

## THE ULSTER-SCOTS LANGUAGE SOCIETY

**JAMES McKAY** of Clough is interviewed by Elizabeth McLeister in 2001, at which time James is 80 years old. James recalls growing up on a farm, and then meeting his wife at a dance. As a member of a band, James played at dances around the country halls, travelling to them on his bicycle. He sings the song 'The Flower of Corby Mill' and talks about working with flax and cutting peats, as well as recalling his mother baking on the fire and the good foodstuffs of his earlier life.

[00:00:00.00]Elizabeth: And what did your father work at?

[00:00:03.00]James: Oh well, he was a farmer and we haed the flax mills an' A wus kep busy that way - but A daen ivveriethin, helped tae herd the cows an' so on.

[00:00:18.12]A wusnae the age for milkiin or oniethin like that, but A did that in later years roon the farms whun A staired tae wark.

[00:00:24.10]Elizabeth: Did you farm at home for a while?

[00:00:26.08]James: Well A wusnae the age tae be a big assistance but och yeah, I suppose I done anything I wus tould tae dae like.

[00:00:34.14]Whun A left schuil A went tae a farmer an A done ivveriethin just.

[00:00:41.19]A helped with the cows an the milkin o the cows an helped him tae cut the corn and pull lint an the usual things.

[00:00:52.01]A had a go at everythin on the farm like, or A adapted mesel tae it.

[00:00:57.08]Elizabeth: What age were you when you married and met the Missus?

[00:01:00.16]James: Och, A must hae been comin tae thirty, twenty-nine or thirty.

[00:01:04.13]Elizabeth: Uh-huh. That was a reasonable age in them days, aye.

[00:01:09.06]James: Aye, ye jouked about a while tae ye got caught (laughter).

[00:01:14.09]Elizabeth: Well did ye go tae fetes and dances?

[00:01:16.03]James: Oh aye, I went to them.

[00:01:17.15]Elizabeth: Is that where you met her at some of them things?

[00:01:19.26]James: Aye, it wus really, aye. We kep goin together for a wheen o years then, an then we got hitched up.

[00:01:27.20]Elizabeth: Well, you mind the fetes then?

[00:01:30.05]James: Oh A dae rightly, aye.

[00:01:31.16]Elizabeth: Did you go to many?

[00:01:32.23]James: Och A went tae a brave wheen, aye.

[00:01:36.01]Elizabeth: And what about the dances? Did you play at dances?

[00:01:38.03]James: Oh I played at the dances, an A seen us goin'...

[00:01:41.02]Me on an ould bicycle an an ould accordion ower yer beck - three o iz, a set o drums an two accordions tae play roon different halls.

[00:01:48.10]Elizabeth: All on the bicycles?

[00:01:49.16]James: Oh on the bike.

[00:01:51.11]Elizabeth: Aye. The bicycle was your means of transport?

[00:01:53.10]James: Oh that was my motor-car then.

[00:01:54.26]Elizabeth: Aye, well tell me, do you mine gettin your first one?

[00:01:57.14]James: Oh A dae, aye. Oh that was a.... Thur wur nae sate on that!  
(Laughter)

[00:02:05.05]I got it frae somebody in Moss-side, thur'r fellas 'Taggart'. The' made suits an ivveriethin fur oniebodie that wantit them an'...

[00:02:16.09]Elizabeth: Is that how you got the money for your first bicycle?

[00:02:19.06]James: Oh I didnae buy oniethin fur they gien me it.

[00:02:20.26]Elizabeth: They gien ye it?

[00:02:21.20]James: Aye, somebody, some o' the Taggarts gien me this ould bike.

[00:02:26.05]Elizabeth: Well they say Clough's a could place.

[00:02:28.06]James: It gets that name oniewye but och, thur'r an odd wee corner in it if ye cud get a het yin in if ye knowed whaur tae go!

[00:02:37.11]Elizabeth: (Laughter) Well it sits away up, quite high, up on the hill.

[00:02:39.29]James: Oh aye, it's well up, it is indeed, plenty o fresh air about Clough.

[00:02:44.16]Elizabeth: And you've always been playing music all your life, singing?

[00:02:49.21]James: Aye - an' A startit tryin the violin or fiddle whun A was about fourteen. A niver wus a star at it but A kep at it beck an forrit.

