

Extracts for Elphinstone Kist Website

Categories/Category : work: war : folk history – all three

Andrew Gove Cargill of Gourdon, born 1921, Skipper of the *Reaper*, talks about Gourdon harbour in the old days – late 1920s/30s and about types of fishing, fishing off Stonehaven and fishing at different seasons.

1. Early memories – boats and boat building

I gaed ti the sea wi mi father but I remember a gid bit farer back than that. There wis a fleet o very near thirty boats and the system was upti bringing oot flocks ¹ and they used ti ging ti Aiberdeen and bide aboard the boats for a week and come hame. (*Govie goes on to talk about boats in his family, in particular the Rely*). In 1925 or 26 the family boat wis left but my father took it ti the sea and then in 1932 he bocht it I mind them getting it. ((*Govie then mentions the Gourdon boat builder in connection with another Gourdon boat the Vivid*). She wis built here. She wis built wi Jeems Mowatt. I dinna ken fin Jeems stopped building. The shipyaird wis at the fit o Mowatt's lane in afore Railway Cottage and he used to haul them across the road and doon Jeems' Slough and pit them in. I mind o the shed being there – it was jist an auld ramshackle at that time but I mind o it. He built the *Rely* and twa three ither boats The *Rely* wis a Fifie. She wis decked. The *Rely* was amang he first ti pit in an engine – 1912, a 25 horse-power Kelvin paraffin engine an it wis the mill engineers that installed it. ²

Gourdon Harbour - fishing seasons – the start of seine net fishing



Govie on the family boat, the “Rely” ME 44, approaching the harbour - Govie sitting to foreside of mast, crew member, possibly Willie Dorward at wheelhouse.

(Govie confirmed that there were thirty boats in Gourdon Harbour in his youth)

They lay in three tiers, roughly, roughly three tiers across the herber and the middle tier, you could walk fae ae pier ti the ither roughly. The *May Queen*, ³ and the *Rely* and the *Lizbeth (Elizabeth)*, - they were the tap tier – there's maybe been six or seven at that – I jist forget foo mony.

(Govie's father had gone to the herring fishing at Scarborough but the herring fishing was over by the time Govie was a youngster).

Well, now, as I gather, the main fishing along the east coast was the herring, aa along the coast and the herring boats here, ye see, were a bittie bigger and they were crewed six or seven men to thir crew and

they carried sae mony nits per man and I dinna ken whether it was regulated. That was the main fishing and fin they were at the herring which started in Merch and April up north and

¹ Flounders/flat fish – vey tasty!

² The flax mill was Gourdon's other main employer, after fishing.

³ The *May Queen* was the interviewer's grandfather's boat (Adam Craig)

they followed it aa the wye and at that time that was the main fishing and so the line fishing was jist the littler boaties jist baiting bitties o line and gaein. The women were baiting the long lines at that time and the main catch was haddock, whiting, codlings, jist the same thing. There wis shell fishing. Ye see that wis a seasonal thing too. That wis the summer time. Efter Merch when the fish spawned, and the inshore fishing sort o fell awa, twa/three gaed ti the creels, twa/three gaed ti the lines and then about the late 20s, they first started – they gaed ti the flukes – first – and the Danish seine nit came in, the haddock nit. Now that had only started aboot – here onywye – aboot the late 20s, early 30s. I can remember in 1934/35, my uncle coming up fae the herber and shoutin up the stair, “Willie Cargill ⁴ come err!”. He says, “Gae wa doon the pier and see fit they’re doh- in.” And this wis Davity Andrew and Joe Craig wi the *Trustful*, wi a twa-cylinder engine and a haddock nit and they gaed oot and they were in the herber filling boxes and they were up ti thir waists, wi sma fishies. And Geordie Mill sed then, he says, “They’re startin smething noo at they’ll nae feeish”. Ye see the results o it. (*Govie is referring to the later demise of inshore fishing and seine netting and indeed to the decline of the whole fishing industry in general and in particular the devastating effects on small villages like Gourdon*).

