

Ivan Jaines-White Interview Transcription (RAW Audio Time Stamps) – 09/11/23

Interviewer – Eileen Byrne (EB) and Katherine Briggs (KB)

Interviewee – Ivan Jaines-White (IJW)

[0:00:00] EB: Good afternoon.

[0:00:04] IJW: Good afternoon.

[0:00:05] EB: I'm Eileen Byrne, and I'm a volunteer with the Peterson Project. Could I ask your name?

[0:00:12] IJW: You can. My full name is Byron Ivan Jaines-White, but I'm known as 'Ivan' on the docks and the seafood community. So, Ivan Jaines-White, please call me Ivan.

[0:00:24] EB: I will Ivan. Now, would you mind giving us your date of birth?

[0:00:30] IJW: Happily. It's Christmas day, 1948.

[0:00:34] EB: Oh! *[Laughter]*

[0:00:36] IJW: My daughter was Christmas Eve. And my dear late wife was easily remembered in November 5th.

[0:00:45] EB: Oh, yes. Now, were you born in Grimsby?

[0:00:51] IJW: Cleethorpes, actually. Cleethorpes, Croft Baker I think, and St. Peter's Avenue. Brought up behind my grandmother's fish and chip shop so I had an association with fish for a very long time.

[0:01:05] EB: You had. Now, could you tell us what your connection has been with Peterson's?

[0:01:12] IJW: With Peterson's, yes. By the time the Peterson arrangement came to pass, I'd already been in the industry since the age of 17, and the Peterson involvement would've been somewhere in the 1980s.

[0:01:27] EB: So that would be the year you started up with Petersons?

[0:01:31] IJW: With acquiring Peterson's?

[0:01:33] EB: Acquiring Peterson's. And how long did that association continue?

[0:01:38] IJW: Continued for quite a number of years, probably into the '90s, and then the business that I had, which was Jaines-White Seafoods incorporating Peterson's, was acquired by Ross. And I remained with Ross for some time.

[0:01:56] EB: But in a different role, was it, or?

[0:01:59] IJW: Yes, it was in different role, it was, but the Peterson's association was quite a number of years.

[0:02:04] EB: So what was the actual work you did with Peterson's

[0:02:08] IJW: With Peterson's, well, the business of Peterson's was largely involved in the buying and selling of herring, mackerel and sprats, and they had a wholesale stand actually on the pontoon, but also they had the smokehouse, with the name of Frank A. Peterson that was Arthur's father. So, having acquired that business, it basically continued as it was previously, smoking herring that was over from the wholesale business of trading whole herring and whole mackerel, and it maintained the business name of Frank A. Peterson.

[0:02:46] EB: So where did you get your supplies of herring?

[0:02:49] IJW: In the earlier days, in the good old days, as we call it, of the golden fishing era, there was a lot herring coming from Scotland, there was herring from the Lowestoft area and from the south coast, and again we were taking herring from the west coast, very large herring called 'Loch Fyne herring', and Loch Fyne kippers were a really sought-after item.

[0:03:16] KB: So you mentioned earlier about a deal, an arrangement with Peterson's. Could you elaborate a little bit more on that please?

[0:03:25] IJW: Yes, it was a bringing together of minds really. I had started a business of pot-smoked mackerel, and I was buying in very large quantities of mackerel at the time, and Arthur Peterson's business of course was buying large quantities of not only mackerel, but herring and sprats, all of the pelagic species, on a wholesale basis. The difference is I needed large mackerel for my hot smoking business, and Arthur needed more medium-size, because the wholesalers didn't want huge mackerel where there was only a few in a box, but I needed that, and as stocks began to dwindle, what we were finding was the ideal size for smoking was sale one to three, for the retailers it was three to fives. And fish began to get mixed, so Arthur and I started, saying well, "Okay Arthur I've got so many boxes of small that I've sorted out of these", "Okay well I've got so many boxes of large", and it was a marriage of minds, really. And then progressively we began to see the benefits and Arthur was reaching retirement age, his brother-in-law didn't want to continue the business, so we had some long discussions and between NatWest's lovely manager called Tony Binns, Arthur, and Bob, I agreed to acquire the business. And that's where my involvement really began.

[0:04:52] EB: So what would a basic working day consist of for you?

[0:04:57] IJW: Well, mine or the business, 'cause mine varied -

[0:05:00] EB: Yours.

[0:05:01] IJW: - because I was operating two businesses. So, I would have the hot smoke business in Riby Street. There was also an office above NatWest bank here, where I would spend time, but then hand over to Bob as it was at the time, he remained for a while, and I would interact between the two. But I'm what you call a 'scales under the nails' man, I'm not an observer, very much hands on I'd be on the pontoon sorting fish, I'd be filleting fish, I'd be smoking it, brining it, basically everything that anybody else did in the business. So, very very active.

[0:05:38] EB: Were any other members of your family involved with you?

[0:05:41] **IJW:** No, no. Certainly not at that time, I mean my son was still quite young in those days. But no, he followed a different route although he enjoyed coming down to the business. And no, no other family members.

[0:05:57] **KB:** So, you mentioned earlier that you were doing hot smoking?

