



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

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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

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FRONTSHEET

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Now. So, umm...Margaret, can you tell me your full name please, your date of birth and the place of birth please.

My name's Margaret Owen, Margaret Ruth Owen. I was born on the eleventh of May 1952 at Whitefield, Manchester.

And can you tell me about your parents and your grandparents, that's, if you can give me their full names on both sides, please.

Well, my mum was Ruth Gregory, and my dad was Samuel York Gregory, and they lived in Manchester at the time, and when I was born my dad was a gravedigger. But they had – I'm the youngest of five – and they had uh, quite a tragedy in the family, of two of their children died, and so my father came to live in Morecambe when I was five, to be the verger in St John's Church in Morecambe and he was the verger for thirty-one years.

Now my grandfather, he, actually, he was James um... I can't think of the maiden name, but he was James, and that will come to me, and my grandfather actually, one of his jobs was he was a deckhand on the tea clippers going out of the Manchester ship canal. And my grandmother was called Ellen. ...Gosh the last name's just evaded me at the moment.

Not a problem. So, you came to Morecambe when you were about five years old.

About five or six when I came to Morecambe.

Can you remember your...first coming to Sunderland Point? Did you come as a child?

No, I never came to Sunderland Point as a child or anything, I came when I came to live here, that was the first time. For months before we came here we wanted to live here. Trevor's lived here all his life, and he only ever wanted to live here. So when I met Trevor, and we had the opportunity, we came to live here – we were very lucky. Because there's only a few privately owned houses, most of them are rented.

So what year was that?

That was 1981 when we came here. It's in stone, because we - it was a tiny little two up, two down cottage when we came, so I had to build on the kitchen, build the backyard, build the barn on. And we had it put in stone above the barn, 1981, T and M Owen...

So you mentioned that Trevor's sort of worked in fishing, sort of most of his life...um, but for you coming to Sunderland Point, um...how did you get involved in fishing on the Bay, how did you get started?

Well, mostly because of Trevor but our family, our whole family, me mum and me dad, so... me mum and dad were scout masters and guide mistresses when we were younger, so we've all been, we were brought up sort of outdoors. And we didn't live far from the beach, from um, Sandylands...where I learned to swim in Sandyland's pool. We always walked from Sandylands to Heysham regularly, so the beach and the crabs, and everything that went with it were just part of our lives. I've always been an outdoor person, so... I just loved it at Sunderland Point, so...

So how did you get started fishing, actually fishing?

Well it was fishing, it was because of Trevor, Trevor also was a slaughter man you see, he was an apprentice slaughter man, but slaughter men always finished before dinnertime and the chaps he actually worked with fished as well. So he grew up...he grew up in Overton, sort of as fishing and working, and of course it just naturally came to me, and I just loved it, I've got to tell you, it was like a gift from heaven to me. And I thought, whatever they can do I can, and so I did!

Can you remember the first time you went out, fishing?

Oh, yeah, of course I can, it's just lovely. You just, I suppose as...perhaps as you read a good book and enjoy it, I just slipped into the water and I never really

slipped back out again! And that's just... I just love it, and that's how we've done it.

Are there any experiences that stand out for you, being in the fishing boat?

Well it's a fishing boat, and the... the kind of fishing I do, I stand in the water four hours a day twice a day, minimum up from June July and August, and I stand up to me 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 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.

Sure, sure. So the type of, fishing that you're describing, standing in the water, um, is that haaf* netting?

It's haaf netting yes, it's done by...I carry an eighteen-foot- six pole - you've got to imagine a goal post, like on a football field, but imagine it eighteen-foot-six long, and about waist high. Same net as well on the back, and I go round the back of it and stand in it. I carry it on my back down to the water and I edge into the water, and I wait for the fish to go up the river, not like the freshwater, fall back and that's when I catch the fish. Sometimes they go past your net, and you can just feel them touch, and the 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, and some of them they're twenty pounds, it's a heck of a time really. And the adrenaline is unbelievable. And even now, when I catch a fish, when I've finished and I put it on the line at the back, my legs are shaking with the adrenaline, the excitement is overwhelming, it really is.

Sounds amazing. Are you talking about salmon here?

Salmon and sea trout, this is June, July and August.

Salmon and sea trout, June July and August.

But, we do shrimp - at the moment we're shrimping, and that's great, 'cause you never know what's coming up in the net. I do most of the riddling and the sorting out of the crabs, and the fish, and also now we have nets set for um - we catch the food the helps feed the sea lions and penguins at Blackpool zoo, so we're catching sprats and whitebait at the moment.

And how are you catching...amazing that you're feeding seals, did you say?

Sea lions, penguins, and also, um, in the Spring it's all the chicks, the ibis, the flamingos, everything that's at the zoo. Everything you can possibly think of that eats fish - otters, snakes, it all goes towards helping them. We go through, to the zoo, about once a fortnight or once every three weeks, and like the fishing I am just as excited every time we go near Blackpool zoo. I'm running round there, on my own, at nine in the morning, nobody else but me and Trevor in the zoo, and it's just lovely.

Sounds amazing, so um, what sort of fish and how are you fishing for those, for the zoo animals?

The zoo, well it's called a fixed engine, the nets that are set down the shore, that have to be emptied four hours after high water. We empty them through the night, as well as the day. At night time, the sprats swim on the top of the water, and in the day time they go to the bottom of the water - the bottom of the sea, and the whitebaits swim on the top, so you get whitebait in the day, in the same net as you get sprats, at night.

Wow, it's like...they were organising themselves.

They're so organised, yes, totally organised! [Laughs]

[Laughter]

And what quantities of fish are you catching in these, these are static nets that you call...you call fixed engine. Um, what do they look like, how big are they?

