

**MORECAMBE BAY
PARTNERSHIP**

Headlands to Headspace

**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: H2H2017.40
INTERVIEWEE NAME/S: Clare Worrall
YEAR OF BIRTH: December 1973
INTERVIEWER/S: Barbara Copeland
DATE OF INTERVIEW: 9 March 2017
LOCATION: Furness Fish, Poultry and Game Supplies, Moor Lane, Flookburgh
TRANSCRIBER: Michael Redman

Summary of Interview:

No of Tracks: One

Main Contents of Transcript (Brief Description):

Track 1: A relaxed interview about the origins of the present Morecambe Bay shrimp businesses owned by Furness Fish Poultry and Game Supplies, Moor Lane, Flookburgh. The owner Clare Worrall talks about the story of Baxters of Morecambe which holds a Royal Warrant, the process of producing the potted shrimps and details of the Morecambe Bay fishermen that fish for, and supply, the raw shrimps. The business has changed through the past 20 years with the introduction of web sites, mail order supply to the public and attendance at shows and events, recently with a converted Peugeot J7 commercial vehicle.

Right, so your name please?

Clare Worrall

And are you, you manager?

Owner.

Owner, of,

Yes

Er, so this is Furn'?

Furness Fish and Game

Right

Yes

In Flookburgh?

In Flookburgh. yeah.

Ok, so when was this firm established?

It was established back in 1974 (see end note), by Les Salisbury, and we were based in Ulverston. Then, he was keen fisherman, and originally the business, supplied hotel and catering and food service, with products, but he was a shrimper and used to bring his shrimps out to Flookburgh, to be potted by Flookburgh Fishermen, and that's how he started producin' Morecambe Bay potted shrimps. That continued through, ... he retired, I think seven years ago now, and, I've been working for the Company for, twenty, twenty-one years, and had slowly bought into it, and then when he retired, bought the rest of the Company out, so we had Furness Fish and Game, Flookburgh Fishermen, which is, just part of the heritage really, which was who used to produce the Morecambe Bay shrimps. We have a frozen fish company called Fish Fanatics, which again sells the shrimps, and, then also, James Baxter and Son at Morecambe, which are the oldest shrimp company, who pot shrimps, and have the Royal Warrant on their potted shrimps

Right, we'll just ... checking something. So, obviously potted shrimps are important part of the...

Errm, very important, part. It's one of our...we process game and we process, potted shrimps, and we actually peel the shrimps as well here, so, it's a really important part of our business and our heritage really.

And, the shrimps come from the Bay?

Yeah, we... we purchase in shrimps from the local fishermen, from the Bay, that's from right round the Bay, so, from Ulverston side right round to Morecambe side, and, and obviously the Flookburgh fishermen bring them in to here, but we also purchase shrimps from the Solway, the Solway Firth, and, also, down near Lytham, and then into Wales as well. The brown shrimps from there.

So when you say that Baxters have the Royal Warrant,

Yeah,

... is that only Morecambe bay shrimps or ...

No, only in Morecambe Bay. Baxters only use Morecambe Bay, they only use Morecambe Bay, Furness Fish and Game will use, the ones from all local ones from around, because if you look at Morecambe Bay we are going into the, into the S...into the Solway as well. But no Baxters, and it's very strict, regulations with them for pottin' and everythin', It... it's a different, you know, the shrimps, --- Start again. I was goin' to say that, to gain the Royal Warrant, you have to have such a prestige product, and their shrimps are, you know, not saying anything about Furness Fishes', ours, but theirs are the ultimate, you know, that's the ultimate accolade to get that Royal Warrant on them.

Right. And, the potted shrimps, I mean obviously they go to the ... royalty, but where, do they go all over the world or are they just ...Yeah, no ...

We don't export them, we sell, ... we sell, we have a mail order business, which we sell to households. We also sell 'em on shows, 'cos we attend shows, around the country, we supply Booths supermarket which is our oldest customer, and they, they sell them in their stores, frozen and fresh, and then we do a lot of delis and farm shops as well. We also produce for Waitrose, a potted shrimp, for them, and Morrisons.

Because there must be a limit to how many shrimps...

There's, there's a limit what we can do, and the last ... what happens is our main season is September through 'til November. We take as many shrimps as we can possibly take then, and, we... all, the last two years we've been really, you know, had a lot in, and then what we do with those we put them through our, machines, which peels them, and then some of those are frozen down ready for the rest of the year, to carry on through. We have a second season, which is in

March, which normally lasts us through to July. Unfortunately for the last three, four years that's been really bad, so that means that we end up using, so we're slowing', so this year we really need new shrimps to come in.

Hmm

... so we're still now cleaning our, frozen ones, but, yeah, we need, you know, need to keep on with them all the time.

And are the customers aware of this... (that they are from the frozen stores)

Yeah, the customers are aware, and we do take them out for a while, when we haven't got any. So that if we can't ... if we're strugglin' then they, then they come out of stores.

So when the ..., say the Flookburgh fishermen, bring ...

