

THE ULSTER-SCOTS LANGUAGE SOCIETY

In 2002, Elizabeth McLeister interviews Atcheson Armstrong in the townland of Drumaird, Broughshane, County Antrim. Also with them is William McCrory of Racavan. The men recall the superstition of strangers putting 'the blink' on the churn and on animals. They talk about a sow who gave birth to 26 piglets, and remember the old farm tasks of threshing and flailing.

[00:00:00.00] Atcheson Armstrong: Then thair wus fowk churned then an iveriebodie churned at milk an churned, an the' wur...

[00:00:09.29] Ye didnae want onie strangers cummin in whan ye wur churnin in case the' wud blink the churn.

[00:00:16.03] Did iver ye heer tell o that? Thair wud be nae buttèr in it. Ye cud churn away tae yer hairt's content but thair wud be nae buttèr.

[00:00:24.11] An gypsies wur very much feared, ye wudnae hae lut a gypsy at all near the thing because the' cud hae blinked the churn, the' said.

[00:00:33.15] an fowk.... That superstition hung on lang... Even whan my faither who, an he wusnae very, wusnae a superstitious person at all, but he wudnae hae waantit oniebodie in, na, the churn cud be blinked.

[00:00:45.24] William McCrory: Ah but dae ye know, thair wur a lot o that stemmed fae the fact that ye cud hae churned too long, ye know, an if ye wur taakin tae somebody ir somebody in,

[00:01:00.18] Ye see, ye only had tae churn so long tae bring the buttèr up.

[00:01:05.01] Atcheson Armstrong: Ay, ye cud hae over-churned an churnt it away.

[00:01:07.09] William McCrory: Ay, over-churned an away it went - ye wud hae seen it through the buttermilk.

[00:01:10.28] Atcheson Armstrong: Ay, an A see an A suppose, that tuk up the attention.

[00:01:15.05] That tuk up the attention an then the boadie wud say, 'Luk, that's whut did it, it wus the boy blinked it'.

[00:01:21.16] William McCrory: A hae mine whaniver the churn was doon in the middle o the floor, the kitchen flare, an the clock wus set on the table and ye churned bi the clock.

[00:01:33.23] If the thing wus right whan you started, you churned bi the clock, an whun you haed churned 20 minutes, I think bi mem'ry, whan you haed churned 20 minutes, it should be ready if the whole setup wus right fae the start.

[00:01:48.17] Atcheson Armstrong: Ay, an if the heat wus right. Ye haed tae hae the right heat an aa, an it ready fur churnin'.

[00:01:53.14] Ay, well that cud... That's whur that ...

[00:01:56.15] William McCrory: Well, I wud hae thought that's whaur that cum fae - somebody cum in, ye got waylaid or ye didnae keep at it the wye ye should or it took too long tae do it.

[00:02:09.02] Atcheson Armstrong: Ay, well then agane the... a mare foalin or a cow goin tae calf, the' didn't like a stranger seein them ether in case the' wud blink them an the' wud hae a dead calf.

[00:02:20.05] William McCrory: Oh in case it wud pit them aff, keep them, püt them back...

[00:02:24.16] Atcheson Armstrong: An agane that wud stem fae that that ye cud pit, a stranger cummin in cud pit the coo off, ay, an then it'd be too lang an the calf'd be dead so I suppose thair wur....

[00:02:36.25] William McCrory: I mine whan - thair niver wur onie foals aboot oor place - but the cow calvin. Ye wudnae hae... The' usually lukked in through the wee hole in the byre door

[00:02:48.03] Tae it wus that far oan that the' thought she needed help.

[00:02:51.03] Atcheson Armstrong: Right, ye didnae go in?

[00:02:53.04] William McCrory: No, no, thair wur nae annoyin o her.

[00:02:57.14] Elizabeth: Well then, did you ever keep pigs and hae tae sit up wi the oul soo?

[00:03:00.26] William McCrory: A niver sut up wi a sow, naw.

[00:03:04.27] Elizabeth: The' used tae hae tae dae that aa the time.

[00:03:06.16] Atcheson Armstrong: Oh that had to be daen. Well up in Correen I seen a soo in a kitchen, a big Ulstèr soo an....

