

Interviewee(s): Catharine Knight (CK)	Interviewer(s): Lorna Lewis (LL)
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REGION	East Lothian
TOWN	Musselburgh

0h 00m 00s

LL: Mrs Catharine Knight, tape two, track one. Now, we were talking there, before the tape ran out, about these two characters. Ye had Chessy and ye had Scotty.

CK: And Scotty... who was... wasn't a nice character but always was very popular with Musselburgh boys and especially the Loretto boys. I don't know why but they- they used to feed him on drink and it was a shame, ye know. And he would go very, very wild. Oh, he was... I often wondered what to him, ye know. He was, em... I didn't like him as a character at all but Scotty came about and he must've lived enough, ye see. Every night. We've had several people like that, ye know, but... latterly they disappear, I don't know where.

LL: When ye say the Loretto boys gave him drink...?

CK: Oh well, we'd better not say that [*laughter*]. No. They would give him money-

LL: Ahh.

CK: -to go and buy drink. That would be it. Give him money. But they used tae give him something to eat, if they had sausage rolls or anything like that and he was always at a Loretto match. He was- Scotty always went to the Loretto boys' matches.

LL: The rugby matches?

CK: Yes. But whether he had some connection with that, I don't know. But he was well known among the Loretto boys of that time, oh yes. Scotty.

LL: So, he just sort of came and went?

CK: He just came and went, uhuh. Yes.

LL: Now, at what time can you remember these two characters being in Musselburgh? How old would you have been at that time?

CK: Oh, well, eh...

LL: Were you a child or...?

CK: Five years old. About five years old. Well, let's say about nineteen, it would be about... nineteen... No, how old would I be? I think-

LL: Five years old? You-

CK: Yes, about five years old

0h 02m 00s

LL: Yes.

CK: Yes.

LL: So, you're talking just about 1902?

CK: Yes.

LL: Thereabouts?

CK: Yes. Yeah, 1902. Uhuh.

LL: You can remember seeing the two people...

CK: Uhuh, uhuh.

LL: At about that time?

CK: But I know Chessy was at the head of procession at... ye know, we have a twenty-one year old celebration? Well, he was at two of these, so he must- he was old, he was quite old when he died, ye know, and he did die and I don't know what... where they buried him or anything but his mother was born in the poorhouse, I know that, and he was reared there. What they did about schooling for him, I do not know.

LL: Perhaps he didn't get any?

CK: Poor wee thing. A pathetic little thing. But he was always undersized, just a wee monkey. Just looked like a little monkey. And- but he had an alert mind, that one. He could... he could do [?] of a shilling and do you out quite well, ye know. But there was a great joke with him one time. He... he used to... what was it my father said about Chessy? He said 'Chessy, ye... what are ye going to do to yourself this morning?'. He... he says 'I hear ye've been getting into trouble with some o the... the farmers or something. With the horses'. 'Aye', he says, 'but ask them who started it. Ask them who...' – kicking him, ye see. 'Ask them who started it'. But there was nothing in it, ye know.

LL: But he was fighting for himself, he was sticking up for himself.

CK: Oh yes.

LL: So, he wasn't that simple?

CK: No, no, that's... oh yes, because he did in a friend of ours... a lot of cinders. He used to- I tell you, he had one job and that was at the gasworks, to take bags of cinders tae people's houses. So, mother asked him to bring four bags of cinders to this friend.

0h 04m 03s

Well, he pocketed the money but he never delivered the cinders. We never saw him again. So, that's the type he was. But, eh, just a... och aye, just a wee character, right enough. Sort of... but he was a character, as far as I remember about him. Chessy. George Chestnut, that was his name anyway. So, he must've had a name of some sort [*laughter*]. Aw dear. I don't think we have people like that today. I don't think any...

LL: No, no.

CK: No. We had Jimmy o the Cowp – that was another one. Jimmy o the Cowp. He used to sleep among the tins and things, over there, just at night. Oh, terrible.

LL: On a refuse dump?

CK: Jimmy of the Cowp, he was called. Just sleep there. In fact, my husband has a picture of him yet, I think ye've seen it, lying sleeping among the tins, with one boot off.

LL: Aw, I haven't seen that one, no.

CK: Well, eh... he used tae show that in his lectures and [?] and laugh and aw. Jimmy o the Cowp. But that's, that's how he was known among the youngsters of that generation: Jimmy o the Cowp. But these are the three characters that we've had: Jimmy o the Cowp, George Chestnut and Scotty [laughter]. Oh dear.

LL: Ye mentioned your husband there now.

CK: Eh?

LL: John T. Knight, your husband.

CK: Yes. Oh.

LL: Now, he was a science master, I believe, at the grammar school.

CK: Yes, he was. Yes.

