

After the Ebb

IT'S JUST A WAY OF LIFE.

It's what we've been brought up wi' ... me son's followin' on.

Hopefully there'll be a living to be made at it.

But ... it gets 'arder and 'arder all t'time.

So, we'll just 'ave to wait and see.

You'll be lucky if there's 6 full time fisherman now.

Whereas, in father's day there'd probably be at least 20.

I can remember a tale that 'e used to tell when there was twenty one horses and carts.

All in a row - going shrimping ...

It must 'ave been a sight to see.

What is it they talk about?

Wooden 'orses and iron men, is it? Aye.

WOODEN 'ORSES AND IRON MEN.

Well, that's what they used to say about people out 'ere on t'Bay, like.

You know. Hard life, and that.

They used to call 'em ...

wooden 'orses and iron men.

TO GO OUT THERE,

AND STAY OUT THERE

ALL THAT TIME.

As I say ...

they used to have it to do, didn't they?

You just took it for granted like, didn't ya? Yeah. You went fishing ...

COS IT'S ALL SAND OUT HERE.

When you talk about it. You say, "Are you going to 'sand today?"

You don't say, "Are you going fishing today?" You say, "Are you going to t' sand?"

we always call it going to 'sands

From the age of about five I went shrimpin' ...

Really, it was just a big adventure when you're a child.

You're allowed to drive the tractor, you know.

If you start to get a bit more confident - you can drive a bit further.

And I think that was the big thing - was driving the tractor.

Because you were out on the sands and two hundred square miles of nothing ...

IT WAS REALLY AN EXPERIENCE OF A LIFETIME.

It's just absolutely magnificent out on Morecambe Bay,

you can't describe it ... you'd have to go out there.

Some of the sunsets, some of the sun rises.

It can also be pretty 'orrendous out there.

And you've got to know what you're doing.

Nothing special.

I were Jack Burrow's daughter and part of a fishing family. And I was just there.

JUST THERE. THAT WAS IT.

There was nothing ... I wasn't making any statement.

Absolutely not.

I were just a fourteen year old kid, out wi' me Dad, enjoying meself. Because I liked being out there.

I never thought ...

I mean sex discrimination wasn't a word that was out there then when I was fourteen. Sex discrimination only entered the vocabulary in the '70s.

I certainly wasn't out there making a statement or a point.

I WAS JUST A KID. THAT'S ALL.

“The first boiling is in freshwater. Morecambe lads they boil in salt water. Completely different. *Ours are a sight better than the Morecambe fella's!* They keep a lot better - that's why we do it. One of the reasons is - we don't boil at sea. We fetch them home to boil. Whereas the Morecambe lads - they boil on board the boat. So they've got plenty of water there ... but they don't keep the same when they've been boiled in the salt water. *No.*”

It is very labour intensive is making a pot o' shrimps. You wouldn't believe, if you went out and did it ... Anybody saying they're dear - they want to bloody well try it, don't they! It's not an easy way to make a living. Yeah, down to the fact that they are a lot of work to do. But, they are delicious.

“Put skin on yer back like velvet - and mek you sleep wi'out snorin'!”

That's what 'owd Les used to tell 'em. On Kendal market. 5

“Left school on the Friday. Went cockling on the Saturday. They offered me jobs in Barrow shipyard. I could've gone there. In them days you could get a job at anything. ***All I wanted to do was to go out there.***” 6



“MUSSELING. THAT'S RATHER DANGEROUS. Compared to cockling.

Because musseling, especially in January and February - the best mussels are always at the ebb. Usually seven or eight hours ebb. *Which is ALWAYS in the dark.* It's nearly always working in the night or early mornings. ***And it's pitch black.***

The best mussels are always the ones that are in the water the longest. So when we mussel we go on the biggest tides. It comes in more, but it also goes out more. So a lot of the time, some of the mussels aren't exposed for weeks on end.

You'll go on these big tides and you'll mebbe have an hour's working before the tides coming back.

We call it the 'dash for the cash'. 8

“IT WASN'T LIKE A NINE TO FIVE. *You'd go as and when the tide was in or out.* Sometimes we'd go out with one tide, in the boat. And come back with the next. So, we'd be out for some time.

