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INTERVIEW WITH MR. GEORGE FLETT.

4 MORVEN CRESCENT, FINDOCHTY.

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27TH JULY, 1988.

Q. What age did you leave school ?

A. Fourteen.

Q. And then what did you do ?

A. I went in a boat, fishing, as a cook. There wis nobody in this village that hadn't any work when they left school. They all went ~~in the scoops~~ ^{as cooks} - some longer and some shorter time.

Q. Do you remember the name of the boat ?

A. Yes. It wis the 'Shannon' - a fyfie boat, we' a paraffin engine, limit 55 horse power at that time. An' wi jist slept in the cabin. Ye hid tae remove the table when we were goin tae start cranking the engine.

Q. What things did you cook ? Did you have to cook for many people ?

A. Well that wey o' boats hid eight or nine, bit the drifters hid two engineers an ten of a crew. That year, it happened to be the general strike, an we left the drifter in the harbour an went in this motor boat for the summer. But we went to Yarmouth in the drifter. Ma father had a drifter an we went in her. An' that's the year that the seine net started. We brought home all the seine net gear an got it fitted out when we were lying in the harbour here. Herd & Mackenzie they hid a yard jist at The Hythe there, an' they fitted out the boat for the seine net.

Q. How long were you a cook?

A. Jist a year, a fireman next year an' a deck han' the following year. I wis big an' ye wis supposed to do a man's work at that age.

Q. When you were a fireman how many tons of coal did you have to have on board?

A. Well that boat held 16 tons.

Q. Do you remember the price of the coal?

A. Yes. Thirty or thirty one shillings a ton. An' we used to get best English coal when we were in the office in Stromsay. The coal boats came there an they put it intae a hulk. They hid hulks for the boats goin along-side. So that wis that. That wis the price at that time.

Q. It had been a hard job that fireman?

A. Oh no, when you were young you could tackle anythin'.

Q. Can you remember what your first wage was?

A. Ah well, the first wage as cook wis thirty shillin's a week. An I don't know fit the fireman got. He micht a' got thirty five. An the engineer, he got a little more, maybe two poun's five.

Q. Did you have to send some of the money home?

A. No. They didn't get any money at home until the end of the season. When everything - all expenses were paid. They shared out. There wis a third went to the boat, a third tae the nets an a third tae the workin share. Ye hid always a couple o' men from the West coast or the Lewis Islands to make up the crew, 'cause there weren't enough o' men here. There wis eighty boats in this village at that time.

Q. Was there?

A. Forty motor boats, aye that's sail boats converted into motor an forty drifters. So everybody wis busy at that time.

Q. They would have been. Now after you were a fireman what happened then?

A. Well, I wis a deckhand after that.

Q. That involved a lot of cleaning, scrubbing, did it?

A. A deck hand, no, no. That wis what was called the workin share. Workin on the deck as a man of the crew. You see the cook an' the fireman an' the engineer, well, the engineer didn't haul the nets bit the fireman had to haul the nets an' the cook. He was down below coiling the spring ropes as we called them. This wis a two to three inch rope that ye tied when ye wis puttin out the nets. Ye hid stoppers for joinin' each net an' they tied maybe two or three fathoms o' this rope on till this bushel when it was runnin out. An' they heaved on the rope when you started haulin'. An the cook hid tae haul this rope down in the place jist like a box. An it had be coiled so that it ran out without gettin fouled. Jist every tier ye had tae go round an' round. That wis the cook's job. So ye usually started tae haul about 12 tae 1 o'clock in the mornin', an' ye took a four five hours. Depends how big yer catch was, a big catch ye took longer to haul. Then the cook had tae go an' clean his han's an' make the breakfast. When ye started the first o' the season, this ropes were all put through tar to preserve them, an' it took sometime before the tar went off, so the cooks had tae clean their han's.

Q. That had been hard on the hands?

A. Oh no it wasn't. Well it depends on what kind o' day it was. If it was a rough day ye had tae keep a good strain on the rope. It was heavy wi' the capstan. This box the callerin box that we called it, wis jist below the capstan. An ye hid tae keep it tight all the time when ye wis goin' round. Some o' them hid better boxes than others an' it was easier done.

Q. How did you judge the weather 'cause there wouldn't have been any radio?

A. No there weren't any radios at that time. Even up till, well, it was nearly, oh aye, the nineteen twenties, the middle twenties that it started. Some o' the boats had a radio. We hadn't a radio. But the skippers used tae watch the barometer and the sky an' the like. There wis no fish finders or anything. Just used there own knowledge where tae go an put their nets out.

