

## **George Leiper (21/9/06) Memories of Fishing in Stonehaven and of World War2**

**Transcription** (Brief interjections/questions in italics: some murmurs of agreement/encouragement omitted: some unclear words italicised)

It was agreed that the interview would be conducted in mainly Scots, the Scots spoken in Stonehaven where George comes from and in Gourdon where the interviewer grew up. However, there is more of a mixture of Scottish English/Scots in this Interview than in the Andrew Gove Cargill Interview

**This is an interview with Mr George Leiper of Stonehaven about his early fishing memories from boyhood through to adulthood – on 21 September 2006.**

Celia: George, can you tell me your full name and when you were born?

George: George Knowles Leiper , born 27 March, 1923

Celia; Which makes you ...?

George; 83

Celia: 83 years old and what about your family – was that a traditional Stonehaven family? Did you always come from this area? And were your father and them involved in fishing?

George: My grandfather came oot o Findon. My father was born here, of coorse.

Celia; Did he go to the sea?

George: Aye, aye he went ti the herrin.

Celia: Can you tell me a bit about the herrin? Do you remember personally anything about the herrin or wis it jist what yer father told ye?

George: Jist fit mi father's telt me.

Celia: Mmhm. Fit did he tell ye? Some o the things he telt ye?

George: Ah, jist about when he went ti the herrin fishin?

Celia: Fan did he ging?

George: Aff here like, aye but I think he went to Shetland and Scarborough and that.

Celia: And the herrin wis plentiful at that time? *Aye.*

Celia: Did ye have a lot o brothers and sisters?

George: Two brothers and a sister and I'm the survivor. I'm oldest

Celia: You're the oldest.

George: Well, my sister would be older than me but she died afore I was born. *Really?* My brither, he was a chief engineer in the Merchant Navy. He died in Australia. My younger brother, he died o' blood poisoning afore I was called up – 1942.

Celia: Really. That was kinda sad. You lost yer sister and then you lost – *my youngest brither*. Yer youngest brother. How old was he when he...?

George: He was only nine, or ten, he would have been. *That's sad, mmm, that's quite sad.*

Celia: When you were a boy, George, growing up around Stonehaven, fit did Stonehaven look like as a fishing town? A fishing village? Were there a lot of boats in the harbour? Was there a lot of activity?

George: Aye, there was a lot o' boats then.

Celia: Could you describe what the harbour looked like?

George: Well, eh, forty feet down like at that time. Maist o' them gaen ti the lines.

Celia: The women were baitin the lines?

George: The women were baitin the lines. Mussels fae Montrose.

Celia: Was it like the line fishing further down the coast? How many hooks? Twelve hundred at Gourdon.

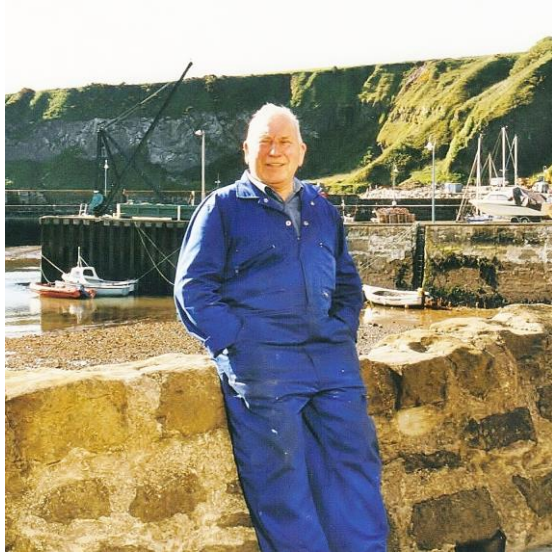
George: Aye, we'd similar here.

Celia: And did your father go ti the sea at that time?

George: My father startit gaen ti the sea – he startit gaen ti the herrin. And then he took a job ashore – he was at the gas work. And then he was called up, or joined up for the First War. And he came back – he didna start gaen ti the sea again till late on. 1920. He startit a fish curing business – ti start wi – *fin he came back fae the First World War?* – Aye – and then the Depression ganged up

Celia: Fish curing, right – that's interesting. Let's just pause there. Okay, now you were telling me about things that happened before you were born. When you were a boy, we were startin ti speak about what the harbour was like and what your memories were. Did you ever play down at the herber? Did you ...

George: Nevir awa fae the herber



**George in mid life at Stonehaven Harbour**

Celia: Never awa fae the herber – so what would ye hiv done at the herber Then? So there ye are, doon at the herber nearly every day?

George's wife (Madge): Catchin crabbies and ...

George: Just pleiterin in the herber

Celia: Wis there a large number o boats in the herber?

George: Oh aye, a lot o boats. *How many? Twenty?* Oh aye, there wid hae been that onywye.

Celia: Now which bit o the herber are we speakin about –are we speakin about the Inner Herber , the Outer Herber? Fit wis it like?

George: Well, the Inner Herber wis far aa the boats were. *Where the yachts are now?* Aye.

Celia: So yer twenty or more boats wid hae been in there? *Aye.* And then there wis the outer bit?

George: Ah well, they only gid ti the ootside herber fin the tide wis wrang. Fin it wis low water in the morning, they tided the boats ootside.

Celia: That wis the benefit o Stoney herber, wisn't it? It wisna affected by the tides?

George. No, ye kid aye get oot. *Yes, whereas Gurden wis a tidal herber<sup>1</sup>* That's right.

Celia: Yes, okay. And ye said that there wis line fishing at that time and the women were baitin the lines? The main catch wid hiv been...?

Madge: Lines – it wis codlins, wisn't it?

George: Codlins - haddocks

Celia: Wis there any other kind o fishing beginning ti come in – eh net fishing, eh creels?

