



**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  
INTERVIEWEE NAME/S: Alan Smith  
YEAR OF BIRTH: 1943  
INTERVIEWER/S: Tinnie Naylor, Carol Bennett  
DATE OF INTERVIEW: 03/12/15  
LOCATION: Sunderland Point  
TRANSCRIBER: Giulia Nicolini

**Summary of Interview:**

**No of Tracks: 3**

**Good morning Alan, could you tell me a little bit about your childhood growing up in Sunderland Point?**

Good morning, yes of course I can. Um, growing up at Sunderland Point was absolutely idyllic. Um... traffic-free, run where you want, do what you want, whenever you want...your parents didn't have to worry about you, we lived next door to the...to the local farm, so, if we weren't with dad fishing we were with Harry the farmer...taken care of and looked after in between meal-times and bedtime. And um, summer holidays, um... I always remember going back to school after summer holidays and people telling me, or fellow pupils telling me where they'd been for the summer holidays. These places called Cornwall, and some obscure place in Scotland that I'd never heard of. Where had I been? Sunderland Point. Never wanted to go anywhere else during the summer holidays. Um, *not* that we were able to, because it was dad's main time, uh, salmon fishing, um, during the summer months from April to the end of August, so that ran in conjunction with the six weeks break from school. And so we spent an idyllic childhood here at Sunderland Point minding our own business.

**Thank you. And can you then go on to tell us a little bit about the salmon fishing, about what you saw your dad doing, or..?**

Yes, yes.

**Did he follow down from his father?**

Yes he did. Yes, and um, there's two, two main types of salmon fishing on the river, still carried out to this day. One is with the uh, haaf net, that we now call it, but uh, the proper descriptive name is haaf netting, um, spelt 'h' - double 'a' - 'f'. And uh, it's a Norse terminology, so it really is a heritage fishing. And the uh, the other one is whammel, or drift netting, and the whammel is spelt 'w'-'h'-'a'-double 'm' - 'e' - 'l', and uh, we think another Norse derivative, uh, of this type of

fishing. The haaf netting is done with a beam, approximately fifteen feet long, two poles at either end with a centre staff where the um, man or, the lady, as we have fishing on the river today, stands and the net flows behind you, and you can feel the fish strike um, as they hit the bag of the net. You lift it, and wrap the fish round the beam and hit it smartly over the snout with a piece of wood you have in your belt called a priest, which is very aptly... aptly named isn't it.

### **Priest? What...?**

Yeah, issued the last rights.

### **Aah... [slight laughter]**

Mm. And the other method of fishing, the whammel and all the drift netting, um, consists of three hundred and fifty yards of net in a boat. And.... nowadays it's one man one boat and an engine, um, but the early days were two men, one on the oars and one paying the net out over the sand. The net itself, three hundred and fifty yards long, um, they would set off on the ebb tide, and fish down the lower reaches of the channel, from the lighthouse right out to number one buoy. And um, they would keep a distance of approximately a quarter of a mile between each boat, to give them working clearance. And then they would return on the, on the flood tide, hopefully with er, hopefully with a good catch. They could go for many many days without even seeing a fish, even weeks, um, such was the precarious nature of the job. The season in the early days was from April, to the end of August, and there were some pretty grim days in April down that river, snowin', rain, gales and wind, not fit to be out. And, latterly, the season now starts from June to the end of August for conservation methods...umm, whether they're working is a different matter. We think the fish are now running later than August, due to climatic changes, etc. um, nature slotting into that program. But the, uh, boats that we used were specifically built. And um, they were called whammel boats, and they were built in the Woodhouse's yard, in

Overton. And indeed, the boat that my father used, *Mary*, named after my mum, was the last boat that the woodhouse yard built. [Clears throat] And uh, regarded as the best boat they'd built... um, sea quality, and sailing qualities, it was a sailing fine boat because of course, no engines! It was oars, and sail. And um, they would come back under sail, mainly they would go down under oars on the ebb tide but, very very often they would come under sail, and it were a fine sight. Um, just into the 'teens of whammel boats comin' all under sail. It was quite an incredible display. And there were some skilled seamen. My dad in particular was a very very skilled boatman. And uh, the boats themselves would be round-about eighteen foot long, uh, very beamy, very beamy to withstand the uh, rough seas they could get.

### **Can you explain that?**

Uh, the width of the boat is the beam of the boat. And the wider the boat, the more stable it is, the narrower the boat, the more unsteady it is, as you can well imagine.

### **Ah, thank you... yeah, yeah.**

And, virtually, you could get a whammel boat on its beam ends and it would still be safe, no problem at all. It were a really really well-built boat. And there was a saying amongst the uh, local fishermen at the time that my dad had the boat built, uh, 1937? And it would cost round-about forty pounds to have it built. Me dad's name was Bert, Bert Smith, Hubert. And the local fishermen – 'Ey Bert, thou not...thou never mek the money back on yon'...And I suppose it was an awful lot of money in those days, but uh, the boat is still in existence today, um, it's been restored, but umm, you could still...you could still go to work in it, a fine boat.