LL: But he was also a very good photographer, wasn't he?

CK: Oh yes, that's the... that's the bit. He was a very keen photographer. He could've... he could... he was another man, ye see, he wouldn't take money for things. He sort of... did an awful lot of all this work he'd been showing, ye know, these beautiful pictures; he would give so many of them away and so on.

0h 06m 03s

LL: Just for the love of it?

CK: Uhuh, just for the love of it. And he did an awful lot of retouching for them and things like that. And even taking little pictures of people dead, maybe a group, and somebody would say 'aw, I would've liked a picture of ma father to remember him by'. 'Well', he says, 'bring down the print' and he would take a photograph of this one man and enlarge it, make a beautiful print and hand it to the lady. That happened I don't know how often. He was so fond of his art, ye see. So, that's the type of man he was. Och yes, ye always get nice people, ye know. That's all about it. An awful lot of people who do a lot for nothing. But, eh, he was very much respected in Musselburgh, ye know, from the time he was a boy. However...

LL: You've lived all your days in Musselburgh, haven't ye?

CK: Mm?

LL: Ye've lived all your days-

CK: Yes, uhuh. Yes, I was born in Musselburgh and I've lived all my life, except for six years down in Lakefield, opposite these trees.

LL: Yes [laughter].

CK: Isn't that awful? We left the-

LL: I don't know, it's a very nice spot, I think.

CK: [laughter] We left the other house when I was about six years old and my job was to bring the cats along in a basket. I remember that. 'You'll be careful not to let the cats out?'. I had to bring the cats along, I was always very fond of a cat. So, eh... that's all. So, that's all the-

LL: Where was that house, then, the very first-?

CK: Fisherrow, opposite the, em... where, now, the brewery's away now, at the back.

LL: Aw yes. Fishers Wynd, is it?

CK: No, it's in the other direction. Ye cross the big- the big bridge, the fancy bridge, ye know, not the [?] bridge- the... the one that's at- well, it's supposed to be taken down and put up again. Em... ye know, the big one. Eh... Fisherrow.

0h 08m 12s

LL: Mmhm.

CK: That's the one near Millhill. The one you, yes, the one you crossed when you're at Millhill, ye can get across that one or ye can get across the arm one. There's two bridges and it's this one, the big- rather a clumsy one, I think it is. It'll replace what was called a Wooden Bridge but the Wooden Bridge gave way in June of the wartime, one time and they're- they had to build a thing which is very- it's not nice. However, it was going to be used by the electricity board, ye see. Eh... another one they put up. But, oh, something's happened. There's a bridge still there, ye know. We could have this bypass through the other bit of the town but, eh... I don't know what's wrong. They've to pay through the nose for it or something and the Millhill- people in Millhill said the drains wouldn't stand the traffic and so on. So, it's- they'll open it on race days, that's the one thing, ye see, and then close it, close it after two days, after the race is over. But...

LL: So, your house was somewhere sort of New Street?

CK: Yes, that took ye straight into New Street, ye see.

LL: Yes, I'm with you.

CK: That was called New Street and Fisherrow and that's where the Fisherrow... eh, the Fishermen's Walk, they all- they join up there. That's their... their meeting house. Their mission house is down in Fisherrow, too. It's- this Fisherrow community's a very- it's a very nice, ye know. Very nice community, too.

LL: Now, your father had a shop there for a little while, didn't he? In Fisherrow, itself?

0h 10m 04s

CK: Yes, that's it, uhuh. Yes. It's called New Street but it's really Fisherrow, ye see. And away down near the, eh... oh well. It's still facing the road but you can get down to the sea very quickly from it. And it was a just- a shop that sold everything, ye see. So... he was in business there for a long time. He used to go on a Wednesday and serve there and leave my brother to look after the High Street shop, I remember that. Quite a lot. And then he got into difficulties with the fisherwomen and... with debt, ye see. So, he ultimately sold it. Sold the business and I don't know- it's juts a big lemonade shop now, it's just one o these... ye know, everything. But that's a shop I remember too. I used to go along to see a certain lady in it. She would just sit, telling me all the tales about the old days, ye know. It's a nice walk along New Street from this one. So...

LL: But ye were telling me there, when the machine was off, about your father's red hair and what the fishwives used to say to him.

CK: Oh yes, his curly hair. That 'yer awfie roused like, Robert' – Robert or Robbie, it would be – 'yer awfie roused like, yer hair's fair standin on end'. Fair standing on end, now that's an old expression. There's the cat, look at that.

LL: Yes. [?]

CK: And that beast's nearly fifteen, would you *[laughter]*...

LL: He's doing well.

CK: Pussy? Tootsie? You're not coming in yet, no. Ye can just stay out. For a wee while.

