

MR AND MRS HAROLD DURNO, FINDOCHTY, ARE INTERVIEWED

Mr Harold Durno, a retired cooper, and his wife Maggie were interviewed on behalf of the Buckie District Fishing Heritage Society by two trainees from the Balloch Trust which was then operating from the former Thorn Lighting factory at Marchmont Crescent, Buckie. The interview took place at the home of the couple, 10 Seaview Road, Findochty on 30th June 1988 with the following script being the answers, recorded on tape, to the questions that were asked. Later these were all typed up directly from the tape.

“What age did you leave school?”

“I left school and spent my thirteenth birthday in Shetland. I went away there efter my father died and the cooperage, which wis far the caravan site is noo, closed doon when the men hid a tae gang tae Shetland. So instead of me gan tae Buckie, they took me tae Shetland wi them. I spent my thirteenth birthday in Shetland on the eleventh of June 1918. Aefter that I wis awa wae a crowd tae Yarmouth and syne back tae Shetland a then workit a winter it the barrels wi staves, ye see. The staves that we eest tae mak the barrels wi a cam fae Sweden. They cwid easily mak them fae Scotch fir, that’s hame wid, bit the firm I workit wae, Downie Flett, he hid tae hae a his o the best o stuff. They wir made wae Swedish wid.

Wait till I see, twa, three, I think there wis four cooperages here at one time. (Findochty) There wis four cooperages here at ae time. There wis ane far the bank es noo, ye ken the bank doon there (the Clydesdale Bank), et belonged tae Willie Chambers. They moved tae Buckie bit a’ll tell ye fit hoose they hid in Finichy it that time. Ken Aiden Doon? It wis their hoose it ae time. Well ma father workit there for a start, ye see, an they hid a dog, Nancin wis its name. It eest tae come tae the cooperes ivery day, an we stoppit doon the toon, an that dog bade wae hes recht up till it deed. Nancin, I can aye mine on that.

Noo the boat eest tae come in wae the cargees of Swedish staves bit we hid tae dress them in athin see. They wir jist roch, ye see. We hid tae cut them the size an then we hid tae jint them. At that time there wis nae machines tae jint them, it a’ hid tae be deen wae han, ye see. As the time wint on we got saw’s for jintin them, ye see.”

“How yi get them (the staves) carved Harold?”

“Well the wae it wis, ye see, the stave we got wis narra at baith ends, ye see, bit there wisna ae eine narrarer than the ither. Then she gradually cam oot in the bilge, an that’s the wey ye got it, the bilge wis there. That allowed the barrel tae roll on the grun, ye see fit a mean? Fin they wir packin the herrin ye see they startit at the bottom an as they cam up the barrel, she nott mair herrin as she came up tae the bilge.”

“Yi mean at the bilge?”

“Aye. Then she closed in, the same it the bottom it the top as she did it the end, ye see, now that aye wis the wye. Aye there wis fower, if nae five cooperages in Finichy at ae time. There wis Chambers, there wis Downie Flett’s, syne there wis Alex Flett. My breether Willin, he served his time as a cooper but he died it the time he wis servin his time. There wis a few coopers here ye ken, Robert Wood an a them bit they’re a awa, ye see. They’re a deed noo, ye see.

“Fit happent tae a the barrels, did they jist go away?”

“Well the barrels maistly it that time geed tae Lerwick an Stromsray. That’s far the weeman geed an the coopers in a an the boats geed there, yi see, bit it that time the sail boat wis weerin awa, aye the boat wisna weerin awa, bit they wis getting in an engine an makkin them motor boats.”

“Wis this paraffin engines it the time Harold?”

“Aye some o them hid paraffin, twa Kelvin engines made for it yi see, an I think they wir paraffin, bit I think the big engine widiv been a kind o diesel, somethin like that, yi see. They hid that they a got that, the sailboat drifted awa and they got motor boats.”

“Motors in? That must have been afore the drifters wis it?”

“Aye, well the drifter wis beginnin tae come, an I’ll tell ye fit happent, noo there – Herd and MacKenzie. Cane far the auld slip is? Well they eest tae build the drifters there an launch them bit then they hid tae gang tae Aiberdeen. They towed them tae Aiberdeen tae get in the engine. Ye see because it wis steam engines it that time, ye see. Noo the motor boat, she wis aul sail boats, ye ken. They wir getting in that engines, ye see. So the sailboats died oot an it wis the motor boat. Noo some o them hid twa Kelvin engines an some hid this Gardner engines, ye see, bit the drifter, she hid tae get in her biler for steam ye see. Noo they wir a bilt ower there, yi see, the slip in that, yi see.”

