

The Thomas family of Port Isaac fishermen

Father and Son team, Joey and Richard Thomas, fish from their boat SHARICMAR



Richard and Joey bring in a pot

Photo courtesy Julian Brown

Joey looks back and reflects ...

I was 7 years old when I went out fishing with my Grandfather, Old Man Joey, in "The Hope".

The first boat that I owned was called "The Three Wishes".

Other boats I have owned/worked on over the years were called "I'm Trying", "Princess" and "Sharicmar".

Once my boys, Richard and Martin, were old enough, they helped me with the fishing.

One of the changes to fishing rules and regulations over the years was the introduction of the minimum size rule. You are only allowed to catch lobsters measuring 9 inches or longer from eyesocket to the end of its body.

The future for fishing in general is not too good. There are so many rules and regulations now, and the price that we can sell our catch for has not kept up with the rises in fuel costs and general maintenance of the boats.

For instance, in

2005 Lobsters sold for £15.00 per kilo and fuel was 55p per litre compared to 2012 Lobsters sell for £10.00 per kilo and fuel is 72p per litre

courtesy Joey Thomas

Richard remembers ...

My first fishing trips with my Father were when I was about seven years old. He was working in the Dockyard in Plymouth and we used to come to Port Isaac every weekend. Father had a punt called "The Swan" and we used to catch mackerel and skate with long lines.

By the time I was eleven we were living in Port Isaac and Father had a boat called "The Three Wishes". I used to go out with him baiting and stacking the pots and steering the boat while Father shot the pots. I was so small I could hardly see over the wheel!

I've always fished with my Father and never worked any other boats. When my Father suffered a heart attack and was recovering from his triple by-pass surgery, I worked with my brother Martin for about five years. At that time we fished around Lundy. When Father decided he was ready to go back to sea we all worked together for a time and then Martin went into the building trade.

I went to St Austell College to study engineering, but left after a couple of years to return to fishing full time. My Father, Great-Grandfather and Great-Great Grandfather all fished from Port Isaac.

A day's fishing routine

I get up between 4.30am and 6.30am, depending on the tide, and we usually start work about an hour later. The first thing we do is fill the diesel cans and put them and the boxes of bait into the punt and go out to the boat. As we leave the harbour we have our first cup of tea and a sandwich and then it usually takes us about 30 mins to an hour to reach our first string of pots.

While we're steaming along we cut up the bait ready for baiting the pots. The pots are hauled, the fish removed and measured and the under size fish thrown back. Then the pots are re-baited, stacked, and then shot out of the stern through a gate.

We haul between 300/400 pots per day and then we steam home. On the way back we band the lobsters, which literally means putting elastic bands around the claws to prevent them nipping. The crabs are also "nicked" to stop their claws closing. The day's catch is put into large store pots which are secured on a strop outside the harbour.

When the fish is landed, once or twice a week, the week's catch is brought ashore from the store pots and packed into fish boxes ready to be sold to the wholesalers who come to pick up the fish.

The boat is then moored up in the harbour. It is secured to the mooring chain on the floor of the harbour by two heavy ropes, one from the bow and one from the stern. Mooring up and leaving the boat ready for the next day takes about half an hour and in total an average day is about 10 hours long. The last job is to come ashore in the punt and take it up to the Platt on a trailer.

Today's problems

The biggest problem for the fishing industry in Port Isaac is not the stocks of fish but the prices which we receive for the fish. Prices have been about the same for 20 years whilst the overheads have continued to increase, so it is becoming harder and harder to run a successful business.

Although stocks are healthy, any increase in the fishing effort from other boats fishing these grounds will put more pressure on local boats.

courtesy Richard Thomas