[00:03:17.06] William McCrory: That wus whaur the'... that's whaur the' wud hae pigged.

[00:03:20.05] Atcheson Armstrong: But I seen it yince. The Crawfords, oul Mrs Crawford an them, the Crawfords' wus a kailey hoose. Fowk aa gathered intae Crawfords.

[00:03:29.29] An A hae mine o bein in it an the soo in the corner lyin, an bedded nicely an the wee pigs; and she wus a big oul Ulstèr soo.

[00:03:41.04] William McCrory: Wi the big hingin ears an the black spot on her?

[00:03:44.13] Atcheson Armstrong: Her ears wur doon ower her eyes an she jaist lay thair, an whan the wee pigs needed a sook, somebodie haed tae rin in tae (fur a when o days at first) an heave up...

[00:03:53.16] The bottom tits were too low, the' wur away doon in an the wee pigs wur hokin doon in, ye know, and it wus a cement flare an the' wur hokin and pokin doon in there but the'....

[00:04:06.07] Why she wus in, it wus in the deid o the wunter an it wus the only place thair wur onie heat, thair wur nae electric.

[00:04:12.21] William McCrory: Well I heard ma Granny taakin aboot haein the Ulstèr soos ye taaked aboot, an she haed 26 pigs an she raired 24 o them an she lukked...

[00:04:26.11] She kep 12, she divid the litter in two boxes and she lut the yin lot oot this time, an the ither lot oot the nixt.

[00:04:35.15] Atcheson Armstrong: That was a bit o work.

[00:04:36.22] William McCrory: Well, that went on an she raired 24 oot o the 26.

[00:04:40.21] Atcheson Armstrong: Ay, that wud be... She wud hae 12 tits, raired 12 pigs.

[00:04:45.00] William McCrory: Ay, she raired 12.

[00:04:46.10] Atcheson Armstrong: That wus mighty goin.

[00:04:47.14] William McCrory: An she liftit... She kep the two boxes at the side o the fire an she lut them oot time aboot.

[00:04:54.20] Atcheson Armstrong: An she wud hae tae rise at night an aa?

[00:04:55.28] William McCrory: Oh ay, it wus iverie... Agane it wus daen by the clock.

[00:05:00.23] Elizabeth: Well, I remember the pet pigs bein in the corner at me Granny's - a pet, ye know.

[00:05:07.06] William McCrory: The' wur dependin oan the litter o pigs tae keep them, but.

[00:05:10.05] Atcheson Armstrong: Oh the' wur, oh ay. Oh ay, that wus part an parcel o keepin ye, thair wur nae doot aboot that.

[00:05:14.28] William McCrory: Part an parcel o keepin aa right.

[00:05:17.26] Atcheson Armstrong: That wus great goin, A never heard tell o that bein done.

[00:05:20.03] William McCrory: A heard her taakin aboot it

[00:05:25.13] Atcheson Armstrong: But aw no, thair wur nae piggin crates then, the soo wus, the soo jaist wus in the corner.

[00:05:31.05] William McCrory: This might seem odd but I heard her sayin that it was easier nor anither experience that she had. Now you knowed me Uncle Wully that wus in the Proota Factory?

[00:05:45.07] A did.

[00:05:46.28] William McCrory: Well thair wur a set, thair wur twun girls ouler than him but the thrie o them wus all below two. He was barely walkin whan the twuns wus boarn.

[00:06:08.17] They wur, the twuns wus barely walkin whan he was boarn - he wus 14 months young'r than the twuns.

[00:06:15.26] An she sayed, monie a time A seen her lauchin an' sayin it wus easier rairin the pigs nor rairin the three o them! (Laughter)

[00:06:28.12] Elizabeth: Quite a handful.

[00:06:29.11] Atcheson Armstrong: That wus some hannlin.

[00:06:30.16] Elizabeth: Thair wur nae disposable nappies then ether.

[00:06:34.25] William McCrory: An you wur taakin about drinkin oota the spoot? It didnae shorten onie o their lives fur... Well, the'r one o the twuns still livin an she's 95 an the other one died last yeir.

[00:06:51.24] Ma Uncle Wully died at 87 an thair wur... the conditions wus plain.

