

## Mark Aisthorpe Interview Transcription (RAW Audio Time Stamps) – 01/11/23

**Interviewers – Jasmine Butler (JB) and Katherine Briggs (KB)**

**Interviewee – Mark Aisthorpe (MA)**

*Images are referenced at 0:15:04, 0:16:28, 0:17:28, 0:18:47, 0:19:31, and 0:19:48.*

**JB:** It is Jasmine Butler doing the interviewing. It is 10:07 on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November.

Hello, it's lovely to meet you, could you introduce yourself for us?

**[0:00:25] MA:** Yeah, my name's Mark Aisthorpe. I worked for Peterson's from 1976 to 1977, but my memories of Peterson's go back a little bit further than that. If I start at the beginning, my grandad, Alf Aisthorpe, was born in 1914, end of 1914, and he went to work for Peterson in 1936, and he worked for Peterson's all his life. He retired in 1980, and he was the foreman at Peterson's, and basically he ran the Peterson's smokehouse. Arthur Peterson, who worked alongside my grandad, he worked on the stand on the pontoon, and he ran sales of fish for all of Peterson's customers, where my grandad was in charge of the smoking operation.

Most of my family worked at Peterson's, myself included, my brother worked there, my father worked there – that was his first job before he went in the army – and a lot of other relatives worked there. My grandmother worked there, I've got photographs of my grandmother, I've got photographs of my grandfather. Fire away with any questions you've got, I'll do my best. I do know a lot about the actual operation of the smokehouse, about the machines, I've even got videos of the machines. So, I hope I can help with your project.

**[0:02:12] JB:** That's great, thank you. Can we ask quickly, can you share your date of birth with us?

**[0:02:17] MA:** Yes, 26<sup>th</sup>, January, 1960.

**[0:02:20] JB:** Thank you. So, it sounds like you've lived in Grimsby all your life?

**[0:02:25] MA:** Up until ten years ago, I lived in Grimsby all my life, apart from a little spell when I went working down south – London, didn't like it, came back. But yeah, I worked on the fish docks, not as a proper job but as a Saturday job from being 12 in 1972. I used to go down dock every Saturday with my grandad and that was to the smokehouse, and basically my Saturday job consisted of just packing kippers. Purely and simply, that was it. Carried that on until I was 14, and you used to be able to go to the education authority on Eleanor Street in Grimsby and get a work permit, to enable you to work I think it was 20 hours, during the school holidays? But I was working more than 20 hours. Wasn't supposed to, but, you know, I was working probably 40 hours full time, and loved it. And that's when I learnt all about the operation, covering every aspect of the job apart from working the machines, because, you know, complicated machines, always going wrong, so – the health and safety would've had a field day. We never worked them with the guards on, just – you'll see the images in a minute, but to just – whirring cogwheels, going round and round and round, if you had a coat, you had to roll your sleeves up because if they got caught, it'd just take your hand in.

There was two machines, I remember, I don't know if they're still in there.

**[0:04:16] KB:** A lot of the machinery has been moved out, when the Peterson's smokery was sold, it stopped being a smokehouse, and they blocked up the chimneys. But they're hoping to restore it to being a smokehouse.

**[0:04:30] MA:** Well, the two machines – we used to go down on a Saturday morning when I first started going down as my Saturday job and I always remember my grandad saying to me, “Stop outside”, because the place used to just fill up with smoke. So he went in the back door, went through the building, and opened the front door, and basically the smoke dissipated. And as you walked in the back door, there was a little toilet to your right hand side, and then, we used to call it the gantry, was where trucks unloaded the herrings, which were gonna be turned into kippers, and a kipper machine right in front of you, which was purely and simply set up to make boneless kippers – they split them a different way. So, if it's gonna be a kipper with its head on, which everybody associates with a kipper, it was split down the backbone and opened up, if it was gonna be a boneless kipper it was split down the belly, head taken off and the tail taken off, and the backbone removed. So, the boneless one was near the back door, the kipper machine was near the front door, and in the middle were a row of about 10 brine tubs, where the herring once they'd been split used to get tipped into brine, coloured brine, and soaked for 20 minutes, and then it was hung on wooden speakes, which again, wouldn't be allowed today it's all stainless steel and everything, but the wooden speakes, with nails in them, like an L-shaped nail, which the kippers were hung on to. Before you got used to it, you used to quite often stick the nails in your thumb, but yeah, they were hung on to them, and then they were carried over to the smokehouse, put in the smokehouse, and obviously as it filled up, you used to have to climb in the smokehouse, and straddle yourself like that [*gesturing*] and higher the fish up the smokehouse.