What I liked about going out in the boat, especially at night and coming back at night with the tide, was we used to ride the tidal bore.

You'd get all the phosphorescence on the bow.

It was brilliant.

Seeing and hearing this roar.

You didn't 'ave to row.

You thought you had a super-duper outboard motor on the back of the boat - pushing you through.

It was brilliant.

You'd have to be careful that you didn't go over it.

Otherwise, I think it'd swamp you when it came back. 2

“The jumbo, it was ... invented 'ere. In me grandfathers time. Before that they used to drag 'em out of t'sand, rake 'em straight out of t'sand. Or get 'em wi what we call a *craam* which is a three pronged little fork and they would hook 'em out. You could see t'eyes o' cockles - what we call groatin' - when it squirts its water out, and you'd pick 'em one at a time.

And one day, they'd took a feed for the 'orse in an old galvanised bath tin. And two lads got in and wobbled it about a bit and these cockles come up.

So this fella thought, *“Well, I'll mek a board like that!”*

Put some handles on it.

And that was the invention of the jumbo.

So the story goes. 6

“THERE WAS A LOT OF FIGHTING.

But, if ever you needed owt there was help available.

But, it may or may not have been wi' somebody that you had an ongoing feud with.

I mean, you laugh at these things ... they weren't particularly serious in the sense that it wasn't the wild west.

But as he says, you're out on the sand, and particularly when you're getting into the mechanical age.

If the tractor stops, for whatever reason, you've a long walk and you're leaving a lot of money behind.

AND ANYBODY.

EVEN YOUR WORST ENEMY, WOULD PULL YOU 'OME. 3

“There's tales ... it might have been me father that telt me. Tales that many a time through the neet. Say they'd done well through the day and thought, *“Well we'll do a sight better at neet in t'dark”* ***They'd put sacks round the 'orses 'oooves so as they didn't mek any noise going down road ...***

YOU COULDN'T DO NOWT IN FLOOKBURGH WITHOUT SOMEBODY KNOWING, YOU KNOW.

Twitchy curtains. A small community.

No television - no noise or owt like.

If tha 'eard a hoof,

“Where's tha going?”

“What they on wi'?”

Well our father said ... well, he's done it his self. Tied hessian sacks round 'orses hooves

So as they didn't mek any noise when they was going down the street.

And he could get away wi'out anybody knowing. 5

“Used to go wi' me grandad. They wouldn't let me go by me'self for a long while. *There are good reasons for that.* They didn't generally go in ones because if somebody gets stuck they need some help, and while there's a lot of rubbish talked about quicksand in the Bay, there is mud that you can get stuck in. ***And it moves about.***

You get things that they call flow holes.

You get turbulent water and it will scour a hole and then as the tides change, the hole will fill with mud.

So you've now got a big depression, filled with mud.

At certain times on a very low tide it'll put a two or three inch skim of semi-solid sand over the top of it. So, you can actually walk across it quite often.

Then you'll realise it's wobbly.

But - you ride into that wi' a tractor, it's just ... ***GULG!*** You're straight into the hole.

Your tractor hits the mud, your wheels go round.

BUT YOU DON'T GO ANYWHERE.

In the good old days, the horses had a bit more sense than a tractor. When they put their foot on that they would, what they used to call, they would ***STRIKE.***

The 'orse would sort of ... get on wi' it.

I mean it can't go backwards cos everything's behind it, but they would strike out, and go.

No matter what the driver was telling them to do.

The 'orse knows its on something that won't support it, and it would be doing its damndest to get out. They knew which way to turn.

To deeper or shallower water.

So the horse saved itself a lot of the times, and you with it. 3

“Just melted the butter and boiled them up in butter.
And added the spices.
Cayenne pepper, white pepper and nutmeg or mace.
We just did ‘em to our taste, didn’t we, really?
And then you seal ‘em wi’ butter.

It was done originally cos there was no fridges and
freezers. It was done to keep ‘em.

