

## Mr Dave McKay former cooper, fisherman and soldier

Mr Dave McKay , 7 Merson Street, Buckpool, Buckie, was interviewed on behalf of Buckie District Fishing Heritage Society on 6 June 1988. Mr McKay was 93 at the time. The questions put to Mr McKay and the answers given were all recorded on a tape using a tape recorder.

*“What was the name and number of your first boat?”*

“Oh I jist canna mine the name o her but the name of the very first boatie iver I geed tae sea in at hame in Wick wis the Volunteer, but she belonged tae Buckie at ae time. I canna mine the number but the Volunteer wis Wk at this time. She came oot o here, she came oot o Buckie over to Wick.”

*“How long ago was that? What year was that?”*

“Oh I think it would be 1915 but I jist geed for that summer fishing, yi see. I wis cook for the summer fishing, my first go at the sea, but the boat was bought tae Wick oot o Buckie. Skipper Hay fae Buckpool hid her before she came tae Wick.”

*“Was it a wooden boat or a steel one?”*

“Oh it wis a sail boat.”

*“You were the cook on it, were you?”*

“Aye.”

*“Who taught you how to cook?”*

“Oh jist masell as I geed along. Yi see that wis the way. Yi geed aboard the boat and yi hid to make the best of it and kile the rope for the herrin fleet. The fleet o herrin nets. That wis yer job, kiling the ropes, hauling the nets, cookin, well frying anything yi like. That wis the case then.”

*“What sort of things did you cook?”*

“Well you’d make a pot of soup. Yi jist took your beef wi yi, salted doon for the week, yi see, but as muckle as did for the week aboard the boat and jist made a pot o soup.”

*“How many hours did you work a day?”*

“Oh it wis ..... Yi didna ken, yi see, yi geed tae the sea , yi wis up an doon a times. You wis a nicht kiling the ropes and hauling the net and you were cookin makin up the rest o the day. Yi jist hid to go when you got the chance, that wis a there wis till’t.”

*“Grab an hour’s sleep when you could?”*

“Aye.”

*“What were your working conditions like?”*

“Oh they were the very best. They were a good tae yi and the crew, yi were jist a young loon, they were a willing tae help yi.”

*“You all got on well together?”*

“Oh aye.”

*“What like was it on board the boat? Did you get on? Did you play pranks?”*

“Oh they could do that, but there wisna so much o that pranking about. But yi see that wis only ae fishin, yi see, when I wis at the start. I became an apprentice cooper at the end o the summer. I must be wrang about the dates because in 1915 I wis in France. I’m wrang there because , eh it’s 1910 I should have said when I hid my first go at the sea. Yi see I wis fifteen year auld in 1910, that’s far I geed wrang. Nineteen ten I should have said. Then I wis an apprentice cooper until the war started in 1914 and I wis mobilised.”

*“You were badly wounded weren’t you?”*

“Oh I wis one beerit by a shell and twice wounded in both arms. I wis wounded at Vimy Ridge. The Kaiser’s war, oor battalion wis nearly a captured. I wis one of seventy that fought on for three days before I got wounded again. That wis in 1918. So that’s far I made the blunder, it’s ten I should have said instead of 15. I wis mobilised being an apprentice tae Danny Stewart, the fish-curer in Wick. When I came back fae the war I went back tae the coopering trade for about a year but it wis too heavy, so I started going to the sea now after that.”

*“What was you pay when you were at the sea?”*

“Oh I canna mine, six, siven or eight pounds for the season at that time. Jist so much for the season.”

*“When you weren’t hauling the nets did you have a sleep?”*

“Aye. I’ve seen yi maybe getting yer tea in the mornin or your breakfast if yi were steamin in. Yi see yi were a clear you could do fit you liked, that’s it.”

*How long were your trips?”*

“Oh yi were fishin oot o the port, you were jist oot an in.”

*“Did you have any long trips at all?”*

“Oh fin I started going trawlin, that wis the lang times.”

*“How long was that? How may weeks?”*

“Oh that would have been three weeks to Iceland.”

*“How long were you at home?”*

“Oh fin I startit going trawlin jist a nicht and back again tae Aiberdeen , that wis a that wis there.”

