

THE ULSTER-SCOTS LANGUAGE SOCIETY

Elizabeth McLeister interviews 85 year old Antrim man, Dan McConaghie (born 1918) at his home on Causeway Road, Bushmills. The interview was conducted in January 2003 and Dan recalls making shillelaghs, working in the family shop at the Giant's Causeway, the Christmas Rhymers, riding the bicycle and helping out on the family farm.

[00:00:00.00] Elizabeth: What age are you, Dan?

[00:00:01.26] Dan: A'll be 85 in a wheen o weeks.

[00:00:05.16] Elizabeth: Other than bein that spell in Ing'lan, ye've been here all your life?

[00:00:08.25] Dan: Whan A got demobbed fae the navy, A cum back here.

[00:00:15.23] An A done bits o plumbin work an yin thing an anither, ye know, an then ma wife's father, he wus a local man. He lived down thair...

[00:00:29.02] He wus the manager o the Causeway whar ye had tae pay tae get in, in them days.

[00:00:35.04] An A gien him a han at weekens an that, an then ma wife wus rinnin... we haed a wee shop jaist as ye walked down, ye know, on the bay.

[00:00:46.17] An A went an A started an made shillelaghs an things laik that - an A giv up the plumbin althegither

[00:00:56.12] An A wus able tae help in the shop an dae the shillelaghs at the same time, dae ye know whut A mean.

[00:01:02.10] Elizabeth: Yes, it wus a guid place tae have a shop.

[00:01:05.12] Dan: Ay like, but in them days, thair wurnae as much made in them days as thair ir now.

[00:01:16.25] An the'r far fewer people but the'r far mair made in the shop - but then shoppin haes changed ye see.

[00:01:24.00] In them days thair, a person would hae cum in tae you, intae your shop, ye know, 'Ah A wud hae loved that but A'm short o thruppence'. Well you just said, 'Here tak it with ye,' ye know?

[00:01:34.24] That's whut happened in them days, an then thair wur no, thair wur no elabrit thair. The' wurnae sayin a thing cost ye a shillin, oh we'll chaarge two shillin fur that...

[00:01:44.12] That didnae work in them days. Ye mebbe chaarged one an thruppence, ye know - thruppence o profit or somethin like that, ye see - but nowadays it's a hunner per cent profit. That's...

[00:01:56.25] Elizabeth: A suppose you don't make any shillelaghs any more?

[00:01:59.02] Dan: Naw, naw - the arthritis... A had two dozen hangin up thair, blackened, ready tae do - an A wusnae able tae move the next moarnin

[00:02:10.21] an that's whan the arthritis set in. The'r still hangin in the workshop.

[00:02:14.03] Elizabeth: Well tell me, whar did ye get the stuff to make your shillelaghs with - blackthoarn?

[00:02:18.11] Dan: Iveriewhaur, iveriewhaur.

[00:02:20.01] Elizabeth: Blackthoarn wus it?

[00:02:21.03] Dan: Naw, ordinary thorn, or yer blackthorn. Well ye got the blackthorn if ye got them, but ye niver wud hae got... Ye cud hae walked fur mebbe a day an mebbe onie got two or thrie blackthorn, ye know,

[00:02:31.07] But naw, ye wud hae got the farmer thair that wus cuttin the hedge at this time o the yeir, ye see, an ye wud hae went an asked the farmer, 'Can A tak the shillelaghs oot o this?'

[00:02:40.03] An av coorse he said, 'Ay, gaun ahead,' ye know. Ye wud hae got mebbe a farmer whan he haed cut doon mebbe wud hae said, 'Luk, away ower thair, thair's anither fiel o mine,' ye know.

[00:02:49.14] Ye cud hae been up roon thair fur nearly a week, ye know.

[00:02:53.01] Oh A cut aa roon Armoy an the Glens o Antrim an aa roon that, away as far as Magherafelt - that's the last place A cut.

[00:03:04.00] Elizabeth: Is that right?

[00:03:05.09] Dan: A man the name o Hutchison, ay, A mine it as well. Alec Black, fella, Alan McClellan, an Alan wusnae workin', an Alan...

[00:03:16.14] I said tae him, he wus up wi me yin night, an sez I, 'Alan, A'm goin away tae Ma'rafelt tae cut shillelaghs. Dae ye want tae cum up an earn a wheen o shillin?'

[00:03:25.04] 'Oh ay,' he said, 'Surely,' he said. So him an me went fur a week an that wus the last cuttin that wus done, an that wus up in Magherafelt, wi an oul man the name o Hutchison.

[00:03:36.13] Elizabeth: Whut wus Christmas like when you were a youngster, ye know? Thair wasn't the same amount o fuss about it as...

[00:03:45.28] Dan: Whut? Och, jaist the Christmas Rhymers wus the main thing. Oh ay, the'd the Christmas Rhymers thair before Christmas - ay mebbe three or four weeks before Christmas

[00:04:00.05] An they wud 'a' cum... Ye mebbe wud had two or three in the yin week, ye know - different yins.

[00:04:07.10] Oh ay, they wud 'a' cum, ye know, an the' wud hae been aa different dresses on them, ye know, an thair faces mebbe blackened an ye know...

[00:04:15.15] An a big stick wi them an mebbe some o them wud hae sung a song, ye know, or somethin like that. An then ye wud 'a' got Bushmills Male Voice Choir - it wud hae cum at Christmas and it wud 'a' sung.

[00:04:30.10] Elizabeth: Jaist outside?

[00:04:31.18] Dan: Jaist ootside, aye. Naw, the Christmas Rhymers cum intae the hoose, the' wud hae done iverie hoose, ye see, oh ay. But naw, the Choir just sung outside thonner...

