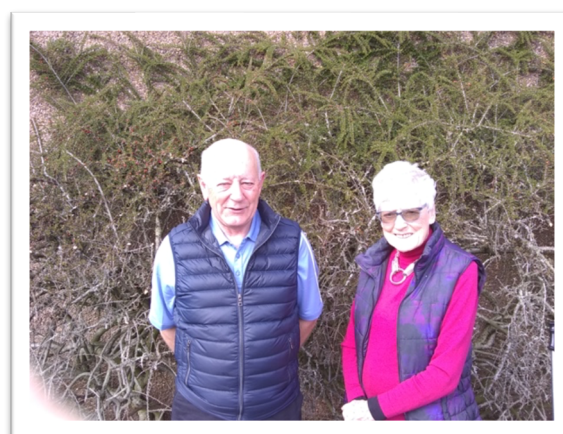




Project: Ploughing Up Our Past
 Respondents: William Watson & his mother Mrs Jean Watson
 Year of Birth: 1927 (Mrs Watson)
 Age: 94
 Connection to project: Semi-retired farmer and his mother
 Date of Interviews: 27th July 2021
 Interviewer: Ian McGhee
 Recording Agreement: Yes
 Information & Content: Yes
 Photographic Images: No
 Length of Interviews:
 Location of Interview: Respondents' home at Muirston Farm
 Recording Equipment: Zoom H4n Pro



William and Jean Watson

Time (from/to mins/secs)	Description
00.00/00.10	IM: You've always been a farmer? WW: Yes, born and bred on this farm.
00.11/00.53	IM: And what about you, Mrs Watson? What was your farm? JW: Yes, it was Netherton Farm. IM: And you were born on the farm? Do you mind me asking how old you are? JW: Yes, born on the farm and I'm 94. I've seen a lot. IM: So you went to school in Cumnock. JW: No. I went to Garallan school and then to Cumnock Academy. IM: And then to another farm? JW: No. Just back home.
01.05/01.27	IM: When did you move? JW: In 1948 my Dad bought Calton at Cumnock. He bought it lock, stock and barrel. That means he bought the stock and everything. He sold the stock that was at Netherton with a sale and we moved to Calton. And then I met my husband to be through the Young Farmers. Then we got married and stayed at the cottages at Bogside up the road and then Granny and Grandpa retired and then I moved here.
01.28/01.46	IM: You say you met him at the Young Farmers. Was there quite a social life among farmers at that time?

	<p>JW: Yes. The Young Farmers movement was just starting up around that time. It had been on the go for 2 or 3 years. Lots of dances. You know, the usual. A meeting every fortnight. The meetings were purely agricultural I would say. There was an odd one based towards girls' things. Whereas nowadays Young Farmers it's mainly social. And there was competitions. There was lots of competitions.</p>
01.54/03.05	<p>IM: I believe there was also things like farmers discussion groups at that time. JW: Well, my Dad was a member of the original Cumnock Agricultural Discussion Group. He was one of the original members who set it up.</p>
04.13/05.44	<p>IM: Did you feel that you always wanted to stay in farming? You didn't want to try other careers? JW: It was just the thing most farmers' children did. I was happy. I liked the life. IM: It was maybe not the easiest life for a woman being a farmer's wife. JW: Not really. I think you have to be brought up to it. Mind you, these last 40 years there's been lots of farmers' sons have married girls from the town and most of them have got on fine. IM: Was it always the same kind of farm your parents and your husband had? JW: Yes. It was dairy and before the war Mum and Dad kept a lot of hens. WW: My Grandpa, he kept hens as well. IM: Was this to supplement farm income? WW: I think a lot of farms had hens. My Grandpa, we've got a silver and a gold medal he won for hens, egg-laying trials. You can see them. IM: I'll maybe take a photo of them before I go. So it was a hobby? WW: No, I don't think it was a hobby. It was part of the business. My Grandpa kept a lot of hens. Too many hens to call it a hobby. JW: For my Dad, it was a business. He used to hatch out chickens and sold them. IM: So it did supplement the business. WW: Definitely. I can remember there were hens out in the fields. JW: Ours were all out in the fields, scattered here and there. WW: I can remember a big storm once and the henhouse got blown away. It was smashed to matchsticks but I don't think there were any hens in it at that time. JW: For the hens the houses were scattered in different fields.</p>
06.00/06.52	<p>IM: It's quite rare now I believe for farms to have employees but at that time did you have farmhands? JW: We had a maid. I mean I was one of seven. The eldest of seven. We had a maid, a young man in his late teens or twenties, then we had a boy, he was a hen boy. WW: Was that at Calton? JW: No. That was at Netherton. But the hen side of it, when we went to Calton, it was more or less abandoned because at that time you couldn't get food for hens, feeding. And mainly at Calton it was dairy and sheep. It was a sheep farm too.</p>
06.59/07.41	<p>IM: And you [Mr Watson] were always dairy? WW: Always dairy up until we sold the cows about 13 years ago. IM: Did you retire then? WW: I decided to take things a bit easier. JW: It's not really retirement WW: No, I've not retired but I had 2 hernia operations and I thought the big man upstairs was trying to tell me something because it was hard going.</p>

