

# A TRIBUTE TO THE WOMEN OF GOURDON

.... 1837 – 1986 ....

By Celia Craig



Mrs Margaret Ann Smith, baiting again, aged 95



Betty Stewart, Margaret Cargill, Nellie Cargill sheeling



Vally Craig in the Fish House with yellow haddock fillets.

**WITHOUT THE VITAL AND SKILLED WORK OF THE WOMEN OF GOURDON, LINE FISHING COULD NOT HAVE OPERATED**

*For my mother and all the bonnie fisher lasses of Gourdon, past and present*

**The Fisher Lass by John McGhie (1867 – 1952)**

**1914**



**THE FISHER LASS : JOHN McGHIE**

**Courtesy of the McGhie family/descendants: for kind permission to reproduce the image via the Scottish Fisheries Museum, Anstruther. From his base in Pittenweem John McGhie created many beautiful paintings of local people and scenes.**

## *The Bonnie Fisher Lass*

(North East Scotland folk song)<sup>1</sup>

*1. 'Twas in the month of August  
One morning by the sea  
When violets and primroses  
Were strewn on every lea  
I meet a comely damsel  
For an empress she might pass  
Ah! Then my heart was captured  
By the Bonnie Fisher Lass.*

*3. Her petticoats she wore so short  
They strayed ablow her knee  
Her tidy legs and her ankles  
They quite delighted me  
Her rosy cheeks, her yellow hair  
Oh, none could her surpass  
With her creel she trudges daily  
The Bonnie Fisher Lass.*

*2. "Good morning to you fair maid,"  
I unto her did say  
"Why are you up so early?  
What are you doing this way?"  
"I'm going forth to look for bait,  
So allow for me to pass.  
For my lines I must get ready,"  
Said the Bonnie Fisher Lass*

*4. "My father's on the ocean  
A toiling on the Deep  
To gain a comely livelihood  
He oft times is afloat  
And when he doth return again  
He lovingly will clasp  
Unto his aged bosom  
His Bonnie Fisher Lass."*

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<sup>1</sup> This folk song was one of my Deddie's favourites – Adam (William Adam) Craig and I often sang it as a child. "Deddie" is the affectionate name for grandfather in Gourdon.

# **A TRIBUTE TO THE WOMEN OF GOURDON**

**.... 1837 – 1986 ....**

- **BAITING**
- **SHEELING**
- **IN THE FISH HOUSE**
- **WITH THE HERRING**
- **AT THE LIFE BOAT GALAS**



**CELIA CRAIG**

**NOVEMBER, 2015**

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## .... 1837 - 1986 ....

**1837** – I have chosen 1837 as the starting point for this *Tribute to the Women of Gourdon* from the book by D.G. Adams who quotes the *Statistical Accounts of Angus and the Mearns*, listing the number of fishermen and boats in different years.<sup>2</sup> Further *The Statistical Account of Kincardineshire, 1843* refers to “ten larger boats, who go to the herring stations about the middle of July yearly, and continue at the fishing for six weeks or two months”, page 16.<sup>3</sup>

**For 1837** – around 50 fishermen, 10 large herring boats, 7 medium

**For 1855** – 118 fishermen, 22 boats over 30ft, 20 standard, 5 yauls

**For 1881** – 165 fishermen, all sizes of boats

It can be deduced that Gourdon boats were involved in herring fishing as early as 1837 and that in all likelihood, the women were gutting, salting and barrelling the herring catches, or at least participating along with the men. See photos of herring barrelling, pages 21, 69,70, 71 below.

By 1855 the figures suggest a variety of fishing with different sizes of boats. The larger boats would be the ones following the herring down the coast to Yarmouth and Scarborough. See page 85 below for the report on the “Morning Light” disaster, not long after a successful trip to Scarborough in 1909, following the herring. (This was my grandfather Mowatt’s family boat). Adams concludes:

Ten large boats went to the herring fishing from mid-July for six to eight weeks and throughout the rest of the year the cod and ling fishing was kept up by a curer who engaged the fishermen and employed a gutter to dress and salt the cod for the London market. The same person dried cod in summer for home consumption. (page 88).

It can be fairly surmised that the Women of Gourdon commenced their contribution to the operation of fishing in Gourdon around 1837 when the fish wives would have had to gut and salt the fish themselves as well as market their wares

Their contribution ended when line fishing came to an end in Gourdon – in 1986 when the last boat to go the lines, the “Enterprise” ME 155, skippered by Alex Welsh brought the practice to an end, apart perhaps from a few small scale outings, line fishing, not involving the women baiting. I have this on incontrovertible authority from the man himself, Alex Welsh, fisherman, Skipper and son of a former Harbourmaster.

**From 1837 – 1986 - 149 years**

**From 1850 – 1986 - 136 years – if a more cautious date is preferred.**

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<sup>2</sup> David G. Adams, *Fishing Communities of Angus and the Mearns with Notes on Salmon Stations*, edited by Gillian Zealand, the Pinkfoot Press, Brechin, 2013, page 92, and 88. Adams whose book was written mostly in 1980, later edited by Zealand, has consulted Parish Registers, Statistical Accounts and censuses for his book, an invaluable source of information on all matters concerning fishing communities of Angus and the Mearns over the centuries.

<sup>3</sup> *The Statistical Account of Kincardineshire*, Willian Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh, 1843, page 16.

# FOREWORD

The idea of writing a Tribute to the Women of Gourdon came to mind after I had tackled and completed a number of other related pieces for the Maggie Law Maritime Museum and its website, in Gourdon, the village where I grew up – pieces such as *The Maggie Law Maritime Museum Poetry Anthology*, a collection of poems about or by the people of Gourdon, 1850 – 2013; an extended version of the Anthology for the website; a Glossary of Guid Gurden Words; Oral History Interviews – versions of the Interviews I conducted for the Elphinstone Institute of Aberdeen University<sup>4</sup>, with added illustrative photos. In the spring of 2015 I began to do some volunteering at the Museum too, usually on Sundays which concentrated the idea in my mind as a worthwhile, indeed essential project to honour the Women of Gourdon for their vital, skilled and dedicated work in facilitating the operation of line fishing in the village over nearly 150 years – 1837 to 1986.

Of course growing up in a fishing family – my father, Alexander Mowatt Craig (Alex) skippered the “Trustful” ME 132 and my mother, Ciss (Elizabeth) baited his line – gave me personal insight into line fishing and the traditions of the village. In later life I grew to admire my parents’ hard work, skill and dedication more and more and indeed also to admire the women of the village for these very qualities. The idea of a Tribute took shape as a work of Oral History and Photo Gallery. It would pay tribute to the women, preserve an important aspect of Gourdon’s heritage and complement the work of the Museum. In due course I took the decision to self-finance the project, now clear in my mind as a book. I would use the same Stonehaven Printer, James Bruce who had printed the *Maggie Law Maritime Museum Poetry Anthology*.

The format of the Tribute seemed inevitable to me – a photo gallery –illustrative photos of the five main areas of their work - baiting, sheeling, working in the fish houses, barrelling herring, officiating at the Lifeboat Galas, photos ranging from earliest times to 1986 when line fishing came to an end – accompanied with detailed explanatory notes and background information.

The call went out to the people of Gourdon for photos! The response was generous. I received dozens of emailed scans of the photos. Some photos were given to me to take away and scan and return: this was done diligently. I also researched and purchased four other special photos, one from Dundee University Archive and three from Aberdeen Journals. Towards the end of my work on the Tribute, I was lucky enough to secure the permission of the descendants of famous Scottish painter, John Mc Ghie, to use a digital image of his beautiful painting of 1914 - the Fisher Lass. In addition I consulted various Archives, Libraries, Museums and Services for information where necessary, a case in point being the complex issue of Designated Landing port status, only to discover late in the game that Gourdon was never actually a designated landing port though subject to similar regulations. Whenever I had a doubt about any aspect of

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<sup>4</sup> Six Interviews, including one of myself interviewed by Dr. David Northcroft, with additional, illustrative photos, inserted with the help of Derek Mc Neill, Maggie Law Maritime Museum website manager, are available on the site ([www.maggielaw.co.uk](http://www.maggielaw.co.uk)) as well as on the Elphinstone Institute *Kist* website ([www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstonekist](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstonekist)).

line fishing practice and procedure I could turn to John Craig and Alex Welsh who gave generously of their time, knowledge and experience and whose fishing credentials are impeccable. They made it clear that I was free to consult them at any time. On identification of people pictured in photos, especially older photos, of time and place, Vally Craig was an unfailing and invaluable mine of information. They and many others are gratefully thanked in Acknowledgements at the end of this book.

The photos and explanatory notes are arranged chronologically as far as possible, and thematically within groupings – e.g. Across the Years; Generations – in the five main sections – Baiting. Sheeling, In the Fish House; With the Herring; At the Lifeboat Galas. There is a section near the start giving background information : there are also a number of sections towards the end charting the End of line fishing and the Aftermath as well as a number of Appendices for related aspects of interest. I have included a Glossary of Gurden Fishing Terms – pages 94- 98.

Some of the photos stand out among the collection as extra special – I would call a couple of them beautiful – for example the photo of David Criggie and Jess Freeman, page 28. I would also be interested to hear from readers which are their favourites. (Contact by email: [celia.craig@btopenworld.com](mailto:celia.craig@btopenworld.com)). I have also included near the end a Tribute to my mother and father – two poems and a few photos.

I have enjoyed and even relished at times working on this Project and book. I hope that someone from Gourdon, or perhaps a group of Gourdon men will take up the torch and record the vital and skilled work done by the Men of Gourdon in their turn over many years in line fishing, creel fishing, seine net, cod net, trawl, and salmon drift net. I will be happy to pass on to them the many photos I received of the fishermen of Gourdon.<sup>5</sup>

Celia Craig

November 2015

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<sup>5</sup> I was pleased to read in his book (*The Sma' Line Fishing on the East Coast of Scotland, Arbroath Area*) how much Jim Swankie also admires the work of the women and the men of the locality. He states:

“As for the women I can't praise them enough. They had the worse end of the stick. They got up very early in the morning to sheil the mussels, then when that was done, they had to bait the line. In my case my Mither had to sheil and bait 2 lines. My Granny and Grandy helped her as much as they could. There was a woman 2 doors along from us and sometimes she helped as well. Then there was food to make for the bairns and see them off to school”. Second last page - Jim's book is not paged. He also pays tribute to the men, “who put in many a stormy day shooting and hauling lines. I have seen us getting washed aft, scull and all, with a lump of water.....It was a hard life but we never knew anything else.”

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## **Another Family Venture**

### **A Life of Skilled Work**

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# HISTORY : LINE FISHING FOR HADDOCK, COD, WHITING

## A WAY OF LIFE

White fishing with the 1200 hook sma' lines had a long history in Gourdon, from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century when it was on a smaller scale, not the full size line it would become, till 1986 when this respected operation came to an end, Alex Welsh's boat, "Enterprise" ME 155 being the last boat to deploy lines. It was practised ideally in the winter months, alternating in the summer months with creel fishing (for crabs/partans and lobsters), giving the women of Gourdon who played a major role, baiting and sheeling, a well-earned rest though in earlier years some boats fished with lines year round. Gradually seine net fishing became popular with the larger boats in the summer, with more boats going to the nets than to the creels though there were a fair number of creel fishermen: a number of smaller boats still operate creels today (page78). Whereas 6 fleets of 20 creels (my father's innovative method was to use 5 fleets of 25 creels) were common in the 70s/80s, today creel boats often deploy hundreds of creels with the help of a special hauling device – a hauler.

Of course the drift net for herring fishing, commencing around 1837 in Gourdon, <sup>6</sup> reached its peak towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, early 20<sup>th</sup> century with hundreds of barrels of herring brought ashore in Gourdon, along with a number of Gourdon boats making the trip to Scarborough and Great Yarmouth in pursuit of the herring, including women of Gourdon also following the herring to these thriving ports. My Mowatt grandfather's boat, "Morning Light", crewed by his sons, having grossed between £400 and £500 for nine trips out of Scarborough in 1909, returned only to be swamped thereafter on a routine day's fishing out of Gourdon by a sudden storm, all lives lost. By then the herring fishing was ending.

Another type of line with fewer and larger hooks, the great line/ "greit lin" was also fished at other seasons in tandem with the herring net. David Adams in his book footnoted below notes that "in 1881 there were 108 boats and 165 fishermen and boys; three sizes of boat were kept, all sail: herring boats, great line boats and winter boats", page 88

Sma' line fishing as a daily, inshore activity, continued strong in Gourdon, long after its decline in other N,E. harbours although even in Gourdon it had noticeably started to fade in the 1970s, struggling on with a few boats into the mid 80s. Fish taken by this procedure were special, undamaged, totally fresh, delicious to eat, by families as a "fry" taken home that day for their "tea", and more importantly sold at the Gourdon Fish Markets to the wholesaler/fish merchant the day they were caught, and retailed that afternoon or the very next day after processing in the fish houses. Gourdon became renowned for its line fish, justly considered a premium product. <sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> David G Adams, "Fishing Communities of Angus and the Mearns", Pinkfoot Press, 2013, p.88 – "Ten large boats went to the herring fishing from mid-July for six to eight weeks", with reference to 1837.

<sup>7</sup> I have added a Glossary of fishing terms used in Gourdon at the end of the book, pages 97-101 .

The process of baiting the sma' line was the preserve of the women of Gourdon who carried out this long, arduous, tedious but highly skilled task daily for many years – from at least the turn of the century into 1900 to 1986 – skills handed down among generation of native Gourdon families but also carefully learned by country and town lasses,” inabootcomers”, sweethearts and wives of Gourdon fisher lads and fishermen. Such was my mother, Ciss, Elizabeth Craig (nee Gray) from Barras and Kinneff : she and others like her provided valuable new blood to this traditional process. (See pages 39 – 40).

## DIVISION OF LABOUR – MALE AND FEMALE

1. Preparing/ Setting up the line – the men
2. Sheeling the mussels – the women
3. Baiting the line – the women
4. At sea – shooting the line – fishing – hauling – boxing – landing – men
5. Redding the back - men
6. Redding the line - men
7. Preparing for the following day – both
8. Working in the Fish Houses – both
9. Additional aspects – Herring fishing – women : the fish wife and her travels.<sup>8</sup>

### **Family and community played a key role in these processes**

A number of the stages were shared and members of the extended family also contributed – e.g. a grandfather (the affectionate Gourdon name is “daddie”) would redd the back and assist with Stage 6 too – redding the “shot” line in from the sea : the wife might assist with redding the back and both would deal with the delivery and organisation of the mussels for the following day, delivered by lorry from the Montrose supplier, Josphe Johnston, organised by the Gourdon Fishermen’s Association. Women would also run the household – meals, washing, cleaning for the whole family which might include a number of children. **According to Alex Welsh – “A’body helped a’body”** (Quoted from a telephone conversation).<sup>9</sup>

### **1. Preparing and setting up the line**

After purchasing or acquiring or inheriting a pair of lines to be alternated day by day – one to be fished, one to be baited for the following day, the fisherman would set up the line. He might begin by stretching the line, running it out over a field or other area.<sup>10</sup> If the line was already in use this might not be necessary and he could proceed to attaching the 1200 sma' line hooks at equal intervals along the line. Before the advent of synthetic

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<sup>8</sup> I have provided detailed information of the key processes, 1 – 6: the remaining sections – 7 – 10 are sufficiently covered in the full text of the book.

<sup>9</sup> Edna R Hay and Bruce Walker, *Focus on Fishing: Arbroath and Gourdon*, Abertay Historical Society, Dundee, 1985. See Appendix 5, pages 94 - 96 for additional information on line fishing as well as photos of my father’s boat printed in the book.

<sup>10</sup> I remember helping my father to stretch a line – by running it out along the braes beside the Gourdon quarries along the Low Road/the shore road north towards Bervie. I simply took the line in my hand and ran off – a distance of some ¾ of a mile! The line was sectioned into twelve hunks (hanks).

fibre (“couralene”) attachments, immediately prior to that he would have attached the lengths of cord called “snuds” to which further lengths – the “tippens” – horsehair strands would have been added. After “couralene” had replaced “tippens”, the hooks could be attached directly, without “snuds”. The hooks were “beaten on” with strong thread, called “beaten threed”. These were spaced on average at 50 inches apart along the line and fastened carefully into the synthetic fibre attachment in order to ensure the hooks did not come loose and catch the fingers of the baiter. In earlier days when horse hair strands were used in lieu of synthetic fibre, the actual horse hair strands had to be spun and twisted together, using a special tippin stone which was weighted and would be suspended and allowed to spin to bind together and secure the individual hairs into one stronger strand. Thereafter the line would be redd/coiled into baskets, ready for the baiter. An additional preparation might involve cloving the line into three portions and preserving it by “barking” the hunks in a special preservative, a vegetable dye, called bark which also turned it darker in colour. Once cloved the line would be immersed in the hot water in the boiler where the bark (locally termed “Borneo Cutch”) had been added. One of the Baiting photos, page 30, displays a portion of cloved line, in teardrop formation, with hooks kept clear on the clove stick. The barking process is well pictured by Jackie McLean (nee Cargill) in her poem *Memories of the Past*:<sup>11</sup>

*From time to time, we were sent fir bark  
To the Sochie off we’d track  
We’d kerry it hame in broon paper pokes  
Sometimes tak the lang road  
And ging hame ower the rocks.*<sup>12</sup>

*Wi the boiler on the firie  
The bark was couped into to dye  
Lines were left to steep  
And for ages they wid lye.  
Fan ready they’d be hauled oot  
Wringing, dreeping, soaking weet  
Cloved and hung on claes poles  
Left ready to dry a week.* (verses 10 – 12).

<sup>11</sup> *Memories of the Past*, Maggie Law Maritime Museum Poetry Anthology, pages 37-38. [www.maggielaw.co.uk](http://www.maggielaw.co.uk)

<sup>12</sup> The Sochie was the Gourdon Fishermen’s Association : the shop, a sort of ship’s chandler for fishermen supplied appropriate clothing for the sea and equipment necessary to pursue line fishing and seine net fishing as well as accessing and delivering lorry-loads of mussels each day for mussel shelling, ready for the baiting of the line next day. I well remember my mother and father heaving heavy boxes of mussels through to the baiting shed, sometimes in the dark on a winter night, especially if the Association lorry delivering the mussels had done its round late in the day. Mussels were sourced from Johnston’s of Montrose or from further afield on occasion. Supply of oil was also organised by the GFA. Before the formation of the GFA around 1953 those services were provided on a more *ad hoc* sort of basis by different individual businesses. The fish salesman, also Secretary, Jim Stewart was also appointed by the Association : a second salesman, John Boyle who had operated before, also continued to auction at the Fish Market. The GFA was wound up, around 1990, soon after Fish Markets came to an end in Gourdon, around 1989. The Maggie Law Maritime Museum archives some of the correspondence conducted by the GFA concerning quality of mussels and provision of sheel blades among other items (Appendix 1). An important aspect of the Association concerned the money from the boat’s catch sales : The money was collected each Saturday from the fish salesman’s office in the building for “dealing out” in shares to the crew in the Skipper’s house, a scene I also clearly recall.

## 2. Sheeling the mussels

Sheeling (alternative spelling – sheiling) was the first early morning task performed by the women, rising around 4 a.m. who would start the next process, baiting, some time later, depending on the number of women involved in sheeling. Sometimes family members would help out before going on their regular work of the day. School children would sheel a jar of mussels before going to school. The baiter might employ a sheeler to provide her mussels. This could lead to frustration if the sheeler had not completed the sheeling of sufficient mussels in time. Around 2000 to 2400 were needed – usually two per hook unless the mussel was very plump. If mussels were small, three might be required on occasion. Mussels, once sheeled were decanted into a bucket and even one bucketful delivered from the sheeler to the baiter would allow her to make a start on the line. If the rest were not available when she was ready for them, the baiter would be held up. This frustration might be avoided if the sheeler was working in the baiter's premises which made the task more companionable and enabled the baiter to get going with the baiting and never run short of mussels. The sheeler might also bait a few hooks at the baiter's hand, thus speeding the process further.

