An aerial photograph of the Grimsby Docks area. In the foreground, a white building with a large black sign that reads "ALFRED ENDERBY LTD FISH SMOKERS" is visible. The sign also features logos for "Haddock" and "Salmon". To the right of the white building is a red brick building with a gabled roof. In the background, the docks are filled with various structures, including a tall, thin red brick tower. The sea is visible in the distance under a clear sky.

Grimsby Docks: Memories, Myths and Legends

- The following memories and stories, and a lot of the photographs too, have been provided by members of the public who either filled in a short questionnaire, added their memories to the registration form for Heritage Open Days 2021, or got in touch directly.
- None of the memories and stories sent in have been edited or changed - even spelling mistakes have been left in.
- Where a story or memory doesn't have quotation marks, it has been recorded from a telephone call or from speaking to people in person.
- Some historical information has also been provided where applicable.

If you have your own story of working on the Docks, please let us know!

HAZ@nelincs.gov.uk

“Never know it as the Kasbah, always been down dock”

“I have lots of down dock stories. My dad was a lumper, my grandad a lumper, fisherman, skipper of a minesweeper and skipper of a shop that rescued soldiers from Dunkirk. ”



Picture © David Shreeve and not submitted with the two separate memories to the left

Q. Do you have any memories of the area from visits?

A. “How utterly unique the area is and the sense of how bustling it would have been back in the day compared with today.”



Picture © Garry Crossland and not submitted with the memory to the left



© Gordon Green

Ian (Solly) Salsbury remembering the Pontoon Stands

“The filleters stood there all year round filleting fish in all weathers, two at a tub with the Fish in cold water in the tub, dip a hand in to pull a fish out then do some really deft cuts to separate the fillet from the skeleton, the fillet was pared de boned and put on the growing pile ready to be weighed into boxes, ice added and sealed up to be dispatched.

In the 50s and 60s a lot of the time the Fish was put into a Hessian bag like a supermarket bag with handles this was tied up with a label on it – not too sure on how the system exactly worked, this bag was called a bass.

Also on the stand was a walk in fridge and a tall desk that the merchant would stand at doing his paperwork. Over the stand facing the road side was a large wooden sign ... with the merchants name on it. Between the stands was hung a tarpaulin to delineate the space and to try to keep the worst of the weather at bay. Life was pretty grim and in the middle of winter stalactites would form from the pound board that the men filleted on. Also on the stand would be the Barrow that the fish was brought from the market on by the barrowboy.

Up to when the Beaching cuts happened to the railways the fish was dispatched right across Britain by train. The rail tracks ran along in front of the raised pontoon, and the boxes and basses had to go in the right boxcar for different areas.

Then afterwards a huge network of lorries was set up by the FMA and dispatched every day taking the fish to every part of the country.”



Filleter, William
Vinson's Stand,
No.1 Fishmarket



© Jane Hyldon-King and
Paul King

“Fact, To beat the Policeman on duty of exit from Grimsby fish docks traffic lights at Ribey Square, Blokes used to put one large fish nose down in his BASS on his bicycle handlebar with the other nose out so it looked like one the allowed 'one' fish except when the bloke started cycling, It was so heavy it caused him to lean right over to one side.”



Picture © Gordon Green and not submitted with the memory above

“my granddad was a skipper who sailed from Grimsby and was lost at sea in 1929.”



Picture © Garry Crossland and not submitted with the memory to the left

“My dad was a customs officer based in offices next to the dock tower and there was a high tide that caused huge flooding to the docks. He took me down in the car with him and I recall ships out on the dock sides and he had to rescue some of his female colleagues from his offices, carrying them out by piggy back! Our journey down there took us on the street running parallel to train line and everyone was out of their houses on the front, due to flooding and there was water pouring off the the tracks on to the road below. A very dramatic night for a young girl!”

Image supplied by Associated British Ports



“my father was a skipper for a fishing boat that sailed from Grimsby and I used to work repairing the fishing nets with my mum.”



