



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

Cumbria County Council, The Factory,
Castle Mills, Aynam Road, Kendal, LA9 7DE
Tel: 015397 34888

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

© Morecambe Bay Partnership

FRONTSHEET

INTERVIEW NO: H2H2017.43
INTERVIEWEE NAME/S: Janet Butler
YEAR OF BIRTH: 1948
INTERVIEWER/S: Barbara Copeland
DATE OF INTERVIEW: 21/07/17
LOCATION: Aldingham
TRANSCRIBER: Michael Redman

Summary of Interview:

No of Tracks: One

Main Contents of Transcript (Brief Description):

Track 1: Janet Butler 1

Janet Butler explains how she moved from Bradford, Yorkshire to become a fisherman in the Newbiggin area of Morecambe Bay. Along with her husband John Butler and his family she has fished mussels, cockles and shrimps for many years and taken part in the management of the fishery both before and after the Chinese cockle fishermen disaster of 2004 as part of the North Western Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority. She gives us a first-hand account of fishing techniques, the relationships between different fishing families in the area and the way of life of inshore fishing in Morecambe Bay. The Butlers supplied bait mussel to Whitby and exported cockles to France.

Right, so, I'm talking to Janet Butler. Janet could you tell me when you were born, where you were born, and your name, original name, please?

Well, I was born in Bradford¹ in 1948, long time ago, and we came up here with my parents, when me dad came to work in this area, and then, I met my husband and got married in '64, and we have lived at Newbiggin² ever since. I've been involved with John's parents who were fishing folk in Morecambe Bay. John's mother stood the market at Ulverston for 60-odd years, she had a stall on there that sold fruit and veg, flatfish and shrimps, and was quite well known in Ulverston as Lizzie, Lizzie Butler. John's dad was quite a character, he had fished in Morecambe Bay all his life from being a young man in Flookburgh, then they came over to this side of the Bay, when they got married, and they've lived here at Newbiggin, or they lived at Bardsea first, then they came to Newbiggin, after that, and we've lived here ever since. They've made a living out of Morecambe Bay all their lives through the market garden, and fishing for shrimps, mussels, cockles, flatfish, and everything. We have done fishing, my husband had fished when he was a young man, and then he took a trade as an agricultural engineer, but he still enjoyed going out onto the sands, to shrimp, and cockle and mussel. Then in the latter years of our life we have gradually gone onto fishing for cockle, a lot more, and the mussels. John fished for mussels in the '70s and '80's, and worked the mussel beds on the end of Foulney for quite a lot of years, on and off. Then, we used to sell the bait mussel over onto the east coast, in Whitby, we did that for quite a few years until there was no skeiner's left at Whitby to skein the mussel³, so that job died out, 'cos it was only the elderly generation that would do that. Then we've, made quite a good business out of supplying cockles into France. We did that up until the tragedy in Morecambe Bay when the Chinese fishermen were drowned, but

¹ Janet Butler was born in Bradford, Yorkshire (Confirmed by Janet Butler 13 November 2017).

² Newbiggin, Furness near Barrow-in-Furness.

³ "Skein the mussel" – dialect phrase – the process by which the flesh of the mussel is removed from the shell. A shortened knife is inserted between the shell halves and then twisted.

<http://www.whitbyseafishing.com/mussel.html>

since then, it seems as though we were persecuted a bit by the authorities, more regulation came in and it got harder and harder, to be able to go out to fish as we had always done. Now we have to pay 500 each, £500 per year, for a permit to fish. If I want to buy cockles from the local fishermen in the area, I have to have a gang master's licence, which costs me £2,500. Then I have to pay £400 every year, to be, ... have the ... privileged to be able to buy from the local fishermen. We are governed by North West' IFCA⁴ of where and when we can go out to fish. We have argued with them for a lot of years over the closed season for the cockles and mussels, because in the old bye-law books you only ever fished for cockle and mussel during the winter months when there was an "r" in the month. Through the summer months, when you have problems with the shellfish dyin'. We have algae in the Bay when it gets too hot that causes poisoning on the shellfish, so we've argued that the shellfish should be left alone through the summer months, and it would stop a lot of problems with people being ill through shellfish poisoning. We tend to shrimp and fish for flatfish during the summer months and fish for shellfish through the winter months. It always worked like that in the olden days, and I can't see why it can't carry on working like that today. Fisheries would like to have open seasons for everything, all year round, but the Bay will not be sustainable if that is allowed to be implemented. (pause)

Can I just ask, go back to different things you've mentioned? So, the first thing is, do you know why your father-in-law moved from Flookburgh over to this area to fish?

