

Denis O'Neill

Newtown

7th June 2017

Denis throat clearing

Ruth: now, it's the 7th June with Denis O'Neill. Thanks Denis, I might leave these up beside you if you don't mind

Denis: no bother

Ruth: is that ok

Denis: ya no bother

Ruth: thank you. ok, so you were a fisherman Denis?

Denis: ya, ya I fished on the river am, I started going on to the Shannon River with my, with my own father and and and Willie Keyes, who would have, they used to fish together, ah drift fishing

Ruth: ok

Denis: so, I was going down there from the age of eight, so around '78/'79, was the first time I, was introduced to the fishing scene. And after that then I was starting to fish with my own father we'd say, or Willie, whichever the case was, from 13 years of age on. So, ya, that, so basically from that right up to the time

Ruth: it's very young, though isn't it? (unclear)

Denis: well you'd always be introduced, you wouldn't actually be fishing with them at that particular stage, you'd be, you'd be in the bow of the boat, as we call it, front of the boat,

Ruth: right

Denis: you'd be sitting down there for the day like you know or whatever the case was, or maybe a half tide which

Ruth: and what's a half tide?

Denis: four hours, we'd say you know, or a bit, we used to call it, we'll say your tides, your tides are a basically every six hours you have a tide, but when you went in, they used to do what a half tide they called it, kind of a four-hour tide, do you know, that's what they used to do. so, they might take up, the last, four, we'll say three hours of the coming tide

Ruth: ok

Denis: and we'll say the top of the tide then would do the last hour, the first hour or it off, basically what they it the first hour of it going away. So, that's what they used to call a half tide.

Ruth: ok

Denis: so, you get to do that for the first couple of years with them so it wasn't so long, you weren't all day on the boat

Ruth: ya

Denis: and once you started fishing away then with them on the basis of, we'll say yourself, you could well you could go down for what we call low water, which is the lowest part of the tide, so you'd be fishing, you'd fish from ah maybe two, two and a half hours three hours before that that particular time, and you'd fish from there then right up to the top of the tide which could, could be 13, 14 hours on the river

Ruth: ok

Denis: depending how good fishing would be or whatever the case would be like

Ruth: right, so when did you start off actually fishing?

Denis: ah, I'd say 1983 was my first time actually fishing, properly

Ruth: first...

Denis; ya ya

Ruth: and how old were you then?

Denis: 13

Ruth: 13, ok, and before then you were on the boat but you weren't...

Denis: you wouldn't have been fishing ya, you wouldn't have been you wouldn't have been physically strong enough to put out the net or and you definitely wouldn't have been strong enough to row the boat

Ruth: ok

Denis: you know so that, you were just shown how it was done, basically, well, I was a net man, I used to let off the net and bring the net in, that's, that was my job we'll say

Ruth: right

Denis: so, ah, you physically wouldn't have been strong enough at eight, nine, ten, eleven years of age to do it you know

Ruth: so, what did you have to do when you say let the net off? what's, that?

Denis: you basically have to let, put the net out, out into the water we'll say, you know, you had a buoy on one side, ah, what we call a cork line and a lead, a lead line. Basically, is what you have, cork line floats obviously and the lead line is what goes down and that keeps the net opened. So, you let off a couple of handfuls of that, and your oars man then, he'd be pulling it towards the bank or whatever direction my net we'd say it would be going. and once you started off a bit of it then, you can let go of, of the lead line, and just hold the cork line and just feed it out, just keep feeding it out off the boat

Ruth: ok

Denis: ya that was it

Ruth: and how deep would the water be?

Denis: ah, the, we'll say, I I I don't know what the exact depths of the water are

Ruth: ya that's ok

Denis: but obviously for low water and for high water we'd say you're talking, there's ah, what we call it, a six metre tide, which is 18, we'll say, 6, 2, 2.2, 20foot tide, so they call it, it's *stutter* (unclear) at the highest water, water mark, it's at 20feet, so you have 20foot water on, do you know

Ruth: ok

Denis: and they, they are rowing nowadays, there, you didn't see it when we were fishing so much but there is 7.2/7.3 tides now which are huge

Ruth: ok

Denis: ah, which you didn't have before, you know, there were usually 6.1/6.2, they were considered very high tides, one time

Ruth: right

Denis: but obviously with ah, ah, ah, with am, globalisation I suppose and whatever it is now, you know, seas are rising and rivers are rising with them you know

Ruth: crazy, isn't it?

Denis: ya, it seems to be ya, it seems to be the case ya ya ya

Ruth: and, am, so that was fine then you started off doing your fishing

Denis: ya

Ruth: and did you always do the net or did you get other jobs

Denis: well, if I, we'd say you are either rowing or your fishing, its one or the other, so, as, you were getting older, once you hit the 15, 16, 17, am, you were strong enough to row the boat then at the stage

Ruth: ok

3.60mins Denis: so, depending on who, we'll say, when I was with my father now, we used we used to swop, he'd do the net, and, or id always start with the net and he'd do the rowing, and vice versa then as the day would go on, just for the sake of changing over, do you know, whereas, Willie, Willie Keyes, who my father fished with nearly all his life, was happy to stay on the the oars, all day long

Ruth: right

Denis: that, do you know, he rathered those, he rathered doing that than he did, the, the net

Ruth: ok

Denis: do you know, that was just the way it was, they weren't the only two people I fished with, I fished with loads of people down there over the years, you know

Ruth: ok

Denis: we used some shite (unclear if this was said?) at the end we'd say close towards the end of it I used to do some shore, shore fishing, which is a different type of fishing altogether,

Ruth: right

Denis: shore fishing, you you you have someone ah, on the, on the bank all the time, one on one end on one end of the net, and then what you have is, he'll, you'll, he'll walk, his walking what they call walk the mud, he walks the mud, for a certain distance, maybe a hundred yards, hundred and fifty yards, there about, and the others, there's two lads then or sometimes only one, we'll go way out, they'll take the boat out, and it goes around in a circle, circular shape, to, and you just, you haul your net in then, and and you, if there were lucky enough if you went fishing, they come out of it, if they haven't then you re- re-make it again and you do the same circle again on down again

Ruth: ok

Denis: and that was the shore fishing, ya, harder work

Ruth: right

Denis: a lot lot more involved in it because you, you

Ruth: in terms of physical strength or?

