

JOHN GRAY, A FORMER CHIEF ENGINEER ON A TRAWLER IS INTERVIEWED

Two trainees with the Balloch Trust interviewed Mr John Gray, 2 Braeview Road, Buckie on 2nd May 1988, on behalf of the Buckie District Fishing Heritage Society, the following transcript is the dialogue that took place which was put on to a floppy disc by Allan Fraser on May 2nd 2003.

"Tell me the name and number of your boat"

Oh, God a mechty there was twinty boats."

"Well any of the boats"

"Well I startit awa oot o here on the Violet BF1474. I was cook and ma father wis driver."

"Now was that a wooden boat or a steel boat?"

"It was a steel boat."

"What were your working conditions like?"

The workin conditions - gie hard I wid say. The money wisna there for a start. I geed cook for twinty-five shillings a week the first ear, thirty shillings the next ear bit I geed deckie for 10 shillins a week. For twa fishins, twenty two weeks in the simmer, twelve at Yarmouth, I got nine pounds for ma twa fishins an I hid tae buy water beets, ilies, the lot an we tried tae, well I wis only young, bit the fishermen tried tae get a guarantee of ten shillins the week an the buggers wis turned doon. Ye gied ye got nithin. The auler fowk, well they hid tae tik their groceries, an a fae the likes o Jimmy, auld Jimmy Paterson, he eest tae be doon on Main Street, an various ither grocers hid tae gie ye tick fin the fishin was doon an they were doon an a."

"How did you order your stores as a cook on a boat?"

"Well win I wis cook I eest tae go up tae the grocer like in Stornawa. I'll gie ye a lauch aboot that. Ye hid tae ask the skipper, ye see it wis his boat,. That wis his hoose, Netherfield on St Peter's Road. I says tae him this Seterday, we hid hid a poor week, I says, 'Fit will I tak doon for oor breakfast?' Says he, 'I dinna ken fit wye yer wonrin aboot somethin for yer breakfast, we've a hale box o saut fesh.'" Sunday mornin an I'm hacking sticks for the little stovie an I washed the ex an went awa for-it an took eft twa cod, about this size, an it wis stiff, ken fit I mean noo like frozen, weel I pits them on the bits. Well that's if you're tying up the boat the rope comes throw a hassle an goes roon this an the nets were richt abeen the skipper's heid. I'm hackin awa at the fesh bit the knife couldna look at it an then Alky comes up an he says, 'What in the worl a guid are ye deein noo? Jist throw that stuff awa'. I says, 'I'm makkin the breakfast.' 'Oh for the love o God', said Alky again, 'Ye're nae pittin that oot'. He geed awa doon ablo. Up cam the skipper. Now suppose I niver move oot o this cheir the skipper says, 'Fa telt ye tae pit that oot?' I says, 'You, I asked ye yesterday.' He was gan tae blame me ye see an I hid tae bile that three times. Noo ye hid tae go in an tak it oot an poor the water awa. An fin ye wir washin the dishes the skin wis a stuck tae the plates like glue. Afore I jined that boat things wir that bad, as I says ma father wis driver, the crew hid pease-meal brose three times in a day. That's a fact. We eest tae ging awa fae hame whin I wis cook wi aboot twa months supply o beef in a barlie on tap o the galley, satted an spiced an us gan oot an in tae Stornawa, ye couldna see the sense in it. Same wi groceries we wis buyin."

"How did you do your weather forecasting?"

"Oh it wis very very grim then. A wireless an mair or less the skipper's ain discretion, ye ken. Oh there wis nane o this modern gadgety. Whin we left we thocht you'd maybe gie intae the norrit if his luck wis in up it came, ither we cwid go awa to the southert - blank, ye ken. Oh it wis a practical knowledge."

"What action did you take in severe weather and storms?"

"Well the aulder the skipper, the mair experience he hid. They cwid forsee bad wither. Oh bit a this anes nooadays have a the instruments, bit you see for yoursell we the forecasts the forecasts can be wrang. Common sense shid prevail."

"What were your working conditions like?"

"Awful. I jint a ship in Aiberdeen, a trawler, an I've seen me lycin in ma bunk readin an oot the side o ma ee, ye widna believe it, the bloody rats wir up on the table awa wi a slice o loaf an fan they cam tae the corner o the table, you see this body (upstand on edge to save stuff from falling off) wis here wi a space at the corners this wis so that you could swipe doon the table. The rats couldna get the loaf ower the upstan, an ye speak aboot brains, they tilted it oor wye doon the leg o the table. I catcht, fit wist, eighteen rats in nine days an I got the Sanitary doon an he got twenty-one the time we wis at hame. That rats caused mair trouble in a boat wi their stealing. The likes o this auld fishermen hid a muffler o admiral cloth, well the rats hid it awa for a nest an him blaming abidy for stealing it aff him, 'Far's my muffler?' He didna ken the rats hid it awa, see that's a fact. Oh ye widna believe some o the stories I could tell. Aye that wis trawlin. Bit noo since we gied intae diesels, aye in my latter life, ye niver see nae rats whether it is the smell o the diesel ile, I dinna ken bit ye dinna see rats the same noo."