Picture © Mr P. Boggis and not submitted with the memory to the left

Net cleaning in the 1980's

“Cleaning nets for the Gill netting boats in the 80's was a real family affair. I was a teenager and would go 'down dock' with my mum and sisters and we'd meet more extended family (cousins, aunts, nana's), all there to clean nets and earn a bit of extra cash. £1.50 for each net cleaned was really good going! We sometimes cleaned nets for my Dad's boats (The Whitebank and then until 2001 The Saroya) and sometimes for the Danish boats that landed in Grimsby. I think we were in a building on fish dock rd next to Kurt Christensens (at that time) but sometimes, even in winter, we went on the boats (in snow) to clean them!

It was always freezing, but we soon forgot about the cold as we sang along to songs from the Musicals on our tape recorder, lots of banter about who had the most tangled net to clean, we laughed a lot. With a desire to make as much money as possible, we'd busy ourselves de-tangling nets, and returning the net rings onto large stakes, removing left over bits of fish and starfish were particularly tough! (a real stinky job). For me, the wage at the end of the weekend was always worth it, I remember being able to buy a new pair of jeans from Arrow fashions, a shop in Freeman Street. Can't imagine doing anything like that now but at the time it didn't seem like anything out of the ordinary.”

“These boats were the last of the coalers and were on their way to a breakers yard in Belgium. In the background the building of the Ross Groups' new head Offices is in progress. The first multifloored building in Grimsby! Ross Group was owned by Carl Ross very progressive and entrepreneurial for his day.”



Memories of Ejvind Mørk: North Sea skipper in the late 70s

“One time there was a really bad storm and the seiner we were on was on the top of a 60 foot wave 1 minute and down in the water just as deep the next!”

“Sometimes it would be that cold that we would have to chop ice off the rig and deck as it was so frozen up so the boat wouldn’t turnover/capsize.”

“We were fishing for 14 days, 20 hrs a day but because of the ships costs we all owe the office £170.”

“That was a good trip! 8 days and 6 of us brought home £1700 each after ships fees!”

“We were fishing in the North Sea 1 time and we pulled the nets up and that was funny because there was a ladies wedding dress in the net!”

“Loading ice for the trawlers next fishing trip at Great Grimsby Ice Company factory
You can see the loose ice coming down the Pipe into the barrels.”



© Mr P. Boggis

“My Grandfather started his working life as a clerk in Sutcliffes offices down dock. After a spell of 10 years in America he returned to Grimsby and found work on the trawlers.”