Denis: ya, well, it was it was mud, you were walking mud, so you were up to your knees all the time in mud like, so, depending on what part of the river that you were on, some of it was hard, more of it was soft, and you could, could hit a soft spot you know so, it was physically

more demanding, so it was ya ya. Physically more demanding, and you have less time on the river than as well because you were, you were governed by the tides, where as in in the drift fishing, you could kind of stay on the river all day long if you wish

Ruth: oh, I didn't know that

Denis: you were just drifting with it you know

Ruth: so how long would you be shore fishing then?

Denis: shore fishing we used to do again, used to do maybe the last two hours of the going tide, but you'd only be, you'd only get about two and a half, three hours of the coming tide because it would, with with the shore fishing you had to be off the, you had to be off, once the mud was covered, it was kind of a law that, that, a law or a rule there that you had to be off, off the, off the river basically

Ruth: off the river ok (unclear)

Denis: ya, ya ya ya, once the water came to the sedge as well called it, you'd have to take it off of it,

Ruth: what did you call it? when the water

Denis: sedge.

Ruth: sedge?!

Denis: we'd say, sedge, ya. Or the grass line If you want to call it, same, it would, it would be the same thing like

Ruth: ok

Denis: ya, so you'd to be off the water at that stage so you'd less time and you'd, it was definitely, in my opinion it was it was it was am

Ruth: harder work?

Denis: harder work ya ya

Ruth: ok

Denis: for less, you, it was also for less, ah, less of a chance of, of, catching because the net sizes are different, as well, you'd have your, you'd have once 120 yards, or was it 100, 100 yards I'm not too sure now, I can't remember exactly, of a shore net, as against maybe 150 to 180 of a drift net, so understandable do you know, you'd you'd a less chance obviously of catching, of catching, fish

Ruth: ya

Denis: with that as well you know

Ruth: and is there a difference in the types of fish that you catch between

Denis: no, it was all salmon

Ruth: all salmon

Denis: all salmon ya ya everything everything was ya that's all we fished for was salmon around here

Ruth: ok

Denis: um

7.12mins Ruth: and, so you used to go out with not just your father and Willie,

Denis: Willie Keyes, ya, no, no like, there was plenty others, we'd say when I was shoring we'd say, I used to do it with a lad over the road, Ger O'Neill is his name, no relation, we used, we used, to do a good bit together, and Liam, we'll say Willie Keyes' son Liam, we done a good bit of shore fishing together as well, am, ya, we'll say, there was times down there we'll say, where, ah, someone, someone might be stuck for a an, a tide or whatever the case is when you go away with them for a couple of tides you know, you were never stuck to get, there was always someone to go with, do you know, or or vice versa, if you were at home and there was no, and you had nothing on, you'd go, you'd go with them, do you know that kind of a way

Ruth: right ok

Denis: there was, there was always someone looking to go out,

Ruth: and it didn't matter as long as someone had a licence?

Denis: once there was a licence on the boat ya and a nominee, ya, we'd say, we'd say, a licence owner, and a licence didn't actually have to be fishing once he, once he had a nominee, what was known as a nominee, so most people had the same nominees for lifetimes, we'd say, the boat that we used to fish was was Liam, was was was am Willie eyes relation with it, it was ah, it was a Chri-chri-christy Coughlan I think was his name

Ruth: ok

Denis: but ah, he actually owned the licence, but it was Willie Keyes, was, was the nominee on it, you know, so, you, we just that was the way it was fished. And then, I know most I'd say, bar, bar now, where you had an owner of a boat, which would we'd say be Peter Byrnes, below now is an owner of a boat you know

Ruth: ya

Denis: he owned his own boat you know so he was kind of always on it like, you know, bar that, it was nearly always a nominees that that were doing the fishing

Ruth: right ok

Denis: you know ya ya

Ruth: and did you keep the boats somewhere around here Denis?

Denis: ya, below at the end, you'd say, ah,

Ruth: where did you store them?

Denis: we'd say, ah, arg, you pass we say, when you pass back now, if you were going back to Declan and Valerie's now we say,

Ruth: uh hum

Denis: instead of instead of turning right, instead of turning left back that last lane, go straight to the end of the road there, and its down at the Corrie O'Brien's, is known as the name of the place,

Ruth: right

Denis: and the Orchard, is, it was known as the Orchard, and down there, everyone had their own little, they had their own little am, piece cornered off, and it was basically a paling, paling post and a bit of, bit of thorny wire, was basically what it was, and you'd have a little box inside in that then, where you'd keep your boat engine, and maybe your supplies, or whatever the case may be do you know, and you'd have your boat then staked, alongside that for the, well basically for the day that you wouldn't, that you wouldn't be fishing on at the weekends, you had to take your ah, your nets had to be out of the boats for the weekends, from six o'clock on a Saturday morning until six o'clock on a Monday morning. they all had to be out, you couldn't have any net on a boat for those, for those ah, for those hours,

Ruth: ok

9.40mins Denis: that was it, you had to be off the water for the weekends basically is what you had to be. so, then, you had what was known as a stake then, in in with in within that ah, within your own little compound we'd say or what'll I say, what they called a stake, and you'd put your net up on that, so basically you, you, you'd have two of them like that, and you'd you'd run your cork line one side and you'd have your, your lead line on the other side, and you'd you'd basically what you'd have, ah, you'd do a bit of cleaning on it as well, take the sea weed out of it, take whatever grass out or other bits that are stuck in it out, you'll take all those out of it as well you know

Ruth: right

Denis: while you'd be doing it. So, you'd, so ya

Ruth: how long would it take to clean them?