They're a triangle, they're like a triangle shape, with a tail end, the smallest end at the bottom is where the fish are caught, so there's sort of bigger mesh for fish to go through, and there are about, Trevor could probably tell you, they were about eleven-foot across probably, the mouth of them. They might be less, they might be about ten foot across, I'm not quite sure. They had three floats on, so you've got a triangle, three floats on the widest part, going back to a small one, a small tail-end, and you just empty them. Now we have to empty them in the dark as well, because if we leave them, believe it or not the foxes go down the shore, and chew the nets, so it's a busy cold winter, but we manage fine. But you know, it's OK.

And what quantities of fish are you...

Well it depends sometimes it can be hardly anything, sometimes it can be three basket-fulls or two basket-fulls, it all depends what the sea decides to give you. You've got - one thing - people make us smile, because say, say just going back to the salmon and seatrout, they'll say, right, could you get me eight pounds salmon today, and you think, well I would like to, but it might be a ten pound, or it might not get one, or it might be five pound, it just depends what the sea wishes to happen, that's all there is to it.

Yeah...And are there, are the fish getting caught on the incoming tide, or the ebb tide?

Yeah, it's getting caught on the ebb...

On the ebb.

The tide comes up the river, and it's on the turn, it's on the ebb there. But, at the moment, me and Trevor, we're both sort of semi-retired now. We do this, but our main source of income at one time was the shellfish, when we did the cockles and the mussels, and we use to shrimp to sell them to Baxter's and things like that. And we used to travel from um, Scotland to Wales, cockling and musseling, they were long hard days. Sometimes, at the River Dee, you'd go out on a dinghy, you'd be out in the middle of the River Dee, for about five or six hours, then float it back with a ton of uh, cockles each, different things like that. We were away from home a lot, travelling up and down the coast, fishing.

And when was that?

That was up to about four years ago.

Oh ok.

It only makes it hard work because you see for thirty odd years - I mean I've always fished with Trevor - but for thirty odd years, I um, was a dental nurse receptionist two days a week, so that's what made it quite hard work, because I used to finish working at the dentist, I was there on a Thursday tea time, and I would get in the car and drive to Dumfries, where we were working, then we'd work Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and I'd come home, do me little dentist job, and then I'd go down and meet Trevor in Wales, wherever we were.

So, was that - you were travelling quite far afield, is that because there wasn't fishing here at Sunderland Point?

Well it was... well it was also because that's where the cockles and the mussels were, on a cycle. When we first started fishing, Trevor and myself, life in Morecambe bay was absolutely idyllic, it was um, it was done like farming, let's put it that way. So we had a season for it. So we knew that June, July and August we salmon fished, September, October we did the shrimping. The colder months we used to do the shellfish. Things were sustainable and conservation ruled, it was fantastic, because we moved 'round like you did with your farming.

The trouble was, about ten or fifteen years ago as you know, suddenly the world got wanting more cockles and mussels, so instead of us being, say, ten people that worked the bay, suddenly there was 800 people, within a matter of three weeks, and, so what was sustainable in our eyes, suddenly went. What would last us all winter, as a job, and keep us fed, clothed and everything, lasted two weeks. And things like that. And so the world changed. So they had to bring in licensing, and I was on the IFCA...MAFA...it was the sea fisheries, sorry, to begin with, and then it was the IFCA, which is the Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority. I was on that for about ten years representing the fishermen, and getting licenses through, and organising by-laws. Because, the trouble was, life was so easy-going in the fishing industry to a point, but there wasn't any by-laws, so when mishaps happened, years ago, and things went wrong, the authorities couldn't implement anything quickly, they had to work and build new by-laws. And the by-laws were really complicated and complex, and we used to have to go down to Mold, County Hall at Mold** and all over. It was a really intense time for the fishing industry, but, I'm glad to say progress was made. People now are licensed. We used to have to pay, for the River Dee, a thousand pounds each just to go and get the cockles, and we used to have to pay about 300 pounds each to go and get the cockles in Scotland, but Morecambe Bay didn't have a

licensing system, so it was open for the rest of the world to come and plunder, and it was a shame. But, like I said, progress has been made, things are so much better. The Sea Fisheries, IFCA, have worked so hard, tirelessly hard, you know, they are...the chap that's over there is called Chief Exec Stephen Atkins, and he...he has worked hard, and his team have been brilliant, and they've brought Morecambe Bay back round, and got it under control. So now, if you want to go into the Bay, to do your fishing, you have to have a permit, and it's worked, it's great, so there you go.

And is it policed, um...

It's policed by the Sea Fisheries, uh chaps, young chaps, who are very good. Um, I mean, when we first ...then [?] you used to have one or two of them, that's all they needed, and suddenly they went from policing say half a dozen people, working and Flookburgh across the Bay - to all these hundreds of people, so it was all a case of money, getting people trained and, you know I've seen the progression over the last say eight or nine years, and what there was eight or nine years ago to what there is now, totally amazing, they're all trained, if you're...even if you're a scientist on the IFCA you have to be a sea fishery officer as well, you got to have qualifications beyond if you wanted to be a scientist! You know, it's really come on, so that's good news for the fishing industry really.

The cockle beds are still closed, aren't they?

They are at the moment.

Why is that?

Well when they...they shut the cockle beds, that's because say, Mandy and the team - who's a top scientist there - they've gone and done surveys, and there's got to be a certain amount of cockles in, say, a square yard, or whatever, metre

or whatever they call it now, before they think it's right for them to take them. It's all to do with conservation, and sustainability. And that's the main thing. You see, the people that are not fishing people, think that things grow overnight, and they don't. Once you take the cockles it takes three years for them to come back, so this... you know, wham bam thank you ma'am, and take them and hope to fish them all year doesn't work. So it's really well-controlled now. So, the situation that occurred a few years back will never occur again, it's monitored all the time.