Picture © Mr P. Boggis and not submitted with the memory to the left

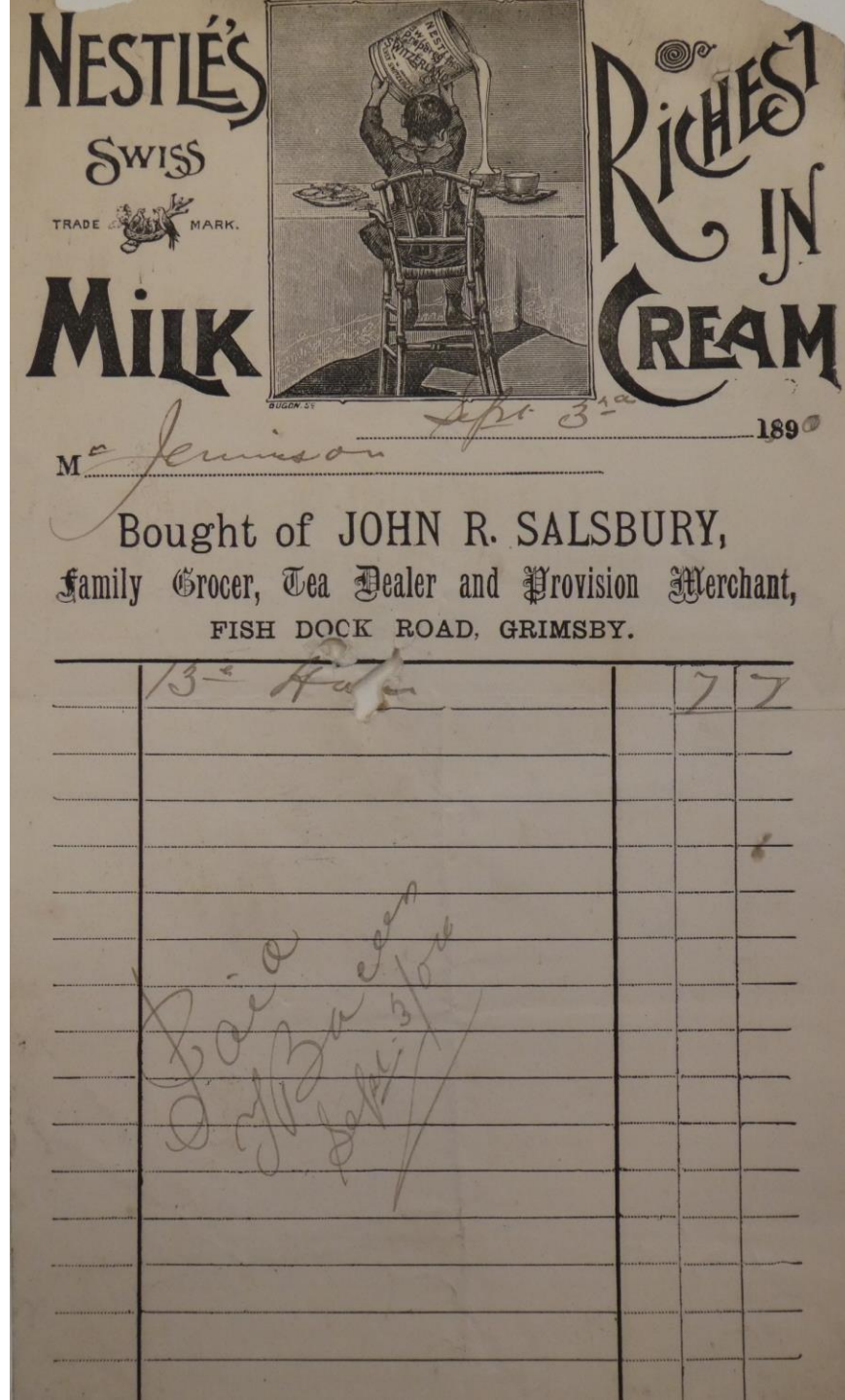
“The herring trade was seasonal and the shoals were followed from East Scotland down the East coast , the trawlers dropping their catches off for processing as they went.”



Café memories from Ian Salsbury: 1

“The first one was my present workshop which we built in 1860, ... at around the same time my great great Grandfather's brother was in business in the café on the corner of fish dock road and Hutton Road. In later years this was the original Ross shop and upstairs where there are several offices was the (reputedly) largest private telephone exchange outside London from where the Ross Empire was connected.

The café was then taken over by Rodney Beckett and not sure why but my father went into partnership with him and in about 1965 my father bought him out and we referred to it as Salsbury's Becketts cafe.”





Café memories from Ian Salsbury: 2

“We had the number four refreshment room on the pontoon at the back of the ice factory, I don’t know when we took it over but ... probably late 1950s or early 60s. It was and still is a concrete bunker and it always smelt damp but it was a godsend to the merchants and barrowboys, there was a pot belly stove stood in the middle of the floor of the seating area for cold days.

A very popular café was situated on the corner of Wharncliffe Road in Russell grants building, The manageress was a most incredible lady called Rita, when she retired after more than 30 years I looked back and she had had only had two days off sick! She was loved by all the men and it was their delight to be banned by her and chased out of the shop (till they came back next time again of course.)”



Did you know?

This Grade II Listed Building, originally Cosalt Butchers in 1896, but better known as Russell Grant, has a basement/cellar – quite a rarity here as the whole peninsula is ‘made land’, it was all salt marsh prior to the 1850s, hence East Marsh being the ward where it’s located.

