

THE ULSTER-SCOTS LANGUAGE SOCIETY

In January 2005, Elizabeth McLeister interviews 82 year old John Atkinson at his home in Ballymoney. John recalls his farmwork - threshing and baling all round County Antrim, as well as pulling lint. His own father's eldest siblings were able to remember the Great Irish Famine of the mid-19th century; while some of his uncles emigrated to America and worked on the railways.

[00:00:00.00] John Atkinson: A threshed through the country for thurteen yeirs and A threshed fae, fae the New University beyond Coleraine tae...

[00:00:11.26] tae Dunmynnin Cross an A knowed, A knowed nearly iveryboadie inside that, oul an young, ye know.

[00:00:22.05] Elizabeth: That was interesting.

[00:00:23.09] John: Ay, it wus surely.

[00:00:24.19] Elizabeth: There was plenty of crack when the thresher came.

[00:00:26.01] John: Plenty o value so thair wur ay. But thair wur no money for it at that time, no.

[00:00:32.08] We rid, no only me but thrie other men along wi me, we rid tae Kennedys': that wud be Kennedys o the Cranagh, ye see, doon at Coleraine at the University.

[00:00:44.11] We rid tae thair an threshed al day an baled; an we rid back home at night; an ye warked tae dark on Saturday night.

[00:00:56.10] An when A come tae the fit o the Rasharkin Road here, A haed tae ride on tae Bendooragh an A come in that road wi fourteen shillin.

[00:01:06.08] Elizabeth: It wusnae much, was it?

[00:01:07.14] John: It wasn't big bulk, no.

[00:01:09.18] Elizabeth: But then fourteen shillin went a wee bit.

[00:01:11.11] John: Oh it went a wee bit but still it wus nothin, ye know, no. No, an ridin then, like ye know, it wus a day's work ridin there an ridin back, ye know.

[00:01:21.14] An it wus the same frae here tae Dunmynnin, it wus a brave danner, ye know.

[00:01:25.22] Elizabeth: It was a right few miles.

[00:01:27.21] John: It wus, sure, ay.

[00:01:31.15] Elizabeth: And there would be some guid turns at the threshin?

[00:01:35.20] John: Oh, thair wur surely.

[00:01:37.05] Elizabeth: Plenty of good wee doags to kill the rats at the bottoms?

[00:01:41.25] John: Oh, fur guidness sake, thair wur nothin but rats in them times, ye know?

[00:01:47.01] I seen me at Pettersons' thair, up in Garrydoo, an Jhone brought oot the barra an set it; an A thought iverieboardie sayed the rats went oot o the stags in the summer time, but they pit up pooerfu big stags.

[00:02:03.13] An A went oan August Monday o the nixt yeir tae thresh last yeir's coarn, an dae ye see the heids o them stacks? The mice an rats had them et right doon tae the ring.

[00:02:17.14] Elizabeth: Ay, in the middle.

[00:02:18.27] John: Ay. An dae ye see the doags? We pit a zinc up roon the stacks an the doags kilt the rats when we finished at night. John says, 'Whut dae ye think o that?'

[00:02:29.29] He'd a full o a borra o rats piled up.

[00:02:33.05] Elizabeth: Thair wudnae be much guid coarn left?

[00:02:35.15] John: Oh well the bottoms o them wus aa right - the' wur big stacks an the' cudnae wark on the bottoms o them the way the' cud do on the tap, ye know.

[00:02:44.15] Elizabeth: They used tae pit thoarn bushes, didn't they, on the bottoms?

[00:02:47.16] John: Oh ay, it wus thoarns an whuns we pit oan the bottoms o them, an...

[00:02:51.28] Elizabeth: You thatched them wi the rushes?

[00:02:54.08] John: Oh rushes, ay that's right. Well ye see, dae ye see doon roon the Eden thair? They'd another patent: they filled a bag o hay an püt it in the centre o the stack an the' wur...