That's really good to know. And I noticed last year, they were operating, they were fishing...musselling off near...Sandylands, so that one went according to plan...

Yeah, the musselling, we haven't done it for...it's about four years since musselling. They take the seed mussel from there, that's relayed down in Wales somewhere. Now, the seed mussel, it just...it must...animals fish food and everything and have a mind of their own. People can sort of um...say you have big ones here and small ones there, but, they have a thing called a spatfall, and when the spatfall falls, it's the small mussels. Heysham always has been brilliant. Heysham and the place over at Flookburgh and they are solid with spat, absolutely solid. So much so, that if they didn't thin them out, they would lose them, they would get washed away and they would get lost. So, for so many weeks they allow them to thin them out. And it's very heavy, hard work, the... small mussels, because they're in this clay, and they've got to be washed, but they are monitored all the time by the Sea Fisheries, or the IFCA, the new name's the IFCA, I keep saying Sea Fisheries but it's IFCA. The difference between the IFCA and the Sea Fisheries is plain and simply. The Sea Fisheries used to really concentrate on looking after the fishermen, we thought. Now the IFCA is an Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority, and as I was on the...even though it was the same committee, I couldn't say, once it changed to the IFCA, that I was representing the fishermen. I had to be just an independent body that

gave them advice, whereas before, I represented the fishermen any complaints, it still worked the same, but it was all under a new...a new wording.

Fascinating, it really is. Um, so...you fell in love with the fishing at Sunderland Point. You...you went out on the boat?

Oh yeah, aboard the boat, we used to before, before... we used to go in the big boat all the time, Trevor built his own trawl on the back field, like one does. He did it with his chainsaw and his wood, and then we all fibre glassed it, turned it over, and the whole Point came and knocked the bits out, and Sam York sits at the front at Sunderland Point, there.

What's it called, sorry?

Sam York. It's called Sam York after me dad, me dad was called Samuel York Gregory.

That's nice.

Yeah. And um, and then, I heaved, as I said, I started to heave, and then I did it for five years. But for eleven years, I drift netted the same as the men. I had a boat, and three hundred and twenty yards, or three hundred and eight yards of net, and I salmon fished, whammelled it's called, just like the men. And the boat, I was one of the team.

Can you describe the uh - that process for me?

Well it's a small boat, and you take three hundred and twenty yards of net, and you set off as the tide's going out four hours after high water, and the idea is you pay all this net out across the river, and you've got to get to the bottom of the river, which is quite... sounds quite easy really, except the river's got turns, and

catches in and stones underneath, and trees that you get caught on. And on high tide it's...it washes you to one side then the other, it's really jolly hard work. I did it for eleven years, but I just loved that as well. I loved it...the worst thing about whammelling, really, the worse the weather and the windier it is, the more fish you catch. Because the fish love the waves, they love the sparkling water, they love the oxygen in the bubbles, so you've got to go with the open mind of right let's just get this over with. Let's go down, get what we can, and come back. And, when I used to get out of the boat at this end I always used to think, glad that's over [laughs]. But that was really exciting.

Are you travelling in the boat, or are in a sort of stationary...

No you travel down, you travel down. You pay your net out and it's moving all the way down from here to the bottom, right out into the Bay.

So where would you go from? From Sunderland Point...

From Sunderland Point, you follow the River Lune straight down, down onto the shipping channel, and sometimes when the shipping was going out from Heysham, you looked like a tiny little dot underneath it, and when we used to have the...um, catamarans going...the new ones going to the Isle of Man, it could flip your boat over if you weren't careful. They were very dangerous. It would scull the water, and then throw it back at you. But I wasn't treated any different than anybody else, I had to catch the fish 'cos we all had to share. There's no sympathy because I was a woman. I once nearly lost me finger, because I got stuck on a massive rock, underneath the lighthouse. It caught, it was - we'd had a storm and the rock had come out, and I'm pulling away at this net, and I thought Ooh what's all that red on the floor, and it was the end of me finger...

Ohh!

..But I had to go to Preston and they sorted it out, and things were OK! But uh...

[Gasps] Gosh that's lucky!

Yeah, you just get on with it! It's been...but it's exciting...it's just, it's good.

So, what's it like being a woman? Back when you started in the early '80s, what was it like being a female fisherman in a very male-dominated world, I imagine.

Well it was...I was nearly forty when I actually applied...[inaud.] to get this application for the...to sa... I had to wait until I was nearly forty to get the salmon license. And one of the fishermen's wives rang up - which is ridiculous - said, um I hope you're not going to wear a swimming costume down there. And I thought, for goodness sake! And...I used to - I knew all the fishermen, and I thought they were all being nice to me, I was talking to them, being really sweet to them, not knowing there was a huge campaign, trying to stop this woman from being - they must have thought I was a complete witch, because I was going, Oh hello! And so.. and I think it was because they had this mystery, that once you went below the lighthouse, you know, I think they thought there was hell and the monsters of the world belonged there, and there wasn't, you see. And so of course once I went, and I could bring back fish, I think I took the mystery of the [gasps] 'Where do they get the salmon from?' And the other thing was, I used to come up the shore, and I used to love everybody to see what I caught, well I got told off a few times for that, because you're not supposed to tell where you get the fish. I mean, for goodness sake, if I've caught it, nobody else can catch it can they, I mean...goodness me...

[laughs]

... so that was ridiculous [laughs]...

That's interesting though, so you gradually sort of picked up the culture...

Yeah!

...and the habits, were there any like superstitions...?

