

MR GEORGE GEDDES, FORMER FISHERMAN, IS INTERVIEWED.

The following tale was told by Mr George Geddes, 3 Grant Street, Ianstown, who was interviewed on 28 April 1988 by trainees from the Balloch Trust on behalf of the Buckie District Fishing Heritage Society. In June 2003 Allan Fraser, then secretary of the Museum, as it was called by this time, put the transcript on to a floppy disc which could be accessed by a computer.

Though there little record of the questions asked as has been common in most of the other interviews, one can follow the type as the story unfolds from the answers given though the person who typed up the words of the interview from the tape chose to omit most of these.

“Well, I come from a fishing family on both sides. My grandfather, my mither’s father, came down from the country because they were crofter/fishermen for a start. Then they started going out in bigger boats. They started first in Scaffies, and then they went in for the bigger sailing boats and then after that they started going to sea as steady fishermen. The villages grew round the coast after that.

My mither’s side came from the Sloch, Portessie, fit they ca’d the Rottensloch. My father’s side came from Buckpool, on the shores of Buckpool, that’s where the fishermen started there. Their forbearers came from the sea, came in from the sailing ships and settled on the shore and they started fishing from that side.

Buckpool hairber was the first harbour and Buckie harbour wis built later on. One basin which is now filled up for the cargo of timber. Fin I wis at the school in nineteen eighteen or seventeen, Buckie harbour wi opened. We wis marched down from the school to see it opening .

In my lifetime my grandfathers, both of my grandfathers owned sailboats. My grandfather in Portessie hid the ‘Jeannie Gairen’ and the ‘Dexterous’, two sailboats. The ‘Dexterous’ wis a Scaffie and the ‘Jeannie Gairen’ wis a sailboat, a Zulu. Mt grandfather in Buckpool hid the ‘Ellen Ann’, also a Zulu.

Fin I started first at the sea I wis jist fourteen. We went to the west o’ Ireland, in the month of January to fish off a Drumpranna, that’s in the north west o’ Ireland. The boats used to go there in the fishing season, in the wintertime.

Life was a bit different then besides now. I went cookin at fourteen for ten men. Your job wis tae cook for the men and tae coil the messenger rope which consisted of a four inch tarred rope that drew in the nets, yi know, the herring nets and yi hid tae coil that every mornin. An sometimes if yi got herrin yi were six hours on the job or eight hours or twelve hours depended on the amount o’ herrin that yi wis ha’lin. If yi wisna getting nae herrin yi wid ha’l in maybe fower hours. But yi wis up all night, every night and yi took an hour when yi could get it, an hour’s sleep when yi could get it. So that wis the life when I first started, that wis in the drifters, the steam drifters.

Life wis a different story in those days because the wimmen wis involved the same as the men. The wimmen had to men’ the nets when we came home. This house wis all constructed wi’ lafts upstairs, that’s why they hiv that outside stair, yi ken. The nets wir carried upstairs and the wimmen used to men’ the nets. And then when the men came home and their period o’ repairin the boats they repaired the nets. It wis a constant work all the time, ashore and afloat, yi know. That wis how things went in that days.

An then came the war and we wis taken into the service. We wis all in the Navy, yi see. An’ after the war things changed dramatically. They went in for more motor boats and the motor boats got bigger an’ the fishin now is a very commercialised industry. The fishin they had to go further afield for the fish, yi see, they fished them up in shore and they hid to go further afield now. They’ve got bigger boats and they’ve gone in for pair trawlin and all that different modes o’ fishin noo an’ purse nettin noo an’ the drift net fishin went out after the war.

Well it wis jist in the year, the winter after the war, the boats wis workin the winter fishin and the winter fishin wis jist finished and they were comin home. My father wis in the drifter, ‘Exchequer’ which was built in Buckie and launched from Smith’s yard in Buckie. The day before the ‘Laurel’ (Loyal) went ashore there wis a nor east gale for aboot a two three days an’ there wis a heavy swell comin in but the win wis doon like and ma mither wis expectin ma father home that night. I wis tae stay up with her fin she was sittin waitin for him to come home. My father came in an’ he said there wis a heavy sea comin in an’ he says the light wis oot in the lighthouse an’ they struck the pint o’ the quay an’ they knockit oot their stem an’ they came in stern first intae Buckie. Half-way across, he says, they passed a sailboat comin across wi’ half sail. At that time I used to sit an’ listen to the yarn, yi know, an’ I wis jist going away to my bed fin the rockets went up for the lifeboat. My father pulled on his sheen an’ he rushed away oot pullin on his jacket. He says, ‘That must be the sailboat that we passed. It must hae gone the wrang side o’ the hairber.’ So he went away oot an’ ma mither pit on her shawl an’ I went awa’ doon tae the end o’ the street. That wis jist down frae the hairber. There wis a boatie there. We went intae the back o’ the boatie an’ looked out an’ we could see the light o’ the boat at the back o’ the harbour. There wis a rowin lifeboat in Buckie at that time an’ the coxswain o’ the lifeboat wis John Murra’ He came fae the Yardie. Bit the lifeboat couldna get ower the tae the boat for the rocks. They were tryin to get a line across the boat from the quay bit the wither wis comin ower, yi ken. One man, Andrew May, he belonged to Portessie, tried to swim out with a rope to the boat bit the sea wis too heavy an’ he wis pulled back.