“Did they build them it the Hythie in a?”

“They bilt them in the Hythie there, that’s far they bilt the drifters there, ye see. They launched them there an took them in. I mine fin we were kids we eest tae ging doon tae the launch an ye got a bottlie o lemonade.”

“That his been a fine treat, that eh?”

“Aye so it wis. It hid been a penny a bottle it that time. We eest tae get a bottlie doon there.”

“Fit wis the wages like fin ye startit servin yer time?”

“Well fin I startit, fin I startit tae serve ma time, I jist canna mine richt bit I think it wis aboot three an six or something a week. Three and six, and I think the last ear o ma time, I canna mine, I think I got slightly mair than some o them cause ma father deet an ma mither wis left a widda, ye see. I think then that I got twenty shillins. I mine fin I wis it the Hythie it the barrels there, twa pound twelve. Fit cwid ye dae wi that noo. Twa pounds twelve shillins an there wis

fower shillins keepit aff for stamps. We cawed it shillins that time. Two pounds eight, that wis yer weekly wage. Ye see in Finichty it that time, it wis maistly carpenters an coopers, ye ken, that they wir a gan in for, ye ken fin they left the school in that. Then the carpenters a got a job we Herd and MacKenzie for buildin the drifters, ye see. Then there wis that, one, two,, there wis the fower curers here. There wis Chambers, that's them far the bank is noo. It eest tae gang fae the bank hoose richt up. Ma father wis there for a start, then they shifted tae Buckie an ma father moved tae the aines far the caravan site is wae Flett's' that is Walkers, like the name ower there."

"Fit kind o ooers did ye work fin ye first started working?"

"Well, fin yi workit yea startit tae mak the barrels early in the mornin, some o them startit it three o'clock, nae later or fower onywe. The middle o the night, like the bakers. Ye cwid hear the coopers haimerin it the barrels afore ye could get oot o yer beds here. Ye ken in the quate mornins."

"Fan wis yer busiest time, can yi mine?"

"Aye. The busiest time for us wis fin we wis awa fae hame, yi ken, bit ye cwid be busy at hame tae. They used tae cure heerin in Finichty. There wis a place jist it the heed of the hairber doon there. Ken far the cop shed is? Well, ma father an them, alang wi a puckle quines fae here eest tae cure there locally. The first World War, noo I can mine in that, jist as a loon, they startit tae kipper there and practically a the quines and the wifies a workit it the kipperin there, ye ken. There wis smokers cam fae Stornowa, they were Hielan men. They eest tae bide wi a wifie jist across, jist it the back o the Post Office. Jean Dott they eest tae ca the wifie. You've heard the name? Now there eest tae be a cooperage there that wis Walter Flett. That Fletts wis a brithers. Ye see that Glen Elg, that hotel, well I wis at the makkin of cement blocks for that hoose. We eest tae gang up an mak the cement blocks for that hoose an creaseitile the wedd. The beams an athin hid tae be creaseitiled or the jiner widna get leave tae pit them up.. That's that Glen Elg noo."

"Fit like wis the hairber her fin you were young. I suppose it hid been packit, wis it?"

"They eest tae drag the sail boats up wi a traction engine.. I can mine on that traction engine, it hid a name. Donald Dinnie, that wis its name. (Called after a famous strong man from Deeside) The engine used tae come doon fin the boats cam hame fae Yarmouth. Ye see there wisna this sort o winter fishin, ye ken, gan awa tae Stornowa, some o them geed bit maist o them tied up and Donald eest tae gang an pull them up the beach. He eest tae come back again in the Spring o the ear an pull them back doon. De ye ken the wye they eest tae pull the boats doon? Ye hid tae pull them doon be the starn, ye ken. So see that great big pole on the pint o the pier? Well there wis a wire rope pitten roon there. It wis then fixed tae the boat. Donald Dinnie pult this wire, ye ken, up the beach and the boat went doon. Bit I'll tell ye fit they hid tae dee. They hid tae howk them oot, ye ken, so the water could get in tae half full them. Ye ken the fishermen a did that. They hid spads for days an days howkin them a oot. Let the water settle in tae them then Donald Dinnie did the rest o them. Got them a back in the water. I kin mine in that as far back."

"Wis that afore the jetty wis built? Aye the middle ane."

"Well there wisna a jetty it that time, it wis beach a roon aboot noo far the road is. Then that jetty wis built. The ither road noo there wis built, bit that's nae that far back since that bit wis built yi see. A good while back like, bit nae that far back."