Denis: ah, you'd clean them in half an hour, it, it wasn't, it wasn't so big a job, once once once am, once you had two fellas working on it, it wasn't a big job at all like

Ruth: ok

10.23mins Denis: ya. so, the what do you it's were a bit more awkward alright, the the the shore net, because they were deeper. Shore nets, were, are, are, are they are a deeper net than the, than the, am, than the drift.

Ruth: right

Denis: the drift nets, the drift nets are 60 matches deep, whereas the shore nets are a 120 matches deep,

Ruth: ok. and, where did you get these nets? where did all this come from?

Denis: ah sure, see its going on for, fishing is going on for, I don't know, hundreds of years, like you know, I'd say down here I don't know exactly I'd say, the likes of Peter Byrnes and them now would, would have a, a vast knowledge of going back and do you know

Ruth: uh hah, and how long it's going on

Denis: and the dates for, for those ya, for the likes of that now. I don't, I used, there was different types of nets there that time. there was nets called ah ah 'hussy nets' they used to call them, they were kind of

Ruth: what was it?

Denis: a hussy net,

Ruth: ok

Denis: ya and there was another one, I can't, I don't know what the name, I can't, I don't was.... they were all there before the nylon came in. And am, they used to break down quite a bit actually, they used to, you'd say the same thing, they used to take them out of the river we'll say, take them out of the boat for the weekends as well, and when they go back on, on the Monday morning, you used to find that they were all frayed, and, they were they were nearly none non-usable do you know. but, the reason, reason being apparently that time, ah, the type of the type of ah, material that it was,

Ruth: uh hum

Denis: it used to break down in the sunlight

Ruth: go 'way

Denis: so ya ya they found that, so what they do, what they used to do for a finish was they used to put them into trenches. take them out of the boats and put them into trenches there and cover them in water for the weekend and they'd work away the finest again then for the following week

Ruth: go 'way

11.53 Denis: ya, ya there was, there was another like there was another name of one now, of a net and I can't remember exactly what it is, but again I presume the likes of Peter Byrnes and them would have that given

Ruth: unclear

Denis: they'd have all that given you know

Ruth: brilliant, ok

Denis: ya,

Ruth: and, did you just fish down, here Denis?

Denis: yes, it was from what we call Coonagh Point, which is, which is a point ammm, closest to Limerick, ah, how would I explain it to you now from here, there is no real way, ah, it would be close, we'll say, it would be roughly parallel with eh, with eh, what do you call it outside, do you know the the the the, where you pay there across from the tunnel, do you know, do you know where

Ruth: oh ya

Denis: where, ya, roughly that point,

Ruth: the toll?

Denis: if you went... ya! if you came straight in from the toll kind of roughly that point there, we used we used to fish up as far as that, which is Coonagh Point, but you could go from there then down to Ringmoylan, you know, baycal (?) well he used to one time back there they used to the used to go to Bay Castle even which is further back again you know, ammm, nowadays, we'll say, nearer the end of the fishing, we'll say, as it came closer to finishing up

Ruth: um

Denis: they say, use, Ringmoylan would far, would have been kind of as far as you'd be going, any, and even a small bit closer to home. But am, ya, ya, there was, depending on how many boats were on the river at the time, depending on what way fishing was going, you wouldn't be going back that far you know, Sandy, we'll say Sandy, Grass Island, these are places you'd always, you'd you'd always be hitting around Grass Island point,

Ruth: where exactly is that?

Denis: Grass Island is on the mouth of the Maigue. its where the Maigue, its where the river Maigue meets, meets the Shannon. it's a small island, it's a small island, its known as Grass Island. It's actually owned by the Men in Stud, which is just inside, which is just inside over the bank of it there. ammm, their the owners of it

Ruth: ok

Denis: ya.

Ruth: and how long would you be gone fishing for?

Denis: oh again, depending on on on

Ruth: depends?

Denis: depending on fish, on on on, if there was fish there, you could you could do, you could do 12, 13, 14, hours of a day on the river. you know. at the latter, the latter couple of years of it when fishing was gone bad when salmon, salmon stocks were depleted, quite a bit, most people only went for we'll say for the last three or four hours of the coming tide. very few people actually down for the low water anymore. it physically wasn't worth it to be honest with you

Ruth: right

Denis: ya, just wasn't worth it.

Ruth: ok

Denis: ya.

14.12mins Ruth: and, am, do you remember Denis, how much you'd get for fish or how many, or what quantities you'd get or?

Denis: *stutter* we'd say going back, we'll say, when I was fishing first, there was there, it was a great bounty, do you know you'd have a fantastic bounty of fish. that time you could have, maybe, over the course of the week you could have 150/160 fish over the course of the week. Do you know. and it always averaged differently then, you you couldn't you couldn't put a cost on it because you had ah, if you were dealing with the fish mongers, if there was plenty of fish there, the price was dropped to little or nothing

Ruth: ummm

Denis: do you know, so you you you you were at the lap of the Gods when it came to fish, if you were lucky enough to get in with the first lot, where, where nobody had gone into him before you, you might have got a better price than the fella that was last in do you know that kind of way

Ruth: right ok

Denis: and sometimes they mightn't even take them off you, if they had too many of them. so, price wise you couldn't put a price on it because, it just it it varied, it nearly varied day to day rather than even week to week

Ruth: right

Denis: you know, there was a fella, when he say he'd be full (unclear) *stutters* in the last '70s, he was coming way before that, he was coming I suppose late '60's early '70s, he was coming from Cork... he used to come up from Cork every, every morning, and every evening. He'd drive up from Cork and he's take eh, he'd take we'd say whatever surplus salmon they

had around you know, a fella, the locals here, they'd hold onto them, he'd come on then with his ice boxes, and the whole lot and he'd weight, he'd weight whatever fish you had and he'd pay you on the spur. he used to pay you there and then for them as well like

Ruth: right

Denis: he used to come twice, he used to come twice a day, up from Cork

Ruth: and you don't know what his name was?

15.42mins Denis: ah I haven't a clue what his name was now what you call it, the likes of Peter Byrnes then I'm quite sure would have had his name, and they, they

Ruth: (unclear)

Denis: ya ya, that that information would have been given from them you know

Ruth: and the fish monger that you were speaking of there a few minutes ago, where is that?