*“How did you get home from Aberdeen?”*

“A bus. There wis buses, the trainie first and then the buses came. The trainie wis goin at that time tae Buckpool station of Buckie station at that time. “

*“Now I see you have lost a finger. What happened to your finger?”*

“Oh I lost it in the rope works when I left school first. That was when I wis 13. Wick Rope Works, Buick Rope Works, that wis in nineteen ten. “

*What happened to it?”*

“I wis makin ring ropes, aye horses rings, yi see, an I wis wi an auld mannie an wi wis heavin. ‘Gee’t some more turns’, he said. ‘Gee’t some more turns’ So I wis jist richt in atween the two pin heads and that wis it. So I geed tearing doon the rope works; oh it wis lang it wis nearly the length o this street. the office wis doon at the end, so I hid tae run doon an I walked intae the tarry quine. There wisna a hospital in Wick at that time for doing that kind of things. Jist the one doctor that that would do the cutting. When I geed doon he bandaged it up an tell’t me tae come back at five o’clock wi ma parents and then he sortit it. A the doctors in a the hospitals I wis in, Canadians, English an the rest , they aye looked at the hand an said fa iver did that did a bonny job.”

*“After you were cook you said that you became fireman?”*

“Aye that wis after the war was finished.”

*“Now when you were fireman did you have to do the maintenance on the boilers? Did you have to clean the boilers?”*

“Oh well yi were jist aboard the time of steamin. It wis the like of Hamilton’s that did that at the end of the season. The biler cleaners did that. Yi jist his tae steam the boat. Yi steamed oot or in. The driver did one way and you did the other.”

*Did you have any superstitions?”*

“None in particular.”

*“What did you do on a Sunday when you were a young fisherman?”*

“Well according tae far yi wis, yi jist walked about. When we wis younger we used to go to the Baptist Kirk at nicht , at seven o’clock to shove in the nicht. A Welsh mannie that wis the minister. A grand singer. That’s the kind of things we did. Yi hid nowhere to go but tak a walk oot the south side of Wick or the north side. “

*“How did you get your weather forecasts?”*

“Weather forecasts? There wis nae forecasts that time. Yi jist gauged the weather accordin tae the sky. Everything wis gauged accordin tae the sky. There wis nane of this , what do you call it, TV’s forecasts. There wis nane of that.”

*“Was there a lot of boats in the Wick harbour then?”*

“Oh you could walk fae the point of the south quay round the harbour fae boat tae boat in the fishin time.”

*“Was it the same in Buckie harbour?”*

“Oh there wis Buckie boats there , Yarmouth men, a kine of boats. There wis aye plenty Lossie men, richt roon here, Banff an a. Yi see Wick wis the main herrin port at that time. Everybody was there, solid Yarmouth men.”

*“Tell me about your ship wreck?”*

“That wis at the trawlin. Nineteen thirty six that wis. The boats wis a in tae Lerwick. I left here on Thursday and geed tae Aiberdeen and we were getting an overhaul on the pontoon so we were doon measuring a bittie of a paint an away doon tae that place Methil tae get coal. So we are away tae sea now straight away to Lerwick. We were going tae Lerwick but a the boats hid been near a week nearly but we carried on but the second fettle on a Saturday nicht the skipper came up. He wis a Cullen man. An the second fishermen give him a wrong licht, yi see. Oot o Skerrie it wis, bit it wis fit di yi ca it, that he thocht it wis. So right o, steam away, he says, an nae Lerwick men can understand how we got through wi the boat without sticking rocks but we sailed an sailed an at eleven o’clock at nicht we struck Lunna Ness. That wis far we struck so we put oot ower the sma boatie, as the water cam pourin intae the cabin. The cabin filled up afore yi kent far yi wis at. That wis a richt, we hung on it. It wis dark at nicht, elven o’clock on a Saturday night. So we put the sma boat oot ower. The crew a wanted her oot but the said no. but we persisted an put her oot and tied her fae stem tae stern, yi see the sma boat. That’s a richt now we geed on a good while and it must have been eleven or twelve o’clock at nicht the Indian rugs (?) started tae lake. There you go now, so sometimes they cam pretty fast an all of a sudden the gas tanks cam up in a blaze, away she goes. I wis up in the veranda for I said tae mysell when the water started tae cam intae the cabin I put on my go ashores so I wis up on the veranda tae keep my feet dry, aye bit I hid tae get quick steppin an get out. So I got intae the sma boat. Oh what a nicht we hid. We wanted tae keep clear o rocks but we a got fed up and caul an we jist let her go far she went. Ae lad jumped ashore ontae the rocks when she wis passin an we got intae a nook an a we hid tae dee wis step oot tae get doo , yi see. And we said bide far yir at noo. Yi canna come doon here, cis we didna ken far we wir at We his nae far we were at, whether we were on the mainland or on a rock or fit. So we got him persuaded tae bide, aye he got doon in the lang run. When daylight started tae come in we started tae walk and away we geed tae walk. A long an a the boys wi their sea boots on got tired , yi see. We cam tae a dyke and