His wife spoke for the first time when she said: "The last time he wis amon the herrin wis fin he wis it Ullapool." Harold then continued with his tale. "Well I wis workin tae Dougie Flett at the time, afore ma time wis oot I got the job o sorta buyin, ye ken, buyin herrin in that, well Ullapool wisna in the go it that time, it wis donkey's ears afore that. Then that a stoppit cause I saw a photograph in the paper here jist twa three weeks ago bit I canna get it, fin they eest tae go tae Ullapool an cure, well there's a lull atween that ye see."

"Then it startit up again?"

"Then it startit up again. I geed there tae buy an we startit curin, well I hid tae buy for the six firms. That wis for kipperin, yi see. We cairtit them hame tae Buckie wi Davy Taylor. There wis a lot o sma kin o curers in that oot there."

"Fit did ye dae apart fae workin? Did yi hae ony hobbies?"

I niver hid nae hobbies or nithin like that, yi ken. Well, jist ma gairden an that, we've aye hain ane. We hid ain in the last hoose, ye ken, doon the brae there. It's selt noo, ye see. Then we moved up here an I didna hae a gairden there so fin this ain cam up we got it. That's ma hobby, the gairden, yi see. I jist like the gairden."

"Fit did ye dee in Sundays as a young lad noo?"

"Well, on Sundays, ach, yi jist wanert aboot on Sundays as a young lad, yi see."

"Hid abody tae gang tae the kirk noo?"

"Well I wis niver a kirker. No, well I'll tell yi I geed tae the Salvation Army as a youngster, yi ken. It that time it wis jist up the back o the hoose, it wis at. Salvation Army it that time, wis a big widden shed, richt intae the bay. Yi ken far it is noo? Well it wis up at the back, richt ablow the brae. I dinna like tae say it bit fin we wis youngsters we eest tae throw stanes doon on tae the tap o the reef, far the chapel is noo. Yi eest tae throw the stanes fin we wis youngsters doon on top o the berrecks. Then somebody wid aye cam oot an chase us awa, yi see."

"I dinna suppose ye hid bikes or onything tae play wae fin ye wir young. You wid hain nithin like that?"

"No, no. Well, I can mine fin the chapel there wis built, the Methodist Chapel, of course far the Salvation Army hall is noo is far the Methodist Chapel eest tae be."

"Fit did ye dee tae spen the time fin yi wis at Ullapool?"

“ I niver wis a lad for wanrin. Fin I wis awa at Ullapool an Gairloch ye jist geed awa a walk, ye ken. Maybe, sometimes yi come in fae Inverness tae the picters in the hall. Came in there an maybe geed there, yi ken, ye jist geed a walk, yi see, bit then I kent abody in Ullapool fae the bobby tae the minister. Ivery ane, ivery livin soul, in fact we wis thinkin in settlin doon there bit the quine said no. Bit I wid’ve deen that time settl’t doon in’t. We startit a fish shop for the plenty fish that cam in an there wisna a fish shoppie it that time. Noo there’s a that noo yi see.”
The questions from this point on were put to Mrs Durno.

“ *What age did you leave school?* ”

“ Oh, I was fourteen.”

“ *Did you go straight into the gutting?* ”

“ No I wis in service a filie afore I went intae the guttin. I wis seventeen year auld afore my mither wid lat me awa wae the crowd., yi ken. Ye see we wis jist on our own an stayin in huts an I wis three years wae More. He bocht near a the herrin thit cam in, I think. We eest tae be workin till twelve o’clock it nicht. We eest tae ravel oor claithes in the mornin, auld fashioned claithes. Bit they went roon the yards that time, in ye wisna supposed tae work late, ye ken, bit eh we went tae the fishin for seventeen pown. A lot of money it that time, bit that wis eight weeks awa bit we thocht that wis good in that time.”

“ *Fit did they pey yi the barrel, Maggie?* ”

“ A shillin the barrel, fin ye wis fillin up the barrel the herrin sank doon, yi see, and there wis pickle in them an the ye eest tae rin aff the pickle fore ye fult them – well so much oet.. Aye, in that they got four pence the hour. Four pence the oor for rinnin aff the pickle an a in the fullin up aefter they fult them up the coopers pit on the lid. They hooped them doon, then we used tae type on the names on tae the barrels. I liket that job, we pit them on wae a little brush. It looked right bonnie, ye ken. Then we rolled the barrels fae the putters. Putters!. Twa o ye ti ae barrel, singin a the time in a’.

Aye it wis a richt shuffle handle. There wis a thing thit stuck in tae the barrel, ye ken. The main thing wae a sharp pint on et for puttin the wed.

