



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

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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

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FRONTSHEET

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INTERVIEWEE NAME/S: Charles Overett  
YEAR OF BIRTH: 1945  
INTERVIEWER/S: Jenn Mattinson  
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**Interviewer – Jenn Mattinson**

Interviewee - Charlie Overett

**So, Charlie can you start by telling me a little bit about your early life, where you were born, and give us some context for that please.**

Yeah - I was born in Heysham, but I think by the age of three I was moved down to Morecambe where they set up a shop, right opposite the fishing boats of Morecambe on Marine Road - and really it was from then on that you would walk across the road and look at the fishermen play there and it just took... we all went fishing, all of us as young boys. Hand netting with little tiny hand nets, getting rubber dinghies, pretending they were trawlers - and then when I was about eight, I think I got a trip with a fella called George Mount and his boat was called 'The Jane' and he took me out for the first time, and it was great - and then from then on, we just carried on.

**Lovely. Well I think we'll talk more about that a little bit later. If you could just tell me a little bit more about your family and your parents and your sort of family history.**

Yeah - me parents... it was really me mother who was the main one - she was a business woman and she had two shops - an antique shop in Queen Street and one on the promenade and then of course, me father being from London, came into Morecambe, met me mother and then joined her in the business. So they carried on ever since until they retired, and I think me mother would be seventy six when she retired. She had a good long life as a business woman. But there were people in me family and especially me father's mother's side - they all went to sea and they were captains, mates - and even the women, I think they would be cutting herring around the fishing ports down in the south and things like that. I've got the full history sent to me from a guy in Australia. He's traced me and it's

really interesting to think half of me family were all sea-going people on me father's side. Really good.

**What was it like then for you growing up in this area?**

Brilliant - with the Morecambe fishermen it was brilliant because they were a good bunch of guys. They were straight and yer 'ad to do as yer's told but that was the way to grow up to fishing. They all knew what they were doin'. There was some really good fishermen and it was brilliant, it were good and that set us boys off on a road of going to sea. It was a good start - really.

**And do you have any specific memories then of your childhood – such as being a small boy in this area and what you used to get up to?**

Well, all of us did, we would be out at weekends with me pal Davy Brown rowing. We'd be hand netting, we'd be going with the fishermen if it come summer. We'd walk down the pier and jump off and swim to the side and get told off by the people on the pier. We were forever swimming jumping, swimming - you name it, we did it and that's all our youth - that's what we used to do and then in the winter we'd be out musselin' with the fishermen - all things like that, all to do with the fishermen. Fishing with a rod on the end of the jetty and selling bait. We would go hand netting and we'd sell some of the shrimps to people and they would have bait and we would make a few bob as well. Yeah - it was good.

**And did you grow up in the same house then and, or did you move around?**

No, in the same house. We stayed there from me being about three 'till leaving school and going to sea. So yeah we was there for years.

**So where was that house?**

Right opposite the central pier on number 297 Marine Road. And that's where we lived above the shop and me mother would run the shop and I would go out across the road and be by the sea and that was it. And all me pals did the same. We all went to sea, all of us, all our pals. We all went to sea - it was good.

**Did you have any brothers or sisters?**

No.

**Just you. So how was that then being an only child?**

It was grand - no problem. Me mother didn't want me to go to sea. That was the only problem. She said 'Oh' when I went to sea the first time, I walked down the back street an' I was sixteen and she said "Oh - let 'im go" she says "after one trip, he'll come runnin' back". Which I didn't do - ha, ha, ha - stuck it out 'till I were sixty.

**So obviously you're talking a lot about your memories of childhood and fishing and things. Can you remember that first, the first memories you had about those experiences?**

Well, not really the first - there was that many, well you can't bring up the first memory really. I mean, the first memory was going on that boat from Heysham harbour and then going on a big ship which was a really.... when I saw the size of the thing and I'm only used to little Morecambe fishing boats and I joined a ship 38000 tons an' I thought Wow! I'm not gonna be sea-sick on this and I was. I was sea-sick for three days! But that was a memory when I first went on that and then I went on cargo ships and tankers and things like that. So those days were great - sailing out of Liverpool and it was brilliant. Brilliant times - going out the Far East and round Japan and the States and Africa - everywhere. To me it was brilliant - yeah... good. But nice to be brought up at Morecambe with the

fishermen. I keep coming back to that 'cause it gives you a good grounding. Really, it sets you off.

**And what do you remember about those times then, when you were a young boy in Morecambe?**

Well, the happiest of times and I can recall when I cycled down on the jetty, is the days when I was hand netting. I was like – in competition with two or three other little lads and we were all pushing our hand nets about - who would catch the most, and we were really pretending to be like proper trawler men and it was just brilliant. We would sell the shrimps - get them picked at home and we would sell them to the local shops and then we would compare who had the most at night. It might be an ounce more or half an ounce more and that's how we were. And those days were great but what did come for me really, that fishermen would show you how to splice ropes and mend nets and row and scull, which today you don't get a lot of people sculling a boat with one oar, which we all did in those days and rowing, and you could turn your boat round and pull it one way or the other - and when I went into supply boats with two engines and I had to go close to rigs the principle was the same. Where they taught me to row and turn a rowing boat round and to the landing stage and get the guys on and off was the same principle as the two engine supply boat, just the same principle. So really, that early days and rowing come into its own and it helped me think, that was what I used to do as a kid in a bigger way. Instead of the oars you had two big engines - it was good.

**So, you were talking about the hand netting with you and some other boys - how old were you then?**

Well, I've got a record there of me in 1953, as I've shown you, of Jack Mount giving me permission to shrimp - to catch shrimps - so I'd be eight. We'd just go from eight and we'd have a little tiny net and we'd make our own little one out of

an onion bag and then we'd get a bigger net and then then we'd make a proper push net and then we'd be right, then we'd be off - with a little bogey that we would push out there.

**If you can Charlie, describe all these terms that you're saying because we'd like to build all the different descriptions of all the different nets, so while you're talking, don't take for granted that I'll know what you're talking about.**

Right - right. A hand net or a push net they call, it is a net that's six foot say, wide and you push it along the sand, along the shore and it catches the shrimps in a depth of a foot or so and that's a hand net or a push net as they call it. But of course, when you go onto the bigger boats, then you've got bobbins and iron ends that roll on the bottom and get towed along - so that's what a hand net is yeah - or a push net they call it.

**And can you remember that then, that encounter that you had with Jack Mount? What exactly happened?**

Yeah - I can remember that day.

**Describe it to me. Can you describe it as much as possible.**

Yes, I can remember because he was a stern, strict guy and I was walking up the slipway. I can remember this to this day, and he shouted at me, he said "Hey - comer 'ere. 'ave you got a licence to catch those shrimps?" I says "No - no Mr Mount I 'aven't" (you 'ad to call 'im Mister Mount) - and he says "Well come 'ere. I'll give yer one". Right - so he gets out his diary and writes this thing down and gives it to me and I've got it to this day. '1953 - Charles Overett can fish for shrimps - permission of Jack Mount.' And he frightened me, 'cause I was only a

little boy and with he coming up to me and shouting, I thought "Ooh, I'll have to do as I was told".

**And did you keep it in your pocket or...?**

I kept it in me pocket and I kept it at home and I've still got it to this day. Yeah, and it's something I can remember old Jack Mount. And he used to read the weather for the Visitor. He used to say to the Visitor " Oh this summer it's gonna be fine" and this that and the other. He's like a bit of a folklore guy. And everybody took notice of old Jack Mount. So - I do remember that well. So I went off with me licence to fish for shrimps.

**It's interesting how your immediate family - your mother and father didn't have any connection with the fishing industry?**

No.

**How did they respond then to your obvious sense of enthusiasm?**

I don't think that me mother would like me fishing because it was a dangerous job and she would have thought I would come into the shop or something like that, but I was just not interested whatsoever. The only thing I was ever interested in was either swimming or going to sea, that was it, and I just couldn't wait to get to sea which I did, and I stuck it out 'till I were sixty.

**So where do you think that all came from, that real passion as a child?**

It's probably the influence of the Morecambe fishermen and the good times we've had, I would think, because all my pals apart from one, there was probably six or seven of us and we all went to sea. I don't know why, 'cause we were involved with the fishing but, as I've said before, on my father's side, his family were the

Stone family and everyone of the Stone family went to sea. They were captains; they were mates, even owned their own ships running from Dublin to Liverpool, eh... a great history of ships. Now whether it's come through my grandma from my dad's side and his mother to me - God knows. But one or two of my family have been to sea - both my boys have been to sea - Mark and Tony. They went to sea and they're both on oil rigs now but they're more like bosses now.... and my cousins Andrew went to sea. Jake was on a small boat sailing out of Heysham which was my uncle's, so one of us has flitted around like that. Me uncle Freddy, he also went to sea. He was on the Sleaburner (**inaud**) from Heysham and also the Sandcasto (**inaud**) from Heysham and then I think he went on a Fyffes banana boat as well, he talked about. So there's a sprinklin' of it there, of a bit more of a travelling type, and adventurous thing really, but certainly me grandmother's side on me dad's side.

