

The Blackwell family were based on Greenish Island and were pilots who aided other ships going up and down river. The Blackwell's also fished using Gandlows. Michael Mulclair remembers seaweed harvesting.

Sharon Slater Interviewer (SS), Harry Blackwell (HB), Michael Mulclair (MM)

.....

SS: Today is the 10 May 2017 and I am Sharon Slater and I am interviewing Michael Mulclair and Harry Blackwell on life around the Shannon and on the Shannon Estuary. So, what I would like to know first is how long have you been in the area? I am going to ask Michael first.

MM: I'm here since 1932, oh sorry 34, that's it.

SS: And were your family on the river? Did they work on the river?

MM: No, nothing at all to do with the river. Absolutely not.

SS: And Harry?

HB: Well I'm 60 years old I'm here since I was born and it's heritage to me to be on the river because my granduncles came out of Greenish Island which I'm the present of today and eh, all before me have been boatmen and fishermen so as I said it's heritage really.

SS: And you said your family were, what were your family, do you know any of their names, your granduncles?

HB: Oh yes yes, my granduncles were pilots for the river Deel when the schooners used to come into this river and come up to the small piers up the river we'll say the schooners used to come up to Gort Pier, you know, so when the boat would come into the Shannon Estuary once she's come to the mouth of the river where there's a place called the 'stake' and Greenish Island is just inside the stake adjacent to it. So my granduncles Robert and Jim they were pilots for the river Deel and they used to bring up

the schooners then up to Gort navigate up the river, because as you can understand the captain of a ship coming up, of a schooner, coming from any place else wouldn't know the local area.

SS: Yeah.

HB: So, it's a very meandering river because when the tide is down it is all s hooks the channel. Now as I say there's mudflats at both sides of the channel. So when the tide comes in after half tide unless you know the area very well you will be on the mudflats but at the present day it's well marked anyway with port markers leading from the stake up to the new quay.

SS: And was that a full time job for them? Was it all year round?

HB: No, it was only a part time job for them at the time, you know, but eh, actually one schooner came in, you know, so their tariff at that time was a shilling to bring in a schooner and take it out. So they decided they would look for a rise, you know, in money but they said they would wait until she was up above in Gort pier first and he wouldn't know his way out then if he didn't have a pilot right. So, they decided to look for, in old money at that time a tenner which was six pence that was the rate one and six, you see. So whatever smart the two boys were, the captain of the schooner was a little bit smarter because he had a small little boat with him and he went down river at low water and he took all his landmarks to get him out of the river. So when the tide came in, off he sailed from Gort out past Greenish Island and out past the stake and into the Shannon Estuary and left the boys without their tenner. [Laugh]

SS: What did they do, em, outside of being pilots, what was their other job?

HB: They were farmers on Greenish Island and they were fishermen as well, you know. Like at that time fishing was a living, you know, they had to go and fish, because you can understand everything was scarce at that time, money was scarce. But, eh, they used to fish for flat fish and salmon. Now the flat fish would be fluke and plaice and sole and then you had salmon fishing as well, you know. They were all their lives at it of course, you know, but not alone my granduncles on Greenish Island you had the Meskells, you had the Nashs, you'd Dan Terry Collins and the Meskells they were all fishing out of Askeaton as well.

SS: And how did they fish, was it nets, was it, what was they way.. the system?

HB: Oh, yes yes, you had two different types of nets that was used. Number one you'd a drift net or a draft net as they called it, you know, which is a long net you put out after a boat and you drift it. Then you have the other net which is called the shore net now that's a lot shorter net altogether or it's called hauling, d'undertand me, which had to be licensed as well, you know. So with the hauling or the shore net, em, you had one man would walk along the verge of the mud and the water, right, and the other man would go in a half moon in a boat called the Gandalow in a half circle around. They may go for fifty meters or they may go for a hundred meters or farther, you know. And the boat would come in onto the mud and the two ends of the net in then together and there would be a purse in the net then and any fish that would be in that net would stay inside in the purse. And you could also have the draft net or the drift net with a purse as well. That's the way it was done at that time.

SS: And the nets, who made the nets, where did they come from?

