



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

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**TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW**

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**FRONTSHEET**

INTERVIEW NO: H2H2015.1

INTERVIEWEE NAME/S: Jack Manning

YEAR OF BIRTH: 1932

INTERVIEWER/S: Jenn Mattinson

DATE OF INTERVIEW: Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2015

LOCATION: Flookburgh

TRANSCRIBER: Marion Dawson

**Summary of Interview:**

**No of Tracks: 4**

**So it's Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2015, my name's Jenn Mattinson and I'm with Jack Manning, and this is for the Headlands to Headspace Oral History Project. So Jack, we're going to start at the very beginning. Can you tell me a little about where you were born and when you were born?**

Yeah, I was born here in Flookburgh, not more than 60 yards from where I sit now, over 82 years ago. And I've lived in five different houses, and the furthest I've been from where I am now is about 65 yards. So I haven't moved very far, I've not been very adventurous. Yes, I've been practically all over the world, but not living. I've always lived here in Flookburgh, and so have all my family, all live in Flookburgh. And we're fishermen through and through. At least four generations of our family have been fishermen, on both sides of the family, on my mother's side and on my father's side as well. Fishing for shrimps, cockles, mussels, flatfish, be it flounder or plaice. Flounder we call flukes. And people say that the name of Flookburgh was from the fluke. It certainly wasn't. Flookburgh was named almost certainly from a Viking man's name, Flocksman or something like that.

**Could you tell me a bit then about your family background, about the different generations?**

Yeah. All my family are really Butlers, but my father was adopted. But my mother was a Butler, and my father was adopted by my mother's cousin, so they were Butlers as well. So really both sides of the family were Butlers, but my father reverted to the name that he was born with when he married. But the Butler family, a lot of them, see, going back a couple of generations, they all had a lot of children. My mother was one of nine children, and her parents were families of about twelve. So there were a lot of Butlers, and unfortunately a lot of them, through the generations, had the same Christian names. They were given the same Christian names, one generation after another. So they're difficult to research in a way, with that. You're looking for Robert Butler and you find probably six. And John Butlers, when I was young, there were six John Butlers in this village that I knew. So yeah, a close family but mixed up (laughs).

**And can you tell me a bit about their jobs and what they used to do? I know you**

**said there was fishing involved.**

Nearly all the men, the Butlers, were almost all fishermen. My father's brother, he was a stone mason. But all of the others, right through my mother's family, four brothers, they were all fishermen. And going back into the generations before that, as far as I know, all of the men then were all fishermen. Now there are no Butlers fishing at all with the name Butler, except one who is a part-time fisherman. I always thought, with there being so many Butlers around, that the numbers of that family must increase, but no. They've decreased, until there are hardly any left now at all. Some left the district, of my generation that is, and went into jobs outside the fishing industry. And quite a lot of them were girls, so they married, and their name of course changed. Where they had been born Butlers, their named changed, so as I say, there are two or three Butlers left, but none of them are full-time fishermen.

**And the ladies that married then, did they stay within Flookburgh?**

Most of them, yes. They're all in Flookburgh or round about within a couple of miles. I've got one cousin who lives in Derby, but I think she's about the only one that's out of the district completely.

**And what memories do you have then of your father and your grandfather and your family members?**

I've lots of memories, but I've got to say, I regret not listening more to them or getting them to talk, particularly my grandfather, who was one of the last of the boatmen here. Boating ceased to operate about the time of the First World War, because the estuaries had silted up so much that it became impossible to sail out with a boat from here. But all that knowledge was lost. There's really nobody in this village that knows about that time, and I, for that reason, wish I'd asked more questions of my grandfather about his life and how they operated the boats, and what the boats were like and so forth. But yeah, of course, my father, I worked with him for ... until he died, practically. Although, you know, I was self-employed from the time that I was married, I did work a lot with my father and brother-in-law and cousins etcetera. And particularly my uncles who, as I say, were all fishermen, and lots of memories of them, all completely different

characters, some of them quite noisy and used to shout a lot. But we were so used to it, we took absolutely no notice, as boys. I've often thought, you know, if some of our children today, when they were young children, my children and grandchildren, if they could hear those men shouting at each other or at us, they'd probably be scared. But it was all natural to us because they'd always done it. You know, if you didn't do something right, they would shout at you. But that was the nature of the men. We ignored it. But as I say, a new generation would find it strange.

**And as a small boy then, do you have any sort of memories or stories about some of those first encounters, of going out with your father or your grandfather out fishing?**

Yeah, my first memories are going out with my grandfather when I was probably only five or six years old, going out with a horse and cart across the sands to nets that had been set out there. And we would go to look at them and take the fish out and straighten them up and so forth. Because when I was young, before the Second World War, my father had gone to work at the steelworks at Barrow for a while, because fishing was so bad at that time, it was difficult to make a living. So it was mainly with my grandfather and uncles that I started to learn about fishing, and when I became sort of ten years old, I used to go with my uncle, my mother's brother. By that time my father was in the Royal Navy anyway, called up in the Second World War, but I used to go with my uncles, particularly my Uncle Bill, my mother's brother, and I learnt fishing from him, mainly. He was an excellent fisherman. And I used to go with him, and you were expected to work like men, you know. You didn't go there and play as a boy. You had to work.

I also remember cockling was a very hard job, manual hard job, and sometimes the sand could be nearly as hard as concrete. You were banging on it and it would be really hard, and sometimes it would be quite soft and sort of half quicksand, if you like. But I remember saying to my Uncle Bill one day, "Eeh, it's hard here, Uncle Bill," and he'd say, "Aye, but tha'll have to be as hard as it is," and that was all the answer you got. No sympathy at all. And if you were going out early in the morning, say three or four o'clock in the morning, they'd just give you a shout and you'd to bounce out of bed and go. But I really enjoyed it, and I enjoyed working with those men who'd been been fishermen all

their lives and knew every aspect of it, and one learnt quickly from people with that experience. And then when my father came back from the Navy in 1945, I think it was the end of 1945, then I started to work with him. A horse was bought for me when I left school in 1949, and so I worked alongside my father, he with his horse and me with mine, two horses and carts, and we worked from home and worked quite well together.

**What about your brothers and sisters? How many of those have you got?**

I've just got one sister. I had a brother who died about the time that I was born so I know nothing of him whatsoever, sadly. But my sister, yeah, she is now 84 and is quite well, living, again, quite close to us, probably 300 yards away from where I live, and we get on very well.

**And can you tell us a little bit then about family life and how it was for you?**

Yeah, when we were young, let's say when we were going to school, my sister and I, we were very poor. We didn't realise how poor we were because nearly everybody was in the same boat, you know. We were all pretty much alike, our cousins and ourselves. And we lived a very frugal life really. We never had holidays. We didn't go on the traditional family annual holidays, nothing like that. We lived in a terraced cottage with just two up and two down, and all our time was spent in one room really. We only went into what was called the parlour at Christmas. A fire was lit in the front room, which we called the parlour, and that was great excitement at Christmas for about ... probably a week or maybe more than that, we went into that room and decorated it and so forth, but at no other time. It was strange, a room wasted, really. And that carried on right through till I was married. But we had a pleasant upbringing really. We roamed around, and there was an Army camp here with a lot of soldiers, a lot of foreign soldiers, and an aerodrome with lots of airmen down there, and air ladies – WAAFs - as they were called. And you never had any fear of anybody being molested or anything, in spite of all those people there. Boys and girls roamed around quite happily, even at night, with never a thought of any danger. And I don't know whether you'd do that today, would you? There's always this fear these days. Kids have got to be looked after and taken to school and all that. We just went our own way.

**And with you being the only son then, was there sort of a level of expectation then on housework and chores and things that you had to do as part of the family?**

That's a foul word, housework! We ... we the men, didn't do any housework at all. We were real chauvinists. My father, he wouldn't've known how to start to do anything in the house. And likewise myself until I went in the Army and learnt to look after myself. Before that, my mother did everything for us. She would clean our shoes, put the jam on our bread even, that sort of thing. No, we didn't do anything. The food was expected to be on the table when you came home and all that. It's absolutely true. No.

**So when I say housework, I mean kind of the general, you know, odd jobs, DIY, that kind of thing.**

No. My father never did any odd jobs. He was pretty useless at anything practical like that. A good fisherman, good at sport, but at anything practical, at mending anything, no, nothing at all. I was brought up rather differently. We were coming onto tractors, so I had to learn to do everything with tractors. If they broke down, you used to repair them yourself, unless it was a major operation. We learnt to strip the tractors down, rebuild them and everything. And that's the way it's carried on. I've two grandsons who can, you know, virtually do anything, either in the building trade or mechanically. They're very good. But no, before that, the generations of men didn't really do anything. I might say that we were lucky in a way, that the blacksmith's shop, the smithy, was sort of 50 or 60 yards from our house. The blacksmith had served his time as a joiner. Then he became a blacksmith, so when we had horses and carts, he was able to do almost any repairs. He could shoe the horses, of course, which was what we expected. But he could also mend the carts or put hoops, the iron hoops, onto the wheels, or do any sort of repairs to carts, because he'd both trades. So that's how most of our work got done when I was young. I was quite decent at woodwork because I did some at school, and in the winter of 1961 into '62, I built a cart from scratch. It was a very good cart, and I still have photographs and videos of that cart, I often think about it. Yes, I spent most of the winter, when there was no fishing, building that cart. I didn't make the wheels of course, they were bought, but everything else, yes, I made from scratch.

**And you mentioned that you ... it was quite poor, you were quite poor at the time. What about mealtimes and foods and things that ... Was it a traditional time to all sit down together or ... ?**

Yeah, we always had our meals at the table. Of course, we didn't have television, and when I was young we didn't even have electricity in the house. There was no electricity in the village until I was perhaps six or seven years old. So there was no radio, no television, and we did sit down at the table for meals. And we fared quite well really, even in wartime when things were rationed and things were scarce, because most of the people up and down this village had gardens, market gardens. They used to sell their produce on the markets, the green crop, cabbages, potatoes and everything. Quite a few people including my grandmother kept hens, so you could have a [inaud] chicken for Christmas Day, but that was the only time chicken was eaten. That was an absolute luxury, was chicken, once a year. But we did do quite well, as a say, because we could always get eggs, even though they were rationed. And you could probably get some pig meat, bacon and suchlike, because I'm sure a few pigs were killed illegally because you know, it was all under licence in wartime. But I'm fairly sure that quite a few pigs were killed illegally. So we always had some meat around, not always and not every day, but I think we fared better than townspeople would do. There were things available to us all the time, as I say, like fruit and vegetables and things. But we lived a sort of simple life, frugal life. We'd very few toys or playthings. My sister would have a doll, and I remember she had a toy piano. At Christmas we got one or two fruits, a game, maybe Ludo or something like that, an odd toy, some chocolate coins in a sort of net bag that were wrapped in gold paper, they looked like coins. And most importantly, sugar mice. And I'm going to tell you this little story, because I found it quite funny really. When we'd just got television, I was off sick for some reason, I probably had flu or whatever, and my daughter, then about five years old, was off school, she'd just started school but she was off school and I was off ill. And we were sitting watching television, and three ladies, of different classes, if you like, from a very lowly working-class to a middle-aged lady and an upper-class lady, were telling of their Christmases. And the lower class lady, the working-class lady, who came from somewhere in Yorkshire, I think it was near Huddersfield, she said, "Now, for Christmas

Day,” she said, “We got a few toys, but my grandfather kept a few hens, so he would give us a hen for Christmas dinner, and we got a bit of fruit, a toy, I maybe got a doll and some chocolate coins.” And then she went off and the next person started to speak. And I shouted at the television, “You forgot your sugar mice!” And sure enough, she jumped back in and she said, “Oh, and some sugar mice!” (laughs) Yeah, we did get very little really. But I think what was remarkable, when I think about it, is the excitement at Christmas. With those few things, we generated more excitement than the children today who get masses of expensive toys. Some of ours, and I'm sure it's the same for everybody, they don't know where to put their toys, they've got that many, and some of them expensive things. And yet, with those few simple things that we got, it was absolute joy, because you didn't get anything at any other time of year. Now, of course, a child expects and gets things all the ... I don't say there's anything wrong with that, but that's the way things have gone. They get things bought all the year round. We didn't, we got those few things at Christmas and it was great pleasure. Christmas was an exciting time.

### **And what about school? How was school for you?**

School? I absolutely hated school. I went to the infant school at Flookburgh, where I can't remember learning anything. The only thing I remember was that the teacher was a lovely lady, Mrs Cully (ph). She used to sit at the piano and sing to us and we used to go to sleep on little beds. And amazing when I think of it that we all went to sleep every day. We must've learnt something, but I can't remember learning anything. But pretty much like what ... I'm trying to think what they're called, the little school today, it's not play school, it's nursery school, which is what they have here now. And then I went on to Holker School, which was sort of from seven or eight year old for two or three years, until I went to Ulverston Grammar School. I went to Ulverston Grammar School and put on five years there, and I say put on, and that was all I did. I had no interest whatsoever, and I'm ashamed of it now when I think about it, the opportunity that I wasted to have a decent education, and to take that place where somebody else could've taken it and made good use of it and had a good opportunity of a decent education. And I didn't, I just squandered it.



### **Is that just 'cause you weren't interested or ... ?**

Because I wasn't interested at all. Yeah, of course I learnt some things, and the first year I was at Ulverston Grammar School, I was about third in the class. I was top in French, I think top in Physics, well up in Woodwork, Geography and not bad at English Literature. So I came third in the class out of 30. And in the subsequent years I went down and down and down and down, until I was almost at the bottom by the time I left, because all I wanted to do was get out of there. And it's awful really. I wasted that good opportunity. Having said that, if I'd had a better education, what would I have done? Would I have done anything different? I'd probably still have been a fisherman. But they say that education is never wasted, so I could've ... I could've done more, put it that way, at school.

### **So what were you preoccupied with then?**

Mostly playing. As soon as I came home in the evening, had a bit of tea, I went down to the village hall to play billiards and snooker, to go out and play with the other children. We used to play games like what we called Hounds and Hares, where you ... a man went out and you chased after him. After a short period of time, you went out, you gave him a start and ran out and ran after him and sought him out. That sort of thing, and football, at which I was never very good anyway. I was probably the last to be picked. When they were picking the teams, I was probably the last to be picked, but I did play football. And at the grammar school I played rugby and I didn't like that and I still don't. I can't watch rugby on television. I hate it. But, yeah, we had really quite an easy childhood. And you often read and hear about people in their teenage years having problems growing from a child through puberty and into adulthood. That passed me by. I had no problems at all. I went from being a lad through to being a man with no problems at all, sailed through it, and I didn't know anybody who did have any problems. And when I read about it now and hear about them, I think, "What's that all about?" You know. There shouldn't be any problems growing through your ... you know, your growing up years through teenage and so forth. Why should it be any different?

### **So you mentioned woodwork. Did you have any other talents as a young person?**

I don't think I did, no. I know I sort of took naturally to woodwork, and I did think at times, because I used to spend hours and hours watching the blacksmith and helping him, and I thought, "I'd love to have been a blacksmith." But that wasn't to be. We already had a blacksmith. And then when horses went out in the 1960s, horses disappeared from the fishing scene, the smithy closed down and the blacksmith went, lost his job.

### **So what did you used to do with the blacksmith then?**

Well, we used to go up there, and he was of course shoeing horses and he was working on iron in the fire, heating it up. We used to blow the bellod (ph) for him. He had a big pump handle that you blew the bellows to blow the fire up, the coke fire. And then he got an electric blower to blow it after that, but for quite a few years I used to blow his fire up for him and help him with lifting things, you know. He would have great chunks of wood or iron, and we used to help him with ... with them - we couldn't do any work - or hold the horses when they came to be shod. But it was interesting to watch him carrying out his job of shoeing horses and making quite intricate things on the anvil, hammering them out. Yeah, my childhood was no different really from any other of the children round here. In fact, I said we were poor, we were poor, and I didn't realise till I remember my mother saying, "I didn't know what it was to have a five pound note in my pocket." Did we have five pound notes? I think she said, "I never knew what it was to have a five pound note in my pocket." And as I said, I worked with my uncles, and my grandfather a bit, and he was coming to the end of his working life, my grandfather. But I worked a lot with my Uncle Bill, as I've told you before. And I used to go fishing with him day after day through the summer holidays, and other members of his family. There were four or five of them working in that family. And once a year, my mother used to take me and two cousins to Morecambe. That was our annual holiday, day out, to Morecambe in the summer holidays. And the night before we went in 1944, I remember it were '44 because I was in the summer holiday, waiting to go to the grammar school in the September, so it was about July or August 1944. The night before we were going to Morecambe, my uncle gave me a ten shilling note. Well, that was a heck of a lot of money, you know. I'd never held a ten shilling note. I mean, it's

50 pence today, it was half of a pound, but of course it would buy a lot more then. Rides on the ponies on the sands at Morecambe would probably be a shilling or even sixpence, five pence in today's money or whatever. But ... and the rides on the fair, you would get quite a lot for ten shillings. So it was a lot of money to me. And probably a week's wages for a man then would be no more than say, seven pounds. I was working for eight pounds a week in 1962. In winter, when there was no fishing, I was working for a company and we got eight pounds. So ten shillings was quite a lot of money to a lad like me. I never expected any pay. I enjoyed working, gardening. They all had gardens, a lot of garden, and we used to have to work in them, and I enjoyed it. I enjoyed the fishing. And as I say, you didn't play about. You had to work, just ... you were expected to work like men.