"Now what about the cold, the wet and the dangers? Were there a lot of dangers?"

"Ah well there aye hiz been ye see. The wither can rear up, far there's nae a bitty discretion for seein somethin ye can rin intae danger, ye see. Aye we lost a boat in the Firth, the Dalewood, I think that's her, an I wis that bloody hivvy gin in ower the rescue boat that I burst ma ribs. Ken fit I mean I wis awa aboot eighteen tae nineteen stane gan in fit the ca a pocket trawler. I wis aff mony weeks, a canna mine noo bit a guid file."

"What was the name of the boat"

"The Dalewood."

“What was the number of it?”

“Oh now, now. It wis fae Aiberdeen. It wis an Aiberdeen boat.”

“What did you do in your off duty, did you live it up?”

“I’ve seen us doon at Fara’ (Faeroes?) in a trawler, Setterday nicht come, waitin for the fitba, skipper comes in, there’s anither ane, he’s deed an awa noo, a Buckpool man, he slept alow the wheelhoose, the second fisherman an twa three o the crew they’re up to hear the wireless on Setterday aifterneen, he cam up an he switched it aff an he says, ‘I pey for that, that’s for fishin purposes.’ That’s Gospel supposin I niver move, That’s the type o people ye hid tae live wi, ken, arrogant, oh jist - it’s hard to describe. If you spoke ower loud, ye see, that wis you secked, whither you wis a good man or no. That wis wir ain noo fae Buckie.”

“What were your conditions like aboard the boat? Did you all get on well or was there fighting among you?”

“Oh there wis quite good harmony. The food wis the biggest problem. Fin I wis cook aboard the drifter I think I did awa wi about four cran o heerin, bilded, fried, that’s sixteen baskets for a simmer fishin. The skipper says, ‘I’ll gie ye a treat and cam doon wi a box o kippers. God, I dinna ken fit wye we survived. Aye we wis doon at Iceland in a trawler, an Aiberdeen trawler, an ae day I wis aff duty, you dinna ging forrit wi a big haul o fesh. The skipper wis that bloody feart they wid burst the deck. That wis the conditions doon there. A big catch o fesh, sixty or eighty baskets. They’d let her go ye see fin it wis on the deck, bit no, no I let ‘er richt doon afore I wid open the bag. That wis an auld steam trawler.”

“What were the cooking and galley conditions like? Have you any stories about them?”

“Oh weel that stove would be it. I eest tae lose ma rag wi it. My father being there twa three ear wid say jist hae patience. Fin the stove wis gaun it wis aye reekin, oh ken yer een were sair, ye lifted aff the funnel an pit doon a kettle o water an sweelt her oot inta a basin an it wis awa like a daisy. There wis a hole in the back o the stove ‘n it wis a new stove at that.”

“How did you get your clothes dried if you got soaked?”

“Well in a steam job ye werna sae bad ye see it wis up tae the chief of the boat he could say, ‘Aye, Aye, Admiral’, fin he wis speered gin ye cwid dry yer claes alow, itherwise ye could leave them weet an put on a new shift. Well you aye cairrit ane or twa spare sets, ye ken. At the twalin ye eest tae tak yer claes hame at the eyn o a trip.”

“Did you have any safety or first aid on the boat?”

“Well a the skippers an mates wir supposed tae first aid trainin. I mine ane o oors, it wis the deckie, he hid nae hair onywe, the boat took a lurch an his heid went intae the winch, ken fair on, an the skipper couldna look at him, he wis seek. He pit him doon an cried me up oot o the engine room an I says, ‘Fit can I dee, you’re the skipper.’ He wis at seek he couldna face it. Oh that man I canna mine hoo mony stitches he hid tae get, ye ken. Noo the next skipper he’d sit doon and shew this coal bag. That’s a fact, this was part of their ticket, ye see. They had to have a first aid ticket. We hid a bloke there, oh wis a proper yap, ye see the skipper he says, ‘I can shew’, an I says, ‘Ye bugger yer nae gan to shew me’. What an eesless brute, bit he wis that full o his ain comft.”

“Have you ever had any men injured on the boats you were on?”

“Aye I mine there wis a man died, Aye oor George wis the skipper. We didna ken at the time, he wis fully built, well hardly as big as me, bit he wis big, I wid say he wis aboot eighteen stane. We’d hid oor supper an they wir shootin the gear awa, coorse we hid tae ging on the deck. I wis aff watch, an as I say my loon wis skipper, he cam fleein oot o the wheelhoose an he says come on an gie me a han there’s somthin wrang wi the second fish. Well he wis a big bloke an a, an it took us a oor time tae cerry him intae the galley. He spoke tae the skipper twice, I got him turned ower on his side an he wis kina frothin at the moo. We got him ontae the galley fleer, he wis that heavy we couldna chance tae pit him on his bed. Ye ken this I wis left wi him as the skipper, George, wis contacting the Coastguards to get guided intae Westray an aye comin doon tae see fit wis gaun on eence he got the boat under wye. ‘How are ye getting on?’ he asked. I says, ‘Twelve bloody men on this boat an I’m the only ane left wi the man an I’m rubbin his hands an ye kent that he wis awa. I shouted doon, ‘Ye buggers, the man wouldna hae hairmt ye fin he wis livin an he winna noo fin he’d deed.’ Aye bit they werna lang in gaun intae his bloody berth for his fags. Well that nicht we gied intae Westray, I’ve a sister fa bides there. We got doon the doctor an he asks what we did, ye see, ‘Ah well’ he says, ‘You couldna have done anything more, that’s a massive heart attack’. An there’s twa three baskets o fish lyin on the deck an the skipper says to the crew, ‘Go awa an square up the deck an tak three fish an sell them to yersells an that will gie you a pey.

