



**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:	H2H2017.36
INTERVIEWEE NAME/S:	Harold Gardner
YEAR OF BIRTH:	1924
INTERVIEWER/S:	Mandy
DATE OF INTERVIEW:	13/10/16
LOCATION:	Morecambe
TRANSCRIBER:	Mike Redman

Summary of Interview:

No of Tracks: 3

Main Contents of Transcript (Brief Description):

Track 1: Harold Gardner a resident of Sunderland Point, Lancashire tells us of his life as a child in a small fishing village on the River Lune.

Track 2: Harold explains about fishing – Mussel fishing, salmon fishing on the Lune using sailing boats and in later years, the introduction of engines. He explains how the Second World War affected traffic on the river, and how he became a pilot on the Lune.

Track 3: We hear about piloting on the Lune, the introduction of radar, and the preserved pilot boat, “Peggy”, the King Orry incident, and cups of coffee with ship Captains.

Interviewer: So Harold, can you tell me your full name, your date of birth and your place of birth, please?

Interviewee: Harold, Harold Gardner. Date of birth is 6.9.(19)24 and I was born at Sunderland Point.

So can you tell me about your parents and your grandparents? Can you give me their full names on both sides because I think you are from a long generation of people living at Sunderland Point aren't you?

Our family originated, years and years ago, from Annan in Scotland. The, it came about because the Morecambe fishermen used to go shrimping to different areas, when there's no shrimps in the Bay. They went and fished on the Solway and they stayed in a hotel there and the gentleman, who had the hotel's wife, died and my great, great grandfather married his widow.

Right.

And, they moved from Annan to Maryport because he used to fish there at times and then they came back to Morecambe and when they came, they, everything they had came on the shrimp boat, furniture and everything they had. And, you know, Morecambe has got... In those days there were lots of fishing boats at

Morecambe. The Baxter's and the Woodhouse's, so many of them. They all had nicknames, you know, Happy Jack (chuckles) and Long Tom and...

Happy Jack and long...who would Happy Jack be?

(Chuckles) I'm just saying those that there were, but ...

So, so your great grandfather arrived with his wife by shrimp boat at Sunderland Point?

Yes.

What, so can you remember their names at all?

Well, there was, my grandfather was Richard Wilton Gardner, who later became the Harbour Master at Lancaster. He had the job 'til he, 'cause in those days all the ships that came to the river came up to Lancaster. The only time they stopped at Glasson Dock was if they were a bit too deep drafted and the tides weren't big enough. They would discharge some cargo so they could get up to Lancaster next day. Apart from that Glasson Dock only had the dry dock. The tugs and all kinds of smaller boats came to the dry dock. But going back to the family, my... on Iris's side I think they would always be at Sunderland Point, the Townley's. My father was a Townley, you see. And, my father married a Townley I should say and my mother's name was Clarice. And I've only met one person called Clarice in all my lifetime and that turned out to be a friend of my wife when she was at school, at college. And, my wife's, of course, dead now, but she does still keep in touch at Christmas with them.

Yes, ok. So your parents were Clarice and Thomas Gardner.

And Thomas Gardner. Aye, we were a family of, my father was a family of ten. Six sisters, and we had a boat called "Six Sisters", and four men. The, only, I think only two of the children, of the ladies had children. Aye.

So, what about your family? How many siblings did you have?

Yes, at Sunderland Point, I had a sister and a brother. But, going back to my school days, well I'll start now there Of course, Iris would tell you about me walking to Sunderland Point, to school, arriving at Overton School, long before the school itself was open because we had to go before the tide. And, of course, I missed a lot of schooling. I was the last year of serving all my time at Overton School. Iris and the others all went to Morecambe at fourteen, but I left at fourteen. (chuckles) They went on 'til sixteen.

What was it like? Can you remember?

Alan Smith at Sunderland Point, one of the boys had a great record. He never missed a day's school in five years where he went to Morecambe.

Gosh! Can you remember the journey between Sunderland Point and school? What it would have been like, maybe as a young child making that journey?

Well, one of my, in winter time, 'cause boys didn't wear long trousers in winter in those days. My knees, legs used to get chapped with the wind, you know. When we arrived at school early sometimes in the village, the blacksmith, in those days there was a blacksmith in Overton and so many horses, all the farmers had horses. They came for, and being shoed in a morning and we used to go and work the bellows and sit by to keep warm, and ...

Lovely! What was it like growing up on Sunderland Point? You were born, were you born there? Do you know?

Well, I was always keen on sport and those kind of things. There was no competition because there was only me and another girl, who went to school for about eighteen months. We were the only two who were going from Sunderland Point. And I used to practise playing football, to make my left foot as good as the right, trying to kick it over a wall from certain distances and things like that, you know, (chuckles) You made your own fun. Children today are bored, they are running about with the tele... computers...[inaud]

Yeah, [inaud] iphones and things...

Lots of things that we were brought up (with) you see, we used to row boats soon as we could get in a little dinghy. My sister had a dinghy. She still, it's still around somewhere is that, but, er, and then with fishing. We used to have fishing lines in our, rowing the boat and catch fish.

How old would you be when you first rowed a boat, do you think?

Well, round about six or seven when we would play about in boats.

Really, that's ...!

You see, my father built a boat just with, out of wood, you know, called the "Mackenzie". I have a photograph of it somewhere with me and my sister sat in it.

That's, that was its name? Mackenzie?

"Mackenzie".

“MacKenzie”, it was called. And, well, like, in the First World War, my father was, mineswee..., in the minesweepers at Lowestoft and their boat was called “MacKenzie” and I’ve a brooch, there’s a brooch with “MacKenzie” on it somewhere. That’s why, that’s why it was called “MacKenzie”. But then you see, we used to take it down on the beach and we’d put it on pram wheels and we used to paddle through the water as it was going on the road, pushing somebody, sat in, the baby sat in the boat, you know.(laughs)

Sounds like great fun!