### **Whereabouts is it?**

It's moored over the road.

**Oh is it?**

Yes over the road in the uh, in the reeds. It's a, it's a safe anchorage for winter.

**...right...**

Yeah you don't get the poundin', you don't get the big waves...and um, it's safe when it goes aground on the soft...

**Yes, yes...**

The soft mud and the rushes, yeah, yeah. And um, as I was saying, two men in the boat, one on the oars and one paying the net out. And um, they would be dressed, they would be dressed in um, a gansey, a fisherman's jumper, that would be made by uh, by my mum. Um, a pair of waders, and oilskin, made by my mum. If it came onto rain the sou'wester would go on, made by my mum. So, at home, there was an industry ongoing itself, if you will. Mum would be fulltime housewife and fisherman's wife, and...during the winter months, dad would spend a lot of time making the actual whammel nets, and uh, they would, he would set off with the first piece of twine on a hook, in the corner of the lounge, and we would thread the needles, we would thread the needles with twine. It was a twine that came from Joseph Gundry, in Bridport, Dorset. And it would be flax, man-made, a man-made fibre. And we would thread the needles, and if the twine on the needles wasn't firm enough, in other words if it was dropping off in front of dad when he was knitting, he would sort of throw them back at us and ask them to redo 'em...much to our ...(laughs) dismay and disgruntledness.

**So how old are you, when you're helping your dad like this?**

Ohh...six or seven?

**Really?**

Oh yeah...yes.

**Lovely...**

And, you'd have a piece of twine over the back of your hand, just to keep it tight as you were threading it, round the needle, just to keep the tension on it. You knew what you had to do. And uh, dad would be knitting away and uh, there was 350 yards of this net to make, and I mean, more than one net, because in those days there was various mesh sizes. You'd go from four inch, two and a half inch mesh [?] up to eight inch mesh. Such was the variation in the fish at different seasons, from April to the end of August. And they would uh, they would take, uh, a specific sized meshed net out of the boat and put another one in, because that...different fish had arrived. So there were different nets to catch the different sized fish. And um...when the net was made, uh, you'd more work to do then, what we call 'steeling on'. 'Steeling on' meant fastening the top cord of the net with the corpse to the net that had been made, and a bottom cord, with round lead at periodic intervals, to keep it hanging like a curtain, when you drifted. And, that used to be done...on the green, on Second Terrace( yes that's right), here at Sunderland Point on a fine... spring day, and they would have what we call 'three legs', at various intervals, and the three legs were pieces of wood or iron bars, shaped something like a tepee. And your net would run in the centre of them so that you could work at standing height. And they would walk along with a piece of measured wood and a piece of charcoal, and they would charcoal a mark on the top cord, where the net had to be stitched on. And they would go back and stitch it on at these...marked intervals. And the same with the lead weights – the lead weights were in sheet form, they'd be... three inches long. And they wrapped

them round the bottom cord and tapped it with a little hammer, to keep it fixed. So, a lot of work. A lot of work was involved in making the nets before they could go fishing.

**What sort of depth is the net then?**

What sort of depth in the river?

**Yeah, yeah, depth...I mean, does the net go to the bottom of the river?**

It can do, yes it can do. The uh...there's such a massive variation of depth of water in the channel. Sometimes the net's dragging over sandbanks, and shallows and so on. So, um...you can wade across the river in some places. You... sometimes have to get out of the boat and walk alongside it, because you in it would cause it to go aground, yeah.

And, on Friday night, when they got back to the moorings, the old nets would uh, the old (ph./inaud.) (flax) nets would come out of the boat and they would bring them up onto the beach, on what they called a net barrel. A net barrel was a wooden contraption, and it had slats of wood across the centre, where the net rested. And there was two handles at the front, two behind, and that's how they used to bring the net home. And three hundred and fifty yards of wet salmon net was very heavy. And they used to put it on the poles, and the poles are still there to this day...umm, on by where the old cotton tree used to be, and the black hut that we call the 'fish house'. And you had three poles for each fisherman, and the net was drawn backwards and forwards across these three poles, then it was... pulled up, by a block and tackle with a Y-piece going through the net, and the Y-piece from the – would be from the branch of a tree, with notches round it to tie the rope. And that was on the end of the block.

My job on a Saturday morning would be to go and clean the seaweed out of the bottom of the net.

**How many boats were around at this time?... In the river...about.**

In the heat of things here, there would be four boats here...there would be the same amount at Overton, at Basil Point, probably the same at Glasson Dock. Into the 'teens of boats at times, going salmon fishing...amazing. With two men in each boat.

