

THE ULSTER-SCOTS LANGUAGE SOCIETY

In this clip, Will McAvoy, originally born and reared on Mid-Isle, an island in Strangford Lough, near Greyabbey (Greba), reminisces about various subjects including his schooldays, games he played in the 1920s and 30s, trying to judge the tide when out 'coortin', washing blankets, milking cows, killing pigs, lifting potatoes and hay threshing.

This is part of a series of recordings made by Will for the Ulster-Scots Language Society, and produced in cassette form as "Hairts o Greba".

[00:00:00.00] The mair we wurnae boarn in Greba, it wus aye oor village an schuil. Noo A'm taakin about nineteen-twunty-echt an intae the Thirties.

[00:00:14.04] We leeved on Mid-Islan' - weel, it wusnae really an islan, thair wus whut the' caaed a "Causeway" ontae it - we caaed it a "roan". In high tides or reuch wather, ye'd be cut aff fur twa or thrie oors.

[00:00:34.14] We had tae waak tae schuil through the fiels - ay, wat or dry. We wore buits an stockins up tae the knee, an shoart breeks.

[00:00:45.14] Ay, thair wurnae onie lang breeks in them days: na, it wus shoart breeks hel up wi galluses, an a gensey wi a pattern on the collar an a tie tae match.

[00:00:58.11] Ay, the tie usually haed stripes across it an ye usually chowed the en o the tie an cleant yer nose on the sleeve.

[00:01:06.25] The weans nooadays ir cairtit tae schuil in motor-cars, an thair schuilbags - the'r bigger an heavier than thairsel. Oor schuilbags wusnae very heavy, na - a jotter an a pencil an a readin buik....

[00:01:25.27] an oor piece, oh ay, thair wur nae schuil males in them days, na. Oor piece wus twa roons o plain loaf: it wusnae sliced in them days ether: na, yer ma cut it wi a knife.

[00:01:39.04] An thair wur hame-made buttèr on it an rhubarb or blackberry jam - an it wus rowled in newspaper.

[00:01:47.26] Ye got oot o schuil at twalve o'clock an ye et yer piece. Then ye went tae the Goat-Isle an played fitbaa.

[00:01:57.06] The Maister wud ring a han-bell at yin o'clock an ye went back in, mebbe covert wi gutters an the sweet blinnin ye.

[00:02:06.24] O coorse, we haed ither pastimes like, sich as 'hoops' - that wus the rim o an oul bicycle wheel an a bit o bent wire. An 'peeries' - weel, that's whut we caaed them - noo A think the richt name wus 'taps'.

[00:02:25.02] An 'cheesers' - ay, chestnuts wi a hole drilt through them an a bit o string through it, an we blattert at yin anither till the' brok.

[00:02:35.14] An the hissies, the' haed skippin rapes. Oh the education folk in them days wus richt an gen'rous - they supplied the rape an the fitba.

[00:02:46.07] The teachers in my time was ool Marshall Hill an the wife; an then Ferris an the wife; an Miss Morryshin. Noo she was boarn in Greba an went tae Greba schuil as a wean, then taught in it fur ivver foartie yeir.

[00:03:04.03] Nooadays the weans at schuil ir aa weel dressed. Thair's some has uniforms: thair wur nane o that in oor day although, mind ye, A think some o the higher schuils had a uniform.

[00:03:18.23] The wee fellas haed skull-keps an a tie tae match, an the hissies haed whut the' caaed a "gym frock", tied roon the middle wi some kine o a belt.

[00:03:30.13] Mine ye, the frocks was a kine o shoart in them days - a bit like the miniskirt noo - an the' wore white stockings up tae the knee, ay, an the navy blue knickers wi 'lastic roon the legs.

[00:03:44.12] A tell ye, thair's nae elastic roon the legs o the knickers noo - thair's nae legs in the knickers. Oh, hooaniver, that's anither story...

[00:03:53.25] But Greba's fairly changed aa the same. Thair uist tae be only thrie streets in it - Main Street, Church Street an North Street ('Hard Breid Raa' as the' caaed it).

[00:04:05.27] Like the sang says:
"Wha saa the Greba lasses,
Wha saa them gaun awa,
Wha saa the Greba lasses,
Cummin doon the Hard Breid Raa?"

[00:04:15.25] Some o them haed buits an stockings,
Some o them haed nane ava,
Some o them haed big bare backsides
Cummin doon the Hard Breid Raa".

[00:04:26.16] An then thair was the breid-cairts - Hugh Baird an Tammy Moore, Bertie Donnan, Eddie McConkey, och! Thair's ithers an A cannae mine. The' uist tae go intae the islan.

[00:04:39.09] But ma Ma uist tae bake like a lock o ither folk - soda an wheaten, proota breid, proota oaten an oaten breid. Ay an the beef-cairts - Alec Morryshin. We used tae hae tae rin across an get the beef.

[00:04:54.00] Ay, yer Ma gien ye a pie-dish an half a croon an ye got a pun o stewin meat an a pun o sassidges an a block o that hard drippin - ay, an ye got change oot o the half croon.

[00:05:09.01] Noo, the reason we had tae meet the cairts was, ye see, thair wur nae road ontae the islan in them days.