HB: Oh at that time, there was no monofilament nets it was hemp nets, right, they were a heavy net. Now, a lot of people could mount these nets themselves. You had a cork line and you had a lead line. So, but it wasn't everybody that could mount the net, there was a special way to mount the net, you know. There was a pole at either end of the net then and at the bottom of the pole you have a piece of lead to match with the lead line and keep the net open. On the top line then, your top line is all corks, right, so when the boat would go out and go into a half circle you had the man walking on the verge of the mud and the verge of the water he had a rope onto the middle of the pole and the pole would keep the net open until it would be brought back in on the other side.

SS: And it was all just men who worked on the boats that was doing this?

HB: Yes, yes, and then as you can understand it was the Gandalow, a 'Gondola' was the original name for 'em but our own slang word here would be Gandalow. Now they were a boat specially built for mudflats and servicing islands as well because a keel boat is no good to you when the tide is out on the mud. If you go in to an island and the tide is going and you leave her on the mud and if there's a keel, even an inch of a keel on the bottom of that boat you cannot push her off the mud when you come back. Whereas the flat bottomed Gandalow which was perfectly designed for to slide them along the mud and also when you're fishing because you slide when you come in with the end of the net you slide her up on the mud and she's there, tip your leg against her and the two ends of the net and you take your fish and put them in and you push her off again.

SS: And who would have made these em, the Gandalows?

HB: Mostly the people that fished them because they knew the exact type of craft that was required and they are the only type of craft, there all the way from Limerick down to the Cashen in Ballybunnion. Now there is different type of Gandalow, the standard Gandalow is around nineteen foot six and they're built of larch planking and originally elm framing but when the dutch elm disease then came into the country that did away with the elm so it's mostly teak framing now or it could be oak, you know. Now the standard Gandalow, as I said there are different kind of Gandalow on the Shannon Estuary. The fishing and pleasure Gandalow is mostly Limerick, the working Gandalow is more on the Clare side here and what I have here myself because they are a load bearing Gandalow which can carry more of a load, you know, when they are servicing an island as well. They would be different, I can actually show you two of them Sharon before you go away, you know. One is a load bearing Gandalow, hard working Gandalow and the other is fishing and pleasure, you know.

SS: And how would the tides effect seeing as the estuary being tidal, how did that effect the boat? The boats going out.

HB: Oh well, as you can see out there on the river the tide is in this evening now but in six hours time there will be no water worth talking about in the channel. Now, once or twice of a spring tide on a Good Friday I walked across the bottom of the Deel there in a pair of wellingtons when the tide was out. That's in a spring tide, you won't cross the bottom of it in a neap tide because the neap tide doesn't go as low as spring tide. But everything as regards fishing would be governed by the tidal conditions because normally when they were fishing for flat fish or fishing for salmon you fish when the tide is out. You could fish the last hour or hour and a half with the going tide and you'd fish approximately an hour or an hour and a half with the coming tide as well. You're duration was around three hours fishing, you know, you can't fish when the tides come above the mudflats when the tides is covered.

SS: And how, I know there was a good few people who were fishing, how was that decided who got to fish what area?

HB: Oh they would all have their own areas, kind of you know. The Blackwells in the island now they mostly fished from a rock outside of the mouth of the river called 'Curragh gar amont a seomra' and that would be up at this side of Aughinish now, ah up from from 'Tromore hole' up to 'Marina' they fished that area. The Meskells and the Nashs and those, eh Micheal as you know, they fished from the stake up to the 'Slobber Island' that would be about half a mile that area you know. They kind of all had their own and every one got on, and done their own area and fished their own area.

SS: I was going to ask that, did they get on and not impeach on each others territory.

HB: Ah in those times they had to because there was no outboard engines or anything that time Sharon they were all rowing boats at that time.

SS: And did they have much with the bailiffs, were the bailiffs up and down much in the estuary because I know further up river they were?

HB: Well they're more frequent in the latter number of years but going back, they were there, oh they were there ok. But I mean now they have high powered craft. They can come on you now in the space of a couple of minutes, you know. Whereas nobody had high powered craft at that time, you know. They had either to come by road or..

SS: Did the, em, families, the the different ones, did the people have nicknames, were nicknames common or was it just regular names used?

HB: You'd know more of that Michael I'd say.

MM: No, I wouldn't think so.

HB: Yeah.

MM: You've named the families mainly that are

HB: Well you had the Nashs and the Meskells and Dan Collins and all those that fished out of uptown you know.