Yes, it was. And, also we used to set lines with hooks on, to catch codling in the winter time. You see, we’re not allowed to do that now. You got to have licences for everything. We used to fish for eels.

Eels! Ah!

Eels, during in the war.

Where were the eels?

Well, they, they come into the country at certain times of the year, don’t they, like a salmon you know. They come as little elvers, in, millions of them, especially on the River Severn.

Yes.

You’ve got to have a licence to fish for eels now.

Where did they come down the Lune, then? How, where did you see them on the Lune?

Well, you don't see them, they are such wriggly things, you know, but we used to dig in the garden and get the worms and thread them on wool, knitting wool, then tie them in a bunch. And then we went out and across the middle of the boat, we'd put a sail or a sheet to catch them in because you wouldn't catch them yourself, they were all over and we used to... And, every now and again you'd feel it go and we used to lift them, swing it into the boat, well sometimes it dropped off because it was only hung on by the wool, you see. But we used to collect quite a lot and then we kept them alive.

What size were they? Were they full-grown eels?

Well, yeah, big ones about that size.

That's maybe over a foot long?

Oh yes. Yes, the little ones didn't sell very well, but they were a delicacy.

Ok, so how did you keep them alive?

Well, we had a couple of little tanks in the garden. And, when we had sufficient, to go to the market, we used to take them to Overton. We had no transport you see, and, the bus driver, wouldn't allow us to put them on the bus. So we suggested, he suggested that we tried to tie them on the mudguard at the front (laughter) and that's, that's how we took, took our eels to Morecambe. (laughter)

On the mudguard, in a tank, in a ...?

Oh, No, no, we put them in, in bags to take them...

In bags. They were bagged up and tied to the mudguard of the, of the bus.

Yeah (More laughter)

Mmmm, Well I suppose they would have been cool that way.

You see, that was a big drawback for fishing as well until freezers came along. When I was a boy if there was a lot of shrimps, if you didn't have a market for them, we didn't go as we'd no one to sell them to. And I had...er...one of my uncles had a business in Lancaster, and he used to say "Well, you'll not have...Oh, go tomorrow." He says, "I'll get five pounds worth off you, five pounds and bring them to town and give them away." just to keep us working.

Right. So, you'd only go out if you knew you could get paid?

Hm, and then, of course, there was Sunderland Point. Most of the houses in Sunderland Point, when I was young, were a bit dilapidated, you know, and lots of people had them as summer cottages. They used to come each year and it was great, with about six weeks. The only thing, we at Overton only had four weeks holiday but they were from bigger schools, they had six and eight weeks, you know. (laughs) But we used to play cricket, the two halves of Sunderland Point. One half played the other. I've got records of it in the drawer there in a book, "Sunderland Point Cricket Club".

When you say "two halves" how do yo...?.

Well, the first terrace and the second terraces of Sunderland Point between the pathway along.

What, what number, where, what was your address, on Sunderland Point, as a child?

Well, we were 2 The Lane.

2 The Lane, oh, yes.

2 The Lane, yes, yes. Hawthorn Cottage it was called then. A big hawthorn at the front door nearly as high as the house.

So, was that first terrace or second terrace team you played for?

That was, we were the first terrace.

You were first.

And, we could raise two teams, with girls playing as well, you know, they used to play. When we played, we played nearly every night, but we let the girls have two times to get out, instead of just one.

And where did you play?

We played in Sambo's Field.

Oh right! Quite near the edge, the end of the ...yes.

The landward end, where it was flat at the bottom there. Every year, Easter Monday, we all, everybody in the village went to the egg rolling in Sambo's Field by the grave there.

Oh, egg rolling, right.

Whatever the weather. Snowing once, one April, whatever, and when, sheltering behind the wall from hail stones. We used to take big rugs for the ladies to sit on and wrap them in, wrapped them in.

Yeah.

And we always played rounders after we'd rolled the eggs, but that kind of village life has gone now.

So, was the church the centre of the community then? You mentioned Easter Sunday with the egg rolling. Would you have all gone to the church there?

I wasn't a church-going boy. At one time they did have a, a teacher at the Sunday School. That was before my time, but we, when we had, being a Church of England school, certain days we all used to go from the school up to the church for a service. Well, you know, we'd walk from Sunderland Point to Overton. Then we had to walk all the way up to the church and then walk back. And, they gave you a day off, afternoon off then.

So, you're, are you talking about St. Helen's Church in Overton?

St. Helen's, yeah.

Ah! I was also wondering about the little church on... In fact it's on The Lane isn't it, on Sunderland Point?

Yeah, the one on the, ah yes. We used to attend there, yes.

You did used to go to that church?

Yes, the services.

Yes, what, regularly or...?

Aye. Rather unusual. Perhaps I shouldn't say this, but there was a compliment about my singing. (chuckles)

Oh lovely! Can you remember any of the songs or hymns that you used to sing?

Well, it wasn't such a good song. I hadn't such a good voice. When I was at school. At school we all had to sing a song and I started singing it off, (chuckle) and I only did about three lines and he said, "Sit down, Harold."

Ah! (sympathy) Was there a fishermen's choir in Sunderland Point?

No, there was a big fishermen's choir at Morecambe, you know.

Right.

They used to sing on the telly and the radio. I have a photograph of that and it's rather strange because the gentleman off the [inaud] big into the golf, Tom was playing for Lancashire Second now that lives across there, and I had this, I said, "I have a, a document saying how Morecambe Golf Club came into being," and I took it across for him to read, to read and then it went to the Golf Club and it was quite a while before I got it back. But, the only reason why I had, I had it was the fisherman's choir was on the back of it. (chuckles) So, there were two [inaud] things, that were one piece of paper.