[0:06:01] **IJW:** Yes.

[0:06:03] **KB:** Were Peterson's cold or hot smoking?

[0:06:05] **IJW:** Totally cold.

[0:06:06] **KB:** They were cold. Would you describe the differences in the process for us?

[0:06:10] **IJW:** Yeah, by all means. Cold smoking, ideally you don't want the temperature to go above 25 degrees, which in traditional smokehouses is a little difficult to control, because when you get summer ambience of 30, how do you keep it lower than 25? So managing and operating a traditional smokehouse is quite an art, it's not just a question of, you know, just throwing the fish up there and that's it. So, hot smoking you would tend to use the mechanical kilns, where you can take the temperatures up to 80-odd degrees, which you need to do because it's a ready-to-eat product. So, kilns tend to be hot smoking. Salmon, as in the specialist business that Enderby has, they're doing white fish but they're also producing salmon. Again, as was with kippers, you need to bring a little bit of the temperature up to get the oil out. Now you can do that in a traditional house by bringing the salmon closer to the bottom of the chimney, near the fires, but you're not cooking it. It is a ready-to-eat product, but it is not a cooked product. Whereas kippers of course you need to cook. So, cold smoking, 25 degrees, not above 30 ideally. Hot smoking, up to 80 degrees plus, for listeria kill and bacteria kill.

[0:07:30] **KB:** What sort of materials would they be using to stoke these fires? And do you know where they might be getting it in from?

[0:07:36] **IJW:** It's soft woods generally, beech, for example, and shavings. So, you can just use beech or sawdust, and put a ring of water around it and light in the middle of that to stop the smoldering spreading greatly. You can use shavings beneath that, to start the fire, but then generally it will smolder all night. You can use hard woods, as you often hear with salmon, and you can use a blend, hard wood and soft wood. A lot of that is in the marketing, which has come to the fore these days, because, okay yeah we smoke over sawdust but, "We smoke over a delicate blend of cherrywood and beech" sounds lovely. So it's marketing more than anything.

[0:08:28] **EB:** Were there any health issues related to the sort of work you did? The cold weather, smoke?

[0:08:38] **IJW:** Weather is cold, but, you wear warm clothes. It's as simple as that, you know. I'm quite happy to say that I wore long johns and y'know I was always warm. Never really suffered in that sense. The dock itself is infamous for – one of the jetties out there that used to be called 'pneumonia', because no matter where you stood on it, the wind blew, and it was called pneumonia. Affectionally, or not.

[0:09:06] EB: So, did the smoking affect any of the worker's chests or anything?

[0:09:11] IJW: When you consider that a lot of them that I came across certainly rolled their own with very strong tobaccos, I would say not. And, they'd been there for a very long time.

[0:09:22] EB: So, the building 'Peterson's'. It's a bit of a wreck at the moment.

[0:09:27] IJW: I can imagine.

[0:09:29] EB: But you saw it in its heyday really so can you remember, really, the sights, the sounds, and the smells?

[0:09:36] IJW: Absolutely. The building, when it was operational, they'd had two stories. There was the brining area down below using big stone brine troughs, there was a loading bay up one end and stairs up to the first floor, and again similar to the traditional smokehouse construction that you're aware of in Enderby's business. There was loading down on the ground floor, and there was unloading on the upper floor, and ideally, you know, each – I would say rod, but not rod these days, tenter of kippers was passed up from down below, and then there'd be somebody stood in the house, straddling the rails on either side, passing it up to the top of the house, and then when it's cured you'd open the top doors, and you'd pack them on the top floor. Not on the ground floor. Now, when I say tenters, these days we used stainless steel. In those days you would buy tenter hooks from the Aberdeen Fish Curers Association and you would – this was a perfect right angle, double-pointed tenter – and you would nail them into spars of wood, one either side, and then when you'd brined the fish, you would [*gesturing*] pop them on the tenter hooks, which is why traditionally cured kippers have got two holes in their shoulders. Because that's where they're hung. So that's how it was done.

The smell, yes, smoky. The décor – tar. You'd describe it basically as tar-based or nicotine-coloured walls. Going back to the business itself, the cowls at the top are very very different from – if you look at Enderby's smokehouse, you look at Keith Graham's, you look at the smokehouses in Riby Street, they're either cowls that will stop the wind blowing straight down the chimney, because the cowls will swing and the wind will be behind, or there will be what we call the 'flaps', double-sided flaps so if the wind was coming from one direction, you'd close that flap off and open the other one, so you weren't getting this huge draft, because windy conditions, rain conditions, can affect what you get out of a smokehouse. And, certainly I can remember, when you opened up the smokehouse in the morning, it was a thick fog of smoke, and you had to leave the door open for it to clear. Those cowls do need that facility if they're being rebuilt, something needs to be looked at in terms of how you stop the straight-through draft because if you look at them now, you can see light through. But they worked, they worked very well.

