

Interview with Cedric Robinson #1

**MORECAMBE BAY
PARTNERSHIP**

Headlands to Headspace

Interviewee : Cedric Robinson, born Feb 1933 ('CR')

Interviewer : Rose Clark ('RC')

Location : Guide's Farm, Grange over Sands

Date : 18th July 2016

Recording duration : 14 mins 1 sec

RC Right. So, can we start off Cedric with you giving me your full name, and where you were born, and when you were born, if you don't mind.

CR When I was born and what ?

RC Where were you were born ?

CR Well, I was born as a baby. [laughs] It's recording now, is it ? [RC : It is, yes] My name is Cedric Robinson, and I was born in the village of Flookburgh, and I was born at 4 Market Cross, Flookburgh, on the 17th of February 1933.

RC And what about your Mum & Dad ? Were they involved in fishing ?

CR Yes, they were involved in fishing, you see, because ... when I left school, I didn't want to do [1 min] anything else, only follow the sands of Morecambe Bay like mi father, grandfather, mi uncle, Meryl's dad, mi uncle Maurice as well, they all followed the sands, Maurice not quite so long.

RC Was Maurice a Robinson ?

CR Yes, he was younger brother of Meryl's dad, younger brother of dad.

RC So did it go back, the fishing go back sort of beyond, do you think, your grandfather, great grandfather ?

CR Yes, well see, when I left school, dad told me that ... I know there were about 20 fishermen with horses and carts, it was a wonderful sight. And the thing was, when they went during the night, my mother used to know which horse and cart was going down the village. Same as, you know, motor cars, they all have different sounds, don't they ? Well, the horses had different sounds. And she used to say, you know, to dad: so-and-so's gone, and such a thing gone. But I must say this. There's fishermen and fishermen, and there's good fishermen. Very rarely that they all agree, you know, because it was every man for himself out in the Bay. But if it was a dark night, there was one man stood out, right, and it was ... his nickname was Carey, right, [RC : Carey ?] yes, he was my uncle Jim, Meryl's dad. [RC : Jim Robinson ?] Yes. And do you know, his horse, he bought it from a farm in Holker, and it was a cross bred between a fine bred horse and a farm horse. But Jim bought it, but it had a bad habit of running out the shafts, and his harness was torn to shreds and was all fastened up with string, but his mother, Meryl's mother, and his wife, always had to get up and help him yoke the horse, and she had to be there to help him un-yoke it when he come back, because

it had a habit of, you know, it was bad to fasten and bad to un-yoke. But, on a dark night, everyone, [3 mins] I must say I'm telling everyone, there's some good fishermen in Flookburgh but no-one wanted to drive, if it was a dark night. And they all waited for one man, right. And he lived at the top of Flookburgh, [RC : Yes] It were Meryl's Dad....?, and he used to come out, clip clop clip clop, and then you'd hear another clip clop, they were all waiting ready to follow. But there's horses and horses for the bay. Some, if it was bad weather and blowing, they would rather turn round and go the other way would a horse. [background chatter] But, uncle Jim's horse you could put it's head for the fishing grounds, and it would go straight as a die. And that's why everybody followed him. He was a good man on the sands, he was.

RC So when you say there were 20 odd families, was this sort of in the '40s and '50s, when there would be 20 families fishing then ?

CR Yes, I would say so, yes. There would ... see, there were only three ... we were youngsters. [RC : Yes] I was ... I followed the [4 mins] sands, Jack Manning followed the sands, and Brian Shaw, we were the only three, as followed the sands as youngsters. The others were same as my father's age, around my father's age, and then was some young, middle, you know, younger than them, but we were the three youngsters. But dad told me, that when he was young, there was over a hundred fishermen, and women, following the sands from Flookburgh, going out cockling. That must have been a marvellous sight, mustn't it ?

RC Absolutely, absolutely, yes. So when they ... you said you lived at Market Cross, so which way did they go out ?

