



**MORECAMBE BAY PARTNERSHIP  
HEADLANDS TO HEADSPACE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
2015-2018**

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**TRANSCRIPT SUMMARY**

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INTERVIEW NO: H2H2015.10  
 INTERVIEWEE NAME/S: Ernie Nicholson  
 YEAR OF BIRTH: 1938  
 INTERVIEWER/S: Jenn Mattinson  
 DATE OF INTERVIEW: 23/11/15 and 11/01/16  
 LOCATION: Morecambe  
 SUMMARISER: Jenn Mattinson

<b>Track 1</b>	
0.00 – 3.30	Family background. Ernie’s children are ‘sand grown uns’ (born and bred in Morecambe). Grandparents had a farm near Keswick and when they sold up they moved in with Ernie’s parents in Bare, Morecambe.
3.30 – 5.00	Grandfather had a huge Greenhouse, gardeners by trade, used to chew tobacco.
5.00 – 5.45	Mother’s side of the family came from Walney, Barrow – worked at Vickers factory
5.45 – 8.30	Ernie used to go and work at Torrisholme farm during his school holidays and then worked there when he left school. Loved hay timing and shire horses. Talks about leading the horses across Morecambe.
8.30 – 9.25	Ernie would work at the farm and in return he was given food, this was when food was rationed, remembers dropping a huge lot of eggs. Doesn’t remember anything about fishing in the area as a child as he wasn’t connected with it.
9.25 – 11.00	Childhood illness, what they used to call pigeon chest (thin and narrow chest). He couldn’t do national service as he failed his medical, and was told just to do light duties and have a rest.
11.00 – 12.20	Ernie wanted to get a job – only one job available – net maker at Morecambe Trawlers. He was good at figures, had a try out, and they decided he would be OK at it.
12.20 – 14.40	1964 had an accident (Ernie only has operational use of one arm) – talks about the car accident, and fortuitous circumstances of a top consultant being a few cars down when it happened. On the way back from dropping a load of whitebait off at Young’s at Southport, his land rover started losing power, and the land rover went right over, chucking Ernie out, shattering his right arm and elbow.
14.40 – 18.55	Determined not to sit on his backside for the rest of his life, he decided he would carry on fishing. Took him 5 years to get back net making and he learned to fish with 1 arm. Politics of getting back fishing, receiving a 50% grant for a new engine. Story of him falling out of his boat.

