

Fishing village Mortsund in Lofoten

By Marius Evjeberg in Nordlandsposten no. 53, Saturday, 2. March 1968

Mortsund is not what it once was. That holds true, of course, for every fishing village in Lofoten.

But old venerable Mortsund has held up well against centralisation, relocation from the "outskirts", competition from the big neighbours, Stamsund and Ballstad and other things that the welfare and nuclear age entail.

Anyone coming to Mortsund on a winter's day will not find much that seems appealing. Rocks and stones and stones and rocks in abundance. The place is decidedly uninviting and inhospitable, just like most other fishing villages in Lofoten.

On a summer day the scenery is quite different. The rocks and stones are the same, yet they are warm and covered by green tufts of grass growing out of every crack. Docks and factory buildings are reflected in the mirrorbright sea and islets and reefs create a beautiful decor in the harbor and outside. Yes, it is beautiful here, idyllic to the extent that one could wish for a small cabin placed on those rocks, just to sit there on a sunny day, meditating and dreaming.

In total, there are seven fish farms in Mortsund, says Ottar Statile who has owned the biggest one since 1950. He is not aware of its history prior to 1900. Nor have we been able to find anything of significance from the old days.

In the past, when fishing was done from rowing and sailing boats, it was all about getting as close to the fishing ground as possible, says Statile.

Here in Mortsund, boats rowed out to Brandsholmen, Moholmen and Sandsund. Out on Brandsholmen there were no less than three merchants. In Mortsund had they also been busy buying and selling fish. And here was a post office and steamboat landing.

Around 1900, the left part of Mortsund was owned by Petter Andreassen from Holsdalen, while the eastern part of the village belonged to brothers Ludvig and Richard Jentoft from Ramsvik. Ludvig's son, - Ludolf Jentoft - still owns the place. The left part of the village, i.e., where we are at, was after Petter Andreassen taken over by his son Emil. He later sold it to his brother A. B. Andreassen from Fagerstranda near Fygle, who in turn sold it to his son - again by the name of Petter Andreassen. In 1950, Mortsund was sold to the current owner, Ottar Statile from Borge. By then, the place had become completely dilapidated. Both the main

It is beautiful here, idyllic to the extent that one could wish for a small cabin placed on those rocks, just to sit there on a sunny day, meditating and dreaming.

house, dock, and fish factory as well as the fishermen's cabins were completely worn out after many years of inadequate maintenance. A fish factory, perhaps more so than any other commercial building, must be looked after properly, otherwise it will soon "go downhill".

When Ottar Statile had bought Mortsund in 1950, he had to make repairs to the extent that he could somehow operate in the winter of 1951. The following spring, a production facility was built, a 12 by 20 meter construction on three floors. Furthermore, a fish oil plant, commercial fishing docks, and a major repair of the steamship dock. The following year, he erected a construction to dry fishing nets, with separate dock and renovated fishermen's cabins. The main building with shop, post office, bus dispatch, steamboat landing etc. was restored.

In 1964, Mortsund got its own pumping station. It cost NOK 250,000, of which NOK 110,000 had to be financed by bonds and loans.

A freezer and cooling system were built in 1960. They cost approx. NOK 100,000. It was quite a job to build up the fishing village of Mortsund in a hurry, but Statile was young and energetic. And if the business were to be profitable, it had to be in top condition. - It's all about making it as easy as possible so that people can prosper. If it doesn't work with good, timely maintenance, it certainly won't with a lack thereof, says Statile.

Ottar Statile has cabin space for 50 fishermen. The other fishing businesses can accommodate approx. 200. During the first years, it was overcrowded. But in Mortsund, as in other fishing villages, the number of foreign fishermen has fallen by about half. Last year's good season led to higher occupancy rates this year.

Mortsund has very good drying conditions for stock fish. It is therefore in strong demand and if it is possible to stretch the price a bit, the stockfish from Mortsund will succeed. Last year around one million kilos of skrei were caught for Mortsund, - compared to three million kilos in 1950.

You cannot write about Mortsund without mentioning the landlady. She is a farmer's and fisherman's daughter from Borge. - Bjørga Statile - or Rystad as she was called in her time, was taught how to make herself useful early on. It could be sitting on the mowing machine, helping with seine fishing, or gravelling the road. Nothing was too simple for the many "Hans Kalsa girls". In Mortsund her many activities show everywhere. In front of the main house, she has created a beautiful rock garden where both apples and plums grow. There have not been any big crops, but she has harvested apples of 85 grams. The owner's wife also has her strawberry fields where she takes her 200 liters in good years. We are allowed to ask where the

soil comes from. It was taken from wherever it could be found and transported in buckets and cardboard boxes, and compost was made from everything that

The outskirts are an important component of the country's fabric. They make the country larger, richer, and more varied in terms of their distinctness. They provide peace and tranquility and a health remedy for tired nerves.

compost can be made from. The rest is good care and the work of the sun. It can get quite hot in between rocks and stones – if the sun is shining. In addition, she has planted a forest, as many as 600 fir trees have been made room for between the stones. Mrs. Bjørga enjoys having beautiful surroundings – pleasant

also for the fishermen who come to the village. Thus, she has taken the initiative to build a common building for them. It was finished a couple of years ago.

We ask Stale whether he has a wish for the place.

– Then it has, first and foremost, to be a wish for all remote places, that the authorities must not forget us. The outskirts are an important component of the country's fabric. They make the country larger, richer, and more varied in terms of their distinctness. They provide peace and tranquility and a health remedy for tired nerves. Our contribution to the country's economy is not insignificant. When it comes to Mortsund, better roads and bus connections are key. We have lost the steamboat calls, but they can be replaced by better bus connections. Like so many other remote places, we have lost the school which was a heavy loss. For many years, it had been our cultural center, – a gathering place for children and adults alike. It cannot be right to take such valuables away from us without giving us something in return, concludes the owner.

It has become quiet along the docks and in the harbour. We learn that the large vessels are out at sea.

They carry driven, skilled fishermen who fish all they can get hold of. The smaller vessels fish in the Vestfjord, be it pollock along the coast, salmon between the islets or minke whale out in the fjord.

The young people have long moved away from Mortsund as from other outskirts, but if it is skrei season and life and excitement as it once was, some of them find their way back home, and those old enough



The owner of Mortsund loves children. One of his grandchildren comes in and thus the young lady must be in the picture, grandfather insists.

stay in the fishing village. This winter the fishing is good, very good everywhere in Lofoten. But even then, it is impossible to ignore the challenges. Should the Lofoten fishery be regulated?
