



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

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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW
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FRONTSHEET

INTERVIEW NO: H2H2017.35
INTERVIEWEE NAME/S: Michael Wilson
YEAR OF BIRTH: 1972
INTERVIEWER/S: Marion Dawson
DATE OF INTERVIEW: 19 and 28 January 2017
LOCATION: Flookburgh
TRANSCRIBER: Michael Redman

Summary of Interview:

No of Tracks: 2

Main Contents of Transcript:

Track 1:

Michael Wilson is a fisherman from Flookburgh, a small village in South West Cumbria. Michael talks about the regulation of the inshore fishing in Morecambe Bay. We hear of fishing techniques for shrimping, cockling, musseling and fixed netting of flat fish. He talks about his family's involvement in fishing in the Bay,

and his from being a small child. He outlines the involvement of non-local fishing including the Chinese cocklers and the disaster of 5 February 2004. There is a discussion about his involvement in cross Bay walks. Finally some words about his market gardening business.

Track 2:

Michael continues with memories of beginning fishing as a 5 or 6 year old child and his relationship with his father. Stories of life in a small fishing village can be heard, Young Farmers, Flookburgh Silver Band and other community activities. The changes to village life are illustrated with a description of tourism. Changes to the fishing in the Bay are explained by the impact of mobile phones and GPS devices. Michael explains further the impact of gang-masters on inshore fishing and the recovery of the remains of one of the Chinese cocklers. We also hear of the dangers of travelling across the sands.

Track 1

Right, Ok, so it's Marion Dawson and it's the 18th January, 19th January 2017.

19th

And, I'm talking to somebody for the Headlands to Headspace Oral History Project. Could you give me your full name please?

Michael Ronnie Wilson

And your date of birth?

21st of the tenth 1972

And, what's your occupation?

Fisherman

And, your father's?

Fisherman.

And, your mother's?

Housewife.

So, you were talking before about Regulations. I think you were a bit, you were saying that there's something that needs to be sorted out?

Yeah. They've introduced, they've licensed shell fishing now, which is cockling and musseling, and you have to have a license which is, you pay £500.00 pound a year for now, which is yeah, it is working to a certain aspect, but there's still things that need to be ironed out. And, one of the problems, in my opinion, is they haven't left a way of introducing your sons or daughters to the job. So, we're now finding, like my son is nine years old and he's starting to show an interest, and traditionally, I went with my father, and he went with his father, and, and they can't go now, which is... It just needs to be sorted out with the Fisheries that, you know, obviously I'm competent to go, so your son should be able to go with you. I think they are trying to get a way to sort it out, it just takes time, I mean this job's been on, I can't remember now, five or six years we've had to pay for licenses. Might be longer now. And they still haven't got that sorted out, and it just needs addressing.

Did you say that it's because they need to have a National Insurance Number?

Yeah, they need to have a, they say they can't go until they have a National Insurance Number, which I can't see why, 'cos. They can go shrimpin' and they can go to the, he come to the nets with me, and he can walk around on the Bay, doing anything else. Any member of the public can go on the Bay. It's a highway. So, anybody can just decide to come up there, and decide well, "I'm going to drive from Morecambe to Flookburgh if I want to.", and no one can stop you. It's a Public Highway. So, therefore, it just needs addressing a bit, just to sort...But they are, they are getting better at these things.

And, did you say that shrimping was more dangerous than cockling?

Yeah, oh definitely, it's more so. I mean with the cockle beds we can go three hours after high water. I mean, usually, it doesn't get back until three hours before high water, where with shrimping, we go later, and we work right until the tide gets to us. And, we have to work every day until the tide gets to us, 'pecifically (specifically) 'cos that's when we gets the best shrimps. And, musselin', that's rather dangerous, compared to cocking because, musseling, especially January and February, the best mussels are always at the ebb, which is usually seven or eight hours ebb, which is always in the dark. For nearly, January, February, December, it's nearly always working in the night or early mornings, and it's pitch black. By t' time it's come light, the tide's come in, or by t' time it's, or evening end, by t' time you want to be, it's gone dark anyway. So, you just work in the dark.

I feel a bit stupid, but can you explain what "the ebb" is?

When the tide goes out, how far it ebbs out. So the mussels, the best mussels are always the ones what are in the water the longest. So, when we traditionally

mussel, we go on the biggest tides. So 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, and then you'll go on these big tides, and get right down into the bottom. Well, you'll only maybe have an hour's work while the tide comes back. So they call it the "dash for the cash". (laughs)

But you don't need a license, for that?

Yeah, you need a license now for musseling and cockling, for shellfish, but you don't need a license for shrimping, or nets, or for catching fish. You need to have authorisation, to catch fish, but you don't actually need a license.

Can you quickly describe the process of shrimping for me again, because you did before?

Yeah. We go with our tractors, that used to be traditionally horse and cart, so it's now a tractor. We pull a trailer behind it what we call a "chassis", simply because it was made out of an old car chassis years ago, but now we sort of 'pecifically make them. We, we have two beam trawls on them, which are 15 foot each, which tow two nets, in the shallows, to catch shrimps.

What's a beam trawl?

A beam trawl is basically, a lump of bar along the bottom, like a scaffolding pole. And then some, well we use half inch bar up the sides and round the top, and that's what we call a beam trawl.

And, the nets, what kind of a net is it?

Well they were traditionally made out of courlene, but now we've gone onto like a nylon sort of stuff what they make salmon pens out of. There isn't actually enough demand, really, for shrimp netting anymore.

And you make them yourselves?

Just make them ourselves, yeah. You can get them made, I think. So, but it's easy just to buy the salmon pens. They have a lot of off-cuts, so we just buy them. Cheap and cut out our nets out. 'Cos, we're, we're only using a very little amount of net.

So, did you learn fishing from your father then?

Yep. It's a very, well I wouldn't call it a closed shop, but nearly. A lot of, a lot of the fishing families, if their fathers have done it their sons sort of follow into it. 'Bit like farming. If you're a farmer, your son falls naturally into it. Sort of, yeah. That's how we, we, a lot of us are from generations of fishing.

Have you got brothers or sisters as well?

Yeah, I've got a brother and a sister, but they haven't followed into the job. My brother's an electrician, and my sister's a nurse. But my brother does come fishing sometimes. He's got a, he's got a permit, a byelaw 3 permit for cockles and mussels, but he's fulltime job, he's an electrician. He's what we call a "good time fisherman".

Oh, right.

So, like, quite a lot of them that, if it's rich pickings, he suddenly shows an interest.

So, what made you want to follow in the footsteps, then, whereas your brother and sister didn't?

I don't know really. I've always just wanted to go ont' sand. Ever since I was a child, I, I feel quite privileged that, you talk to people in your life and you'll talk to someone and say they've worked in Glaxo or Sellafield or where ever, and they've hated it, hated it. And, I've always known what I wanted to do, and I can remember going to school, when I was about 14, 15 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, he was going to be a farmer, and I was going to be a fisherman, and, can't remember what the other lad was going to .., a mechanic, I think, his dad was a mechanic. And she said, "Don't you want to do anything else?", and we said, "No, no." And that. I've never had have the urge to do anything else, just go fishing. It's great.

So, what do you like about it?

Err, I think, I just like being your own boss and, and you've got to be very self-motivated, which some people... It's very easy to say, "Oh, I'm not going this morning, it's pouring down." But, then you always find, if you don't go that morning, that's the best catch. So, yeah, it's, you know, you'll wake up at, especially in November morning, at five-o'clock in the morning, and it's pounding with rain against the door, and it's dark and you have to set off and go, and you think, oh, so, but no.

So, how many days a week do you fish?

Seven, if I can help it. We have to, to make a living.

Is it hard to make a living, fishing?

It's always been traditionally, boom or nothing. An old fisherman once told me, that, to be a good fisherman, is to be able to make money, on the Bay, when no-one else can. Anyone can catch fish when there's lots of fish. Anyone can make money when there's lots of cockles, on it. It's being able to get onto that next thing when, when no-one else is on it. Like traditionally, cockling was a very poor thing. You struggled to make any money. And then they got into the Spanish market with them, and the French market, and then, oh, it was boom time. And that's what attracted a lot of, what happened in the Bay¹. What we all know about, was the money factor, But, before then, on-one really bothered with the cockles. It died a ... There was a bit of a boom, I think. When the beds were good there was quite a lot of, but a lot of time, there was very few people cockling in the Bay. So, it, yeah, there's different aspects. There was a big thing, a lot of years ago, in the 60s. It was, a lot of salmoning went on in the Bay. Well, obviously now there's no, or very few salmon left. So, the ones who tend to still salmon now, are people who've done it all their lives, and they're all getting old. There's very few young people on the salmoning, or even have a license to salmon, 'cos there's no commercial interest in it, there's no money to be made in it, which is a shame, really.

So, where do you sell your fish?

All over. All over. Shrimps are more just locally, on the, like what we call the little cottage market. Basically, in the village and obviously Furness Fish and Game, and they then pot them on and sell them, in butter and spices. Cockles, all over Europe, basically. Sometimes through a firm called Parsons Pickles, have you heard of them? If you ever go in a pub and ask for a jar of cockles, it's usually Parsons Pickles. That's them. But, the better money is more in the Spanish market, and French market, from what we call the "live market". So we harvest them now and we send them live to them. And mussels, you can send them

¹ The Morecambe bay cockling disaster 5 February 2004

abroad, but we tend, tend to send them more down Cornwall and Devon, down that way.

Are you hoping that your son will go into it?

Yes and no. I mean, yeah I hope he will. He'll definitely show an interest, because there's always an element to attract them to the job, because, when I've just spoke about good time fishing. So, sometimes you can make, so you can make money quick. So, there'll always be that draw to it. But, to actually make a full-time living, and pay a mortgage and, it's difficult. But which job isn't? So, yeah, I don't, hmm, yeah, it depends how clever he is upstairs I suppose. There's a lot of, like traditionally, years ago, there was few, well fewer paid jobs, and people didn't travel the same. They didn't know the world the same did they? Well now, you just go on the internet, and you can go anywhere. You could become an outback trucker in Australia, if you wanted. So, there's so much more opportunities for him to have. But, no, I'd like for him to follow on.

So, what are your memories of growing up in a fishing family? Can you talk a bit about that?

Yeah. Well, memories, memories. There's all sorts of memories when we... Especially when going fishing with my dad. Remember, I can remember once going and me and my mate from school, we, like... That's another aspect of the job. Your dad can traditionally, like he'll have been in the morning, and then he's at home, and then he goes again. And, we come home from school, this particular day. He was just going to go fish his net, and he said, "Oh, do you want to come?" So we all get on the tractor and ride with him, and when we got there, he'd caught a shark in the net, which was about an eight foot shark.

Really?

Yeah, it was all tangled up in it. And we. It had obviously wrecked the net, but we brought it home. There's some pictures somewhere. We put it in the wheelbarrow, and we wheeled it round the village (laughs). And we thought it was like, 'cos obviously then, in the 1970s, Jaws was on at the movies, and we had this shark, wheeled it round the village.