2. The fishing seasons

Ye could very near pit fishing doon as a seasonal thing and we’ll start, say, fae January. Noo, in the end o December, beginning o January, the haddocks come inbye ti spawn and they come inti sand and gaen wi the lines, ye jist hid ti come oot o the herber, shoot and ye come in – 10 – 12 – 20 boxes but that wis only for mebbe a fortnight or three weeks and they started ti move awa and then efter the Nor West breezes come and cleared the water, February and Merch, that wis the codlin fishin feenished an aa Finever the water cleared, baitin wisna muckle yoose. So ye hid ... near ivery year fae the time I wis at the skeul up until 38, 1938/39, I used to pack up the lines at the end o Merch and ye wis aff the sea aa April and ye started again in Maie. That wis fin the next roond o haddock come on the go and that wis the system and at this time wis April 39, so I wis aichteen on the 11th and mi brither-in-law, Willie Dorrit (Dorward) cam doon the herber on the 12th and said “Fit aboot joinin the Reserves?” ⁵ But I sed, “Willie, I’m jist new aichteen” but wi saw fit wis comin. Ye see ye kent fine ye wis gaen ti be called up.

Fishing out of Stonehaven ⁶ with the *May Queen*

The allure o fishing oot o Stoney was deep water, deep water. Ye could git oot and in mair or less ony time. And there wis mair buddem for floatin, saft buddem. We werna livin aboard the *May Queen*. The ither boats wir. Bobby Stewart, Robert Gowans and his brither, Jimmy. There wis three o them bidin aboard. There wis three o us – yer grandfather and me and we had a room fae a Mrs Mill doon at the herber. And we’d come ashore ivery day and wi slept in this room – jist shaak doons, of coorse but wi wis up at three o’clock i’ the morning till three o’clock i’ the aifternoon, ye see. Ging hame and wash yer face, hae something ti eat, seek sixpence ti ging ti the picters. Because ye hid ti get, borrow fae the Skipper. Ye didna cairry bawbees i’thae days.

3. A Note on line fishing at Gourdon

⁴ Willie Cargill was Govie’s father

⁵ The Royal Naval Reserves was the traditional service for Gourdon fishermen

⁶ Stonehaven, twelve miles north from Gourdon, unlike Gourdon was not a tidal harbour : boats could get out of the harbour to fish at any time

Line fishing was labour-intensive for fisherman and fisherman's wife who had to shell enough mussels first thing in the morning to enable her to bait a long line with twelve hundred hooks, often at least two mussels per hook, into a long, oblong/oval - shaped basket, called a "scull" where the baited hooks were placed in neat rows from the middle of the scull upwards while the line itself was coiled into smaller, round woven baskets, while her man had to go to sea to shoot the line off the stern of the boat, haul it in and unhook the fish, then come ashore to land the catch, unravel ("redd") the twisted, tangled line, into two large woven baskets, replace any missing hooks and tippins (the length of thinner twine, later nylon, originally horse hair which attached each hook which had been "beaten on" at regular intervals to the main line, measured in "hunks"), ready for his wife to bait next day, as well as take the line she had baited that day and "redd" it "back" ("redding the back) to the start, ready for shooting the next day. Redding back moved the newly coiled line after it had been baited from one end of the scull to the other, ready to be shot over a funnel-shaped cylinder at sea, allowing the line to run out smoothly and fish. "Funnel bunches" would occur from time to time, disturbing the smooth flow of the line. Sometimes if the line was badly and unevenly baited, the line would not flow smoothly but become trapped around the funnel, creating a snarl, requiring clearing, at sea and untangling and repairing on shore. **Govie commented,**



Govie seated redding the line, assisted by Jake Freeman.

"If there wis funnel bunches – somebody caused it ...haulin the heuk oot." Each fisherman of the crew would have a pair of lines and sculls and several baskets. In the early 50s lines might also have to be "barked", immersed in a solution of "bark" (called "cutch" from the bark of Malayan trees) to treat and preserve the hemp lines prior to first use. Barking was not required after the advent of "nylon" lines. ⁷ New line might also require to be stretched out for its full length along the braes prior to use. ⁸ Before the advent of various strong nylon products, horse hair had been used for the "snoods", the lengths

attaching the hooks to the main line. Strands of horse hair were spun into a single strong cord by suspending a "tippin steen" with the horse hair attached and allowing the stone which had been weighted appropriately to spin, twisting the hair into a single cord. **Govie Cargill has further details on the number of hanks required to make up a full line** – the sma/long lines as opposed to the greitlins which had fewer hooks, maybe five hundred and were baited at sea by the fishermen themselves. **According to Govie the tippin steen could be home-made, for example from a cocoa tin "filled wi lead, wi a brass nail bent ower the tap. Cleekit it in and then ye span it till ye jist felt the twist comin in. To feenish up they (the hooks) were about thirty-two inches apart but they were closer than that ti start wi.**