**How long would the nets last?**

The nets... that's a difficult one really, because it depended really on how often they were used...er, but they were prone to going rotten, due to the fact that it was a man-made fibre. I suppose nowadays it's nylon, and they last forever, you keep them in the boat all seasons and you don't even take them out. Umm...my elder brother Tom, umm...who fished, has quite a lot of these nets still, some of them brand new, in various huts and net boxes and so on. Some will be in a house, for safekeeping. You could go up to some of them and you could rip them apart, but some of them... no, you can't, it...depends, it depends. But they would make new nets, every year, to replace some of them that were wearing out, so it was an ongoing process.

**So in the summer, would the fishermen go out every day, when the tide was right?**

In summer... umm, when the tide was right. And, there's quite a few aspects to that particular comment. It's subject, to an awful amount of freshwater coming down, is the river Lune. Because we've not got to lost sight of where it starts, up in the high ground, beyond Tebay. So there's an awful lot of catchment areas, to... tip freshwater into the river before it reaches the estuary. And... it can be solid freshwater, just like tap water, there isn't a trace of salt in it, whatsoever. Those conditions are absolutely hopeless for catching fish. They've either gone



up, into the freshwater, towards the spawning grounds, or they've gone back out to sea. Because they can't stand that sudden transition, it's got to be gradual. So if they're met with a great volume of freshwater, they'll turn out and they'll go out to sea, and they'll nudge back into it, gradually. Because they've got to *change* their body style, from fresh – from salt to fresh. And so... many was the time that, it was running solid fresh water, like it is today, that it would be no-go, they would not bother going out fishing. And it could be running freshwater for a week or fortnight, so... umm, pretty grim, pretty grim. And...and of course, the other...the other end, the other end was umm, pure salt, clear as gin, as they would call it, and the question would be... 'have you caught any fish dad?' ... 'No, net was on fire'.

**[laughter]**

Right, the net was on fire? What, burning, smouldering, smoking? No – phosphorous, at night time, in the water, running through the net, everything's lit up. Amazing sight.

**So where does that come from?**

It's a natural, water-borne...algae, living being, in the water.

**More in the saltwater?**

[inaud.] (18:41) in pure salt. In freshwater it doesn't exist, you don't see it. You could be walking on the sands, in summer, in the dark in pure salt water, and you can see every footprint, where the water's squelching from beneath your wellies, lit up, that was on fire. And of course, the fish can see it, the fish can see the whole of the net, so, they're not gonna go anywhere near it.

**Very interesting...maybe it will sound a silly question... are you catching fish when they're coming into the river, or when they're coming out?**

Not a silly question at all...perfectly logical. And a good question. [Clears throat]. Many is the time you catch a fish when they are coming back down the river. Now the reason they're coming back down the river is because they can't get over the weir at Skerton, because there isn't enough water. So they're coming back down and going out to sea again. So you will catch fish, what they call 'dropping back down'. You will also catch fresh run fish, and, those are fish that are coming into the river, for... for the first time. The first time this particular year. Umm...very often the tell-tale sign is sea lice, on them. Which was, or is a very big irritant to them. And that's one of the main reasons that um...you'll see salmon jumping. I don't mean going up the waterfalls and that sort of thing but here in the river. It's trying to relieve themselves of the dreaded sea lice, because it's uh, it's an irritant. So, um, you can catch fish either going in, or coming back out. Umm...you would not catch, or you would not bring home a fish that had spawned. It's spent, it's thin. They call them kippers. The majority of the fish that spawn die, that's the end of their cycle. 90 percent. 10 percent do come back out to sea, they do escape. And um, you can also catch fish called umm...'grilse'. Grilse is a salmon that was born in the river, returning back for the first time. And it's a narrower section leading to its tails, is a grilse. You can virtually span it with your fingers. I suppose, a bit leaner, a bit more, a bit more of a streamlined fish than a full-blown, full-grown salmon, if you will. And that will return in, after five years, being at sea, going to its place of birth to do its...thing. So, um, yes, it's not a silly question, do you catch fish, when they are going back out. They're going back out, after having been up the river. And they'll come back down, and they'll hold up in deep holes, and then, as the tide ebbs out, those holes get shallower and shallower, so they'll move out and they'll go back down. And that's why the people with the haaf nets catch them, they're dropping back down, that's why you fish on the ebb tide.

**With a haaf net...**

Yes.

**...Is it...It's not set up and left, is it, it's just...for the time you're fishing.**

You are stood with it, correct. Yeah, you are stood with it in the water, yeah, correct.

