

Interviewee: Catriona Wells (CW)	Interviewer: Margaret Smith (MS)
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MS: So this is June the 13th 2014 and my name's Margaret Smith I'm a field worker with the Dumfries Project and I'm here to interview...

CW: My name is Catriona Wells, always called Cate at work, date of birth twenty-five one 1946, I was born in Southern General Hospital Govan, or 'Go-van' if you were to be [?] Glasgow [*laughter*] I stayed in Glasgow until I was about fourteen with Grannies, two sets of Grannies, and then I came down to Lockerbie to live with my dad and I really thought I'd died and gone to heaven, cause I loved Lockerbie. I left school really quite early I didn't stay on although I had passed for secondary school in Glasgow, I never really picked up my studies here as well as I should have, so I went to work in Laidlaws the Chemist until I was seventeen and a half, and I started to think was this what I wanted out of life? And I knew it wasn't, so it was either the police force or nursing, and nursing appealed the most, so I went for my interview and was interviewed by Julie Hutt, who was a very severe but also a kindly lady.

MS: Can I ask what attracted you to nursing rather than the police force?

CW: Well I suppose the idea . . . well, dad always used to say, "They're very necessary Catriona, but nobody really truly likes them." He says people, which isn't true cause I've got a few friends that are police personnel, but I think the idea of giving back, and I always liked when I was in the chemist, I loved working with particularly the elderly and helping them with you know if they had any queries, asking the pharmacist to come and talk to them, so it seemed a kind of logical progression, also I learned about drugs and drug interaction, so I thought that's gonna be useful. Because when I started nursing and I recognised the drugs and I had a rough idea what they were for, so that was a start.

MS: So you were interviewed by Miss Julie?

CW: Yes, with her Pekingese dog!

MS: Oh did she!

CW: She did! Aye, and I think my first ward . . . I don't think I know, we went to Charmwood and it was dear Davy Shankland who was our tutor in fact we were Davy's first PTS.

MS: Oh were you?

CW: As he always said my first PTS and I'm still getting over it!

MS: And PTS being a preliminary training school for nurses.

CW: And then if you remember Margaret there was a wee classroom at the bottom of the corridor before you went up to the medical wards, so when we were kinna . . . I canny remember how it worked out but you'd be in there somedays and before you even went into classroom you had to go up and help in the wards from seven till eight or roundabout or half seven till half eight, and so that

was just gradually weaning us into . . . but I mean they made us work you know, making up beds, helping with patients, the usual emptying bed pans and getting the teeth out and things like that, and then my first ward was with Sally Smith, super Sally Smith, ward three kids ward, and I wasn't particularly happy with . . . not unhappy but the toddlers you know they were starting to develop a personality, so I would nip off to the nursery and I would spend my whole shift . . . I would ask if I could go because it was everybody's favourite place, and I remember there might have been six wee babbies, and you started off washing you know wash feed settle and by the time you got to the last one it was time to . . . and then you had to make up their wee formula milk and put it in the fridge, so I done that, what would it be? Maybe six or eight weeks maybe three months I can't remember, but I remember my first ward because it was so nice, and so nice to be with her, she was a nurturing sister I would have said, and then I just worked through my training and I enjoyed it, there was one night in particular I was . . . in those days they put . . . they had student nurses in charge of wards, which was very daunting and in truth shouldn't have happened, and I remember Dad running me up to the nurses home to get changed to go on duty and I was crying. "What's wrong?" I says, "I'm frightened Dad, I don't know if I'm going to cope or not." "Of course you'll cope," he says for I'd be about second coming onto third year, and I got in the ward and I was on with another good lass, Anne [Holt] and there was always ward orderlies, and I think Jack Love, you couldn't get a better team than that and once we got in there I was fine, but it was just the thought of being in charge cause of course in these days there was no intensive care, so you got your very acute your overdoses your MI's, your severe CVA's everything, right into the wards. And I enjoyed surgical as well and I loved outpatients, and then the final day when we were waiting for our final results and I got the letter through and I couldn't open it, Tommy Curry remember the famous Tommy? Oh I says, "Tommy open this letter." So Tommy opened this letter and I'd passed and I remember giving him a cuddle and dancing up the ward you know! And . . . oh it was just great, and it's given me a great life.

MS: Ok, thanks for that Cate, now I'm particularly wanting you . . . because I know you worked at Lochmaben Hospital as was the old hospital, so can you maybe tell us about how you came to be working at Lochmaben and your memories of that?

