An Oral History of the Tasmanian Seafood Industry

VOLUME 1: NORTH EASTERN TASMANIA
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About this Book

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The Sue Rene on anchor at Bicheno in 1960

Front cover: Scallop vessels in St Helens during the 1960s
Courtesy of Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office.
Crayfishing in the 1940s
with Arthur Dood’ Pike

The fishermen and their cauffs on the beach at George Rocks
Photo courtesy of Dood Pike
Arthur ‘Dood’ Pike was 17 years old when his older brother John came home to Launceston from the war. The year was 1945, and John had gone through hell on HMAS Hobart, a vessel which had been torpedoed by a Japanese submarine killing 14 of John’s crewmates and good friends. Wanting a quiet life in Tasmania, John asked Dood and third brother Morris (Joe) to go crayfishing with him.

‘Our father, Charles Pike, had saved up for years to buy the Anonama, a 30 foot Huon Pine hulled yacht built by Ned Jack,’ explained Dood. ‘Dad loved sailing down the Tamar [River] on her and he agreed to let us convert her into a fishing boat. We fitted her with an International truck engine and lined the back hatch with galvanised iron to carry the crays. Dad was keen to join us, but Mother put her foot down and insisted he remain at work earning some income until we found out whether we could survive off fishing.’

‘We were warned off the local area by the local fishermen...’

In late 1945 the three novice fishers sailed out of the Tamar River. The destination was St Helens and their ambition was to make a living catching crayfish. But the Pikes didn’t even know how to make a craypot, which was an essential art for all cray fishermen in those days. And that wasn’t the only setback.

‘We were warned off the local area by the local fishermen, been here for years and didn’t want any competition. So we kept right away from them and worked out of George Rocks (also known as Georges Rocks),’ said Dood. Within months of arriving in St Helens, they were joined by their father, Charles.

Fishing in the late 1940s was very hard work, with no communication, radios, pot haulers, fridges, radar or echo sounders. Instead the Pikes would hand-haul their 27 pots three to four times a day, most of the time through thick heavy kelp.

‘We used to find all our bottom [reef] with a lead line in the wide [deeper] stuff. Between that and seeing the tide swirls on the top of the water, that’s how we found it all, and we didn’t miss much either,’ recalled Dood.
During the day, they would keep their catch in a tin tank on the back of the boat. Each night they would return to George Rocks and put the fish into wooden storage containers called caufs. Their home was a simple tin hut and all cooking was done on an old metho stove. It would take five to six days to get a full load of cray, with the catch being anything from 50 to 80 x 100 lb bags.

“We would have to load them into a little dinghy and row them out to the boat…”

‘When we got enough [cray] we would have to pull the caufs up the beach, load them into bags, and the bags would be half in the water and heavy. We would have to load them into a little dinghy and row them out to the boat and then lift them up onto the deck of the boat. And she’d finish up with about six inches freeboard by the time we put all the bags on. To ask anyone to work under those conditions today would see you in jail for slave labour, but overall we enjoyed it,’ said Dood.

With the boat loaded, they would set off for the trip back to St Helens, all the while hoping they would be able to get through the barway into Georges Bay. The catch would be sold to Don Wardlaw, who had a shop at St Marys. He would cook them in 44 gallon drums then distribute them to hotels and restaurants around Tasmania. ‘And we got a very low price for them, 5 pence a pound. This would equate to about 12 cents a kilogram at today’s rates’ said Dood.

After a while Dood’s brother-in-law, Twoey Hutchison, decided to join the Pikes in the fishing game, convincing Joe to join him. ‘They were the first fishermen to fit a pot hauler. It was made using a motorbike clutch,’ said Dood.

‘We went out with them to see how it worked, poking fun at them all the time, calling them “lazy buggers”. We were amazed at how it worked. We were just about convinced to get one when the next pot started to come up through thick kelp and the two inch pipe davit with block sheath out on the end suddenly folded up. Well, we just burst out laughing. It was the first time I’d seen old Twoey get upset. He said all we need do was to put a gusset inside the bend in the pipe and he called us a pair of geese for laughing.’

Sure enough, Twoey went straight home and fixed it, and it didn’t take long for all fishermen to cotton on to the idea of pot haulers.
The old hut at George Rocks that the Pike family called home. (left)

The Anonama, Vagabond and Nunya (L to R), laden with pots, on anchor at George Rocks (right)

Loading the catch into hessian bags (left)

All photos courtesy of Dood Pike
Catching scalefish from Bridport

The fishermen’s harbour at Bridport
Photo courtesy of the Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office
During the mid 1900s, all commercial fishers would target scalefish at some time of the year, whether it be flathead, couta or shark, and Bridport was one of the favourite ports in the north-east of Tasmania.

Keith Krushka, better known as Kak, has a long history of fishing at Bridport. ‘My earliest memory of commercial fishing is rowing my boat to school when the tide was right [in 1948]. I lived up the river further. I’d come down and row the boat out a bit, about a mile, and catch flathead and sell them for a few shillings.’ Like many others of that era, Kak started full-time commercial fishing as soon as he left school. Initially he targeted flathead and couta. ‘There were plenty of boats around, about 20 couta boats in Bridport. And flathead boats of course. And there used to be a few chaps come around from Port Sorell.’

One of those ‘chaps’ was Peter Rockliff. Peter first started his fishing career around 1948, fishing out of Port Sorell. ‘I heard the flathead were good around there [Bridport] in spring. So I thought I would have a go at that because there weren’t many couta around [at Port Sorell]. So I went along there in about ’49 I think it was. Camped on the shore, in front of the RSL and put a couple of months in there.’ Peter recalled returning to Bridport the following year. ‘I think we were couta fishing [that year] because the fish canneries were at Bridport, as well as along the coast here [Devonport]. We used to get about 4 pence a pound, which wasn’t too bad.’

‘There were 30 boats working out of Bridport and at certain times of the year, all those boats would be out catching couta.’

Haydn Miller started his fishing career in 1963, catching crayfish from a little cray dinghy around Eddystone Point. He later moved to Binalong Bay, where he fished for almost two years, before moving to Bridport. ‘I used to catch couta. There were 30 boats working out of Bridport and at certain times of the year, all those boats would be out catching couta. And Safcol were taking the couta. The heads were frozen for cray bait, and the bodies were used for canning. I’ve seen two semitrailer loads of couta leave here to go to Margate in one day.’
Lenna in Bridport during a downtime in fishing, bringing a load of sheep off Waterhouse Island in 1964
Photo courtesy of Richey family collections

The Dell R alongside the old Safcol factory at Bridport with a full load of salmon (about 30 tonnes) in 1959
Photo courtesy of Richey family collections
3 Exploring the deep seas off Bicheno

The slipway and jetty, The Gulch, Bicheno
Photo courtesy of Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office
Bicheno has a very long history with the commercial fishing industry, with species such as crayfish, abalone and scallops being the lifeblood of the town for many decades. In the early 1960s it became apparent that the commercial crayfish fishery had to be managed and a three month closure was subsequently implemented. It was during this enforced time off that several rock lobster fishers began exploring the deeper water off Bicheno with drop-lines, searching for blue-eye trevalla and other deep sea fish.