Mussels taken from the Montrose Basin and supplied by Johnston's of Montrose were delivered by the GFA - Gourdon Fishermen's Association's lorry the night before. Mussels, still in their shells would be sluiced down but still exuded a silty, dirty liquid, termed "garra water" in Gourdon, when being lifted out of the wooden mussel container/troch and shelled. While the early trochs were wooden, later models were metal. In addition to the mussel troch, the sheeler would have a large container, perhaps a zinc bath for the empty shells which were collected by the GFA lorry and disposed of. For many years the beach at the back of the Mill had been used as a depository for mussel shells: there is still evidence of this today. Each sheeler had her own sheel blade – a short, round-handled wooden knife customised to suit her hand, usually from a small kitchen knife or vegetable scraper. Many years ago women could take their blades to one of the Gourdon Mill engineers for shaping and rounding to suit the mussel shell shape.<sup>13</sup> In 1965, the GFA explored the processing and purchasing of commercially-produced sheel blades (Appendix 1 letters, pages 88 – 89). Some sheelers were incredibly swift at slitting open the mussel shell and scooping out the mussel from the troch to the jar or container, often a two pound jeely jar, which was then decanted into a nearby bucket/pail. (See the photo, page 50 of a mussel shelling competition staged in Gourdon in 1963). Sheeling exposed women's hands to the "garra" water and actual sheeling might result in a cut to the hand or finger and to "sair" and "roch" hands. It might take a sheeler four or five hours, working alone to shell enough mussels for the 1200 hook line, at least two hours with two working together. The baiter might need up to seven hours to complete the line working on her own.<sup>14</sup> Sheeling required considerable skill, speed and dexterity.

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<sup>13</sup> My informant here is Alison Ingram, daughter of Jim Stewart, the Fish Salesman and GFA's Manager.

<sup>14</sup> Here I rely on Vally Craig for information on two sheelers working together and on Molly Lownie who employed a sheeler to shell half a line's bait – 600 hooks and took about 3 hours to shell her half, plus a further five hours to bait the line with "breaks" to look after the children. Molly maintains Tay mussels were best, with fewer barnacles.

### 3. Baiting the line

Baiting the line was a time consuming business even with help – from a sheeler or another woman baiting at hand, involving early rising even if a sheeler was employed to shell the mussels. The baiter would be out in the baiting shed to light the stove, a kind of boat's stove requiring fuel, or in later times to put on the electric heater, an electric fire with a couple of glowing bars to heat the shed. In warm weather baiting used to be carried on outdoors.

Once she had enough mussels the baiting commenced. The baiter sat in the centre between a large capacity cane basket on her left (in later times a plastic tub) which contained half of the coiled line with its 1200 hooks (a second basket would be at hand for the second half of the 1200 hook line), and on her right the oblong, oval scull (alternative spelling skull), a long cane basket, deeper and wider at the bottom (locally termed the “erse” of the scull) than at the shallower, narrower top end, the “gob” which would hold the baited mussels while the “erse” would hold the line. The gob started from just above the inset handle grips in the middle of the scull, marked by a narrow board (the “corsin ging”) where the first row of baited hooks would be placed. The gob was lined with fine bent grass, sea grass which could be found and was gathered along the grassy foreshore to the north of the village, near the Coastguard Station – to stop slippage of the mussels : thin strips of newspaper were also prepared and on hand to be placed between each row of mussels, again to secure them in place. Slippage might cause the line to bunch when being “shot” over the “funnel” at sea to fish. (See section 4, page 15). Later newspaper replaced the grass lining. The scull was conveniently sloped against an upturned box or other similar item, in easy reach of the baiter's right hand. In front of the baiter was a stool with a basin containing a quantity of mussels and across the basin a board, possibly an old chair back, was used for a smaller quantity of mussels immediately needed. The woman would be wearing an overall and warm clothes, with an apron and a bag or other protective covering over her knees.

As I write this I am back in the baiting shed at 7 Mowatt's Lane, Gourdon where my mother did most of her baiting though she also baited when we lived up the brae at Selbie Place. She often wore a royal blue overall – she was wearing that one in the photo which I cannot find – instead I wrote a poem about her baiting – page 82 . In the far corner of the shed which was quite large was the old stove which required fuel, later replaced by an electric fire and along the back wall of the shed was a place reserved for her sheeler and the mussel troch. In my memory the shed was cosy and warm.

The baiting process began with lifting the “bending”, a thicker, stronger rope than the line itself which would later be used for tying the lines together in the line “shooting” process, and which was placed to hang down over the end of the scull at the “erse” – some 6 feet long. Taking the line back (i.e. the line itself) in her left hand and passing it through her right hand, coiling or simply laying it in the bottom of the scull, the baiter would come to the first hook which she would unfasten from the synthetic tippins/strand, bait with mussels from the baiting board, usually two mussels, normally using her right hand to bait, placing the baited hook on the corsin ging board, the first of a series of 1200! Like sheeling, baiting required considerable skill, speed and dexterity.

*Baiting boardie to the brim  
 Mussels ready to begin  
 Skull set high upon the horse  
 Gob brimming fu o gaithered girse*

*Garra bags upon their knees  
 Mussels put on heuks  
 Some in twas, some in threes  
 Heuks set doon line efter line.*

“*Memories of the Past*”, Jackie McLean, *Maggie Law Maritime Museum Poetry Anthology*, page 37, verses 4 -5.

And so – the baiting would continue, ging after ging (row) up the gob till the very top was reached and the 1200<sup>th</sup> hook marked the end of the labour. Mary Lownie, grandmother of Jackie McLean who wrote “*Memories of the past*”, was known to say at this point as it was placed over the baited hooks, “God bless the bending!”. Several of the photos in the first main section show a full baited line with the bending in place – **a true Work of Art.**

**The Artefacts**

**Synthetic fibre attachment with fastened hook**

**Top of funnel for shooting the line**

**Top row**

**Skull**

**Mussel shells and sheel blades**

**Second row**

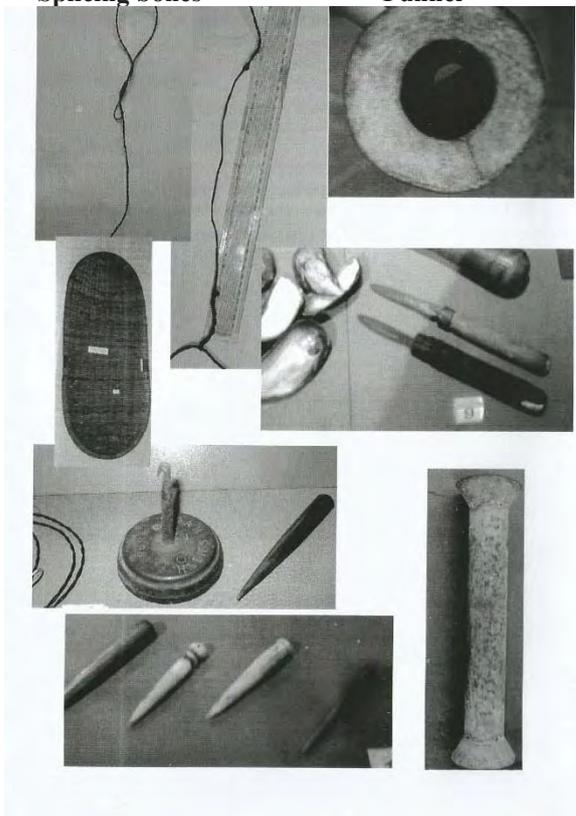
**Tippens, tippin stone/steen, splicing bone/been**

**Third row**

**Splicing bones**

**Funnel**

**Bottom row**



Photo, courtesy of Jim Swankie, *The Sma' Line Fishing on the East Coast of Scotland, Arbroath Area.*

#### 4. At the Sea – shooting the line – fishing – hauling – boxing – landing

Rising very early (around 4 a.m.) to catch the tide – perhaps having tided the boat “doon by” – Gourdon is a tidal harbour - nearer the harbour mouth allowing slightly later rising, the fishermen would make their way to the harbour, lines on carties and set out for their chosen fishing grounds. [Valuable information is available from the Interview I conducted with Andrew Gove Cargill (Govie) and from conversations with John Craig, my second cousin]<sup>15</sup>. Govie refers to a favourite fishing ground out from Gourdon – the Shald Water. The Hirst is another favoured ground. (Shald is a Gourdon pronunciation for Shall - shallow)

Celia: Far about wis the Shald Water exactly?

Govie: South East - and eh, it's the Montrose Bank if ye see a chart – that's the same. But ye see there wis aye the competition and it wis a case o fa hid the best shot the day. There wis gaen ti be half a dizen mair there the next morning or else ye wid git oot o synchronisation wi the tides, so ye see I preferred raither ti let them ging their ain wye , try and synchronise the tides better, simple as that.

Once there the process of shooting the lines would begin. This involved lining up the sculls on deck, gob end to the boat's stern and attaching the bending ropes so that the second bending of the first scull line, at the erse was attached to the first bending of scull 2 and so forth till the crew's lines were attached, each to the next in line. The funnel man would get ready, taking up position starboard, funnel on his right arm, held at 90 degrees to the gunnel, looking over the side.

The flag/buoy, the anchor, chains if required by the tide, the ground/grund string attached to the first bending of the first line, are all at the ready. The flag is cast away and the shooting process begins, with the boat moving fast ahead and the line playing out, hook by hook over the top of the funnel. With the lines flowing smoothly there would be no funnel bunches, no snarls. The end flag with its attachments marks the finish.

The lines would lie on the sea bottom, stretching out for miles. Each line was around  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile long. They would be left to fish for around 45 minutes before being hauled in, one man hauling, another to tip – clean, clear and fasten the hooks in place, laying the lines in their individual sculls, a third to “heuk” /unhook the fish and box them according to size. The Skipper would steer the boat partially into the tide. With a crew of fewer than four, these jobs would have to be skilfully timed and covered.

Time to steam for home.

*Steaming fae the shall water  
The boaties they wid steer  
Landing whiting, cod and haddock  
Now they're berthed langside the pier.*

*Kerties made wi auld pram wheels  
The lines were pit on board  
On tap the empty piece box  
And a fry for up the road.* (“Memories of the Past”, Jackie McLean, verses 6 – 7)

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<sup>15</sup> Oral History Interviews – [www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstonekist](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstonekist) and [www.maggielaw.co.uk](http://www.maggielaw.co.uk)

## 5. Redding the Back

When he came in from the sea the fisherman had two further tasks to perform in addition to resting, refreshing himself, having a meal. For example, having been up in the wee sma' hours, my father often went back to bed for a brief kip, maybe an hour before getting on with redding the back and redding the line. Thereafter he and my mother could concentrate on getting the mussels ready for the morrow, once they had been delivered by the Association lorry. Of course by that time it would be dark and if the lorry had been delayed, it might be after the evening meal/teatime before all was ready for the next day.

Redding the back of the baited line involved ensuring that it would run clearly and smoothly at sea the next day. If the baiter had coiled the line into the bottom of the scull as she baited, his task would be straightforward; occasionally he might not need to redd it back at all. This indeed was the case at times with my mother's lines. However, some baiters merely laid or flung the line between each hook into the erse, making it essential to redd it back.

This was done by lifting the line up and over onto the gob and then redding and coiling it neatly back into the erse. Of course, there was a knack and routine to this, beginning by placing the baited line on a flat surface, such as a table.<sup>16</sup> Two of the photos (pages 42-43) demonstrate this task effectively, including the placing of the bendings. The first bending returns to its original position given by the baiter at the start of her baiting – hanging over the end of the erse while the final bending secures the baited line. These cords/ropes will be used to attach line 1 to line 2 and so on for shooting the lines at sea. Details, page 15.

## 6. Redding the line

Redding the line was a longer, more difficult process. The line had been fished and hauled at sea and also partially cleaned, cleared and tipped/hooks fastened into the line attachment. Nevertheless further work was needed to make it ready to be baited next day. Only so much work in these areas could be executed at sea, especially with a crew of fewer than four men. The man redding moved the disordered, tangled (“raivelled”) line from the scull to a basket. Any remaining mussels, corse feet or other detritus had to be removed from the hooks; any missing hooks, ripped off (termed “wints” in Gourdon) would be isolated from the line to hang over the basket and hooks beaten on later. The baiter would deal with these in turn as she passed the line through her hands. The hooks had to be “tipped”, fastened in to the couralene/synthetic fibre attaching them to the line to make them safe for the baiter to handle, The redding continued till the whole line was neatly coiled into the two baskets required for next day's baiting.

Help was often available from other family members – a wife helping with redding the back, a grandfather helping to redd the line. I remember helping with tipping from time to time if I happened to be around. It was neither expected nor compulsory. On one occasion I had failed to keep up with the pace of my father's redding – doubtless my lack of expertise was also responsible and ended with a hook caught in my middle finger. I seem to remember it was rather superficial and not over the barb on the hook. Nevertheless it left its mark on my finger, visible into my later life.

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<sup>16</sup> Further details from Alex Welsh and John Craig on request.

# **FIVE PHOTOS – FIVE KEY AREAS :**

## **BAITING THE SMA' LINES : Meg Ann Craig**

The Sma' Lines were used by inshore fishermen to catch small fish – e.g. haddock, and can be distinguished from the great-lines – in Gourdon greitlins - which had much larger hooks but far fewer (around 600) than the 1200 hook sma' lines.<sup>17</sup> The sma' lines are mentioned in the Banff Statistical Account of 1795 ; St Andrews Gazette of 1885; by P.F.Anon, *Fishing Boats*, 1930; in the Scottish Geographical Magazine of April, 1968 – see footnote 16 below. The Kincardineshire Statistical Account of c. 1772 distinguishes sma' and great lines: “The small boats were then employed in catching haddocks, whiting etc. till the end of February, when the “near great fishing”, about 8 or 10 miles from land commenced.

## **SHEELING MUSSELS : Margaret Cargill and family.**

One and half hundredweight/a bag and a half of mussels were required to bait one line, with at least two mussels per hook – 1200 hooks in all. Mussels were supplied to Gourdon, to the Fishermen's Association from Joseph Johnston & Sons Ltd, Montrose and sometimes from further afield.

## **IN THE FISH HOUSE : Vally Craig**

A variety of special skills were required of the fish house workers employed by the Gourdon Fish Merchants, including the noted Gourdon filleting.

## **WITH THE HERRING :**

Gourdon boats sailed to Yarmouth and Scarborough following the herring as did some of the women, but barrels of herring were also landed at Gourdon Harbour in the herring season, dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Herring fishing collapsed in Gourdon in 1908.<sup>18</sup> Gourdon boats were still following the herring to Scarborough in 1909 when my Granny's brothers took the Mowatt family boat the “Morning Light there.

## **AT THE LIFE BOAT GALAS**

**A time to celebrate and enjoy the village annual events for the women of Gourdon**

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<sup>17</sup> Dictionary of the Scots Language: [www.dsl.ac.uk](http://www.dsl.ac.uk) – the above information is taken from this source.

+ Hay and Walker in *Focus on Fishing* give an interesting definition of sma' lines: “ a form of set-line fishing known as 'bottom-long line fishing, p. 53. To distinguish sma' lines from greitlins the size of the fish taken is the key, not the length of the line or the number of hooks used, page 53

<sup>18</sup> “Mearns Memories” in the *Mearns Leader* –article by Roy Souter quoted from the personal “Mearns Memories” scrapbook of Alison Ingram, c. 1980s

# THE SMA' LINES

## BAITING

Baiting the 1200-hook Sma' Lines called for early rising, often around 4 a.m. long hours and sheer hard graft daily, all winter long and into the spring from the baiter, almost invariably the fisherman's wife, requiring skill, dexterity and dedication, also involving strong family support and co-operation. At times the baiter might be assisted by another woman, usually a relative who would "bait at her hand", baiting the mussels and placing them on the mussel board, ready for the baiter to pick up and place in rows in the scull. Lines were baited indoors, in the scullery or kitchen in earlier days, outdoors, weather permitting and later sheds were built specifically for baiting.

## STEPPING INTO THE BREACH



**Mrs Margaret Ann Smith (nee Craig)** - Meg Ann is pictured baiting in the kitchen at 1 Mowatt's Lane, Gourdon, aged around 95, c. **mid 1950s**, She was born in 1860 and after baiting in her younger days, returned to baiting her son, John Duncan Smith's line during a time of family crisis, at the time of her daughter-in-law's illness and after her death. The photo, with its accompanying story records the importance of family, working together, and co-operation at this time when line fishing was at its height. It typifies the huge input of the women of Gourdon to line fishing which could not have operated without their unstinting help over the generations. (Meg Ann was my great aunt/ Adam, my grandfather's sister. For part of my childhood we lived at 7 Mowatt's Lane in a house built by my great grandfather, Alexander Mowatt, now retained as a second home).

## SHEELING (SHELLING MUSSELS)

Sheelin at least 2000 mussels daily for the lines was also arduous work, often carried out solo by the baiter who was also sometimes assisted by family members : alternatively she might employ a sheeler, perhaps a more distant relative or family friend. On occasion two, even three sheelers would share the work. Typically the sheeler/baiter would rise at around 4 a.m. and carry on into the afternoon as required. Sheelin often resulted in sore, rough hands from the silt, grit and salt water, termed “garra water” in Gourdon, still coating the mussels from the mussel beds, even after they had been “slooshed down” with water. In this photo Betty Stewart would complete her share of the sheeling in the early morning hours before going on to her day job, working in Gove’s Fish House nearby.

## WORKING TOGETHER



The family of “Reaper” ME 105 Skipper, Andrew Gove Cargill – **Betty Stewart**, sister-in-law, **Mrs Margaret Cargill**, wife, **Mrs Nellie Dorward (nee Cargill)**, sister, sheelin mussels at the mussel troch, individualised sheel blades in hand , c. 1970s. The family input and its essential contribution is again clearly demonstrated.

## IN THE FISH HOUSE

In the Fish House women also played a prominent part, working with the the fish bought by the fish merchant/fish house owner, displaying a variety of skills, ranging from gutting, skinning and filleting to close smoking and cold smoking, including the unique Gourdon method of filleting. Again family worked together, men and women.

## THE END PRODUCT



**Mrs Valerie (Vally) Craig (nee Stewart)**, “pittin up” vellow haddock fillets, on a “spete”, ready for cold smoking in the kiln, **early 1980s**, in her son, Ian Craig’s establishment, Monkstone.

## BAITING : SHEELING : WORKING IN THE FISH HOUSES

**WITHOUT THE WOMEN OF GOURDON LINE  
FISHING COULD NOT HAVE OPERATED.**

## WITH THE HERRING

Drift netting for herring, commenced around 1837 in Gourdon,<sup>19</sup> reaching its peak towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, early 20<sup>th</sup> century with hundreds of barrels of herring brought ashore in Gourdon, along with a number of Gourdon boats making the trip to Scarborough and Great Yarmouth in pursuit of the herring, including women of Gourdon also following the herring to these thriving ports. My Mowatt great grandfather's boat, "Morning Light", crewed by his sons, having grossed between £400 and £500 for nine trips out of Scarborough in 1909, returned only to be swamped thereafter on a routine day's fishing out of Gourdon by a hurricane, all lives lost. (See pages 65-67 for further illustration of herring barrelling in Gourdon)

### GOURDON HARBOUR – HERRING BARRELLING



In this old photo at the top of Gourdon Harbour, William Street, with what would later become David Ritchie's Fish House in the background, men and women of Gourdon are pictured packing the herring – gutting, salting, barrelling. The high windowed building in the background was originally a grain store for onward shipment of grain, owned by J.S. Boyle (**pre-1896**), later becoming a wood store owned by William Lyons. The buildings in front were being built as smoke houses – dated 1896. Today the fish house is owned by Stephen's Fish Merchants (David Ritchie), having been bought by James Ritchie from W. Lyons around 1924, and still uses one of the smoke houses for smoking. The original building may date from early 1800s.

