

Sharon Slater (SS) Conor O'Brien (COB)

Conor O'Brien was a reed cutter in his teens and early 20s along the Newtown Clarina area. He tells of the process of reed cutting as well as where the reeds grew. He also recalls taking sheep out onto the islands.

----

SS: Today is the 16 May 2017 and I'm Sharon Slater and I'm interviewing Conor O'Brien on life on the Shannon River. So my first question would be how long have your family been associated with this area?

COB: So where we live here it's the farm is called Churchfield and it basically it's a long narrow farm that runs along the estuary. Going back in the title deeds the farm was in the name of the O'Briens from around the middle 17th, mid 1700s

[Interruption dog bark]

COB: So from around the mid-1700s and it's been in the family since. I was born here. My father was actually born in Cork but his aunt and uncle lived here on the farm and he inherited the farm then so, that's about it I'd say.

SS: And were your family involved in fishing on the Shannon?

COB: Not so much fishing. My brother fished quite a bit Brendan when he was young he would have fished probably from when he was around 13 or 14 maybe up until he emigrated maybe when he was only 19 or 20. I would have fished a number of times maybe when I was around 15 or 16. I fished with Liam Coughlan on one boat and I fished with Aiden O'Brien not a relation but a neighbour on another boat. But I would have cut a lot of reed here over the years. I probably would have cut reed from when I was about 14 maybe until I was about twenty two or three. So, and most of that reed cutting I did with Aiden O'Brien who was my next door neighbour.

SS: And the reed cutting, where would that take place?

COB: So off our own family there is, there is, a stretch of reed ground called the ladder, it's called it's known as that that backs onto our own farm. So we were cut there and then we would also have cut at the end of our farm there's a section called a spur. A spur is the name of the place where the reed grows or the reed bed. There's a spur there called Cooper Hill and it's belonging to Irish cement. So we would have cut there. As the season progressed then you'd move kind of maybe a bit further away to get the reeds so you might end up in Tervoe which is also owned by Irish cement. Or as you might go west, basically down river which would be down to Bunratty down around that side on the Clare side. So they're kind of the main main areas. We used to bring if the reed was near to home we used to bring the reed into our own kinda little, there's a little place there to bring in the boats what we call the boat bed but what some other people around here called the orchard. I don't know, in my family was I was called a board bed but I know the fishermen around area called it the orchard or more so, yeah, some of the fishermen.

SS: And what was the season for reeds?

COB: Em, for the reed cutting basically the first kinda, you'd need a few frosts at the end of October and you probably start realistically the best reed, it would be November before you'd start cutting reed you might if it was a lot of frosts in the autumn you might get cutting in October and then it

would depend on the year. But generally you'd cut until late March you know some years you might cut into April if you had a big order or something but more of the reed would have been cut anyway by March you'd be only kinda scratching around trying to find a bit extra you know.

SS: Who would buy the reeds?

COB: Em, So I guess Aiden and myself when we used to cut together Aiden used to sell his portion to the thatchers direct a lot of the time. And then I might kind of open my back towards the end of the season and just sell it. Aiden used to have a lot of contacts just up and down the country more homeowners you know. And they would ring him every maybe 10 years looking for a big order of reed to maybe redo their house or you know it could be a new house or something. So you'd have both one side of it would be you'd sell to the thatchers and the other side then would be that you would sell direct the actual homeowners, you know.

SS: What was the process of getting the reeds?

COB: Em, I guess there was, if you're cutting by hand basically what you'd want to do is you'd need to go down when when the tide wasn't covering the spur and you could easily walk around it so you might either walk down there across the fields if the tide was completely out. Em, on a day where there was low tides you might take the boat down and be able to get directly on to the spur with the boat. When you get out there basically you start cutting you might, you might, you might, cut reed until, until lunchtime then you'd start tying it up and once you'd have it tied into the sheaves, the sheaves would probably be about a foot in diameter and you'd tie it with a bit of bailing twine and then you'd start to draw it out then into the boats and get ready to transport back up, up into dry land, you know. You know some people were good at cutting. Other people were good at drawing it, you know, you'd be kinda young and fit I suppose to draw the reed because you basically take taken maybe seven or eight sheaves on your back and walk out through mud and delivering them out to the boat.