Right, right. It would be good to find out about the fishermen's choir. Did you go and listen to them or see them perform or...?

No, not to Morecambe, no. My mother only went and sung to Lancaster about four times a year. You see they had to row across to Glasson Dock to get to Lancaster. And went by boat and the train from Glasson Dock to Lancaster.

Ah, the old train that ran, ah yes.

Yes, the, on the mast at Glasson, at the pier head. They used to hoist a flag up when they wanted this, a ferry back home across the river. You see my mother... There was so many [inaud], so many carts came round selling things. There was a fish man came every Tuesday. There was a co-operative man had a travelling van. It skidded off the road. I have a photograph of that, everything in it was ruined.

Oh dear! What sort of year, what time period are you, would that have been? In what, the fifties or...?

Yes it would have been...

When cars started becoming more common?

Yes, when. Yes, the, also they used to, a chap came across selling muffins and griddle bread on a bicycle. He'd would come in all weather. All kinds.

Extraordinary, to think...

And, I was saying to my cleaning lady about the number of houses in the village that were the Post Office. When I was young, the Post Office was at the end of the pathway, between the two terraces. And there was a hut there, and he used to bring the mail in a morning and stop and have his dinner there, and then about two o'clock in the afternoon, he would take the mail, walk back with the mail again. And then it got that a, a lady did the walk, just walked for it when the tide was up. They came in a boat from Overton to pick it up, so they caught the post. It's wonderful because I've lots of postcards where they'd send a postcard about four o'clock in the afternoon. "Coming to seeing you tomorrow, Annie" and they'd

be delivered before they came. (laughs) The post was always on time those days.

Amazing! Amazing! Did the tide become a problem at any point? Did you get marooned or stuck at any, at any point?

Well, obviously we know the tides and a, and a lot of young people who've come to Sunderland Point have got caught, get caught in the tide. One not all that long ago. They are still there. I spoke to his wife. I said, "Was it your husband?" "Yes," she said. "He won't do it again." He'd only gone across for some fish and chips, I think. Something, but er...

Have you been involved in any rescues of people?

The other. My father, they were building a new barn, on one of the farms, and they were expecting a load of bricks coming in. And it came and he got fast in the tide with the lorry with the bricks and it was blowing a storm from the east, a very bad wind, and my father and another pilot managed to get in one of the little sailing boats and they had a job to sail. And, he was sat on the top of the cab when they picked him up.

Gosh!

And, and my mother always says "That rescue, you know, the man on the lorry brought us some pipes, smoking pipes," 'cos my father smoked then. They were, she was one, you know, for rescuing them. And, my father smoked a pipe all day long. Even, even if it wasn't lit, it was in his mouth. But, people didn't think about cancer, those days, throat cancer and things did they?

No, they didn't know about it then did they?

That gentleman, with that lorry that went by, goes past most days, I think it's just letting people know that he's loaded.

Do you want a little, do you want to stop and have a, take a sip of a drink?

I'll just have a little drink.

Yeah! Ok.

Track 2

So Harold can I ask you about when you started fishing, perhaps in the sailing boats, 'cause you did whammeling didn't you ?

Yes. Well, going to school in those days, at the village school, going to school, in those days, fishermen's sons were expected to be fishermen. Farmers' sons were going to be farmers and those that hadn't many brains were going to be farm labourers (chuckle) or boat builders. That was about what everybody did but er...

How did you feel about becoming a fisherman like your father?

Well, when I started I was not all that keen really. I was not good at, in the cold weather and to start with we used to collect mussels and we used to ship them that went to Glasson Dock, to the little railway there and they all were taken to the east coast because they used to bait lines fishing. Filey and Whitby, Scarborough and all those places.

So they used the mussels as bait?

Mussels as bait when they got there.

And collecting mussels is quite hard work isn't it? Can you describe that a little bit, to me?

Well, on the River Lune, all the mussels were fastened to stones. You had to pull them off, but, at Morecambe, the mussels settled on sand and they could go and get them with big rakes.

Right. So was that craam, craam rakes?

Craam, yeah. Big ones, that big.

About two foot wide.

Twelve, twelve [inaud] over, throw them in the water and a pad on your shoulder and...

So you had a pad on the shoulders that the rake pole was resting on?

Yeah, resting on your, the pole, you know. You had to, and then you'd to turn it over and then pull it up to make sure the mussels were still on it.

Right.

We would, only did that when it was dark. The weather, we'd gone down, and then it came daylight, we got out and picked them. But, when we started, my father wasn't really a fisherman. He was, he looked after a yacht for a gentleman. The yacht was built at Overton. And, it was finished after the First World War. In 1919, it was launched, and he was in charge of it 'til the Second World War came along.

Can you remember the name of the yacht?

“Sue”, “s”, “u”, “e”. Lots of photos of that about, and so I didn’t really start fishing, when the [inaud] my father, they sold the yacht and my father started fishing and the job was almost as new to him as what it was to me, I think. [inaud]

So you learnt together?

Then, we fished together.

What was that like?

Well to start with, they fished in a company of about six boats, fishing altogether. But, with me being only fourteen, just left school, they were only going to give me half a share of money, but you’ve got all your nets and everything, there was certain amount of money you had to lay out, so my father said “Well, we’ll fish on our own, the two of us”. And, there was a lot of competition at first, but then they found out I was that keen, you know, finally, after about two years, they asked us if we’d join them.

Right!

And we all fished together, after that. Happily ever after. (laughs)

And, what difference did that make, belonging to a little group of you?

What difference did it make fishing as part of a group of fishermen?

Well, I said to my brother “We are going every, out every tide this season if we can go.” Every, twice a day. And there was one at Glasson Dock was the same. And, of course, some didn’t feel like going in bad weather or they weren’t so good. If they were ill they got a share but sometimes they weren’t ill and they stopped at home and they didn’t get anything. And, it was quite a problem dividing the money up at the end.

