

The Importance of Navigation to the Fishing Industry in the 1966-7.

As told by Mr Malcolm Cooke, Trawlerman in Brixham Harbour and Morecambe Bay (Fleetwood).

“The navigation system at that time was the Decca navigator...[it] was developed in the last war (WW II). It gave you pinpoint accuracy. Decca developed it after the war for commercial vessels. They hired you the equipment. You had to rent it.

It was very accurate. The repeatability was amazingly accurate. The actual place you were at was not quite as accurate; it would be about 50 yards out but you could go back to the same numbers every day and it would be exactly the same place which of course was ideal for fishing.”

“..... the invention of the Decca changed the whole fishing industry because it enabled people who had no experience of fishing before that time to actually know where they were and this was important because there were so many wrecks left over from the wars. After the two World Wars, the losses of equipment and gear [to the fishermen] was enormous. So, a lot of people went out of business because of these losses. Actually, the demise of the sailing trawlers and the port [Brixham] was because of the losses of the gear.”

“But, once we got the wrecks on to the Decca navigator system we’d know where we were and didn’t catch them (the wrecks).”

Fishing before the introduction of the Decca Navigation System

“Before the wars navigation was by lead line. The depth of the water was all on sea charts so if you were on a sandy bottom at 30 fathoms you could go to the chart and pinpoint where you were.”

The lead was loaded with tallow at the bottom...they have a hollow in them and you put tallow in them and drop it to the sea bed and it will show you what you have got. Very valuable information it gave you. The other way they marked where they were in navigation was done by cross marks on the shore. You could pick out a church and perhaps a hill behind it and some rocks and you'd know you were on a clear line. Trees were used as cross marks but you had to know them obviously – they were valuable aids to navigation.”

“The sextant and use of the sextant to take a longitudinal sight and latitude was only accurate to about a mile. Theoretically, it was about 50 yards but in practice, trying to hold the sextant still...; you were lucky if you were within a mile or so it wasn't any use at all for avoiding wrecks or hazards on the bottom.....of course, you needed accurate time and chronometers gave you accurate time and radio gave you the time too.