

MR GEORGE REID, PORTGORDON, A RETIRED FISHERMAN, IS INTERVIEWED

Mr George Reid, 3 Cathcart Street, Portgordon, was interviewed by two trainees from the Balloch Trust on 13 July 1988 who were doing the work on behalf of Buckie District Fishing Heritage Society. Mr Reid, a former fisherman, was 85 years of age at the time.

“How old were you when you first went to sea?”

“I left the school when I was 14 an that wis jist the start o the war. My father hid a share o a sailboat, jist for the summer fishin and we Gied tae Fraserburgh. We stayed ashore in lodgins but we went tae sea in the aul sailboat because our ain drifter, the ‘Winner’ wis commissioned. She wint awa tae the Navy so I wis, weel, part-time. Yi gied there ivery simmer, bit jist the simmer fishin.

1918 there wis a boat caad the ‘Pearl’, Geddes built her doon there an he pit in a motor an he asked me wid I ging cook on her tae Yarmouth, that wis in 1918. That wis ma first herrin fishin in Yarmouth. The boat did the west coast an a’. So that wis the herrin experience.

“What was your job on board?”

“Well as a young loon I gied awa is cook fin I wis fourteen or fifteen.”

“An fit sort o cookin did yi dee?”

Oh jist the aul Scottish grub. Broth an different tae that, fried fish an biled fish an stew. Jist the Scottish diets. That wis the Scottish diets in a drifter. Nithin luxurious as yi wid say. That wis yer grub.”

“ Foo mony o a crew did yi cook for?”

“Weel on the drifter, the ‘Winner’, there win nine o a crew, sometimes an extra man makkin ten fin yi wir in Yarmouth.”

“Fit wis the wirkin conditions like on board an fit did yi dee aefter yi wis cookin?” Did yi get on tae the deck at a’?”

“ Aye I got on tae the deck. I jist went on tae the deck fae there. Yi see it wis ma father hid the ‘Winner’ It wis a faimily affair, the ‘Winner’. Four sons, I wis the youngest.”

“ Did yi a hae a share?”

“Aye, I hid a fourth share o the ‘Winner’. That’s richt. “

“Fit aboot nets, yi wid’ve hain a share in them, widn’t yi?”

“Aye, that’s richt, a share o the nets, aye I hid. Yi cairried a fourth share o the nets on the boat.”

“Fit time did yi come hame? Yi ken cwid yi describe yer ear fae fan yi startit aff in the simmer?”

“Well gaun tae the simmer fishin first It wis controlled, the herrin fishin. It wis aye, on average the tenth o June an we went tae the Shetlands. We fished in Shetlands richt up tae the fair, Peter Fair time an then we came ti Peterheed an wirked oor wye sooth. We finished there maybe the first o September an gied awa tae Yarmouth on the first o October an cam hame the first o December. We didna ging tae nae winter fishin. We tied the boat up.”

“Fit did yi dee durin the winter.?”

“ Yi went trawlin in Aiberdeen.”

“Whit aboot the preparations afore yi went awa tae the simmer fishin?”

“Well as regards riggin oot the boat, yi hid the annual slippin. The boat wis slipped twice a ear. She wis slipped tae go tae the simmer fishin an painted, bit we did a’ the deck paintin wirsels like. It wis maistly for the hull ti be painted that she wis slipped. We wirket Jones’ Slipway. So that wis the programme o the herrin fishin, yi ken fit a mean. That jist covered the simmer fishin an the Yarmouth fishin. We niver went tae the winter fishin. It wisna payable. “

“ Noo the oors that yi worked, how many wid that hae been? Wis it lang oors? Did yi get lang spells without sleep?”

“Absolutely. I’ve seen us startin on the Monday fin the herrin wis good an plenty an cairryin on till Setterday. Weel fit a mean tae say is yi usually fished for five days a week, Monday tae Setterday. Yi took nicht aboot, different nchts different boys took the watch. Yi turned oot at twelve o’clock for yer tae an then yi started pullin.”

“Can yi describe hoo yi shot the nets, fit the procedure wis.?”