Allan Yates was among the first to explore these waters. ‘We went exploring out in deeper water here off Bicheno. But our monofilament snoods [short line attaching a hook to a main line in sea fishing] kept getting bitten off. We later found out they were gem fish. Anyway, we experimented, and came up with this system of wire snoods. Next thing, we come across these blue-eye trevalla. Anyway, we unloaded this 600lb of fish [blue-eye] at the processor. Let ourselves in and locked up on the way out. Next morning Tommy Cooper, the manager, rang saying they didn’t want the fish, couldn’t sell them. So I had to go around and collect them up and dump them on the tip.’

During another oral history interview with Grace Bailey, the wife of the late Tim Bailey, and her son Andrew, it was revealed that the other person involved with this early exploration was in fact Tim Bailey. ‘This beautiful fish and we couldn’t sell it. [They were put] on the market [on the mainland] and sold as barramundi. And that’s how they got going,’ recalled Grace.

The two fishermen also persisted with the local markets as well, finding a niche market within the Tasmanian counter meal scene. ‘We had a chap here that owned Silver Sands. He had just started Silver Sands and they had a big freezer there. And he came to us and said, “These are the best fish we’ve ever had”. He said, “We want to continue this for counter lunches.” So anyway we would catch them, fillet them and put them in

Weighing crayfish for export at the Tasmanian Fish Canning factory at Bicheno
Photo courtesy of Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office
plastic bags and get cash over the counter. They filled their freezer up," recalled Allan. ‘He was also involved with…the Innkeepers [group], they had restaurants all around the state from Strahan right round to Lenna at Battery Point [in Hobart]. A local, Bill Bailey, used to go around all his motels and keep the stock up. Have a look in the freezer and send some up. This is the trade we built, that’s how it started. They had counter meals all around Tassie. And we got paid under 2 shillings a pound.’

Andrew Bailey added to this story: ‘It was actually Dad [Tim Bailey] who went down and cooked them for the patrons at Silver Sands. He’d don the old chef’s hat and went in and cooked them all up. “What do you think of this?” And of course it was an instant hit.’

‘And in the fish book they were supposed to be 10 inches long and caught off South Africa and New Zealand or somewhere.’

Andrew also remembered finding new fishing grounds and encountering new species with his father. ‘Dad was coming back from Flinders Island, he’d always have his sounder on. And he ran over this little bit of a pinnacle. So he joined a couple of trevalla lines together because it was pretty deep. And these colossal great big trevalla came up. We went back again, and every hook had cardinal fish on them. So we ended up cutting a few fillets off and giving them to one bloke here [at Bicheno] to see if it killed him. Gave him a feed to see if they were alright. And we sent four bins down to CSIRO to see what they were. And in the fish book they were supposed to be ten inches long and caught off South Africa and New Zealand or somewhere. These [cardinal fish] were three foot long and like a great Atlantic salmon or something. And of course that [the pinnacle] became St Helens Hill and the orange roughy fishery.’

*Early catches of blue-eye using a drop-line*
Photos courtesy of the Bailey family, Bicheno
The development of the modern oyster industry at Bicheno
The first Pacific oyster spat arrived in Tasmania during the 1940s and by the 1970s there was a handful of marine farmers trying to make a go of the industry. They all relied on the collection of spat from wild oyster populations that had been seeded in the Tamar River near Launceston. Among the early pioneers was Ian Cameron. ‘At that time [1974] Dennis [and Jack] Wivell was the only one that was catching spat; he was in the Tamar. That was all stick and rack. The industry was just getting started, I think there were seven or eight people involved,’ said Ian.

The rapid expansion of Launceston brought with it increased pollution. The Pacific oysters suffered to the extent that they were no longer able to spawn. A few people also became ill from eating oysters and the Tamar River was subsequently closed.

Another early oyster pioneer, Allan Yates, recalled the closure. ‘So here we are with farms and no oysters. So what the hell are we going to do now?’

‘We decided to get involved in the industry seriously, with a hatchery,’ said Ian Cameron. ‘We did a lot of work in the Tamar, smashing up oysters and trying to get the things to spawn. That was sort of coordinated by Trevor Dix, who was Chief of Fisheries Research at the time at Taroona.’

So it was in 1979 that a small group of oyster farmers joined together and devised the idea of building an oyster hatchery as a reliable source of oyster spat. Initially there was Allan Yates, Roger Calvert, Ian Cameron and Peter Chew. ‘We had two or three meetings in Hobart, formed a little board and a company called Shellfish Culture,’ said Allan. ‘The deal was we would be funded by industry and loans. And those that contributed the most would have the biggest take on the seed produced,’ said Ian. Other farmers, such as Jon Poke, Jonny Alders, Frank Kennedy and Trevor Dix soon joined the Shellfish Culture venture.

At the time, Allan Yates owned a block of land in The Gulch at Bicheno. He and a couple of mates had planned to build a processing plant, with a restaurant above overlooking the water. They hoped to take advantage of the busloads of tourists coming through Bicheno every day. Plans were drawn up and council approved the development. Allan even had the bricks onsite ready for building. But Allan recalled that his two partners in the venture got cold feet, so he bought their shares out. Instead, Allan put an offer forward to the Shellfish Culture Board. ‘I said whatever it cost me [for the land and the blocks] I’ll put it into the company and take it out in shares so it won’t cost you anything. So away we went and we built the thing [oyster hatchery]. We got a bloke over from New Zealand to manage it. He was supposed to know everything. And he thought he knew too. He was an honest enough bloke, but he didn’t have a clue. And we kept on rearing a few and they would die. All these blokes with oyster farms, they had shares in this company and no oysters! And they were all panicking.’
By now Shellfish Culture was desperate, so it sent Trevor Dix over to America on its behalf to see what he could find out about rearing oysters in a hatchery. Ian Cameron’s memory of that time was that a friend of his, Harry Shaw, knew an American by the name of Ron Zebal, who happened to work in a hatchery over in the US. Harry made contact with Ron and got him out to Tasmania to manage the hatchery.