So that was downstairs. Upstairs, you went up the concrete stairs which I presume are still there at the side, got to the top and you had all the smokehouses to your right hand side – not all used as smokehouses, the first one was used as a store for the wood chippings. We had some fun and games, I can tell you about that later – I've written some stuff down for you. But, yeah, all the smokehouses were to the right hand side, and then all along the full length of the building were wooden horses, we used to call them, and basically after the fish had been smoked, you used to take them out the smokehouse and stack them on there. So my Saturday job, I used to walk in, upstairs, first job was a cup of tea, obviously, and then it was packing kippers, and it just seemed neverending, because all these horses was stacked from the floor height to probably about 6ft high, rows and rows and rows of kippers, and you used to just stand there, paring kippers and packing them up in boxes, half-stone boxes, one-stone boxes. We always used to send out for a bacon butty or a sausage butty on a Saturday morning, have a tea break, then it was back to packing kippers, and that was from six o'clock in the morning through to till about – we were usually all done by eleven o'clock, five hours. And then it was off to the pub [*laughter*]. Even as a 12-year-old lad, my uncle was secretary of the Exchange Club in Railway Street, which I think is now a mosque, and Harold Bryant – another fish merchant who dealt with herrings, he was chairman of that club, so I was allowed in and I wasn't allowed a drink as such, I was on a shandy. So that was my early days, say 12 to about 14, then at 14 I went basically full-time in the school holidays, and when I got to – I finished school when I was 16, 1976, I really wanted to be

an apprentice electrician, and I applied for only three jobs over the space of about three months, and the final one I applied for was an apprentice electrician with the council. Didn't get it, 120 applied and I got in the final three. So, I bit the bullet and came to work down dock.

I stopped at Peterson's from 16 til 17, or about 17 and a half, by then I'd passed my driving test and then I set up business on my own down dock with eight other relatives and we had a little fishhouse, again down Henderson Street but the other end of Henderson Street, and we used to sell fish inland. So I used to go to Derbyshire and Yorkshire, South Yorkshire. So I went to Swinton, Mexborough, Wath, that area of South Yorkshire, and anywhere between Chesterfield and Derby, off the A61, I used to sell fish all round there. I did that until 1989, and I'd got married by then, the wife was pregnant with the first, and she didn't want me going down the road anymore. So I stopped working on the docks altogether, and I went to work for British Telecom. I did seven or eight years of British Telecom, and then a little spell down London at a job I didn't like, and then came back to work on the docks, but not on the fish, I went on the cars which is still going now, so I went to work for a company called ECM, and basically dispatching cars all over the place. And that went on until about three years ago now, due to COVID and that, I had the chance to take early redundancy. I'd planned to retire anyway, y'know, earlier, so I took my redundancy and I've been a man of leisure ever since.

But yeah, fire away with any questions you've got about Peterson's I'll see what I can-

**[00:11:38] KB:** Well, that sounds wonderful. You've covered a lot of things, and I know for me you've already sparked quite a few other avenues that I think we might want to have a chat about. So, in terms of that then – I think we've covered those – if we modify that question maybe – you said your grandfather had the first connection with Peterson's, how did he get involved and when did he start working there? Did he work his way up to foreman?

**[00:12:17] MA:** I don't know what happened there, apart from my grandfather Alf, who – again, I've written you some notes, so if I miss anything out you probably might find it out from this. But he went to work at Peterson's in 1936. My father was born in 1936 as well so I don't know whether that sort of prompted him to get a job at Peterson's. I don't know where he worked before that, because '36, my grandad would've been 21, or maybe even 22 but around 21, and he worked at Peterson's from '36 til '39, and then he did his war service, obviously cause there was the Second World War, but I know he was back at Peterson's for '42. Obviously the war hadn't ended by then but I know he was medically discharged, but I never ever spoke about – my grandad never spoke about the war. Ever. My dad, obviously, I say he was born in '36, he went to do his army service, which was national service when he was 18. But before that, my dad, that's Ron Aisthorpe, he worked at Peterson's, and I've got photos of him as well, and I said my nan worked at Peterson's as well, but Alfie went to work at Peterson's in '36, at some point he became foreman, I don't know whether it was before he went to do his war service or after. But I have got one interesting fact about my grandad going to work there, as I say he worked there from 1936 until he retired at 65 in 1980, and he lived down Elm Avenue, which is just off Yarbrough Road and he rented his house, and I know from stories that Arthur Peterson offered to buy his house for him, and my grandad could just pay the same as what he was paying rent but

obviously at the end the house would be his, and my grandad refused saying, “I don’t want to be tied to a job”. And he finished up working there all his life, so, yeah [*laughter*] bit of a mistake.

**[0:14:50] KB:** Oh, that’s fascinating! And you mentioned your nan, your grandma, as well also worked at Peterson’s. What was she doing?

**[0:15:04] MA:** She was basically what we used to call a ‘herring girl’. [*hands over a photo to the interviewers*] That’s my nan to the left. As I say, the photos are a bit dark but they’re all really good quality on here.

