

Seanchas Ìle

HERITAGE ARCHIVE

Bowmore in the old days

JS: John Stewart

EE: Emily Edwards

EE: Will you tell me about where you were born and brought up?

JS: Well, I was born in *Creagan na Peighinne* [Rocks of the Penny Land], that's between Bowmore and Bridgend. We were smiths, my father was a blacksmith and I went...I was born there and I was brought up there.

EE: Uh-huh.

JS: That's the first...well...the start ?...

EE: Càite a bheil sin?

JS: *Creagan na Peighinne*

EE: *Creagan na Peighinne*, where is that exactly?

JS: That it, between Bowmore and Bridgend, just half way between Bowmore and Bridgend. That's where it is.

EE: And were there many there at the time? Were many people living there at the time?

JS: In Bowmore?

EE: Uh-huh.

JS: Well, I came to live in Bowmore, well, after the war I came to live or about then...

EE: Oh right, uh-huh.

JS:...After the time of the war...

EE: And where did you go to school?

JS: Oh I went to Bowmore school and...

EE: And were there many in the school at that time?

JS: There were a lot in the school at that time, there were a lot, Bowmore school was a place that took many [pupils] in and they were coming from

every ? and every field around Bridgend as well, they were taking in from every place like that.

EE: Aye uh-huh, and how many teachers were in the school?

JS: Oh well, I couldn't say [??] at all what was there but there was a good number of teachers. And the first one I knew, Bryce was his name and that was...after that Winnard came and...he married here and he stayed here agus he married, he was a Welshman agus he stayed here and he married a woman here...They had a family, the same thing again, they would speak English, yes, yes.

EE: Yes. So you didn't get Gaelic at school?

JS: Well, I had Gaelic originally agus when I went to school I had to learn English.

EE: yes.

JS: But there were many, they had English when they went to school and that's how it was at the time, I was raised with Gaelic and now they have Gaelic if they choose to take it at the primary school in Bowmore, if they choose to take it on...There was a lot of work going on in this place at that time. There were tailors, dress-makers, distillery workers, and some were repairing shoes, and butchers and bakers and hardware stores, the dairies, photographers, there were blacksmiths, chemists, car hirers and the hotels. It was a busy place, yes, at that time but now everything has changed since then. There were lots of shops and now we only have the Co-op, and they are well stocked and we make a lot of use of the place...But in the time when there were small shops, they had vans and they were sent around the countryside selling their things.

EE: Aye.

JS: Sometimes, there were some who would take eggs for paying for the groceries that they got. Like the barter system.

EE: Aye.

JS: They brought the eggs back to the shop and sold them again, that's the way things went at the time.

EE: Aye.

JS: And today everything comes in in containers on those roll on roll off ferries and that helps a lot, that was a good thing for [island] life. There is no handling of the groceries or anything that, you take you get it just the way it left Glasgow or that sort of place.

EE: And you said that the boats came into the Lochandal?

JS: Oh yes, yes the boats came in with...well at that time they came in to the loch, they would call into Bruichladdich, they had a store in Bruichladdich and

lots of stuff would be brought there, stuff that would go all over the Rhinns and throughout the island and to this side of the island. And the boat would come to this harbour and, what do they call it, with the lighter they would call it. It would come out and it took the things in to Bowmore. They had a lorry that would take it...this stuff around the shops at that time, oh yes, yes.

EE: That's interesting...And it was said...Did most people speak Gaelic at that time when you were young?

JS: Most people spoke Gaelic, most people spoke Gaelic but like most other things they would learn English and many strangers were coming in and you had to speak English to them at that time. The Gaelic decreased a lot in the, back in the thirties, the start of the thirties. There were many coming in...between Bowmore and Bridgend, it started to be quite a Lowland place because lots of golfers were coming in and tourists and well, as they call it [?] they were coming on trips and there was a pair from Glasgow and a pair from Paisley and the thing was going all summer. And there was a golf course up at Gartmain and many people gathered there and they would be from Bowmore and Bridgend and around where they would be staying...throughout the entire place, they would be gathering at the golf course and going around there it was, as they would say, quite a popular place!

EE: And the people that came to play golf, were they well off people? Quite well off people?

JS: Oh yes yes, most of them stayed around Bridgend, I don't know if it's upper class that you would call them! (*laughing*)

EE: Yes, yes and where would they come from? Glasgow?

JS: All over the place, all over the country and some of them came down from England as well. Many came at that time. Yes. And I used to go around, at the time my father looked after the golf course and at that time I would be a young boy going around and looking to see that the greens were clean in the morning because the sheep would lie on them and they would dirty them terribly! (*laughing*) And I had to go around with a shovel and big sweep to clear them so they would be fit as they said, for the people coming around. Generally, I would be meeting them about the road and there were a lot of young people there.

EE: What age were you when you were doing that, that work?

JS: Well I was only quite young, about ten or twelve, well twelve years old or about that, I was going around...Yes and they would, I would be meeting them sometimes, I would be going around letting some of them see around the course for golf, what way they had to the ball...there were markers and they had to keep to one or other side of it and they would be right for the green and...

EE: Did you ever play golf yourself?

JS: Oh no

EE: Oh you didn't.

JS: I would do a little...a little was done, I would work on putting and things like that but I didn't ever go in for anything like that.

EE: An what job did you have after leaving school?

JS: After school, well, I went to joinery, I worked at joinery and I kept at that and I'm still keeping my hand in doing jobs. I was working, there were many houses that were built here throughout the years, I was at many of those houses.

EE: In Bowmore?

JS: In Bowmore and Port Ellen and Portnahaven...

EE: Oh all over the island.

JS: And Port Charlotte, I was [working] all over the place. I was working, the men that were coming in to build houses, I was working with them. And, well, I did that, as they say I did a turn!

EE: So you've lived on Islay most of your life?

JS: O yes, yes I was living here, I had a house up in the town, up at Flora Street as they call it. I lived there. Well, at the time of the war I got married, but the woman I married, it was English that she had and well, the children lost the Gaelic...because of this Gaelic wasn't spoken in the house. I haven't spoken Gaelic for more than sixty years.

EE: Well you've still got it!

JS: I'm trying, I went up to this Columba Centre just to try pick it up again but to speak Gaelic to people again and to pick it up again. Over the years you lose a lot of words, if you don't use it to speak, but everything now as they say is so Anglicised. That's the way of it.