Well well atween drug addicts an that nicht knives, aye there’s ane doon there I could tell you his name bit I winna bather, knives, an that loon o mine, o he’s big ye ken, I’ve niver seen him sae bloomin angert in a his life. He says to think that a man wis lyin eft there deed an you carryin on. Noo he says ony fechtin come oot one at a time. I dinna believe that he lifted his han

He wis richt ye got that irritated wi the type o people ye wir sailin we. Christ they were gaun up tae the jail at Craiginches for deckies tae go awa wie us. The runner cam doon ae day an says, ‘I’ve got a good deckie for ye’. Aye this wis in Aiberdeen, an I sweer tae God you’d hiv needed a camera, he hid on ane of those black airmen’s helmets, black coat like fit the Germans hid, a leather coat, thigh beets, leather beets that they hid awa back tae the battle of Waterloo, an this wis the rig o him ye see. The cook wis as well, we caad him a fairy, ye see, fin he saw the state o this lad. Well they gave that man gear, ileskins, sou’wester, water beets. Well the watch gied tae call the next watch that wis comin on he’s in ower his bed wi the iley on an the beets, Oh my God. I didna see him but fin he wis crawlin oot o the foc’sle they hault, well he got a hud o a skate, ye, he hid it on his knee he didna ken far tae pit it. This wis supposed tae be a good deckie, he didna ken fit the hell tae dee. The skipper says, ‘That man is no use, the crew are gaun tae pack their han in, will you tak him doon? I said, ‘By God you’re good at it.’ Well me and the

seconds had to do his work. We eest tae hae a five gallon drum for ashes, ye ken, he couldna lift it aff the stokehole. I hid tae dee it half-full an in the latter end I says tae him, 'You come doon here an fill the buckets' Ye speak about an experience - aye an he got a his pey tae. The skipper an mate never as much as said thank you, We gied intae Stornawa tae dae a job, my breather in law wis we us then. The twa o us did the job oorselves, aye the biler, bleedin the biler an pittin in twa sockets an the time we wir deein it I says tae him, 'it wis one o'clock in the mornin, ging awa an get the hose an we'll get intae the biler ready tae full the biler ye see. He comes back tae me an says, 'There's a licht in the fesh room'. 'Licht in the feshroom?', I says, 'Hoo cwid there be a licht?' There wis nae power, we hid nae steam, ken fit a mean, we hid nae electricity. I says, 'Is there onybody on the deck, the skipper or the mate?' He says, 'No'. 'Well', I says, 'Go awa an tell the skipper'. Well fin he gied forrit they couldna git oot the feshroom. They gied intae the icebox, ye see, there wis three o them in there. A Buckie bloke, he's still livin, twa fae Aiberdeen, the cook an anither deckie. He took aff the hatch tae lat them oot, ye see, an there wid hiv been, I dinna ken hoo mony baskets of fesh an bags o rockwood. This wis tae go awa an flog tae themselves. Fin they geed eft, ye see, the skipper hid tae pit on the hatch an on the cover. They didna ken at the time Cocksie he hid a better key than the skipper hid for the bottle. He says it steals a bottle of whisky. So at breakfast time, ye see, it wis aye the occasion that the skipper wid hiv geen ye a nip, so he dishes oot a nip an he says tae me, 'That's twa bottles a man'. Well I says, 'Go awa an get the police' 'Oh no, we'll be kept in here, said the skipper, 'an there'll be an enquiry. I say, 'Ye ken fa his deen it.' Noo that three bade on the quay, they were nae comin aboard. Ah well we're slowly getting the steam up so fin we're nearly ready I says tae the skipper, 'Fit boot turnin the boat roon we oor han so that her heid is awa oot o the loch. We did this an efter a while left Stornawa leavin the three rogues ahin. Normally there wis ten o a crew so that made only siven noo. The skipper says, 'We'll try a haul 'n if we canna manage we'll gang awa hame.' I says, 'That's nae bloody eese this. I says ye hiv a cripple man on the deck there, a young loon about siventeen, he couldna lift a basket o fesh' I says, 'If ye pit him in the galley Coullie an me will dee the cookin an the bakin an he can disht oot, ye see, wash the dishes.' We hid twenty-one hauls efter we cam oot o Stornawa an that thing in the galley he niver came on the deck once. So we're nearin Aiberdeen noo an this three's hame afore us. We're gittin oor pey, ye see, an the skipper says tae me, 'Fit div ye think then, yer're awfy dour about this.' I says, 'Nae bloody winner'. I says, 'That man his tae hae a second's ticket to ging here an that crowd that jumpit her is awa wi mair bloody money than him.' Well, ye see, if the skipper an mate hid onythin in them they widve taen a pound fae each o them. He took a poun aff the cook's. Ye see this three geed ashore, the rest wir left aboard, aye the deckhands, they got three men's shorthand money plus three men's rose. Well, ye see the seconds tae me got nane o that. Bit I wisna worryin too much about masell but the bloody skipper he took a poun aff the cook's shorthand money tae gie tae ma brither in law. Alex Cowie. (This might have been meant to be Coull.)