“ Weel it wis jist twa or three miles an oor, wi yer engine turnin ower. An we eest tae work eighty fower nets wi a stretch o a little ower a mile. That wis the number shot o the nets, aboot echty fower. “

“An hoo did iver fisherman ken his ain nets?”

Weel, as a faimily, there wis fower o his. We hid different cork marks. I hid a white cork, Johnnie, ma brither brither Johnnie hid a reed cork an Jim. Across the road, hid a green cork and the ither brither hid anither colour, maybe yalla. It wis the single cork on the end o yer net that yi kent her by.”

“ Too bad if yi lost a’ yer nets.”

“Aye, oh no, no, no”

“Did yi play ony games fin yi hid spare time aff in the boat?”

“Well yi hidna really nae time aff. Lerwick wis jist a’ richt. A’ kine o foreigners, an Lerwick wis the capital o the Shetlands at that time, yi cwid hardly get moved on a Setterday nicht on its narra streets. Far did a’ the fowk come fae. Weel yi wid hive hain six or siven aff ivery drifter and there wis mony o them in Lerwick a’ at the same time besides

the foreigners. Lerwick wis great, yi ken, a kin a nationals came intae Lerwick, an then the wife wis a gutter. She gutted in Grimster an in Lerwick. I've seen me walkin her oot at nine o'clock on a Setterday nicht an her still workin. They hid tae clear the yard for the weekend, though it wis ten, eleven o'clock on a Setterday nicht."

"Fit about Sunday?"

"That wis a day o rest, absolutely. Nithin wis deen on a Sunday. There wis nae Scotch fishermen wirked on a Sunday. Even in Yarmouth or nae ither wye. No, no Scotch men kept Sunday. That's richt, aye."

"Fit about bad wither an the forecast? Hoo did yi keep in touch wi the wither?"

"Weel in my early days there wis nae wither forecast. Yi jist hid tae look at yer barometer an tak the risk. If the barometer wis droppin, yi jist hid his tae shot or nae shot an tak the risk."

"Can yi mine on ony bad storms yi wir caught in?"

"Oh aye, in the 'Winner'."

"Did onything bad happen during ony o the storms?"

"Oh no nae really bit I hid an experience of being rescued eence."

"Hid yi, can yi tell us about it?"

Aye. In 1934 I wis second fisherman in a trawler, the 'Spearn' that yi used durin the wenter time an wi a Buckie chap that wis skipper. We left Aiberdeen wi a pending gale of win comin an we wis about a hunner an thirty five miles nor east fae Aiberdeen fin a sea struck her an made her derelic'. Even the biler went. We bailed unceasingly for twa or three days an there wis a new German trawler had been at the Pentland Firth wis afraid tae tick an he cam north about an he picked hes up. Yi ken we hid flares handy tae burn an this new German ship came along side an picked hes up about thirty five mile fae North Rolandsay. It's a good job he picked us up. Yi ken the new ship hid up tae date lifeboats. First an foremost he pit a lifeboat ower the side wi a light cord and we got the lifeboat wi hivvy wire an he launched his boat an we took her up alongside."

"It must hae been an experience."

"Aye. That sea hid her, nithing left. Even the deck, even the wheelhouse, glass, windees, the hale lot went. The twa chaps on watch, wi the wheel pit themselves intae the lifeboat bit it an athing wis washed ower the side. We hid tae thank the Jerry for rescuing us. It wis a father an his son that wis skipper an mate. The same chaps wir invited tae Aiberdeen an at the Town House the skipper got a gold watch and the crew got fifty pounds. The second rescue I hid I wis on the 'Flower' at Buckie. I wis mate on the 'Flower'. We his jist finished. We hid a good trip on board then. We hid about twa hunner an fifty or three hunner boxes an we sprung a leak An the gale o win cam an we pit oot a Mayday call. We hid twa rafts."

"Fit force is a gale o wind, it must be gye strong?"

