

# **SELLAFIELD STORIES**

## **ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**INTERVIEWER: Colin McCourt**

**INTERVIEWEE: Tom O'Brien**

**DATE OF BIRTH: 16<sup>th</sup> April 1927**

**DATE OF INTERVIEW: 26<sup>th</sup> July 2010**

**EQUIPMENT USED: Marantz PMD 660 recorder at 44.16 kilohertz  
AKGC 414 microphone**

CM: *This is an interview with Tom O'Brien, interviewed by Colin McCourt on 26<sup>th</sup> of July 2010, using a Marantz PMD 660 recorder at 44 16 kilohertz and an AKGC 414 microphone, very technical see Tom. Could we start off Tom by telling me your name, where you were born at and a bit about where you lived and your mam and dad?*

TO: yea, oh aye, well my name's Thomas O'Brien, I was, well there was ten of us altogether young uns and I was born in Marlborough Street in Whitehaven and I lived in Marlborough Street til I was twenty five when I got married then I went to Mirehouse

CM: *when were you born Tom?*

TO: eh?

CM: *when were you born?*

TO: when?

CM: yes

TO: April the 16<sup>th</sup> 1927

CM: *what were them houses like that you were actually living in?*

TO: ah they wasn't very good, there was a lot of us, they wasn't very good but we thought they were alright like, they were alright then

CM: *it wasn't at Whitehaven Mansion was it?*

TO: oh I had a good life, I had a, my mother was, she must have worked very hard, I never starved to death, we always had plenty to eat even though it was cheap stuff you know, she used to send me for a cup of sheep [incomp] [laugh] for to make broth on a Saturday night

CM: *what round to butchers?*

TO: well a lot of, yea, Billy Wilson down in market then, oh aye it was bit of, it was a hard life for my mother

CM: *so did all, all ten of you have different jobs to do? Were you all expected to muck in?*

TO: yea, oh aye did a lot of, I was just talking the other day about it, I used to do a lot for my mother

CM: *what kind of things, what kind of jobs?*

TO: cos me other brothers they worked away, John and Pat, they went away to work in London but Dennis he worked at pit, everybody worked at pit, me sisters worked at pit so my mother wouldn't let me go to pit, so that was alright

CM: *your sisters worked on the screens did they Tom?*

TO: eh?

CM: *did your sisters work on the screens?*

TO: yea, aye, oh my sisters

CM: *that would have been quite a hard life?*

TO: worked on screens, oh had a hard life like, two of them married Danish fishermen, they went to live in Denmark so we were left me and me father and me brother and one of t'other sisters was looking after us, she lived in Strand Street and we lived in Marlborough Street, so she looked after us

CM: *and did your house have running water at that time when you were a kid? Did it have running water when you were a kid?*

TO: just a, you'd a sink in back kitchen and toilet out in the yard, that was it, and we slept upstairs at very top so if you wanted the toilet you had to go a long way down and out into yard

CM: *so was this three storeys high at Marlborough Street?*

TO: aye, yea, in Marlborough Street yea

CM: *so when your sisters came in from on screens they'll have been a right pretty mess with coal dust?*

TO: yea

CM: *so everybody will had to get washed what in a dolly tub kind of thing, er a zinc, a zinc tub or something in front of fire?*

TO: oh aye, oh aye

CM: *is that how it went?*

TO: we all did that, yea we did, big bath tub in front of fire and all that sort of thing, oh that was common, cos only water you got was off fire, kettle was on all the time, kettle used to hang on a hook and it was always boiling so

CM: *what was it like, cos Marlborough Street is right on side of the docks isn't it?*

TO: yea it was right beside it oh aye used to come from school throw clogs off and go down and jump in the water

CM: *which school was that Tom?*

TO: St Begh's, used to go to, well I went to Key Street first

CM: *which is on?*

TO: Key Street until I was seven year old and then we went to St Begh's but er you know it was great living where we lived and summers were summers then and I keep saying that because it was summer, this, this time of year it was red hot, always red hot, you were always swimming, everybody was swimming, that was the best part about it

CM: *so they were all in the dock, what on Golden Sands area, is that where you went?*

TO: there was Golden Sands and there was Big Sands and there was Little Sands, one up at Marlborough Street that was the littlest

CM: *Little Sands?*

TO: that was, that was...that was Big Sands up Marlborough Street, then there was a little un beside of it, there used to be bridge across for the wagons

CM: *aye*

TO: that was Little Sands and then there was Golden Sands

CM: *and this'll have been at the time when there was still steam trains going across the harbour?*

TO: yea

CM: *yea, from the, with the coal from the pits?*

TO: yea, well they loaded coal in the dock, Queen's Dock all the time, they sent a lot of coal away by boat like

CM: aye

TO: Queen's Dock was going all the time, all the Isle of Man, went to Isle of Man and Ireland coal, coal boats, so it was always full

CM: aye

TO: it was very busy, busy little port then

CM: *so your mam told you she didn't want you going down the pit?*

TO: no

CM: *so what job did you start off doing when you left school?*

TO: what?