According to a former Peterson’s Smokehouse worker, this basement is even more special because it contains a sarcophagus, with a priest buried inside!



Café memories from Ian Salsbury: 3

“When the new fishmarket opened we no longer had a need for the number four refreshment room and as I was in charge then, I opened the new café which predictably enough I called Newmarket, based in the office space overlooking the Fish market.”



© Grimsbyfishmarket.co.uk

“This was an interesting time when there were lots of visiting VIPs who were shown around the market and then treated to a silver service smoked haddock and poached egg breakfast in the boardroom, I had the job of setting it all out and serving up, and some of the groups were quite disparate, we had a group of Colonels from different armies. Neil Kinnock and local politicians. Brake brothers. Groups of fishing leaders from Denmark and Iceland. I suppose I really should have kept a diary of them all. When Frank Flear became Lord-Lieutenant of Lincolnshire we had a very strange mid afternoon sit down buffet for probably 30 past Lord lieutenants. Quite surreal.”

Q. Have you ever worked in this area of Grimsby?

A. Fred's Fish

An interview in 2020 with the last tenant of Fred's Fish revealed that Arthur and Robert Osborne, trawler owners, had constructed the three-storey building on Wharnccliffe Road North in c.1856. It was built for receiving money from fish merchants upon the landing and selling of the catch and for paying the mariners when they came to shore.

In 1966 the Osbornes moved their offices to a building, now demolished, which was located on what is now the carpark in front of Alfred Enderby's.

Frederick William Parkinson, fish merchant (Fred's Fisheries) then sub-let the building from the Osbornes, and the building stayed in use by Fred's Fisheries until it was vacated in September 2011.

(BB Heritage Studio, 2020, paragraph 2.2.10, 'Conservation Management Plan (Revision B): Peterson's Smokehouse & Building 89)



Did you know?

The *Cambridge News* received a call from Grimsby shortly after 6pm on November 22, 1963, warning "Call the American Embassy in London for some big news". This was 25 minutes before the assassination of US President John F Kennedy.

The call is reported to have been made by Albert Osborne, a Grimsby-born soldier turned spy who was recruited as a KGB agent while in America. He had returned home to visit his sister in November 1963.

Fred's Fish was still being run by the Osbornes at this time, and it is understood that Albert had visited his relatives there, doing some work himself from the building whilst back in town. There is no evidence at all for this, but there's a chance that the call to the Cambridge News could have been made from this building, perhaps from this sound-proofed room on the first floor!



Q. Have you ever worked in this area of Grimsby?

A. “national provincial bank Riby square 1957-1967”

“Originally one of the Smiths' Banking Group based in Lincoln.”



Did you know?

The former Post Office on Auckland Road / Cross Street was fully re-built in 1946 following bombing during WW2, which had left the original building in ruins.

During the 1980s, however, it was being used by Brymarine Communications to transmit 'Sailor Radio'.

It was also later used by Docklands Recording Studio.



Memories of Working in the Post Office: 1

“In 1960 my first job on leaving school was to join the post office as a telegram boy, following in my older brother’s footsteps.

We were given a bike and a leather pouch in which to put the telegrams. A uniform would follow if I made the grade .