**And what kind of person was your mother then? What was she like?**

My mother was the loveliest person, in my estimation. Kindly, very calm. I mean, the salt of the earth. The epitome of the grandmother that we all expect. She absolutely was. And I don't know anybody who would say any different to that, of all the people that knew her. And she lived to be 100 years old. And I think probably some of the best times of her life were in her old age, when she didn't have the responsibilities. She probably had more money, almost certainly had more money in old age than she did when she was young. When she was young she left school and went into what was known as service down in the Manchester area, working for well-off people, or well-off by our standards. And as I remember her saying, they were mostly Jewish people, not that that mattered. I don't suppose race matters or religion, but I remember her saying they were Jewish people, because she talked about their traditions. But that's what she did. She went into service down there, as did others of her family, because there was no work round here, there were no factories or anything, so there was no work for women or girls. And came home, got married and that was it, into ... a life of drudgery, really. She had to work hard all her life, always involved in the fishing, you see. When we were catching shrimps, the women were very much involved in that industry, getting the shrimps out round the village to the pickers and picking shrimps themselves. So wives of fishermen didn't go out to work. They were fully employed at home, looking

after the family and looking after the shrimps.

**And was your family religious at all?**

No. Back in my grandparents' days, most people went to church. We have a church here that is absolutely beautiful, built in the year 1900 and built ... you're going to have to edit this.

**You're alright, don't worry.**

What's the word? It was financed by the Cavendish family, who are, you know, the aristocracy here. And it's almost as big as a cathedral. It is a fine church, designed by Paley and Austin. Is that right? Oh, I wish I hadn't start this now! I wish I hadn't started on this.

**You can move on if you like.**

You'll have to edit that. Austin and Paley built the church, they were the designers and it's a beautiful church. And I am very much involved in the church, but I'm the only one who has been through the years. My sister goes to church now fairly regularly, but she didn't go regularly for a lot of years. But none of our family, bar me and my sister, go to church on a regular basis. But I was in the church choir when I was young, I was on the church PCC committee, and I was a church warden for a number of years. So I have been involved with the church quite a lot. But none of our family are regular church goers.

**So you mentioned about what sort of person your mother was. What about your father and your grandfather? You mentioned lots of shouting that used to be going on amongst the men.**

Yeah, that was mainly a couple of uncles. But no, my mother's father, grandfather, John Butler, he died in I think it was 1926, so several years before I was born. Six years before I was born, he died, so I knew nothing of him. My father's father, grandfather James Butler, who adopted my father, was the kindest and gentlest man you could ever meet. He really was. Never heard him raise his voice. I was the apple

of his eye. Although he had other grandchildren, I really was the apple of his eye, I've got to say that. And he was wonderful to me, and again, a really kindly gentleman, yeah, very nice. He never had any temper.

**Even when you were a small lad and you were learning how to fish and, you know, more often that not maybe getting in the way if you were really little?**

(laughs) Aye. No. And in fact, I've written in my autobiography that I never remember my grandfather Jim Butler raising his voice to me ever. No. He was that kind of a man, a gentleman, put it that way, and I mean a gentle man. Although he was a fisherman and had a hard life, he was one of the last of the boatmen that sailed out of here, up to 1912, when there was an awful tragedy. Yeah, he had a hard life.

**What about your father? What sort of man was he?**

Yeah, he could be very bad tempered. Hadn't a lot of patience with me at all. And yet he was brought up in that kindly family by my grandfather I've just described. He er ... was always a bit rather ... discontented. Maybe a bit of a chip on his shoulder. Perhaps because he was adopted, I don't know. But yeah, he could be quite bad tempered with us, and not a lot of patience with me as a lad and learning things. But in latter years, when we were working together, we got on quite well, worked quite well together. And he was, you know, he was a good man really.

**Did it affect how you grew up then, if he was a bit bad tempered and didn't have much time for you?**

It may have done. I ... when I was young, was always a nervous child. And till... you know, till getting on in teenage years, I was always quite nervous and shy. And I don't know whether that was born in me or whether it was the way I was brought up, 'cause my father could be quite severe sometimes. Never physically, he never hit us, but he used to be very bad tempered and sometimes used to drink quite a lot. I must say, he never, ever missed work. He used to go to the pub nearly every night, but even if he'd to get up at 2 o'clock in the morning or whatever, he never, ever missed. So drink didn't affect him to that extent, but he did drink quite a lot. So whether that affected the way I

was, you know, nervous and introvert, in my first years, I don't know. Anyway, I grew out of it (laughs).

**You certainly did.**

I forced myself out of it. Yeah, I consciously did force myself to do things that I wouldn't have dreamt of doing when I was young, and so then became the other way. I became, I suppose, what people might think extrovert, in that I've usually lots of confidence. And I think it's been a better life for that. It's allowed me to do things that I couldn't have dreamt of when I was, say, twelve years old.

**'Cause you've had your own family. Do you want to talk a little bit about that?**

Yeah. We've three children, not children now of course, but a son and two daughters. And eight grandchildren, two great-grandchildren. And what surprises me, and I often think about it, is that out of the eight grandchildren, they are all completely different from each other. You'd think that amongst eight of them, there's going to be two that are very much alike, but there aren't. They're all different personalities, but I must say all good workers, all good children, and they get on very well together. That's one thing that is particularly pleasing. Out of all our family, and I include my sister's family as well, and there are quite a lot of us, I don't know what they'll be, 40-odd, I would imagine, we all get on well. We really do. And that's quite pleasing because I know there are families that fall out within themselves and they don't speak and all this, and we ... no. We get on, and I'm grateful for that. I would hate it if I were to be completely out with any of my family. You know what I mean by that? That if there was one or two members of the family with whom I'd fallen out and wasn't speaking... oh, that would affect me. (laughs) Silly really, but our family are well integrated. They're good, a good family.

**So you and your wife Margaret, how many years have you been married?**

61.

**And how did you meet?**

Well, we were both in the village, and both went to Ulverston Grammar School. So, you know, we were meeting all the time, and when we were sort of ten, twelve, fourteen years old, we used to be in gangs of children who all played together, and we were among that lot. So we ... we knew each other, you know, all our lives, as it were. Yeah, it'll be 61 years in two weeks time, since we were married. We had a big celebration for our golden wedding, and then another big family event for our 60 years, for the diamond anniversary, yeah.

**So when you met then at the school and you were, you know, quite pally with each other, did you feel like you were destined to be together, or did you just sort of naturally come together?**

We did, yeah, from about the time that I was sixteen and Margaret was thirteen, yeah, I felt sure that we were going to be together. Yeah, we went out with others in subsequent years, but then got back together, and I always had that feeling that we would be married. And sure enough, it did happen, in 1950... (laughs) ... '54! Yeah, '54. Yeah, who thinks you're gonna be married that long? I dunno.

**Did you have to do a lot of work then to bring her round or ... ?**

No. No, I ... I remember making my feelings known to her even when we were at school, and it developed from then. And she lived at the station. Her great uncle and aunt, who brought her up, he was the station master at the station here, at Cark Station. So we only lived no more than a quarter of a mile apart when we were children. Yeah, and I think we've lived a very happy life in general. We have very much the same interests, and when we go on holiday we enjoy the same things. So we are quite compatible. I don't say we don't fall out (laughs) and we get on each other's nerves sometimes, but in general, we've got on very well. I think it's been a reasonably good marriage.

**And Margaret used to help quite a lot, didn't she?**

A lot.

**Do a lot of work.**

Particularly with the shrimps. And shrimps was our main job. Shrimps were our mainstay, through almost all our working years. And so I would catch the shrimps, bring them home and boil them, and from then, they'd got to be peeled. All the shrimps in this village were peeled, tons upon tons every year, all peeled by hand, one at a time. So nearly everybody in the village picked shrimps, and I mean nearly everybody. But Margaret had to look after them. We would have sometimes as many as ten people in the house picking shrimps round a big table. There would normally be half a dozen, but sometimes you would get children in at night, or people who'd been at work who were glad to come and make a few more shillings. And so we would have a lot of people in. And we also used to take a lot of shrimps out round the houses round the village to be picked, to people who did them in their own homes. You'd have a van full of buckets or boxes of shrimps that maybe had, you know, four or five kilos of shrimps in per house. I'm talking kilos, I don't know why, I've never talked in kilos in my life (laughs), but I think that's what people understand these days. We were always in pounds and stones. We would take, you know, 20 pounds of shrimps to a house for them to peel, and then around all the houses, maybe take twelve or fourteen lots out, if we weighed in that many, to different houses. So she'd got to do that sometimes, if I were out fishing, and look after the shrimps that were being picked in the house. And in the early days, the boilers that boiled the shrimps had got to be lit and the water boiling, ready for the fishermen coming home to put them in, because shrimps had got to be alive when they went in the boiler. If they were dead, they wouldn't peel, they just broke in bits. So, I don't know why, I can't explain it, but shrimps had got to be alive when they went in the boiler. So the boiler was always or usually boiling when you came home. Even if it was 3 o'clock in the morning, she had to get up to light the boiler at 2 o'clock, ready for me coming home at three. And so, very much involved in the job. No possibility of going out to work or anything like that. Very few wives did then, very few wives went out to work.

**So I'd like to get onto fishing in a moment. I just wanted to talk a little bit more about your working life, because obviously you've mentioned fishing was very integral in your family traditions.**



Mm.

**Did you have any other jobs leading up to that sort of when you were a teenager? 'Cause you said that you were quite an introvert as well. That must have been quite difficult to be able to then project yourself, you know, into the working stage, if you like?**

Yeah, but remember, we were all self-employed. So we didn't have to work with other people, we weren't in a gang of people, as you might be in a factory or whatever. We all worked for ourselves. I mean, when I first left school there was only myself and my father working together, and then sometimes if we were cockling, we would be working with quite a number of other members of the family, so, you know, you weren't working with strangers. It was a family group. I mean, my brother-in-law, my sister's husband, that is, he worked with us when we were cockling, two or three uncles, and so it was always family groups. No, I'd no problems in that respect, as far as work went. When I first left school, I went to supposedly serve my time to be an electrician. But that didn't last very long. My father wanted me home to help him, and I wasn't very keen on the job anyway. So I went back to fishing (laughs).

**So did you want to be an electrician? How did that come about?**

Not particularly, but one of my uncles was an electrician, erm, and so it was decided that I would go and learn a trade and be an electrician. I didn't particularly want to be. I didn't object, but I didn't really like it, and so came back into fishing. And I don't know what else I could've done, really. It was in my blood. Of course I knew all about it, it wasn't as if I was coming into a strange job fishing, because I'd done it from being a young lad, as all our family did. My son went fishing with me from when he was like six or seven years old, and went out on a tractor, driving his own tractor when he was, I think, nine. He could've been ten, if I sat and worked it out, but I think he was nine the very first time we went. I was on one tractor and he was on another. Ridiculous, when I think about it now. You couldn't imagine today sending a lad out on a tractor on his own at that age. But it did happen.

**At the age of sixteen, you went to serve your time as an electrician but that didn't**

**work out.**

No.

**And then was fishing then your main trade for the rest of your days?**

It was my only trade for the rest of my days, yes. I did go to work at Glaxo, a Glaxo factory at Ulverston for two years, but that was after I'd had a bad spell of health, and the doctor advised me to get out of fishing because he said the illness could reoccur. Recur. What a daft word, reoccur (laughs). He said the illness could return, anyway, and so he said, "You'd better be employed somewhere so that you've got security of, you know, unemployment benefit and that sort of thing, sickness benefit. So I went to Glaxo. I never ailed a thing (laughs). So then I left after two years. But even when I was at Glaxo, I was still fishing at nights and on days off, all the time.

**So when was this then? What sort of age were you?**

I was er ... just in my 30s. It was 1966 and '67. So I was, what? 33 or summat like that, when I went to Glaxo.

**And what did you do then in the factory?**

I was a process worker, er, making synthetic Vitamin A. And I enjoyed it, as well. I was on a three shift system, and I didn't enjoy the nights. I hated the night shift, although I'd worked nights, you know, in fishing, all the time. We worked probably sometimes probably more at nights than they did at daytimes, but I didn't like nights working in the Glaxo factory. But I enjoyed the job, I found it quite interesting. But then after two years, as I say, I was still fishing, and fishing was quite good at that time, so I left Glaxo and thought, "Well, I've not ailed anything. Am I going to?" And I didn't ail anything with that particular illness after that.

**So when you had this spell then of bad health, how did you feel when the doctor turned round and sort of said, "Oh, you should get out of fishing"?**

Yeah, well, it was a ... it was a very difficult time. I had an illness where I was off work for almost a year, and I was quite ill all the time. And I was in Barrow Hospital, and I

was in there for fifteen weeks. And one day in July, I remember it was roundabout Margaret's birthday, if not on that very day, the doctor came to me, the consultant, and he said, "I'm very sorry, old chap, to have to tell you this, but you've got quite a serious illness, and we can keep you going with, you know, with medication, but unfortunately you'll never work again." That is absolutely true. Fancy a doctor saying that. But he did. So he must've meant it. He must've thought that that was what it was going to be. He wouldn't come out with a statement ... That was his words: "Very sorry, old chap. I've bad news for you. You'll never work again," in effect.

**You weren't old though.**

No, but ... no, that's the way they spoke.

**Yeah!**

(posh voice) "Old chap."

**Goodness.**

Yeah. That was a man called Dr Waynd (ph). And I was devastated.

**You were only 33, did you say?**

Yeah. All I wanted to do was work, I really did. I should've been catching salmon at that time, and it was a good year for salmon, I was missing it. And so ... it was a really bad time. And ... I still remember the amount of money we were getting for sickness benefit at that time was seven pounds and one shilling. And I was in hospital, as I say, for fifteen weeks, and Margaret was pregnant with our second daughter. And she came to the hospital every day until a few days before Lynne (ph) was born. Yeah. She drove there, we had a car, and er ... on seven pound and one shilling a week (laughs). It's amazing when you think about it now, but that's what it was. And then, er ... I went to see a specialist in Manchester. The same man, Dr Waynd (ph), came one day, and he said, he came on his rounds, he said, "You're not very happy with what I told you, are you?" I said, "Well, not really, I'm not thrilled by it, you know what I mean?" He said, "Well, to be honest, I'm not. How would you like to go and see ..." I think it was

Professor Platt (ph) at Manchester. Off I went to see Professor Platt, and he said, "I don't know what you've got, but you certainly haven't got what Dr Waynd thinks you've got (laughs).

### **So you never actually got a proper diagnosis for this illness?**

So he prescribed some medicine, but I'd got to go back in hospital to have that medicine, and injections every day. And after another couple of months, I was still no better, came out of hospital, and then a miracle happened. And I know it was a miracle, there's no other word for it. (Sniffs) Erm ... it was November, and round about my birthday, which is the 10<sup>th</sup> November, and it was a Sunday afternoon, and my father and brother-in-law were going out to some whitebait nets that were set out in the Leven Estuary. And it was a pretty awful day of a big, strong north-west wind, and hail showers, really cold. So I said, "I'm coming out with you. I'm going out fishing with you." And I still remember my mother saying, "It'll kill you!" I said, "Well, it'll either kill or cure me. I don't care." So I went out with them on that afternoon and all I did was sit on the trailer, the tractor. We went out with a tractor and trailer. I sat on the trailer and watched the two men doing the work. And I came back, and I was so cold, I was absolutely frozen, and I took my temperature, which from the end of May that year until that day in November had been raised all that time, it never went down. I took my temperature, and it was so low, it was almost off the bottom of the thermometer. I'd got hypothermia. Later in the day, when I warmed up, it came up to normal, which was 98.4 then. We still weren't in this decimal system. 98.4, er, Centigrade I think it was.

### **Fahrenheit.**

No, Fahrenheit. Fahrenheit. And it stayed there. And that was the first time my temperature had been normal for all those months, from May till November. And from that time, it never went up again. I wasn't cured, but because I'd been sedentary for so long, I couldn't do much, but gradually got to work in, you know, doing bits around home and knocking around, until I was back to work in about the following February, four months later. And I can't think of anything else. I know that if I hadn't made up my mind to go out fishing that day, I would've been an invalid, or even dead, you know what I

mean? And I've done a lot of work since that time. A lot of work (laughs). So Dr Waynd said I would never work again. I had a miracle. From where, I don't know, but it was, and I did a lot of work in the subsequent years. What? 40 years after that.

**Thank goodness, because that would've been such a life-changing moment.**

Yeah. And if I'd stayed in that state, stayed in the house and sat in a chair, I probably wouldn't have got any better and I would have been an invalid. Very much like a man I remember reading about or seeing on television ten years or something. He was told he had a bad heart when he was a young man and he never worked. He never, ever worked. And then when he got to middle age or more, they said, "No, there's nothing wrong with your heart and never has been." And he never worked all those years. And I thought that is strange, because even if somebody told me there was something wrong with me, I would still do what I could, if you know what I mean, do whatever that illness allowed you to do. And that's what I have done in recent years. I've had all sorts of things wrong with me, but I've pressed on and done whatever I could, in spite of ... You know, even the family say, "You're damn fool," or whatever, because doing this, I'm climbing up ladders and building or making things, laying a hedge and ... (laughs).

**Some say fool, others would say fighter.**

Yeah (laughs).

**Shall we have a little break?**

Let's have a coffee.