‘...what a stab in the dark, this bloke in a band said he could grow oysters

The story told by Allan Yates is more entertaining. ‘Trevor [Dix] was having a meal one night in a restaurant [in America] and there was a band playing and he got talking to the band when they were having a bit of a spell. And there was a bloke in the band called Ron Zebal. He said “I know all about that, I use to work in a hatchery, I can do it”. Anyway, Trevor comes back and tells this story. You know, what a stab in the dark, this bloke in a band said he could grow oysters. So this bloke [Ron] he lands here, this Yank. He had a look at the hatchery and said I want to do this, this and that. And we said “OK Ron.” And I’ll be buggered if he didn’t click, he knew how to do it. It was a stab in the dark. And from then on we never looked back. He just knew what to do, to take larvae and turn them into oysters.’ And so a reliable source of oyster spat was sourced, and the modern oyster industry was born. And it all started in Bicheno.
The door of the Springfield hatchery, drawn by a young casual employee. In the words of Pheroze Jungalwalla, 'I said paint me something that represents a trout hatchery, and he drew this' Photo courtesy of Pheroze Jungalwalla
Who would have thought that, from its first commercial harvest of just 53 tonnes during the summer of 1986/87, the farming of Atlantic salmon would become the most valuable seafood industry in Australia in only 25 years! Although the origins of the commercial salmonid (salmon and rainbow or ocean trout) industry vary depending on who you talk to, the name Alec Purves keeps popping up as the father of the industry.

Alec has been credited as the first person to fully commercialise the production of rainbow trout in Australia. This feat was achieved in the small coastal town of Bridport, to the north-east of Launceston. Alec explained, ‘I chose Bridport because it is the only place anywhere near civilisation where you could get fresh water and more or less pure salt water together. I don’t know of any other places, apart from maybe the south-west [of Tasmania]. I originally had salmon eggs on order when they first came in from Nova Scotia into New South Wales [in 1960]. I knew the Director in NSW, he was a friend of mine. Anyway, I checked on the hatchery in Nova Scotia and I found out they had a virus that affected the eggs. So I dropped it like a hotcake. So we had no salmon to start with, so it had to be trout.’

Starting up a commercial venture utilising the iconic and recreationally caught trout was not without its issues. ‘We had a hell of a battle to get the law changed. We had a hard core of anglers who didn’t want their trout being commercialised. Roy Fagan was Deputy Premier back then, and he finally put the law through in August 1962. We got our licence in 1963.’

Alec built his first trout hatchery in Bridport during 1963. However, the supply and quality of fresh water in Bridport did not live up to the figures suggested by the Rivers and Water Supply Commission. Subsequently a new hatchery was built a short time later in nearby Springfield. The business plan was to produce small ‘portion’ sized fish. ‘The market wasn’t big but we supplied Victoria first and then the mainland all over. But once they started fish farming on the mainland we couldn’t compete. The freight just killed us,’ said Alec.

The Springfield site, however, had access to exceptional quality water and the eggs and fish produced there were tested as disease free. This meant that an egg export market was a viable trade. The first eggs were exported in 1965. They were sent to Idaho in the US to seed the newly established Clear Springs Trout Company. News of the disease free status at the Springfield hatchery soon spread around the world. ‘The state of Washington wanted some of my eggs,’ explained Alec. ‘They sent their pathologists and chief scientist out. They had a good look at the records and hatchery. It was the only hatchery outside America that could ship into Washington. Overall we sold eggs to 23 countries over the years, and so we were fairly well established in the hatchery business overseas.’
Alec was also the first to trial the salt water farming of rainbow trout, setting up sea pens at Moriarty Reach in the Tamar River during the early 1970s. ‘We used to take the six inch fish in oxygenated insulated milk tanks. We put them in net cages hanging off square wooden frames. They worked alright.’ The venture produced beautiful fish; however, pollution in the river from nearby woodchip piles quickly put a stop to the project.

In 1984, the Tasmanian Government purchased fertilised Atlantic salmon eggs from Gaden Hatchery (Thredbo River, Jindabyne, NSW), which were from stock originally imported in the 1960s. ‘The Tasmanian Government, I think it was 1984 or thereabouts, they wanted Saltas to have a monopoly, which I objected to. I had a brown trout licence I didn’t particularly want and Neil Robson, he was the Minister, and he agreed to swap the brown trout licence for an Atlantic salmon licence. I had the licence therefore, when they got them in I got my ration out of Saltas because I was quite legal. I put them into the hatchery at Springfield. And we started the hatchery side of salmon,’ said Alec.

Pheroze Jungalwalla, a well-known identity around the Tasmanian salmon industry, started his long Tasmanian salmonid career with Alec at Bridport and Springfield in 1976. ‘About three or four weeks into that [working with Alec], early one morning, about 1 o’clock, 2 o’clock in the morning, the alarms go off. The whole raceway has failed at Bridport. Of course we assemble, we had an amazing rest of the night. All of Bridport came out to help. No water, the fish die. I’m driving a backhoe getting fish out of the bottom of ponds. We start trying to gut them and save something. By about 6 o’clock in the morning Alec and I take a break. Alec said to me “Pheroze, I could quite understand now if you don’t want to come and work for me, this is quite a major event”. I thought to myself “what a man, amazing. He’s lost a huge portion of his business and he’s telling me I have an out if I don’t want to work for him.” I immediately said, “Yep, I’ll come and work for you Alec.”

‘Alec is the father, he started back in the 60s with the trout.’

Alec Purves didn’t stick around to reap the current rewards of the salmon industry. Instead, he got out of the business, selling out to the current powerhouses of the industry. But many believe he can stake a claim to be the founder of the salmonid farming industry in Tasmania, including Peter Rockliff, the founder and current owner of Petuna. ‘Alec is the father [of the salmon industry], he started back in the 60s with the trout.’ And in the words of Alec himself: ‘And I really started the salmonid industry in a sense. But I wasn’t the most popular bloke in town because everyone else thought they started it.’
The modern abalone industry

Photo taken from 'Abalone diving in Tasmanian waters' by Milfred Knight
The arrival of scuba diving gear in Tasmania during the 1950s saw an increased interest in the commercial harvest of ‘mutton fish’ or abalone in Tasmanian waters. Although scuba dive surveys conducted during the 1950s identified large abundances of abalone around Recherche Bay, the Actaeon Islands and around the Tasman Peninsula, it was not until about 1963 that the prospect of a serious commercial fishery emerged.

John Haslam recalled the early development of the abalone industry on the North-East Coast. ‘It was 1964 to 65 I’d say. There were four abalone divers working, came across from Victoria and diving off the shore. They were renting a house at, I think it was Red Bill Point [just north of Bicheno]. They hired me to take them out on the boat, so they were [some of] the first divers to work off the deck of a boat. We went mainly from Cape Lodi to Long Point. And they were taking their abs, putting [shucking] them in a rubbish bin and salting them down and taking them up to Launceston to fly them to Melbourne. And Launceston was the only place they could get their bottles filled. Then the next year I did the same, I came down in probably May, June. And there were eight divers, and a bloke by the name of Dave Gilbert built a drying shed in Bicheno and he put in a compressor. So for those two months I had them working off the deck of the boat.’