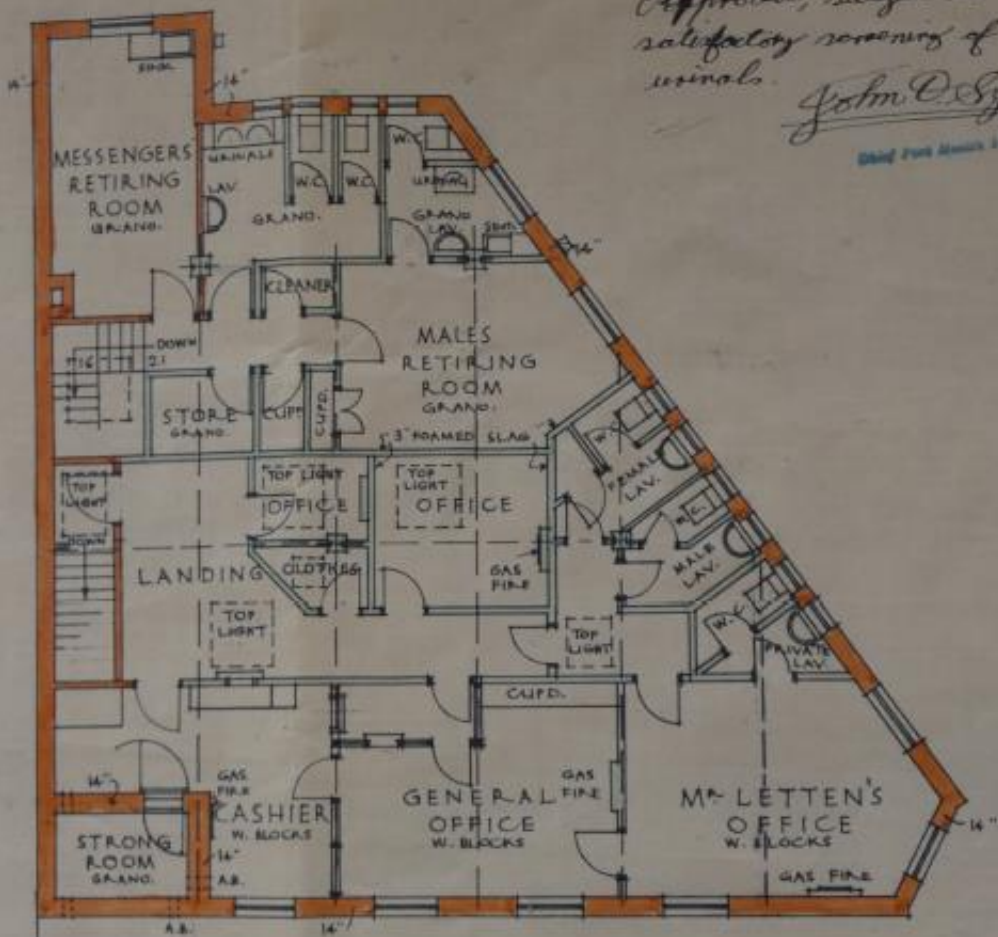
On Saturday mornings “confirmations” were delivered to the fish merchants. These were the legal contracts for orders made over the phone during the week. We had to deliver these in two’s due to the notorious behaviour of the women fish house workers.

The offices were always situated above the working area and were accessed by a wooden staircase. So on one occasion me and my fellow boy delivered the confirmations and on the way down the stairs all the ladies were waiting with their knives being sharpened on steels and looking at us leeringly. We vaulted over the side of the staircase and ran for it but my mate was caught.