SS: What was use to cut them?

COB: A sickle 06:18 A sickle, I probably have one probably inside my mum's house actually. But yeah you want I can go in and get you one and you can take photo of it or something. So that was the way we did it. Predominantly. Now, at one point then there was two brothers back 'Parknamore' the Costellos, Aiden and Tom Costello they cut a massive amount of reed over the years and export a lot of it but they used a machine which was made in Holland and trying to think in the year now but somewhere in the 90s I'd imagine. Yeah maybe in late 90s they bought a new machine. And they gave Aiden O'Brien next door to me their old machine. So I built a barge to basically take this machine out into the Spurs around here and myself and Aiden cut with that on a few occasions not too many. It proved to be a bit unreliable. Obviously it probably had a lot of its work done but the days that we did get to work it works very well. You know if you cut for 40 minutes you spend the rest of the day tying up and drawing away from it. It was a brilliant machine when it was working you know.

SS: Were you involved in thatching at all?

COB: No. There's one local Thatcher here Tommy Roberts he just lives over the fields there and Aiden, sold a lot, Aiden O'Brien sold a lot of his reed to a Thatcher called Patsy, I can't think of his second name now but I could fins it out for ya. I can't think of his second name. Patrsy something or other. He was from back, I think he was from back around Cappagh or Adare or somewhere in that direction. Patsy Noonan was his name, Patsy Noonan. So yeah it's kind of you were probably talking

to people but find out you know there was. There was the sallies that they used basically for holding the reed on to the roofs. We didn't cut any of them around here. I think West Limerick is where a lot of them were cut. But if you talk to Tommy Roberts he'll tell you exactly because he buys them to this day you know.

SS: What did you have any special clothing that you would wear going out?

COB: [laughs] Yeah, like you'd have to wear waterproof pants and wellies. But the nature of the work meant that you wouldn't really have too many layers because it was eh. Yeah. It's you'd sweat a lot of like you know you wouldn't be fit for much of the evening like it was. There was no need to go to the gym after a day down there. Yeah. Like some people used to wrap their legs in fertilizer bags because the when you'd cut the reed you cut it at about knee height or maybe kind of between your knee and in your waist. And so the leftover reed you know the stump or whatever the stubble would actually rip your waterproof pants quite easy so some of the older guys used to wear fertilizer bags tied with twine. You know it was probably a bit more effective. But eh, yeah basically a pair of wellies like the spur that you'd be working on so long as there wasn't a high tide you could work you know you walk around it quite well you know the underfoot conditions weren't bad at all. Now there would be the odd drain and stuff that you would have to hop over and things like that and maybe the soft patch would you could you could manage to walk around it.

SS: How many different people would be working it?

COB: We used to work in twos you know sometimes there might be three if Aiden a son or someone else working with him you know might go down there with three people. We'd always kind of work with two boats together. They'd be tied side by side tied parallel because it was a better way to build a load of reed and typically with two of the normal, the fishing Gandalows that we would have here you'd load about 300 sheaves onto onto the two boats tied together. It was you know it was something that you had to be quite skilled in loading the boats because if you had them if you loaded the boats slightly off level you can imagine a boat is level like that and the water comes up the sides. Now if you loaded this board off level the water can actually coming over the side. If you if the river was a bit rough that evening when you'd be bringing in the reed or you know. We did experience that time to time. You'd also have to be careful when the ships to be pass and you do the ships when you're fully loaded. They create a sizable wash off the back of them and it's basically like a big wave for a series of waves. So you'd always have to be careful. Once you see a ship coming now you know 90 percent of the pilots are very accommodating. Once they would see you with a load of reed they'd always cut back the revs on the ship and just kind of glide past you, you know but that wasn't always the case, you know yeah.