MM: Yeah.

HB: And they you had the Blackwells below

MM: Paddy Frawley, Paddy Moran

HB: Paddy Frawley fished in his time, yeah he did.

MM: Paddy Moran

HB: Yeah, yeah.

MM: No I wouldn't say, no no.

SS: So nicknames weren't a common thing. And where did the fish that were coming in, em, where were they sold to? Were they eaten locally or were they shipped out?

HB: Well Nashs, you see Nashs, Chris was fishmonger of course, as you know.

SS: Chris?

HB: But before that they were taken to Limerick and sold, you' know. And they were used for their own use as well. That's the way it was done. And then again Sharon they used to fish on the Clare side as well they used to fish over, the Blackwells often went over there and they fished above at the corner of a place called Coney Island, Rat Island, small little place just above Coney Island it's a great place for sole, sole fish, it's really one of the only places you'd get sole fish, you know, but they used to fish what they called the Coney Island bank.

SS: And the Gandalows and the nets, did they have any other tools that they would use what kind of oar, how were they propelled were there any other?

HB: Oh the boat were propelled by two oars, two paddles, two paddles, but there could be two or three of them pulling the Gandalow together. All that has changed now as well Sharon, you know, because eh going back years and years ago nearly the Seagull and the Ailsa Craig were the first engines to come in. And sure I'll tell you a story about that now. Because, the Lord have mercy on him, PJ Guinane from Coney Island he died there two years ago. He told me that his father came over to Blackwell's Island that's what they used to call it from the Clare side it wasn't the Greenish Island because the Guinane's were after buying an Ailsa Craig engine and they couldn't start it and they knew that the Blackwells on Greenish Island had an Ailsa Craig and they rowed over for to show 'em how to start the engine, you know. But all that has changed now because you'd the Seagull engine came in after the Ailsa Craig or about the same time and they were a very popular engine at that time. So Peter McInerney in Horse Island in Clare he had a three horsepower Seagull engine and next thing he traded it for a five horsepower and PJ said to him "You have some power now Peter!" [laugh] You know that was only two horsepower of a difference at that time now there's twenty horsepower and there's thirty horsepower, there's four stroke engines on 'em now and actually the engines that's on the boats now are too big and too heavy for them, you know.

SS: Em, oh yeah, the, seeing as this part of the river you had all trade, the large ships coming up, up and down as well how did that impact on the local people and the local fishing?

HB: Well of course you see you had Gort Pier and you had the New Quay right it didn't really affect their fishing because they weren't fishing the Deel right but it was all schooners that was coming in, you're talking boats now fifty, sixty and seventy foot long roughly in or around that, you know. Now they exported hay, Michael didn't they? From the New Quay.

MM: From Gort, yeah

HB: Yeah, yeah, now and you had the mills up the quays as well hadn't you Michael?

MM: Yeah

HB: You'd know more about them than me.

MM: Yeah

HB: Who owned the mills there?

MM: Em, on the quay Bannetyne's mills they were known as, they were the predecessors of Ranks.

SS: Em, yeah yeah.

MM: It was they own, and Hunt, Hunt

HB: That's right yeah.

MM: I don't know what to tie in there but hunt was the landlord there. But they stored wool and grain there, on the quay.

SS: And there was lots of other trades that went on around the river as well like the reed cutting as well?

HB: Well down here Sharon you wouldn't have reed cutting whereas there's no reed growing down here. The only thing that is growing down here is the seaweed and an other vegetation called 'rice grass'. The proper name for it is actually *Sportina*, right. It originated, there was a nun, a girl from Nixon's Island, down the back of Shannon airport, and she was out in China or somewhere at the time and she brought home this growth because it was on the mudflats out there and she brought it home and she planted it above in Nixon's Island down at the back of Inish MacNaughtaun below Shannon airport, there Michael

MM: Yeah, yeah

HB: And it would grow, what it does is Sharon it grows on the wet mudflat and it holds the drifting mud and the drifting mud forms into a 'caucus' and it will develop into land later on once it binds together in time. So Henry Blackwell, my father, whose uncles at that time were on Greenish Island he went over and got it over on Nixon's Island and brought home a few shrubs of it and planted it and it took off and it grew around the whole place, you know. But that, we call it here rice grass, but actually the proper name for it is Sportina. Now there's no reed down here in this area you'd have to go up in to the Maigue and speak to the lads up there as there is where the reeds is grown for thatching but what you did have down here and it was the fishermen in the town as well that we have named already. They had their own allotments down along the river Deel because as you know Michael down below in front of Fitz's 'Montell' Hill there's squares on the mudflat where they drew in stones and the seaweed will grow on the stone, it needs wet and it needs dry, right. So, they all had their own allotments there and they seaweed in there. So Dan Terry Collins used to come down, usen't he Michael?