So, the idea was these, the six fishermen, you would all go out at the same time?

Yes, well, there's a starting buoy. We all went to the buoy, and then started about quarter of an hour between turns and drifted down the river about...

So it's staggered? You went out, like staggered, one after another?

Well, we all took it to the, first ones to the buoy got the first turn and then you took in turns, and you tried to keep that distance apart all the time.

What sort of distance?

But, this was for salmon, you see.

Yes. Can you describe how you fish for salmon, using, this is in a whammel boat with, under sail, so you're...?

Yes. Mr Smith, who's ill at present, is the only other one that's fished under sail. I don't think any other fisherman that go for that or fishes, ever sailed a boat, you know. Now, I, we got a little boat for shrimping. We had a bigger boat for shrimping, but it was too deep drafted. We couldn't get near enough the side for the shrimps so we got a smaller boat. And we went out with it one night with a salmon net in it. There was no wind and we all got down the river and as we, as they, as we came home, they came to see how we were going on, you see, and they all hung on behind and had a tow home. And I said, "Now, you want to make the most of tonight because I'm never going in a boat again with an engine." And I never did. I didn't like it.

Didn't like the boat with the engine?

Well...

Why was that?

Well, one reason was, if you broke down with an engine, you've got to have oars and a sail as well, to get home. Well, these boats that fish now, they don't have a mast and sails at all, or oars. If you go with, if you with just a sailing boat, you go where you know you can get back from. And when you've had rough times when you've got to be very quick. I, I took my nephew fishing, he was a farmer, a farmer's lad, he'd just left school and he went with us one night. And, we went round what we call the "drop off" where the river meets the sea and the wind was north-west and it was blowing quite hard on the Pilling Sands. And, we got down in time to go but it wasn't safe to go through at first. And we were the first boat to go really, and we waited. And, then we went. And, I think we went just a bit too soon really, but anyway we'd to be very quick getting the sail up. We were only about twenty yards off the side by the time we'd got the net in. They used to act [inaud] quickly and let the net go and cut at it. By that time you would be ashore, you'd got to get it in. But, my nephew always tells me about that, you know. He would have liked to have been a fisherman, but he ended up a farmer.

Right. Why do you think he didn't become a fisherman?

Well his father wanted him to be a farmer.

Oh right, yeah, yeah!

They farmed at Sunderland Point and he was wanting a farm of his own. And his parents, they were, they came from Kirkby in. Kirkby, not Kirkby Stephen, the other one, Kirkby near Barrow, and they bought a farm up there eventually. And that's where my sister's boat is at present.

So I'm, I'm really interested in the salmon fishing in your, in your whammel boat. Did you call it a whammel boat?

Yeah.

Yeah. How, how did you actually catch the salmon and what was it like to haul the net in, and did you catch many or was it just one at a time? What was it like, fishing for salmon?

Well we had to, we had to fill returns in, you know, to let them know how many we caught. I think, if somebody caught a lot and the others weren't catching many, there wasn't, they'd say, "Well, I wonder why they are catching a lot", but they, you had to be at certain places at certain times to catch salmon.

And how did you judge that?

One of my uncles was very good at it. He learnt me how to salmon fish, and when engines came out. This chap came with an engine, the first time he hadn't much idea what to do in a boat, I don't think. And, after he'd been fishing a while, we couldn't get rid of him, we couldn't, me and my brother. And he, I said to him, "Why don't you...(go away?)", "Oh," he says, "I learnt how to, you learnt how to fish off your uncle, and I'm going to learn how to fish off you". And, we called him "The Crook of Lune" (laughs)

The Crook of Lune. So, did he learn from you then?

But, er... No, well sometimes salmon are difficult to catch. "You've got to get them", my uncle used to say. Even if it's a quiet morning and there's not much, you have to have rough weather really, for catching salmon in, in the whammel nets. But he used to say, "The sun got in their eyes, in a morning." And, on the

flood tide, they used to swim up the river, and if you had your net out, there's a chance that you'd get one or two, because of the sun.

Oh, that's interesting.

And that kind of thing, like that.

Of course, 'cos they're swimming up river to

You see, the idea, of putting the net across the river, it didn't stay across the river. Either one end went too quick or not. Now they went, you always shot with the wind behind you, you see. That was another problem when the engines came. They used to shoot the net into the wind, and with the engine, they held, they held the net across, which was not fair. They weren't supposed to use the engine to fish with, only for getting home. But, they used to hold the net across. Now we had to put it the opposite way. We went with the wind. Well, when we got across, then we had to [inaud] tied the net back on the horse to keep the net [inaud] moving in line with the other side. Then, of course, there were buoys in the river. The buoys used to be down the centre of the river, so you just got your net out once, and you'd got to pull it back in quick, because you're going to catch around the buoy. There's all kinds of hazards.

How long is the net?

Three hundred and twenty yards.

Gosh, that's very long.

Now there's ...

So, I can't imagine how you, how you spread, how you would get the length of it, how you spread it?

Well we had a boat-house at Sunderland Point, and it was eleven yards across. So, every time we did a length, fastened it on with a rope, we used to call it ten, 'cos you lost a foot at each end, fastening it on. So, it was roughly about... And, if you put your corks two yards apart, you could count the number of corks you had, could be round about (ph). But, when 1948 was the best salmon year we ever, was ever on the Lune, I think. And in 1949, there was always six boats fishing. There was twelve people rigged up with boats. Other fishermen could join in you see, and they all had engines. And then it came as there was thirteen, and they had to lock them out, and it's a sorry tale really, but one boy died because of that. He lost his license. Twenty-eight years old with two children, and he was, he was a grand lad was Peter. He, it just got too much for him and he ran down the stairs in the middle of the night and just went into the river and drowned himself. Terrible.