SS: Is there, are you still cutting it?

COB: No I'd say the last time I reed it was when I was in college and then I left, I emigrated for a number of years. And I suppose you know it suited me when I was in college and school. I'm not sure about using Aiden's name [laughs] because he may have been, you know what I mean. So like, a lot of the people cutting reed would have stopped in the last few years. And there'd be a lot of people cutting you know would have been subsidizing the fact that they weren't working at the time as well you know. I think if you went through some of the RTE archive footage you'd see they'd interview people down there I think nationwide interviewed Liam Coughlan there a few years ago but if you might have noticed in the background other people didn't show their face.[laugh] That would be the case but in general there isn't as many people. So when we were cutting reed there would have been a lot of, what would I say. You'd have had to kind of fight for your reed a small bit you know

you'd have to be down there again Cooper was always the best spur. And you's always have to get down there early and try and cut it before the people from Coonagh might come across the river and cut on your patch you know. But I don't think that kinda exists anymore because there isn't that many guys cutting reed anymore. There's plenty to go, there's plenty of reed there for the number of people that are cutting. I'd imagine there's a number of reasons for it. Towards the end of when I was cutting there was a reed coming in from Turkey I think at the time and I'd imagine maybe there isn't as many thatched houses around either you know around the country. Like a lot of thatched houses that are there now are probably more tourists ordinated than actual dwelling houses. I know that from talking, when I built this house here I considered it. One of the main reasons I didn't do as I think was to do with insurance. It's also like it's a beautiful roof and it's done but then you know it's deteriorated over time and it's a maintenance cost going forward but the insurance would be the biggest stopper, you know I think if you go back the road there, you can, there's two thatched houses just back the road one is Tommy's, Tommy Roberts he's a thatcher himself and that's a new house. And then there is a cottage in across the way it would be his, it would be belonging to his aunt Anna Roberts and you know that's a thatched cottage as well so. They are the only two down this end, there's one up the hill as well.

SS: When would you be cutting the reed was it day time or night time?

COB: Oh day time, yeah. Yeah you go down there like that time of the year the days were quite short. So you know maybe eight to six be kind of general time for a cutting reed. Sometimes you'd would come in in the evening and you might be waiting for the tide to come up so that the boats could floor. And you bring the reed in into the jetty or whatever. Or into the Mungret Quay was another place we used to bringing in. That like, that had its own problems too because people were often concerned for your safety, you know. It was before mobile phones a bit too like you know. So yeah that was that was probably a bit of an issue at the time. But luckily we never had too major up, yeah, I would have spent a minute or two under water one night down there one night. We were loading the reed machine on the barge and there was obviously no brakes on it. But the barge was at a slight bit of a tilt because the water hadn't come up fully and yet when I loaded up the machine anyway I reversed it down to the barge and it kept going. And the two of us ended up inside the river and it was kind of on top of me. So, but luckily I got out of that one but it was a cold spin home in the boat [laugh].

SS: Can you swim?

COB: I can swim Yeah yeah yeah I can swim. But we never wore lifejackets down there. It's just the way it was I suppose you know. But no not many of the people I worked with down there was in a boat with could swim you know whatever. Whatever the reason I'm not sure.

SS: Weren't there many other accidents?

COB: There wouldn't have been there was one night alright where we got caught badly in a in a wash of a boat and we had to run the boats aground because they'd taken on too much water but we just we were able to run them in aground. We were near the shore and then we just bailed out the water that was in the boats and then went back on, carried on our journey. But there was never a time that I was you know, I supposed to time underneath the machine [laugh]. Yeah I was a bit of it was the shock of the cold water I think. But we recovered the machine the next day when the tide went down. It sailed again. So yeah I don't know. I don't think I ever really feared for my safety down there.