In another interview, Adrian Holmes recalled how he got into the abalone industry during the early 1980s. ‘I was at Bicheno and went out on a cray boat with a fella, just ab diving one morning. He’d done two hours work just south of Bicheno. He came back and put his catch on the landing and I said “How much is that worth?” and he said “$250”. I was on about $60 a week and I thought how do I get into this?’

But at that time, abalone licences were not transferable. However, it was only a couple of years later that the government made abalone licences a transferable entity. ‘The first one I was after was $25,000. I eventually was able to buy one at $45,000. I got a small boat called Bung, a 16 foot Caribbean, came with the licence.’ Adrian then got to work catching abalone ‘A typical day’s fishing out of St Helens, up around Eddystone and Cape Portland, with four or five hours diving was 400 to 500 kg of fish.’

Shucking abalone into a garbage bin
Most early crayfishers would make their own pots. This photo shows two Flinders Island fishermen steaming wood to make craypots.

Photo courtesy of Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office
In the not too distant past, Flinders Island supported a thriving fishing industry. At its peak, there were around 25 local cray boats and two main processing factories on the island. Combined with the multitude of visiting scallop, abalone and shark boats, the island was abuzz with fishing activity.

John Hammond and his wife Jill have a long history of fishing around Flinders Island. Based at Lady Barron in the south-eastern corner of the island, John mainly targeted crayfish, giant crab and scallops.

‘I started with my dad on the Arlie D in about 1960 to 1962. I was 10 years old in 1960. And I spent most of my time on the boats. I wasn’t learning much at school so I better learn the fishing caper.’ John went fishing permanently in 1964, and started running the Arlie D when he was only 17. ‘All we had was a paper sounder and one radio. No refrigeration, nothing. Kangaroos hanging around the rail, that was the bait back then. We fished all around Flinders Island, only ventured down to Eddystone [Point] once. Didn’t have to go anywhere else because there were plenty of fish local. Even with 20 boats working around the island, it was good,’ said John. ‘We would head out fishing for about a week, then come back to Lady Barron to unload.’

Living on an island posed the problem of how to get your catch to the Melbourne and Sydney markets. John explained, ‘The fish were flown to Sydney and Melbourne direct, mostly from Whitemark. The buyers used to charter the Bristol Freighter in.’ Jill added ‘there were three or four Bristol Freighters [flights] a week, servicing the 25 cray boats around the island. Up to 700 bags or about 35 tonne a week.’ But with the high possibility of bad weather or alternative flight commitments, John and his fellow fishermen would also store their crayfish within caufs in the local bays and anchorages.
With the advent of improved technology and stronger boats during the 1960s, John recalled venturing into new unfished territory. The first time we went fair dinkum offshore we found some ledges, they’re now called Harlies Ledges after the old man. And the first shot we had on that we got a tonne off it for the shot, 35 pots. We got as many off the outside of the pots as we got inside. It was amazing, just a big white ball came up. It was only down 20 minutes.’

John was also among the first to explore the scallop beds around Flinders Island. ‘I think it was the Challenger at the time [1972], discovered scallops off south-west Goose [Island]. We built the Concorde in 1972 and went to Hobart in the winter of ’72 to put the scallop gear on her. And we went up and started to try and develop the grounds around Flinders.

‘It was pretty simple, a couple of flags out over the side, a couple of lights and that was it. Three or four used to go out and find them, then the other 30 or 40 would turn up and follow us. We used to call them the moth fishermen. They came to the lights of a night time,’ remembered John.

At its peak, Flinders Island had two main fish processing factories to deal with the tonnes and tonnes of scallops and other seafood that was being caught. Jill Hammond managed the plant at Lady Barron for over 10 years. ‘We processed a lot of scallops, abs, shark and cray. I had 60 or 70 scallop splitters. I don’t know how many tonnes of scallops we used to send to France. John used to cart them to Welshpool [Victoria] to save freight. 16.5 tonnes at a time [meat].’

‘we put through 25 tonne of abalone, 56 tonne of shark, 50 tone of crayfish and 48 tonne of scallops, the meat.’

Pulling out an old fish factory log book, Jill was able to recount the recorded tonnages put through that one factory. ‘In 1985 the factory put through 92 tonne of abalone, 27 tonne of shark, 23 tonne of scallops, and in 1987 we put through 25 tonne of abalone, 56 tonne of shark, 50 tonne of crayfish and 48 tonne of scallops, the meat. There was also 20 tonne of garfish and 450,000 mutton birds.’

With one final comment, John recalled fishing around Flinders Island during the 60s, 70s and 80s. ‘The place was just buzzing’.
Fishing boats

The changing faces of the Riawe (Lady Pam): On the Tamar River during the 1920s (top); on patrol with the Royal Australian Navy during the 1940s (middle); and refitted as a recreational vessel in 2012 (bottom)
Fishing boats are an integral part of any fisherman’s livelihood and it is hardly surprising that many fishermen talk about the boats they have owned with great pride.

Haydn Miller recalled the first boat he purchased and owned was the *Lady Pam*. Built in 1912 at the Trevallyn boatyard of Ned Jack from Huon Pine, the *Riawe* as she was then known was 36 feet in length, 10 feet 6 in the beam and drew 4 feet 6. ‘She was built for [Capt James] Holyman to cart sheep to Waterhouse Island. And I believe they could take 90 sheep on it, which I find surprising, but apparently they used to jam them in,’ said Haydn.

‘It is rumoured that she even came across a submarine at one time.’

In January 1942 the *Riawe* was commandeered by the Australian Navy and taken to Devonport. After several modifications, she began active duty in December 1942. ‘She was used as a gun boat for the Royal Australian Navy [HMAS *Riawe*]. She patrolled from Low Head to Devonport, and she was armed with a mounted 303 [Vickers] machine gun on the bow. And it is rumoured that she even came across a submarine at one time,’ recalled Haydn.

In 1954, the *Riawe* was converted to suit crayfishing and renamed the *Lady Pam*. She continued in this role for the next 50 years before being sold in 2004 to a private owner, after which she was renamed *Riawe*.

Haydn recalled, ‘I fished with that boat for 10 years. It broke down the first day I went fishing with it, and I caught the first load of crays, 12 bags or 600 kg, all by sight, just pottering around between George Rocks. I started off with 23 pots on her and ended up with 27. I had a crew, as in those days if the boat length was over 35 foot you had to have a crew, which made it a bit difficult at times. I thought I was hard done by, in very primitive conditions at the time. But when I look back I realise what a wonderful life it was.’