**[0:15:17] KB:** We’re looking at a wonderful photograph of three people in 1940s? 1950s-

**[0:15:29] MA:** I would put it probably before that, maybe – yeah 40s, definitely. As I say, my nan gave birth to my dad in 1936, so whether this is before or after I wouldn’t know, but they were from a massive family. My grandad was the eldest of 17, of which 14 survived, and so if my nan was working after my dad was born – if she was working at Peterson’s – then I would imagine my dad would be looked after by my grandad’s mother, because as I say she had a massive family anyway so it would’ve fitted in, y’know, the more the merrier I suppose. That’s the herring girls, that’s outside Peterson’s fishhouse.

**[0:16:22] KB:** Could you explain a little bit more for us what herring girls would do?

**[0:16:28] MA:** The machines – I wouldn’t know when they went in, but before the machines, the herrings used to get split by hand and then all of the jobs what I told, as in brining the fish, hooking them on the wooden poles which was called ‘speakes’, and then I would imagine the girls went in the fish houses, went in the smokehouse highering the fish just the same as the chaps. [*Hands over a photo to the interviewers*] That’s another photo of my nan, with the docktower in the back and you can tell that’s just outside the fishhouse as well. I’m sorry I don’t know any of the other girls’ names.

**[0:17:15] JB:** This is wonderful.

**[0:17:17] KB:** So, we’re looking at a photo of two herring girls, and they’re both riding bicycles so I take it that’s how they were getting to work then?

**[0:17:24] MA:** Yep.

**[0:17:27] KB:** Oh, that’s lovely.

**[0:17:28] MA:** My grandad could drive but he always – he never bothered getting a car, he always cycled to work. Unless he got a lift. When I used to go down with him quite often – again, I’ve written it in my little notes what I’m gonna leave you – but he used to get one of his mates to pick him up. I remember A. B. Stern, another fish merchant who had the fishhouse alongside Peterson’s and he used to pick us up in his yellow Triumph Stag [*laughter*] which was great when you’re a 12-year-old lad y’know. [*Hands over a photo to the interviewers*] That’s off the original photo when my grandad retired, and on that photo, the guy to the left is Bob Cormack, he was Arthur Peterson’s brother-in-law, then that’s my grandad and my nan, and then Arthur Peterson to the right hand side. [*Hands over a newspaper cutting to the interviewers*] And that

one is the actual newspaper cutting as well but again, the quality's not fantastic, but they are all online.

**[0:18:39] KB:** That's fabulous. We're trying to get an interview with the Cormack family, so that would be really lovely to show them this photo.

**[0:18:47] MA:** Well I know Arthur had a son called Anthony who was an officer in the RAF, and I know he got married to a Greek Cypriot girl over in Cyprus when he was serving out there, but as to where they've gone and what happened after that I have no idea. [*Hands over a photo to the interviewers*] But this one is one of my favourite photos and this I would imagine from the age of my father is about 1950. And this is Henderson Street again, but it's the other side of Henderson Street. My dad's on that.

**[0:19:30] KB:** Which one is he?

**[0:19:31] MA:** One of the youngest at the front, the one – I think he's about fourth from – [*points to his father on the photo*] that one.

**[0:19:39] KB:** In a lovely fairisle jumper. How many people were working at Peterson's, do you know?

**[0:19:48] MA:** I have no idea. I know quite a few of the names from my time at Peterson's from even being 12 through to '77 when I was 17. I know who was working there then, but the earlier people I really don't know. **But that was quite interesting and [*hands over a newspaper cutting to the interviewers*] this is how I found out that my grandad had finished his war service by 1942, it's a clipping from the *Grimby Telegraph* and the headline of it is 'Foreman at Fault'. Arthur would be in the RAF by then, Arthur Peterson, so my grandad was basically running the place, and he got fined, I think it's 40 shillings, for allowing a light to be displayed in the hours of darkness. So that's how I know he was out of the army and back at Peterson's in 1942. 40 shillings back then was a lot of money.**

**[0:20:53] KB:** That's a lot of money, and especially on such an important dock during blackout you don't want any light shining. Oh, that's marvelous.

**[0:21:03] – [0:21:28] –** Pause. For removing during editing.

**[0:21:28] JB:** Do you remember the sights, the sounds, the smells of the building?

**[0:21:32] MA:** Oh yeah, oh yeah. [*laughter*] Right, we'll start with the smells, firstly. Kippers, smoke, hard to describe right. I actually love the smell, and quite often when I was working on the cars over there [*gesturing*] – I started at five in the morning, even when I worked in Hull I used to leave home at four to get there for five for the lorry drivers coming in to pick the load of cars up. And you could quite often get the smell of the smokehouses wafting and I loved it. So, I can't say I loved it all the time I was working at Peterson's because, y'know like you couldn't leave work and go straight to the pub because you absolutely stunk. But yeah, that was the smell, kippers and smoke.