(Laughs) 'Cos he was always fightin' in Flookburgh. He was quite a character, and, I think he was, well, I don't know whether he was thrown out, or made to go from Flookburgh, because of, he was always in trouble. His nickname was "Old

⁴ North Western IFCA – North Western Association of Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities - <http://www.nw-ifca.gov.uk/>

Scound”⁵ and, he was the only man that could put the bullring on the hook in the Fisherman’s Arms and become drunk after the night, because he got a pint for every bet that he made with anybody to put the ring on, the hook, in one go. He could do it, but no-body else could manage it. He was, he was quite a character, and he was well known for it. But, when anybody strange came in, he would have the bet on, and he used to bet for a pint, and what else have you, or a glass of rum.

But he knew the fishing would be good over this area, as well?

Yes, he knew this area like the back of his hand. Although he couldn’t swim, but he went all over out there in Morecambe Bay. I can remember one night when they’d been out musselin’, they filled the boat up with mussels, and it was about an inch, the top of the boat was about an inch off the top of the water, and he used to say, and he said to the boys, that were in there, “Put your oars in gently, boys”, and how the hell they ever got home with all them, I’ll never know to this day, but they did. But, it’s not like that now, I’m afraid the mussel scars⁶ are very depleted. They’ve sanded over because they let them dredge too much on them, and then the sand comes in and washes over the top and then that’s it, it’s gone for ever and a day.

So, when you’re musselling, because you talked about taking the mussels over to Whitby?

Yes

So, you go out with a boat, do you?

⁵ “Old scound” – Possibly from “old scoundrel”

⁶ Mussell scar – Feature of Morecambe Bay – for example Wadhead Scar off Bardsea – Ordnance Survey map OL7 - Also see “skear” a Northwest dialect word
<http://www.normannicholson.org/june-2015-skear.html>

No we used to go out and hand pick, hand pick for mussel, 'cos we used to take the old barnacly mussel. You have to have a fairly big mussel to be able to skein them, for the fishermen, in Whitby and that, to put them on the hooks an' the lines that caught the fish over there. So, but we used to go with, ... at first we started with a wagon, we used to go over with a wagon load, and then it got down to a pick-up load, and then it got down as it wasn't worth going all that way with what, what orders were left. So, we...

So was it the fact the fact that the mussels were depleting or the fact that the Whitby fishermen weren't requiring them anymore?

The older generation were dying off, and nobody could skein, nobody could do the job, if you know what I mean.

So, when you say skein, what do you mean?

They open the mussel and take the meat out inside. Whereas, if you cook them, it opens up, but these were just raw, mussel, and they wanted the raw meat so you had to be able to open the mussel, open the mussel with a knife, and get the meat out, to put on the fish hooks. Like you know do the lines for fishin'.

So that must mean you picking by hand the mussels, must have been a very labour intensive job, to get a truck load?

But we used to go and rake them, and you could get quite a lot, and we used to bag them all up and then trundle over with them.

So, what years are we talking about when you were doing that?

In the late '80s, '90's, 18 ... er, 1980, to 1990, (laughs), somewhere in that region, not 1800, not that old. (laughs), but .. **so**, it's a shame that the mussel beds have got depleted to such the extent that they are, and actually the mussel that's left now is not very good because it's got a lot of pearl in it, and it's not really good for human consumption. There's nothing wrong with them as such, but if you get the pearl it can break your teeth and a lot of people now, businesses that would buy mussel don't want them if they've got pearls in. You know it's not, it's a grain of sand seemingly, that gets into it, that develops into this mussel, but I don't know how it can be stopped. I think it should be an exercise for IFCA to try and, sort of see why the mussel actually gets a grain of sand in it to develop into the pearl.

And, Morecambe Bay area is it, was it a larger musselling area.

It used to be, yeah, a lot of years ago, but now they've cleaned the Bay up, of course, so there's no muck goin' in, So that there's not mussels and that, sort of shellfish feed off, ...they're bottom feeders, so they feed off a lot of muck, and syphon it through, and, of course when there was a bit of muck in the Bay, they sort of, seemed to thrive more, as do shrimps as well, sort of thing, but now they've cleaned, they've cleaned the Bay up to such an extent, and of course then you've got chemicals going into it, people use, you know, more bleach, everybody's fastidious about cleanin' and cleanliness, and what else have you, so of course, there's more of this. And, everything has to be tested now before human consumption, it's got be of a certain grade before, ... before we can take it to sell on to anybody for human consumption.