Tasmania’s commercial fishing fleet owes much of its uniqueness to the shipwrights who ensured boats were prepared for adverse conditions. Shipwrights such as Ned Jack and Bernard Wilson, just to name two, are credited with producing some of the finest wooden boats in the fleet, many of which are still in operation today. Indeed, many of the older wooden fishing boats were built by fishermen themselves, as they knew exactly what sort of vessel they needed for a particular job.

After spending several years fishing for cray, Dood Pike and brother Morris, who was better known as Joe, decided to build a new boat at their St Helens home. Dood had
already built two small clinker dinghies and a 26 footer, as well as worked at Ned Jack’s for ten months building a 60 foot topsail ketch for brother John. ‘I felt pretty confident with Joe helping that we could build what we needed, which we did between fishing. Getting the Huon Pine was very difficult and we had to make the trip to Strahan and beg Reg Morrison to cut us a load. We got the Celery Top Pine from Britton Bros at Smithton, all beautiful timber. The keel came from the local mill at Goshen. Ray Fitzgerald and Richards squared it out of a big Brown Top Stringybark. They got two keels out of the same tree so we kept both of them and built a second boat for local fisherman Norm Johnston. A couple of years later, the 46 foot Rockaway and 48 foot Georges Bay were completed.

In the mid 1960s, Dood and Joe built a 50 foot Norwegian stern boat from Celery Top Pine, the Wavecrest. Later on they built the Bonnie Rose. They then helped their brother-in-law Edwin George Dwyer (Mick), a boilermaker by trade, build them a Jack Meyer designed steel boat at their slipyard in St Helens. Their first attempt was called the Minimurra, their second the Oceanaire.
A helping hand at sea

The Jeannie B in the Gulch, Bicheno
Photo courtesy of the Bailey family, Bicheno
Tasmania’s commercial fishing fleet regularly provides a helping hand to anyone requiring assistance, and at times the skippers and crew of commercial fishing boats have gone well beyond the call of duty. The late Tim Bailey from Bicheno was involved with many rescues at sea, as recounted in an interview with his wife Grace, and son Andrew.

‘The police would always come for Tim to go to the rescue,’ said Grace. ‘Dad would never charge [towage fees] to tow anyone. Anyone in trouble... anyhow and anytime,’ added Andrew. One rescue conducted by Tim saw him nominated as an honorary member of a Belgian yacht club. ‘He towed the University of Belgium yacht in. It was going on the Round the World Race and it had broken its mast. And they were so nice, so many letters and things. They came in here [Bicheno] first. Customs had to come up before they would let them off the boat. And then he [Tim] made provisions for them to stay at Silver Sands,’ said Grace. ‘He then towed them to Hobart,’ added Andrew. Some of Tim’s other rescues are detailed in the newspaper headlines below. (Courtesy of the Bailey family, Bicheno).

Kak (Keith Krushka) from Bridport also recalled two rescues he was involved with. ‘Rescued a couple mutton birding one night. Got over there and they were almost froze to death, but anyway we got them home.’

‘They reckoned we looked like the Queen Mary when we got beside them.’

‘One other time a boat went out here [Bridport] and they broke down and the cops came and got us, Dick Richey [and me], and we had to leave the pub about 2 o'clock in the morning. Seen this thing in the break of day, two women and a man sitting in the boat, only about a 12 foot dinghy. They had the brains to tie a rope to their outboard and throw it over the front. Anyway we got alongside and I think they were pretty happy to see us. They reckoned we looked like the Queen Mary when we got beside them. We got some nice letters from them. One of the women was in hospital for three or four days after.’
Trawling for orange roughy

A load of roughy on board Allan Barnett's boat the Lutana
Photo courtesy of Allan Barnett
The orange roughy fishery boomed in the mid to late 1980s and early 1990s. Peter Rockliff recalled pioneering the fishery on the West Coast and acknowledged the role that GPS technology played in the pursuit of catching roughy. ‘We had a three hour window [for detecting the satellites]. And by that stage we were catching roughy. We had been catching roughy from about ’82 on, but no quantity doing long tows. We knew somewhere there were aggregations. It was about ’86 I think that we found the first aggregations. That was a sight to see when they came up.’

‘Then we found St Helens Hill, and that’s when things really cranked up.’

Allan Barnett also spoke of the satellite technology that allowed a small three hour window to locate the roughy aggregations. ‘In 1987 we started trawling off the East Coast, and we found the roughy in 1988. I was one of the first on the East Coast to target roughy. Then we found St Helens Hill and that’s when things really cranked up. When we first found it I was out there with Uncle Peter’s [Rockliff] boat. We were steaming around on it and I said there’s something here. And I didn’t know what it was. You couldn’t really read the bottom or anything. We reckoned it was all mud. And Geoff Richey was there too on the Susan Richey. So I wandered around and thought I’m going to have a shot at this. And we pulled her up and she was full. We came in and unloaded and went out the next day and done it again. It started off with only two or three of us there [boats] and by the end there would have been bloody 40.’

Andrew Bailey from Bicheno recalled 78 boats on the hill during its peak.

‘What we used to do, we’d be sitting there waiting. Wandering around trying to find it [the aggregation],’ said Allan. ‘We knew the satellites would come on at say 8 o’clock and we’d all be ready. We had the satellites for about three hours a day. On each shot we would get 40 to 50 ton a tow, a boatload of fish. What would happen is that you’d go through and have a shot, and if you didn’t get a load you would have to go to the end of the line and wait. There might be 30 boats in front of you.’

‘The quickest load we got, we went out from St Helens, loaded up fully, back into the wharf and unloaded in 11 hours.’
Catching fish from a plane

The net almost around a 28 tonne school of salmon as seen from the air
Photo courtesy of Richey family collections
The Richey family are well known entities in the Tasmanian seafood industry. Although the Richey Fishing Company is based today in Devonport, it was originally based at Bridport, as explained during an interview with Stuart Richey, the son of the company’s founder, Dick Richey. ‘My father [Dick] was the first in his family to go fishing. Prior to the war he was in New Guinea, running supplies up the Fly River for the Shell Oil Company, so he had a marine background. He joined the Air Force, but he was colour blind so he wasn’t able to fly. So he went into the marine section of the Air Force. During the war he was running rescue boats and he was also running a schooner with supplies around New Guinea.’

In 1945, at the end of the war, Dick returned to Sydney. ‘He went into the Fisheries Department wanting a fishing licence,’ Stuart said. ‘The clerk there said, “You’ll go broke as a fishermen, but seeing as you’re a returned serviceman we’ve been instructed we have to give you a licence”.

