

Brough Transcription Template

Accession Number:	DBR100002
Batch Number:	
Date of Interview:	17 th November 2010
Interviewee Name:	Hugh Crowden
Fieldworker Name:	Interviewed by Joanne B Kaar Typed by Joanne B Kaar
Keywords:	Hugh Crowden, Boat builder, Brough, Cairnfield, Henderson, Salmon, peat, Heatherbell supersititions, George Shearer, cod
Interview Summary:	(02:40) Hughs Grandfather was born in Brough. He was a boat builder. Hugh used to help him with salmon fishing from Brough. See newspaper article. (09:57) bad luck to meet George Shearers father. (11:00) Location of Traditional Cod fishing grounds from Brough harbour. (12:50) nets (14:04) creels

Transcription

(remember to note time code from recording regularly to make it easy to find key quotes quickly later) Time is munutes and seconds.

JK: Recording. We're in Castletown Heritage Centre. Today is, I think it's the 17th of November 2010 and I'm interviewing em, Hugh Crowden for Brough Bay Associations Oral History Archive. This is my first interview so we'll see how we get on. And Hughs sittin there laughing at me! Right, Hugh maybe you could, we could start by telling me em where do you come from?

HC: (00:31)Well I was born in Dunnet in Cairnfield which is just hardly in Brough but near enough to Brough, just a few hundred yards away. 1941 and eh brought up by my grandad and granny in Cairnfield. Went till e school in Dunnet. Till 1949. Then moved to Castletown in 1949, the 3rd May. And been er ever since. And I'm still here which is eh 60 odd years afterwards.

JK: Do you have any other family in the area just now?

HC: Well I've got my aunties, two aunties in Thurso and in Scrabster. My son stays in Thurso and that's about it as far as close relations.

JK: Well, could you tell me how did you make a living? You're retired now, but I think your just as busy as ever.

HC: *(laughter)*

JK: Maybe tell us about how you made your living and what you do just now.

HC: Well when I left the school first of all was eh went till e sea till e crab creels in from Scrabster with my uncle and my grandad, up as far as Sandside for about two or three month and then after at I started with Daniel Gunn in Castletown, served my time as a mason with him for about I was workin er for about 9 year. Then times got hard like what they are in present day and no jobs. Moved on till Dounreay till Vulcan, nextdoor till Dounreay. Was with the MOD and security for 8 year. In 75 I moved in till, we moved to Rolls Royce who were running the place for the MOD and I was with them for 30 and a half years working with Rolls Royce. So I spent about 40 nearly 40 years at Vulcan. And then I retired in 2006 and I've been here at the Heritage Since.

JK: They let you out now and again though?! (with Irony)
(Laughter)

HC: Ah well may be a little more this last couple of month, seeing we're more or less finished! (Laughter)

JK: (02:40) Well, I'm, I found a eh newspaper article here em printed on April 26th 1969. The newspaper article was even printed before I was born! So em.
(Laughter)

HC: Tells ye something!
(Laughter)

JK: But this is about a chap called Harry Crowden. He a relation of yours?

HC: He's my grandad, he as the man that brought me up because I didn't have a dad as, It just happened. And eh I stayed all my life wi him and even after I got married we stayed with him in Castletown and eh, your seeing the boats ere well I'd give him a hand when he started them in Castletown, not in Dunnet, because I was too young, but he was building boats and repairing boats all his life. In between being a mason, a master mason and he was working on different places that he told me about in Thurso an Kirk O'Bruan and eh Castle of Mey and different places. But once he retired and it was well into his retirement that he started building boats, big boats. He would just go to Wick, buy the wood, come home and tell me, take it off the bus, Morrisons bus, would collect it and leave at e end o e hoose and take it doon till e shed and he would start e boat off himsell. Once he got till a certain height he would need a hand then, so I used to be e guy at give him a hand and put the (???) (03:54) in the boat and put the engine in boat an all at kind o things for him.

JK: So is that where you learnt all your skills?

HC: Ye, and him and me went till the sea for a long time together. Then I went with his son, Donny. Him and me went to sea together as well for a good long time, out at e creels in from Castletown. And I've been at the Salmon fishing with my grandfather in Brough, and in e, well not in Brough, but my uncle in Brough and my grandad up in Sandside and before at he was in Keiss. And I was at 'at when I was still in Dunnet 1949-48 he started er. So I was wi him there a few year in eh Keiss. (04:32) But my grandfather had been in Brough at the salmon stations a way back before the second world war as far as I can make oot. About 1938 or 37 somewhere thereabout, or maybe just afore 'at.