CW: Yes, well in fact in 1974 my marriage broke up, and I didn't want to stay in Dumfries, so I managed to get digs for my daughter and I in Lockerbie, prior to that I'd went to Lochmaben to be interviewed by Mrs Edwards, and she offered me a job as staff nurse, so I started in ward one as staff nurse, and I was there for quite a few years thoroughly enjoyed it, loved the elderly, one of my greatest regrets is that they took care of the elderly from the NHS, because we were intent on getting them well and home, and with respect the private sector are there for an income, I'm sorry if that's political but that's how I feel. And we did get quite a few home or we allowed them to realise their full potential, and it was a good . . . it was very satisfying and then the post of night sister came up, and I should say . . . sorry I should backtrack a wee bit when I went to Lochmaben there was a . . . as you come up the long driveway ward one was the one on the right that looked over the bowling green, behind that was the admin block . . . sorry the nurses home and the matron's office, in the middle was the admin block and x-ray, up the back was the old fever hospital was still existent, then you had ward two so ward one was all male, ward two was male and female, and ward five was female I think, then behind that they had the orthopaedic ward which was still running.

MS: Oh right.

CW: So they were still doing orthopaedic operations they were still doing bronchoscopies, the physicians were out at least once a week to check their patients, the orthopaedic surgeons also came

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out, and it was really a busy . . . when I went there there would have been about a hundred and twenty beds, then the gradually reduced it over a period of time, so we ended up with wards one, two and five, I think the x-ray block still stood . . . the x-ray admin block, the Clayson rooms were there which was a day hospital come well, rec hall, whatever you like, but then I got the post as night sister, then Annan Hospital came up and I applied for the job as nursing officer there and I was fortunate enough to get it so that would be in '87. So I was there from '74 till '87, seen a lot of changes, and maybe not always for the best either on reflection. Because I still think there is (although a lot of people would disagree) but there is . . . if community hospitals were used correctly, would . . . it's a super intermediary service between discharge and getting home, or allowing some of the frail ones to live their . . . see the rest of their days there.

MS: When you were then you were on night duty, what kinna staff team did you work with?

CW: Well I would actually make myself as a . . . I would go round the wards helping initially, so there would be one trained two auxiliary per ward. I actually stopped them going out in the middle of the night cause they had to go across to the dining room and I didn't think it was safe for staff to wander across there, so if they really wanted to I never stopped them but I said I would strongly advise that you don't wander about there in the dark. So I said by all means bring in your packed lunches or whatever you want you know but no wandering about in the dark. They were good staff, they were great staff.

MS: So what kinna stories have you got . . . ?

CW: Oh lots of stories but, one old boy, a dear old boy, a Glaswegian and he had a son that was very caring of him you know he would come up quite regularly, and when the night staff came on this old dear would say, "You get me a sweetie dear?", he would say. "Of course we will [?]" and did you mention tho the day nurses?" "Whit!" he said, "It'd be easier getting the Queen Mother to visit the [coocans?] [*laughter*] And then there was another old boy that kept a diary, which really . . . the stuff in it was comical to say the least you know but his observations were really quite priceless! There was just some wonderful characters, great characters, I'm trying to think what other ones. There was another old boy, and his wife would come and sit at the end of the bed, he was frail you know, and she would sit knitting away and she would look up and see his . . . "How are ye?" [?] "Ach," she says, "I think he'll trach on a while yet!" He's lying there on the bed listening to her! Ach, so many stories.

MS: What kinna thing did the staff get up to, at Lochmaben then?

CW: Well they were . . . they used tae . . . well Miss, or matron, or nurse Wills at the time, Mrs McMichael, liked us to get into recreational activities with them, so when we went on at night, we would maybe have a wee sing song or a wee entertainment thing, but you've got to remember these were all folk that were sitting up most of the day in those ghastly geriatric chairs wi' the table fronts that . . . and by the time we were on nights they were exhausted. But we always took the time when we took each one to their toilet first or to their beds, to have a bit time with them and a bit laugh with them, there was lots of laughs, not at them, with them. And there was concerts

sometimes in the wards which wisny so bad, I never really particularly liked . . . although I've no doubt it was done with the best of intentions but I didn't like them being taken out and you know . . . but to me we'd entertain them when we could, and also on the medicine trolley we had our drinks trolley, so each of them had a wee bottle on the tray on the bottom, so a lot of them preferred their wee nip to a night's sedation. Their names were on the bottles.

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MS: And that had all been approved by the medical staff?

CW: Oh yes, aye oh yes. They'd get their wee dram maybe a wee whiskey or whatever and it did help them sleep, it did help them sleep. And it was just nice. The night staff . . . in fact, I'm slightly prejudiced but they were a really superb bunch of . . . as were all the staff day and nights, they were good girls.

MS: So did you have much contact with day staff, I know you had a handover but was that about it?