So, when you buy the cockles, (are) you buying the cockles from local people?

We buy from local people in the area, that fish, out there, and then we grade them, when we get them back here, and then we ship them out to France, and export them out there.

How do you ship them out?

We meet wagons that come down from Scotland on a night.

So, they've got their own that they're taking to France, or ...?

No, they're done with a firm that transports a lot of fish from Scotland end, into France. They pick up off us half way down, and they pick up further down as well, at different pick up points, and they're in France the next day. And, distributed to whoever we sell them to, and that...

So, it's still profitable, selling cockle?

Yes it is, cockles, cockles are profitable, but they need to get on top of takin' the small cockle. We would like to see the size, the take-able size put up to 22 mm, for cockles.

What is it now?

20, to preserve the stocks, and make sure that we have a living for the following year.

So, at the moment you feel that 22 is..?

22 mm would be more ideal, because then it matches up with the take-able size in France. If we send cockles that are undersize, into France, they get fined, over there for receiving undersize cockle.

So logically it should be twenty, twenty two...

...It should be the same at what it is abroad.

It should be...

And they should look at the market trends. The IFCA should look at market trends, as well, to make sure that cockle is better sold in the winter months, more so than the summer months. The summer months, it's..., the boiling plants like the cockle, but they take huge quantities and that's what causes the depletion in the Bay. And they take the small stuff. Whereas the hand gatherers, the local fishermen that fish in the winter months, take the sized cockle that goes into France and we don't have any problems with poisoning or anything like that. They all go to purification centres, and what else have you, before they are distributed to people in France. 'Cos somehow the English don't seem to eat a great lot of shellfish, seafood, which is a shame really.

No (agreeing). Yeah.

But, you know it's, it's an on-going saga really.

And shrimping, does your husband still go shrimping?

Yes, now and again. Not a great lot, 'cos he struggles to lift the nets now, like he used to do, but my son goes, when he can, and...

And, is there a season for shrimping?

Yes, yes, it..., they tend to come into their own in, after August, September and October, that's when you get the better shrimp. We do get shrimps earlier, but

they're very often small, then they're hard work to peel, 'cos you seems as though you're sat there peelin' for ever and a day, an' not getting a big pile of shrimp.

So, and I've heard, it is better to peel in certain types of weather, like if it's too hot they're hard to peel?

If it's too hot, and you bring them home, and they're going to the boiler, when they're dead, they don't peel, which is difficult.

So you mean they die on the way from the sands....

From the sands, yes

... because it's too hot, they're out on the sand?

You know, if you get, if it's hot weather, you need to get home, get them boiled, and done, to make sure they'll peel ok. 'Cos once, once they die, they tend to go like ..

... shrivelled ...

... well they go soft, and when you cook 'em they just sort of disintegrate. They're like crabs and lobsters. You have to cook them live. You know, to get the best, out of them, sort of thing. But, it's a bit of an unthankful job, sitting and peeling shrimps, but it's very therapeutic, sometimes people tell us, but they've got to be done, because they don't last that long, so everything has to be kept fridged and cool and ..

Do you have a few pickers, peelers, ... pickers?

No, we peel all ours ourselves, what few we get. We peel them.

And, who do you sell them to?

Well, we eat most of them ourselves, if we have surplus, we maybe sell to the shrimp factory in Flookburgh.

Yeah.

But that's about it, really.

So, going back to cockling, you were talking about, well we saw an article on singing, listening, yeah ...can you explain that?

Listening, yeah, ... well, I don't know much about it, 'cos I've never heard them singing, but the old people that used to go, used to say that when they went out, if the wind was a certain way, that they could hear the cockles singing, and that's how they found them. Sort of thing, but I don't know, I don't know how it works, and there's none of the older generation, unless Jack Manning, or somebody like that would know, ... what it means, this, the cockles were singing, sort of thing. I mean, I think you have to ..., you have to have the experience and the know how to know what you are looking for, to find a decent cockle bed. And, I think it's only the, the old die-hards, the local fishermen in this area that know what they are looking for. And, it's always been a rule that when they did find them, you kept it to yourself, you didn't go tell everybody else, because, you know, but that's how it was, and, that was the art of fishing. Whereas, there is no art, no more, because now they've got machines that tell them where everything is. you know what I mean, it's like, more so with fin..., what I call finfish, because of, a skipper drives along in his boat, or sails along in his boat, I should say, and his screen, radar whatever it is, tells him where all the fish are. Well to me that's not fishing. (laughs) I think, you know, the old .. you know, the elderly gentlemen, that fished,

in Morecambe Bay, they're the ones that have got all the know-how, and they pass that on to their sons, and they did to their sons, and that's how Morecambe Bay fishermen learn how to do what they do, and where to go, in Morecambe Bay.