The sights, the sounds, the sound of John, who was the foreman down there, or 'whistler' as he was affectionately known, because he whistled all the time – drove you mad, but a very nice guy, and then we can look at the nailing machine. Now, we might find a picture of that somewhere on the web, but – wooden boxes were supplied by Faulkner's, who were down Railway Street in Grimsby, they're now Cooper's, and just out of interest, at the side of that where one of the energy companies is now, if you look up the wall you can see the remains of a smokehouse,

down Riby Street. So, what we had, in addition to Faulkner's supplying boxes, we had the blanks, we had two pieces of wood for the top, two pieces for the bottom, and two ends, and this nailing machine, you'd put a load of nails in it, and it would be [*imitating sound*] ch ch, ch ch, ch ch, the sound of the nails as they were moved so they didn't get en masse, and there were four tubes, and you'd place the two tops, if you like, against the box, pressed on a plate on the floor, and bang. Four nails would go in either end of the box, and then you would pack your kippers in the box. But that was a sound that you can well remember.

[0:13:58] KB: We've heard talk that there were also filleting machines later in the business. Were they there when you were involved?

[0:14:06] IJW: Filleting machines – they're called 'splitters' actually and the name of those was 'Fisadco', great big cast iron things. One of them was outside the heritage centre in Grimsby for a long time, until I think it was scrapped. But this was a round table, that you called it, and there was like a notch on this round table and you would place the herring tail into the notch, and it would take it through the machine, and a blade would slice the herring straight down the top, along the top opening it out and it would come out the other end as a split herring ready to brine and smoke. Marvellous machine, like a lot of things British in the early days, they were made to last, so they were still being used and probably still are in one business further north, and the one guy called Graham Nailer, who was a Fisadco engineer, made a nice living out of travelling around the country servicing the Fisadco machines. But, once they were built, that was it, they just lasted forever, with servicing, and I don't know what the modern equivalent is, if at all. But the hand-splitting of the herring was done by a little knife about three inches long with a blade of no more than an inch, and you would put that into the kipper, and you'd be quite robust with it 'cause you had to split the skull, and then go down the flesh to open it, but of course it's got a skull, so you have to split that as you'll see on a modern kipper and then go down it, and Tommy Taylor used to sell them.

[0:15:48] EB: So, what did the staff think to this machine?

[0:15:53] IJW: The machine was brilliant, the machine was very very good, I mean it took the guts out of the fish, the gut came separately, and of course one important byproduct if you're producing your own kippers is the herring milts. So you've got the eggs, the roe, and then you've got the milts, the milky white sacs. Very important if they're handled correctly, and again one of the sights and sounds that I well remember – Arthur would take the milts and John would make a little box out of wooden pieces from the big boxes, nail it together, and put it in the cold store to freeze, and when they came out they were as black as coal. But – they didn't sell very well, but some people bought them. But largely now what you see in the shops are the Canadian milts, and people eat those. But it was an important byproduct.

[0:16:52] EB: And where did you sell your fish? Who were the retailers or wholesalers?

[0:16:57] IJW: Wholesalers locally, 'cause again you have to remember that that time, this was a town within itself. It really was, I mean the Riby Square opening, when the working day if you like finished, was just a mass of people and of course, a decade or two before that the fish trains were still there. The fish trains moved over to the road transport and we had nationwide

coverage, so I would be selling to Whittaker for example in Southampton, a retailer, I would be selling to Jim Bugby who had multiple stores, and then, I got the opportunity to supply Keymarkets, which was then acquired and was part of Somerfield, and I was supplying kippers to Somerfield, I was supplying hot smoked mackerel, that was good business for us. And again, you know, built on the Peterson come the Jaines-White areas, and that's when we changed the brand, and in view of my dear late wife the boxes were Golden Rose kippers, and the hot-smoked mackerel was Longship, and the Longship brand – people would ask for it, and Bob Stansfield, when he was there, and all the retailers, all the van lads used to go down to the pontoon – they would have stacks of those branded products on. Bob would used to say, “20 boxes today please”, I would drop them off and then the van retailer used to pick them up and put them in his van so many of the time. So, it was at both ends of the spectrum, it was the individual retailer and I got into the supermarket as well.

[0:18:45] KB: So, how did you get involved in smoking in the first place?

[0:18:49] IJW: Well, I started with Ross as management trainee, and they should be recognised as one of the best training companies out there. The management structure was very good, the training operation was good, and if you joined, I remember Eric Walla saying, “If you begin with a business, you start where it starts.” So you start making tea for the fish buyers on the market in the morning, and that was my first job. Then, progressively, I went through various – working with the depots all round the country, and then I was asked if I would take on the ownership of a subcompany called Sid Clarke's, which was at the back of Thorold Street. I took on that business and started smoking salmon, and at that time, although it was part of Ross I was smoking all the smoked salmon for Young seafoods, and Young's at that time was still independent. Malcolm Young and his sons Norman and I've forgotten the other guy's name, but we were smoking salmon, and we were also smoking some white fish but predominantly salmon. And to slice to smoked salmon we had something like a bacon slicer and we had to cut the salmon into portions that would go against the blade on a bacon slicer and I had a dozen girls there who would then have probably – remember the old sweet scales, triangulos type with a mark? We had all those, with prongs on that were modified. So they weigh so much, slip a vac-pack over it and away we go.