	<p>JW: Also we had improved lots of buildings but the buildings had reached the kind of end of their lives.</p> <p>WW: The buildings were getting tired. They were out of date a wee bit and needing a lot of money spent and I just didn't think at the age I was that it was worth the while.</p> <p>IM: Dairy particularly seems to be a 24/7 operation. Other types of farming you can maybe take a day off here and there.</p> <p>WW: Yes it is.</p>
07.52/08.36	<p>JW: At Muirston here they always made cheese.</p> <p>WW: This was way back. Pre-War.</p> <p>IM: So you didn't keep the cheese making going?</p> <p>WW: No, no. When the Milk Marketing Board came in in the 1930s it was abandoned.</p> <p>JW: It was all liquid milk after that. And most of the farms that made cheese also kept pigs. And they were fed on the whey that was left over from the cheese processing. Well that went by the board too – pigs on farms at that time.</p>
08.49/09.45	<p>IM: When you sold the cows 15 years ago what did you do? Has it still been farming you've been doing?</p> <p>WW: Well, I still make silage and I take in cattle and feed them in the winter for other people for a fee and a lot of the fields are let out to other people and they make silage in them. There's a big demand. A lot of people have more cattle than they can feed. There's a big demand for fields of grass so I manage to make a pound or two at that.</p> <p>JW: He's certainly not retired as such.</p>
09.49/11.42	<p>IM: The big change we talked about. The employees on the farm and the labour force declining but the corollary of that I suppose is technology and how that has changed.</p> <p>WW: There's very few farmworkers on farms round about here. There's none here. There's none at Knockhill. There's one at Davidston. There's one at Auchinbay.</p> <p>JW: The big contractors do all the work.</p> <p>WW: David ? is the main contractor in this area and he does all the work. He farms thousands of acres.</p> <p>JW: And when you see these huge machines coming in I think to myself how we toiled – that's the word, toiled – in the fields at hay and things and you see these machines and the man just sits in a big tractor and it's absolutely magic. I love going round about; Willie sometimes takes me out and we follow the choppers and it's absolutely amazing what they can do.</p> <p>IM: But you couldn't afford to buy one. You have to lease or get a contractor.</p> <p>WW: No. But I don't think a lot of contractors buy their machines. They lease as well.</p> <p>IM: They're very complex with GPS and computers...</p> <p>WW: If you were to buy a silage chopper it's quarter of a million pounds. It's a lot of money. You cannot just fork that out of your back pocket.</p> <p>IM: You wouldn't be using it all year round either.</p> <p>JW: No, it's just very seasonal, very seasonal. The changes are beyond belief actually.</p> <p>WW: There's very little field work done nowadays by farmers themselves. It's all contractors.</p> <p>JW: But then the outfits are getting bigger and bigger.</p>