George: Well, afore the War the seine net come on. And aabody, we aa startit ti that.

Celia: Wis that something that wis difficult ti afford? The seine net?

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<sup>1</sup> See Interview with Andrew Cargill. Gurden is Gourdon, 12 miles down the coast. Stoney is Stonehaven.

George: I suppose, aye and the rope wid hae been the dearest thing. My father made his ain nits. *He wis able to weave his ain nets?* Aye, he wis good wi the wyvin. But then we hid a net factory here. *Yes.* Ye kid ging up and buy a sheet o net.

Celia: And did a lot o folk buy their nets fae the net factory?

George: Oh aye, it wis busy maakin herrin nets.

Celia: And then did it mak seine nets later on, the Danish seine net?

George: Later on – aye – but nae till eftir the Second World War. It wis aa herrin nets afore that.

Celia: When did you first start goin ti the sea?

George: On mi own – jist afore I wis called up.

Celia: Wis that 1938?

George: No, no, no,no! It wis 1941 afore I startit on my own.

Celia: 1941 – so by that time you were 18. So what did ye do when ye left the school then?

George: Well, I wis a a message boy for twa year and then I got a job doon the breakwater – 1939 – and we wis workin on the Sunday and stoppit at 11 o' clock and came up and heard war declared! *Laughs.*<sup>2</sup>



**George in uniform**

Celia: Were you called up right away? *No.* When were ye called up - 41 did ye say? *42.* 42 – right – that's – and off ye went ti where ti do yer War ... service?

George: Butlins Holiday Camp – Skegness. *Ye were being trained there?* Aye. *What kind o trainin?* Aye, jist five weeks there – rifle drill and aa that and then I went ti an Engineering School at Wetherby, beside the race course. And fae there ti Chatham. And then I went aboard the *Whimbrel*, at Glesga, a new ship and that wis my only ship.

Celia: Wis that ship a British ship, a British made ship, British built?

George: Built wi Yarrows i Glesga.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> George later told me, during a phone call, that they were working, cementing at the breakwater and knowing that Neville Chamberlain, the Prime Minister was going to address the nation, they stopped, came up from the harbour to listen to the broadcast, then returned to complete the job in hand. George was only 16 ½ at the time.

<sup>3</sup> As George explained later, *The Whimbrel* was a sloop of the Black Swan Class, all named for birds, a whimbrel being an Artic bird rather like a curlew. Other ships of that Class included the *Starling*, *Wild Goose* and *Chaunticlear*.

Celia: And you said ti me before that she wis a sloop. Have ye any idea o what the dimensions of a sloop are? Wid it be bigger, smaller than...?

George: Three hunder feet lang, and I dinna mind – aboot forty feet wide

Celia: So it wis quite nippy?

George: Twenty odd knots we kid dae.

Celia: Once ye were on *The Whimbrel*, was it, *Whimbrel*, once yer were on *The Whimbrel*, where about were yer serviced, where were ye stationed, where did ye serve?

George: Wir main port wis Liverpool. It wis North Atlantic. *Yes, it wis the same wi mi father.* Aye – it wis.

Celia: So you were on convoys across the Atlantic?

George: Aye – that and sweepin for submarines. Used to be six o us, wid leave Liverpool and sweep right across ti America and come back, clearing a line o submarines for convoys and then ye wid dae the escort duty an aa.



Celia: Sounds like dangerous work. Wis it?

George: Ye didna ken. Ye didna think nothing about it.

**Sloop of the Black Swan Class, HMS Whimbrel**

Celia: Did ye nae? Wis any ship in the convoy ever in trouble when you were on escort?

George: Nae a lot, no. I wis pretty lucky, I think.

Celia: What aboot leaves? Did ye get back ti Stonehaven?

George: I wis very seldom here. The last twa eer, I wis hame in ... fan wis it now? Been fin the mine went aff in the herber. That wis November 44. I didna see Stoney again till June 46.

Celia: Gosh – and all that time you were in the North Atlantic?

George: No – 44 ti 46, we left and gaed oot ti the Pacific.

Celia: Ah! Tell me aboot fit ye were doing in the Pacific.

George: Chasin submarines. *The same.* Jappies.

Celia: Where about exactly? Ye were off Japan?

George: I wis in Japan fin the Surrender wis signed. <sup>4</sup>

Madge: But ye were in Russia beforehand. Ye wis in Russian convoys as well. *Eh?*  
*Aye.*

Celia: Wis this the Murmansk....

George: I wis up at Murmansk. *That wis the most dangerous convoys around, wasn't it?* Aye. We got up and come doon and never lost a ship. <sup>5</sup> \*\*

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<sup>4</sup> This subject is reprised towards the end of the interview on Side 2.

<sup>5</sup> \*\* **Additional information: I caught up with George some time after this Interview on Saturday 22 October down at the harbour where I discovered George still kept a small boat which had been a ship's lifeboat originally found adrift in Norwegian waters, if I have picked up the details correctly and eventually bought by George who had gone out to sea with it on smaller trips. He had not taken it out this year but continues to check it and to make sure it is free of water after heavy rains and so forth. He is still very agile at nipping up and down the steps leading to where his wee boat is moored.**

However, in addition, George told a story about the Russian convoys and Murmansk which he had not touched on during the interview. George had just received a few days before Saturday 22 October, his Russian Convoys Medal : he had told me this previously over the phone.