they wid sit on it for a rest. Said I am nae going tae stop I'm gaun tae keep masell warm. So this Alex Robb, an Aberdeen chap, he says, 'I'm nae gaun tae sit doon either. So we took a walk away doon a bit, yi see, an we spots a hoosie an we'll awa doon tae this hoosie. An she wis a Mistress Henderson, an ex school teacher that bade there. But anyway we're doon an afore yi kent far we wis at a great big peat fire an twa eggs a man for yer breakfast. An she made apot of soup, broth at denner time. Now we didna ken far we sis but she says yer on the mainland and I know she says where there is a shop and she puts the lad away, the lad that worked looking after the sheep. So he geed away and phoned intae Lerwick for a bus tae take us tae the Mission. So oot comes the bus at the back o denner time and we're away intae the Mission and we're lucky the St Clair had been lying in Lerwicj the hale week wi weather but she was leavin at eleven o'clock nicht. So we were intae Aberdeen on Monday mornin that wis the end of that. "

*"Did she give you dry socks to wear?"*

"Aye that's the kind of things she did. She gave yi dry socks and washed your anes and kept them for the next lot. "

*"How much coal did you use when you were away on a trip?"*

"I couldna be rict sure but it wis something like from eight to ten tons aboard for the twa bunkers. "That would be aboot ideal thing for a drifter."

*"How much was it for a ton of coal?"*

"I dinna ken the real price of that but I mine when my ain auld man at the lines oot o Wick, before the first war, they used tae hire two boats fae Shields, the Irvins, the Northumbria and the Hibernia, and they geed tae the lines in the winter time, yi see, in this big boats, pretty big drifters, bigger than the ordinary class, Shields boats. When they used to sometimes make the landin in Aberdeen with this fishin but in atween hands they took a trip to Shields. When they geed there they took home a ton a man. I think that it was a pound a ton they peyed for it. I'm sure I used to hear them saying it wis a pound a ton, but they parted it oot among the crew, yi see."

*"How did you get your ship's stores?"*

"The cook ordered roughly what you needed, but as a rule if you were away like that yi see, the stores were rather doon at the end of the trip. If it wis it wis a case of fry fish or fry onything jist to keep it goin till you got in."

*"How did you keep your food fresh?"*

"Oh in that boats thy a hid ice an it wis among the ice. It wis among the ice, you jist lifted the bit you wanted for the day."

*"How did you get your butter and milk? How did you keep that fresh?"*

"Oh yi jist hid to take a chance wi that. Yi aye put it in the fish room and kept it in good order there."

*"How did you get you lights on your boat?"*

"The lights at that time were a gas, gas tank, yi see."

*"How did you fill up the tank with gas?"*

"It wis carbide that made the gas."

*"When you got married, where did you stay when you first got married?"*

"Oh doon at Harbourhead."

*How long did you stay down there?"*

"Twa three year an then we shifted oot and spent a couple or three years in 103 Buckpool and then back tae 37 Buckpool again and then up tae 20 James Street. I think that it wis in nineteen thirty eight that we came up there. Oor David, he got married an he wis biding up here, yi see, but I think it wis 1970 afore I came up here. Oor David was here wi the young bairns and this was catcht, fit div yi ca at Shanghai. David hid twa three youngsters here. Oh I says, Oh Lord I dinna like the idea of the bairns being up there. So we changed hooses, yi see we got a change in a. Wanted for them to cam doon there. They hid twa three bairnies by this time and then cam doon there and it finished up he bocht the hoose. But we only came up here, it wis me that proposed to cam up here for the bairnies sake among sik rough fowk. But anyway he geed doon and he finished up buying it. It wis him that put in the garage and biggit the wall around it. But then he he selt it to a chap Coull. Chap Coull selt it to a minister, a Yankie, the Beatles they ca them. Oh the Beacons, that's it."