Q. Were you ever caught in a bad storm?

A. Oh yes. The worst one was in 1929. I don't know if you've heard about it or no. The Armistice gale they called it. It was on the 11th of November. That was a very bad storm. The nets, some of the nets, wis all away. Some boats left their nets an' went away ashore. Didn't bother with their nets. An' we broke away from wir nets about eight o'clock. It wis on a Monday an' we dodged up an' went back an' fore, an went down an' hid a cup o' tea. An' while we were down the man in the wheelhouse, the mate, he said "I think this is wir nets that we've crossed." Ye see we wis goin back an fore an we came up an we put on the hatches in case o' a big lump of water. An we got hold of one of the buoys, the floats, an hauld up till we got this rope that I wis tellin you aboot that the cook hid tae tar an put on the rope that we hauled intae where it broke. We hid a chain near the bottom, ye see before dark, there wis three of us went fore'it an put out a chain onto the rope in case it would chaf afore it went through the leads for puttin the ropes on the top rail, an the rope would have chaffed on a there. That bandage ye pit on 45' of chain an that night oor capstan was wrong when we went tae heave in the rope an the chain an we had that tae pull in wi oor hands, an we hid a whole rope, it wis the second rope that balled we had all that to pull in wi oor hands. Course we were young at that time, we were in the early twenties at that time. I went tae sea in 21 and that was 29.

Q. Did you ever suffer from sea sickness?

A. Well some get clear of it sooner than others, but Mondays were always the worst days because you were feedin on all the fancies up in the womens houses or huts.

Q. Fraid you suffered after an Monday the lot came up?

A. Well some were better than others. It didn't bother me much.

Q. If anybody did take ill what was the procedure?

A. Well for sickness like.

Q. No if anybody had an injury or anything like that?

A. We weren't so far from the land, we were only..... well latterly we hid to go further afield like bit if you got fish, herrin, you were in every day an they jist went ashore.

Q. What did you do in your time off in Yarmouth?

A. Oh we went ashore. Every night that you were in the harbour you went ashore. I remember the first time that I wis in Yarmouth, we didn't go ashore on a Friday night and we were cleanin up for gettin clear early on a Saturday. I remember when we got finished hauling that mornin, my father was skipper an he says, do you think there is anybody worse than we are an we hid only eleven nets out of the fleet that wasn't torn or the net away. The first boat that we come to his small boat had been washed over, an he was a far bigger boat than we were. An when you went tae the river, the Yarmouth river, I don't know if you know about Yarmouth, it's a river at the harbour an there wis so many people on the pier heads asking if you hid seen their relatives. It wis dark afore we got ashore an the pier head was all....there wis so many people wantin to know if you had seen their relatives. But there wasn't much damage done, there wis one boat that lost a man, but when you are lyin at the nets, it's like a sea anchor you are safer lying at the nets that way nobody would be steamin, although them that broke away from their nets had to find them again. Of course that wis nearly the end of the season. Sometimes you fished all the month of November. That year there weren't very many after that. We wis a whole week makin up a fleet of nets. You took two fleets of nets wi you an you put one half ashore in the store an when you got the nets stolen or destroyed you went to the store an brought them down if you needed them. So we jist managed to get a fleet an you were a whole week before you got all this one put ashore an another fleet.

Q. Did you ever work on a Sunday?

A. No no the Englishmen went tae sea on Sunday but the Scots, well there wis maybe a few.

Q. Did you go to the Kirk?

A. Oh yes.

Q. When it was cold in the winter how did you keep warm?

A. You jist put on jerseys, you didn't feel cold when you were workin although there wis spray like you had always your oilskins an sou'waster on, your head gear.

Q. Did you have the long leather boots?

A. Oh yes the leather boots were better for steadyin yoursell on the deck than the rubber boots. Rubber boots were too slippery.

Q. They were made to measure these leather boots?

A. Yes. The last pair that I had was in 1935 an I got a few years out of them. We weren't fishin during the war, the drifters were all commandered, not them all but a few were.

Q. What did your leather boots cost you then?

A. Well I think it wis only 2 to £3 that I paid for that. They were all hand made. Maybe I got a bargain. I think it wis a pair for someone else an they didn't fit them an I got them. You wondered how they could make them at that price.

Q. Did you always get home for Christmas?

A. Oh no. The year that I was married. Married after I came home from Yarmouth, we were jist a fortnight married when we went away to the winter fishin on the 24th of December. We were six weeks away.

Q. How did you celebrate Christmas an the New Year?

A. Well it wis jist an other day.

Q. You didn't celebrate?

A. No. no not what they do now. An we came home from fishin an oor wages for the six weeks were £3.14/-. That wis for my net share an my workin share.

Q. How did the women manage all the time you were away?

A. I don't know. Sometimes the grocers an the bakers gave them credit an it wis paid, well before our time they did that. Poor times when there wis nothin, time of the depression.

Q. It must have been hard cause they all had big families then?

A. Oh aye they a hid big families. Well there wis six in our family beside the one that died, a girl that died wi pneumonia when she was hardly two year old, an there wis one that wis

three days an then there wis one still born. But there wis six of us that grew up. Two sisters in Hall Street an a brother in Edinburgh. One that was a nurse an she got married at the start of the war, she died wi her first baby. Then the other one died when we were in Castle Street.

Q. Did your wife ever do any guttin or was she a domestic?

A. Aye she was at the guttin, but after we married, we were only five years married when she had rheumatoid arthritis so she wis an invalid after that. We lived in Castle Street for about five years. When this arthritis started wi her we went tae be beside her mother so she could help her an we were there for over twenty years. When this houses were being built we were both in hospital an we put in for this house an she never saw it. She died in Portsoy. I hid four operations within two years an I wis jist about five or six weeks home from the last one when she died an I've been here mysell since then.