The sights: dirty, dank. The lighting in there was really, really dismal, and – it was really very dismal – and everything was coloured from the brine. All the wood upstairs, the horses what the kippers was stored on, right, you could literally, if you'd run your fingernail down it, you'd get gunge [*laughter*] but yeah. And the sights, as I say, I've described what it's like in there, but it was all filthy, basically. It used to get washed down everyday, at the end of the day, but it was just a jet of water – we didn't have a pressure washer first off, we did get a pressure washer eventually – but it was just washed down with a hosepipe. And the yard outside was y'know, was just swilled. We used to get an ice kit, fill it, bung the holes up, the drain holes at the bottom of the ice kit, fill it with water and just tip it in the lane and it used to wash everything away.

**[0:23:48] KB:** And what about the sounds?

**[0:23:51] MA:** Clanking of the machines. I say I've done you two little videos, so that'll describe the sound. The machines – again, I've got the images on here [*gestures to USB drive*] and on my laptop. I remember went I first went in thinking they looked like a couple of robots. That would be as a six-year-old boy, and it reminded me of *Robby the Robot* off *Lost in Space*, and the reason for that was all of the cogwheels – I don't know if you remember *Lost in Space* but *Robby the Robot* had cogwheels in his belly, and these kipper machines were full of cogs.

I wouldn't say – 'scary' was probably the wrong word, but I was a little bit dubious of them, yes. But yeah, just clunking of the cogs going round and every so often a click – the cogs whirring, and the click which was an arm which as the fish passed under, it used to lift up and it clunked back into place. Y'know, and it was monotonous and it drove you mad after so long.

**[0:25:11] KB:** Not much time for talking then other than on a tea break.

**[0:25:15] MA:** There was no talking, it was all shouting. I think that's probably why I'm half-deaf now [*laughter*].

**[0:25:23] JB:** Interesting. Were there many your age working in there?

**[0:25:27] MA:** On my Saturday job I never saw anybody apart from my grandad, obviously, who I went down with, and two chaps and two women. The chaps was a guy called Harry Ballard, who – he died young, he died aged 45 in about 1982, and his wife Jean Ballard – I remember their son, Mike Ballard, I think he worked for Peterson's for a short while as well, and then another chap was called Ken Gibbs, and again he died, not as young, but again I think he died about 1987. Kenny Gibbs. And I can remember he was always telling stories about like ghost stories and – which, when you was a kid, you know [*laughter*] used to terrify you. So yeah, there was Harry, Jean his wife, Ken Gibbs, Michael Ballard who was the son of Harry and Jean, and then there was a lady, and I've racked my brains and I can't remember her second name, but her name was Hetty. And there are people who still know the girls who was working at that time because due to the wonders of Facebook I got in touch with somebody who worked at the fishhouse next door which was Donnelly's, and he was saying, "Y'know I can remember them two women who used to work at Peterson's, what was their names?" you know, as soon as I said the names he remembered. So, yeah, but as for my age I didn't meet anybody my age until I started working there in the school holidays when I was 14, and for the life of me, I can't

remember hardly any of their names apart from first names, there was a guy called Steve, a guy called Pete – they were sort of my age.

**But staff at Peterson's – it was one of them jobs where you loved it or absolutely hated it, and a lot of staff didn't last long. I remember the odd one who'd turn up in the morning for his first day and go out for lunch and never come back!** You know, but when I left school and went to work at Peterson's at 16, I went to work on the stand with Arthur Peterson. I don't know why because I knew literally everything about the fishhouse but I think it was probably he didn't want me working with my grandad thinking I'd be favoured, but anything couldn't be further from the truth because my grandad – he was a tough taskmaster, as I told you he was one of 17 kids originally, who 14 survived, and there's only two of them left now and they're both well in their 80s. And I went to see one of them, probably a couple of months ago now, and just pop in for a cup of tea on a Saturday when I came over from Hull to see my sons, and it's always reminiscing about the docks and how hard it was, and it was a hard job, and he [inaudible], “Can you remember working for Alfie?”, you know, “He was a tough taskmaster”, and that's my uncle's words, and he was a tough taskmaster. I quite regularly got all the horrible jobs, if you like. The worst job was sitting behind the boning machine on a little box, a little wooden box and, it's gonna sound awful this but you're sorting through the belly, guts, off a herring, and you're after the white – the male herring roe, which was called ‘milts’. And they used to get put in a little wooden box, only [gestures] like a little casket like that but it was full, it held seven pounds in weight, half a stone of herring milts. But it kept your hands clean [laughter] you weren't dipping them in brine but it was horrible. That was my job when I was working during the school holidays. Awful job

**[0:30:06] KB:** Were the milts being smoked or were they to be sent off?

**[0:30:10] MA:** No. They were – you didn't smoke the milts, the milts went out as they just came out the belly of the herring. So – used to dip them in flour and fry them. Quite nice, quite nice.

