

Transcript of interview with Robert Caldow

Interviewed by Lee Paton on 20th June 2018

(Added information not on recording and notes for clarification in brackets)

0:00

LP. You were born at Culnaightrie (Auchencairn)

RC. That's right. Then we left and went to Wee Sypland for a year and then back to The Rigg (On Torr Farm) Sypland's near Kirkcudbright, near Whinnieliggate. I was born in 1928, 6th October.

LP. So, you moved to Sypland when you were a baby then?

RC. I was born in October, and we shifted in the November.

LP. So, it was only six months later that you came back to Torr.

RC. To The Rigg

LP. Why did folk move around so much. Folk moved around so much, were they just looking for better work? Better pay?

RC. Better pay, well, everything better!

LP. My dad used to talk about people moving every six months, every May, and every October.

RC. Well, I there was nae licht in Little Forest (another cottage on Torr. Roberts family moved there when he was seven) till your dad came. The houses were basic. No electricity. The Rigg had an outside toilet. At Little Forest it wasnae, they had altered the back place. I think when we went to Little Forest the dogs were in the back bit. Bob Edgar was the herd, and he died so Faither took over as the herd. He was herd till your dad came (Hugh Paton bought the farm in 1947)

LP. So, is that why you moved from The Rigg to Little Forest?

RC. Aye, because Little Forest was the herd's house, and it was a better house. Slightly! At the Rigg the joists were just out of the wood with bits chipped out of them to kind of straighten them out. So, it was just rubbish to start with! It would have been a hell of a job making a house with that kind of wood

LP. You came to Torr when you were seven months old so that was 1929. Dad bought the farm in 1947. You had been here for 18 years. Why did your dad stay so long? Was Tom Ovens (The owner then) a good employer compared to the rest?

RC. Miserable! Oh, Christ aye! He wouldn't let you catch a rabbit or ocht like that. He used to say, if they were cutting the corn and there were rabbits, Jimmy Kirk, he was the rabbit catcher paid a rent for them, and we shouldn't be catching them! Oh! bloody hard!

LP. I thought when you had been there that long before my dad came that Tom Ovens must have been a lovely man, but no!

RC. I never thought him a lovely man! I never got a penny from him. I used to help my faither. When he was herdin', he had an auld bitch, and I used to take it and shift lambs for him, shift maybe the single lambs and that out of the lambing field. There would be about 500 ewes in those days. He looked after them and he looked after the outside cattle an' a'. Ken, there used to be bings

everywhere and we fed them oot o' the bings as you went roon. I never got a thing! I did what my faither told me. I had to dae what I was telt.

5:00

LP. Were your family always farm workers Robert?

RC. Aye. Father was always on a farm. He was, as a boy, at Auchengool. Corries, Auchengool. His father and mother were at Auchengool. He was born at Rainton. The family were from round the Gatehouse area and that.

LP. And your mother?

RC. She was from Borgue. She ploughed with a pair of horse in the 1st World War. She wasn't married then. And she used to take the mail across on horse- back to the island, The Ross. She went across on horseback. The name of the horse was Wypole (?) It's richt name was Wypacraft (?) I was telt that.

LP. When you think back on your childhood do you remember it as idyllic or quite hard?

RC. Oh Christ! It was hard! Lived on rabbits! Rabbit pie, rabbit a' ways! We weren't allowed to catch the hares, but Faither used to catch the odd one with the dog when he was herdin' like. I mind once, this is going back, when I was just a wee boy he had a very good dog, an auld dog and it was very good and he was breaking in a dog for his brother, Will, frae Lockerbie and this dog had pups and he wanted yin, but he got twae, and he broke them both in. He sold one and kept the best yin. And I can mind it herded a hare from among the sheep and didn't kill it but brought it to him and he killed it with a stick. It wudnae let it oot frae among the sheep and it kept birlin' round and birlin' round till in the finish up it was fair bugged. And I'll tell you, that same dog, he was sitting with Uncle John and Ivie Irving who used to live at Slate Row - his mother lived there anyway, and he was brought up there and his faither worked on Orchardton estate, but they were sitting, after he had broke in that dog, they were sitting on the summer seat in front of the house and my Faither said he could gather the sheep in The Boat Field (within sight of the house but some distance away) hame with it. said I'm bloody sure you canny. But he did and it hunted then up to the gate and then hunted them back down to the middle of the field and then he cried the dog back. It was a good dog. When your faither came he still had that dog, but it was getting old. Jenny Rogerson who worked at Barlocco got it, but she never let it off the lead and just wasted it. I think it was Jimmy Jardine got it for them at Airds, he was the farmer there. Your Faither had a good dog, I couldn't tell you now, what he called it, but he got it from somewhere up North I think, it came as a pup, and he broke it in and it turned out a good dog and then it got poisoned.

