

SET ONE



THE
FISHING HUT

THE FISHING HUT

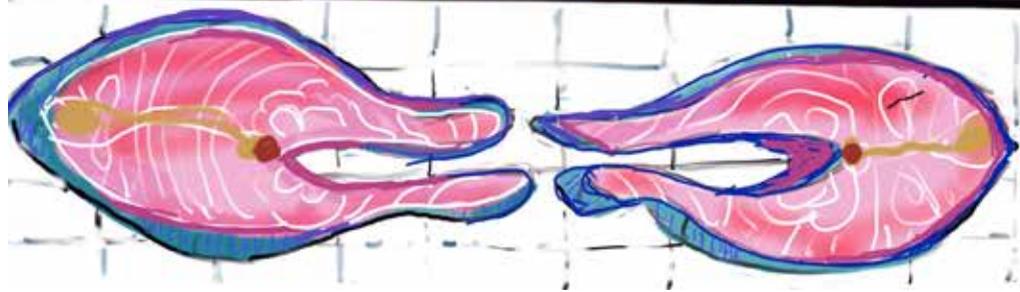
Set one : 1

Between 2015 and 2017 Morecambe Bay Partnership (MBP) www.morecambabay.org.uk recruited a volunteer team to gather an audio archive about the history of fishing around the Bay. Guided by Jenn Mattinson, over 50 hours of interviews is now stored and filed, available as a unique resource for the community and researchers. In 2017 as part of their Headlands to Headspace Landscape Partnership Scheme MBP invited artists to respond to the archive and create artworks. We, Hannah Fox and John Fox were two of those commissioned. Given the responsibility of distilling and disseminating aspects of this rich source we have chosen this approach:

During Summer 2018 The Fishing Hut, a handcrafted travelling shed, will appear at locations round the Bay. Visitors are invited inside to enjoy a kaleidoscope of Hannah's short animated films and John's small illustrated stories set on 20 large cards. We have each chosen archival aspects with relevance for today. Hannah has taken The Child's Eye View, exploring growing up as a child where work and play intertwine. John has looked at knowledge and attitudes to be recalled and celebrated today. In seeking '*the essential truth*' different tales have on occasion been amalgamated and simplified to re-emerge as useful fables. Individual credits are given where appropriate. Huge thanks to everyone who generously offered their experiences for us to trawl.

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SALMON IN THE PRAM

Set one: 2

When I was a little girl Mam would push me out in my pram. *Morning Charlie* she would say to the policeman. *Morning Mrs Butterworth*. He had no idea there was a salmon under my pillow and she was going to the pub to sell it. My Dad poached salmon. Bailiffs often hid in the bushes hoping to catch him.

I was so close to those fish, I can smell them now. Where do these beautiful creatures come from? Where do they go? Once I looked up, the sky was pink and sliced, just like scales of a fish. After years at sea the salmon return to the Lune, to the river of their birth, to spawn. Leaping over any barrier, hurling themselves many feet out of the water until they get to the top, or die of exhaustion. No turning back. For centuries returning to their ancestral channels. We catch them. It is brutal but necessary. A few fishermen with a licence still fish for salmon, using a selected net. They are caught by their gills in the right size mesh. Then a quick blow with 'the priest' a weighted wooden cosh. When Dad died we had a salmon in the freezer. Big as a submarine. Saved it for couple of weeks while he was ill. Seemed right to eat it at the funeral tea. That salmon fed 30 people. It was really delicious. Dad would have been so proud.



CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR Set one: 3

Credit: Charlie Overett

When I was in the Merchant Navy I travelled the world and had many close calls. Seamen often describe themselves as God fearing men. Not so much because they go to church or believe in an old man in the sky but rather because having survived storms with waves as big as houses they recognize the power of nature and value luck. There are many superstitions. If you are born with a membrane (caul) covering your face they say you will never drown. Once they fetched a price as lucky charms. And you are never supposed to bring a pig on board.

