cobham. Somebody’ll know, won’t they. Some of these’ll have taught the boys. [indicating a list of teachers on a printed document]

HH Mr Tookey – Jack Smith talked about him…

KV Oh yes, we’ve heard of Mr Tookey.

MC Did you come here? [59:57]

KV No, we’ve heard of some of these teachers from…

HH Can I have a look at this leaflet?

MC They’ve got a lot of ‘Esquires’ after them, haven’t they?

KV Did you have much chance for any extra curricular activities, or was it just, you had to get on the bus back home?

MC Bus back, in my case. I can’t remember doing anything after school, like sports or anything.

KV Was there a canteen or anything here, what did you do at lunchtime?

MC Oh, there was a canteen, I remember the canteen, I can smell it now – cabbage! Boiled cabbage! Anybody else mention that?

KV I can’t remember.

MC School dinners again, you know. I’m glad you’ve mentioned that, I’ve got a very vivid memory with us – long tables like this, full of kids. Windows going on to, I think it must be the railway or something, and on the window ledge, they always put the puddings out, it was usually something stewed with custard on, and when you got it, it had flecks of soot… **[1:01:16]**

HH Oh no! Blown in from the window…

MC **Well, through the window, I presume it was from the railway or some industrial chimney.** That’s a vivid memory. The other one, is chewing your blotting paper, making little things and firing them at ceiling, see if they’d stick, you’ve done that, have you? With a ruler?

HH Yes, we used to do that at school.

MC We used to get – Oh we got lines, for not use…wearing…oh yes! Many times, you’d take your hat off, didn’t you, when you were out. **We must have gone out of school at some stage, round… we must have been allowed out, because I got lines for not wearing my hat. It was a beret, and then some of them had a little Panama I think, which I can’t remember wearing, I don’t think I ever... “I must wear my hat when I’m out…” hundreds of lines, you know, and you’re writing – that’s perhaps where I learnt to write well, quick, quick writing, but fancy getting a job for good handwriting!** They could read it at Doctors. I don’t know if I’ve anything else to tell you really.

HH to KV Was it Elaine who says she remembers putting her beret on the lions heads when they left, you know the lion…Griffin-type sculpture that’s on the main doors? [MC No.] Yes, she recalled that – put your beret on the lion when you left.

MC Oh did she?

HH They did, what year was Elaine there?

MC Yes, they’d be glad to get out, er, yes. So I worked at James Askew, then I got married, I think I’ve told you most of the stuff really, and a bit extra…

HH I’ve got something to show you, I’ve got a photograph of your name in the Annual Report, I’ve got it on my phone.

MC Oh it’s my past coming back to me is it? I wanted to ask you if you’ve got any school photos, did we ever have a class photo at all? I can never remember seeing one.

KV No, that’s odd isn’t it. I don’t recall anything.

MC No.

KV …and is it true that the boys and girls never met?

MC No, we didn’t, never met. This must have been the only time [indicates the sports day leaflet] I notice that there’s boys…

KV Did you have separate lunch times or…

MC I can’t remember having any boys in the Refactory we called it, The Refactory! Have you heard that before, has anybody told you that? It’s just come to me, the Refactory, and it smelt to me of boiled cabbage. It was massive! I don’t know whereabouts in the school it was, obviously somewhere in that old section. The other thing I’ve from school days – it was the very first time I had ever seen, and I presume it was an Indian, turban. We had to go to an office to get a new pen or pencil, or whatever had worn out…have I not told you before? They were very skinny with the pencils. And obviously, there were all these other students coming from abroad well, after the war, wouldn’t it? And I remember seeing this man walking, and he had a massive turban, he might have been from China, or the east, [KV Yes, India or somewhere?] Africa, or India or somewhere, yes, he had a big turban on, you know, the whole thing, and he were black, and I’d never seen a black person in my life before. He was just walking along corridor, and he went, you know…So I never knew – there was B1 and B2, there must have been A1 and A2, so there’d be, what, a hundred and odd children coming in every year, wouldn’t there. Oh it was all new to me, every bit of it. And the hockey, I liked playing hockey, but getting the uniform, the kit, everything was second-hand. I had second hand [ugo pads?] put on your shin pads. I was never goalie. I was very good at running, I was on the left wing, and bullying off, and all that sort of stuff. Did you play hockey?

HH Yes, I wasn’t very good. I liked it when we did it indoors, we had an indoor sports hall. Because the floor of that is completely smooth, it’s a lot easier, than on the grass.

MC Oh yes. It was all on the grass. I was in Tom Finney’s left wing thing. It was Tom Finney, he was left wing, a footballer, wasn’t he? I watched him a few times, yes. So, it was a very good experience for me really, I didn’t seem to have any problems at all. I was quiet, at the back of the class, but my friend that I mentioned before, Mabel Ratcliffe, she’s now Mabel Heaton, she lives in Blackburn, she’s a month or two older than me. We made friends here, and I know she used to go on holiday with her parents, up in the Lake District. She once, I think she paid for me to go on a bus from Starch House Square in Preston, I don’t know where that is now, is it under one of these university things? There was a bus company, and they drove us up to the Lake District, and I went for a day out to visit her in the Lake District there. And we stayed friends since. Some years ago, when the Art School, I can’t think how many years ago now it was, I found out it was being closed, and I asked somebody here, I’ve no idea who it was, now, at this stage, if I could have a look round it, because it was where I got changed to go to sports, and I must have gone every week I think, and lads in the football no doubt, I was interested to see it, so we got a tour round, and Mabel came on that tour, and several other people from all over, came and had a look round it., but it was a sad… very sad looking in there. What are they doing with it now?

KV It’s – they are doing something with it. Somebody’s bought it and there was an Open Day a couple of months ago. I went down, and the architects had some drawings, so it’s going to be a bit of a Community Centre, exhibition space. I think they are going to have almost like a bit of a hotel at the back, with rooms, but it is in a dreadful condition now, but I think that there are plans to do something with it.

MC Yeah, so the people who’ve bought it, have let it go to rack and ruin have they, they’ve not done anything with it.

KV Seems like it.

MC That’s a shame. There’s a lot of these old…I spent a lot of time, even when I was at Askews, we used to get an hour and a quarter for lunch, and I’d bring something my mother had made for me, and eat it in the canteen, and then go out, round parks, I wasn’t one for going round shops, I spent a lot of time also going into the Harris Museum, looking round there. It was very quiet, nobody bothered you, you just went round and had a look. Did you do that?

HH Yes.

MC And library. We didn’t go in library much, but – reading room, I don’t know whether it’s still there? They’ve been working on it.

HH It looks like they’re taking down the scaffolding.

MC Are they?

HH On the outside anyway. It’s not opening until next year though I don’t think.

MC Is it not? Ah right. I avoid coming into Preston because of the parking and the traffic’s…they’re shutting it down here aren’t they, this road? Closing it for normal traffic.

KV Yes Friargate is now closed off.

MC Has that gone totally bus.

KV It’s pedestrianised now, most of it.

MC Is it?

KV I think we’ve probably grilled you enough, thank you. [1:10:50]