This wes hard labour, I think. An if somebody startit tae sing, abody wis singin.”

“ *Did the gutting affect your hands, your fingers?* ”

“ We tied oor fingers in the mornin, aye fin we wis tae be gan tae gut. They telt us fin we wis roon the door, tie yer fingers. We eest tae tie oor fingers wae thingmert. Took oor teeth tae tear the clot and tie it. We hid tae clean it ivery day, yi ken, an we eest tae be oot it six o’clock in the mornin. Tie oor fingers an ging oot it six o’clock in the mornin. We bade in hutties, ye ken.”

“ *Hoo mony folk wis in the hut Meg?* ”

“ Six o’es in the hut. We took day aboot o scrubbin oot the hut, we scrubbit it ivery day. We papert oor huttie fin we new geed tae the fishin an we hid a coal firie in oors, we hid the end hut, ye see”

“ *Did yi dee cookin in that eh?* ”

“ Oh yi took day aboot I’m sayin. Cause yi said this is my day on, so it wis like a day a week, ken, afore yer turn cam roon again. That wis you an you scrubbit the hut an you made the mait an athing an aye oor hutties wis aye bonnie an clean. We packit this barrels an the coopers eest tae pit them up, high up, tiers, yi ken. If we pult oot ane the hail lot o them cam doon.

Willie Taylor wis wae hes that year an Downie Flett’s. My sister geed wae Downie Flett for a start. Then fin I grew aller I geed wae her and a chum fae Sinine, Ina Cameron, she’s deed noo tae. They tiered up the herrin ony wae, the mannie eest tae come an taste them. (I believe that Maggie must be speaking of her husband here.) He aye hid that job. He got a job in Glasgow lookin efter the herrin in a store. He eest tae gang tae Liverpool an ship them an athin the time o the war. We wis in Glasgow for eers. She wis wae me for a file. I geed tae Glasgow fin I wis new marriet, I workit in the cold store, Sandy, (This was likely to be Sandy Mearns, one of the interviewers) bit I didna belong tae the cold store company I belonged tae the curin side, I belonged tae Downie Flett. Bit I workit in there, bit ye maybe winna believe this I’ve hane fifty thoosan barrels o herrin in that cold stores an ye wis wonrin far they wir a gan. They a geed tae America an the continent. I got wurd fae Buckie like hoo much tae ship to the Yanks in a Friday an that wis fin the American boats sailed oot o Glasgow. I can still mine in their names, the California, four boats time aboot. The herrin geed in tae the boat’s fridge, the barrels, cause they cam oot o the fridge in the cold store they hid tae go back in there. I worket in Glasgow for years.

Fin my sister worked for Downie Flett’s in them, they geed tae Stromsay in a boat, a wee boatie. Barrels an athin. That wis the curers hoose, it the corner, Wattie Flett’s. We geed in the big boats bit fin iver I saw the boat I was seek. I wis seek afore I left the pier. Then it wis the train tae Yarmouth. The boaties eest tae come for the barrels. I canna mine on their names noo, bit they eest tae come for the barrels an loaded them on it the pier. We jist geewd awa tae Stromsay an Lerwick wi them, yi see, an it saved a fare.

There eest tae be cattle an athin in the boats, that’s true. There wis sheep an there wis coos an they geed in an they’d baw an they’d moo. We wis there in the middle o’t an finiver I saw the boat I was seek. I wis aye glaid tae see Stromsay. Aefter ye cam aff the boat ye thocht ye wis still on it afore ye got the richt eese o yer legs. The boats it that time thit we geed in, were jist ordinary cargee boats. That wis the boats we geed tae Kirkwall an Shetland wae. They cairrit passengers bit we cwidna lie doon ony wae. There wis nae room or ony wye o ony eese. Niver mine we wis aye singin an lauchin, we hid some happy times spite o it a.”

“Yi hid a lot o laughs then?”

“An we eest tae gang to oor beds jist deen. Yi seemed tae get warmer wither that time. Warm simmers an athin. We aye got plenty work, ye hid tae work a lang time afore yi got a wage. They paid yi, they gave yi somethin every week for

“Your messages an stuff?”

“Aye so we jist ordered them. The loonies eest tae come roon the door an yi gave them an order. Yi got athing then squared up at the end o the week. Yi hid aye twa, three shillins left, that kept yi going, ye ken. Pocket money! It wis hard work, oh aye, bit we enjoyed it, so. It’s the sea. Ye aye said ye widna go back bit ye aye got awa back again. There wis nithin else of coorse. There wisna work unless yi geed tae service.”