Denis: well you'd have a couple, we'd say you'd have what do you call him in Limerick there, sure he's still there, ammm, here on the Dock Road

Ruth: Rene Cusack?

Denis: Rene Cusack ya Rene Cusack was a big one, and there was another there on Roches Street, ammm, again he's still there too

Ruth: Mortell's?

Denis: Mortell's. Mortell, good girl you are

Ruth: ya

Denis: ya

Ruth: he's still there ya

Denis: ya, there were kind of the big two at the time like, ya. ya.

Ruth: and did they used to come out here two Denis to pick up the fish?

Denis: no, you'd have to go in, you'd have to go in to them. they'd never come out, you'd always have to go in to those and take them in for them. and if you were lucky enough, some, some, of we *stutter* I don't ever remember them going, going to ah, hotels, but some of the lads they'd be fishing, they'd have a contract with a hotel, maybe the Woodlands or, say the Greenhills or one of these places, they'd have a contract, that they'd take so many fish of them every day or every year, you know, over the course of the season, and if you were lucky enough to have one of those contracts, you know, you could, you'd have ah, you'd have a great chance of ah maybe getting an even price for them all the time you know

Ruth: ya

Denis: so, you know, we, I know, I know we never done that, t'was nearly always in to in to Cusack or Mortell's that we used to go with them

Ruth: and ammm, I forget what I was going to say to you now, oh ya, were you fishing full time Denis or was it

Denis: no no no, part time, part time fishing. It was ah, you'd you'd you'd do nearly you'd do that we'd say, in the early days you'd you'd definitely do, we'll say up to the time before I started working, we'll say going on to work when I was, up to the time of 18, you'd fish every day,

Ruth: right

Denis: ya ya, you could nearly stay full time fishing at that time, and after that then I went away and I done an apprenticeship over two, over four years, and ah, basically as soon as you came home, the tides would be right you'd be gone again, basically do you know

Ruth: right

Denis: ya, you basically would like

Ruth: and did you keep any fish for yourselves or did you just sell it?

Denis: oh, you would, you'd keep a couple, ya you would ah you would ya. we'd always keep a free, we'd say we left 7 or 8 at the end of the season in the freezer, you know

Ruth: ummm

17.42mins Denis: ya, that would be, that *stutter* the home house was never, a huge fish-eating house you know

Ruth: ya ya

Denis: so, it wasn't ya, 7 or 8

Ruth: just extra income?

Denis: ya, it would be kind of an extra income t'would ya, t'would have been ya that's basically what it was. T'was

Ruth: ok. Were you nervous when you were going out fishing as a kid?

Denis: never no

Ruth: and can you swim Denis?

Denis: I can, not greatly but I can

Ruth: ya

Denis: ya, I'd say 80% of the people that fished down there could never swim

Ruth: ummmm

Denis: ya. I'd say safely ya, but ah, you know, it was it was, it was more the fact that you were taken early enough do you know

Ruth: ya

Denis: you were taken early enough, do you know early enough and you were you were shown how to respect it and and and do you know, how to look after yourself and say, god forbid if you fell in, you know, for thing you do is to grab the net, that was the first thing you done

Ruth: right

Denis: and that's for obvious reasons, the net is tied to the boat. do you know, so, at worst, either you pull yourself in, or the fella that was with you would pull you in do you know,

Ruth: right

Denis: so, it was simply, it was simple mathematics basically like, if you happen to fall in catch the net if you could do you know

Ruth: ya ok

Denis: (unclear)

Ruth: and did you, did you ever, see or hear anyone fall in

Denis: I did twice I saw I saw the same man fall in, twice in the one week actually, and both times, both times t'was am, he just, he basically fell out on top of the net do you know

Ruth: right

Denis: its easy laugh about it now but at the time it wouldn't have been you know

Ruth: no

Denis: but like you know, t'was ah, t'was t'was, it did happen like

Ruth: it would be easy happen I'd say

Denis: ya ya quite easy, ya because most fellas just just used to stand up on the ba- locker which is on the back of the boat

Ruth: stand up on the what?

Denis: the locker, what we call the locker, which is the back of the boat, and it was basically, the reason you stand up on it was it gave you more height away from the net, that was in the boat, so you could shake it out a bit easier you know,

Ruth: ok

Denis: so, basically it untangled your cork line from your lead line, is what it used to do, so it it it made the net flow freer, when it was going out, so it did.

Ruth: ok, so that was easier, and then pulling it back in then how did you manage?

Denis: same thing ya, it was basically the same way you you you had *stutter* what we know, what we, what we knew as a pole, it was tied on to both ends, or your cork line and your lead line, it was known as a pole, and that was tied on to a rope that that was attached to the boat, so that was the first thing in, so your your your your your we'd say your, the man who would be rowing the boat then, well he'd turn around and face, and we'd say he would face away the net, he'd pull away in towards it, so the net would come right along the boat so you'd just you'll be hauling in straight alongside the boat ya

Ruth: right

Denis: and it was all the way then, so ya ya, t'was t'was quite simply really like you know, there was, there was no science to it like,

Ruth: right

Denis: you know it was simply enough, simply enough method to do

Ruth: I get ya

Denis: ya ya ya

Ruth: ok. And was there women involved?

Denis: Ann O'Brien was the only woman I ever see fish down there, she was, she's down at the very end in Newtown, ah, Ann and Aidan, they used, she used to fish with her husband, Aidan, I I I think she fished for a couple of other lads down there as well down through the years you know

Ruth: right

Denis: again, going back year, I never, I don't, I think I saw her fishing once only in my life time, when I was down there, but she did fish quite, quite a number of years,

Ruth: ok

Denis: down there like so she did ya

Ruth: just wasn't a women's job, was it?