So I was involved in smoking then. By the time I was 25 I was travelling to Australia, to Germany, big business with coley, and exporting fresh smoked fish to France, Italy, and Belgium, from Sid Clarke's, and the biggest one, which was part of the Amos Brothers business that they had, was smoked fish to Australia, and we were sending a container load every month. True product descriptions weren't around in those days, so we sold ling from Cornwall that was classed as Humber cod, and branded with the Scottish rampant lion in a box, but huge business.

[0:21:23] EB: So, did they go by plane?

[0:21:25] IJW: No, container, frozen container. Yeah, we would freeze it. So I was very interested in the smoked side of fish and especially a business in Germany to Cuxhaven, to Hussman and Haan, and Fish Union – massive concerns. Fish Union were hot smoking things like Greenland halibut. Different from the Atlantic halibut which is the white halibut steak we're used to, it's an oily fish, and Germany was hot smoking these in like an oven with a door on the

front but over split logs, and that sort of made me think. The way that I got involved in hot smoking was – there was only one business, Fish Products and Ernest Cox Limited, Graham Piers was the director there and Ken Mumbycroft. They were hot smoking mackerel, and the business well, went into liquidation basically, Ernest Cox, and I had words with Frank Robinson and the liquidators and I acquired the business. I didn't acquire the premises, didn't want them, but I acquired the business. So then became my involvement with splitting Finnan haddocks, but also, I then had that business for producing hot smoked mackerel fillets, whole hot smoked mackerel. So that was again another acquisition that gave me the opportunity. By that time I had got kilns. So it just progressed, and my interest has continued ever since. 10 years ago I was in New Zealand advising the New Zealand King Salmon company on their smoking, they asked me to go out there. And I'm still conducting courses, I'm doing one 21st, a couple of weeks time, the sea fish course which is principles of hot smoking that we show online., and up to the seafood village having to repurpose the training facility that we developed, we were doing practical courses there, showing people how to hot smoke and cold smoke. One guy from New Zealand came across, spent a week with me, early mornings, late nights, smoking eels, hot smoking eels, because they'd got an area, and off we went. And he'd bought two kilns and went back to Byron Bay and started a business, so I'm still very much involved, and people still talk to me and come to me. So, all based on starting out with Ross many years ago and recognizing opportunities. In the 1980s, when Poland was undergoing change in the Solidarity regime, there's a picture of me in the *Telegraph* loading half a ton of hot smoked mackerel to go to Poland, as part of the TUC's drive to get food convoys there. I just enjoy it. Passionate about it.

[0:24:30] EB: When you were at Peterson's, was there any sort of uniform provided for people? And sort of what about their holidays, and lunch breaks, what was the process?

[0:24:45] IJW: Got a vague memory of holidays, [*laughter*] or lunch breaks, but lunch breaks [inaudible] really depended on the workload. In that sense, you got some of the traditional robust type of characters that were on trawlers, you know, if you've got a full haul, "Sorry guys we're not doing that for the next half an hour" every lunch, you know you got it done. To give you an example, this is me personally but other people worked very long hours, when I was establishing the business my very first kiln I bought second-hand from AFOS, and I was training but also there was good money to be made out of smoking fish for other people, because it was money coming in, but nothing going out. And one weekend, one Easter, when there was – the price of fish goes very high before Easter, it drops like a stone afterwards. And there was a surplus of fish, "Can you smoke this for us Ivan, can you do this, can you do that?" and I started on the Thursday, and I didn't go home until the Monday, and my wife brought me bits and pieces in and I slept on the couch that was in that business. But, you know, generally now, and it's still there, they're a fairly robust lot in this industry, you know, some try and fail and come back again, there's family members in there. But yeah, it was a hard life, it certainly was, especially for the guys operating on the pontoon, but uniforms, basically, your uniform would be, in general, white coat, and – genuinely, this is true – white coat and wellies and boots, but in smokehouses, the open all hours Arkwright brand coat, for obvious reasons – got a lot of smoke about. But no, I mean, you would supply overalls. Wellies tended to get a bit, y'know, "There's a hole in my wellie." I've known people wear a carrier bag inside their boots, because of a hole. But it is was

an incredible industry to be in, people will not see the likes of it again. When I first started on the dock, my grandmother used to say I looked like a Kelly doll that you would find in a budgie's cage 'cause I was eight stone, wet through and I wore clogs, so they were heavy things, and the *Telegraph* did a two-page article on me many years ago when I said, "I will never forget my first day on the fish docks." The clamour of the clogs, calunk calunk calunk, that sound – you will never hear again, but it was incredible, as you approach the ramp at this end of the fish market, you would hear it, and it was a staccato calunk calunk calunk. Marvelous. Massive bows of an Icelandic trawler, the lights on the pontoon, and just a sea of white coats and boxes four, five high, 10 stone boxes all the way. As I say I can talk for England, probably the world actually, about my involvement.

[0:27:24] EB: But, the women at Peterson's, what sort of role did they have?

[0:27:58] IJW: There was only one in Peterson's, there were more in my business, Maggie Sparks, Alice Barber, Rose, Myra, yeah. Damned hard workers.

[0:28:14] EB: But just one at Peterson's?