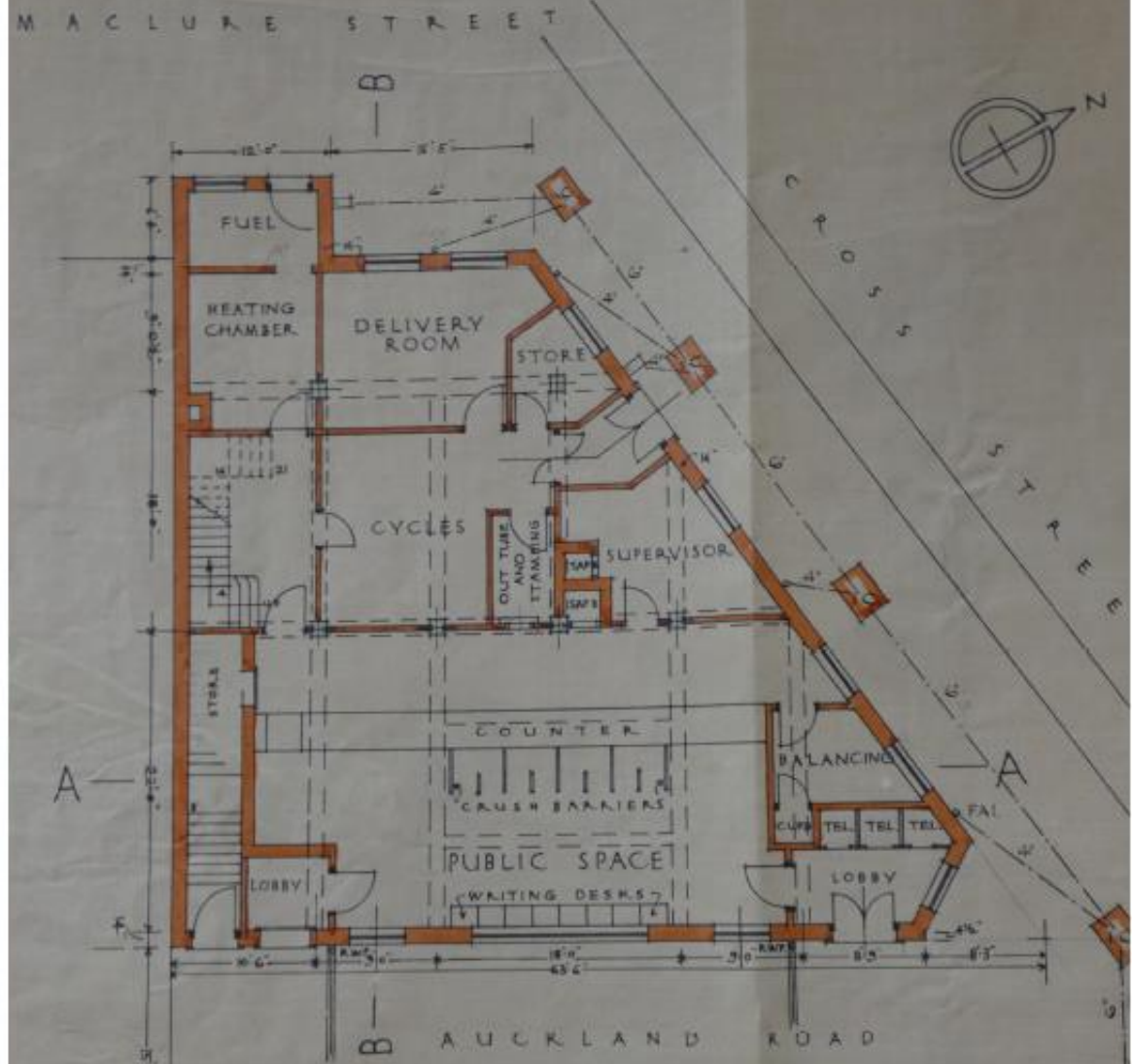
They stuffed fish offal down his shorts and up his shirt and pushed him out of the door.

He had to go home and I did the rest of the deliveries”

8/7/46.
 Approved, subject to
 satisfactory screening of
 minerals.
 John D. Syme
 Chief Fire Officer 1946