4. Women and line fishing – wages for women baiters proposed

Govie describes fishing with and skippering the *Reaper*

⁷ Lines for barking were coiled onto a "clove" stick for immersing in a boiler containing bark solution, then hung up to drip dry

⁸ The Interviewer (Celia Craig, 63) remembers running along the braes as a child, above the shore to the north of Gourdon, called the quarries, stretching out her father's new lines (Alexander Craig).

I likit being a skipper. The *Reaper* wis 42 fit, wi a twa-cylinder diesel engine. And we still gaed ti the lines and we still gaed ti the creels and so on. But I didna care an affa lot for the creels aither.⁹ It wis ti me affa scuttery wye a dohin. But we made a good enough living aff ae it – aye sometimes, some summers. But we aye managed ti survive. I likit the lines. That wis my favourite thing.



Govie and crew at sea on the Rely. Govie at stem/bows, Willie Dorward in hold, Willie Lownie, at wheelhouse

(Govie goes on to discourse on the role of women and families in line fishing, explaining that it was really only economically viable if whole families became involved in the mussel shelling and baiting, rather than a fisherman having to find and pay out for a sheller and baiter. Women who married fishermen realised that they were likely to have to shell mussels and bait lines : it was taken as a matter of course.

Govie continues :

Aye, in a sense it was a work o art, baitin a line – to see the mussels and the heuks tippin oot, and say that’ll

ging over the side wi nae a hitch. Very few funnel bunches.

Govie then advocates as ideally desirable the paying of women for this work, something that was never done in Gourdon, or perhaps anywhere in line fishing where the women in the family simply worked for the good of all. Of course if a fisherman had had to find a non-family baiter and sheller, then she received payment.

The only thing they did wrang about it - and this is anither side to the thing – the only thing they did wrang about it and I’m afraid the accountants didna gie ye very muckle insicht, but they shoulda – peyed / gien the wife a wage and peyed the stamp but they widna. If ye speired that, they widna say, “Aye, this is the thing to doh”. Wi the result that a thae years, Margaret (Govie’s wife) wis workin but she wisna peyin the stamp. They should hae – they should hae gien them (a wage). They should have puttin a stipulated price on it and seyn “that’s that”. Whither it wis the richt price or no, it didna matter a damn but ...because fin they stoppit sheelin, fin they stoppit workin *(Govie leaves the though unfinished but clearly indicates that women had had no payment and would receive no benefits).* Women should hae been waged. Ye see, a mairriet man – he could aye get his lined baited but if ye hid a son-in-law gaen wi ye, if he didna hae a sister that kid bait his line or kidna get a baiter... *Govie lets the though tail off, then continues about a married couple that they got better “wages” than twa wid hae gotten workin in the Mill or twa wid hae gotten workin i’ the fishhoose because on average ye got better wages than them. And therefore it wis justified in that sense but the fact wis it should hae been declared as a wage so’s they could get aa the benefits o the Stamp. Accountants widna pit ye through it.*

⁹ The Gourdon boats went creel fishing for crabs, “partans” and the occasional lobster, at one stage sending their catch via train (before Doctor Beeching closed all the small, branch lines) to Billingsgate, London.

Fishing Grounds – competitive spirit

Govie refers to the standard ground of the Shald Water ¹⁰

The Shald Water wis about 16 miles awa. The Hirst wis about the same – but aff Skateraw ¹¹. The Shald Water wis South East – it’s the Montrose Bank if ye see a chart – that’s the same. But ye see there wis aye the competition and it wis a case o fa hid the best shot the day. There wis gaen ti be half a dizzen mair there the next morning or else ye wid git oot o synchronisation wi the tides, so ye see I preferred rather ti let them ging their ain wye, try and synchronise the tides better, simple as that. It wis very competitive – if I kid tell ye the truth ...But I’m nae gaen ti.