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<sup>19</sup> David G Adams, "Fishing Communities of Angus and the Mearns", Pinkfoot Press, 2013, p.88 – "Ten large boats went to the herring fishing from mid-July for six to eight weeks", with reference to 1837.

# AT THE LIFEBOAT GALAS

Women of Gourdon also played an active part in the social activities of the village, galas and other special harbour events, sometimes involving concerts. Noted impresario, fish salesman and Gourdon Fishermen's Association supremo, Jim Stewart officiated with great flair at such events ably assisted by the Women of Gourdon, helping to organise, set up and run the various stalls, make and serve the Teas, usually sited in Brymie's (Ritchie's) Fish House beside the main site of the Gala next to the Farquhar Monument. The Gourdon Life Boat would be launched and would take the eager public out to sea on boat trips. Many of the fishing boats also undertook to run trips.



Lifeboat Gala Day – teas and sale of work: back row – **Margaret Souter, Bessie Walker, Phyllis Moncur, Miss Anderson**, school teacher, **Margaret Ritchie (nee Horn). Bell Dorward**, Seated – **Margaret Mowatt**, son Bob who drowned in a boat accident on her knee, Front – **Hannah Lownie**.

Children include – Sandra Melvin (nee Gibb) and her sister, Janice Anne, Bruce Dorward and Moira Coull (nee Dorward), Lesley Peters (nee Barbour) c. 1960.

Leading ladies, easily identifiable by their special RNLI tartan shawls include the above **Bessie Walker, Phyllis Moncur, Margaret Ritchie, Bell Dorward and Hannah Lownie**. Not pictured, **Agnes Scott**, along with **Phyllis Moncur**, ably assisted with the highly popular Wheel of Fortune event – a tombola-type event.

# BAITING : ACROSS THE YEARS

## A WAY OF LIFE FOR FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

### 1914



**Mrs Margaret Dye Cargill, (nee Freeman), wife of William Cargill, Reid Lichtie, behind the baiter, Isabella Freeman (nee Gove), her mother; Andrew Freeman, Isabella's grandson; Chris Davidson (nee Gove), baiting at her sister's hand; Mary Freeman, sister of Margaret Cargill behind Chris at Davidson's Buildings. Reid Lichtie was so named as originally an Arbroath man. So called because of their red boat lights.**

Notice the sacking apron, possibly part of a mussel bag/garra bag on Chris's knee. The line in the scull on the right has yet to redded. Perhaps the photographer arrived early before this could take place. The women could not bait the line unless it had been redded : lines came in from the sea tangled and "raivelt". The term "garra" refers to the dirty, muddy liquid from the unshelled mussels. There are very few shelled mussels on the baiting board or on the plate for baiting at hand. The women are baiting outside beside the family home where **Andrew Gove Cargill**, Skipper of the "Reaper" ME 105, son of Margaret Cargill and his family lived : Govie died in 2015. His sister-in-law, **Betty Stewart**, still resides there. (See Sheeling photo, page 19).

# 1924



**Mrs Colina Cargill** , front right, baiting at her mother's hand, William Street, 1924 - a way of life for the family. Notice the scull placed on a slope on a box to retain the mussels in the rows in the "gob", the upper part of the scull: the mussels are on the board over the tin basin: a mussel troch sits on the left. It would have been used earlier that morning for the unshelled mussels, waiting to be "sheeled". The bicycle (on the right) was a popular means of locomotion in the village for years thereafter. Notice too that the women are baiting outdoors. It may be that they were outdoors in the summertime if the boats were going to the lines the year round in this early period.

# 1930s



Earlier times – **Mrs Valentine Ritchie (nee Bell Lownie)** baiting the line at the scull, with family visitors baiting at her hand (Chris Smith, back, Jean Thompson, front) from Grangemouth on their summer holidays, c. 1930s, outside 2 Bridge End Cottage, Gourdon.

Notice again that the baiting is being carried on outdoors. The scull is sloped over an upturned box : the line can be seen in the bottom of the scull (traditionally termed the “erse”): the rows of baited hooks are in the upper part of the scull, the “gob”

# 1937



5

## The Dorward (Dorrit) family

**Mary Dorward (nee McBay)**, gutting fish for tea; **Lizzie Milne (nee Dorward)**, aged 14 standing by shed, off work at the Mill because of a sore throat; **Chris Dorward (nee Moir)** baiting; Child below scull – possibly Mary's daughter, Ina or Barbara ; **John Dorward**, husband of Chris Dorward, redding his line. William Street, Gourdon (Harbour Bar in the background), c. 1937.

Once again the extended family is involved in this co-operative work. The woman baiting and her husband are carrying out two central occupations – baiting the line and redding the line, untangling the line after it has been “shot” and fished at sea, replacing any missing hooks (“wints”) and coiling it in the basket, ready to be baited next day while his wife baits the other line for the sea on the morrow. The scull for next day is on his left. Chris baits from left to right – from the basket with the line to the mussel board and basin in the centre to the scull where the rows upon row of mussels will be carefully placed. The sculls are the traditional cane variety which preceded the later wooden sculls. Notice again the work is being carried on outside.

## EARLY 1940s



James (Jimmy) Craig and family pictured outside the family home, William Street, Gourdon. Jimmy was my Deddie's brother, Jimmy, born 1882, William Adam (Edom), born 1884, the two youngest sons of the large family (of 14) of Joseph Craig and **Mag Gowan**, his wife. The latter was an invaluable source of information about the village and its history as passed down to her family and later local "historians", eventually reaching Roy Souter – *Souter's History of Bervie and Gourdon, Part 1, including the Journal of Robert Gowan*, printed 1985.

Standing beside the window are neighbour and possibly sheeler to the family – **Annie Horn (later Nicholson)** and **Bella Craig (nee McLeod)**, daughter-in-law, wife of Jimmy's eldest son, James/Jimmy Craig, father of John Craig. Baiting the line is Jimmy's wife, **Mag (nee Forsyth)** and baiting at her hand is **Bets Forsyth**.

Jimmy's spaniel is at his knee and nearby the second basket with the rest of the line awaits. The women are wearing aprons to protect their knees and Mag is wearing the familiar spotted overall/dress.

# 1940s



Baiting and sheelin' in Queen Street, Gourdon. Back standing, **Martha Christie, Jim Christie**, centre, sheelin', **Maggie Christie**, baiting, foreground, around 1940s.

In this photo the mussels troch is upright against the railway dyke (the railway line below: the trains were of great assistance to the fishermen for the onward transport of shellfish) ; the second/spare scull further along has also been placed upright against the dyke; the scull for the line is sloped as usual; a spare ladle of mussels awaits the baiter's need. Maggie has just started to fill the "gob" (upper part of the scull) with rows (termed "gings" in Gourdon) of mussels, row after row until the 1200 hooks have been placed and the "gob" filled. The grass lining the scull helps keep the mussels in place and narrow strips of newspaper separate and secure the mussels in their rows, protecting the line against possible "funnel bunches" when being "shot" at sea. Empty mussel shells are scattered on the ground. The view stretches away to the top of the Gourdon Hill and the Winnikie o'Tam – actually a local corruption of Windygate Holm, identified on old maps.

The work takes place in the open air and illustrates the typical location for the work, weather permitting. A native, life-long Gourdon resident, **Alison Ingram (nee Stewart)** recounts that on her way to school in the early 1940s, several baiters and their "assistants" could be seen along Queen Street as she made her way from 1 Mowatt's Lane, over the wooden railway bridge, up the path (later steps would be put in place) between the houses to the school. She lists the following families: **Mag Middleton (nee Wyllie)**; **Annabel Watt (nee Moir)**; **Nancy Ritchie (nee Waiter)**; **Rachel Gray**, baiting her brother, Wullys Gray's line. Some of these might be baiting to the house side Of the street. Later in the day the men in from the sea would be "reddin' the line at the railway side of the street.

# 1962



Young fisherman, **David Criggie** is reddin' his line in William Street, Gourdon, with his baiter, older woman, **Jess Freeman** observing. They are yards from what was then the Apparatus Shed (rescue apparatus operated from the shore – as opposed to lifeboat and surf boat rescue) and what is now the refurbished Maggie Law Maritime Museum. David is in the process of unfastening a hook or perhaps fastening it again into the “tippins” (the synthetic fibre attachment to the actual line). The Bobby Criggie (David's father) family boat was the “Chrissie Criggie” : boats were often named for the son or daughter of the family. Young single fishermen would need a family member, a sister or aunt perhaps to bait his line or would employ a baiter outside the family circle till he got married. His mother would already be baiting a line for his father. (Image courtesy of Aberdeen Journals).

## GENERATIONS: 1940s - Mime – 1960s - Bella

**Jemima (Mime) McLeod (nee Soutar)**, Granny of John Craig outside 3 Queen Street, Gourdon, c. 1940. John is a Gourdon man, former fisherman and builder.



Mime’s dress/overall with its spotted pattern was traditional for women of the time: She is wearing a protective apron over the top: she is baiting outside.



**Isabella (Bella) Craig (nee McLeod)**, baiting, 3 Seaview Terrace, Gourdon, c. 1961/62. Bella baits in the shed; behind her hangs a hunk of “cloved” line which has been specially redd in teardrop shape for “barking” – preservative dyeing.

## GENERATIONS

Bella is John Craig's mother, Mime's daughter. Two generations.

Bella Craig's grandson, **Raymond Craig** wrote this poem in tribute to his Granny. The poem is printed in *The Maggie Law Maritime Museum Poetry Anthology*, page 39.

### “The Baiter”

*Could callused fing-ers,  
Sheel-blade-hackit,  
A peenie roond her waist,  
An auld chair back, a baisin,  
The past ten – twenty yeer she's faced.  
Grey, woolen shawl aroond hir heid,  
Haiter at hir feet  
A scull, a line, a mussel troch,  
Twelve hunder heuks –  
Oh, what a thocht!*

Raymond effectively conveys the rigors of baiting, the long years of unremitting work. Since the time of his Great Granny, Mime McLeod, his Granny has the comfort of a heater but still suffers the same cold, the cuts, the 1200 hooks daily.

“Sheel-blade-hackit”, line 2 :

**Sheel blades and mussels shells. Each sheeler had her own customised short-handled blade.**

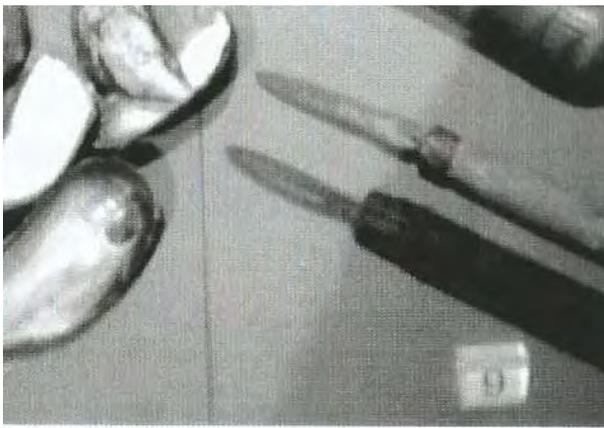


Photo courtesy of Jim Swankie

The records of the Gourdon Fishermen's Association contain letters pertaining to the purchase of sheel blades, suitable for use in Gourdon – a fascinating historical archive which can be consulted in the Maggie Law Maritime Museum archive folders. See Appendix 1, pages 88-89 for three sheel blade letters.

# GENERATIONS – KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY

1948



**Valentine Ritchie (Vulty** – grandfather of Mrs Valerie/Vally Craig (nee Stewart). (see photo, page 20 and others), redding the line, with his daughter, **Mrs Lizzie Ann Stewart (nee Ritchie )**, mother of Vally Craig), helping at Bridge End Cottage, Gourdon, c. 1948.

Earlier in the 1930s Vally Craig’s Granny, her Mother, and her Auntie, Mrs Bella Boyle were baiting two lines a day for Vally’s uncles, Andy and Valentine who were going to the sea with the “Boy Charlie”, ME 61. Vally’s father and her husband, Charlie Craig were with the Fishery boats, respectively, the “Explorer”, operating out of Leith and the “Kathleen”, operating out of Aberdeen.

1965/66



**Vally Craig** baiting, with her mother, **Liz-Ann Stewart (nee Ritchie)**, baiting at her hand, in the house, 10 Brae Road, Gourdon. Vally, like my mother, Ellizabeth (Ciss) Craig (nee Gray) and some other baiters, coiled the line neatly in the bottom of the scull (colloquially referred to as the “erse”) whereas others, including Mrs Stewart (Liz-Ann) flung the line in. The coiling made the line easier and quicker to redd back, in preparation for “shooting” next day at sea whereas the other method took longer to redd back. Redding the back with one “bending” cord on top, the other at the bottom was essential if the lines, joined together with the bending were to pay out freely at sea when being “shot”, without catching of hooks etc over the “funnel”, a metal “pipe” designed to help the line run free during the line shooting process. (The bending of the first line in the process was attached to the ground (“grund”) string and to the marker flag When it did not run free a bunch, termed “a funnel bunch” occurred which slowed up the whole process and created complex tangles. The thicker, bending cords at the start and the end of the line were required for attaching the second line to the first and so on thereafter till all the lines were “shot”. A boat might have two, three or four of a crew, each with a line. My father used to maintain that my mother’s coiling was so meticulous that he scarcely needed to redd it back at all!

One well-known story told by Gourdon woman, **Mrs Margaret Middleton (nee Lownie)** against herself runs as follows. Referring to her husband, James Craig Middleton (Craigie), she stated jokingly that when they were first married, “Craigie Middleton used to ca’ me Honeybunch, noo he caa’s me Funnelbunch!”. However, Margaret was a first class baiter – funnelbunch- less!

## GENERATIONS – YOUNGER AND OLDER TOGETHER

**MARY -1930s/40s    MINA – 1950s/60s**



**Mary Cargill (nee Lownie)** standing and **Mina Cargill (nee Pittendreich)**, her daughter-in-law baiting, 7 Hillfoot Terrace, Gourdon, early 1950s. Mina is baiting outside, with the shed in the background. Mary has already sheeled enough mussels for Mina to get started baiting. Both work together co-operatively. Mary was known to say at the end of baiting as it came into view, “*God bless the bending.*”



**Mary Cargill (nee Lownie)** baiting, in **her baiting apron**, 7 Hillfoot Terrace, Gourdon, early 1950s. Notice the grass at the top of the scull. The grass was sea grass and served to secure the mussels in their rows in the “gob” – the top part of the scull. Mary also sheeled mussels for her daughter-in-law, Mina Cargill.

In earlier days Mary baited her husband, John (Sergeant) Cargill’s line in the house for the family boat, the “Rosaleen” ME 59. Later her daughter-in-law, Mina was baiting for her husband, John Cargill (son of John/Sergeant and Mary), firstly for the “Rosaleen” and later in the 60s for the “Jacqueline”.

More recently Mina’s daughter, Mary’s granddaughter, **Jacqueline (Jackie) McLean (nee Cargill)** wrote a poem which forms a tribute to her parents and grand parents and also describes vividly the difficult, hard and skilled work for the whole family involved in baiting, sheeling, redding lines and line back and going to the sea.

“**Memories of the Past**” - from *The Maggie Law Maritime Museum Poetry Anthology*, pages 37-39

1. Did you cum fae Gurden  
And yer father ging tae Sea  
Yer mither rise the early oors  
In the sheddie she wid be,

2 . Raking through the garra water  
Wi her sheel blade in her hand  
Getting mussels ready  
Wi Granny’s help wis grand.

5. Garra bags upon their knees  
Mussels put on heuks  
Some in twas, some in threes.

3. Granny sheelt half the mussels  
**Her baiten apprin** she wid wear  
‘Granny, how di ye ken foo much to sheel?’  
‘Eh lassie – till ma shudder blades are sair.’

4. Baiting boardie to the brim  
Mussels ready to begin  
Scull set high upon the horse  
Gob brimming fu o’ gaithered girse.

Heuks set doon line efter line  
When wark was feenished  
A sup tea was just fine.

(Verses 1 – 5)

## GENERATIONS -1980s



**Rena Welsh** baiting at hand for her mother-in-law, **Isabel Welsh (nee Moncur)** – Rena’s husband, Alex Welsh’s line. Notice that the old-style, spotted overall has been replaced by an up-to-date, patterned design. Notice the paper-laid gob of the scull where in earlier days sea grass would have been used to secure the mussels. Isabel has only a few more “gings” (rows) of mussels to bait to fill the “gob”. Isabel and Rena are using the newer wooden scull which came into use as cane-worked sculls became a disappearing craft.

In 1986 Alex Welsh’s boat, ME 155, “Enterprise” was the last boat to go to the lines – Rena’s the last line to be baited till a special reconstruction in 1999 for a special visit of celebrity chef, Rick Stein to the village. After 1986 the women of Gourdon baited no more. Some net fishing/trawling for white fish continued on a small scale for a time but gradually landings of white fish at Gourdon became significantly reduced and that, along with other regulations meant that Gourdon ceased to be a viable port for landing white fish, while retaining shellfish landing rights.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Information from Marine Scotland and from Alan Donaldson Interview, Elphinstone Institute *Kist* website [www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstonekist](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstonekist) : Alan’s Interview can also be accessed on Maggie Law Maritime Museum website [www.maggielaw.co.uk](http://www.maggielaw.co.uk) See Appendix 4, page 93 for a detailed account of this issue

## A FULL GOB – ISABEL WELSH - 1986

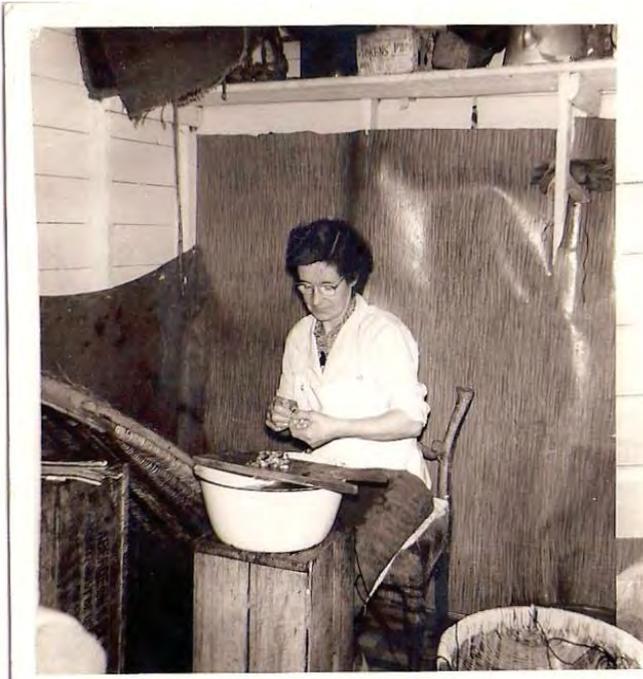


The last of the 1200 hooks of the sma' line are baited – the gob filled full, row upon row. Isabel has completed the daily darg.

Time for a cup of tea!