Seal ‘em wi’ butter. 7

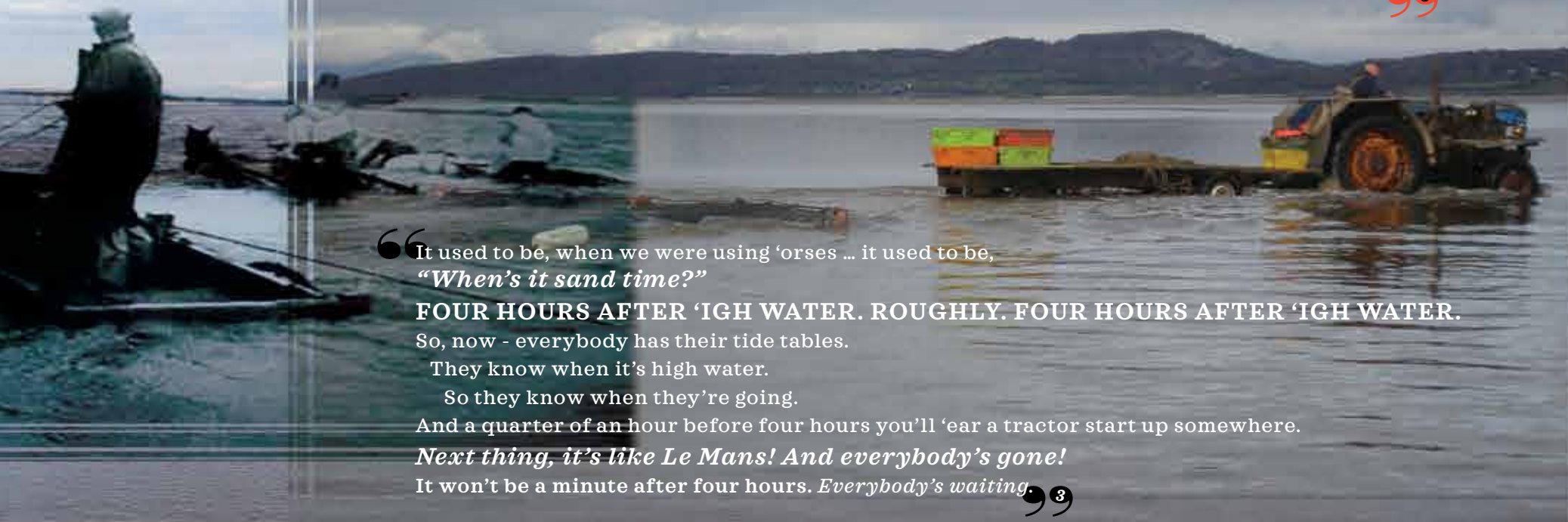
“IT’S MORE CHALLENGING IS SHRIMPING.
With cockles and mussels - once the beds are
established and they open them to go fishing it’s just a
matter of physically getting ‘em.

Whereas with shrimping, there’s more skill to it.
The same with setting nets.
There’s a lot of skill in that.

*Anyone can set a net - but it doesn’t necessarily
mean they’re gonna catch anything!*
A lot of it’s a waiting game setting beach nets.

Traditionally in summer time there’s a lot of muck
floating about. Bits of seaweed and jellyfish ...
All sorts of things like that, which clog the nets up.
Then all of a sudden it sort of clears out.
AND YOU’VE GOT TO BE READY THEN.

You can set ‘em on top of a bank and your nets can get
buried. A good fisherman could set ‘em, mebbe
quarter of a mile away and his are nice and clean.
You’ve gotta know how the water’s running. 8



“It used to be, when we were using ‘orses ... it used to be,
“When’s it sand time?”

FOUR HOURS AFTER ‘IGH WATER. ROUGHLY. FOUR HOURS AFTER ‘IGH WATER.

So, now - everybody has their tide tables.
They know when it’s high water.

So they know when they’re going.
And a quarter of an hour before four hours you’ll ‘ear a tractor start up somewhere.
Next thing, it’s like Le Mans! And everybody’s gone!
It won’t be a minute after four hours. *Everybody’s waiting.* 3

“I don’t know what age I was,
but I didn’t know the way ‘ome from Cartmel.
*But that didn’t matter, cos you’re on the ‘orses back and
it knew where it was going...*
And don’t let anybody believe that a ‘orse is nice to
ride, cos they’re not! They shatter yer spine.