After trawling out of Narooma in NSW for a few years, the Richeys moved to Lakes Entrance, Victoria, in 1951. By 1956, Dick was doing very well at fishing, so he decided to learn how to fly a plane. ‘He always wanted to fly, so he bought the old Tiger Moth, even though he knew he was colour blind. So while he was doing his pilot’s licence, I used to spend hours with him going through what’s called the Ishihara Test. It’s a book of circles and dots. If you’re colour blind you don’t see anything, you just see circles and dots, and if you’re not colour blind you see the numbers. We’d go through that book night after night. And he memorised every page in the book. He’d say “What’s

Dick Richey with wife Dell by one of the company planes
that?” “That’s all dots.” “What’s that?” “That’s a 2.” He memorised the entire book. And when he went to do his colour blindness test he passed with flying colours.

Flying around in his Tiger Moth, Dick realised he could see all these fish from the air. ‘He came for a wander around Tasmania in the old Tiger Moth. Saw all these fish down here, nobody catching them and that’s how we came down to Tasmania. We bought the Dell R over ... and settled in Bridport.’ We operated with the Dell R, and she seemed huge, until she was chock-a-block full, decks awash with 30 tonnes on her [of salmon].

Must have been about 1961 or ‘62 we bought the Lenna.’ This vessel upgrade was the first of many, with their current vessel, the Dell Richey II, being a purpose-built salmon, scallop and research charter vessel.

Stuart looked back on his father’s capabilities in the air with amazement. ‘It highlights how silly some regulations are, as he was totally colour blind but he could fly around in an aeroplane and pick out the minute colour changes in the water to see schools of fish.’ Further evidence of Dick being an accomplished pilot in no way impacted by his colour blindness is highlighted by his landing on some of Tasmania’s most remote and rugged beaches and islands for picnics, holidays and, on more than one occasion, to conduct a rescue.

Dick’s flying skills were also highlighted in an interview conducted with David Fehre. For a short period in 1961, David recalled helping Dick out on the Dell R. Upon his arrival, Dick decided the best way to learn about catching Australian salmon was from the air. ‘So we hop in the Tiger Moth and of course you know what happens to the passenger in the Tiger, they’re put in the front seat,’ said David.

The pair headed off towards Waterhouse Bay in the north-east of Tasmania. They were chasing a patch of salmon at the mouth of Tomahawk. The Dell R was anchored nearby, patiently waiting for the fish to move off rocks and weed and onto open sand, where they could be netted. Not wanting to waste fuel, Dick decided to land on Waterhouse Island rather than head back to Bridport. The first run over the island was to scare the sheep off the landing area. On the final approach to land, they were heading straight at the cliff face. ‘I’m sitting in the front of the Tiger Moth, and I thought “Oh, there’s the top of the island up there!”’ It hadn’t occurred to David that the very skilled pilot needed to account for the updraft from the cliff face to avoid overshooting the entire island. ‘When we stopped I got out and kissed the turf. He looked at me old Dick did and just laughed.’
Boats on anchor in the Gulch, Bicheno
Photo courtesy of Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office
At anchor

Much of a fisherman’s life at sea is spent in a sheltered bay or inlet, at anchor. ‘Back in those days it was a real community on the anchorages,’ remembered Keith Krushka [Kak]. ‘It was great times. Tie alongside each other and forget about the fishing of course, and stop telling too many lies. Sometimes they just slipped out.’

‘It was a real community, in the anchorages at night. There was a real camaraderie. And everyone would try and outdo someone else,’ added Rodney Treloggen. ‘I’ve seen 11 boats tied up side by side, that’s the most I’ve ever seen. In Spike Bay on Clarke Island. All tied up to one boat.’

And we could hear from our boat, every time we pulled it: clunk, clunk, clunk.

Many a practical joke has also been played while at anchor in an attempt to waste the time away. Haydn Miller of Bridport recalled one time he was at anchor, ‘Paul Morton had an aluminium planing hull. And we went in one day and anchored in front of him, probably about 40 to 50 yards in front of him. Anyway it got dark and we tied a bottle onto nylon fishing line. I was going to try and tap it on the bow but the tide took it past his boat. And as I pulled it back, Morton’s boat swung around and I actually pulled it under his rudder somewhere. And we could hear from our boat, every time we pulled it, clunk, clunk, clunk. They were hanging over the side with torches. Then I would let the line go loose and apparently the bottle would float away from the boat a bit. Nothing would happen for a while. Pull it up again and give it a few more tugs. We gave them a couple of hours of it.’

The deckhand

The majority of fishermen rely on a deckhand to help conduct their fishing operations. Some deckhands will only last one trip. However, others will last a lifetime, despite the jokes and tricks played on them. Kak clearly remembered his deckhand: ‘I was a bit lucky, I had a good fishing mate with me. I had him for 28 years. Caught a lot of fish because of him being with me. Rube Lovegrove. He was with me all the time. Didn’t matter if I was going in the middle of the night or the middle of the day, he’d always be there. And I remember a few times, he used to live just below us, a couple of houses away. We’d be going home at 3 o’clock in the morning. I’d knock on Rube’s door and say, “Rube are you ready?”. And by the time he was up and going I’d be at home in bed. He was very dedicated.’
Scallop fishing has been described by many fishermen as being notoriously hard work. Long hours, cold weather, wet hands and heavy bags. In the early days, the scallop game was fairly simple, put two anchored ‘dan poles’ down and conduct your tows between the two poles. However, there was always another boat on the scallop grounds that didn’t necessarily abide by the scalloping rules. These rogues bore the brunt of many a practical joke.

Bicheno fishermen Andrew Bailey recalled a couple of incidents during his early scalloping career. ‘We had a particular boat that used to go sideways through your poles. We were up off The Gardens one time, and at The Gardens there was like rocky bottom and she came out onto the sand. And the scallops were right on the edge of the rocky bottom. So we saw this particular boat coming and thought, “We know what he is going to do.” So we went up one end and moved the dan pole in on the rocks. Went up the other end and moved the dan pole onto the rocks. We started working up behind there, just let the dredge down to about 20 feet. He went straight in between the dan poles and went “clunk”. Filled her up [with rocks] and had to come back to Bicheno to upend her.’

‘And the smaller boats, they would go straight to the middle,’ added Andrew. They just couldn’t cope with the tide and that sort of thing. You’d get one particular boat that done it all the time. A lot of the time with the tide going you were sort of sideways to your dredge. And this particular boat would come down and you would hook him. Because he was hooked to you he would be going backwards. You wouldn’t say anything and you’d be watching this boat going backwards at the same pace [as you]. Of course we had an 8L3B [type of engine] and she didn’t miss a beat. It would be, “You better go and tell him” … “We got him again father.”