SS: And your boats. Where did you get your boats?

COB: So basically Aiden, Aiden owned the two boats and there were two fishing boat you know. You know they were used for fishing in the summertime and reed in the winter and that was kind of a general, the general thing. There's a local boat builder here that lives up at the top of Newtown hill Peter Byrnes. He would have built he would have built a lot of boats in this area.

SS: And it would have been the same style boat?

COB: Yeah there are quite similar. [Interruption]

SS: And who owned the reed beds?

COB: [laughs] Em, that that's a contentious issue I guess. It was never an issue for us now or I was never involved in any of those arguments but the ladder know it's off our land I suppose we would kinda claim it, you know, so to speak. It wasn't a great spur anyway so there was never too much competition for cutting reed down there. I think since I stopped there I don't know. I think I know one other man to cut down there after that one or two seasons but because a lot of the reed beds around us were owned by Irish cement. They never were bothered with them you know. Whereas if you go to, if you keep going back to the mouth of the Maigue there's a reed bed, reed bed back there called 'Carriagh Clogher' and that's owned by, em it's owned by Anne O'Brien now. But it was owned by her husband until he died. And he would have always sold of reed off of that to the Costelloes in 'Corcamore'. They would paid to come down and cut it. So. You know in that sense I guess you know the person who owned the land beside it I know that across the river you know. I think the Ryans were the name on the Clare side of the river across from us. They had their own reed beds and they used to have a machine and cut it and you know no one ever went in there and cut it because it was just taken that it was theirs. So I guess whoever owned the adjoining land realistically would have owned the reed bed. But again you know there was large portions of reed around the river and as you know no one ever really minded if you came in and cut it there. So yeah including our the reed off of farmland, the reed off of Irish cement land, the reed up around Bunratty it didn't seem to be claimed. No one was ever stopped going in there to cut it.

SS: How far up and down the river did the reed grow?

COB: Em, You know you're talking about from the Maigue up to, right up to, 'Bunlecky' I suppose. I don't know if you know where that is but it's, do you know where the metal bridge is on the Dock Road there, yeah kind of up to about as far as there from the from the mouth of the Maigue which is kinda opposite Bunratty you know, down that end, and like it grows up along, there's some nice reed beds up along the river Maigue as well. You know the Costellos used to always cut them. And they were off their own land as well.

SS: So what was, what did the ground had to be like that reeds to grow?

COB: Em it was all good solid ground but it was covered by the tide. Now it may not necessarily be covered by every so basically every 12 hours. You know you have high water. Now I could probably pull out a tide book there but like in this region the tides range from about five and a half meters maybe to about seven and a half or seven meters anything above kind of six meters would usually cover the spur you know or you would have water on the spur. You might be able to walk around it. But you know 6.5 you wouldn't be able to walk across the spur, you know. So what I would say is you know for 80 percent of their time the reed beds are dry and you know 20 percent of their time they're probably covered in water and it's that high proportion of water plus the fact that they're dry enough to, their made of soil like you know it's it's mud which is dried out into a soil you know. So. Yeah I would say you know it's it's spends a portion of its time covered in water, you know.

SS: Did it grow more after it was cut, or?

COB: Yeah it came back. It always came back much better if it was cut. If you didn't cut an area for a year it became, em the new stuff didn't really grow up through it properly and the old stuff used to stay there and it would become brittle and kind of grey and then it would lodge a lot easier in high storms and stuff like that it would fall over and it wouldn't be any good for anything. You know the best reed was always the stuff that was cut the year before and cut properly. When I say cut properly cut of the right height which is just above the tide mark. So the reason we cut above the tide mark is because anything below that is stained with muddy water and it wouldn't be good for sell, selling it you know. But. If you if you cut it too high. So some people use cut it up around their waists so they wouldn't have to bend over the reed becomes quite strong and course. Whereas if you cut through at the right height it's nice and fine reed. But then again some thatchers liked it course more thatchers like it fine. If you if you doing it a nice ridging detail on a house you would want to reed fine. If you want to just. You know thatch the whole side your house you want to good big course reed I suppose because it took less reed to actually fill up the area. So there was a mixture of wanted and thatchers when we were cutting I guess we'd always keep a bit of fine reed separate maybe from the course reed because different people would require different stuff.