Wow! I forgot to ask. Where you born in Flookburgh?

Yeah.

Ok, so have you always lived in Flookburgh?

Always lived in Flookburgh (agreeing), yes.

Wow. Was your mum involved, in the fishing?

Yeah, yeah. Mum's always been involved. Yes, she's traditionally peeled the shrimps and sold them, and... But that's a thing what's dying out. Nearly every, fishing family have cousins, and things, with it being a village. And, not so much my time, when it, just before my time, the school would break up after 3 o'clock. But no kids would come out and play in Flookburgh before 4 o'clock, because they all had to pick a pound of shrimps before they could go out. So you, they'd get all, traditionally, pick them as quick as fast as they could then come out and play. Which was part of village life. But things have changed. Too many people get money off the Soc(ial)² now. There, are, you can't get people to peel them anymore, and it's ... Shrimping is becoming very difficult to make a living out of.

So, but you didn't pick when you were a child?

² Soc(ial) – means Social Security - UK Government unemployment benefit

Yeah, yeah. Everyone had a go. Yep. Me brother and sister, and we'd all have to sit round the table and have a go, yeah. I'm better at it now than I was then. I couldn't, I wasn't in... I think, a child thing. Girls are better at it. They're more nimble with their fingers, than lads, but I can pick them now.

So do you pick your own shrimps?

Yeah. Peel them ourselves. We have a few older people, cousins, mainly cousins and aunts, and, people who have done it traditionally, for donkey's years. But, any younger people don't, aren't really interested in it anymore.

When you say, "ourselves", so who do you go fishing with?

Me and my father. He still goes. He's 71, and he still goes. And my mother. And my wife used to pick them, but that's a different story. But, yes, so, we were all involved. And, obviously my sister would pick them, but she's moved up to Carlisle now. But my brother's wife, and her sister, and her mother and father, they, they pick some for us. So it's more friends and family.

Yeah, yeah. I think you said earlier that shrimping's your favourite?

Yeah, it's more challenging, is shrimping. With cockles and mussels, or... Once the beds are established and they open the bed to go fishing, it just a matter of physically getting them. Where, with shrimping, there's more skill into it. It's the same with setting nets. There's a lot of skill in that. Anyone can set a net, but they're not necessarily going to catch anything. (laughs)

So what's the skill in setting nets then?

Knowing how the channels are running, and waiting. A lot of it is a waiting game, with setting beach nets. Like traditionally, there's a lot of ... In the summer

months there's lots of what we call muck floating around, which is like, bits of seaweed and jellyfish, and all sorts of things like that, which clog the nets up. And then, all of a sudden it sort of clears out and you've just got to be ready then to be on the job. You could set them on top of the bank and your nets can get buried, and yet a good fisherman could set them, maybe ¼ mile away and his are nice and clean. You've got to know how the water's running and what's happening.

So you said a beach net. What's a beach net?

A beach net is what we traditionally, they call them a fixed engine net, is the proper name, and we set them on bars. And we obviously set them when the tide's out, and then the tide comes in, and then we go and fish them when the tide's gone back out again.

OK. And which fish is that for?

A selection of fish. We can, ... there's different types of nets for different types of fish, but traditionally flukes, Flookburgh. Plaice, bass now. They used to set for salmon, but that's sort of died out now. Bass have come in. Few codling about in the Bay now. So, it depends on what time of year and what's swimming about.

So you do a bit of everything?

Bit of everything, I'm what you call a traditional fisherman. Where there's, especially since the cocklers have got involved, there's what you call shell fishermen, and they specifically just target mussels and cockles. But I'm what you call a traditional fisherman. Which is quite strange really, because you could have a shell fisherman, and he works out there in the Bay, but he doesn't have a clue about shrimping. Never done it in his life, doesn't know how it works or anything.

And are they from the local area?

Yeah. Yeah, some of them are, yes. Some of them are from away. Some are like from Liverpool, Wales, Scotland.

And they come to Morecambe Bay?

Yeah, basically for the cockles. Obviously, when the Chinese got drowned, that was a big...everyone knows about that when all of the big cockle people got involved. Well, they've sort of been involved since then, a lot of them. There weren't really fishermen before, but obviously they have licenses now, and. But they are, they are directly, we have quite a lot of Polish lads come cockling. We had a lot of Polish a few years ago, but now they are down to about, 15 or 20 of them. They are what you call regulars who we know, who come all the time now.

So, do you know each other? Do you mix with each other?

Yeah. Yeah, all like, if it's bad times or it's a poor time, or say it's shrimping season time, there'll be happen, half a dozen shrimpers out of the village. So you know everyone who's wandering about on the Bay, and what they're doing. But, then it's when the cockles came, when the cockles came good, well just more and more people were coming from anywhere, and no-one had a clue who anyone was. But that's sort of been ironed out a bit now, 'cos it's licensed to a fixed amount of people. So, you get to know who have the licenses. So it regulates itself. Because even if we don't mix with say, some fishermen from Morecambe, they'll know, we know each other. But they'll, if they have someone turn up onto their patch who they, ... they'll know that they don't have a license, so, it's, they'll soon tell the bailiffs that some people have turned up cockling here, and they don't have licenses, and come up here and sort them out. And they do. So, yeah, it works well really.

So, is it a bit territorial, do people have their own..?

Traditionally, it was, but it was. Well that was part of the problem. I mean, there was fishermen from Aldingham, fishermen from Morecambe, fishermen from the village, and obviously if the fishermen from Flookburgh heard of a good cockle bed at Aldingham or Silverdale, they used to go. Well the ones from Aldingham were a bit territorial about it. But, they didn't predict that all of a sudden in ..., when they brought the... the law was on the Bay, it was a public fishery, and anybody had the right to go and fish on the Bay. And traditional law was, if... I could walk through a farmer's field or anything to get on that Bay, to go fishing. You could not be stopped, as long as you are going to go, and this law was brought in with the Magna Carta I think. And it had never been changed. So when all these Chinese cocklers turned up, a lot of them were sleeping in the woods at Sea Wood, but they weren't doing anything wrong, and if the police turned up and asked them where they were going, they said they were going fishing, so they couldn't stop them. But, the law, obviously, when they wrote that out in the Magna Carta, they didn't think that half of China was going to come did they? So, times have moved on, and it's like anything. You'll find a lot of laws, they don't move on 'til they have to. But, they've tightened it up a bit now. So...

Yeah, so they've brought in more regulation since then?

Yeah, you've got to have a licence now to cockle and mussel. And you've got to go on what they call "hand foreshore gatherer's course".

On a what?

On a "hand foreshore gatherer's course", I think they call it, and it's just to prove you, you are basically competent to go.

Hand foreshore gatherer's course?

Hand foreshore gatherer's course.³ Yeah. 'Cos we're classed as hand gatherers, 'cos there's no mechanical means to get them, you just collect them by hand.

Right. So, have you been on the course?

Yeah.

But you already knew how to do it?

Yeah. I've been on a course, but...They say we have to keep going, I think it's every, is it, four years, five years and have a refresher? But, it's only an advisory course.

Right. What does that mean?

If you go on it and you listen to their advice, you get your license.

OK.

But if you went on it and they said you were fit to go on the Bay, and then you drown yourself, they might be held liable.

Oh, right.

So they don't ...say that... no.

Oh so they don't say that, oh I see right I understand.

³ Hand foreshore gatherer's course – means a "Foreshore Gatherers Safety Training Certificate" run by NWIFCA – see <https://www.nw-ifca.gov.uk/byelaws/> and "permit" means a byelaw 3 permit.

You understand what I'm coming...?

Yeah, yeah, Ok.

'Cos no-one wants to be held liable, for someone else's cock-up.

Yeah, yeah. Right.

But the job's become a lot easier now. I mean, we all have, we all carry GPSs.

Right, OK

So, I mean, we used to play a bit of cat and mouse, years ago, 'cos it's a big, vast area. If someone went cockling, say, and you found them, and you didn't want to, you'd go at night, or you'd go on foggy days ... But now, once they've found you, all they have to do is press that button on that GPS and it'd take them back there, every day.

So, it's got easier?

Oh, it's got easier, that way. But that's worse for us. I mean that's just modern times, isn't it?

So what do you actually do when you are cockling, how do you catch cockles?

How do you catch cockles? Well they're growing in the sand, they're living in the sand, and we take what we call, a jumbo. Or some people call it a tamper board now.

A what?

A tamper.

Tamper.

Yeah, a tamp board. Slightly different that we made. We have two handles, and we, we, you sort of rock it by your side, where a tamp board just has one handle and you rock it, more like that. Some people prefer tamps. We, traditionally we've always used jumbos round this area, but sometimes you'll find that tamps work better than jumbos and sometimes jumbos work better than tamps, so there's a bit of a mixture of both, now. But,...

So what do you use that for?

You rock that on the sand, and the cockles come, float to the top, and you'll just either rake them in, or sometimes, if what we call they're thin, we pick them individually with what we call a craam. But, it's more this year because they are quite prolific, we're just raking them. Now last year, when they opened them for the first time after, I think it's eight years it's been shut. There was just some big cockles and they 'pecifically (specifically) said that you had to pick them with what, what we call a craam, so you had to pick them individually.

Right. What's a craam?

A craam is like a little three pronged, fork. Basically, you flick them out one at a time.

Ok, and is it hard work?

Yeah, yeah, can be. It's very nice work sometimes. Yeah, same old thing. It depends on how many you have to get, and how many people are there, and if you, how greedy you are.

Ok, Yeah, and I think you've said shrimping is, is it less physical, but more mentally challenging?

It's more mentally challenging than, yeah, it's less, well it can be very physical. If you catch a lot of shrimps, you've got to..., but same thing, times have moved on. We used to riddle them all by hand, traditionally, out ... 'Cos you got to riddle them before you bring them home. So, obviously all the baby ones go back. No, we used to riddle them all by hand, stand in the water, riddle them all by hand. But now we've all built what we call riddling machines, and we tow them behind the tractor. We use them now, so that's took a lot of the physical work out of it.

Right. Right, so with shrimps, you pick them. What's the process for cockles then, once you've caught them?

Well, that's another thing why it's become so easy, because there is no process, basically. When the big boom time was on years ago, the buyers were just waiting on the shore, and they just bought them in the shell. They just weighed them on a set of weighing scales, weighed them on a set of scales, and they said that's it, they paid you. So there was no processing. Well years ago we had to process, process them ourselves. You'd cook them in the boiler that we boiled shrimps in. And, take the meat out of the shells, and, and traditionally sell them on market stalls, or round the pubs, or anything. But, that's all gone now. They all just go, either, to a processing factory, in this country to get cooked, or they go abroad to get cooked.

Right, OK. So's that always happened with cockles, now you don't cook them yourself?

We, we still cook some, but only basically for, we still get samples for DEFRA and Sellafeld, and things like that. So, we, they just 'pecifically want the meat so we still boil a few for them. And there's one, I think there's only one fisherman left now, who still boils a few for his market stall, but it's very, very political.

Is it?

Yeah.

