

The Families at Sea Project.

In July 2010 I took up a secondment with the Kilkeel Development Association to manage a project titled 'Families at Sea' a heritage project based at Kilkeel Harbour. The project which was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the NITB grew out of a public feeling that before it was too late, a comprehensive project should be undertaken to record the precious and fascinating maritime heritage of Mourne, as told by the families who have lived that history.

The scope of the project was defined by a maritime committee composed of people who are or had been involved in some area of the maritime sector. I would not have been able to complete the project were it not for their help.



The element which defines the project is the portrait of twenty families who have a background in seafaring. Although the majority of families have gone to sea through fishing, many families also had members who served in the Merchant Navy, worked in processing, net-mending, marine engineering, even marine conservation. There is a great depth to the areas covered which document the history boatbuilding, piloting and fish selling to name a few.

The Bonnie Ethel, which left Kilkeel in 1956. She would go on to appear in a film 'Fire Down below' that featured Rita Hayworth.



Uncle Charlie Cassidy became so known as he fished with a crew almost exclusively made up of his nephews.

I compiled a photographic timeline of Kilkeel harbour's development and with enthusiast David Snook created a display of CR-10 cards for 100 Mourne Seamen from the early 1900s. All of the information was skilfully presented by the team at 1440 Design which can be viewed on touchscreens in the Centre.

Over the year more than 20 school classes and 25 adult groups came to visit the centre. We also worked closely with the RNLI where Gary Young was very helpful.

The project has shown however that over the years in Mourne there have always been good times and bad and that the resilience of Mourne's people is enduring.



John Cassidy, chatting to Thomas, Willie John and Sean, members of the Cunningham family who have followed in their fathers' footsteps in becoming pilots for Carlingford Lough.

I would like to thank sincerely all the families who participated and indeed anyone who helped me during the course of Families at Sea. It was an unforgettable experience and I will always look back upon my days spent at the Harbour very fondly. I am proud to say we have a fascinating portrait of the past eras which will never be lost.

Conor Keenan