**Yeah.**

[Break]

**OK, so big question, Jack, but if you could just summarise your involvement in the fishing trade over the last however many years you've been working. If you could just sum it up for me, to start us off.**

Yeah, well, shrimps have been the main job, our real mainstay over all the years. There

have been periods of a few years where cockles have taken over, but they've really been temporary. We have relied on shrimps over the years. So when I left school, I started shrimping alongside my father and two or three uncles and so forth, and there were 20 odd fishermen working with horses and carts when I... just about the time I left school. And we used to go out into the various channels, dragging for shrimps, and there were a lot of shrimps at that time. They'd never been really worked a lot because people didn't go shrimping regular, regularly, until after the Second World War. There was no way of preserving them, you couldn't send them any distance, we didn't have fridges, you couldn't keep them. So they were only sold to local markets. People would take a few to Barrow Market and to Ulverston, maybe a couple of shops would take some, but it was a limited market, until after Young's opened up a factory at Cark, just for processing shrimps and freezing them. So yeah, we were working like that, and then I was called up into the Army not long after I left school, came out, and at the time that I came out of the Army, the fishermen at Flookburgh had just started to harvest the biggest lot of cockles that there'd been, that had ever been, probably, up to that time, I should imagine. There were a lot of cockles. So everybody was getting cockles. There was more money in it than anything else, because if there are a lot of cockles there, you can always get them every day. Now, going shrimping, you might get a lot one day and practically nothing the next day, and you might go a full week and get practically nothing. But with cockles, if they're there, and if you've got the market to be able to sell them, you can always get a regular income. So from the time that I came out of the Army in 19... May 1953, we were cockling with horses and carts. And the only thing that governed what a man could make... we're talking about working men's wages, we're not talking about millionaires but... was how many cockles he could cart home with his horse and cart, and how many cockles he could sell. If he could sell all that he could get, he could bring home anything between half a ton and maybe twelve hundredweights with a horse and cart. So that was his day's wage, and it was virtually guaranteed for the best part of two years. And then we'd a great invasion of oystercatchers, oystercatchers being the only bird that can eat a lot of cockles. They're the only bird that can open cockles virtually instantly, and therefore can consume a cockle in, you know, sort of 20 seconds, where no other birds can do that. But anyway,

they came in vast numbers, over a quarter of a million oystercatchers, and they ate all the cockles completely. There were no cockles left in the bay. You couldn't find one.

### **So is this in the late 50s?**

That was in about the end of 1954, if I remember rightly. It could've been into '55, but thereabouts. '54... 1954, '55. And we could see it coming, these great flocks of oystercatchers. I mean, sometimes when they were on the sand in great flocks, the sand was black with them. And an Inquiry was set up to see what we could do about it, but it was decided nothing could be done, they'd got to be protected, which was ridiculous. So they ate all the cockles, there were none left at all. So then, of course, we were back to shrimping. And everybody was shrimping then, and there were a lot of shrimps, there were plenty of shrimps. So it was still quite a good living, except of course that shrimps disappear in Winter, they go out of the Bay, because the shallow estuary water was... it gets too cold. So they go off into deeper water. So from, say, the middle of November, or the end of November, depending on the season, we'd no shrimps until the following Spring, which would probably be the last week in March at least, or into April. So if there were no cockles, that was quite sad, 'cause you'd no Winter income. You'd got to survive, and people, well, most of us, including myself and my father, we didn't have any other trade. We knew nothing else. We could only go shrimping or cockling.

### **So is cockling then a sort of all-year-round process?**

It could be an all-year-round process, but it was the Winter's mainstay, that was the main thing about cockling. You could catch shrimps throughout the Summer and the Autumn, and then shrimps disappeared in Winter, so then you turned to cockling. And my father, I always remember him saying to me once, "I never knew a time when there were no cockles," until this time when the birds ate the lot. So we'd nothing, and that's why I said earlier that I made a cart one Winter. I'd nothing else to do, and so I made a cart. And there were times, several times, when I did nothing all Winter, three or four months, till the shrimps came back again. But the one thing that was guaranteed, so one never worried, was that we knew that from the end of August until the middle of

November, you would always catch a lot of shrimps. It was guaranteed. And so you could really make enough to carry you the year round. But of course we were used to that, and so we could, we would make the money last out. You could've gone and blown it easy enough, as people might do today, go and blow it. But you knew it had to last year round, so you didn't go mad. You'd put some away, and it'd last you through the year, if it had to. But we did catch a lot of shrimps through the Autumn. And it was great to know, you know. I could go buy a new van in August, it was usually August, because the new licensing letter came out in August. I'd go and buy a new van or a car, go into the shrimping season then, and I'd pay... pay for the car, and make enough to keep us right through to the following Winter. So that was... that was great. It was never a worry.

And now the same thing cannot be said today. Without a doubt. Mortgages... nearly everybody has mortgages, they have all the trappings of modern life. Contract phones at maybe £30 or £40 a month, televisions and recorders, and all the things that go with modern life that you pay monthly or whatever, big outgoings all the time. We didn't. 'Cause there were no mobile phones. We paid our mortgage off, which wasn't very much anyway. We paid that off in a very short time, and so we'd no regular outgoings in that respect. So we managed quite well, but we knew what we had to spend, and you spent accordingly.

**So you said that you used to go out with your father in the beginning. How did you learn all the tricks of the trade and how to do it properly as a job?**

Mm. Yeah, well ... I learnt a lot from my Uncle Bill when I was young. I used to go out with him at night when my father was away in the Navy and afterwards, after I came out of the Army. And he would teach me how to find the way in fog, and in bad weather, when you could go out into the Bay and be five or six miles out and not a glimmer of light from anywhere round the shore. You'd got to be able to navigate your way back home or to the fishing grounds in that... you know, in thick fog or whatever. And you learnt that just like you learn any other trade, picked up the tips. A compass was a handy thing to have, essential sometimes. These days they've got GPS machines, you know what I mean, but I just had the compass, which, using regularly, I got used to, and



I could go practically anywhere in the Bay with the compass. But like any other job, you learnt your trade through practice and going with experienced men. And they would give you the tips and show you how to do things. And then of course, in time, you'd become expert, if that's the word. And it's funny, I use that word because I always say "Beware of experts!" (laughs). I do. Experts come out with things that are absolute rubbish, sometimes.

**So can you remember any particular events or stories where you were learning those trades with your uncle or with your father or your grandfather? Times when you went out?**

Yeah, well... we would... I was taught to tell the direction, to a certain extent, from the marks on the sand. When the tide goes out, it leaves ridges like furrows, very small, only an inch or two inches high, but they're quite regular furrows in lines. And you were taught to look at those and say, "Well, the tide has gone off in that direction," you know, it told you which way the tide had gone off. So in a way, if you knew where you were, that was as good as a compass, practically. But the tide doesn't always go off in the same direction at every place, because channels are going in various directions. But if you knew where you were, which hopefully you did, you'd say, "Well, that channel is running southwest, and home is that way." It was just one of the tips, I don't make a big thing out of it, it was just one of the things you ... and then of course, we went by the compass in thick fog and learnt to use that well. And now when I mention the compass to the young ones now, my grandson for instance, they don't know what I'm talking about, you know, they wouldn't know how to use it. But that was all we had. And with experience, you... Because, I've said it many times, what you had was a mental map of the Bay in your head. It was just like looking at a map, if you like. But it was there in your head. You knew where you were, as related to all the channels. So with a compass, you could work your way home from there. So little bits of tips like that.

**And can you remember any specific events where, you know, you went out in the middle of the night and, you know, where things, events or...**

There were lots of events, there were lots of happenings. I can remember two

occasions where... One time I'd set off out to go fishing and it was a foggy morning, it was really thick fog, but I knew where I was going, and when I got halfway there, I came across some nets that were set for flounders. I thought, "Well, I'm wrong. These nets shouldn't be here. I'm in the wrong direction." So I followed my track, the mark that I'd made on my way, followed it back to where I started and had a completely fresh start with a fresh mind, and landed into the nets again. Which got me thinking. Well, I thought, "Well, there's something queer here." Little did I know, I'd been away the day before, I remember, I'd been to a band contest in Manchester the day before. That was a Saturday, this was a Sunday morning. And somebody had gone and set those nets there on the Saturday while I was away (laughs). So I was right. I was going in the right direction, but that's only a little story.

There was another time where I was coming home, I'd left a channel, and I knew roughly from the way that, the direction the channel was running, which was the way home. And I set off, and I was... I was going towards home, but the horse always wanted to go a different way. I had to steer it all the time, which was not usual. So I thought, "There's something wrong here." (laughs) So believe it or not, I turned it round again, and went back to where I'd come from, the edge of the channel that I'd left, and set myself up to go in the right direction and er... I went on with the compass to where I thought I should go. It was black dark. You couldn't see any... I was only two miles from shore, but couldn't see any lights at all, it was black. Anyway, I set off again, and went... I found I was going in exactly the same direction that I went before, and landed up right at the right place. So you can have doubts. In fog or bad weather, you can have doubts. There was one man, and I wasn't there on that time, but one man, he nearly went berserk. He was with a group of fishermen, including two of my uncles and a cousin, and he came out of this channel and he had a compass, and he set off home, and the compass pointed to the north, right? But he'd got it in his head he was going the wrong direction, and he couldn't get it out of his head. And he convinced himself that the compass was wrong. And these men that were with him, they said he was going berserk, he didn't know what to do. It's strange, but he'd convinced himself he was going the wrong way, although the compass said he'd got the right. Eventually of course, they did land home. But no, you can have strange dos.

And one time, myself, my uncle and my cousin, we did have a difficult time in fog, but that's a long story. But if we hadn't all three of us been experienced fishermen, we would certainly have drowned that morning. I was working on the compass, but we were on ground that we'd never been on before. It was strange territory. So we were in ... and it was through the middle of the night. And a thick fog came down. God, it was thick. We couldn't see... you really couldn't see above three or four yards. And we had difficulty getting home that morning. We landed home onto the road, just as it was coming daylight on... at about er... I think it was the first week in December or the last week in November, and we were at Bolton-le-Sands of all places. We'd set off to go to Bolton-le-Sands with horses and carts, and set off through the night, and that was the result, the fog came down. Set off on a fine night, it was 2 o'clock in the morning, beautiful moonlight morning, no problems. Got halfway there, the moon went down and the fog came down. And that was the difficult thing, that we were going onto territory that we'd never been on before. So we... we did have difficulty.

**Would you mind telling me that story? I know it might be a long one, but I think it would be really interesting.**

Yeah, well, my Uncle Bill and I had been working in a channel that was something like a mile, mile and a half offshore from Carnforth and Bolton-le-Sands, but working from home, from Flookburgh. And we were doing quite well. So we thought we'd take... but we had to cross the main channel of the River Kent to get there. So we thought, "It's getting bad weather and dark time, Winter. We'll go over to that side, to the east side of the Bay, to Bolton-le-Sands and work from there, so that we've no channels to cross, and we've only a mile and a half to go out. So we decided we'd take two horses and carts over. We left home at 2 o'clock in the morning, bright moonlight morning. We went past Humphrey Head Point, which is two miles from here. Crossing the channel of the River Kent, we met two fishermen from Flookburgh who were taking flounders out of a net there. We stopped for a couple of minutes to have a few words with them, said what a nice night it was and goodnight, and off we went. Well, we'd about an hour's walk across to the next channel where we intended shrimping, and we had to cross that channel and then go up to Bolton-le-Sands shore. The moon went down and the fog

came down, and it was the thickest fog you could ever imagine. Well, it was black dark. So I'm going on the compass, and my cousin, who was with the other horse, didn't know where he was going because he hadn't been there before. So I was leading the way. We got to the channel that we'd got to cross, and I went in, I only went in 20 yards and couldn't get through, it was too deep. The horse was soon up to... you know, as deep as it could wade. So we came out again, went up the edge of the channel to where we thought we'd go another few hundred yards and we'd get across it, went in again, still couldn't get across. So we persevered, and went further and further up this channel, but the thing was, the fog was so thick, you couldn't see the edge of the channel. And although my cousin, his horse was right up behind my cart, I couldn't see it, it was that thick. That was how thick it was. So I went up by the compass, kept going up this channel north. Well, my uncle had said he would go round in the van to pick us up. When we got to Bolton-le-Sands, he would come and collect us. And he said, "I'll have a walk out and see if I can find a route back to the shore, because we'd never been before." So eventually we got to a spot where I could hear him shouting. I could hear... you know, he was shouting. He said, "Don't come across here, it's all quicksand." He said, "You can't get across." So there we went, further and further up.

Eventually we got across, and we met our uncle because we could hear his voice. And we met up. And we didn't know where we were by that time, how far north we were. We knew roughly where we were, but we didn't know how far north we were. We'd been going up towards Grange. So we get across. But then we'd to get our horses and carts and us onto Bolton-le-Sands shore. So we set off out eastward, and landed to the salt marsh. Well, the salt marsh all the way up has a cliff off the edge about three feet high. Well, we couldn't get the horses and carts up there, and we knew we had to because it was a high tide, so we'd got to get off. It was decided that I would walk across that salt marsh to the shore and see if I could find where we were. (laughs) It sounds ridiculous now. I set off with a compass in one hand, the torch in the other, and I'm walking eastwards. Well, salt marsh is all full of big potholes, everywhere big potholes. So I had to find my way round these holes, and every time I got round one, straighten up with a compass and get a new course due east again. Eventually, I landed to the shore, and luckily there was a farmhouse right on the shore, and the light

was on. The farmer had just got up to milk his cows. It was about 5 o'clock in the morning. I knocked at the door, the farmer came to the door, and I can still remember my words. I said, "It might sound strange but," I said, "Can you tell me where I am?" He said, "Yes, you're very near to Carnforth. You're on the shore at Carnforth." And I explained the situation. I said, "We're out there with two horses and carts. We're trying to get onto this shore near Bolton-le-Sands." He said, "Right. If you carry on south towards Morecambe for about a mile and a half to two miles, you will find the track where I go off with my tractor to tend my sheep." He had sheep on the salt marsh. He said, "You'll find that track over the salt marsh, and you'll see my tractor marks." And that's what we did. And we came off at Red bank Farm at Bolton-le-Sands at about 7 o'clock in the morning. And we'd set off at 2 o'clock. (laughs) But if we hadn't been experienced fishermen and able to read the compass, we would certainly have been drowned. But if we'd been on ground that we knew, it would've been no bother, it would just have been another morning. But it was the fact that we were at a place where we'd never been. I'd never been off the shore at Bolton-le-Sands in my life. So... but the daft thing was to set off at that time of morning. And we did that simply so that we didn't waste a daytime tide. We'd be going out at 2 o'clock in the afternoon fishing. We didn't want to waste that tide taking the horses across. Ridiculous. But when my Uncle Bill said, "When I take the van round, I'll walk out on the sand and find your way off," and my cousin said, "You silly old so-and-so, you've no need to do that, we'll find our way off." But were we glad that he did walk out and we met him! Oh dear. No, that was the worst experience we've had in fog, and shouldn't have happened really because it was simply the fact that we were on strange ground. We'd been in thick fog before when we'd been fishing, but it had been on territory that we knew, and we knew every inch of it, so that was OK.

**And when was that particular event then?**

Erm, about 1959, I think. I think it was '59 or '58, maybe '58.

**So you've mentioned a lot of places and areas. For anyone who doesn't necessarily know the area, can you just talk about the places in which you fished?**

Erm, I don't quite know what you mean by that. Every area in the Bay to us, to fishermen, had to have some sort of a name, you know, because you talked about, you know, "We've been fishing today..." One place was called Cod Hollow. Erm... another one was called just The West Channel, 'cause that's the channel in the west side of the Bay which is the channel of the River Leven. Er... West Dyke. Cod Hollow, I've mentioned. Lancaster Channel. Yeoman Bank. They all... all the places had names of some sort, or you tried to describe 'em in some way. Well, every aspect of the fishing had to have a name, you know, to be able to talk about it.

**And, erm, what I meant, sorry, was just the actual physical area. So how far did you go out? So you mentioned that, you know, that you were doing a lot near Humphrey Head, and then you were in Bolton-le-Sands. How far out did you go fishing from Flookburgh?**

Erm, more than six miles was the farthest. Probably about seven miles was the farthest you could go. But to catch shrimps, you'd nearly always got to go at least two or three miles out, 'cause you'd got to go out into the channels, which are way out in the Bay. Erm ... sometimes you'd get cockles within two miles from shore. But you're nearly always out, with a horse and cart, an hour's walk to an hour and a half's walk to the nearest spot you'd go fishing. And shrimping farther than that. Yeah, quite a long way. The farthest place I went to shrimping with a horse was two and a half hours walking from home. No, two and a quarter hours. Erm, and then you'd get to the channel, two and a quarter hours from home, and then go down that channel dragging the net down it for another mile or more. And then you'd come out and got to walk the two and a quarter hours back home. So four and a half hours of travelling time, besides the fishing time. Whereas now with a tractor, you'd get there in 20 minutes to half an hour, probably half an hour.

But cockles are usually five miles out, and sometimes six miles. In... when we were fishing in 1953, '54, we were definitely six miles out, because we went out with a wagon one day. It was nice low tide, the sand was dry, went out with a wagon and showed it on the, you know, on the clock, it was six miles. So quite a long way.

**So you've made reference to some of the methods and the names and the processes. Could you just talk us through those processes of the shrimping and the cockling and the differences between them and the methods in which you had to use?**

Yeah. Well, for shrimping, it's simply a matter of taking a net, or in this case with tractors now, two nets, and dragging them down a channel. And they are dragged along the bottom on the sand. The shrimps are down on the bottom, and as that beam goes along, which is about two inches high, there's a surge of water up over that beam and it takes the shrimps back into the net. And you made... you made trawl for, you know, for just a couple of hundred yards, because sometimes there's a lot of seaweed and rubbish, so you can only go a short distance. Or if you know that it's clean and you're going there regularly, you can maybe trawl for the best part of a mile or maybe, you know, three quarters of an hour before you lifted the nets again.

**And what did you collect them in?**

Well, when you're working with a horse and cart, you're dragging down the middle of a channel. You may be in three feet of water or you may be in as deep as the horse could wade. And then when you'd gone so far, you'd pull the net to the cart, still in the channel, the horse would stop, and you'd pull the net towards the cart, pull the net up onto the back of the cart. The net was twelve to fifteen foot long, depending on what length you wanted, and that would sit across the back of the cart crossways, and then you'd eventually come to the end of the net, lift the shrimps up and tip them into boxes. And then when you'd emptied those, you could either go back up to the top and start again where you'd started the first time, or go forward onto the next stretch of channel, depending on what you felt like, or whether you knew the shrimps were going to be better at one place or another.