Oh my I've seen an heard a lot an that wis just a sheer existence we wis comin through. It wis only the last five ears that I wid say fin I wis trawlin that I got onything like fit I wis due. My last trip wis nine days. Thirty one and a half thoosan boxes and I've landit in Grimbsy sixteen hundred and fifty Aiberdeen boxes. Twenty three days doon tae the North Cape o Iceland for twenty five hunner pounds That's a fact. Na it wisna a sunshine in oor day, ye ken. Ye hear o big trips noo bit there's some gie poor anes an a. There's a boatie there it hisna hid a pey since Christmas. They're that bad they hid tae buy their fags they couldna get a sub an well the boat wis tane fae the skipper last week. Noo fit wye can fowk exist on that eh? Then ye see the last fower days they hid nae lights or nithin an I says tae ane o the crew, 'Fa wis yer engineer?' 'We hinna got an engineer,' he says. Noo that shouldna be at the sea. That's riskin men's lives. They've tane the boat fae him noo. He's lucky, I wid say, in a sense that he didna lose her"

"When you went to Yarmouth and other long term fishing how did you get on? Did you have good trips or bad trips?"

"Well that depended a lot, ye see. I mine the boat I wis on first as cook an then deckie. Well trawl men in auld gear, well that's nae eese, it's nae eese nae wye, it's the same in Aiberdeen, if ye hivna on good gear you'll get naewye, ken?"

We geed awa at the back o the war in the June Rose oot o Peterhead, the skipper wis a Salvation Army man. I praise the Salvation Army bit as I say there is a midst in athing. Sunday mornin we hid oor breakfast an he's on tae the wee tract sheet. He eest tae ca the crew in the mornin wi a bugle. He cam doon intae the engine room, an I wis chief o the boat, the driver, I'm gaun awa to dee a job on the engine He says tae me, 'Fit are ye deein?' I says, 'I'm gaun awa tae wring this top and bottom'. He says, 'Div ye ken fit day this is?' 'Oh,' I says, 'fine that.' 'But', I says, 'this is the only chance I can get.' 'You leave it alone'. Well I wis that feart o that cheel that I gied awa oot o the engine room an I lat him gang awa tae his meetin bit as seen as I got him ashore I kent fit I hid tae dee.. I couldna hiv left the engine the wye it wis, there could've been danger if we hid broken adrift. I gied doon an did whit I hid tae dee. I pit the tools awa an I'm sittin aft, fit they ca the quarter deck, in the aifternoon fin Clunie cam aboard. I didna notice him gaun doon tae the engine room. He cam up an he says tae me, 'I've been doon in the engine room an you gied doon that engine room an worked in it efter me tellin you no. I say, 'Aye, I couldna leave the engine like that. 'You disobeyed my word'. I says, 'I would have disobeyed you supposin you were the King.'. I says, 'I couldna leave the boat like that, the insurance wid hiv come doon on us, but', I says, 'in future I'll do naethin on a Sunday an you'll hiv to wait tae Monday mornin an breakfast time for steam cause, I says, 'I winna lat the fire ging out.'

See they aye caad us the Black Squad. They wir awa tae the Kirk, Brethren Meetings, he wis awa tae the Salvation Army bit he wantit steam for twelve o'clock at nicht. Noo ye canna tak that oot o a packit. It's coal, steam is made wi coal. Ye see that's how much they thocht o us. 'Oh no', I says, she'll nae be ready for you the nicht at twelve o'clock.' It wis an awfy attitude, ken. Well at that time that I wis speakin about I've seen it as high as a thoosan boats in Yarmouth an they are at sea first bit the steam hid tae be supplied by the twa nincompops, the Devil's men."

“Had you a lot of time at home?”