On the Saturday he mentioned it to the other Stonehaven men who formed our chatting group down at the harbour, a group which included my second cousin's son, a joiner from Gourdon who was working on the planks of a Stonehaven boat, *The Nadine*. Whilst in Murmansk, George learnt that some British oil tankers had been in Murmansk : the smaller ones had left but the largest one remained. Word reached George's ship asking for someone from Scotland, from between Montrose and Aberdeen. Being from Stonehaven George fitted this bill. When the tanker sailor came aboard George's ship, he discovered that the man was well known to him and from Stonehaven! It emerged that the Russians had not been feeding the tanker men well, possibly they were unable to provide supplies: the crew were hungry. When George's friend saw George's tot of rum, provided with meals, and his dinner (lunch), set out ready for him, he announced that George would be sacrificing both that day to him and ate and drank the lot, leaving George to hunt out some bread and possibly cheese for himself. The men on George's ship were well-supplied. Things were obviously far different in Russia and under the Russians at that time.

#### George's Medals

- 1 Russian Federation Medal in honour of Atlantic Convoy veterans.
- 2 Commemorative Medal from the Russian Federation to mark the Anniversary of the Great Patriotic War 1941 – 1945. Wristwatch from the Russian Military Historical Society to accompany the second medal.

Celia: Really! So ye did North Atlantic, then Russian, then ye were in the Pacific.

George: Aye, I wis at the Sicily Invasion in 43. And then the Normandy Invasion – 44. And wis aa set for the Japanese Invasion in 45. *Laughs.*

Celia: Goodness. So were you aware at all of the bombing of Japan with atomic bombs? Was that something that didna filter through ti ....

George: Aye, we kent about it, aye.

Celia: Did ye? How did ye come ti ...know about it?

George: Well, we wis in the middle o the Pacific fin it happened, aff New Guinea, I think it wis. We wis actually on wir wye ti Australia for a refit. And it wis on an efterneen about twa o' clock, I cam aff watch. We wis sittin hae-in a smoke up on the upper deck. Bonnie day and the ship jist about-turned and oh aabody says "Fit noo?" A lad come doon aff the Bridge and - says, "Fits on the go?" "Oh," he says, "The Japs hiv packed in. We're gaen awa north now." *Laughs.* So we landed in Tokyo Bay on the 2<sup>nd</sup> o September.

Celia: And that wis August, wisn't it that Hiroshima and then Nagasaki were bombed – aboot the 6<sup>th</sup> o' August, or something like that? Beginning of August.

George: Aye, Japs packed in 15<sup>th</sup>. Surrender wis signed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> o September.

Celia: Were you aware o being involved in ken like important, significant events? Did ye think – oh my goodness, this is, this is terrible stuff?

George: No – jist – it wis jist anither day.

Celia: Then ye were demobbed?

George: No, eftir Japan, we come doon ti Hong Kong ti try an ...<sup>6</sup>

Celia: Ye certainly got around.

George: We got around aa richt. *Ye got around.*

Celia: When were ye demobbed then?

George: Eh, July – *July of 46.*

Celia: Straight back ti Stonehaven?

George: Aye, well, cam hame and got three weeks leave and then went back. *Inaudible sentence.*

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<sup>6</sup> Indistinct – but George later mentioned that hey were trying to capture an island where there was a radio station

Celia: Some people say that they formed very good friendships during the War. Did you have any best pals or mates during the War? Anybody ye remember?

George: Well, a lad that I wis wi. Wi went on leave thegither and aathing. He jist died, fit - last year?

Madge: Na, it wis mair - two year ago, I think. *Twa year ago*. But he heard his (her husband, George's) voice fin he wis speakin ti Ulrike - (*Celia - on television*) - he wrote and we got it the followin morning. We went doon there *to see him* - twice been.<sup>7</sup> A holiday wi him

Celia: Where was that again, somewhere in England?

George: Crawley

George's wife: And, far wis the ither - Dorset?

George: Dorchester.

Celia: Dorchester. And this wis an Englishman? Fit wis he?

George: No - he belanged Saltcoats.

Celia: Really! So ye met up wi a Scotsman?

George: No, no, he went doon ti London there as a loon ti play fitba and nevir gaed back ti Saltcoats. *Really!* Gaed inti the Navy and ... - *Tails off*.

Celia: Right. That's interesting. My father had a good chum when he wis in the Navy during the War, Jim Jesson, from Liverpool and they were really good buddies. My father spoke incredibly highly o Jim Jesson.

George: Well, Jim Mclellan wis his name - him and me spent two leaves thegither in Australia. We wis twice doon

Celia: What did you make o this travelling? Ye were basically on a world voyage - North Atlantic, America, Russia, you know, the Pacific, Japan, Hong Kong. Was there any chance at all to enjoy the sights or were ye always conscious o the fact that ye were kinda on a dangerous mission?

George: Well, ye couldna help it. Ye couldna dae nothing about it. That's far ye wis put.

George's wife: Different atmosphere at that time o day an the ages they were. I mean it wis jist teenagers.

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<sup>7</sup> George's wife, Madge joins in at this point to explain how contact was established with George's war time chum through a chance event when George appeared on Ulrike Johnstone's morning weather programme on television to speak to her in Scots. This was heard by George's pal who then contacted them by letter with the barest of addresses which still reached George.



Celia: Aye, they wid jist hae been twenty odd – 1923 ye were born - 43, ye were still jist twenty – twenty- three when ye came oot. Twenty- three wis when my uncle Joe wis killed, the lad that wis killed on *The Beverley*. He wis jist twenty-three when ...Aye – 23. Aye.

Celia: So – yer wartime adventures – did that affect ye much when ye came back or did ye just get straight inti life in Stonehaven?

George: I didna ken fit I wis gaena dae fin I came back. But the day, the nicht before I cam hame fae the Far East, mi father cam inti the boat and broke his ribs.

Celia: Fit wis the name o the boat that yer father fell in?

George: *The Rose* ye ca'd her. *The Rose*. There wis only him and mi uncle. Well, Madge's father wis gaen wi them then.