With the tractor, the tractor goes down the edge of the channel, and the trailer, towed by a long length of rope, goes out into the channel. The tractor's down the edge of the channel, it may be in two feet of water, but along the edge of the channel, and the trailer's right down the middle pulling two nets. So then when you get to where the

finishing point, or wherever you feel that you'd need to go, it's all got to be pulled out. So the tractor goes away out onto the sand, 200 yards or whatever from the channel, and the trailer eventually comes to the edge of the channel. You stop it where you're still in a foot of water or more so that you're able to wash the shrimps, and then tip 'em into boxes.

And then they've got to be riddled. First of all you've got to get out all the what you might call foreign bodies, that is anything that's not shrimps. Crabs, seaweed, small flatfish. So you put them through what we call a crab riddle, 'cause it's about three quarters of an inch wide in the mesh, and as you shake it, the shrimps drop through, and the crabs, the seaweed and other rubbish stays in the riddle. You chuck it out and dump it on the sand, and you're left with almost nothing but shrimps that you've riddled into another box.

### **So they go in the box and then what would happen to them?**

Well, you fill as many boxes as you can, obviously. Bring them home. Well, they've got to be riddled with a shrimp riddle to get the small ones out. And you could do that out on the sands if you can, and then sometimes they're brought home. At one time, you used to bring them all home and riddle them at home. And then probably in the 19... about 1960, we started to riddle them out on the sands, even still with working with horses and carts. So that you'd, you know, you'd got a finished catch when you got home and ready to boil. But other times you'd bring them home and put them down a mechanical riddle, which is driven by an electric motor. That gets all the small ones out, and then you've just got a finished product that goes into the boiler and is boiled. The water's boiling when you put them in, but obviously when you put a quantity of shrimps in, it goes off the boil. You've got to wait till it boils up again, and it doesn't want to boil very fast, just simmer, for about... after it comes to the boil, maybe about four or five minutes, stirring them up so that they all get boiled evenly, because you want the boiler full. Stir them up, and eventually, the shrimps, which are a dark grey colour when they're alive, turn into a nice pinky colour. And the way that I always used to tell whether they were ready and finished boiling, was you'd take them out, a few on a scoop, a net scoop, let them cool for a second or two, just maybe 20 seconds, and



they'd get white spots on. On the pink shell that's gone pink with boiling, they start to get little white spots, and then they're ready.

**And you were saying that the water at home always had to be... it had to be ready for when you actually came home.**

Yeah.

**How did you communicate?**

Well, the women would... you'd have a fair idea of when you were going to be home. It was usually four to five hours job, and I'd probably say to my wife before I went, "I'll be home at about so-and-so." And it wasn't always so, but if she'd got the boiler boiling then she could probably leave it, put plenty of water in so it didn't boil away, and at least even if it wasn't boiling when you got home it would be hot, and almost boiling.

But that was when we fired with coal fires. You lit a fire just like you did in the kitchen fire. Wood and coal to start off with, and just coal and... coal and wood to boil it up. But then, it might've been late '50s, or into the 1960s, we started to go oil burners. And they... they boiled within like quarter of an hour. So then it wasn't necessary for the women to get up and boil them. But when you were boiling with a coal fire, it took about an hour to get them to be boiled because you'd a boiler that, in my case, it was 20 gallons, a big boiler, a lot of water in it, 20 gallons. So to get that to boiling with a coal fire took quite a long time.

**And the women would then take over the process from then on?**

No, the women'd go back to bed.

**(laughs)**

If it was still in the night. Yeah. No, the men did the boiling but it was a matter of just having the boiler hot or boiling when you came home so that the shrimps would still be alive. And if it was the back end and cool weather, say, you know, October, November, they'd stay alive quite a long time. But in warm weather, you'd a job to get them home alive anyway, but you did your best or you didn't stay out so very long. That's the best

you could do. But they wouldn't peel if they were dead when they went in the boiler. They were virtually wasted.

**But the women did the peeling.**

The women then... men would boil the shrimps and finish them off, clean them, riddle them, and then they were put into the fridge, if necessary. That was after we got fridges. But the first fridge we had, I remember very well, was 1958. We didn't have fridges before that, and most people wouldn't have fridges even after that for a while. But I remember buying that fridge. It was second-hand, '58. And though... so you prepared the shrimps to be taken out round the houses, round the village. And I would do that if I was there, or maybe Margaret would do it if I was busy with something else. Or if I was out fishing, and, you know, say I went out fishing at 5 o'clock in the morning, I wasn't going to be home till 9 or 10 o'clock, well, then she would have to take the shrimps out at 8 o'clock in the morning or whatever. And then she would have to look after the er... the pickers in the house. Er... see that there were shrimps on the table ready to peel and weigh off the ones that had been peeled and take off the empty shells. It was all, you know, a continuous process, and she would pick as many as she could in between.

**And it was a collective process then? There was lots of women who came and did the same thing?**

Well, we had a big kitchen table that had extra leaves that pulled out so that you could get six or eight women round, and they were all picking shrimps, and they got paid by the pound for how many peeled shrimps they finished up with. And when they got a pile of say two pounds on the table, they were weighed off and booked down. You booked them down in a book, how many they'd peeled. And they would sit all afternoon, and maybe all evening as well, and some women... The critical thing was how big the shrimps were. It might seem daft to say big shrimps, because you talk about shrimps in that tone, don't you, small, like "shrimp-like", small. But shrimps vary tremendously in size. If you've got big shrimps, women would pick two to two and a half pounds per hour. That's finished product: shell the shrimps, if you like. If they were very small,

she'd struggle to pick a pound in an hour. A lot of difference. And the most I've ever seen anybody pick in an hour was three pounds and a quarter, when I got some extremely big shrimps. So big, I didn't know shrimps grew to that size. As true as I'm here, one particular night, through the night, I was out with a friend of mine, we were out with two tractors, and we went into a channel that we'd never been in before. And I said to my mate, I said, "Look, let's get in this channel. We might get some plaice for our... you know, to eat." Because it was a deep channel and we'd never been in it. And, anyway, it was black dark. I still remember it. And when I lifted these shrimps, tipped them in the box, and when I felt them, it felt like I was feeling bits of wood, they were so hard and solid. And I thought, "There's summat queer there." And it was, as I say, it was black dark, and I didn't have a torch. When we got home, got home, put the light on and the boiler out, at about 3 o'clock in the morning, saw massive shrimps. I said to Alan, I said, "I didn't know shrimps grew that big."

Well, we went away the next day, Margaret and I, I can't remember where we went. But there was a particular lady, a friend of ours. I said, "Look, there's some good shrimps in the fridge. Get them, get what you want. And, come on, pick what you want over the weekend." And when we came back, she'd picked a lot of 'em and she'd done three, three and a quarter pounds in the hour, and I've never seen... I've seen somebody do nearly three pound but not three and... that many. Usually two pound's good going. My daughter was a very fast picker. Just one daughter was much faster than anybody else in our family. I don't know why, that's the way it is. Some people are fast.

### **Who was that then?**

Wendy, who has the shop down in the village. She was a very fast picker. Yep. She could pick, well, half as many again as any of the rest of the family. My mother picked shrimps all her life, she was OK, but not particularly fast. And Margaret quite a good picker, but not as fast as Wendy. It's hard to explain that, really (?). But that was the way. Some people were fast pickers, and some people picked all their life and were still just plodders. Well, average, as you might say. There was one particular lady who was German, only came here after the war because she married a soldier and she was very fast.

**So you've mentioned about the changes in tools. So the horse and cart, and then the tractor. In your opinion, that must've been quite difficult to get used to, all these different changes. Was any better than the other or ... ?**

The advantage with the tractor, of course, is the travelling time, that's the main thing. There are others. I mean, I loved working with a horse and cart. Unfortunately, I became allergic to horses and that was difficult. Really allergic, violently allergic. And the doctor, my doctor, sent me for tests and gave me all sorts of treatments of pills and one thing and another, and I just got worse and worse, and he just said, "You'll just have to keep away from horses." Luckily, tractors were just coming in, so we were able to get rid of the horses and that was that. But working with the tractors, we'd started with tractors simply as a method of carting off great weights of cockles. But then it was developed for shrimping as well. And as I say, whereas it used to take us say an hour and a half to two hours to get to the shrimping grounds, you could be there in sometimes twenty minutes or never more than half an hour with the tractor, and the same way coming back. So that was an advantage. Also, you can pull two nets, whereas you can only pull one with the horse. And when you park the tractor up, it didn't need feeding (laughs). With the horse, even if you didn't go to work, you'd still got to feed it and groom it and look after it and clean it out and what-have-you all Winter, of course, if you weren't working. Even in Winter, you'd got to look after the horse all Winter. The tractor was parked up. But there's always a lot of maintenance with the tractors. Because of the salt water, the effect on the tractors is awful: bearings are going, electrical parts are going, starters won't work and... (laughs) But as I said before, we had to learn how to mend these things, or else it'd cost you a fortune, if you'd to go to a garage or mechanic every time. So we'd learnt to mend them and to strip them down, put new clutches in, come home with the clutch gone one night and you set on it next morning, you'd have it up and running in like two to three hours with a new clutch in. That sort of thing.

**What did you love about the horse and cart then?**

Oh, I could wander around the sands at night, particularly at night, on my own, think about all sorts of things, maybe things you shouldn't think about. Er, and talk to the

horse, strangely enough. Maybe not have a conversation with it, but you could say, you know, "Go on, get up," and generally communicate with the horse on directions by mouth. You could do that with the tractor but it didn't take any notice, unfortunately. So, another thing was, when we all went with horses and carts, sometimes you went out three or four men or maybe half a dozen men together. So you'd a line of horses and carts, you'd be going across the sand, and there's not much noise because the horse feet didn't make much noise on sand and the wheels didn't. So you could... you could talk as you went, talk about anything you liked or general conversation. And you could leave the horses and they could walk away on. Maybe one man was driving the first one and the others would follow on. So you could group together and walk by the side of one cart and talk, generally. Or you could talk from cart to cart, you know. One man'd be sat on his cart and the other man's on the next, and he's only three metres away, so you could talk. You can't with the tractors. You'd leave home with a tractor, and you may be in close proximity with other people on tractors but you couldn't talk because of the noise of the engine and the distance and that. So it was more social when... or sociable, when you went with horses. You communicated. With the tractors, you'd go out, you'd be on your own, you wouldn't speak to anybody till you came home. That isn't a big thing, but it is a difference.

**Did you have any memories then of any specific horses that you remember well?**

Yeah, a lot of horses. I must've had... oh, I think I've counted them up. I don't know whether I mentioned... I think altogether, we had just over twenty horses between myself and my father. But my grandfather, I only remember him having one horse, and he had that horse for twenty years. But he was only going out cockling or to... to fluke nets or set nets. We were shrimping, so we were covering a lot of ground and trotting and galloping or what-have-you. And I certainly had into the teens of horses in my life. Some of them weren't very good, and some were extraordinarily good, and very... I don't know whether perceptive is the word. Some had a lot of common sense. And some hadn't any at all. It's surprising the difference in horses. I always remember the Duke of Edinburgh saying horses were the stupidest animals in the world, although he used to drive horses and carriages, didn't he? He said, "Horses are stupid animals." I

never found them so. One horse in particular that I had, he was a wonder-horse. It seemed to know everything, really. It always knew the direction to go. It went... walked as fast as it could all the time, and was so easy to work with. Some of them, you'd got to drive them all the time. You'd got to have the reins in your hand and driving them all the time. But that one in particular. But we also had another one that was a family pet, if you like. The kids could take it anywhere. Wendy, that I've mentioned a few minutes ago, when she was like four years old, she could take it down to the field and all this carry-on, it was so quiet and tame. So, yeah.

### **Did you name them?**

Yeah, they all had names. Yeah (laughs). They all had names, aye.

### **Which was your favourite then?**

I think Tinker was a favourite, and it was Tinker because it was said to have been in a tinker's cart when it was... when the man bought it. I bought it from a farmer who said he'd bought it off a tinker in Ireland. And it could've been because it was a piebald horse, and the gypsies and tinkers, they like a piebald... what they call coloured horses. And that was really a family pet as well as a work horse. A lovely horse to work with.

### **Is that the one that was intuitive, that you've just been talking about, or... ?**

No, it wasn't. The other one I had at the same time, which was Bob, that was a big seventeen hands horse, very dark brown, almost black in Winter and in its Winter coat. But that was the one with all the sense. But that horse and my father didn't get on very well. I don't know what he'd done to it, but it didn't like him. I know that sounds strange but it didn't. In fact, it grabbed him by the chest on one occasion. As it walked past him, it put its ears back and grabbed him with its teeth, made a mess of his chest, he was black and blue. It smashed the cart on two occasions with him. And I'd been away. I'd been... I'd to go back to the army for two weeks of what they call Z Training. When I came back, the cart was broken. And I said, you know, "What's been going on?"

“That bloody old horse of yours,” he said. “Oh,” I said, “Well, please don't take it again. Leave it where it is.” And I had no bother with it at all, but as I say, I mean, it knew him and it didn't like him.

### **They can sense, can't they, animals?**

Yeah, but he must've done something to it, and as I said, he had a lot of sense, this horse. But what happened was, we were going cockling one morning. Down at the bottom of the road, where you go down to the salt marsh, there's a gate. He got off the cart to open the gate. He opened it wide, and as the horse went past him, it just turned its head and grabbed him by the chest with its teeth. It was unbelievable, but it did. And I knew he was in pain. We went cockling, he was in pain, and when we came on, he stripped his clothes off at the top, and he'd a great black and blue mark where it had really bitten him. So there was animosity between them. But in the end, I just said, “Now, don't go near it.” It's strange because it was so good with me, it really was. Got into difficulties and it always got out. We crashed into a stream one morning in the... well, it was about midnight in the dark. It didn't realise I was near this stream. It wouldn't go near it because it was always full of quicksand, and it went, “Zhhuum,” down into this stream and it was plunging about in this quicksand. And I knew I couldn't get back up this bank. So I turned it downstream and it plunged away down, and it kept going. If it had gone down in that, we'd've never have got it out, but anyway, it didn't. It went away down to where it was a bit harder, and then the bank levelled out a bit, and I couldn't see it because it was dark, but I took a chance and it came out. Most other horses I knew would've stuck in there, been mired. But anyway, that was that horse.

I'd one that was blind. I didn't know it was blind till I'd had it... I'd had it on two occasions. And I didn't... it was blind or nearly blind. It wasn't quite properly blind. But I didn't realise it till it bumped into a wall twice. And the first time I just thought it was an accident, and then the next time, I thought, “Oh, damn, poor thing.” It was blind. Mm. I only bought that horse as a... just give old Bob, who I've just talked about, a good horse, a little spell off, you know. Instead of going every day or twice a day, I bought this other

horse just to give it a day or two off. And it was the cheapest horse I could find, at £45. So that was what I landed up with.

### **Now you know why it was cheap!**

Yeah, it wasn't a good horse. And daft thing is, I sold it and then bought it back again a couple of years later because I knew it would do the job, although it wasn't a good horse. It was cheap (laughs). Oh, I've had some escapades with horses. I've had some... fun sometimes, and some awful expeditions. One went down in quicksands. We got it out, but we didn't get the cart out for another... oh, six months. Dug it out to six months later. But the horse that went down in quicksand and... we eventually got that out after a few hours. We've had them drop into deep holes and they've been swimming, which isn't very good when you've got a cart and a net behind, which is like an anchor. Yeah, these sort of things, they happen. Tipped the cart over once, going down over the rough salt marsh. Hit a bump and the cart turned over and I was underneath it. Cart was upside down. My brother-in-law and his friend were coming down a few yards behind, and they came across the cart upside down and the horse lying there, and they said, you know, "Where are you?" I said, "I'm underneath the cart!" They had to lift the cart up to get me out.

### **Were you injured or... ?**

No, and the horse wasn't injured. Erm... we got it up, took the horse out of the cart, and the cart was damaged. So I went home, got my father's horse out and went to a different place to the others because I knew I was a bit late for going there, it was a long way. And I got more than the others did on that morning. I was lucky, in a way. But that was a funny old morning (laughs).

### **I bet you've had some dos, as they say.**

Yeah. I'd tractors down umpteen times in quicksands. But we got them all out, but



sometimes the tractor was ruined anyway, and sometimes you got them going. I got quite used to it, in that I came off the sand one morning at... towed this tractor off that'd been down in quicksand, landed home about 3 o'clock in the morning, went to bed, got up, started to work on it, stripped the engine down, had it running by dinnertime and went fishing on it in the afternoon. You get the knack of it, you know, you get used to it, you get practice.

**So how do you... how do you control that sort of situation if you're on a tractor and then it's... it's getting lost in quicksand?**

Well, there's nothing you can do really. Sometimes you know where quicksands are, and you avoid them. And then sometimes you think, "Well, it could be soft here, but we'll try it, we'll go through," get some speed on and roar through it. And... but sometimes you do get into quicksands that you don't know are there. But sometimes, and it's more often than not that it happens when they go down, it's when they're stood, and you're stood there emptying the nets or something and you hadn't noticed it's a little bit soft. And it gradually goes down, and you look round, and it's gone down, it's stuck. And that's happened several times.

But er... at first, we had difficulty getting them out. Well, it's never easy, but some of them you floated out with the big oil drums, get these 50 gallon oil drums and tie about ten of them to it, let the tide come and float it out, and get them out in that way. If they're not down too far, you put two or three tractors to them with big ropes, and pull them out that way. But er... it's something you could do without really (laughs). But it happens.