**Right...**

(Track 2)

**Ok Alan, can you tell us a little bit about family life and how you were involved, or how your mum was involved in...in helping out.**

Yeah. The whole life, family life, did revolve around um, fishing, that was the, uh, that was the family business. Grandfather's before...before ourselves obviously, umm, were involved in the business and handed down to our own father. And there was um, three sons...and a daughter, and umm... four sons and a daughter should I say. And three of the sons followed the fishing, I opted out...and latterly my younger brother John opted out but uh, Tom and Philip our elder brothers followed it, with my father. Um, mum was a fulltime fisherman's housewife, helping to make the fisherman's sweaters, and the oilskins and sou'westers, having meals on the table at all times of day. Um, salmon fishing in particular was very time demanding - two times a day, for the majority of the season, fishing during night. Many was the time that um, we had to keep quiet during the day in su- in school holidays because dad was asleep - don't make so much noise - he hated that aspect of it, he hated it. And um... in the spring time, before the fishing started, early spring time, all the boats were to get ready, well a boat to get ready, painted, um, and made ready for the arduous task

ahead and the mast and the oars all had to be in good order. The sail, the sail would be cotton, made at Nicholson's sail loft at Glasson Dock. And it was, a red ochre colour, and indeed it was treated with what they called red ochre. That was another exciting time, going over to Glasson Dock with dad for provisions for the fishing. We'd go over in a small boat, small punt... you wouldn't, you wouldn't set foot in it now probably. If you did you'd have to have life belts... and life jackets, and heavens knows what – we didn't, we just got aboard and went, I'd be six or seven years old. And uh, we'd arrive at Glasson Dock on the flood tide and everybody knew – everybody knew dad - 'Hello Bert, Hello Bert'. He would have been going for a coil of rope, some tar, some red ochre for the sail, linseed oil, to mix –

### **What was the tar used for?**

The tar was used for the bottom of the boat, and the inside of the boat, in the bottom. And also, they would tar rope, to preserve it. Messy awful job. I remember them cleaning the tar off their hands with butter [sound of rubbing hands together]...no rubber gloves in those days.

**Yes...**

And uh, linseed oil, raw linseed oil, to mix with white lead paint...for the boats...

### **Gosh... no health and safety.**

No health and safety! That's why so much work got done. None of the manby-panby of today. Men were men and jobs used to get done. Umm... but uh, health and safety today goes a long way to preserving... people. So that was an adventure, and I can smell, I can smell the sail loft today – hemp, hemp rope, tar, everything that went with it. And there was a shed, there was a shed next door to where grandad used to live, and all the stuff used to get put in there, and I can -

the same smell was in that. It was heaven, when you opened that door. Sadly, all gone. Um, but, springtime, leading up to salmon fishing, yeah, very very busy time. And um, dad had a fishing partner, and um, when he passed away, my elder brother went with dad, in the boat. He'd be in his early teens, on the oars, massive undertaking for a young chap, [clears throat], but again Tom, like my dad, became a very skilled boatman, due to serving a good apprenticeship. Um, the fish...landed, and they were marketed locally, there was a fish shop in Morecambe called J T Woodhouse, and everything was taken to J T Woodhouse. And um, the price would be negotiated, and that would be it. I always remember the price dropping, when the Scottish salmon fishermen started, because there'd be a glut, on the market, and the price would drop. And there was long faces to be had, when the price of the fish was plummeting. But as a little footnote to the um, salmon going to J T Woodhouse, um, in winter months which we'll come to but, [inaud. -wild farming? 5:55] used to be part of the winter income, and uh, mallard and teal – mallard and widgeon – um, would be on the menu, and they would go to J T Woodhouse. And they would be hung outside with the rabbits and the hares, uh, again, no health and safety or anything of that nonsense, or sell-by dates.

**[laughter].**

So it was, yeah it was full-on, it was full-on, yeah. And of course eventually the salmon season came to end, the end of August, and uh, much relief. But there wasn't much time for any let-up, because then one had to look forward to the spring activities, which would be shrimping, catching the Morecambe bay shrimps. The Morecambe Bay shrimps were in the River Lune, in the estuary. And um, my um, brother Philip, would be the first member of the family to have a boat with an engine in it, it would be a petrol engine.

**What sort of year are we at now?**

We're in the 1950s.

**The fifties.**

We're in the 1950s, and it would be a 1914 Kelvin petrol engine, which was prone to being unreliable. The spark was generated by a (ph) magnetum I always remember Philip taking it off and putting it in the oven, to keep dry, so he would have a spark when he went fishing the next tide. Brother Tom would go with a horse and cart, Tom would go with a horse and cart, down the lane towards Sambo's grave, and then along the west shore, up to... Middle- Middleton sands, Potts Corner. Around to the um, holiday camp that was once there, and then strike out, down the sands, to what they call Lake [ph. Brest? 7:59], Heysham Lake. And the quality of shrimps he got, were absolutely fantastic, they were like mini langoustine. They were absolutely stunning. And of course, Tom wasn't in a position to boil the shrimps on board as you can with a boat, they all had to be brought back. I remember the shrimps crawling all over the washhouse, that it was called then, because there was a boiler in the washhouse, where they used to use it for washing the clothes. But it had now been put to good use as a shrimp boiler. And um, wonderful wonderful quality. But, on board the boat, you had... a boiler, and in the early days it was boiled by putting firewood underneath it, in a wooden boat.