Well they didn't like women down the river you see, you're not supposed to have a woman in a boat, just a load of tosh, honestly. But when I cockled and musselled on the beach, we, um...that's really hard going. And if one of the chaps could get a ton, I could get a ton and a half, I could work hard. So I was accepted just as a person, 'cos...like I said we were with people from Wales, Scotland, and you know, all decent chaps, big, rough, ready men a lot of them. But you know something, and I honestly hand on heart can tell you, especially the South Waleians, you could hear them swearing like troopers from a mile off, but as soon as you were in their company, you never - they never swore. No? They were gentlemen, big, rough, rugby men, you know, and...but when you're on the beach everyone helps everybody else, you can't be... you know, you need...your bikes break down, everything happens, and everybody, you know, helps. There's some that fall out, and some that don't want to be bothered, but generally, most people help each other when you're on the beach, it's just something you do. Because that tide comes in whether you want it to or not. It doesn't go Oops, something's broken down I won't pop over it with the water, 'cos the tide comes in! [laughs]

Did you inspire any other women to take part in fishing?

Well no... not really, we've a young girl at the moment that lives up the lane, Sophie that sometimes goes with Philip who's got a net. But my daughter and our family said, Look, you know, I'm the only lady in the whole of the UK that got one, but my daughter always said Look mum, who else wants one? [laughs] I did

nearly drown once... that was just a...mishap. I'd been fishing with the heave beam, the 18 foot 6 beam, and I'd edged me way across the river which I shouldn't have done, but you do. And this particular day, it was a nice day, like today, it wasn't anything horrendous, but we'd had a storm the day before, and as I was coming back, with the beam, I stepped back, where I've always done, but there was a hole, and as I went down, the net wrapped round me feet, and in those days - I mean now I have neoprene on, which is just one suit - but in those days, neoprene wasn't about, and I had -

It's a wetsuit type of thing that you wear?

Neoprene is... well they're chest waders but they're nice and warm. But to keep me warm in those days I had chest-waders and like a fluffy suit underneath that just soak... would just soak water up. And I had me yellow top on, and I had a belt. But they say that, you know, that whoever's...people...there's about a hundred and ninety-nine thousand people in the water, and there's so many a coward - well not coward but panic, and I happened to be wi' one that day. And instead of just pulling, pulling the beam in - he had a beam like mine - instead of just pulling it towards the side, he ran to call the coastguard. He just ran from Sunderland Point...

Sorry, who is this?

A chap, another chap that was heaving with me. And he ran up the shore, and it left me floating down the river. I grabbed his beam, and, um, the trouble was, he went to call the coastguard, but me and Trevor are the auxiliary local first coastguard shouts, so I knew that the coastguard would be trying to ring our house to tell me... to go and...look. Anyway, as it happened, a Simon [?] had got up, had got through to Liverpool, and Carl who was over it, knew us really well, and they sent the um, oh this is really funny...well it's funny to us. They sent the lifeboat straightaway, because by now I...sort of floating down...the peculiar thing

is, when you're drowning - which sounds silly, 'when you're drowning' - but you can't see anything but water, you wouldn't believe that, but you're in the water, and this 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...yet he waded out with his heave 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, he's alive today, is Harold, and he used to be a pilot, you'll know. And after... they took me to hospital that day and I came home, and the next day I had to go and apologise to him, because, as the boat had to come up to see if it could save me, it had cut through his net, and to make matters worse on the way back it had cut through it again, and he was rather cross. So I actually had to go and apologise for being saved to Harold! [Lots of laughter]

[Lots of laughter]

...So it was quite funny.

Was he gracious and accepted your apology?

[While laughing] Well he was a bit grumpy really, because it takes a bit of mending the net, but I thought you know, there was a special circumstance! So, but that was my own...and I did go back in the next day to fish, so I was OK, it didn't put me off.

Gosh, you're very brave, it sounds completely frightening to me.

No!

So what stretch of water were you...were you dragged towards the mouth of the river, or...

Well I was taken from... just down past the lighthouse, that was all.

That's quite a distance.

Well it was, really. And it's just...and when I came out I couldn't speak for a day or so, because I'd stretched me neck trying to keep out of the water, and things like that your neck's all swollen, you know, it's just, just generally...but when I was floating down, I must say, the only thing I could think was... I used to think, I hope that you know, I could live just to see my grandchildren be born, you know. So, now when... we've got nine between us, I always just think, well this is just lovely! I've got my wish, I've had my chance, and so...yeah! I got my wish, so...

Can you remember being saved?

No I can't remember being pulled out, or anything, I can't remember that. I remember coming round on the back of a tractor. There were people called Gerrard's, from the farm opposite Crook Farm. Dick Worthington had pulled me out, and uh... the lads from the farm had lifted me onto this trailer, and when I went round to say thank you they couldn't believe what size I was, because when they'd come to lift me up, I was totally like this big wet log 'cos I was saturated with water, and this fluffy suit inside had sucked all the water in, and I was this big thing you know. But I was fine, I survived it, it was OK, it was...it was alright. It was just a bit of a mishap, people have worse don't they? Nearly getting knocked over and stuff.

Have there been any other incidents on Sunderland Point, or...the area that you can remember...where people were in risk?

People are always in risk, always driving through the water, with their cars they do it regularly at Sunderland Point. There's always somebody coming through

could get washed away. We've even had uh... Prince William with his helicopter, he called in one time, he was local, but that was for something and nothing. The people had shouldn't have even rung and he was just in the vicinity.

Oh you mean in his capacity as rescue...?

Yeah.

Really?

Yeah, yeah. We didn't see him, but they...what happened was, they were down somewhere, and they got called, and this car...was just at the beginning of the road, and um, because he'd come out of their way and everything they'd ran out of fuel and had to stay on the banking 'til they brought them some fuel with the helicopter. But there's always people, silly people, messing about in boats they've no idea. You've got to have a great respect for the water, 'cos it doesn't respect you at all [laughs]. You've got to, you know, treat it with kid gloves or else you've had it really, you know.