10:32

LP. That was Bob because I think it was probably the only dog he had. He said he could pat his chest, and it would jump up into his arms

RC. Aye, it turned out a guid dog.

LP. I remember staying when your folks were still at Little Forest, everybody had hens, and we ate a lot of rabbit, and you had ferrets.

RC. We had ferrets for catching rabbits. When your faither took over this bit somebody called Ainsworth took the shooting, and Colin Thompson, I think it was, he was the kind of gamekeeper, and he just kept the rabbits for the shooting and there was bloody thousands and thousands of

them. When you came down to The Bow Wood, the field running into the wood had bloody hundreds of them. Your faither said to Ainsworth he was taking the shooting off him. He said to my faither and Andrew (Kalotka) they could catch the Rabbits. We killed hundreds o' rabbits, we did, we killed hunners!

LP. Do you think there was more wildlife?

RC. There were more young birds in those days. There's not so many wee birds now. There's as many of them hawks and things. At Little Forest yesterday, I went up to Little Forest. I came to the village and went to see Lily (Wilson) and Alec Berry and then went up to Little Forest and yesterday there were four squirrels and there was one, one was bigger and it was the nicest thing I've ever seen. It was dark, dark red. It came running along the grass and up the tree onto the feeder. Then another one came but it was slightly wee'er. It had a white tail. And then 2 youngsters came, and they were chasing each other up the tree and round about. And hundreds of birds! The hawks sweep in to try and catch them.

LP. Were your grandparents about when you were young?

RC. I never knew either grandfather on either side, but I had a great grandfather on my mother's side. He lived at, ye ken the twa brigs as you go into The Haugh of Urr, that's where they stayed at the hoose in there and I mind getting my photo taken with him, it was four generations. He was an old man then. I had two grannys. Faither's mother was an old bugger, so she was. You daren't say ocht mind! You were no' to make a noise. She used to come and stay for a week or a fortnight and you daren't give a squeak. Mother's mother was alright. She stayed at the Haugh, Mrs Kirkpatrick. I'm Robert Clark Kirkpatrick Caldow. Clark for my great grandfather and Kirkpatrick, my mother was a Kirkpatrick.

15:33

LP. Were your parents quite strict?

RC. Not really, well they were alright. You had to do what you were told! When I was playing football, he used to say, "you're not goin' tae nae bloody fitba till you've done an hour in the garden!"

LP. Were you well behaved?

RC. Ye had to be.

LP. Did you do all your schooling at Auchencairn?

RC. We didn't have high school in those days. I did all my schooling at Auchencairn and left when I was Fourteen. I worked at the sawmill from fourteen to sixteen because I couldn't start serving my time till I was sixteen (as a joiner with Tom Corrie) along the road at Potterland. They used to make meal there (oatmeal for porridge). Old Davie Corrie, he did the mill. They used to take me up to take corn from Torr, and they made it into meal. Then you went back and got the meal. After Davie died, Tom used to do it himself.

LP. Were school days happy days?

RC. Aye, I was alright at the school, but he (the master) wasn't a good teacher. There was some got a hell of a tankin'. Alec Telfer, Winston Kennedy, Owen Beattie, he used to take them through into the woodwork room and you could hear them screaming, getting leathered. I got leathered too. I'll tell you what, there was no phone in the school and Tommy Lawrie sat up on one window and I sat on

the other windowsill when the master was away using the phone up at the manse and we were looking out for him coming and we missed him, and we were still sitting up on the windowsill. By Christ and we got it then! Four of the strap on each hand. You could see the marks on your hand. It was a thick belt, and it left all the marks on your hand. Christ it was sare! Mrs Trotter, Keith's mother, she got him banned from the school. He was sore on Keith. He wasn't so sore on Kieran but he was sore on Keith and it was her that got him banned from the school. He wouldn't get teaching nowadays. But if you behaved yourself and did what you were supposed to do you were right enough.

19:55

LP. What did you do apart from football at night and at the weekends?

RC. We used to watch the tennis, we used to spend our time there at nights and even before I was old enough to play football, we would watch the tennis and the bowling

LP. Did you play tennis?

RC. I never played tennis, no, but we used to watch it. They (the courts) were 'right in they days, they looked fine. It was auld Davy Gordon spoiled the tennis courts. He dug them up, he said he was going to help them, so he dug them up and they never were right. He must have got into the drains and that, but that was the finish of them, and they never played tennis again on them.

LP. How has food changed over the years?

RC. Well, we got oat-meal ground at the mill for making porridge. It could be course or finer depending how many times they put it through the stones.

LP. Everybody had hens and gardens.

