

THE ULSTER-SCOTS LANGUAGE SOCIETY

Elizabeth McLeister interviews Dervock man and poet, Charlie Gillen, in 2001.

[00:00:00.00] Elizabeth: Did ye like school?

[00:00:02.08] Charlie: A dinnae know that A didnae like it - but oor boys wud hae far rether ye wud hae steyed at hame an done whut the' wud hae deemed tae been somethin a bit mair uisefu.

[00:00:10.17] Elizabeth: Well, had you a farm or anything?

[00:00:11.24] Charlie: Oh ay, ma father haed a farm.

[00:00:13.27] Elizabeth: Ay, plenty of work to dae thair.

[00:00:16.25] Charlie: Any amount - thair wur six o iz, thair wur a chap on each side an four girls in between.

[00:00:25.21] Elizabeth: So you left school then, whut did ye dae?

[00:00:28.02] Charlie: I left school an bi that time, ma faither wus died young. Well I wus nae age, I was only aboot nine or ten

[00:00:37.23] an like a whole lot o things like that thair, thair wur nae will an it wus a whole scatter-market an things jaist kine o deteriorated efter that.

[00:00:47.08] But it's no oul grun A wud g'ower very affen fur thair's naethin ye can dae aboot it.

[00:00:53.05] A went tae work tae local farmers - Stewart-Moore's wus a big, big outfit. Thair wus seventeen o iz in't.

[00:01:02.23] But it wus, ye know, it wus a gran place tae be fur thair wur plenty o oul boys thair an the crack wus guid.

[00:01:09.05] Elizabeth: Ay, wus that a mixed farm?

[00:01:12.02] Charlie: Ay, thair wur iveriethin on it, iveriethin o the day. Thair wur layin hens, pigs an beese an barley, prootas.

[00:01:19.23] But then the ither Stewart-Moore, oan doon the road a bit, a brither o that boy, he wus the boy that specialised...

[00:01:25.09] He staitit aff that North Antrim Turkeys. That wus Davit Stewart-Moore.

[00:01:30.09] Elizabeth: So you enjoyed the farming bit all right?

[00:01:32.03] Charlie: A did, A did, A enjoyed the farmin bit, but A always haed a kine o an intrigue fur ouler farmin methods mebbe - fur oul horses an stuff like.

[00:01:41.28] Whaniver me Da wus leevin, thair wur still horses aboot an ye wur sort o grew up amang Clydesdales' feet if ye like.

[00:01:49.22] Elizabeth: An the kye, or whutiver ye cal them, they weren't the same size o herds?

[00:01:53.27] Charlie: Naw, naw, the' wur mebbe... Wait tae we see now, we'd A think mebbe milked mebbe aboot eight, an that wud likely hae been brave an big, ye know.

[00:02:03.16] But the' wur diffrent breeds - the' wur Shoarhoarns an Ayrshires, an Friesians wus, well the' wur stairtin tae creep in, but thair wurnae near as monie o them.

[00:02:10.25] Elizabeth: And like your latest tape thair, it sayes the kye hae names.

[00:02:14.28] Charlie: Oh ay, so the' had. These oul dolls aye had names an the' aa haed tempriments o thair ain tae, like. Ye know, thar's some o them...

[00:02:22.12] Thair wus yin oul doll in parteeclar, an thair wurnae yin o iz cud go near her but oor May. She wus the only yin that cud hae milked her.

[00:02:29.13] But afore we went tae school, even a wee bit before the oul boys ay, we wur milking coos afore we left fur tae go tae school in the moarnin. Soart o, ye wur gien two apiece tae milk afore ye left.

[00:02:43.04] Noo ye probably wud think that wus a sayrious job tae gie tae a wean - but then it was whut ye done, ye niver questioned whut ye done or whut ye wur bid dae.

[00:02:53.10] Elizabeth: A suppose when ye wur a cub, dae ye mine gettin yer first bicycle?

[00:02:57.06] Charlie: First bicycle A had wus a rare-lukkin article: it wus bits o aboot four ither yins. It startit aff wi a frame fae Tilly Taggart an a wheel fae...

[00:03:08.07] A think thair wur a wheel aff yin, an oul bicycle that lay aboot Annie Samsin's.

[00:03:12.10] An the rest o't wus kine o pooched fae here an thair but, oh, it done the joab, I learnt tae ride on it aa right.