	<p>IM: Farming always seemed to be an accident-prone industry.</p> <p>WW: It still is.</p> <p>IM: Did that happen on the farms you were on? Were there accidents or emergencies you had to deal with?</p> <p>WW: I can't really think of anything. Lots of minor things, trips and slips but you just get on with it.</p>
13:00/14.09	<p>IM: A lot of things have changed around farming. We've talked about technology and how capital intensive it's become but you don't have a local bank manager as you did maybe in the 50s and 60s. You would go to the local man with your proposal and now it's all on a computer. That must have changed the way farmers look at their land I would guess.</p> <p>WW: I don't know. If you're borrowing money nowadays... actually I wouldn't know where to go to nowadays to borrow money [laughs] when there's not a local bank manager. I suppose if I made enquiries I could be pointed in the right direction.</p> <p>IM: I suspect it's done online now.</p> <p>WW: Well, I spoke to somebody and I think they made enquiries at the bank and some guy from Edinburgh came out to see them about borrowing money.</p> <p>IM: So it's not a personal relationship?</p> <p>WW: No. Not at all.</p> <p>IM: I would guess there's an awful lot of things which used to be personal relationships – people you knew, people you dealt with – that are no longer that way. You're dealing with a more faceless...</p> <p>WW: Still, the supply chain for farming, feeding and fertilisers and things, it's still fairly personal. I buy all my stuff from a guy I've known for years. A fellow Ayr United supporter [laughs]</p> <p>IM: I'm not telling you I'm a shareholder in Kilmarnock [all laugh].</p>
14:50/16.15	<p>JW: But farming is a thing where you really hold the farm in trust for the next generation.</p> <p>IM: Land is a very elemental thing.</p> <p>WW: It's a very long-term business. You're doing things and making choices which will affect things in 10, 20, 50 years' time. I've just had a bit of draining done, a bit of field where the drains were all full and choked, about 5 acres or so, and that will benefit somebody a long time hence. Hopefully.</p> <p>IM: Do you have children?</p> <p>WW: No. I'm not married.</p> <p>IM: So what are you going to do with the farm?</p> <p>WW: Enjoy it.</p> <p>JW: You enjoy it at the moment. You have some hobbies.</p> <p>WW: Not for the last year and a half. I counted up that I'm a member of 11 different clubs and they're all shut down [laughs].</p> <p>IM: Mrs Watson was saying about holding land in trust so there must be some element of wondering about what's going to happen to all this land.</p> <p>WW: Most of it will still be farmed.</p> <p>JW: Sometimes I wake during the night and think about it. I was the fifth generation here.</p> <p>WW: I don't wake up and think about it.</p> <p>JW: If you had family it would probably have been handed over but then they might not have been interested.</p>

	<p>IM: There's a lot of farmers' children pursuing other careers.</p> <p>WW: There's a lot less farms than there used to be. A lot of them have been amalgamated.</p> <p>JW: For a lot of them the farm's your life. And for all the money that's invested in a farm, it's a huge amount of money and the return's quite poor in comparison. Not that we can complain but it's a poor return.</p>
16.20/18.32	<p>IM: This trend for amalgamation. When did it start or has it always been going?</p> <p>WW: It's always been going. I'll show you some old documents. This is a map of Barskimming Estate in 1800, from a survey in the 1750s or 60s. Muirston farm is on here. I've got some figures somewhere – I'll dig them out and show you them later – but it was only about 70 acres at that time and Bogside farm across the road was about 80 acres and they were amalgamated, this is officially in the title deeds. They were amalgamated so in the title deeds it's Muirston and Bogside. And I've got some other old documents I'll show you as well, the tenant in 1848 was tenant in both Muirston and Bogside and he was also paying £44 rent for part of what was Lochhill Lands at that time. So that's how Muirston came to be. It's made up of 3 different farms that have been amalgamated and that's away back before 1848. And it's just something that's always been happening. As technology moves on, machinery comes in, you can farm a bigger farm. The landlord would just look at the hardest working tenants and they would get another farm added in so he could make more money.</p> <p>IM: I can see that from the landlord's point of view. I suppose too that as technology gets more expensive you have to farm more land to make it pay.</p> <p>WW: Oh, you have to. You can't buy a silage chopper for £250,000 and farm 100 acres. If you don't move, if you stand still, you're left behind. Standing still is not an option. If you stand still you're going backwards.</p>
19.10/20.39	<p>JW: Willie's great, great grandfather came here in ...</p> <p>WW: Either 1849 or 1850</p> <p>JW: Early 1850s because he had a wee farm at the Clewes (WW: High Clewes) over at (WW: the Auchinleck Estate, just next to the Howford Bridge, the railway bridge) and he had a wee farm. He had a cow or two cows or something and he also had a horse and cart and when the railway went through and the viaduct was built (WW: about 1846) he carted stone for the viaduct.</p> <p>WW: He saw his chance to make some money.</p> <p>JW: And he made money and so he went to Muirston and that was a huge step up for him. High Clewes would just be a wee place. It's always been so that lots and lots and lots of wee places have disappeared because the person in them saw a chance and moved to something bigger and then he would buy more land round about.</p> <p>IM: That's interesting that story about Ballochmyle viaduct because history repeats itself. I was speaking to Russell McNab at Springs farm and when he was at Garlaff he found he was sitting on whinstone which he used to strike a deal with Barr for the Cumnock bypass.</p> <p>WW: He was sitting on a goldmine made of whinstone. [JW: Opportunity knocks] When you get the opportunity you have to grab it.</p> <p>JW: My dad had the old saying, "cut a stick when you see it".</p>
21.33/25.06	<p>WW: Yes it is. I took it down and showed it to Robert Stevenson and I've just got it back from Derek Barbour. Do you know Derek Barbour? He wrote <i>Steps</i></p>