"Aye. That's a force atween siven to eight. An it wis the first o June. We launched the twa rafts an we his tae abandon her. We thocht it widna be lang till she wint doon, There wis a ship comin along in the distance, it hid seen oor flares. This wis the boat fae the White Sea, the 'Lauda Wood', she wis registered in Ireland he picked us up and landed us in Wick. Aye he cam intae the bay an the lifeboat picked us up So that wis the second sojourn."

"So you've had your share o shipwrecks."

"Aye, I've his ma share o shipwrecks, aye."

"Noo, fit about, can you remember the biggest catch that yi iver had."

"Aye, yes, yes. I'll tell yi about the biggest catch. We wis wirkin the west coast at the time. That wis the early days o the phones being installed in drifters. We hidna a phone bit there wis anither motor boat cam along an said, 'Look there's big fishin awa up past Orkney, past Whiteney". We steamed there an if we didna get nae herrin we wid get hame the weekend. Fin we arrived the boats wis a shotting an there wis naebody there wir nae boats atween us an the land. We started tae haul in the mornin, oh early mornin, an we felt her full, full. We pit oot twa hunner an fifty-two cran an three baskets. Naebody wid believe we held that. We arrived at Wick at twelve o'clock on Setterday nicht."

"Yi hid been gye low in the water."

"Aye an we discharged. That wis the record. That wis the 'Winner's' record in a the boats in Wick – twa hunner an fifty two an three baskets we pit oot at Wick

"Fit about the nets?"

"Aye we got them an the last ten or fifteen nets, we shook them ower the side. We cwidna haul nae mair. We arrived at twelve o'clock on Sunday nicht., because McRae cam ower here, aye Jimmy McRae cam ower her. They didna ken far we wis at, yi see."

"Fit wis the date o that?"

"Well it wis Wait till I see fit the date wid a been. That wid a been about fifty-two or fifty three. Aye, that wid abeen about it. I couldna gie yi an exact date, bit it wis in fifty-two or fifty-three. I mine the gala wis held that weekend. They said we hid tae stop ower in Wick, seein we landit that time. And spend the Setterday nicht gala, which we did. We wis entertained at a hotel tae wir tae. Aye, yi see an they got a barometer that wis presented. So that wis the record catch of herrin landed in Wick for a time."

"That wis yer reward"

"Aye that wis the reward. I mine Stewart an them cam up. Stewart an Dodicky an Jessie's man cam up in a car wi Covie

Esslemont. They slept aboard that time. So that wis the ‘Winner’. She wis one o the last boats. “

“Speakin about Esslemont, wis that far yi got yir groceries fae?”

“Well, no, nae really. We dealt wi McRae’s brither in Buckie here. That wis oor salesmen, McRae, Duggie an McPherson.”

“Fa gave yi the groceries an that?”

“Well it wis the shop caad the Globe. They aye came fae the Globe Stores in Buckie. That wis the grocers.”

“The grocer supplied a kine o dry goods on the boat, did they?”

“Aye usually bit fin yi went tae a port like Lerwick yi hid a baker that yi usually went tae ear efter ear. That wis it. Aye we wis weel enough fed in a drifter. “

“Can you describe a fishermen’s claes that he wore at the sea?”

“Aye, fin I startit the fishin first, say aboot nineteen sixteen or seventeen there wir nae rubber beets in them days. A yer beets wis made locally be the local cobbler. It wis a’ leather beets an yi ken there wis nae rubber beets then”

“Hoo much did they cost?”

“Oh they wida cost three or fower poun in that days an they wir very hivvy, besides the licht rubber beets noo-a-days. An ileskins, hame-made ileskins, yi ken.”

“Hid they leather soles on the beets?”

“Oh aye, hale leather, tops an a’, hale leather. An yir ileskins wis locally made tee. There wir twa or three chaps in Buckie, sailmakers, made their ain ileskins. “

“Fit about yer claes, jerseys an that, mony o them wid HIV been hame-knitted, wir they?”

“Aye, we wore han knitted ganseys an hivvy serge troosers. Yer twa shirts an yer lang drawers of coorse. Yi hid tae hae them. Claes for a withers, aye.”

“An yi wid hane claes for gaun ashore wi?”