## **YEARS OF WORK - ISABEL/BELL DORWARD**

Isabel Ritchie Dorward, baiting, in both pictures at 24 McGill Terrace, Gourdon



**EARLY 1960s**



**1970s,**

## INABOOTCOMERS - AN IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMMUNITY

Young women from both town and country marrying Gourdon fishermen willingly took on the onerous job of sheeling and baiting their lines, learning and quickly mastering the required skills from members of their new families and from helpful neighbours. They were absorbed into the heart of these families and into the heart of the community. Their contribution was vital for the life of the line fishing.

### From the country

One such was my mother, **Elizabeth (Ciss) Craig (nee Gray)**, from Barras and Kinneff, wife of Alexander Mowatt Craig, Skipper of the “Trustful”, ME 132: another was **Mina Pittendreigh**, from nearby St Cyrus, wife of John Cargill, Skipper of the “Rosaleen” (page 34). Others included **Rena Welsh** from Johnshaven, wife of Alex Welsh, Skipper of the “Enterprise” ME155 ( page 36), and **Barbara Donaldson**, wife of Sandy Donaldson (pages 41-42), baiting for the Rick Stein visit to the village. Yet another was **Mary (Molly) Lownie (nee Walker)** , from Benholm who baited for her husband Charlie Lownie whose father, Henry was then Skipper of the “Silver Quest” ME 150. Today, Molly, a Gurdener, recalls these days with affection, tempered with realisation of the long hours and dedication involved, saying, “Ye jist got on wi it!”. Others included **Betty Dorward (nee Malcolm)** from Huntly and Laurencekirk, wife of Chae Dorward and **June Calder (nee Duncan?)**, wife of Joe Calder. In fact it is interesting to speculate on the relative numbers of native Gurdeners and Inabootcomers baiting lines in the heyday of the Sma’ Line. Molly Lownie was probably the last sheeler and baiter of the youngest set. Thereafter (early 1980s) the Sma’ Line fishing declined, the seine net took over and it simply became increasingly difficult to find women willing to commit to the unremitting grind of sheeling and baiting but in addition fish stocks had been depleted and catches poor. Regulations were also militating against white fish landings.

In this connection, I recently discovered a collection of Wartime letters from World War II, covering the period 1940 -43, from my mother (**Elizabeth Craig**) to my father (**Alex Craig**) and my father to my mother across the seas and different locations where he was serving during the War and where she was living and working. Alex Craig served most of that time on North Atlantic convoy escort duties in the Royal Navy and his sweetheart, later wife, Ciss was working for Doctor Anderson’s family in Hillside. They were corresponding two or three times a week over a long period of time.

She reflects in two letters about being different, coming from the country, from the Gourdon fishing community. In Letter 1 she is comparing their different backgrounds. In Letter 2 she resumes the topic, having had a letter from my father in the interim. I detect a note of apprehension and appeal in her letters at this point:

*“ All the same, I’m quite different from you folks and that makes a difference. You should have picked a fisher lass, Sandy – only don’t change your mind now when I’m beginning to learn.” ( Letter 1: February 1940)*

*“ You say you don’t think I’ll be a fisher lass but I will be – in a way, won’t I, Alex? Don’t think I mind because I don’t – so there.” (Letter 2: February 1940)*



**Ciss and Alex during the War**

### **From the town**

The above were country lasses but **Carol Criggie** was a toonanser from Aberdeen. Today she too is a Gurdener. Back in the 1970s she was baiting a line for her husband, Bobby Criggie who was going to the sea with his father, also Bobby Criggie, Skipper of the “Chrissie Criggie”. Notice the fully filled gob, right to the top of the scull.

### **A Work of Art - Carol with the baited line – the bending cord across the line - 1970**



**© Alex Coupar Collection**

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## A SPECIAL OCCASION : RICK STEIN VISITS GOURDON

When celebrity chef, Rick Stein visited Gourdon on **August 13, 1999**, special arrangements were put in place by the people of the village.

- Two women undertook to bait a full, 1200 hook line, provided by the men of the families.
- Another family put their boat at his disposal to go out to sea and “shoot” and fish the baited line.

This would be the first time since 1986 when Alex Welsh and his crew of the “Enterprise” were the last boat to line fish, that baiting, sheeling and sma’ line fishing had taken place in Gourdon.



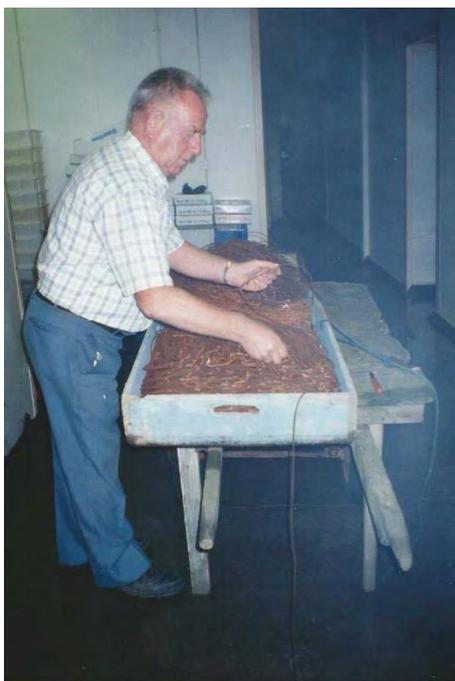
**Rena Welsh** baits at the hand of **Barbara Donaldson** who is baiting the line in Douglas Welsh’s Fish House, “Gourline” – wooden scull on Barbara’s right, lined with newspaper – **1999** for Rick Stein’s visit.

The line was subsequently taken to sea by the brothers. Stephen and Peter Morrison on their boat, the “Vivid”, along with Rick Stein, and “shot” and fished but with little in the way of a catch. Later, Peter used to reflect, with a smile, how ill-equipped for a cold day at sea in the North Sea, Rick Stein was, wearing only a light windcheater; I’m sure he smiled at sea that day while Rick shivered,



View of the baited line in the scull from behind – less than half full – a long way to go. The wooden sculls came to replace the older, traditional cane sculls when the required skills for crafting the older sculls diminished.

**Sandy Donaldson**, Barbara’s husband, redds the back of the “Rick Stein line, then places the bending across the line, ready to be shot at sea or attached to an adjacent line for shooting.



**REDDING THE BACK**

## **ANOTHER WORK OF ART –THE BAITED AND REDDED LINE BACK**

**Alex Welsh**, Skipper of the “Enterprise” ME 155, redds back the line baited by his wife, Rena. The scull is the newer wooden type, not the traditional cane variety.



**The completed Work of Art, with the bending on top.**

# IN FROM THE SEA

The lines have been “shot” and fished, hauled in, the catch boxed and landed and the tangled lines in their baskets placed on the “kerties”. The fishermen head home to redden the lines and also redden the back of the line baited that day. (See pages 15-16).



In from the sea – **Jimmy Dorward**, left and **John Cargill**, Skipper of the “Rosaleen” (son of Sergeant Cargill – see below) with their lines in new style plastic “baskets”, on “kerties”, having been shot and fished at sea, now ready to be redded, untangled, hooks fastened, replaced as required and beaten on, coiled in baskets for their women folk to bait the following day. Their baited lines for the morrow will be completed or nearing completion: these will also required to be redded back.

**Often other members of the family would help with redding the line – e.g. grandfathers (“deddies”) and redding the back – e.g. wives. I recall tipping for my father in a casual way now and then and once (painfully) getting a heuk in my finger as I tried to clear and re-fasten it.**

# REDDING THE LINE



**John Cargill** redding the line, 7 Hillfoot Terrace, Gourdon, early 1950s.

John Cargill was the famous Sarge/Sergeant Cargill who had a notable career as a fisherman, in Army Service during World War I where he became a sergeant, in the Royal Naval Reserve as a volunteer during World War II where he served on a minesweeper, was involved in the Dunkirk evacuation and was awarded a DSM. More famously he served aboard the “Carpathia” (1912-1913), first ship on the scene of the “Titanic” disaster : the “Carpathia” rescued 202 first class passengers, 115 second class passengers, 178 third class passengers, 4 officers and 206 crew. He is the “daddy” referred to by Jackie Cargill in her poem “Memories of the Past” - a tribute to her parents and grandparents and to Gourdon’s fishing traditions.

Steaming fae the shall water  
The boaties they would steer  
Landing whiting, cod and haddock  
Now they’d berthed langside the pier

Kerties made wi auld pram wheels  
The lines were pit on board  
On tap the empty piece box  
And a fry for up the road.

Dad and deddy busy – redding lines and tipping heuks  
Beaten threed at the ready to mend the eens that broke.  
Deddy ready-fu he waited  
To redd the back o’ the line mam baited.

*(Memories of the Past, verses 6-8)*

# PAYMENT FOR WOMEN

## GOVIE'S PROPOSAL

**Andrew Gove Cargill**, Skipper of the “Reaper” ME 105 contended that the women sheeling and baiting the lines should have had their National Insurance Stamp paid and received payment, a wage for their work. In an Oral History Interview <sup>21</sup> in 2007 he stated:

“They shoulda peyed/gien the wife a wage and peyed the stamp but they widna. Wi the result that a thae years, Margaret wis workin’ but she wisna peyin the stamp”

Govie is referring to his wife, Margaret here and to the accountants who would not agree when consulted that it was the right thing to do. He explains:

“I’m afraid the accountants didna gie ye very muckle insicht.....If ye speired that they widna say, “Aye, this is the thing to doh”.

The clear implication is the devaluing of the woman’s pension.



**Govie reddin’, fastening a hook, assisted by Jake Freeman**

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<sup>21</sup> Celia Craig. Oral History Interview with Andrew Gove Cargill, Elphinstone Institute *Kist* website [www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstonekist](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstonekist) Now also available at [www.maggielaw.co.uk](http://www.maggielaw.co.uk)

# THE SMA' LINES

## SHEELING

“UP THE BRAE”



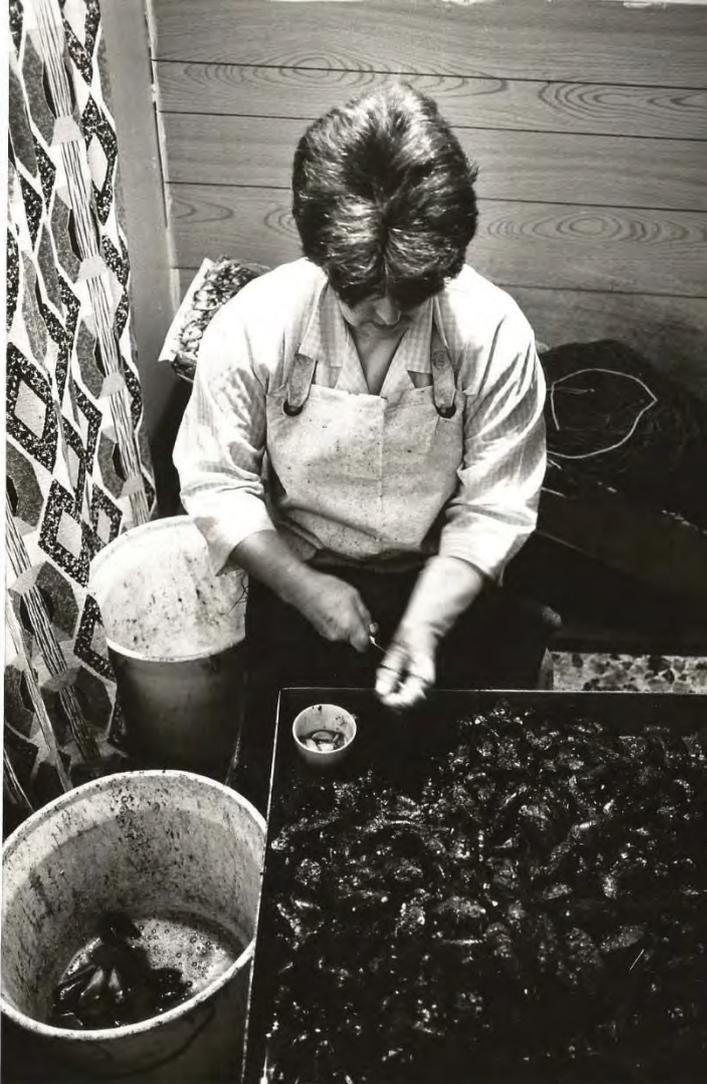
**Chris Dorward (nee Moir)** sheeling at the back of 24 McGill Terrace, Gourdon, “**up the brae**”, c. early 1940s. Working outdoors was pleasant in good weather but also helped to keep the kitchen clean. See also page 26 where Chris is baiting outside, “**doon the brae**”, William Street, Gourdon.

# SHEELING IN THE SUN



A young **Lizzie Soutar (nee Ritchie)** sheeling mussels outside for husband, **Roy Soutar**, fisherman, lifeboatman, skipper and author c. 1960s.

## AMONG THE GARRA WATER AGAIN



**Rena Welsh** sheeling (c. 1975) for the line she baited for her husband, Alex Welsh, Skipper of the “Enterprise” ME 155, also pictured baiting, page 36.

Notice the finger guards Rena is wearing to protect her hand from cuts ; notice too the black mussel clusters and the marks left on the pails. The mussels would have been washed down after being delivered by the Gourdon Fishermen’s Association lorry, from Montrose or sometimes from further afield, e.g from the “Neeborough”. “Garra Water” was the Gourdon name for the muddy, dirty water/liquid from the mussels.

# KEEPING THE TRADITIONS ALIVE

“Knives flash as odd-man-out William Pert and eight contestants get down to last night’s mussel-shelling competition at Gourdon. The knife that flashed quickest was wielded by Mrs E. Morrison (second woman from the left), 18<sup>th</sup> July 1963. (Quotation and image courtesy of Aberdeen Journals).



At the traditional wooden mussel troughs are **Willie Pert, Iris Walker, Lizzie Morrison (nee Mowatt)**, the winner. Can you name the others beyond Lizzie? **Vally Craig** suggests – **Meg Douglas, Peggy Church**, another not identified, **Ina Watt (nee Moncur), Bessie Walker** – perhaps **Annie Lownie** or **Bell Dorward**, the last two being a stab in the dark.

# IN THE FISH HOUSE

## A LIFETIME'S WORK 1971



**Mina Lownie (nee Ritchie)**, and her sister, **Agnes Watson**, filleting haddock, in the Lownie family Fish House, c.1971. **James Lownie** - far right – described his wife, Mina as an excellent filleter, quick and accurate, no bones missed.

**The Gourdon method of filleting** allowed the filleter to simply pull the skin from the haddock because the fish were so fresh: **the Aberdeen method** required cutting into the back of the fish to facilitate filleting.

# 1971

## A FAMILY AFFAIR



**Mina Lownie**, c. 1970s, in the family Fish House, washing trays for fish, possibly for use on the family fish van, operated by their son, **Edward**. Many Gourdon fish vans left the village each morning on their individual rounds, north, south and inland, serving their regular customers.

## 1980s



**Mina Lownie** displaying a beautiful “spete” (bar/row) of close smoked haddocks, just out of the kiln – in her husband, James Lownie’s Fish House, 1980s. The large brick kilns could accommodate several rows of smokies. As children we were allowed to salvage and eat any smokies fallen from their “perch” in the kiln during the smoking process – they tasted delicious! Close smoking involved setting the wood clogs alight at the base of the kiln and then closing the lid for approximately an hour to allow the pairs of haddocks on the spete to be cooked and smoked to perfection in the wood smoke. No colourants were required.

In the early days Gourdon boasted up to ten or more Fish Houses, some larger, some smaller. In my own childhood in the 1950s I can recall at least seven establishments.

# 1981



**Mrs Mina Lownie** (wife of James Lownie, Fish Merchant) in their Fish House, with haddock fillets ready to be smoked on top of a spete (spit/bar) - cold smoking to produce yellow haddock fillets. The fish were marinated in a “pickle” of salt water, with a few drops of vegetable colourant.

In the cold smoking kiln which was taller than the more compact close smoking kiln, the fire was more fully dampened down than for close smoking, ensuring the fish were smoked but not cooked. The bottom of the cold smoking kiln was laid with shavings of oak wood chips, with sawdust on top, plus a sprinkling of water; the kiln was lighted and left to smoulder all night. The fish could be undyed, lightly smoked or really “yellow” fish. Haddocks with the bone left in were the true “finnans”/finnan haddies.

## 1990s - 2000



Mina Lownie at work in the Fish House, c. 1990s - 2000 – trying to keep warm. Fish Houses had to be kept quite cold and also used cold water when working with fish. A very cold job in the winter.

**2001**



### **A Lifetime's Dedication**

**Mina Lownie** in later life (c. 2001) in the Lownie Fish House, with a tray of fish. Mina and James both continued working into their 80s.

# ANOTHER FAMILY VENTURE

## A LIFE OF SKILLED WORK

LATE 1960s



**Valerie (Vally) Craig (nee Stewart),** left, and **Ella Birse (nee Gove),** filleting fish in Fred Birse's Fish House.

After working in the Gourdon Mill (leaving school at age 14), then in a Johnshaven Baker's Shop, **Vally** began working in Lindsay's Fish House, aged 16, in 1947, thereafter in other Gourdon establishments. By the 1960s Vally was baiting her husband, Charlie Craig's line in the morning, with her mother's help and working in different fish houses in the afternoons to help out a needy fish merchant. Vally's helpfulness and dedication in this respect exemplifies the tradition of helping out others in the community. Arrangements were put in place by the fish merchant in a staff shortage to allow Vally to work only certain hours and days which could be fitted into her baiting schedule.. Vally continued in her son's Fish House, Monkstone till 1998.

# A VARIETY OF SKILLS

## GUTTING FISH



Working in Douglas Welsh's start-up Fish House, long before his Gourline establishment – early 1980s – Douglas Welsh, Kevin Smith and **Valerie (Vally) Craig (nee Stewart)**.

Gutting was a necessary first step towards the other required skills – filleting, preparing different types of “yellow” fish, smoking, kippering.

Photo courtesy of Aberdeen Journals.

# FILLETING



**Vally Craig filleting fish in her son, Ian's establishment, Monkstone – 1980s.**

# PREPARING YELLOW FISH



**Vally Craig** in Monkstone preparing yellow haddock fillets, with the “spete” across the basin, early 1980s – see also page 20.

The haddock fillets were “pickled” in brine and a few drops of vegetable colourant. Finnan haddocks were part filleted, leaving the main bone in place, “pickled” and both types were cold smoked – see page 54 for details of cold smoking. Page 53 details close smoking.

# SKINNING AND PACKING

## FILLETING



**Vally and son, Ian Craig in Monkstone – c. 1988** – Vally is skinning and packing, Ian filleting. The Gourdon Fish Houses were very much a family concern, with different members of the family contributing to the endeavour. Other non-family workers were also employed.

# HADDOCK CUTLETS



Haddock Cutlets, skin on, back fin removed, in pickle – of salt water, with colouring. The cutlets could also be undyed, with no colouring.

Courtesy of Ian Craig of Monkstone.

# KIPPERED HERRING



Kippers in pickle, with dill.

Courtesy of Ian Craig of Monkstone.

# EARLY DAYS

## WOMEN OF GOURDON PREPARING FINNAN HADDOCKS



Far right – **Mary Ritchie (nee Lownie)**, Jean Ritchie (nee Gellatley), Mary Ritchie (nee Rait)



Notice the head scarfs above, traditionally worn by the fisher lassies but here protecting the head from fibres in **the Gourdon flax-spinning mill, another occupation where women excelled.**

Images courtesy of **John Ritchie** – website [www.gourdon.org.uk](http://www.gourdon.org.uk)

# A SPECIAL CATCH

## 1950s



Proudly pictured with a very special catch – a **STURGEON** – are workers of John Lindsay’s Fish House - **Annie Nicholson (nee Horn), Lot Watson, Margaret Ritchie (nee Horn) and Rena Taylor** – brought in by the Ritchie boat, the “Happy Return” ME 149. The Queen chose to receive *her* sturgeon which was duly sent to her.