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

1946 rebuild proposals
 for building No. 11



**Grimsby Fire Brigade on exercise near
Auckland Road, 1950s. The Post office is
the building on the left.**

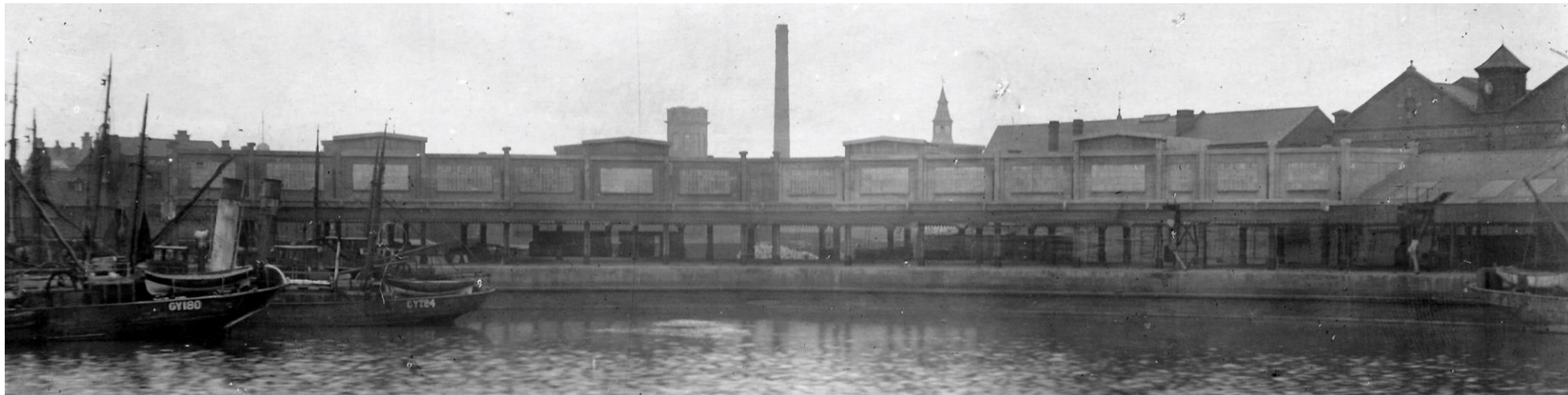
© North East Lincolnshire Archives

Memories of Working in the Post Office: 2

“Another one I remember is climbing up onto the pontoon using a lorry wheel and walking towards the sentry huts they used as an office. The pontoon was awash with water and fish slime and it sloped down towards the dock to enable drainage.

I immediately slipped onto my back and slid slowly downwards towards the hut where the merchant cooly took the telegram out of my hand and carried on filleting.

I got up with some difficulty and cycled home to get changed.”



Picture © Garry Crossland and not submitted with the memory above

“The dockers are unloading baskets from the hold for distribution on the fish market [adjacent] and later sale by auction. Note. They are balanced on planks and wearing clogs. Very slippery and definitely before Health and Safety!”



Memories of Working in the Post Office 3

“The “office” then discovered I had 5 o’levels and moved me onto the post office counter and I spent over a year at the fish docks office nearly opposite “The Coal Salt”

The office had a bank of telephones inside that the merchants used for business and one day they were all out of action and it got pretty scary. They were furious.

The permanent senior officer there was an ex marine commando who regaled me with gruesome tales of his war in Burma and hand to hand combat. He also contracted malaria and sometimes had to go to a hospital for tropical diseases in London.”



Picture © Garry Crossland and not submitted with the memory to the left

Q. Have you ever worked in this area of Grimsby?

A. “Havelock Seafoods”

Built before 1896, this building was listed as Grimsby & East Coast Fishing Co. Ltd in 1908



Q. Have you ever worked in this area of Grimsby?

A. “Petersons”

Peterson’s Smokehouse fronts onto Henderson Street, with the rear of the building facing onto Brown Street. This Grade II Listed building was built sometime between 1877 and 1896. On the 1896 Goad Insurance Map for this area it’s shown as in use as ‘fish curing’, with the map showing 2 smoke shafts. By the 1925 map though there were nine smoke houses in the building, which corresponds with plans from 1923 showing proposed alterations.



Picture © Garry Crossland and not submitted with the memory to the left

Peterson's Smokehouse: 1923 Building Plans by Clayburn & Co.



FRONT ELEVATION.



CROSS SECTION A-A.

MESSRS J. C. CLAYBURN & CO. LTD.