[0:28:21] IJW: There might have been two. There might have been two at one point when Arthur took over, but they were basically brining, y'know not heavy work, but very important. I mean the history of women, particularly in the herring industry, for the splitting in Scotland, very very strong, population if you'd like, of women. A lot of hand processing going on. But yeah, the 'fisher lasses', that we called them. But I remember the women that worked for me with great affection, I mean they worked very hard. Maggie Sparks – I'll use the name, she won't mind, but I heard Bill Leaning – sterling chap, in the smoking side, very important to my business – I hear him giving Maggie a real, y'know, dressing down, with the colourful language that we expected, and I heard this 'cause my office was upstairs on the gantry and I thought, *I'm not having this*. So I opened the door and started tearing downstairs to [inaudible] off Bill, and then I heard Maggie reply, so I turned round and went back into the office, but superb people, you know. Hearts of gold, would do anything for you, and sterling people, you know, they worked very hard.

[0:29:39] EB: So, what were their wages like in comparison to other areas?

[0:29:42] IJW: They were just grateful to work for me. [Laughter] No, seriously, by comparison, the wages were quite good. I mean, the thing about the industry is that you've got skilled people, and certainly the wage element is more to the fore these days because you could move. You know, if your particular skill was needed especially in the smokehouse, you would pay that extra bit of money for it. So, they were mobile, but generally they tended to be very loyal. You know, there was none of this zero contract, you know, you were employed, and it's a set turn of events, you know, and I really feel for people these days that try to get on the property ladder, renting or whatever. And in those days, school leavers, that common phrase, "There's always the dock." There was always the dock. "What are you gonna do when you leave school?", "Well, I'd like to do this, I'd like to do that, but there's always the dock." But of course, in those days, there was the dock's board, Labour Dock Board, and if your father was in the business as a

lumper for example, unloading the boats, you had a very good chance of progressing if that's what you wanted to do. But if you didn't get opportunities in other areas, the camaraderie would be, "My lad's leaving, he's struggling job-wise, can he get something from-", "Yeah, yeah, tell him to come down, we'll do it". So there was a wage structure, that was around, and piecework of course is still out there in Grimsby, especially for process filleters. And over the years, we've now got a nucleus, of I would say fairly solid businesses. We went through a period where all your capital that you needed to be in business and compete against somebody like Young's, who had massive factories and all the cost that goes with it, for the price of a knife, a filleting board, and renting a chiller on the pontoon, you were in business. And a telephone. So, there was huge competition and huge regulations, very different between that guy there and a factory. Very different, But Peterson's – I'm not aware of anybody producing kippers on a large scale, in Grimsby now. The only two people who were around as kipper producers in the UK as opposed to Croan's in Scotland was a firm called 'Ballard' in North Shields, and Arthur and myself would collaborate with Ballard because we would be bringing Norwegian fish in as well, containers at a time. So, if the Norwegians had too much fish, they might overload the container even if they didn't ask for it and we would split it with Ballard. Ballard's burnt down, they suffered a bad fire in 1980s, and it's now an art gallery, like a museum.

[0:32:41] KB: I think I know where you're talking about -

[0:32:32] IJW: The business is still there, the specialist businesses, Spinks for example in Arbroath, Spinks is a traditional business and it produces Arbroath smokies as part of its portfolio, but it's traditional, family-owned, been there a long time. Specialism: Arbroath smokies, but they do sell other things, salmon and the like. Similarly, Peterson's was a specialist, producing kippers and dealing in pelagic fish. And then you look at smokehouses in Riby Street. The specialist business of Proctors that was run by Norman Haste, producing nothing except Finnan haddocks, and then you move along to Georgie Worrall, producing Finnan haddocks. The specialist businesses have their place and tend to survive, but as things have moved on, smokehouses have become smokehouses and they'll produce whatever there is. Peterson's was a specialist business, and a gentleman approached me some years ago and said, "I think there's a great opportunity for hot-smoking mackerel again in Grimsby", I said "Okay. You've got to realise that the marketplace has changed. It's polarized, it's the small retailer and it's the supermarkers and there's not much inbetween." So the smaller retailers are getting sold, a fishmonger will be sold and it will be turned into a pizza place. That's the way the high street has gone. My own view on it is that there are opportunities now emerging, because supermarkets are tending to close off their fish counters, so for the independent retailer, he could have a high-class business, and with the things I'm involved in now, the microkiln, the small one that we had at the Seafood Village for training. You imagine – like the London smokers, a lot of London fishmongers, they have a smokehole in the back

of the premises. Now you imagine a modern building, with a microkiln in, with a glass door, like an oven – am I gonna do these specials on Friday, we're gonna do bucklings. "Bucklings? What are they?" I know what bucklings are. It's a hot smoked headless herring, so you take the head off, and you hot smoke it, and it's ready to eat and it looks golden, and the same as these hot smoked halibut that I mentioned earlier on, the steaks. Now these have disappeared not because people don't like them, but supermarkets can't stock them because the sell-through isn't big enough to justify it. If I was going to go into business tomorrow, I'd have a retail fishmongers, I'd have a very nice shop, I'd have complimentary wines and equipment, and I would have a smoking kiln in there with a glass door so people can see their salmon and I would be saying, "On Friday we're gonna produce probably the best kippers you've ever had in your life."