[00:07:01.17] Elizabeth: Oh ay - but ye see A think children got an immunity tae things because they weren't kept as sterile and as clean. I think fowk's kept far too clean

[00:07:12.28] William McCrory: Far too clean! Ye built up yer ain resistance then.

[00:07:18.12] Atcheson Armstrong: Well then the thresher was a big scene whaniver it... the... whan the motor travellin thresher cum roon.

[00:07:28.27] William McCrory: Ay, did iver ye dae it wi the flail?

[00:07:32.12] Atcheson Armstrong: Naw, but a nibor beside me did it in Correen, an monies a time I lay in bed an heard the flail goin.

[00:07:39.11] 'Ned's Jim' the' caaed him. He wus a Jim Armstrong tae. His faither wus Adam an he got Ned's Jim. His faither wus Andy's Jim.

[00:07:47.26] An' thair was Jock's Jim an Min's Jim an Büsh Jim - all Jim Armstrong, but oh, A heard him thumpin away at night.

[00:07:56.12] William McCrory: That's one A hae up on ye fur A daen it whaniver A wus twelve.

[00:07:59.25] Atcheson Armstrong: Ah, ye did?

[00:08:01.02] William McCrory: A daen it whaniver A wus twelve, between twelve an thirteen.

[00:08:06.13] Ma granda wud hae threshed. The threshin wus daen in the barn that you were taakin about

[00:08:13.21] An he made me a wee one an I wud hae stud at the other side o the threshin boord wi him, an we cud a daen it time about. He learnt me hoo tae dae it.

[00:08:21.19] Atcheson Armstrong: Ye hae tae let her turn in yer hand, ye hae tae let her spin.

[00:08:25.10] William McCrory: Ye turn yer han, that keeps her fae bouncin, that keeps her fae bouncin whaniver you hit the board.

[00:08:31.13] Atcheson Armstrong: Oh ay, thair ir a pooerfu art in it because the wee short boy haes tae hit level. If he hits... The whole thing's a failure if he hits point doon.

[00:08:40.11] If your shafe o coarn's lyin thair an the flail, the wee boy's cummin doon, he haes tae lan flet on it jaist.

[00:08:48.08] Thair's nae guid lannin on it that wye, an you break the....

[00:08:50.07] William McCrory: It's no sae bad if the heel lans first but the point mustnae lan first... No, no.

[00:08:56.02] Atcheson Armstrong: Well then, ye can cum off yersel a skite on the back o the deck very readily wi it, ay, whan ye swing her.

[00:09:04.03] William McCrory: Ye see, thair wus a knack in giein her the turn at the back o yer heid tae bring her doon.

[00:09:10.01] Elizabeth: Well, that's one thing A niver seen anybody usin a flail.

[00:09:14.02] Atcheson Armstrong: Oh, did you no? Well I seen Ned's Jim uisin it an I was too wee a boy tae work wi it but Paul Alexander who... We aa leeved jaist, we wur alwayes close taegither at this fairmyaird, this here

[00:09:29.11] an A hae mine o Paul bein in wi me. He aye flailed at night wi a hurricane lamp.

[00:09:35.29] An we went in yin night an Paul wantit a go wi the flail and he made a wallop o a thing an the flail hut him in the back o the neck, oh ay.

[00:09:45.17] An it riz a good lump on it, it hut him jaist in at the beck o the ear thair. Oh ay, that finished his flailin antics.

[00:09:51.01] William McCrory: The'r runnin oot o..

[00:09:52.22] Elizabeth: Then the portable, the travellin thresher...?

[00:09:55.25] Atcheson Armstrong: Oh the travellin thresher came roon an that; an the nibors gaithered up then an it wus a great...

[00:10:01.27] Elizabeth: A big social event?

[00:10:03.00] Atcheson Armstrong: Oh ay.

[00:10:03.27] William McCrory: But that wus whaur Murray gien them nae meat?

[00:10:05.10] Atcheson Armstrong: That's whaur Murray gien.... Ay, Murray didnae cum up wi the food, ay.

[00:10:08.18] William McCrory: An iveriebodye, the' dwinnled aff one bi one tae thair wur naebodie left an Davy Robysin haed tae stack.

[00:10:18.05] An then Murray cum oot tae see whut wus wrang an Davy explained tae him that the' wur away lukkin fur somethin tae eat.

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