“Oh aye, yi hid a sma widden trunk that hid yer suits an yer shirts for the weekend or Sunday. Oh aye yi dressed up a richt, oh definitely.”

“Hoo did yi ken the different trunks? Hid yi yir name on them or the colour?”

“Well ivery lad hid his ain trunk. Yi jist kent yer ain trunk. Yi hid tae hae that tae keep yer suits in, oh aye.”

“Fit about safety, fire precautions, rockets an a’ that? Did yi hae a’ that on the boat?”

“Aye, oh aye, yi hid tae hae a’ that. Yi see the Board o Trade see tae that. Even in the early, early days, they mightna hae been sae efficient, I mean tae say, as time wore on, bit yi hid tae hae yer ain rockets an yer life belts. Yi hid tae hae that. The Board o Trade seen back even the first world war. Yi couldna gang tae sea unless yi hid that.”

“Fin yi wir a cook, fa taught yi tae cook, wis it yer mither?”

“Well yi jist learnt , an watched yer mither, really. Fin a young loon cam aboard there wis aye an auler lad, mair experienced, gave him a han.”

“I suppose yi niver got much money tae spen for gaun ashore?”

“Oh very little. If yi got five shillings on a Setterday nicht yi wis made.”

“An fit did yi dee, jist ging ashore tae the picters?”

“Aye , tae the picters, that’s richt. An wi the girls, yi aye hid a walk oot. That’s on a Sunday. They gave yi yer tae. That wis in the likes o Lerwick. There wis thousands o girls, workers then. I remember my young day, the mail boat cam tae Buckie an loaded up for Shetland. The Highland girls, the Stornoway girls, a came tae Buckie, an she left gae Buckie – the St Ninian, left wi a consignment o gutters a gaun tae work at Lerwick “

“Now did yi believe in superstition on the ‘Winner’?”

“No, I niver did really. Not me, no. No I wisna superstitious at a’ really, no.”

“Can yi mine farther back in Portgordon, fin yi wis young an the boats an the hairber ? Fit wis the first recollections fin yi wis young?”

“Aye, well, Portgordon was a very , very prosperous village. Bit nae noo because Portgordon, I wid say , yi know ivery family. There wir thirty steam drifters belongin tae Portgordon, thirty. An nae only that we’re livin in Cathcart Street. Well aboot two hundred yards doon there wis Geddes’s boat building. An in 1912, unbelievably, he pit twelve drifters ower the top o that beach, in the twelve month. That’s drifters, 86 feet long.”

“Hoo many men were employed?”

“Weel , I suppose at the peak, a hunner an forty or a hunner an fifty. An then there wir nae unions. In the simmer time they niver ceased, I mean tae say. Maybe off fower hoors. Nicht an day they wirket. Bound till tae pit twelve drifters ower the heid. Fin they launched that drifters they hid tae come intae the hairber an the tug cam fae Aiberdeen an as far sooth as Yarmouth . An Geddes built boats an delivered boats tae a’ the fishin ports in the British Isles.”

“Far wis that boats finished off at?”

“Well different weys. The herrin fishin, motor drifters, motors preceded them, an they hid tae deal wi them. There wir a lot o good boats scrapped. They wir too expensive to rin.”

“Aye, bit faur wir they completed?”

“ Well, some in Aiberdeen. Maistly the boats that wir launched wir sent tae Aiberdeen. Bit there wis ane or twa that wis towed tae Yarmouth. Different boats for tae get engines. Geddes built for a’ ower Scotland an for England, he delivered

drifters. An then Portgordon hid anither great asset. The Duke of Richmond and Gordon's salmon fishin station wis jist next tae it. The bothy's still there. It employed aboot twenty five boats, An I've seen daily records. Maybe twa hunner salmon wis nithin for a day's fishin. An then the ither place, up the toon, the engineering works, McWilliam. He did a' the iron work, bunkering work, on the new boats. He wis fully employed. An Portgordon well wis a very prosperous village then. That a' finished efter the first world war. I'm sayin fae nineteen hundred, the time o the herrin boom till the war startit wis the best ears."