	<p><i>Through Stair</i>. That Act concerns the financial affairs of the Millers of Barskimming.</p> <p>IM: That's a Private Act because it concerns a person.</p> <p>WW: That's a photocopy. I got it from Joe Hare. His brother Jim has got the original. He bought it from some site in America. I've to take that back to Derek because he's still reading through it but if you want a read at it I can get you another copy.</p> <p>IM: You can get that in the Carnegie Library. There are bound volumes of the Statutes and if it's not there it'll be in the Mitchell in Glasgow.</p> <p>WW: One of the most interesting bits is at the back. There's a bit about Muirston and Bogside and he was also paying rent for a part of Lochhill Lands and it shows you what the rents were for all the places. So many hens and so many chickens [laughs]. When you read through it, I think it's pretty near the beginning, this Act was - I can't remember if it was William Miller or Thomas Miller, there were two generations with the same names – but this man Miller died in 1846 and some lawyer, in Edinburgh I think, one of the top lawyers, and when he died they thought his affairs were in order but here, they weren't in order at all. He's dividing up his estate between his 4 sons and 2 daughters and some of it was entailed but they'd entailed the wrong bits. He was meaning Barskimming to be kept to go to the eldest son and all the other bits to be sold off and the proceeds to go to the other sons and the 2 daughters and they found out that the lawyers had made a mistake and he was a lawyer himself. And the bits that were entailed shouldn't have been entailed and it was an awful mess and they had to get this Act of Parliament to sort it out. I don't know what happened. This is 1848 but Barskimming was sold at that time so whether they couldn't sort it out I don't know. But he owned a lot of land at the topside of Mauchline as well and a lot of land at Fenwick and a lot of land where Lord Glenlee, down at Kirkcudbright, where the hydro-electric dams are.</p> <p>IM: At Loch Ken.</p> <p>WW: That's the place. But apparently, as far as I can figure it out, they couldn't sort it out and the whole thing had to be sold. So there you go, although he was a top lawyer himself he couldn't sort out his own affairs.</p> <p>IM: The other big change, over the 20th century anyway, seems to be tenants buying their farms. The big trigger for that was the First World War and death duties. If you look at the valuation rolls that's when.</p>
25.38/27.13	<p>WW: I don't have the documents here today because David's still got them. Barskimming Estate was actually put up for sale before the First World War and some of the farms were sold. We've actually got the original sale documents and the map but I don't have them to hand. Some of the farms were sold and some of them weren't sold and then there was another sale after the War and I think it was after the War that my Great grandfather bought Muirston, I think it was 1920. But it was put up for sale before the War. I was speaking to John McQueen and he's got a lot of old documents about the renting of Quilkeston. I worked out that it was originally called McWillockston. His forebears, the first McQueens came to Quilkeston in 1840s or something. The man McQueen was the ploughman. It was somebody from a bit away bought the farm and he brought the ploughman with him and then the ploughman married his daughter and that's how the McQueens came to be in Quilkeston and they're still there yet. You need to go and speak to him because he's got the old documents and you can actually read them.</p> <p>IM: The main aim of this exercise is to get people's personal memories of how they grew up on the farm and how the farm changed and whether they tried to diversify and I don't know if that ever crossed your mind when you were farming.</p>