**And you mentioned there were six or seven of you who all wanted to do this. Can you remember their names?**

I can. There was Howard (ph) Chorleston, Jimmy Casher, David Kaye. Now Raymond Woodhouse was the only one that didn't go t' sea - he was the plumber - and David Brown and meself - all of us went to sea - and David Brown was me best pal and he went to be an officer and was a really clever lad and eh... we all went to sea, all of us.

**So obviously, y'know, sort of picturing you, eight year old doing all this with the hand nets and everything, how did it then progress and how did you make that decision? Can you recall the time when you decided 'I'm gonna do this as a profession'?**

I thought right away I was gonna go t' sea. It was in me t' do it. I just thought 'as soon as I leave school I'm off. And the sooner I leave school the better. Even if it was twelve, I'd 'a left' but I stuck it out 'till I was fifteen and then went on the ship



called the Pendeniss, and I was fifteen then and then I had my sixteenth birthday on that boat and you couldn't go deep sea until you were sixteen so I sent all the paperwork off and I got a letter back saying I had to be ready in a fortnight's time after leaving the Pendeniss (was in October). I had to be ready in two weeks to go deep sea. And then I did actually. I went home and got changed and down to Southampton and sailed off and that was it.

### **And where did you sail to?**

In the first trip I sailed down to the Cape of Good Hope, right round Capetown, East London, Durban, fuelled up and Madeira on the way 'ome and Las Palmas on the way out. A couple o' trips on that and then I went on an oil tanker that went round the West Indies and after that I went on the Bay Fisher which was bound for Russia but got altered and went to Spain for scrap metal and round the North Sea and after that, another oil tanker and then after that Cunard sailing out to Canada and Montreal, New York. Kennedy was shot, was it '64 and we was going into New York just as he was shot. I remember everybody was going mad about that. And that was the year we was sailing in on a brand new ship called the Medea sailing into New York - yeah. And after that, blue funnel ships sailing out the Far East and then by then me mother's getting fed up of me being away. I mean you'd be away five months and have seventeen days off. so I thought right then, I'll start fishin' an' I'll give 'er a break an' I'll come 'ome fishing for a year.

**I guess... sort of looking back to - you know - age of fifteen and your first proper job and going out on these big ships, you must have had to grow up incredibly quickly?**

Oh aye – yeah, definintely. Yeah - after being with the nice fishermen and then of course, part of me family on the Pendeniss when I was fifteen, me uncle Jake and the captain was a friend of the family's and then you're suddenly thrown into

a ship which 'ad six 'undred crew and they're from all over the place an' all diff'rent types o' guys an' I'm only sixteen which today, when I look at sixteen year olds, they're like babies... eh... but yeah, you 'ad to grow up - yeah. An' then, especially when you went on the cargo ships from Liverpool, there was some tough guys there - but they were crackin' people. I really do like Liverpool people and I really enjoyed me time sailing out of Liverpool - it was good. Nothing wrong at all. It made me grow up an' that was it.

**So, on the bigger ships and the trawlers, can you talk about the types of fish you were collecting then and catching.**

When I went on a bigger trawler? Yeah, when I went on the big trawler there, this big one here 'The Onward Fisher', we fished for cod, whiting, sole, pollock, skate - all sorts of fish like that. And fishing up in Scotland, they were good quality fish as well, but now when you fished off Blackpool in the Stern (**inaud**) trawler the Starbank, it was just mainly plaice and sole. It was a good livin' but when you hauled a net you had a big bag of small fish and you'd a lot of work to get through it. But when you fished up in Scotland, you had small little lifts but they were all really good quality fish so the job was easier and you could do two or three days or four days - haul every three hours clean up within an hour and the crew could go and 'ave a couple of hours sleep but fishing up in Scotland was a lot easier - only for the weather, the weather was the worst thing because you 'ad some big seas then up there. But yeah - all sorts of types of fish - cod and whiting...and dogfish, plenty of dogfish. We got that many dogfish in Loos Bay that we couldn't haul the net - because they 'ave no swim bladder and they sink. It's just like catching a big whale, and it just sank and we couldn't do a thing with it - so the only thing I could do is tow it until it ripped the net and just really spilled itself out. And it did - it split the net and we got partly the net back and with about twenty boxes or more, and then we mended the net when we were at anchor waiting to go in the harbour and that was it. They just come in massive shoals and you can't split them because you've got a little fin - er - a little spike at the top

and you can't manoeuvre them up the net like you can cod or whiting so they're really awkward to manage. So that was one memory in Loos Bay, yeah - filled the net full.(ha ha)

**So, you've mentioned lots of different places, could you for me provide a bit of a summary as to your working life - so where you started at the age of fifteen and then kind of take me through all those kind of different places that you went, because you have fished in a number of different places.**

Yeah..

**Offshore and inshore?**

Yeah - well I started fishing at Morecambe from being, was it, twenty one when poor Robert Woodhouse died and then I fished all round Morecambe and down to Blackpool and I bought another boat the Mark Anthony which - he kinda get further afield, and went up towards Black Combe and all around there - what they call the Duddon Estuary fishing for fish round there which was a long way to go for a small boat but it took three hours to get there and three hours back which was six hours and you've only a twelve hour day because of the tides so you've only got a quick two or three little hauls, an' all the way back again for three hours. But that was quite successful and off Blackpool with it. Then I found that the boat was too small and I bought a bigger trawler, a stern trawler called the Starbank and then we fished out of Glasson Dock for three years or more landing the fish in Fleetwood first and then that was all the Blackpool area, Preston area as far as down to Liverpool but you couldn't go too far away because you didn't have carry (inaud) ice on that boat, it was really just what they call a day boat - a day meaning 24 hours, no more 'cause you needed to land your fish back. Then after that we bought the Onward Fisher and we was after another boat called the Onslo which needed a ticket, so I went in and set my ticket and the Fishery was helping you to do that, the Fishery Committee and they'd pay you so much for

setting your ticket, so that was handy for me. Went in, got this ticket that enabled me to skipper trawlers - a lot bigger than we could ever thought of, and we didn't buy the Onslow, we bought the Onward Fisher. And then we went up to Scotland, drifted up that way somehow, got information from different ports from where to fish, because you hadn't a clue where to go until somebody said - here's a little map or a chart or the fasteners where you can tow and I built up that by talking to different people of different ports like Kirkcudbright. Galloway (ph), the Isle of Whithorn, Whitehaven and you just build a map up of the sea bed and then you roughly know where to go. And then I lived up in Scotland for three and a half years with both me boys with me and we fished out of the Isle of Whithorn successfully for three and a half years. An' it was good.

### **It's beautiful up there isn't it?**

Yeah, beautiful - oh, I fell in love with the place when we went in overnight. We needed our trawl ropes, our wires - they've got like a soft eye-splice, soft meaning there is no fiddle to protect it, 'cause it gets fast in the winch (**inaud**) or whatever and you need to chop them sometimes and re-splice them. One beautiful night, I was with me cousin and Andrew and I said "D'ya know we need to go in somewhere". The fishing was slack, the weather was absolutely wonderful, I thought we could go into a harbour and we could chop these two wires off, splice them, have a couple of pints and come out the next day. And I thought - on my chart there's a little tiny harbour called the Isle of Whithorn and I thought 'where's that?' and there's a fishing boat near me and I called him up on the radio - channel 6 it was, and I asked him and he says "well I'm going" - I could only just understand him because he was broad Scottish - he says "I'm going there now when I haul me net". I says "Well - is there room for me in there? He said "Yeah, yeah, no problem. Just follow me". So I thought Right OK - so we were hauling, followed this guy in and it opened up this absolutely picturesque harbour called the Isle of Whithorn and it was wonderful. Lovely summery night. We tied up and he was friendly enough and then we spliced our

ropes, went for a couple of pints and a bit of a meal and then went back to sea next day an' I thought - right, from now on I'm gonna pop in there again which I did for bad weather. When we went in for bad weather we could sell the fish to her using the lorry that this guy used so we chipped in and gave him so much to help with the payment of the lorry. When we got back we had really good prices so I said to my cousin Andrew, I said " y'know what, it would be better if we stayed up here altogether. Yeah - We've no Fleetwood Dock dues, we've just got a little tiny dock due there of fifty quid a year, the prices was absolutely fantastic, fishing was great, so we decided to work out of there with this fisherman and we'd come partners with him in the lorry. And he accepted us and we were grand. So we stayed up there three and a half years and fished out of the Isle of Whithorn. And the fish really took off that year. My parents were not good, so I ended up coming home and I thought I'd better look after these two because they're not good and I got a job down at - I finished fishing - and I got a job down at British Gas where everybody knew me and they said, "oh you can come and work with us", so I worked with Freddy (ph) Scass until I lost both me parents, which was say, three or four years and then they wanted me to go offshore for them and I went offshore on the Bay driller and I was deck foreman after that after say two or three trips 'cause I knew all about ropes and this, that and the other and stayed out there for twelve months and after that twelve months they offered me a job in Africa going skipper of one of the British Gas supply boats and I had to go for an interview and the interview was at Heysham and as soon as I walked in the door he says " I know what you're after. He says "Here y'are - there's the ticket - you can get gone and do us a good job". So I went as skipper of his boats for him and I was down there fifteen years but not just Africa, I went to North Africa - I was in Tunisia for three and a half years. But the rest of it I was down in Gabon, the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Angola, the Cameroons, Ivory Coast - all up and down there.