Oh, terrible.

And, I went, I was living in Lancaster then, on Morecambe Road, and there was a policeman on the other end, and my brother and I went along and said, and that, when we were coast guards, I said, "We're going down the river," We walked down and I said "We know what we are doing, don't be frightened of us," And about two and a half miles down, we could, spotted him, and he was right away. And, I said to my brother, "You get back as quick as you can." And, they came out with a farmer's tractor from Middleton Sands, and just got there in time to get us all back again.

So it was a stressful job working. Fishing, fishing would have been a stressful job, even, even then before, you know, the modern day stresses.

We think of modern life being stressful now, don't we, but it sounds as if it was, ...

Yes, yes. Well, different things came along with the freezers, and that you know. We started catching whitebait, which was never done before.

Whitebait. What were you, what sort of year would that have been then?

Well, I can't just say, now.

In the 60s, perhaps in the 1960s, when freezers came?

No, no, long after that.

1970s?

More like 80s. They started at Morecambe. We were out shrimping in the middle of, end of November, beginning of September and we could hardly find any shrimps anywhere. They'd gone into the deep you see. Now the Morecambe fishermen have heavier gear, and they could fish in the deep. They used to go off Blackpool into the deep water, and Maryport and those places. But we, in the river, it was difficult fishing from Sunderland Point, because we had to go out with the tide, and come back, and the best tides were going at two o'clock in the morning, or two in the afternoon. So, you got up and got, went in the morning, coming daylight, instead of going at night and coming back in the dark. And, ...

So yeah, shrimping. You were telling me about shrimping, yes, and the stress?

Shrimping, yeah.

Are freezers coming in?

Yes, Well, with the whitebait, we with the whitebait.

Whitebait, sorry.

Yes, there was a, a ship went out from Heysham harbour, going down, right down the deep, and there's thousands of seagulls following it. And, I said to my brother, "They're whitebait." And we pulled the shrimp net in, and we had a, just an ordinary sack, you know, that we were going to carry the shrimps home in. We tied that at the end of the shrimp net. We went out and put it over the side about three feet deep. We didn't go 120 yards before it floated to the top, it was full of whitebait. Just a mass of whitebait.

Wow, wow!

And we came home. We'd could only bring home, what we hadn't... We'd nothing to do. And next day, we went to Morecambe to buy a box freezer. And, by the end of the season everybody was stopped because there was too many whitebait. But we persevered. We were sending them through a very good merchant at Fleetwood, which was a great chap for us. And he used to send out, "I'll keep taking some whitebait off you, but if you don't mind, I won't pay you 'til we sell them." And I thought, "That's a good idea," and he kept us going, just getting so many. And, he came once a week to pick them up. Well then, there came no whitebait, at all, some years hardly any. We were only... We had set nets now, in the river, for them. Well we getting two pounds of whitebait, and three pounds a day. And, he rang up and he said, "I want as many whitebait as you can for Thursday." And, just as if it had to be that night, we got a good lot of whitebait. (laughs)

That was lucky.

Lucky?

Where was he selling them on to?

Well he, he used to, the whitebait went all over the country from the big dealer in Fleetwood. The, just the same with the salmon. If ... he liked, liked the salmon fresh. I mean, one of the fishermen, certainly, used to keep his salmon frozen in his freezer and then send them, but he didn't get as much for them. And the gentleman at Fleetwood said, "I like them as fresh as you can." You get a better price. And, if we had a good tide, I used come in from fishing, going straight to Fleetwood, perhaps five-ish, be there about half past six in the morning, waiting for him coming, asleep in the car, and knock, "Here, are you in?" [inaud] and, and by the time I'd got back home again, you'd only two hours in bed before you're going out again.

Gosh. Long days, long. So was this sort of when you were fishing with your father, and your brother? Did, you fish with your father and your brother, as you were growing up?

Well, the war came along, and I joined the Merchant Navy, and my brother took over from my job with my father,

Right.

'til he. he got his calling up papers, for the Army, and he decided he would go to sea, and they came, as a deserter. They came, you know, to take him off the ship, and put him in the Army, and he spent his Army days in Mogadishu, in Africa, a lot of the time.

Oh!

And, he was, he should have been a conscientious objector, but he wouldn't have been. I don't know what they made of him in the Army, but, you know, there's like boxing to do and things like that. And they put these boxing gloves on, and he said, "Well, I'm not going to box. I won't box." He said, "That chap hasn't done me any harm." And he wouldn't do it. But, he... they would sail from Liverpool, blowing a storm on the troop ship, and he said, "I was about the only one that got up for something to eat in the morning." Everybody was sea-sick.

Of course, he would have his sea legs, wouldn't he.

He came back when he got demobbed. One of my cousins was getting married, on the Saturday, and he couldn't get back, 'cos he was in York, getting fitted out with a demob suit, and things to come home in. And when he got to Sunderland Point, Overton, the tide was on the road, and he walked on the footpath. They don't know there's a footpath at Sunderland Point now, people, they never walk on it. But they went across dykes, and there's a plank missing in the middle. There was three planks, and there was one missing, in the middle. And he came home in his new suit and he fell off, all that way from Africa, and he fell off.

Oh, no.

About two hundred yards from home.

Oh, what a shame.

During the war, you know, there was an Army camp at Sunderland Point.

I believe so, yeah.

Anti-aircraft guns. When they came, the first day they came, they'd took over various houses in the village, and the van, they were expecting all the food coming for the, for them. And, they were waiting, and, I said, "The food van's there now," I said. "It's going to get fast in the tide." Says, "Come on!" And, they'd come with, with my brother, and I, who'd have saved a lot of food, but they had to wait for an officer. And when we got there, loaves of bread and everything was floating out, and ...

Wasted.