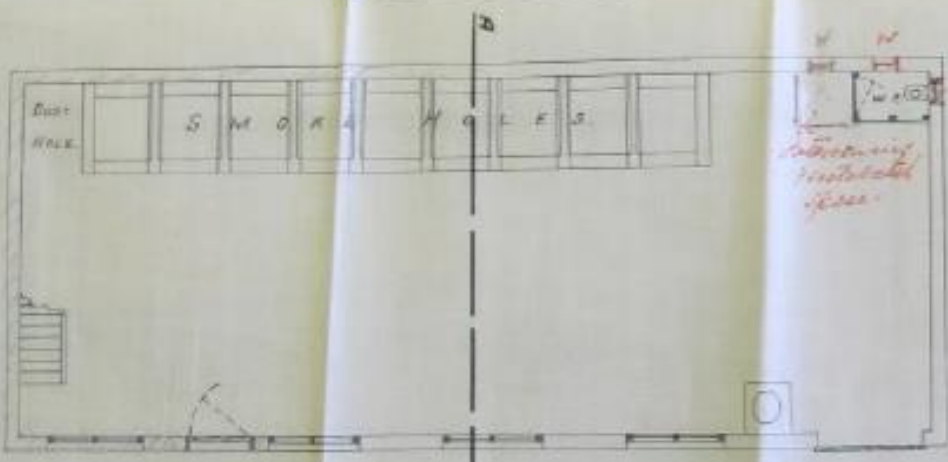
PROPOSED ALTERATIONS TO PREMISES.

HENDERSON STREET, GRIMSBY.

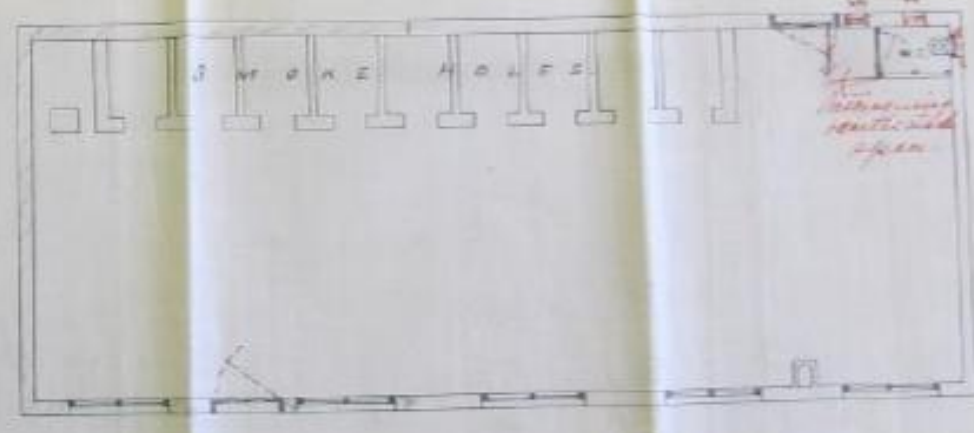
SCALE 1/4" OF AN INCH TO A FOOT.



SITE PLAN.



GROUND FLOOR PLAN.



FIRST FLOOR PLAN.

*Alterations to Peterson's 1/12/23
Subject to higher authorities
Approval & Approval of Plans*



“I remember going with my dad to collect his wages when I was a little girl.

I’m sure it was a small building with just one on man and all the brown paper pay packets were laid out in rows on the table in front of him”



Picture © Jane Hyldon-King and Paul King,
and not submitted with the memory to the left

“I frequently visited the area in my childhood with my father Fred Stone who was a fish merchant. He started work on the docks as a borrow boy when he left school aged 14 in 1927. He became a filleter and went on to have his own business with a small stand (F C Stone) on the old pontoon, then Choice Foods Ltd and Barnet & Roberts cold store in Henderson St and finally Barnet & Roberts (with Fred Smith) moved to Ocean House from where they sold smoked salmon.”



Fred Stone (left) and Harry Stone (Right) on the Pontoon (© S. Stone)

“I documented the Kasbah in 1989/90 for a major photographic exhibition called FISH TOWN.”

The FISH TOWN collection is currently available to view online here:

<https://www.stevethornton.co.uk/fish-town-grimsby-docks-steve-thornton-images-collection-1990-to-2020/>



Thank you!!

We would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who shared their memories and sent in photographs. We've really enjoyed reading them all and trying to imagine what it was like working down Dock, and we hope you have too.

If you have your own story of working on the Docks, please let us know by getting in touch at the following address:

HAZ@nelincs.gov.uk