Can you explain, tell me, what IFCA stands for, again, just for the...?

Well it's the North Western Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority.

And, do you want to tell me how that came about, and you being a member, on it?

It was the sea, ... it was the old North Western Sea Fisheries⁷, and then it was upgraded to the North Western Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority. And that came into being, .. I think it was about 2004 maybe 2005, I can't just remember exactly when, but it was after the Chinese people lost their lives in Morecambe Bay⁸, that all this regulation came in. I did become a member of the IFCA, and, to be quite honest it was harder than going for a job because I had to have a, do a c.v., I had to have an interview in Preston, to go on it, and I served on there for four years, which I quite enjoyed, but I, I was a bit disappointed because the IFCA didn't seem to take the fishermen's views across the board, and really listen to us, because, we were the ones that knew what was going on, and how it worked, but they didn't seem as though ... they wanted to take on board what we were saying. We seemed to get over-ruled, and I think that is

⁷ North Western Sea Fisheries Committee - From the IFCA website - <http://www.association-ifca.org.uk/about-us/ifca-history> - "To achieve this, the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs) were set up in April 2011 as a new type of regulator to work with stakeholder groups to achieve this common aim in English Inshore waters. The IFCAs replaced the Sea Fisheries Committees with extended responsibilities not only to achieve sustainable inshore fisheries, but also to help achieve conservation objectives. Of course they need to work in strong partnership with Government and other regulators with the aim of securing the future of the seas and the benefits we all get from them."

⁸ The Morecambe Bay cockling disaster occurred on the night of 5 February 2004.

totally wrong, and at the moment, there is only one fisherman actually on the Committee of North Western IFCA., and I think there should be more fishermen having their input in, and say, on what happens in Morecambe Bay. And I have voiced my opinion about that, and I have told IFCA as well, on a survey, that that should be.. When I was on the IFCA, I also fought very hard, for the older generation of fishermen to still be allowed to go out and fish, as they had always done, all their lives, without having to pay the £500 for a permit. We wanted a reduced fee, for anybody who was over 65, to be able to still go out, and maybe get a bag of cockles, and do what they had always done all their lives. But, I couldn't get the Committee to see my side of the reasoning. They could not understand that it was a way of life, and that fishermen might as well have just gone away and died, if they don't allow them to go out on the beach to do what they've done for the last 50 or 60 years. It's a bit like the, the certificate, the courses they have to, that the fishermen have to go on now, to be able to apply for a permit to go out there to fish. People who have fished in Morecambe Bay for generations, and been taken out since they were kids, up until they were 50 and 60 year old had to go and sit in a classroom, and listen to somebody telling them how the tide works and one thing and another, to be able to have a certificate to say that they were competent enough to go out on Morecambe Bay, to go and fish. And, they'd done it for "x" number of years, and knew everything that (was) there was to know. And when certain questions were asked to the person who was teaching them, they couldn't answer the questions that the fishermen knew. So, to me, it was just money for old rope, taking money off fishermen, for a certificate, so's that they could get a permit. That they had to pay £500 for now, every year, come what may. And we have to pay that whether or not the IFCA open any fisheries. If they don't open a fishery, we still have to pay £500 and earn nothing. Otherwise, we go to the back of the queue, and we can't get a permit next year.

So, who forms the body of IFCA, what sort of people?

Defra, the Government. Defra and the Government. And it's run by Natural England, Environmental people⁹, Councillors in the, from different areas around Morecambe Bay¹⁰, and personally I don't think that they have enough experience and knowledge of Morecambe Bay to make some of the decisions that they make.

With Brexit coming, how do think that's going to affect, ...

I'm hoping that it will make it a lot better. (laughs). I'll be quite honest we voted for Brexit, I don't think we should be ruled by Europe, and a lot of this regulation has come in from Europe, and it's not common sense. Common sense has gone out the window with a lot of things.

So you hope ...

I mean, I would like to see Morecambe Bay kept as a sustainable fishery, there are certain things that are good, but there's a lot of things that aren't. And, I think that the fishermen from this area should be given a bit of preference treatment to what people from other areas that come up to fish. You know, the local fishermen don't get.