LL: But was this your father trying to... to get some money from them or...?

CK: Yes, that was the difficulty.

LL: Mmhm.

CK: Ye see, they would say 'ye can...' oh, 'give me two pounds of sugar, Robert. I'll pay ye on Monday' but their money never came. No, that's what really killed the business. So, it was disappointing, ye know.

0h 12m 12s

LL: Mm.

CK: Very disappointing but, eh... oh, we were in business for years, ye know. I used to go along a lot and drink a bottle of lemonade and it was just a general store, ye see.

LL: Yes.

CK: But the old fisher folk knew Robert Couston's business quite well. So, a few of them are left, ye see, but that's all. But that's how things come and they go. Ye know, life just keeps changing, doesn't it?

LL: But... but your father was actually a grocer in Musselburgh for a great number of years, wasn't he? He had two other shops?

CK: Oh yes. Right from the time I was... from the time I was, em... before I was born, till the time I was married. No. No, he would've retired by that time. But, em... hadn't he? How many years did it say? Did it say in the paper at any time?

LL: No. He wrote that poem in 1904, I think.

CK: Uhuh. I can remember... ye see, he must've- ye see, my brother began to carry on the other shop, the High Street, the other High Street shop, after a certain time but...

LL: Mm.

CK: There's nothing in it. It was still in business during all the time he was writing poetry.

LL: 1906. Sorry, I made a mistake. 1906, I think he'd written that poem.

CK: Oh.

LL: 'Me and Andra'.

CK: He wrote 'Me and Andra' in 1906?

LL: 1906.

CK: Gracious.

LL: Well, at least, Andrew Carnegie is replying to it in 1906.

CK: Oh, I see. Well, it could... it must've been just before it.

LL: I think so.

CK: Uhuh.

LL: I think so.

CK: And I was just a little girl, ye see. I remember quite well the fuss there was at the time, ye see, people coming in and wanting copies. I'm sure he's... he got about five hundred copies, a lot printed for himself. An awful lot went to America.

LL: Of this particular card?

CK: Yes, uhuh.

LL: Mm.

CK: They seemed to revere Andrew Carnegie in America very much at that time, ye see. So, I know he sold... they all sold an awful lot abroad. But oh well, things come and they come and they go, ye know. And nowadays, ye know, Musselburgh people put different values on things but I don't know, the... I've seen the day when they would've made a great fuss in the paper, the *Musselburgh News*, about ma father but nowadays they'd rather take a sportsman or somebody who's done something in the... in the running line, ye see.

LL: Yes, yes.

CK: Sort of-

LL: But also, there's always somebody who's interested.

CK: Yes, always somebody interested.

LL: Yes, yes.

CK: And he's had his day, there's no question about that. He's had his day.

LL: Well... there again, as I was telling you earlier...

CK: Mm.

LL: That particular card or a copy of it-

CK: Oh yes.

LL: -was in the Andrew Carnegie exhibition just this summer in the Reference Library.

CK: Oh yes, uhuh.

LL: So, he's still being remembered in a...

CK: Oh yes, yes.

LL: In some sort of way.

CK: I'm very glad they've got that, ye know. It's... I must let my- my nephew in Perth hasn't seen it yet. He hasn't been through for a long time because he was ill for a while too, that's the beekeeper.

0h 16m 00s

LL: So, he'll be quite pleased to have a look at this now that we've returned it to you. On that point-

CK: Mmhm. Yes, I'm glad to have it back. I think I'll keep that one out particularly and put the other photos away. I don't know what I'll do with them. Is there any you've kept back?

LL: No, I've returned everything to you now.

CK: Mmhm.

LL: We'll go through them in a moment.

CK: I don't want them. I mean, ye can have anything ye want, ye know, but, eh...

LL: Well, I think that it's good that ye get them back. We've copied them.

CK: Uhuh.

LL: And... we can maybe think again another time. But I'd like you to have them back so ye can have a look at them.

CK: Yes, uhuh.

LL: Yes.

CK: Aye.

LL: On that point, I'd like to thank you very much indeed-

CK: Oh, well [*laughter*].

LL: -about your father. I think it's a wonderful connection with Musselburgh and Andrew Carnegie.

CK: Yes, it certainly is. That's the two places. And the fact he was born in Torryburn. They're very proud of the fact- they're very proud of him, I know that, in Torryburn. Eh... and I thought in Dunfermline too, ye see, but we stopped getting the *Dunfermline Press* but... they were certainly Fife people, ye see. So... and that's all people know about you after all. The generations come and they come and they go and they wonder who on earth you are and so on. Ye see, people now are even beginning to remember- they still remember my sister teaching. She's a very beloved teacher among them, very painstaking and, eh... she taught Latin and English and she took a great interest in the pupils but ultimately the pupils got beyond her.