[00:03:01.06]an A played at an odd dance wi the fiddle- alang wi the Kelly Brithers an that, we'd an ould Dance Band at that tim.

[00:03:11.24]Elizabeth: You always sung, didn't you?

[00:03:13.02]James: Oh aye, A always sung a bit. Thur's an oul sang like, frae the niborhood whaur I lived, wus the Corby Mill.

[00:03:20.27]Elizabeth: Oh that would be lovely if you could sing a wee bit of the Corby Mill.

[00:03:25.17]James: Aye, well I'll try...

[00:03:27.08]Oh come all ye tender-hearted chaps and lend to me an ear

[00:03:33.09]And likewise pay attention to these few lines I've here;

[00:03:39.03]It's all in praise of a pretty maid. I mean to use my quill -

[00:03:44.05]She's the blooming Rose of Antrim and Flower of Corby Mill.

[00:03:51.11]It was on the first of January last, I was going to Butler's Fair,

[00:03:57.15]I spied this pretty fair maid, she was combing down her hair

[00:04:03.02]And as I gazed upon her, my heart with joy did fill,

[00:04:07.28]She's the blooming Rose of Antrim and the Flower of Corby Mill.

[00:04:14.19]It was all for recreation I went to the Fair that day -

[00:04:20.28]I didnae intend to tarry long as I crossed McMullen's Brae

[00:04:26.09]But meeting with some comrade lads when I arrived there,

[00:04:31.11]Oh how kindly they saluted me, 'You're welcome to the Fair'.

[00:04:38.10]We went into Mrs Butler's, for there we did sit down -

[00:04:44.05]The mugs of punch came tumbling and the toasts went merrily round;

[00:04:49.07]The silver bein' plentiful, we drank our hearty fill

[00:04:54.01]And we toasted a glass to the bonny wee lass that works in Corby Mill.

[00:05:00.25]Aye this fair maid to make mention I will not name her name -

[00:05:07.10]Her parents might be angry and I mysel' get blame;

[00:05:12.15]She's a mill girl to her trade and she has the best of skill,

[00:05:17.11]She's the blooming Rose of Antrim and Flower of Corby Mill.

[00:05:23.27]I have travelled Ireland o'er and o'er, and parts of Scotland too,

[00:05:30.19]I've travelled England far and wide, believe me, friends, it's true,

[00:05:36.00]I've travelled Ireland o'er and o'er, crossed many a hollow and hill

[00:05:41.27]But an equal yet I ne'er could find with the Flower o' Corby Mill.

[00:05:49.10]Elizabeth: (Applauding) Very good Jimmy.

[00:05:51.28]James: It's a gye oul yin that, ye know.

[00:05:53.29]Elizabeth: It's a nice one. Well, what was Corby Mill? Was it a flax mill?

[00:05:56.07]James: It wus a flax mill, oh aye, it wus a flax mill where they did the scutchin' an' that's whut wus the Corby Mill.

[00:06:03.21]In fact there wur two mills at the Corby - thur'r Smith's an Galbraith's, just yin up an doon the water a wee bit.

[00:06:11.03]The' wur driv by the turbins, the watter turbins. It wus just fur the saisonal thing but I mine when I was young, ye'd hae heard the turbin goin' tae...

[00:06:21.25]The' worked tae eight o'clock at nicht. Ye'd hae heard the noise like.

[00:06:27.02]Elizabeth: You never scutched yersel, no?

[00:06:28.26]James: Oh I tried, I buffed a bit wi' my Da like whuniver he was, when he haed the mill. That's the first process.

[00:06:37.02]Well it went through the rollers first an then it wus cleaned. Usually the scutcher or some o them made it ready

[00:06:46.14]an then whoever, the' finished the flax off tae the finish, tiil they were pit into the rolls like.

[00:06:54.06]Elizabeth: There's no flax at all now.

[00:06:55.26]James: No, it's a thing nearly o the past.

[00:06:59.10]Elizabeth: Aye. You see the odd field but it's used for thatch I think.

[00:07:03.20]James: That's right.

[00:07:05.19]You knowed a lot of the people up round there - any characters up round there, like ould fellas that they told ghost stories an' tales an...?