Celia: Fit wis Madge's father's name?

George: John Watt.

Celia: John Watt. So John Watt's boat?

George: No – *No – whose boat wis it?* Mi father and mi uncle hid the boat.

Celia: Yer father and uncle hid *The Rose*. Right. Okay

George: So – aye – John Watt went awa wi his nephew, Johnny – the two o them gaed awa wi the breadwinner then. So mi uncle wis left alone mair or less. So I nevir got nae leave nor nothing. I'd ti put on the boots and g' awa ti the sea.

Celia: Off ye went ti the sea. Now did you have ti get a line set up or two lines and get them baited or were they already at the net?

George: We didna ging ti the lines. We gid ti the seine nets.

Celia: The seine nets – so ye didna hae to find somebody to bait lines and aa this stuff?

George: No, the only thing I bocht wis twa greitlins.

Celia: Twa greitlins – yes. Di want ti tell us fit a greitlin is. I mean, I do ken but I mean ti jist get the details in from yourself.

George: A cod line and the hooks wis four fathom between them and that made yer hooks – *because they were quite close on the normal line*.

George: Cause ye jist baited them as ye shoot them. Hooked on a herrin or a bit o squid.

Celia: Whereas wi the lang line – ye were baitin them wi ...

George: Aye, the sma lines – they were baited wi mussels

Celia: But this is the fishermen themselves. Would that have been five or six hundred hooks or less?

George: It was only a hundred - on a greitlin.<sup>8</sup> That was four hundred fathom o line.

Celia: So you went to the net. Now what were catches like? What kind o catches were being landed at that time?

George; Well, mainly flukes.

Celia: A lot o them though? Were you getting lots o boxes? Was business booming?

George: It wasn't bad to start with.

Celia: What was a typical catch be? Five boxes? Ten boxes?

George: Something like that. About five.

Celia: Five boxes.

George: Aa different sizes?

*Celia: Landed them on Stonehaven pier? Aye. Fish merchants to buy them? Fish merchants bought them. Stonehaven fish merchants? Aye. Did you remember any names?*

George: George Main. Dan Taylor. That was the two biggest ones.

Madge: Chalmers

George: Well, that was a fish shop - John Chalmers.

Celia: Did any o the Gourdon fish merchants come up to the ..sales?

George: They did eventually, aye. Aye, Moss Waiter, Joe Craig - they were the ones that came mainly like.

Celia: And of course there were fish houses in Stonehaven - to deal with the fish - to cure the fish? Aye.

Celia: Now how long did this continue because I'm aware that Stonehaven declined as a fishing port. When did you ... how long did you go to the sea and it was still a viable business? It was still quite good to go...? How long did you continue like that - 60s, 1960s or 70s or...

George: Well, I retired in 88.

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<sup>8</sup> The terminology refers to the *great line* baited on board the boat by the fishermen themselves, about one hundred hooks widely spaced out on the line with large bait and the *small line* of the same overall length but with 1200 hundred hooks baited with mussels by the wives/women ashore. See Interview with Andrew Gove Cargill for further details of line fishing.

Madge: Didn't the things stop when they started comin fae Aiberdeen – *Aye* – and they were makin fit they ca a ring. One fish merchant wid buy it at a price. There wis nae - and then they broke it up<sup>9</sup> So the fishermen ...

George: So we finished up sellin wir fish in Gurden. *Ye did*. Stoppit sellin them here.

Celia: So because – yer wife was saying – that there was kinda a ring set up whereby it wis a fixed price.

George: Kept the price doon.

Celia: Right - So that meant that you took yer fish ti Gurden?

George: No, well, what happened wis oor salesman took or, the fish doon ti Gurden wi his lorry and sellt them doon there. *Sellt them at Gurden*. **He** sellt them at Gurden. *Right*.

Celia: You any idea when that was happenin, George? Would that hiv been 1950s, 1960s?

George: 1960s

Celia: The 60s. Right. Cause ye see Gurden continued as a fishing place for a good while longer whereas the Stoney boats started to disappear. *Eh?* The Stoney boats started to disappear., did they nae? *Aye*. Fit happened?

George: Jist – well, they thought it wisna viable and that's aa that there wis aboot it.

Celia: Ye werena making enough ti mak a living?

George: Nae a lang time – na.

Celia: Right – and I mean they tried the seine net, went ti the seine net.

George: *Aye*, ..there wis Stoney boats but they were inti bigger eens. Aa 70 fitters then, workin oot o Aiberdeen. *So, trawlin?* *Aye*.

Madge: And they sellt their fish in Aiberdeen.

George: Their fish wis sellt in Aiberdeen. *Yes*. It wis still Stoney boast but they were in Aiberdeen.

Celia: Yes, they were workin ot o Aiberdeen. Wis there ever much shell fishin, creel fishin in Stoney?

George: Oh aye, there was, aye.

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<sup>9</sup> George later explained that one Aberdeen merchant would buy a large number of boxes at the one price and later on the way home all the Aberdeen fish lorries would stop just outside Stonehaven, on the road north to divide out the boxes among the other Aberdeen merchants and transfer them to their lorries. This ring was broken up by the Stonehaven fishermen selling to Gourdon merchants instead.

Celia: There wis - cause there's still one or two boats do creels here, isn't there? Is it Bob Malcolm, Ian Watt, is it?

George: One , two, three, four – Ian Watt, Alex Malcolm, Chris Mennie and Derek Murray – that's the four.

Celia: Are they able to make a living at the creels?

George: They're maakin a livin at it. Aye.

Madge: At this moment they are. *Aye. ( Here Madge, George and Celia all speak together – indecipherably!)*

George: There's nae the crabs now that there used ti be.