MM: Right, Right

HB: Wasn't it you related the story to me was it a bottle of water and he's fill his Gandalow with seaweed and would get a pound for it at that time was it? Yeah. The fisherman you to gather the seaweed off the shores for the farmers as well and the farmers would buy it from 'em.

MM: He's be away whole day now, pulling seaweed to put it on to Gandalows.

HB: They come down river Sharon with the going tide because when you were propelling by oars, as little as possible against the tide, you went with the flow as they say, they'll come down with the going tide, they'd load their Gandalows then and they'd wait for the coming tide come back up river again.

SS: And what was the seaweed used for?

HB: Oh farming. Farming, growing grass and especially gardeners as well because seaweed is very high in pot ass, you know. But that's what it was used for now.

SS: And, em, I'll go back a second for the fishermen, what did they do off season? It was just farming? I think I asked that one already.

HB: Well I mean the people in the town they wouldn't be farming, you know, they were only living in Askeaton and I suppose they had alternative work, you know.

SS: And eh, do you remember what people would wear when they would go onto the boats, was there particular clothing, that they wore going on to the...

HB: Well as much as would be waterproof as was possible but they didn't have much oil skins in those days, you know, but em the wellingtons had to be worn of course, you know but that didn't mean you didn't get wet. But a lot of them did suffer from arthritis in later years from getting wet, you know, soaking wet, you're out there you get wet you have to get wet when you're harvesting seaweed, haven't you Michael?

MM: Absolutely, the same thing applied to the fishing.

HB: And you're wet all day then until you get back again. But a lot of them did have problems with arthritis.

SS: And could they swim?

HB: Well as they say a lot of fishermen up the west of Ireland can't swim because, they all have their own reasons I suppose they make out in fact if they fell out they the quicker they go the better but I wouldn't agree with that myself but everyone has their own pluck on it as the fella says, you know.

SS: What about fishing nowadays, is there any fishing now?

HB: Oh sure it has been banned, you know, well I mean as Michael will tell you there there used to be a lot of fish in the river Deel now well you can't have the same abundance of fish there because you've trawlers outside coming inside the twelve mile limit and they haven't got just a couple of hundred or a couple of thousand meters, they have miles of net hanging off them and in all fairness if someone is caught up here fishing or poaching or whatever you want to call it, they're only getting the stragglers that is coming into the Shannon Estuary. They're only getting what's left, you know, it's unfair, I mean our fishing industry have left us down miserably, you know.

SS: And the same with the seaweed, is anybody doing the seaweed anymore?

MM: No

HB: There's nobody harvesting the seaweed, there's nobody harvesting the seaweed here now anymore but two days ago I have been told they're harvesting the seaweed up in Donegal again.

MM: Are they?

HB: They're harvesting again yeah, just two days ago Michael I've been told this, yeah yeah.

MM: But that seaweed was very laborious altogether, very.

HB: But very good for gardens. Very good for growing potatoes, turnips, cabbage anything like that, you know.

SS: And you'd go down with the tide and spend the hours doing it.

MM: Go down with the going tide and come back in the coming tide.

HB: Because your propulsion was two paddles, that's what your propulsion was so you'd go with the flow. You go out with the going tide, you'd harvest your seaweed into the boat and you come back with the coming tide.

SS: And how was it harvested, was it just pulled up?

MM: Some of em had a hook hadn't they?!

HB: Some had a hook and some of them pulled them with their bare hands off the stones, you know that's the way it was done yeah. But I mean it had to be brought in then up on the quays and the farmers would collect it then on the quays in their ponies and cars or donkeys and cars or whatever. You know.

SS: And it was a good trade, laborious but a good trade?