So um, so as the only woman around here fishing in the bay, was there any... you said you gradually...you've been accepted.

Oh yes, really was, from the beginning.

Was there a point, at which, or an incident at which point you thought, well that's it I'm one of them now, I'm one of the fishermen.

Yeah, no not really! I just... we just sort of, we just carried on...we just worked! And that's it, I don't know. I just... I wanted to fish and so I fished, and that was that really.

That's great, very inspiring. So you've done drift netting, and haaf netting...

Haaf netting...I used to, before we had a boat, I used to have a David Brown tractor, and Trevor had a Nuffield, and we used to go out to the Lake Brest [spelling?] with a thing called a trailer[lar?] like they do over at Flookburgh. And, you have a trailer behind your tractor, and two shanks, with like um, how can I explain it...two big oblong frames, about a foot high, and about...I think about four to five foot long, with nets on the back, and you trawl for shrimps on the Lake Brest, where we used to go out...

On the Lake...?

The Lake Brest, that's...the sand out on Middleton Sands, between the harbour and the mouth of the river, the Lake Brest there. And we'd go two tractors, and your [29:30:?] which was a trailer, a wooden trailer, pulling the shanks, on a big long rope, would swing right out into the water, you'd have your tractor along the side, coming along the side, and you'd have to turn it round, empty your trailer, and go up and down. We did that before we got the boats, that was exciting, that was different. Bit scary, because sometimes the sand would move, you know...Trevor always used to be about a hundred yards in front of me, and I had to watch the sand when we were going out there, because Middleton Sand can be very tricky further out, and you'd see that, not just a little patch, you'd see the whole area do like a sandy wave, and you'd think, Oops, better not go there...[laughs].

Yeah 'cos they used to use horses, didn't they...

Tom used to use a horse, yeah.

Can you remember...or was that before your time...

It was before my time, but um, I just had a tractor [laughs].

Yeah, yeah interesting. And what about draw netting, is that...what's draw netting?

Oh draw netting, now Trevor had the draw netter's license, and so I used to have to be, I was on that license with him, and that entails um, Trevor would row round, I would hold one end of the net, and Trevor would row round in a half moon and get to the other end, push the boat to the side and then you draw the net in with the bottom cord as low as you can, to catch the salmon and sea trout. We sort of progressed. We did draw netting, heaving, and the ultimate is to have the whammel license, and then...

Which is when you're in the boat...

...when you're in the boat, but then after my eleven years I've been back heaving now for about six years.

It's an ancient practice, isn't it?

It is, and I think it's one that's sadly going to come to an end, there's...the net limitation order is coming up for the environment agency, next year, and I'm quite sure they're going to cut...they've done away with the draw net already. The last person to have it they did away with it, a few years back, so there's only...only seven whammel nets now, and twelve heaves on the river, and I'm sure when the net limitation order's up next year, I'm sure they'll cut us back. Because d'you know, for some - unknown reason, the anglers that are up the stream think, because there's no fish for them, that we've caught them all. They don't understand that if there's no fish for them, there's no fish for us. When they catch fish, we catch fish. You can't catch fish if they're not there, and our problem at the moment is - and it is a big problem in Morecambe Bay - is the seals.

Really?

We never had seals, we never had them, now what do seals love? Salmon. And I'm telling you now when you've had a long week, and you can go all week without catching a fish, and you see one strike which is amazing, as they strike they hit the net and the water's flying everywhere, if you see a big black seal coming up to your net, getting your fish, laying on its back and eat it in front of you, then it is a bit...downing, I'm telling you! And there are now hundreds on Walney Island, hundreds and hundreds. And when you're at the bottom of the river, when you're whammelling, it's a time called low water, just before the tide turns, right. And, at low water's when, sometimes, and there's a place called the drop-off, it's where the river meets the sea, and many a time the fish hang about at the bottom. So at low water everybody's waiting to put the nets out, you put your net out, start your engine, and you might as well be ringing the dinner bell, because that's when the seals appear. This year they haven't been so bothered, but last year they had a lot of problems with them. And they're huge! And if they're pulling your net, and you're trying to pull your net, they could pull you in, no problem at all. But uh, so we used to sort of say - I don't need the lads to do it now because I haven't done it for the last few years - but you know sort of, one person'd set off, and the others would just keep an eye where the seals were, and every- you'd just try and take it in turns to try and get your net in first, before they...ate your fish. But I'll tell you something, these seals are such a damn nuisance to say the least, but I do remember one time there was a little baby seal stuck on the side, and what did the fisherman do? Go and save it, and put it back in the water. Now then, so...[laughter].

[Laughs] They're very cute aren't they..?

Yeah, so there you go! So everything's to live, haven't they? They only want their dinner like we want ours.

That's fascinating, I didn't know there were seals in the Bay. Why d'you think they're...becoming more popular?

Well the water's warmed up hasn't it, all over, really. And all the way down the coast you're getting things. And my heart goes out to the bass fishermen actually in Morecambe Bay, they can be pulling the net in with say, thirty fish in and fifteen of them are just the heads. In fact two years ago they stopped fishing for a few weeks because they were getting...they just couldn't catch anything, it was just getting eaten all the time. But you see you're not allowed to sort of complain about the seals, even though they weren't here, you know they're a new thing, you've got to... But they have decided, the conservationists have decided they are like the vermin of the sea now, like we have overrun with rats, you're getting overrun with seals all over the world, so...

Interesting. I had no idea... Um, hake, I've got written down, with a question mark. Do you fish for hake...?

No.

...Or was that my bad wri- handwriting...?

No, we don't fish for hake! No, no...

[Laughs] I don't know why that's there. Um, so you've described cockling and musseling, I mean there's mussel beds out here on Sunderland Point, aren't there?