In what way, that's interesting?

Well, our little boiler houses, what we call boiler houses, our little sheds where we process our shrimps and everything. We're very small scale, where you take all these cockles to a factory, the health and hygiene, and regulations, and the cooking temperatures have to be so precise, where they've basically wiped us lot out. You couldn't come and process cockles now. It would cost thousands to, they call them a cooking plant now. So, there's one, one man. I think they still allow him, basically to do it because he just sells a few. He sells them on his market stall. So, he's always done it.

Yeah, but, yeah. So you couldn't afford to do that?

No, you couldn't you couldn't set up a cooking plant.

Right.

Because it would cost thousands.

Ok, so you're not allowed just to do it in a shed, anymore?

You are, but you're not, if you know what I mean. (laughs) It's one of them things. They're basically phasing it out, which is a shame really, because it was always done that way. Anyone, it's a bit like anything. Anyone who did it, they've let carry on, but anyone who wants to come along ...

They're not letting new people do it?

Yeah, but there's too many Regulations, they put a kybosh on it before they start.

Ok, Ok. So do you mean like health and safety, or...?

Well, health and hygiene, basically.

Ok. Right, ok.

And, not only that. Another thing what's killed fishing, especially like that sort of side of it is, having somewhere to do it. All the properties in the village now. If it had room for what we call a boiler house and somewhere to... Traditionally, it was somewhere to keep the horse. Well now it's somewhere to keep the tractor. Well all them houses have nearly been built on. So people can't afford to ... You can't just go and buy a house and park an old tractor and shrimping trailer outside on the road. (laughs) The people who go shell-fishing, a lot of them, all they have is a quad bike and a van. So, yeah, so, things have, things have changed.

So, there used to be a space on the property that people would use as a boiler house?

Yeah, yeah. A lot of them, but like, the house you're now sat in, this is like a traditional fisherman's cottage. Well obviously, there's a big garden down the back, and the shed's down there, and then me tractor's kept down there. But, the

house next door, and the house next door to that, property developers are wanting to buy, they've bought that. And, they want to build on it all.

Right, right.

So, so once they've built on it, there's no room for people to start fishing.

Ok, ok. So are there a lot of new people in the village?

Yeah, yeah. It's becoming more of a tourist village than a working village. And, it's only happened in the last ten or fifteen years. More, Cartmel and up that way was what you call your, your holiday maker's village, but now, it's spreading. They've got to Cark and coming to Flookburgh. The world's a small place. You look on the internet, Manchester to Cark, on the train. Get off, walk down into Flookburgh, and they're in.

Yeah. So is that a positive or a negative?

It has its positives, and it has its negatives, doesn't it? Yeah, It's pushed house prices up, which, I mean, they've gone up anywhere, everywhere, but it's a lot harder to make enough money out of the Bay to buy a property. 'Specially a property with land, what you need to do the job. And then it's also ... People want to see it happening, or hear about the traditions of fishing, but people don't want to smell it. Which, it, yeah. It sounds daft,

No it's funny.

Yeah, you know that. In this street, where you are, there's me here now, and there's Frank there, across the road. We're about the last two, but there was Brian, up the road. This is when I left school. There's Brian up the road, there was Tony Wilson, there was Herbert Benson, there was Les Butler, there was

Derek Butler, there was Jack Manning, there was Harold Manning. Well, they'd all come home from the sand at the same time. They all lit their old boilers up, and a lot of them, back then, were ... Well we've always used diesel burners, but a lot of them used to burn sump oil. So all this black smoke was coming out of the village. And, you'd hear all the house women run out, "Get your washing in, they're home from the sands". And there's all, this black soot would... And then, and then, you'd smell all the steam coming up in the village, and shrimps being cooled down, which is very picturesque to talk about, and everything, and wonderful stories, but if you get someone who've just spent £200,000 on their house, and they've just decorated it, and they've hung all their nice washing out in the back yard, and a lot of fishermen come home and have a load of, start up their old tractors in the middle of the night, and "What's all this noise going on?" and things clanking past and then next thing, they're back home in three or four hour's time, cooking all these stinking shrimps.

Yeah, yeah, I can see what you're saying. So, I mean, has that happened? Have people actually made complaints?

No, not really. You can tell, like people want... With a lot of things, they want like farming, traditional farming methods. They want to see the "olde worlde" picture on a bag of 'taties (potatoes) of someone picking a few of 'taters up, but that doesn't happen anymore, it's a mass' machine that goes up and down the thing. But, and same with the, free range eggs, farmers. And, they want to see this chicken wandering around in the, in the farm yard. That's lovely that, isn't it? They don't want to see in it a battery hen. But they also don't want to see the chicken going round the corner and eating the dog pooh, where the dog's done its little thing, 'cos that's what chickens do! But people believe that free-range is very good for you. So, there's elements of, people want tradition, and promote tradition, but then it can't be sustained as a modern way of life, really. You got to find a fine balance.

Yeah, yeah. So, what's positive, do you think, about the change, about? What have been positive changes?

Don't really know. Well, I s'pose the introduction of tractors was a positive thing. It makes the job faster, but then again, it's the same thing. People want to see a whole lot, an horse and a cart, you know. They see these old pictures of horse and carts and everything. But then if they saw me now, if I was going past with an horse, fastened to a cart and we were going out in the middle of the night and the horse is up to its belly in water in February. What would people's opinion of that horse be now?

But there are still a lot of local people living in the ...?

Oh, yeah, yeah. There's a lot of local people, but even the local people, obviously you see it's been a fishing village. But, even the local.. It's no longer a fishing village. People, you know, they can go get a job at Ulverston, or they can get a job at Barrow-in-Furness, but they still live in the village. So, they know that their grandfather went to the sands, but they've never actually been to the sand. So they tolerate it because they've been brought up with all these old tractors and things, but. In the last few years people are very impatient, shall we say. You know, you used to come down here with your fishing tractor, and people would see you coming and get out of your way. Well now, they're coming through whatever. So. Yeah, things change.

So, is it very noisy?

Well, it can be, yeah, I mean. It's not so much now 'cos there's not so many of us left, but when I was 15 or 16 there'd happen be 15 or 16 people going to full tide, riding to the sands. I mean, if it was 5 o'clock in the morning, going, and all of a sudden there were 15 tractors would roar into life in the village, and start up, and

then they'd be all shouting and bawling at each other, and... So, yeah, it's gone quiet now. There's only me and Frank on this street, and Frank's 60-odd.

What's Frank's surname?

Benson. Oh, and then there's Tony at the other end, Tony at the other end of the village. But, he tends to go up over the hill, and that way, where we tend to go this way. There's different, you can get on, on the Bay at each end of the village. So.

Right ok, and do you go to the same place that your father went, to?

You go everywhere in this bay.

Oh, right, right.

Everywhere.

So, it's a free for all.

It's a free for all. It's a free for all.

Ok. Ok. Is there any rivalry, between fishermen, or was there?

Oh yeah. That makes a good fisherman doesn't it?

Right, rivalry makes you a good fisherman?

Yeah, you've got to be hungry haven't you?

Right, Ok.

You don't want to be too hungry, but you've got to be hungry enough. Yeah, yeah. There's all sorts of tales of, like, some fishermen. It doesn't happen so much now, but they used to, they'd buy an old tractor and first thing they'd do is take the governors out of the pumps and they went faster than anybody else's. Had to get there quick, and then as they got home, say, like in the spring, traditionally, you might get a boiler full of shrimps, which is one boiling. But, if someone had two boilings there'd be two lots of steam go up. So, "they've done alright today."

Right, right. Yeah, yeah

...and things like that, yeah.

So you'd see how much other people had caught, and you'd want to do better than that?

Yeah. Yeah, or you might have been to the east side of the Bay and they'd been to the west side of the Bay, and they're still cooking their shrimps, and you're finished. So, you'd think, "Well they've had a good do where they've been. We'll be going there, tomorrow."

Exactly yeah. Yeah, yeah. Do you think that there's actually less fish in the Bay, than there used to be?

I think there's actually more in some species. There's a lot of plaice, very, a lot of plaice now. Where, when I left school, you'd be very lucky to see one. Now, Now, they're basically that prolific we chuck them away. We can't do anything with them. We catch that many of them. So, why that's happened is that nature? Is that to do with Fleetwood, it's a very big activity at Fleetwood normally. There's very few trawlers, there's very few Morecambe trawlers left. So, have they come

back because of that? We used to traditionally catch a lot of mullet, and that was more of a summer thing, for us. We'd go to what we call, "the side of a gold mine", which is the side of the east channel, down by Heysham Power Station. If you go to Morecambe, they call it the "west shop". So, same place, but different names, and we would wait 'til the tide started to come back in at them. If the sand had got baked on a hot summer's day, and as the tide come on to it, all these mullet would come on to the side, and we'd just to walk round and catch them. But, they were worth very little money, and a lot of people scared them away. You just have to walk, they are quite a timid fish. In the last ten years, the market become quite good for them, and there's no mullet anymore. So they have sort of been fished out. Or, or have they been fished out or have they just naturally moved on. We don't really know. You went back to the 60s or 70s, no one ever caught a bass. Never heard of catching a bass in Morecambe Bay. And if they did, they didn't know what it was, and now we, traditionally, think, well the bass'll come July, August, September. So things move. Times move on.

But, so you don't think that's a reason why less people are fishing. You don't think there's actually less fish to be caught?

No. There's less people fishing 'pecifically because it's easier to just get a job, and the property side of it goes up. Like, there was a lot of part-time fishermen. Their father's had fished, and they moved into their houses, so the yards were still there, and they had a tractor and thing. But, then, "Mr Property" man has come along and bought the yards for so many thousands of pounds and that's basically become their pensions. But then, it leaves no room for the next generation to come on. So, well, you'll know, with Morecambe, more than this side of the village, the Bay. (correcting himself) Because Morecambe, obviously there was a lot of Morecambe trawlers and things. And, Morecambe was a traditional fishing village, and then it went to a seaside town. But, there's very, very little room left on the seafront for the fishermen, isn't there?

Right. Do you think Brexit is going to have any impact?

No, no. Not one bit. No. Now, we should, that should have been in ..., we should have been really, I suppose, been worried about that because we sell a lot of our mussels, and mainly cockles to the French and Spanish markets. But, it hasn't made one bit of difference. They still want our cockles. So, they'll still, buy them won't they?

So, EU regulation doesn't have any impact?

It, it, yes. Yes, it's had a lot of impact, really, but not as me being a fisherman. I've never really got involved in the political side of it. But, just lately I've had to go to a few meetings, and I've come to understand, like the Fisheries⁴ we say, "Why don't you just open that, you know. There's all these cockles there. They're going to die. Just get it open." But, we've come to understand now that, it has to go to the European Union, it has to be delegated with the birds, it has to have scientific impact studies done on it and all sorts of things. Well, by the time you've done all these things, the fish have died anyway (laughs). But, it, yeah, it's very difficult for them to, to just open places and shut places, and, and ...

Yeah, you said something earlier about how lots of people are involved in it now, and lots of people have a say, about when the beds are open, and closed.