**[0:30:23] KB:** We're they smoking anything else other than kippers?

**[0:30:27] MA:** Just kippers.

**[0:30:27] KB:** Just kippers?

**[0:30:28] MA:** Only kippers, yeah.

**[0:30:31] KB:** Well you discussed earlier about the upstairs and the horses, was there an office in Peterson's at all, or did they have a separate place for all of the admin?

**[0:30:43] MA:** Right. The downstairs layout, I think I've told you, all there was downstairs was as you walk in the back door of Peterson's there was a toilet to your right hand side – which would've been condemned today – then the gantry where the lorries used to pull up and unload the herring. The row of brine tubs and the two machines downstairs, up the concrete steps, and then smokehouses all to the right hand side as you walked up to the top of the stairs, facing in to the building all to your left hand side was the horses to store the kippers and at the back of the building, there was another toilet which was basically above the downstairs toilet, and the



upstairs toilet was classed as the ‘ladies’ toilet – no better than the downstairs toilet though. Alongside that was the mess room, where everybody used to get their cups of tea and eat your dinner. Alongside the mess room was my grandad’s office, which was – basically, he had a window at the front of the building. As you look at the building now, you’ve got two doors upstairs. – Yeah? – And where that door is upstairs, grandad’s office was in that corner. So yeah, that was the upstairs layout, so an office, a canteen, and a toilet on the far wall away from the stairs. On the other far wall, sort of above the stairs, was basically the box store, and – exactly what is says, you used to store all your boxes in there. The boxes used to come on a truck, somebody would stand upstairs at the door, and somebody’d be on the back of the truck, and you used to throw them up, throw the boxes up, but not one at a time it used to be three at a time. Didn’t matter whether they wore one stone boxes or two stone boxes or three stone, four stone boxes, you used to throw them up and literally sandwich them together, throw them up like that [*gesturing*] and whoever was at the top used to catch them like that [*gesturing*] and if you missed the bottom one used to fall out, you know. Yeah, so that was the layout of the upstairs.

[0:32:58] **JB:** Interesting. How much were you getting paid doing this job?

[0:33:02] **MA:** [*Laughter*] Funnily enough, I can remember. When I went on a Saturday, I was paid three quid, £3, for five hours work, which was pretty good actually for a 12-year-old lad. When I went during the holidays, I was getting whatever the going rate was, which I can’t remember, but it enabled me to save up for a few things I wanted as a 14-year-old lad, which was mainly audio equipment, I was into my radios – no CDs then, but stereos, eight-track players, a little mixer – I used to think I was a DJ – and then when I started at Peterson’s in 1976, I was earning £16 a week. Which was not enough, and I remember going into Arthur Peterson regularly, and I’m on about literally once a month, saying, “It’s not enough, it’s not enough, I can’t live on this”, and I started on £16 a week in 1976, and when I left in the middle of 1977, I doubled it, I was on £32 a week.

[0:34:34] **JB:** Was it just you that managed to do that?

[0:34:38] **MA:** [*Laughter*] Arthur Peterson always – bless him – he always used to say, “I’ll give you an extra 25p an hour. Don’t tell anybody.”, so I did tell everybody. So no, it wasn’t just me you know, all the lads got a pay rise. But, I say, it was really low wages, I had friends from school who was on literally double that, you know, and they were only working on a fruit stall on Freeman Street market. So, yeah, from £16 up to £32 a week in 1977.

[0:35:17] **KB:** So, do you know where the herrings were coming to you from?

[0:35:22] **MA:** I do.

[0:35:24] **KB:** Ah, who were you getting them from?

[0:35:25] **MA:** Well, Peterson’s had more than one depot. They had a depot obviously in Grimsby, and as you’ll see from some of the photographs what I’ve got, it says on the wooden boxes ‘Grimsby and Lowestoft’. So, they’d another place in Lowestoft as well. I don’t know much about it, I never went, but my grandad used to travel to Lowestoft. He also used to go up and buy herrings to Oban in Scotland and he told me that he travelled up to Fraserburgh as well



quite a bit. But as for who brought the herrings down, I've got a picture on here [*gestures*], it was a company called 'R. Croan', and they had quite a few trucks, red and green trucks, got a photograph again, and they used to bring the herring down. Usually overnight, but sometimes they came down at funny hours, it obviously depended what times the boat the landed and how desperate we were for the fish. But yeah, Croan's used to bring the fish down, and literally it got split between the fishhouse, the smokehouse, and the stand and the driver used to come, pull up in the gantry, and you used to get your dragging hook and drag the fish off the truck, stack it all on the gantry, then you'd go round with the driver to the pontoon, and again drag them off onto the pontoon, cover them over with a sheet ready for the next day. Obviously, ice them as you're taking them off ice, re-ice them, and yeah. I used to come down at silly o' clock, I remember one night and it would be 1976 – the docks were flooded. There was a high tide and the docks were flooded and we had water coming over the top of our wellies, back then. But I went down for midnight that night to unload herrings. Tough job.