**Mm. So have you got any memorable stories then of when you've been shrimping?**

No, most days were just routine stuff. I've had wheels come off when you're travelling (laughs), a tractor wheel flown off on odd occasions (laughs). Erm, I can't really... I

once ran out of diesel when I was actually shrimping. I was trawling down a channel and ran out of diesel, and the trailer with two nets was 200 yards out in the channel. I don't know how that happened but it did. A complete surprise, but luckily there were several other tractors there and they pulled me out. But the trailer was left in the water, way out. But we got the tractor home.

**So your main trades, the shrimping and cockling, was there one that you preferred more than the other or... ?**

Yeah, shrimping, definitely shrimping. But in recent years... when I say recent years, in the last 20 years, cockles have come to prominence. A lot of money's been made from cockling. Not now because there've been no cockles for about eight years, but before that for a decade, there were a lot of cockles, and some of the men made a lot of money. I was retired by then, I missed it all. But cockles then took over and the men, the young men, thought that was going to be forever, you know what I mean. "We're going to have all these cockles always," making a lot of money, doing well. And I said, "Look, this is only a temporary thing. Shrimps are the mainstay." And, you know, they couldn't imagine that, because a man comes into the job, we'll say he's eighteen years old and he gets ten years of cockling and he thinks, "Oh, that's going to be forever." But it came to an end. And there've been no cockles now for... I don't know, since... we're in 2015, there's certainly been none since about 2006.

### **Track 3**

**So Jack, we're gonna pick up from where we left off the other day, and we were talking about shrimping, and I remember you said that it was probably your favourite type of fishing, the one that you most looked forward to. I was wondering if you could just explain that a bit more.**

Yeah, it was really the mainstay of our living was shrimping, practically throughout my working life. And I enjoyed it, especially with the horse and cart, although it's nostalgic, when I think about it. There's a lot of nostalgia in it. Yeah, we went out, the fishermen

still go out, something like four to five miles, sometimes more than that, get to a channel, and there are several channels that one can go into, and drag a net down it and hope there are some shrimps there. And the method of fishing and catching shrimps hasn't changed, although the method of transport has. As we went with horse and cart for years and years, and then in the sort of 1950s and 60s, we changed onto tractors, which altered the whole aspect of it, but not the actual catching of the shrimps, which remains the same. It's simply a method... a matter of dragging a net down the channel, and if there are shrimps there one catches them. They're on the sand at the bottom of the water, the net comes along with a beam that stands maybe two, two and a half inches high, which sends a surge of water up over that beam and the shrimps are thrown back into the net and eventually fall back into what we call the cod end at the bottom end of the net.

**And can you talk about the different types of nets then and what was used for shrimping?**

There's only one sort of net used for shrimping and it remains the same to this day as it's always been. When I first started, everybody used a net that was twelve feet wide, the mouth of it was twelve feet wide. Now we usually use them in fifteen feet but really that's the only difference. The net's simply dragged down the channel and hopefully there are some shrimp, but nearly always a lot of seaweed as well and crabs and everything that comes in its season. Jellyfish in June and July, crabs throughout the year, lots of seaweed mainly in the autumn when it becomes ripe just as crops come ripe. It comes away from the holdings, whatever it's holding onto and we get tons and tons of it, and sometimes the nets can be absolutely full in... you know, drag them a couple of hundred yards and they're full. So you've all that to contend with. There's always something that's trying to stop you catching shrimps. If you get days when it's completely clean, then it's a bonus and you're very lucky.

**And did the net... does it have a particular name or a term or a nickname?**

No, we'd just call it a shrimp net. At Southport, they call it a shank, they're going shanking. But we don't, it's just a shrimp net.

**And before when we met, we spoke about the processes and how the shrimps would come back to the home and they'd get boiled and the women would prepare them. What would then happen with them? Can you just talk me through the end process?**

Yeah, well, quite lucky that not long after I left school, Young's opened a factory up at Cark, simply for processing shrimps. And, so then, you came home, boiled the shrimps, and then they're taken out to houses to be picked or peeled, whatever you like to call it. We called it picking. Or picked at home with quite a number of people in the house, in our house, picking them. And then they went up to Young's in the evening. They opened up to take in everybody's catch at 9 o'clock in the evening, and from there they were put into freezers and potted all the year round from those freezers. Young's would pot shrimps all the year round. And then we opened our own processing factory a few years later, and the same thing really: take them down there, and there were ladies down there that potted them every day.

**So they'd always be taken to the factory.**

Yes. Before that, it was rather a dicey job. Nobody had any great orders where you could take a lot of shrimps. A few shrimps were sold here, there and all over the place on the local markets and in one or two shops and so forth, but there wasn't a big market for shrimps at all. So extremely lucky really that Young's came to Cark at the end of 1950 and were into production a year later and took all the shrimps that we could catch, for a few years, until we opened our own cooperative society: a society that was formed by about a dozen fishermen. We all put a certain amount of money in, got the premises going, and then it was an exceedingly good company from the fisherman's point of view. It closed after 30 years and owed me nothing, it served me well. And luckily again, it closed just about the time that I was due to retire. So yeah, that was a very good

company, Flookburgh Fishermen Limited. But it got to the point where there was so few fishermen, in fact there were only three of us in the end that was producing anything to go through the factory, there wasn't enough throughput to make a profit necessary to run the factory. At that time it was costing about £25,000 per year just to keep the place open and, you know, three men putting stuff into there couldn't accumulate enough business to keep... to make it viable. And so it closed. Most of the members had either died or retired, till it left just three of us. And so that was... it was the end of an era. Sad, really.

**So could you just talk us through the timescales of when you created this cooperative and then when it closed?**

I think I'm right in saying that the cooperative Flookburgh Fishermen Limited was formed in July of 1959. Yeah. And operated for almost 30 years. No, that's... stop it.

**No, that's alright.**

I think that must be wrong.

**We can er...**

It was going into the 1990s, so it was over 30 years, yeah. Can we edit? Can you go back and edit that out?

**That's fine, yeah. Just clarify your point, if you like.**

Yeah. I think, as I said, I'm pretty sure that it opened in July of 1959, and closed in the early 1990s.

**Is that when the Furness Fisheries then... did they begin? Or was there a bit of a gap?**

Yeah. There was a bit of a gap. Furness Fish and Game Company were operating in Ulverston and they bought the premises after a short time. It took a while to get the business sorted out and sold, and they took over, and they started to produce all sorts of things. I'm not sure what they produced but they'd do other things besides shrimps. And they have installed shrimp picking machines, mechanical machines, where it was all done by hand before. And we'd never seen picking machines before, and so they... I think they've got about four of them in there. Now, they don't do the perfect job but it is much faster than picking by hand. But after that, they've got some ladies who've got to go through those shrimps again to pick out bits of shell and so forth that are left, because it's not perfect. But it is a good process really.

**And do you know much about the history of Young's then?**

No. I only know that Young's operated or started down on the Thames Estuary, I think at Leigh-on-Sea. And they came up here about 1950 and said that they wanted all the shrimps that we could catch, and we, not for a minute did we believe that, because we could catch a lot of shrimps. But when they got into production, they did take all our shrimps. And sometimes that meant a quarter of a ton or thereabouts of peeled shrimps, you know, the finished product, going up there. A quarter of a ton per night sometimes when shrimps were at their best. And we don't catch shrimps in Winter here. As soon as the very cold weather comes, say, mid-November or it may be early December, shrimps always disappear from these estuaries, because the water becomes very cold, shallow water. They go out into deeper water. But in the first year, Young's paid anyone who would go shrimping through the Winter ten shillings a day. Ten shillings, fifty pence. But I suppose that would be enough to, say, keep your horse for the day, or even, might even pick for nearly a week. I don't know what it would be in today's money, probably £15 or something like that, I would imagine. It was the price of say three gallons of petrol. So it was some sort of an incentive to go and try to catch shrimps. But when they got going, yeah, it was a good company. They employed, I suppose, twenty odd people, mostly women, who were processing the fish, peeling

scampi and potting shrimps and so forth.

### **And when did they close then?**

Well, they closed... they went... they carried on for a few years after we opened the Flookburgh Fishermen Limited, which I said was 1959. So they would close somewhere about the mid-1960s, I should imagine. But I can't really remember because I started to take all my product down into our new premises, but some of the local fishermen did carry on taking shrimps to Young's. Because we had meetings about forming the cooperative society and so far as I remember, everyone was in favour. But on the day when it came to actually putting money on the table, some backed out. Not because they didn't have any money, I might say, but they probably thought, "Well, it could be dicey. It may not be a success." And they carried on taking shrimps up to Young's. And they may have gone on another ten years, I'm not sure. But quite a few years after Flookburgh Fishermen opened.

### **And what made you want to set up your own cooperative then?**

It was simply the fact that soon after Young's started to take out shrimps, the price kept dropping. It kept slowly getting less and less, the price that Young's were paying us for shrimps. Until after a few years, you know, we found it difficult to carry on. And in fact, we went on strike, which was ridiculous, for self-employed fishermen to go on strike. But we said, you know, "We'll go on strike, we won't bring you any shrimps." And we did for about a fortnight.

### **When was that then? What year are we talking about?**

I don't know when that was. Erm ... mid 1950s, maybe '56. Something like that. And we were annoyed because they were dropping the price. And we said, "Well, you know, we're not going to be able to carry on." Now, we were very annoyed at the time, but we knew nothing about the national or international markets, fish markets. We'd always

sold fish locally, and you could nearly set your own price, within limits, you know what I mean. Cockles, for instance, went onto the markets at Ulverston and Barrow, and the fishermen that went there, say three or four of them, would set their own price. It was quite local. Young's were dealing in national and international markets. And I'm sure they were governed to a certain extent as to what they could pay. So perhaps the markets did drop their prices and Young's had to drop their prices to us. So maybe we were little unfair to them, but we did say that if they didn't buck up their ideas and pay us more, we would open our own premises. Well, they'd shown us the way. They'd shown us how to pot shrimps and freeze them and so forth. We knew nothing of that. But we did have the advantage of one or two women that had worked there were prepared to work for us, because they were relatives of... not particularly mine but some of the fishermen. The ladies who had processed the shrimps up there, potted them and so forth, would move down to our factory and pot our shrimps. So it started off, and we got one or two loans, and a grant from the Fisheries Organisation Society, which paid for a manager for one year, which was fine. And they said, "Oh, you may go into profit in, you know, five or six years." It was into profit in the second year, and did very well.

I say it was into profit, yes. The company didn't accumulate a lot of money because when it made money, it was distributed to the fishermen in er... what we called a bonus. It was a ... struth, I can't think of the word. Never mind. No, I can't think of the word.

### **Like a share or something?**

Yeah. On what you'd... it was a percentage of what you'd taken in. Well, say a man had taken a thousand pounds weight of shrimp in in the year, he got a very good bonus, you know, share of the profit. And likewise, relatively down, you know. Dividend! That's what I'm trying to think of. It was a dividend from the profits made. And so a man who only went fishing, say, two or three times a week, he didn't get very much. But the man who went fishing every day did quite well. I did very well out of it because for all the years it was open, except I think one when I was ill for a long time, I took the most product into that factory, and I picked up the most dividend in the year. And still



have the figures to prove it (laughs). Because I worked night and day. I didn't just go fishing once a day, which was normal. I went twice nearly every day. Say, 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and then again at 2 o'clock in the morning, or whenever the tide went out. Too much really. I did far too much, looking back on it. But that's the way I was, pushed it to the limit.

I used to go to bed, have a couple of hours sleep, never more than about three, if I were fishing twice a day, and then off again. Come home, finish boiling up and that say by 10 o'clock in the morning. Go to bed, get up again twelve or one o'clock. Off again at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. And then again another two or three hours at night. And that's the way I worked. But I say I did take the most product into the factory, year after year, and picked up the biggest dividend. And that dividend was quite handy. It would almost pay for a new van every year, you know, or whatever. It would pay for the horse and its keep at the start, or the running of the tractor. Yeah, it was quite a substantial figure in its day. Well, say you picked up, er, say, six or seven hundred pounds in dividend, that was a good lift. It was worth a few thousands in today's money. So there you go. Flookburgh Fishermen Limited. Very good company, cooperative society, and came to an end near the time that I retired.

**Lovely, thanks, Jack. So if we can maybe talk about some of the different types of fishing that you did. So we haven't really spoken about the cockling.**

Cockling remained virtually the same for years and years. Maybe, I don't know, a couple of hundred years, maybe more. Go out on the sands, gather the cockles, which had to be mature cockles, what you might call large cockles. Say, almost as big as a conker, can I put it that way? Three years old, at least. Because they went on the markets to be sold in the shell. And they were sold here locally by the quart, quart measure. They'd got to be a good size, even when they were sent away into the markets down in Lancashire or Blackburn, Manchester, Liverpool, Keighley, Bradford. They were sold on the markets or in shops in the shell, so they'd got to be a good size. So you went out there and you'd rock what you call a jumbo, which was simply a flat

board on the sand. It's maybe about fourteen inches wide, four or five feet long. Rock it on the sands till the sand turns to a sort of jelly, a liquid form, a mud, if you like. And the cockles would float to the surface. They're only about a quarter of an inch under the sand, never more than half an inch, because they've got to be able to put the pipe up and feed when the tide comes in. So they're not very far under the sand but they come up to the surface when you rock the jumbo, simply because they are lighter than sand, and they float to the surface. The surface of the sand, that is. They're not lighter than water. And then if you were picking up individually, you picked them up with a little three-pronged instrument called a craam, and chucked them into a cockle basket, an oak swill basket made by people called Swillers up in the Lake District. And that was very important, that basket. You picked the cockles into that, a rapid process. Somebody once described it when I was a lad... they described it, the sound of it, like the rattling of a tambourine. The cockles went in so fast that it was a rattle. And then they were washed and put into bags, into hundredweight bags. Now I don't know whether anybody knows what a hundredweight is now. It was the normal weight for coal or for cockles or whatever: a hundred and twelve pounds.

**So where was this happening then?**

Down on the sand.

**So where... when you said they were washed...**

Yeah, you'd wash them in any nearby water, or dig a hole, and that hole naturally fills up with water on the sand. You'd take a spade if you like...

**Yeah, so you'd done it on-site.**

...dig a hole and wash them there, put them in the bags, a hundredweight bag into a Hessian sack. It was always Hessian sacks. If they were going onto the markets away on the train, and they went from Cark station here, there was a siding where the goods

wagons were backed up, closed wagons that is, backed up into those sidings, and names were put onto those wagons on a ticket, and it would say 'Manchester', 'Leeds', 'Blackburn', 'Liverpool' or wherever and you put your cockles onto that relative van.

### **Straight off the shore?**

Yeah.

### **And into the vans.**

Well, you'd probably come home and have your dinner and, you know, sew the tops of the bag up. You sewed them up with what we called a packing needle, which I think is a sail-maker's needle, and some string, and put a label on them to where they were going: to, you know, whoever the buyer was, went to the station with a horse and cart for a start, put them into the correct wagon, and off they went. And that'd be quite an adventure sometimes with the horse, because the trains would come in, you hoped that a train wouldn't come in while you were there because, you know, steam trains were very noisy. They're letting off great gusts of steam and the horses would be startled. And then if they were shunting, there was tremendous clanging, as the buffers banged together and the chains rattled. And some of the horses were terrified, so it was quite an adventure sometimes on there. But that was what happened. And then if there were a lot of cockles and they're what we call rank, sort of nearly touching each other and they're too many to pick up individually, one at a time, you'd rake them up with a glorified garden rake. It is really a garden rake. And you'd pull them into a heap, and then into a riddle and riddle the small ones out, so you only got the mature cockles. That was fine.

I was shocked, and really shocked, I must say, when I had not been cockling for a year or two, a good few years, and I'd been retired a while, and decided to go cockling again with my son and one or two more, and we went over to Bolton-le-Sands near Morecambe. And there were a lot of men, you know, from all over the country, cockling

there, up to five or six hundred men cockling, and I saw them dragging up the cockles and chucking all the lot in, even the tiny ones. Cleared the lot out. And I couldn't believe it. I'd never seen it before. But the market had changed. The people who were buying them, they were taking them for boiling and putting into bottles, you know, bottled cockles or whatever, boiled. So they would take anything. So they were taking, as well as the mature cockles, those that would've been the next season's catch, that we'd always riddled back onto the sand.

**So there was never any official rules and regulations, it was almost like cockling etiquette, that's what you did?**

No. There were rules about size of cockles that may be taken, but those rules were never enforced. Absolute disgrace. The fisheries people never enforced it at all. There are people in this village who will verify what I'm saying now. There were times when there were wagons coming down onto the aerodrome here, parked up, maybe four or five massive wagons, and they were filled with cockles, to maybe put ten or more tons on each wagon. And hardly any of those cockles in that wagon full were of legal size. And nothing was done and nothing was said. And the fishery officers used to come, and say nothing. Why, I've no idea. Whether they were scared of the number of people there, which if it was true was pretty awful, because it implied that if there'd only been the few locals there'd always been, it would've been stopped. Well, one of the fishery officers did say to me, "Well, there are so many men, we can't deal with all that." That is absolute rubbish. It was their job to stop them. I said, "Look, all you've got to do is wait for those people coming off the sand before they get to the road. While they're still coming off the sand, stop them, look at the cockles and say, "Look, those are too small. Take them back."" And he said, "Well..." Believe this or not, this is true. He said, "Well, look, there may be four men on that tractor. How do I know who caught those, who gathered those in there?" I said, "Well, that is absolute rubbish. They're illegal, they're small. Whoever got them, they should take them back." But that was the way it was, and it never was stopped, and they took all the lot.