*"How did your parents manage to bring up a large family in the old days?"*

"Oh you jist had to work when you left school that wis a aboot it. When I left school I geed intae the rope works where I got the finger off. I worked fae six in the morning till six at night, ten hours a day, Saturday six to two. That wis fit yi did, yi never wanted work at that time. Yi see yi got a job of some kine, come what will. I got eight shillings every second Thursday nicht. Yi got a tanner fae yer mother on a Saturday nicht."

*"How did you spend your tanner?"*

"Accordin tae fit yi would like, a sweetie or onything of that kine. That wis about the strength of it."

*How did you entertain yourselves?"*

"There wis plenty entertainment. There wis a lad hid a shootin gallery, Bill Farquhar, hid a shootin gallery. Then there wis the Italians, wi, fit div yi ca it, that snooker."

*"Did you ever go dancing?"*

"Oh aye. There wis aye dances. Used to hae dances in the Templar's Hall every week. Oh they didna want for dances. Harry Troop wi his fiddle. "

*"Did you ever go to the pictures?"*

“Aye pictures an a. There wis a picture hoose there and the lad, the darkie that came to Wick to work the picture hoose came fae Buckie, ken?. He was killed during the war . He was a a capital man at the piano.”

*“How did you keep yourselves warm at the sea?”*

“Aspirin”

*“What did you do if you needed a doctor?”*

“ There wis plenty of doctors . Jist hid to cost a little the doctors. When Bignall put up the hospital there in Wick there wis a fever hospital in Wick, a fever ane but there wis nae surgery done in Wick until this Tory mannie, Bignall, put up a hospital but he wis a richt Tory he gave everything to Wick at that time. Put up a new pilate hoose for the pilate. That Bignall Cottage hospital, oh a bonnie hospital, it’s aye there yet, and a great big park, Bignall Park, the toon park. All that kine of things in Wick an a fae him.”

*“How much did the doctor cost?”*

“I mightna be wise in sayin this. It wis a lassie that came roon and collected fae the thingmurt here for your doctor, that’s fin I came here.”

*“How much was it?”*

“Oh I dinna ken, she jist collected so much a week tae get it cleared. That quine, she’s deed noo. She bade in that hoose doon there, next tae Dolly Bond, next hoose up here. Bissett, a quine Bissett. She used to collect. She came to oor hoose.”

*“What happened in the Depression?”*

“Depression? I hid tae clear oot o here tae the trawlin. Worket deepenin Herd and MacKenzie’s basin at the back there. Wis workin there for practically nithin so they could pay their taxes. The fishermen were at that. Didna ken that , did yi? Aye deepenen the hairber. Then that walk through the Yardie, there that wis jist humps and pools of water fin I cam here. Aye that road wis only made fin I cam here . I wisna workin at it. Nor the hairber either, I wis away tae Aberdeen tae the trawlin. “

*“What kind of fashions did you wear in that days?”*

“Jist ordinary fishermen’s fashions; a ganzie, that wis about most, a bonnet, a lot of them wore what you ca a cheesecutter. Always a bonnet.”

*“What kind of clothes did the women wear?”*

“Jist skirts and blouses, that wis a.”

*“Were they long skirts?”*

“Aye a good length like. Aye a the women would be richt doon to their boots. The young anes were ..... when they were kippering jist ordinary clothes like a workin rig. But the gutten, they hid oilskin coats right doon tae their feet. But the kipper hoose wasna the same muckin aboot among salt.”

*“When you were at the school what were the teachers like?”*

“Oh the very best. One teacher, I was in Standard three, I wis top of the class everytime. She belonged to the outside of Wick. I got a tanner every month.”

*“Did you ever have to wear second hand clothes? Were the clothes handed down in the family?”*

“Oh you could depend on that. Maybe ae lad was longer than the ither or less. Jist got a new ganzie when you needed it an a new suit. You jist wore the makin muppers first when you were young. You got a pair of lang anes when you got about 14. A lang suit then that wis the thing. “