Yeah.

...Have you musselled there...

No, we've done it at the lighthouse years ago but they have been ripped now off at the lighthouse, with the bad storms. I mean to get this...you know this...before I was telling you these new licenses that you have. To get them, originally years ago, before they came in, we had to take...you had to take courses, you've got to take your firefighters, your first aid, your sea survival, your radio operator's license, your hand gathering license, it goes on, and on, and on. I'm qualified to be able to take a fifty foot boat out, without even batting an eye lid, because I've got me boat handling, and all the people that get these licenses now, have to have got - done all this, first aid, everything. So it's a good thing, the courses are, you know, for...that's why it's moved forward. And you get the genuine people then, instead of people that used to just have um, take the summer holidays and come and take the cockles and mussels, so they'd have their work all year and then they just swiped the cockles and mussels.

And are the local communities sort of responsible for policing this...at all, I mean, you know if you see people that you know don't have a license, or...

Well I don't know, well not in the Bay because the Fisheries do, but like our licenses on the river, our licenses on the river come from the Environment Agency, but the licenses in the Bay come from the Sea Fisheries, like that.

Oh...it's two different authorities...

It's two different authorities, like the environment agency, they have bailiffs that are up and down Matthew all the time, but that's not necessary, because... there's such few licenses, and there's such precious ones that if there was somebody going to do it, they would be caught straight away, they would be told on, you know the boats that go from here...

So you have to pay for the licenses, for haaf netting...?

Yeah, yeah mine's nearly three hundred pounds and I think Trevor's is...I'm not sure, his is about six hundred pounds, something like that. Our grandson got a heave license this year, so that was really...really a good thing, yeah.

Ohh!

So...so I've been teaching him to...to heave net, and he's quite good at it, because he's six foot two, and so he's very tall, so he goes in the deeper waters than me, so...keeping his eye on his granny! [Laughs]

[Laughs] So, nowadays you're normally fishing with other people...

No, no, no, mostly on me own, because people don't want to fish through the night anyway, I like fishing through the night. Tim does it, if and when he can get in. But it has - it's been the worst season in all the years I've ever fished this year, there's been absolutely nothing about. On this side, because the river on this side sanded in, very badly, so we're having problems. But the drift netters...the fish, um...there's salmon that's seven pounds and under they call them (ph) grils, and they come in usually in August. And last year they didn't come in, and this year they haven't come in hardly, so that's been a bit of a blow. But there've been a lot of lovely big fish caught, and considering that people say that, um, or um, you know, it's been wiped out, we've looked at records of people say seventy, eighty years ago, and the same situation was then.

Hmmm.

You know, that there was summers without fish, and then you had a glut. In fact there's um, a chap called John Smith that works at Glasson Dock, and he always used to say to me that his brothers, and his grandfather and his fathers, you know, did the fishing, and he had a heave. And he once said when he first got his

- he doesn't have one now - that he was newly married, and he was working at the harbour, and, he went heaving the first day and he caught a massive fish, and so he jacked his job in at Heysham, and he never caught a fish again all summer [laughs].

[Laughs]

Yup, yup.

Yeah.

But it's so exciting when you're heaving with like the fish like I said, touching, touch the net and...you know, it makes you jump out of your skin even no matter how many years you've been doing it.

So tell me about what it's like fishing at night...when...

Oh, night's lovely...especially um, when they get dark, it's a different world altogether. It's quiet for one thing, your eyes don't get tired of looking, 'cause sometimes when you're stood in the same place you're looking a long way all the time. I know it sounds silly but you don't realise that when you're a normal person 'round town that you're not...lookin' all the time...But just as it's coming dusk, y'know the... say the shelducks bring their little babies past you, 'cause I'm so quiet in the water, that...that one year, I was so quiet, I turned round and there was about twenty little shelducks all in the back of me net. I had to shoo them off 'cause I thought I'd hurt them when I lifted them, yeah. And...and the other year I had the otter came in the night, and now when a fish is swimming towards ya, 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 corner and I'm thinking, Oh my god, if the salmon is as big as this, I'm never gonna hold it, and I was nearly sweating, and [gasps], me heart was beating, and the moon was up, and I

could see this acker coming towards me and 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. I saw it the next day it came in the daylight in the next day. Yeah it was amazing, totally amazing. And then there's a thing called phosphorescence in our water, that people round here don't know about. And that's, really no good for fishing but, marvellous to see. It's salty water you need, so you don't need it to have rained. The tide comes in and it's salty, and every single drop of water that you touch, or every tiny bit of seaweed you stand on, lights up like Disney World - like the green necklaces you get at a carnival, and they're like that. If you threw a stone into the water, every thousands of millions of particles are bright green, and nobody knows. And when I take people down, it doesn't matter how clever they are, and what they think, and they go Ohh, they're expecting, oh probably something nothing, and they all go Oh my god, and start picking stones up. But the problem is, when I heave and it's like that, every strand of my net lights up. And the fishermen, so it's no good for salmoning. And if you're in a motor boat, with an engine or anything, its green coming off the back of you...It's a wonderful thing to see...but it's got to be very dark, no light pollution, and salty water. And it's amazing...

Sounds it...Sounds magical

It is! It is, and...when you walk on the seaweed, you know like it pops and everything, all these little things pop bright green, just like switching little lights on. Amazing it is.

Does it affect your ability to catch fish then the light?

Yes, it's no good for fishing! [Laughs]

[Laughter]

It's just no hope, you come out! Yeah, because they can see the net, it's like, you know it's like Blackpool illuminations; ha ha your net's lit up! Yeah!

And, but you can still fish when the moon's not out, it's light enough for you to...