SS: Do you remember when you first went out to do it?

COB: Yeah I'd say I was about 14 I went down to the ladder which is just off our own land and I cut twenty five sheaves yeah the first time. [laughs] And I went with two other local fellows who were about my own age one was Ian O'Leary and the other was Ciaran O'Brien. I think we. Yeah we. We. We cut for three days that time together the three of us and I think that was as much we did the first year I kind of progressed and then from then on I kind of worked with Aidan O'Brien the following year, so yeah.

SS: Were you taught how to do it?

COB: Yeah Aidan would have taught me how to cut. Yeah. And there is there is a skill in cutting like because someone like him you know he had a very slow, I wouldn't say slow, he had a very steady motion and he'd nice swinging motion and he's take about five cuts of the sickle and that would give him a handful and then maybe five or six handfuls would give him a sheaf you know so maybe 30 or 35 cuts swings off the hook would give him a sheaf. Now if we were cutting this side by side I'd always be flat to the boards you know. And I turned around he'd still have a sheaf made the same as me. And he seemed to be going at a much easier pace. But he seemed to be able to cut it quicker. So I guess it's just something that came with time and years of practice. Yes so I guess.

SS: What would you do if you got caught out there in a storm?

COB: To be honest if the weather was that kind of bad we generally tried not to be there. [laughs] Yeah. There would have been one evening you know where I would went down to bring in some reed off of the reed bed do you see you might go cutting today. okay and high water might be in the middle of the day. So you'd go down in the morning and you'd cut all day the tide would rise at 12:00 and fall and it wouldn't make any difference to you, you'd keep cutting all day and in the evening you'd have your pile of reed maybe if these was two of you cutting there would be 200 sheaves there ready to go that evening. Now the tide has gone out would so you can't actually move the reed. So I guess it is one evening there was no highwater until about maybe 9:00 p.m. And when we came up from cutting reed at 6:00 p.m. or whatever at a normal time. We could see that there was a storm coming that night. And there will be a chance that your reed would get lifted and taken off down the river and you'd never see it again. So. Yeah that night. I [laughs] I suppose Aidan was

unable to go down and I got someone with me who would have had no experience whatsoever. A friend of mine and we a, we went down and we we loaded the reed and brought it in with a bit of difficulty. But yeah I don't think it will. The difficulty wasn't so much the weather as probably the fact that we loaded it in the dark and didn't do it properly and but yeah.

SS: After you loaded onto the two boats. How would you get the boats back up river?.

COB: OK so you have an engine on one of em, the two boats are being tied side by side, the engine to be on the back of one one boat on the stern and basically you make a bit of room to stand at the back yourself. And then. I don't know how you would describe it basically but there would be a big pile of reed and one guy would sit on the top kinda saying where to go. And the other guy would be the engine of outboard at the back and then we had down here in front of the house. We had a kind of a big channel, a dugout and you drive boats in there and once you get them in there you could probably just leave them in the channel overnight and be safe enough or if you wanted you can throw the reed on the side if you are well organised you would have had a tractor trailer there and you throw it directly from the boat into a trailer and take it up, up out of the boat bed, you know.

SS: Was there a particular way you have to stack it when it came back on to?.

