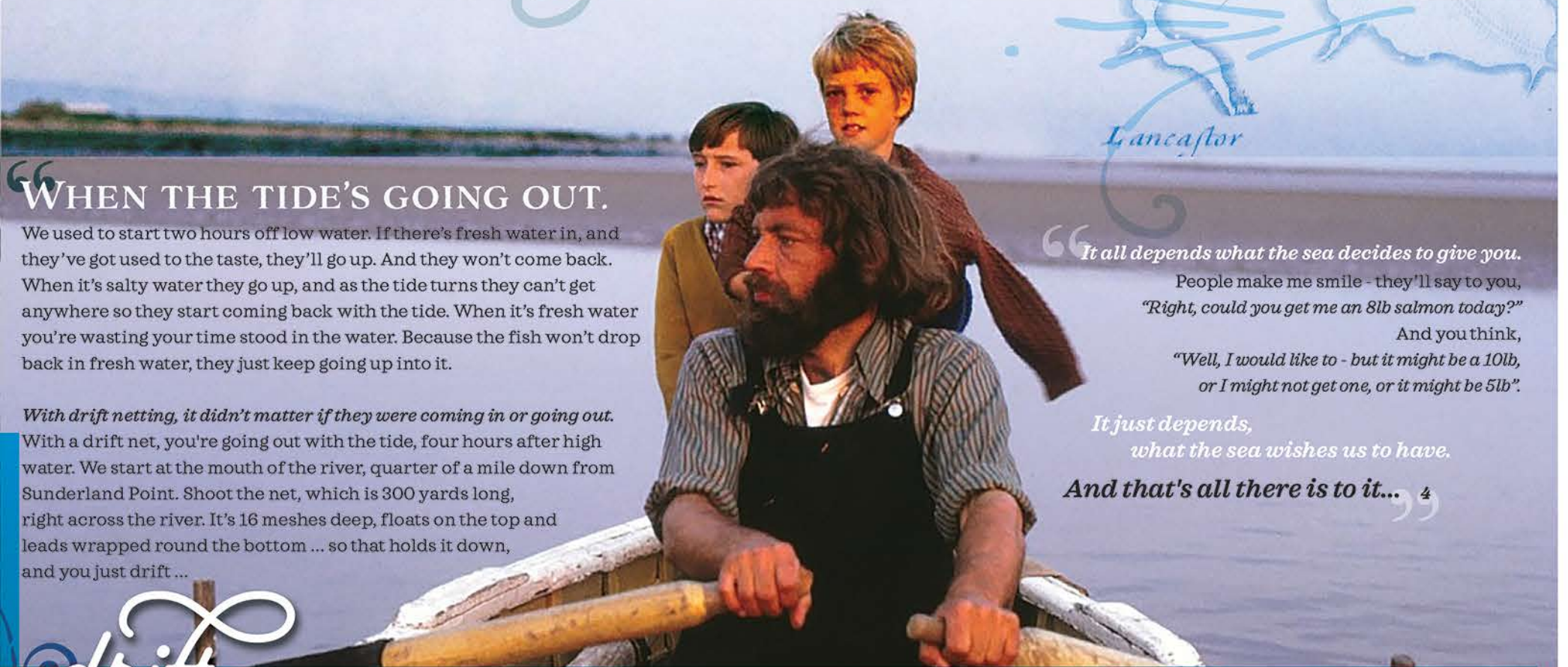


After The Ebb



“WHEN THE TIDE’S GOING OUT.

We used to start two hours off low water. If there's fresh water in, and they've got used to the taste, they'll go up. And they won't come back. When it's salty water they go up, and as the tide turns they can't get anywhere so they start coming back with the tide. When it's fresh water you're wasting your time stood in the water. Because the fish won't drop back in fresh water, they just keep going up into it.

With drift netting, it didn't matter if they were coming in or going out. With a drift net, you're going out with the tide, four hours after high water. We start at the mouth of the river, quarter of a mile down from Sunderland Point. Shoot the net, which is 300 yards long, right across the river. It's 16 meshes deep, floats on the top and leads wrapped round the bottom ... so that holds it down, and you just drift ...

drift freely with the tide...