Greg Rainbird of St Helens recalled another favourite trick on the scallop drag. ‘We set the dan poles to mark our runs. It would get like a bloody pine forest sometimes. Everyone had poles stuck up. Sometimes we’d throw a pole over in the tide [without an anchor] and it would drift away. Some boats would chase it with a dredge down.’

‘All these little boats with big tractor engines.’

Allan Barnett recalled the early winches that were used to haul the dredges aboard. ‘All these boats had tractor engines bolted on them as the dredge winch. All these little boats with big tractor engines. It was good though. On a cold night we would go up and hug around the bloody exhaust pipe to get warm. Get your gloves and put them over the exhaust pipe and warm them up, put your hands in.’
Taking the kids fishing

Many commercial fishermen whet their appetite for fishing at an early age, heading out commercially or recreationally with their fathers or family. Andrew Bailey recounted when he was first allowed on his father’s commercial fishing boat. ‘If we could fit into a life jacket we were allowed on board. So we would get three or four jumpers on … I used to have a rope tied around the mast. And when we were getting the trevalla up … I had enough rope from there [the mast] to the rail, with this hook stick to go and hook the trevalla. The old man would keep going around in a circle because they would be popping up 20 to 50 yards away. You’d be going around and of course birds would be pecking them in the guts, that would let the air out and they would sink. So all we had to do was hook it and hold on to it, because they were too big for us. Everyone worked [on the boat], we knew how to bait hooks right away and cut all the bait up. If you wanted to go fishing you had to do something. We had a ball.’

Allan Barnett was only 7 or 8 years old when he first headed out with his father. ‘I used to sit up on the bow rail. Dad used to have a boat called the Judith, a little 40 foot wheelhouse forward boat, just for sharking. She only had rails up around the front, no bulwarks. And it had a roller there for the shark net. I’d be scared sh*tless. Holding onto this rail hoping I didn’t fall over the side.’

‘I spent most of my time on the boats … a fair bit of skipping school …’

John Hammond was typical of many commercial fishermen’s sons. ‘I started when my dad got the Arlie D in 1960. I was 10 years old. I spent most of my time on the boats, even back then. A fair bit of skipping school. I went permanent fishing in 1964. I started running it when I was only 17.’

Others, such as Rodney Treloggen, recalled their first memories fishing with family. ‘As a boy growing up, my family used to own St Helens Point Recreational Area, Burns Bay and that. I was only 12 or 13 when I first went. We’d load into the back of this old brown Dodge. We used to use a sheep’s head, tie a bit of bailing twine around it and hang it down into the kelp. And you’d see the feelers come up through the kelp. The record in my memory, there was 13 cray in one scoop of the dip net. And our first job of course was to carry the bloody things up the bank and back to the truck or tractor.’
Communicating at sea

Prior to the availability of two-way wireless radios, there was no capacity for fishermen to communicate with the outside world. ‘No radar, no GPS, no radio. Not even a battery on board in the early days,’ remembered Peter Rockliff. ‘We had a sounder before a radio.’ Even with the availability of two-way radios, communication with family, friends and colleagues whilst at sea proved a difficult task. ‘Then we got a radio,’ recalled Peter. ‘But Bridport didn’t have a station.’

Rodney Treloggen recalled the changes in communication during his time at sea. ‘When I first went to sea we had HF radio, which was notoriously unreliable when the weather was bad. You only had Radphone on that and everybody listened to that anyway. Then we progressed to 27 MHz radios with a single side band. I used to have a 30 foot aerial up here [at home in St Helens]. That could work, but once again everybody listened to you. Then we got in touch with somebody who knew about electronics and he actually used to split the bands so that we could have a secret channel; which was okay until somebody else got theirs split the same. Then we progressed to UHF radios. They were great, UHF with a repeater channel. We could be at the top end of Flinders Island and talk back to home which is great. Then along came of course mobile phones and that.’

Kak also recalled the advent of radio communications. ‘We used to listen to the two-way wireless a lot of course. And I did have a tape recorder on and I’d often tape certain blokes. They’d be calling up and I’d tape ’em through the night. At 10 o’clock at night I’d put it on [the recordings] and call certain blokes and they would answer. Those little things were quite funny at the time.’

Rodney Treloggen also remembered this habit of Kak’s. ‘Kak had a bad habit of using a tape recorder. He’d tape all the conversations and then he’d spend hours editing stuff, then he’d press the button on the radio and play these taped conversations back.’

Where to go fishing?

During an oral history interview with Kak, conducted by Rodney Treloggen, some friendly banter regarding where to go fishing came to the fore. ‘I’d know where you’d be going [to fish] when I heard you coming out. So I’d go there first,’ stirred Kak. Rodney replied, ‘Finally admitting that after all these years are you? You don’t want to say on tape about the day you sent me around the back of Swan [Island] to catch two crays or something, when I was going somewhere else and you talked me out
of it’? added Rodney. The quick reply from Kak: ‘I can’t remember that. But they [the cray] must have been there the day before. We might have got them that day, but they were there.’

Another practical joke at sea

Rodney Treloggen recalled another joke played by Kak. ‘When I went to Bridport once, I left my boat up there. The locals looked after it for me. And of course I came back and got in the boat and we headed off. We headed out through the bar at Bridport. And Kak had gone out before me. And he called me up. He said, “You see that yacht out there towards East Sandy Cape? I think it’s a mate of mine but I can’t quite see. I haven’t got my binoculars. Can you have a look through your binoculars and tell me if it’s…” some bloody name he gave me. Anyway, I put the binoculars up and of course they’d been around my binoculars with Vegemite hadn’t they. So I ended up with two black eyes. They always denied they did it.’

Cooking crays in a Tasmanian processing factory (left), and crayfish stored in tin tanks on the deck of an old rock lobster boat (right)
Photos courtesy of Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office
The arrival of technology in the fishing fleet

St Helens wharf
Photo courtesy of Anita Paulsen
Pre 1950s

Prior to the mid 1950s, fishing boats had no radio, sounders, GPS or even refrigeration. Commercial fishing was a completely different game, with the now lucrative abalone fishery non-existent, and the now profitable lobster fishery not such an attractive option. ‘We used to go craying, but as soon as a couta poked his head up we thought bugger that craying;’ recalled Ross Wisby. ‘As Dad and I used to say, crayfishing was just stinky old boats. They had no freezers. Used to have their bait all salted down. As soon as you got near them they stunk like buggery.’