## TIME FOR A BREAK



Taking a break from the fish house - **Lot Watson, Vally Stewart (later Craig), Moira Watt Margaret Balneaves (later Duncan), c.1948** – across from Lindsay’s Fish House beside house at the top of the Gutty Harbour.

**A.Gove’s Fish house workers taking a photos call – 1986 – marking Ian Craig’s last day at Gove’s, prior to starting his own business, Monkstone.**



**Agnes Stewart, Margaret Andrew (later Strachan), Margaret Cargill (nee Stewart), Ian Craig, Betty Stewart, Chrissie Criggie, Jim Stewart: middle – Jean Harris (nee Allison), Moira Watt: front - John Gove, Eric Gove, sons of Alex Gove, Duncan Waiter.** Many of the workers here are family members and women outnumber men as so often in Gourdon Fish Houses.

# AT THE LIFEBOAT GALAS

The people of Gourdon enjoyed their high days and holidays when mothers, fathers, and children could relax as exemplified in the Life Boat Galas when big crowds turned out for the Wheel of Fortune, ably managed by Jim Stewart, fish salesman and concert party impresario, the cake and candy stalls, the teas, the trips on fishing boats and best of all the trips on the Lifeboat. Over the years Gourdon had five lifeboats for rescue at sea in addition to the Maggie Law Surfboat for nearer shore rescue. Full information about both rescue records and exploits can be found in Roy Soutar's invaluable books: information about the Maggie Law can be found on the Maggie Law Maritime Museums' website – [www.maggielaw.co.uk](http://www.maggielaw.co.uk)

*Call Out : Service Records of the Gourdon Lifeboats 1878-1969*, transcribed from the original by Roy Soutar.

*A Wild and Rocky Coast*, Reprinted on behalf of the Maggie Law Maritime Museum Gourdon from the original by Roy Soutar, 1988, sponsored by Stonehaven Heritage Society 2014.

Gourdon's lifeboats:

“Young George Irlam” – 1878

“Theophilus Sidney Echalaz” – 1892

“Moss” – 1919

“Margaret Dawson” – 1936 – Gourdon's first motor lifeboat – petrol engine

“Edith Clauson Thue” – 1952 – twin-screw diesel – 1966

After 91 years of service the Gourdon Lifeboat station was closed – May, 1969.

The “Maggie Law”, built by James (Jeems) Mowatt in 1890 operated for 46 years, till 1936, saving 36 lives during that period.

**A typical scene – crowds on the pier at a Lifeboat Gala -1950s?**



Courtesy of John Ritchie [www.gourdon.org.uk](http://www.gourdon.org.uk)

# GALA DAYS – 1960s



Fancy Dress Parade – Gala Day - outside the Village Public Hall – 1960s  
Time to relax and have fun – for all.

# WITH THE HERRING

## FOLLOWING THE HERRING



PICTURED centre, above, is Mrs Colina Church, mother of the Church sisters, and her two aunts — Jess and Janet — who were part of a Gourdon herring-barrelling crew working at Great Yarmouth at the turn of the century.

### *Church sisters re-united*

WHEN their sister, Mary, jetted in from Australia on Tuesday, there was a happy family gathering of the Church sisters at the "Pend", William Street. After many years away, Mary Church (Mrs Aspinall), who was born in Gourdon in 1925 and emigrated "Down Under" shortly after World War 2 ended, travelled from her home in Cogarth, near Sydney, to spend two months with her sister, Peggy (Mrs Officer).

And Elsie Church (Mrs Fontaine), who arrived from Toronto, Canada, last week, is also over here for two months. Although her roots are firmly in Gourdon, Elsie was actually born in British Columbia in 1913, but came to Gourdon with her mother, Mrs Colina Church, who returned at the outbreak of World War 1 in 1914. Elsie returned to Canada in 1929 but has been back, on holiday, on a number of occasions.

Her sister Peggy collects every copy of "The Leader," and the old stories of Gourdon's past have helped jog the memories of her childhood in the village. She remembers fetching milk and other messages for "Codlin' Rob" Gowans and says she always received a "maik" (an old halfpenny) from him.

The Church sisters are descended from the Mowatt family on their mother's side. A distant relative, Alexander Mowatt of Fergus, Ontario, has been appointed genealogist for the Mowatt families in North America, and he has already traced 60 family lines, many of which originated in Gourdon and Inverbervie, as well as other parts of Kincardineshire.

(Maggie Law Maritime Museum archive cutting)

Gourdon women following the herring to Great Yarmouth as part of a Gourdon herring barrelling crew were also playing their part in the great national yearly migration of lassies from all parts of Scotland, following **the silver darlings** to ports up and down the east coast, particularly to Yarmouth and Scarborough. Compare the picture of the Great Yarmouth farlins, the large containers above and below at Peterhead with the barrelling picture at the top of the Gourdon harbour, page 21. There are no farlins in view there though I have been told by an older Gourdon resident that he remembers the farlins. The barrelling seems to have been completed in Gourdon in this photo and the farlins removed. Farlins can be seen in the 1900 photo below of herring barrelling at the Railway Loading Bank (page 71).

## HERRING BARRELLING – PETERHEAD – 1890s



Notice the farlins, the barrels and the baskets in Peterhead, and Gourdon below where the barrelling seems to have been completed and the farlins removed. (Courtesy of Aberdeenshire Museums Service: photo – Jamie Cutts).

## GOURDON – 1890s



# HERRING BARRELLING

## AT THE RAILWAY LOADING BANK – GOURDON

1900



The farlins are full of herring; the women stand ready to barrel, dressed in headscarves and aprons; the horse and cart attend. The barrels are piled high on the bank.<sup>22</sup> The Railway Goods Shed doors are open. A herring station building was completed in 1908 but by then the herring fishing had collapsed. The building was across the road from the Loading Bank and would become the site of the Gourdon Flax Spinning Mill, later the Selbie Works. (Roy Souter, *Mearns Memories*, personal scrapbook of Alison Ingram). When I was a child my father leased part of the Goods Shed as a fishing store for his gear and I recall the time during school playtime when I saw him arrive at the Shed one morning, with with delight and we exchanged waves. We were schooled in the Gourdon Hall after the school burned down and the Public Hall was right opposite the Loading Bank. I was in Primary 7 at the time. Later Dr Beeching would close the Inverbervie – Montrose Railway which had served Gourdon fishermen and locals so well from 1865 when it first opened.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Margaret Gowans (nee Dorward) who supplied the 1914 baiting photo of the Cargill and Freeman family at work, page 23, provided an interesting detail, on coopering in Gourdon – Andy Freeman, father of the Andrew Freeman, pictured in the 1914 photo was a cooper. He was probably a busy man, making barrels in the lead-up to the herring season!

<sup>23</sup> Robert Gove, *Gourdon in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, pamphlet supported by Gourdon Mission Hall, page 6 cites 1864/65 as the opening date.

## THE SILVER DARLINGS

### *Come a' ye fisher lassies* by Ewan MacColl

Come a' ye fisher lassies, it's come awa' wi' me  
Fae Cairnbulg and Gamrie and fae Inverallochie,  
Fae Buckie and fae Aberdeen and a' the country roon,  
We're awa' tae gut the herrin', we're awa' tae Yarmouth toon.

Ye rise up in the morning wi' your bundles in your hand,  
Be at the station early or you'll surely hae to stand,  
Tak plenty to eat and a kettle for your tea,  
Or you'll surely dee o hunger afore ye get tae Yarmouth quay.

The journey it's a lang ane and it taks a day or twa,  
And when you reach your lodgins sure it's soun' asleep you fa',  
But you rise at five wi' the sleep still in your e'e,  
You're awa' tae find the gutting yards along frae Yarmouth quay.

It's early in the morning and it's late into the night,  
Your hands a' cut and chappit and they look an unco' sicht,  
And you greet like a bairn when you put them in the bree,  
And you wish you were a thousand mile awa' frae Yarmouth quay.

There's coopers there and curers there and buyers canny chiels,  
And lassies at the pickling and others at the creels,  
And you'll wish that the fish had been a' left in the sea  
By the time you finish guttin' herrin' on the Yarmouth quay.

We've gutted fish in Lerwick and Stornoway and Shields,  
We've worked along the Humber 'mongst the barrels and the creels;  
Whitby, Grimsby, we've traivelled up and doon,  
But the place to see the herrin' is the quay at Yarmouth toon.

*The Silver Darlings* (poem by Halfin and Hulskramer)

Oh herrings are harvests that fishermen glean,  
Where flashes the silver through deep oceans green,  
And when herring harvests reach old Aberdeen,  
They're known as the silver darlings.

*Chorus*

Silver darlings on Aberdeen quay,  
Brought by the fishermen home from the sea  
To the city that stands 'twixt the Don and the Dee,  
The home of the Silver Darlings.

The boats leave the harbour, their wakes spreading wide,  
And empty they roll with the swell of the tide,  
Oh soon may their hatches be thrown open wide  
With a catch of the silver darlings.

*Chorus*

There's ice on the rigging and death down below,  
With the gales screaming wild and the glass hanging low.  
The wives and the sweethearts are women who know  
The price of the silver darlings.

*Chorus*

## **THE TRADITIONAL FISHWIFE: BETSY SOUTER: 1842 - 1915**

### **A JOHNHAVEN FISHWIFE WITH GOURDON CONNECTIONS**

**A STURDY, UNDAUNTED CHARACTER, STEADILY CAPTURING OUR GAZE AND OUR ADMIRATION, OUT OF THE PAST.**



**Betsy Souter**, Grandmother of **Roy Souter**, Gourdon fisherman, lifeboatman, skipper and writer, is garbed in typical Fishwife's clothes – plaid headscarf, fringed shawl, braided skirt – creel on her back, basket in hand, ready for her rounds, out of Johnshaven, up the Johnshaven “partan road” to Benholm Castle and the countryside beyond. Information supplied by Eileen Townsend who adds that Roy Souter, Betsy's grandson told her Betsy walked the Partan Roadie (Gourdon's Roadie perhaps?) over the Garvock to Laurencekirk and beyond. Widowed in 1889 she perforce carried on hawking fish right up to the outbreak of the First World War when she became too infirm to continue, always working on her knitting wires or with a book in hand.

*“Betsy Souter”*

A Tribute to a noble Johnshaven fishwife by Eileen Townsend, writer and historian, Johnshaven.<sup>24</sup>

*For forty years she trod the Partan Roadie  
Frae Haughs o’ Benholm owre the Garvock and into the Howe,  
Her auld bauchled shoon like herself  
Worn down wi’ age and long miles travelled,  
A heavy creel on a back now bent wi’ toil.*

*Gnarled hands worked the wool on her wires  
As she made her painful way  
Up the path to the castle of Benholm,  
Just ‘the auld fishwife’ to those inside,  
But more noble a soul than any lady  
Who ever lived within its ancient walls*

Gourdon certainly had its own “Partan Roadie”, now almost totally overgrown, along towards the end of Westbay at the side of the final house in the row and up the brae to the main road – quite a steep climb, often tackled and easily conquered by ourselves as children. The road, as the name suggests was used by the creel fishermen to haul their catch of partans (crabs) for onward transport to market by the main road, termed the High Road, as opposed to the Low Road, along the shore to Inverbervie in the North and Johnshaven in the South – hard and heavy work for the fishermen, labouring to the top with their catch. Later the Railway line would parallel that shore road and more importantly provide the transport for boxes of partans. I recall as a child my father (Alex Craig) preparing boxes of crabs for rail transport via Montrose and onwards to Baxter’s of Billingsgate, London – a whiff of faraway places and almost magical connections. Occasionally there would be telegrams noting that some crabs had been dead on arrival, a hazard in those days of slower transport. Sometimes I would be asked to run to the Station Master, Mac, with the “schaidel” (schedule) for the onward transport of my father’s catch that day – an important “mission” for me as a child!

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<sup>24</sup> *The Maggie Law Maritime Museum Poetry Anthology*, page 34

## A GOURDON FISHWIFE – MYSIE DOUGLAS (NEE CRAIG)

A Gourdon equivalent of Betsy Soutar was Mysie Douglas who delivered fish to nearby Inverbervie - perhaps also to Johnshaven – soon after the time of Betsy Soutar – a limited round compared with Betsy’s travels up country. She would have accessed the family Fish House in Gourdon for her sales : **perhaps herring formed part of her wares.** A child in the 50s, I remember **Mysie, my Deddie’s (Adam Craig’s) sister,** my great aunt, garbed in black – a long black skirt/dress, and black shawl – resembling the traditional fish wife apparel. Around the house she added a black, spotted/polka dotted overall/apron as did my Granny (**Elizabeth.Craig (nee Mowatt)**) and many of the other older women of the village.

Another Gourdon woman, **Georgina Criggie (nee Anderson)** also prepared and traded fish on a small scale, in the fish wife tradition. She was known to produce excellent “yellow fish” – finnan haddock, with the bone in, of course. My father always took our own supply of haddocks for our own meals to Georgina for curing – straight from the boat to Georgina to the table – delicious. Of course in early days, fish wives had to prepare and cure their fish themselves.

*Caller Herring by Lady Nairn* (“Caller herrin” was the cry of the Newhaven fishwives, on their rounds selling their freshly caught herring, their creels or baskets on their backs)<sup>25</sup>

*Chorus*

*Wha’ll buy my caller herrin  
They’re bonnie fish and halesome farin,  
Wha’ll buy my caller herrin,  
New drawn frae the Forth.*

*When ye were sleepin on yer pillows,  
Dream’s ye aught o’ our puir fellows,  
Darkling as they faced the billows,  
Aa to fill the woven willows!*

*O when the creel o herrin passes  
Lassies clad in silk and laces,  
Gather in their raw pellises,  
Cast their heads and screw their faces.*

*O neighbour wives now tent my tellin,  
When the bonnie fish ye’re sellin,  
At a word aye be your dealin,  
Truth will stand when a’thing’s failin.*

*Wha’ll buy my caller herrin,  
They’re no brought here without brave darin,  
Buy my caller herrin,  
Ye little ken their worth. Final Chorus*

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<sup>25</sup> See pages 21 and 69 - 71 above for the herring barrelling at Gourdon

## AS TIME GOES BY – DECLINE

For decades, throughout the 50s, 60s and 70s in particular, the rotation of fishing practice continued steadily with line fishing in the winter and creel or seine net fishing in the summer months. Some fishermen preferred to go to the net, some the creels in the summer. **Govie (Andrew Gove Cargill)** in his Oral History Interview <sup>26</sup> clarifies dates and times and specifies the advent of the seine net:

There wis, ye see that wis a seasonal thing too. (Govie is referring her to shellfishing). That wis the summer time. Efter Merch when the fish spawned, and the inshore fishing sort o fell awa, twa/three gaed ti the creels, twa/three gaed ti the lines and then about the late 20s, they first started - they gaed ti the flukes – first – and the Danish seine nit came in, the haddock nit. Now that had only started about – here onywy – about the late twenties, early thirties and I can remember in 1934/35, my uncle coming fae the herber, up ti the herber, and shoutin up the stair, “Willie Cargill come eer!” He says, “Gae wa doon the pier and see fit they’re dohin .” And this wis Davity Andrew and Joe Craig wi the *Trustful* – (*Oh right, aye aye*)<sup>27</sup> – wi a twa cylinder engine and a haddock nit and they gaed oot and they were i the herber filling boxes and they were up ti thir waists, wi sma fishies – (*Goodness*). And Geordie Mill sed that then, he says, “They’re startin something noo at they’ll nae feenish” Ye see the results o it. (Willie Cargill, Reid Lichtie – an Arbroathman, was Govie’s father)

Much later and for a short time only most fishermen invested in drift nets for sea salmon fishing till the practice was banned in 1962.

My father, Alex Craig mending seine nets during retirement for Stephen and Peter Morrison of the “Quest” - on a snowy day in the late 1970s/early 1980s. After selling his boat the “Trustful” ME 132, my father went to the salmon fishing at Bervie and then at Rockhall for a few years: as a young man before the War, he had gone to the salmon fishing at Carnoustie/ East Haven – a halcyon period in his memory. He retired in time to avoid the final decline of line fishing.



<sup>26</sup> Six Oral History Interviews (with illustrative photos) are archived in the Maggie Law Maritime Museum, Gourdon, including Govie’s invaluable and informative interview : five of these are also archived with Aberdeen University’s Elphinstone Institute where they were originally filed after I had completed them. The Interviews are available as hard/paper copies, online, and on CDs for those who prefer to listen to real Gurden speech!

<sup>27</sup> Interviewer excited because her father later also skippered another *Trustful*

## THE END

However, as time went by, overfishing rendered catches smaller and made carving a living from the sea harder and harder. In addition that other hardiness – the hard way of life – was becoming less acceptable to younger men in Gourdon and to the women.

Finally by 1986 line fishing came to an end when the last boat to fish the sma' lines – Alex Welsh's boat, "Enterprise" ME 155 stopped the practice. Some net fishing continued on a small scale for a time but after the Designated Ports legislation of 1999, controlling the landing of white fish, and other regulations controlling and licensing landings even at small ports like Gourdon, and as the volume of fish landed at Gourdon continued to decrease, by 2004 Gourdon was no longer landing white fish though shellfish could still be landed and still is to this day – crabs (partans), now including velvet crabs, lobsters, latterly also clams/scallops and prawns. This licensing may have contributed in a small way to the end of fish markets at Gourdon and the fish merchants had to procure all their fish from Aberdeen, instead of partly from Gourdon catches. The reputation of Gourdon white fish was such that for years thereafter people from afar would still go to Gourdon to buy Gourdon fish and many people still favour "Gourdon" fish today.: they prefer to buy their fish from the Gourdon vanmen.<sup>28</sup>

The fishermen of Gourdon now had to seek other employment – Govie Cargill, John Cargill, Bobby Criggie, Robert Gowans, Charlie Lownie, David Lownie, Roy Soutar. Charlie Lownie listed for me his different jobs over the subsequent years: firstly at the Gourdon Mill/ Selbie Works; Mc Intosh Donald at Portlethen (1990s) after the Mill closed its doors in 1997; Nicolson's Milk delivery; finally at Whittaker's Engineering works. At certain times he would also go to the creels in the summer as well as work at his current job. My second cousin, John Craig started his building business after the fishing failed. Some men went to the country for work, including seasonal work such as tattie picking.

Currently in Gourdon today, in 2015, there are four boats working full time at shell fishing (landing shell fishing is still permitted) and a few part-timers. Sadly, as noted above, for some years now, Gourdon has not been a viable landing port for white fish and codlings are virtually non-existent to inshore fishing.

The full time boats, depending on the suitability of the weather, of course, are: Ian Balgowan – "Harvester" – A865; Wayne Barbour – "Sine Bhan" ME 27 ; Kevin Birse – "Marnik" ME 15; Alan Donaldson – "Emma Kathleen" – ME 87.

Alan Donaldson fishes for clams/scallops while the others focus on crabs (partans) and lobsters and velvet crabs.

Part timers – sometimes fitting in the creels with their day jobs are:

Raymond Craig – "Girl Sandra" ME 2 ; Johnny Stewart – "Stroma Isle" – ME 216.