**Yes [laughter].**

And, latterly of course, the gas canisters went aboard, but um, I used to stoke the fire up, on the boat, anybody from afar would think you had a steam engine on board I would imagine. And the shrimps were boiled on board, and of course you've got to boil them in salt water, if you boil them in freshwater, the flavour goes.

**Ah...**

And even when Tom got home with his shrimps, umm, we used to get the salt water out of the tide to put in the boiler, to boil them in salt. It's a brine isn't it? When you're finished, giving that flavour.

**Yeah... it's a preservative...**

And then the work started of course, because all the shrimps had to be picked. And um, they were brought into the kitchen, tipped onto the table, and we all sat round picking shrimps.

**Did you... did you help with that?**

When I came home from school, when I came home from school there'd be a bite to eat on the side, [inaud. 9:48] a couple of flukes, and some bread and butter and a cup of tea. And the flukes I would have to take off the bone. Nobody showed me, you just did it, you just took all the fish off the bone, had your tea, then you sat down and started picking shrimps, however old you were...six, what, six, seven years old? And umm, in those days shrimps were measured by the gill, the pint, the quart...and let's say a quart is equivalent to a litre, for want of a... And, when I was in my heyday, before rheumatics and awkward fingers and so on, I could pick a litre an hour. And, you devise your own method of picking. Some people can— sit up to the table, pick a shrimp up, tail goes there, the head there, the fish there... I used to have to sit sideways, arms on the table, the shrimps coming towards me, and I would pull the tail off, throw it that way, pick the head off and- [inaud. 10:55] the fish was there. Then you would get a big pile in front of you, it got too much so they were all scooped away. But you always kept a measure, a check on what measure you were picking. If they were good quality, boiled to perfection, nice big shrimps like Tom was bringing home, you could really set the world on fire.

They would, uh, then go down to Morecambe Trawlers, the co-operative in Morecambe. And um, indeed when I was um...old enough, I had a motorbike...they were all stuffed into a haversack and, uh, off I went with the shrimps to Morecambe Trawlers – post haste. Um, so-

**And when they're at Morecambe Trawlers, is that when they'd be potted, and...**

Where they were processed and potted, exactly. Yeah, the famous Morecambe Bay shrimps. Yup, and uh...yes.

**Can I just ask yer, what sort of a...living, what sort of a lifestyle living did you have? I mean was there good times, bad times, financially, you know...how did you feel your family were coping with...?**

Yeah...it was, financially, it was very precarious. There could be weeks, and weeks with no income coming in. And with a big family of five children, you really had to be a good manager, with finances, and budget accordingly.

We never ever went short. There was always a meal on our table, there was always clothes on our back. And... even people who were making good money, it wasn't mega bucks in those days. You're talking somebody...in a factory in Lancaster for instance, a foreman, seven pounds fifty a week. Dad could match that. Dad could match that. So... when things were in favour, things were going well, he was a good fisherman...because, um, alongside the shrimps for instance, he would have the fluke nets set... for the damp, for the flat fish, we call them flukes. He would have them set on the sand banks, off to the point end. And um, storms and storms in wait of flukes were brought, every once....

**Was that seasonal as well?**



Yes it was, yes it was. This time of year. Um, every one was sold. You can't sell them now. Because they're not in a polystyrene tray with breadcrumbs on them, wrapped in cling film. But everyone sold, again to J T Woodhouse, in, in Morecambe. And vast numbers, vast weights. I can see...I can see boxes of flukes. Um, and dad just gutting them. Not filleting them, not taking their heads off, just taking their guts out. And that's how they would go, that's how they would go. And there was a, there was a massive catch one tide, and both my dad and Tom went down to the nets, and they were absolutely heaving, they were dripping in flukes. And uh, Tom had to come back, and borrow the horse and cart from a farmer, and I believe there was 23 stone of flukes. All marketed...all marketed. And excellent quality, beautiful fish. And so that was another aspect of winter. But, the one I think dad liked most of all, was gathering the mussels, shellfish. And, again, it was all done in the estuary. There was various (ph) skears (pron: ske-yas) that had mussels in those days. And um, I think the favourite one would be Plover Scar, where the lighthouse is, off Cocker Sands. And um, the main of the, the main of the mussels would be gathered there.

**Can you just tell me how, how mussels grow?**

Yup. Mussels grow on what we call a sعار. S – c – e – a – r, a sعار, or scar. Um, and they anchor themselves, via a growth that comes through the shell, onto... a stone, or rocky seabed. When you pick the mussel, it's still [inaud.] and they call it the beard.