Next thing the officer's car got in the water. (laughs)

Oh dear.

But, they used to, soldiers used to come into Morecambe, for night's out, you know. And, one night, it was really foggy, and they got in this field. It was a field where you had to go from corner to corner, not a gate straight, or else a path. You had to go across the middle of the field, and they couldn't find their way out of it. (laughs) Shouting away. And, I said to my brother, "You'll have to see where they are," you know, and he had a horn.

Did you rescue them?

I could, go on talking tales, all the time, about this and things like that.

So when you came back to Sunderland, you served in the Navy, you did, you said in the Navy?

Yes, I was on a coastal boat.

In the war.

When we were in, we'd loaded in Manchester, for Falmouth, and we went down the canal, and when we got, for the Crown, we were stopped from sailing, and that was the day of the invasion.

It's ok, I'm just checking that my, the battery's alright. Yep, it's ok. Sorry, go on.

That was the start of the invasion, across the channel.

Oh, oh, gosh.

We used to go down to Falmouth quite a lot with this ship. Then we used to lug china clay from the Cornish ports, and back again. And, the build up in Falmouth of American troops was ... It was, you couldn't, it was no good going ashore. There was so many waiting to go.

So when you came back from having served, during the war, back to Sunderland Point, were there very many changes when you returned, after the war?

Well, no, I'd just took over. Though, I didn't start piloting right away.

So this is, your father had been the river pilot?

Yes. My father started as a river pilot just before, nineteen, a bit, just a bit before the war. You see, all the ships came to Lancaster, as I was saying. There were three, my first recollection was, there was four pilots at Sunderland Point. They all had little dinghies, about twelve to fourteen feet long. At that's pilot's, all the boats, they were all local coastal boats that were coming to Lancaster. So, they came up the river to Sunderland Point on their own. And then, we rowed off from

Sunderland Point, to put the pilot on board. In the day time, you would take it up to Lancaster, and then come back on the bus.

So the pilot, the pilot. Was this a paid job, the role of pilot?

Well only by the ships you'd piloted, and that was ...

So, the ship that needed the pilot to steer the boat through would pay the pilot?

Yeah.

There and then, or as and when?

No, monthly.

Monthly?

Well they had, we had a, there was a shipping firm that dealt with the ships and they used to collect it monthly.

So how did you become a river pilot, was it, did you do qualifications? Did you have to pass an exam, or take a test, would you have training?

I'd already, I'd already been a first officer in the, in charge of vessels when I was at sea.

Yes.

When I was twenty-one.

Yeah, yes, of course. I was thinking about your father maybe. How did he get to become a river pilot?

Well, when he was at home, in the winter time, he used to do a little bit of fishing with a boat that we had, and he used to help the pilots out, backwards and forwards. But, I mean, he'd been in charge of boats all his life. And, I was saying, there was two pilots from Fleetwood. They used to pilot as well, just from Fleetwood to Glasson Dock. So, sometimes you'd get a pilot on board as when it came up we was And, I was always remember, when I was about fourteen, and I rowed off, fifteen, and the pilot, the Fleetwood pilot shouted out, "You're going bald on top Harold!", and my hair was coming out a bit on top. (laughs) I remember that. But, during the war, you see, Glasson Dock was very busy. There was... It was absolutely packed with trawlers from Fleetwood at Christmas.

I'm just going to ...

[End of track 2]

Track 3

My father became a pilot because one of the Fleetwood pilots got drowned getting off a ship, off Fleetwood.

Oh, Gosh.

Two pilots there had fished, you know, all their lives, very [inaud]. And, that's when my father started piloting. Then, during the coal strike.

The coal strike? In, in the ...

It was before the coal strike. Glasson Dock had its ups and downs of shipping. You know, you've got the strikes at Liverpool.

The dockers' strikes, at Liverpool, do you mean?

Yeah, the dockers' strike.

Yeah, Yeah.

Things like that. My wife, I said to my wife, "I'm going out fishing." Now I said, "I've written on this paper what you've got to tell this ship, this captain, when he comes on the radio." And he called out, "I'll stop you sailing in the middle of the night." And the wife calls out, told what he had to do, where he had to come to anchor, and when the pilot would come out, and everything. And, when he said, "By god," he says, and he come on to me, "You've got a very good officer at your port." (laughing) That's [inaud] it was my wife!

So the, so the captain of the boat would radio in did you say?

Well,

Or telephone, radio telephone?

Yes. When I started piloting, radar was only just coming out. Most of, a lot of the ships had it you see, and a few foreign ships would come because the buoys weren't lit up in the channel. So, it had to be good nights, if you got them in and out in the dark.

So, you talk about in the nineteen f(ifties), after the war? Maybe in the late 1940s or 50s? When you came back after ..., when you were piloting after the war, was it?

Yeah, I didn't start piloting until in the 50s, late 50s.

Ok, yeah. Sorry.

When I get interrupted, I just stop. It's alright.

Yes, I'm sorry, I was just curious to know when this change happened. So, the radar, you were telling me about when the radar was coming in.

Yes. Yes. The agent. The ship would call the agent up on his radio, you see, and I would ask him, ask him if he's got a radar, to start with. And if he has one, is it a good one. And some of them were very poor, you know, the picture was poor. If there was few seagulls flying about, you could see them on the screen. And, sometimes, I wouldn't go out, I wouldn't risk it, you know. But, I had to learn like that with, with radar. And now then, you can see the cows walking about in the fields now, and they are so good.

So, you'd be, you be rowed, you'd row to the boat, or how did you ...

Well we had the pilot boat, "Peggy". Behind you, on the picture behind you.

Oh, yeah. That one?

No, that one.

Oh yes. Oh, that's lovely, "Peggy", thank you.

That boat's in the Maritime Museum at Lytham St. Annes.

Oh.

Have you heard about it?