18.55 – 22.00	Story cont'd – falling overboard. Kicked off thigh boots as they were filling with water. Hearing a voice in his head, he thinks he fainted. Not sure how he managed to haul himself back on his boat with just one arm – playful suggestions.
22.00 – 22.50	Description of Dan Lino Net
22.50 – 24.40	Back to talking about how he came into fishing – he was very good at figures and was a bit of a natural at net making. They had been trying to fill the position for ages. Describes what nets should be like.
24.40 -	First going into Morecambe Trawlers and them showing him what to do. Thank goodness no spelling in net making. Tom Baxter, the man he learnt off, joined the Trawlers in 1919. He told Ernie never to smoke, both hands were brown. Trawlers closed the netting department in May 1960, as it wasn't a viable business anymore, nets were lasting too long.
27.00 – 29.00	Ernie went fish trawling to supplement his income earned at the Trawlers. He estimated he earned about £30 per week making nets when he first started in c.1960. Started in his 30s (might have been in his 20s judging by dates?)
29.00 – 33.30	Description of making the nets. Change from dipping nets in tar or oil, to the <b>courlene</b> nets. Remembers going to Fleetwood women were hand knitting nets, braiding the tail ends. Explains his expertise in making nets.
33.30 – 35.30	Designing different nets – trouser nets
35.30 – 40.00	Remembering conversations about netting with the fishermen, betting against one of the Willacy's that his net would 'catch' and he allegedly came back with 5 stone of shrimps. Post war, Willacy men and other families selling fish in Annan, Dumfries, Keswick, Silloth, and Gretna Green.
40.00 – 42.40	Remembering fishermen in local area – Tom Smith catching 40 stone worth of Flukes with his net in the 70s!
42.40 – 47.20	Tom Baxter was the brains of the Baxter family. Mentions 'Craft Rafty' – never did know his real name. Wanted by fisheries, police, you name it. He used to come in with a Mac on and steal from his shop! According to his father was a wrong un and so was his father! His 'new' method of getting fish – chatting to all the fishermen on the shore, meanwhile he was stealing a pint metal cup of shrimps from each of their buckets
47.20 - end	Shop bureaucracy. When Ernie started his own shop, Jack Shaw was giving up and sold him all his stock to get him started.
<b>Track 2</b>	
0.00-3.00	Clarifies that he grew up in Bare. Talks about growing up and helping on local farm in Torrisholme. It was ration time so for helping out he would be given local produce.
3.00 – 5.15	Fondness for a shire horse and its love of mintos! It would place it under its tongue. Talks about a big hay cart, and some of the farm hands.
5.15 – 7.20	Ernie worked on different farms when he left school. Leading the horse back and forth to the farm, and really enjoying it
7.20 – 13.20	Worked at a farm in Bentham. Some of the jobs he had to do. Family connections to farming. Grandparents' names were Nicholson and Rigby.
13.20 – 18.45	No family connections to fishing. Back to farming. Fire during his work, having to try to get the animals out of the barn.
18.45 – 22.00	Ill health – being signed off work and told to do light work. At the doll office the one vacancy they had was 'net maker at Morecambe Trawlers'. (1956) He picked it up very quickly. His methodology on how to spell!
22.00 – 28.10	Tom Baxter teaching him how to knit and oil the cotton nets. Talks about how to do it. Tom was ill from smoking, he told Ernie he was the best he'd seen in net making. Numerical values of making nets and Tom's plans in a book. The net plans were kept in a safe at the Trawlers.
28.10 – 30.30	Needles were made out of animal bone. Ernie learning his craft and building a reputation for being a fine net maker, being good at figures. All the methods were kept in his own head.
30.30 – 33.30	With Tom Baxter's death, needles and plans disappeared. Sam Baxter was Chairman of Morecambe Bay Trawlers.
33.30 – 37.30	Net knitting needles were first made from animal bone, then wood (maybe larch) then plastic (c. 1970s). Sizing of needles. Importing the highest quality ones from