**You've seen so much of the world by your experiences. It's incredible.**

Yeah - it was good.

**So - how old were you then, basically when you decided to come back and work for British Gas?**

I would be about 42 then I think... 42-ish

**What were your roles then, when you've just been describing going off and being the skipper? Can you just explain exactly what you used to do?**

Being skipper of the supply boat you mean? Right - well it was new to me. I'd never done it and I'd had a couple of trips on supply boats in Heysham 'cause that was part of me job. They used to change the buoys over and the Marine Control would say "Charlie, jump in and we'll go with 'em and we'll watch what they're doin' and make sure it's right". So I was watching what they were doing and I went on the rig for 12 months so I could see the supply boats coming in and doing what they were doing but when I first got this job and they flew me to the States to sail it back, I was mate not skipper and the skipper of it was 70 which was great and I learnt a lot from him about navigation and stuff, like swapping charts when you're doing long distance sailing and it was brilliant but when I got to Africa, he went home and I was in charge and then I had to manoeuvre this damn boat along the rigs in a big swell, a big South Atlantic swell and I think – 'oh my God, what have I done?' But going back to what I told you before, it was just the rowing days. The rowing days come back into its own. It was just like one of the fishermen saying "Come 'ere. Let me get on your rowing boat" and I'd turn it round with the oars, go astern with the oars, stop it before it touched the slipway, because they'd play 'ell if it touched and it was just, that - really came back into its own. The old rowing days helped me. And it was good, so from then on we managed and I will say, it was a vessel without a bow thruster because all supply boats usually have a bow thruster and the two that I was in, didn't have a bow thruster. So you all'us had to be careful if it was head to wind to keep the

ship very fine into the wind, 'cause once it starts to blow off, you've got a lift down on your deck - you can't control it, you've just got to hopefully they just get the lift off quickly and then you re- manoeuvre it. Now if you had a bow thruster, you can always keep the ship's head to the wind if it's not too strong. So it took a lot of manoeuvring but the skills of rowing they come into their own.

**And then you progressed. Did you say you became foreman of the boat?**

No - before I went on the supply boats I was deck foreman of the Bay Driller. I joined the Bay Driller, just as really a seaman and once I'd done two or three trips and it was only short trips - two weeks at a time, they realised, obviously they knew me - I'd been to sea, and we had to do some rig moves. That means the rig had to jack down and close and we'd get towed to another location and jack back up again so they asked me if I would do all the ropes which I did and then of course they made me deck foreman and then being deck foreman I had to sit a helicopters landing officers certificate so that I could bring the helicopters in as well, so I'd be there with the radio "yes you can come in land" and "wind south east eh five knots" etc that was part of the job and then the other part of the job was just going round the rig doing lifts for anybody with cranes so I would be in charge of the cranes telling the crane man to come down, up, down and whatever and then of course when we did the rig moves I designed all the ropes. I had two heaving lines at every tug so if you threw a heaving line one next to you, the other one ready, then you passed a messenger down which was a thicker rope so that the guys on the rig could get a hold of it 'cause we had no winches, we had to pull it by hand which was called Norwegian steamed and they'd pull it by hand so I sent the messenger down. They'd fasten that to the wire and then my guys then could pull it all back with this thicker rope rather than the thin rope in their hand so I organised all that. So I was - I had a good job there and then of course after that they asked me "Do you fancy a job in Africa?", because I had a skipper's ticket and it did for supply boats and then I went down there, yeah.

**And quite physically hard work you know you were sort of progressing in your career and you were sort of forty plus, sort of older. How did you manage all that?**

No problem - no.

**You were physically fit then?**

I was physically fit. I've always walked and cycled and fell walked especially once I got this job working in Africa, two on and two off - two months on and two off. I had that much time and I'd lost me parents and I just had to take a hobby up and the fell walking was the one but I used to do all me exercises on the boat and all the crew would sit and watch me at night doing these step ups on the step and they were all black guys from em from Nigeria and where else - the Congo and all them places. We took Africans from all over and they would just sit there and watch me at night thinking 'God what's the captain doing? It's unbelievable - ha ha. Yeah a lot from Ghana - a great crew from Ghana. They were lovely lads really. The Ghanaian crew was my favourite and they would clean me shoes for me if I'd been walking and made me a lovely step - a 6 and a half inch, or was it 8" step to step up on at night and I'd do me step ups and do me press ups . Nah they were good and I was in Tunisia for 3 and a half years and they were all ex-fishermen so they must have thought they were tough guys and they said "Aye - give me that piece of net and I'll show you how to mend". "How do you know how to mend". "Well", I says, "I've been a fisherman" and I was right and all the fishermen down the quay knew me at night time when I'd have me evening moor. "Hello Captain" and they all knew I'd been a fisherman.(eh-heh)

**How does it feel to be captain?**



It was good. I used to come in in Tunisia at night, especially Tunisia 'cos all the little boats must have been about 40 boats - little ones and a little bit bigger and then a few bigger ones, they were all lots smaller than me and I would come in at night and it would be blowing and they'd all be coming out xxxx(**inaud**) 'cause they would fish in the dark and they'd put a big light down and surround the net and catch the sardines and I'm coming in with a nice pot of tea on the bridge and looking down at them with their sou'westers on and thinking 'yes well I've been down there mate, I know what that's like' - and it was great. Then they'd come in with their big supply boat, tie up and then go for a nice walk somewhere but it made me think - you know, I appreciate this big boat.

**And did you carry on then with that career until you retired?**

Yeah, I carried on until I was sixty and the company was not making much money and they was thinking of selling up and I was thinking of getting out when I was about 58. I was getting a bit tired then of being away a lot and then they said, "Oh no, stick it out Charlie with us. We're gonna sell the boat too". So I did, I stuck it out right to the very end and me last trip to sea, I did 3 months and I waited for the owners coming down from Nigeria to take over the ships and I showed them how the worked and everything and off they went so I went home with a nice clear conscience that they'd sold everything and I went home and I was sixty. I had me sixtieth birthday out there. And then home got me bike and fell walked he heh.

**And so through your career then where would you say you were most happiest in terms of you know you did come back to Morecambe and you were fishing and then you've done all the offshore and out to sea ? Where would you say you were really happy or content?**

I think fishing in the little Mark Anthony would be the happiest times. You hadn't got a lot of expense to worry about. You'd only got one man.

### **Is then when you were back in Morecambe?**

Back in Morecambe and fishing for fish and learning the fish from shrimping to fish and learning how to mend fish nets and otter doors and bridles and then going to different places far away from Morecambe and catching fish and coming back it was a real experience and a real adventure for a little boat to do that . Sailing away 3 hours and 3 and a half hours up the Duddon estuary and having a trawl? (**inaud**) and then nipping all the way back all the way home again. I think those were happy days but I've had loads of happy days in Scotland fishing with those people. I've been happy as a sandman working in Africa with the Tunisian and the Africans. I've been happy wherever I've been. If it was a ship or boat it were right and a good crew, that's the main thing and I've had good crews and they've been cracking - and I've enjoyed it. I've enjoyed it all.

**So I think we'll come back to Morecambe then so correct me if I've got this wrong - so age sort of 15 to 21 you went out to sea and offshore and then you came back because you, mainly because your mum wanted you to come home?**

Yeah - she were not very happy.

**How did that come about then?**

Well, I went deep sea when I was 16, so like you say it was very little leave in those days, not like today - 2 on and 2 off - it was - you got a week - no you got a day per month that you did and then every Sunday at sea you had, that was 8 hours, you got a day's leave. So when you come back there wasn't a lot of leave, so unless you took more leave yerself and yer not on pay, well then that's it, but if you was on the same ship like the blue funnel ships, I went home after 5 months and she went round the coast to deliver all the cars. There was a little

crew of coasters they call them coaster men ships and then as soon as she's ready for deep sea again you joined it again and that was only 17 days and then you're back away for another 5 months, So then by then, your mum's getting fed up of your being away and she heard off one of the top fishermen which was called Robert Woodhouse that he was looking for somebody. And I'd known Rob for years and he was a good fisherman. He'd stay out a long time and go to Blackpool and everywhere and he was noted as a good fisherman. So when I come back home I said to him "Right, I'll have 12 months off and I'll fish with Robert" which I did. Unfortunately Rob died and I was first to be offered to buy his boat which I did and the receipts are here now. 570 pounds I paid for it and the little rowing boat, the big boat the moorings and nets and then off I went fishing on me own. I got married and had 2 kids and that's it - that's the life.