**Yeah, I've heard of that.**

You've got to take the beard out, you don't eat the beard, that must be extracted. And, so, you are picking the mussels from where they're anchored. And um, those...mussel forks, a small, two-pronged device, with a short wooden handle. And you would have that in one hand, and you would have a homemade basket

in the other. And the basket was called a [ph. tiernal]. Where that expression comes from I don't know.

### **A [tiernal]?**

A [tiernal]. But you'd have a tiernal, maybe in between your feet, just tipped up slightly so that the mussels would be [ph. hoiked] into it. And...say the basket would be half-full, you would take it down to the water's edge and get your feet into it and knock as many barnacles off as you could. And then they'd be tipped into a hundred weight hessian sacks. All to be lifted into the boat. And there was a boat specific for that job called Daisy, that was grandad's boat. Built at Crossfields at Arnside. Not at Woodhouse's yard in Overton. And if they hadn't got quite enough mussels, um...down at the lighthouse, they would come up to this skeer here, outside the house, where mussels used to grow on there, and they'd finish the tide off there, they'd top the bags up, on the – on that skeer. They would then, later on...just before high water, take the mussels up to Glasson Dock. And they'd have a ton of mussels on board. There'd be...about...that much boat showing, **(laughter)** about that much free boat. And the railway line used to come through to Glasson Dock, used to come through from Green Ayre at Lancaster, through to Glasson Dock. And um, they would carry the mussels up the stone pitchin', into the goods waggons, hundred weight bags at a time, lads in their teens, you know. And they would go out to the East Coast, and they would use them for longline fishing, for bait, on the hooks.

### **Oh right, not for eating?**

Yeah. And I mentioned this when I was over at Amble, last year, and they do remember mussels – one fisherman, an elderly fisherman remembered mussels coming over from the west coast. In all probability, they were, uh, they were dad's mussels...but I think they went to Whitby as well. The only complaint they ever gave were from the girls who used to open them, if there was too many

barnacles on them, hurting their thumbs, and their fingers. That's why they used to scour them as much as they could to get the barnacles off. If they didn't go there...they used to go to Lytham St Anne's - the purifying tanks to eventually be entered into the food chain. And um, and old um...army wagon used to come and collect them, I remember it now, a 'big Bedford' they called it. And they would go to deliver them to St Anne's. Now, if there was no market for them, or the price was low, or whatever, they used to lay them – put them into beds, at the bottom of the shore. They used to bring the sacks, tip them out, and I always remember seeing bits of wood sticking up with tin cans on them to keep the Oystercatchers off, what they call [ph. sea ya pies? 19:56], Oystercatchers, sea-ya pies...is the local nickname. And um, then eventually they'd be gathered up and marketed when the time was right. Dad liked that, Dad liked salmon fi–musselling, he did, very much so. Because it was one tide a day, and uh it was good money.

**Is that daytime?**

Yes, yes that's right. And um, you'd finished, you weren't sat around a table picking things out of shells for another eight hours, after you'd been down the river eight hours. So uh, that aspect of fishing, I think that was one of his favourites.

**Sorry, it seems now that it was a whole year round occupation.**

Oh it was.

**Absolutely.**

Cos I've not finished yet.

**Busy every year.**

**Oh...more?**

Yes. Er...eventually

**[End of recording 2]**

I'd just like to mention before we finish on the um, aspect of musseling...or mussel gathering we always referred to it as musseling – muscling in! [spelling?] And that was a method of retrieving mussels from deeper water, and they were retrieved from deeper water using a device called a 'craam'...it was a long rake. And I think the name is spelt 'c' 'r' 'double a' 'm'. Again, where that comes from I don't know. Um, but the...shaft, it'd be all of...eight, nine foot long. The rake itself is a very heavy, roughly made device, made by the local blacksmith. And, from the top of the rake coming to the um, shaft, would be a piece of net, a piece of old haive net, and it would stop the mussels going over the top of the rake and spilling out, so you wouldn't lose any. And um, that was one of the favourite methods of collecting mussels because they used to be big blue deep water mussels, absolutely wonderful. Never ebbed out of water, always in water. And they were relatively...relatively clear of barnacles, than the ones that were on the surface on the skeer...

**Can I just ask you...can I just ask you, you said 'never ebbed out of water...' and, what does that mean?**

Mm...never dried out. The tide never left them-

**Aah...**

They were always submerged, always submerged, yep. OK.

So I think we can leave the musseling aspect behind us now, and move onto an aspect of fishing that was adopted, here, on the estuary, in the 1960s. And um, it

was a method of fishing that was brought about by my middle brother Philip, for catching whitebait, which is a great delicacy in the restaurants up and down the country and on the continent. And the net... that was used, and is used still to this day, is very similar in style to a shrimp net, that you would tow behind the boat, patrolling. And it's set at various places, on the mudflats or on the skears, local to us. And um, you fish... you fish them as they're ebbing out, as the tide's receding, and um, tip them into baskets, bring them back, sort them, clean them, and put them into polythene bags, and vacuum pack them and deep freeze them, and off they go to market. It's a very very ...quick, easy method of fishing, and it's again one that dad liked very much indeed. Because if you like, there's a rough [inaud. 3:30], job and finish, it doesn't go on for hours and hours on end. And, it was another aspect of fishing that came in bang on target when other types of fishing were either no longer in existence, or the food chain didn't require them anymore, so it was a very very welcome addition indeed. And it extended the season no end.