So, there's other people from round Britain that come up to fish in Morecambe Bay?

⁹ "Environmental people" – means The Environment Agency.

¹⁰ "Councillors from different areas around Morecambe Bay" – Lancashire County Council, Cumbria County Council, Blackpool Borough Council, Sefton Council, Wirral Council, Halton Council, Liverpool City Council, Cheshire West and Chester Council. - <http://www.nw-ifca.gov.uk/members/>

Yes, yes, they come from Wales, anywhere. And, it, sometimes, I mean, when the, when the Chinese people were here, it was a lot of people that came, and could get a permit to go out there, 'cos we didn't have to pay for it then, that had no experience whatsoever, and went out there, and then they put the Coastguards, the RNLI men, it puts all their lives at risk. 'Cos they don't know anything about how the tide works, where it comes from, what it does, how fast it can come, different weather patterns, all that sort of thing. You have to have a bit of experience, and a bit of knowledge of all that, how it works, before you go out there. So, (laughs).

(Sound of a third person in the background)

Hello.

(Laughs) It's, you know, a common sense thing.

What about other types of fishing, like flukes, or have you done any other, or your family done any other fishing apart from cockles, shrimps, mussels?

Well, John's dad always fished for shrimps. We don't go quite as much because we can't get them peeled, so it's pointless getting, a ton of shrimps if you can't get them peeled. So we just get what we want for ourselves, and do and that's about it. Flukes, we enjoy, flukes, fresh flukes from the sea, there's nothing nicer, and especially if you get a nice thick one, and get it filleted off, they are absolutely beautiful.

Do you have a boat?

Pardon.

Do you have a boat, a boat?

A boat, yes, yes. We've just, ...well Robert and his dad acquired a boat, two year ago, called the "Oysterfisher". We haven't just quite got it ready for the water yet. It wanted quite a bit of work doing to it, but because we farm, we have a few suckler cows as well. Of course, it doesn't just happen that you can get on and do the jobs all day and every day, there's other things to do besides, as well. So, we haven't got on as fast as what we want to do, but Robert's, he has bought a fishing licence for it, and everything, so hopefully this year, we should be able to get out, and maybe try and catch some crabs and lobsters, and that type of thing.

Right.

And, do. Although we would like to be able to get out onto the mussel scars as well, and see what there is a bit further out. And see if we can get mussel, some better mussels from different areas. .And what else have you. But until we get it all sort of ready, that won't happen.

So there's lobsters out in the Bay?

Yes, further round at, off Walney side, sort of thing, you know, sort of thing. John did build a big boat, himself, out of steel. It's a bit like a landing craft with a drop down front that they can put the quads in and what else have you. We have had that going in Morecambe Bay. It looks like a floating skip. We call it the "Lizzie B". It's quite a big piece of kit, it's about 30 foot long, it's a fair thing like, you know.

Yes.

... and what else have you, but we are just renovating that one as well, at the moment. So, you know, but we, we do use it. We used to go out there with a tracked machine, like an amphibious snow cat, it was called, but we sold that to

the Bay Search and Rescue team, a few years ago, because it was keeping up on top of the running costs with that, it was quite expensive. So now we just, if we go out there, we just go with the tractors, and like everybody else, or the quads, and then. So, I don't know what else to say.

So refrigeration, have you got big fridges, here, that ... ?

Yes, yes. We've big cold rooms that we keep everything in. You have to keep everything right. We do have, we even have purification tanks, 'cos we did have a go at growing oysters at one time. They're not in use at the moment, but we still have all the gear, so, if ever we decide to do anything again we'll probably rig them back up **interesting** ... and get registered again for purification. I mean, we can only sort of, fish for stuff that's there, but we would like to try and keep Morecambe Bay as sustainable for the fishermen to make a living out of it, for as long as we can.

Are there any other fishermen around the Aldingham area, Newbiggin area?

Only, oh there's Thomas Butler, he goes out for shrimps, now and again. He enjoys just going for a run out, you know, sort of thing, for their own use. There's William Barlow and Les Salisbury that have the shrimp factory. When he's up here he likes to go out. There's Ray Porter at Canal Foot¹¹ who fishes full-time. He's the Guide to the Sands, but that's about it on this side of the Bay. And the rest are all at ...

Were there a lot more when your father-in-law was here?

¹¹ Canal Foot is a small industrial area near Ulverston.