"An that's the time a' the big hooses wir built up the toon?"

"Aye, that's richt."

"Fit aboot a' the hooses doon here?"

"Well this hoose wis built in nineteen hunner an one, wid it be? Aye aboot that."

"Is that the time fin the herrin fishin wis good?"

"Aye, that wis the time the herrin fishin wis good. That wis the herrin boom, fae nineteen hunner, yi may say, till the first world war. There wir nae seine net or nithin then. Trawlin, bit there wis nae sic thing as seine net. A' this coast. Peterheid richt up tae Inverness wis based on herrin fishin. It wis a' herrin fishing."

"Did ony ither trade come tae Portgordon hairber?"

"No nae really in my time, no, no. Aye there wis coal. Peter Thain wis the coalmerchant, an I mine fin he wis at the school there wis a little sail coaster cam in. They caad her the 'Lady Cecelia A', wi aboot a hunner an fifty ton. She aye cam tae Portgordon wi coal. Portgordon wis a hale busy toon then. Mind yi, Portgordon. Well aefter the war, wis a dark city. We hid nae street lights. It wis a black oot. I cwidna gie yi the official date bit the fist lights that cam tae Portgordon wis paraffin - absolute horror. I mean tae say it wis a failure."

"Aye, bit they caad it the paraffin city."

"The paraffin city, aye, that's richt. I dinna ken really fa proposed that, bit fancy a nor east gale o wine, yi couldna licht them, nor regulate them. Absolute failure."

"Wis there a man cam roon an lit them?"

"Aye. An then as regards licensed places, we hid five pubs in Portgordon, five! We hid one up here, fit yi caad Logie's Bar. There wis the Station Bar, the Harbour Bar an fit we caad the Night Office, that wis ane."

"An fa went tae them?"

"Ah weel, yi see. I've seen in the simmer fin the boats wis riggin oot they hid tae depend on Heilan men. Portgordon wi its amount o drifters, they cam fae a' ower the islands, the Hebrides an a' weys, tae man the boats. I've seen a hunner Heilan men doon at the hairber waitin tae gang off in the drifters. They hid tae import labour wi sae muckle boats."

"Fit aboot kirks in Portgordon?"

"Aye, yi hid twa kirks in Portgordon, the Methodist Kirk an the Church a Scotland."

"Some fowk eest tae ging up tae the Enzie Kirk, didn't they?"

"Well that wis, yi see, there were the Wee Frees. Ma father an them wis the Aul Kirk. That's the kirk that's left noo. The ither ane's deen awa WI. That's the kirk that's still goin. An I wid say it's worth a look, that kirkie, even the reef o't, it's a widden reef. It's a lovely kirk inside."

"An fit aboot yer school? Can yi tell me aboot yer school?"

"Aye, wir school up here in Portgordon?"

"Aye up the brae."

"Aye an I'll tell you for the size o the place there wir mair deep water ship captains in Portgordon that there were in ony village. A lot o ship captains gied a' ower the world fae Portgordon. An then, yi see, there werena far tae gang. Spey built a the ships. Garmouth built up tae twa hunner tons, that's sailin ships. Well that wis a lot o Portgordon captains."

"Fit kine o lessons did yi get at school? Did yi get seamanship?"

"Oh away, that's richt, aye. Yi eest tae get seamanship. Classes at nicht, yi eest tae get up in the school."

"Readin? Writin?"

"Aye, readin an writin an that, an navigation. So that wis Portgordon. I mean tae say. An it wis a real prosperous town an we hid a kine o shops in Portgordon, chemists, butchers, an grocers shops."

"An is there nane left noo?"

"Nae even a chemist here noo. Yi see there are nae fishermen left here noo, or very, very few. Foo many boats belongin tae Portgordon noo? I dinna ken if there's three noo. I don't think so."

"An when yi hid yer nets an that tae mend far wis this deen?"

"Oh well, this wis deen in pairt o the hoose. This sooth end wis the laft. Bit the laft cairried richt along the top. Bit ane o the rooms wis far yi ment yi see. An the nets wis a' stored in the top."