... We'd probably drift for half a mile. Haul the net. You can see when the fish strike. Most of 'em. Haul the net. Come back to the side. Set off again. You might have two or three goes and get right down into Heysham Lake where the shipping channel is. That's where the main of the fish are, normally.

CALLED THE DROP OFF.

Where it drops, from the river - into the sea. And on a massive tide it could be, as you're going over the drop off, it might be 3ft deep or even less in parts. As you're going over, it'll just drop down to 15ft or 20ft as it goes over this drop off. *And that's your best place to catch the fish.* Normally,

“It all depends what the sea decides to give you.

People make me smile - they'll say to you, “Right, could you get me an 8lb salmon today?”

And you think, “Well, I would like to - but it might be a 10lb, or I might not get one, or it might be 5lb”.

It just depends, what the sea wishes us to have.

And that's all there is to it...”

“Philip Smith, he was Tom Smith's brother ... he was a fisherman. And, I was on 'oliday that week. I worked at Heysham Harbour.

And he said,

“I suppose you'll be down the river, mekkin' a nuisance of yourself!”

I said, “Yes! We will, Philip.”

Anyway, we went down. They went, and we went. We were shrimping. We were shrimping away. And the next thing we looked - and there's Philip, waving.

Waving like mad.

So we went over to him. And I said, “What's wrong?”

“Could you boil me shrimps, I've run out of gas!”

I said, “Oh! I've a spare can 'ere Philip. You can 'ave it.”

So, I give it him. Right. And we left 'im, and away we went.

Anyway, when we come back, we moored up, and he moored up.

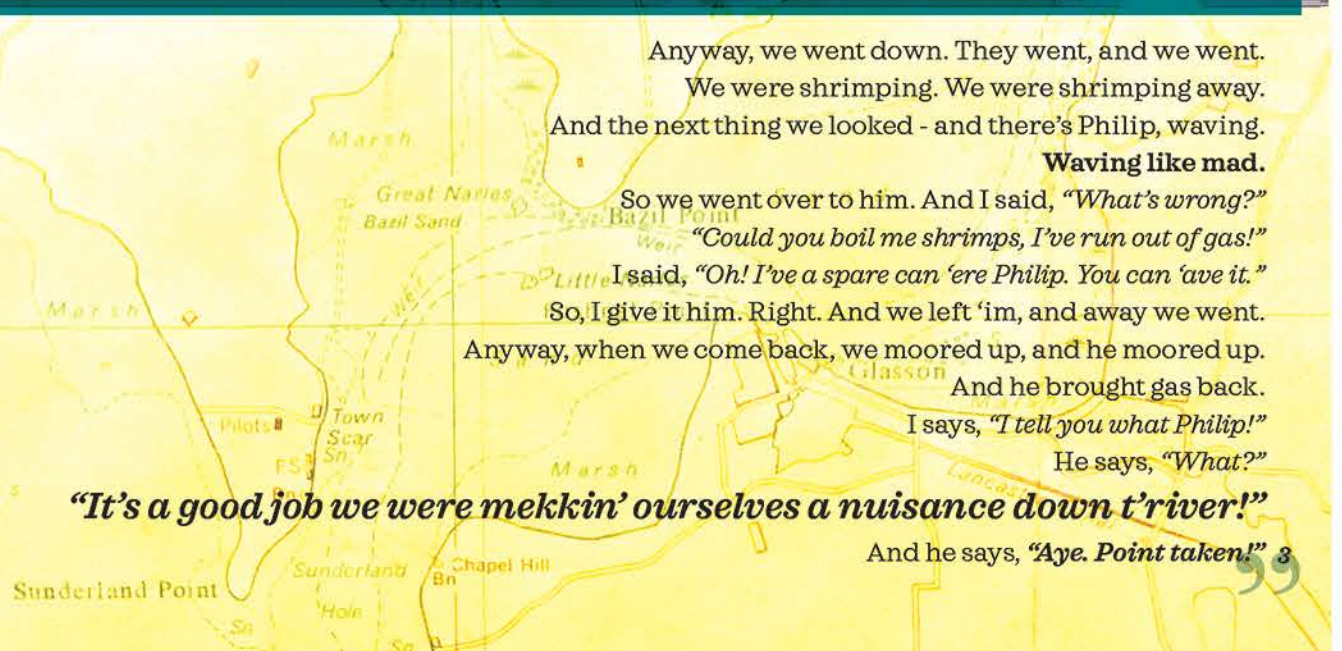
And he brought gas back.