Peter Rockliff also remembered what it was like fishing at this time. ‘It would have been 1953 I think. It was pretty basic. We used to carry all our [drinking] water in bottles on the deck and wash in salt and cook in salt [water] … We only had old cork floats. Even when we got the sounder on we were still using cork floats. [Fishing in Banks Strait] you would have to wait till slack water and the corks were waterlogged, the water would squeeze into them. We spent a lot of time looking for our gear. No radar, no GPS. Not even a radio. We didn’t even have a battery on board in the early days. All we had was a kerosene lamp. Cooked on a little petrol stove. We used to carry it [the petrol] in a 44 gallon drum and that was one of our seats we would sit on.’

Kak also remembered the early days. ‘We had to catch our own bait … read the weather yourself without the technology. Being able to read the weather meant you caught the fish. Used to use the barometer. Make the decisions yourself. When I first started with Peter (Rockliff) we didn’t even have a two-way wireless.’

The introduction of radios, sounders and radar

By the mid to late 1950s, technological advancements such as two-way radios, sounders and radar had made their way into the Tasmanian fishing fleet.

Peter Rockliff remembered fitting his first sounder. ‘I’d heard about echo sounders but there were none around then. I went to Melbourne, to the National Instrument Company I think it was then, and got a little Elac sounder. It was three or four months before I put it in. And when I switched it on I couldn’t believe my eyes. We had the sounder before the radio.’

Dood Pike recalled that by the early 1960s, echo sounders which printed their readings onto paper were common and communication was much better. ‘Gas cooking, refrigerators, radars, everything developed very quickly, which made fishing a much more comfortable occupation. The first sounder I remember being in St Helens, Lionel Barber put one on. He had it for about six months and didn’t seem to be very
impressed with it. We went and had a good talk with him and he said he wouldn’t bother buying one, it was only a waste of money buying the paper, and they don’t tell you much.

‘We were that impressed that we came straight home and put one on.’

Not long after, Dood recalled being at Clarke Island and local fisher Joe Greeno came in. ‘We pulled alongside and looked in his well and it was full of big light coloured crayfish. We said, “Where’d you get them Joe?” And he said “Just out there.” “But there’s no bottom out there Joe”. “Oh yes there is, come and have a look at this”. And he had a little Elac [paper sounder]. Joe had found patchy bits of hard bottom in between all the more substantial bits of reef they traditionally fished. ‘We were that impressed that we came straight home and put one on’.

Colour sounders and GPS

By the early 1980s colour sounders had become readily available. ‘They made every bad fisherman a good fisherman’ said Haydn Miller. ‘There was a skill in reading the old black and white paper sounder, but reading the colour sounder made it so much easier to catch fish.’ Also around the early 1980s, GPS technology was becoming available. ‘I think the first satellite navigator cost me $27,000 and it never really worked,’ recalled Peter Rockliff. Not only was this technology expensive, but there was also only a limited number of satellites, which meant there was only a narrow window of opportunity each day for operation.

‘That took the skill out of it. Nothing was ever sacred again’

Regardless, GPS technology had a huge impact on the seafood industry. ‘It [GPS] made it so you could go back to where you found fish,’ said Haydn. ‘You could wait on an area until the weather was right then you could go. You didn’t have to look for it on the radar, you could just go bang. Somewhere I’ve got some disks with 12 months of my fishing. Somebody could put those into the machine and go back to every one of those [marks]. That took the skill out of it. Nothing was ever sacred again.’
Fishing today

Today, modern electronics allow a high degree of interaction between sounders, marine radar, compass and GPS technology. This makes a vessel’s electronics exceptionally powerful, and highlights how technology has been the biggest advancement in the fishing game.

During several interviews, many fishermen spoke about how this intertwining of technology really took the skill out of fishing. They described how fishermen can now sit at anchor, watching a boat some three nautical miles away. By using their radar and plotter they can work out when the boat slows down to retrieve a pot and put that exact mark into their own plotter. All while they are at anchor.
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St Helens in pictures

Top to bottom: St Helens bridge and wharf area c1900, c1940s, c1960s
Photos courtesy of Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office
Fishing: A good life
Regardless of all the hardships described by the many fishermen interviewed as part of this project, all acknowledged with a passion how fishing had provided them and their families with a great life and how the camaraderie of the fishing fleet provided great times, whether at anchor or in port.

‘It’s been a good life to us. I’ve been lucky with the people who have helped me and the fella’s I’ve had fishing with me. They have all been great. I’ve had a lot of blokes help me out through my career and I’ve tried to do it to them. It was a real community on the anchorages. It was great times.’ Kak (Keith Krushka)

‘She was basic. We carried our fuel on the deck in a 44 gallon drum. No oars, no sounders. We used to carry all our water in bottles. And wash in salt and cook in salt. You didn’t know it was tough, you enjoyed it. That was the way it was. You lived for it and the fish were good.’ Peter Rockliff

‘I thoroughly enjoyed my life as a fisherman. It was always a delight to come home to my family [Dood had 10 children with his wife Bonnie]. I worked in partnership with my brother, Morris [Joe] for some twenty-five years and we never had a dispute of any kind. We both worked in perfect harmony all the time, fishing, building and operating a slipway, boatbuilding, making pots, building our own houses and others, as well as living next door and I consider that an achievement in itself’. Dood (Arthur Pike)

‘It was a good lifestyle, I enjoyed it. I had 40 years at it. Got to know a few people. Learnt what to say and what not to say.’ Haydn Miller

‘Thursday night at the Bayside was happy hour. And there was a special corner where the fishermen all used to get and tell the most lies. And some nights you’d probably see 30 odd fishermen in there.’

‘We’d go to the North-West Coast, to the forests. A tribe of buses and boat trailers and utes would leave here [St Helens] at 3 o’clock in the morning and head back that night loaded to the eyebrows with pot sticks.’ Rodney Treloggen
‘They used to make all their own pots. He made a good pot, didn’t he [Tim Bailey]. We used to go out and have a picnic getting the sticks. The whole family. Get a spot and go and work, get 1,000 sticks or something. Bundles and bundles and bundles of sticks. Then she’d be a big day of steaming them and making pots. Mum would be fixing up 100 sandwiches and bringing them up. At that stage there was [Derek] Freeman and [Roger] Lockhart, [Tim] Wardlaw and Dad [all independent fishermen] and all us boys. A real social affair.

Andrew Bailey

Scott Bailey (left), Andrew Bailey (middle) and Tim Bailey (right) making pots at Bicheno
Photo courtesy of the Bailey family, Bicheno
This project was completed by the Tasmanian Seafood Industry Council.

The Tasmanian Seafood Industry Council (TSIC) is the peak body representing the interests of wild capture fishers, marine farmers and seafood processors in Tasmania.

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