Yes, no. I wouldn't say an awful lot. There was Edmondson's', further down. There was John's dad, and that. There was old Tommy Butler on the corner, which was Thomas' dad. There was Alf Butler, Steve Donnelly, they used to go from Canal Foot. But, roughly, there was only about half a dozen. Oh and Hill Top at Baycliff, old Abby¹² Benson, and them lot used to go. But they were the only generation of fisherman from this side of the Bay, everybody else seemed to come from Flookburgh or Grange, and they fished from the other side of the Bay.

Right, hmm. Because, historically, there must have been a lot more fishermen this side of the Bay, mustn't there?

I would say so, a lot of years ago, but I don't know, you know, who a lot of them were. I mean, a lot of the older generation used to sort of make a living, not make a living, like live off the Bay, you know, they used to... Aunt Esther that lived at the bottom there, they used to have fish, fish, for ever and a day coming out, 'their ear 'oles, and she lived to the ripe old age of 97, you know.

And, market gardening, that's always seemed, well in Flookburgh that goes alongside the fishing. Was that the same here?

Same here, yes. And it was the same at Baycliff, when Bensons at that end, did it. Also, Bill Barlow, he went out to shrimp with his lads, and what else, have you. But he also was a gardener and a green keeper.

So when you went to market you were selling fish alongside fruit and veg?

Fruit and veg, yes. Anything that they grew. When John's mam and dad were alive, they used to have the big greenhouse, and we, they used to do their own tomatoes and lettuce, all that sort of thing. The only thing that they bought was a

¹² "old Abby Benson" – Abby is a nickname for Albert Benson.

bit of fruit. Everything else was what they sold their selves. What they, you know they produced of their selves. Sort of thing. .. a bit err.

Yes.

About health and sickness in the fishing industry. I mean, do you know of any people who were, like, became ill due to fishing, or sickness or anything related to fishing?

Well. There's a lot of, lot of people died of cancer. And, there's quite a few Fishermen died of cancer, over on Flookburgh side. But, I don't know. I mean, we've eaten fish all of our lives and John's mother and father ate it all and everything. They've never had anything. I think, I think it's the luck of the draw whether you get it, or you don't. I think everybody has a bit of it inside them and it takes summat to trigger it off, sort of thing.

But, nothing else, ... no other diseases that....?

But, no. There's no proven evidence of anything. And today, all the shellfish is tested by Cefas¹³, that the rules and regulations are quite strict, which is rightly so because, people, today don't seem to be able to fight off germs like they used to do in the olden days. I think people are too clean today. Everybody's squirting stuff and what else, have you, I mean, there's clean and there's clean, sort of thing, you know. I mean, I wouldn't like to give anything to anybody that I wouldn't eat myself. We keep everything refrigerated, and keep everything right, to best as we, you know. Sort of thing.

¹³ Cefas – The UK Government Fish Health Inspectorate is based at the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) laboratory at Weymouth - <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/fish-health-inspectorate>

What about any acc..(idents), apart obviously, the Chinese cockle accident, tragedy. But, any other accidents or incidents that you've heard about?

I have an old newspaper cutting of a fishing trip that went from a pub in Ulverston. I think it was called the Union Vaults. There was two boat loads of fishermen came to fish down the Bay. But only one boat load ever got back. And, there was quite a lot of people drowned and there was, one boat that had ... some brothers, I think there was two or three of them lost, sort of thing. But that's really the only tragedies that I can sort of recollect.

You don't know of any fishermen being, .. like going out on the sands, or, no...

We've all lost tractors and had escapades, and what else have you, I mean. If a wheel comes off, or summat like that, you know, I mean. These things happen, don't they, but... There's never really, but I can't say that I can recollect anybody being killed from the fishing fraternity round here. I mean we all try to help one another if, if there is a problem, you know if somebody breaks down or if they get in soft sand. That's the worst thing, if you stop the tractors, and stop, that's it. Sometimes they just, putt (sound), go. And if they get to, you know, there is escapades when we have tried to pull them out, and then two tractors go down, you know. You got to be careful.

So, you've lost tractors, have you in the past?

Yeah, yeah, and it's panic stations, 'cos 'tide's come in, and, it's a fair long way when you are three mile out, out there, to run back to't shore, sort of thing, you know. But, as they say "Tide and time don't wait for no man do it?". No, you can't out run it.

So, you, you've been out quite a lot have you, fishing?