	America and they were sold through Bridport company.
37.30 – 43.15	Info re Bridport company and other netting companies and employees working their way up through the ranks.
43.15 – 45.00	Ernie's main supplier, Bridport Company, Knoxs (ph) in Scotland – bit of bargaining. He would buy the sheet netting from them and then braid the net himself. Specifics of rows and width of tail ends.
45.00 – 48.00	Banter and bets with local fisherman on how many fish they can catch with different size meshes on the tail end of the net. He bet one bloke £100 on cotton net in the late 1950s, won the bet but never got the £100.
48.00 – 49.30	Sam Baxter said every tail end had to be 80 meshes wide. Ernie would wash the shrimps before he cooked them to avoid the sand in them but others would cook them and wash them when they were cooled.
49.30 – 54.20	R.M.Woodhouse (Robert) took a job over the winter months painting the landing stages and the boats for 2 shillings per hour for Frank Gerrard.
54.20 – 57.10	(Lost the trail of the conversation a little. Talks about accident again and the consultant and how lucky he was)
57.10 – 59.30	1956 Ernie was earning 2 pound 17 shillings and 4 pence per week as a net maker, for 43 hours work. 1 shilling and 4 pence per hour. 1957 1 shilling 10 pence per hour, for the week he earned 4 pounds 6 shillings and 2 pence. 1958 2 shillings 8 pence per hour, earning 5 pounds 17 shillings and 4 pence for the week. 1959 3 shillings 4 pence per hour, 44 hours per week, 6 pounds 12 shillings. 1960s, he asked for a wage increase and got 4 shillings and 6 pence per hour, 9 pounds 18 shillings for the week. Reflection of his increase in learning.
60.00 – 64.45	Tom Baxter told him not to be taken for granted. He was making large orders at the trawlers, bringing in £500 worth of yachting material. Chairman at the time (of Fisherman's cooperative?) was Willacy (we think it might have been James) nicknamed 'Seaweed' and Ernie accidentally called him 'Mr Seaweed'. He gained that name because he was the only fisherman who complained about getting seaweed in the net. Nipping crabs!
64.45 – 69.15	Morecambe Trawlers shop – making nets, selling yachting goods, and fishing tackle, clothes. Dispute over the £500 of yachting equipment. It was called the West Shop, after one of the channels.
69.15 – 70.40	Morecambe Trawlers was on Green Street in Morecambe. The west shop was attached to the factory, where they had the wet fish shop, a room for picking shrimps. Ernie later had another shop and he would sell fish directly from that.
70.40 – 71.30	Ernie's wife got fed up of fish 'mention fish and chips and she'll throw a pan at you' – his son Richard and daughter Caroline also got fed up of it, as he used to do cooked fish and chips every Saturday.
71.30 – 74.30	West shop channel description. Ernie's 2 shops – the one at the trawlers and the one he ran on Lancaster road later on. Centre of gossip for the fishermen. Ernie confessed his nickname was 'Lord Has Nowt' as he always professed to having nothing and not being able to afford anything.
74.30 – 76.45	Importance of fair treatment of animals – if you got caught out on the sands in the fog, it would be the horse that would bring you home. Remembers one fisherman mistreating his horse
76.45 – 79.00	Frock – fisherman's smock with a hood and zip, made the fisherman look like a monk. He recalls the fishermen all bowed down to Jack Willacy – his nickname became 'the monk'. Ray Edmonson, fisherman, nicknamed Eddie Bear.
79.00 – 84.00	Design of the frock, which Ernie was the first to sell to the fishermen in the area. Made in Yorkshire. 100% waterproof. Important to get a size bigger to prevent sweating. He also supplied the jerseys, the gansies. Brace and Bibs cost about £6 and the Frock was about £7 in the 1970s. Guy Cotton was one of his suppliers, and at one stage a company called Johnsons took over one of the big production lines, which were later sold off.
84.00 – 85.20	Responsibilities of shop owners to those who don't know the water
85.20 – 86.45	Fishermen don't generally wear life jackets; Ernie said you were called a baby if you had one. He never had one on when he fell overboard.
86.45 – 89.50	Jack Shaw bought all the yachting equipment Ernie had in his shop, and he stressed the importance of selling people life jackets. A story about a customer...an 8 foot

