

Neville Andrew (NA) Interview Transcription (RAW Audio Time Stamps)

Interviewer: Shirley Boothroyd (SB) – Peterson’s Oral History Project

Date of Interview: 16/9/2023

Location of Interview: Building 89 (Fred’s Fish), Wharnecliffe Road, Grimsby Docks

SB: So I am Shirley Boothroyd and I’m a volunteer with the Oral History Project, for the Peterson Project, and we are here to collect memories and the date is the 16th of September and I am talking to -

NA: Neville Andrew

SB: Neville Andrew, and you used to work for Peterson’s?

NA: Yes

SB: Fabulous, ok, so are you actually from Grimsby?

NA: I am yes,

SB: so, what was your job in Petersons?

[00:00:38] NA: I started out taking all the offal to the pontoon and dumping it on the pontoon, and then got promoted, well not promoted but I ended up brining the kippers, doing the roll mop herrings, doing the roe’s, stuff like that

SB: Yes,

[00:00:58] NA: Just normal everyday factory work.

SB: Yes.

[00:01:00] NA: It was hard work, in the day, especially with the wooden barrow when you had about 15 kit of offal on it, pushing it up on the ramp, had many of them fall off.

[00:01:13] SB: [Laughing] So was it just kippers that they did at Petersons, or was it other things as well?

[00:01:17] NA: Roll Mop Herrings they did as well.

[00:01:25] SB: And the smoking, somebody mentioned cold smoking? Is that what they did, cold smoking there or -

[00:01:32] NA: Yes, like I say they would brine it all and then put it in the smokers, and then they’d light a fire and leave it overnight, and it would just cure them.

[00:01:46] SB: Right, and what year are we talking about when you were working there?

[00:01:51] NA: Oh, well I’m sixty now and I was 15/16 when I started there, it was a long time ago

NA – (wife): 78, 79 maybe?

NA: yes possibly, yes. A long time ago.

[00:02:10] SB: Yes, gosh. So did you have any other family working there?

[00:02:12] NA: my brother

SB: Your brother was there as well?

NA: my older brother yes,

[00:02:17] SB: Anybody on the wider docks area?

[00:02:19] NA: No, just me and my brother, my older brother, yes. Oh sorry, after that I went to R and J Sanders on the North Wall.

[00:02:28] SB: Oh right, was that the same type of work?

[00:02:29] NA: No, Well it was fish, I trained to fillet fish and then after a couple of years I got made redundant, but I've been working the fish trade for most of my life – cold storage, I used to do the [stack pack] fish blocks. They used to come off a boat and because I worked at Salvesen's, we used to stack them all there, and like I say, recently I was at Morrisons for six years, salmon training, so it's been fish mainly all my life.

[00:03:07] SB: Yes, when you left school and you mentioned about not sitting your last exams [Laugh] so, was your brother already working at Petersons?

NA: He was yes.

SB: So you decided to join him, at that point?

NA: yes

[00:03:22] SB: And can you remember your first day at work?

[00:03:46] NA: Not really no, I can't to be honest. I should image they would be pretty much the same as all the other days there, you know, just getting there and get on with it. Like I say I'd be probably brining the fish, putting them on the rods and what have you, ready to go to the smokers.

SB: Someone would just tell you; this is what you are going to do.

[00:03:50] NA: Yes, after a while you just went in and did what you was used to doing, there was a row of tubs and you would just fill it up with salt and brine and fill it up with water and then there'd be a machine that would split the herrings, they would do the boneless herrings, then they would do the boned one and they would just go into the brine for a bit and then like I say, they put them on the pins to smoke.

[00:04:17] SB: And how long were they smoking?

[00:04:19] NA: They would be there overnight. And then the next day, if I remember right, upstairs was the packing area, so the women upstairs would pack the kippers. They used to get people coming in to buy a box of seconds, where the belly had got a rip in them or something like that, and they couldn't sell them as a first class kipper. They sold them like a couple of quid a box, which in them days was a box like that. [demonstrated the size]

[00:04:55] SB: Thinking about when you first went there, what was your first impression, you know maybe the sight or the smell or -

[00:05:07] NA: Oh it stunk

SB: [Laugh]

[00:05:10] NA: I used to come home with red hands cos like I say they was always in brine, you'd just smell like a kipper and your hands would just look like kippers, cos it was a dye and you couldn't get it off. Cold as well, especially in the winter, no heating. Good days.

[00:05:30] SB: A hard life. But I hear so many stories about it was fabulous, a fabulous community.

[00:05:40] NA: Oh it was yes. I always remember when I was going on the pontoon with a barrow of offal, some of the filleters would get dog fish eggs and flick them at you, and the seagulls would

come and you would just see them throw a fish to the seagull and you would just see the seagull eating the fish in the air.