I says, “I tell you what Philip!”

He says, “What?”

“It's a good job we were mekkin' ourselves a nuisance down t'river!”

And he says, “Aye. Point taken!”



“Bill Bailey, he used to have a really big trawler, 60 odd foot, in Glasson Dock. I used to go wi’ ‘im occasionally. And, *Fauna* - it were called. It was a Grimsby registered one. It was when ... there was a lot of fish about.
We used to get a lot of fish.

I’d gone out wi’ ‘im, ‘bout four of us onboard, and we used to go right out. Way out.
You could just see Blackpool Tower.
We were that far out.
Trawlin’ all day. And then come back to Glasson Dock. Mostly in the summer months, when I used to go wi’ him. One haul, he had ‘bout three ton o’ starfish in the catch. The deck used to just be full. A lot of fish about. Plaice. Dabs. Flounders. Whiting. Codling. Sole. Skate. Yeah. It was like a mixed batch.

And ‘e always had a couple of big tubs there wi’ “P.P.” on. Flounders and small plaice, used to just gut ‘em. You’d be stood there gutting for about three hours. I used to enjoy it though, just stood there gutting fish, and wangin’ ‘em - all the small ones - went in them barrels. Big tubs.

And he used to lift ‘em up onto the side of Glasson Dock, and there was always a crowd o’ wimmin. Well, fellas as well. They used to come from Lancaster. I said to ‘im, “What’s P.P. for?”
He said, “*Paupers of the Parish.*”
They used to just come and help thereselves.

Rather than throw ‘em back half dead, he used to put ‘em in these tubs. And they all used to go. They used to just empty the tubs. Wimmin ‘ud come down wi’ bags or baskets - just tek eight or ten fish, and go!

... Tom would go with a horse and cart, down the lane towards Sambo’s grave, and then along the West Shore, up to Middleton Sands ... and then strike out.
Down the sands.
And the quality of shrimps he got were absolutely fantastic, they were like mini langoustines.

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. Because there was a boiler in the washhouse, where they used to wash the clothes. But it had now been put to good use as a shrimp boiler. And ... wonderful, wonderful quality.
On board the boat, you had ... a boiler, and in the early days it was boiled by putting firewood under it.
In a wooden boat!
Latterly, of course, the gas canisters went aboard. But, 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.

“... we used to go from Sunderland, after the tide’d turned, and started going out. And you used to go down to the bottom of the river and then, by ‘time you got down, you’d wait a bit and tide’d be low.
So then you used to start to shrimp when it was low water.

We al’ays started at the top, put the net out. A trawl. A beam it was, at the back of the boat.
And we used to slowly go down to the bottom.
And then, pull it in. And, you’d get rid of all the crabs. Plenty o’ crabs.
And then, we used to put ‘em on top of the engine box and the shrimps - used to riddle them out.
The big ones out of the little ones. And then keep ‘em. You’d do that quite a few trips ... then, if we’d got quite a few shrimps we used to boil ‘em on board.
We ‘ad one of the old gas boilers they used to ‘ave in ‘ouses. We had one of them. It used to work off calor gas.
We’d boil the shrimps as we were still dragging.
And you boiled ‘em - and we always cooled ‘em over the side wi’ salt water. And boiled them in salt water, yeah!
By time we’d finished, we’d be coming back.
Tide’d be flooding, we’d be boiling the last lot.

We’d ‘ave tea. Then we’d start to pick ‘em.
We used to get round t’ table
And that’s what we used to do. *Pick away...*

We’d get most of ‘em done that night then we’d finish ‘em off next day. Next morning, wouldn’t we?
And sell ‘em at the door.
On a Sunday - you could sell ‘em at the door...
Just put a sign “*Fresh Shrimps For Sale*”
And they’d go. People’d knock and tek ‘em.