Yeah, yeah. But lots of people who know nothing about the job. Which, I mean, we, me and the fishermen. I've tried to campaign that the fishing activity, for instance for cockles, does not make one bit of difference how many cockles there are out in that Bay. It doesn't, we do not affect it. Now, 'cos of, the Chinese came, and everything, when they shut the Bay down, a lot of people have, now got in their heads, "Oh, they've wiped all the cockles out", and that's why there's

⁴ NWIFCA North Western Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

been no cockling in the Bay for the last 8 years. That's a load of absolute tosh. I mean, the cockles have per..., set, what we call "set", which is spawn, and started to grow. Three, I think three times where they've been really, really good, and they've all got to about the size of your finger nail, and then they've all died. All of them have just died, out of natural causes. We can't find out why they die, but this..., well not this year, but last year, they've set up again, and they've grown, and they've lasted last winter, and now this winter we're able to go and get them, and there's plenty of cockles growing. So, it's a natural thing. They try, people try to talk about having a sustainable fishery, but you can't sustain something what either there's tons of it there, or there's nothing of it there. And, it has nothing to do with the fishing activity at all. But, also, the scientists who run the job, and everything, they have to follow rules and legislation, and all things, and they come up with this idea that, if there was less than 20 cockles per square metre, we couldn't harvest them. But now, they've come to realise that doesn't really affect the breeding activity of the cockle. For whatever, see, I'm only a fisherman, I don't know why they breed and why they don't breed. I don't think the scientists even know.

So they've come to the conclusion, it doesn't affect it, really?

No. So, we're trying to campaign, you know, that the fishing activity doesn't really have any effect, impact on them. There's cockles there, they live for 4 or 5 years and then they die. But, if we don't start harvesting them, they just grow and they choke their selves and they die anyway, naturally. And, obviously winter storms can come and blow them all into big heaps, and then they choke and die. So, there's a lot of natural phenomena what stops us fishing, than actual fishing activity. You don't fish them out, really.

OK, and you said something about birds, birds?

Birds, yeah. That's to do with the European Union now and everything. They has to do scientific studies on the impact of the Bay, and how much shellfish is there, and I think they have to... Say they estimate there's 12,000 tons of cockles out there. They have to say "Well we'll let you harvest 8,000 tons and 4,000 tons have to be left for the birds to eat." That doesn't make any difference to the birds, the birds like us being out there.

Why's that?

Because, the birds are scavengers, basically. They're looking for an easy way to get into a cockle. So any that we, as we go, traditionally, get them in, and you obviously break them with your rake, or anything. You chuck it out, the bird comes along and eats that one, 'cos it's already opened for it. So we have birds 'specially Curlews and sandpipers, and basically stood watching us cockling. They're looking for the scraps.

Yes. So you do shrimping, cockling, you talked about mussels.

Yeah, musseling, beach nets, do Cross Bay walks.

Right, Cross Bay walks?

Yeah. Used to do them. Where people want to walk across the Bay.

Ok, so you've led, you've led Cross Bay walks?

Led, yeah. Or, well, we've helped on them. We've helped on them.

Ok, So, you and your father?

Yeah, yeah. It was us who helped, well we, we, we sort of set up the idea with a feller called Alan Sledmore, about the Cross Bay Challenge, if you mean that. But that got very political and same thing, people get involved, and so.

So, what was the Cross Bay Challenge?

The Cross Bay Challenge was a thing, it become over time ... The first year they did it, it was a running club what wanted to basically, just run across the Bay. And, Alan said to me, "Could it be done". I said, "Yeah, it's easy enough to do." So, they turned up, I think there was about, maybe 20 of them, and all they did was, basically I set off with a tractor and drove from Flookburgh to Morecambe and they ran behind. But then, people sort of come up with this idea of doing this for charity. And it grew over time and then Cancer Care got involved. I think, the first year it went towards the RNLI. They raised the money for the RNLI. But that got political, as it does. Anyway, it went to Cancer Care, and it's been done like that for the last 10 or 12 years now. And then, I think that they basically, the fishermen who were doing it, have basically said it's got too complicated now. There's too much risk involved with... It's too highlighted, too many people are involved. The Coastguard's involved and all these other people, and they don't really know what they're talking about. Like last year they ran from Hest Bank to Flookburgh, but they couldn't set off 'til 7 hours after the tide. Where, at Liverpool, it's starting to come back in. So the Coastguard are saying, "That's dangerous, you can't do that, the tide's already starting to come back in." But we can't get across the Kent river 'til before the tide's, 'til the last hour before the tide comes back in, safely. So, you've got to run them through the river, but what once they get up, out of the river onto the top, they had all day. Because you would specifically pick a tide when it was low tide, so once they'd got up onto the top, even if the tide came in, it's not going to get them now. There's only that bit in the bottom, but they didn't... To try and explain that to people, and, and, oh dear.

So, you used to be involved in that?

Yeah.

But, you're not anymore?

No. Which is a shame really. A man called, er, well you've heard of Cedric Robinson? He still guides people across the Bay. And Raymond Porter, he's the other guide for the Leven. They still do it, and Alan Sledmore he used to do it from Hest Bank, but I think he's retired, basically, through ill health and other reasons.

So was that a voluntary thing that he did?

Yeah. He just set off doing it. He liked walking across the Bay and he set off doing it, then some people. It grew over time. Some people wanted to go with him, and then he said, "Well what happens if you know, there's 5 or 6 walking across this bay and summat happens to us?" So, then he asked traditional, ... he asked me, or someone. Jack Manning first, I think it was Jack Manning who went with him. "If we have this walk, will you come with your tractor and then if anyone is lame or has a thing, you can take them off the Bay?", and he said, "Yeah". And then Jack, he got to the point when he retired, so then Jack came and asked me, would I do it for them. And, maybe I had one or two walks a year, but then it got to 5 or 6 walks or 7 walks and then it got... People, other people got involved, of course, Guide got involved, and yeah.

And you were doing that on a voluntary basis?

Just on a voluntary basis, yeah. Which, you didn't mind once or twice, but then it got to, it got more and more, and we also would like, well you know..., we didn't want to do this every weekend in the summer.

Yeah, yeah. So, what else do you do apart from fishing?

Well, I've a bit of a market garden. I grow a few plants, and grow a few taties, and very olde worlde. (laughs) The good life, but it's not so good.

So, is that here?

That's just the other end of the village, where my grandfather used to live. We have a couple of acres of land there. We grow a few taters, and carrots, and then in the summer we'd go and stand on the market at Barrow. My father used to stand there. And my grandfather used to stand there, three days a week, and fish in between. But, fishing's took over and the markets have sort of died out a bit. So I just stand there twice a week now, in the summer.

So when you say "we", is that you and your dad?

It used to be me and my wife, but my wife is no longer with me. So, it's just me now. My dad sort of retired, he doesn't want to... He comes and helps me sometimes, now, but, he's 71 now so, it got so that me and my wife used to, took over the business, but things change.

Ok, so when you were saying, "We", you meant you and your wife?

Yeah.

Ok, so your dad's retired now?

Yeah.

Ok. So you grow potatoes and carrots?

Yeah, and beetroot, and lettuces, and spring onions, and turnips, and a bit of bedding plants. Few tomatoes, yeah.

And, do you sell the fish on the market as well?

Yeah, sell the shrimps on the market, and the fish, yeah.

And that's twice a week in the summer?

Twice a week in the summer, on a Wednesday and Friday, I go. But that's another thing that's died out, is markets. Mr Morrison's, and Mr Asda price has put a kybosh on that. So.

Is that because it's cheaper to shop in a supermarket?

It's cheaper, and it's so convenient, isn't it. You can get everything under one roof, you can park your car outside for nothing, where... It's just 'pacifically, Barrow-in Furness or Morecambe, it's every town isn't it? They've all had a knock on effect. You can just pull up on a Sunday morning, go and get your breakfast in Morrison's' café, go and get all your shopping, and put it all in the car and go home. Where, to go round, like, the traditional town centre where you'd have to park miles away. You'd have to pay for parking and then you'd have to trump it all along the high-street, go in the butcher's, and then go in the greengrocer's, and go in the ... Well you can see why people don't do it. But then again, people want tradition. People think it's all very nice this little village, or this little town, you know. And, they promote like Ulverston as a traditional market town and they try and promote it as that, but you're not going to stop modern progress, are you?

So what makes you keep on going, then? What makes you keep on doing it when ...?

Well luckily, we adapt. You have to adapt, don't you? I mean, there was a few years ago, before the cockles come good. It, it was struggling with the fishermen they were dying out and no-one was replacing them. Then the cockles came in, and then we've got on with marketing them ourselves, and got a bit more, 'cos of the internet's came along. You can, you've found out that, oh, they'll like cockles in Spain now, and maybe tap a few e-mails on your computer and you're suddenly talking to somebody in Spain, where no-one knew anything about that. Even the biggest market, you know when they've traditionally potted the shrimps with, to take them to London, which people thought was a long way away now. But now, it's not. You can put them on a wagon and they can be in France the next day. So the world's got a smaller place, and it's opened up more markets. But, you've got to be the first on the market, you got to be in there. So.

So, do you never think about packing it all in and ...?

Oh yeah. Every winter. Every winter. Or, or when something's fallen off the tractor, or you've blown a piece up, or you've broke something. You just think, "Why don't I just have a normal job?" But, then you're going out on a summer's evening at 7 o'clock at night and the sun's going down and, or you're going early morning, and the sun's just coming up, and you look round and you think, and you look over towards Morecambe and all the cars are going down the front, and you think, "They're all going to work now, and there's me out here chugging about." I know where I'd rather be. So.

Do you think, you'll always fish then until you retire?

Oh, yeah. I'm too old to do a change now, and I don't want to change. I never have wanted to change, so I'll always fish. That's me. Yeah. I mean, there's opportunities, will come along, but you get lazy as you get older. You get content. You get, ... You need young blood to push you along, and, and like find these

markets, and otherwise it'll die, you know, like. As I said, whitebait was a big thing. Well no-one has traditionally bothered with whitebait, late, for a lot of years. But, there's no reason why there isn't a market out there, if someone researched it enough. We've just got on to the, like mussels was never any good for a lot of years, but it was in the early 1900s. And then it sort of died a death, and then it come back again. And, so, it depends, yeah, it depends. You might not go full generation and all they've ever done is catch mussels, and then the next generation comes along and it dries up. So, they have to change and adapt to catch something else. There's always going to be a living to be made in the Bay, but you've got to be on the ball enough. People want tradition. People like, if you caught salmon for 30 years, you're not going to just stop salmon fishing, even though it's no longer commercially viable. They still carry on. It's tradition. They go there in the summer, and do. Where someone will come along and start catching bass, for instance. And they're making more money catching bass, but they don't tell them, because they don't want them to know what they are doing. And so, things change. And it, over the next ten years, they say, "Well, you've been doing that for 10 years now." So you know, so, yeah.

So do you think there's a positive future then?