**So what sort of year are we talking about?**

That would be 66/65/66.

**And tell me about Robert then, Robert Woodhouse?**

Aaahh... he was great, he was a great fella. He - a great story was Robert, he bought a van and he tried to pass his test and he had an L on driving about and he was the only guy that ever started off in fourth gear and changed down as he was going. I says 'no it was the other way round' but he used to start off in top gear and then wanted to go into bottom gear for some reason or other but he was really kind to me and he said I could borrow the car at night and pick me girlfriend up and take her home again and that . He was a crackin' bloke but he liked to stop out. He was one of the first out and the last back - he was noted for that. He was a good fisherman and he was very kind to me and then when he got ill pains in his chest and that they used to say go to the doctors which they wouldn't do these guys, they were tough guys and he just one day died and there was a note on me office door off his wife, saying 'Robert won't be coming. Can

you go to sea on your own'. So I did and then I came back next morning and I think it was Keith Willacy's father Amos said to me "Robert's died" and that was a real blow. And then after that I bought his boat, but it was a blow losing Robert 'cos he was well liked and he was a real top fisherman. Yeah.

**And what did you learn from him then?**

Well I learned, not just off Robert 'cos I was with him that year - I learnt from every fisherman because I'd been going with them that long, right from being you know like 10/11 and 12, I learnt everything with them. I went with so many fishermen - Dick Woodhouse and Dennis Old and Jack Mount not Jack Mount, George Mount - and I picked stuff up from them all the time y'know, so you learnt by these guys and then when you go with Robert for that 12 months you knew a lot, you knew what to do. You knew how to riddle shrimps and boil them. It was just second nature, you just knew it .So, yeah it was just one of those things, you just knew it because you'd done it for so long. These fishermen taught you everything.

**So, if you can humour me and tell me then if you were out with Robert say age 21, what would be a typical day then , what time would you be getting up and where would you go . What would be a typical day then, what time would you be getting up and where would you go what would you catch just tell me what kind of typical day would be out.**

A typical day with Robert well all of us, we could be sailing it could be 1 o'clock in the morning, it could be 2,3,4 or 5,6 and once it got to 6 and 7 well it wouldn't get to 7 - they used to what they called change the tides because the shrimps had to be landed early so that they could be taken to the pickers and be picked so you never had like an 8/9 start, it was always very early mornings. So you would sail say at 3 and you'd come back in the afternoon say at 2 o'clock and you could have gone to Blackpool fishing which took you two and a half hours to go - you'd

could have gone down the Heysham Lake fishing over where the ships run up and down to Heysham Harbour. You could go out to the west to the Ulverston channel - the west shop they called a channel leading up towards Grange or all the little channels all around. You could go all over the place and there was little boats everywhere and you'd be 4 at one place, 4 at another and everybody would look at what each other catches. Then the day after you think that's a better place and go there. So yeah, you'd go all over the place really, but locally, you know just locally and we had to be in reasonably early for the shrimps to be picked, so that's what made you go on an early start but that didn't bother Robert and didn't bother anybody anyway, they all got up early and off you went.

### **So you were catching shrimps - what other fish were you catching?**

Not a lot other than that, other than shrimps. You'd get flounders and plaice and soles but that net was basically designed for catching shrimps and then when you swapped your shrimp net over to a fish trawl or a trawl that catches plaice, that was a different ball game then. You had what you'd call a little flapper in it but the fish would go in and get trapped in it whereas the shrimp nets didn't. Probably when you hauled your shrimp net, probably fish would escape but when you changed over to your fishing net for fish, there was a little trap that trapped 'em, called a little flapper. So that's why really shrimping you didn't get a right lot of fish. You'd get fish, you'd get plaice and soles but not like a great lot y'know, not like you would if you swapped your nets over with a proper gear like otter doors and bridles and different type of fish in them.

### **Who would you be selling them to?**

We sold them to the Morecambe Bay Trawlers which was a co-operative and we were all members so we all landed our own co-operative which had been going for years and years. I don't know when it first started - long before me and that was all the shrimps were picked and potted some were sent to the Queen and if

we did have fish over it could be sold at the shop - a little shop they had so the fish would be sold there and rough shrimps sold out of the co-op and it was all our own business really.

**And you have touched upon this but could you just describe the methods and the techniques you used with all the nets and everything. So you'd go out on the boat and just sort of tell me then what would happen.**

Yeah - for shrimp trawling you had what you call a shrimp beam. It was beam trawling. It was two wooden - like two kinda trees lashed together with two iron ends at the end which would rub on the bottom but in between the iron ends, there was a row of bobbins that would run over bits of rough ground and peaky ground and then your shrimp net would be attached to that. So you would tow this beam around, which was say 20 ft wide and these iron ends that would rub on the bottom and followed in between this row of bobbins and that's how you would catch your shrimps. But towing for fish was totally different. Towing for fish you would have an otter door which flew out like a kite and in between the otter door then you'd have a bridle, a long bridle which was a long leaded rope that I used to use which would rub along the sea bed and scatter the fish into the fish net, a net which was wide mesh that would only catch fish. It wouldn't catch any shrimps at all and then we'd go into the net and get trapped in with this little trap that they called a flapper. So that was totally different and that covered a lot of area with the otter doors going wide trying to shepherd the fish in.

**How far out then were you when you were collecting the fish?**

When I started fishing for fish, I'd be up at Duddon which was a long way from Morecambe and you're talking of say twenty mile away. Over t' Barrow, then you'd take a course northerly and go straight the way up to the Duddon estuary, then you'd start fishing up there. You're a long way away from us for a small boat.

### **To catch shrimps?**

This was to catch fish but not shrimps, no - this was only for fish. Shrimps was all in the bay or close in shore. Even at Blackpool you were close in shore but when you went for fish, you were a lot further out like off 7 or 8 miles from Blackpool. Right the way off you'd fish all out there. You can fish well in shore but the shrimps are very inshore but the fish you want to be further out really, off Barrow, off Duddon, well off Blackpool.

### **And in your experience then were there any areas that were more lucrative than others, or at different times of the years.**

Yeah, different times of the year brought different types of fish and quality and quantity. I mean the Duddon estuary fished, I think I remember, at the end of May through the summer but I did fish at Ravenglass with the bigger boat in and out of a tow there that I got given, and there was some massive plaice there. The ground was a little bit rough and the net kept snagging but the plaice were massive. They were really big pink plaice and full of little shells and full of little shells, little mussel shells and cockle shells - a good feed. So that was only there for a short while and I think if I remember rightly that was in May. I do remember a couple of trips in there. Even with the big boat but with the bigger boat, with the power, you can't go on rough ground because you'd do a lot of damage. Where a little boat you get snagged and you can ease back and it doesn't really damage the net as much. But if you've got a lot of power and it'll just rip your net to pieces. You've gotta be careful then.

### **And have you got any poignant memories of those times then, times that you went out either shrimping or to collect the other fish whilst you were sort of in and around the bay or you mentioned Glasson Dock before or the Duddon estuary.**

Yeah, there was that many times really y'know I mean - same as when we went to Duddon for the first time. That was a memorable time. I said I've heard of them going up here and I had a guy with me called Walter and we didn't know what we were doing at all, we just went up and we shot the net out and thought 'it's shallow - there's something wrong. We were a long way from the land and it was the Duddon bar so I got me chart and oh, I'm on this bar, and when we pull the net in after about an hour or so there was about a stone and a half of fish, little tiny plaice. I thought oh my god we've nothing here so I decided to sail up a little bit further north and got away from the bar. I said to Walter "What am I going to do? go out or in? I don't know what I'm going to do". I says "I think I'll go in." And I think I shot the net in roughly twenty five foot of water and I had a little tow up to the north and I got fast. That means the net got snagged. So we pulled the net in and there were fish everywhere. There was big skate coming out and this was coming out and I says "Oh my god what have done? where are we?" So that was a memorable day because it was a lovely day and me and 'im had our shirts off - me and Walter pulling the net in by hand and it was fast to a rock but we got it off and there was no damage. And there was fish everywhere so then it was a matter of shooting the net again and trying to get a clear tow so that we could get away from this rough ground and it got snagged again and there were still loads of fish and in the end after two or three days of fishing there, you tried to get a map in your mind of where this rough ground was and we got a little mark on the land of a little house and a bunch of trees. I can't remember now it was so long ago and I remember towing out on that tow and it was on the edge of this rough ground but to do that with a very bit boat it would smash the gear to bits. So that's how fishing's progressed from little boats getting fast and making these notes and bigger boats can use the information as you got bigger and bigger, because you couldn't do that with the big boat. You'd smash everything to bits. So yeah, it was great that - it was really good and then when we'd sail home with twenty or thirty stone of lovely quality fish which is not a lot of fish really, but it is for a little boat. And everybody said "Oh my god!