Yeah,

...you the shrimps, because we've talked to John and Michael Wilson, as well ...

oh, right, ok, yeah,

When they bring you the shrimps, I mean, is that a particular, because obviously shrimping, they can be out at all times of the day, do they ...??

What they do is, they will, they will catch them and then they will, what's called like a blanching, which kills them, in water,

So they ...

They do them back in their boiler houses, then they bring them straight down to us, we then have to put them through our machines which takes the shell off them. First thing we do is grade them, and, here we get three sizes of shrimps, the ones which is the big shrimp, three's the smaller shrimp, in Morecambe Bay they're probably 70% of the threes, which are the smaller shrimp. Once they have been graded we have different machines for different sizes, generally, your number ones will be hand-picked, so someone will sit there and hand-pick, the others will go through a machine, but you are only looking at maybe 25% of that weight you will get out in meat because of the shell and that they're that tiny, and then what happens is they then go through to another room, where they are cleaned, so the boys or girls watch, watch them going down, like a little conveyor belt, and they pull any husks off that they can see. And then they, and then took into our pottin' room where they're boiled with butter and spices, that, boil them for ten minutes, then they're potted, they're left to cool down, and they, we use a

local butter from Dewlay, which then we put on the top to seal them. And that's the finished product. ... and the reason that potted shrimps have the butter on top, is because that was the traditional way of preserving them, years ago, before refrigeration, and it stops, you know. Now we keep them in a fridge and it's all done to temperature, now, so, yeah.

So it's all technology now?

All, t', yes, (interviewer laughs) It has to be, yeah.

Well health and safety, I suppose?

Yes, yeah, there're really strict Regulations, and we're SALSA accredited and 'cos we supply a wide range of customers, so everything has got to be done correctly, yeah. (see end note)

Yeah. Are there any other fish that you take?

We, local fish we don't, we don't really take much else. Sometimes we deal in, we used to deal in wild Sea Bass, but we haven't done that, so not really, no. We sell a lot of frozen fish, but not really, the fresh fish.

Erm, what about cockles?

No, no we don't...

You don't get involved ...

No we don't get involved in cockles, no.

So, basically it is the shrimps.

It's the shrimps, yeah,

yeah,

yeah.

I can't believe that there's the.... that amount of shrimps, can, you know, have such a big business going, but obviously... there must ..

Well, ... yeah, (laughs), there's tons of, yeah, we'll get quite a lot of tons in, in that, September, October, November, that window, there. And obviously you've still got, here we fish with tractors, Morecambe you fish with a boat, if you go to the Silloth, they're fishing with boats, so when they're catching them, they're bringing in 3-400 kilo in one go, which is quite a lot of, of shrimps to process.

And, is there not a worry that, because they're smaller shrimps, ...

Yeah

That, they won't be there the following year because you fish them out. You can't overfish ...?

You, you don't really overfish them, the more that you, the more you take, there's bad years and good years, it goes more on how much water comes into the Bay, so if you, if we have a really wet winter sometimes that can affect them, at this time of year they're smaller, they will grow, for the bigger, you know, to make the bigger shrimps, so, but, it's not really, you know, that's not really, mm, but at this time of year when we are not getting as many shrimps, we only actually pot for three days,

Mmmm

So, whereas, if we had a lot of shrimps in we would be pottin' five or six.

So, do you have, a set number of employees, or do you bring ...?

It varies, we currently have here, we currently have, I think thirteen, at Christmas time that increases to maybe fifteen, sixteen, and at this time of year, they're not on as many hours, so when we are getting a lot of shrimps in, in September, October, November and well, and December, 'cause we're pottin' Christmas, they, they will work a lot longer hours, whereas now they won't. Which sometimes works 'cause they have the better weather in the summer (laughs), so the staff are very good, and work with us as well, but you can't, you can't pot something if it's not there. So ...

That's true, and, I suppose they're all, local, local staff?

We've got, we got, Wendy from downstairs, she lives in Flookburgh, Christine and Joanne, live in Flookburgh, and I think Christine, gives you a picture, she's from a fishin' family, Joanne is from a fishin' family, the other girl Rachel, is from Ulverston, and then the others, live in Barrow or Ulverston, so yeah, yeah and they're all, local, and obviously some of them from fishin' families, as well, which is always good.

So do you own the Baxters as well?

Yes

Right

Yes

So does that follow the same lines as?

That follows that, so, a smaller place, and it's very, that's based in Morecambe, and there's just, three, three, staff there, a Manager, and then the two girls. They don't peel the shrimps there, they, obviously, we'll peel them here, and they pot them, each day. They only pot Monday to Thursday, and they just pot in a mornin'. So it's a different, an' it's a slower process there.

You peel their shrimps here?

We peel shrimps here, yes.

Right, But because they're specific, those you have to separate them out do you, from ...?

Yes, yeah

You know which are theirs?

Oh yeah, when, we have full traceable..., we have to by law, have full traceability, so if you buy that pot, from anywhere, if you look on the bottom of that pot it will have a batch number, which then refers to, a code, which then gives you the fisherman, who brought it in, and everything.