When I was a lot younger we had a couple of nice surprises. It was a calm day and I was just settling into a brew and a bacon sandwich. Ken said its like being on holiday. Be nice though if we had some girls for company he joked. Then we heard the shrieking. Sirens? There they were. Right before us. Two young women in bikinis. They were in a dingy and got blown way off shore. So we rescued them! They were very lucky. Then later we had an even bigger surprise. Very big. I have seen big things in the ocean. Whales and sea lions and even a giant squid for example. But never an elephant! Two of them straight ahead. Luckily we veered past. Circus people at Blackpool had brought them to the shallows for a bath. The sea always keeps you guessing.

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A GIFT FROM HEAVEN

Set one: 4

Credit: Margaret Owen

My father was a gravedigger, then for 30 years Verger at our local church. My gift from heaven was fishing. Guess I just slipped into the water and never slipped out. It's another magical world. Night and day, day after day, I wade four hours on end, waist deep. Probably the only woman doing this. Rainbows in puddles, otters and seals swimming by, tiny clouds floating like angels and at night with no light pollution the stars shower down and the sea glows luminous green with phosphorescence.

Like farming we worked the seasons. June, July and August salmon and sea trout. September and October shrimps and in the colder months shellfish. With Trevor my husband we worked long hours, often away, musseling, cockling in Scotland and at the same time I also worked for 30 years as dentist's receptionist two days a week.

At Sunderland Point on the edge of the River Lune I stand inside a haaf net suspended from an 18ft birch pole across my back. A Viking system threatened by Environment Agency rules. Annual license £300. Best on the ebb tide catching salmon as they return to the sea. The fiercer the weather the better. Fish like waves. You fight to catch them, they fight to get free. A 20lb salmon is something. Adrenalin is unbelievable. Your legs shake. Even shrimping is great. I did the riddling. You never know what's coming in the net. Depends on what the sea decides to give you. Or wishes you to have!