Where did you get this from?" and "up at Duddon and this is at the other end" and oh brilliant. That was a good do.

**What was his name then and his surname – Walter?**

Walter Cooney. I had him with me for two summers. He was great, and you see the thing about that boat as well, we had lights but all of our navigation equipment was the watch. I did have a chart with me and your compass, that's all you had and an echo sounder. And we were up there one summer and it come as thick as hell, really thick fog and we says 'now what we're gonna do?' and we were right up at Duddon, a long way away from home. So I say's "what we'll do Walter, there's an hour's flood' that means the tide's been coming up an hour. We'll set off for home". So I sailed out into the deep water to get meself roughly six fathoms deep, set me course up for home and I remembered it was an hour and a half and then I put the echo sounder on to sound round Iltsford Point (ph) so that you knew if you were too soon it would come shallow and you could pull her off again. Then you'd have to sound round the Point if you will. So I sounded round the Point with the echo sounder - don't forget the watching and the compass and then I got onto the course of roughly east southeast and I said to Walter, "By, it's thick here" I says "What we'll do, we'll go straight on this course and hopefully we'll land up in Heysham Lake and we'll find a buoy, 'cause there's buoys around Heysham Lake, rather than go up the channels and maybe get lost up the channels. So we'll go right inshore, try and find a buoy and we'll know where we are." So we did, we carried on this east southeast course roughly, I think it was and we come across number six buoy. I thought 'Oh, my god, that's wonderful' then turned her up to the northeast and there I could hear the harbour blowing and then well we got home and it's good for a little boat going all the way up there, just with a compass and a watch and an echo sounder. It was good. Heh, heh - good feeling.

**Lovely. Do you have any other memories that you'd like to share? You seem like you're on a roll. I don't like to interrupt you too much.**

No - if you get me talking about the sea and fishing, you'll be here 'till midnight. Heh, heh, heh! No - I mean, when you've got your bigger trawler, like with fishing, you've got a decker that tells you exactly where you are all the time so you can't get lost. And then you've a radar on as well, so you know what's coming ahead of you. So that is grand, but when you go back to the old trawlers, even back to the Speedwell, where I had no lights on, there was no lights, there was no dynamo, no nothing. So when you go to Blackpool, I took Andy Jarvis with me to Blackpool and he'll tell you the same story. He will have done this many a time. We set off from Blackpool. I think it was November or December when the fog sets in in that time of year. We couldn't see anything at Blackpool, couldn't see nothing. We knew we was roughly round the north pier end or Central Pier and I set for home and again, leaving it an hour and a half's flood, letting the tide come up. You don't want to go home when the tide's too low, 'cause you can hit rocks round at King's Scar, so we set off for home not seeing a thing in the old Speedwell, and don't forget, no echo sounder only a lead line and so I sailed up me hour and ten minutes and then you can see, which the old fishermen told me this, you can see the drop off which drops off into Lune Deeps. One's called 'the false drop off', I think they called it, and next thing it drops off the real drop off. But then you do that with your lead line. You slow down, you keep throwing the lead out and as soon as you lose the full length of the lead, which is the Lune Deeps, then you know you can alter course then and go to the east northeast. So we did, we didn't see anything. We saw the false drop off and then we saw the other one that sounded. Saw no buoys, the King Scar buoy's there somewhere but never saw it. Sailed all the way up and altered course, then up for the harbour and then finally I said "Andy", I said "I'm going to stop the engine here and have a listen out- see if I can hear anything of the foghorn". And we slowed down and we got a bearing, if I can still remember that was south southwest or south southeast, I can't quite remember,

and I said to Andy "Put the lead out" and I could feel a little bit of rough ground and plenty of water - two fathoms. I said "I know where we are, we're above the harbour" and I said "We're going up with the tide up to the north and I think this is the Heysham Skeers" so I said "we won't start the engine till I can get deep water" So I sounded, kept sounding - I could hear the foghorn. We got the bearing. Next thing it deepened and it went off to four fathoms and I says "Right - I'm gonna start up now and to east northeast". And we sailed up east northeast and Andy Jarvis was there and he went out "THE PYLON!" and jumped out of his skin nearly. And there was the pylon right ahead, the pylon off the battery and that's all the way back from Blackpool and we hadn't, so I think from leaving to that pylon only with a compass, watch and a lead line.

### **You just had to trust....**

You've got the courses in your mind. You know the courses, they're there in your head, you know - an hour and ten minutes to King's Scar to the other buoy, a fair way - was it 12 minutes? From there to Heysham Harbour, was it 40 to the Skeers (ph) then up another 12 minutes and then once you dropped off, another 8 or 9 to the pylons and another 7 minutes to home.

### **Did you ever once come a cropper or become lost?**

No. We got back alright. None of us have been lost in the prawners, no. We got back alright. We run aground many a time. All the prawners around here run aground somewhere, because you're going that shallow sometimes, even the year I bought the boat and I did a mistake. I was picking a sandbank up with me lead line and a guy called Johnson Raby who had the Maud Raby, He told me later, "don't sound with a lead line, sound with a stick because it's quick". And I'm sounding with the lead line to pick this bank up and by the time I pull the lead in and threw it back out again, we run aground. So, was fast aground but it wasn't unknown that, because that happened quite a lot in Morecambe Bay. Then

afterwards he said "Use an oar. It's quick". You throw the oar out and it gets back quick. You know - just one of the tricks of the trade.

**So when you run aground, what do you have to do?**

Wait 'till the tide comes back in. You're not damaged, you just - the tide goes out and that's it. I've been when I was a young lad fishing with them before and they've run aground so I knew what the experience was like. 'Oh we're aground!' and within minutes the tide leaves you - just goes right down rrrrrrrmmm! and you're away. That's how strong it runs, so I knew what to expect if that happened. Heh, heh.

**You were showing me some articles before and one of them was talking about one of your boats and you'd installed a radio system. Was that right?**

It was a Mark Anthony and I was the first guy in Morecambe in a Morecambe Bay fishing boat to have a VHF radio. And why that was, so I could talk to the Fleetwood fishermen. And why you wanted to talk to them, 'cause they would tell you where the fish were. So without that, you were done, you were deaf, you couldn't hear a thing. You thought 'well what's going on?' But once you put that radio in, I had a few friends who said "Charlie, you need to be here" or "you need to be there" or this, that and the other. So that was why I put it in and then I remember that first week, if I remember rightly Roy Mitchinson said, "Put that radio in. You'll make that back" and I think I made that price back in the first week - the price of the radio. With listening to them where they would be or where not to be and that's how I had the Mark Anthony with the VHF in - yeah.

**It must have been really exciting, to have the technology in your boat.**

Yeah - and even the press came down and took a photograph of me with the VHF in. Yeah - it was good - it was a good thing.

**And did you ever rescue anybody, in your boat?**

Yeah - with the trawler - yeah. I rescued two girls that I've showed you a photograph of. I was with a guy called Ken Calverley and we were fishing about 5 or 6 mile off Blackpool and in high pressure, you get the wind coming from the east and it can be strong. And it started to freshen and freshen, so I said to Kenny "What we'll do is, we'll just tow in head to wind and we'll get where there's some shelter." So we're towing in and I see this little thing ahead of me and it was flickering. And it looked like a little boat with something flickering and I said "Ee - I wish it were two girls in the boat", as you do as sailors, don't ya? So blow me, when I got to it - it was! It was two bikini-clad women - had sat in their little dinghy and it had got blown away from the shore and off course, blown out to sea! Well by the time I saw them, I saw the rockets going up off the shore with the lifeboat. Obviously they'd called the lifeboat. So I said Kenny "I'll go alongside and get the boat". So we grabbed the boat and we got them on board. First thing they asked for "Have you got a cigarette?" but none of us smoked. I got them on board and then I phoned the coastguard up and told them "I've got them on board". And I had to tell the lifeboat to come to me and we'd pass them over. So that was one rescue, and the Fleetwood fishermen were laughing and it was in their paper and they sent us a cutting of this rescue to me to see what had happened.