	<p>WW: Not really. If you're an expert at something, stick at it.</p> <p>IM: Along the road, the Morton's are trying something.</p> <p>WW: Good luck to them.</p> <p>JW: When the farms were sold they called them the bonnet lairds. Have you heard of the bonnet lairds?</p> <p>WW: They had just 2 or 3 farms or even just a bit of one farm.</p> <p>IM: They saw themselves above the ordinary...</p> <p>WW: Above the ordinary farmer...</p> <p>JW: The bunnet lairds they called them.</p>
28.36/29.45	<p>IM: The Milk Marketing Board started in the 30s and stopped in the late 80s. What effect did that have on a dairy farm?</p> <p>WW: Well, it led to a lot of uncertainty. The Milk Marketing Board put a lot of stability into the market. When it wasn't there people sold their milk to A, B and C and X, Y and Z and prices went up and down seemingly at random. The milk could be going to one creamery one day and somewhere else another day.</p> <p>JW: It took the certainty out of farming. That was Maggie Thatcher's fault really. It was a kind of disaster in a way. And then they put on quotas on each farm. You were just allowed your quota. The it started you could sell your quota to other farmers.</p> <p>WW: The free market. It was a disaster. The quotas became worth more than the farms.</p> <p>JW: We bought some quotas. We had quite a big quota anyway but we bought some quotas.</p> <p>WW: We bought some but it was hard to expand when you had to pay all this money for quotas.</p>
29.53/35.27	<p>IM: When we joined the European Union did that make a change to dairy farming?</p> <p>WW: It made it more prosperous for a time. Prices went up when we joined the EU and then there was too much milk – milk lakes – and then they had to bring in the quotas and oh, it was a total disaster. As far as I'm concerned it was a disaster.</p> <p>IM: And what about coming out of the EU?</p> <p>WW: Thank God we came out. I'm a leaver.</p> <p>JW: I'm different.</p> <p>IM: Why? From the point of view of farming?</p> <p>WW: Far too many petty rules and regulations with the EU. Better getting shot of them. Controlled by a bunch of pen-pushing civil servants.</p> <p>JW: This gentleman might have been a civil servant.</p> <p>IM: I was.</p> <p>WW: A good civil servant is worth his weight in gold but a bad pen-pusher is just terrible. I was in favour of going into the Common Market and if we'd stuck at the Common Market that was fine but it became the Single Market and the Maastricht Agreement.</p> <p>IM: Did it actually affect the farm?</p> <p>JW: So far it hasn't made much difference, has it? But in the future...</p> <p>WW: We don't know what's going to happen in the future. It's hard to say.</p> <p>JW: We're paid the single farm payment.</p> <p>WW: The single farm payment as far as I was concerned was stupidity. They just paid you money. If you had 200 acres they paid you so much. That was absolute madness. I still took the money [laughs].</p> <p>JW: But it kept the price of food down.</p>

	<p>WW: I just couldn't see that that was a way of running the countryside at all. Hopeless. Not that I'm saying that Boris and his crew will do any better. Giving anybody money for nothing is not a good policy as far as I'm concerned. Far better if you're making your money from the market but this idea of a market is OK if you're buying. If you're one of the 5 buyers that's fine. If you're one of the thousands of sellers... They [buyers] manipulate the market.</p> <p>IM: So, in this area are there only 5 buyers for milk?</p> <p>WW: Aye. I can't think of anyone else. There's First Milk, Caledonian Cheese. There's 2 and I'm struggling. There's Mueller, Glanver. I'm stuck at 4. That's about it and obviously none of them are going to pay any more than they need to. The thing that really pissed me off at the Common Market, and I use that language, they had this single market but the dairy farmers in France and Holland were being paid more for their milk than we were. How can that be a single market? They claim it was a single market so the price should have been much the same but it wasn't. [inaudible] was the co-op in Europe and they bought over a lot of the creameries here. They were a co-op and the members on the continent were getting more for their milk than we were. That's not right. That's market manipulation. As far as I was concerned when I got a chance to vote for leave – out.</p> <p>IM: That suggests that farmers have to have an eye on the really big picture of what politicians are doing and what policies are being set. If you're suggesting, for example, that on the continent they were getting from the same buyer they were getting a higher price than here. So the number of things a farmer has to have his eye on...</p> <p>WW: Well, there's not a lot of point having your eye on it because you can do nothing about it. It's a global market, and I don't really agree with this global market. If there's a great harvest in one part of the world then prices are low whether or not there's been a great harvest in your area and then they just... That's what's wrong with the world. They bring in stuff from other parts, burning up fossil fuel and creating global warming just because it's slightly cheaper to do that. But then all these ships and planes operate on fuel that's not taxed and if want to take my products down to Ayr I'm taxed to the hilt for petrol and diesel. What's that if it's not a subsidy? They're subsidising trade and they shouldn't be doing that. My angry old man's side's coming out [laughs].</p>
35.44/36.42	<p>IM: Is there anything you want to add about your memories of growing up on a farm and changes over the years? Anything I haven't covered?</p> <p>JW: I think it was a great life really.</p> <p>WW: Great for kids. We enjoyed ourselves immensely when we were young compared with folk in the town. We used to go climbing trees and wandering about – things that you just can't do nowadays.</p> <p>JW: You didn't have many toys - I was an old meanie – but you used to get those big 20 gallon drums (WW: 45 gallon) and you used to walk them. You had a marvellous time. At little expense [laughs].</p> <p>WW: We used to race them.</p> <p>IM: Thank you for your time.</p>