	dingy in the boot of a Rolls Royce car with oars inside it
89.50 – 90.30	Can't put nylon or cauline netting material in front of the sun as it will go duller in colour and start snapping.
<b>Track 3</b>	
0.0 3.08	Learning the art of fishing, compass bearings and learning the tides – went out with Benny Woodhouse, Dick Woodhouse and someone he couldn't remember. Jumping out of the boat and getting soaked through.
3.08 – 7.00	Shrimping, whitebait, designing 2 boat mid-water nets in mid 1950s. Remembers a net catching 200 stone of whitebait, but there was too much of other fish they shouldn't have caught in it and were fined £180.
7.00 – 11.30	Being a fisherman helped Ernie with keeping up with design of nets. He would fish 5 days a week, and take parties of 6 people out on his boat fishing on a Sunday. So he had 3 jobs – net maker, fisherman, and taking people out fishing on a Sunday. Talks about the courlene net.
11.30 – 14.15	Making nets for Bridport Company. Catching lobsters out of Heysham harbour.
14.15 – 19.50	Supplying fish to Morecambe Trawlers, then when they finished he supplied Johnsons in Pedder Street, Bells in Regent Road and 2 wet fish shops. Sold whitebait and sprats to a company in Fleetwood, and received some great fish in return.
19.50 – 24:00	Boats starting with engines – Benny Woodhouse had one that started with a blow lamp.
24:00 – 27.00	Recalling an animated tale – shrimps jumping out of the box, and not having to riddle them
27.00 – 29.00	Boat licensing, thread I didn't quite follow
29.00 – 34.30	Boat names – first boat called Bert (didn't alter its name as its former owner said it was bad luck to change a boats name), next one was Caroline Diane (after his children, but second child turned out to be Richard), The Owl. Going out fishing in bad weather. Briefly mentions a trawler heading towards Icelandic waters killing several men.
34.30 – 37.50	When he was caught out at sea....took 3 ½ hours to get home...
37.50 – 44.00	Closure of netting shop at Morecambe Trawlers (the fishing cooperative) by Sam Baxter around 1960, the actual trawlers factory was closed 1989. After that he went fishing, borrowing George Nicholson's boat for a time.
44.00 – 48.58	1972 bought a shop with a flat above called 'Fisherman's supplies' on Lancaster Road. When the netting shop closed at the trawlers, netting in Morecambe diminished, so Ernie set up a 12 x 10 shed doing ad hoc orders for about 10 years.
48.58 – 52.11	Ernie had his accident (lost use of one arm) in 1964 and had to re-learn his trade with use of his left hand, it took him 5 years to get back up to scratch. Talks about rope techniques.
52.11 – 58.25	Description of nets: trammel nets, shrimp net, fish trawl, draft nets, drift nets, excuses fisherman have for catching salmon (illegally), catching flukes when they were really wanting bass.
58.25 – 1.04.20	He used to buy nets from a company in Portugal. The courlene net was the fabric that the net was made out of – it changed the shape of fishing forever, because it didn't need treating. The dye could be produced in any colour. Before that, he used to get his cotton nets dipped by a company called Knox's (on Scotland?). Telling a tale about a net being blessed by a priest after the church had borrowed it!
1.04.20 – 1.06.33	Leaving trawlers was one of the best things Ernie did in the long run – he was supplying several companies with netting on his own
1.06.33 – 1.10.00	July 1960 Ernie received his first lot of courlene netting and it was popular right away. Made of Plastic material, produced by a company called Cosalt (ph). Didn't need to be dipped. Description of how it was made. It remains in use today.
1.10.00 – 1.14.50	'Before cotton net was like having a mini, a courlene net is a rolls Royce, you can't go better'. Ernie had his shop from 1972 to 2005 (not sure how accurate that is?) – Stories about him closing up.
1.14.50 – 1.16.50	Nobody wanted to take the shop on
1.16.50 – 1.20.00	Fishermen have to get their nets from away now; they even struggle to get them from Fleetwood. He remembers a Polish supplier where some fishermen got their

	netting after he'd finished, but he couldn't pronounce his name so with the greatest respect was allowed to call his 'Mr thingamajig' – he later altered his name to Boris Howard (Boris nets)
1.20.00 – 1.21.50	Ernie didn't face much competition while he was in business. – Views on others in business trading after him.
1.21.50 – 1.22.45	An 18 foot shrimp net would take Ernie 20 hours to make the net (even with one arm he believes that was a good time)
1.22.45 – 1.29.15	At one time there were over 200 women braiding nets at Fleetwood – clocking on and off, chatting round a table at (ph) Cosalt's factory at Fleetwood – In Ernie's mind, Fleetwood was one of the best places to go for nets.
1.29.15 – 1.32.45	Fishing licensing was a big mistake in Ernie's view. He remembers only 12-14 licenses being made available for Morecambe, and to buy one it would cost around £8000.
1.32.45 – 1.37.47	Ernie would like to be remembered for his shrimp nets, he's very proud of his net designs. He recalls some of his nets catching 10 stone worth of fish. Always a bit of banter between who supplied what and which nets caught the most, fishermen's gossip!