[0:37:38] **JB:** Sounds it.

[0:37:40] **KB:** If you like your sleep [*laughter*].

[0:37:43] **JB:** Do you remember your first day at all?

[0:37:47] **MA:** My first day?

[0:37:48] **JB:** Yes.

[0:37:49] **MA:** As my proper job, after I left school? Not at all, because I'd been going down there, well, working, from being 12, so – I don't remember my first day from being 12 apart from it was packing kippers. I don't really remember much about working during the school holidays apart from the job. But it was just, y'know, it was old hat by then, I'd been doing it for four years when I – by the time I was 16, I'd been going down there for four years working. But I don't remember much about the early days apart from packing kippers. That was it, that was all my job was from being 12 to 14. I do remember the little canteen what I told you about, I remember going in there and having a cup of tea with all the lads and lasses. Great big white mugs with years worth of tea stains in 'em, and all we had for cooking, was a little hot plate, which was literally a little steel square hot plate, for like a tin of soup or anything like that, we didn't bother with much else, we were sent out to Salisbury's Café and then there was a little old, metal, electric fire, that – we had a toasting fork, and used to do toast on that.

[0:39:27] **KB:** Was it quite a warm building with all the smoking going on or was it – did it get really cold in winter?

[0:39:35] **MA:** It was really cold in winter, yes, really cold. Not a nice job in winter at all. I mean, after I left there and I went, I'd learned to fillet by then, when I started my own business, and it was a tough cold job in the winter. But, you were working that fast and that hard that sometimes you didn't even feel the cold. We used to come up here [*gesturing*], up the double ramps – they're still there? Or they was there, wasn't there? Yeah? And if you're pulling a barrow, one of the old barrows with, what, maybe 100 stone on it, sometimes, if you've got 10

crates with 10 stone on it in each, you know, that got you a sweat on, so we used to walk round in t-shirts in the middle of winter.

**[0:40:35] JB:** What were your wider experiences on the docks?

**[0:40:46] KB:** So, you mentioned going to the pubs after, sort of. What were you doing after work as well, on the docks as well?

**[0:40:57] MA:** Well the pub, it was as I say a meeting point, and again I've popped in a few of these notes I've got, that the Exchange Club down Railway Street was a meeting point for quite a few of the Aisthorpes – a lot of them who, some of them who may not have worked at Peterson's but most were involved in the fishing industry. Arthur, grandad's brother, young Arthur, which was his son, worked in our company which was called Ais Fish on Henderson Street, my uncle Peter, uncle Paul, uncle Chris, Auntie Carol, and then quite a few fish merchants went in the Exchange Club on a Saturday. So, when it was my Saturday job, it was straight to the Exchange Club, and I say a few shandies and just a laugh and a joke, and a game of dominoes or a game of cards, and then always back to grandads for fish on a Saturday. And it was all – no kippers, it was Dover soles usually, yeah. We like our Dover soles and haddock. I like every fish, there's not a fish going that I wouldn't eat.

As for other things, as I got older I started mixing with a few of the older lads, there was a lad called Steve who lived down in Nunsthorpe, can't remember his second name, but we used to go in the Market Hotel pub, and have a few pints – underage, of course, but I think everybody did then. But as for mixing with any of the others, we didn't mix that much. You got on with everybody, but we didn't mix that much after work. But everybody – you got to meet everybody on the pontoon, as I say I went to work on the stand with Arthur Peterson, not in the smokehouse on the stand, and part of my job – I was basically a barrow boy, but I was buying the white fish, Peterson even though he was a herring and mackerel merchant – mainly herrings, mackerels, and sprats – he used to have orders all over the country for white fish, such as cod, haddock, plaice – everything. So my job was going round the different fish merchants getting the white fish for his orders, and putting it on my barrow and barrowing it back to Peterson's, and then boxing it up and strapping it up, and then taking it to the Grimsby fish trucks, the [inaudible] trucks, but yeah, met a lot of people, knew a lot of people, knew all the fish merchants, they all knew I was Alfie's son. I had my own little initiation ceremony, which was not nice. That was when I went to work on the pontoon proper, but yeah, everyone who came to work went through a, y'know, rites of passage if you like. I remember one lad, we threw him in – when we used to take the chippings off the truck, when the timber merchant pulled up with the wood chippings, and we used to carry these big sacks upstairs, as you got upstairs I say one of the houses was just purely used for chippings, used to fill it up to the top from downstairs up to upstairs with bags and bags of chippings. And then at the bottom you used to take them out with a shovel, for each fire, and one day we were carrying these up and we threw one of the new lads in the chippings and then tipped loads of chippings on top of him. That was his initiation ceremony. Another lad, as I say we used to fill the ice kit up with water, and he went in one of those headfirst, he was not a happy bunny, but yeah, tipped him in an ice kit upside down. I was driving by then, Peterson's had a little Ford Transit pickup, so I was running to the ice house getting ice from the chutes. That always used to