[00:04:42.15] Whaur the Lan Stewart's hoose wus on the right han side, an oors wus the left, an then the Head Gardener's wus nixt, an the Head Ploughman wus nixt tae that, ye see.

[00:04:52.27] So they just stud ootside - an then av coorse thair wur concerts in aa the halls roon aboot al wunter, ye know.

[00:05:02.08] Thair wud be concerts - doon in the school thair, it wus a reglar place fur concerts. That school wud hae been packed.

[00:05:09.04] Ye see, in the oul'en days, thair wus a diveesion between whut the' cal'd the 'infant classes' an the farder ones up.

[00:05:17.15] Well that - ye wur able tae slide it back tae both sides, ye see, and ye'd a great big hall ye know.

[00:05:24.06] Elizabeth: Well, dae ye mine gettin yer first bicycle or did ye have a bicycle?

[00:05:28.21] Dan: Oh, well A had tae ride a bicycle fae here tae Coleraine iverie moarnin tae work. A done that fur al'most five yeirs.

[00:05:37.14] Elizabeth: That was a good bit.

[00:05:40.13] Dan: An it wusnae a mettèr o... Ye had tae start work at eight o'clock in the moarnin. If ye wurnae thair at eight o'clock, an ye cum in at ten past eight...

[00:05:51.16] The boss, Jack McCandless, waantit tae know whar ye were an whut sort o time-keepin wus this, even if it haed bin snowin hard.

[00:06:00.08] He wud hae thought, 'Well you should hae been here,' ye know. Oh bejaysus, ay, my grandson, he al'ways laughs ye know, whan I toul him, 'Ye din't know ye'r leevin, Jack, ir Richard,' ye know.

[00:06:14.08] Elizabeth: The young ones nowadays.

[00:06:15.22] Dan: Not at all, says I when ye done that... I seen as many as twenty-eight boys on bicycles lavin Bushmills Waar Memorial thonner...

[00:06:29.16] In the moarnin at seven o'clock tae ride tae Coleraine for thair work. Well they're nearly aa gone noo, A cannae mine any o them that's left.

[00:06:41.11] Elizabeth: Can ye imagine the young folk daein that?

[00:06:42.22] Dan: Oh the' wud not indeed. They wudnae ride a bicycle fae here tae Bushmills, the' wudnae. Oh, it's wonderful now.

[00:06:52.21] Elizabeth: Changes, even the way farmin's done.

[00:06:55.02] Dan: Och, farmin! God, I just wus thinkin thair, whan Oul Wully McCordy that wus down in Runkerry thair - seven o'clock in the moarnin them horses wus gaun oot tae start thair day's work oot in the fiel.

[00:07:10.13] He haed already been up an had them fed an watered, because ma father an mother, the' haed fourteen milkin cows an ma father wus oot in that byre iverie moarnin at five o'clock

[00:07:26.16] an Wully McCordy wus the same, in in the stable feedin his horses.

[00:07:31.01] Elizabeth: And fourteen milkin cows wus a brave size tae milk them days.

[00:07:33.28] Dan: Well, A'm tellin ye, hey, fourteen milkin cows an A uist tae separate the milk - ye know the way the' done when the' put it through the separator.

[00:07:43.03] A wud hae done so much before A went tae Coleraine.

[00:07:48.15] An then the Oul Lan Stewart, John McConaghie, he wud 'a' cum an done a bit, ye know, tae help me mother an that, fur she had tae dae that on her own, ye know - separate the milk...

[00:07:59.04] an dae al the dairy work because me Da haed the young calves and al that tae feed, ye know.

[00:08:05.08] But the oul boss, Oul John McConaghie, as A say, he wud 'a' cum and he wud hae, whan I wus gone then, ye know, he wud hae separated away. Oh no, ma mother made butter iverie Tuesday an Saturday.

[00:08:21.27] An' ye see iveryboadie else, al this area here? The' got thair fresh milk doon thair. The' al came down wi wee quart cans or whutiver it wus, ye know, an the' got thair butter an the' got thair eggs.

[00:08:35.28] Oul Doctor Hughie, he cum iverie Saturday evenin fur his butter an eggs. Iverie Saturday evenin that shone, he wus thair fur his... Wi Clarke Stirlin (that wus his chauffeur, he drove him aroun).

[00:08:49.13] An he wud hae cum an mebbe spent an hour thair afore he went back again - because in the boiler house thair wus a great big open fire, an a big fire, ye know.

[00:08:59.28] An yin o the... Thair wus a boiler at the fire an it het the water, ye know, to gie the hot water up in the dairy an all.

[00:09:07.25] An Oul Doctor Hughie wud hae cum in thonner an sut doon along wi the rest o the boys on a Saturday evenin an chatted away tae them. Ay.

[00:09:22.06] Elizabeth: Well the Waar changed things.

[00:09:24.04] Dan: Oh the Waar - completely, laik ye know.

[00:09:26.22] Elizabeth: It changed everything.

[00:09:28.04] Dan: Ay, wait tae we see. A didnae get home tae whut? I wus over two yeirs away - nearly two yeir an six months afore A got first hame - an A seen changes in that time, now.

[00:09:43.27] Elizabeth: Ay, ye wud.

[00:09:46.04] Dan: Ye know? An laik iverie time ye got home, it seemed tae be, ye know, the same thing wus happenin. Ye wud hae seen somethin diffrent an somethin diffrent ye know.

[00:09:56.25] An then av coorse, yinst the Waar wus ower an the' got startit, an the tractors an that appeared, it just seemed tae explode open, ye know.

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