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RULES and REGULATIONS

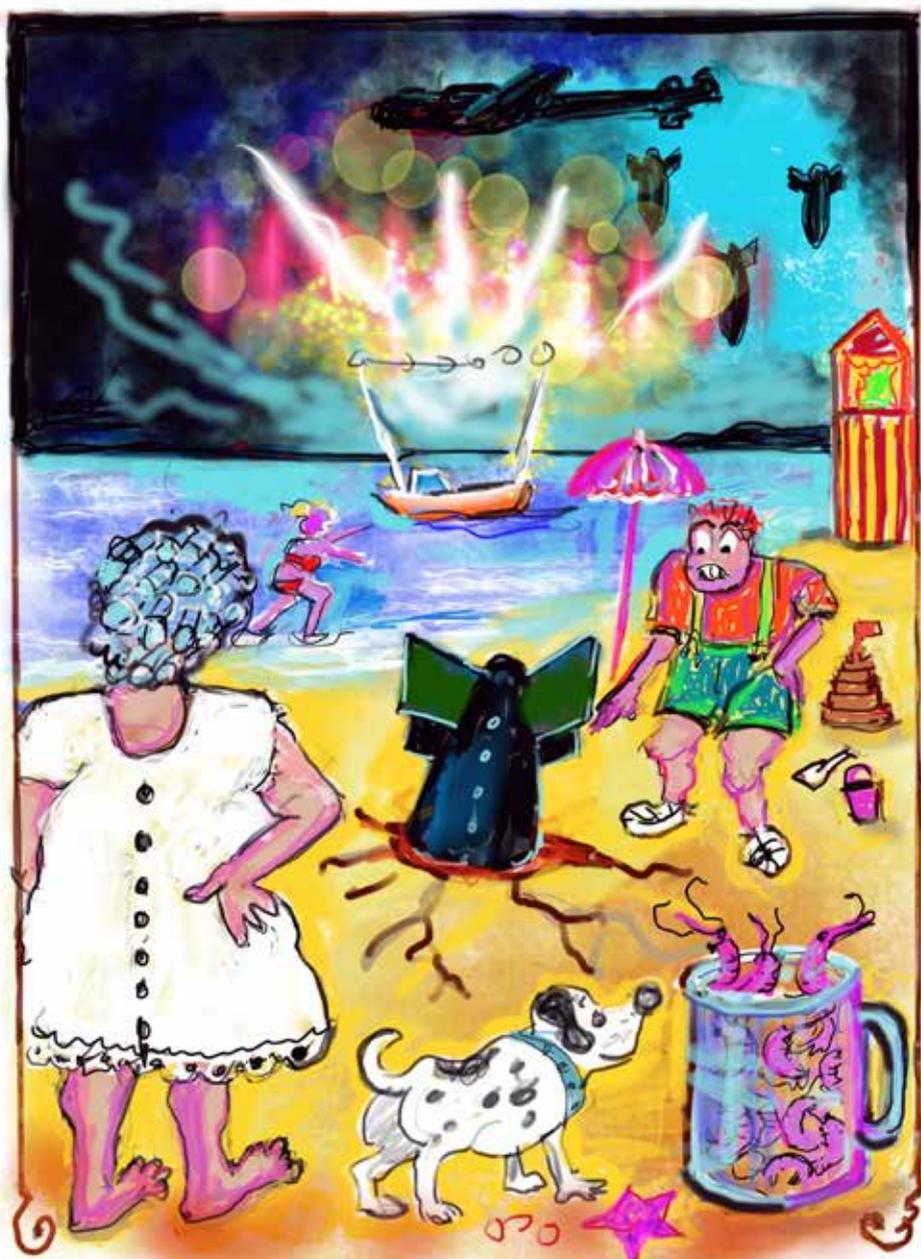
Set one: 5

The North West Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority NWIFCA was set up in 2011. Its current 39 page document, published in 2017, lists all the Byelaws necessary to achieve its goals and which fishermen must adhere to. These are enforced by its uniformed officers with Byelaws regarding:

- Maximum permitted length of mechanical, propelled vessels and engine size.
- Areas these vessels may and may not fish in and the dates when this is prohibited.
- Maximum length of a single net and the required distance between nets and statutory mesh sizes.
- Mandatory depth of water above the nets at any state of the tide.
- Marking and siting of fixed nets, traps, pots and lines must adhere to the regulations.

Whilst fishing controls are appropriate to conserve fish stocks and to eliminate the Wild West previous chaos of cockle fishing, for example, the regulations put considerable pressure onto the remaining fishermen in Morecambe Bay. Fishing like other hard and skilled trades was a family based way of life and often the only work available. Now a highly regulated industry with fewer fishermen half a century ago, the post-Brexit future is uncertain.

"DON'T BRING IT IN!"



DON'T BRING IT IN!

Set one: 6

Credit. Name withheld

I'm 83. Life has its ups and downs. The war was hard. You weren't supposed to have any lights on the boats but often it was like fairyland. The Germans took notice once. They were circling the Bay. I was in bed. There was a big whoosh outside. Our lad ran out of the house. *Mam Mam, there's a bomb.* I said: *Don't bring it in!*

If it had gone off it would have cleared a mile. She was embarrassed. Her nightie was on the wrong way round, her teeth left on the dresser.

Morecambe was bombed three times. An elderly couple Mr and Mrs Hewitt were blown from their beds and killed. 40,000 plus civilians were killed in air raids in Britain but not many here. The Government moved in 5000 civil servants.

Our lads helped each other, didn't fight much. But agreed *If you catch a fish it's yours.* They once scrapped over a sea bass. Dad was a big man and pulled them apart. Joe's head was under water. Dad yanked him out with his walking stick. We survived and were happy. Not well off, made the best of it. You can always sell a can of shrimps...when they're running of course. My husband left. Had another woman. *You can come back but you have to do as I say.* Well he did come back but I was out shopping.