JK: Did he live in Brough.

HC: (04:44) He lived in Dunnet, he was born in Brough. He was born in the hoose next te Cathy Beggs we call it Cathy Beggs, at hoose ats being well kinda, Im not sure what they are tryin till do till id. Knock it down or renovate it. *(laughter)*

JK: It's the building now owned by Keith Parkes.

HC: That's the one. He was born ere. And eh.

JK: My family owned that for forty years.

HC: Well he, quite often he said te me cos I used to take him oer till Brough to see Peter Henderson which was a great mate oh his an all the Hendersons were. Eh said he was going till buy it at one stage and do it up, but he never did it. But he did, that's where he was born, there, 1889 I think somewhere about.

JK: You mentioned a few names there of folk in eh Brough, em, the Hendersons.

HC: Yes, I used to be great we them. I used to go till Harry, Harry Henderson was a day older than me. He was born on the 18th o eh, October and I was born on the 19th. When I was, we knocked around at the school an at then we came to Castletown he as at the school in Castletown (???) (05:43). (05:45) During the period when he came to Castletown or when I came to Castletown, I used to go back on e bus till Brough and eh, we'd go till e hill for e peats and at we his father and at on e tractor, he have a tractor as well and one thing an another. Then it was always on a Saturday like, cos you couldne go through the school week. At at 6 o'clock at night he would say right, we're goin up till his granny who used to stay in red, Heatherbell, you know at the corner. And his granny would have e tea sitting ready for us. We'd have the oatcakes and cheese and she's have it on the open fire, sitting alongside it. And she'd the table all laid out for us. They I would catch the bus going back to Castletown about quarter till seven. That was the bus that took you to till e picture hoose if you wanted to go till e pictures on a Saturday night.

JK: There's no bus at that time now.

HC: No, but there used till be.

JK: No cinema now.
(laughter)

HC: No cinema now even.
(laughter) And eh, It used to be great. And that went on for a long time. And that's where I learnt till go e bike, was going down e 'ca'. when I was very small I would (???) (06:42) jumped on because once it stared going doon you had no option but to hang on. *(laughter)*. And I had another catastrophie him, an Harry and me on the middle road, you know where the middle road is?

JK: Uh hu, Nelly Johnsons?

HC: I was on the handle bars and Harry was on the bike and we came doon couldna get it stopped a e bottom and landed in the ditch and it put oer the top o e dike. *(laughter)*

So it was good times, really good times and as I say I used to go till Peter Hendersons hoose and old Peter went till the sea as well as he did go till Dounreay as well and different things. But my grandfather used till go and visit him and after I got married like, I used to take him over on a Sunday used to go and visit him and he used to visit the Calders in Dunnet and, the two Calder brothers he used to go and visit but I had till go (???) (07:22) and go back and collect him. So quite a bit a goings on in Dunnet and Brough an back and forth you know. For a lot of years.

JK: Tell us a bit more about eh, activity down at Brough Harbour that you can remember when you're a youngster. It seems to have been a much busier place than it is now?

HC: Well, there was a few boats I mean, Peter Henderson had a boat and his daughter went to sea, two of them went to sea for a long time.

JK: Jessie

HC: Jessie, yes, I remember them well you know. And there was eh, there was two or three boats working out it I just cann mind who they all were like because I was too young like. I didna really have a lot till do with Brough Harbour really other than when my uncle was at the salmon fishing er for a few year I use to go and give him a hand you know after I come home fe work at night and at and (???) (08:00) weekend e weekend or anyhin like at but (???) (08:03) Saturday maybe but I didna really have a lot till do with Brough, more Castlehill you know, and he.

JK: Whereabouts were the fishing nets put out at Brough, were they towards Langapor or Sinigoe or which side?

HC: (08:16) They were on e Clett, there was one on e Clett Rock on the ooter little Clett and then there was Singipo and eh Langapo there was one too but it was more tidy doon ere on at side you know the left hand side o e harbour eh right hand side oh e harbour.