And then another time, with the same guy, Ken Calverley, we were going into Fleetwood to land the fish. It was a very, very foggy night so we got to the entrance which was Fairway Buoy and we slowed down and the depth lights were on and in the fog you can't really see like you can with your headlights, so I thought 'What we'll do, we'll wash all the deck down. Well get it all ready for going in before we start to enter the channel, then I can turn my depth lights off

and I can see better.' So, were washing down and next thing I can hear somebody shouting, "Help! Help!" I says to Kenny "Hey, somebody's shouting Help here - and where the hell?" So I have to go in my wheelhouse and look at my radar because I had radar in the Starbank and I thought 'well there's only this big Fleetwood light. Maybe it's there'. So I thought 'well I'll go to it slowly'. So I turned the boat round and headed for the Fleetwood light and blow me, there's two people on it shouting for help. They'd gone out in the fog digging bait, got lost, walked the wrong way, followed the tide line round, found the Fleetwood light and crawled up it luckily for safety, otherwise they could have been lost and I got them down and I needed a bit of advice of which side to pick these up because the local guys will know that and there's a guy called Ben Bee who was coxswain of Fleetwood lifeboat and I called him up on the radio. I say's "Ben, there's someone up on Fleetwood light. Where's the ladder? Which is the best side to pick them up?" "Oh" he said, "go to the north side Charlie. There's the ladder". So there you go - you get information off your pals. Went to the north side of the ladder, got them down and took them back in to Fleetwood and the coastguards took them off me then and I got the writing of that as well sent to me off the Fleetwood men.

## Track 2

### **You were just about to tell about, um, all the boats that you've owned.**

Right the first one, was a Speedwell. Then the second one after that I got one built for me 'specially with a grant from the White Fish authorities, that was called a Mark Anthony after both me boys, and that was fibre glass. And that was what they call a nice big bulky boat, and a good - really good - sea boat, so that's what progressed me to go further away, 'cause she was such a good boat you could go further, you know. After the Mark Anthony, see in those days we were fishing for fish in the end, with having a [capstan] and not a winch and, no fish room and that...you're really, we're doing something that the boat wasn't right for, you...you really needed a bigger boat, you know to be set out for that kind of fishing. So I

bought a boat called the...the Starbank, and she was a hundred and...twenty-five horse Mercedes engine diesel, powerful, with a winch on and everything, and we did very well in her. But you see...we outgrew that quickly because there was no fish room, you could put fish down below but you couldn't carry any ice. So you only had to do a one day, like a twenty-four hour trip, but we had some good...good dos in her really. And then, we kind of outgrew that boat, and then next thing think you're gonna have to go big and get a big one, so we did. And we really was going for the Onslow, me and me cousin, and what we didn't realise the Onslow needed a skipper's ticket 'cause it was always 17.6 metres. So I thought right, and then next thing the fishery guy says to me, 'Sit your ticket and we'll put you in for it, we'll put..' and on about all that...and then I thought well, well go on then. So in to the college I went, and sat me skipper's ticket.

**So how old were you at this point then?**

I would be...about...thirty-eight. Thirty-six? Thirty-six.

**Right, so this is sort of...because you came back to Morecambe aged twenty-one to fish...**

...yeah...

**...and then you progressed through...**

...yeah I would be thirty-six or something.

**So, tell me about that process then of a skipper's ticket and how you actually get one.**

Well, you've got to...they were looking for people to sit these as well because they were trying to promote fishermen, and they were helping to pay for the...for

the digs and everything. And I think we got about forty quid a week, I can't remember now. And I thought, that's a good do, you know it's good of them to want to introduce this for fishermen, so I had to...tell...you know send them what details about me that, what sea time I've had in and what I did and this that and the other, for them to accept me first, to see if I was suitable to sit a ticket...which I had the sea time in right from being in the Merchant Navy if they even took that in as well. So right in I go, and they started from scratch, and this one thing I do I will tell you at the end of it what I thought about this ticket, I'll come back to that. So I was two months in the Fleetwood nautical college, uh, and in the meantime we'd bought a boat but my cousin was doing it up, making it, painted it, and we got a skipper in it, whilst I was in this college, we took one of the owners of that boat in a skipper and he took it out for us to sea. But they taught you from scratch everything about what you needed to know as skipper, and the way I'd described it is when I passed that ticket, I went to live at [place?] to sit me ticket there in four parts, and one part was morse code, and you had to learn morse code at four words a minute, by light. Um, and even that took some doing, just alone never mind the rest of it, and then your chart work and your orals, and then your theory. And I passed that and I thought, that's a cracking do, you know, the first guy in Morecambe to have a skipper's ticket, even to this day. And then I came home, and I said to the guy that's running the boat, you take it 'cause I'm gonna go and have a few pints this week, I deserve it. And when I sailed away after getting that ticket, it's as though my eyes had been washed, I could see things clear...what they taught me, all the details of that...that course, and then everything they taught me, made me look at it in a different light, I looked as though I was looking at it clear, instead of like, hazy...if I can tell you that somehow. They made things much clearer, you knew every detail. Whereas before you knew, but not like the detail, it was cracking, absolutely.

**And, it may seem obvious to you, but just, give me some context as to what exactly a skipper's ticket gives you permission to do.**



It enables you to take a fishing vessel of up to, uh, ninety metres, and skipper those. And you could go as far as Shetland, and out all around the North Sea and right down. So you could take a lot bigger vessels up, you know. So there's no way I'm gonna buy a ninety metre boat, or, you know, so, it was a good thing for me to have that. And the thing is I've been back to the college twice since, I had to...I went back...volunteer to do a ENS certificate, which is Electrical Navigation Systems, that took me I think three weeks, and then I also had...when I was at sea with the supply boats I had to do a GMD assessed certificate, which meant Global Marine Distressor Safety systems, and because we were in area 3 down in Africa, meaning no coastguards and no facilities, you had to take area 1, 2, 3 and 4 in this ticket, and it was hard. And that took two and a half weeks and that was hard-going, it was a hard thing. Everybody were failing it, lots of failures. I thought Oh my god how am I gonna pass this? I thought I'll give it a little bit of prep first, bought a book, and I went in for it and I ended up getting, was it 92% I got, one of the highest that there is, and I've still got the marks now to this day. And I did really well, but I tried hard and I got it, but because...if we were fishing in Morecambe, you'd have only needed area 1, if you fish a little further away you go to area 2, which is medium frequency. But because we were in Africa, fishing - no, not fishing, sailing - where there's no coastguards, we had to rely on satellites, so then you had to take area 3, which involved area 4 as well, which are the polar readings. So I ended up with a full ticket. Ha, fat one [laughs].

**So you got your full ticket, sort of, about aged thirty-six, so what did that enable you to then do, and how did you progress with it?**

Well it enabled you to skip, skip the trawlers in, you know, to ninety metres. So I could just go and...go on any trawler really, and skip for those. But, the thing is, when I got the job in Africa, what they look for is a certificate of competency, and even if it's fishing...the North Sea was full of fishermen, even probably to this day, of ex-fishermen whose skippers stand by boats and stuff like that...and as soon

as I said I had a certificate of competency, that's how I got the job. Without it, I wouldn't have had that job in Africa. No...you needed something.

**And...obviously, um, you know all these things were happening and you know it enabled it to progress in your career, were there any kind of downsides to it? Because you seem to be getting further and further off-shore again.**

Yeah... no, no downsides. It was just up and up, it was just enjoyable. The thing is when you went to Africa in them ships, you got treated so nicely, 'cause right, you're the captain, can you do us this job, and you do it for them, you do it right, they're over the moon with you. My office thought the world of me 'cause I did extra work for the office, I did work even when I came home. I trained a couple of skippers, in fact, even probably three or four of them I trained. So, they were treating me well, I got good pay. I didn't pay any tax because it was legal, we were out of the country for 183 days, so we were on good money, and I was getting well treated really. And me food made for me, not like fishing boats and...comfortable on the bridge and oh my heck...it was a complete difference, and the sunshine. But there's some big swells though down on the South Atlantic, some big, big swells, but um...

**Um, sorry. You mentioned that um, when you came back to Morecambe you met somebody and you had a family, um, did it affect your family life at all then, being away?**

No. I was fishing when I was married, so I was on [captain? 9:08] quite often, but then I got divorced, so then I was kind of single after that. So I could sail away forever and it didn't matter. I had a sprinkling of girlfriends, but...

**[Laughter]...I won't ask too much about that...**

No...

**Right, so um, where were we...oh yeah, could you tell me a bit more about the working conditions, so if we come sort of back to Morecambe, and when you were a fisherman around the Bay and everything, what were the working conditions like?**

Well the working conditions were...well there wasn't...well you just went aboard your little boat in the morning, dressed in all your gear for the day's fishing, and that was it, you didn't sit down, you were just stood up all the time moving your trawler up to go one way or the other, hauling every hour and a half, it was just non-stop from the word 'go', that you rowed out to your boat, to when you come back. That was...that was fishing at Morecambe. And it was a lot of pulling and [riving? writhing? 10:16] 'cause it's on your capstan, the rest...the, what they call the 'after ion hen' [check phrase spelling 10:21] had to be pulled in by hand, that was heavy, so the whole lot was pulling and [riving] and riddling and boiling, and it was just solid work for your eight hours really. And then you had to row ashore, and then that's the end of you day. But you've got to take your shrimps and...round to people to get them picked, which I did. So I had for houses to go to, dropped so much off at each house, they'd pick them and I had to come back at night and collect them and take them to the cooperative. But you got more money for doing that.