Q. You said you stopped the fishing at 52.

A. Aye 52 an I wis there for about 14 years I think.

Q. This is at Herd & Mackenzie's.

A. Yes as a labourer tae slip the boats an paint. That wis harded work than goin tae sea. You were longer on your feet especially if you had overtime to do. You were paintin the time of the tide you hid to work wi the tides for takin the boats on an takin them off. Ye started at half tide, tide half in, an you worked sometimes as long as you couldn't get them out intae the water when the tide was goin back. It was always at these tides when it was dinner time and sometimes you didn't get home and sometimes you only got half an hour for your dinner.

Q. Had the wages been any better?

A. Well if you got £6 that time it was a big pay. You had a lot of hours to put in for that. They built minesweepers at the slip there, that's how they hiv that big shed. It wis a hanger for aeroplanes an they hid to be built under cover. Their first small one was nearly finished when I left there.

Q. Apparently they built boats?

A. His father Ralph was his father, he was one of the painters. Oh there were a few different painters. The Wilson's were painters.

Q. Course they built boats doon at the Hythe at one time?

A. Oh yes. I was only four years old when my father an them got a boat built there.

Q. Was it a sail boat?

A. No a drifter. A steam drifter. The Home Friend was her name an I remeber the launchin an I remeber when she went her trials, I wis only four years old then. Aye that wis 1911. Oh they built a lot of boats down there. They built most of the drifters. The one that your grandfather hid the Corrie was built there. She wid have been about 1907. That wis jist before they started the Buckie registry BCK. It wis BF up until 1907.

Q. Apparently the first ane was BCK 1 the Handsom.

A. We could memorise all the names when we were at school.

(I expect you could. When I was young the biggest boat in the harbour was the Boy James, that wis Campbell's boat. I can never mine on big boats being there.)

A. Oh we used to rigger tae boats, make boats ready in the harbour there an well that would have been drifters, sometimes they did them on the beach but you couldn't get right underneath the same as sail boats were a different shape an you get them all painted the bottoms ye did that yourself. Twice I remeber that they were so far up that they couldn't get them floated on the beach an they had to sink them down into the sand. When the tide went back they went right into the keel an shovelled away the mud and sand outside and that give them the buoyancy sometimes three feet into the sand. That first year I was going to sea we hid to die that. In 1935 I wis in a motor boat that time and we hid to do the same. Took shovel and shovelled the sand away and the boat sank down intae the mud.

Q. Did you ever have the women cleanin the boats?

A. Oh yes. Twice a year they come down an scrubbed the beds out an cleaned all the cabin.

Q. Would this have been before you went away to Yarmouth?

A. Summer tae Yarmouth they always did that.

Q. Do you remeber what they got paid for doing that?

A. Oh very little, a few shillings maybe but they always got a biscuit an lemonade. Went up tae the shops an give them lemonade an biscuits afore we went home.

Q. Were there a lot of superstitions?

A. Oh yes, certain things that werena.....we didna believe it but there was some of my.... we hid one fella on my boat, aye that was one of the Nautilus company, Dodie Smith he lost his leg during the war, an we were up in my sister's, she was in

Gorleston, an it came on aboot rabbits, an oh he wis wild an eh he says we needn't got to the sea now he says talking aboot this rabbits. Anyway we went away tae sea on Friday morning an we got 170 crans. My sister wis wild at them for speakin aboot the rabbits an when we met them up in the town on the Saturday night. We were in at 10 o'clock at night. We went out at 2 o'clock in the mornin and we were in at 10 o'clock at night an we were dischargin the herrin all night. An we were finished an moored up. An we were up at the town's house an we went ashore at night an we met my sister an her chums there. There wis three of a crew, two gutted the herrin an one packed the herrin. That's the way that it worked. When she accused him aboot the superstition oh he says I was wonderin what we would get for the herrin all the way comin ashore. They were very bad aboot that the family. They wouldn't step over the sea boot if it was lying on the floor an all that sort of thing. You couldn't ask anything from another boat on Monday mornin you would be taken away their luck. Ministers and pigs they were all supposed to be unlucky.

Q. Was there not certain names that you mentioned they were unlucky?

A. Oh aye. Ross in Findochty you were not allowed to speak aboot. They gave him anither name. There's a few families of Ross's here.

DATE OF INT: 27/7/88		PLACE OF INT: Home	
ADDRESS: 4 MORDON CRES Findochty.		RELIGION: Brethren.	POLITICS:
NAME: GEORGE FIETT	AGE: 14	COPYRIGHT AGREEMENT	
AGE OF BIRTH: 8/4/1907	BROTHERS: 1	FATHERS JOB(S): FISHERMEN	
Findochty.	SISTERS: 4		
	BIRTH POSITION: 2nd.		
ES LIVED:	INFO JOB(S): FISHERMAN		
	SPOUSES JOB(S): HOUSEWIFE	MOTHERS JOB(S): HOUSEWIFE	