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EELS IN THE KITCHEN

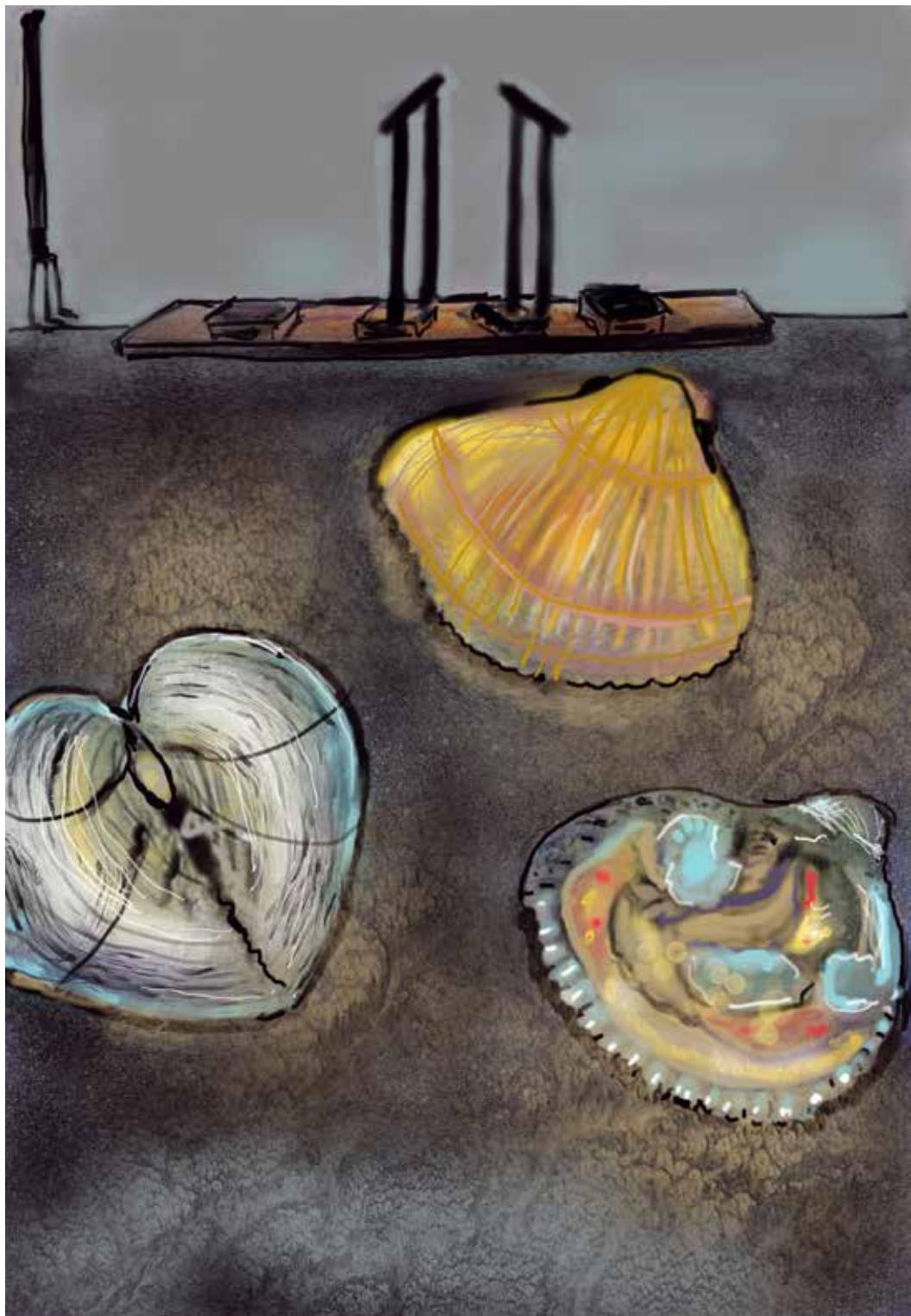
Set one: 7

When I was a little girl, about 12, I came down stairs in the middle of the night to get a glass of water. The evening before, Dad had found a gully in the Bay and set a trap for eels, a cage with the rotting skull of a dead horse. He brought back a load of eels entwined in a basket, but the lid was faulty and they escaped. A slimy mass wriggling all over the kitchen floor.

Eels are hard to kill and skin. Dad uses pliers. He once chopped off the head of one caught on a longline but it kept wriggling. In the back of our truck its sandy body scraped slowly back and forth, forth and back for over half an hour.