Denis: no, I think she was the only woman I ever saw down there

Ruth: right

20.50mins Denis: Nicky Coughlan done a bit of fishing alright with her father, but again I think it was kind of, Nicky would have been very young, at that time

Ruth: right

Denis: and am, t'was kind of more of a, you know, if it was a fine evening, I'd say Liam just took her out for the sake of

Ruth: just take her out

Denis: just to take her you know that kind of a way. but ah, they were the only two women I have ever seen on on on the river

Ruth: ok

Denis: so, they were ya. it was mainly mainly a male orientated kind of a, a thing

Ruth: ya, and probably a bit of a social outing as well was it?

Denis: no no I wouldn't go as far as to say that now, id id id say the total opposite actually you you you'd never, the only time you'd have social, you'd have a social side to it is we'll say if you were going in for a cup of tea depending on tides you know, we'll say, if there was a lot of, if there was a lot ammm, if there was a lot of boats going up the same direction of the river obviously you'd have to wait your turn to go you know, there was, there was kind, there was a rule on the river like you'll have to be let go so far before the next fella could go on out again you know, so the likes the likes of Grass Island was a great place for a meet, for meeting, fellas would have their own, they would have their own kettles and do you know would make up their own bit of a fire there and, they would boil the kettle and they would have a sandwich in the bag and and you know, you could have five or six or seven boats there together, and they pull in there and have a cup of tea, and and as they were ready to go, one after the other they would be tipping away up along

Ruth: ok

Denis: the river then and tip away up you know

Ruth: so that was really the only social setting?

Denis: ya that was the only so-, the only sign you'd actually be talking to someone is if you go held up, if you actually got held up, you know, we'll say waiting for a drift, that that was it like,

Ruth: ok.

22.09mins Denis: and if you had a lot of boats then in the one area you know you might you might change, depending on the fishing again, if the fishing was right good, everyone knew where, everyone knew the best parts of the river, do you know

Ruth: ok

Denis: and where the best places were to get, you know the best chances of catching, more fish, you know but, if if if that was the case and there was a lot of boats and that, you might have to divert and go in a different direction, you know

Ruth: right

Denis: ok less of a chance obviously maybe of catching a fish because we'll say, on on the river, ah we'll say, you you you had ah, what's known as the main stream of the river, the main the main the main channel, you know, and you kind of stuck to that quite a bit, am, why I don't know,

Ruth: and where would the best places Denis?

Denis: am, well we used to call the North Shore was one, which would be kind of ah ah that would have been opposite ammm, Shannon Airport, basically is what that was, Grass Island was was was one of the main areas for both shore fishing and drift fishing, ah, you come on on up along then and you come in to Sandy, Sandy was very, every every boat met in Sandy, every boat met in Sandy, and you have two parts to Sandy then, you have the top end of it and the bottom end. Bottom end would be known as just over the dirt, it was known as 'over the dirt', and to Sandy's sluice, you came on then to the Tower and from the Tower up then you had three different, your three different, you have three difference directions you could have gone then from the Tower. You could have gone was we, was what was known as the Orchard which was home, we always take, took took it as home

Ruth: right

Denis: because it was the closer one to it, ah, you have the centre of the river then which was known known as the Durch (?) the reason being that, one time when the ships used to come out of Limerick they used to fill them with ballasts stones, rocks, all that kind of stuff, and ah, once they get out a certain distance out along the river then, they could let it off, they would let off the ballast

Ruth: ummm

Denis: and you you you basically fol-, there was already a rock formed there, there was a rock and and and and it kind of got filled up a bit more with that so you could never fish that on low water, cause your nets would get caught in it and tie,

Ruth: ya

Denis: but over over over, a high-water tide, you would get over it, do you know

Ruth: ok

Denis: so you just do that, and the inside one then was down as you know the green light, that was that was the that was the channel, you you were basically following the channel that way, and, all three would take you Coonagh Point, you know, again, there is different, different we'll say, different landmarks, if you stayed up in by, if you went from the am, the Tower up along we'll say by we'll say, up along by am the Orchard, next you'll have Max Mud then up along from that, do you know it was known as Max

Ruth: there's loads of places

Denis: ha?

Ruth: there are so many places

Denis: oh, tis massive ya ya, that's what I'm doing at the moment outside, we'll say myself there now at the moment just trying to remember remember the all, all the different meets that were there in it you know, and and and ah, oh Jesus there is a massive amount of them ya, and no one, and known basically where the landmarks are, every everything had a land mark, you didn't just throw the net out, you know

Ruth: right

Denis: there was a land, we'll say we'll say there was, you had the old, there was old, am, fish weirs, going back in the day, there were owned by, if, for the want of a better word, they were gentry owned, basically, do you know, or or maybe the ESB owned it or some of them as well. but you had, we'll say, when they all taken down and and over the years, they left stakes in the mud, which your net could get tangled on you know, so you'd to know where all those things were,

Ruth: oh god

Denis: and you have to know how to get around them, and how to work them you know like, one, one of the main, we'll say there was one, from, what was known as John, Johnny Greene's Island, he was the last, he was the last known islander to live on the islands, and ah, that was out near Bunratty, the mouth of Bunratty River, so to come around his place, you were to be able to see King John's or ah, ah ammm, the Cathedral side, St. John's Cathedral,

Ruth: uh hum

Denis: the spire in that, you'd let off the net,

Ruth: right

Denis: and you'd drift aro-when you'd be drifting away out in then, and as that was going out of sight, Bunratty Castle had to come in to sight

Ruth: right

Denis: and if you lost both of them then, your net well you you can forget about your net,

Ruth laughs

Denis: your net was gone like, you were on top of the stakes, you were too far in do you know

Ruth: right

Denis: that was, they were just some of the things you had to watch out for you know

Ruth: that's brilliant

Denis: do you know like you had, we'll say to go down, am, out between Battle Island, Battle Island, was it Battle and Kay Island I think, I could be wrong on in the Islands now, I think Battle and Kay, do you know, you were looking at Carrig Rock, there was there was ah, a high tree in Carrig Rock, that had to be in line with the Green light in Sandy,

Ruth: right

Denis: and then, you could let off your net then, and that would take you up between the two islands at full drift, you'd get out between the two of them safely like

Ruth: brilliant

Denis: ya ya so you- but you had to keep those marks, you had to keep them on line like, if you drifted inside or outside then you were going to get caught in one of the two islands then you know

Ruth: ya

Denis: and like, the likes of, of, they are, the are all over the place like, down, there was another one am, you know as you get out past, in order to get out past am, the Rock Lamp we called it, to go out into Sandy, it was a tricky enough kind of a draw now, it was a draw that, we we we rarely, we used to do it, but you used to go back to the sluice to do it, and you know, it was you used, you'd have to keep, you'd have to keep the green light, was it the green light inside or outside, or the green light outside the ri- Sandy Buoys what it was known as,

27.09mins Ruth: right

Denis: to let of the net, the green the green lamp they called it

Ruth: and what was the sluice, sorry?