[0:35:44] EB: Well, do the kippers taste as good now as when you did them at Peterson's?

[0:35:49] IJW: It's like anything. If you've got a piece of meat you can make a mess of it or you can make something that's very very nice. A gentleman once said to me some time ago, he said, "I'll be honest with you Ivan, it was a big business. Our fish these days is introduced to the smoke," rather than smoked, because the longer you leave it, the more yield you use, and with supermarkets competing for every penny, there's only one place that they can go to reduce, and that's the producer, and it's not a bottomless pit. So, I'm a traditionalist, I like strong flavours. The kippers that are in Waitrose produced by what's-his-name up north, are superb. You get near the fish counter, you can smell the kippers. You can smell them. But also, the population has changed, and tastes have changed, it's gone down the milder route, the reduced salt, which is an important part of the smoking process in terms of the brines. So, tastes have changed a little, but traditional smoked fish you can certainly tell the difference between a traditional smokehouse if it's been operated in that way and one produced mechanically. But there's a proviso there. You can use a mechanical kiln for longer periods, I can smoke fish inside five hours, but I can extend it to eight or ten. So, tastes vary and producers vary, but the flavours are still there, depending on what you have. You get a good butcher, you've got a bad butcher. The tastes are still there, but most certainly, traditional smoke, it's gonna be in there for probably at least 12 hours, you know putting it in the chimneys on the previous evening taking it out the following morning. But you start with a good product. You cannot – what was it Arthur [inaudible] used to say to me, "You can't turn a sow's ear into a silk purse." So people – before freezing – you know, and all these people around buying fish, they would all have fish hoping to sell it to the wholesalers. Now the wholesaler in those days were quite mercenary, 'cause they had the choice of a number of suppliers. So, you'd get your fish on day one, *hmm, not having very good sales*, day two comes along, day three comes along *oh God, what are we gonna do with it, let's freeze it, let's smoke it*. You're not improving it. And most of the big businesses had what they called an 'institution

department', God bless them, and there was a firm called Britfish, and that was a conglomerate of all the major producers. So, they would export the fish, they would freeze, or they'd produce it for institutions. Her Majesty's prisons, hospitals, and schools. We probably lost two generations of schoolchildren because [laughter] with fish today, and it came from fish that had been slowly dribbled into the institutions. Hospitals, I don't know, but yeah, it was HMP, big contracts with GLC was one, Great London Council. So, you need to take care of your product, you need to have a good product to start with when you're smoking. You don't improve it by smoking. You really don't, and it's not a question of putting it in, 12 hours it's done, or in a mechanical kiln 5 hours it's done, this [gestures] your hand, touching it, feeling it, has a big effect, because they're living things, and the biology of them, the structure of them changes over time with breeding, with swarming et cetera. So some fish may take a little longer than others, and as I said earlier, there's a lot of expertise in it, if you get a thundery night, it's the worst night ever for smoking. Seen the film *Mary Poppins*? You see the view over London and you see chimney and you see smoke going straight up. Absolutely, and that's because the cool air draws the warm air out, it goes up. You get a hot humid night, that same draw isn't there, so instead of the smoke flowing nice and smoothly if you like, it sort of meanders through the fish before it comes out. So you need a bit longer and you need that touch to say it's done, the term we use is, "It's a bit slack", so it needs a bit longer. Takes a bit of working.

[0:40:42] EB: So did you always eat a lot of fish?

[0:40:44] IJW: Did I always-?

[0:40:46] EB: Eat fish.

[0:40:47] IJW: Oh yes, yes.

[0:40:48] EB: And the workers – they were allowed to take fish home, were they?

[0:40:52] IJW: Fish was cheap in those days. When I was with Ross, every member of middle management had a parcel of haddock on every Friday. Gifted, every Friday. Your grandad would've had one of those, John and I got on very well. But, it was different, very different, fish was plentiful in, you know, we hadn't had these massive troubles with Iceland in those days and a lot of fish would go to fishmeal. A lot of fish wouldn't be used, wouldn't be bought.

[0:41:24] EB: So what sort of recipes did your wife use?

[0:41:30] IJW: Fish and chips from Ernie Beckett. [Laughter] Basically, with the haddock it would be very simple, you know, poached in a pan with egg. The mackerel would be standalone hot smoked mackerel we'd eat it hot or we'd eat it cold, salad item maybe. But in the factory, you know, we'd smoke roes as well, and we would lower the roes down right over the fire pit, and we'd have them with toast, we'd just spread them on

the toast. There's a little bit of a risk to that – if either of you are smokers, you'll know the feeling, but if you go into an atmosphere where there is smoke, you're throat's a little hoarse, so you're taking something out that's been exposed to smoke for many many hours and you're gonna eat it, and it's noticeable later on that you get a little bit of this acrid taste. The flavours come out and work through as the fish cools and matures, but I'll be very honest, hot smoked mackerel out of a mechanical kiln, yeah, out it comes – delicious.

[0:42:36] KB: So if cost was no option do you have a favourite fish then? Or would hot smoked mackerel be the top of your list?