RC. Aye and you used everything. We had a good garden at The Rigg and a good Garden at Little Forest, it's the best garden ever. It's some garden the now because I was up it and had a look through. It's a good garden, onions and tatties and everything was looking smashing. It's the best garden and its early, it gets the sun whenever it comes up in the morning

LP. What about doctors and dentists

RC. The last teeth I got pulled was at Castle-Douglas up at the health centre and he said, "I can't give you a jag, I'll just pull it" and it was sore. It was a big double yin, the only one I had left. He had about three goes at it and said, "if I can't get it this time, I'll just have to leave it" He was trying to pull and hold my mouth open and I was trying to get it shut!

LP. So, you reckon dental treatment hasn't improved much over the years then?!

RC. Oh, it has really! At the school they used to pull them out. It was murder! The first lot of teeth I got pulled by Mr Grieve in Castle-Douglas, it was his faither, Grieve's faither that pulled them, he used gas.

25:12

LP. Grieve was my dentist till not that long ago. It was his father.

RC. There were only two doctors in Castle-Douglas and that was up until Betty had Steven (Betty and Roberts son, born in the 70s). There was Dr Moffatt and Dr Kerr. I can mind taking Betty to Dr Kerr it was, and holding her hand, and he says she wouldn't have any family. It was murder, it upset me!

LP. But then you had Steven.

RC. Steven, aye, that was twenty-four years after. Betty was forty-four and I was forty-seven. After Steven we thought we'd have another, but it didn't happen.

LP. Well, you've got grandchildren now to keep you on your toes!

RC. Aye, they're lads!

LP. So, what about social life in Auchencairn? Did you have dances and stuff.

(Robert mishears this as a question about his dad)

RC. Well, he used to play football. I can mind him playin' fitba. I think he was just about twenty-six or something when he came to Torr the second time. I think he was just twenty-six then, I couldnae just tell you for sure.

LP. I cannae imagine because I just knew him as an auld man, with his fob watch.

RC. Well, he was an auld man! When I used to gan tae' . . . if Betty wasn't going with me and I was maybe going to buy a pair of trousers she would say "Don't come back with old man's trousers!" and I'd say, "But I am an auld man!"

LP. Clothing, there wasn't so much choice

RC. No but there was an old man worked here, Jimmy Milligan, he wasn't Betty's father, but it was who she was brought up by. His brother was a tailor. He'd been a tailor in Glasgow, and he made suits. He used to make things for the men, the workers like. He would get old coats and things and make leggings with buttons down the side of them for the men on the farm. They used to call him Auld Tyler Milligan.

LP. There was no such thing, even when I was a wee girl, and I'm only fifty-five, there was no such thing as fleece or Lycra or sweatshirts. It was all woolly and stuff that shrunk.

RC. I can remember when I was a boy, Willie Rennie and Tommy Rennie, father and son, and they used to put in the garden (at Old Torr) with a wee plough and the dog pulled the plough. That's going back, I was just a wee boy then. It was just a home-made wooden thing, but it worked alright. They haltered the dog to it, it was a kind of gimmick.

30:05

LP. Tell me about the village when you were wee Robert because there was the reading room

RC. There used to be billiards and dominoes and what else did they play, oh, darts. First of all, the reading room was doon where the ... (before The Heuchan Institute but Robert couldn't explain to me where it was). It had double doors, that was the reading room and then auld Bob Heuchan left money to build what was his smiddy

LP. I was told he built it (The Heuchan Institute) as a smiddy but never really used it.

RC. He did use it because I took socks, ken, for the ploughs, for the horse ploughs in for him, he used tae pit a wing on it or put something else on it so that it flapped the soil ower better. When you were ploughing with a horse.

LP. So, it was a smiddy for a wee while and became a reading room after that. Was it a bit like a social club?

RC. Aye' the reading room was, and they used to buy papers.

LP. A cross between a library and a social club then. And your Uncle Jimmy used to go and light the fire. Did he always look after it?

RC. Well after he retired from the police. You see, Frank Sherry, there was a lot of them, Bob Sherry, Frank's brother, Bill Monroe, Norval Rennie, a' them, went in a night and that's where they spent their nights. There was no television then in they days. Some went to the pub, and some just went up to the reading room and spent their time there. Robert Wilson and I used to go there, and we played billiards, but we weren't very good at it. Frank Sherry was good. Frank was a builder. His father had the business, and he took over when his father died. He had a brother, Jock, but they never got on. Frank and Jock never got on. They wudnae work together.

LP. So, you went and did your apprenticeship at Potterland.

RC. Aye, five years. I was there thirty-seven years till he (Tom Corrie) retired and them came to work at Torr. I got £14 a week from Tom Corrie and when I came to Torr, I got £17 (early 70s)

LP. So, my dad gave you a pay rise! What year was that?