[00:05:15.07] Na, cars cudnae go ivver, an it was the Borstal boys that made the road ontae it, the Malone Trainin School.

[00:05:23.21] Ay they had thair simmer camp in the islan, an the' had tae make a road across tae get the lorries ivver wi the wudden huts. That was in the early Thirties.

[00:05:36.16] The tide wus a bit o a nuisance at the islans, ay - although, mine ye, we uist tae use it as an excuse tae get oot o schuil early.

[00:05:45.15] But if ye wur gaun oot at nicht, ye had to see whut time the roan covert through the day: then, ye see, it wud be covert aboot the same time at nicht.

[00:05:55.27] So if ye wur gaun coortin, ye had tae make it quick. Monie a time A hae cum tae the roan an it wus jaist covert.

[00:06:05.28] Ye haed tae tak yer buits an socks aff an wad across or else, like, wait fur twa or three oors.

[00:06:12.03] But, mine ye, waddin across the reuch stanes in yer bare feet in December, sowl, it pit the notion o coortin oot o yer heid!

[00:06:21.11] Ye see, ye cudnae stye oot onie langer fur the hissies had tae be in at ten o'clock in them days.

[00:06:28.14] Thair wus anither big job - waashin blankets. The beds in them days had woollen blankets an patchwark quilts, ay an sometimes a tapcoat. We haed tae turn the big meng'le.

[00:06:44.28] Ye see, thair wur fleas in them days (we caaed them 'flays'). Ye pickt up the odd yin at schuil but ye wudnae hear tell o flays noo.

[00:06:57.04] O coorse, the folk haes waashin machines noo an the' waash iverie day. In them days, the' only waashed yinst a week, an the blankets yinst a yeir. Na, a flay wudnae hae an airthly nooadays.

[00:07:12.15] Whan we got hame fae schuil, we got a drap o tay an then we had tae gaun tae tha Sooth Isle tae bring the kye hame tae be milkt - ay, ye learnt tae milk young in them days.

[00:07:25.15] Thair uist tae be a lot o cats aboot the fairms - ay, ye see, the' uist tae keep them furtae keep the rats an mice doon. Ye see, thair wur nae poison in them days.

[00:07:36.16] The cats aye knew whan it wus milkin time. Ye see thair wus a tin dish in the byre an, och, A can see the cats yit, aa roon the dish wi thair tails up.

[00:07:47.26] An then the milk wus pit through a separator an the crame wus made intae buttèr, an the servint-man wus sent, yinst a week, tae Davy Davison's wi the buttèr, in the horse an cairt, an a list o guids tae bring back.

[00:08:05.27] An then the' uist tae kill the pigs on the fairms in them days - ay, thair wus the pig killers, Willie Gilmore fae Cairdy an Patie Keag fae Bellyfrenis.

[00:08:17.03] Maist o the fairmers wud pit a pig in the tub in the wunter-time, like fur thair ain use - an the folk used tae cum fae Greba tae get a bit o liver.

[00:08:29.10] Oor simmer holidays fae schuil wus spent in the fiels makin hye. Oh, it wus aa daen bi han then. We uist tae hae tae dae the rakin, like wi a big rake the' caaed a "cuddy rake".

[00:08:44.19] An the coarn wus cut wi reaper an tied wi han, an stookt, an cairtit in wi horse an cairt, an built in whut the' caaed 'roonaboos' an 'havils'.

[00:08:57.24] The schuil uist tae get aff at proota-risin time an the weans uist tae go tae the farms tae gether prootas. We uist tae clat them.

[00:09:08.17] Noo, the drill wus split wi a drill-pu an ye pit bags roon yer knees - we caaed them 'knee cloots' - an ye got doon on yer knees an clatted them. Eh, ye wur mair or less hokin for them.

[00:09:23.16] An ye pit them intae rod baskets wi a hannle on each side; an then intae a bing an covert wi strae an slitch on the tap, tae keep the frost aff them.

[00:09:36.09] Oh A mine the tay wus aye brocht tae the fiel. Ay, ye got tay at ten o'clock an thrie o'clock; ye went hame fur yer denner. Boy, tay in the fiel wus quare an nice!

[00:09:49.14] Oh, roons o plain loaf an then blackberry jam an mebbe a bit o barmbrack, an tay in a mug oota a big tin can. But och, ye wur aye gled whan it wus quattin time.

[00:10:04.21] The oul folk wus able tae tell the time bi the sin but ye cudnae go wrang fur thair wus a bell in Rosemount Estate an it rung tae tell the workers there that it wus quattin time - an thair wus yin in Mountstewart tae.

[00:10:24.20] The fairmers in them days helpt yin anither - the' caaed it 'niborin' – especially at the threshin. The big mill wud hae cum intae the district - an it wus steam in them days.

[00:10:39.13] Ay, an thair wus Hughie McChagherty fae Bellycranmore, an then Hugh Moore fae Kircubbin. The' wud hae thresht fur a week in the district, yin fairmer helpin the ither.

[00:10:52.07] An then some folk wud cum tae get caff like, tae fill the bed tick, an us young yins wud be there, like, tae chase efter the rats an mice.