Denis: Sandy or ah, there was a sluice, half way back between, back to Grass Island, between the Rock and Grass Island, and it was a long vein, it was it was basically a sluice (unclear) and you'd have to go back to that, you'd let your net off from there then, and that basically will bring you, will draw you out, out, between the Rock at Sandy and and the buoy that was in the middle that showed you the channel.

Ruth: uh hum

Denis: you were you were actually going out the channel is what you were doing

Ruth: ok

Denis: so, ah, you'd keep all those things in in in line with one another, in order to get out, because if you didn't, you were going to get caught in the stones and the rocks, that was basically it like,

Ruth: ok

Denis: ya ya ya

Ruth: and did that happen

Denis: oh, it did happen several, oh it did it did ya god it happened loads of times

Ruth: and how much would it cost then to repair the net or how would you do that?

Denis: well it would depend on how much you would get back, we'll say, you'd have you you you'd know fairly quick whether you were to get caught in it or not do you know

Ruth: ya,

Denis: so, you start hauling away as much as you could and depending and depending on how good or how lucky you could be, you might pull it off the rocks, you might save a lot of it you know,

Ruth: right and if you didn't know

Denis: if you didn't then, you'd you'd have to ring, we'd say, there is a place in Killibegs that we used to buy the nets and there was a place in Cork, Marine something, ah, what was the name, some place something Marine was the name of it, and there was a crowd in Waterford, there was three places you could get them you know

Ruth: right

Denis: and you basically just ring them up like and you, they send you on a bale of net, basically that was it you know

Ruth: and who repairs it then

Denis: you'd repair it yourself

Ruth: ok

Denis: ya ya, you'd have to cut out a certain amount of it, and maybe cut down the ropes, and and remount it again

Ruth: is that hard?

Denis: it it it wasn't so much that it was hard, it, you had to be very accurate with it, you couldn't you couldn't, we'll say every mesh, is diamond shaped, every mesh is diamond

shaped like that, and you'd to make sure you connected it into everyone, if you missed one, it would throw the shape of the net out you know

Ruth: oh ya

Denis: so, so it wouldn't hang properly, so once, so it wouldn't fish properly then straight away like. so, there was different types of that then as well, we used to use four seven eights, that was for for for the pale, pale season, and ah it was five, five and an eighth then for the salmon, salmon net. they used to use, say, going back, we'll say, before my time, they used to even use, we'll say, a six-inch mesh, because you had bigger fish that time, do you know there was no trawlers in the rivers, or the seas or anything, so you could be looking at 20, 25, 30-pound salmon coming up the river,

Ruth: and what was the size of that net?

Denis: they were six, they were, they were over six inches as far as I know. you used to measure them, across across the knot, so you basically, you have your diamond like that so you pull the diamond, you pull,

Ruth: oh ya

Denis: pull the two knots together then, and the distance between the two knots will give you give you the distance of of of what it was, that's how it was done

Ruth: so, there was bigger fish then?

Denis: ah, sure there was massive

Ruth: so, when was this then?

Denis: ah, going back into the fifties, sixties, ya ya ya ya, a time you had no trawlers in the rivers, it only, its only since you went into Europe that the trawlers came in to play you see

Ruth: ya

Denis: and and and, once they came into play then, of course everything that was outside, everything that was big, and and do you know, they they took all them, it was basically only the fish that got throw their nets outside that came in then after that

Ruth: ok

Denis: that's basically, that was the way, that's the way it worked and that's how it happened like.

Ruth: ok

Denis: ummm

30.11mins Ruth: ammm, right ok, and then the pale season, when is that and

Denis: pale season was always

Ruth: does it vary

Denis: it does ya, they used, we'd say going back at the very start, the salmon season started in February one time,

Ruth: ok

Denis: t'was February,

Ruth: I think someone is outside

Denis: oh, that's the in-laws

Ruth: will I move the car?

Denis: oh, hold on now one sec now (unclear)

30.30mins break in interview until 33.18mins

Ruth: so, we were just on about, you were going to say when the pale season was?

Denis: pale season, pale season came in kind of in May, May, June, May and June, we'll say were the main months for the pale. am, the fishing, kind of, everything ch-, everything went back to May for a finish, seasons got shorter so the salmon seasons we actually, we taken off of them you know, `

Ruth: right

Denis: as as the years went on. I I remember my own father fishing before I ever, I'd say I'd say they were, I'd say the pale, the salmon seasons, I'd say they were gone by the mid '70s I'd say, we'll say which is February, March, those two, those two months, I think `they they held on to April for a little bit, am, after that, and then even April went, as the years went on you know, so the whole season, there was no actually one, there was no pale, there was no season for salmon and pale, it was all one season for a finish.

Ruth: right ok

Denis: ya. and that was from May, that was from May, until, it was from May, until July and it finished up, that`s that's when it finished up.

Ruth: ok. and would anyone be fishing outside of these times then?

Denis: no

Ruth: no

Denis: that, that was the seasons. no,

Ruth: there was no point?

Denis: they were the seasons and that was it, ya. it's not that there was no point, I'm quite sure, there was salmon going up the rivers all the time, but but you were governed by, the government, they they they were the ties they give you like.