JK: uh hu

HC: But more at Sinigoe, we'd two nets there but didna catch a lot o fish, you caught a, caught a few salmon early on in the year what you'd call big Salmon because they sort a they were running through you know. But my grandfather had worked there years before at as he had worked in Mey as well. But they were bothered with seals, terrible lot of seals in Mey. And more or less give it up. Then he went till Keiss as I say and he went till eh, up till Dounreay.

JK: (???) (08:52) Were they the last eh salmon fishers from down working from Brough?

HC: Yes I would say that

JK: Or was there folk after that?

HC: eh, when nets I would say that my uncle Geordie who was at the Salmon fishing here in Castletown as well he would, started here started down here about 1980. And at was before that he was at Brough, I think that he would have been the last that worked actual bag nets, what we called bag nets. I think that Jimmy Henderosn had the fishing rights for a wee while but he only did it wi a just a little net sort of thing. But I

can't remember anybody else having nets as such but you know big bag nets up or anything like that. But as I say we never took photos or any o at kinda things. I do have a couple of photos down at Keiss, but that's all. I don't think worried about them days takin photos of things which maybe they should have done. But there was a, I had a photo somewhere in the hoose with two or three boats in it you know, like four or five boats ere but I dinna know where it is! *(laughter)* It's like everything else it gets thrown out sometimes. But that's about all I can say well I

JK: Do you know George Shearer?

HC: (09:57) Yes

JK: Was the last eh full time lobster fisherman from Brough.

HC: Yes, crabs an at.

JK: (???) (10:01) know George?

HC: Yes, I know George well, but he was away for a long time for many many years he was away. And eh, there was always a saying that my grandfather then would say that if you, if you met eh, his father on the road, he says they used till avoid him because there was always not very much fish gotten that day or whatever so they used till

JK: Back luck to meet George *(laughter)*

HC: Back luck to meet George's father. Which I didna know, I knew of him like.

JK: Right

HC: Because I was only a little loon when they stayed up there in the middle road.

JK: At Pentland View?

HC: Yes, the two story house up ere, but that was just a saying that they had you know, they didna want to meet him on the road, they would avoid him with all chances that they could.

JK: Did it ever come true or not? *(laughter)*

HC: Don't know, I never really thought o asking them 'at, you know it was one o these things that you never asked you know.

JK: uh hu

HC: But it was at was one o e stories. But eh, yes.

JK: Do you mind any, any big storms or any big events down there things happening that eh boats wrecked or.

HC: No, no really

JK: Good catches or?

HC: (11:00) No not really, but I've heard my grandfather talking about eh, big catches of cod, they used till go till e cod but they'd no engines on the boats they'd used till be sail boats they used to go

JK: Right

HC: And eh, they'd catch a lot o cod, and what they used to work e tide you know they would go oot off e Dunnet Head and wait till the tide to ebb and it would take them they would just sit on the tide and go out towards Scrabster. Then they'd wait for the flood coming back down and it would take them back till where they started more or less. And that was (???) (11:24) You know without any engines it was all oaring or sail like, but I've heard him talking about the big big halibut that they used to get.

JK: Oh aye.

HC: Oot o eh Brough er and he would say that they use to have a cart that would take them till e mart.

JK: Right

HC: And that the tails

JK: Scrabster?

HC: Well I assume (???) (11:43) Thurso

JK: Thurso?

HC: Thurso I think mabye more so before Scrabster started.

JK: Right, yes

HC: They used to sell them in Thurso I think before Scrabster actually got going. And eh, or they would sell them to a client, maybe, I don't know. But eh, I had a photo (???) (11:55) I'm sure there is a book somewhere from Thurso some guy did and you'll see their tails stick oot oer the end o e cert.

JK: At big

HC: Yes, great big ones about maybe coming up near a hundred weight in weight you know, but I don't think you ever get any o at or very few now a days.

JK: Would they land them onto the boat when they were at the sea or would they drag them next to the boat?

HC: No, they would just land them in the boat

JK: uh hu

HC: you know, hook them up them up and take them in the boat, they worked lines as well like (???) (12:18) last two or three baskets of lines and baited them an what they'd call

great lines(???) (12:23) you know and you got, did a lot o that kinda work. Maybe that's what we should be going back till as you only catch what you can eat an at you know.