No, I'll have to go and see it.

I've got a leaflet about it there.

Oh, I'd love to see that, yeah.

When we finished with it, we sold it to a man at Hilbre Island, in Birkenhead, in Hilbre.

Ok.

It was a Hilbre pilot boat, years and years ago, and they took it home. And, a gentleman bought it, on his own. To start with, he was going to use it for taking passengers out, but he joined with about four or five together, you know, and they split up, and he was left with it on his own. So, he sold it to a holiday camp, for the children to play in it, it was in this holiday camp.

Right.

And, this chap from ..., said he would, "We'll go," he said to his father. "We'll go and have a look at that pilot boat, I want to bring it back to Birken(head), bring it back to Hilbre. And, they went and, his father said, "Don't touch it, it's too big of a job." "No," he said, "I'm going to do it," and that's how it is now, becoming a, still being... What they did was, you got Birkenhead, the shipyard at Birkenhead was closing down, and looking for work, and the apprentices at Birkenhead repaired it for nothing. He provided them the material, and they took it back to ... and they launched it when they came and I was invited to go to the opening of it, there. Unfortunately, I couldn't go, but I sent them a donation. And, I don't think there

was enough people going in the museum, there to keep it going, you know. Financially it got, and, he gave it up. And, I don't know how it came to be in Lytham now, but that's where it is.

So, in its working day, that was the pilot boat?

In its working day, it was... When it was a lifeboat, at first, in 1904, it was a rowing pilot boat.

Right.

... with eight men rowing, and a coxswain.

Right. So, it was lifeboat, as well as a pilot boat?

Yes, it was.

Where was that based then? Where was it anchored?

It was 461, that's the number on the lifeboat, 461. Built, I forget just where it was built now, but it was launched in 1904, in it served at Birkenhead, and then it went to Ireland. It was in Ireland, stationed in Ireland for a long time.

So, it was a pilot, you remember it as a pilot boat? And how would it ...?

Well, it, it came back and it.., a gentleman from Morecambe bought it, to take pleasure boats, that people have. And when he finished with it he took it to, he just took it to Glasson Dock to sell it really. And, it was just the time when we were looking for something. And my uncle had said, because most of the ships were coming foreign now, and we were having to get out to them. And I was having to use the Heysham pilot boat or the Fleetwood pilot boat.

Sorry. The boats were going?

Well, the ships coming into that, into the port now were bigger and they couldn't get to Lancaster.

Right.

So Glasson Dock was the main area, bringing them in. That's why we wanted a boat of our own.

Yes.

And then he at the shipyard at Glasson Dock, converted it, put a deck on it and converted it for us, to use as a pilot boat. And, I think it was a grand boat for the job. And, ...

So, living at Sunderland Point, if you were a pilot, you were a pilot for the River Lune and Glasson Dock?

Yeah.

How did that work?

Well, when it started across, there was three pilots piloting to Lancaster, took it in turns. The Fleetwood pilots, there was only one Glasson Dock Pilot also had a license from Fleetwood, and sometimes, the Fleetwood pilots were too busy themselves, so my uncle had to go to Fleetwood, and bring one in. And then, it would be during the war, when they brought a lot of coal from the Bristol Channel. And, they were coming one after another ships. You didn't know what size or what they were, and the two pilots at Fleetwood, my father and my uncle

had to get to Fleetwood somehow. They had all [inaud] kinds of methods of getting there. I would row them across the river, and they walked to Glasson Dock, to get the bus to Knott End, to get there. And, sometimes, the Fleetwood pilot bring one in at night, would sleep with my uncle's at Glasson Dock, and take one out next day. And my uncle and father used to sleep at Fleetwood sometimes, waiting for them coming in.

Right.

Sometimes, they'd got to get a bus at Fleetwood to Blackpool, to Garstang, to Lancaster. (laughing)

Gosh.

Getting home!

So, what I am trying to understand is, your family, you know, your father were fishermen, and doing this job as, as pilot. How did it, how did they manage to combine it, you know, how did you decide which, what you were going to do on any day?

Well, there's twenty-four hours in a day **(laughing)**.

Which came first. Which was a priority? Did you have to ...?

Well, it came... Sometimes piloting was a nuisance, because we could make more money, perhaps missing a good tide of fishing. It was good fishing. And, ...

Can you remember how much you got paid for piloting, then?

Pardon?

Was it a set fee for piloting?

Well, it was for the particular ship. When I started, it was when the coal strike came along, later on. And, there was a lot of ships coming in. We had three pilots then. And, then it became difficult then. You see, even when ships were just coming to Lancaster, when, at night, there was no buses to get home. The pilots had to go all the way from Sunderland Point to Lancaster, to take a boat out. I used to think, I was thinking, the other night, my father must have been tired. We'd been out salmon fishing, and then, he'd to get in the boat to get up to Lancaster to row all the way up, and if he didn't start off right away, the tide got as it was not running as hard, if you went right away, you went with the flood tide, and got up quicker. And then, they used to tow the boat back, with a, it had a tow rope, and one day, a ship coming down was hooting. They used to hoot three times if they was stopping at Glasson Dock when they came down. But this one kept hooting, and my father said, "There's something wrong." Well, they were passing the boat, from the side of the ship to the stern, because it was a bit rough. And the silly beggars let the rope go, you see, and it drifted ashore by Lancaster Golf Club, did the boat, (laughing) and we had to row up in another boat. Had to pick him up when it got dark.

Oh dear. You must have some quite vivid memories of those times, with piloting boats. What's your stand out memory?

You heard about the King Orry?

Oh, was that the steamer ship. Yes, tell me about the King Orry, yeah.

Well, we brought it in, and then you know, it was ...

This was the steamer ship from the Isle of Man.