CM: *what job did you first go to?*

TO: me mother got me job when I was twelve year old, errand boy, I had one of them bikes with the great big basket on front

CM: aye

TO: I was a big lad like then and I was working

CM: *who was that for?*

TO: er fruit shop on Lowther Street, I forget, I think they called it Robinson's, I'm not quite sure but I worked there before I'd left school, getting seven and six a week and then when I left school I went full time and I got ten bob a week [laughter]

CM: *big pay rise [laughter]*

TO: so it wasn't much

CM: *so where did you actually deliver to on your bike?*

TO: aye, oh I went, we used to go all over, I went up Inkerman once with that bike full of vegetables, I parked it on side and I went in with some stuff in this house and when I come out bike had fell over and rolled potatoes all down the bottom of Inkerman, I had to go down and pick

all bloody lot up, all mixed up and everything, well it was alright, it was good life

CM: *so you enjoyed that?*

TO: oh aye I enjoyed my kids life and then I went on fishing boats unloading when I was about sixteen, unloading fishing boats, Danish fishing boats

CM: *this is off the, in the harbour?*

TO: yea, they used to go to Iceland them days, come back full up from Iceland so we used to be down there six o'clock in morning unloading boats, I made a decent a lot of money then like that wasn't so bad til I was eighteen and then I got called up, I went in army and lo and behold I went on boats [laughter] one of my brothers had told me, he's in Royal Engineers, he says 'there's boats in army' I wanted to go in navy but war was nearly finished and they wouldn't let me join navy unless I signed on for eleven year, well I wasn't going to do that so when I went to Carlisle for six weeks course and then you had to decide what you're gonna do so I told the officer, I says 'I wouldn't mind going on boats, there's boats in army' well he didn't even know that himself, he says 'well I send for you' but anyway I got on boats

CM: *so what were you doing on the boats?*

TO: well we trained up in Clyde first, Isles of Bute, Rothesay Isle of Bute, we were there six months training, we learned all about navigation, all things like that and then we went down to Isle of Wight, the whole camp moved to Isle of Wight and I was there a couple of months and then I went to, lo and behold Venice in Italy, I was on Grand Canal for eighteen months, I was Cox and then skipper

CM: *not one of these gondolas?*

TO: Skippers, aye on the big eighteen foot harbour launch aye got skippers job on that as well right away, so that was alright

CM: *aye you were lucky there*

TO: oh I enjoyed that but when I come out of army I went on fishing boats then

CM: *so that got you set on your life on sea as it were?*

TO: it was a big help because when, I was on one fishing boat we were gonna go to Iceland, skipper had a ticket, he was a Danish fellow, he had a Danish ticket but for the insurance sake you had to have two certificated men aboard so they sent me to Grimsby, I went to Grimsby for my skippers ticket, well I had a good idea of the whole lot of it, I got it no bother like, Morse Code and all that I'd learned all that in army

CM: *how long does that take you to get that ticket?*

TO: er, took me about, well I first, two months altogether cos you could go every month there was exams you could go so I was two months down there

CM: *and what do they do, do they take you out on a boat and you had to prove how competent you were and those things?*

TO: no it was mostly in, mostly in classroom all the time, if you didn't know it before you went they didn't teach you much

CM: aye

TO: it wasn't like a proper classroom but these now they teach you, now as long as you've been to sea four year you're alright they'll teach you to get your ticket but when I went you had to know a good bit and, and I did as well so that was handy enough, oh aye that was good that

CM: *so how did you enjoy?*

TO: I think I, I think I was first Whitehaven fisherman to get a ticket

CM: aye

TO: either, there was nobody either had one before

CM: *cock of the north*

TO: not a fishing ticket, there was Merchant Navy men with tickets, Harbour Master, John Bridges and all them who had made Merchant Navy tickets but there was nobody had fishing tickets but there was no fishing boats then

CM: *so this was start of the fishing fleet coming to Whitehaven?*

TO: yea

CM: yea?

TO: there was, oh aye it was full of Danish boats then and they started fishing and I come back out of the army I went straight on fishing boats well then you had to learn Danish because there was three Danes aboard and you, I was cook, started off as cook

CM: *can you still speak a bit of Danish?*

TO: so I was, I was good in that in finish I was quite fluent

CM: *well give us a couple of sentences in Danish?*

TO: in Danish?

CM: *aye?*

TO: [speaks Danish] I could also count [speaks Danish] there was no bother, no problem then speaking Danish

CM: *aye*

TO: especially when you got in pub and had a couple of pints I could talk perfect Danish

CM: *do you still come out with Danish when you've had a couple of pints?*

TO: no there's no Danes, there's no Danes here now, they've all gone

CM: *what was it like going out to sea on a fishing boat cos I've always imagined it's a very hard physical job?*

TO: oh I like fishing, I like fishing

CM: *you were enjoying it?*

TO: I always loved fishing, I was pleased I didn't want to go down pit anyway so I knew I liked pit, no I was always fishing, I loved fishing, I fished for about twenty two, twenty three year, then I went on that Sellafeld boat