COB: Yeah. So we used to have to stack it standing up. So basically you'd usually stack it along a wall or a fence line or something you know, and you'd stack it standing. If you didn't have a wall or a fence line to stand it against what you'd do is you'd start a kind of a 'stook' which basically, you'd stand in the middle with one sheaf and keep building sheaves around it, it would be like, how would I best describe it, a bit like a tepee when you'd be finished, you know. It would be wide at the bottom and narrower at the top and there could be a couple of hundred sheaves standing together, self-supporting, you know. It was always to be vertical so that when it would rain the rain would run down along the reed same on a house, run off, that's why if you look at some of the thatched houses they've quite steep roofs and that's to keep the water running down off them. If you brought in your reed and you threw it on the ground flat and you didn't stack it, what would happen is it would start to rot. It would hold the water, the water would sit in it and it would start to rot and it wouldn't be much good, you know.

SS: How long would it last before you had to sell it on?

COB: Ah generally like if you cut it between November and March you could be selling it away during that time or you know, you might sell the last of it in June or July if it was a slow year, you know, but you'd definitely have it gone in the summer. Because the thatchers generally worked I think more in the summer months anyway to be up on top of someone's roof. So that was when the demand was there for it, you know. But, homeowners I guess, you know, they'd probably make, they would have known when to contact the reed cutters. I think down through the years they would have traditionally had numbers, you know. I know that Aidan for instance like, you know, people just rang him every ten or fifteen years like. Just as well people didn't never change their phone numbers, you know, because that was how they trapped him down. But, yeah, there was, and then like you'd deliver the reed to them sometimes or sometimes they would come with the truck or whatever.

Sometimes we'd deliver it in a tractor and trailer. I think the furthest place I would have gone in a tractor would have been I think Coachford in Cork I delivered some down there. There was a guy up the road called Anthony O'Neill, he's a coal man, he used to deliver the reed for us. So, you know, if there was someone from Galway looking for a load of reed and they didn't have a way of collecting it we'd suggest that Anthony would deliver it, you know so. And it would be an extra, you know it would be just something extra there for the likes of a coal man who probably have his runs maybe four or five days a week but on that one day he'd organise himself and he'd earn a few quid as well.

SS: About how much was, how much did it cost for?

COB: When I first started cutting I suppose it was about a pound a sheaf and then it would have moved to 1.30 euros a sheaf and by the time I was finished cutting it was about 1.50 a sheaf. Now I won't try and confuse you too much but when I first started cutting there was 25 sheaves in a 100 so I don't know why that was but em, on a good day you cut 400 of reed but you'd only 100 sheaves but we used to call it 400. Em, and it was £25 a hundred [laughs] but as times kind of moved on, that's when I first started cutting, as time moved on we kind of spoke more and more about it in sheaves. I think when it moved from pounds to euros people got so, they just called it "how many sheaves and how much a sheaf". But when I first started cutting it was always, there was 25 sheaves in a hundred and it was £25 a hundred so. Now it was £25 a hundred but then there was certain, there was a thatcher there and you know he would em, I don't know was he small bit opportunistic but he would buy it off the reed cutters during the winter time when we, there wouldn't be as much sale for it, at £15 a hundred but then the reed cutters if there were ever selling it to him they would always make the sheaves a bit smaller so it was a bit of a catch 22. [laughs] So, I never really used to sell to him, I always kind of held out for a big order at the end of the year.

SS: I think that's it unless you've got anything else to add?

COB: No, I don't think so, the reed, the fishing, ah the other thing I suppose we would have done and it was more my brother and a neighbour Patrick O'Brien that was involved in it but they used to take sheep out to the islands. So we used to farm quite a few sheep here at one time and Dad would give my brother what he would call, you know, the wild ones the ones that we couldn't control on the farm. They'd be sent to the island. So [laughs] they could be, you know, they could be, there would have been maybe 15 yeos or maybe 20 yeos on the island at the peak and they would be on one island for the summer and on a different island then for the winter. Kind of a, the summer island was more exposed but it was a lot grassier and then the winter island was a bit kind of more sheltered. And we used to use the fishing boats to bring back in the lambs during the summer times and they's be sold. Yeah, that was always quite adventurous. We would have had experiences where [laughs] the lambs would jump overboard and start disappearing down along the river. So then we'd throw the sheep dog out after them, we'd tried that but unfortunately [laughs] the sheep dog wouldn't have been used to rounding up sheep in the river [laughs]. So, but yeah we would have, it's funny the tide runs quite fast there at times so like when a, if a sheep jumped over board, the tide could take it quite quick and by the time you'd get the boat to go round in circle to collect him, you know, and try to catch up. You know, you'd be going very slow in the boat 'cause you're loaded up to the