I got all the way to Ravenstown corner, and ...
Stupid thing - you should never ever do it.
I’d wrapped the binding, the twine, round me hand.
And as it come past the corner, it put its ‘ead down.
Well, I went straight over the top. SMACK.
Right outside Auntie Nellie’s.
Hit the ground. Blood pouring out of various parts of
me. Sat there yowlin’. And the ‘orse stands and looks
at me for about half a minute, and then got bored.

*It just walked off.
It went ‘ome on its own. Left me.* 3

“They used to have a sidings at Cark station, just
specially for cockles and fish - the ‘Fish Side’ they
called it.
THAT’S NOT THERE NOW SADLY.
They used to send ‘em away down there in bags.
A lot of tonnes as well, I believe.

Many a time they used to gather cockles in winter.
They would gather cockles, put ‘em on t’train and
they would end up down in these mill towns.
And many a time, you got a letter back ... to say they’d
been condemned.

So, you’d ‘appen do all that work, a couple o’ days
work, and pay to get ‘em on t’train.
Then you’d get a letter back.
NO MONEY.
They’d been condemned.

Now, whether they ‘ad or whether they ‘adn’t you
would never find out cos you ‘ad no means of getting
down there. So, they’d ‘appen selt the cockles and not
paid you for ‘em.

I said to our father,
“Well, I wouldn’t have sent ‘em anymore.”
He says,
“Well when there was nowt else. Thou ‘ad to send ‘em.”

Hunger’s a sharp thorn, as they say. 5

“IDON’T THINK YOU’D BE SWIMMIN’.
The way tide comes in down there I don’t think you’d
‘ave much chance of swimming anywhere.

We were down one morning and we were waiting.
Our Michael was just a bit further down and I’d
pulled out and I was waiting for him.
I was stood riddling at back of me tractor and tide
come, *and it got to running.*
It ran me chassis in and I jumped on tractor.
I just pulled out and got onto the top, and all the water
lifted high and mebbe a good quarter of a mile wide.

I set off wi’ tractor doing 20 mile an hour.
I kept looking back, and it was still there.
Kept looking. *“Aye, it’s still there.”*
Tractor was doing 20 mile an hour.
The tide was keepin’ up to me.
QUITE FRIGHTENING. 6

“I remember when I was young, not four or five - but
young, sort of still in single figures.
I went shrimping with me Dad.
And I was sitting in the front, and we’d gone on a
night time, which you don’t often do.
*It’s only certain times of the year when you get the
shrimps coming to the side and you trawl in shallower
water in the dark.*

And we were ... he was fishing ... and I was sitting on
the front. As I say, you go down - you’re going the
same way as the water. *You just have to go a bit faster
than the flow of the water.*

And when you fish the net you actually stop - and the
net is easier to pull back up to the cart. Then the
fisherman has to lean over and get hold of the top of
the beam and lift it up onto the back of the cart.
At which point the ‘orse has to set off so that the net
itself doesn’t go underneath the cart and get tangled
up. And, all the fisherman would do is it just - *click.*
You know, *“Click! Click!”* and ‘orse would set off.
Just as you’re lifting it up - you’re going, *“Click! Click!”*
and ‘orse would set off and everything’s fine.

Well I was sitting up the front and me Dad’s leaning
over the back and I just went, *“Click! Click!”*
‘ORSE SET OFF!
And ‘e went headfirst off the back into waist deep
water! In the middle of November. Night. Stars out.
*You could ‘ear ‘is castanets chattering all the
way ‘ome!*

And I wasn’t in good order for a while... 3

“Shrimps are a mollusc. They eat muck really.
They’re on the seabed eating whatever.
They’re not keen on plastic - which is a big bain ...
I HATE THE STUFF.

Everytime you get little bits of plastic and I know the
bigger fish must be getting ‘em - *they can’t be filtering
all that out, can they?*
And, it’s a big problem is plastic.
Everywhere you go.
And it’s got worse really, ‘asn’t it?
PLASTIC BAGS. PLASTIC CUPS. PLASTIC BOTTLES.
It’s everywhere now.