**So that was quite profitable then, the whitebait?**

Yes, it was, yes.

**And what season- was that seasonal as well?**

That was seasonal...and that w-... *year-round* really, um, but they didn't do it during the summer months because it interfered with the salmon fishing.

**Yup.**

But as soon as the salmon fishing season finished, the whitebait nets would go down, and um... one of the best ways of fishing the whitebait nets was while they were still in water and going up to them in the boat and bringing the tail end of the net where all the fish were into the boat into the hamper, and in that way they

were – that would be cleanest. As opposed to being on the edge of the river when there was silt running and they were getting a bit messy and so on. And I remember Tom going up to his nets, which were just a little bit further up the river, with the boat, and bringing vast quantities, baskets of whitebait home, absolutely wonderful, all these little silver fish gleaming, brilliant. And of course to eat them – well, mm...next best thing to shrimps. When you think about, when you think about this river, when you think about this river, the river Lune, umm, the type of fish it produces, uh, salmon, sea trout, shrimp, mussels, as it did, cockles on the side of the sandbanks, leading down into the river...um, the whitebait...you'll catch seabass along with the salmon sometimes. Um, mullet, plaice, uh, Dover sole, all within this estuary...it's just a smorgasbord of delicious food.

**Yeah... So when you say 'the estuary', you're not talking about...you're not creeping into Morecambe Bay?**

You're not creeping into Morecambe Bay, this is the river Lune, this is the river Lune. And this still goes on 'til this day. I enjoy over a twelve month period, a vast array of delicious seafood from the river Lune...long may it continue. Okay.

**Is there anything um... that would be special about living in such an isolated fishing community...I mean, how...the social life, that sort of issue, that you can remember.**

Yes, very special to me. I've lived here all my life. I have not lived, obviously, anywhere else. I've spent time in other places, and loved it to bits...Spain, Greece...um, Scotland, the Isle of Man I love being there. Um, it's always nice to come home. And, uh...why is it nice to come home? We're an isolated community, cut off by the tide very often, which is super. Far from the madding crowd, far from the *horrendous* traffic situations wherever you go nowadays. ...Although I'm guilty of joining them, we have cars, we have to commute, we

have to socialise, of course we do. But...it's always nice to come back to this backwater.

### **The silence...**

And the silence... And you can say to people 'just listen to that' – 'listen to what?' 'The silence'... 'Oh, I've never heard silence before'. And... it always used to hit me when I was working full time, and you got to the end of the causeway, you went over the hump down to the bottom, rattled over the cattle grid, and the whole world closed in on you. Coming home, the reverse, over the cattle grid, over the hump, and this big sky opened up in front of you, and the light, and the water, and the expanse of everything – magic, you just can't take that away. And it differs from...every ten minutes, every twenty minutes. The level of the water, the light...today as we look out it's grey, it's drizzly, it's damp, it's horrible, the light isn't going to change much, it'll only get darker as the day goes on, it's that time of year. But, the big skies, the light, the water, your whole surroundings, the wildlife I love...as you get further into winter, the more of the different bird species come back to join us, from afar, as far as arctic Canada, Greenland, Iceland. Um, that aspect I love during winter, the wildlife, I love it to bits. So yeah, it's a lot going for it, a lot going for it. And, thankfully, lots of people join us. It's a very busy place on a nice day...Um, there's all sorts to see...Sambo's grave to visit...and um, of course we are a historic port, here at Sunderland Point. We were a port before...Lancaster was ever thought of, before Preston, Liverpool...Bristol were ever thought of on the west coast. We were one of the major trading ports, and um, we used to get trading vessels coming in from the West Indies, with goods, with cotton, spices, tobacco, rums, all sorts of contraband. That's why we have a custom house here. There'd be all sorts of smuggling going on, there was no streetlights, was there? Everybody'd have a cubbyhole somewhere, where contraband was stashed. Can you imagine it? And of course further down, uh, further down Sunderland Point, off on the sands, when you're walking round you might see what remains of the old tree stumps.