Mysterious and ancient creatures. A very threatened species, with an extraordinary breeding pattern, using an innate directional mechanism, which we still don't fully understand, they travel 3000 miles to the Sargosso Sea to spawn. Then they and their larvae, turning first into elvers, then into silver eels, migrate back (over 300 days) to their original residence. Fierce with razor sharp teeth that can bite you. Unchanged in millennia. Yet here they are in our own estuary and our kitchen!

In some places they are eaten a lot, both as standard stew and as a luxury, smoked or jellied or cooked slowly in wine with garlic. Delicious.



COCKLE

Set one: 8

This small edible marine bivalve mollusc lives in a heart shaped rounded shell about 3 cm across. While its 3 cm muscular foot burrows into the seabed it sucks and filters plankton through a syphon from surrounding water. *People who are not fishing people think they grow overnight.* In fact they take three years to regenerate, depending on 'sprat fall' (seeding). Gathering is hard work; buried in sand they are bought up by rocking 'a jumbo' (a heavy plank) above them. Beds rejuvenate on a regular cycle.

A culinary delicacy in Southern Europe eg Paella in Benidorm, they sell raw from a refrigerated truck at £1000 a ton. Hence the onslaught of greed on 5th Feb 2004 when 23 Chinese migrant cocklers, dressed only in shorts and flip flops, were driven to an incoming tide by ignorant gangmasters. Coastguards and police ran out of body bags. *It was hard to handle bodies with dignity.* Prosecutions occurred, laws were changed, memorials ensued, funds raised and their families in China, still in debt to traffickers, had some loans paid off.

The sand flats continually reveal an ochre runway of broken cockle shells. A trillion fragments of molluscs, that once sucked, squirted and devoured for a living, An unfeeling tonnage of remorseless consuming energy.

Not unlike global capitalism!



SHIFTING SANDS

Set one: 9

Credit: Jack Manning

Apart from a brief spell at the Chemical Factory and when I was ill I always fished in the Bay. Loved it. Loved the work. My family have fished here for 150 years. I first went out with my grandfather, getting up very early, freezing as I snuggled into his warm coat. My grandkids aren't so keen. One loves it. She asks about the old nets and traps. We had a horse and cart then. It stumbled on Idrich Scar by Baycliff and we nearly went over. I like horses, but tractors don't need feeding in winter. You have to move with the times. Everything changes.

The main channels shift over about 8 decades moving like a side-winder snake. Now as farmers lose turf on the Silverdale side spartina grass (brought to Britain on a Yankee schooner 100 years ago) is colonising the shore at Grange and Bardsea. The cycle will reverse. Need to observe and build on the past. In 2000, tons of sand were washed away near Flookburgh, revealing relics of Cartmel Priory's mediaeval fish-farms. Twenty wooden posts in a V (carbon dated 700 years old) held with low walls and 'wattled hedging' of willow or hazel instead of nets, caught fish as they came down the estuary on the receding tide.

Our family was quite poor. No benefits! Our Christmas was a chocolate mouse and an orange. But we were very happy with our life.

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FISHING WENT CLANG

Set one: 10

Credit Keith Willacy (1936-2018)

*When a fisherman died his coffin was always carried by four other fishermen. After the service the coffin was put in the hearse and all the fishermen would line up to walk before it from church to seafront. There they would form a line along the promenade and the hearse would slowly pass it on the way to the cemetery or the crem. That was known as **'the fisherman's last look at the sea.'***

Strangely the day after finding this recording Keith Willacy died, aged 81. During archive dipping, chance is a frequent guest, but death shifts your focus. Testimony is fixed, questions go on. Keith always lived in Morecambe. The most decorated volunteer of the local RNLi lifeboat, involved in over 200 rescues, an exemplar and inspiration. A modest, brave and dedicated man whose career included fishing, navy, fishery officer and artist. His last words bring change and history home. They are a salutary reflection on those old customs when a community ritualised **'A last look at the sea.'**

Fishing is past its last legs. There are only two full timers left. In the 90's storms broke the sea wall and flooded the prom. New huge stone sea defences shifted the channel that silted over mussel and cockle beds and the tidal run of shrimps. Fishing went clang and hit the deck.

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