"An can yi describe hoo the nets cam in an hoo yi ment them?"

"Well yi dried them a' first an then yi took them up."

"Far did yi dry them?"

"Well fairmers, yi ken, on their parks an so on. An then yi engaged twa net men'ers. Fit wis the fee they got> Thirty five shillings or twa poun. It wisna very much. An that wis fae eight o'clock in the mornin till six o'clock at nicht, five days a week. Up tae twa poun, the net menders got. Well, I mean tae say, twa poun wis twa poun in them days, yi ken."

“Fin you were a young boy did yi help yer mither an father? Or did yi help yer father wi the men’in nets? Fillin needles”

“Oh aye, that’s right jist like a lot of ither loons in Portgordon fas fathers wir fishermen. As ma father an a’ them retired they a’ bought sma’er yawls. My father hid ane they caad the ‘Hurry’. There were aboot twenty five o this boaties in Portgordon then. An codlin nets, they shot them throughout the day fin the codlin wis on. They hid twa lorry loads o fish tae Buckie. There were nae market then yi jist drapped them at the pier in Buckie. Fish wis plentiful then, in shore.”

”Hoo did yi get peyed for the codlins then, wis it by the size o the fish?”

“Very, very little, I suppose. About fifteen or sixteen shillins a box for them, I suppose. Bit there were plenty fish inshore then, yi ken fit I mean. So fin the auld boys retired they a’ hid ane o this boaties. They retired early, yi see fit I mean. They a’ hid ane o this boaties, an wirket the codlin nets.”

“They didna work till they wir sixty five?”

“ Well, aye, sixty five wis quite a young man tae my age now, I wid say, isn’t it.? Portgordon, I mean tae say, his geen oot o existence now. Yi see, Portgordon hairber, oh I couldna say, it must a been jist aefter the first world war, took it oot. You know condemned it as the harbour. After that there were nae leadin lights. They were a ‘ finished.” Did the Portgordon drifters come hame tae Portgordon every year?”

“Oh aye, absolutely. And the time that the Portgordon drifters after the Yarmouth fishin, yi see. Well there were nae room in Buckie, there were nae east basin in Buckie. Seen’s yi got yer gear oot, awa yi went an yi went intae the dock part. Now, a’ the Portgordon boats that wisna fishin wis tied up in the dock port. Yi couldna gan tae Buckie because Buckie’s east basin wisna constructed it that days.”

“Yi painted yer boats in Portgordon?”

“Aye, yi painted yer boat in Portgordon. Yi slipped her, of coorse. Bit, oh, aye, it wis gie busy times in that days. It wis happier times. I mean tae say there wisna much money bit it wis really truthful.”

“Hoo mony brothers an sisters had yi? Were they a’ engaged at the sea?”

“A’ engaged. I hid three brothers an I wis the fourth one. An I hid twa sisters. They were mairrit in Buckie tae Johnnie Barrie an Weelum Jeams Thain.”

“Big changes”

“Aye, this is the hoose that I wis brocht up in an a’ the boys wis brought up in. This wis ma father’s hoose, see.”

“Yi wir born in this hoose?”

“Aye, an some wir married. We’ll, wi the laft, there were nae conveniences up the stair, an there wir nae sinks or nithin up the stair. So we cam tae the conclusion that we bocht this sma hoose up in Gordon Street an we got it renovated. We stayed ten, eleven ear there. Ma father died during the war an then my mither died so I cam doon here. So they wir a the gither the brothers. The aulest brother, Jim, he’s number six. Johnnie, next tae me, he’s number one Shore Street. That’s the next street. So the three brothers o’s wis a thegither. Hud awa the aulest lad, he’d Edendoune, up the brae. He built thon hoose as yea gang up the Station Brae, Edindoune, St Elmo an Sunnybank. That wis the only lad that wis awa fae the beach, like. Bit we were a thegither. The family wis a’ thegither doon here.”

“An wid yi say that yi’ve seen a lot of changes ower the years.?”

“Oh tremendous, tremendous changes.”

“For the better?”