Oh yeah, yeah, but people are lazy, aren't they? People are so much more lazy now, than what they were 50 years ago. 'Cos, "Well I'm not going to work, I'll get on the Soc(ial security)."

So you think, but you think that fishing will, carry on in the Bay? You don't, forever?

Yeah. Maybe not so much full-time, but yeah, there'll always be the goodtime fishermen. Always.

Ok. Is there anything else that you want to add, before we?

Not really I don't think, no. Well, is there anything else you want to ask?

Ok. I could go on and on, but I'm quite hungry so I think I'm going to have to go and get myself some tea somewhere.

Some dinner?

Yeah, but thank you, thank you very much. I really appreciate that. That's fantastic.

No, no problem. Yeah.

[End of track 1]

Track 2

We talked a lot about things that are happening now, today, but we didn't talk much about your childhood. So I was wondering if, I was wondering if you tell me when you first started fishing, 'cos I know you followed your dad into it?

Yeah. Yeah, well basically, from day dot. From being just a little boy. You just, you know, on nice days, or whatever, your dad would just say, "Do you want to come?", and you'd go. Obviously, it's more just in the summer when you are younger. As time went on, you went, going in school holidays and wintertime, like now.

So what kind of age?

I'd say 5 or 6 we started going.

And what were you catching first of all?

You'd probably go to the fluke nets and catch fish and flukes and things. Or, maybe sometimes if he was going for a few cockles, we'd go and help him get them. Just basically for a day out.

And what did you actually do?

Oh, we helped him. Yeah, we helped him. If he jumbo-ed the cockles, we were obviously little kids, we would pick them up and put them in the basket. And, obviously the same with fishing the net. You'd go along and pull some of the fish out a put them in his basket.

And was you sister involved in that as well?

Yeah, sister come, and my brother. Yeah, they've all been through it. But, they just took better careers.

And what sort of man is your dad?

What sort of man? Just an average sort of man, I suppose.

Well what sort of personality? How would you describe him?

He's quite laid back. Yeah. He's a lot more laid back, now he's older. But, yeah, no. yeah. Very good. Yes, my mam would come and all, some days, like take a picnic and make a day of it. So, it was work combined with pleasure, really, at weekend. Obviously sometimes the tide it's early mornings or late afternoons and things. But, if the tide was right, we'd go sometimes.

So, if was an early or a late tide, you wouldn't (go)?

Yeah. But., sometimes, like after school, if you was going after school, sometimes, me and my mates would all jump on the tractor and go help him fish the net. And that's, well that's how you learn, isn't it? This is the problem, as I said before, about young people getting involved with this cocking thing now. And, I have talked to the bailiff since and they are, they are recognising that there's something that needs to be done. So, hopefully something will be done about it.

And, did you say, your uncle fished as well, or does still fish?

No. I don't think so.

Oh, alright. But was it your grandad?

My grandad, my great grandad, they all fished. Well, yeah, we're all from a long line of fishermen.

So, did you know your grandad?

Yeah, Yeah, my grandad, he, he was still going to the sands 'til he was 87. He would come cockling sometimes. Only odd days, but my great grandfather, I think, he went every day, until I think he was about 89.

Do you have any stories of their lives, that have been passed on?

Yeah, there's all sorts of bits of stories. Like my dad, when he was young they found a bed of cockles, so they wanted to go and get them at night so no-one would know where they were getting them from. So, the first night they went, him and his grandfather would go. Anyway, they took a Tilley lamp with them. Like a

paraffin lamp. They had that on the beach and they were cockling away and next thing, the lamp went out. So his grandad said, "Go see why the lamp's gone out.", and he said, "Oh, tide's come in." "Oh well we'd better get home quick." 'cos they had to come up the bank, and through what they called the meetings before the tide got there. And, anyway, he said, "Don't tell, don't tell your dad. Don't tell your dad what happened." And anyway he said, next night they would go again, and he said "Have you got a watch with you?" He said, "No, I haven't got a watch grandad, I'll go and get a watch." So, he brought an alarm clock out, so they got there, they were cockling away. Next thing, the alarm clock, went off, and the horse ran away. (Laughs) And they said, it was pitch black and all they could do was hear this, jingle, jingle. And they were walk towards where this, and it would jingle, jingle some more, they followed it around the sands, in the dark, yeah. To catch the horse again.

Was that your grandad, or did you say?

That was my dad and his grandad.

Right.

My great grandfather.

Yeah. Well, so you come from a long line of fishermen?

Oh yeah, yeah.

Are there any other kind of well-known characters, in the village, or people that you knew growing up.?

Yeah, well there was a lot more fishermen in the village then. There were, there was loads of fishermen, and they'd do all sorts of things. Like, they would send

like along this main street of Flookburgh. If everyone got home, and they were boiling up. They'd be watching how much steam was coming up, and then they'd say, "Well, that's their second time they've boiled today. They must have caught some." And, they'd come round and ... Can remember one story, a young lad was playing out on the street, and a fisherman said to him, "I see you've caught quite a few shrimps today, did you do alright?". And, he said, "I can't tell you because my dad said we're going there again tomorrow." So, obviously, they were going there again. So, everyone was going to go there.

Did he have a social life, your dad, or ...?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. He played in the band, in Flookburgh Band. I played in the Flookburgh Band, my brother still plays in the Flookburgh Band. My grandfather played in the Flookburgh Band, so we all did that bit, yeah.

What kind of a band?

Silver band. Flookburgh Silver Band, yeah. That's always been made up of fishermen. A lot of fishermen have been in that, yeah.

So, is that quite an important part of the village then?

Yes, yeah. I mean, it's still, the band still comes round and plays carols at Christmas. And, it still plays every Christmas morning ont' square, which has become very popular now at Chr(istmas). Square's always full. It never used to be when I was in the band, but it's become ... 'Cos a lot of the villages that are in the area are all holiday homes, and people come up from Manchester, and everywhere. We all come down to stand on the square, and sing Christmas carols, on the Christmas morning, which is... They think it's fascinating, I suppose. That, yeah, so.

So what did you play?

I played the baritone. My brother plays the cornet, and my dad played the bass.

The baritone⁵ what?

A baritone is like a smaller bass, like a tuba. And a, yeah. But, it become the choice of the Flookburgh Band or the Young Farmers. I took the Young Farmers and I've never gone back. I keep saying, I might do, one day, but we'll see.

So how old were you when you went?

Well, I was about 16, 17.

So what was the attraction of the Young Farmers?

Girls. (laughs) Well, just more social life, young people. The band was a lot of practising, and they got into doing a lot of competitions, which I didn't really like. So, I made the choice of Young Farmers.

So, what did you do in the Young Farmers?

Oh, all sorts of things. Yeah, you know. You did, you do stock judging and laying hedges, and all sorts of things. And, talking, and, Have you never... Did you never do anything with the Young Farmers? No? No, yeah, it's a good thing. It's still on the go, yeah. Yeah, they do all sorts of competitions, and they have field days, and, yeah. It's just a load of young people, that all get together. So you're a bit ... Obviously young people are all a bit wild. Yeah.

⁵ A baritone is a brass horn with a brighter sound than a euphonium.

So, I wouldn't have thought of someone who's a fisherman joining the Young Farmers. So, I wouldn't have...

No, but I mean. I suppose it goes hand in hand, because you went to school, and a lot of it's farming round here, and, a lot of it's fishing. You grow up with them all, so your mate joins, and he said, "Well you join." And, you see. Because it's Young Farmers, you don't ...? Oh, it's not particularly just, you know, farming. But, some things are quite good to learn, like you went to learn. A number of them went and did hedge-laying, which in later life, now I have a field, I can lay my own hedge and do. So yes, certainly. Obviously stock judging's not much good to me, but, it was interesting, quite, to learn things, yeah.

So, you said that, it could be quite wild?

Oh, yeah, yes. Especially the dances, end of the year. Field day. They had, like a field day. They still have it every year now, and that was good. Yeah, and then they'd have a big dance at the end of it. And, young people do what young people do, shall we say. So, yeah. No, it was good.

And was that in Flookburgh?

No, No. There's Young Farmers clubs everywhere, at Carnforth and Lowick, and Furness, and they'd all. All the clubs would join up and have this big field day, and then there'd be competition. Who's the best club, and then there's a dance at the end of it, end of the night of it. Yeah, so it's good.

Is that, is that something your father was also, you parents were also involved in?

No, I don't think so, no, they were never in it. My sister was heavily involved in it. She got into it in a big way. She liked it. Obviously, she married a farmer, so that's how they basically met. So, yeah.

So, has there always been a relationship, between fishing people and farming people?

Yeah, 'cos, I suppose like in a village like Flookburgh, that's all there was. There was nothing else. There was either farming or fishing. I mean it was only a small, or a smallish village then, so everyone knew everybody. So, yeah. I mean, and it's not so much now, but years ago like, everyone would go and help on the farm, get the harvest in as everything else. When you were kids, you'd go tatie picking, and things, but that's all gone now. So a lot of the community's gone. You know. It's all just tractor work and machines, and health and safety. And when we used to go, and they used to spin a row of taters and all the kids would turn up out of the village and pick them all up for the farmer. So, yeah. And hay time, when we say hay timing now, you don't go now, we go driving the tractor around the field, while they load it up with hay bales. And none of that is ever done anymore now. These kids don't know any of that.

So, why is that not done anymore?

Well, it's just modern technology, that's just come along. It's all big bales and hydraulics, and yeah. Well I suppose farming's moved on hasn't it?

Is that, do you feel a bit sad about that, or ...?

Yeah. Yeah, I mean, yeah. I mean, It's same thing now a farm exists in the village, but no-one goes to it. Where all the kids would go to it at certain times of the year, and go and help the farmer, and mess about. And some kids got interested and they'd go down and help him feed his calves, and whatever, but

they don't go near now, because there's nothing for them to do. And, obviously they can't let them drive the tractors any more or do anything like that, so yeah, it's killed the community side of it really.

And is that purely because of technological innovation?

Yeah, yeah. Especially with the farming job. I mean, with the fishing job, now, years ago like. It's always been a boom or bust thing, has fishing in the Bay. Like, just at this present time, there's a lot of cockles. And they are going to be really good next year. Hopefully, if the weather's ..., and they don't die. But, that's when everyone would go out of the village and help. You know it was good times are here. But that's all stopped now, because of this licensing thing. No-one can go. Which is a bit of a ... aunts and uncles, and you know and anyone who ... Some people who, I don't know, have lost their job, or whatever, they could go and make a few quid down there 'til they got going again, doing something else. But, that's finished now, which is a bit of a shame really. I mean times move on, you've got to, sort of, protect the industry. Which it, when it was based in Flookburgh it was just a little industry wasn't it, but now, there's nothing of, someone getting in a van and coming from Liverpool, Manchester, so yeah. They'd had to do something about it. But, it's a shame, 'cos the community side goes of it. Everyone would go, get up and go cockling, and then they'd all come back and talk about it, and all the fisherman would go to the pub and get drunk, and do all sorts of daft things, but no that's gone now.

So, was the pub quite a big part of village life?