Post War – Grant and Loan

After the War there were few changes at first

Nae changes – no – There culdna be because thir wisna ... naebody could invest in anything, ye see. Ye couldna invest in boats ...they could hardly get crews ti taak the boats ti the sea. But fin I cam back that wis een o the things that really astonished me that maist o the diesels



On the pier - Govie's father, Willie Cargill cutting flukes for creel bait on the right : Govie, lower left and crew making up creel bait - upper left,

wir in jist afore the War. I think Bri –mie hid an Atlantic diesel jist afore the War. I think he wis the first een and then efter the War, Jimmy Criggie and Doh-y (diminutive of Joseph) – they werena lang in pittin aboard diesels. The boats werena that muckle bigger. The *Chrissie Criggie* (Skipper Criggie’s boat) - wel, she wis jist on the 40 fit mark, bigger built. And then, by this time seine nittin wis improving. So that come April, fin the line fishin petered oot, some o them gaed awa ti the seine nit. This wis catchin haddocks, flukes, you name it – the Danish seine nit. And it started aff wi twa coils o rope at the side and then as the power increased and the boats increased, coils and coils till yer speakin aboot six and seven coils. That’s for the latest eens and of course, since then it’s gaen fae seine nittin ti trawlin fir aathing and iverthing.

Efter the War, the Government set up a scheme – Grant and Loan. If you could raise a £1000, ye got a Grant ae a thousand and a loan o twa – so ye could get a new boat. And of course, eftir the seine nit got goin, things wis improving, markets wis grouwin better and aa ither thing. So ti get a boat that wye wis quite aisy in a sense. So eence ye got a start, ye see, things improved but the thing wi Gurden wis, there wisna nae Gurden interest. I think I had the only Grant and Loan.

¹⁰ Shallow Water – the Montrose Bank, 16 miles out.

¹¹ Skateraw, near Portlethen, is some 16 miles north of Gourdon.

Overfishing

In 1953 we were gaen ti the creels i the summertime and the lines i the wintertime. I wis nevir very interested in seine nittin to be quite honest. I didna like the principle ava because o overfishing.

Interviewer ; Ye were aware o that, even at that time?

Govie : Ye didna hae ti be aware ae it. Fin ye gaed, they were shuffling fower times ower the side fit they were bringin ashore. Ye've nae idea – the slaughter. If they were bringin in ten boxes and shuffling aa that – thirty awa, ye can imagine fit the rest were (doing). (*Govie is referring to bigger boats elsewhere and the proportionally larger waste. Gourdon boats were still not very big though bigger than in the past.*)

Interviewer : And this thirty wis udersized?

Govie : They were a killed. Ye see, nae wye can ye run a business. A fermer his ti keep grain and saw'd and let it grow. Ye hiv ti pit in tatties and let it grow. The fishermen wis taakin aathing and nae pittin nithin in.

Interviewer : So you're saying that the seed o this overfishing started back in the 50s as boats became mair powerful and seine netting started scraping up everything/

Govie : Aye ... that's right ...it moved, it moved fae even here wi bringin in thirty and fifty boxes. Maybe five boats bringin in forty boxes, 200 boxes eftir aa the rest o the boats cam in. Well, the rest o the fish hooses couldna handle them but the first they were the size and they were fit for human consumption but they were ...jist gaen awa ti meal factories. The fish mechants here ... ivery morning – that's foo they got the larries. They loaded the larries ivery day and took them for in for fish meal. They got mair fir fish meal than fir their catch.

Interviewer : Terrible. Terrible. So the traditional line fishing was absolutely abandoned?

Govie : It wis the best method o fishing.

Interviewer : Well, ye got beautiful fish. I have never tasted fish like it.

Govie : Ye got very few udersized. That wis aa the Afore the War they used Scottish or Redditch hooks ¹², 19s but they were littler. And before the War ye used to get quite a lot o sma haddocks aff the lines but fae 1950 on, ye got Mustads, 19s fae Norway and they were a bittie bigger. So it wis a bigger bait. Now, whither the bigger bait wis ower big for the little fishies or no ... but ye didna get near the same.