“... Of course it just natur me and I just loved it. I’ve it was just like a gift from h and I thought,
‘Well. Whatever they can do -
AND SO I DID.

“No, no, never scared o’ water, not in mi own boat even. I used t’ ...we ‘ad to follow these boys t’ go t’ Glasson Dock, we ‘ad. But, comin’ back one day it came very foggy but I knew where I was at with mi instruments told mi, that, so I didn’ worry. No.
Never frightened at all, no.

I can’t swim, nobody could.
Nobody could swim on the Point. An’ if I go on holiday I won’t go in the baths but I would go in the sea.
But not the baths, I never go t’ the baths.
So, jus’ the sea what I go to.

I don’t think anybody ever ... none of them could swim! None of the Smith brothers or mi cousin Harold; he couldn’t swim, mi cousin Thomas couldn’t swim, none of us swam, our parent’s didn’t swim!

I don’ know why that wus; but none of us... an’ I still can’t swim today, but I’m still ‘ere!
‘Ave always felt safe by the water! *Always ... yeah.*
I wouldn’ like t’ live too far from the sea, I wouldn’t.
‘Cause I love it so much! I do.

“Many was the time we walked, 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. You’d have a long Gabardine mac, I’d have one of me dad’s old sou’westers. I still have one upstairs.

And ... 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. 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.

“It’s haaf netting, yes. I carry an 18ft 6” pole. You’ve got to imagine a goal post like on a football field. But imagine it’s 18ft 6” long, and about waist high. I carry it on my back down to the water, I edge into the water, and I wait for the fish to go up the river.
And that’s when I catch the fish.

Sometimes they go past your net and you can just feel them touch.
Other times it’s so hard they nearly knock you over.
Then you’re fighting to catch them.
And they’re fighting to get free.

Some of them are 20lb.
It’s a heck of a time, really!
And the adrenaline is unbelievable.
Even now when I catch a fish, when I’ve finished and put it on the line at the back my legs are shaking with the adrenaline.

The excitement is overwhelming.
It really is.

“Oh. Night’s lovely.

It’s a different world altogether. It’s quiet, for one thing. I’m so quiet in the water that ...

One year, I was so quiet I turned around and there was about twenty little shelducks all over the back of me net.

I had to shoo them off! ‘Cause I thought that I’d hurt them if I lifted them.

And the other year - the otter came in the night.

And now, when a fish is swimming towards you it puts a thing out called an acker. It’s like a ‘v’ on the top of the water.

You can see the water moving when it’s quiet. And I was stood in the water and I’m thinking,

“Oh my God. If this salmon is as big as this I’m never going to hold it.”

I was nearly sweating and me heart was beating, and the moon was up, and I could see this acker coming towards me.

It just got in front of me and I didn’t know really if I was panicking or not, to tell you the truth.

And then it disappeared. And I thought - ‘where’s it gone?’

And I looked round, and back of the net was an otter. It hadn’t been a fish, it had been this otter swimming down.

Yeah, it was amazing. Totally amazing.

The kind of fishing I do I stand in the water four hours a day, twice a day minimum.

From June, July and August. And I stand up to my waist and deeper in the water.

Morning, noon and night. And to explain it to you is just like - imagine going to

Disneyland, or your best fantasy. And to me that’s it.

You see stars that you’ll never think could ever happen showering down on you.

You see otters swimming to you in the dark. You see rainbows that are upside down,

or little circle rainbows. You see clouds that you couldn’t possibly describe.

They’re just like little angels floating around really ...

**And it’s a wonderful world the water.
But you’ve got to have great respect for it, really.**

**really came to
got to tell you
heaven to me**

I can.’

**“Reg Bailey once said to me - he said,
“I’ll tell you something Margaret”, he said.**

**“You’ll look down and you’ll have barnacles on your legs,
because you’ve never been out of the water!”**

I was obsessed with the haaving.

I was never out. I was in all the time.

And, do you know?

**I took that as an absolute honour,
that he said that to me. I did!**

Yeah! I had barnacles on me legs.

In the front room, which was very tiny, by the fire place, he had a hook.