[00:03:10.05] Whan you built up the lenth o the bag, ye reached in an pulled the bag up efter ye, ye know whut A mean? An thair wur a hole like that thair, right doon the centre o the stack.

[00:03:20.13] Oh they thought it wus a good thing but it gien the rats anaa room tae wark, an the' cud hae warked doon that hole, ye know?

[00:03:28.17] Elizabeth: Ay, and was that tae keep the air circulating?

[00:03:30.24] John: That wus tae keep the air, ye know, keep too monie heids fae bin in thegither, tae keep it frae heatin, ye know?

[00:03:37.19] The more weight you haed oan the tap or in the centre o the stack, ye see, the more heartin ye'd in, the likelier it wus tae heat, ye know.

[00:03:49.10] Elizabeth: Well, when they heated, it wasn't much good after that, it was fustit.

[00:03:52.27] John: Oh not at all, it wus destroyed, destroyed. The coarn wus redd an the strae wus redd, ye know, strae wus fur naethin.

[00:04:00.24] Elizabeth: Well, that's my country, I lived there.

[00:04:02.25] John: An the Catherwoods, two sets of Catherwoods mebbe in there - ay, Alexander an... Robert wus it they' caa'ed the ither fella?

[00:04:13.02] They wur drawin' the Creamerie at that tim an A mine ye cud... It wus Raghery.

[00:04:21.12] Ye haed tae go straight up like that, up intae it, an they left the cairts oot the lane or threw aff the cans or somethin oot the lane, ye know.

[00:04:29.06] Elizabeth: Well I mine o gettin a sail tae school in Catherwood's cairt

[00:04:33.15] John: Ay, thair ye are. Well A cud tell ye, that's a brave wee while ago.

[00:04:37.11] Elizabeth: Ay, that's a quare while.

[00:04:39.03] John: It's... I wus in Robert Campbell's at the time I went there. I used tae work tae Linn, ye see, Bob Linn there.

[00:04:46.04] Elizabeth: That's ower sixty years ago.

[00:04:47.22] John: It is - dae ye tell me, A think A know! Isn't it powerfu tae whaur the time... An yer man, James A Gaston was at Miller's Coarner.

[00:04:59.29] Elizabeth: That's right.

[00:05:01.00] John: Peter Steele, Maurice... Och?

[00:05:06.04] Elizabeth: Johnston.

[00:05:07.05] John: Ay, they were good value. Ay, the Johnstons - an A mine the' wur aa at hame at the time, an I wus warkin tae Robert Cammell an we went up.

[00:05:15.25] Campbell came hame this night and he says tae me, he says tae me, "A want ye tae go tae the Mill themorra," he says, "fur A want tae go tae a ploughin match". "Well," I says, "That's al right".

[00:05:27.01] So we landit in the morn then, an o coorse, Perlie wus oot, just ready fur ection. An afore she knows whaur she wus, A haed her daen.

[00:05:40.13] "Ye'r no the boy I wus toul ye wur," she says, but they wur good value so the' wur, ay.

[00:05:48.09] Elizabeth: Your memory's gye good.

[00:05:50.00] John: Ay, it's no too bad yit like, ye know. Bi 26th o July, A'll be 83.

[00:05:58.24] Elizabeth: Well, did you ever go to dances or anythin like that?

[00:06:01.18] John: Very few dances but I niver missed thrie nights in the week tae the pictèrs if possible. An we, mebbe twuntie or thurtie o us, we waaked in, ye know, an waaked back oot again.

[00:06:13.20] Elizabeth: Tae Ballymoney?

[00:06:14.21] John: Mm-hmm. The pictèrs cost ye six pence - eighteen pence ye needed fur the week's pictèrs.

[00:06:23.23] Elizabeth: Ay, it was good entertainment for eighteen pence.

[00:06:26.06] John: A mind whan A wus in Boyd's... Boyd sent me an Wullie Loney wi a baler tae bale roon Clough. An A mine whan we wur gaun up, whan we wur fornenst the Eglish Hal, ye know up....