absolute maximum between people to catch the sheep and sheep [laugh] so we, we used to bring them in for shearing and then the last few years we actually used to take the shearing men out there. So, em, the shearing men used to bring a little generator and we'd load him up on the boat and take him out and a few gates, we just have a few gates from the farm and we'd round up the sheep out on the island into a corner and shear them out there. But, eh yeah that was.

SS: What were the names of those islands?

COB: They used to be on Grass Island and Cragg Island, they were two of the islands they would have been on. Trying to think, there was a third island, I can't think of the name of it and they might not conform with maps, with names on the map as well. So, em, yeah that was another thing that happened there and that would have happened you know maybe for ten or fifteen years and it died out. My brother was big into sheep, he had you know, he, Brendan, was his name, he a, still is his name. He, you know, he had an interest in sheep anyway so I think and it was, you know, he probably made a few quid off of it. The people that owned the islands I know that one island that we used to use was owned by Mellon Stud. People who would have owned Mellon at the time were Barrys I think was their names. But they never had any issue, I'm not sure if they ever really knew to be honest that they were even there. Like you wouldn't meet much traffic other than fishermen back then you wouldn't really meet a whole pile of traffic on the river. Like, to this day I have a boat and a little jetty down there, which I share with one of my neighbours and any time we go out on the boat the traffic on the river is pretty scarce. Last Tuesday, this day last week we went down to Scatterly Island just for a day out and we passed one boat, you know, and it was a sail boat coming out of Kilrus. Oh obviously we passed ships. Aughinish by far is probably the busiest port you know for ships. You know, we would have passed one that was going to Limerick as well the same day.

SS: And has that been a noticeable decrease in boats?

COB: Limerick Docks, the amount of traffic going up to Limerick Docks in the last few years, I think it took a slump for a couple of years but in the last twelve months its been quite busy and I think that's because, if you talk to someone in the docks or harbour they will probably give you the right answer to this. My understanding of it is because I think that they unload, part unload these ships down at Foynes and then they sail, they sail the rest of the load up into Limerick Docks. So the likes of people like em, Roche's Feeds I know do that and I think em, the fertiliser company there on the Dock Road, I can't think of their name off the top of my head, they do, Grasslands Fertiliser. They do the same. I think there's a good bit of scrap metal and recycled glass going out but I'm sure someone else will tell you that. But I do know that the dredging is something that is probably lacking down there. again the harbour people will tell you this but like there used to be a dredger on the river, I think it was called the Curragower, but that was replaced by a work boat with a kind of a harrow on the back. I'm not sure it does much dredging to be honest. Can I think of anything else that happens up in and down there. I guess like just growing up here the fishermen and the boat bed, it was great, great times, like em. We can take a quick walk down there is you want to take a photo of it or something but it would be littered with fishermen and they would all be working, you know, There would be people there would have licence to fish but that licence might be fished on a shift rota, you know. So someone might fish that licence during the day and then their sons might fish it at night or vice versa. There was always a lot of roguery, you know [laughs]. Maybe not mention too many names but, you know one of the greatest characters going down there would have been Liam Coughlan, you know, he was always up to something. You know, if he, you know. He's always, if there was a bad days fishing, you know, he might decide to throw a bag of bags up on his shoulder and pretend that it was full of fish, you know, walking past the other guys just to, to make them think that he's caught a lot more [laughs] than he did .Or tell them that he was going to have to go for the transport