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<sup>28</sup> Review of Fisheries, OECD, 2001 – information supplied by Ruaraidh Wishart of Aberdeen City and Shire Archives and by Stuart McCubbin, Business Manager, Marine Scotland Compliance. The latter highlights the fact that Gourdon was never actually a designated landing port and was not listed in the 2004 Review. **See Appendix 4, page93 for McCubbin's full explanation of landings ("blackfish" controls) and fish markets, citing environmental and pricing issues.**

Johnny Stewart fishes for prawns and scallops – Raymond for crabs and lobsters in the summer only, while all the others fish also during the winter. As previously noted in earlier times fishermen went to the lines in the winter and the creels or seine net in the summertime. The Stewart family in earlier times would also go to the prawns off the west coast of Scotland.

Buyers include Douglas Welsh of Gourline, Murray McBay of Johnshaven,, Islay Shellfish of Stornaway for velvet crabs which are transported onwards to Spain

Traditionally Gourdon fishermen would have rejected velvet crabs, now so popular with the Spanish Market. In my father's time velvet crabs were a rarity in any case: they flourish now in the absence of crab-eating codling. The creel men and the scallopers find it hard to make a living, going to sea only on days when weather permits, unlike the bigger trawlers and scallop dredgers who can fish far afield, stay out for days and overcome bad weather and storms. Of course oil is an expensive commodity – another factor relevant to the decline of inshore fishing. Quotas, fish sizing, relating to sustainable fishing and days-at sea are additional factors in the mix.

The serious implications of the decline are clearly exemplified in the Oral History Interview I conducted with Alan Donaldson, Skipper of the “Emma Kathleen” ME 87 on 16 June, 2007. As previously noted and footnoted the Oral History Interviews are archived at both the Maggie Law Maritime Museum and Aberdeen University's Elphinstone Institute. Alan had been outlining the difficulties of making a living at the sea, fishing out of Gourdon and spoke of his favourite kind of fishing:

.... if I could get a livin trawlin for fish, I wid be back at that, like. Bit I div like gaen ti the scallops, I do. *Ye do?* I'm the only een that's stuck at it aboot here. I'm the only een that seems ti really like it like bit it's a job that ye like or ye dinna like.

He raises a related matter and his dismay at not being allowed to land his catch at Gourdon:

.... if I can get a livin at hame - bit trawlin for white fish wid jist beat gaen ti the scallops, if I kid get a livin at it bit I widna get a livin at it here. That wid be mi favourite – trawlin for white fish because if I went back ti that noo, yer nae actually legally allowed ti land fish on the pier at Gurden

He explains when landing white fish ended at Gourdon:

....

that wid be – *Cor blimey!* - five year ago, fower year ago, five year ago and we went ti see – Robert Smith,<sup>29</sup> me, aabody, Ian Barbour, Stephen, Peter, Wayne, even though they were at the creels, we aa got a meetin, well, went ti see him at Banchory fir a start and then we got a meetin wi him. He come doon the pier, Robert Smith and some EU wifie and he said he wid doh fit he could. Obviously he couldna doh enough and that's Gurden. Yer not allowed ti legally ti land – ye can land a prawn or a scallop or a partan or a labster bit ye cannot land white fish and Arbroath is not a designated landing port.<sup>30</sup>

However, Stuart McCubbin, Business Manager, Marine Scotland Compliance assured me that Gourdon was never actually a designated landing port and was not listed in the 2004 Review but lost out to other similar regulations involving control of “blackfish” landings and environmental issues concerning the demise of the Gourdon fish market. (Appendix 4, page 93). Now in 2015 most of the East coast ports are undesignated, including Arbroath and Aberdeen : Peterhead is still designated and I believe fish delivered from Peterhead can still be purchased by fish merchants in Aberdeen.

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<sup>29</sup> Constituency M.P. at this time - 2007

<sup>30</sup> Oral History Interview with Alan Donaldson, Full Transcript, [www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstonekist](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstonekist) and [www.maggielaw.co.uk](http://www.maggielaw.co.uk)

## **AFTERMATH: "Death Row"** (Words and Music - David Craig, formerly of Gourdon, now Johnshaven, musician and song writer)

On a bench at the harbour the auld fishermen sit  
And talk o times lang ago,  
Reminissin and pittin the world tae its richts  
But Willie he ca'd it death row.

Efter years at the sea then there's nithin tae dae  
Jist sit an while awa time  
Mindin o storms an big shots o fish  
Fin they were a in their prime.

As the years they roll on, one by one they get less  
Jist had enough, so they go.  
Nae fishermen left tae replace them that leave.  
Aye Willie still ca's it death row.

Well, lest week wiz bonnie, so I hid a seat  
Fin Willie says, "Quick min, let's go.  
We're sittin here yarnin an nae thinkin richt  
Coz noo we're the anes on death row."

Am sittin here noo on a fine summer's day  
Lookin like I'm the last ane tae go.  
There's naebody here - jist masel an ma thochts.  
Looks like I'm the last on death row.  
Looks like I'm the last on death row.



**Henry Lownie, Neil Ritchie, Alex Welsh, Leslie Davidson, Len Noke.**

Outside the old Harbourmaster's Office (previously Dovey Craig's oil shed) where they were out in all weathers, in lang drawers and thick semits though for a time they were inside the office which was heated till the Council got round to disconnecting the supply. Ian Craig of Monkstone gave them shelter in the fish house where they could not see the "steer" around the harbour: they resumed their

observations outside.

## GOURDON HARBOUR

A quiet scene from earlier times – lines on the pier



Heyday at the harbour, 1960s – fish market, boats



## FAREWELL

**“Tide of Change”** Words and music by Sue Briggs, Community Education Officer, folk musician. The poem, written in 1998 on the steps of the Tolbooth, Stonehaven, reflects on the decline of fishing in North East harbours, the traditional way of life swept away by “this thing they call progress” a fate that has already overtaken many harbours from Gourdon to Gamrie.

**“Tide of Change”**

... there once was a time when these harbours  
moved to the tune of the seas and the skies  
but now – where there once was a fisherman’s future  
lies the untold decay of our times ...

so think of the changes our lifetime has brought us  
as you sit with your conscience forever on hold  
and think of the living once tied to these places  
where the fishing boats fade with the day ..  
with the day...

the sea laps the berths of those ships sailed for pleasure  
that fill up the harbour in summer and spring  
but the working man’s boat was his sole way of earning  
a place for his life on this shore ..  
on this shore ...  
on this shore ...  
on this shore ...

we are swept by the wave of this thing they call progress  
as history sinks to the deep rolling sea  
it’s the price we pay for the times that we live in  
where fishing is lost to the tide ..  
tide of change ...  
tide of change ...  
tide of change ...

# TRIBUTES

## TO MY MOTHER AND FATHER

I wrote the following poem after a frustrating time searching for a photo of my mother baiting in the shed at 7 Mowatt's Lane, Gourdon. I could picture the whole scene so clearly in my mind that I had to get in down in writing – at least!

### “Finding the Photo”

It's missing – lost – I've searched and searched in vain  
In drawers – in cupboards doon in the auld hoose.  
My mother baiting in the warm, bright shed,  
Neatly dressed in royal blue overall.  
Snapped – looking up and smiling cheerfully,  
Greeting her student daughter, home for the weekend.

She took a good photo, always, natural, at ease.  
She'd been hindered that darkening day,  
Still at her eident, patient, skilful work –  
My father's “bonnie fisher lass”, though country-born –  
My mother.



My mother, Ciss Craig aboard the “Trustful”, ME 132, 1960s/70s



My mother and myself on a walk along the low road to Bervie, early 1960s.

The following poem was written for an anthology for school pupils, upper primary, lower secondary, entitled "Fit Like, Yer Majesty": it also forms a tribute to my mother and father, recounting an incident at sea where my father and his crew of the "Trustful" ME 132 nearly lost their lives in a sudden gale. The incident became part of our family history and strangely echoed an earlier incident where my Granny lost her four brothers, my father's uncles on the Mowatt side of the family. The "Morning Light" had been following the herring to Scarborough and returned to Gourdon to resume winter fishing, only to be lost in a sudden gale which foundered the boat. I append a newspaper cutting reporting the tragedy.

**"Gurden Herber" (1950s) (Celia Craig)**

Fin I wis a lassie in Gurden  
It wis doon at the herber we'd be  
The hale lang, glorious summer,  
Watchin the boats comin in fae the sea.

*Harvester, Reaper and Happy Return,*  
*Star o' Bethlehem, Quest an aa*  
But the best o them aa wis the *Trustful*,  
My father, the Skipper sae braw.

Past the auld, curvin horse-shoe braakwater  
Syne landin their catch on the pier,  
Then salesman, and merchants cam clusterin roond  
At the fish market, makin a steer.

**Yellow oilskins, blue een and a smile,**  
My father wis in fae the sea.  
The partans and labsters were landit  
Wi maybe a fry ti wir tea.

It wis gey cauld and dreich in the winter  
**My mither wis baitin the line**  
Fin a gale drove the *Trustful* past Gurden  
And she thocht that my father she'd tine.

Soakin weet, they had made the next herber,  
Then hame, safe and sound in his bed.  
Eneuch o thae coorse, drublie winters  
Bring back glorious summers instead.

Strangely enough also, though I can clearly picture my father coming into the harbour in yellow oilskins and smiling, blue-eyed and cheerful, I have no photo of this. On the actual day of the storm, I clearly recall my mother taking me through to their bedroom where my father was sleeping peacefully and her saying, "We nearly lost him the day". What a joy to have him safe and sound. I have written a tune for the poem which I hope to transcribe in manuscript in due course. Other Gourdon boats had had to run for Catterline and Stonehaven harbours though some made it home to Gourdon: my father made successfully for Johnshaven. I regard the two poems above as a loving tribute to my mother and father.



My father setting up a line, c.1961 at 7 Mowatt's Lane, Gourdon.



My father, Alex Craig with some creels stored behind the gable of 16 Arbuthnott Street, Gourdon where he lived as a boy. 1970s.



My father had several hobbies, sports/pastimes one of which was archery which I shared with him, c. 1962



He also played different instruments, particularly the violin/fiddle but also the guitar, banjo, flute. I accompanied him on the piano. This photo up the hill above Bervie on a family picnic is early 1970s. The music on the stand is Scott Skinner's **Scottish Airs**, a firm favourite, especially "The Laird of "Drumblair".

# GOURDON'S HEAVY BLOW.

## CREW OF THE "MORNING LIGHT" LOST.



Portraits of brothers, victims of the sad disaster, are presented in above group. The centre one in the back row is Alexander Smart (the skipper), who is a half-brother of the others. On the skipper's left is David Mowatt, and on his right is Alexander. Graham, the youngest of the four, is inset. The parents, Alex. and Elizabeth Mowatt, Mowatt's Lane, Gourdon, are in front.

Gourdon has received a heavy blow indeed, which has fallen like a shadow on the community. Like all fishing places, Gourdon's life is punctuated by just such blows as the one before which it is now reeling. For this, the latest disaster in a neighbourhood where the toll of the sea is heavy, has gripped the hearts of the villagers, and for the time being cast its darkness over their comings and goings. The incident and the sadness of it in all its circumstances form the sole topic of conversation. The thought of it is apparent in everybody's mind. A visitor on Saturday was struck by the unwonted stillness which hung over the usually busy streets. A sense of bereavement seemed to fill the air. Few people were about save at the harbour, where the wind whistled through the rigging of the yaws and skiffs curtseying to each other on the swirling tide, and where the fishermen gazed seaward over a foam-flecked waste of rolling water breaking angrily against the pierheads.

### Swamped.

On Friday morning last the boats were working from four to five miles south-east of the harbour. It had been blowing in capfuls of wind throughout the night, and it is a pathetic fact, in view of what eventually took place, that William Smart, the skipper of the Morning Light, when he got to the fishing ground, turned before one of these boisterous spells and made as if for home. But the gust lasted only a few minutes, and when it fell away the Morning Light's course was altered and the craft manœuvred seaward again. Later came the fateful hurricane. The boat was not of so heavy a type as some of the others in the fleet, and was working well in between the bigger craft and the shore. She was observed before the gale burst upon them, and when the fishermen had time to look about after seeing to their own safety she was not visible. It had all been over in an instant, for had the unfortunate crew been in difficulties for even a few minutes their plight, from the position they

were in, would have been certain to attract attention. Sailing over the locality where the Morning Light was last noticed, a scull basket, used for carrying lines, a box or two, and the buoy locally known as a "flag," to which unhailed lines are attached, were observed. Overhead nearby wheeled a dozen or two reaguils, brought to the spot it is now thought by the fish which the crew had caught before they were sent to the bottom.

Talking to the fishermen one found the general opinion to be that the Morning Light had been swamped about nine o'clock. At that time, just after the breeze broke, a tremendous sea came along. One skipper described it as being as high as the local railway bridge—i.e., about 20 feet. It threatened to engulf his boat, a bigger craft than the one now missing, but it rose to the crest and on the wave rolled towards where the Mowatts were lying. The probability is that they had been hauling their lines on board, when the huge bank of water, breaking right over them, sent them down. What actually occurred, however, will remain a mystery of the sea.

### The Crew.

The crew consisted of William Smart (43), Alexander Mowatt (36), David Mowatt (35), and Graham Mowatt (29). Smart was a half-brother of the others. Alexander and Graham Mowatt each had a wife and child, and David was to be married this week. They belonged to one of the most respected and most industrious and successful families in the village. A month ago they returned from the English herring fishing the most successful of Gourdon crews. For nine trips out of Scarborough they had grossed between £400 and £500, and they were looking forward to being able to take matters more easily in the stormy days of winter. But it has been ordered differently. Practically the first bit of weather has denuded one family of four of its members, made two widows, and bereaved a prospective bride. Throughout the district the deepest sympathy is felt for the aged father and mother and all who are left sorrowing.

## CONCLUSIONS

Certain conclusions are clear and inescapable and often movingly exemplified in the many photos which feature the Women of Gourdon at work.

**Their hard work, dedication and skill are undeniable. In addition and perhaps even more admirable – their cheerfulness and goodwill, early, very early and late, very late, every day, over many years, outdoors and indoors; there were undoubtedly times when they felt scunnert, when life was grim. Above all proper emphasis must be placed on the skills deployed - the skill, speed and dexterity shown in their labour-intensive work.**

**Their work involved baiting the 1200 hook sma' lines throughout the line fishing season, autumn into spring, with at least two, sometime three mussels per hook and sheeling the mussels required for this – in excess of 2,000 mussels daily unless of course bad weather prevented the boats getting to the sea.**<sup>31</sup> However, then they might also be baiting an extra few hunks of line to add to the one already baited – maybe another 400/500 hundred hooks which would also require their quota of mussels. In earlier days (1920s – 30s) when line fishing was practised by some boats year round the job of the women would be totally unremitting.

Baiters could, of course, pay a sheeler to take away that part of the burden – if they could find a woman willing to take on the job. This could be difficult. Sometimes two women would share the job, sheeling half a line's bait each. Sometimes the baiter would be hanging on waiting for more mussels from her sheeler/s, unable to get the line finished. Sometimes family members would help out but were not always plentiful! A married man was blessed to have a wife to sheel and bait but a young unmarried man might have to employ a baiter and sheeler, lacking a sister or auntie to fill the gap.

**Other aspects of their work** might involve helping the man out with redding the back, helping to carry heavy boxes of mussels to the shed, and sluicing them down, ready for sheeling/baiting the next day.<sup>32</sup> In addition, of course, they would also prepare meals, wash clothes, clean the house, do the shopping, spring clean, probably involving the washing of blankets in those pre-duvet days, look after the children, do the household accounts (not the share dealing of the crew's wages at the end of the week, done by the Skipper), deal with bills and banking, and earlier on gather the sea grass (girse) to line the gob, cut up the strips of paper to keep the rows of mussels in lines. Some baiters would bait the line in the morning and work in the fish house some afternoons to help out if the fish merchant was in staffing difficulties. It is also worth mentioning that all this took place while women coped, almost secretly with what used to be termed "women's matters" – menstruating, with primitive sanitary provision in earlier times, pregnancy, giving birth, nursing dying family members, dealing with illness and death. Water might have to be fetched in early times and inside toilets or any toilets at all might be lacking. See Appendix 3, pages 91-92 for further activities often undertaken by women of Gourdon.

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<sup>31</sup> In his weekly articles in the Mearns Leader, *Gourdon Gleanings*, Roy Souter noted on Friday, 21 February, 1992, referring to the earlier period when line fishing could be year round, not seasonal, that 29 line boats would produce 116 lines baited each day the boats were at sea and with 1200 hooks per line 139, 200 hooks would be baited in all. See Appendix 2, page 90 for the complete article. (Maggie Law Maritime Museum cuttings archive).

<sup>32</sup> It is an interesting fact which pays testimony to the work involved that one hundredweight of mussels, a bag and a half were required to bait a line.

**Certain aspects, perhaps latterly in the 1950s and 60s and beyond, when the older practices and procedures had changed, when improvements in conditions had been put in place, may be less well-known nowadays. Certainly a few of the photos reveal aspects of which I had little knowledge.**

**Of these I would note the practice of baiting and sheeling outdoors, weather permitting.** In contrast when I was a lassie, the women baited in sheds, specially assigned for that purpose. However, I do also remember baiting taking place inside the house, in the kitchen. It may be too that some of the outdoor baiting took place in the summer months in earlier times if the boats were going to the lines all year

**Another related aspect involved paired work when the baiter was assisted by a second woman, usually a family member, baiting at her hand, i.e. baiting hooks and placing them on the baiting board, ready for the baiter to set in rows across the gob.** This kind of help of course, enabled the baiting to be completed far faster than if only one person was involved. I do not recall my mother ever having that kind of help and although it did undoubtedly take place in the 60s, it was more unusual than in earlier days. Of course, an aspect here might relate to the availability of extended family members.

**Also worth noting is the early focus on family members helping out with sheeling as well as baiting.** My father and his brothers, for example, used to have to sheel a jar of mussels each before going to school to help my Granny in the 1919 – 1920s. This was common practice though girls had housework to do rather than sheeling before school. The later photo (1970s) of Betty Stewart and her sister, Margaret Cargill (nee Stewart) and their sister-in-law, Nellie Dorward (nee Cargill) sheeling together illustrates this beautifully and reveals the continuity of the practice, again family members permitting. In the early hours of the morning they are working together before Betty goes to work in the Fish House and Margaret baits the line. By the time I was at school, girls in the family were not expected to do any work relating to baiting or sheeling at all. I do remember tipping hooks for my father when he was redding the line – but only a for a short time, maybe an hour or so and very informally, with no set time, no requirement, just as the impulse took you. In later years when line fishing had become seasonal, come the summer months the boats went either to the creels or the seine net and the women were free until the line fishing season came round again.<sup>33</sup>

**It must be noted too that the women in the fish houses also worked long and often cold hours** among cold water from early in the morning till dark: their various skills were essential. Today a few women still work in the two remaining Gourdon fish houses, with a third Monkstone recently closed.

**These aspects can be summed up under the heading of family and community help and co-operation, an invaluable feature of village life and the lives of the fishing community of Gourdon.**

**Without the vital, skilled work of the Women of Gourdon, line fishing could not have operated at all, nor operated so long in Gourdon.**

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<sup>33</sup> It is also worth noting that women in Gourdon, once married retained both appellations – their maiden name as well as their married name. For example, my Granny was Liz Mowatt as well as Mrs Craig and was routinely referred to as such. It may be that the married name was reserved for official purposes.