“Weel, financially it’s better, I mean tae say. Fin I cam ashore, I finished ma days in the ‘Flower’, I wis mate in the ‘Flower’ wi John Cooie. Yi see, Stewart, aye the second son, mairrit John’s sister, Nellie. The stop up at Highfield Road, an George he’s in Mill Crescent. They’re in Buckie, yi see. “

“Aye, bit yer family’s real near?”

“Aye, I’ve only ae member o ma family fishin. He’s a share o the ‘Reliant’ wi a chap Addison. Jones’s built that boat for them three ear past an they’ve done exceptionally well.”

“It’s fine that somebody’s carrying on the tradition for you.”

“Aye. The aulest loon, he’s been in the Foreign Office for thirty ear, I suppose. He jined the Foreign Office thirty odd years ago.”

“ When you were young, wis the fishin the only occupation you could follow?”

“Absolutely, aye. Well, there wis servin yer time in the shipyards , for jiners an carpenters an them. Yi see, there were busloads fae the slips. There wir three slips in Buckie that time, Jones’s, Herdies an Thomson’s. Well, I wid say mony young loons did serve their time. I niver hid a trade. I jist left the school an gied awa wi ma father, the time o the war, really.”

“I think fathers had a big influence on them.”

“Aye, bit that wis the only lad that wis interested. Peter gied awa an he’s noo in Hong Kong. He’s been nine ear in Hong Kong. He gings oot for three an back for three, This is nine ear in Hong Kong. Six ear in Singapore, He wis six ear in Burma an three ear in turkey an he finishes in January. he retires at sixty, he’s aboot fifty seven now. He’s due hame in January an that’s him finished. That’s it, yi retire at sixty. Good job though. Stewart he’s in the Fishery Cruisers, second in the Fishery Cruisers.”

“Yi’ve aye bidden in Portgordon, hive yi?”

“This is the hoose I’ve stopped in a’ ma days apart from a period of ten years fin we wis on Gordon Street.”

"I dinna suppose yea wid wint tae bide onyweye else?"

"Oh no, absolutely not, bit as Muggie says, this hooses wis a built the wrang wey. There were nae plannin."

"Is there ony ither aul folk yi can ging oot an hae a chat wi?"

"A' my age his worn awa nearly, hud awa Jimmy doon there, an I see Jimmy very little noo. Bit afore, fin I retired first, there wis twa seats doon the hairber. There were twenty aul pensioners gied doon there an we sat. They're all away. They've a' died. An a very great friend of mine died this week, George Murray. We wis thegither afore I went awa in the 'Dardamates' when the war broke oot. Ach I wisna keen on the Navy, an I gied aboard a parent salvage ship, 'Mintinda', an George wis there. I wis regular an George wis bo'swain. Ach, I wis twa ear awa an they asked me tae tick charge o a salvage drifter, so I got a salvage drifter tae masel wi a part-time Buckie crew. I hid Johnnie Reaich, mate, an his son George that died wis second. I hid a lot Buckie chaps."

"An is that record that yi had at the herrin fishin still stanin in Wick yet?"

"Oh well the herrin fishins finished now. But certainly that stood for all time. Two hunner an fifty two an three baskets. Because I min there wis a big write up in the 'Press and Journal'. Wir photies wis a teen stanin on the quay at Wick."

"When there wis a launch in Portgordon, can yi remember fit happened?"

"Oh aye, the school got a bit o leavins that day. A' the youngsters cam doon. It wis a sight tae see them gaun over the heid o that beach at twenty five or thirty mile an hoor. An then, yi see, there were three boats bein built the same time doon there. It wis a pure hive o industry. Yi wid hardly believe it. An even the days before that, before the war, there wis a boat building yard that built sail boats, further doon, A massive builder o boats, I'm tellin yea. It takes a year now tae build a boat ane o these boats in Jones's. Fancy him (Geddes) pittin bigger boats, twelve of them, over the heid o that beach in 1912., twelve drifters!"

"Dae yi mine ony o their names?"