You set yer nets you know, for the flounders - we set
nets for flukes - and the amount of ruddy bits of
plastic and plastic bags, carrier bags ...
Well, everything’s bloody plastic these days isn’t it? 1

**“I’ve always just wanted to go to ‘sands.
Ever since I was a child.
I feel quite privileged.**

You’ll talk to people in your life, and you’ll talk to someone and they’ll say they’ve worked in Glaxo or Sellafield or wherever and they’ve ‘ated it.

I’ve ALWAYS known what I wanted to do.

And I can remember going to school, about thirteen, fourteen and there was three of us called in and the jobs career lady came in and she said, “What do you want to do?” And there was a farmer’s son and he was going to be a farmer and I was going to be a fisherman and can’t remember what the other lad ... his Dad was a mechanic I think ... She said, “Don’t you want to do anything else?” And I said, “No. No.”

I never have had the urge to do anything else.
Just go fishing. It’s great. 8

“Cockling was a very hard job, manual hard job.
And sometimes the sand could be nearly as hard as concrete.
You were banging on it and it would be really hard, and sometimes it would be quite soft and sort of half quicksand, if you like.
But I remember saying to my Uncle Bill one day, “Eeh, it’s hard here, Uncle Bill,” and he’d say, “Aye, but tha’ll have to be as hard as it is,”
And that was all the answer you got.
NO SYMPATHY AT ALL.

And if you were going out early in the morning, say three or four o’clock in the morning, they’d just give you a shout and you’d to bounce out of bed and go.
But I really enjoyed it.

I enjoyed working with those men who’d been been fishermen all their lives and knew every aspect of it, and one learnt quickly from people with that experience. 4

“It was all ‘orses and carts when I left school.
I don’t know ... there’d mebbe be at least fifty ‘orses in this village.
I’d see as many as thirty going out there at once, ‘orses and carts.

We’d two ‘orses when I left school and then by time I got to about sixteen or seventeen tractors were coming in. A few ‘ad messed about wi’ tractors a bit earlier on. One reason they come in, winter of ‘63...
it was just like being in Antarctica out here, ice flows forever more.

We were cockling out from Silverdale down there, and that become all tractor work. You had to have a tractor. And we got on wi’ using tractors then and when we come back to work ‘ere we just got on wi’ tractors and ‘orses went out of date.

Everything changes. I suppose it’s for the better.
It’s called progress, isn’t it? 6

“LEARN OR DIE!

If you go often enough you find out where yer are.
One of the things, if you go often enough - and in those days people were going regularly.
And you might or might not realise it but - there’s a lot of sand out there and sometimes there’s a bit of water!
The water tends to make ridges on it. ‘Owever, when you go out with a tractor - you leave two lines.
And when you come back you leave two lines. And so does anybody else.
And one tide going over it doesn’t actually tek that off ...
You get miles of where there’s just a shiny path. It doesn’t show you as a road, it doesn’t show you as wheel marks.
But where wheel marks ‘ave been you get like a different texture in the sand. And, if you recognise it - it’s a road.
You get a shiny path. And it’s the same for shrimping at night.

You can see quite clearly ... in starlight where there’s a silver ribbon

Which is where people ‘ave been earlier in the day, on the day tide. Or even a day or two ago.
This used to be handy thirty years ago when there was thirty or forty people going.
Now there’s three, four, five - it doesn’t leave the same trails.
BUT WHAT YOU ‘AVE IS ... PROBABLY THE WORST INVENTION EVER ... THE G P S. 3



Newspaper Designed and Compiled by Kate Drummond : www.tickled-pink.org
Using excerpts of oral histories recorded for Morecambe Bay Partnership’s Catching Tales project
by Ged Benson¹, Hilda Burrow², Bill Butler & Derek Butler³, Jack Manning⁴, Ian McLure⁵,
John Wilson⁶, June Wilson⁷ & Michael Wilson⁸.
Photographs courtesy of Peter Cairns 2020Vision, Cumbria Image Bank, Jack Manning & John Kingston.