terrify me in case I'd get too much because you used to press the stop button and it didn't stop, it just carried on throwing ice out and so you just, you went over your truck like that [*gestures*] and your ice kits used to be way over full. But I was driving by then, and one day, one of the lads, it wasn't me driving but he got chased by the truck, he had his barrow and he got chased by the truck, and he was nearly in tears bless him. But yeah, we had a laugh. You had to have a laugh, if you didn't have a laugh, you know, I don't think you'd have stuck the job because it was hard, dirty, smelly work. I did love it, funnily enough, there were times when you didn't, but most of the time I did love it because you had a good crack with the lads, a good laugh. And I remember Fridays was always a treat, on a Friday, he used to get fish, and I'm pretty certain it was from A. B. Stern's, he used to get fresh haddock for everybody, and it was my job to take it up to the FMA Club, and – that's where all the owners, the fish merchants went for their – they didn't just go to Sally's café, they went up to the FMA [Fish Merchant's Association] Club. And I used to take this fish up and say, "Can you fry this for Alfie", and it was for all the lads, and I used to come out with a massive parcel of fish and chips. Gorgeous – I've put in my notes, best fish and chips I've ever tasted, to this day, and I've tasted a lot of fish and chips! [*Laughter*] So, yeah.

**[0:46:56] JB:** Wonderful. So you've spoken about, sometimes people would drop the boxes? Are there any other accidents or happenings that stick in your mind?

**[0:47:09] MA:** I can't recall any accidents, as such, no. No, I really can't recall any accidents, I mean, as I say, you might stick your finger with one of the nails on the speakes, but, as for falls, no, slips, you used to slip over but them days you didn't think about it, there was no accident book, you know you'd just get on with it. And that was the culture of it, there was no health and safety, no accident books, no nothing, you just, you know, got on with it. But I can't remember anybody having time off because of an accident.

**[0:47:47] KB:** Well that's good to hear. Well then maybe on a lighter note, you mentioned about some of the pranks happening – do you remember any other funny stories, any other good crack with the lads?

**[0:48:02] MA:** Okay.

**[0:48:04] KB:** I mean, that's suitable for recording obviously [*laughter*].

**[0:48:09] MA:** [*Laughter*] Yeah. No I can't really, not off the top of my head. We used to get up to all sorts of things, absolutely all sorts of things, but it were just par for the course, y'know, all silly little pranks. It was hard, sweaty work sometimes, and I remember, say I had my little taste of somebody picking on me on the pontoon, and what he'd done, I had a can of Fanta, and he tipped the Fanta out and peed in it. So of course, when I went to get a drink it was not nice. But yeah, but apart from that I can't really remember any, it was just – something was going on every day, you know, so somebody was getting the rough end of somebody else's treatment and – but it was, you know you were still mates, it didn't matter, it was just, that was what was done, y'know. But, made some good friends and still in touch with some of them to this day, y'know, from when I was working on there, and when I was working later on obviously for myself, because I did 13 years of fish rounding myself, so I've done a fair spell on the docks.

**[0:49:36] KB:** Ah, marvelous. So, all of this wonderful fish that was being smoked and was being taken to the stall – whereabouts was this fish going afterwards? Was all the fish you were smoking just for the stall, or were you doing orders for people?

**[0:49:51] MA:** Well Peterson, Arthur Peterson, had his orders all over the country – obviously herrings and mackerel, but just being sent out as they were, not smoked. Sprats was another thing he dealt with. Obviously herring milts, which was the bellies of the male herring. And then white fish which he used to buy in basically second-hand as he called it. And **that was getting sent all over the country. I remember one big order, was both herring and sprats, but mainly sprats, was for Harewood House, for the birds, to feed the birds. They used to have something like 40 stone a day of sprats and herrings just to feed the birds. But yeah, they used to get sent all over, again kippers used to get sent all over.** As you look in at the front of Peterson’s smokehouse, the upstairs door to the left – there used to be a wooden chute that came down. I remember reading somewhere [inaudible] where they had an electric widge, it wasn’t, it was just a wooden chute that you opened the door, unwound the chute, lowered it down so it was at an angle to the truck and you used to literally throw the kippers onto the chute and somebody would be on the back of the truck catching them, stacking them on a pallet. They then got drove to pontoon and fish would be left on the pontoon for what orders Arthur Peterson had, and for other fish merchants buying kippers off Arthur Peterson, and then what was left at the end of the day used to go to subzero storage, which was down here [*gestures*] you know, out the back of here.