...the Isle of Man. Isle of Man Steam Packet Company. It was on, when it came in, they towed it with a tug from Liverpool, and unfortunately a chap got killed on the tug, with a tow rope. I didn't know he was dead when we brought the ship in, but he'd had this accident. Anyhow, we got it in, alongside the quay at (Glasson Dock). And, then it was there for a long time, you know. And then it went blew a storm one night, and broke all the ropes.

It was stolen, did you say?

No, it was, it blew a storm

Oh, it blew a storm. I'm sorry, yeah.

And it parted all the ropes. And it left the quay, and drifted up by the Lancaster Golf Club, on the marsh.

Oh yeah.

Up high and dry, and it was there about eight months.

That would be Heysham Golf Course?

Pardon?

Heysham Golf Course do you mean?

No the King Orry drifted all the way up, in with this gale of wind. And, the. There's a little cartoon in the paper. Wanted, advertising for a night watchman, because there was a man on it you see. And, of course, he wasn't going to stop, stop on it over there. But it was quite an experience. I enjoyed doing it, trying to get it off.

What was it like, steering the steamer ship then, piloting it?

Well, when, when we tried to get it off, a tug boat came from Liverpool. And, it pulled away at high water, and it didn't budge. And they had a little dredger at Glasson Dock, and at the next big tide the dredger went and had a go, to try to get it off, but it didn't move it. And then, there was quite a nice breeze one day on a big tide, so the owner, myself and the ..., went aboard, and just after high water we went full astern and it moved, and came off. And, the owner said, "Now we've got to get it to Glasson Dock." And, I thought, "How are we going to do that?" you know. Because they'd no telegraph to call down to the engine. They still had the engine running, and the little boy we had, well he was shouting orders down to the engine, 'bout what to do. Anyway, we got it back to Glasson Dock, and it was... I don't know, there was an idea of bringing it up to Lancaster to make it as kind of a nightclub. And, I said, "I'll take it to Lancaster, but it'll never come down again if it goes up there. I won't bring it down." But it didn't materialise. I'm glad really.

You must have felt a great sense of achievement, to have got it free?

It was, when I got it back to Glasson Dock.

Yeah. So, you were piloting boats that you'd never piloted before? How, what was it like, sort of switching to a new boat?

Have you heard about the ship hitting the lighthouse?

No, tell me.

I'll show you after. They've just started to repair it now. It was rather strange. I was back at Snatchems, at the Golden Ball there, and this lady parked behind Headlands to Headspace Oral History Project Interview No: Page 38

me, and I thought, she jumped out, and I thought, and then she said, "Hello Harold," and she said, "Would you like my daughter to take you to Cockersands Abbey, so's you can see the lighthouse being repaired?" Well, I said, "I've got my binoculars, I can't get down the road." You know down to the, I don't want to go down to it, but I thought it was nice for her to do that. But, no. I've piloted. I've got used to, all the different kinds of, blends of coffee that there is, on ships!

Right! That was the important thing was it?

Yeah. Little cups this big, you know, and a big mug of hot water. Keep adding to it.

Might be espresso size, yes.

Espresso ones you know. And, if you'd got a Fleetwood trawler coming in, then it was in a pint pot, that had never been washed for a month. I always remember, because I pretended to go to the side of the bridge, and tipped half of it out. (laughing)

So. So, were you getting boats from all over the world, then?

So, I always steered the boats up to Lancaster, because there was so little water, and it was so narrow. By the time you'd told somebody what to do, it was too late perhaps. But I didn't steer many up to Glasson Dock, I let the Captain or one of the crew steer them up.

Right, but there must have been, there can't have been very, must have been quite small boats going up to Lancaster, were they? What sort of boats were they and what were they carrying? What were they carrying?

Well, they brought coal for Williamson's, linoleum factory, and china clay. They got a lot of china clay. There was two china clay boats there at once.

Where would they have been coming from? Where were the china clay...?

The china clay are the Cornish ones [inaud] Fowey. I used to love it down there in winter time, it was nice and warm, compared to up here.

Yeah. So, you've got coal, china clay. What other sorts of things were coming to, along the river to ...

Timber, all kinds of odd things, now and again. But, cement. You see there'd be a boat nearly every day. Twenty, between twenty and thirty a month, at one time. I've got a, all my pilot, ships that I've piloted are in my wardrobe there, in a big, one on top of the other.

You've kept records, brilliant. Fantastic.

Kept records.

How many do you think you have piloted, over the years?

Well, I did count them, but I couldn't be able to say now.

Dozens?

We did eight boats on one tide at Glasson Dock, three pilots. One pilot took one out, brought one in, and took another out. I brought a big one in, and took one out, and, eight in one tide.

Gosh, that's a lot. You must have worked quite hard?

So, I wasn't fishing then hardly. Hadn't time.

Well it's marvellous that you've got all these memories, I've really enjoyed listening to them. Are there any, is there anything else you'd like to add, Harold, before we have a break?

Yeah, we'll have a break now, and then.

Yeah.

You might come again if you feel like coming, and add to these talk, or something.

Thank you, thank you, very much.

I should be offering a drink, shouldn't I?

No, that's absolutely fine. We'll turn the recorder off now, and we'll have a

[End of tape]

Notes:

Whammel boats story - <http://www.characterboats.co.uk/lune-whammel-no-1/>

<https://thelunepilot.com/articles/the-fishermen-who-still-work-original-boats/>

From Lancaster Guardian

<https://www.lancasterguardian.co.uk/lifestyle/nostalgia/we-lived-by-the-tides-at-sunderland-point-1-1177710>

Peggy the pilot boat

<http://www.lythamwindmill.co.uk/Lytham-Lifeboat-Museum-to-Reopen-for-2015-Season.html>

See abstract from website below for history of Peggy/Chapman.

See also this website below that tells a slightly different history.

<http://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/register/1956/chapman>