Well it was in any village, wasn't it, back then, 'cos that was it? There was, there was either the pub or nothing. So, they'd all, go to the pub, and obviously get a few drinks, and then they'd get daft, and do all sorts of daft things. I can remember two old fishermen, they got in the pub and they were saying, "My horse is better than your horse." and, "No it's not.", "Yes it is.", and the young

lads went and got the horses out of the field, and they raced them up here. Raced them up the street in the middle of the day. Popped up on the back of the horses. To prove which was the fastest horse. Yeah.

Do you remember which fisherman that was?

I can't remember which fisherman it was, no. I mean, there was a fisherman, he was called Ali (ph) Benson. And, obviously when he was a young boy, he always was brought up with horses, and he, I think, he raced in the Grand National, as a jockey. But, my dad once said, when they were kids, they would come home, and they would wait, and the fisherman would give them the horse, and say, "Go and let the horse out in the field." Well, this particular fisherman had this big white horse called "The Colonel". He said, "I'm going to ride that horse.", and my dad said, "You won't ride the Colonel". He was right tame on the sand, but as soon as you let it out, it had done its work, it wanted to play. And they took it up here, behind the back of the school, and Ali climbed on the back of its back, and it set off down the field and it jumped over the hedge. It went round in the next field, and it jumped back over, and Ali wasn't on the horse. He'd fallen off. Well, when he raced in the National, years later, he fell off. But they said, "You were never going to be any good, you fell off when you were riding The Colonel, when you were a kid". So, there was all sorts. And, like Ali, he was a character. He had an old tractor and he got going down to the caravan site, Latham's old caravan site, then, and they would take people out on the sand, with some old shrimping trailers, behind the back of the tractor. And, I can remember, he come up here, one Saturday afternoon, we were kids. And, it was a lovely day, and he stopped on the square, and he had about 20, 30 people on his trailers. And then, he went in't pub, to see if anyone wanted to come. Then, they were all going to go to Chapel Island. So some had come out of the pub, and they were all sat on these trailers, and they set off up here. He was going up Sandgate Hill with it, and it wasn't going to make it in top gear, this old tractor. So, he went for the change down, and half the people fell off the trailers and rolled down the hill. And he just

shouted to them, "You'll have to get up and run to the top. I can't stop, I've got no brakes." And, everyone just got up and ran all along and jumped back on and off they went. Well, can you imagine that happening now with the health and safety, and everything? You'd get sued. (laughing). But, yeah, that was just the way it was.

When, what sort of time was that?

That'd be, like late seventies, early eighties. Yeah. They was often, quite often in summer, trundling about with these old trailers with people on the back of them, yeah.

Was that a tourist thing?

Just a tourist thing, yeah, 'cos of the big caravan site near new Latham's. He used to go get his old tractor, fishing tractor out and get his shrimping trailer out, take the nets off it, and just go round the caravan site and charge them, I don't know, 50 pence or whatever it was to come and have a ride round the Bay on the trailer. But, now they've, that's all been stopped. Health and Safety and it's so dangerous, oh.

So he didn't work for the caravan site, that was just something he just did, for some...?

No, he was just a fisherman, and he just went down. It was just a bit of ... If, if times were a bit lean in the summer, he'd happen set a band of nets and he wouldn't be catching so many fish, so it wasn't really worth doing, but it was something to take the tourists out to have a look at. And if they caught a fish and played with a fish, well, that was wonderful. So, yeah.

Has there always been tourists in, tourists in Flookburgh?

Yeah, yeah, pretty much so. Because, I mean, the railway line's only just at Cark. So, it's only five minutes' walk from the railway line, so obviously when they put the line through to Barrow-in-Furness, I suppose it become easy, easy pickings, shall we say. Easy to get here, accessible, isn't it? I mean, years ago, they used to have the cockle train, and it was a 'pecific train what they used to send cockles on, out of Cark goods station, yeah.

And, where did they go to?

More, I think they went more like down to Wigan and things like that. I don't really know where they went to. But, there was all sorts of tales then, like some fishermen, well say, they hadn't been to the sands for a day or two, but they always seemed to get cockles on the train, and then they found out what they were doing. They were going up there, and just before the train left, they were going in the Guard's van and taking tickets off cockles and putting their own on, sending them. Yeah, so yeah. It's just, I suppose it's life, isn't it, it's characters.

So, even though it was, there was a community, people didn't always pull together?

No. But, it's like anything, money's involved isn't it? So, money's the root of all evil, in a way. In a jolly sort of way, you know. You've got to be, to be a fisherman you've got to sort of naturally be greedy. Otherwise, you know, like this afternoon, it's pouring down, and it's Saturday afternoon. Who would want to go out there, now? And, there's not many people who will. So, it's got to be in you to go.

Do you have special clothes that you wear?

Yeah, we have special oilies, and boots, and yeah, to keep warm. And now, as time's moved on, we all have mobile phones, we all have GPSs, so, yeah. I mean, in a lot of ways it's a lot easier, but then it's made the job easy as well. You know, like when you find a bed of cockles, or anything. It's a big wide area out there, well now all you do is put your GPS in and it just takes you there every day. Where, people have been known to find them and can't find them the next day again, because they haven't really known where they've been. So, yeah, there was a bit of skill, but now that's gone.

Is that failsafe though, the GPS?

Yeah. Yeah. It is failsafe, but you're nailed. You get used to carrying it. So you always have your positions in, so if it comes in foggy or anything, now, there's no skill in getting home really. You just turn that on and off you go.

What if you run out of battery, or...?

Ah, but they're clever them machines. If it starts to get low on battery, it turns itself off, but then you can turn it back on, and well... You know roughly where you are going, so you turn it on and if it says go that way you go that way for so long. Turn it off again, and then you turn it back on, yes, and then it says go slightly to the right. You make your way home. You can, it sort of like goes into limp mode. But they're telling you all the time how, how much battery life is in them. And so, I mean, you always keep topped up with batteries. Or some have them connected to the tractor, so they are on all of the time.

Can you find your way without that though, if you have to?

Yeah, yeah. I tend not to use it very often. I have it as a failsafe, but I only ever have points. Some have tracks. You can put tracks in, but I only have points in.

You only really need a point, like where the end of the banking is where we leave. If you have a point there, well, if you go left or right or wherever, it will bring you back to that point. You'll only come as a straight line, you won't come back on your track, but you will get back. So, you know where you are going. I mean, obviously, if you are going round the top of a channel, and you have to get back round it, you'd put a track in, but if you're just on this side, it doesn't matter if you're 2 or 300 yards out, 500 yards out, it's still going to take you back to that one position. So.

So, what's a track?

You just turn it on and wherever you've drove with your tractor it's remembered. So, if you get lost you can just turn round and follow yourself back again.

Whereas a point would take you back, to that point?

To a specific point.

But not necessarily the same way?

No, it'll just go as the crow flies. It'll take you the fastest way, which on the Bay doesn't really matter. Well, obviously (if) there's channels, it matters, but on this side of the Bay, if you're cockling, or anything like that, just at the moment, you just go straight out onto the cockle bed, and you only need to come straight back. Obviously we go round bits of rough patches in the sand, and stuff, but that wouldn't really matter. You could get back straight, that way, so that's all you really need. So, yeah.

What if there is a channel?

Well, you, you put either a track in, or you put a point in there, where you need to cross the channel at. So, if you... I would put, I would go from the banking to the channel, and then leave a mark there, and then if I went down to cockle, well I'd leave my next mark there, so if it come in really bad, you'd come up, you'd follow your, your track back, or to that point where you can cross the channel. You've got that point in your machine, and then you go across the channel, and then you go, you go to your next point. But, if it was that bad, you just turn it on when you are going and it would make a track. And, as long as you've got there it would get you back.

So can it tell where there's a channel, that you need to (avoid)?

No, it can't tell.

So, you need to do that by sight?

Yeah.

So, there's still some skill?

Yeah, there's still some element of skill in it, yeah, but not as much as what there used to be.

I think you said something on the recording last time, about the GPS that was something about how it's no good for you because, I didn't quite understand. It sounded like it's made it easier, and that's no, no good for you.

Yeah, well it's made it easy for anyone now, you can buy one of these GPSs for about 100 quid. Well, all they have to do is follow you, or if you're cockling and they come across you, and they see you've got quite a lot of bags, they don't

even have to stop, they just press the button, and it's made a point. So, the next day, they're there, where you're working. So, yeah, it's took quite a lot of skill out of it. When we had them Chinese and them lot come, they did that. The gang masters would ride round and see if you were doing quite well, and they'd put a point in, and then next day they'd be there where you'd been working. Which sort of upset you a bit, but ...

So, the gang masters, they weren't from this area then?

No, no-one did it from this area, no. They were, well they were out of Liverpool, and Manchester, and Scotland, and... Well, they were basically people, who, either, opportunists shall we say. They've got on the job their selves and they thought, well, say they lived in Manchester, there's an army of people, isn't there? Anyone's willing to work for a few quid. Well there's a lot more on the dole, or whatever. So, they just had to go round and say, "Come on, I'll take you up there, and I'll take you to cockling. You'll make a .., such and such a day, easy." And, all they had to do was buy a van and bring them. So, that's why they've had to introduce this permit ⁶. Bylaw 3 permit scheme. Which it, it has stopped all that, up to now.

It's, what's it stopped?

These people having gangs of people working for them. You've all got to go on this Foreshore Gatherers hand course now, and you've got to prove that you're competent to go fishing, and anyone who's competent to go fishing, says, "Well, why do I need him?". I'm not going to sell my cockles to him for £10 a bag where if I can myself going, myself, I can get £25 a bag. So they've all become little independent fishermen now.

⁶ Hand foreshore gatherer's course – means a "Foreshore Gatherers Safety Training Certificate" run by NWIFCA – see <https://www.nw-ifca.gov.uk/byelaws/> and "permit" means a byelaw 3 permit.,

Who have?

Well, there's what we call the, like us, the traditional fishermen, and then there's some what we call just shell fishermen, and they, purely all they do is either cockle or mussel, so.

Do you think that those regulations would have been brought in, if it hadn't been for that disaster?

No, no. They wouldn't have needed to. Too much of a thing, too much of a good thing spoiled it. Traditionally like, there's been cockle beds and we've all like had a quite what you call a good do out of it, but by the time other people have found out about it, it's not so good anymore, you've had the best bit. But, the Bay set up with that many cockles, that it was just a never ending supply, so more and more people got involved, and more and more people found out they could make money, and yeah. So, it spoilt itself in a way.

It spoilt itself?

Yeah, 'cos it, it was, it was too good for too long. So, obviously these Chinese got involved, and gangs of Polish people and Lithuanian people. There was everyone that was there. And all these Authorities were scratching their heads saying, "We can't really stop anyone doing this." So, obviously they have done now.

So was it only when people died that they decided they had to do something?