Ruth: right

Denis: do you know, it was them that kept shortening down the season. it was basic, basically, what we'll say, you you have the demise of the salmon on on on the rivers, so, basically what they were saying was that you couldn't keep fishing, you couldn't keep fishing as the way it was intensively being fished

Ruth: ummm

Denis: do you know, so they had, something had to give, so they basically, so they were looking to take off the, take the likes of fishermen off of the rivers, you know so, in my opinion and definitely the opinion of any fisherman that you'll talk to around here, they took the wrong people off the rivers. do you know, we'll say, it was outside at the mouth of the Shannon where you have a fella with 20 miles of a net, he was the man that was causing the damage do you know

Ruth: ya

35.13mins Denis: and then after that, then you had, we'll say there was no, there was actually, there was no, ah regulations on on farming that time

Ruth: ya

Denis: so you had slurry, and you had you had we'll say your slurry, content, we'll say the industrial fertilisers, all those things were going in to the small streams, and it was up in those areas, definitely in my opinion that caused the major, the major, problems, we'll say with spawning and salmon and the whole lot do you know, and of, we'll say you had the E.S.B then had them, had, one of the biggest, fish farms of the whole lot, with, in Ardnacrusha.

Ruth: right

Denis: you know, where they, they spawned the fish themselves up there, and am, you know, there was, that was a massive change like, there was a massive change in that. a lot of fish in the Mulcaire, the same thing, there were thousands, there was thousands of ah, ah, salmon killed above in the Mulcaire through, through slurry and through through, all the likes of that you know, and those things, those things caused,

Ruth: upset

Denis: a greater problem, I think than than than the fishing we were doing below you know, and even, even, we'll say, I think we were a bit slow ourselves, as as fishermen, to am, to let it go, I think we let it go too easy

Ruth: did you?

Denis: I think we did, I think from a historical point of view, ok, everyone knew the drift fishing, you you can drift any part of the river, we'll say your right, you know, there was nothing stopping you, if you really wanted too you could have drifted all the way down to Foynes, Ballylongford, the whole way down if you wished, there was nothing to stop you doing that, you know, but we'll say, the likes of the shore the shore fishing, we'll say in our area here, from Coonagh Point down as far as Ringmoylan, there was only three parts of the river that you could actually shore. do you know so, ah, our three, we'll say, it's probably wrong of me to say it was the only three parts you could shore, but it was the only three parts that we did shore

Ruth: right what were they

Denis: ah we'll say they would have been Grass Island, Sandy, and then what was known as the North Shore. they were the only three places that we used to shore fish.

Ruth: ok

Denis: and realistically I think we should have pushed, we should have pushed harder to hold on to that, for the sake of histor-, just for historical point of view, because, ah, as I'm saying to you, you've only got three parts of the river that you could do it, your nets were smaller,

Ruth: ya

Denis; were only 120 yards long, do you know, and it would have it would have held it would definitely have done nothing to the ecological part of the salmon fishing, or the salmon cycle, definitely wouldn't have harmed, harmed that. and, plus the fact, it would have kept it an historical part of of of of way of life in Newtown and on the Shannon, alive you know.

Ruth: ya

Denis: you'd still be able to see it, and ah, I I I don't know, I think most people that you will talk to, and who, the rest of the girls *stutter* that work with you, you'll find that will come out quite a bit. I think that will come out quite a bit do you know

Ruth: ya

Denis: you know, it's a pity, it's a pity. definitely, there was nobody, nobody looked into the historical side of it.

Ruth: at all?

Denis: as to what, as to you know, just get rid of it, it's gone.

Ruth: ya

Denis: it's a way of life but sure what, what, what about it, it's gone.

Ruth: do you think that you'll get the licences back?

Denis: I wouldn't think so no. I don't think they will ever come back. I couldn't imagine they will ever come back

Ruth: right.

Denis: definitely the drift fishing will never come back. that definitely will never happen. am, if you were lucky enough to get a couple of, shore nets, you'd want an extremely good minister,

Ruth: ya

Denis: and he would want to have a fair lobbying behind him before it would ever come back I would imagine.

Ruth: ok

Denis: do you know

Ruth: ya

Denis: it's not, you definitely won't get it back on a historical point of view. you know, because salmons, salmon are still dwindling, do you know, there are still...

Ruth: but it's not (unclear)

Denis: stops, not at all no, not at all no. it's a wider thing completely ya

Ruth: ya

Denis: absolutely.

Ruth: it's a pity though isn't it

Denis: oh, it's massively disappointing ya.

Ruth: and, and did you, did you get offered compensation or anything Denis?

Denis: there was, there was compensation, there was compensation offered ah, to anyone who wanted it, there was the likes of ourselves now who who were working the boat, we were, there was no, no offer of compensation to us, you had to be an owner of a boat to get compensation

Ruth: right

Denis: and it was up, it was up to the owner then as to whether he wanted to split that cash for the people that worked for him, or, keep it for himself, and to be quite honest, I think I think, it's definitely 50/50, if not 60/40 that people didn't take the compensation.

Ruth: right

Denis: they didn't, they you know, they are hoping that maybe somewhere down the line, that by not taking it,

Ruth: that they'll get (unclear)

Denis: that they might get something back, or that they might get a licence of some sort back you know. so ya, that that's, ah, and probably rightly so not to take it as well, you know, if nothing else, it just gives, it just gives the, it gives a small bit of an insight into the peoples, am, what should I say

Ruth: that it's a community thing

Denis: ya, yes, just an individual thing, ya ya exactly ya. 100%.

Ruth: am, you mentioned weirs there a minute ago, were there many or?

39.56mins Denis: there was, quite, quite a few ya all the way down along the river. Again, the likes of Peter Byrnes now would have, he has, ferocious, knowledge of those

Ruth: right

Denis: Peter is 88 now. and he has the names of the people that owned the weirs and he knows exactly where they were, I'd have a good idea where they are, but the names of them and who exactly had them I wouldn't you know

Ruth: so, he has all that

Denis: he has all that ya, that's well and truly covered anyway, I'm quite sure his, once you go, once you go back into those times, like he remembers those weirs working like,

Ruth: ya

Denis: so that will tell you now you know

Ruth: (unclear)

Denis: he, he has, he'll have a fierce knowledge of those,

Ruth: ok

Denis: ya

Ruth: perfect

Denis: but ah, Johnny Greene like, Johnny Greene, as I say, he was the last islander to live to live down there we'll say, he lived on the mouth of the Bunratty River.