**And, did you...you mentioned about lots of the nets snaggings and things...did you mend your own nets? How did you learn how to do that?**

Hmm...you made your own...you mended your own nets 'cause I'd learned that through the Morecambe fishermen, but when you go back to the fish..net... fish trawling nets, which was a bigger mesh, they would rip a lot easier, and then you had to, what you call knit them properly, as though you would make the net up as it was, so you'd have to knit it. Well when I started to do that, the Morecambe

fishermen weren't mainly into doing that, and they mended in a fashion that not like the Fleetwood men. So I kinda watched those, and bought a book called How to Make and Mend Nets, by, if I can remember the name, John Gardner, and then I started to cut a little hole in a net, and mend it and mend it. Fleetwood fellows would give you more tips until you could mend properly then. And then we had to mend because we were out at sea for two or three days, and you had to do it otherwise that would be it, yeah, it meant you mended all your own nets, yeah.

### **How did you mend them, then, what did it take? What techniques?**

A needle, and twine, and if there's a hole you've got to try to piece it back together again, and you've got to make a starting point, you must..that is the most important thing. And what that is called is a 'haafer' (ph), and it's a three point mesh, like there's four to a square isn't there, so you're to cut one out and start on that 'haafer' and the rest of them you cut away, but then you've to finish on a haafer, that's how you know... your starting point, cut everything else out, and finish on another haafer, and it's correct. So it's just like an ordinary net again. It's not um...sewed together wrongly, so the net keeps its proper shape. But if the net does get badly damaged, what you could do is then what they call is, throw a shooting piece in. You'd go down in your fish room and you'd get some spare netting, you'd cut a big piece out, and shoot a piece in, and you'd sew that in properly, you'd start on a haafer, and work all the way round until there's a big square put in. And it just fits the net again. So we've done that many a time. Or even put a new wing in, or a new...a new complete belly, the belly of the net could be ripped to bits, so you'd just cut the belly out, and put a new belly in it, which you've got ready, and you sew it up two of you...done in...an hour and a half, back in business again.

**So, Heysham and Morecambe then, you've spent a lot of time away, but has this always been your home, did you always come back once you were out**

**to sea and then you came back, did you always come back to Heysham or Morecambe?**

To Morecambe yeah, I've always come back to Morecambe. When we fished in Scotland, I used to stay away for two weeks at a time, and then have a long weekend and then go back again, but when I took my son with me first, my son Mark, uh fishing was that good I never went home for a month and three days, and he had tears in his eyes he didn't think...he says oh I didn't think it'd be like this, he says we're not going home when are we going home, he wanted to go and party and do what they do. I says no, fishing's too good we can't go home yet, so we stayed away a month and three days, without coming back, I'll always remember that. The fish was just there, there were soles and...soles were good money, and it was summertime, and it was good weather, so we just couldn't stop, it didn't go away. So we stuck it out for the month and he didn't like that at all. So I didn't come home for a month [laughs], and then it had only been for three days and then we go back again.

**Did you come to live in Heysham too...?**

No, Morecambe. I only moved to Heysham here when me father died - when me mother died. And I moved in with me girlfriend, to look after me father. And me father lasted another year and a half I think and he died, and then me girlfriend was Danish, she went back to Denmark, 'cause she didn't like England. I had a job with British Gas, and I got me children here, and I stayed here and...carried on and lived here ever since in Heysham. And left her to go back to Denmark.

**Track 3**

**So we were talking about Heysham, and Morecambe and home for you and the fact that you always returned home after these...these big trips away.**

Yeah.

**Can you mention about your involvement with Morecambe Lifeboat, 'cause you've had a lot of involvement with them haven't you?**

Yeah. Right. Well that, that started when all of us, I'm talking about all my pals, David Brown and myself, Richard Palmer and another guy. Dick Woodhouse was the coxswain of the Lifeboat in those days, and he was a terrific coxswain, and a terrific seaman as well. Um, and he used to take us into the lifeboat and say 'right, you, start the engine', and he'd make us do things like that you know. And he would show us how to row 'cause he was in the sea cadets, he was one of the...um, the commanders there, that would take you out rowing and showing you things and...and knots and all sorts like that. So he introduced all us guys to knowing about the Lifeboat. And we used to go round pubs collecting for the Lifeboat at an early age, with the other fishermen of course, um...so really Dick was trying to put us into the Lifeboat even when we were very young. So, when I went back to sea as a young lad, and I came back home and I started fishing, all the fishermen then were all...all Lifeboat men. It was the Morecambe and Heysham Lifeboat Association. So all the fishermen were involved in that Lifeboat. So whoever was there, the crew would be whoever was there. Now if the coxswain which was Dick, they would phone him up he would go. But if Dick didn't turn up, another guy would take over. Um, then after Dick it was Jackie Willacy wasn't it? Poor Jackie got his leg round the capstan, and...made a mess of things, so I was voted up, temporary coxswain for one year 'til Jackie got right. But then somebody had to nominate it, you know and say 'we propose Charlie', then they all had to second it, which was a good thing, because it's all from your...your working men really. And after twelve months we had another meeting, and Jackie said 'no, leave Charlie where it is, Charlie's coxswain now', and they all said 'yeah, we'll second that', and that's how I ended up coxswain. But, as soon as you're a fisherman at Morecambe you're a member of the Lifeboat,

because it was a communal thing. So, that's how we got back into the Lifeboat again.

**Um, and Jackie Willacy, he was Mark Willacy's father?**

...Father, yeah, yeah he was his father. Which is Keith's cousin.

**What memories do you have of him then?**

Oh, Jackie. Well, he was a great little... I've known him all me life, all since I was a little boy you know what I mean and, he was a great - he was another great fisherman, and he was a hard-working man that guy, he was a tough little fellow. I mean if the [capstan] broke down he'd go out without the capstan and pull it in by hand. He...he was a great lad, you know, good fisherman...was Jackie. And a good coxswain, he woulda...you know what I knew of him. Dick Woodhouse we always remember as a coxswain, he looked the part, he did the part. And then Jackie, obviously was a...they're all good coxswains these guys 'cause they've been fishing...all their lives, so it's just second nature to them you know. But uh...no, he was a great lad Jackie Willacy, good hardworking lad that guy.

**And you said he had an accident?**

Yeah...he went out fishing one morning which happened to [Sam Baxter? 03:33] as well, which is...it happens to a lot of fishermen if they're not careful, even in the Fleetwood trawlers or anywhere. When winches and capstans are going round you can just happen to get snagged up in it, and poor Jackie got his leg wrapped round the capstan and...didn't do it any good. So he was off the scene for about twelve months, so that's why I took over. But Jackie after he recovered he went back to sea, but...he just said leave Charlie where it is and that was it.

## **And what was your role then, with the Lifeboat when you became coxswain?**

Well, you were noted down as coxswain, then I had the phone and the of course the police would have my number. Where Jackie I don't think ever had a phone, so it was either setting the rockets off and him hearing it, or he didn't because many a time I'd take the lifeboat out, even though Jackie was coxswain, because they'd phone me you see, if Jackie had a phone they'd have been phoning Jackie up. Umm...so what I'd have the phone I had a special bell put at home as well so that I wouldn't miss any calls. And the night we had to get turned out, in 1974, I was sat watching the TV on a Sunday night, it was Sunday night at the London Palladium, and the TV kept flashing up 'structural damage in Northern Ireland, Isle of Man and North-west England', it used to do that in those days, you'd have little flashes of...of weather report coming up like that, and it was a howling night, and the phone went off and I just said to me wife, I says 'wouldn't that be funny if it was the lifeboat' and when I picked the phone up it was, it was the police, 'can you come down'. Went down on the promenade with me oilskins and...I said to- it was Captain...not Captain, Sargeant Ferguson it was, the Sargeant there, he says 'are you going out in this?'. The tide was high...and I said well what have you seen, is there anything? He said yeah we've seen red rockets, I says yeah well we're going then. And that was it, never thought anything about it, we're just going. And off we popped. Keith Willacy was with me...Freddy Gardener. The little lifeboat put us into the big lifeboat, and off we popped and got these four guys off. I went back and moored up, and Keith took the guys ashore in the little lifeboat, which was too rough to land at the Green street slipway so they had to go to the Town Hall slipway, because it was that rough at that slipway. And in the meantime, I was stuck aboard the lifeboat with Freddy Gardener, and I saw a flashing light off a moored boat. Not a trawler, one of the amateur handling boats. And I kept looking and I said to Freddy 'there's somebody on that boat'. I says I'm starting up we'll buzz off again, just the two of us.