[00:06:03] SB: So, thinking about the community, obviously you would get to know the people you were working with very well and at the end of the day would there be places on the docks where you would all congregate or have more social interaction?

[00:06:23] NA: No, it was the Humber. We used to go to the Humber Pub, that used to be absolutely rammed, cos it was all cash in hand, well not cash in hand but you used to pay with cash in them days, so we would go down to the Humber and have a few pints in the Humber.

SB: That's the one on -

NA: Which is now the clothing place, isn't it?

SB: Yes, on Cleethorpe Road?

NA: That's the one, on the corner. And then there was a bit later on, after my time, there was T.C's and that became quite popular as well, didn't it?

NA [wife]: You used to come though, with your mates

NA: Yes, one of my mates used to work down on the dock and I used to come down here and meet him. He was a dog skinner, I can't remember the place now, on the North Wall. Yes, it was good days.

[00:07:12] SB: Yes, that's what I get from reading what people put on the internet and things, that it was a real close community. A lot of fun but hard work.

NA: Yes, and it was about £15 a week

SB: £15 a week, gosh

NA: You used to think you were rich then.

[00:07:33] SB: And how long were the hours, how long were you were working in a week?

NA: It would be until you'd finished, until we had done the fish.

SB: Right, so what time did you start in a morning?

NA: Start at five or six in a morning, you could be there ten or twelve hours in a day

SB: Wow, was that five, six days a week?

NA: Yes, we would do the occasional Saturday, yes but like I say, £15 in them days was a lot of money.

[00:08:06] SB: So, workwear, what sort of thing did you wear as part of your job, presumably -

NA: Yes, it would be what they call an oily and a pair of wellies. You couldn't wear gloves, not in the factory and if you was brining cos your gloves would get full of brine. So, like I say, we used to have a bucket of hot water and keep that topped up, dip your hands in that for a couple of minutes and carry on. It was hard work, but it was good.

SB: It sounds horrendous, doesn't it?

NA: It is a shame that it's all gone to what it is now.

[00:08:53] SB: What about, are there any funny stories that you remember? In the workplace?

NA: No, like I say, when my brother would be up in the smokers, we'd shut the top door and light the fire below him so that would get smoked out [Laughs] That was about it to be honest, I can't remember a lot about it to be honest.

SB: It sounds very dangerous that really doesn't it [laughs]

NA: Yes, my bit was the easy bit, my brother's was the harder bit, like I say, having to climb up the smokers, cos he'd have a rack of kippers and he'd have to put one up and then the other end up and then he'd have to climb up.

[00:10:01] SB: And the fires were lit with what? What were the fires lit with?

NA: It was oak chippings and a bit of paper and then they'd just light it.

SB: And do you know where they would get the oak chippings from?

NA: I have no idea.

[00:10:30] SB: So I am just thinking of him climbing up this chimney. Where there, that you know of, any accidents while you were working there?

NA: No, nothing, no, surprisingly. (10.50)

[00:10:44] NA [wife]: The closest you got away with was when you got fish bones in [Inaudible]

NA: Yes, in the days you'd get pricked by a bone and you'd end up getting fish poison in your finger and then your finger would just swell up and you couldn't bend it. Then it was just a course of penicillin.

NA [wife]: That's the worst thing I ever saw you with.

SB: You don't imagine that do you, getting a bone and then it -

NA[wife]: It was nasty, cos if you think about it, they don't know they are doing it, then carrying on and it's getting infected.

[00:11:21] NA: The Boned kippers, they were the worst, they would have the head on and everything and then just be split down the middle and when you put your hand in the brine, you just pick them up and go like that [demonstrates] and carry on. The next day or two, your finger would be swollen, you couldn't bend it.

[00:11:42] SB: So you said about the heads, so did somebody have the job, at Petersons of, what was it I heard someone say this morning, "Edding and Luggin"?

[00:11:49] NA: No, it was all done by machine. There would be a machine and it would just rotate, cos being herrings, they'd just go through this machine and it would split them straight in half, and they used to get the herring roes which they used to sell, like cod roe, it used to be a bit of a delicacy in them days, apparently.

SB: It's very nice, cod roe, I like it

[00:12:22] SB: Do you remember anything about the actual décor of the inside, you know, I think you were talking outside -

[00:12:30] NA: Yes, I remember the wooden floors, the haddock smoking chimneys were just like coated, in like when you sweep your chimney, coked in that. Every so often you would go and give it a good brush down. The floor was just wood, bare wood floor. Downstairs was concrete floor and just painted walls, nothing special. And it was cold. In them days you could smoke while you was working, smoke over the tubs and smoking in the chimney's as well, you'd have a fag on while you was climbing up to do the kipper, again, it's not allowed today is it?

SB: No, how times change.

NA: You'd flick your ash in the tub

[00:13:41] SB: I think that really covers everything, unless there is anything else you can think of that might be really interesting for us.