Wow

So it's the same, and so, at Baxters, it's the same, they follow a different, they don't, do not supply any bigger, 'cos they just keep a premium product so any ones that come into the Bay they get, so,

Hmm

Yeah,

So, how many fishermen in Flookburgh?

I think there's about six.

Yeah, so, can I name them?

Yeah,

Frank Benson, one,

Yeah he brings shrimps in, yeah

Ian McClure

We do get some shrimps off his son, yes, which Tony, yeah.

Yeah, obviously Michael Wilson,

Yeah

I don't know any others.

Stephen Manning,

Oh, of course.

Matthew Lambert, and, and another man who spends some of his time abroad, as well, so there's him, then at Ulverston, there's Ray Porter, who gets a lot of shrimps for us, an' then obviously we've got the Morecambe side as well.

Yes.

So, but, but yeah, they're ours yeah

Yeah. So when they bring in the shrimps in from Ulverston, do they, is it round or will some of them go round Aldingham and ... ??

All well..., they'll go out from, like Newbiggin, so one, one goes out at Newbiggin, then further round towards Ulverston, just passed Aldingham, Baycliffe.

Oh, yes.

Yeah.

Yeah, right so you've got the full Bay..

Yes,

Yes, like you say

Yeah,

And are they quite small? Are different parts of the Bay?

No, all the bays are about the same, really, 'cos when you get out there, you're not very far from, so, if somebody goes out from Aldingham, they're actually, they're nearly at the Flookburgh lot when they come out, go out, down here.

Mmm

'Cos when you got on to that, you know, estuary, you, you know, you're not so far away,

Yeah, yeah,

Not close enough to talk to each other, but they, you know, they all can see each other.

Mm

But you'd probably know that by talking to Michael Wilson.

Yeah.

Yeah

Yeah, I've been out on the sands as well a couple of times.

Right ok.

So I can, yeah, I know what you mean...

Yeah.

Yeah. Right, ... (pause) ... I think we have almost covered everything. Oh, yeah, factory update, that was just to say, are you, you know, are you extending or have you brought new stuff in recently, or are you...

(Laughs in response to question) We always want to extend, we just have no money. (Laughs) Yeah, not at the moment really, what we did last year was, we got, we do some catering on shows, and we got a new street food van, for, mainly for Baxters at Morecambe, and we called it, it's an old, J7, Peugeot fire engine, which we have converted into a street food van, and it preliminary did seafood, from local sea food and so we do Baxters potted, or Morecambe Bay potted shrimps on a toasted muffin. We've passed, er, different things and it was getting out there, and selling a bit more and promoting those sort of things. So, so that's what we've, worked on last year, but as far as here the factory, the actual building, we are not really planning to do very much, with it.

It is quite a large building..

Yeah, yeah, yes it is ..

And by all the cars parked, I can see you've got a lot of people in already...

Yeah, yeah...they seem to, though they all live in the village, nobody walks down.

(Laughs)

S'too cold, in the summer you'll find there's loads of bikes.

Yeah, ah well.

(Laughing) yeah, yeah, so

So what percentage is, because I've looked on your web site, and obviously you do all sorts of other things as well...

Yea, yeah.

What percentage would the fish be, compared to the....

The shrimp side?

Yeah?

I would say, originally it used to be a lot higher, but now I would say it's probably, about, 25 to 30%. 25% of our business.

Right.

Yeah

Right, right. And do you do a lot, 'cos your web site I thought was fantastic, (laughs)

(Laughs)

I thought it was a really good web site,

Yeah, yeah,

I mean I got a lot of information from that...

Yeah

Do you do a lot orders through...

We do a lot of orders, mainly at Christmas, but no, it so, runs ... it runs twelve months round of, you know, the year. So maybe today there's maybe four or five going out, it's quieter at this time of year, but, yeah, it seems to do alright, the web site, the trouble is, you, a lot of people they now they can get things so when you go to, if you went to, sort of your local deli, or, even Booths it has really good quality food in now, whereas, years ago it didn't. So years ago the web site used to do better, now it's not doin', 'cos, like down south they've got their little Waitrose stores, and everybody's doing, you know, the real food market and things like that, so they can get real good quality, food, rather than having to come direct through us.

Yeah, yeah. It's certainly got better in Britain hasn't it...

Yeah, yeah.

...the quality of food? Yeah. Is there anything else you want to add, because I don't think?

No, I think that's everything covered

I think we've gone through the process, haven't we, and who the fishermen are, and the quality, and, yes I think that's...

Yeah

...yeah

Yeah

Right well, thanks very much Clare, no that's really interesting...

No, no.

..I've learnt a lot from that.

Yes, thank you.

[End of tape]

Notes.

1. SALSA - Safe and Local Supplier Approval - is a food safety certification scheme for small and micro food producers. <https://www.salsafood.co.uk/>
2. Clare states that the business started in 1974, however, the **Company web site mentions** 1983. <http://furnessfish.co.uk/About%20Furness%20Fish.htm>