RC. I started serving my time when I was sixteen for five years

LP. That would take you to twenty- one

RC. And I was there for thirty-seven years. (Robert was possibly 37 when he came to work at Torr, not 37 years with Tom Corrie)

LP. That would take you to sixty-eight, fifty-eight, sorry. That can't be right, you were at Torr longer than that. You worked on a bit after you retired

RC. I was seventy-two when I stopped.

34:53

LP. And one of my last questions is about language. My dad used to talk about the way they spoke at school and the playground and at home on the farm at Chapelcroft and he said they used to get belted if they were heard speaking Scots in the playground. There were a lot of words that Dad new that he didn't use anymore because they had fallen out of use in his lifetime. Have you noticed that?

RC. Aye it's just kind of fizzled oot. But just when you're talking about that, had a Scots dictionary, I had twae dictionaries, big encyclopaedias, and they threw them oot! Steven and Carrie bloody threw them oot! I've nothing left!

LP. You've had to downsize Robert.

RC. Oh! It is downsized! I had a lot of dishes, nice wee dishes for sandwiches or cakes or that and I haven't one left. Not a one have I!

LP. Does that mean if come and see you for a sandwich it'll have to be on a bit of newspaper?

LP. Well, your memory's still pretty good

RC. I can mind things further back

LP. When we used to come up to Little Forest to stay, you always had Sunday tea on a fold out table. RC. I can mind the table that was at Glebe Crescent (11 Glebe Crescent, where Roberts Father

and sister Jean moved to when Jean's son Joe got married and remained at Little Forest with his wife, Sandra), I dinnae ken what happened to it.

LP. They had curly legs, and the council houses all had them because they could be folded up under the window and it could be brought out into the room. It was after your dad and Jean and Connie moved to the Crescent. I used to love those teas on Sunday, jam and cheese sandwiches and ham sandwiches and cakes. There was never a vegetable, sometimes a bit of tomato. I used to love it.

RC. Sunday tea

LP. Something folk don't do now

RC. At one time at Sunday tea, we would have rabbit, cooked and taken off the bone and fried it with onion. Christ, I liked that. It was re-het with the onions through it. With bread or scone likely, it would be. Mother used to bake a lot. When I got married, Betty made everything. Cakes and scones and everything was home made. She worked in the bakery. She worked the hot plate in the bakery in Auchencairn. And she aye ran down Corson's rolls. She never liked Corson's rolls. She said they can't make rolls like Alec Mitchell!

Caldow Family Photographs



ROBERT WITH HIS GREAT GRANDFATHER ROBERT CLARK, HIS GRANDMOTHER JENNY KIRKPATRICK STANDNG LEFT AND HIS MOTHER JANET CALDOW ON THE RIGHT. EARLY 1930S



MRS AND ROBERT CLARK



PHOTO TAKEN AT THE HOME OF TAM ESKDALE (STANDING IN THE DOORWAY) AT CULNAIGHTRIE.

JEAN(JANE), ROBERT, JENNY(JANET) AND JANET CALDOW. MID 1930S



ROBERT AND JOE. LATE 1940S



JOE WITH RABBITS EARLY 1950S



**ROBERT STANDING, HIS FATHER JOE SITTING AND NIECE, CONNIE.
EARLY 1950S**



TORR FARM STAFF MID1950S

BACK: BILLY MC GARRY, JIM MC GARRY, JIMMY MC GARRY (DAIRYMAN AND FATHER OF BILLY AND JIM), JOE CALDOW (ROBERT'S FATHER), MRS MC GARRY. FRONT: NICK (WHO STAYED AT OLD TORR) JIMMY MC WILLIAM (DAL TAMIE), ANDREW KALOTKA (RIGG OF TORR) JEAN CALDOW (ROBER'S SISTER).



ROBERT AND BETTY'S WEDDING, AUCHENCAIRN



**THE CALDOW FAMILY. TAKEN IN JAMES AND EUPHEMIA'S GARDEN
IN MAIN STREET**

**BACK ROW; WULL, JOHN, DAVY, BOB. FRONT; JOE (ROBERT'S
FATHER), MARY, ANN, JESS, JAMES.**

DAVY, MARY AND JESS VISITING FROM CANADA.



STEVEN AND BETTY



**AUCHENCAIRN BOWLING CLUB. INTER COUNTY COMPETITION,
DUMFRIES V STEWARTRY.**

**BACK. FRED LEWIS, RAMSAY LAMONT, ROBERT CALDOW, JAMES
CALDOW.**

**FRONT. JOSEPH CALDOW, JAMES MCCRACKEN, BILL CORRIE,
NORVAL RENNIE.**