**So this is the same night, when...**

Same night...

**...you'd already rescued some...men.**

Yeah...we were tied up...yeah. We were tied up, moored up, ready for off. And I saw this flashing light, so, started the engine, told Freddy to let go of the mooring, get down below and come down with me. So I sailed up, and rounded up to this boat, and there sure enough was a fella stuck on board. He tried to tie the boat up, the wind was so strong for him he couldn't put the big I into a hook, so he had to just wrap rope round it to make it secure, but he got trapped aboard, it was too rough for him to row ashore. So there he was, so I'm shouting to him, do you want me to pull you ahead to...hook you up, he says no I've got plenty of rope round it. I says right I'll come round the next time and jump aboard here with me and I'll take you off. So I just rounded the boat round and rowed back for him again, he jumped aboard and we went back to the lifeboat mooring again and tied up. So we got him off. Just the two of us, me and Freddy. But in the meantime I sailed round every one of the trawlers to make sure they're all alright. I went right down the pier, to the south end and round, and right the way back to make sure every trawler was alright - which they were, they were fine. And then we tied up and then we got took ashore.

**So was that the most memorable time then, that you had on the lifeboat, or can you remember any other instances?**

Hmm...I, yeah...a horrible one, when I lost me best friend, erm, I don't want to talk about that really. I was going on holiday with me family and he was lost as I am packing my bags to go on holiday, and I got a phone call to go to the lifeboat, and when they said he had fallen over the side I couldn't believe it. I went...I had his brother with me in the lifeboat, we searched all the way up 'til [place name: 8:07]

and everywhere, couldn't find him. And sadly had to come back, and his brother was with me. And we tied up and the day after I went to Portugal with me girlfriend and me two boys. That was a poor one that one. Umm...and then there was another plane crash across the Bay, and I think the guy got beheaded but luckily enough they got to him before me 'cause by the time I'd gone out there the tide had covered the boat and the aeroplane and he was covered. Umm...there's so many that we've done as well, so many. Even in me trawler, I've done a few in the fishing boat to be honest. But yeah there's a few...a few that you can remember.

**So how long were you coxswain for?**

I was coxswain of it, until they scrapped it. But I think after me I don't think there was ever another - there wasn't another coxswain made. And I read the minutes of the meetings and they didn't have another coxswain. I think they concentrated more after I left, on the rubber lifeboat, the RNLI small rescue boat, and Keith was coxswain of that. So that really took everything over, that. He couldn't do what the big lifeboat did, but I don't think they ever hardly used the big lifeboat after I left it. 'Cause I...why I left it is because I went bigger trawlers and moved away from Morecambe fishing, so I wasn't as handy to get as a coxswain anymore. So I was out fishing from Glasson Dock, and then to Fleetwood. But by then they were just not using it, and...that was the end of it, and then it ended up in the...the museum in Lancaster.

**So, when did they do away with it then, and when did it end up in the museum?**

I don't know. I'd been living in Scotland or...I don't know. I can't - I don't know what date that would be. I know it was laid up for ages not doing anything, and then suddenly it was missing, and then it was taken to Lancaster but I don't know when. 'Cause I was away that much.

**And you've said that there is a campaign that's trying to get it restored in the museum, is that right?**

Yeah that's right, yeah. I'm involved with it with Andy Jarvis and Trevor Owen from Overton, and hopefully Keith will come along. Um, we're trying to get these people from Liverpool who are nobbies, that's a Morecambe Bay fishing boat called a nobby, they're enthusiasts and they said they would do it up for us if they could get a grant. Now, they've applied for a grant we'll have to see, if they get a grant they'll do it up for us. Not to make it seagoing but to make it look worthy and, cosmetic really, make it look nice that we could show it off, you know. 'Cause it was given to Morecambe by Lady Priestley, so it's a big thing really.

**Do you want to tell me about that story?**

The story of...?

**The Lady Priestley, how did it come into...**

Uh, I don't know. Keith'll tell you better than me, all as I know is that Sir William Priestley was a keen sailor I think of Morecambe, and loved Morecambe Bay, and um...I think when he died Lady Priestley thought well I'll do something for the town, and she bought this lifeboat for the town. So it was a boat built especially to be a lifeboat, not a fishing boat, 'cause it had the propeller in the middle, built for an engine, built with buoyancy tanks, and built more of a...little bit structured difference, small foredeck and a good seaworthy little boat, you know. And that become Morecambe and Heysham's lifeboat.

**Lovely...I think we're getting to the end now, um, just before we sort of wrap up is there anything that you feel like you'd like to talk about that we**

**haven't quite covered, to do with some of your experiences, things that you want to share.**

Um...I can't think of anything really, I think I've told you that much. Me throat's that dry I don't think I could talk...[laughter]

**[Laughter] Here, have some of my orange.**

...Um, I think we've covered most of it really haven't we, as much as we could.

**Um, so just really to sort of, you know, to ask you a few more final questions, um...what's your view on sort of, have you noticed lots of changes now to the fishin industry, and how do you feel about those?**

Yeah...well there's changes now, but when you go to Fleetwood now, there's only two or three boats fishing out of Fleetwood. And when I was there there'd be, what, forty, and maybe years and years ago maybe hundred [inaud, 12:52, at dock? or odd?]. And look at Morecambe, there's only two - Raymond Edmondson and Mark Willacy, so...it's all changed, and they don't go too far away. There's nobody drifting right the way off to the Bay and...Blackpool and all over like they used to do, they just seem to be fishing very near in shore now, and not really going too far, you know. So that's altered. So the whole structure of it's altered, there's just nobody about, nobody only those two guys. Fleetwood's the same, I was there a fortnight ago with Andy Jarvis, there was just no trawlers about. So the whole industry's disappeared. But um...I have friends all over the country, and up in Shetland who I visit now and again and they're doing very well. But it's big sophisticated boats, all on quotas, and they struggle. But they're still doing ok. But his boat cost 1.2 million [laughter].

**So when you look back then on your career in fishing, what do you feel most proud about?**

Skipper's ticket. I loved that. I thought that's a good do is that. I wasn't that good at school... I was top in truant, but uh, I couldn't wait to get to sea, but when I took that ticket I thought that's a good do is that. And then I took two more tickets and passed them. I know I can do it if I want to do it, and that's the thing about passing exams innit, if you want to do it you can do it. No I was quite pleased with that. And I was quite pleased with being the coxswain of the lifeboat. And I was quite pleased with being captain of those ships, I really enjoyed that, when I opened the door of me cabin and it said captain on it, I thought that's a good do. I'd love to tell me mother that one.

**And...sort of if you were to pass on any specific skills or...um, words of advice to sort of future generations of fishing in this particular area in Morecambe Bay, um, what advice would you give to people?**

Well, you know, fishing in this area, I don't think I'd advise it, because there isn't enough really to warrant fishing like it used to be. I mean we all made a good living, there was boats everywhere, there was net menders, net factories, everything. But now there's just nothing, you can hardly buy any gear anymore. I don't know where they buy shrimp nets anymore. And their oilskins you have to get probably online, and all this...I don't know, I wouldn't advise anybody. And if you went to Fleetwood, where you going to fish, there's nobody fishing out of Fleetwood. So really, the fishing industry, at least round here, I don't recommend it for anybody. I mean my friends up in Shetland, they're doing very well but that's...that's a different kettle of fish.

**And, do you do anymore fishing, now, do you do any?**

No. I'm a coastguard watcher. Um, I'm a volunteer for the coastguards, that if I see anything untoward, I just phone in, and I do that now and again. So I'm still around, and I've found a load of bombs on the beach, I found twelve mortar

bombs, and that was through scouring the beach. And I reported them time and time and time, until they come and blew them all up. So yeah, I'm a coastguard watcher now.

**And what do you think's so special then about this...this specific area, about Heysham and Morecambe, why is it special to you?**

Well...Morecambe Bay, I mean, the writer, the travel writer, was it Bryson they called him, you remember that guy Bryson wasn't it?

**Bill Bryson...**

Bill Bryson. He said that it was the best view in the world, and I honestly think in the places I've been to in my life, it's hard to beat a sunset at Morecambe Bay, when it's right. I don't think there's one ever you could beat, than Morecambe sunset. It's absolutely brilliant. In fact they talk about the green flash, and...is it Countryfile tried to film it, by going to the Outer Hebrides, and I watched the program, and they come back and they didn't see it. But I got onto their website, and I found a little block where you could send a note to them. And I did, I told them that I see it in Morecambe Bay quite often, and I got a reply back from them they says 'lucky you'. She says if we're in your area, I might look you up on that one. But I've seen that green flash many a time. So...that's special, it's a special view. It's a great view, one of the best there is.

**Lovely, thank you Charlie. Is there anything else you'd like to add? No?**

**Thank you.**

Thank you.

**[End of tape]**