



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

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TRANSCRIPT SUMMARY

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INTERVIEW NO: H2H2016.14
 INTERVIEWEE NAME/S: Eileen Baxter & Helen Graham
 YEAR OF BIRTH: 1925 & 1952
 INTERVIEWER/S: Jenn Mattinson
 DATE OF INTERVIEW: 14/02/16
 LOCATION: Morecambe
 SUMMARISER: Deborah Coleman

Recording 1

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| 00.00 – 09.00 | Introductions & family background. Eileen Baxter, née Tratt, was born on 24 February 1925. Eileen’s daughter, Helen Graham, is with her for the interview. Eileen was born in Stockport, later moving to Eccles, Manchester. Her mother, Lily Nuttall, married William Henry Tratt, a widower with 3 children, & they went to have 4 children together. Lily was a teacher & William an overseer with the GPO, in charge of the night mail to London. Eileen didn’t know her grandparents & none of her siblings are still living. When she left school she worked as a shorthand typist for Williamsons, a lino manufacturer in Manchester |
| 01.34 | Meeting & marrying Sam Baxter. Sam’s mother had a boarding house on Morecambe prom, where Eileen used to stay with her mother & aunt. Sam was home on leave from the navy & barely acknowledged her to begin with, but later wrote & one day rolled up in Manchester without an invitation. Eileen’s mother put him up for the night & it all started there. They married on 14 June 1947 & lived at first in ‘this house’ with Sam’s mother & Jack [<i>Sam’s brother, who has learning difficulties & now lives in Kendal</i>]. They moved to a terraced house in Morecambe when their first child was born, then to Thornton Road with Eileen’s mother, then back ‘here’. Morecambe was nicer than Manchester, though Eileen liked Manchester too & enjoyed playing tennis in the park with friends |
| 04.04 | Sam & Morecambe Trawlers (MT, or Trawlers). Sam (1921 – 1995) loved his job & loved fishing. He was involved with the Central Methodist Church (Eileen was from a Church of England background but changed to Methodism). MT was formed before Eileen’s time [<i>at 2.00.00: in 1919</i>] & run by a collective of fishermen: Sam was Chairman. They had a big building near Morecambe Library where the catch was landed & sold both retail & wholesale – people could see they were getting fresh fish. Sam managed the warehouse for a long time after he had an accident on |

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| | his boat & couldn't go back to fishing. The shop prospered for quite a while but closed down when number of fishermen became depleted. [at 24.00: Eileen worked in the Trawlers offices a couple of days a week, dealing with wages etc] |
| 11.35 | Lancaster & (? North) Western Sea Fisheries (referred to as LSF below). The controlling body for fishermen in the area, implementing legislation (e.g. size of fish that could be caught). Sam was Chair till he retired |
| 13.48 | Boats. Sam & Jack used to fish together. Eileen shows a picture of their first boat – <i>Connie Baxter</i> , named after their aunt. Then came <i>Girl Helen</i> , named after Helen. LSF named one of their patrol boats <i>Samuel Baxter</i> , after Sam, & Eileen launched it at Liverpool – someone had to help her hit the boat with the bottle of champagne! One of the boats is now in Florida |
| 17.48 | Sam's family & his accident. Eileen & Helen show a family tree. Sam's parents were John (Jack), 1894 – 1946, a fisherman, & Rosetta, née Cunningham, from Workington, who worked as a housekeeper / maid. They had 2 surviving children, Sam & Jack. Jack was not a particularly willing worker but by & large a help. He liked to say he'd saved Sam's life after his accident but in fact it was Jack Willacy who'd done most. Sam's leg got caught in a rope round the capstan – the rope was tangled & he kicked it to try & straighten it – & was badly injured. Sam had to have surgery in London & couldn't fish again. Later he lost the leg due to diabetes |
| 25.45 | More about the Baxter's. There were another set of Baxter's at Overton, & another - Sam's cousins – who owned a shrimp shop round the corner. Sam & Eileen had 4 children, & lost one (<i>not clear if 3 or 4 living</i>) – John, Helen, Mark & Sam. John (? <i>deceased</i>) didn't go into fishing but Mark did until he smashed his boat, not covered by insurance; now a taxi driver. (at 2.30.00: <i>Sam is in Australia</i>) |
| 29.20 | Helen's memories. Helen remembers Sam wheeling nets & diesel (tank in back yard) down to the prom in a handcart before he had a car, then out to the boat in a punt. He'd come home frozen to death. Main memory is coming home from school to a huge pile of shrimps on the kitchen table, & not being allowed to play out till they'd all been picked. Sam would hide small coins amongst the shrimps for encouragement. 'Poor Mum' had 2 full sets of heavy knitted clothing to wash & dry every day. Eileen says she was lucky to have the Raeburn & an old-fashioned rail round it. The men wore navy woolly jumpers; thick cord or cotton trousers; yellow oilskins & sou'westers; & thigh boots. Helen also remembers sitting in the corner of the shed where the nets were made & repaired with a shuttle (like knitting), while the men sat round chatting & smoking their pipes. (Eileen tells a story about a young Sam having his hair cut & taking a handful of hair to his balding uncle Tom Baxter, who worked in the netting shop). At the end of the day's fishing Sam would take fish to the Trawlers in the handcart & bring some home. Jack used to try & sell a few fish on the prom (Eileen adds that he shouldn't have). When Helen was 7 or 8 Sam got a little van which made life easier |
| 37.35 | Helen's & Eileen's shrimping memories. Helen went out once or twice on the boat. Jack rowed them out in the punt & they then had to climb on board. Mainly remembers the nets being covered with crabs when they were pulled in, & Sam sitting her on top of the wheelhouse to get away from them. Best bit was having their sandwiches. Sam had a tin can for tea (<i>drink</i>) & reheated it in the water used for boiling shrimps. She got very seasick; Eileen only went once & felt sick so didn't go again. Eileen picked at home, & there was a picking room at the Trawlers where women worked. Other fishermen (e.g. Reg Bailey, David Braid, Jack Willacy) all very nice & decent |
| 44.22 | Set-up at Morecambe Trawlers. Fish were landed straight into main part of building; other rooms off it for picking, cold stores & offices; retail space in open warehouse. Cold place to work in winter. Eileen worked in office but got roped into helping in the shop too – liked it & meeting the public. (see below at 57.55 too) |
| 47.44 | Picking & potting shrimps. The ladies who picked shrimps were on call, depending on size of catch – sometimes agreed to divide work between more people than necessary & each earn less. Not enough to rely on for income. Helen used to help when at school for pin money. Separate potting room. Shrimps potted in pure butter, melted to quite a high temperature with secret spices, including mace, then chilled. Eileen potted shrimps at home too, with salt & pepper & mace, but she & Helen agree best way to eat them is fresh & plain |