CM: *why did you change over onto Sellafeld boat?*

TO: er I didn't, well I had, I had a lot of accidents at sea like, I was on rocks, first eighteen months I was on er you're on, we went, ground down Barrow somewhere, thick fog, on sand bank, boat, steaming boat somebody fell over we were on a sand bank or sommat so that was alright, that was nowt special but then same boat a few month after we

were steaming from [incomp] down towards Haverigg, steaming to Scots yard so we turned in and skipper put this other fellow, lad, deck hand engineer on wheel and he turned in, next thing we were run up on the blooming beach at Sellafield, we were right up, just missed a great big rock as well so boat went that way, when people were going to work next morning, the train they were all looking at us, we were lying there

CM: *what was name of that boat?*

TO: Sea [?] aye Sea [?] I think it was

CM: *was that one of them owned by, is it Thompson's?*

TO: one of Neil Thompson's boats, yea

CM: *one of Neil Thompson's boats yea*

TO: and er then when I was another small boat, like an Irish boat skipper but there was a Danish fellow who was, he was the main skipper, he was catching fish and we were on our way through Whitehaven to Luce Bay on Scots side, we left Whitehaven about midnight or sommat and we got to Luce Bay, I was in my bunk and the next thing we run up on the bloody rocks, off just Burrow Head, up on Burrow Head, just about force four, it wasn't that bad but it was bad enough and we were right up so me and this Danish fellow we got off the boat, on the rocks with a big lamp to have a look at damage and when we got off the boat fell off [laughs] so skipper's went to come in to pick us up and this Danish fellow shouting 'get away, get away' cos he knew it would damage it again

CM: *aye*

TO: so he went up to Port William in Luce Bay and we hitchhiked it up so fifteen bloody mile, I had a pair of boots on and no stockings, you imagine that eh

CM: *aye*

TO: and a pullover, no shirt, just a pullover, pair of pants and a pair of boots, fifteen blinking mile

CM: *and what time of year was that?*

TO: it was September, it was I mean cos Luce Bay opened in September, Luce Bay was shut all the year but it opened September til Christmas

CM: *was that it's fishing season for?*

TO: just for small boats, certain sized boats, fishing plaice so that's how I know it was definitely September, oh we finished up with a good trip

CM: *is that what you were fishing then Tom, plaice?*

TO: yea I'd just started fishing then, we'd lost fifty, we went into this little harbour, port and when the water went out we went down to have a look at damage, it was about fifteen foot of keel missing but otherwise the boat was alright, it went fishing anyway and we made a trip down to Fleetwood

CM: *aye*

TO: so that was alright like

CM: *so where did the boats go in then to get fixed?*

TO: the boat belonged to Belfast lad, this Irish boat, Irish skipper and another fellow was Irish on it and then me and this Danish fellow, but after that I went on Danish boats then and I was on Danish boats, oh I was on a long time

CM: *when the boats got damaged, that Irish boat, did they take it back to Ireland to get fixed or did they fix it round here?*

TO: yea they took it back to Ireland and I never saw it, it never come back to Whitehaven again

CM: *so did you enjoyed working with the Danish people?*

TO: yea, aye I went on Danish boats then, I stopped on Danish boats, it was only Danish boats really, no it was alright, I fished all my life then like, no it was great, I was on, I was only on, I always stuck to boat, when I got a good boat, first I was on a boat called [incomp] I was with this fellow Dane who married a Whitehaven lass, [incomp] and he got a boat built, I was with him for five year, that was built in Scotland, went to Iceland from Whitehaven

CM: *what was it, did you go up to Iceland?*

TO: aye, oh we fished up at Iceland, thirty days it took us

CM: *so what was the weather like up there? I always imagine it to be very stormy and*

TO: blowing, oh blowing gale all the time, always blowing like hell and that skipper of ours he, weather didn't bother him so we were fishing in bad weather like

CM: *and what were, what were you trying to catch up there?*

TO: eh?

CM: *what were you trying to catch, what kind of fish?*

TO: this big plaice, big plaice, best, the best you could get, boat wasn't that big, you could have filled up with cod but we couldn't carry enough cod to make a big trip but if you could catch big plaice it would make a good trip, it took us ten days to get up there first trip blowing that hard, then we fished about fifteen days and coming home it only took four days, flat out, eight hundred mile in four days, that was good going

CM: *that's good going isn't it?*

TO: aye

CM: *what about, were you ever sea sick Tom? All these years at sea were you ever sea sick?*

TO: I was always sea sick when I first went to sea, always

CM: *and that never put you off?*

TO: even when she was [incomp] I was sea, if we were sailing at midnight I was sick as owt in the house, wife used to say 'go and have a couple of pints' I says 'that'll make me worse' 'you could go and have a couple of pints' oh aye, I always went to sea with erm, what do they call them at kl, kl, sea sick tablets you can get them, you can still buy them, starts with a K, forgotten now, always

CM: *so by that time you'd started, you got married then and you'd started your family?*

TO: eh?