[0:42:41] IJW: I enjoy hot smoked mackerel, but still a Finnan haddock – I'll go with Patrick's or Enderby's smoked haddock – but a Finnan haddock which is a whole haddock, take the head off, you clean all the membrane out form the gut cavity and then you split it. Quite an art in splitting Finnans, although the bones are still left in there, that's still one of my favourite dishes. Nobody likes bones, and there was panic when they nearly choked the Queen mother on a bone years ago. So, the trend is to boneless, and of course, it's like ribbed beef, that went away after the Mad Cow Disease, but now it's back, and I think a nice beef rib, cooked, is fine.

So, yeah, fish is still very much out there, and it is healthy. It's a healthy food. But back to what would my wife do, with the haddock that I would take home every Friday. Sometimes we'd deep fry it, other times Jeanie would go a little bit down the route of doing it with cheeses, with butter. One that I remember was butter and lemon. Sauce, butter and lemon, and it was gorgeous. But yeah, she was an absolute gem, as I say. Sadly, she never did see the new factory. I had the business, and as I say she was very loyal and supportive with brining stuff to me when I had long weekends but, what happened was Boston Fleet Fish had a smokehouse in Riby Street run by Eric Lightfoot, then Mussan was the foreman there, quite senior. Eric Lightfoot used to run the business and then from the little place I had in Salvesen's at the back of the pallet yard, I had my first business and a small kiln that I bought second-hand from AFOS. Then Len came to me one day and he said, "We're having some work done on the kilns. Could you smoke our fish for us?" Yes please, absolutely. And I did that for quite a while, and their work was extended and I said to them, "Len, why don't you look at letting me smoke your fish for you?", and he said "What?", and I said, "Well, Eric, you've got a big staff there in Riby Street, I've done this for you but you've been very satisfied with the product, I'd like to take the business. I'd like to get the smokehouse." And he came back to me, a little over a week later and he said, "Were you serious?", and I said "Yes" so we negotiated with, as it was at that time, British Transport Docks Board, and I took the business in Riby Street or rented it, so that got me very much involved, and then, in the Thatcher years, Maggie said, "No, we're splitting rail and we're splitting docks." So everything this

side [*gesturing*] of the railway lines in Riby Street became split from Associated British Ports. The other side it was all still ABP rental, this side became free market, because Maggie said, “Okay you want money, you get rid of some of your assets” and in the secretary of the FMA was Ken Beacon, and he got all the businesses down Riby Street at the time including mine, and Worrall’s and all the rest of them, and as a group, we made a group purchase, and on the following day, the individual’s businesses were transferred. So, that’s how Riby Street became free hold. And as I say we continued in that business for a very long time, and had a good name.

[0:46:33] KB: So, something I forgot to ask earlier is: in a previous interview, it was mentioned that Peterson’s also had a second location at Lowestoft.

[0:46:43] IJW: Not a second location. But the herring was – big herring in Lowestoft coming down the coast, round into Lowestoft. But, Arthur would follow the herring shoals. So, they would take the vehicles up to Hartlepool. And they would drive down to Lowestoft, and then they would follow down to the south coast, and then they would ship the herring back to Grimsby. They didn’t actually have a premises, but he was quite a dynamic guy, and so was his father.

[0:47:16] KB: Do you have a lot of memories of Arthur?

[0:47:19] IJW: Oh, yes, yes, yes, I do, I do. He was quite a robust character, he had a dry sense of humour, and – you mentioned the décor, and I said tar basically, and it could still be an issue with that building depending on the cowls, but the problem was the tar, because of this circulation problem, was that heavy, when he was getting pressured to decorate, to clean, I remember very well John painting the doors, and I think the upper doors were painted red. Problem was every time you touched the doors, for six months afterwards, you had red fingers, because unless you completely clear that film, it can’t dry, and it wouldn’t dry. And the other one was when Arthur spoke to me and said the HO [health officer] had been pressing him because the ceiling was tar covered and he wanted that ceiling cleaning and make it easy clean so Arthur said, “I did make it very easy clean, I painted it black.” Which is exactly what he did. But, yeah, some interesting moments with Arthur, and – big stone troughs in there for the brine tanks, I mean you couldn’t move them, you needed two, maybe three people to move the things. But yes, I remember it with great affection. In the early days, when I took the business and the EHOs [environmental health officers] were there, there was no hot water in that building. There was no hot water, they had a Burco-type boiler, that was it, there was no hot water. So my father and I bought put an immersion heater on top of the office at one end, and we plunged that in to give hot water into washbasins and what have you. Wasn’t easy, it had been under pressure, and certainly Ian Rayner and Chris Melville who now I work with very well, you know I’ve grown to be a friend of Chris over the years, but when he first

came to Grimsby, he wasn't keen on Peterson's and what have you. And I remember the two of them there saying, "No, you've crossed the Rubicon," and they neither wanted to-

[0:49:40] EB: But you did have toilets!

[0:49:45] IJW: Was there a toilet in there? Yes, but we made improvements and they could see that we were making an effort, especially with putting the water in so they said, "Okay, we'll let it go" but continuously, we developed a cooperative relationship. But, there's no question, it was hard for the EHOs in those days because there was a lot of resistance, "Why do we need to do this? Why do we need to do that?" But things have changed.