**And this was more of an issue after you'd retired, was it?**

That was after I retired, yes. It was maybe six or seven years after I'd retired. I retired officially in 1997, and I didn't do any fishing for a good few years. I wasn't interested in it. I didn't even want to talk about it. I was doing other things, I was doing voluntary work in the village for the church, for the village in general. I became a local councillor. And I wasn't interested in the fishing. Went on several holidays a year with the caravan, and occasionally abroad. And then I thought, "Oh, I might as well do a bit of fishing again. I'm quite fit." So I did go, as I said, with my son, and one or two other people, and then in latter years with my grandsons. And then this is what I saw that was happening. And there were tremendous amounts of cockles. And I think it would be fair to say thousands of tons were carted away. And of course a lot of them we worked beds that were mature cockles, that was fine. But when we came to beds of immature cockles and very tiny ones, no bigger than peas sometimes, and they were all taken, just taken in. Whereas we used to riddle them with, you know, a sort of inch square riddle, and so the little ones dropped through and they fell onto the sand and they grew to the next year or two years, for your next catch. So I found it very sad really that this was happening. And particularly that it was in front of the fishery offices and they did nothing.

**And how was it for your son? Because he was still trading and, you know, it's part of his livelihood.**

Yeah. Frustrating. Because he was still dealing in only mature cockles, because his were going into France, again, to be sold as live cockles, onto the markets. So we had to riddle ours for that purpose. So that's the way it was. A lot of people came from Wales, from the Liverpool area, and of course the Chinese, which most people know about through the awful tragedy that happened to the Chinese people.

But yeah, the industry changed in the last fifteen or twenty years, something like that.

### **And where did you used to cockle then?**

Well, anywhere in the Bay really. Anywhere in Morecambe Bay. There've been cockles in most of the areas of the Bay throughout the years but not always at the same place. So, you know, you go wherever the cockles are.

### **Where there any particular areas that were more lucrative than others?**

No. They've all been lucrative at different times. But I must say that, I don't know when it was, erm, 1990s sometimes, we started to get cockles over on the Furness side. Not very far off the Ulverston to Barrow coast road, only a matter of sometimes half a mile out from the shore. And I had never known cockles over on that side at all before. There were some, yes, in the 1980s, I think it were, but I'd never known any there before. I've seen times when you could maybe get a bucket full, but never more than that. There was a man in this village who was nearly 100 years old, and I used to go and talk to him. And I said, "Have you ever known cockles over on that Furness side?" and he said, "No, never." So that was strange. But there were a lot of cockles there at that time. There was a period in the 1980s and then late 1990s, and maybe just after the millennium.

### **Why do you think that was then?**

I've no idea. Probably just because the sand was suitable. You know, they need suitable sand for them to land on, the tiny cockles, to grow, to feed and grow. Now, there were also a lot of cockles down off Bolton-le-Sands near to Morecambe, which there hadn't been since about 1945 or '46. Well, that was rather strange. I remember the time when they were there before because I was still going to school but some of our family were working over there with horses and carts. And they took the horses and carts over there and stabled them at wherever they could over there. Sometimes at the hotels that still had stables and so forth. And that was, I think, 1946. And then there were none again till just into this new millennium. And I went over there at the end of

2003. So that was when they came over there again. But there were a lot of cockles over there.

**So in terms of your business then, it was erm... was it a bit more dicey then than the shrimping, because you never knew how many you were going to get?**

Yes. Shrimping was, as I've said before, a mainstay of our livelihood throughout the years. Cockles came and went. But cockles were the winter job really. They were the job for winter, particularly at a time when they were sent away by train and they wouldn't last more than a day. So, you know, it had to be wintertime so that they would keep. Cockles and mussels in wintertime will stay alive for many days, maybe up to a week. But in summertime, they'll hardly keep a day, you know, so you couldn't send them any. So cockling used to be a winter's job. So you'd be shrimping all through the year, say from the end of March or into April, right through to November and then start cockling. If they didn't go shrimping, they would spend a lot of months cockling. But cockles aren't always there, as we've proved now over the last, I don't know how long it is, maybe eight years since we had any cockles here. And so yeah, we got cockles throughout my life and certain periods and did very well, made quite a bit of money on, you know, just odd years. In the 1980s and '90s, it virtually took over from shrimping. It became the main occupation. And the young people who had just grown up and come into the fishing as the cockles, all these cockles arrived, thought this was going to be forever. I said, "Mark my words. Cockles come and go. They only live, say, four years. So if no more come in after that time, those are gone, those have died or been taken, and it depends whether any young ones come in and set." And they haven't done in the last, er, certainly in the last six or seven years, probably eight, I can't remember. But there have been what we call sets, spats of young cockles, particularly three or four years ago, and they all died. They didn't get more than the size of a little fingernail, and all died. Why, I have no idea, but they did. I think there were two lots. And none grew at all.

**Do you think the water's changed or certain... ?**

I feel there has to be something, because another thing is, another factor is, shrimps are not growing here as they should. I cannot explain it, but over the last two years, in the autumn when shrimps should have been a good size, they were very small. This, along with the fact that all the cockles have died, seems strange, doesn't it, to put it at the very least. It seems very strange and odd that should all happen at once. But the fisheries people who should be looking into such things don't seem to either know or care. I mentioned to a person that was one of the fisheries authority's biologists I think she is, and she didn't know anything about it. And that seems to me to be their job.

### **Have you got your own thoughts then as to why there's been these changes?**

I really haven't. It is very strange. It all started in about 1985 or 1986, one of those years, and I can't remember which, but I remember it when it happened, you know, in my mind. I used to catch more shrimps at night time than we did in the daytime, mostly, that is, because shrimps used to come to the edge of the channels in the dark. It was seen to be in their being that they had to come out to the edge of the channels in the autumn in dark weather. Just as birds go to roost at night, shrimps came out to the edge of the channels. And it all changed about that time, mid 1980s. And for some reason or other, I couldn't go shrimping in the daytime, although we'd been getting enough shrimps through the day that we needn't go at night, at that particular time. For one day, I couldn't go through the daytime, and a friend of mine who'd been out that day, got a lot of shrimps, so I decided I would go at night. And I went, set off out at 11 o'clock at night, and I got nothing. I came back with nothing at all. There weren't any shrimps. So I said to him the next day, I said, "There's no point in going there today." I said, "There was nothing last night." He said, "Well, I did well there yesterday." He said, "I'll go there again." So I went with him, off we went. And we loaded up again, plenty of shrimps. And from that time, there were no shrimps at night. I could not explain that. I'd love that explained to me, why that has changed. Now, we didn't go shrimping at night after that, although it had been my main time for shrimping was night times. It was so much easier with the shrimps being on the edges of the channels.



Instead of loosening the trailer off from the tractor and sending the tractor out on a long rope down the middle of the channel, which is our normal job, I could go down the edge of the channel with the tractor still hooked up to the trailer in about a foot or two feet of water. So that was that. Shrimps gone at night time, we couldn't catch any.

Now, I can't say whether that's true today or not, because nobody goes at night. They only go at the daytime. They go in the morning in the dark, in the morning, ready for it sort of coming daylight, starting maybe just as dawn is breaking, but they don't set out at say 10 o'clock at night as I used to do, or midnight or whatever. So I don't know whether there are shrimps at night or not. I'd love to go and try but nobody would go with me (laughs).

### **Can we talk about fluke fishing?**

Yeah. Fluke fishing has been a tradition a long time in this village, I'm sure. And you can bet your life that the fish traps that we discovered in the year 2000 and date back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, I bet they caught flukes as well. But for flukes, there are several methods of catching them. Some of them now in the last decade have gone by the board because they're too much work to operate them. But let's start off and say there's a thing called a baulk net, which is a long net, say two to three hundred yards long, could be, could be shorter, but two hundred yards was very often used. And that sets out on the sands, where one hopes there's a lot of flukes feeding. And when the tide comes in, the bottom of that net lifts up. It lets the fish pass through. When the tide turns, that bottom cord drops down to the sand, and it forms a barrier and the fish are prevented from going back to sea, back into the deeper water as the tide ebbs. And it's called a baulk net because it baulks the fish, if you know what I mean.

### **So that's b-a-u-l-k.**

Yeah, it can be and I always write that, but it can be b-a-l-k. There's a thing called a balk in the game of billiards and snooker, and if you look at it in the dictionary, both

words can be used. B-a-u-l-k or b-a-l-k. But a baulk net, anyway. And I used them all my life, as did my father and grandfather that I know of and almost certainly great-grandfather, who I remember well, by the way. So that's the baulk net. Simply prevents the fish from going back to sea. And the fish then, when the tide's gone out, are either laying on that net or on the sand in front of it. They've simply been stopped from going back to sea and are lying there. And in the end of that net, you make a little... a little trap. What's the word? We call it a turnpike, a little turn in the end, so that the fish get lost and land back into the middle of the net. And so it worked very well. It would catch a lot of flukes sometimes. Sometimes tons. And you didn't want tons, but if you set that net, it caught whatever it... you know, whatever it caught. If you wanted a hundredweight, fine, or two hundredweights. But I remember when I was young, horses and carts coming back, loaded to the top, the cart was full. I mean, I would usually go and take a couple of boxes, and tip the flukes into the boxes out of the cockle basket again. You picked them up in the cockle basket, washed them, and tipped them into a box in the cart, or two boxes or whatever. They used to come back, I can remember particularly my uncle who lived only 300 yards from here, come back with a cart overflowing with flukes. You know, when he come down the hill, they'd be running over the front, it was so full. Yeah. And they would sell them all.

**So is the tradition of catching flukes then hasn't really changed much?**

No.

**It might be how they get transported from the shore.**

Yeah. But now you can't sell any quantity of flukes. They're only sold locally, either at people's house door or on the local markets. They're never sent away as they used to be. They used to be sent away on the trains, just like the cockles were. But a lot were sold by mostly retired fishermen and probably a dozen of them at least that went out into the countryside hawking them. They went on the train to Barrow and Ulverston and Kendal and sold them round the streets from a handcart: wheeled the handcart to the

station, put it in the guard's van. I don't think there's guard's vans now but there was then that carried the goods. And got off at Ulverston or Barrow, wherever, and hawked them round the streets. And they were mostly the retired fishermen that, like my grandfather's generation, although he never did it, but one of his brothers did, who again had been one of the fishermen, had been one of the last of the boating men. And now very few flukes are caught and they're so cheap, relatively, that it's hardly worth doing. One or two people do catch flukes and just sell a few. I suppose it helps if you're already going shrimping and you're going past the nets, pick up a few flukes and sell them at home, but no quantity.

But to carry on with the methods, we've talked about the baulk net. There's also a thing called a stream net, which in this case is set on the edge of a very fast flowing stream, probably the main channel, the river channel. And it has got to be a fast-flowing, ebbing tide. The same nets are used, but in this case, the stakes that carry the net are put into the sand. They're put in like two to three feet into the sand, and close together, no more than about a metre apart, because they've to stand such a weight of water, the fast-flowing water. Then the top cord is put onto the stakes at about knee-high or just below. And the bottom cord is fastened something like six inches up from the sand. And so it forms a sort of a bag in the net. And the fish go in-between the top and bottom cords and are forced in by that fast-flowing water. And as the tide goes out, they drop down into this bag, and they're simply taken out again into the cockle basket and dumped into the cart or into boxes or whatever.

**And is that mainly flukes then fish?**

Flukes. Used to be plaice, but there've been no plaice here for... and I really shouldn't say that because there have been a few in one particular place over the last five or six years. But for more than 50 years, there were no plaice here at all. But in my father's time, when he was young, and my grandfather's time, they got plaice certainly every autumn, made a living from them. But then after 1954, and I say that precisely, 1954, there were no plaice here until about maybe 2006, something like that. Then just in one

channel, quite a lot of plaice came every year, every autumn. Not very big plaice. Some big, but mostly sort of from four inches in length up to ten inches. But some bigger ones, but a lot of small ones, which were a blooming nuisance, if you were shrimping. You'd maybe get two boxes of plaice in and a few shrimps. But we talk about stream nets... really over the last 60 or 70 years for catching flukes. Now, the baulk net will almost certainly be never used again. But I used them right up to the time that I finished fishing. And in fact, after I'd retired, a few years after, I realised that the baulk net would never be used again, and yet there was no record of it. So I'd given the nets away, and I said to the man that I gave them to who was an amateur fisherman, I said, "Have you still got those nets?" He said, "Aye, I have." I said, "Can I have 'em back?" So I went up into the woods and cut about 80 or 90 stakes, wooden stakes about inch and a half in diameter, got the nets back and went and set a baulk net, simply to take video of and photographs to keep as a record. So that it's always known.

**So the reason they're not being used again is pretty much because...**

There's too much labour in setting them.

**Yeah.**

It's a big job. It's half a day's job to go out and set a baulk net on my own, yes. It would take me, with a horse and cart, an hour to get out there, at least, and an hour back, and probably two to three hours setting the net. Now they have nets that have become to be known as drop nets. Why, I've no idea. But they are the simplest things you could ever imagine. You go out there and stick in some iron bars, probably about four metres apart or more, sometimes much more than that if there isn't a strong tide running. Put the nets onto there with a biggish mesh of fine twine, nylon or what we call mono filament, and they tangle fish like flies in a cobweb. It is so easy. You set one of those up in, well, certainly ten minutes. It's simply a matter of putting a dozen iron bars into the sands, which run towards a hundred yards long, and hang the net on, and the fish tangling in this very fine mesh, very fine twine.

### **So they really replaced the baulk net?**

Yeah, they're very handy, I must say. They aren't all that work. And similarly to pick them up. You see, with the baulk net, you set the net, it either caught some or it didn't. Sometimes it didn't. You'd then to pick it up. Again, it would take an hour to load it all up, if you were on your own, get the nets off the stakes, pull all the stakes out of the sand, load it up and take it somewhere else and set it again. If you were doing nothing else, that was your job, fair enough. But you couldn't do anything else. And so, a laborious job. But it had gone on for... let's say, I don't know, maybe a couple of hundred years, I would imagine. It took over from the ancient fish traps that we used 500 years ago or whatever, which were fixed. They were fixed nets set on hard ground, and were never moved. I think it was realised that you needed to have nets that were mobile, that you could move around. But at what stage in the years that was, I don't know. But all the nets that we've used, you can move them to wherever you want, yeah. Quite a big job, but they could be moved.

### **And did you say that you came across a baulk net then that was evidence that it was used a couple of hundred years ago or... ?**

No, fourteenth century. Yeah, that was discovered in the year 2000, when the channel of the River Leven came into our shore and took off 20 feet of sand from an area, 20 feet vertical of sand, and exposed this great area of hard ground, stony ground, which we didn't know about. And on which the remains of fish traps, that after a lot of work and experiment and what-have-you, we discovered go back to the fourteenth century, about 1350 or thereabouts. And were almost certainly used by the monks at the priories. And they were fixed nets that could never be moved. Well, there was nowhere else to put them, they'd got to be on hard ground. But they... they weren't nets. They were posts put into this hard ground about eighteen inches apart, and then they'd been interwoven with brushwood to make like a wattle hedging. Where we would use nets today, they'd use wattle hedging. Used at various places, and I know that there were

similar things in Ireland, particularly in Strangford Lough, there were fish traps very similar to those found here. I haven't seen any that are the same anywhere else, but I did get pictures from Ireland showing the same things. So then it was found, or it was necessary to be able to move nets around. So these movable nets that I used all my life came into being. Now, we've talked about the baulk net, stream net. Which, the baulk net was usually set in an arc, stream nets in a dead straight line. Stakes very close together, no more than a metre apart, the top cord two feet high and the bottom cord six inches from the sand or thereabouts. And the fish would be taken in by a fast-flowing water. And they would catch a lot of flukes at times. I always remember my father saying he'd taken seven score out of one net, which in his case, he only used 20 yards long nets. Now, when I say 20 yards, you could use multiples of 20 yards. You could put the 20 yards on and then add another 20 yards and another 20 yards till... you know, as long as you liked. But he said from one 20 yard net he got seven score. A score of flukes, a score of anything is 20. 20 pounds. Seven 20s.

### **Hundred and forty.**

Hundred and forty pounds, yes. Out of this 20 yard long net. So a lot. You know, we say we're fourteen stakes. In-between each of those stakes there'd be something like 40 or 50 fish. Yeah, that was a lot. Usually, you know, you'd probably get, say, 20 pounds out of a 20 yard net, or 30 pounds or whatever.