[00:06:44.27] Elizabeth: Yes, I know where it is.

[00:06:46.10] John: Ay, whan we wur gaun up that, A mine thair wur nae mud-guards on the trector at the time so ye may guess it's a while ago.

[00:06:54.00] An we wur gaun up thair an the auld trector filled up wi dust or chaff or somethin an we had tae tak the manifold or the jet an aa oot o her, ye know, tae get her redd oot...

[00:07:08.05] an A says, "At least A know whaur the Eglish Hal is noo!" An we went up thair an baled, an whauriver we went, we stayed at night ye know.

[00:07:18.14] Elizabeth: Oh ye didnae come home?

[00:07:19.27] John: No, no, we didnae come hame whan we wur thair - fur, ye know, we wur balin aa right tae the Cloughwattèr, ye know, away Cloughwattèr Church, ye know.

[00:07:28.07] Elizabeth. Yes, and then ye'd sleep in the house then?

[00:07:29.26] John: Oh ay, we stayed, we slep in the hooses, whauriver we wur.

[00:07:33.26] Elizabeth: Oh right, that was good. Did ye ever pull any lint or anything like that?

[00:07:37.15] John: Monies the time A pulled lint, pulled wi the han for years and pulled wi a puller forbye, ay A did surely.

[00:07:48.03] The thing wus, A'll tell ye about ae thing, though A niver lukked intae it half... Dae ye see the Proota Famine?

[00:07:55.25] I think I'd uncles leevin durin the Proota Famine! You could har'ly credit that but A'll tell ye hoo it come tae be.

[00:08:05.28] Me faither's yins was all - thair wur ten brithers an two sisters an me faither wus the third aff bein the young'est; an me faither wus boarn in 18 an 68.

[00:08:21.04] An A hae minded sorta because A'll tell ye why. Noo he wus boarn in 68 an Gladstone fought the Land Bill in '86, ye know what A mean, ye jaist reversed it, ye know?

[00:08:34.29] An Gladstone... me faither wus 20 years o age whan Gladstone fought the Land Bill so ye may guess, me faither wus in his 90... he wus in his 96th yeir whan he died.

[00:08:47.09] Elizabeth: Well then you had uncles... If he was the young'est, you had...

[00:08:50.08] John: He wasn't. He wus the third aff bein the young'est - thair wur 9 brithers an sisters ouler nor him. An then A'm the last oot o the second generation, the whole lot, A'm the last.

[00:09:04.23] An A hae two sisters - an that's, that's that whole thing, the second generation wiped oot noo - the'r finished.

[00:09:14.03] But I niver thought about inquiren much intae it, ye see. A should 'a' but A heerd me faither sayin that even away later on in years, he minded o his faither...

[00:09:29.07] or he mebbe didnae hae mind o it, but he heerd him sayin that he went oot tae a proota pit at six o'clock in the moarnin, an a wumman, Bettie Blue, leaved on the ither side o the road,

[00:09:40.10] doon low doon below the road, ye know, fur it wus cut ower moss. An he says she wus ower at ma proota pit, he says, lookin fur her breakfast.

[00:09:51.11] Ay but, well A haed thrie or four uncles went tae America an went thair an bound tae work and saved up an come hame here.

[00:10:01.29] An me Uncle Andy bought this here whaniver he come hame. An Johnny bought the place doon the road, an Hugh bought yin in Bendooragh. Ay, them thrie fur sure oniewye.

[00:10:16.28] Elizabeth: Ay, they came back?

[00:10:18.02] John: They come back an bought bits o land, ay.

[00:10:23.13] Elizabeth: Ye don't know what they worked at in America, no?

[00:10:25.26] John: Eh?

[00:10:26.23] Elizabeth: Ye dinnae know what they worked at in America, no?

[00:10:29.16] John? Ay, they worked in... Me Uncle Andy worked on the railway here makin the new railways in it.