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| 52.47 | Domestic life. Family lived largely off fresh fish. Helen didn't appreciate how lucky they were at the time. Eileen: a struggle, but never went without. Couldn't run to luxuries but always had the basics; did a lot of baking to spin things out. She had housekeeping allowance + fish Sam brought home. Sometimes he dug mussels up too. Helen: well fed & well looked after, a very happy childhood |
| 57.55 | Selling fish at MT. Gypsies used to come for eels, otherwise thrown away. Everyone including titled people (Lady Shuttleworth - £100 worth of salmon at a time) and once Eric Morecambe came to buy fish. Also sold wholesale to Young's & other big food manufacturers. One fisherman was dismissed from the co-operative for selling half his catch elsewhere for a better price. Co-op ceased to be in late 1980s. |

Recording 2

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| 00.00 | Early days of MT. Interviewer: looking at article by Tess Pickford. MT set up in 1919. Article quotes Benny Woodhouse on preserving shrimps before refrigeration: rub salt into shrimps, pack into barrels with watertight lids [<i>with water?</i>], turn barrels over so salty water ran right through them. Before they were sold shrimps had to be washed clean: quite a job. Helen remembers Sam talking about time before boats had engines: used to row; still being sailed when she was a child |
| 04.00 | Lifeboat. Sam was responsible for turnouts of lifeboat. Coastguard would ring him then Eileen would ring round crew. Old fishing boat used for rescues before RNLI lifeboat. Before phones rocket would be set off on prom & anyone who could leave work would run to boat. One arrived on a child's bike once – no one had cars. Sam would decide whether there were sufficient crew & if it was safe to launch. Helen would have liked to be on crew – no girls allowed. Rescues included yachts, windsurfers, people on sands, falling off pier. Son / brother Mark won a commendation for rescuing man from sailboard in very stormy sea |
| 09.45 | Baxter fishermen. Mark was 5 th generation of Baxter fishermen – there won't be a 6 th . Family names of previous generations alternated: John / Sam / John / Sam. |
| 11.15 | Fishermen's choir & other social gatherings. Choir still going when Helen was young; sang in (usually Methodist) church at special services, e.g. for lifeboats. V popular & impressive – would travel to perform elsewhere. Otherwise fishermen used to meet on the 'top' – landing jetty at Queen St; sit, chat, smoke pipes & put world to rights; waiting for fishermen who were still fishing to come in & tell them about their catch. Big part of Sam's retirement. When son / brother John was born Sam's mother waited on the 'top' to tell him when he came back from fishing. Sam used to collect Helen from Sunday school & take her there; Eileen got cross because he'd let them run on the sands in their Sunday best & get shoes damp – 2 Sunday schools in those days, am & pm – couldn't get shoes dry again for pm |
| 17.53 | Remembering Sam. Couldn't swim – saw no point as if you fell in the water would fill your thigh boots & you'd drown (but did fall in a couple of times & didn't drown). Weathered it all well – a wonder didn't have more illness. Always expected a hot meal on the table when he came home but Eileen never knew when that would be because of the tides. She had to keep 4 children quiet so he could sleep – went down to shore, or to baths – but 'happy days'. Helen remembers one of his sayings: 'I'd just as well sit in the slitch [<i>mud</i>] wi' no pants on' (as do something he didn't want to – e.g. go to a classical concert). |
| 22.52 | Honours & heritage. Sam was awarded the MBE in 1978 for services to the fishing industry, a very proud moment. Helen & Mark went to London on the train with their parents; ceremony at Buckingham Palace with Duchess of Kent. Eileen got a commendation for fire watching in Blitz with a bucket of sand & a child's spade. Helen: very proud to be part of Baxter family – a wonderful heritage to have, played big part in Morecambe life. Sam (son / brother in Australia) has made a Baxter corner in his house full of memorabilia, & has been to Florida to see the family's former boat |
| 31.20 | Special memories. Eileen: trip to London for MBE; launching the <i>Samuel Baxter</i> . Always something to be proud of with husband & 4 children; v glad to be in the family – all very nice, always welcomed. |