Ohh, yes, gosh, of course you can see better without...I take a torch down for the headlight just in case something gets stuck in the net and I can't see, but torches are a nuisance. If you talk to anybody that works in the dark, or fishes, and something like my job, you can see more with the dark than you can with the light; with the torch...the torch restricts you. I mean we have torches for sorting the whitebait out, but when I'm fishing I wouldn't have a, I wouldn't have a torch, no [laughs].

And do you go out in all weathers?

We have to do! You've got to work in all weathers, the difference is I stay out in it while you go in a building! [Laughs]

Do you not get cold?

No because you dress appropriately, I used to be colder going to work at the dentist than I did out over here! I couldn't go to the dentist with me wellies and me thermals on, could I? [laughs]. But no I have all the proper stuff. I tell you what's made a difference as well, the wind farms came, didn't they. We had the wind farms, so this is like the modern era. And now these wind farms need your cooperation, and as good and as kind as they come across, really they're buying you, but we didn't mind. We're all in the Morecambe and Heysham Fisherman's Association, Trevor, my husband, he's the chairman, and the secretary is, and is

the vice-chairman for the NFFO, for the North-West, is Trevor, national - you know, Fisherman's Association. And um, the wind farms, they wanted to um, to look after us for any inconvenience let's say, and they've got to money burn, it's a joke really, but they're very good. Our association received I think it was nearly a thousand pounds each person, not in money, in goods, and they bought us all man over board watches, which cost...a lot of money, um, new life jackets, and fish boxes that are about eight hundred pounds each, six or eight hundred pound each, that this one huge fish box you could put ice in it today and it would still be there next week. As long as we went on their booklet, and was in their booklet saying thank you, I'm actually the front page - afterwards I was shown - the front page of the...uh, Morecambe Bay, whatever it's called, it's called the West of Morecambe Fisheries Fund, I'm the front page of it. So we all smiled and said Thank you very much! [laughs]

[Laughter] The face of the wind farm!

Face of the wind farms I am! It's quite a joke, really, but there you go! We've done, I've also done, cookery programs for the telly. We had Matt Dawson, from Question of Sport, he came and did a 'Matt and Mitch's seafood adventure', he caught the fish, cooked it in the kitchen and...and then served everyone on Sunderland Point. Then the chap from Coronation Street called Sean Wilson, I don't think he's in it now, and he did the same, he came and caught the fish, and we've done all sorts for them...[laughs].

It's such a special place, Sunderland Point, isn't it?

Oh, it is.

What's it like living here as part of the community?

Well I'll tell you now, it's one of these places that, if you don't want to bother with anybody you don't need to, but if you want to be part of it you are. And it's...also the kind of place where you never need to be worried because there's always somebody there to help you. If you, you know if you want to be per...quiet, and keep out of the way, everybody would respect that, but you know you're never stuck. It doesn't matter morning noon and night, somebody would turn out and help you. And I think in this day and age, that's rare. It's a real safe place. We have all sorts of things going on up here.

What sort of things do you...?

Right, we have a fisherman's choir.

Oh, do you?

Yes, we do, and it is amazing. Trevor, um, my Trevor, he's very musical, he's played in bands all his life. And he realised a few years ago that there's lots of want to be musicians, and, once our daughter left and there's a spare room, that's the music room there, there's keyboards, and guitars, and everything. And so this little band they have they play once a month at the Globe, and we have, on here we have Scotty, who is the Mail on Sunday's Sports editor. We have David who is a private dentist. Scotty plays banjo guitar. David plays harmonica he's a private dentist. Dave Clark who was the clerk of the parish plays mouth organ. Um, young Philip who's a mechanic and Sophie they play guitar. They've got, um, Peter Jetson that used to live on here playing keyboard...Colin that runs the Lancaster Castle and all the museums, Colin Penny, he's the singer in it. He's absolutely amazing. There's Trevor on... on guitar. They go to the Globe and if anybody wants to get up and sing with them they do, but for the rest of the chaps that perhaps can't play a musical instrument, David Andrews come up with Why don't we sing this fisherman's choir. And now, they are tremendous. Everything from [spelling? 46:13 'Heav'em Oh'] and 'South Australia'. On

Saturday night we had um, in the old cart shed at the back of First Terrace here, we had a huge party night for the end of summer, at Bryan's house, and the cart shed was done out for groups, and all the Fisherman's choir played. Two weeks ago we had a Reggae night on Second Terrace, with people that um, rent a house there. They're, they've been lecturers at the uni and they used to be a Reggae disco DJ, we had a brilliant Reggae evening. About three weeks before that we had proms night, on the green, all the men in their tuxes and all the ladies in the long dresses, and took their very own posh picnic. We have teas on the green once a month or whenever we can. And through the winter we have Whist once a month, we have Christmas concerts and everything, it's quite a lively little place.

Amazing. I hadn't...who knew there was so much going on!

I know!

What's the band called by the way?

Well actually...Trevor will tell you, 'Rock and Ruin' I think it's called, they didn't have any... it's just they asked them to play, Colin now lives at Wray, so when the Wray Scarecrow Festival was on, they had them playing in the back of a wagon! Up at Wray, yeah!

Brilliant! Um...

Oh Brian's the drummer sorry I forgot the drummer! Brian that lives on here, he's the drummer!

Fantastic! That there's all this...activity!

There's lots of people that are musical that just need a little shove and a bit of encouragement, and Trevor thought, Well come on, he'd done it all his life and played...between fishing and slaughtering and playing six nights a week, that's been his busy life. He's been a busy man, building boats, he never ever sits down. No he doesn't really.

So um, what about the characters... perhaps the older generation of fisherman that are perhaps still around, that would have been... so thirty years ago, in the early eighties, they would have been working then as...as fishermen. Can you remember any of the old characters?

Oh yeah they're miserable most of them because they had this, they had this air, as I said of all secrecy, you know it was all a big secret and they didn't want women down there, down the river and things like that. But they had to change, though, didn't they? Life goes on and women can do...it's not...I don't think women want to be better than men, I never thought that, I think just women want people to understand that they can... they just want to do what they want to do. And it's just got into a specialised subject these men, haven't they. But the old fishermen, I admire them in the respect that they didn't have the warm clothing that I've got, and they didn't have the outboards that I've got, and... just general, you know, the utilities that I have to...do the fish with, and the facilities that I have to freeze the fish, I don't know how they managed...you know, they used to cart...mussels on their back and...to sort of, to Lancaster. I mean I've thrown mussels up on...about thirty ton up onto a wagon and everything but...they were going onto a refrigerated wagon, so life must have been...different. Unless, at their level of life at the time, they didn't know there was going to be something better, so it didn't worry them. Whereas I think I couldn't have gone back in time, and done their job, whereas they'd love to come forward and do it now, you know, just have...decent welly boots, and "yellows" [hi vis waterproofs] like we got, you know, it's...it must...[inaud.] but it must have been cold, and terrible. I mean I've been on the back of the quad bike in the middle of the bay, in winter,

and got off and couldn't walk, or do anything for about ten minutes because I was so cold, you know, and they...and I had the good stuff on! So...I don't know what they would do.

Can you remember any of the old...characters in, you know by name...

Oh well Harold Gardner like I said, there was Harold, and there was Tom, there were the Brays, David Bray, Reg Bailey, he was lovely, he's died now, he got Parkinson in...he's died but Reg once said to me, he said I'll tell you something Margaret he said, you'll look down you'll have barnacles on your legs because you've never been out of the water. I used to be obsessed with the heaving, I was never out, I was in all the time. And d'you know I took that as a, an absolute honour that he said that to me, I did.

That's a great quote.

...Yeah, I'll have barnacles on me legs. Oh and then one of the - I can't think who it was...Oh it was John Smith! Again. When he was - I mean he's only our age, but when he was uh, doing...he said one morning you'll wake up and Trevor'll be trussed up on the floor, because he'll have jumped in the night and you'll have thought it was a salmon and [clapping noise] clubbed him! [Laughter] 'Cause you get really edgy because you're waiting for that tug, you know!

Oh do you club them?

Yes, that's how I kill them!

Oh! What...what...what do you club them with?

It's called a priest but it's like -

A priest?

A priest. It's a stick with lead in the end, so you've got to hit them between the eyes to kill them.

Oh gosh!

...And then thread them. All this is happening at once, your fish goes in the net, it's fighting to get out and it's a big net, and it's a big pole, and you're up to your waist and sometimes the water's running that hard it [inaud. 51:13] nearly has you on your back. Normally, it's not easy, you slip into the water, but it's...sometimes you can hardly hold it, it breaks your back holding the beam, it's a ferocious thing the tide. And so the next thing you've got this fish that you've got to get out the back of this net, and then I've got to kill it, hold this net, and then thread it onto string so it floats behind me, and then get the net back into the water as quick as you possibly can.

But if you're in the middle of the river, and you've got a fish and a...

Yeah you've just got to be quick, and good.

...a club, you haven't got anything hard to hit it against...

No, no, you've got to...you've just got to get it on your beam or under your arm...

Oh the beam, the metal...

Well, no it's wood the beam.

Oh it's wood...

It's wood, yeah, and you make your own as well it's...you get a piece of pine and you've got to shave it all down and then put green ark, and then you buy a piece of net, but you've to knit your own netting to the proper shape, it's quite a work of art. In fact, the first person that showed me how to put the net on was a man called Ronnie Braid, who was a heaver who's only just finished heaving after doing it for fifty years, and he was Trevor's - still is - Trevor's friend and he was a slaughter man at the slaughterhouse with Trevor. And he came and put my first net on for me, when I first got the thing. He used to be the biggest strongest chap you could ever see, was Ronnie. Really old traditional, talks very Overton, sort of [in nasal voice] "tha knows" still, really grand chap. But he was a really experienced - his family, Ronnie, and David Braid they're all related, either cousins, or brothers. The Baileys, there were the Burrow's... Oh I must tell you when we first - Trevor got the...I got the heave first, and Trevor got it second and...one of the Burrows were getting rid of a beam, and they offered Trevor a little piece of net, to put between, he said, What we used to do is stand, and have a piece of net in between to get extra fish. I mean nowadays you couldn't - you're not allowed to do it, but...them days, it was...

Yeah...

...it was funny. But they must have had a hard time. I mean I stand in that water four hours at a time and it's cold, and I've got all the proper gear on, so...

Yeah...it was a hard life.

It must have been terribly hard for them. But, in those days apparently there was loads of fish, and so, it was worth it.

Hmmm....We've covered an awful lot!

Right! Done.

It's been brilliant! You've told me so much about so many different things, I'm just buzzing with...the amount of information, and memories. So just to kind of bring it to a close then, when you look back on the time you've spent on the bay, what are the memories you most cherish? On the river, and in the bay.

I think I'm so lucky, to have had the experience. And like I said at the beginning...as you like to go on a long walk, or read a book or something, I slip into the water and that's been heaven to me, you know, just to be privileged and...I like hard working people, and I like to work hard, and you get the opportunity to work really hard and when you come off the beach, or it doesn't matter if you're covered in mud or anything, it's a really good way of life. Good people, good honest, down to earth people. And it's just been lovely, I've loved it.

Thank you! Is there anything else you'd like to add Margaret?

Not really, I don't know! That's fine...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?

Definitely. Thank you very much.

[End of tape]

*Haaf net is the noun and the verb is haaf netting or "heaving" (pronounced "haiving". The Environment Agency spell it as "heaving").

** County Hall, Mold, was the regulatory authority for river Dee