No, I think that they were already trying to do something, but it takes that long to go through Parliament and whatever they have to do with it. I mean, I discussed

with you about, we have the bylaw 3 permit now, and there should be something about, you should have... I personally think you should be able to have like an endorsee on your, on your permit, so I could take my son with me, and that's how he would learn the job. And, I talked to the Bailiff the other day, and he basically agreed, but...they haven't been able to do anything because there was a court case, and they were doing that, and they can't change the rules while the court case is on. Anyway, that's all been sorted out now, so he said, they are looking at maybe introducing an endorsee thing or some reason. 'Cos, as it stands at the moment, my son can't go 'til he's sixteen, 'til he gets a National Insurance Number. But he can't become... There's a waiting list, and they can't go on the waiting list 'til he's sixteen. But, he might be 20 before he gets a permit. Well, in that time, he might have got another job, which is no good. I mean, there should be some ... They could say, well from the age of twelve they could come with you as an endorsee on your license. And, if they go every year, when they get to sixteen and they get a National Insurance Number, they'll go naturally to the top of the list, to get a permit. So, yeah, there's things starting to happen. But, they'll get there in the end, I think. But, the problem is this, this, this time now, there's been no cockling for quite a few years, and the licenses have died down and died down, and dwindling down until there was about 50 or 60 people. Well, now, they've all found out there's all these cockles, everyone's wanting to buy licenses back again. But, they won't allow that. So, yeah, it is working.

How much is it for a license?

It's £500 a year. So, it's quite a lot of money. It's not, well it's quite a lot of money no matter whatever you do, but it's not a lot of money if it protects my living, is it? But, it's a lot of money to someone who already has a job, and just wants to do it for a week or two. But, just before these cockle beds opened, this year, I went to a meeting, and there was quite a lot of permit holders had objected to it opening. And, it was basically on a pure fact that the cockles weren't going to be worth a lot of money, this year, because they were only small. So, they wanted it to be

kept shut 'til next year so when they are worth a lot more money, they could pack up their jobs, and all come. 'Cos going and making £70, £80, £100 or whatever you're making with them now, is no good to them. They're making that at work so they don't want it open. And they don't want us to get, fish it out, before they've all grown big. But the fisheries do listen to the, what you call like the genuine fishermen.

I've got nothing else to say. But, is there anything you could think of to talk about? I know I missed talking about the social life, last time, so I've asked you about that. And, asked you about the cockling disaster.

There's been all sorts of disasters in the Bay.

Such as what?

Well, there's always people falling in and drowning and dead bodies getting washed up and ... Like, I,.. One of the Chinese cocklers, I found the skull.

Oh, you told me about that, I think that must have been when the machine was off. Can you tell me again?

Right, yeah. We had, we had a cross bay walk coming from Hest Bank to Grange it was going. It was a Saturday afternoon, and I had to go and meet them, to show them across the channel. I went across the channel and, well I met this, I found this skull in the sand. So, I thought, "Well I'd better pick it up, and put it in a carrier bag, before all these walkers come." And, I put it in there. Anyway, the walkers went through and off they went, and that. I thought, I'd better phone the Police, and tell them I'd found this skull on the Bay. So, I phoned the Police, and they said, "Where did you find it?" I said, "I found it near Hest Bank, but I'm going back to Flookburgh now." Anyway it come on horrible night like this. It started to rain, and it was horrible, and then the Police rung, and they said, "Is it a Cumbria

Police matter, or a Lancashire Police matter?" I said, "Well, I don't know". Apparently, I didn't know this at the time, but now, if you find something on the Hest Bank side of the Kent river, that's Lancashire Police, but if you find it on this side of the Kent river, it's Cumbria Police. But, I'd found this skull on the Lancashire side, but I was coming back to the Cumbria side. Anyway, so, obviously then, I've had this phone call and there's phone calls going on to the police. Then Cumbria Police rung me, and said, "I believe you've found this skull", and I said, "Yes, yes, I'm going back to Flookburgh." "Well could you not take it back to Hest Bank?" I said, "No, I can't take it back to Hest Bank." "Why?" "Cos, tide's come in, I have to go back to Flookburgh". "Alright then, we'll send someone to meet you." I said, "Very good, I'll have to wait again." And then the phone rang again. Answered it again, "Are you sure it's a skull?" And I said, "I am not the most intelligent person, but it is definitely a skull, and I've asked its name, and it won't tell me, just send someone to go and get it, please." Anyway, I come home, and I hung it on, I left in the carrier bag on the tractor, and about , ooh, about 2 or 3 hours later a police lady came, and she said, "I believe you've found a skull." And I said, "Yeah, yeah, it's up there on that tractor". Anyway she went up the yard and I stood and watched her. She opened the bag and looked. She shut the bag and then come back down. And I said, "You can take it, I don't want it." "Oh no. I don't know what to do now, we thought you were an hoax caller." And anyway, about two hours later a hearse came and picked it up, and it, it turned out that it was one of the Chinese cocklers. So.

Were they living around here, the Chinese cocklers?

They weren't living in Flookburgh, they were living more in Barrow-in-Furness or Morecambe. It's a lot cheaper accommodation for them. There's no, there's no accommodation in the village for them. So, it's anywhere like Morecambe, obviously a lot of old guest houses. They were made into flats, they were in there, and Barrow are the same sort of thing. But, no, not actually in the village. They would come in vans to the village and then go.

So, they were driven by these gang masters?

Yeah.

Did you meet any of them?

You saw them all of the time. But they never bothered you, if you didn't bother them. But, if you bothered them, then there was going to be trouble. But, if you didn't bother with them, and you just got about your work, they just got about their work, and they were quite happy. It's not my job to, to say what they can and what they can't do is it, and I wasn't going to go and argue with them? So.

With the gang masters?

Yeah. It was up to the authorities to sort that out, which they have done now. So.

So what, when you say if you bothered them, they would bother you, what do you mean?

Yeah. Well, how can I put it? If, if, if they just went to work, and they did their bit, and you did your bit, and you were just on your little tractor, they never bothered with you. They'd just let you go passed them and they'd go, but if you tried to stop them doing it, or, or reported them, or... I know one fisherman, in the village, he thought he was going to have a, make a few quid quick. And, the, the, the Chinese pickers who were picking for these gang masters, because it's such a wide area, sometimes they'd drop them off here, and some over there, and some over there. And this big tractor would be going round and picking the bags of cockles up, and every now and then, one of the Chinese would come along and say, "You buy cockles, you buy cockles off us?" "No, no. no we don't do that, we just get our own.", but one fisherman said, "Yeah, I'll buy some, I'll buy some." So

he bought these cockles off them, loaded his tractor up, and he said, I said to him, "How did you get on with them Chinese?" "Oh, marvellous", he said," marvellous. I made £200 out of them today, I'm going to be rich." And this went on for two or three days. Anyway, he stopped coming on the sand. "Where's he at?" "Oh, he's not, he won't come anymore". Anyway, apparently, these Chinese, these snakeheads or whatever you call them, they come round to his house, opened the door, went in, opened the coat, got the machete out and said, "Any more of that and we'll chop your head off."

The Chinese did that?

Yeah, and that was it, he didn't come to the sand, yeah. Stopped him. But, if you ... They were alright if you got stuck or anything like that, they'd help you, and you'd obviously try and help them. There's always that. You don't want them there, but you're not going to leave them stuck. But, a lot of them, some of the failing was, a lot of them couldn't speak English, or anything. They just didn't understand what you were trying to tell them. So, and they were turning up, you know, like a winter's day now, it's January and it's cold. And they were turning up in just shorts and ... No not shorts, a pair of jeans, and a pair of shoes. Well that's no good out there. And, you know, the, these authorities were trying to well, well we can't really stop them, and you know. They aren't really breaking any laws, it's only common sense, but anyway. They've sorted it all out now, so.

So, when you say if they got stuck, or you got stuck, is that something that happens quite a lot?

No, it ha... Not so much with us, because, we're going all the time and we know what we are doing. But, there were coming with. Like, old cars and old motorbikes, and anything, and old trailers, and next thing, a wheel would fall of the trailer, or, or they were trying to put too much weight on the trailer, and it would snap, and all this carry on was going on all the time, with them. And,

obviously, you're coming back with your tractor, and you have to try and help them get off the beach. Drag them off, or whatever. You can't just drive passed them. So, so. Basically, a lot of it was they were running old vehicles, old pick-up trucks and stuff like that and putting maybe, 10 or 20 people on one pick-up truck. And then they were putting like, trying to put two or three tonne of cockles on it. Well this pick-up truck was 20 years old, and is it going to stand that. And, next thing is, it's stuck in the mud, and you'd have to try and pull it out, and get it going again and, yeah.

So, that was the Chinese themselves, that were doing that, or was it the gang masters, or...?

Well, there was that many of them. You didn't get really involved who was who. Some of them were just, you didn't know if they were working for other people, or they were just independent, on their selves. You just didn't know. You didn't ask them. They just come running down the beach, "We've got stuck, can you come and help us?", and you'd go and help them. So, yeah.

And, how long would they, how long did that go on for?

Well, it went on for about 12 months, 18 months. But, it built up over a period of time. There was a few come like, there was a Scottish gang came, and there was a few of them at first. And then a Liverpool gang. Well then, they didn't get on. They didn't like it, Liverpool didn't like Scottish being here. But then when the Chinese got involved, Liverpool and Scottish got together and they didn't want the Chinese here, which was bizarre. 'Cos only a month or two before, they were nearly fighting with each other, but now they weren't going to have them here. But, yeah, so. But, they never bothered any of the local fishermen. I mean when the police came and they had a big raid on them. There was quad bikes going up and down the village, and all these old 4x4 pick-ups and you could tell half of them weren't fit on the road. Anyway, one morning, they blocked the roads off,

and they were doing like a VOSA ⁷thing, checking these quads and if you are insured, or anything, and the policeman got me with my old tractor, and he said, "Where have you come from?", and I said, "Where do you think?", and he said, "Yes, I do take a point there, yes. You haven't come so far on that, have you?" I said, "No, I've only come out of the village." And they were fine, and they just checked its number plate and it was insured and off you went, but people with these quad bikes, They would happen have ... They'd go passed this window and they'd happen be 10 of them on one bike, just going trundling along. Anyway, it, yeah. But, they didn't know what to do with them, a lot of them.

The police didn't know?

No. I mean, they said when it all happened, a lot of these Chinese ended up in Barrow-in-Furness, and we had a meeting with Barrow-in-Furness police and they said, "We've been down to Aldingham shore today, and we arrested 32 illegal immigrants." Which was a big thing for Barrow police station, and the policeman told us this his-self. And he said we will come up to the police station and we had them all arrested, and we rung the Home Office, "What shall we do with them?", and their answer was, "Let them go." And he said, "We knew where they were going to go." Back to, you know. Yeah, so, it was a bizarre sort of, a surreal sort of time really. And then, at night, it was twice as bad. There was people running about, at night, everywhere. So, but, they've sort of, they've nipped it in the bud now, I think.

Why was it twice as many at night?