There's another way of catching flukes, which is with a boat, a small rowing boat, where you'd go into a... what we'd call a deep hole. It might be only five feet deep, or it might be fifteen feet deep, more than that. Say the deep holes that are scoured round the railway viaducts in particular, these can be very deep, and they're quite large pools actually. And the flukes would be lying in there and stay there all the time, even when the tide's gone out, and sometimes a lot in there. You'd go out with a little rowing boat with what we called a flu net wound on the back of the boat in a pile, go out into the water, drop an anchor off, row the boat away so that all the net pays out in a long line or an arc, and then drop the last anchor off at the other end of the net, and the net's laying

there... It's still water, fairly still. The net's laying there, ledge on the bottom, floats on the top. And then you go away from the net about 40 yards with the boat and used what we called a pumer (ph), which is a wooden disc about a foot or more in diameter, round, circular. I don't suppose it had to be, but we always used circular, with a pole in about five feet long or more, and plunged that down into the water off the back or the side of the boat, which made a big noise on the bottom of the sand, a reverberation. You plunged it down, and if you were doing it right, the echo came back up from the bottom and rattled the boat. It actually shook the boat. As you're standing there, you can feel it through your body. If you weren't doing it right, all you made was a big splash and wet yourself through. But if you did it right, you'd strike down as near as you can under the boat, and it'd go "spladoosh". And that sound on the bottom scared the fish. But it also, as I say, bounded back up and hit the bottom of the boat, and you knew you were doing it right. In that water it would make a big sound. Like, nearly like a little explosion. And the fish would fly in all directions. And they wouldn't all go in the net, but you hoped that some would go in the net because you'd go nearer and nearer to the net. Which is great if there's two men, which it normally was a two man job, because one would row the boat nearer and nearer, along the boat, nearer and nearer till you got near to it and then you'd simply pick up the end of the net, you got a buoy, a float fastened to the anchor, pick up the first anchor, wind the net in and hopefully it'd be full of flukes. Very often it wasn't, very often you got nothing, but mostly you'd get... let's say you got 40 pounds of flukes and you'd do it again and you'd do it again, at a different place, you'd keep moving. And then sometimes the net's full. I remember one time in particular, I got half the net in and the boat was full. I had to take my knife out, cut the net in two, row that half to the shore and go back for the other half. I once was there with my sister, believe it or not. And my sister didn't go fishing but she said "I'll come with you, it's a nice summer's day." So there we were, rowing the boat around and flueing, as we called it. And I'm pulling the net in, and it had a lot of flukes in, and we were only in a little boat, ten foot long. I pulled it in and the boat was almost sinking, and I didn't dare say anything to her, but there was only a couple of inches of what we call freeboard out of the water and I quietly rowed it to the shore. If it had got a bit more or if it'd rocked, it would've sunk. Well, I mean, we could both swim, we weren't going to

drown, I don't think, but it wouldn't have been pleasant. But yeah, we'd quite a lot that day. We must have had a few hundredweights. Yeah, I've got nearly all these activities on video. I did them on purpose, you know, to keep. But with the flueing that we've just talked about, I was extremely lucky in a way because I was supplying live flukes to Manchester University. And some people used to come with a van and go out with me, and we'd get the flukes and they put them into tanks of water. We'd take the tanks out on a trailer, put some water into them, seawater, and then pour the live flukes into them. Well, they came with me one beautiful winter's day, I think it was December, but a lovely day, and I took the camcorder with me and I gave it to the lady who was driving the van. And I said, "Just film this a bit." And she filmed it, and it's come out OK, but she didn't know how to use the zoom or anything, I didn't show her that. It could've done with being on a tripod and zoomed at times to show it, but it's better than nothing. It does show the action, and it shows me pulling in a lot of flukes.

### **So you could fish for flukes at any time of the year then?**

Any time of year for flukes, but they do disappear in winter. Again, it comes hard weather, particularly hard frost, they go very rapidly. And you could catch a lot of flukes when they were going, because they were all rushing out of the estuary. And the old people used to call drovenans (ph). What they meant was driven ones. They were driven by the hard weather. And they would set the stream nets and catch a lot, because they were coming from way up the estuary. You know, say, five miles up, all the estuary, and they were going out to sea because of the frost. So then they disappeared and they didn't come back then till March or April when they come back as thin as paper. Just skin and bone. Pretty awful to look at, really. They come back and all the bones are showing. Because they've been out and they don't feed out there. They go out to breed, they spawn in the wintertime and early spring, and then they start to come back as the weather improves. And you'll see the marks on the sand where they've been feeding about middle or end of March. And then as the season gets going, they're gorging themselves on the tiny cockles or tiny macoma, or shrimp-like creatures that are in the sand. And they become fat by about the end of May. It takes them



towards a couple of months before they get really fat and marketable. But they come in big quantities at times, the flounders. But there aren't as many as there used to be. One of the reasons for that is, I think, is that for one thing, you never find them down in the bay. They're always up in the upper reaches of the estuaries, whereas when I was a school lad I remember going setting nets way out down in the bay. There are no flukes down there now. I don't know why.

**They're fussy, these fish, aren't they?**

They are, they'll go where there's food. **(laughs)** Really that's all it amounts to, like most wildlife.

**You said flounders. Is that the official name and flukes is the nickname?**

That is the official name. They are flounders. We've always called them flukes: f-l-u-k-e-s. Flukes.

**And, so there's a few other nets that I've become aware of. Now, I'm not entirely sure what they're used for so: a bag net.**

A what?

**A bag net.**

A bag net, again another method of catching flukes. Not been used since about 1970. And I've got photographs of the last bag net that was ever used, and it was set by my father when he had a very bad spell of health. So myself and two grandsons, his grandsons, that is, went to help him to set this bag net on Chapel Island. So that all he'd got to do was ride to that bag net on his tractor, tip out the flukes into a box and come home, no more work to do. The bag net is set very much like a small baulk: a length of net set, and the end of it where the bag is goes up a slope. And in there

there's a pocket that all the fish land into, and the net is set so that it guides them into the pocket, which we called a bag. And it's designed so that it... the fish go in and can't get out again. It's got a little none-return system. It never caught a great lot of flukes. I've seen it catch a hundredweight: a hundred pounds, that is, or hundred and twelve. But mostly it'd be catching 30 or 40 pounds. And if it caught a salmon, that was extremely pleasing. But it wouldn't normally. But occasionally they did catch a salmon. And then my father would be extremely pleased if he got a... if he got there and found he had a salmon in it.

**So did you ever go out actually fishing for salmon, or it was just... ?**

Oh, yes, yes. I had a salmon licence from the time that they were first issued here, which was mid-1950s, until I retired. So, what? 40 odd years or more. But salmon are so scarce in these rivers. In fact, my son, who has a licence, my grandson has a licence... I don't think he'd caught a salmon this year at all, and last year I think he caught one, which is ridiculous. But if you do catch them now, you'd have to catch a lot to make a living. Whereas, when I was going to school, or when I was a teenager, if you caught one good salmon, say twelve pound weight, it was almost a week's wage. It was quite a fuss if someone said, "Oh, so-and-so's caught a salmon today." It was a big thing. Because he'd certainly got half a week's wage. When cod was worth pence per pound, salmon would be worth say six shillings a pound. There was no comparison. I mean, cod was rubbish, and salmon was a prize fish. I was amazed when I went into a supermarket, let's say five years ago, something like that, and I saw that cod was dearer than salmon. Couldn't get over it. That's because of the farm salmon now. You can get salmon at any time of year. And nice salmon at that.

**And what was the methods you used then to catch salmon?**

The only legal method was to catch them with what we called a lathe net, which is a net that you carry around, a net on a frame, a triangular thing about four or five feet across the bottom coming up to a triangle towards you. And you'd actually see the fish and run

after it, chase it, scoop it up into the net.

**So you'd be physically right in the water.**

You're in the middle of the channel, in a shallow spot which we call a bar, where the channel was running at, say, four inches deep or a bit more than that, in what we call gillimas (ph), rolling, rolling down very fast. And the salmon would come down the river. They'd get onto these shallow spots, find they can't go any farther and they'd turn round and fight their way back up. And they'd be splashing with their tails. And you'd run and catch them. Or if you'd calm weather, you could see them coming or see them going back up. You could see the mark of the fin. Even though they weren't cutting the water, you could tell the fish was there. You could see a V shape going up, and you could catch them in like three feet of water. Sometimes not easy, but if there's a fast flow of water then you could catch them. You still can catch them. But as I say, salmon have become so scarce now that it's... if there are some salmon there, it's sporty, and that's all you can say about it. It'll never be a job again, to, you know... It'll never take over as a job, a fishing job.

**And I heard about a type of fishing where you'd actually go in barefooted. Is that to do with flukes?**

Oh, yeah (laughs). Not used by fishermen.

**No, but just... just tell me about that.**

Yeah. Well, if you go into these holes, the same as I described that you went flueing (ph) in, or into the channel where there's a good lot of flukes, and it may be a couple of feet deep or whatever, you can walk around and stand on the fish, what they call treading them. You stand on the fish, reach down and pick them up. Well, I've done it when I was young but it's not anything that fishermen would do.

### **More of a recreational activity.**

Yeah. Holiday makers have done it from time to time, I know. But the strangest thing, and the odd thing, I read in a... I was in a doctor's waiting room 40 years ago. I was reading one of these glossy magazines, it could've been Lancashire Life, Cumbria Life, I don't know.

### **Women's Own (laughs).**

Not Women's Own, no. It was one of these glossy magazines with lots of photographs in. And I was reading about this treading flukes. And it said you can go into these channels and walk around and tread on flukes and pick them up, but you've got to walk backwards. **(laughs)** Well, I've never heard such twaddle in my life. Now, the other thing was, in the same article, they said the fishermen go out cockling, and they go out with a jumbo, and they bang it on the sand, and the cockles think it's the noise of the tide coming in, and they come up to have a look, and then the fishermen grab them. Well, if you'd seen that in the Sun newspaper, you might take it with a pinch of salt, but not in a glossy magazine! You'd thousands of people that read that and think that it must be true, you've got to! But it was amazing. Nothing could be further from the truth. **(laughs)** Yeah, to say that, you know, the cockles think it's the tide coming and come up to have a look (laughs).

### **So have we covered pretty much all of the fishing that you used to do then? In that we've talked about shrimps and cockles, flukes...**

Yeah. I've got to say that with salmon we've just talked about, I admit to taking salmon illegally, because the baulk nets would catch salmon. If one comes along that's swimming in that direction, the baulk net will catch them. Sometimes it was accidental. Sometimes it was done on purpose, you know, you set them out for it. I did, anyway. You'd have a job to do it now. The water bailiffs are very keen. They come out with walkie-talkies and night-sight glasses and... God's truth! (laughs)

### **Is that their official term? The Water Bailiffs?**

Yes, I think so. It always used to be, anyway. Bailiffs employed by the water companies, aye. And the Fisheries, Fisheries Officers.

### **I did have another term here: the whitebait net. Did you ever have anything to do with that?**

Yeah, whitebait... Morecambe men with the trawlers had been catching whitebait for a number of years. But they had a great net, the mouth of which was 20 feet square held over the front of the trawler, and dropped down, could be 20 feet deep. But they could alter that depth, they had ropes on the end, and it laid there with the boat at anchor with a massive great anchor. And it held the boat and the net. And the net went right under the boat and out behind the boat, it was so long. But anyway, they were catching whitebait, and after we had the very hard frost of 1962 over into '63 when everything was frozen up, I mean the ground was frozen to two feet deep, Windermere Lake was frozen and cars were driving across it, that's how hard it was. It froze for twelve weeks. It was extreme. It was terrible. And we were fishing in that, cockling it was. It was unbearable. But anyway, after that, you'd (?) killed all the cockles, there were not yet any shrimps. So two men who were sort of half cousins of mine or second cousins, our grandparents were brother and sister, these two men decided they would try to catch whitebait. Now this was in 1963. And they tried all sorts of ways. Obviously they couldn't use the way that the Morecambe men did, but they set nets out on the sand, tried various ways and various places. No idea where to go or how to catch them. But eventually they did catch whitebait. And I think I'm right in saying that they caught six tons in that first year.

### **What, around here, around Flookburgh?**

Well, a bit out like out in the bay on the edges of channels. They would be mile and a

half, two miles out. And I think, I'm fairly surely that one of the fellows told me they'd got six tons in the first year. And they were half a crown a pound, twelve and a half new pence. Which added up to a lot at that time. Well, my brother-in-law and I were working in Scotland the first year when the local men all decided they would have a go at whitebaiting. So it was the second year that we then were back home and doing nothing, we would go whitebaiting. So everybody, all the fishermen were whitebaiting. And we did from time to time catch a lot of whitebait. But it's strange stuff, in that it comes and goes. And you never know when it's coming or going. The only way you can tell if there's whitebait is to set a net. There's no visible evidence that whitebait are here. So you go out and set a net and it might not catch any. You go and set it again a few months later, and it might catch some. So then... But it was thought that it would only be a winter's job to take over from the cockles, you see, and that's what it was at the start. And we thought, well, they only come in winter. But when you got, say, twelve fishermen going out and everybody had half a dozen nets, 70-odd nets, let's say, they took up a lot of ground because the whitebait only swam in a strip. They weren't all over the bay, they only swam in a certain spot. So some would be getting a lot of whitebait if they were in the middle of the patch, and some on the edges not getting very many at all. But on top of that, when you started to get a lot, the factory couldn't deal with it. You could only freeze a certain amount. If you go in there with wet fish, whitebait, and you've got say 2000 lb weight and they're only put onto freezer plates, couldn't handle them. You know, day after day. I think we could do 2000 lb at a push, but they would take more than a day to freeze. They would be like a day and a half to freeze. So you could only fish one day out of two. And if there was just a nice few whitebait, that was fine, you could handle it. But what it needed to handle a lot of whitebait was blast freezers. I think what they call blast freezers. We call them that anyway. Where they blast cold air onto them and they freeze instantly. We didn't have facilities to do that. Now, the whitebaiting went on for a few years. As I say, it started in 1963. And I got the last whitebait that was caught here in 1991. It had finished because, mainly, the markets demanded what they called, I think it's called IQF. But it was, to freeze them individually like you buy a bag of frozen peas, so that they're frozen individually and you could pour a few out of a bag, like a person would with a bag of

peas, pour enough out for lunch. We couldn't do that. And the markets wanted that. So it came to an end. But I decided to set some nets... it was May of 1991, I think. Certainly May. And the first day I set them, I got quite a few whitebait. And of course I was the only one fishing. So I got a nice lot of whitebait, and I could freeze all the lot because there was nobody else fishing. It lasted about a fortnight, I think. And then the jellyfish came. Millions of tiny jellyfish about as big as marbles. What we call ju-jus (ph). And they absolutely ruin it. They fill the nets. You can't make anything of them at all. And that finished the whitebait for that time. And I never got any again, never. But I did well for those couple of weeks. And I've no doubt that if I'd started a few weeks earlier, I would have had a good... I think I got a thousand pounds worth in those two or three weeks, or whatever it was. And a thousand pounds was quite a lot of money then. Erm... I suppose a man's wages then would be let's say a hundred pounds, I would imagine. Or maybe less than that. I've probably got that all wrong, never mind. I did catch whitebait 1991, that was the end.

#### **Track 4**

**So one question I had was, you know, how do you become an expert on reading the lands and the shores? Because obviously you've... it's over a number of years of experience you've built up.**

Absolutely. Like any other job, it's just time and experience and actually doing it. And taking notice. And in my case, listening to people that I went out with when I was young. Listening to my grandfather and, you know, my father and my uncles. And they taught you a lot of things. And then you pick a lot up by experience, as I think you would in any trade, wouldn't you, really, in any job. The longer you're in it, you're always learning something, aren't you?

**And if you were to offer advice then to people who are fishing now, what would you... ?**

Oh, that is difficult, because I've got two grandsons who are fishing and you've a job to

offer them advice, I can tell you! To be fair, they're good fishermen now. There's quite a lot of things that they haven't done that I've done, but in cockling and musselling, which has been their main jobs, they're very good. But now they have the advantage of GPS machines, you know, for finding your way and finding the spots where you've been. Which we didn't have, of course. But they are a great advantage to those people who use them now. Particularly in extremely bad weather, in fog and that. But er... yeah, I don't know as I could offer any advice for fishermen. I could show them things (laughs). But the lads do come and ask me things, if they're going on a different job, you know, from what they've been used to. But er... difficult to offer people advice.

**And we talked about... we've talked quite a lot about the women and the picking shrimps and everything. Did any of the women used to do the cockling in the earlier days or not?**

One or two women did go cockling but not many. I know women went cockling, women and children went cockling 150 years ago, they certainly did. It was said that 180 people went out cockling from this village. Well, that had to be women and children. And I have photographs of the women out there with horses and carts, with men as well, of course. But in my time, local women only... certainly you could count them on one hand, the women went out cockling. And never any women went out shrimping. Although there is a book doing the rounds called Around Morecambe Bay, where there's a photograph and it says... I think it says 'Woman returning from shrimping.' That's no woman, that's my Uncle Bill!

**So you mentioned... we were talking earlier and you started saying about the times of day that you used to go out fishing. Could you just talk a bit more about the working conditions and what it was like.**

Yeah. I did go out at any hour when the tide went out. I used to spend a lot of time fishing at night, and enjoyed it, particularly if it's a fine night, because if it's fine weather and you can see all the lights round the bay, you can look at Ulverston or Blackpool and



you can see all the lights. To an experienced fisherman, it's really only like working through the daytime. Not a lot different really. But then there are times when you can't see any lights round the shore at all, and it's fairly black looking, and there are times when you can see a glow up above the clouds, in the high clouds, a glow that's from the lights of a town. You can look and you'd see a glow over Morecambe and Ulverston or Barrow, and sometimes even Kendal. And they're as good as compass, as long as you know which is which. But I have at times had to look at a compass to decide which is which. You know, if you've got a glow here and a glow there round in a circle, you think, which is which? I look at the compass and then that tells you which is which. And that's OK, that's handy. It can still be very dark. But then there are times when there's nothing, it's absolutely black. And then you really have to know what you're doing. And it is really a matter of having a mental map of the bay in your head. And to go from one what you might call landmark, if you like, there are gutters, as we call them, streams that have dried out, some of them very tiny little streams and some bigger, that might have two or three inches of water in. And you'll come to one and you'll say, "Well, I know what this is. I've got... if I'm working on the compass, I'll maybe be coming north-east towards home, and I'll come to another one and I'll say, "Well, I know what that is," and so forth. If you didn't have that mental map there, you wouldn't know what they were, you wouldn't know where you were. But in that way you find your way round, and eventually maybe come to some tracks where you've gone off, or where tractors or carts have gone off the day before. Just a matter of getting used to it. And I used to wander around on my own, through the night, never bother about anything really, I could go anywhere.