HB: It was a trade but I mean the pay was very small, it was only just existence. Just existence. But I mean you asked me there about the Gandalow, the boat that was used. The Gandalow has changed dramatically over the years because it had to change to the type of propulsion put that was on the back of it, do you understand me. But all the Clare side now, all the islanders over there on the far side. Well we call them the islanders they don't actually live in the islands their living on the mainland they mainly build their own boats and they have their own cattle boats as well for taking in cattle and tractors and that into the islands, you'd know. They're kind of self sufficient.

SS: And you were saying about the Clare side and the Limerick side and there was a lot of interaction, was there..

HB: Oh there was good interaction, there was very good interaction between Greenish Island which belonged to my granduncles now and the islands over, Coney Island, Horse Island, Canon Island and Low Island. There was great interaction between them you know.

SS: So was there almost more intermarriages and things across the Shannon as opposed to up and down or did it make much difference?

HB: No, I have worked over there for a good lot of years now with machinery there as well but a lot of the Islands intermarried between themselves. They intermarried from one island to another, on the far side on the Clare side, you know, they're nearly all related [laugh] you fell out with one you could fall out with them all [laugh]. Oh they were very honourable decent people.

MM: But Harry having said that, you said there was a lot of interaction, there was a lot of rivalry too with them over seaweed. That's what I understood anyway from listening to the stories if these crowd went across to the islands over for seaweed, they were challenging on a few occasions.

HB: Yeah

SS: Well unlike the fish, the fish would move into your area, but the seaweed is stuck in one place.

MM: Exactly

HB: Well you see Sharon, the way it works with the fish is. Once the fish come from the Atlantic and come in, lets say to the Cashen River, when they enter the Shannon Estuary right. It takes approximately three days from the time they arrive there until they arrive up here, right. Now when salmon come in from the Atlantic they carry such a thing on 'em called sea lice, right, and the first place they'll make then is any place that's seaweed along the shore to scratch the sea lice off themselves, yeah, then after that they'll make for the mouth of any river they can find especially when their coming up to spawn, [cough] excuse me. Because the first thing they are looking for is a taste of fresh water and when they get a taste of fresh water coming out from a river, they'll follow that river up then and sure, as you know yourself, you have seen fish going up to spawn, haven't you?

MM: Oh yeah, over over the weirs

HB: Michael will tell you all about that now.

MM: Further up the river there are several weirs, you know, the, there's what there's five or six weirs between, between George's weir and where the inlet to 'alcan' is now.

HB: Yeah

MM: But, eh, if you have the patience to sit down, especially at the round weir, it was a rounded weir made of stone sets and the fish would be jumping over them and that's where all the poaching was done. That's a away back but that's not happening anymore because there's no salmon going up.

SS: And the weirs, do you know who built the weirs?

MM: I'd say it was the landlords that built them, Hunts at that stage, anyway, but I wouldn't be sure of that now.

SS: And what were the weirs for, what was the main purpose of them?

MM: To help the fish up, you see if they get over the weir then they're in a flat for maybe a couple of hundred yards until the next one, to the next one, you know that's the way it progressed up along but it was a smashing sight to see salmon going to the weir, running across it, testing it first and falling back down and then he'd take off, you know, and cleared the whole thing. Massive absolutely.

SS: And a lot has changed since, you said about the engines coming in on the boats, changing was that more of why there was a down, decline or do you know why there was a decline in fishing?

HB: Well, the decline in fishing, of course as you can understand it the present day Sharon is everybody is out seeking in work now, there's jobs available to people which wasn't available at that time and you're not going to make the same living out fishing on the river as you are in a commercial job, you know, to be fair about it and I mean if there isn't jobs here people emigrate but I mean going back there now to the River Deel. There was Gandalows and a lot of Gandalows on the river at that time even before my time. Now, there's only two Gandalows on the river and I own the two of them. No body else on the river owns a Gandalow, you know, so that will change you the change in times, the people that's there now are more into pleasure craft and gone away for the weekend or whatever, there's nobody depending on fishing for a living anymore, not here but then again as I said the fishing industry have people left there, you know, I mean there were, they insulted people there some years ago, they offered them put a drift net they offered them €6,000 to stop them fishing completely and I mean there's people there it's heritage with them to fish and it's their right to fish because they've done it all their lives, you know, the same as I do myself.

SS: And em, I've got another, one of my questions from my list were there any tragedies from the fishermen down in this area?