# APPENDIX 1

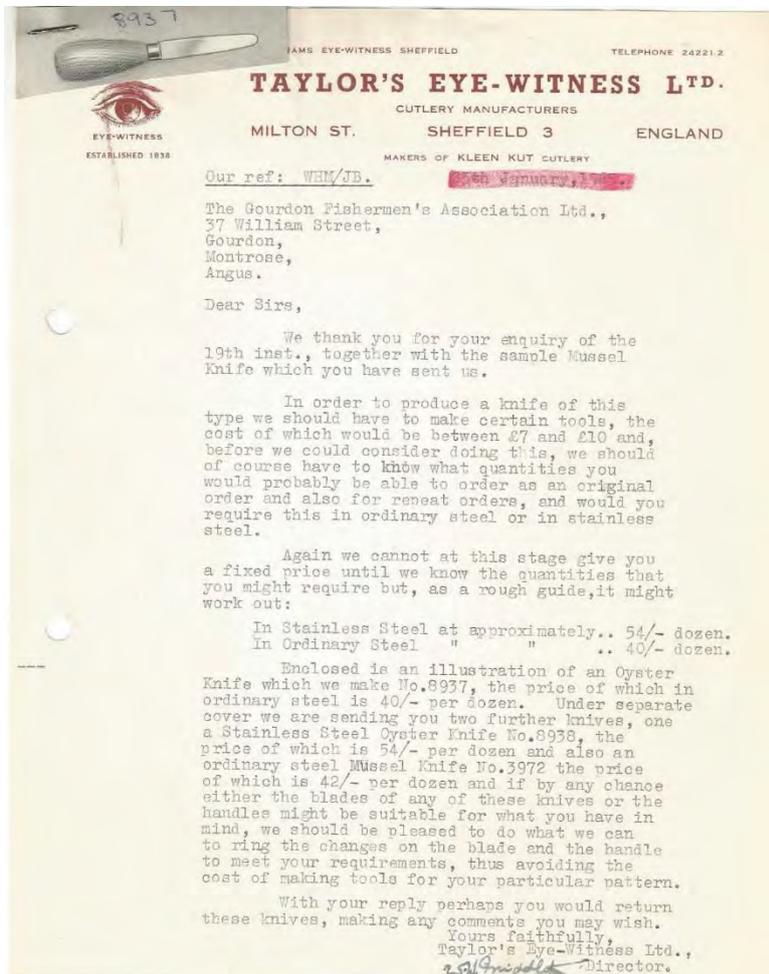
## SHEEL BLADES

The correspondence of the Gourdon Fishermen's Association<sup>34</sup> is not only fascinating to read but also a valuable historical record of a number of aspects of fishing in Gourdon, the requests, needs of the fishermen, information about the rising price of mussels as well as their quality among other topics – cod nets, salmon nets, hooks, mussel dredges. The correspondence is archived at the Maggie Law Maritime Museum. Letters cover the period 1957 – 1974.

One series of letters focuses on the needs of the women of Gourdon as sheelers – the acquisition of suitable sheel blades which had to be sharp, short-handled as well as round handled. In addition the company had to modify their tools to meet the Gourdon order. There is no letter actually placing an order. I seem to recall Gourdon sheelers customising their own blades

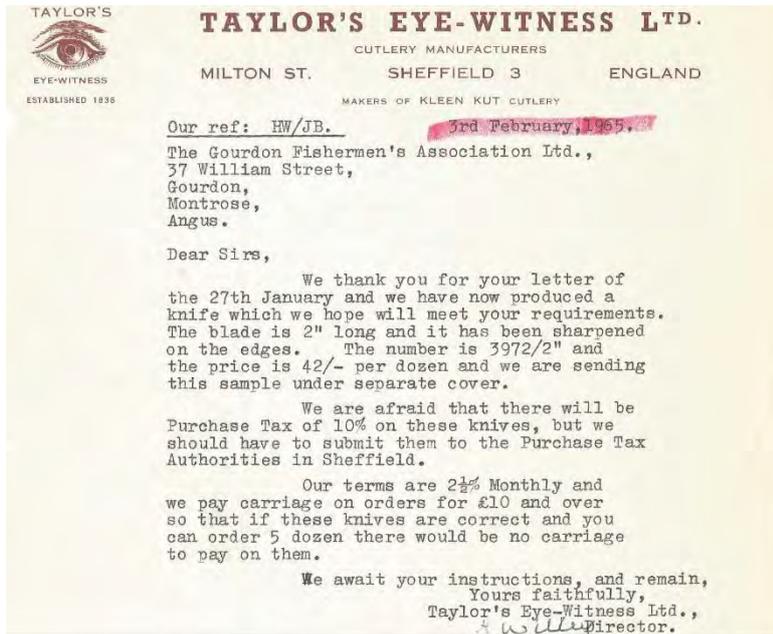
I append three letters, courtesy of the Maggie Law Maritime Museum

25 January 1965

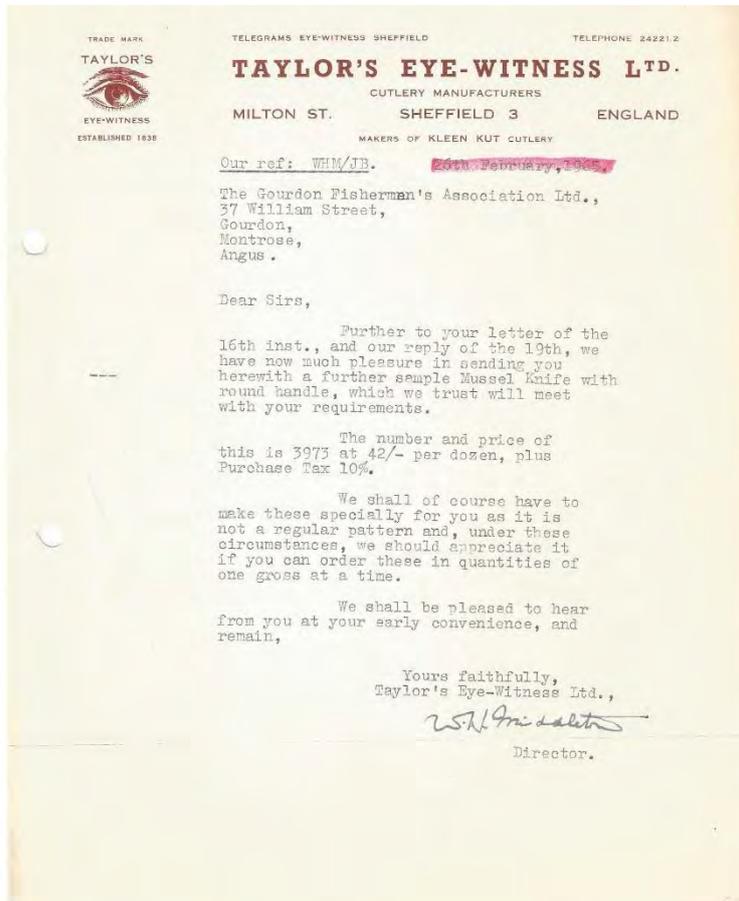


<sup>34</sup> The Gourdon Fishermen's Association was founded in the early 1950s, perhaps 1953/54 as far as I can ascertain from my respondents in the village.

3 February, 1965



26 February, 1965



## APPENDIX 2

### Gourdon Gleanings. Mearns Leader, Friday, February 21, 1992

**LINE FISHING**, which has been carried on from Gourdon for centuries, is now practically finished. Once a year-round occupation, and the mainstay of fishermen and their families, this ancient method of catching fish has been reduced to a mainly Winter-based activity.

In 1934 there were 29 line boats fishing from Gourdon. One local man with a mathematical brain reckoned that 116 lines would be baited each day the boats were at sea; and each line, if it was a proper length, would carry 1,200 hooks.

This meant that two or more mussels per hook had to be shelled to bait 139,200 hooks — and therefore mussel mortality was very high! Each line was three-quarters of a mile long and the total length of lines from 29 boats would stretch for approximately 87 miles — or the sea distance from Aberdeen to Berwick.

The horse hair “tippens”, to which the hooks were attached, were about 28 inches in length, and if all these tippens were placed end-to-end they would reach from Gourdon to Dundee.

One hundred million mussels or more were baited to 50 million hooks every year by the womenfolk of Gourdon.

Work it all out for yourself, and if you cannot sleep at night, count mussels, not sheep — but spare a prayer for the poor old mussel! And think of all the horses that had their tails shorn to supply all the line fishermen around the coast with horse hair to make their tippens!

Nearly four centuries ago, in 1617, two Gourdon fishermen — David Todd and Andrew Mearns — were sentenced to banishment for life, for cutting off and stealing tails from horses belonging to the Lairds of Haulkerton, Pitarrow, and Burnton.

Gourdon was not alone in prosecuting long line fishing. Every village and hamlet where a local boat could be launched had line fishermen. In his Statistical Account of 1799, Walter Thom writes that Bervie seemed at some period to have been a considerable fishing station, for lines, hooks and shells had been dug up in different parts of the town; but beyond the memory of man, there had been no professional fishermen — “probably they have removed to the village of Gourdon, which is a more eligible situation for carrying on that business”.

Sole survivor of long line fishing at Gourdon is the “Enterprise”, M.E.155, crewed by Alex Welsh and Bob Mellis. Both men are now approaching pension age, and unless the situation changes drastically, this will be the last Winter a crew will be working long-lines full-time.

In years to come, villagers and visitors will look at the banks of mussel shells that are a feature of Gourdon’s shoreline, and wonder what they were for and where they came from.

These shells have been lying at the “Back of the Mill” and the “Warehole” for many generations and form a strong part of Gourdon’s heritage. The women who shelled them have long since gone, and perhaps never again will a Gourdon fisherman’s wife sit at a “mussel troch” in the wee sma’ hours, shelling mussels to bait her husband’s line.

A way of life will be gone — unless someone can invent a machine to open mussels and perfect a foolproof one for baiting the mussels onto the hooks.

(Maggie Law Maritime Museum cuttings archive).

Roy Souter, author of *A Wild and Rocky Coast*,<sup>35</sup> fisherman, skipper, historian wrote a weekly column about Gourdon and its history for the Mearns Leader, featuring some fascinating early events. In this particular edition, he focuses on line fishing, supplying interesting ‘mathematical’ facts about quantities of mussels and lengths of lines.

<sup>35</sup> Roy Souter, *A Wild and Rocky Coast*, reprinted on behalf of the Maggie Law Maritime Museum, Stonehaven Heritage Society., 2014. See also *Souter’s History of Bervie and Gourdon, Part 1, including the Journal of Robert Gowan*, 1985, also by Roy Souter, available from Stonehaven Library/Aberdeenshire Libraries.

## APPENDIX 3

### STILL WORKING

Other jobs carried out by women included knitting jerseys/ganseys and doddies (mittens) for their men and going to the tattie picking and tattie planting outside baiting and sheeling seasons and after their baiting and sheeling days were over, collecting sticks.

Knitting a gansey was a complex piece of work, requiring four knitting needles to form a circuit, knitted in the round, often to an intricate pattern. A Sunday circuit in particular had special features such as the addition of pearl or mother-of-pearl buttons at the neck opening as well as a complex pattern. In two letters written by my mother (Ciss) to my father (Alex) during the War (World War 11) when he was on naval duty escorting merchant convoys to and from the United States and Canada, across the Atlantic, my mother wrote of the difficulties. I gather her first attempt had not been entirely successful. I learnt as a child when she recounted this episode that the jersey was too small: her second attempt was to be supervised by my father's sister, Lizzie and would have, she felt, a greater chance of success. In April 1940 she wrote:

*“I'm pleased with myself today though – I have started your circuit. Goodness knows how I'll pull through. Of course there's always Lizzie. Now you'll have to wear it because, you know, it'll be very special seeing as how you'll be able to say Cissie knitted it, eh! In a sense, you'll say. You know I haven't forgotten the last one was a failure but this will be to work in”.*

I know when I was a child that my father had a Sunday best circuit: my mother had obviously knitted at least one more jersey after the day- to- day one mentioned here!

In another letter (she wrote at least twice weekly and received regular replies), she reflects on the progress of the War, wondering if my father's youngest brother, Joseph, the baby of the family of four brothers and a sister would be able to carry out his plan of spending Whitsun weekend at the Royal Sailors' Rest.

*“I'm wondering if he (Joseph) will get there for in the news, I believe all holidays are being stopped. What do you think of things now? Here was me knitting away at your jersey and saying to your mother, you would be home to wear it. Things don't look like finishing up for a long time, I'm afraid They seem to be just getting down to it, eh! Well, we will just have to wait and see, Alex and keep our chin up.”*

Sadly Joseph was killed in action on 11 April 1943, aged 23 when his ship the HMS “Beverley” was torpedoed off Iceland.

## Collecting sticks

### A Charming Picture



Mary Freeman, Hannah Lownie, beside the dyke and Mimie Cargill behind the fence, their baiting and sheeling days long past, have been gathering sticks. They appear to be standing at the far side of the main road south, having previously crossed over to start their gathering on the brae and wood above, from the Gourdon side where a steep path, called the Partan Roadie reaches the road, once used by shell fishermen to get their catch to the main road for onward transport. Now having completed their collection, they have descended to the foot of the Gourdon Hill (Bikmane Hill, so identified on old maps) on their way home, happy with their successful foraging.

# APPENDIX 4

## LANDING PORT STATUS

Date: Wednesday, 28 October 2015, 9:08

Celia

Gourdon's status was the same as Stonehaven and many other small creeks around the Scottish coast. Basically it was not a designated port for landing whitefish, however you could still land fish (Cod) there below a certain weight in total (2 tonnes) from memory. These rules were introduced in the vessels licence to restrict and centralise the landings of whitefish which at the time suffered from the 'blackfish' crisis of the late nineties. By centralising landing points it made controlling the fleet more manageable.

During the 1980's/90's rules bringing in track records and reference periods also came in to play which in effect meant that historical track records may have precluded certain fisherman (via their licences) from operating in certain fisheries.

Gourdon fish houses bought most of their fish from Aberdeen even in the 1980s.

A number of factors would have come into play that would have finished the market in Gourdon irrespective of the demise of the fleet there.

New environmental rules would have meant that the market outside would have had to move into an undercover facility similar to Arbroath, economically that wouldn't have been an option in Gourdon.

The number of buyers in Gourdon could not support a regular fish market and vessels landed elsewhere to seek a more profitable price for their fish

(market forces).

Arbroath suffered the same fate about 10 years later, as did Buckie, Macduff, Whitehills and Wick.

Effectively it was the 1990's version of what happened after the first world war to the smaller creeks that were once dotted all along the Scottish coast

Happy to expand on this if you wish sometime, it is complicated to explain and write down in an email

Regards

**Stuart McCubbin**  
Business Manager  
Marine Scotland - Compliance

## APPENDIX 5

### ***Focus on Fishing : Arbroath and Gourdon* by Edna Hay and Bruce Walker, Abertay Historical Society, 1985**

This fascinating book records various interesting facts about line fishing, primarily in Arbroath but also in Gourdon.

**A Notes and References section (page 94) lists the Gourdon fishermen interviewed:**

A.M. Craig, 7 Mowatt's Lane, Gourdon (my father), Alexander Glass, 29 William Street,, Gourdon, Mr Walsh, 29 William Street, Gourdon. I wonder if the Mr Walsh was Alex Welsh or perhaps Alex Welsh senior, his father.

**The Gourdon baiters interviewed were:**

Mrs Donaldson, 27 William Street, Gourdon and Mrs Gowans, 1 Brae Road, Gourdon.

**I was intrigued to see photos of my father's boat, "Trustful", ME 132 included. I have permission to print them below.**



Fig. 42b. The Fife skiff, 'Trustfull', Gourdon, 1974.

My father is at the tiller: the crewman is Robert Warden, I think. Both men are in their oilskins. From Hay/Walker book, page, 92.



Fig. 42a. The Fife skiff, 'Trustful', Gourdon, 1974.

The “Trustful” ME 132 is here depicted on chains in the harbour where she had middle of the harbour moorings. Once there she could be reached by using the harbour coble which was sculled out to the boat and back as required. Normally she would be moored alongside the wall of the Middle Pier. (Hay/Walker, page 91).

The reason my father’s boat was chosen for the book emerges on page 87 where the authors discuss Sma’ line boats and focus on the Fifie build:

The fifie had an almost vertical stem and only a slight rake on the stern post, enough to make the reverse tapered rudder look vertical. This resulted in a boat with a keel almost the same length as the overall length of the boat, a good feature when ‘running’ but presenting problems for a boat ‘going about’. East coast fishermen preferred the fifie whereas fishermen from the north facing ports of the Moray and Pentland Firths preferred the zulu. A slightly narrower boat, with vertical stem and steeply raking stern, easier to manoeuvre owing to its reduced keel. (Page 84).

The authors continue, with reference to my father:

Mr Craig, one of the fishermen interviewed, worked from a fifie skiff a little over eight metres long. This skiff the “Trustful”, was built in St Monance for an Arbroath man before being purchased by Mr Craig. It was designed as a combined motor/sailing vessel and still retains many of the original sailing features. (Page 87)

The story of my father’s boat is rather more complex than the above summary allows. You may be interested to read **The Lifestory of a Fishing Boat** where I trace the background in some detail. Available on the Maggie Law Maritime Museum website under that title – [www.maggielaw.co.uk](http://www.maggielaw.co.uk)

The book also includes this photo of the wooden scull on Gourdon quay

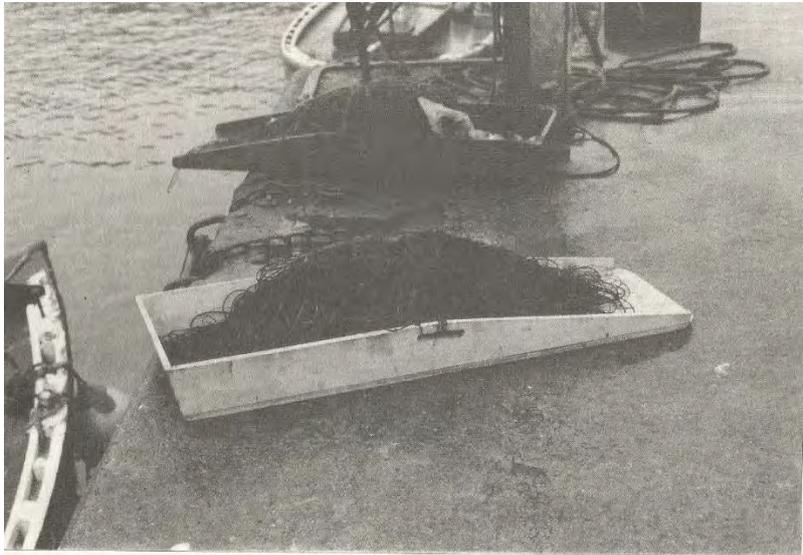


Fig. 24b. Timber scull on quay, Gourdon.

This photo affords an interesting comparison with Fishwife, Betsy Souter, depicted on page 74 of *A Tribute to the Women of Gourdon*



Fig. 28a. Fisher girls carrying home empty rips after a day selling fish in the Angus Glens, 1931.  
(D C Thomson)

(Hay/Walker, page, 74)

# GLOSSARY – FISHING TERMS USED IN THIS BOOK

## FROM – GUID GURDEN WORDS GLOSSARY<sup>36</sup>

### Explanatory Notes

Scots Words - making up the Scots language, spelt in the traditional way, marked Sc or Ne Sc (North East Scots) - widely used in Gurden

Gourdon Words - part of the Scots language, considered to be unique to Gourdon, spelt to indicate the Gourdon pronunciation, marked G

Abbreviations - n- noun; v - verb - pt - past tense; pp - past participle; pres.p - present participle; adj.- adjective; adv.- adverb; pron. - pronoun; prep. - preposition; conj.- conjunction; dim.- diminutive; expres. - expression ; pl.- plural

Phrases and expressions appear under the main word.

Alternative spellings are separated by a /

Celia Craig

August 2013

**bark/barkin** - v Sc/G - to preserve by barking, preserving a line using "bark" - **barkin the line** - a process of preserving lines by boiling in water to which the substance "bark" (originally the tormentil plant) has been added.