But there was an incident once where we came out of a channel. We went out from here down what's known as the mile road, across the salt marsh, straight down towards Morecambe into a spot that was called the gold mine. And it was about 9 o'clock at night. When we came to set off home, it had turned into a very nasty night. A nasty slow drizzle, and no visibility at all really, you couldn't see any lights round the shores. So it was a matter of knowing where you were going, to come home. And really it was quite easy if you had a compass. It was due north, almost spot on due north to come

home, and I knew that. Well, there were a line of carts, horses and carts, about maybe seven or eight of us, and I was the last. Well, when you come out of the water, you've a few jobs to do: tidy the cart up, put the net along the side and tie it on, fasten it on. And the horse is going away, following everybody else. And when I got tidied up, I just shouted up the line, "Does anybody know where we are?" And the reply came back, "No!" I said, "You're joking." "No." So I said, "Has anybody got a compass?" A man said, "Yes, I have." So I said, "Well, all stop." So, as I say, we were in a line. And so I got the compass off the man, and I find out we were going almost southwest, certainly a westerly direction. We should've been going north. So I straightened up. And I thought, well, we've gone quite a way west, maybe twenty minutes we've been walking. So I got straightened up and I thought, well, my track originally would be north, so I've got to go a bit east of that to compensate for where we've drifted away. So I got in front and off I went with the compass, and I said to the man, "What've you been doing? You've got a compass here." He said, "Yeah, well, I can't see it properly." Well, believe it or not, it was a smashing compass. It was luminous, it shone like a light, it did. It was a good compass, about four inches in diameter, a good size compass, came out of a lifeboat. We used to get them out of lifeboats that were broken up at Barrow docks, when ships were broken up. Anyway, I get in front and set off for home, and the first thing I knew was when the horses' feet clattered on some stones at the bottom of the salt marsh, and I knew we were about 20 yards off the track up the salt marsh, we were that near to it. And up we came. And the chap who gave me the compass, he said, "It must've been a good compass!" I said, "Aye, it wasn't any good to you!" (laughs). Oh dear.

**Do you have any other sort of poignant memories, or stories that you'd like to share about...?**

I've one poignant memory that I'll never, ever forget, when I almost drowned. It was the end of 1976 and I think it was the 20<sup>th</sup> December. Christmas was just coming up, and I had a lot of fluke nets set up in the near to the River Leven, in the Ulverston channel if you like. And I was going to bring them off, and I was going to go at 3 o'clock in the

morning. And I woke up, and it was blowing a gale and extremely cold. It had been very cold the day before. That was a Sunday the day before. So I woke up at 3 o'clock and I could hear the wind howling. I thought, "No, I'm not going in this. I'll go this afternoon." Anyway, I woke up again by chance at 5 o'clock, and I couldn't hear any wind. So I thought, "I'll go." Well, really, I was too late when I went. I get to the nets and it was absolutely dark, black dark. I couldn't see anything around the bay at all. The nets were about maybe two to three miles out but between two channels. When I got there and I started to work on these nets, lifted all the nets off, but the stakes, and there were about 90 of them, had been in the sand for probably about six weeks, so they were dead hard. Couldn't get them out. I struggled with them, very hard work getting them out. And I got them, maybe all bar about 20. And I should've probably given up, but I thought, "I'll get these, I'll get these. OK." Well, while I was working, the tide came rushing through the net, quite a big tide. And so I jumped on the tractor. As I said, I was between two channels. So I was on top of this sandbank, and I'd to drive up between the two channels. By that time the tide had got to about a foot or 18 inches deep. Jumped on the tractor and set off fast as I could through the water. I'd only gone two or three hundred yards when the tractor stopped. It air-locked, which it'd done before. It wasn't getting enough fuel through when I put full revs on. So if I'd had two minutes, I could've bled it up and gone again, but I didn't have two minutes, I knew I hadn't. So I jumped off and started to run. Well, I was already up to thigh-deep then when I got off, so running in that water was extremely hard. And as I say, black dark, I hadn't a clue where I was going, it was only guess work. Well, I struggled on as long as I could, and eventually got through one channel towards the shore, but I could hear the tide going up another channel right under the shore. And I could actually hear it, it was rattling away up there. So I had to keep running. I kept on going, I was absolutely shattered, I'd pain in my chest and I was running away, gasping for breath. Eventually I got up onto the shore and laid on the salt marsh till I recovered. But in that time when I was going, I'd stripped my clothes off. All I had on was a pair of jeans and underpants. I'd lost all my other clothes, they'd gone in the tide. The tractor was left there, of course, with all my nets on, several hundred yards of nets, and all those stakes, and my clothes. So I lost all that morning: the tractor and all those nets, and my clothes, a lot of money

and a lot of time in getting fit up again.

Anyway, there's a farm about quarter of a mile away or less than that. I walked up to the farm, and the farmer, who I knew quite well of course, he took me home in his land rover. And it was just coming up towards about 8 o'clock when I arrived home. But being Christmas week, that was just as it was coming daylight, of course. It'd been dark all the time I was out. And then I could've done with going to bed, I was absolutely knackered. But I thought, well, I've got to arrange some sort of recovery for this afternoon to try to get the tractor back. So, again, by the time the tide was going out again, it was coming dusky. We went out with two or three tractors, and two farmer brothers came with a great big four wheel drive tractor, which was quite unusual at that time. There weren't many four wheel drive tractors around. And I had a great rope that came off one of the steamers on the lake: great thick thing it was, certainly as thick as your arm. And we... when we got there, we'd a job to find the tractor. It was upside down with just a bit of one back wheel sticking out of the sand, about a couple of feet at the top of the back wheel sticking out. We put the rope onto the wheel, and the fellow went with his four wheel drive tractor, hooked it up to this... the front-loader, and he set it off to lift up. And as it did, it gradually tightened up and the rope tightened up and it had a lot of stretch in it... and the tractor, eventually it came out and it "whoof", it catapulted it out. It came out flying out of the sand, weighing two tons as well. And as it came out, I could see the battery shot out of the battery box and through the air, and I'd just put that new battery on the day before for my son to go out fishing the afternoon before. I thought, "I'll put him a new battery on and then he's not going to get stuck." The battery went sailing through the air and smashed. So we towed the tractor home, of course. I worked on it for about two months, took it down the road when I got it running, and it just went one mile and gave a great big scream and packed up. And that was the end of that. So I'd lost my tractor, lost all my clothes, all my nets and stakes. A bad day's work.

**But you hadn't lost your life.**

No. But all for nothing. I'd no need to have gone that morning. I should've set off home before the tide came, but I thought, "Yeah, I'll finish, I'll get it finished." It wouldn't have mattered if I'd gone in the afternoon or the next day. But I didn't want to waste, you know, half a day. So ridiculous. Now, if the tractor hadn't broken down when I set off home, it would've just been another day, I would never have mentioned it to anybody. But it didn't turn out that way (laughs).

### **So what specific skills then do you think that you need to become a fisherman?**

Well, you need to be physically fit. You definitely need to be physically fit and well. A bit of common sense, I hope. Yeah, definitely a bit of common sense. It certainly helps to be brought up in a fishing family. I think I can honestly say that I only knew one man who wasn't brought up in a fishing family that made a success of it. But he married into a fishing family. But he'd never been a fisherman, but he became quite a decent fisherman. But he was the only one that I remember. Some came and they were going to do this and do that. Didn't last five minutes. Couldn't blame them, because you need that experience really, and to be brought up. And serve your time, I think that's the way to put it. You need to serve your time. Like you do with any other trade. And learn the tricks and get the experience.

### **And what kind of personal attributes do you think you need?**

You need to be greedy. I think that's about it. Yeah, you need to be greedy, so's you're always wanting to go and work hard and make more, if you like. No good being lazy and think, well... I always remember one man, put it this way. He said, "Yeah, I'm gonna start fishing, but I'm not gonna go at weekends, I'm only gonna go through the day, maybe when the sun's shining." And I thought, "Aye. You're not gonna last very long." And he didn't (laughs). But he was serious. "No," he said, "I don't want to do all that going out at nights and going out in bad weather stuff." No, you've got to be prepared to go whenever the tide goes out, whatever the weather really, and I think enjoy it. I mean, I didn't enjoy it all. There were times I could've done without, I can tell

you that. But as my father once said... he said, "The one thing about fishing, every day's different." You never know what you're gonna get. You go out full of expectation. And sometimes that doesn't work out, it doesn't come to fruition. But you've always got that hope. You set a net out and you go to it with great hope that you're gonna catch a lot and it's gonna make you a good wage. It doesn't always work out, unfortunately.

**And do you feel like you sacrificed some of your personal or your family life for your fishing?**

Definitely did. Certainly, without a doubt. I look back on it now and I think, if I could go and start again, I like to think I wouldn't do the same. I wouldn't work as hard. I would spend more time with my family. As I said, I went out every day, night and day practically. I didn't go to places like, say, go to football matches with my son, or go anywhere... Don't get me wrong, thought the world of the children. They were everything to me and still are. But didn't spend a lot of time with them taking them to places as we see fathers now at weekends. They finish work on a Friday night maybe, and they're going with the kids on a Saturday or a Sunday, going taking them to wherever. Yeah, we did... the kids I'm sure weren't neglected. But I like to think, if I got the chance again, which I won't, I would, yes, devote more time to the family.

**And... so obviously, you've been fishing for such a long time and you've noticed a lot of changes. Could you just speak a bit about that, the changes that you've noticed, and whether you think they've been for... you know, the good or bad of the industry.**

Yeah, well, the first big change came, of course, was the tractors coming onto the job, round about 1954, when we'd a great lot of cocklers here, and my uncle, my mother's brother and his family had a small Ferguson tractor with which to cultivate the land. And they decided to use it to cart off cockles. And that was how the tractor first came to be used on the sand. Of course they didn't know whether a tractor would even travel on the sand. But it went out there, only went part way out to the cockle beds for a start, and

then gradually went farther and farther out till it landed onto the cockle beds one day, and for that family the horse was finished. They just used the tractor. And so of course everybody could see the advantage of the speed in travelling with the tractor. Plus, when it was finished, it just stood at home, it didn't need feeding. But that was the first big change. And then the... another... the next big change really was the... the change in the way that the cockles were gathered, which as I said before was a great surprise to me and a sorrow, in a way, to see people just taking all the cockles, raking all the cockles up, where we'd always picked cockles up individually so you only picked the big ones anyway. You left the little ones. Or if you raked them up, you always riddled them. So the little ones fell back on the sands, and only the big ones went into the sack. And that was a big change really.

The methods of fishing really have changed very little. Whitebaiting has been and gone, doesn't look as if it'll ever be done again. A shame, really, although it was a rotten job. You had to go out twice a day to whitebait nets. But that was... that was a new thing, never been done before and it was done for... 30 years, practically, and then disappeared. No, there's nothing else, I mean people started going out with quad bikes, GPS machines... Yeah, the cockling's a new... it's a different ball game now. Not much else really. The method of dragging the nets has changed in that we use the tractor, we use... we're able to drag two nets instead of one. Boilers are now fired by... oil-fired, whereas they used to be coal and wood. But the same methods really. Boiled just the same. Some shrimps are picked at home by one or two people, but not many, whereas nearly everybody in the village used to pick shrimps. It was a big cottage industry really in a small village.

**And what do you feel you'd like to pass on then to future generations of fishing families?**

There's nothing really that I can pass on. I don't think there is. I've got one son and two grandsons now fishing. They're able to look after themselves. Occasionally they'll come and ask questions. But as my son Steven said, when I've tried to tell him things, he'd

say, "Nah, I've got to learn by my own mistakes." "Fair enough." My grandsons, I've tried to show them things. I've tried to show 'em how to mend nets. Whether they'll ever need to do that, I don't know. They don't use nets much these days when they're just gathering cockles and mussels and shrimps. When they were setting baulk nets out and stream nets, you needed to mend the nets, to be able to mend them properly, that sort of thing. But I try to give them tips if they ask. But usually they're pretty good and independent.

**So the men used to mend a lot of the nets. Did the women used to mend them?**

Yeah, when... My mother said they used to... We called it knitting nets. I think they're mainly called braiding nets. She said they had to do so much knitting of nets before they could go out to play. You know, they'd to do so many inches or yards or whatever it was of nets, before they were allowed to go out to play. Well, there were 5 women in the family. They all did a bit. (laughs) It would add up, I suppose. So I suppose they made all their own nets in those days. In my time, we bought all our nets from... you know, from agents, mostly down on the south coast. And sometimes we'd buy long stretches of nets and cut them into the necessary lengths and put them onto ropes. Shrimp nets we used to buy in one piece from a chap at Morecambe. But then in the last 40, 50 years even, I've bought sheep netting and cut it up and stitched them up and made my own nets. Aye. They're easy enough really but you need a bit of experience about... with string and making knots and things.

**So when you look back on your life and all your achievements, how do you feel and what do you see?**

Erm... I feel some satisfaction that I've done my best. Put it that way, I've always done my best. Erm... I've made mistakes, who hasn't? Especially working for yourself. You've to make all your own decisions, and some of them inevitably wrong. And I've set off to do jobs and made a lot of preparation and they've failed. That's inevitable. But usually I've given a bit of thought to things and they've usually worked out. And I've always



made a living, been able to keep the family to a reasonable standard. We've never been rich. I don't know many fishermen that are. But we've lived a reasonable standard, and more importantly, been able to enjoy life in retirement, which was what I hoped to do. I always said for years... I said, "I'm going to retire as soon as I can see the way to do so," because so many of my friends and relatives died just as they were about retirement age or before, when they were 60 years old. And I thought, that's not going to happen to me if I can help it. You don't know this. I had a cousin who was the hardest working man you could ever imagine, and he was going to do all sorts when he retired, and he died from cancer ten days after his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday. He didn't see any retirement. I said, "Well, it's not going to happen to me if I can help it." And I've been retired now almost 20 years and enjoyed it. I've had a quite nice life. I've not been a millionaire and that I could do anything that I wanted to do. But I've travelled the world a bit. We had a caravan where we went over most of the British Isles. We used to say, "Well, we haven't been to so and so, let's set off and go." We travelled down into Europe, through France and Belgium and Austria and Switzerland and Germany, France, down to the Mediterranean. Did that sort of thing for a good lot of years and then we sold the caravan. And we usually still go with the car and travel round England for a week a couple of times a year, and maybe one holiday abroad every year. So we've done alright, put it that way.

### **And what else do you enjoy doing then now?**

I enjoy the family, and we've two... got two fairly new great-grandchildren, one's two years and a bit and one's just a couple of months old. They give us great pleasure. And the grandchildren, of course. And I do quite a bit of work on the computer, writing and playing about with photographs and things, making videos. And music. Music has been a big part of my life. Playing a cornet in brass bands. Played with Flookburgh band for just about 70 years. I started just 70 years ago this year, started to learn, and was actually into the band it'll be 70 years next year, which'll be 2016. That'll be 70 years since I was actually playing in the band. And then I joined the South Cumbrian retirement band about 15 years ago, and I still enjoy playing with them.

**And you give a lot of talks, don't you, about your fishing and research into local dialect?**

Yes. I've given literally hundreds of talks about the local fishing over the last let's say 40 years. Illustrated talks, you know, with slides. Used an old slide projector for years and years, and now I've gone digital with a laptop and a digital projector. Yeah, I quite enjoy doing that. I've given talks about the history of fishing around about here, and I've given talks about the ancient fish traps which we discovered in the year 2000.

**And have you ever had any thoughts as to, if you hadn't become a fisherman, what do you think you would've done with your life?**

D'you know, I've thought about it many a time. And I thought, if I'd taken more care at school and had a better education, I might've been able to do other things, and I think, "What would I have done?" D'you know, I've done some dealing in boats because I had a boat business dealing in second-hand boats, I enjoyed that. I did that for 15 years as well as fishing. Yeah, I could've been in some sort of business in dealing, whatever that might be. But other than that, no, I think I was always destined to be a fisherman.

(laughs) Aye.

**And what is it about Flookburgh that's so special to you?**

Well, we think that Flookburgh is a very good village. I'm sure it got a bad name a few years ago round about, because there often used to be a bit of trouble in Flookburgh, but it was nearly always offcomers that caused that, people that came into the village from the towns. And they would cause a bit of trouble. But if I tell you now that I would not know when was the last time I saw a policeman in this village. I never see a police car, I never see a policeman walking around. I bet I haven't seen one in almost a year, which in a way speaks for itself. If there was trouble in the village, it was a troublesome village, the police would be around more often. No, I never see them. There's practically

no vandalism, almost no burglaries. No, it's quite a good village, and there are all sorts of things going on with societies and so forth. There's a pensioners' club, what we call the over 60s, that is very well run, I must say, by that committee. There are often things going on at the village hall that I find interesting. And to say that all our family, all my mother's descendants, if you like, and there are a lot of 'em now, are all in this village now except one. One of them's gone away to work. The others are all in this village and have no desire to leave. Which must say a lot. They've all travelled, but don't want to move from Flookburgh. And I know that my wife says the same. Although she wasn't born in Flookburgh, she's lived all her life, certainly since she was about two years of age in Flookburgh, and she will say the same. We think it's a good village to live in. And when we retired, we could've gone anywhere but decided to stay here, built the bungalow in which we now sit for our retirement, and have enjoyed just over 18 years in it.

**That's lovely, Jack, thank you. Is there anything else that you'd like to add?**

No, I don't think so. Just to say that there was just myself and my sister of our family, my mother and father's offspring, and we've got eight grandchildren. Joan's got... oh, bloody hell... no, no. I'm gonna scrub that because I can't remember.

**It's alright.**

I think she's got seven. I think Joan's got seven grandchildren, quite a number of great-grandchildren and we've got two great-grandchildren. And I must say, they are a good family. And I wouldn't say that if it weren't true. I'd give 'em some stick if they do anything wrong but they don't, they're all hard-working people and they cause no trouble at all. And even when they're coming up through the teenage years where we know some families' kids can go off the rails, they've all come up reasonably well. And we're proud of them, in that they all want to work, they're all in work and want to stay that way. And so we have a good family and we all get on. I think that's important as well. I would be really upset if I was really at owts (ph) with any of our family and we weren't speaking, as you'll often find. So all in all, life's good. I've enjoyed my retirement, and

may I still have a bit of time left still at 82 years of age.

**I hope so too. Thank you so much, Jack.**

Thank you.

**[End of tape]**