**[0:51:52] KB:** I think we’ve had the chance to look at that recently. Oh, interesting. Do you know any of the other fish merchants that were buying off Peterson’s at all?

**[0:52:01] MA:** All of them.

**[0:52:03] KB:** All of them? It was a very high-quality product, then. From the sound of it, of course.

**[0:52:08] MA:** Yeah. It wasn’t the only smokehouse in Grimsby, Saunt’s in Railway Street, I remember a lady – again she’ll be well long gone now – but she was called Moana Saunt, who had a lot of dealings with Peterson’s because they smoked kippers as well. And it would be a case of if they needed extra, we would take some round to them, and I remember being told by my grandad, “Nip round and see Moana and get me 10 stone of boneless kippers”, because we were short of boneless kippers you know. But as for fish merchants, I dare say literally every fish merchant because fish merchants had the customers all over the country. Grimsby fish went all over, and they all used to come to either Peterson’s or Saunt’s for fresh kippers. So, fish merchants used to just come [inaudible] – sorry, not the fish merchants so much, the barrow boys used to come to Peterson’s, “Can I have two stone of kippers for Tony Waltsham’s, can I have two stone of kippers for Alfie Crampin, can I have” – J. W. Moore, who was up on Fish Dock Road, I think that building’s gone now but that was near the ice house, right near the old railway crossing as you came on the dock. Because before I started driving the truck, that used to be one of my pet hates going to J. W. Moore because it was such a distance, you know. The others was all handy, you know, on the pontoon, but you used to have to wheel your barrow all the way up to J. William Moore for half a stone of kippers, and the worst was when you used to get there,

give them half a stone of kippers what they wanted, get all the way back and he went, “Another half a stone for J. W. Moore there”, and you’d wheel your barrow all the way back up.

But, I’ve got some photographs what’ll speak volumes more than I can actually tell you. So, I don’t know whether you –

**[0:54:05] – [1:01:01]** – Pause. Showing photographs to the interviewers.

**[1:01:01] MA:** But that’s the machines, outside Fiscardo, when they were getting ready for being dispatched and the reason I’ve loaded that one is it shows the covers. Which we never ever put the covers on because they used to go wrong that often, or need setting up, they needed to be set up for different kinds of fish, so size wise, and quality wise, and the richness of the fish. So different times of the year, the fish, all the goodness used to go into the rows – the goodness of the fish went into the rows. So they would tear easier, so they had to be set up a different way. And no good asking me – that was my grandad’s job, and nobody touched the settings of the machine. But when they went wrong, quite often, you know, it could be a little spring or something like that, which was an easy repair, but sometimes, one of the cogs, the teeth would jam, and the teeth would break, but a parcel of fish worked wonders, a parcel of kippers. We used to nip to E. A. Bacon’s, which was a metalworkers, engineers, again down Henderson Street but the other side of Henderson Street, and nip there with a parcel of fish and say, “Alfie said can you repair that?”, and they used to weld a new tooth on to the cog, and away you went again.

**[1:02:32] – [1:07:55]** – Pause. Showing photographs to the interviewers.

**[1:07:57] JB:** Thank you for this interview. We really value you sharing your time with us, particularly – you’ve given us so much to work with there. Thank you very much!

**[1:08:08] MA:** That’s not a problem Jasmine, I’ve really really enjoyed sharing it because, you know, I am one for history, and I think if you don’t share things, it just would get lost forever wouldn’t it. One last thing, I’ve wrote, literally a few things of what I’ve said – the English is not the best, the punctuation is not the best, and unfortunately every one’s got number one on, so you’ll have to work from number one and work through that way if you keep them in order. But it literally gives you an insight into everything from me first going down as a six-year-old lad and I went on a deep water trawler on a Sunday, and then going down from being 12, and right through to when I finished.

**[1:08:59] KB:** That’s fantastic thank you so much, we’ll be sure to use those and I’ll look after those thank you. I’ve maybe one last question then, as a little fun side – you said you like all types of fish. Do you have a favourite fish recipe? Or a favourite way to cook kippers perhaps?

**[1:09:16] MA:** Kippers, I think my favourite way would be to do them over the oak fire in the fishhouse – they were good. Quite often if you, y’know, you’d not took any packing up or you just fancied a kipper, on a Saturday morning, we used to – if the fire was still smouldering, pop a kipper over the top, basically on one of the speakes and put a piece of foil on the top and pop a kipper on there and it used to cook, and they were the best kippers ever. As for favourite fish, I love most fish, but Dover sole and lemon sole are my favourite [*laughter*] expensive taste.

**[1:09:58] KB:** Well thank you very much again!

**[1:10:00] MA:** Loved it.