**barkit** - - adj. Sc/G - the colour produced by "barking" - see above. Example a "barkit jumper" - a fisherman's smock, originally of canvas, latterly of cotton, sometimes with oilskin sleeves, also originally dyed using "bark"

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<sup>36</sup> Celia Craig, *Guid Gurden Words Glossary*, [www.maggielaw.co.uk](http://www.maggielaw.co.uk) - available for download.

canvas, latterly of cotton, sometimes with oilskin sleeves, also originally dyed using "**bark**"

**beetin threed** - n *G* - specially strong linen thread used to bind/whip hooks on to the cords attached to the line

**beet on** - v *G* - to whip a hook on to a line attachment, using beetin threed

**bendin** - n *G* - the end of a baited line, a thicker piece of cord/tow to be attached to the flag/buoy rope. One Gourdon baiter always blessed the bending when finished baiting with "God bless the bendin"

**clove/cloved** - v *G* and Fife - dividing the line into three portions, coiled tear-shaped, attached to the clove stick, with the **snuds** across it to keep them out of the bark ready for the line to be barked/ **barkit**. See - **snuds** and **barkin**.

**corse feet** - n *G* - star fish, with five points, often hauled aboard with the lines

**corsin ging/coursin ging** - n *G* - the wooden stick dividing the **scull** for line baiting, roughly in the middle, with the **gob** above for the rows and rows of baited hooks and the bottom part for the coiled line. The first row of mussels is placed on the **corsin ging** once the **gob** has been lined with grass. Possible derivation - in the phrase "course to go". See **gob**, **scull**

**doon by/doun by** - adv. *G* -the boat is taken down and moored at the harbour mouth to facilitate getting out to sea next morning with the remaining tide - allowing the fishermen to stay in bed a little longer, instead of getting up at 3 a.m., for example. Gourdon is a tidal harbour. "**I'm awa to tak the boat doon by**".

**funnel** - n *G* - from line fishing - a circular, hollow tube about three or four feet in length and approximately six inches wide, with an

internal handle, used to run the baited lines into the sea. The fisherman holding the funnel, places it above the top part of the **scull (the gob)**, the oblong basket containing the baited line with its rows and rows of baited hooks. The end of the line (**the bending**) is attached to a strong, thicker cord (hemp tow) which is attached to a **flag** (a buoy) which is flung into the sea, causing the line to start to run out over the funnel, keeping the hooks clear - shooting the line  
**funnelbunch** -n G - a disruption in the shooting of the line when hook/s from one row run into hooks from another below and cause confusion and muddle

**garra water** - adj. + n - G - referring to the dirty liquid that comes from the dirt on the mussel shells for line fishing and baiting, not dirty in general. It may be used to refer to the bag or piece of sackcloth a woman baiter would place on her knees to protect her clothes from the dirty water, **garra bag**, perhaps originally the bag that had contained a delivery of mussels

**gansey/ganzie** - n Sc - fisherman's jersey : with buttons, often pearl, up the side of the neck - G/Ne Sc

**ging** - v Ne Sc - to go - Expres. - **ging to the sea** - go out to sea, to go out to fish but also one's occupation/profession - **he gings to the sea** - sometimes used derogatively - **There's fishermen and there's fowk that jist ging to the sea** where the former - fishermen are regarded as professionals and the others as less dedicated.

**ging** - n G - a row of baited hooks in line fishing where consecutive rows are placed one above another, separated by a strip of thin paper till the whole upper part of the scull basket, the **gob** is filled with baited line

**girse** - n Sc/Ne Sc - grass (often with reference to bent/sea grass used to line the **scull** for baited lines).

**gob** - n G - the upper part of the scull basket of the baited line, containing the rows and rows of baited hooks. The **gob** is usually lined with slender grasses.

**greitlin/grete lyn** - n G - a shorter line than the 1200 hook line which (ironically) was termed "sma line". The **greitlin** might have 600 hooks and might be baited at sea by the fishermen

**raivel** - v Sc/G - to disorder, tangle, snarl, muddle, also to get into a muddle or tangle - v pt - **raivelt/raivellt** - disordered, tangled - of thread or yarn and in Gourdon particularly of a line after being shot, fished and hauled in at sea

**redd** - v G - to **redd the line** - to untangle the shot, hauled and **raivellt** line, coiling it ready for the baiter next day, also replacing missing hooks ("**wints**" - see below) and mending any torn parts  
**redd the back** - v G - pass the line coiled by the baiter in the bottom of the scull back up and over the gob, then coiled back into the bottom of the scull, ready for shooting the line next day.

**scull** - n G/ Sc - the oblong basket for the baited line, deep at one end, shallow at the other - from similar shallow, oval baskets of wicker for carrying peats, turnips, potatoes

**scull muckins** - n G - residue from the fished line. Once shot at sea, hauled in and the catch unhooked, any remnants of bait and other unwanted detritus such as corse feet/starfish remaining, need to be cleared.

**tippens** - n G - the horse hair strands gathered together as a cord, with the hook whipped on to the bottom end and the top end attached to the snood ( see **snud**) In later years polypropylene. couralene was used instead of horse hair. Once retired an old fisherman might have spent some time spinning the **tippens** on the **tippen steen**, making strong strands for his son to use to set up the line with its 1200 hooks and to prepare some in advance for repairs

**tippen steen** - n *G* - a weight with a cleek for spinning the horse hair into a strong cord , ready for the hook to be whipped on.

**wints** - n *G* - wants - missing hooks from a line that has been fished at sea and lost some hooks, now requiring to be replaced while **redding** the line (see above)

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to the following for –providing wonderful photos, often family photos , past and present, for scanning the photos and emailing them to me for sizing and cropping, for supplying information about line fishing, baiting, sheeling, working in the fish houses, herring fishing, life boat galas and to others for permitting me to use your poems at key points in the book. You were all amazingly helpful, especially Vally Craig and John Craig and Alex Welsh. Grateful thanks also to the various Archives, Libraries, Museums, Services and Archivists I contacted where respondents were unfailingly helpful, often going beyond the call of duty. I have identified the donors of specific photos by their page numbers in the book

Aberdeen Journals – permission to purchase and use three selected photos, pages 29,50,58

Abertay Historical Society, photos – Appendix 5 – pages 94-96

Bruce Archibald – sending photos on behalf of Mina and James Lownie – pages 51-56

Derek Birse – information on velvet crabs

Sue Briggs – use of poem *Tide of Change*

Ciss Brown – clarification of the Meg Anne Smith story

Jimmy Brown – Stonehaven Harbourmaster – general information

Tom Carnie – photo scans

Moira Coull (nee Dorward) photos, pages 26, 38, and support.

Alex Coupar – permission to use photograph – page 40

Ian Craig – photos, pages 20,25,32,33,57-63,80, correspondence, information

David Craig (Cravit) – use of the poem, *Death Row*, information

John Craig – photos, pages 21,30,70, detailed line fishing information and explanations

Raymond Craig – use of the poem, *The Baiter*

Vally Craig – a well of information – identifying people in photos, dates, times, locations

Jamie Cutts – herring barrelling photo, page 70 – Aberdeenshire Museums Service

Alan Donaldson – Oral History Interview quotations – fishing information

Dundee University Archive – permission/copyright – to buy and use photograph, p.40

Linda Fitzpatrick – Scottish Fisheries Museum – negotiation with the McGhie family/descendants for permission to use an image of his famous painting, *The Fisher Lass on the Tribute*, page 1

John Gove fish house information, cuttings, photo, page 66

Robert Gove – village history information

Bobby and Margaret Gowans – photos, pages 23, 92, personal memories – herring cooping.

Alison Ingram – anecdotal information, personal scrapbook of Mearns Leader cuttings

Stella Lindsay – fish house information

Charlie and Molly Lownie – employment information post-fishing; sheeling/baiting

Mina and James Lownie – photos, pages 51-56, and accompanying details

Stuart Mc Cubbin – Business Manager Marine Scotland Compliance – Designated Landing Port information and link to a valuable book on fishing with focus on Arbroath and Gourdon.

Helen McGregor – Marine Scotland Science – facilitating Landing Port information

Jackie Mc Lean – photos, pages 34-35,44-45, support, use of poem *Memories of the Past*

Deryk Mc Neill – photo enhancement and technological advice

**Maggie Law Maritime Museum – archives – cuttings 69, 90, photo, page 71, letters – Appendix 1, pages 88-89.**

**John Ritchie (Rover) – permission to download photos from his website – pages 22, 28, 48, 64, 65, 67, 68.**

**Martin Sim – photo, back cover**

**Lawrence Smith – memories of herring on the Gourdon pier and further clarification of the Meg Ann Story – his and his sister, Ciss Brown’s Granny, my Great Aunt.**

**Jim Swankie – photos – pages 14, 31. Quotation praising women baiting, page 6**

**Betty Stewart – photos and identification of those in these photos – along with her nieces – Betty Greenan (nee Cargill) and Isobel Steptoe (nee Cargill) – pages 19, 24, 66.**

**Melvyn Taylor - support**

**Eileen Townsend – use of poem *Betsy Souter*, information about Betsy Souter**

**Ian Watson – landing port information, with Ian Balgowan and area Fishery Officer.**

**Alex Welsh - photos, pages 36-37, 41-43, 49, detailed line fishing information**

**Ruaraidh Wishart – Aberdeen City and Shire Archives – Designated Landing Port details, later updated by Stuart Mc Cubbin**

**Archives; Archivists; Museums; Services:**

**Aberdeen City Archive**

**Aberdeenshire Archive**

**Aberdeenshire Libraries**

**Aberdeen Harbour Board**

**Aberdeenshire Libraries**

**Aberdeenshire Museums Service**

**Marine Scotland Science**

**Scottish Fisheries Museum – Mc Ghie family/Linda Kirkpatrick**

**Stonehaven Library**

**Note – The people of Gourdon and respondents from the Services above listed gave me information and answers to numerous questions most generously. For example, as may be deduced from multiple references above to Designated Landing Port information, several of those I consulted returned information which initially was difficult to locate and which was later modified.**

**Any mistakes about practices and procedures involving line fishing, fish house work and the different skills involved as well as white fish landing rights, dates and locations etc. are solely mine and mine alone.**

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The book is out of print but thanks to Marine Scotland Compliance, Business Officer Stuart Mc Cubbin who gave me the web link –

[https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Focus\\_on\\_fishing.html?id=IBgXAQAAIAAJ](https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Focus_on_fishing.html?id=IBgXAQAAIAAJ)

I was able to read Search excerpts of key words. Later I was able to consult this invaluable book via a request to Stonehaven Library and gain permission from Abertay Historical Society to print a number of photos from the book.

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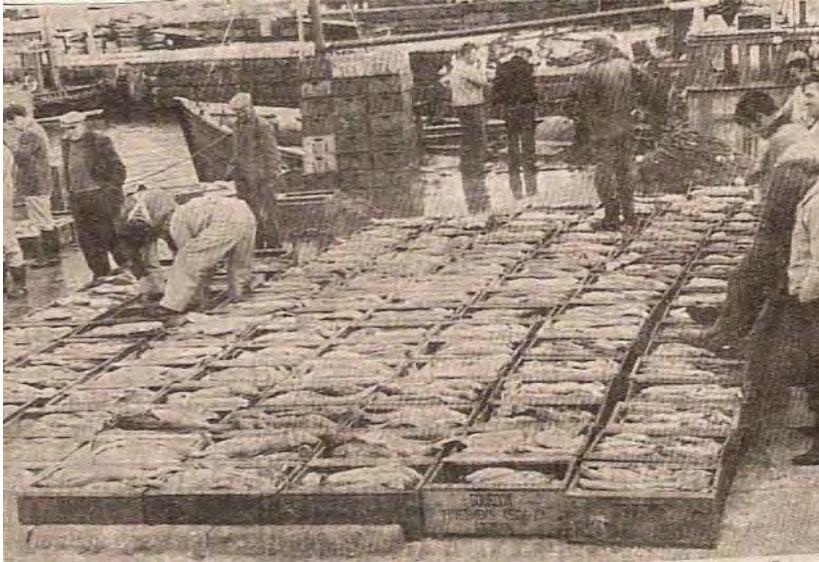
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Swankie, Jim, *The Sma' Lines Fishing on the East Coast of Scotland, Arbroath Area*. \*

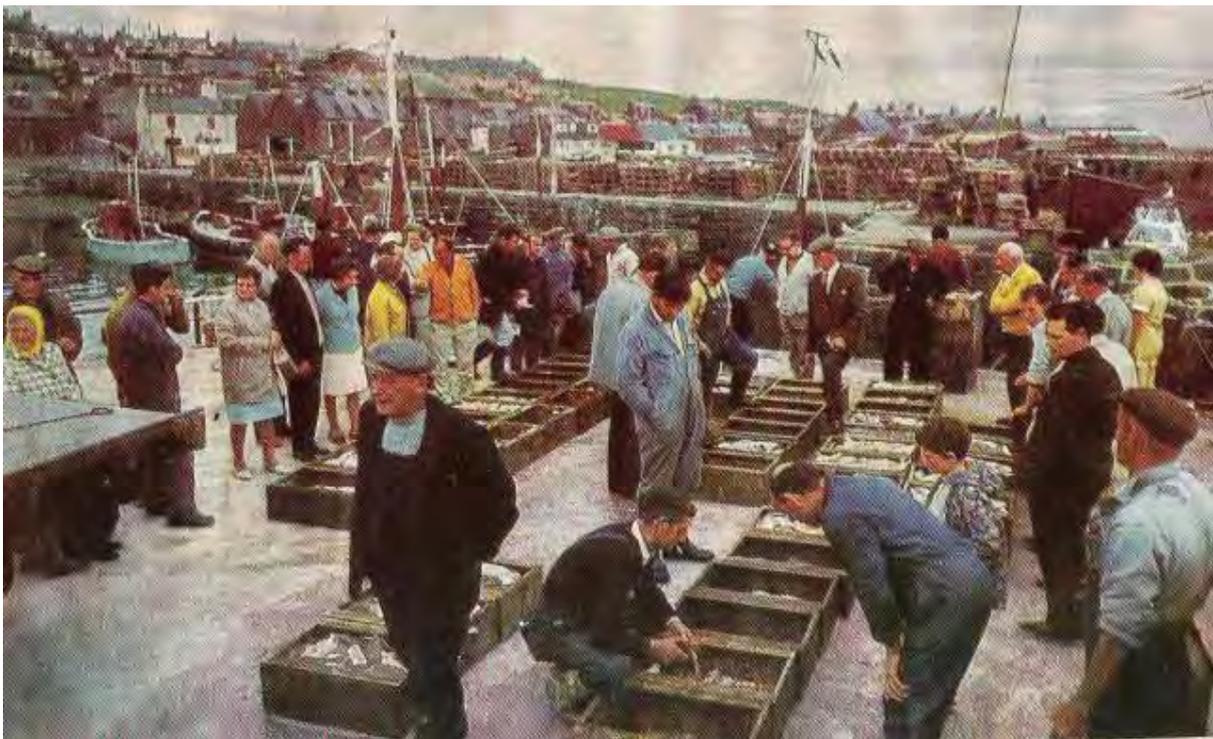
\* date of publication not printed.

## The Heyday of big catches – boxes lined up for the Fish Market

Gourdon Harbour c. 1950s/60s



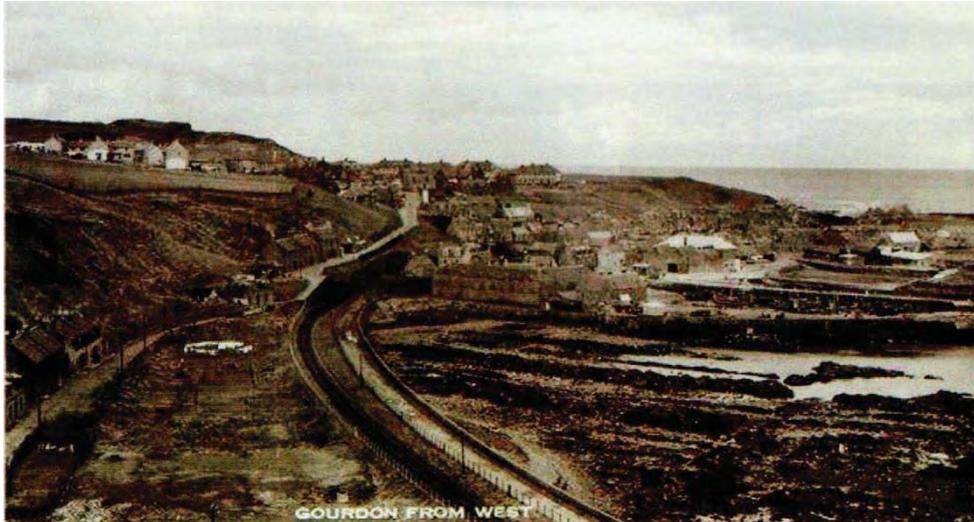
The Fish Market



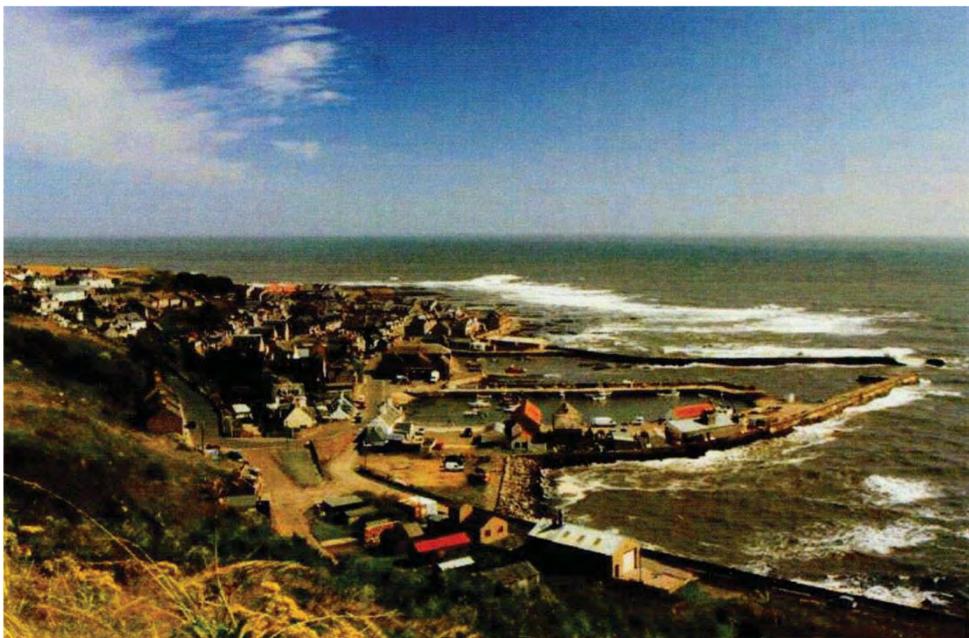
Fish Salesman, Jim Stewart, one of two (the other being John Boyle), stands at the top with foot on a box. Moss Waiter walks off while Johnny Ritchie squats over a box and Georgie Walker? looks on, 1960s. The Fish Markets at Gourdon declined after line fishing came to an end in 1986 and regulations, licensing and controlling the landing of white fish came into force in the 1990s. By 2004 only shell fish were landed at Gourdon. Traditionally Gourdon Fish Merchants bought part of their fish from the Gourdon Fish Market and part, an increasing part as time went on from the Aberdeen Fish Market. New environmental regulations requiring markets to be under cover, and market forces were additional factors in its demise.

## **TWO VIEWS OF GOURDON**

**Gourdon from the West – the harbour full of boats, possibly 1950s**



**A similar view but far fewer boats in the harbour – mostly small craft, 2013**



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