Celia: So when did you actually stop fishing?

Madge; Last year. *Laughter*

Celia: Stopped gaen ti the sea then?

George: Ah well, fuhl time fishin - 1988. I wis 65.

Celia.: 1988 – right – 65. Ye went right through ti that time. Wis it aye each share fishing that ye did where there wis a deal? The skipper divided up inti shares? <sup>10</sup>

George; The last 20 year there wis no share. It wis all mine. I wis on my own. *You were on yer own.*

Celia: Tell me the name o yer boats then, the boats ye were in. Ye started on *The Rose*.

George: And then mi father retired and the *Rose* wis sellt. And I bought a sma boatie, *The Sardonyx* *Oh right, that's an unusual name!* And I put it ashore and it wis scrapped. Aye, I hid it aboot five eer, six eer. Put it onti the garden. But I gaed ti the salmon fishing then.

Celia: Where were ye based for salmon fishing?

George: Newtonhill and Cowie <sup>11</sup> And then eftir *The Sardonyx* I bought, well, it wis the *Choice* they caa'd it fae Peterheid, but I caa'd it the *Margaret* eftir mi dothir. The it got sellt efter twa three year and Sandy Greig and me got a boat built. *Where about? The Sapphire* – in Peterheid. *Built in Peterheid.* Aye – 36 fit boat. And of course, I only hid it twa year an he deid. Mi partner died. I couldna get a settlement, so I sellt it. Then I bought the *Progress* – that wis in 1969 and that wis my boat till – till I finished

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<sup>10</sup> The traditional method was for the skipper to meet with his crew members in his house each Saturday morning when the week's money had come through and to divide the total sum into shares – a share for each crew member but usually the skipper got a second share “for the boat”.

<sup>11</sup> Newtonhill, a village some five or six miles from Stonehaven; Cowie, Stonehaven's original fishing village, still very picturesque.

Celia: So was just under 20 years – 69 ti 88? Now what wis that called again?

George: The *Progress*.

Celia: The *Progress*, right, very good. When you look back on yer days in fishing di ye think – Oh that wis hard times? Were conditions in life hard or ... any particular feelings that ye remember at different times about fishing as a livelihood?

George: Oh, they'd been hard at times.

Madge: It made ye wish ye were an auld age pensioner towards the end. *Aye, that ye could retire. Aye and Ian Watt and them, they hiv a hard time now. (Voices merge here – making it indistinct)*

Celia: Just the difficulty o making a living, ye mean?

Madge: Folks says foo lang ..... *rather indistinct here again.*

Celia: Ye didna live through previous times. Yes.

Madge: There'e nae "buroo"<sup>12</sup> or onything for...

George: If you wis on yer own, ye didna get nae unemployment benefit. If there's two on a boat, ye did. *Ye did. Aye, right, I see.* But on yer own, suffer it.



**George at the creels off Stonehaven**

Celia: Do ye have any happy memories from yer time as a fisherman on different boats, or crews or jist, things that might have been happening when, ye know, there wis maybe things going on locally that were jist very pleasant and good?

Madge: Aye , there wis bound ti be

George: Nae – nothing unusual.

Madge: I wis workin and it wis really rough and I said ti him I wis affy good .....And I seys eh, ye could pit up oor wages ..... "God bless them on the land because them at the sea can put oot an anchor"<sup>13</sup> She said but that's nae true. It wis just a joke.

Celia : Ye've seen a lot o changes, more technology comin in , bigger boats, mair equipment, more ...

George: That didna help the fishing neen.

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<sup>12</sup> The "buroo" was unemployment benefit.

<sup>13</sup> The story Madge tells here involved her boss at work, I think although it is not very clear because Madge was sitting further away from the microphone and also spoke quite softly. The punch line comparing land and sea folk was said jokingly.

Celia: No, did ye feel that eh, it wis jist over-fishing that ruined the fishing? What would you describe, say the decline is due to?

George: A lot o't greed. They didna ging for a livin : they wanted to see how much money they could maak.

Celia: So they over-fished. *Over-fished a lot.* But would that have been inshore fishermen like yerself or would that have been trawlers? Or would that have been the Russian klondykers?

George: *Laughs.* A lot o't wis the fish wis teen. For the inshore fishin, the fish wis caught afore they could get ashore.

Celia: I wonder what ye mean there, George?



**George with Stonehaven Harbour and shoreline in background.**

George: Well, ye ken, there wis bits that the boats wis fishing among and they were getting about a hundred boxes a haul and they were only putting about five or six boxes o that doon the hold and the rest wis thrown back inti the sea. *Too small?* Ower sma. But once ye tik a fish ti the surface that's it. So that wis a lot o waste.

Celia: And ye put that doon ti – who would you be blaming for that? *Greed.*

George: They should hae left them.

Celia: And do you think it's completely ruined, the fishing now? Will it ever come back, the stock? Will it get a chance ti replenish?

George: I doubt it. I doubt it'll ever come back The inshore fishin – it's finished. *Definitely?* Aye.

Celia: Does that make you feel a bittie sad or ...

George: It is sad., isn't it? *It is. It is really.*

Celia: What sort o skipper were you when you were skipper o yer own boat? Were ye a hard taskmaster or what? *Oh no..... (A little blurred here)* .Did ye know all the good places ti fish?

George: Some o' them.

Celia: Far are the good places aff Stoney? And how far oot did ye ging?

George: Nevir seine netting outside the three mile.

Celia: And, I mean at Gurden, for example, een o' the good places wis the Montrose Bank.

### **End of Side 1**

### **Side 2**

Celia: Right this is side 2 and we'll continue what we were saying. We were speaking about you at the fishing after ye came back fae the War and inshore fishing and how the fishing and everything had declined and the changes over the years. Is there anything else ye want ti tell me aboot changes that ye've noticed in fishing over the time that you've been involved?

George: Well, jist that things is modernised now compared ti fin I started. Itherwise aathing's jist similar.

Celia: Although ye were sayin that ye didna think that the inshore fishin would ever come back,

George: Don't think so.

Celia: You don't think so. And some o these trawlers that just shovel up everything fae the bottom o the sea, hoover it up, is that a problem still?

George: But then, they'e gaen awa with the feedin an aa. That's the biggest problem. If there's nae feedin, ye'll get nae fish.

Celia: That's right, aye. I see what ye mean, yes.

George: Well, the trawlers fin they ging on the hard boddom, they ging on fit, well, I na ken fit I caa them. A lot o them caas them fit ist, dead man's fingers, ye ken, ruttocks, we caa them. *Yes, ken fit ye mean.* Well, there's a lot o feedin cling ti them. They've been aa trawled aff the hard boddom, so there's nae feedin.

Celia: So fishing's in a desperate situation – *situation* – a desperate condition.

George: An then, one o the biggest problems, I wid say is them fishin for sand eels. That is feedin for fish. It wis feedin for the birds. Now the birds are sufferin and the fishermen are sufferin.

Celia: Yes. So maybe things are comin ti an end?

George: Quite possible.

Celia: Quite possible unless they can stop fishin for a considerable period and let the stocks replenish. Let them grow again.

George: Aye the sand eels is a disaster. Pickin them up. Ye nevir see the kills o gulls, ye ken now, di ye? *No, no.* Well, that wis aa sand eels that they were feedin on

Celia: Aye the gulls are hungry beasts as well.

George: Aye. But then it wis fish that wis underneath the sand eels pushed ont the surface. *I see, aye.* Now there's nothing underneath ti push ont the surface.

Celia: No, exactly, yes, aye. It's quite sad to reflect. But earlier on ye were speaking about yer Wartime experiences on *The Whimbrel*. Is that correct? Aye. And one o the things that ye could perhaps have told me about was yer crossing of the Equator. Could ye describe some of that cause ye've obviously been in different spheres of war and ye had ... When did ye cross the Equator? What was that about?

George; We wis on the way, on wir road ti, aye oot ti the Pacific. And we had to go doon ti the Cocos Islands, is it ye caa it? *Was it?* And nane o us hid – we hid ti cross the Line gaen doon there because when we wis in Colombo, they asked us if we wid divert ti the Cocos Islands ti deliver rum ti a survey ship. They hid run oot o rum. *Oh, I see.* So we took ten gallon drums, a cask o rum aboard for them. So we went doon there and it wis a great thing ti see the Cocos Islands. That's far the *Emden* was sunk in the First War

Celia: Where what was..?

George: *The Emden* – the German battleship. And a lot o the German sailors went ashore there and never went back ti Germany. And they mated up wi the natives and it was great ti see them, the youngsters, aye ken, the young eens there. They were dark-skinned wi European features.

Celia: Yes, that would be kinda unusual ti notice.

George: An fit they wanted – they cam oot ti us, aye in their sma boats like, tryin to trade us knives, ye ken like daggers and big knives made oot o the steel o *The Emden*. *Oh, I see. Goodness.* And ye know what, they didna want money for them. They wanted Navy jerseys. If ye gied them a jersey ye 'd hae gotten a big knife. It wis jerseys they wanted. Nothing else.

Celia: Why did they want jerseys, jist...?

George: We don' know. *Ye don't know.* It wis jerseys they were wantin.

Celia: That's fascinating. What about this Crossing the Line bit, George? What did that involve? When ye actually crossed the Line, did ye have ti ... were ye ducked in water? What happened exactly?

George: Well, we rigged up a tank on the deck, filled it o water and put in Condy's Crystals. That turned the watter reid and there wis a chair in the middle o the thing and there wis lads in there and ye wis thrown in, puttin inti the chair, soaped and shaved an then ducked.

Celia: And ducked! And di ye remember the experience quite clearly? Can ye...?



George: I wis doon the engine room fin they cam for me. There wis lads detailed aff as policemen ti ging and collect ye. Well, they took me oot o the engine room and took me up there. But I took aff mi biler suit first.

Celia: And wis King Neptune there? *Aye*. What was he dressed like a King?

George: *Aye*, I suppose. Rope for hair an aa that. *Trident?* *Aye – he had a trident?* *Aye*, they made aa that. *Gosh*

George: Oh, it wis good. Fin he cam aboard, the – we wis steamin at the time and he cam up. The lad climbed up ower the stem o the boat and walked doon the deck and the Skipper wis wi him. And I didna see this but they said somebody put twa tails o rope across the deck and he said to the Skipper, “What’s that?” He says, “That’s the mainbrace, sir.” He says, “Well, splice it!”

Celia: Splice the mainbrace!

George: *Laughs* We didna get an extra tot o rum though.

Celia: Ye didna – no but ye got a certificate. *Oh aye*. Yes, ye showed me this certificate here, beautifully decorated, Order of the Bath - To All Sailors around the World : *Be it known to all ye landlubbers, loafers, beachcombers, politicians, quislings and others who may be honoured by this presence that George K Leiper has been gathered to our fold and from now and forever should enjoy our Royal Protection and is exempt from further homage – and it’s signed by King Neptune, Neptunis Rex.* That’s really fascinating. Ye said ye were brought up from the Engine Room – so your job on board was to do what?

George: Well, most of the time make water, fresh water – that wis the main job

Celia: How do ye do that?

George: Wi an evaporator.

Celia: Mmhm – just tell us though.

George: Steam coils intil it.

Celia: Did ye use sea water?