The hale o' the crew perished an' the men ashore couldna dee naethin about it. An' the last man that wis left on the boat, he wis the skipper, tied himsel to the mast. The mast went about four o'clock in the mornin. Peter Thomson wis skipper.

They were workin at the end o' the hairber that time, extendin the pier. The pier o' the hairber used to come flush wi' the lighthouse an' they were extending it right out about three hun'er and fifty yards or so further oot, yi ken. The diver wis workin next mornin at the end o' the pier. The diver's name was Philips. They stayed down at the end o' Ianstown, there, next to the harbour. There wis three harbour houses there, the diver's an' the harbour employees. He wis doon workin at the end o' the pier fin the skipper came round the pier same as though he was waken an' pit his two airms roon the diver's thingmart. Philips turned his thingmart tae be pulled up and fin they pulled him up the skipper had his airms roon the diver's neck. The diver, Philip, never dived again aifter that. An' they got the crews, one aifter the ither on different pairts o' the beaches, yi know. Remember that wis away back in either 1918 or 1919, aye 1919 it was. (The name of the boat was the 'Loyal' and the tragedy took place on the night of 13th February 1920 A.F.)

Well the simmer fishin started on the 10th of May an' the boats, some o' the boats, went to the west coast to fish Stornoway an' the majority o' the boats went down to Shetland, to Lerwick to fish there. They fished in all directions from Lerwick, Bressay, Shapsall, North o' the Bard, North o' the Score Point and all around the Shetland Islands. There wis hundreds o' wimmen went fae the coast here down to Shetland to gut the heerin durin the season. They were arled. They got so much from the curer to bind them tae the job an' then they bought certain things wi' their arles an' then they went down to Shetland. They were transported there by steamers that came to the ports, sometimes they came to Buckie and picked up the wimmen an' took aboard their trunks an' took them down to Shetland. Some went down in boats that wis carryin barrels, the barrel boats. Of coorse the coopers made the barrels at home all winter and they transported them down to Shetland before the season started.

The wimmen stayed in the huts, three till a crew a packer and two gutters an' they made their livin that wey. They got so much the barrel, I think. I don't know how much it wis at that time, maybe it depended on the different curers. They workit there for the season and then the season started up further sooth and the boats moved down to Stronsay waters. There wis a certain amount o' wimmen there an' some o' them wis transferred from Shetland tae Stronsay. An' then as the fishin progressed they moved down to the Wick waters. They fished off a' Wick an' Fraserburgh and Peterhead an' the wimmen moved all round the coast guttin the heerin and then in the latter part of the season they moved down to Shields and Blyth an' they fished from there and down as far as Scarborough. At the end of the season the boats came home. They refitted and they went away down to Yarmouth. The Yarmouth fishing started in October, about the 5th or 6th October. They, they fished there in the Yarmouth and Lowestoft waters workin from the Havenburgh waters right down to Smith's Knoll, light ship an' round about twenty or thirty miles from the Knoll to the Bretton Banks and all round there they fished for the herrin. The season lasted up until the end of December. Some boats went down the Channel to fish but the majority of them came home and prepared for the winter fishin which took them to the west coast, around Stornoway and the South Minch.

If there wis Loch fishin', in which they wirket the lochs, anchoring their nets, that started in the month of December. When outside fishin started in the month of January when the boats went richt in the outside in the Minches and that carried on till the month of Aprile, sometimes maybe before that, maybe the month of March. The boats came home an' repaired their sails and their nets for the herrin season again which started up in the month of May, aye about the 10th of May. Okay?"

"Are there any stories you can tell us - any funny stories?"

"Oh well I couldna think o' them ayenoo. There's a lot o' thingmart. Your memory jist thingmarts, aye."

"Do you know the number of the first boat that you went to sea in?"

"Oh aye, the first drifter that my father hid that I went to sea in wis the 'Summerton' - BCK126. We hid that an' I went in her from I wis fourteen up until the war started in 1939 then I went away to the services. When we came home I fished in the 'Summerton' an' a cousin took her over an' we bought the 'Forelock' - BCK127. We fished up until the 'Forelock' was put away a motor boats came intae bein cause the drifters wirna a payin prospect, they were too dear to run, an' the boats wis condemned an' put for scrap.

15 June 2003