I did do, in my, when I first got married and came down here to live. I don't go out as much now, sort of thing. It takes me all my time to lift a bag of cockle. But, no I used to enjoy it. It was good, sort of thing. But in them days, John's father used to put the bag of mussels on me back and let me walk back to the tractor, carrying it on my back. You were wet through and muck up. And then we use to bring them all in to the yard and we had to tread 'em, to separate them all, and then they were to riddle, all by hand. And, they used to put them on the train in them days, and send them in sacks down to Bolton Market, to Openshaw's, and that. And what else have you. But, it's a bit different to that now. There is a bit of machinery that does some of the hard work for you. And what else have you.

So when you came, they were already using tractors were they?

Yes.

You never saw a horse, then?

No I didn't see, I wasn't here when the horses were, that was, sort of, when my husband was a, like a young, a young lad, sort of thing. But, it was nice to see them going with the horses. We once, well, two years ago, or last year was it, we went over to Belgium to the Shrimp Festival where they shrimp with the horses there. But, it's a tourist attraction, and they pay the fishermen to go out and fish with these horses. But they trail, trawl the net behind the horse. They don't use a chassis like we do, sort of thing. And, they didn't have carts, they just used the horse and the net, and, they fetched what shrimps they catch, they fetched them in to the town centre, sort of thing. And, people were there gathered round, and you could go and stroke the horses and do, and everything. And the few shrimps that they caught, they weighed them, and the person who got the most shrimps in weight was the winner of the medal, but they do it every year, and then there's a festival. They made shrimp soup out of the shrimp husks, the shell. They fried

flounders and flukes. They fillet them all off and they season them and they were frying them in big skillets, on the front of the stalls and you were coming out with two, or three, fillets to eat. They were boiling mussel, and you could have moules, and that, on there. Then it showed them shoeing the horses, it was absolutely fantastic.

What a good idea.

And then they did a big parade, and it was all done, they're themed, to fishing for shrimp and the fish. It's absolutely fantastic and it's on every year in Belgium. In I think it was June, beginning of June.

Is it like a week-long festival or one day?

No, it's only just a day thing. Sort of thing. But it was, it was good to watch, you know.

So they, they were historically, were doing the same as they do in Morecambe Bay. They were fishing with horses, but just slightly differently?

Just slightly different, yeah.

But was it as efficient as round Morecambe Bay?

No, no, 'cos they didn't catch the amount of shrimp.

It doesn't sound like it would, but ...

No, no, but it was a tourist, you know. They paid their fishermen to do that as a tourist attraction, and it was good. It was surprising. It would be nice if something like that could happen over here, you know.

Yes, that's a good idea.

Sort of thing. To bring a bit of tourism into the area as they call it, you know. But, it would be nice to be able to do something like that in Flookburgh.

It would. But you're chairperson of Morecambe Bay Fisherman's Association, so what does that entail?

Well. (Laughs) We're supposed to have a meeting every year, sort of thing, and, fishermen pay their dues into the pot, sort of thing, and we discuss different aspects of what's happened and what else have you. And, if there's anything, a new ruling that comes out, we often have an emergency meeting, and have the views of the fishermen and what they think, and, just a general discussion really. And what else have you.

How many members would there be in Morecambe Bay (fishermen's association)?

There's roughly about 30, at the tops. We actually bought Aldingham foreshore, the Fishing Association, between them all. So, we always have an access to get onto the beach come what may. If in latter years, or later years, if, after our day, if different rulings come out and say that they can't cross certain areas with tractors and what else have you, we ...

It's a good idea that.

... that was why we purchased Morecambe, Aldingham foreshore to make sure that we always had an access on to the Morecambe Bay.¹⁴

And there's not been any other purchase right around the Bay, that's the only one is it?

No, no, there was the whole foreshore from, where was it from. It was what John Poole owned that bought Moat Farm¹⁵. He sold off the foreshore that was on his deeds, which included Newbiggin, Aldingham, Baycliff and part of Bardsea. And, I think they go past Newbiggin towards Barrow as far as what we call Deep Meadow Beck.

Is that one continuous strip then?

Strip, yeah.

Because round our way, Holker Estates have a lot of foreshore.

Yeah, yeah. But, this was a person who bought a farm that had, you know, goes straight down to the foreshore, sort of thing. And, it was that stretch that he owned that he put up for sale in different lots.

So there's nothing like that over the Morecambe area?

No, no.

Interesting.

¹⁴ The purchase of the foreshore was at Aldingham not Morecambe - Corrected to Aldingham by Janet Butler during her vocal recording.

¹⁵ Moat Farm – I believe that this is correct. - A Moat Farm can be found south of Aldingham on the coastal road.