JK: What about there must have been a lot of repairs things need doing, did you get involved in helping out with that? Is that more, is there a season for doing that or was it just whenever it needed doing?

HC: For what?

JK: Repairing net or

HC: Nets, oh well, nets is on-going I mean that if they were at the salmon fishing you were repairing nets you have it out for maybe most of a week and then you'd have till take it in and they'd be repairing all the holes because you might have to repair them at sea as well if you had a seal attack. Cos they would just rip a whole bit out of the net and you'd have to sort it cos other wise you'd get no fish in it you know. But as soon as they came in, all at things were done before e net went back oot again, you know all e holes would be mended up and ... I've done plent o that kinda work but not at Brough more at Castlehill

JK: yes Castlehill

HC: and e and at you know and Sandside.

JK: I've brought em, a few, different sizes of netting needles here. Em ... eh ... I don't know if each of these have got different purposes different sizes of nets or

HC: Welllll

JK: different things that your catching

HC: mostly for different kinds of nets you know there would be the biggest one you've got there would have been more, more used on like a big seine netter or a trawler cos they worked with big nets, big coarse nets you know and that would be for an bigger heavier string you know. And then the smaller ones we'd use for making nets for creels or crab creels or anyhin like at. And then the very small ones might be makin very small nets you know like finer nets for herring and things like at you know or, or at kinda things. But I've never worked with ones as small as at, but I assume that's what they are for.

JK: (14:04) Did you have your own creels out?

HC: Yes

JK: Was that out from Dunnet?

HC: We always made wer own creels.

JK: Castletown?

HC: Yes Castletown

JK: Castletown.

HC: Yes

JK: How many creels did you put out?

HC: Och, we only had maybe about 50 or something like that between the two of us.

JK: unhu Were you doing that when you were working at Dounreay?

HC: Yes, just a couple hours you know just going oot and not that you ever got very much sometimes is last lot of years it's not worth it that's why I dinna bother with it now is no worth bothering with unless you've got hundreds of creels. I mean people, in the days when my grandfather was going till the creels they would have a hundred creels sort a well 80 till 90 creels maximum. And maybe in the summer time, they would just maybe have a 120 maximum. Because they had different ways of fishing, some of the people would take their creels in oer the weekend till dry them oot. Which they don't do nowadays. Because they always thought that if they smelled you know they got lining(14:54) oot

JK: right

HC: There would be a smell off them and this would stop the lobsters fe going in,

JK: right

HC: they would take them in and dry them. And then they would take oot some new ones And things like at.

JK: right is that nothing to do with Sunday either no or is that

HC: No,

JK: No just

HC: Not as far as I know , not as far as I know.

JK: right

HC: (???) (15:01) affect some people up west or something like at

JK: Yes, no

HC: but I don't think it affected any people down in this part of the country.

JK: No

HC: not that I know of but eh you know stories I've heard and my grandfather going till the sea going till the creels in the summer time they used to stay out all night.

JK: right

HC: They would set off maybe about 8 o'clock at night haul the creels depending on the tide, if the tide was coming in there used to be what they would call flowing water they used to go round till e what we used to call e Red Geo's an round Dunnet Head at side. And as the as tide was coming in they would lift the creel on one side of the boat and throw it oot on the other side which meant that it was about two boat lengths further in till the shore, and they would maybe do at at couple of times and then once the tide started to turn they would do it the opposite way start throwing them oot again.

JK: Right

HC: And ... that' how they an an know they used to say you'll leave e creels for e whole night and you'll get a lobster, but you would get a lobster within maybe five minutes.

JK: uhhu

HC: Which I have seen myself. Dump the creel in and lift the one and say o did we lift that one or did we no, you take it up and sometimes there would be a lobster in it. If they're there they're there if no there no.

JK: What about the bait, what bait did you use for that?

HC: Well mostly ... you know haddies after they had been filleted or like what we call flukes which is e flounders you know.

JK: Would you be catching your own bait or would you be buying bait in?

HC: Seldom catch were own, maybe sometimes in the summer time you'd get mackerel maybe or cuddings or something like at, but other times you'd be depending more on on eh getting fish from somebody that was at the fishing you know like a, a seine netter or something like that get a box from them and maybe salt it down or something like at and then just use it. Seen us having two barrels (???) (16:31) salted down because because it just depends on the weather you know if you could get bait or at, sometimes you get a lot, sometimes you couldna get none you know.