And he used to knit his nets from there to the door.

You hadn’t to go in when he was knitting them.

Me Dad. He used to knit them there.

And his sister, who lived in our ‘ouse ... she did his needles.

Filled his needles for him. And he filled some.

And I did some. *But they weren’t tight enough.*

He did show me how to knit a net. That’s what he did.

That was the winter. That’s how he spent his winter, doing that.

And then in the summer, he used to take them out, and in front of the house.

Right along the green - so far along. They used to ... what they call ‘steeling on’.

Used to have a rope that went along, and the nets used to fasten them on.

So many on, and then a piece of lead. **And that was called steeling on.**

“I did nearly drown once.

That was just a mishap.

I’d been fishing with a haaf beam, the 18’6” beam.

And I edged my way across the river.

Which I shouldn’t have done. *But you do.*

And this particular day, we’d had a storm the day before.

As I was coming back with the beam,

I stepped back where I have always done.

But there was a hole.

And as I went down the net wrapped round my feet.

To keep me warm in those days I had chest waders, and

a fluffy suit underneath. It just would soak water up...

A chap, another chap that was haaving with me,
he ran up the shore.

And he left me floating down the river.

I grabbed his beam.

The trouble was he went to call the Coast Guard.

But me and Trevor *are* the local, first call, Coast Guard

shouts. So, I knew that the Coast Guards would be trying

to ring *our* house to tell *me* to go and look.

They sent the Lifeboat straight away because by now I’m
sort of floating down ... the suit was pulling me down.

All you can see is water.

And luckily for me - there was a chap called

Dick Worthington fishing over by the Lighthouse.

Who couldn’t swim - right.

And yet he waded out with his haaf net beam, caught

hold of me and dragged me in.

I mean, I was unconscious by now.

But - this is the funny side right.

We had an old fisherman called Harold

Gardner. After they took me to hospital

and I came home.

The next day, I had to go and apologise to him!

Because, as the boat had come up to see if it
could save me, it cut through his net.

And to make matters worse, on the way back it
had cut through it again.

I had to go and apologise for being saved...

And I did go back in the next day to fish.

So I was OK. *It didn’t put me off.*

When I was floating down, I must say.

The only thing I could think of was that,

I used to think ...

I hope that, you know - I could live just to

see my grandchildren be born - you know ...

So, now.

Now - we’ve got nine between us.

I always think - this is just lovely.

I’ve got my wish.

“... it's always nice to come home.

And, 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.

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.”



“

It's just all been an adventure. And that's what everybody should do.

HAVE AN ADVENTURE.

Always think.

That yesterday you can't alter. Today's OK.

But tomorrow's an adventure, isn't it? 4

“

It's a stand out memory every day 'ere!

We have some good laughs. Yeah.

We have some right good fun.

Going out in some weather when you shouldn't.

That's the only trouble wi' drift netting for salmon.

The rougher it is, the more fish you get.

And, we go out when nobody else is out.

You know. And you're in, like, 20ft long open boat.

You've to 'ave your wits about you. It's a bit rough.

You always 'ave bad times, but you forget all the bad times.

You always have bad days where things go wrong.

Rope round propellers.

Running aground.

Or, net getting all rolled up.

You know. But you get used to it, don't you?

IT DON'T MATTER 'OW GOOD YOU ARE.

YOU NEVER STOP LEARNING WHEN YOU'RE FISHING.

Something will always go wrong.

And nine times out of ten, it's when it's going dark.

Leaving things to the last minute. 5

“... we had a friend, he lived in Heysham Village, and he had a house.

A bungalow - just off Knowlys Road. It looked right over the Bay, lovely bungalow ...

Anyway, he used to come to Sunderland on his bike, and we got talking to him, didn't we?

We made a friend of 'im, and he used to come every other Sunday, didn't he?

PARADISE ISLAND. He called it.

And I used to say, *'What about yours?'*

'Oh. But this is better.'

And sometimes he used to come, he used to sit on 'Point end, there.

Just past the houses, and sit there.

He said, *"Paradise"* he said.

NOBODY. QUIET. DESERTED.” 8