CR Well, there's two ways you could. From the village square, you could go down the mile road, which was ... we mostly went down that way. Or you could go up the village, up Sandgate Hill, that's steep, and down the other side and out at Sandgate. See, there was two channels. You used to shrimp in the channels in the Spring, soon as the frost went, in the river channels. You know, [5 mins] there's the River Kent which is on this side, and there's River Leven on the Ulverston side. And then, when it got to same as, I would say backend, it's a fisherman's term, you know, August or later September, you'd fish in what we called old spots, [RC : old spots] where there's not much movement of water and it has a round top, it has two sides, and a dry top. [RC : OK] And shrimps at night, they used to come, they don't do it now, they've changed their habits, because they've had a rough time with the Flookburgh fishermen over the years, so they're hiding somewhere. But the shallower you went at night time, the shrimps, you got more shrimps. And you could go round and round with your horse. And another thing you could do in those days, you couldn't do it today with a horse, it would set off and gallop away, and turn the cart upside down or something. But as lads, there was Tarro from Flookburgh, [RC : Now who was Tarro ?] Well, he was ... he lived up very [6 mins] close to where Meryl lived, [RC : At Hill Foot ?] yes, aye, he lived close there. He didn't follow the sands regularly, he went hawking, you know, out with his caught shrimps, and probably flukes and vegetables, 'cos we had wholesale vegetables from Barrow used to come into the village, and there was quite a few did that, doing that, you know, out at the different districts.

- RC So some did it full time. So your family did it full time ? [CR : Yes, we did it full time] and others did it with [CR : just part time] part time, OK.
- CR Yes. And I remember, I'll tell you a tale, there was one chap, he's dead and gone now but I won't mention his name, but he was a bit on the lazy side, and Walter Benson's still alive in the village, Walter's in his 90s, late 90s, isn't he, [RC : Yes] and we were all, we were going out in the daylight hours, but he was known to be, you know, he wouldn't help his father much, but he [7 mins] used to go shrimping, and he used to ... his horse, he did the job, you know, when he went out, one horse followed behind the other, [RC : Yes] and he used to sit with his back to it and sometimes he would go to sleep. Well Walter jumped out of the cart, we were about a mile from the shore, going outward journey, and he turned this lad's/chap's horse round, and he was right bad?, I don't think he woke up 'till he got back to the shore ! [laughs]
- RC So when you said it was each man for himself, but did you all go out at the same time ?
- CR We all went out at the same time. But you see, when you arrived at the shrimping grounds ... have you got a DVD of that horses shrimping ? [RC : I haven't, no] Have you seen it ? Have you got it ? [RC : I've seen that, one of them] With just legs and parts of their bags showing, [RC : Yes] That's the one, [RC : Yes] Well that's how it was. It was very competitive. You had to have a good horse. [RC : Right] And at night time it didn't matter, you could net more shrimps with a donkey because, [8 mins] if you went down the side with half your net on the sands, you'd get more shrimps than someone ... if you went in what we called steep in, the man inside with cart in deep water would get hardly any shrimps, the one's outside would get loads. So that's why we used to work on the top, where it was shallower. [RC : At the top of ?] The top of this old spot. We called them lier-ins. [RC : Lier-ins ?] It's probably where the channel had been and left it. [RC : OK] They could be quite deep, and then during the summer, we had hotter summers in those days, and it made, in those old spots, it made floor holes. You'd go in, you'd drop your net, mind you, if weather was quiet, you could see different marks, you know, there'd be ... you could look at the water and you could see it would go like a darker colour, and it was ... you were trawling along, it could be knee deep, and then you'd drop to cart bottom deep. Sometimes, you could drop with ... horse would drop out of its depth. So it was difficult during summer, in the hot weather. It were dangerous.
- RC [9 mins] So what are your earliest memories ? I mean, how old do you think you were when you've sort of your earliest memories of fishing ? Was it sort of what was going on in the house, or was it going out with your dad ?
- CR My earliest memories of going to the sands, not fishing, but I was always mad on the lasses, and I had a love of the sands, and I always wanted to go. And I used to go across to another fisherman called Septimus Benson, right. And I went, dad didn't know this, and I went into Leslie Benson and Septimus's yard.
- RC Did they live opposite you at Market Cross ?