CM: *you'd started your family when you were on the boats?*

TO: oh aye

CM: *and you were away from home quite a bit*

TO: yea, oh aye, we made a couple of trips to Iceland then I went to Grimsby for my skippers ticket but I was on that boat for five year and then I was, I was courting strong then so I decided I would, we were fishing in Grimsby a lot so I decided I would fish at home, I made a mistake there like, it was a poor mistake, I should have stopped where I was at, I would have been better off but, but anyway

CM: *was Grimsby catching far more fish over that time?*

TO: well I was courting strong so when you were in Grimsby you were away from Whitehaven a lot so

CM: *what about the fishing community in Whitehaven, off the boats, was it quite strong?*

TO: oh aye yea there was a lot of fishermen, some years we made some good money some years, I remember one year there was this [incomp] he'd built a boat for me, I was on a brand new boat called Castle [incomp] got built in Scotland and that first year I was on that I think I made about two thousand six hundred which was an awful lot of money

CM: *mmm*

TO: and there was a fellow from Marchon booked a drift, he was a Latvian, he'd made about same money, they were all making big money, Hague pit there was about twenty four hundred men working there and Marchon there was about twenty four hundred men working there, fishing was good, Whitehaven was really prosperous then, 1966

CM: *aye*

TO: beautiful weather and everything

CM: *good year*

TO: tons of fish, you couldn't go wrong making money with fishing, oh aye I had three, three and a half good year on that boat

CM: *on Castle [incomp]?*

TO: yea on Castle [incomp] Castle Ford they called it aye and then I finished on there, it went trawling and then I was on few little boats and then I went on Sellafield boat

CM: *you'll have found that quite mild did you go on Sellafield boat because I don't think, that didn't do fishing did it, Sellafield boat?*

TO: I wasn't that keen like but I think wife got fed up of me having all these bloody accidents and all this, get settled, get the job there, oh money was terrible at first well I had fourteen hundred a year, not so much you can imagine, it wasn't much money

CM: *quite a drop down wasn't it?*

TO: twenty odd pounds a bloody week, god almighty that was nowt

CM: *and did you work the times to coincide with the tide? Did you have to go whatever time the tide was, that was when you'd go out?*

TO: aye, oh, well you got your wages, you got a rise every year like, I was boursin as they called it first, for first twelve months and then skipper retired and I got skipper's job

CM: *so boursin was like second in command?*

TO: yea, yea and then I got skipper's job so it was a lot in for a job on that boat, I think there was about a hundred put in for it first and then they whittled it down to about six, well I had a skipper's ticket, I was the only one, I was the only one with a skipper's ticket so I got that, it wasn't so bad although I was forty three mind when I got that job and I said to boss when I started I said 'I'm surprised I got job' he said 'why?' I said 'well I'm forty three now' he says 'it's alright we'll get twenty year out of you' and they did

CM: *aye, so what was the name of the boat?*

TO: Seascan

CM: *Seascan*

TO: aye it was a beautiful boat, it was built in Scotland for, for Sellafield

CM: *especially for Sellafield?*

TO: aye, we did everything on that boat, we used to

CM: *tell me about your job, tell me about your job on that boat, what they did? Tell me what they did on that boat, the kind of jobs they were doing?*

TO: we did everything really, everything, it was like a survey boat as well, used to fish samples and water samples, mud samples, used to go to Isle of Man every quarter for samples over at Isle of Man, used to get milk and eggs and mud out of the harbour

CM: *did they have a monitor on the boat, somebody who monitored all this?*

TO: yea we had a monitor with us, he was one of the crew, we'd a monitor and a boursin and me self, you'd three handed

CM: aye

TO: and er we went all over Irish Sea as well, used to do long trips down to Welsh coast water sampling, up to Fleetwood and back home again, used to go away on a Monday, that was only twice a year and come back on a Friday but er

CM: *so did you put nets down to catch fish and take samples of what you've caught?*

TO: yea well we'd a big fridge on board for putting fish samples in but there'd be big water bottles for water and mud samples we had containers and everything, oh yea we did a lot of, and then they also did a lot of survey work, we were often getting survey people down at Sellafield so we did a lot of survey work as well

CM: *when you say survey what were you actually surveying?*

TO: eh?

CM: *what were you surveying?*

TO: well I think they were thinking of building a new factory then even further up north so we were, did a lot of surveying for that and also we did a lot of surveying down at Drigg for putting in new pipeline out for a waste pipeline for Drigg, we were surveying there and then also they were putting new pipelines out of Sellafield all the time so we were on that a lot

CM: *so did you work with the diving team?*

TO: aye we had a regular diving team because they'd two steel, old steel pipes for waste Sellafield discharge pipes but they were all going rotten, they'd had loads of holes all over

CM: *so did the divers actually dive off the Seascan?*

TO: yea, oh aye they used the Seascan every year we were diving, they did a lot of diving

CM: *and did you find that quite a, that would be quite an easy job for you was it especially up there?*

TO: oh it was a great little job, got out in morning back in at evening and all that sort of thing, aye I didn't mind the diving, a fellow took over after me he didn't like the diving and so they didn't get on so very well so then they got another boat for their own so they didn't use Seascan then

CM: *who was in charge of the diving when they were coming out of your boat, can you remember who that was?*

TO: aye, there was a Whitehaven lad who was in overall charge erm Joe...see what did they call him? Graham, Graham Norman

CM: *Graham Norman yea*

TO: aye he was in charge of divers but then he got promoted and somebody else took over but they're still doing diving, in fact they got rid of Seascan, it was costing too much they thought, and they went and bought another boat that cost three hundred and fifty thousand and it's bloody useless cos it can't get sampling or anything, it just can only go diving whereas Seascan you could go fishing, you could do diving, you could do owt at all, surveying with it, cabin had bunks and everything, that new boat that they've got there isn't even a cabin, so