[00:07:15.00]James: Well, A cud tell ye a tale or two, but the' wurnae just aal ghost stories, but...

[00:07:19.25]Och, A'd guid friends up round it tae. There were other fellas that sung an things.

[00:07:26.26]A great singer in the Newtowncrommelin area was Tommy Kelly, a marvellous tenor singer.

[00:07:32.23]Elizabeth: Aye, Tommy was a lovely singer. It was all Scotch songs Tommy sang.

[00:07:37.10]James: All Scotch nearly - he'd a great selection o good old Scottish songs.

[00:07:45.01]Elizabeth: Well was there many big nights' music? Did you kailey like, in houses, for music?

[00:07:50.02]James: Oh indeed aye, whiles they went on til nearly the mornin as an all-night carry-on an'....

[00:07:59.11]Good players frae ivverywhaur in these houses. That was guid too - only ye're nearly roamin ivvery ithar nicht, ye'r niver in the hoose.

[00:08:11.10]Elizabeth: No. An did you cut peats then?

[00:08:13.21]James: A did aye. Well A cut whun A wus young an then, whunivver A retired, A went tae the moss again in my old age.

[00:08:22.11]Elizabeth: Och, did you start up again?

[00:08:23.23]James: Ah well, it wus a diff'rent method then. The peats anaa wus cut by machine fur ye,

[00:08:27.26]an it wus onie a matther o gettin' them turned over an leain' it up tae the weather an the' finished them off. Then ye gathered them up an...

[00:08:36.19]Elizabeth: Well I suppose ye remember your mother baking and all at the open fire?

[00:08:41.15]James: Oh surely, aye, oh bakin' the scones and bakin' fadge as we called it, an' hardbreid or oatcake

[00:08:50.02]an that was set up roon the fire on the bits o the rath frames that ye set in tae dry it oot an hae it nicely cooked an good fur eatin'. Home bakin'.

[00:09:00.18]Elizabeth: And plenty of spuds.

[00:09:02.01]James: Oh plenty of spuds an cabbage an leeks, ivveriethin like that.

[00:09:07.17]Elizabeth: And turnip?

[00:09:08.14]James: Oh aye, a turnip's good, hard tae bate, a guid bit o bacon an turnip makes a guid...

[00:09:14.21]Elizabeth: And soup on Sunday?

[00:09:15.25]James: Oh we'd soup all oor life on Sunday (laughter) - aye, soup on Sunday an mebbe Setturday tae.

[00:09:23.11]Elizabeth: Aye that was the fashion. People had lived a simpler life I think then.

[00:09:30.01]James: Oh they did indeed. They enjoyed the friendship and company and chat, more so than what people does now.

[00:09:39.07]Elizabeth: Well then, you didnae throw horse-shoes or anything at the Crossroad Ends or up at....

[00:09:45.15]James: Oh aye, I would hae throwed horse-shoes but A nivver was the champion.

[00:09:50.15]There wus a big boy, Davy White, he wus the champion. Oh he could clung them roun ivvery....

[00:09:55.28]If he'd hae been stannin wi his beck tae, he'd get beck up agen it. Aye, he wus the king, the champion.

[00:10:03.13]Elizabeth: Clough's built up on a hill isn't it?

[00:10:05.14]James: Oh it is indeed, it's built up and there's a very ancient, very old village an, at a time, thur wur a cassel at it

[00:10:13.07]an the cassel wus known as 'The Clough Cassel' an A think it wus the McDonnells mebbe - the McDonnells an the McQueelans, the' wur involved.

[00:10:24.17]An thur wur an odd skirmish or two between them an A dinnae really know who came oot the real victors in the end

[00:10:32.29] but eventually the cassel wus knocked down in some of these battles an thur ir nothin left but a part o it an the' called it 'The Lug o the Tub'

[00:10:44.21]fur it was like a tub an it wus known far an wide an ye'd see it frae miles away an this wus known as 'The Lug o the Tub'.

[00:10:53.23]Elizabeth: Comin beck to the music, Jimmy - hae ye any more oul songs that ye know?

[00:10:59.09]James; Och A dinnae know whether they're very oul or no, A dinnae know.

[00:11:05.08]Elizabeth: Well, even they're not old.