box and the tractor just to [laughs] to upset them even more than they already were by the fact that they had been out for twelve hours and caught nothing you know. But em, like my mum would have sold a lot of fish. Not for profit or anything it would be more of you know through relations and friends and stuff. They would always call down here and you know, they would take the fish off the fishermen, you know. It was at £2 a pound was what it used to be, was what the fishermen used charge for the fish. Which was probably a bit more than they got of the likes of Rene Cusack. If they went into him, he wouldn't have given them the £2 it might have given them, I don't know what he was paying them but maybe 1.50 or something. Whereas it was a great deal for locals, or not locals but people from away to come here and get fish, you know, lovely salmon for that kind of money and it was good for the fishermen too that they got the full price, you know. Trying to think. I guess it's just a bit of , it's a shame that the fishing is gone really, you know. Its very, you know, there used to be a bit of fun down there, you know, there isn't that any more. I went, Peter Byrnes, you know, he's the boat builder and the fisherman and reed cutter, I hope you talk to him as he has a wealth of knowledge. You know, I just went out for a, went out rowing with him around the river last week one evening, you know that's kind of gone, you know, he was telling me what I was kind of doing wrong for most of it which was [laughs] which was good you know because all these guys will be gone in a few years and there's none of us, you know, the next generation fishing and it's kind of sad. I think it should be brought back in some shape or form whether it's based on quotas or shortened seasons but you know we're probably at the point if it goes another, you know, ten or twenty years it will be lost, how to do it even, you know. None of the younger generation will be able to fish. Yeah I don't think they ever caught a whole pile in the last few years down there to be honest but it was a real social thing. People took their holidays from work and went fishing down there, you know. They all had nicknames as well, probably something that was very prominent around here. Everyone that fished down there had a nickname I'm nearly sure of that. I could start reeling them off now but I might start insulting people [laughs], you know. I'd say that's kind of a lot of it. Yeah just the lack of, there's no facilities on the river as well, that's a disappointing thing. We you know, I don't know if we should put this in or not but like there's some pontoons down there, you know and you know that gives us access to get out on the river quite easily. But you know we did that out of our own cost. It wasn't a massive cost but it was at our own time and everything but when we go off on the boat there isn't really anywhere to pull in you know. We go to Dirty Nelly's for a pint but again you climb up the side of a grass bank that might be suitable for me but it's not suitable for everyone, you know. We go, you can go up the river Maigne and maybe go to the Bucket. We go there for a bite to eat or something, you know, but again there's no facilities to pull in. If you go further down the river you can pull in at Foynes, you know the guys in the tug boats are quite nice you can tie up beside 'em or something and get in but there's actually no. There's a club there but you know, unless you know the code for the gate you can't. There's no actual public place to pull up a boat there and walk in, you know, onto dry land. Yeah, it's a shame really you know, I think when you go further down the river we go down to Scatterry, we've been to Scatterry a lot, really like that, it's a beautiful place. It's probably one of the, I go down there on a fine day, it's better than any place in the world if you ask me. I could show you a photo of the other day and it's pristine and there's never anyone there hardly. Like if you go on down then to Carrigaholt, you know, these places are really nice. They have a place to pull up, you can get out and enjoy. The local people and they're out in boats 'cause they have facilities Kilbaha is lovely as well, you know, there a few places we've been up and down the river. It's a shame like even, to go into Limerick for us, a few years ago, we used to go into Limerick in the boat and we used to pull up opposite Closhessy's there, there was a set of steps there and we used pull up the boat there and go for a pint in to town, you know. But you can't do that now 'cause they built a walkway there and didn't provide any facility for a boat to pull up 'cause the walkway now blocks the steps and blocks the place to tie up. You know,

I've nothing against the walkway it was lovely but if they are doing that they should have provided facility for the rest of us, you know. Mightn't be [laughs] the rest of us is probably very small but maybe if the facilities were there more people would do something, you know. Like, it's just a shame, I can send you this but just to give you an idea, last Tuesday morning.