HB: You might have remembered one there Michael, did you?

MM: Well actually I checked it out before I came down and I delighted I did because I hadn't the name. Apparently a way back, I'm talking now I gather in the 20s 30s herring fishing was very prevalent here in the Shannon and there was some, I don't know whether it was the famous 'Big Wind' whenever that was in the 20s that they were out fishing down there off of 'alcan' some place and the storm got up anyway and several of the crews cut their nets and headed for home, which means they lost their nets, but there was one particular man and he wouldn't cut the net and he lost his life, his name was Sullivan. He was Ester Sullivan's father I gather from Philly. But that's a, they always had the old men talking about that, how foolish he was that he wouldn't forsake the net and save his life. It cost him his life.

SS: The net would have cost a good bit?

MM: You see the net was attached to the boat as Harry said and he wasn't able to handle the boat because of the weight of the net and a rough sea.

HB: Yeah sure poor man Phonsie Scanlan there from Clarecastle, God help us, he lost his life there about twelve years ago fishing above Coney Island, slipped out of the boat and got caught in the net and he was gone in a few minutes, you know, but I suppose tragedies do occur.

SS: They do yeah.

SS: Did the fishermen and even the seaweed men, did they go out, was it just in the daytime or did they go out in the evenings at all?

HB: Oh, day and night according as the tide suited.

MM: The tide was governing the whole time.

HB: Tidal conditions really govern everything around here, you know, even with the boats we have there now the bigger boats there like that one you can see there Sharon, out there the one I was showing out a while ago. You're governed, you're governed, the diesel launches we have now, you're governed by about three foot to three and a half foot draft ok. So in a big spring tide, which runs, we read it off of Limerick Docks, 7.2-7.3, when you have low water at spring tide you can't go down the river Deel, in that size of a launch because she's three foot draft and you won't have enough of water, you'd have to wait for an hour in the coming tide, you know. Whereas with the Gandalow the shallow draft craft which will float in approximately four inches of water, right, but with two people in her then she'll be drawing seven or eight inches of water. Ah, you could row her down but you wouldn't be able to propel her with an outboard engine, you know, you'd need another foot and a half of water again. So you're governed here all the time by tidal conditions, in an estuary, and that goes more when you have mudflats.

SS: And the boats and the nets and all of that, were they blessed, were there any special, things, special traditions that went along with them, because I know in other places that boats were blessed?

HB: Oh yeah they used to bless the boats and bless the nets.

MM: Used they, I didn't know that.

HB: Yeah, they used to yeah, that's right yeah. Even Violet now, my mother there, even when I bought that boat out there in 94, right, she had to be blessed,

MM: Go away [laugh]

HB: It wasn't my choice but she made sure the boat was blessed and there was a little jar of holy water put into her and it's still inside in her, yeah [laugh]. And the fishermen in Dingle now and all those, they have an annual day every year for the blessing of the boats, in Valence and all those places, they have yes.

SS: And were there any other, em, folklore about the boats, because I know I've come across redheaded people in some areas weren't allowed to go near boats and were there any down here any little

HB: Well, not really I don't think. Well I do know from my father's time anyway that, with the Gandalows there or any boat there, you did not touch another man's boat without getting permission, it was considered a crime if you went near another man's boat.

SS: Were the boats numbered? Did you have numbers on your boats?

HB: Well, when you have a drift net or a shore net you're supposed to have your boat numbered, you know, supposed to [laugh]. Back in the Cashen now, if you were back in the Cashen in Ballybunion, the Cashen river there, you'd see all the boats, they're all numbered, well they were all numbered the time the licences were there, you know.

SS: And there's no more licences?

HB: No, you're not allowed to fish now anymore.

SS: When did they stop?

HB: Well I suppose that's the most of what ten years ago is it Michael?

MM: More I'd say. More

HB: More maybe, more, yeah yeah. But we have been let down by the fishing industry, by our ministers, you know. But that's the way it is, as I said to you Sharon, the few salmon that is coming up the Shannon their only the stragglers that is getting in from the big trawlers with the nets outside, sure I mean and then if a man is caught with a fixed engine, you know what a fixed engine is do you?

SS: Yeah, yeah

HB: What is called here 'poaching' [laugh] you have your nets staked, of course we wouldn't know anything about that [laugh].