"Och aye. There wis the 'Daffodil' an the 'Gladys', nae the 'Gladys' the 'Winner, an the 'Leader'. The 'Leader' wis the first boat that wis built doon there. The first drifter. He built a few sail boats afore he gied intae drifters, but the 'Leader' wis the first drifter he built. Then the 'winner' wis built in 1905. That wis the boat that oor family hid. Ach, they gied a' wey. 'Barbara Cowie', a lot o Buckie boats wis built at Geddes's. Yarmouth, Peterheid, Eyemouth, they a' gied a' wey. He wis a master builder o boats Bit then, yea see, there wis nae unions in them days an the chaps, in the simmer time, they wir gled tae pit in the hoors tae get a decent pey."

"A' widden boats?"

"A' widden boats. An you know, yi wid hear the caulking doon there in the lang simmer nichts. Nae stoppin. They were bound tae dee that tae get the number o boats."

"An hoo did yi get yer numbers for the boats?"

"Well that wis the Board o Trade again, yi see. Oor number, abody kent it, wis aye BF1805."

"Who chose the name for the boat.?"

"Oh ma father. I wis a young loonie then, yi see, I wis only twa ear aul when the 'winner' wis built. Ma father caad her the 'winner'."

"A good boat?"

"Aye she wis."

"An far did she finish up?"

"Peterheid. She gied tae the breakers at Peterheid. They a gied there, yi see."

"Fit year wis that?"

"Oh that wid've been aboot 1956, I believe. That wis two or three years aifter that record catch we hid. Tae look at Portgordon now, an look at it in the days when it was ... a haven."

"That Ghurkas have deen a good job though."

"Absolutely. Fa iver thought that Portgordon hairber, if anybody hid telt me in Portgordon fin I wis young that Ghurka sodjers wid come tae sort oor hairber. They were nice chappies, very nice. Portgordon did them very well, mine. They gave them silver an that the first time they came they gave them a ceilidh the nicht afore they left."

"They were far from home, eh?"

"Aye, an a lot of nice chaps. There wis one, I started yarin, invitin him up for his tea an every chance he got, a young kid, a young loonie. An fin they were finished we took him up here an gave him a fortnight's holidays. An he kept in touch wi's. He went tae the Falklands an fin he cam back we took him up in December an geed him a holiday. An this crowd that wis he cam doon. Margaret sometimes pit up a bit o bakin tae them. They were absolutely toffs"

"Did they speak good English?"

"Yes very good English."

"An the hairbers useable again is it.?"

"Well, I don't know. There's ower muckle silt in the hairber noo. Well, it wid tak sma boats, certainly."

"Did it ever get dredged in its lifetime?"

"Well it wis done. The only time that I can mine the fishermen volunteered themsels. They laid rails in fit we ca the sloosh hole an the fishermen wirket for their ain benefit an cleaned oot the silt, then on bogies an rails. Bit no, niver a dredger, no. an fin the Harbour Board, the convention, did awa wi't it finished as a hairber. Yea see nae navigation

rights or nithin. Otherwise yi wid come in here at yer ain risk because its nae a hairber. The leadin lights an athing wis done away wi yi see. Yi see, ivery hoosehold in Gordon Street hid a family drifter. Portgordon, the state its in noo, yi wid hardly believe it when yi look back tae the happier times. Alex wis the harbour master.”

“*Hid yi a hairber office as weel?*”

“Well, aye. In the shed at the hairber, that we caad the tin shed, that wis his office. Yi see there’s nane o that noo. Bit even Cullen an Portknockie’s a’ associations now. Bit I’ll tell yi, I hiv a grandson, Stewart’s lad he’s on the rigs bit he’s awfy keen on creels an fishin. He bought a lovely boat an he calls her the ‘Winner’. He wis oot at the creels a fortnight ago fin he wis hame an fa invaded him bit a sloop fae the fishery cruiser. Yi see they wir aefter this salmon poachers. This launch cam along side o him an speered fit he wis doin.”

“*So you’ve still got a :‘Winner’ in the family, eh?*”

“Aye, we’ve still got a ‘Winner’, She’s in Finichty, aye.