Indeed, mooring posts for the gunpowder boats, that used to come here to offload, and they weren't allowed into the village for obvious reasons. And the horse and carts were taken down onto the sands alongside the boat to be offloaded with gunpowder. No doubt the cart would have iron hoops on its wheels, and the horse would have steel shoes on, the guy on the reins would be on his clay pipe probably, on his way back to Lancaster. And where would you think he was taken to in Lancaster? Powderhouse Lane, that was the gunpowder store for the ammunition, from Sunderland Point. So once people get to grips with the heritage factor of Sunderland Point, well then, a whole new chapter unfolds. So, this little corner where much doesn't- isn't happening, a lot has gone on before, and when you get to grips with it, yeah, it's OK thank you. I've no desire as yet, to move anywhere. That's after 72 years...so...

**Is this your family home? Is this where you were brought up?**

No, no, we had a wonderful opportunity, in 1981, to purchase this. We were married in September '70, and we had a little cottage, which joined onto this house. And um, the chap who lived here was a guy from Preston, a builder, and he used to use it for a retreat, and he was talking about one day... I might have to, y'know...and I said well when you do give me first shout will you please. Which he did. So, we took the bull by the horns. We were only in early thirties, weren't we? Working, normal people. Um, no finances behind us then. And the place was falling down, but I said to [name?], my good lady, we've one chance of this sort of property here at Sunderland Point, let's take and we did. And I think after...what thirty, forty years we've just about finished restoring it. [laughter]

**No regrets then?**

No regrets, no regrets.

**Brilliant.**



No regrets, no, no...it's a front view, um, you get all the comings and goings of whatever's happening out there, and um, it's quite wonderful, yeah.

**When you... you didn't come into the fishing.**

Correct.

**...Was that a positive decision or...?**

It was a positive decision. I think...roundabout the time that I was seeking employment, there was a possibility that fishing was becoming a little bit precarious.

**Right.**

And, I was the... I was reading between the lines of... this precarious existence, financially, the way forward for me. It was rather sad really because still to this day salt water curses through me veins. It's not blood. And um, it never leaves you, but I went into agriculture, I started working on farms, because that was second nature. With a view to maybe one day buying my own farm, but um, not on those wages. So I quickly moved onto agricultural engineering, which I enjoyed immensely. And then I...got involved in motorcycling. And I was passionate about motorcycling from an early age. And um, I wanted to start competing in motorcycling events so my salary had to increase, so I went to a local factory, which was horrible. And um, after that, I went to...college, in Leicester, for six months, on a government training scheme, for...furthering my mechanical abilities to become involved with motorcars. And then I finished up with Honda for 33 years, which was quite wonderful. It's had its ups and down of course. So that's how my career spanned out, but fishing always remained close

to heart. And um...it put me on the road I am today, for goodness sake, yeah... eternally grateful for that. And dad's efforts.

### **How do outside employers cope with you having to manage travelling when the tide's right?**

Yeah, that's always a popular question.

**[Laughter]**

And why not indeed. And why not. The um, the tides are usually good to manage. I narrow it down to the low tides, the neap tides, are breakfast and tea time. And a lot of the neap tides don't get onto the causeway. Unless there's the horrendous gale blowing from the southwest, our prevailing wind, and then it can push the tide onto the road at an awkward time, like half past seven in the morning, or quarter to six, and it's not gonna go off 'til nine...and you start work at eight...right. So, you're up out of bed early morning, and you go before it. And you set up camp on the causeway somewhere safe and have a bacon butty and a flask of tea, and watch the wildlife getting out of bed. How good is that?

### **It has some hairy crossings.**

Yes, now, coming home in the evening...is the reverse. You can't leave work early. So, many was the time you couldn't beat the time coming on, and again with a strong wind behind it, and it would be seven o'clock in the evening, half past seven before you got home. So, you would patronise the local hostelry, and have a meal and a drink, and come home after. Or, knowing full well what was ahead of you, take some interesting reading, and sit in the car and have a read. There was always some way out. And... of course that was the adult working life. Prior to that you had to contend with getting to school. And there was no cars, no cars in those days. We were lucky living next door to a farm, where the milk was

taken across the road in milk churns, milk kits as we called them, in a milk float on a horse. So there'd be my sister and myself, along with five or six milk kids, and Harry the farmer, going across the road in a chariot, um...so that was great. It wasn't a novelty, it wasn't unusual, that was the way it was. Latterly Harry got a tractor, a little grey Fergie, which revolutionised the farming industry, and of course we used to go in that. But, many was the time we walked, many was the time we walked the causeway, five years old. If the tide was on, after school at half past three, we used to come through a pathway through the fields. And that would be two and a half miles probably, in this sort of weather. Even worse, blowing from the southwest. You'd have a long Gabardine mac, I'd have one of me dad's old sou'westers. I still have one upstairs. And um...you'd put your face into it and you carried on, that was it, made the best of it. You weren't looking behind you for a car coming, there was none, especially when you were coming through the fields anyway. Um, so...it set you up well for the future, as regards to weather you became a bit of a tough nut to crack you know, nothing much deterred you. So it was a good grounding... don't whinge get on with it...you'll dry out.

**[End of tape]**