The fishin got better eftir the War cause the North Sea wisna trawled ti the extent, and eftir that, ye see it wisna only the trawlers. The seine nitters started gaen and that took aff.

They'd only the three mile limit for a start. That wis the international limit and then they increased it to six and then, of course, the Cod War came along and Iceland they claimed a hundred. And ye see that's the reason , I would say that's the reason, they hiv a viable fishin – we hinna noo. (Then) the Klondykers cam across - the factory ships and they hid twa/three

¹² Name of the hook manufacturer

trawlers working wi them. Well, ye see, the trawlers did the same. And then ---fae the seine nitters ...they got that sort o size ..and increased the power and increased fishing range, increased thir gear till they were very near fae tap ti buddom and nothing cud escape. Noo the fishers can blame onybody they like but... (*Govie clearly indicates that the fishers have only themselves to blame for the decline of their industry*).

I dinna think they'll ever come back. The Canadians wi the Newfoundland Bank and roond the coast, they banned cod fishing for umpteen years until the stock cam back and till it's workable now but ye see, they still hiv the same problem wi trawlers drawin up and doon – so again that canna come back ti fit it wis.

Aye, gae-in ti the sea, to be honest, I enjoyed it. It wis competitive. Ye tried ti keep things on a level keel and fit hiv ye. And ye see eftir the 60s, 70s, there wis nae young lads started. And actually the writing wis on the waa then because catches were getting less aff the lines, aff the seine nit – we wis getting less – and so that it jist gradually deid oot and it wisna worth for here; it wisna worth because if ye wantit ti get a boat, ye hid ti get a big een and join the big boys and then it wis awa fae hame. Ye micht as weel ging awa ti the sailin or join the Navy or done ony ither thing.¹³

Village life

Govie in the full interview goes on to give details of the village Lifeboat and Coastguard Service, recounting the move from man-haulin and sailin lifeboats to motor boat and tractor launched lifeboats. Both interviewer (63) and Govie (85) recall haulin the lifeboat through the toon. Everyone including children responded to the call, ran to the lifeboat shed and got hold of the rope along with the lifeboat men and other men and helped to haul it through the village to be launched, usually just for a practice rather than an emergency call-out.

Govie also described in some detail the “famous” Gourdon School Concerts with their Cantatas such as *The Midshipmite*.

It wis an annual event and he (the Headmaster, Mr Johnstone) started (it). Fin the een ye wis dohin had feenished its run and then ye mebbe hid holidays in atween and then the next ye gaed back, ye got the books. And they were near aa three act plays, so ye started at the front and ye aa sang the chorus : ye aa sang the duets ; ye aa sang the solos, with the result that aabuddy, by the time they pickit the thing, aabuddy kent the pairts. They didna ken the words but they kent aa the sangs. Then eftir the summer holidays, ye gaed back ti rehearse this, the play and then they pickit the Principles and ye gaed through ti the different rooms wi the teachers and they put ye through yer paces and ye hid ti earn them and ye hid ti be book-perfect, I'm telling ye. There wis no nonsense thunder (There/under). And then ye hid the practices. And ye'll mind the middle room, the Maister's up here, there wis twa doors, een at the front and een at the back. That wis the anteroom. That wis far the off-stage crowd wis and they used ti come in and aathing hid ti dovetail. Ah well, that wis about that. The local

¹³ Govie revealed another interesting fishing fact in that fishing was restricted to daylight hours for the duration of the War. For Gourdon boats this meant lying out in the bay or in the harbour till daylight came in and Harbour Master hauled up the flag. They were not allowed to sail in the dark, obviously because of showing lights.

orchestra – I think it must hae been Willie Douglas ¹⁴ and Henry Craig and Davidson, the shoemakkar at Bervie ... and he played the bass fiddle and een o the pinters,, een o the Clarkies played the fiddle and Willie Douglas played the fiddle. Onywe fin we wis rehearsing i the skeul, they brocht the cookin tables through and they set them on the tap o the desks and the band got up there ... that gied ye the floor and the twa doors, ye see. So ye cam in and ye rehearsed the First Act and the the next Act and sang the choruses. Mr Davidson wis standin on the edge, aside a winda and they were inset, ye see. He steppit aff and he .. the bass fiddle gaed ... the bass fiddle gaed through the winda Bit then fin aathing wis gone, ye gaed ower and ower and ower't. Ivery day – half oor i the morning, an oor, Tuesdays and Thursdays – fae three till fower and this wis fit wis goin on. Plus ye hid a prize-givin concert ti get up and ye hi a concert for Christmas – aa hid ti be gotten up.