CR A bit further down this way, near ... about half way ... between the Cross and where Meryl ... about half way up the village. [RC : Oh right, yes, towards Sandgate] Yes, not quite that far. [RC : No, yes] It was Elaine Hodgson's shop in The Square, and it was only about two or three blocks up from there. [RC : Yes] And they had like a ... well, we used to call it a terrified, it was a thoroughfare, where you open like a ... open, [10 mins] and you could go through there and into a big yard and stabling and that. And I went through this day, and Septimus was just loading up his cart to go and fish his fluke nets. And he said to me : does thee want to have a ride with me, mi lad. I took to the idea. And we went down. He had a horse ... and it's funny how fishermen, you know, names come to 'em, but they named this horse after the person he bought it from. [RC : Right] And it was Heggie Hartley from Silverdale. And he was Flookburgh bred and born. But, so he called this horse 'Eggie, right. And we got to Humphrey Head, and he went far too early. And in those days, there was no marsh like there is now, it was all sand right up to the shore. And there was a big hollow dyke, called Holy Well Dyke, and the tide was still in it, right. And Sep was stuck in. He was known he had no fear had Septimus, none whatsoever, and he stuck in, and the horse went right out of its depth and started swimming. Well, I were only a youngster. He [11 mins] grabbed me by the belly, lifted me onto the front of the cart, and he had its reins in his hands, and he kept saying to the horse : 'good lad, good lad, thou'll make it', he kept saying, 'good lad'. And he turned it round, and it swam t' side. I nearly sworn then. [laughs] And it swam t' side. And in those days, there was a building down there, and a chap used to go down and collect the holy water, and bottle it. And this particular day, Septimus took me along, the man was there, with a door open, and he was ladling out his troughs and filling bottles and that, and took it to Heysham and sold it to the holiday makers to cure all ills. But Sep said : 'will yer take this laddy on?', he said. And he took me, I was dripping wet, and he dropped me off well.? Mi father played holy hell with me, I didn't swear now did I? He, father played holy war, don't thee go to sands again like that.

RC [12 mins] How old do you think you were?

CR I wasn't so old, I was only a nipper, I was. [RC : Before school days ?] Well, I was at ... [RC: School holidays?] I was at school, before I left school it was. [RC: In the holidays?] Yes, it was in school holidays, must have been, yes. But I spent a lot of mi time in that yard. They used to have old motors cars, because they had ... Septimus used to go hawking, and there was John & Walter went hawking, and they would buy a vehicle, and when it was ... when it had run out of its time, they would stick it in a ... like they had a garage type of thing. Well, I was only young, and I used to go in there ... that's where I learned to drive, I was sat many hour on mi own, steering wheels, changing gear, and there was no engine[?]. And that's how I got ... I used to watch Sep with Dawson, aye.

RC So when did you take the first ... did you ever take the first horse and cart out yourself, or had they moved on to tractors when you went out ?

CR The first horse and cart ? Well, I wasn't here then when the first horse and cart went out. [traffic noise]

RC No. How old were you [13 mins] when the first time you did it?

CR Oh, when after I left school, 14 years of age. [CR : Right] Yes. And I always went out ... well, when we was cockling, and there wasn't many cocklers, cockles weren't plentiful, they were big ones but they were sparse, and you picked 'em with a hand tool. You had to learn to pick 'em with a hand tool. And father said I was really good at that, because he said there's not many people that can pick a basket of cockles, you know, a full level. You get used to it. I have a DVD from wherever. You used a craamⁱ. The blacksmith in Flookburgh used to make these craams, I've stood and watched him, and he cuts them out of a piece of metal and tempers them. See, if they were made too heavy, they would drag more sand into the basket than cockles.

RC Where was the blacksmith at Flookburgh ?

CR Just as you turn the corner for Ravenstown, well the sliding doors are still there which was the blacksmith's shop. [14 mins] There was a house built there ...

[sound of visitors arriving, and recording cuts out at 14 mins 1 sec]

ⁱ Illustrated in Jack Manning's book, *It was better than Working*, page 64