CW: I suppose basically yes, I mean it was a long shift it was eight till eight in the morning that's a twelve hour shift, it was a long shift, and you handed over and it was a matter of principle that you handed over a clean tidy ward, laundry bags were filled, tied off ready for out, bed spaces were left tidy you know? If there had been any accidents let's say in the carpet (because at that time the wards were carpeted) we did swap care but we also left sheets, you know kleenex rolls so that the cleaners when they come in would know where there had been . . . and actually one of the things I did which wisny actually my remit, on a nice mild night if the wards were fairly quiet I used to take the geriatric chairs out onto the veranda and scrub them and hose them down, get a row for that off the domestic, eh supervisor, but my answer was well you girls dinny have the time you know, if we're quiet, once they're all settled it didn't bother me to do that, and just . . .

MS: I guess staff were there for quite a long time?

CW: Oh yes.

MS: Did that present any difficulties, or how did new staff integrate with staff that had been there a long time?

CW: Well I've never actually known . . . personality clash you mean?

MS: Mmh.

CW: I can't really say that there was ever . . . there was such a rare turnover, you know that everybody knew everybody and knew their ways and, there was one particular auxiliary, a nice girl, but a ponderous kind of girl, and one of the wee . . . her wee chum . . . the wee auxiliary's used to pretend she was winding her up, [*laughter*] it wisny that she needed it you know, now everybody works at the same pace. There wis new staff but I think they were pretty quickly taken into the body of the . . . aye.

MS: You mentioned a bit about the social life, but I do understand that there was a . . . was there not a pantomime or something?

CW: Oh yes.

MS: Tell us a wee bit about that?

CW: Well we used to have a, it was a great pantomime.

MS: Who wrote it?

CW: Well, no, it was actually a variety concert to start with right? And we all done our bits, so the
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night nurses did their bit and the day nurses done theirs, and it was very funny, and the patients thoroughly enjoyed it you know. That went on for really, oh . . . a long long time, and then the format was changed to pantomime, which I didn't think gave the staff full reign of what they could and couldn't do you know? Saying that, it was good, it wasn't just the patients it was the relatives that came up, and they had tea and biscuits or scones or whatever and it was a real family affair, it was good, it was really good.

MS: So share with us some of the things you were involved in?

CW: Well there was . . . myself and the three sisters, did we do the Andrew Sisters singing 'Sisters' you know? We had bless the mister that comes between our sister! And then wee Jean McLean, Gina, and Betty, they did a Gilbert and Sullivan thing, wee little . . . what was it again? No it was The Mikado, that was funny, and I think one of the ones I did I was behind a screen and I was blethering away and I was flinging you know underwear over the line which kind of given a . . . course when they took the screen away I had a (I don't smoke) but I had the fag hanging out anyway and hair up in a turban and the peenie on doing the family ironing! That got a laugh. [laughter] Aw just . . . and then we had a float in the Gala which we all took part in.

MS: Oh did you?

CW: Aye. And that was great fun but we made our wee kinna harem costumes you know? And one of the girls she was the sheik, and she's lying out on the . . . I think it was a trolley actually she was on, when I think about it now! Oh we had fun, aye, it was a team, it was very much a team, I felt it very much, and you shared in their good times and you shared in their bad times as well you know.

MS: What were some of the bad times?

CW: Well, some you know that lost somebody dear to them you know? Or one of their children had a bairn you know it was celebration and you know it was always like being (mind you no all families are close) but it was almost like being a big family you know? And if somebody came in with something bothering them, I think the camaraderie helped, just to know that folk were there no to be judgemental just to listen, and just be there for them basically.

MS: What about the involvement in the local community?

CW: Yes oh we had very good league of friends, an excellent league of friends, and most of them were Lochmaben community, and they're still running, they're still going strong, and I understand

they're still the same ones that are in it, and they're an excellent league of friends, I read the wee minutes of their meetings in the Lockerbie paper I think they still meet once a month.

MS: Do they?

CW: And they do a lot of good, they fundraise and they do a lot of good. They try and get speakers, you know they used to . . . well it was our role, not my role as night sister but it was the role of the nursing officer to go, attend the meetings and give them an update of what was going on in the hospital, and was there any specific thing you needed, say one of the ward tellies was on the blink you know you'd say well if you could manage a way to maybe help fund that that would be good, or if you needed maybe as basic a thing as duvets which was a help or duvet covers, because the actual funding for the hospital has a . . . you know there's a finite . . . it's not a bottomless purse, so anything they could do to make things nicer was . . . and they did they were great they were really

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good.

MS: Can I ask what happened to patients that died during the night?

CW: Well, as a nurse Margaret you'll know that nurses are not allowed to . . . say this patient has . . . so the patient has obviously, obviously appeared to have passed away we advise the doctor that this patient appears to have passed away, and the patient was kept in a single ward where possible until the morning or whenever the doctor come up to certify, then the wards were screened off so that nobody could actually see [?] they were certified.

MS: So then they were uplifted by the undertaker?

CW: And they had a mortuary of their own then, a wee metal hut up the hill.