Ruth: right

Denis: I remember him quite, you know, quite clearly like, see him coming out on the river you know, and you'd often, you know there, thereof of of a Monday morning, you'd often pass down Johnny, and he'd be saluting ya, and he'd he'd give you the thumbs up that there was fish there

Ruth laughing

Denis: or the thumbs down that if there was nothing, and you could nearly always take it for granted you know,

Ruth: ya

Denis: if he said that they weren't there, there weren't there you know

Ruth: right

Denis: and what was the way it went ya

Ruth: ok

Denis: it was am, he was, he was a fierce character,

Ruth: have you any other funny stories

Denis: ah, you wouldn't, wouldn't have a whole pile of funny stories now you know

Ruth: ya

Denis: you know, there was no such things as mobile phones now or anything, at the latter end there was alright but when we started fishing first, there was no such things as mobile phones, if you, if you were down on the North Shore, which is out near Ringmoylan, and you were coming up and the wind picked up, well it was easier to go into Johnny Greene's Island and stay there than to take a chance of coming across the river, you know

Ruth: right

Denis: so, you could have to wait it out, maybe half a tide, you might have to go through a full tide before you'd leave his place, you know

Ruth: and how long would that be?

Denis: that could be six or eight hours like

Ruth laughs

Denis: do you know, and in fairness to him, you'd always get a cup of tea off him you know, and you'd always get a story off him or you know, it was a grad all spot, and you'd never know there was a storm outside you, whatever way, he had a small little cottage there, and it was surrounded by trees, you know and his own little well, everything was there, and go in, go in to that house there, and you'd never know there was a storm outside you like

Ruth: ya

Denis: you'd never know it ya. it was a fine auld place to go

Ruth: he has obviously passed on has he Denis?

Denis: he has passed ya, his not that long dead,

Ruth: right

Denis: maybe ten eleven years dead, you know but not not a whole pile you know

Ruth: right

Denis: and he would be well known now in the historical side of, we'll say, history, you know history of Limerick and that kind of thing, you know,

Ruth: ya,

Denis: he'd be well known for it ya ya ya. they used to, they used to, they were known as the lighthouse keepers they used live, keep the lamps going, the used, when they the the lamps were, before they turned into electrics there, they all, they used to have to row out, every night and light, light the oil lamps for the boats coming up like.

Ruth; and what time was that, what was...

Denis: ah I suppose coming on for dusk, a night, dusk dusk of the evening I suppose you know, I don't know when they changed over from, we'll say the electricity I suppose came in, they changed them over you know, I don't know exactly what days, again,

Ruth:

Denis: again, the likes of Peter Byrnes would have dates for you, he'd have those dates for you now if he was asked those questions you know,

Ruth: right

Denis: there's another man over the road, John Gavin, young man, young man to Mick Gavin, he's in Newtown isn't it

Ruth: ya

Denis: Mick is Newtown, there's a man over there John Gavin, I must give him a ring for you,

Ruth: I think he's been interviewed,

Denis: has he been done?

Ruth: I think so

Denis: ya ya ya ya

Ruth: I can check the laptop

Denis: ya, cause John, John would have a great knowledge as well, John is in his late 70s as well you know, he'd have a great knowledge of stuff as well.

Ruth: ya

Denis: ya

Ruth: brilliant ok

Denis: he would ya. we were all the latter end, we were kind of, do you know, the younger generations of it you know, but we done,

Ruth: (unclear)

Denis: ya,

Ruth: ...inside

Denis: ya ya, but am, ya we done, we done, am, we had a get together there last year, we got the land, we got as many of, of of the people that are still alive down to down to the quay, and we took a few pictures of that down there

Ruth: that's brilliant isn't it

Denis: ya ya ya, just

Ruth: and you have a memorial up there

Denis: we have we have ya we have ya we have. we have

Ruth: it's very good, isn't it?

Denis; so ya I just trying, just trying to keep it alive a small bit, you know, they say, it would be great if you could get, Europe dictates everything here now you know

Ruth: ya

Denis; and that's the problem

Ruth: ok, am, the last thing I might ask you Denis, just anything about the water bailiffs?

Denis: water bailiffs were there, were there for as long as I'm around anyway you know, look they have a job to do the same as anyone else

Ruth: ya

Denis: you know, what can you say about them like you know it's the same as a Guard on the road you know,

Ruth: would they be up and down much?

Denis: oh, they do ya, even today like you'll still like, I'd be down the bank,

Ruth: oh, go way really?

Denis: oh god ya ya ya, oh they're, they're on the river, they're on the river on a constant basis you know, am,

Ruth: just patrolling

Denis; ya, basically patrolling ya, sure look, it's a job, you know that's what they do and that, down through the years when we were fishing down there like, never had any trouble or anything from them or anything you know

Ruth: ya

Denis: they'd come and they'd look for the licence, licence number, you know, you'd have that with you like and you'd have it off your head anyway, they, you'd know it off your head you know, and we'll say, they just see you know, is there any fish going or anything going or whatever the case is,

Ruth: ya

Denis: if they really wanted to like they can actually, they could actually stretch your net out if they wanted to, and check, check the length

Ruth: check it

Denis: of it you know, and in fairness, they, we never had any hassles with them from that point of view like,

Ruth: ok,

Denis: ya, they, they were, in fairness they were pretty good, I, as I say, I could never say a bad word anyway, I had no bad no bad run with them

Ruth: you had no bad experience

Denis: ya ya ya

Ruth; ok, am, alright ok Denis, I think that's fairly it, thank you

Denis: ya

Ruth: am, that was a load of information, thanks very much

Denis: ya you'll find that a load of it, a lot of it is going to be repetitive like you know and that's the way, just the way it is like ya

Ruth: ok well thank you for that anyway

Denis: not at all, not at all

Ruth: ill turn those off there, thank you

END.