No, we have to pay to go over, if you want to fish from Morecambe, to use the slipways and the car park there, you have to pay the Council, and have all your property insured, and, have public liability and all the rest of it. Another expense that the fishermen don't really need.

What about Flookburgh, is that the same?

No, I think, that so long as IFCA sort of say where they can go on and off at, at Flookburgh. But, a lot of them just go down the mile road and go down that way, or at the other end at Sandgate¹⁶, sort of thing.

Where they've always gone.

Where they've always gone from, you know.

Humphrey Head, they don't, ... maybe sometimes?

Humphrey Head, yeah. (paraphrased, but agreeing with interviewer) But, no, it's a shame really, 'cos,, you know, the tradition of shrimping in Morecambe Bay. I mean there's not many left now that do it.

No. (agreeing)

Have you got any, have there, do you know of any superstitions to do with the fishing industry, going out on the sands?

No, not really. I don't know if anybody else does?

¹⁶ Sandgate – As of October 2017 Sandgate Hotel, Salthouse Road, Barrow-in-Furness, LA13 0DL. (I think this is correct)

No, I've never come across any, I just wondered?

No. I've never, never heard of anything. I don't think there's 'owt else really, much.

Well you mentioned the grandfather rights didn't you?

Yes, I wanted to get that bit in.

No, I don't think there's ..yes. So even though you weren't born in the area, you've certainly taken to the fishing.

There was, no ifs, ands, buts about it. When Lizzie Butler laid the law down, you did it, or you suffered the consequences.

Did John have any brothers or sisters?

Yes, he had two sisters, Bertha and Nan , Hannah. They both could pick shrimps, and what else have you, but, Bertha is sadly gone, she's passed on. Nan's still alive, and everything, but.

Yes, but he was the one who took over the fish.., you were the family that carried on the fishing?

Yes, yes. And, of course, my son has carried on from there, ...and he's got ...

And he's got a future now in, you hope ..

.Well he is a farm contractor as well, but he fishes through the winter months. And then his son also goes out with him...

Oh, that's good.

... to, you know to try and learn a bit, and what else have you, sort of thing, he, you know. You need to be young and fit to do cockling and musselling, and to lift the shrimp nets, you know. And, as you are getting older, you can't, you can't do it the same. You know, even though you still like going out there, sort of thing. I mean, it's like my husband said, when you are out there, nobody can get hold of you. No telephone ringing. Sort of thing, you know. It's grand. There's nothing nicer on a good day. It's not so good in winter when it's blowing a hoolie¹⁷ and rainin' or snowin' and freezing your nuts off out there, but you know, you take the rough with the smooth, don't you.

Yes, yes.

It's better than sitting in an office being cooped up all day.

Oh, right, definite, yes.

Well, if there's nothing else, I think that's been fantastic, thank you very much Janet, that's been really... I've learned a lot from that interview.

Have you?

Yeah, yeah.

I mean we have fought the authorities and we have written to MPs and different things, but it's like banging your head up against a brick wall, to be quite honest. We're not enough, we're not a big enough outfit, and we're, there's not enough of

¹⁷ A raging wind

us to make enough noise, to, sort of, demand our rights, if you know what I mean. And, it's a shame really because it's a dying trade, sort of thing. And there's still some...

And you want the next generation to be able to carry that fight forward?

...and Steve Manning's lad, Tim Manning he's very keen you know, and enjoys, you know, they enjoy going out there, you know. Michael Wilson, you know, he takes his lad out there, and what else have you. Michael, you know, they're all keen, and everything, but they're all getting older. Not as old as us, but they are, you know, they're the next generation that's going to come on, that are doing like, I mean. I mean Steve Manning and Frank Benson and them, they're all in the same age group, sort of thing, and you know. It's their knowledge that they pass on to their sons and their grandsons, that'll keep the fishing industry going, in Morecambe Bay. But, I don't know what or ever will happen after that, if you know? But if they don't stop putting so much rules and regulations in, I don't know, I don't know whether we will be able to overcome everything that they're trying to do with us, sort of thing. I mean, yes, I mean, I agree that we have to have, a certain amount of rule and regulation, but some of it's beyond a joke, you know. It's ridiculous. And I would like to see a bit more leeway given to the original fishermen, of Morecambe Bay. You know.

Yeah, yeah.

So, I mean, if there's anything else that you're not sort of clear on, or anything, I'll try and. I'm not a very good, thing, er, talker as such, but I can, you know, try and help you as best we can with it.

No, yeah, that was really interesting.

[End of tape]