SS: No not at all [laugh]

HB: And it's not because of Michael and myself that the fish are not there, you know [laugh] but if you're caught with a fixed engine then you get a few months in jail and a heavy fine.

SS: Were eels down this way? Because you mentioned that there was the salmon and that there was herring and the flat fish

HB: That's right yeah.

SS: What other kinds of fish, what other fish were in this area?

HB: You'll get eels in the River Deel about from the end of July on, August, depending on the weather, they come down from up river, you know, and especially if there's fresh water water coming down you'd have an abundance of them coming down, you know.

MM: Eel fry that length look, millions of them [laugh] absolutely millions of them. I remember there was an old man up on the Square in Askeaton he had a bicycle shop and he was a, he fished with his rod, he used to be telling us that as a young fella 'I use be sent up to George's weir with a bucket, to get a bucket of eels, to make jelly'. What you call it eel jelly, but it was only a case of put the bucket in and I mean I saw it myself but they're not there any more because of pollution.

HB: And then you had another fish there that were very popular as well mullet otherwise called rock salmon I supposed because they were the nearest to the salmon but they were in big abundance on the river now, you know.

SS: Did you ever hear of a fish called a 'Pollen'?

HB: Which?

SS: 'Pollen'

HB: No, not up here, no no.

MM: Spell that p o l e n?

SS: P o l l e n, it was supposed to be similar to a salmon.

MM: Oh, no

HB: Well the most similar to a salmon here, well you'd have bass as well, you know, which would be similar maybe to them but with a deeper girth and eh, with different colours, you know. But, eh going back to the salmon I have seen a fish that was killed on the river in a net and he was 26lb weight. He was killed by, he was caught by Ned Murphy, Lord have mercy on him, of 'Tomdeally' but I believe some years before that the biggest fish that was ever caught at the mouth of the river was a 33lb salmon, but I didn't see him, the biggest I've seen is 26.

MM: 33lb salmon

SS: Trying to haul that into a net. [laugh]

HB: Well you couldn't haul him unless you had him and once you have him you can haul him [laugh]. So that's about the story with it now I think.

SS: Yeah I think that's us done and thank you very much for having a chat with me about the fisheries.

HB: Thank you Sharon for having us, thank you very much.

MM: The one thing that I would add to that is, the turf boats that used to ply here, you know I visited Philly Meskell there before I came down to see if I could get the names of 'em, and she didn't have 'em imagine. She couldn't add to what we knew already.

HB: Right yeah.

MM: The 'Eva', the 'Edgar', the 'Endes' and the 'Maggie Murray', they were turf boats that plied between Kilrush and here. 'Cappagh' Pier and do you know where the swimming complex is?

SS: Yeah.

MM: There that's where the turf used to be landed, mostly and some of it in Gort but principally up on the green.

SS: And where did the turf come from?

MM: Clare, West Clare.

SS: Okay, and what were these boats, what did they look like?

MM: They were what 80 to 100 ton boats, that's what the 'Edgar' was anyway I think

HB: Yeah.

MM: And they were loaded to the 'gill'

HB: They were governed by sail Michael weren't they?

MM: In the early days they were yes and then they were powered.

HB: But of course Sharon as you can understand when they were governed by sail you had to have wind.

SS: Yeah

HB: If you didn't have wind you were going no place, you had to drift with the tide, you know but that's the difference nowadays all boats are powered, you know.

MM: The Meskell family here now they were, they were city originally they had the 'Edgar' and they had the 'Eva' and they plied between Limerick and Loop Head. What's the name of the 'Curran?' back in West Clare.

HB: That's right, yeah.

MM: And that was some run on a Friday evening or with supplies, no it was general cargo as well but that's all finished as well.

HB: Everything was by boat or transport.

SS: And a lot of supplies would come down from the city even

HB: Pardon?

SS: A lot of supplies would come down from the city on the boats.

MM: In the early days yeah

SS: and stop along the towns along the way?

HB: You have no towns, you see, you have no towns adjacent to the shore really, you know, Pallekenry I suppose is one of the nearest and that's well over a mile maybe a mile and a half from 'Ringmoylan' Pier, you know, you have really no towns adjacent to, only Bunratty adjacent to the river, you know.

SS: Yeah.

MM: Some change alright.