Well, a lot of them didn't want to be seen. They weren't meant to be here, or whatever. You didn't get into the politics of it. So, obviously, they were going

⁷ VOSA – means Vehicle and Operator Services Agency replaced by Driver and Vehicle and Standards Agency in 2014 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/vehicle-and-operator-services-agency>

under the cover of darkness. So, the more legitimate ones went through the day, and the more rougher ones, or whatever you want to call them, went at night.

And you said, you didn't want them, you didn't bother them, but you didn't want them there, or not you personally, but I mean you in generally wanted?

No, No and yeah, no-one really wanted them there, but as long as you never bothered with them, they didn't bother with you. Which was fine. It's not my, I'm not political, I'm not ... It's nothing to do with me either, you know. So, no, yeah, it was good.

So was that just because it was more competition, or ...?

Yeah, well, it's natural, I suppose, it's natural greed. These gangs come along, and then they suddenly want it for themselves, and then another gang comes and turns up, and they want it for themselves, and the new gang turns up, and well "We don't want that gang here, 'cos we're getting them. ", and yeah, it went on, it went on like that, but ...

Do you think the Chinese were particularly not wanted?

No, not really. No, I mean, there was Polish, and uthera(ph), Lithuanians, and all sorts here. I don't think it was particularly Chinese. The biggest thing with the Chinese, a lot of them were just illegal. Where, obviously, if they've come from Poland, or wherever, they're allowed in this country, where the Chinese, they were illegal, weren't they? They weren't meant to be here. So that was the problem with them.

But you don't see them anymore?

No, no, they all went, and disappeared back into the woodwork.

But is, there's still Polish?

There's still Polish, yeah, but the Polish who come now, are the ones who've got licenses, and they've done the course, and we, you sort of recognise them all now. It's down to, I don't know how many Polish there'll be on the actual, licensing, but there's about 10 or 12, that regularly turn up. But, you recognise them all now. You've got used to them. And they just do their thing and we do our thing. You know, it ... I suppose some older fishermen still moan about them, "Oh, they shouldn't, they shouldn't allow that.", but you've just got to accept it's modern times, isn't it? Yeah.

You mentioned. There was some other, some other disasters. You said, sometimes people drown?

Oh, there's all sorts of disasters. I mean, can you remember a few years ago when, was it, I think it was called the "Riverdance". Was it called "The Riverdance", the boat? And it come, it sailed out of Fleetwood and run aground on Blackpool front?

Yeah, maybe.

Yeah, it was just up from Blackpool, I think. Lytham St. Anne's, up there somewhere, it ran aground. Well, the next day or two after that, there was loads of, bags of compost all over the sand, and oak floor boarding, and, and all sorts of bits of stuff, what had been washed off. Well, we were picking it up, taking it home. (laughs) I know a lad who, he boarded all his house out with all this oak floor-boarding. So.

Is it a dangerous job?

Well I would say, it's less dangerous than driving down the M6. But, look, how many people are killed on British roads today, in a day? Probably a hundred say, probably more. But, if one person drowned in that Bay, it would make national news. So, it's a bit like, there's car crashes every day, but if a train crashes, oh, it's all over the news, isn't it? Oh, what a big disaster there is. So, no, it's not that dangerous. Obviously, there's, there's an element of risk, but there's an element of risk of getting in your car and driving to work, isn't there? I'd say, it's less dangerous for me to work out there, than what it is if I was going on the train to London to work.

Why's that?

Well, I'm not going to get blown up, or anything, am I? You know, there's no terrorist threat, or anything like that. ... Say I was working in London and going into Euston Station every day, or something like that, there's a lot more threat there than what there is..., and you're travelling a lot further distance, and everything, where I just trundle out on my tractor, go out onto the Bay. There's nothing for me to run into once I get out there. And go and do your work and come back.

What about health wise? Is it, does it, affects your health?

It's very good for your health. It's very good for your health, I think. I mean, even, now, like it's well, January, and I don't work with any gloves on or anything, and yet no fisherman, I don't think, or, don't seem to suffer with arthritis or anything. I don't know why. But we have our, I suppose we have our natural aches and pains, but it's a physical job, so it keeps you physically fit anyway, which is good for you. I mean, I know people my age, now I'm 44, and, can I say it, but they're basically knackered. They've got blood pressure and diabetes, and everything. And, it's only 'cos they work in an office pressing a few keypads. They have to go

and play tennis at night, or something, to do some physical exercise. But, if they'd been and done our jobs, they wouldn't be going playing tennis at night. So, yeah.

So, what do you do, in your free time, if you get free time?

Do a lot of swimming at the moment. I'm quite into swimming. Yeah I did the Great North Swim last year. I'm going to do it again this year, and I quite fancy swimming the Bay. It was a big thing in the 1910, 1920s. Where they all used to swim from Grange to Morecambe. So, I quite fancy having a go at that.

How many miles is it?

Six. You just have to go on the tide and get it right, but yeah. I might go one day and do it. No one will know I've been, I'll just go with my mate. He's going to row, rowing boat and I'm going to swim it. It's just, it's a personal challenge to myself.

Do you go to the pub?

No, I go to snooker on a Thursday night at, up at the club, but that's about it yeah. Pubs are too dear. They've out priced themselves, especially in the village. I think it is, I don't know how much it is, about £4 a pint now or summat. Too dear.

Is that, has that changed?

Well all pubs have changed. Pubs are suffering, aren't they? People are who, who do drink, I think tend to drink a lot more at home now, because it's that cheap to get it from the supermarket, and yeah, there's... You go in a pub and there's too many distractions now. You want, you used to go in a pub and you'd talk to people, but if you go in the pub now, there's a jukebox playing, there's a

telly on, there's ..., and everyone sat on their mobile phone, clicking the buttons. There's no actual communication between people, anymore. It's just a sign of the times. I mean, there'll be someone sat at the bar and they're probably talking to someone in Spain or summat. Texting 'em. You know, well you couldn't imagine that 20 years ago. You went in the pub and you had to talk to someone, and you'd say, "What have you done today, what?" But, with this social media and everything now, you know what they've done if you follow them on their friends 'cos it's all over the phone. I'm here, doing this, I'm having my breakfast here, you know.

Do you do that?

No, I don't. I, I'm still a bit old school. I'm a bit out of time with it really, but I have it on my phone, and I can remember, we were sat, we'd gone to Morecambe, to mussel, and one of the musselers, he put on his phone, "I think I'm a bit early.", and he took a picture of the tide still being in. And. I just put back to him, "Who cares?" You know, just ... It's bizarre. But, like same thing now, everybody carries a mobile phone, where everybody can take a picture of anything. So, the world's become a very small place. Once over, if I mean, if I found a dead body, you'd have to take it home, inform the police, and the police would come and take it. Well now, I suppose, if I took a picture of it and put it on social media, it'd be round the w..., it'd be..., everyone would know before I'd got back to the shore. Which, you know it's a small place isn't it?

Have you found a ..., have you ever found a dead body?

I found a feller, he'd gasses hissel' in the car, at the end of the shore. Yeah. He was there, we had to go and get the police. So, yeah. And I found that skull, and ... I suppose it's an occupational hazard, finding dead bodies. ??? 'Cos they tend to, if they go in at Blackpool, they tend to come up this side, up towards Morecambe. It pushes them up this way. So, they usually come out on the Hest

Bank side, and then if they, if no-one discovers them, it does a circle, round the Bay, then back out. So, you tend to find them, sometime or other.

So, is that people that have drowned by accident, or suicide, or ???

Yeah, either. They always tend to find out what's happened to them, but yeah. Some have happen been walking the dog and fallen in and, and some of them obviously have got drunk and gone for a swim, and yeah.

It wasn't anyone you knew, was it the one that you found?

No, no, it... We found out about it. It was quite a sad case really. He'd got done for drink driving, he'd been to court and got done, and he just never went home. He just went down onto the shore and gassed his self. But, he did suffer from depression. So, it was, a shame for him, but ...

Was he, was he from round here?

No, no, he just drove up here and gone and done it.

So, do... Do you think the decline of the pub has affected the community in the village?

Yeah, definitely. Yeah. But, it's affected every... Every village is different now, aren't they? They're all, like used to have your summer fairs and galas, and there's none of... Very few villages carry that on anymore is there, you know? This village used to have what they called the "Charter Fair", and everyone would go and play on the school fields, and everything. And, it was just a bit of community spirit, but that's all gone now. No one organises it, no one wants to take responsibility of it. No one wants to be sued if some child falls over and twists its ankle, running down the field, 'cos someone forgot to fill a rabbit hole in,

on the field. So people have just ... It's, it's declined, because that way we used to have what we called the raft race. And the River Eea, what we call Cart Beck, it fills up on cer(tain), well on big tides. It fills up, up, up to near the pub at The Engine. Well they used to start below there, and then sail round to the farm, on all these home-made rafts. But, the band used to organise that, the silver band. But, they daren't do that in case anyone drowns and they get sued, and so, that's all gone.

So, people made their own, homemade rafts?

Yeah. People made their own entertainment with them. I mean, the pub would put one... I can remember the pub had one and it had a piano on, and music on, and, yeah.

Are there any other sort of village events like that, or organisations?

Not now, no.

I mean from the past?

Oh, from the past, yeah. I mean, we had a football club, we had a rugby club, and they would always be doing charity events, you know, to make a few quid for the, for the thing. Same with Allithwaite Football Club. When the cockling boom was on last time, Allithwaite Football Club was a bit short of funds, and one of the lads, who played football, was a part-time fisherman, and he said, "Well, why don't we all go cockling, for the day? We'll all go home, we'll sell our cockles, and we'll raise some money for the football club." And I think we made about 500 quid, between 11 of them, in one day, well they thought it was great. We all had a day out, sold all the cockles, and the money went to the football club. Well you see, that's stopped now. That helped the club, that helped everyone.

Why's that stopped?

You have to have a license now to go cockling. Yeah.

What do you think's different about Flookburgh from other villages, or what's distinctive about Flookburgh?

Well, it's going the same way as all the other villages, now. It's on the edge of the Lake District, the people are buying the village cottages for holiday homes, and the community's going out of it. Even now in January, you're walking down Main Street and quite a lot of these houses are now holiday homes, and there's no one in them. And then the people who do come to stay in them, you don't know them. And they don't speak to you 'cos they're out of towns. They just pull up, go in. They want the, the picturesque village, but they don't want the village life, in a way. Because, we're all, "Hello, how are you doing, what you're doing?", and they're not used to that, so they come up, get in their cars, go, and go back again. So, no. It...the village is changing, and not for a good way.

Can you ... I'm supposed to finish on something positive. (laughs) So...

Something positive, I'll give you something positive.

Yeah, go on.

There'll always be fish in the Bay. There'll always be someone getting it.

Yeah. You said that last time.

Yeah, yeah, there will. I don't know about if they will be full-time fishermen, but there'll always be, be someone fishing.

I don't know how. That's probably coming up to about 2 is it?

I'll have a look up, oh. It will be getting on that way.

I know, as soon as I get home, I'll remember something that I should have asked.

Ten past 2, ten past 2 now.

Sh.. Well you need to go don't you?

Yeah, I need to go.

Alright, well, thank you.

[End of track 2]