[0:50:13] KB: We had a very good interview with Chris, earlier.

[0:50:17] IJW: I've got a lot of respect for Chris.

[0:50:18] KB: And it was a fabulous one, and he was telling us about his involvement with Peterson's, and not quite so much, he was telling us quite a bit about Fred's Fish as well, and he was saying how he gave a letter in, saying, "Right. You're dealing with cooked fish, and you're also dealing with raw. Here is how you are going to separate them." And he was very keen for us to ask Steve Parkinson quite a few questions.

[0:50:46] IJW: Yeah, I mean, the regulations have changed for obvious reasons. But, you know, some of the habits that were on the pontoon itself, probably don't really want a lot of description, but, you know, when toilets are half a mile away from you and you're very cold and you've got your uniform on, then – the dock holds a lot of water, put it that way, and I won't go into a lot of detail.

[0:51:11] KB: Well I think the final question we'll ask then is – it seems like there was some great sense of camaraderie, and everyone had a really good sense of humour. So do you remember any particular funny stories, of the way people were?

[0:51:26] IJW: Oh, what can I say?

[0:51:28] KB: That won't get anyone into trouble, obviously. [*Laughter*]

[0:51:32] IJW: Not necessarily funny, more than the Arthur Peterson one. I can remember people having fun and, you know, the occasional playful fight. And I mean playful. But one particular gentleman – and this was a habit that was not warmly received – every morning we would get a rustles list, which showed where all the vessels were birthed and what they'd got on board, and it happened a few times, I mean you'd certainly see a cigarette in a cod head, smoking in box, but everybody was clamoured together, I mean you were crowded around the sale. And a guy would walk up behind and twist the tail of a white coat, he'd punch a hole through the rustles list and put it on the white coat and then set fire to it. Which, you know, wasn't ideal, but there was some fun times. There

was a guy who used to have an A board, he'd put this A board – like you see the protesters have, front and back – with all the prices of his products, for the day, it worked. But the one thing I would like to say, about the camaraderie – people would run other people's businesses, if someone was ill. They wouldn't take their customers but they would do that, and one person, apart from the many who've helped me through my career with Ross – Rex Camp, his funeral was only last year, I went to. People used to say he's a crackpot, 'cause he's a zany character, but anybody that said that about him was a fool themselves, he was very astute. He was a bit eccentric, but when I wanted my first kiln – he always used to call me Byron Jaines, "Now then Byron Jaines how are you? How are you doing?" I said, "Struggling a bit Rex," I said, "I've made the decision," but I said, "I'm struggling to get finance." And he said, "You will, you will, 'cause you haven't got a track record." And I said "I've been to see George Norris at Mercantile Credit in the marketplace and I've been to the bank, but they said I need a guarantor." "Yeah," he said, "It's difficult. My niece works there, Carol. Tell her to bring me a guarantee form, give you a guarantee form." And I said, "Are you serious?" And he said, "Yeah." So I went to see Carol and she said, "You've been to see my uncle Rex." And I said, "Yeah," I said, "I had no idea." And he was in Riby Street at the time, and he was sat on a pot box, with his whites on, and he said, "What have you got there, have you got it?" And I said, "Yes Rex, but, you know-" and he said, "Give it here." And he signed a blank guarantee form. And I needed three grand at that time, bearing in mind we're talking 40-odd years ago, 50 years ago. That was a lot of money, and he just signed the guarantee form. So, y'know whenever people talk – and I told people like that at Rex's funeral, and Gordon Ridlington, he said, "He helped me the same way." Rex was – it was people, Eric Macklam, when Alistair Blair was in business and he struggled, Eric Macklam went in to help him. And it was a terrific atmosphere. Christmastime, you know, you'd [inaudible] for everybody's business. I remember walking home to Waltham one Christmas.

[0:55:07] EB: So, did people have cars at Peterson's, or bikes?

[0:55:12] IJW: John had a bike, Arthur of course, and what's his name had a bike. Not Arthur, Arthur and Bob had cars not bikes. But generally, yeah, there was a lot of bikes and as I say in those days Riby Square pedestrians and bikes used to come off, that was the main thing that came. I absolutely love it, and it's tragic that people won't see and hear these sounds again apart from some of the archive films that are out there. Still active! 75 at Christmas, and I'm advising apprentices now and currently involved in the National Standards Review.

[0:55:52] KB: Well, it's wonderful that you are continuing the tradition of sharing skills like this and keeping it alive, it is wonderful to hear that the next generation are being brought in and hopefully, with the restoration of Peterson's, that will continue as well and help support our effort.

[0:56:08] IJW: I wouldn't mind at all having a look inside it, and if I can help in any way with suggestions I'm more than happy to do it. If I can find these picture that I've got, and especially that one as I say of the surrounded by product, and yeah by all means, more than happy to let you have [*hands something to interviewers*] one of those things there and anything else I can find.

[0:56:27] KB: Well, thank you so much for your time.

[0:56:31] EB: You've now made us so hungry!