[00:13:50] NA: No, no, like I say my memory's not the best at the moment but -

NA [wife]: You enjoyed it didn't you? You enjoyed working there, you always talk about it.

NA: A good bunch of lads there.

NA [wife]: your still friends with a lot of them, the ones that are still around, your good mates with them.

NA: well I still see, well my brother, I don't see him so much, but I see one of the guys Mick, and his dad used to work there and his mum used to work there as well, so it was like more family. It was like the old thing, It's not what you know, it's who you know. If there was someone in there, they'd get you in, it seemed to roll that way.

NA ([wife]): Your brother said to you didn't he, there's a job, you can start tomorrow, so he started on the Friday and he should have done his exams on the Monday, so he binned his exams and came and started working here.

NA: Like I say, £15 a week was a lot of money in them days, wasn't it?

SB: But you enjoyed it.

[00:14:50] NA: I did, yes. One of life's experiences. It was hard work, cold, especially in the winter. Cos like I say, we used to pick all the fish up on the barrows, no vans or ought like that, as it was only round the corner from the pontoon, so we'd pick the kits of herring up and wheel it round on a big barrow.

NA [wife]: you probably did a lot of messing around on the barrow as well.

NA: Yes, I don't know if there's any barrows flying around here, but they were big old barrows, quite a long barrow they were, about as long as that board [points to a wooden board close by]

SB: Oh wow, they were quite big then, weren't they? So they would be quite heavy to push then with all the fish on.

[00:15:40] NA: At the end was a great big metal guard to stop your fish falling off, but nothing to stop it falling off the sides and like I say, when you was going up the ramp you had to go one way and then go another way to stop it rolling back. It was the only way you could get it up there, and quite often you'd get a few box of it fall off, then everyone would be laughing at you, you know and taking the micky out of you. It was all good fun. And like I say, I left the firm and went to R & J Sanders and was part of the heavy gang where we had the fortune of having a van or a lorry, we used to pull up in the morning, load all the fish and go back to the factory. It's a shame about the old ice factory as well, I remember that up and running, pulling up in the van for a couple of kits of ice.

[00:16:46] SB: Yes, from there didn't they have shutes that went straight down to the trawlers?

[00:16:53] NA: Yes, across, straight over the road, straight onto the dockside. And there was a little café on the pontoon there if anyone's told you about that? A little café, it was there for years and years, I used to go have a breakfast.

[00:17:11] SB: I should imagine there would be more than one café would there for the amount of people down here.

[00:17:NA] Yes, there was one on the corner here, it used to be still here, I don't know whether it still is, and the one on the pontoon and one on the North Wall. I think the one on the North Wall is still there. I was down there, took the lads a few weeks, well I say weeks, a few months ago, yes, good days.

[00:17:40] NA [wife]: Not there now, well I walking through and I went, well my mum used to do the nets, you know the fishing nets –

SB: the braiding?

NA [wife]: yes, she used to do them at home and we used to come down and get her wages and it used to be packed, it's nothing like it was. You used to hear all the chattering and all the shouting, all the hustle and bustle, it's sad.

[00:18:06] SB: but we are trying to maintain some of the buildings, they are lovely buildings and –

NA [wife]: there's a lot of them, a lot of little, small ones.

SB: and there's already companies wanting to move in, so they are not necessarily fishing ones but –

NA: but it has so much potential though, hasn't it?

[00:18:30] SB: absolutely.

[18:27:17 – 19:21:21] general chat

[00:19:22] NA: Anyway, I hope that has been of some use, a bit of information

SB: Well thank you so much, Brilliant, thank you.

NA: That's alright, that's why I came down here. I saw it advertised and thought, oh I used to work there many years ago.

SB: But it is so useful to gather these memories as the younger generation will not have a clue what it was about, they won't know the fishing industry at all –

NA: To be honest I think the younger generation today, wouldn't cope, no way would they do what I used to do.

SB: But we know times have changed, but you have to have that history kept alive haven't you, for them to know what did go on. If we can manage to do that, then it's a job well done.

[00:20:14] NA: Yes, I know it was only a small factory, but there was a few of us there, like family and we were all local to the area, I was down Pelham Street, which was opposite the Humber pub, and Mick Ballard, Harry and Jean, they was from Stanley Street, all within walking distance.

SB: And I presume you did walk to work?

NA: Oh yes, later on when I could afford it, I got a moped [laughs] which was a nightmare, Good days. Like I say, I am getting on a bit and can't remember most of it like, but what I can, I got to share it.

[00:21:05] SB: So, can I be cheeky and ask what your date of birth is?

NA: It's the 31.10.1962, so I am sixty one next month. Still at work though and up to a few months ago I was getting up at 2 and 3 o'clock in the morning to go to work and doing 13 / 14 hour days.

[00:21:43] SB: That is fabulous, thank you very much.