LL: Mm.

CK: Absolutely beyond her. They made her ill. And as they've done to many other teachers... the teaching's different altogether, ye see. The same old story. Things change so much and methods of teaching and methods of serving in counters, ye see... at one time my father would've been scandalised.

0h 18m 08s

I remember when Hay started, Hay the grocer. Now, I don't know if they're still in being or not but he started a little shop, just opposite my father in Musselburgh and it used to annoy my father so much. The woman would come over and say 'I'm sure this is short weight, Mr Couston. Will you

weigh it?' [laughter]. What a cheek they had! And sure enough, ye see, he would take tuppence off the pound or something and ye know how women- they'll go anywhere where they can get a bargain and they'd go to Hay's. Go to Hay's, go to Hay's, you'll get it cheaper – and this is how it went on. Then, war started and that's when the rot started in for ordinary private... ye've no idea, I think it's a shame, ye know, that ordinary businesses are having to go like that. And ye see, my boy, it's... it's Stuart, the one who's the electrician.

LL: Electrician.

CK: Ye see, he had this notion to- he's keen on business. And when he started his business, not here but in Fisherrow, it was going to be quite a thriving one and then he bought another one. And then, it was doing awfully well when the coal strike came, ye see, and that's sort of... so, that's punished him. It was the war with my father and brother and now it's Stuart. It looks as though there's something keeping the family from making a great deal of money. But och, well, they're well enough off here, of course, but they've had a... a rather a bad time with illness, ye know, this winter.

LL: Mm.

CK: One thing. One thing and another.

LL: The trials that are... that come upon us, eh?

CK: Yes, uhuh.

LL: Mm.

CK: Ye just can't... ye have to take the good with the bad, ye know.

Oh 20m 00s

LL: That's right.

CK: But, em... I don't know. They've all taken up different hobbies, ye know. I think that's very interesting in a family, to see if any of them carry on the hobby. Now, my brother in Canada had the gift of poetry. He... he... a beautiful poem he wrote on hope. Lovely thing. We had it for a long time. But he had this flair for poetry, there's no doubt about it, but he was the one among us all. But it may come out in a future generation, ye see.

LL: Mmhm.

CK: Little Claire... eh, may have a flair for it.

LL: Your granddaughter?

CK: Yes, uhuh. Yes. She's the one hope. But then, the way she's being brought up, I'd question if the talent'll ever show.

LL: Aw, it may do. It may do.

CK: Well, just have to wait and see. She's very fond of dress and very fond of... various things that's quite a way from things that used to interest me as a child, ye see.

LL: But then, as ye said earlier, your nephew is suddenly coming round to show an interest in things-

CK: Well, my nephew is, yes.

LL: -that as a child he didn't have any interest in.

CK: This Robert, this beekeeper. He's written a magnificent textbook on beekeeping. There's no question about it. And it's- it's been published abroad ... oh, all different countries. And he's gone out afterwards to see the people. So... well, that's that. There's just that coming out in the family from some other way, ye know.

LL: That's right. That's it.

CK: But, eh... ye would wonder where talent comes from at the beginning, wouldn't you?

LL: That's right. But as long as it's there, as long as it's there.

0h 22m 00s

CK: Yes. It should be... it should be encouraged, I think, if any of them have a special talent. Sometimes not very easy of course. No.

LL: Well, I think you have a special talent as a storyteller, myself.

CK: Really?

LL: I've enjoyed this afternoon a lot.

CK: Oh [*laughter*]?

LL: I really have.

CK: Really?

LL: Thank you very much indeed.

CK: Well, I've a vivid mind for things back, away back. A very vivid mind for- even for tastes or smells, things that have happened. Little things just come right back.

LL: Ah, that's good.

CK: And as a child, I remember so well my brothers and I getting up early in the morning, in Fisherrow and going away along in the sunlit street with our girds, our hoops, ye know, before school and that sort of thing. It sort of does something to you.

LL: It stays in the mind, doesn't it?

CK: It does, uhuh. There was no traffic in these days of course. Ye could go anywhere and ye had no fear of people molesting you. Ye... ye see the children of today have not the same... they haven't the same freedom at aw.

LL: Mm.

CK: Really. I know, even with Claire, her mother has to take her to swimming, take her to the [?] or to the [?]. She wouldn't risk it. That's all about it. What's the end going to be, I wonder?

LL: I don't know.

CK: Because it's... I don't know, it's taking something away from children, ye know. And ye know, they're frightened to ask for things... eh, from strangers, they... 'no, I won't take it', ye see, so it's holding back... it's a horrible feeling for the child.

LL: Mm.

CK: Growing up.

LL: Mm.

CK: But there ye are.