“Well we wir awa at Yarmouth twelve tae fourteen weeks, ye see. It wisna sae bad in the simmer time unless you wir awa roon tae Stornawa maybe eight weeks awa an then hame for a weekend. It wisna a weekend. Fin ye wir in Stornawa or Lerwick ye hidna much heerin ye were finished maybe at five o’clock in the mornin. Bit fin ye come tae Buckie supposin ye hid only twenty cran ye hid tae land them, ye hid tae bundle a the nets, tak them awa tae the bank, the driver he’s blawin doon the engine o the biler. Well him an me hid tae ging doon on Sunday mornin tae fill the biler. That wis anither thing. Them awa tae the bloody Kirk wi great bloody Bibles an we hid a that tae dee jist for the bare essentials. The nets wir barkit, we eest tae tak them an spread them on the parks. Monday mornin ye hid tae ging awa an gaither them tak them doon tae the boat ‘n lay them oot. It wis jist sheer graft. An we eest tae work by the boat three weeks tae a month, not a penny, paintin bows. Aye it wis poverty a richt then. Mind they played on it an a. Oh that mannie that I wis we he pit fower o his faimily throwe the college. He’s a loon a doctor, some teachers, a nurse, Eva Reid, Violet, wis’t twa sisters teacher?. At the eyn o the fishin it wiz a the cooks the pun jars that had held jam. We eest tae wash them pit them inta a bag an stow them awa. We got doon tin boxes fae Fowler’s like galvanised boxes for hudding proper sea biscuits. So fin the box wis empty we eest tae clean it oot, grease a the ootside o it so it widna ging roosty. Aye this wis the cook’s stoker, ye see.

We cam intae Buckie this simmer, the second ear in that I wis cook, I hid jars lyin on the table an wis aboot tae gang awa an cairry the biscuit tins hame. ‘Oh,’ he says, ‘leave that’, he says, ‘an I’ll tik that’. He hid aboot six tins, at twa shillins the tin. We eest tae get a ha’penny for the pun jars, he wis awa wi that ‘n a. That’s who bloody greedy he wis. I says, ‘Well, well.’ So fin we’re in Yarmouth, ye see, ‘n I’m washin up a the empty jars I throws them in the bucket, aye the greasy bucket, ye see. My father says are ye nae gaun tae wash the jar. ‘No, no,’ I says, ‘only he can wash the jars I’m nae gaun till’. Am I gaun tae wash bloody jars for him? I left my pey that ear in Yarmouth. Oh we wir acquaint, we ran ashore doon in Scarborough. We wis three weeks in the dry docks in Grimbsy an consequently we lost the best o the fishin. We’re awa hame an it efter twelve weeks. As I say the second year cook got thirty shillings, He says seeing hoo we’re in debt I’ve kept aff half a croon the week aff yer pey. That’s a bloody fact. Ye see if I’d lifted my pey he couldna hiv deen it. A half a croon that cam tae the large sum o one pound fifty in auld money. I says tae my father, ‘I winna leave a broon copper efter this.’ Well there wis twa boats there fae Portknockie a hale fishin an they got nithin, their cards werena even stampet. How they got awa wi thon I jist don’t know. They should hiv been stampin the cards ivery week, that’s the law. Bit they got awa, they made oot tae be bankrupt, ye see.

Oh there wis good boats an them that wis good oh they hid tae work. Ye wouldna hae believed thon, a hoors o the night washin doon, scrubbin doon the casin. The boats wir a workin vessel bit they hid them lookin like yachts. I mine that ear that I wis in the June Rose, a Sunday mornin I geed awa doon. John Paterson, oh he bade doon far aside you bide the last hoosie afore ye come tae the Buckpool cottage, aye his loon bides there noo. Ye niver saw sik a hallirackit bugger in a yer life, ken. A fite sark, it wis fit at ae time, an a tie, an Mattie Guthrie wis gie queer. Thon wis laughable. I gied doon aboard the boat an that wis the pride o Buckie fin she wis oot of Buckie. It wis the Flow”

“What was the number of it?”

“Noo I canna mine. It wis fowk in Main Street and Gordon Street that hid her. For a their boat the steel plates wis a shine an a. They hid doon fit ye ca dip boards, widden frames, something like pallets, an him (Paterson) an Mattie hid fa’n oot, ye see, the biler fronts, on some of the smoke boats doors were grained an a. Well wi the twa o them fa’n oot, ye see, Mattie widna dee his side. Ye wid’ve thocht that ae half o the biler it wis neglectit. He wis like a countryman, John, great big hans. He gied mair on cargee boats. He wid niver hae got a livin in Buckie, ken fit a mean, he wis jist He kent his job richt enough but it wouldna hae suited ... there wis mair baskets o brasso cam aboard than grub sometime, ye ken.

Noo the Peterheed men wisna like that at a, hallirackit. They eest tae pit fit we caad the donkey hose, saut water intae the skelpen washin the engine room.

There wis ae thing aboot the heerin fishin if it hid survived I wid say it wis a great life, far better than Aiberdeen trawling because ye were gaun awa tae Stornawa, Shetlands, the Isle o Man an Ireland. Well in the course o a ear ye cwid get aboot twelve months in Yarmouth or Lowestoft. It wis a big variation. I mine fin we geed trawling first, afore the war, ye didna ken the day or the date. Sunday mornin ye got ham an eggs that wis the only wye ye kent. The rest o the week it wis fish an ye peyed yer ain mait. In Aiberdeen the cashier peyed the bills, we wid pey oor ain grub, ye see, they wir takkin it aff in the office an they wir getting like a 10% rebate aff a oor bloody money. I says tae the skipper did the cook let ye see the bills? He said, ‘Fit wye?’ I says, ‘The grocer his pitten doon here soup, aye like Knorr soup, one and threepence the packet. Brucie the grocer his doon one shillin and ninepence.’ That wis sixpence o a difference. I’m nae kiddin a wis richt oot spoken. I didna care fa I spoke o if I hid onythin tae say I said it. He says, ‘Fit div ye mean? I hiv naethin tae dee wi it’ I says, ‘Ye hiv athing tae dee wi it. It’s you that gets the hens an turkeys at the New Year, fit the hell div we get oot o it?’ He says, ‘If ye wait tae me tae approach Brucie ye’ll wait a lang time for we depend on him for a job.’ ‘Well’, I says, ‘if ye winna dee it I will I’ll go tae the bloody Union an I’ll get the bloody fleet oot.’ I approached the Union. They says, ‘What do you think?’ I says, ‘It’s daylight robbery, we’re nae makkin bugger all atween the office an the grocer an the butcher, they’re stealin us blin.’ He says, ‘We’re pittin in for a pey rise of three shillings a day. ‘Well,’ I says, ‘Why nae pit in for three shillins bit pit it towards us an nae oor grub an let the owners pey the difference.’ It ran oot aboot four and sixpence a day at that time. The owners thocht they wir on a good thing, ye see, oor three shillins stood ear oot ear in bit the cost o livin was gaun up up an they hid tae pey the extra. The skipper an mate wir shareholders, I says ye can dee the same as us.

I wis jist sayin there's a skipper bidin roon on Seaview Road, he's still livin, ane o the big skippers, a Portknockie bloke wis cook wi him, oh jist an excellent cook. An the skipper says tae him 'Why did ye nae pit doon a bit fesh, aye at breakfast time this is tae safe the expense, ye see.

Next mornin I gied awa tae waaken the skipper, he wis like God Almighty, ye ken. He'd go on the phones ten minutes quarter an hoor. Oor watches hid tae go on. I've fan oot wi him umpteen times, ken. Aye weel, fin the skipper wis caad eft the cook pit doon twa fesh tae him an a the rest ham an eggs or sausages an eggs. He didna ken fit tae say in front o the crew bit he waited intil efter fin he wis up in the wheelhouse an he pit doon the deckie for the cook. 'Fit the hell is the idea pittin doon fesh tae me an ham an eggs tae a the rest o the crew?' 'Well,' he says, 'it's you that askit fish'. He says the rest o them disna like fesh, bit this wis a tae ease doon the expenses.

Ye see that firm he wis we, it'll come tae mine. There wis a Buckpool blokie there cook on the same boat an the crew wir peyin the grub, ye see. Noo the owner says, 'Ye're gaun awa doon tae Iceland see that there is plenty food aboard. That same cook is there when it wis changed ower that we're peying the grub they to pey the sub. Cook says skipper is speakin about oor pey. He says tae the cook yer lucky if we don't charge you for the fish that you take out of the pond. Noo that's Gospel. Johnnie Harrow, Beverley Harrow, that's the man, his father wis the owner of the boats afore that. He says, 'You're lucky that we're nae He wisna pleased Greed. Aye an they commanded yer life ashore Nae sae much me bit I wis wi a skipper there he wis in Alwins. He hid an awfa reputation, he didna hesitate liftin his han. Bit the man kent his job an he wis mate on this boat an Irvine, John Irvin wist? Aye that wis it's Irvin's noo. Him an this Beverley Harrow eest tae get their lunch daily in the Imperial Hotel. Well jist adjinin the same bildin a little farrer up in Exchange Street there wis a Buckie man hid a pub, Flannies, and this mate, he wisna mairrit, ye see, he's in there cairryin on, an by Christ they got tae ken o it. They beat him fin they seen him cairryin on wi, well ane o this fairies, bit nae deein ony hairm. Fin he gied hame for his denner his sister says tae him, 'There wis somebody up fae the office wintin you.' 'Aye weel' he says, 'if they come up again say I've niver been here', an gied awa tae his bed. He gied doon next day tae be met wi. 'You were in the Exchange Bar yesterday? Well we are not going to tolerate that' He says, 'What do you mean?' 'We don't like eh, how do you put it' He says, 'Fit I dee at the sea is your business an fit I dee ashore is nae bloody business o yours.' And wi that the boy walked oot. He hid tae walk about a lang time though. The Spragda – that's the power they hid. That wis lang afore Hitler. That's true fit am telling ye. There wis a blokie, his grandfather cam fae Buckie, he fell oot o the boat, the Mary Bruce. He cam through tae Aiberdeen. Yes he worket hard. He gied fireman, deckie, he gied mate. I dinna ken if he gied chief or no bit he finished up skipper an owner o a fleet o boats. I'm talking about twinty boats an that man he turned ower religious so I wis in his ane boat for five ear an I eest tae sweer like a trooper

I says changed days for you. Forty, fifty boxes of fesh taken aff the market an if ye said onthing ye got the sack. That wis daylight stealin. An if ye spoke about it in the office they wouldna credit it, an well if ye got ower heated they said well you know what to do. I fell oot on ae boat, our cook got the sack. He gied aboard anither boat, the same, oor firm, fifty poun o a backhander. The cook aff this ither boat cam aboard us or wis comin aboard an they wir that gipet they telt me. I'm up tae the office an I startit. The manager is deed an awa noo, Charles Scott, he come through laughing. 'What is ado with you John?' I says, 'What's ado? He says, 'You have fairly put the cat among the pigeons.' In their angers, ye see. But my policy wis that wis a hundred pounds atween that twa men, it could've been twa hunner for a we ken. Doon comes the Super noo, he's my boss. He says, 'Fit's adee?' 'Fits adee,' I says, 'They'd bloody steal blood'. He says, 'How can they do that?' 'Well,' I says, 'one person will let ye say fit we mak, of twelve thousand pounds bit the next ane ten thoosan. You'll get fower different answers. We would maybe made sixteen thousan pounds for all I ken, that's nae legal.' I kept on and said 'You are a Merchant Service officer can you pit 140 tons of coal into a boat that can only hold 100 tons?' He started to laugh. He says that's a nonsense. That's the corruption that went on in Aiberdeen. Noo that they are gaun in tae diesel I don't know bit that's chargin the skipper an the mate for 140 tons of coal an there's only a 100. The boat cwid only hud 100. That wis jist sheer stealin, ken fit I mean? Then as I said if you spoke loud enough - tally!

Well there wis ae boat there, I wis in her for three ear. We gied back an fore for a hale week intae Aiberdeen, Coull doon wi a doctor's line. They're playin on it ye see, they're bidin in Aiberdeen. They're getting their day's pey bit it wis costin us fares day to day. I turns roon tae the owner an says if ye canna gie us oor fare gie us oor books we wid be as weel on the bloody dole. We eventually got awa tae the sea on the Friday. The crew is a there, the skipper, the runner up an doon tae Craiginches for them comin oot o the jail. Oh ye see the tickets o some o them. Onyweye I says I hope tae Christ we get awa the day. I says this is nae bloody eese tae me for we wid be better aff signing the brew. Ah well we wir awa for sixteen days, come in, the Super cam doon an got the defects. That boat eest tae ging tae Grantham for coal. It wis a big boat. Not a word tae me fin I went intae the office. So the owner, Andrew King, a proper gentleman, he wis a bank manager at Gourrock said, 'There's your settlin John and of course you'll have to sign on.' 'Oh, well, well,' I say. 'Were you going back?' I said, 'I niver said I wis leavin.' 'Oh but we have got a man.' The time we wis at sea they hid scoured aroon an got a man, a chief, an he's in pey, ye see.. They couldna see their wey o lettin him go on leave. I says, 'Okay'. That wis Friday, I came hame. I got a job in Lossie on Monday. I got ten telegrams within the next fortnight fae that same firm asking if I wid go chief on a boat and that wis efter they hid gien me the sack. I says, 'Oh no I've got a job ashore now so I'll stick it.' Bit it wis aye tae suit them ye see. You're oot there you didna ken fit wis goin on. They're shippin somebody in your place. Well my breether in law sided wi me. Fit wist, oh aye, they got an Aiberdeen man, oh a richt red Communist an him an the skipper fell oot an the message wis comin fae the skipper tae the second and the seconds hid tae gie tae the chief that the end o the trip wis the skipper's Santa. They couldna get a chief at the time so my breether in law gied on as chief. Noo he hid nae tickets at a, Christ that lad could of got the seck. He gied tae the Board of Trade an spraggit tae, aye Allie Coull,

Lilian's man, an they hid tae get a chief then But he wis there an that wis the funny thing about it fin he gied up in front of the insurance an he says you haven't got a ticket an he says no. You should have had a seconds' ticket. 'Well,' he say, 'I'm willing tae sit for the two now.' No only the second's ticket, and he hid tae wait a twelve month. Noo George Reid, doon there he wis catcht oot, machinery trouble, He gied tae the insurance an the first thing they asked wis, 'Have you got a ticket?' He got his chief's and second's ticket at the same time. Noo if that's nae corruption I don't know. Alex Coull hid a the experience bit they wouldna give up wie him.

How we survived I dinna ken. Well ye see we wis comin hame fin that bairns o oors were young at six o'clock at nicht an awa at six o'clock in the mornin I niver seen them. It wis pretty hard all over. Fin we hid the five o them we eest to gie them maybe half a croon the week, ye see, bit as they got up an left the school, ye see, they wir marked absent. Ann she wis the youngest, twinty five shillins, she wis getting a lot noo, ye see. Oh ye want tae hear Teresa, we didna get that. I say, 'No'. I'll gie ye a richt laugh. I'd been sixteen year auld, jist ower sixteen an ma mither an father didna wint me tae go intae Aiberdeen (to the trawling) I geed up tae a ferm abeen Peter Fair park, they wir wintin an orra loon. The fermer says tae me, 'Can ye drive a pair?' 'No,' I says, 'bit I'm quite willin.' 'Can ye ploo' 'No,' I says bit it's an orra loon yer needin nae a bloody transversal.' He says, 'Fit wid ye be needin? Aye in wages? I kent fit wis in front o me. Twelve hoors a day, Setterday an Sunday included. I says, 'Ten shillins a week.' He says, 'God a mechty! The last man that I hid here I hid him for a suit o claes an tackety beets.' 'Well,' I says, 'Ye'd better gang back an get that bloke cause I dinna need a suit.' Ye could aye got a suit fae the Fifty Shilling Tailors at twa pound ten shillin. You cwid rig yersel for a five, an this wis for six bloody month. Oh no I says, 'You had better get that man.'

I left the school an startit beachin wi Jimmy Forbes, an he's in ower the cairt, an me fourteen ear auld. My first pey wis five shillins. I gied awa ower the burn. I canna mine the shoppie, an I got a pair o bib overalls for three an eleven pence. I geed hame wi the shillin an kept the pence. Noo I hid tae work three weeks for the bloody tackety beets. Three hunner and fifty tackets. They were like diver's beets That's nae the best o it. We didna get oot a day o a gale o win. I hackit sticks a day. Fin Setterday came I got fower shillins. He kept a shillin aff. Pairt o me wis gled tae get a job. My God I tellt thon Campbell, ye ken Bill Campbell that eest tae work in the brew, Him an me nearly fell oot. I dinna ken fit you twa is (the interviewers) but he's a richt Tory. I says the bloody Tories wis in power fin we left the school I says that I stood in Land Street alang wi the ither bairns an seen a wife's bloody furniture tain oot an peened by the bailiffs. That wis tae pey her taxes. Well we're comin back hard that wye. This bloody Poll Tax. She's (Maggie Thatcher, Prime Minister) starvin Scotland o industrial land. Would ye believe fit we're peyin here a week in rent cause I've a bloody Lollipop job. (The so called Lollipop people, so called from the stick they carried herded young school bairns across certain streets. Johnny Gray worked at the junction of Queen Street with West Church Street.) Teresa (his wife) is peyin £21.50 a week. This is the idea they are spoutin how many people wid vote their ain council. They're been forced intae it. Mandy is peyin twenty eight pounds the bloody week. Mary's loon is peyin the same. The seener they tak it intae their heid to buy their hoose the better. We've peyed council rents a oor days, wi nithin tae show for it. My God, mine fit we wir peyin in the prefab. They canna tak enough aff ye."

"Have you any superstitions when you were at sea?"

"Aye, I say a gie lot of them. Pork wisna allowed aboard, an salmon. Oh ye couldna say salmon. Pigs wir caad gruntern. Mine hoo they widna speak o ministers. That wis the best o the lot, awa preachin a bloody day on Sunday then come doon expectin the boat tae be ready at 12 o'clock tae ging tae sea."

"You had to work all day Sunday? You did not get Sunday off?"

"No, no."

"They did not leave the port to fish for herring till twelve o'clock, is that right?"

No this wis their religion, ye see. Fa got the boat ready? Richt at the back o the war I couldna get back intae Aiberdeen. Ye cwidna get on the Polars. I wis at the trawling afore this. There ye are. I hid tae come ashore. I wis labourin. I got this job tae ging awa tae Yarmouth an fin I geed aboard, well I waited until the skipper cam doon. He says, 'Are you the man fae Buckie?' I says, 'Aye'. 'Hiv ye been aboard?' I says, 'No, am waitin tae see you an hear the terms.' 'Fit d'ye mean', says he. 'Well I've been telt that there's some o the watchcords getting the share, ye see.' 'They're nae getting tae share here,' were his words. 'Okay, I says, fit compensation are we getting?' 'Fit d'ye mean?' I says, 'Them that is nae getting the share, they're getting ten shillins in a hundra. Aye for iver hundred pounds you made ten bob. A baggy o wages, ye see.' He says, 'You ken as weel as me it's the driver's job tae scum an hale an fa oot the net.' I says, 'Fit chance will I hae at Yarmouth?' I says, 'Take it or leave it. I cam throwe in the bus I can gae hame in the bus. I took the job.'

I wis aboard that boat, he eest tae to go alow himsel as fireman. The skipper an a the deckies wis ex drivers, they're a getting the share, they are lookin for the big thing. They're a young compared wi them (me) So we're comin in wi a big shot o heerin an jokingly the skipper says tae me fan are ye gaun tae set her awa. When you got her underwey, ye see, ye got yer tae. It wis my job tae go doon below an gie a full speen. Oh I says, 'Fin I see the land' He took it seriously. 'Fin ye see the land?' I says, 'Aye'. I says, 'There's an awfy vibration in that steam pipe.' I kent fit I wis speakin about, mair than the hale bloody lot o them. Said the skipper, 'Oh that is nithin, this standard boats are a the same.' Righto I goes doon an went tae town wi her an opened her up an the bloody pipe is goin an it burst. I pit a bag roon it an went up tae the wheelhouse an says tae the skipper. 'Have ye far tae ging?' He says, 'About ten miles, fit wye?' I says, 'Thon pipe that ye said wouldna burst is burst.' 'Oh my God will ye manage tae get her in?' I says, 'I'll get her in' and I says, you or nane o them will tell me my job'. I got her in an got doon the insurance an telt them. The pipe wis about forty fit. I got cut an half an wis managin tae get it tae come an go bit that wis how dogmatic they wir.