It wis three days, three nichts

And then ye cam, ye hi ti ging doon ¹⁵ - the week o the concert there wis nae skeul. Ye started on Monday. It wis Wednesday, Thursday, Fray-day, ye see. So ye started on Monday and ye gaed doon fae the skeul, doon ti the Hall and ye did the First Act or maybe twa Acts and then the next day ye wid doh the Third Act. Tuesday ye wid ging aa through it and then cam Widenstay noo, this is the deal, the end, started on Widenstay nicht and Hall used ti be packit a Widenstay, the opening nicht, but wisna sae fuhl on the Thursday. But Fray-day again it wis packit because the Mill wis aff and aa ither buddy wis at hame – and on Fray-day hey hid a dance eftir't. So that wis it and honest, the waas yohsed ti be runnin a sweat. I fair enjoyed it ti be quite honest.

World War II

Govie recounts some of his War experiences, beginning with joining up. He had previously explained how he and his brother-in-law went to Montrose to join the Royal Naval reserves when Govie had newly turned 18 in 1939.



Govie and Bobby Criggie at work unloading their catch at the harbour

At that time there wis a Bill gaen through Parliament about the militia and they werena sure fit the age wis gaen ti be, whither it wis gaen ti be 18 or 20, ye see. So aa them that wis atween aichteen and twenty to safeguard whither they wis gaen to wear a kilt or no, decided to join the Navy. ¹⁶ And that's why quite big draft gaed inat that time. And then that wis the start. I did my six weeks in Portsmouth, come hame in Maie/June and fin I cam hame, my brither, John, he jist come doon for a fortnicht afore

¹⁴ Willie Douglas was a talented fiddler who organised and trained two village bands, a silver band and a brass band. He taught violin to local lads too, including, for one term only, my father, Alexander Craig who went on to become a fair fiddler himself.

¹⁵ The village Hall was doon in the village ; the school was further up the brae.

¹⁶ The object was to avoid being called up/drafted in the Army, the Navy being preferred by men with such strong links to the sea.

that and that wis him joined. There wis a crowd o them – six o them joined at that time aathegither and that wis fan they were gien up for the War and then, of course, that wis that. Come hame and then second o September I wis called up. The day afore/ the day War wis declared, we were sitting on the Union Jack Club steps, ootside the Union Jack Club (in London) fin War wis declared. And the first air raid gaed aff and they jist used the Underground tunnels at the stations far the trains were – they jist used them as air raid shelters – and wi gaed in and this wis a bit o road that gid in ablow the railwye and of course, there wis a great lot o taxis but their engines wis still runnin, so if wi hid been there for very lang, we'd aa hae been gassed! But it didna lest nae time and then wi gid doon to Portsmouth.

(When asked about his feelings on war being declared and being involved in the first air raid, Govie responded as follows)



Well, ye saw fit wis comin, ye see : ye kent fir wis comin. Ye didna ken foo lang it wis gaen a lest, pit it that wye, but ye saw fit wis comin – and ye jist – well, ye'd volunteered, so ye'd nae option. Ye jis hid ti ging. So then, by the New Year, 39, I wis oot in India. We crossed India in a train – that wis anither first – Bombay to Calcutta. We joined the ship in Calcutta – the HMS *Ranpura*. She wis a P and O steamship. There wis three, the

Ranpura, the Rawalpindi and the Ranchee. They were built in Trieste. And the *Ranpura* wis the only een ti survive. The ither twa wis baith sunk. The *Rawalpindi* that wis far Eddie Bye (Eddie McBay) fae Johnshaven wis taen prisoner early on i the War - and so I wis there for twa and a half year. And I wis oot in Mombassa and I got a draft ti the *Mastiff* which was a whaler – and I did very near three year aboard her, gaen roon the Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles.