

Harris Fishing Heritage Project 2007

Interview with Murdo MacLeod (Murchadh Mòr; MML) and his wife Morag, Scalpay

(Translated from Gaelic)

NB:

...denotes pauses in speech

[...] denotes text which has been edited out

JMD: *This is Jaina MacDonald on the 12th July 2007 in Murdo MacLeod's house in Scalpay. How are you today Murdo?*

MML: O, fine thanks.

[...]

We are going to talk about the fishing. When did you first start fishing?

O, I started fishing when I was a school-boy.

Yes?

Yes.

How old were you when you started?

Och, in earnest...I suppose [I was] eighteen.

And which boat were you on then?

The first one I was on was the *White Rose*. I was on her...on the *White Rose*.

What type of boat was she?

She was a zula.

What is a zula? I don't know much about boats.

The back of them was cut away you see? They are built for the sails. When the back was cut away it was easier for them to turn into the wind or with the wind.

O I see. How many feet did she measure?

36.

Who did she belong to?

An uncle of mine. Big Alasdair MacLeod.

Was the fishing always in your family?

O it was...it was.

Morag: The fishing was in every family here. There was nothing else.

There were thirty boats in that harbour...30.

In your earliest memory?

And there would be five or six [men] in each of those.

That is quite something, isn't it?

Morag: There were seven hundred people here.

Is that right?

Morag: Yes. Seven hundred people. I remember there being twelve shops in the village. Twelve shops. That wasn't so long ago.

And there's only one now isn't there?

Morag: Well, one and the Post Office.

The population has really gone down..

O the population has gone down.

Morag: It is still going down. It won't be long until there won't even be a school or anything else. You were back and fore with the fishing until you went to the War, were you?

Well, I didn't fish much before the War at all. Most of my fishing was after the War.

Morag: You weren't in the War at 18 at all when you were in the *White Rose*.

Well, I was at some sort of fishing somewhere.

Morag: You were on the *White Rose*?

Yes. It was after the War that I went onto the *White Rose*.

Morag: O was it? After the War?

Yes.

Morag: 1945?

1945...47...48.

Is it impolite of me to ask which year you were born?

Morag: O ho ho!

O I have no problem with that! 1922. Twenty-second of May 1922.

Uhu. But when you were wee in school you would have gone out on the boats?

Och, we were never out of them.

No.

No. I would be doing some sort of fishing. Cuddies and saithe.

And most in Scalpay were at the fishing?

Some were sailing too. A fair number were at sea.

Morag: A fair number were sailing.

The fishing didn't pay at times.

Didn't it?

No, no! It was very slack. They would have to go to sea and when they would come home they would get the dole for a while and they would survive on that.

Were your own father and grandfather at the fishing?

O yes.

Morag: Your father was anyway. Was your grandfather?

I don't recall my grandfather fishing.

Morag: He was too old.

He was too old. But my father fished on the *Daffodil*.

Was the Daffodil his own?

There were a few shareholders. Five.

Morag: There were five shareholders then.

Did they work together?

Morag: They worked together.

They had shares?

Morag: Yes.

When you started on the White Rose, do you remember what sort of amount you earned then?

The wages were poor...in this day and age.

But was it good for that time?

Well, we did alright. But if you got a shot of herring then it was phenomenal. You would rarely get a shot though.

What is that now?

A shot – a good shot. Twenty or thirty crans. A cran equals four baskets.

That's a cran – four baskets?

Four baskets – a cran of herring. If you got twenty crans you would be happy. If you got eighty you would be...

Morag: You were fortunate.

Yes.

So you were learning [about fishing] from when you were very young?

O there was nothing here but the fishing at that time.

Morag: And mending nets. There was a net in every corner in every house.

I believe that.

Morag: Yes.

The boys would go away to sea quite early. Some went to sea and they followed that you see.

Morag: I remember Finlay and William...they were always sailing. William – Angus's son – would be away for two years at a time.

Yes – the year he married [...] he was away for two years.

Just after getting married?

Morag: Iain Beag [Wee John] used to tell her that he should have stayed with her two years without leaving at all. How many times had he gone round the world at eighteen? Three times, was it?

Three times.

Morag: O well, if we had asked Finlay last night. Yes, at eighteen years.

Was this a local man from Scalpay?

Yes.

Morag: Yes – a cousin of mine. You don't know any of these boys over there – Iain Gobha's family?

No, I don't think so.

No.

Morag: They are older. They wouldn't have been in school with you.

And when you were on the White Rose, after the war...

Yes.

What would you do on a typical day? When would you get up and what would you do through the day?

Well, everyone had their own nets. Everyone had five or seven or eight nets. They looked after them.

They had to have that themselves?

Yes, and you had to mend them if they were torn or if there was a hole on them or anything like that. That was our work during the winter, mostly. The old men would be mending the nets. They would put cutch on them.

Cutch – what is that now?

Morag: They had big fires....big boilers was it?

Yes, a big tank.

Morag: They would dip the nets into them. I remember that.

What is the English for cutch? [Original interview in Gaelic]

Morag: O I don't know.

Was that for strengthening the nets?

Yes. They wouldn't rot so quickly in the water.

And what stuff was it?

Cutch. Cutch. Well it was stuff they melted in water.

Morag: Hot water.

They dipped the nets in it and it would put a coating on them.

Was this something that was imported [i.e. bought]?

Morag: O yes.

O it was plentiful enough then.

Morag: They used to buy it.

O they used to buy it, yes.

And they would mend the nets and then put that on them?

And it would harden them. They could withstand being in the water. O now, I don't remember the English for cutch.

It doesn't matter.

Morag: I don't know what the English for it was.

When would you get up in the morning and go out?

Morag: Well, they would go in the evening and cast the nets.

O at night?

O it was always at night that we worked.

Excuse my ignorance!

Morag: They would sometimes stay at the end of the nets all night. Other nights they would go out in the morning to lift the nets. It would depend where you were. That was it, wasn't it?

Yes. Yes, in the winter.

Morag: Yes, in the winter. In the summer...I remember we would see out the main road...the East Coast boats...the Minch would be alive with them...they would be there casting their nets...at the end of the nets. But you got your own boat in 1961.

The Estralita?

Morag: Yes...it was. But that was different...the nets were different.

Were they?

It was the Ringnet we had latterly. There were two boats.

Were there? You worked two boats?

O no. Not together.

Morag: Each boat had its own crew.

And what did you have before the Ringnets?

The Driftnet.

What was the difference between the two?

O the Driftnet would just drift. You didn't tow it at all. But you did tow the Ringnet. You would just cast the Driftnet behind the boats at the banks and it would go with the current. The current would carry it east and west.

It would just carry the net?

It would carry the net...it would drift.

Morag: At that time, he would only come home for periods of time.

You stayed aboard?

O all night. We were out all night.

Morag: They were out all night. In the morning...they were only rarely here...[...]. They would go all over the place. On Saturdays they would [??] the nets on the jetty and they would leave again on Sunday night, after midnight. Our children used to say they didn't remember him being at home much!

We weren't at the herring then but at the prawns. The white fish.

Morag: O you weren't at the white fish when you were on the Ringnet at all. That was when you were on the *Britannia* [...]

So you were on the White Rose first, and what was the next boat?

I got one for myself then.

What was that one called?

The *Estralita*.

What a fancy name!

Morag: *Estralita*.

We bought her in Ireland. Three of us had shares in her.

What type was she?

O...her photo is through there.

Morag: Ringnet.

O well, it would be good to see that.

Morag: They are on the wall above the stair.

What length was she? She was fifty feet or so.

Were there engines..?

Kelvin Diesel, yes. Kelvin Diesel.

Was it fish you caught with that one?

O yes. Fish and prawns.

Morag: The *Estralita* was a Ringnet

Yes. And...

Did you catch a variety of things or did you release things...how did that work?

You could sell anything...yes.

You didn't look out for anything in particular?

Well, yes. If it wasn't herring it was prawn, you see?

Did you catch the prawns in nets too?

There is a different net for the prawn.

Is there?

Morag: O yes. The net is different.

You towed it...you towed it...on the seabed. That isn't how the herring is. With the Ringnet you put a half-circle round a shoal of herring....and two boats would tow it together...closing it and pulling it.

That was how it worked? And did it depend on the time of year?

That counted too, yes. There would be herring at certain times of the year and not at others. That was how it was.

And what would you catch through the year, say in January and February?

O herring in January and February and then when March and April would come in we would go to the prawn. We would work out towards the Tiompan and past that sometimes.

What did you catch in summer?

We would work on the prawns all summer...o yes. You would have to work with the Ringnet at night. You wouldn't have much success during the day unless there was a big shoal of herring.

Why?

O you see, you wouldn't get anything during the day. It [the herring] was seeing the net and fleeing.

Morag: Which evening was it you left after getting word from Geocrab? That wasn't at night.

O, it was winter though.

Morag: No. It was light when you left. Someone phoned Murdo – Aonghas Bàn's son – from Geocrab. What did you get? Four hundred crans?

Yes.

Morag: One sweep.

Aye?

Yes.

You were made!

Morag: O they did well with the big boats then. [...] Was it in Geocrab Loch or Grosebay?

I don't know if it was Donald – Margaret's son – that got word?

Morag: No, it was Murdo – Aonghas Bàn's son.

How could they tell there was a big shoal of herring?

O they could see it. They could see it from the houses.

They could see it?

O yes.

Was it that there were seagulls around it?

O yes and the herring itself...it was solid...you could see it black in the water.

Morag: I remember that evening as if it were yesterday. I remember it as well as yesterday. Leaving in a hurry!

And you just left immediately?

Morag: Yes.

Yes. You needed two together with the Ringnet. Two boats.

Morag: You would need two boats.

And did you always work with another boat?

Yes, yes.

Morag: There were two boats. O this was a lively place then.

I'm sure it was.

Morag: O yes. With these big boats. That has all gone now.

And then in the autumn, what happened then? Was it still the prawn?

Well, in the autumn we would go to Skye with the Ringnet. Working on the spawn. The spawning herring would be coming into Skye then.

Morag: Ask him now what the spawning herring was.

Uhu. So what was that then?

It was herring that was reproducing you see?

And you would go out to Skye at that time every year?

That was where we worked.

Morag: Yes, and they would go over to Gairloch and Lochewe. Kinlochbervie.

Did you really? What was the best time of year?

For fishing?

Uhu.

O, the winter.

Morag: The winter.

If you didn't make it in winter, you wouldn't make it at all.

Was it that there was a better price or that it was more plentiful?

It was easier to catch anyway if it was there. And we always said "If you don't kill it in winter, it's poor." We would go with it then to Gairloch and Ullapool and Stornoway and Mallaig.

Morag: You would go up to Store too.

We were there once or twice, yes...looking for herring. O yes.

How far out did you go?

O we would go...we were in Tiree...and from there to the Butt of Lewis.

Up through the Minch?

Yes. All these places. Anywhere between the Butt of Lewis and Tiree. That was the area.

Were you ever out around St Kilda?

No.

Morag: Not fishing but he was in St Kilda with the boat.

I was in St Kilda with the boat.

Just on a trip?

We went there. What was it?

Morag: I think soldiers were there.

Yes. Soldiers used to go over there. They had their own boat but it had broken down and they called us to see if one of the boats would go out to collect the soldiers. They used to return on leave you see. Iain Choinnich who had the *Rìbhinn Donn* got word. He couldn't go so he called me and I went. I took a crowd of them in to Lochmaddy and they boarded the MacBrayne's boat there.

Morag: Tell her about Seumas so she can get a laugh!

There was a man with me here...

Morag: He was home on holiday – wee Chirsty the Butcher's daughter's son.

He always spoke about St Kilda and how how would love to go there. I said to him "Maybe a chance will come yet." Anyway, this chance came. I let him know I was going out to St Kilda the next day if he wanted to go. And, o he went anyway. [...] Anyway, when we arrived, we went into the harbour in St Kilda...I hadn't been to St Kilda myself...I had never been ashore.

Morag: They had to go into a smaller boat.

O yes, for getting ashore [...] And anyway, the small boat came and when the soldiers went ashore I went into the small boat with them and I was asking Seumas to go with me. I said to him "You'll never get another chance. This is your chance to go to St Kilda." He was hesitating and he never went at all.

Och, he didn't?

I went into the boat anyway..

Was the sea rough?

O it was calm! It was calm!

Morag: The most beautiful day!

I don't know what happened at all. I went ashore anyway and I walked around for a while and it was approaching midnight when we came back to the wee boat and the soldiers had gone ashore by then...the ones that were returning...and I went aboard myself and we left after midnight, back to Harris. It was a lovely night. I slept for a good part of the trip. Calum Eòghainn was there too – he was ruling the roost. And she came into the Sound of Harris and we reached Lochmaddy. The boat was there ready to leave. The MacBrayne's boat. We just went alongside the MacBrayne's boat and they opened the side-gate and we let them off there. That was it.

But the other poor soul didn't get ashore at all?

No, and he never went again.

That was a pity when he was so close.

Morag: He told him he had a premonition! “Well you didn’t tell me!” he said to him.

I don’t know what premonition he had. His nerve had gone. He was painting a darker picture.

Morag: If he had told you about the premonition maybe you would have stayed on your backside in the boat too!

No I wouldn’t! He didn’t go at all. He’s talking about going yet.

Morag: Is he?

Yes.

Morag: O never the day...he’s too old. O poor Seumas. “I had a premonition!”

But there was also superstition on the boats wasn’t there?

Yes.

Morag: O yes, they were full of that....some of them. They didn’t want to speak to women on the road or anything.

Didn’t they?

Morag: O they were full of that...

Any women?

Morag: I don’t know if there was any of that in him!

O no!

Morag: No.

I didn’t think like that at all.

What things did they believe then? What did you hear about?

Morag: You should remember.

O no. There were some women who they had ‘marked’.

Really? And what was special about them?

When she met you...they didn’t want her to meet you on the road at all...no. If you went to sea, you know. Some were noted for that.

Morag: One person would convince the other that...

O I didn't know any of them...that had all gone when I started.

Had it? They were funny about colours too weren't they and the clothes you wore?

Uhu.

Morag: I don't know.

Black was worn then. Black was worn most of the time anyway.

There was something about socks which were dyed with crotal wasn't there?

Morag: O they didn't want crotal socks at all.

That's right.

B: Yes. The crotal was out.

There were also words that weren't to be said on board weren't there?

O well, no.

Didn't you have that?

There are words which you shouldn't say anywhere!

Ha ha!

Morag: Ha ha!

What was your longest trip ever? Do you remember?

O, sailing.

O did you sail as well as fish?

I sailed for ten years.

Where did you go?

O South Africa, Cape Town and Durban and up the Canal and India and Calcutta, Bombay...

Morag: There was no word of me at that time.

Wasn't there? Before you married?

O no. I returned from there.

What ship were you on? Or were there a few?

O yes. My memory isn't good.

O it's pretty good!

Morag: His memory is failing.

We left Calcutta anyway and we returned to Cape Town and we went to the States from there...New York and Baltimore.

So, you were round the world too?

O yes. After that...Baltimore...we took a cargo... I don't know what cargo it was...food and things like that...the War was going on at that time and we came back to Liverpool then.

B: Was that during the War? He was torpedoed during the War.

Were you?

We were bombed.

Morag: A bomb, yes. Was it Americans that dropped the bomb?

Where did that happen?

We left Liverpool....o...

Were you in the Navy?

No.

Morag: He was in the Merchant Navy.

We left there [...] down near the Clyde you know...that was where the convoys gathered. We were three days into the trip when we were bombed in the Bay of Biscay. I was sitting at the station...we weren't supposed to be...when there was something like that...I could see the plane above me...it was a lovely day...I saw the plane above me and I saw the bomb leave her. It was as high as 15,000 feet anyway. A bullet was fired at her but they couldn't get anywhere near her as she was so high. There was a convoy and big guns...and I saw the bomb leave her...it was shining in the sunlight. I was on open deck then and I took shelter somewhere...I saw a door and I went inside. We didn't feel a thing. The bomb went down the middle of her into the engine room. She did the very same thing to the one that was with her. [...] There was nothing that could be done anyway. Abandon ship.

Did she go on fire?

She went on fire. The ship was abandoned and we went into small boats.

Did you jump out?

O no...we went into the boats on ladders. We were rowing then and one of the frigates came...destroyers. They were smaller than destroyers...she came down beside us and they made us go aboard this frigate and after a while we heard a bang and they had torpedoed the big ship we had been in. She was destroyed.

Did she sink?

O yes! But she was finished anyway. There was no-one on her then.

Was everyone saved?

Thirty-five were killed on her. Yes. They took us away to Casa Blanca then. That was where we got ashore and we were there for a week or ten days. Word came that a ship was waiting for us in Casa Blanca to take us home. We got home that way.

You were fortunate.

Morag:Did you get back here then?

Yes.

Morag:Did you get leave?

Yes. I came ashore there on the pier and Oighrig was on the pier too and she said "Murchadh Dhòmhnail Iain isn't wearing his own clothes." She spotted that the clothes I had on weren't my own.

Morag:Is that right?

Yes.

Morag:Who was that?

Oighrig Dhòmhnail Fhionnlaigh.

Morag:O Oighrig Dhòmhnail Fhionnlaigh.

Did you go back to the War after that?

O yes. That wasn't going to do. If everyone was going to stop...you had to go. But nothing happened after that.

And you came back after the War?

We came home in 1947, 48.

And you were sailing until then?

Yes. I sailed for ten years.

Were you working on the deck?

O yes, yes.

And what made you come home then?

Morag: Ha ha! I saw him first in 1947. Do you remember that?

I do.

Morag: Chirsty Park. In *Dudamaigh's* house.

In *Dudamaigh's* house.

Morag: I came home for a while...my sister was ill, she wasn't well at all...and did you ever hear of Donald the Butcher?

Yes.

Morag: Well, Donald the Butcher's wife came to our house that night and she was asking me to go down and I said "Alright I'll go down for a walk tomorrow night." And an old man lived next door to her and I went down and what did she have on the fire but a dumpling. And when she took the dumpling off the fire her sister came in...her sister was next door...Chirsty Park...and a piece of dumpling was put on a plate for the old man. And Chirsty said "Come with me to *Dudamaigh's* house." "O no," I said. "Yes, you will. There's no-one there!" I went and he [Murdo] was in *Dudamaigh's* house. Do you remember that?

Yes, fine that.

Morag: I went and she said "As sure as you're alive that one will be waiting for you at the [??]"

Ha ha!

Morag: Christmas 1947. We married in 1957. Ten years on but there was a lot of [??]
We weren't courting all that time.

You didn't marry for ten years after meeting?

No, no.

Morag: No. But we weren't courting at all. There were ten years from when he first walked me home until we got married. I can't remember how we came together again. I don't know.

It's just as well!

I believe it was bound to happen anyway.

Morag: Ha ha! O well, it was meant to be anyway.

It was.

Morag: O Chirsty Park that night! I don't know if she remembers.

O she does.

But you were only young when you met first?

Morag: 1947. O no...he is seven years older than me. I was only in my twenties.

And you went back to sea after that?

O yes.

And when did you return for good?

Morag: He was in [??] Kyleakin in the fifties. I was in England. You were in Kyleakin then.

'51?

Morag: Yes and '53, '54. It was in '54 that I returned from England. We married in '57. He was in fishing boats in Kyleakin then.

And you were in England?

Morag: I was in Sutton in Surrey.

What were you doing there?

Morag: Just working in the hotels. A girl that was with me for years in Pitlochry went down to England and she was asking me to go with her. She died down in London. She was from Beaulieu – Mary Rennie. But you were working on the boats in Kyleakin then. He was on these boats after we got married.

Was he?

Morag: It was in 1961 that he got the *Estralita* himself.

You married in '57?

Morag: '57.

Was it here in Scalpay that you got married?

It was.

Morag: It was in '61 that you got the *Estralita*. Morag was a year old.

That was the one that came from Ireland?

Yes.

What type was she?

Come and I will show you.

[PAUSE]

And you got that one from Ireland?

Yes.

Did you go over for her yourself?

Yes.

Morag: Yes. I will always remember it. His brother Seumas was with him and Donald – another boy from Cuddy Point. The children were small. It was a very bad afternoon. This boy's father came down. His father wasn't at home. He said "You don't need to expect them, they won't come tonight. They are in Campbelltown in a severe gale." That was alright. I went to bed...Morag and Rachel were small. I locked the door. In the small hours I heard...[I said] "Goodness, is that you Murdo?" "Who else do you think it is?!" [he said] He had come in the window...I nearly died of fright! O it was a bad night. Coinneach Thormoid had said you wouldn't come over at all.

O we did.

Morag: I remember that night. "Who else do you think it is?!"

Ha ha! And you came up from Belfast?

O up through the Clyde. We came in from Hamilton. I think it was Sunday the next day.

Morag: O I don't remember that at all.

We didn't want to go on Sunday. We stayed in Campbeltown until the gale had passed.

Morag: There was a gale anyway.

We came over then.

And you worked with that one for a good while?

O yes. We did well with the *Britannia*. The herring was plentiful then.

Morag: They were fortunate.

Was the Britannia the one you built yourself?

Yes.

B: He got the *Britannia* in 1968.

And you built her yourself?

She was built for myself. My uncle Kenneth had one called the *Britannia* too, years before that.

Was that one bigger than the other one?

No she wasn't nearly as big...no [...]

And what length was the Britannia that you had yourself?

62 or 63[ft].

She was a Ringnet?

Yes. O yes.

And how many worked on her?

Six.

And there was work for six on her?

O yes. There was good employment then.

Herring again was it?

O herring. I remember one night, at the end of things, it was coming to an end. We left here...ourselves and a boat called the *Vigilant*...a big one...she was bigger than us and we left and we got 250 crans in the first Ring, and another 250 crans in the next Ring. 530 crans for the night.

In the one night. You would get a fortune for that?

O well, we got...I don't know what we got. We would square things up...you know what squaring is?

Yes.

They shared the money every fortnight. I think they got £260 that week.

That was good.

Morag: It was then.

Yes.

How is the money shared on a boat?

There are three shares. The boat gets so much and the owners get so much and the crew get the rest.

Between them? Depending on what you would get?

Yes.

What expenses would have to come out?

O there was a fair amount of expense. Yes.

Was it diesel that went into her?

Yes. But with 500 crans, the crew got approx £260 each for that fortnight. O that was phenomenal. But I had three shares of that as the boat was mine, and the other three for the expenses. O that was phenomenal.

It was. How many years did you have the Britannia?

Twelve.

Morag: Twelve years was it? He had a heart attack. [...] O yes.

We lost a daughter. She was killed in a car crash.

I heard that. That is very sad.

Did you hear that? Who was telling you?

O I heard a good while ago.

Really? O, we lost a daughter.

She was in school at the time wasn't she?

Morag: Yes, in Portree School.

Things like that happen. It is very difficult.

They do.

Morag: O dear...

...What was the longest trip you were on then with the fishing?

Fishing?

Uhu.

O well...

B: They left on Sunday night after midnight. He wouldn't come until Friday night, yes and Saturday at times. And even if he did come home on Friday night they would be down at the jetty at the nets and so on. But it would sometimes be Saturday night before they would come home from the herring sometimes. They would then go after midnight when the Sabbath passed. On Monday morning, from here.

O yes. There is no free port. The people here were very keen to make money.

I'm sure.

O yes, everyone.

Morag: They were wise enough since it was available.

Certainly.

They would go to extremes to make money.

Was there competition between the fishermen?

O yes, there was some of that.

Morag: Yes.

O yes.

And when you would go out in the boat on a Monday morning, what would happen on a typical day on the boat? You slept on board anyway?

Yes. When we were at the Ringnet we didn't go out early at all, until night-time. Monday night.

Were you anchored out somewhere?

No. If we weren't here we would be in Stornoway or on anchor somewhere perhaps. But here at the house we wouldn't go until Monday night. The herring was around here then you know.

But when you went for the week you would sleep aboard then – there were beds in her?

Morag: O yes, six beds.

The East Coasters left home on Sunday and the first place they made for was that Sound. They knew the Scalpay folk wouldn't be out and they knew the herring would have got a rest. They headed for that and took herring to Tarbert.

Weren't they crafty!

You're telling me!

Morag: Do you remember Abie? I wonder if he is still living? From Avoch.

The rogue!

Morag: He says he was a rogue! He will be an old man.

I remember the pier here was full of boats. It was full...each side...tied together. And they were there – the Avochs – and there were seven or eight of them. And anyway, we left one night and we always went up to the Bays. It was good for herring then. We set off anyway and we went to the Sound of Harris and there were scores of Avochs round us and [...] there was herring. "Keep the light up!" One of the Avochs was on the outside of us. When he saw me putting the light up he started casting the nets further out from me and I just put my net inside his net. We didn't get herring at all – either of us – o but he was cut!

He was a good man too. He kept prayer meetings.

Morag: [...] He was as keen as yourself to make money! Ha ha!

It was also customary to read the Bible on board wasn't it?

O yes.

Morag: They would read the Bible.

In the morning or at night?

O just at night. They went out to the south bank mostly. They would cast fifty nets...fifty nets in a row. They would drink tea then and listen out for the herring playing. After a while they would read the Bible. And you could hear the boats – every one of them – if it was a good evening, you could hear them praise-singing from a good distance.

You sang [praise] too?

O yes! And what exceptional singing. O yes. They sang like thrushes then. O every boat sang.

Morag: If you expected to get herring! If they heard the herring playing!

Ha ha!

Herring playing or not the Bible would have to be read.

Morag: O yes. They read the Bible.

Every boat did that?

Every boat, yes. It was the done thing.

There was a Bible on every boat?

O yes.

What stores did you have to take with you?

Morag: O they had a cook.

Did they?

Morag: They had a good cook – John Norman the Butcher's son.

One of them was usually a cook.

And he didn't do anything but that?

No. Well, they would pull the nets with us.

Morag: Where were you when you got the trout in Stornoway?

He had caught a trout. It was that long. Anyway, we came to Stornoway with the herring and we were going home that evening. Anyway, John Norman started preparing the trout. We took two hours or two and a half hours coming down from Stornoway and he had it ready at the mouth of the sound there.

Morag: They started eating it.

Down tools. The boat was stopped until we ate the trout.

Morag: John Norman was a good cook.

O the trout was exceptional.

So you would have to take a fair amount with you for a week at sea?

You had to get stores for the week.

Was that the responsibility of the cook or did you do that yourself?

Morag: The cook did it. He didn't do it anyway. You paid for it.

I would go to Donald the Butcher and get £200 worth of stores.

Morag: O Donald the Butcher did well out of the boats then. He must have done.

What pastimes did you have aboard then? Were there stories or songs or anything like that?

O no.

Morag: They would sing songs coming home on Friday night. The man in the wheel-house would sing. Fatty and John Norman. It was lovely listening to them.

It was.

Morag: Listening to them on the wireless...we had pastimes then.

It was a great pastime. They could hear the boats on the wireless.

Morag: They could hear every article.

Was it a sort of CB you had?

Yes. They would get the boats on the wireless. They would listen to everything that went on.

Was that in every house?

Morag: Yes, in every house that had someone at sea anyway.

You could send messages to the boat that way?

O we couldn't send word away.

Morag: O no.

You would just listen but they could send word home?

Morag: That's right. We could hear them speak to each other.

And you would be more at ease then?

Morag: O yes. You knew where they were.

When did the radio start?

I always had it. In the *Estralita* too.

DISK ENDS