JK: Do you

HC: So there's all different ways of working with it.

JK: Do you, is there any superstitions that you remember?

HC: *(Laughter)* No whistling when your at e sea, you could get wind.
You couldna call a salmon a salmon. They always called them cold iron.

JK: Right

HC: You've likely heard at?

JK: Yes, heard that one.

HC: And you canna talk about rabbits.

JK: I never get that, why, why not talk about rabbits?

HC: Well I don't know why they didn't like rabbits.

JK: Was that, were you not allowed to talk about rabbits at all or just rabbits when you were out in the boat?

HC: Just when you were out in the boat.

JK: Out in the boat

HC: Mostly most of the things were out were attached till being either in the boat or going out in the boat, I mean ladies were a thing, you know you can't take any ladies out to sea, you know there was how many ladies went till the sea, not very many that I knew, but I do know that some has gone.(???) (17:24)

JK: Jessie Henderson

HC: Yes, and my aunty that was married till George eh, Crowden eh, Patricia, she went till the sea, but I mean there is not very many people, my wife went till the sea for a wee while with me and the odd time would come till the creels with me you know, just for company like.

JK: uhhu

HC: But eh, there was never, that was kinda the taboos that kinda thing you see, but there's a lot of them there's lots of things if you look it up you find then, dozens of things you know.

JK: yes

HC: Yes

JK: When was the last time you was out, out fishing (???) (17:54) have you been out recently or has it been a while?

HC: Oh, I haven't been out since a long time

JK: No

HC: Since years and years since I've been fishing creels, maybe 20 years anyway you know, just gave it up altogether. I used till do it I mean I'd till work, go out in the morning at 4 o'clock in the morning and go off for your work at 7 no problem. No bother me. You know, just depended what you was on, when you're on shifts.

JK: And your, your catch would you be selling that at Scrabster?

HC: Yes, we used to sell it till Jappy when (???) (18:24) when I was at it with my grandfather first I mean we were getting, he mostly put off the lobsters away till Billingsgate and he put them off on the train, we'd take them in put them in a box, put

sawdust on them and fill the box and take it in till e station in the morning 9 o'Clock train. And that would go to Billingsgate. They you would, different firms would take them like eh, Baxters or I canna mind them all now but you could send them till them anyway and you'd get a cheque back from them, sometimes you had so many dead and so you'd so many without toes on them an they always made it worse and eh they had been known to give you a blue paper. Some people got. At meant that they were all dead. *(laughter)* But you had no way of proving were they or were they not! Had you.

JK: Right right.

HC: When you think, they were going till London.

JK: So you didn't get paid until they'd got their catch?

HC: Oh they

JK: (???) (19:16)

HC: paid for them when they got they got them there and when they weighed them and and eh they would set them out the once with one legs on them you didna get so much for them. If they were too big you didna get so much for them, so they'd all kinds a rules that they worked with but I don't suppose that happened when they sold them on I don't suppose? And then crab factory in Thurso started up, and then they use to take lobsters then eventually.

JK: Right

HC: They didna take them at first, but

JK: Is that at Thurso Harbour?

HC: Yes, down at Thurso Harbour. And eh we used till just take them till them, cos it saves the carriage and all at and you could go with them there any day you wished you know. Then eh, when the chappie from Helmsdale they started a lobster pond down at Scrabster and we used till take em there then. So it sort of moved on I don't think there is a lobster pond now at Scrabster as far as I know

JK: No?

HC: Don't think so, There is one in Keiss. But other that that it's lorries that comes round and picks them up as far as I know. Big lorry comes in and does Orkney and he does comes in till John O'Groats and works his way round this way. It's all changed. At how it's all changed with e boats now they go till e sea for the whole week at a time, bigger boats you know they work creels and they're working about maybe anything from a thousand to fifteen hundred creels at a time. Hauling so many a day and the next lot tomorrow so there's a sorta two day space that's how they do it and they are talkin about tonnes of crabs not eh two or three stone of crabs. So at's it.

JK: Yep, it's all changing.

HC: Yep

JK: Well thanks

HC: How will that do you for a while??

JK: That's grand . Thanks a lot

HC: See you, you get on with that!
(laughter)

JK: See if I can stop this now.

HC: *(laughter)*

(End of Recording 20:48)