George: Sea water

Celia: And by the time ye had processed it, it became pure?

George : Pure, distilled water – nothing in it.

Celia: Right and what is the process? What’s the chemical process? Is it just heat?

George: Steam coils intil a boiler, as ye wid say

Celia: Yes, and that reduces, takes off the salt. *Aye, taks oot the salt.* And yer left wi pure, distilled water.

George: It had ti be pure distilled water because the boilers couldn't use anything else. It wis turbines we had.

Celia: Did ye need – Sorry, George, for interrupting – did ye need a lot? Was this a constant job? Did ye need a lot of distilled water?

George: We needed a lot. Well, we'd ti make water for the crew and make water for the boilers.

Celia: So it was every day you were involved in ...

George: It wis about – I wid say the evaporator run 16 ti 20 oors a day. Ye hi ti stop for mebbe four, mebbe eight oors to clean the coils cause they got encrusted wi salt.

Celia: And this water was perfectly fine for drinking as well as washing clothes and stuff?

George: Use it for everything. *Everything*. It wis horrible ti drink cause it had no taste. *No taste at all*. The only thing was when we made water for the crew, we used let over a little drop o salt ti give it taste. *Yes of course, aye*. But ye couldna put on salt for the boilers cause we hid steam turbines and they didn't like salt.

Celia: No, no, that would create problems. How come you ended up as being a stoker on board? Wis it a chosen job that ye chose to do that? *Aye*. Why did ye want to chose that?

George: Well, I wanted to go inti ... I wasna , I 'd no trade but fin I wis called up, I says well, I wis interested in engines, always been. And I said well, they said ga in as a stoker and then apply for a mechanic's course which I did. And I went and hid an interview, aye, ye ken in Chatham for a mechanic's course and they told me that I would - passed ye . If you get a draft chit as a stoker, come ti us wi it and we'll stop it. I did and I got a draft chit ti *The Whimbrel*, a new ship in Glasgow. We discovered that. And I wis ti be in Glasgow on the 31<sup>st</sup> o December. And I says, "I'm nae gaen for a mechanic. I'm gaen hame ti, gaen up ti Scotland for Hogmanay". And there was one o the lads, that went through the course wi me - ...*indistinct here* I met him two year later and he says, "Fit happened ti you?" *Ah, ye went hame*. I gid hame. He says – I says, "What happened ti you?" He says, "Well, I'm on an invasion billet ... *blurring* ... he wis a petty officer by this time". He says, "I did over a year in Rolls Royce works at Derby, learning aa aboot Rolls Royce engines". I missed oot on that.

Celia: I was going to say, did ye regret goin home for the New Year or did ye never...?

George: Oh, it was iffy.

Celia: Yeah, aye. Ah well. Ye also said something earlier on, George that ye were – em - there for the Surrender of Japan when ye were in Tokyo. Have ye got any further details on that?

George: No, it's – I seen sights there that I didna want to see there. - when they brought oot the prisoners – it wis horrific.

Celia: Was that Japanese had British prisoners?

George: It was British prisoners. And they brought them out on the *Misouri* and - were on aye - fit di ye caa them - aircraft carrier. Some o them were able to stand: some were lyin on camp beds: some were bein held up and they were jist skin and bone. It wis terrible.

Celia: Sad times, eh. Was there a sense of celebration at the same time because Japan had been defeated or what was the feeling?

George: Well, fin, .. we wis winning, and we went round the *Misouri* , an the ships were all tootin "V" on their horns.

Celia: Yes, was *Misouri* one of the lead ships?

George: No, that wis American war ship far the Surrender was signed

Celia: Far the Surrender was signed, on the *Misouri*. Sorry - yes, aye, okay. Was that a really big war ship *Oh aye* - and again were you aware , were you conscious o being involved in a historic moment? The Surrender o Japan

George: I suppose it wid hae been in a wye but ...

Celia: What was life on *The Whimbrel* like in general? Was she a good ship to be with? *Very good*. Mhm. A new ship? *A happy ship*. A happy ship. Good Captain? *Aye*. Who was the Captain?

George: The last one - his name wis Mutch. And he wis a good skipper. He went - aye, fin we wis in Brisbane, he hid ti go doon ti Sydney ti get a medal for ..he wis in charge o - fore he come aboard us, he wis in charge o a mine sweeping flotilla that swept the English Channel before the Invasion.

Celia: I see. Important work.

George: Aye - he wis a great lad.

Celia: But you were happy on the *Whimbrel*? *Oh aye*. Ye got some good mates when ye were there.

George: Some good times.

Celia: Some good times. When you went on shore leave, was there a lot of exciting things to do, films to see, dances to go to?

George: Pubs. *Laughs*. No, we - ye nevir got lang ashore.

Celia: No, what like - a few hours maybe or?

George: Ah well, fin the War finished, ye could get ashore for aa night but afore that ye'd maybe to be back for midnight.

Celia: Yes. Were there serious consequences if ye werena back by midnight?

George: *Laughs*. Fined a day's leave, dealt aff ye.

Celia; Ah ha. Now ye spoke about coming back ti Scotland for Hogmanay. And Stonehaven's been well known ti celebrate Hogmanay. Did that always happen when you were a boy? Eh, Fireballs – special celebrations. *Oh aye*. It did. Wis it as – it hid just been more – a simpler affair at that time or wis it always quite a lot of people performing at the Fireballs?

George: It wis very good. *Pretty good*. Then it stopped during the War, of course. *Was it?* They werena allowed ti – *Show lights* – ti put fire about.

Celia: Of course. Were there any other things done in Stonehaven that were worth mentioning? I mean Gourdon, for example, had a lifeboat and we used to pull the lifeboat through the toon for launching it. I'm not sure, did Stonehaven have a lifeboat at that time?