CM: *when, when you were on the ordinary fishing before you went onto the Sellafield boat*

TO: yea

CM: *did Sellafield, did it affect the fishing at all? You know did people have to keep away from Sellafield, the area, because of what they thought was contamination or anything like that?*

TO: well we got them in different areas, we used to go up Scots side for them as well fish, and over towards Isle of Man, drag over Isle of Man you wanted about a stone or maybe a couple of stone and we filleted it, you always filleted them and sent them into factory and they analysed them

CM: *yea but before, before you worked for Sellafield and you worked on the fishing boats in the harbour, did anybody every bother about Sellafield being there because it maybe affect the fish?*

TO: no, I fished all my life from down there, there's plenty of people fish, they catch a lot of fish off Sellafield, small plaice, all small plaice that we catch out here all went to Bird's Eye in Lowestoft

CM: *did it?*

TO: yea because the plaice out here was a small head and a small tail and nice and round, really good fillets, the plaice in North Sea they've got a big long head and a big long tail and narrow body, no, there's really no, not very good for Bird's Eye

CM: *I thought a plaice was a plaice*

TO: oh these fish were just ideal for Bird's Eye, Irish Sea plaice, they were thick, in fact I've got a few given other day, thick as owt, they're still good fish, lot better than small plaice in North Sea not very good and they're dark skin and everything whereas these out of here are all light skinned, nice fish, especially them up the Solway Firth, really nice

CM: *is that the main fish you catch off here, plaice?*

TO: yea, oh aye, well all them rigs up there now, they've stopped a lot fishing up there now with that but there's not much fish out there now, well in fact there's no fish out there now, all they catch now is prawns, if ever the prawns go that's it

CM: *that's it, nothing else*

TO: no, well there's no fleet neither, there's only a couple of fishing boats now in Whitehaven, rest is all part timers

CM: *yea so you'll have noticed a big change in your life time*

TO: in the olden days there was about twenty five boats fishing out of Whitehaven, all fishing out here, no there's no fishing

- CM: *Whitehaven at that time was before it became a marina wasn't it?*
- TO: yea
- CM: *it used to dry, used to dry out*
- TO: oh aye, it must have, aye it's different altogether now like but it was bad then when you couldn't get it and it was blowing a gale and you couldn't get in, you had to wait for the water coming in, things like that, nowadays this gate business is great, I mean many a time, that's how I got this house actually cos we had to go down in winter looking after the boat at two o'clock in the morning sit on boat and make sure it didn't break loose with these nor 'west gales coming right in the harbour, oh it was murder and I tell Joe Bragg about it cos I used to walk down from Mirehouse down near midnight maybe to look after boat for the night and Joe managed to get me fixed up with this house so I wouldn't even have far to go down to look after the boat
- CM: *so this house was a Sellafeld key worker house then?*
- TO: aye they belonged to Sellafeld, they owned a lot of property in town, they owned about fifty houses
- CM: *ah I didn't realise that*
- TO: oh yea that was for people coming away maybe short term, make sure they'd somewhere to live that, that's what they were for
- CM: *and have all them gone now, are they all private?*
- TO: I think they sold them all off, yea, cos first house we got was a flat just on the opposite corner to Whitehaven News, there's a bottom flat but wife didn't like it at all she was really sick there, we were there four year and she didn't, she hated it, then Joe Bragg, well it was him that got us that un and then he got this through somebody living here knew who was moving out
- CM: *was Joe Bragg in charge of the housing?*
- TO: he just died not long since Joe, he worked, he was a big, he was a big staff man at Sellafeld like and er it was him that got us this house so and we've been here ever since, twenty odd year I've been in here now, wife died eighteen month ago, she loved it here, she loved that yard

CM: *oh it's lovely*

TO: oh aye, she loved that yard, you put your washing out there and it's blowing a bit it's dry in two hours, no I've had a decent life only thing is I got one daughter just that's all, and she's a little gem

CM: *ah well that's alright then*

TO: had another couple like her I'd have been alright

CM: *oh you could have retired earlier*

TO: aye, a lad who would have took fishing boat out and things like that would've been handy but aye I don't know, them things that happen innit, and I come out of ten [laughs]

CM: *one of ten*

TO: oh aye was big families them days like

CM: *mmm*

TO: oh they used to say if a family only had three or four kids 'oh he's well off him, well off' oh aye, and hard up before the war, there was no jobs before the war and then when he did work when the war come they were building underground munitions factory down at Drigg somewhere, underground well my father that was his job pit sinker, he used to

CM: *he used to be a pit sinker?*

TO: he was pit sinker, he was what they called ganger in them days, foreman, he was a ganger aye he used, well he was a big fellow, Irish man, oh proper gentleman him and er so when they were building that factory down there well he got a job right away no bother, it was underground, he knew all about building shafts and things like that

CM: *when was that? Was that just after the war Tom?*

TO: yea, oh aye, aye he was alright that fellow, he was a good father like

CM: *aye*

TO: aye never bothered me owt much, just too far distance between us, I could hardly go for a pint with him, he was a bit older than me, I used to drink with my oldest brother, aye they were always drinking together,

he was my older brother, oldest John, me and him often went out together, I was youngest and he was oldest

CM: *round town?*

TO: oh aye he always drunk down town

CM: *did you have to wait until you were eighteen then Tom or not?*

TO: oh yea, aye, oh aye, never bothered before eighteen

CM: *everybody knew you*

TO: we used to like being, getting out

CM: *when your dad went to work at, at Sellafield on the munitions factory*

TO: yea

CM: *how did he get to work?*

TO: who?

CM: *your dad, did he get the train up to Sellafield?*

TO: oh aye trains all the time, there was trains all the time then, to, to factories and all that, aye it was all trains, well there was plenty of buses as well mind but it was mainly trains, trains went straight there, aye there were lots of trains them days as well

CM: *they were all have been steam trains as well*

TO: aye, no it was alright, I've had a pretty good life like, I'd three years in army so and I wouldn't, my brother Pat he loved army, he would have signed on [laughter] but er I didn't, it was alright, I got, I got a driving licence out of it as well, when I come back to England from Italy we were in a camp then, boats, they were packing the boats up so I had to learn to drive so I got a driving licence and I got my skipper's ticket in army so I, I did alright

CM: *aye set you up didn't it?*

TO: aye

CM: *when you worked for Sellafield did you say you were there for, what was it, twenty years or something you worked for them?*

TO: eh?

CM: *you worked for Sellafield was it for twenty years?*

TO: ah about twenty, twenty one or sommat, I think it was 1971 I think and I finished in 1991 but they said I worked twenty one years so

CM: *ah well, so you'll have seen quite a few changes round the harbour in that kind of time when you were coming in and out?*

TO: oh yea, aye it's a lot better now like, that, with these gates on, hell of a difference because town used to get flooded, one morning I was going down to boat and I couldn't, that corner there was that full of water so went this way down and that was full of water, couldn't go that way, had to go right down Lowther Street to get down to dock to boat [sneeze] there was that much big tides and raining like hell

CM: aye

TO: it flooded

CM: *I've seen a lot of pictures of the market there*

TO: all the shops cellars, Donaldson's and all them, Anchor Pub, all their cellars were full of water, standing, it always happened when it's a big tide and rain, heavy rain, rain can't go nowhere so

CM: *what about your house on Marlborough Street, would that be flooded? Your house on Marlborough Street*

TO: yea

CM: *would that get flooded?*

TO: no, no, well, I can remember when I was about seven year old or sommat and I was at Key Street school and we went to school in a rowing boat [laughs] aye we went to school in a rowing boat

CM: *that's commitment that, that's commitment*

TO: our house only had one step but it was a big high step and it was just lapping that

CM: *ah right*

TO: but fellow come, oh my mother wouldn't let us stop in house, oh no we still had to go to school cos when we paddled down Strand Street you could see market steps were about that much showing, that's how much water there was like, if you were only a little kid you'd have drowned

CM: *aye, early navigation for you*

TO: Key Street school was a little bit up so it was dry so they took

CM: *who were your teachers then Tom?*

TO: Misses Chaplin, there was two Chaplin lasses, they were both nursery class in both schools, Key Street school one sister worked there and St Begh's school, when you left there and you went up there first class, nursery class sort of thing it was Miss Chaplin then and lo and behold my daughter bought their house, she lived in their house for about ten year eh, first house going up Bransty on your left

CM: *ah right aye*

TO: Miss Chaplin, they both lived there when I was a kid, well little school, it was a nice little school Key Street school

CM: *then you went to St Begh's you said?*

TO: aye, it was handy, I remember the market, they didn't shut, shops didn't shut until about eleven o'clock at night them days

CM: *aye*

TO: oh aye, aye market was going ten or eleven o'clock at night before they finished, never nowt like that now, used to have a hell of a big market then like in them days, well there was for a long time, aye did reasonable well really, I'm pretty well off now really, got her that's the best thing about it

CM: *it's always nice to have family*

TO: she's my ears and my eyes

CM: *[laughter] well it's been a pleasure Tom*

TO: eh?

CM: *it's been a pleasure talking to you*

TO: yea

CM: *anything else you want to tell us about*

TO: well not really, when I get started at talking

CM: *oh you mean start talking, ah*

TO: oh that's why I have plenty of pals to drink with cos they all like my crack

CM: aye

TO: I've always got sommat I can talk about, if I can't find something to talk about 'what do you think Tom are you this or that?' so, so I have to start telling some tales about all the different things, I fished a lot other spots as well which a lot of them here they only fished out here and they didn't fish anywhere else, where I was fishing west coast of Ireland and up at Iceland and I fished ten years in North Sea, oh aye wife got fed up of me fishing the North Sea, that's another reason why she wanted me to go on Sellafeld boat, I was home

CM: *did you find when you go into the pubs you tend to be round people who've been involved in fishing?*

TO: yea, oh aye well Standard was full of, Standard was a great spot because you could go there for a pint and you could just look down at harbour and see where your boat was

CM: *Standard is now the Waterfront isn't it?*

TO: aye

CM: *so I think there'll be no fishermen going there now?*

TO: seeing boats coming in and boats going out and everything it was a great pub that, ruined it now like, that finished, Kitty the landlady in Stand then she was in thirty, thirty one year I think she was in that pub, Kitty, she was twenty one when she first went in landlady

CM: *and you'll have went in the Wellington pub did you?*

TO: she was in thirty one year

CM: *you'll have went in the Wellington pub, the old one that got knocked down, did they call it the Wellington?*

TO: aye, the old down pier aye

CM: yea?

TO: oh we often went down there, one of marrows got landlord's job, fellow called Tommy Bennett, he was landlord in but landlords change a lot, when I was younger there was only one landlord and he was in for years and years and years but I didn't drink then like but er afterwards changed hands a lot that pub but what ruined that pub was when the first drinking things you know, motor cars,

CM: aye, breathalyser?

TO: aye, when they first started that ruined that pub cos people wouldn't walk all way down and all that sort of thing, they went down in their cars, it was alright but you had to bring that road but drink

CM: *did that pub down Wellington did that attract the miners, the miner after you know they finished work or was it just the fishermen really?*

TO: what?

CM: *the Wellington pub*

TO: there was a lot of houses there

CM: *was there?*

TO: oh I think there was about forty or fifty houses

CM: aye

TO: down Wellington oh aye, there was at least forty, oh it was quite a community down there

CM: *and you can remember them Tom?*

TO: eh?

CM: *you can remember them houses?*

TO: yea, aye I can remember the houses yea

CM: *so they'll have been separate from Mount Pleasant houses?*

TO: aye, oh they kept that pub full all time like, there was always people lost in that corner of harbour they used to call it lucky corner, there was

always at least three people drowned in there every year coming out of pub drunk

CM: *ah right*

TO: and falling in, there was no railings or owt, in fact there was a little kerb and it tripped you up if you touched it, always somebody drowning coming out of that pub, from there like

CM: *it's been closed down for a long time now hasn't it?*

TO: aye, oh aye, when they first had that driving thing, that ruined the pub really, it was only die hards went in down and then in summer, in winter there was nobody in hardly, nobody in at all, just domino night and dart night and that was it, I used to walk all the way from Mirehouse down to Wellington when my pal was in but nine o'clock I used to walk back up and go in the canteen

CM: *aye*

TO: I hadn't far to go to go home then and I first went to canteen, when I first moved up there there was a fellow called Tom O'Fee he was landlord here been in for years and years, but then there was another fellow got it, he was a good fellow, he built a brand new pub, it was a smashing pub like, lovely pub then they converted it to a caf, to a restaurant

CM: *yea*

TO: er Zest or sommat

CM: *so you're losing most of your traditional pubs now Tom aren't you?*

TO: *yea*

CM: *they're nearly all going now*

TO: aye, all the old pubs are gone, they aren't the same now, you don't get a game of darts or a game of cards or owt, game of dominoes I mean you could go in Standard in the day there was two games of cards going, two games of dominoes going, playing darts, none of that now, there is some darts but there's, you don't see them playing cards or dominoes or anything, they're empty, most of them are empty now when you go it, I can't, even Barra Jacks on a Saturday there's just two of us in, two people

CM: *ah not being kept going are they?*

TO: used to be packed out

CM: *aye, going back to when you worked on the Sellafield boat you started working you said your wages were pretty crap really compared to what you'd been earning outside, did the wages go up in the line with the factory as you were on it?*

TO: oh yea, oh aye, they always went up all the time like just the same, aye that wasn't so bad that way, I had to do erm four year with this increments or sommat you got each year well I'd been on by two year when I got, well practically two year when I got skipper's job but I had to go back to four year increments again, so it was six year before I got a full wage so it was a long time really

CM: *how did they work your wages out Tom cos they wouldn't have had any other skippers working at Sellafield, so did they put you on line with another kind of job or something so you knew how much you were going to go?*

TO: well I was supposed to be classed as a manager but I certainly didn't get no manager's money, I used to work on quay, unloading boats and all that, on winch, they always trusted me on winch, til I got skipper's job then I had to pack it up, they didn't like it, but when I was boursin I always worked on fishing boat for pocket money and that was handy like, Saturdays and Sundays but er when I got skipper's job I had to pack it up, it didn't look very nice skipper working on fishing boats, unloading fishing boats

CM: *ah bit of shame though if you enjoyed it?*

TO: I didn't like, I enjoyed it oh used to like me loading lorries cos lorries are that high and I was the biggish fellow then, you know like hard working like but I always liked to work, I like a pint, you like a pint you've got to work

CM: *out of the two, your fishing life and then you had your Sellafield life on boat I know you enjoyed the fishing one, would you say if you could have done without the dangers and the accidents happening on fishing boats you would have preferred to have stopped fishing rather than being on the Sellafield boat or not?*

TO: well, got on my nerves a bit did that fishing with them accidents and all that and it was always a challenge to get out, often left home and went to Grimsby to fish but I didn't make a lot of money and I was away from home all the time so that wasn't so good like, Sellafield once I got used to it, once I got on a big wage, a decent wage I would say not a big wage but a decent wage it was alright, I had good bosses and I liked the crew was alright

CM: *who were your bosses at?*

TO: well the main man that was there when I first went was fellow called Harry Longley, he was a really nice fellow and er then I had another fellow but he didn't like the boat very much so he wasn't a lot of help