[00:03:18.09] But then A got mae hans on a soart o a dacenter yin fur thair wur a boadie coorted yin o ma sisters an he haed a brave dacent bicycle.

[00:03:25.08] An while he wus soart o in visitin her, I paraded his bicycle up an doon the lane. A did learn tae ride it no sae bad.

[00:03:32.16] Elizabeth: Ah, that's good.

[00:03:34.21] Charlie: We would aye hae been soart o shootin folk - or A cud nearly say it noo fur A don't think anybody wud be carin noo, we wur nearly poochers, like.

[00:03:45.04] If ye wurnae footerin aboot tryin tae feed a when o dyucks intae a hole fur a shoat at them at night, ye wur away settin night-lines fur troots or snarin rabbits.

[00:03:55.27] We uist tae get an odd phaisant back an forrit. We used tae mak a wee cone oot o paper an fill it füll o raisins

[00:04:04.13] an they pecked away until the' got thair heid stuck in it an then the' jaist stood like a gome an ye went in an liftit them.

[00:04:10.07] Elizabeth: Is that how ye got the pheasants?

[00:04:11.26] Charlie: Ay, monie's the yin I got like that thair.

[00:04:14.25] Elizabeth: An tell me, did ye uise them? Did ye eat them?

[00:04:17.25] Charlie: Oh heth ay, we uised them. Aw naw, it wusnae fur onie gentleman's idea o sport - it wus mair tae settle the gnaa'in in yer stomach.

[00:04:28.11] Elizabeth: (Laughter) Ay, well the poems take up a big part o yer life, don't they?

[00:04:34.27] Charlie: It stairtit as an interest, progressed intae a hobby an A wud be the first yin tae tell ye it's an obsession noo.

[00:04:42.27] A jaist... Ither folks interest me sometimes a great dale mair nor my ain. But ye collect oul things an... A haenae cum on a bad yin.

[00:04:57.24] Although A wud say thair are some not as guid as the rest, A niver cum on a bad yin.

[00:05:02.17] Elizabeth: They all have somethin tae offer.

[00:05:03.27] Charlie: The' all hae somethin tae offer, the' hae surely. But if it's about oul country things, about oul fairmin things or somethin like that thair

[00:05:12.12] or yin o ma soart o favourite subjects was coortin an aa the perils that ye might befall at that parteclar practice - noo thair are some grand poems about that.

[00:05:23.00] Elizabeth: You like to make them humorous?

[00:05:25.01] Charlie: Humorous, yes, ay. Well, I dunno whether coortin wus designated tae be humorous or no, but it seemed tae go that road whiles.

[00:05:33.01] If ye wurnae that guid at it, ye could aye soart o med a lauchin sport o anythin.

[00:05:38.02] Whaniver we wur first merriet, we'd hae then... Well A wus aye at work between workin on buildin sites an workin on fairmers an wi yin thing an anither,

[00:05:46.23] Whaniver A cum hame it wus aye a tearin match tae the moass then tae cut peats.

[00:05:52.01] An A seen oor two oulest boys - well not thegither, like thair ir about three or four yeirs o diff'rence, naw, thair ir three yeirs o diff'rence in them

[00:05:59.06] Iyin in a carry-cot wi a net curtain roon them tae keep the midges frae eatin them tae we got a when o peats cut.

[00:06:04.15] Elizabeth: The midges was boys in the moss, boys, I niver liked them.

[00:06:07.08] Charlie: Oh ay but ach, nae boadie wud go through thon noo.

[00:06:09.12] Elizabeth: No, ye wudnae be boathered doin that now. But people had to work very hard them days - ye did the day's work, ye came home and did another day's work... You know, really.

[00:06:18.17] Charlie: Ye done anither day's work. Ay, that is right.

[00:06:22.11] Ye wur knockin sixteen/eighteen oors a day in, an that's no a million yeirs ago like, that's mid-Seventies in aroon... But moass wus a thing that seemed tae be pairt o ye.

[00:06:36.00] Elizabeth: Ay, it was jaist something had to be done.

[00:06:38.22] Charlie: Ay, it had tae be daen because it tuk ye a when o yeirs o realisin that ye cud dae wantin it.

[00:06:43.11] Elizabeth: That's right.

[00:06:43.15] Ye aye thought tae yerself, 'If A hae naethin else, A hae fire'. A dunno, ye wur kine o conditioned intae if ye dinnae go tae the moss, the whole worl wud collapse roon ye or somethin.

[00:06:55.25] Elizabeth: That's right but I mean people, or very few people, goes now to the moss.

[00:07:00.08] Charlie: Naw, weel a when o folk goes noo fur a bit o a hoabby an tae tell ye the truth noo A wud hae a langin nearly tae gae back an cut two or three, jaist fur the sake o it.

[00:07:10.12] A wudnae be goin beck tae cut a tear o them, but A wud like tae go up an cut a when o stanks jaist tae...

[00:07:16.19] Noo A see the soart o... Well, ye cud harly say thair wur a magic in it, but thair wur somethin about it an A wud like...

[00:07:24.06] Elizabeth: Oh ay, it's a way of life you see.

[00:07:25.15] Charlie: It wus a way o life, ay, it... 'Social history' wud be a thing that ye wud get cloddit at ye, bak an forrit noo

[00:07:33.00] but thair wur a lot o social history created in the moss fur aa the nibors anaa.

[00:07:38.13] An whaniver we wur weans, we wud hae run up an doon tae the wal wi boattles o wattèr.

[00:07:43.14] Elizabeth: But cummin back to the poetry, when you get a notion to write a poem, A suppose ye jaist cannae wait tae ye get it down on paper? Does it all cum jaist flowin or...

[00:07:55.28] Charlie: Ay, it maistly daes. If a wee thing soart o flits.... Ye see somethin that triggers somethin aff in ye - an ye feel ye want tae mak mair o it.

[00:08:07.04] It's somethin ye hae seen an if somebody else...

[00:08:09.22] If ye can write it weel eneuch, somebody else somewhere is gaun tae see that same thing through your eyes if ye like.

[00:08:18.05] Elizabeth: That last poem that you wrote thair, 'The cows have names,' I can remember the day when the cows had names.

[00:08:23.26] Charlie: Oh ay, well that's sort o reminiscent o al them oul nibors an yin nibor in parteeclar, a wee boadie, Jimmy Samsin

[00:08:31.07] because he was al'ways tae me the soart o epitome o coolness an calmness.

[00:08:40.16] Naethin iver flustered him. He jaist took life at its pace an he jaist lasted as lang an mebbe lang'er fur daein that.

[00:08:48.03] Elizabeth: Ay, but the country way of life is really, it's really disappearin. A mean the kailey - it used to be you kaileyed, you went to people's houses, you know... A blame television fur...

[00:09:04.27] Charlie: Television is the caase, well it's the main caase o it.

[00:09:10.12] But away back, the only thing we haed was an oul broon Bakelite wireless and ye haed tae go wi a wat battery doon tae Jhone Hill's an get it charged.

[00:09:19.05] Elizabeth: I mine ridin away down for two miles to get the battery charged.

[00:09:22.21] Charlie: Ay well we wud hae waaked ower the fiel a mile an then waaked bi the road a mile down tae Jhone Hill's, an ye had tae lea it.

[00:09:29.22] But whiles I worked wi two an ye cud hae charged yin. Well ye wur kine o nearly gentry if ye haed two batteries fur the wireless.

[00:09:39.19] But och thair wur naethin haed the character o them oul Bakelite wireless – the'd whussle an crack an get oan - an then oor boys seemed tae aye want tae hear boxin matches

[00:09:49.26] an A dinnae know whar they wur but this thing aye whussled an chirruped an got on, an thair wur mebbe two or three oul nibors cum up tae hear this, ye know

[00:09:57.13] which must tell ye noo that naw even iverieboadie haed a wireless.

[00:10:01.28] Oh A hae mine thair wur a lump o oul boys cum tae listen tae that boxin an we sut - we wur harly, we wur feart tae open oor mooth.

[00:10:11.03] We wur whiles banished aathegither away tae some ither bit o the hoose oot o the road.

[00:10:16.05] An ye wur soart o fascinated wi this whusslin an crackin an chirrupin an goin on oot o this thing.

[00:10:20.21] An then iverieboadie wus an expert an the' wudda proddle't at her an turned her a bit. Well then thair wur a lump o a copper wire - it got throwed oot o the winda.

[00:10:28.25] Well ye might as weel hae sput, ye know, it done it nae guid but some o thon oul boys thocht it done it guid.

[00:10:34.09] But I think the saddest thing o al theday is weans haes naethin tae mind.

[00:10:40.17] If it wusnae on the television or if it wusnae some o them gornets ether wi hair tae thair knees or nae hair ava champin about

[00:10:49.24] ye know, it's nether music nor naethin.

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