George: Aye, it left here in - 1933. It wis took oot o service.

Celia: Was it?! That's much earlier than the Gurden lifeboat.

George: Oh aye. Stoney never hid a motor lifeboat. *Oh, I see*. Course, there wisna a lot o fishermen fur it here, gin that time.

Celia: And ye got married after the War? George?

George: 1948. Aye.

Celia: To the lovely Madge. I believe yer wife was in the WRNS. Di ye want ti say anything about that?

George: Well, I never saw her in her uniform. She never saw me in my een, did ye?

Madge: Nae that I ken o.

Celia: Ye didna wear it when ye came home on leave?

Georg: Aye, but she wisna here.

Celia: Oh, she wis away trainin by that time.

Geprge: And she was – she went down ti Chester in 44 and I left Liverpool at the end o Maie 44 jist fin she got doon there. We left there ti ging ti the Invasion o France, ye see.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> George explained the *Whimbrel's* duties in connection with the Invasion of France (till November 44) which were to escort the train ferry, with its cargo of rolling stock out of Portsmouth over to Cherbourg for discharging. They would return to Portsmouth and be allowed ashore till 10p.m., returning on board for the midnight sailing across the Channel to Cherbourg. This allowed valuable rolling stock to be more safely delivered to France. The *Whimbrel* here formed the sole escort ship. George was also involved in the Invasion of Sicily as previously mentioned. Here the *Whimbrel*, leaving the Clyde in June 43 for Sicily was again involved in escort duties, this time for troopships, in July 43.

Celia: The Invasion o France? So you were there at that as well?

George: Wis at Arromanches, aye.

Celia: Were ye? You seem to have been everywhere that wis important at the right time!

George: *Laughs.* Aye.

Celia: What was it about *The Whimbrel* that it was always there – at the most exciting, significant, historic moments?

George: The langest trip trip we hid aboard her wis - in a wye . We left the Clyde in June, end o June, in 43 and went fae there ti Bone in Algiers, fae Bone in Algiers ti Syracuse in Sicily – the Invasion there. *The Invasion of Sicily.* And then back ti – fae there ower ti Tripoli in Libya. Fae there ti Gibraltar and then convoy, escort a convoy – a hundred merchant ships across the South Atlantic ti well, Nantucket Light at New York. We thought we wis gaen in there fir a boiler clean or something. No, no, we wis put doon ti Norfolk in Virginia – *Norfolk, Virginia, that's one that mi father mentioned as well. I see.* Then fin we cum oot o there we gaed fae Norfolk up ti Newfoundland, picked up a convoy fae there, back ti the Clyde. We got back in October and we left in June! *Goodness, aye. Laughs* That wis a lang trip. But it was great in America. There wis nae blackout and they'd sugar on the table. *Laughs.*

Celia: My father always said Americans and Canadians were extremely hospitable, very generous during the War. Did you find the same, that they welcomed ye inti their homes and eh...

George: Well, we wis nevir in neen o their hames like. No, it wis aaright..

Celia: Well, that's been absolutely fascinating, I don't know – em – is there anything else that ye would like to add, either about fishing or life in Stonehaven or about the War? Di ye feel we've covered what ye wanted ti say?

George: Nae that I ken o.

Celia: Anything else at all that ye would want ti add?

George: No, that'll dae.

Celia: No, that'll do

George: That'll dae for a day

Celia: Thank you very much indeed.

**End of Tape 1, Side 2 and end of Interview.**

## **Synopsis of Interview with George Leiper (21/9/06)**

### **Side 1**

- Fishing – George’s father – herring fishing
- Stonehaven harbour – line fishing – mussels – baiting
- The harbour again – line fishing – seine net fishing
- The Stonehaven net factory
- George’s first jobs – called up for War service (World War 2 ) – training at Butlin’s, Skegness
- Serving with *The Whimbrel* - a sloop of the Black Swan Class – Atlantic convoys – mine sweeping
- On the Russian convoy route - Footnote 5 – a story from Russia

- Service in different airts – the Invasion of Sicily – The Normandy Invasion/ Invasion of France - Surrender of Japan – from 1943 – 1945
- Wartime chums - reflections on such significant events – the youth of the sailors involved
- Demobilisation - back to Stonehaven – going to the sea – greit lines – seine net fishing - catches of flukes
- Fish landings and sales – fish merchants – price fixing by “ring” – Sales at Gourdon instead - 1960s
- Stonehaven declines – creel fishing survives today – different boats George skippered – salmon fishing
- Changes – technology – over-fishing – greed – throwing back the small fish

## Side 2

- Recap – the decline of fishing – changes
- Regeneration unlikely – trawling that clears the sea bottom, removing the feeding for birds and fish – the disappearance of sand eels
- Back to the War and *The Whimbrel*- the Cocos islands – the German battle ship, *Emden* from World War 1 – the Equator – Crossing the Line – experience of this event on *The Whimbrel* – George’s Certificate/ Order of the Bath, signed by King Neptune
- George’s job aboard ship – as stoker – making pure water for the ship’s boilers and for the needs of the crew
- George goes home for Hogmanay, rather than train as a mechanic
- The Surrender of Japan – *The Whimbrel* in attendance in Tokyo Bay – surrender signed aboard the American warship *Missouri* - Horrific sights as the British prisoners appear on the *Missouri*
- *Whimbrel*’s skipper – Captain Mutch decorated for commanding a Channel mine sweeping flotilla before the Invasion of France – a happy ship – shore leave
- Back in Stonehaven – Hogmanay – fireballs – the lifeboat – George’s wife, Madge in the WRNS
- More about the War – the longest rip on the *Whimbrel* summed up – different theatres of war
- Finally ...