CM: *so did Harry go out on the boat or was he just a boss from inside the factory?*

TO: very rare they come down so I once said to Harry Longley I said to him 'you never come near that boat' I says 'it could be falling to bits for all you know' 'oh no' he says 'I go down nearly every weekend and I have a little look at it' [laughter] he lived at Seascale

CM: *ah right*

TO: he says 'oh no I go down every week, I have a little look at it, it looks alright to me'

CM: *did you ever have to take visitors out on it or anything?*

TO: no, the other bosses used to come out but Harry Longley never come out

CM: *ah*

TO: but he used to come to Isle of Man, used to go to Isle of Man every year on slip so that was like a little holiday, you were there about twelve days and he used to always come over to look, to make sure jobs were getting done right and all that, he was just a little couple of days out for him but otherwise er they never bothered us like, great

CM: *so every year you took it over to Isle of Man*

TO: yea

CM: *for maintenance and things like that?*

TO: every year aye, you used to go over in September first and then we went over in May

CM: *and did you have to do some work while you were there on it or did you just have to basically be there?*

TO: no, no, they did it all themselves, we just, crew went, we painted the inside of the boat and shipyard looked after the rest and also mechanical jobs they did all that, boat was in good order like

CM: *aye well you'd expect it to be*

TO: yea, yea it was a smashing little boat

CM: *so what happened to that boat?*

TO: oh well when I left this other fellow got job, he only had it about five year and he decided to pack it up so they sold him it, but he didn't have to put any money down, he said they sold it to him for £40,000 but he got a contract for to still work for Sellafield like, contract,

CM: *aye*

TO: so they took £5,000 a year out of that contract for five year and that paid for the boat

CM: *he got a good deal out of it didn't he?*

TO: so aye, he come out, sold it afterwards for about £60,000 and then he got a fishing licence, he sold that, aye he got about £100,000 for it altogether, it was handy enough that like, yea it was alright, good luck to him

CM: *yea you make your own*

TO: well I finished when I was sixty five but I went back on again til I was seventy five, part time cos there was always one mission or one sommat else

CM: *what just crewing?*

TO: aye, seventy five when I finished, just about two or three days a week sommat, it was alright for pocket money, it passed me time, every time I went to Sellafield, they still went to Isle of Man to paint up, I always went with them so that was alright

CM: *your annual holidays?*

TO: aye, aye, I enjoyed that

CM: *so you'll have met a lot of, a lot of good friends knocking around the harbour?*

TO: aye, oh there's loads, it was great working on the harbour in them days, you know get out in your boat and have a cup of coffee or owt at all, there's none of that now, think there's only two professional boats really, rest are just part timers, only two professional boats and they're not big boats and they just catch prawns, no, there's nothing in the fishing business now, used to go out one some days and catch loads and loads of small plaice but you don't catch them now, there's no small plaice hardly, it's just these prawns

CM: *there was a lot of people running boats round Whitehaven weren't there, even people who were working at Sellafeld or Marchon, in the pits, lot of people like Geoff Parker and I know Tom your mate went away on boats quite a bit didn't he?*

TO: aye, oh well a lot of them went to Marchon lads off fishing boats, they got fed up of fishing, I loved fishing but lots of them they just went to make money and if they didn't make it they just left and went somewhere else, but Sellafeld wages for anybody wasn't that big them days when I joined, they went up since like you said, good money there now everybody gets good money now but in them days you didn't get good money, some monitors were the best paid job at Sellafeld them days, we had a monitor on board he earned twice as much as I did a year

CM: *and you were skipper*

TO: made twice as much as me cos he got paid overtime, we didn't get paid overtime, sometimes we were diving on a Saturday and a Sunday well we didn't get paid extra

CM: *I hope he was sea sick*

TO: where as he got overtime I'll tell you, aye he made a lot of money him

CM: *and you had to have a monitor on board though didn't you?*

TO: aye he was there all the time, used to send one down when you were going out and all that but they didn't work

CM: *did you ever get like contamination on your boat with what you were pulling in?*

TO: no, not really, we never casting out, we never had much showing, even when we were diving we took the old pipes, we moved a pipe down there once at Sellafield, I found out afterwards it cost about £660,000 to remove that one pipe and then they got big firms in for to take t'other pipe, it took them two year and it cost £22 million

CM: *unbelievable isn't it?*

TO: and we had already did one pipe for £600 [coughs] aye

CM: *you wonder who made £600 don't you?*

TO: Seascan it took us two year like

CM: *so you didn't come across any fish with two heads or?*

TO: no, we didn't get, no we couldn't even get bloody overtime money, we got it in finish but that was only single time as well Saturday and Sunday, just got single time whereas these divers they were rolling big money them

CM: *they made some money*

TO: oh they didn't half, I mean Saturday's they were away sharp four o'clock but they still got paid to eight o'clock, oh they looked after them, didn't matter what time they got finished but they always got booked til eight o'clock at night, aye, they made really good money

CM: *they did indeed, well thank you Tom, I've enjoyed, hope it's been alright for you*

TO: well I hope I haven't delusioned you in any way

CM: *it's been, it's been wonderful, I appreciate that, thank you very much*

END