MS: Was that still used then?

CW: Oh yes.

MS: Was it?

CW: Uh huh, oh yes aye, and the trolley was just an ordinary trolley but it had a metal lid and you just covered it with a sheet or a blanket so that it wasny too obvious.

MS: So patients, or the deceased were not transferred in the middle of the night it was always during the day to the mortuary?

CW: Yes, aye.

MS: Ok, what about . . . you've mentioned quite a bit about the nursing staff and the medical staff you had different people coming out to the hospital and different consultants is that right?

CW: That's right.

MS: What about porters?

CW: Oh we had grand . . . we had good porters they were very much part of the scene, they took away the laundry bags, brought the clean laundry in, brought the dinner trolley over, just generally . . . although there wouldn't appear to be a lot of work needing done they were always kept busy, and again, pleasant fellas. And at that time there was two gardeners employed.

MS: Was there?

CW: Yes, aye, and there was two porters, Tommy and Billy and they were really . . .

MS: Oh gosh.

CW: Aye, oh yeah I mean it was a . . . when you think about it a hundred and twenty beds that was . . .

MS: So we've got a picture on this book '*History of Lochmaben Hospital*', so a lot of these buildings
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were no longer there?

CW: Oh well that's actually residential that house is still there, that . . . now let me think. That's the Clayson Rooms, that was an admin block, no no that was residential that was flats, Dr Rae and sometimes some nurses lived in there.

MS: Right.

CW: I think that must have been knocked down cause I don't know that bit. That was the nurses home that was at . . . admin block and there that's x-ray, so x-ray admin block and theatre were all in the one, that was ward two, ward five, and that there would be the . . . there was a kiddies a school for children, now I never knew whether that was for kiddies that had been afflicted by TB or whether their mums and dads or mum was in here, and therefore they were . . . I never got to the bottom of that one.

MS: Right. But these were not in use during your time?

CW: No, no.

MS: So this was still all the gardens though, that had to be maintained, so there was a lot of . . . quite a size.

CW: A lot, aye, and of course that's the bowling green there, and now it's just a residential . . .

MS: It's changed.

CW: The new hospitals's that way.

MS: Yeah, ok. So coming out of Lochmaben, reflecting on your experience in Lochmaben Hospital, what would you say was the impact on you?

CW: I think the reports of treating every individual as a person, and a personality in their own right. Hoping to ensure that any visitors going in wouldn't know that there was any level of incontinence, by, you know, your olfactory senses telling you as soon as you went into a ward so these were things . . . I liked the idea of the . . . making their lives full but within the bounds of the hospital, we were fortunate we could do that, cause we had a lovely big dayroom-come-sitting room which allowed us to do that. Personalise things, you know try to make sure they had their own wee bits and pieces about them. And we had a weekly programme of all beds stripped, which they were anyway if . . . but every Tuesday it was, we would strip and wash the mattresses spray the linen with either lavender oil or a rosewater so that they were . . . cause I liked the idea of them being in a clean environment, and I would go into the dayroom with the cleaners and wash all the chairs doon and make sure the cushion covers were washed, because it was really . . . to give them a place that you would be happy to live in as much as them. We also got a greenhouse but it was unfortunately never used, I asked for a greenhouse to be built, and they had a gym too, which they didn't . . . well they did get physio but it was done on the ward, so it didn't really give them any level of privacy, so there was things that you could . . . that you had the ability to do which you couldn't do in an old build, you know, and we had monthly meetings of the staff to put forward their ideas and any ones that were feasible we took on board, and I always remember Miss Ritchie telling me, "One of the best ideas I ever got was from an auxiliary nurse."

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MS: Was it?

CW: She said, "So simple, when you think about it, so simple and so easy applied and yet I never thought about it but she did," so all their ideas, you know we printed minutes o' the meetings and any good ideas we took on board.

MS: So what was the idea can you remember?

CW: She never told me, no she never told me but it was a simple . . . it was just a simple thing she said, and it probably would have taken an auxiliary to think about it because we might have thought we were too high powered for such . . . you know? But Anne had a lot of time for her boss, her late boss she was firm but fair, firm but fair. And I had a good wee sister there too you know, a grand wee sister.

MS: Ok I think we will come to a close now unless you've anything else that you wish to add?

CW: No the only thing I would say, my very first knowledge of Lochmaben was going in the bus into Dumfries from [?] and seeing all the TB patients lying out on the veranda with the waterproof . . . the big rubber macs over them you know, and I remember thinking oh poor souls, but of course I didn't understand that was the best treatment for them.

MS: At that time.

CW: And I remember thinking it looked a nice wee place! And I had happy happy years there, and as I say I met a lot of nice people who I would still class as friends.

MS: Well what more can you say, and that's a nice positive note to end on, thank you very much Cate.

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