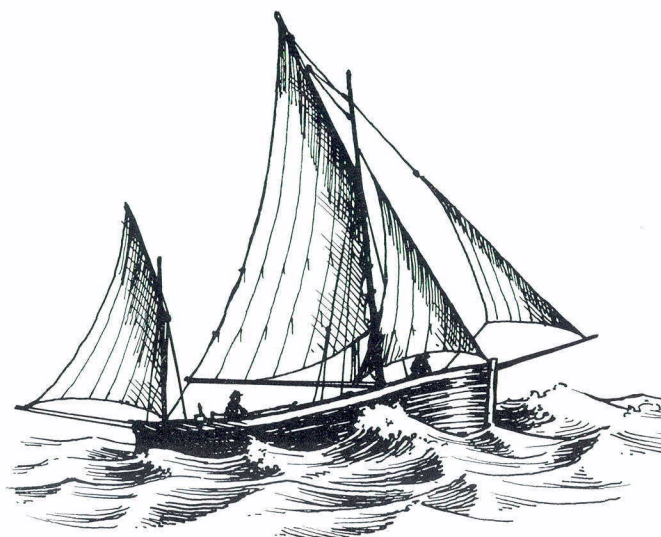




MANX SEA FISHING

2

HERRING BOATS c.1830 – 1940



'Lugger' or Dandy Smack, 1840

FROM 1823 onwards Cornish fishermen came regularly to the Isle of Man to join in the summer herring fishing and their types of vessel became copied by the Manxmen. One of those who took a lead in trying to improve the Manx fishing boats was Captain Quilliam who had steered the "Victory" during the Battle of Trafalgar. He and two friends refitted an undecked Ramsey fishing boat, giving it the Cornish lugger rig instead of the fore – and – aft rig of the Manx smacks and improving it in other ways as a working example of what could be done.

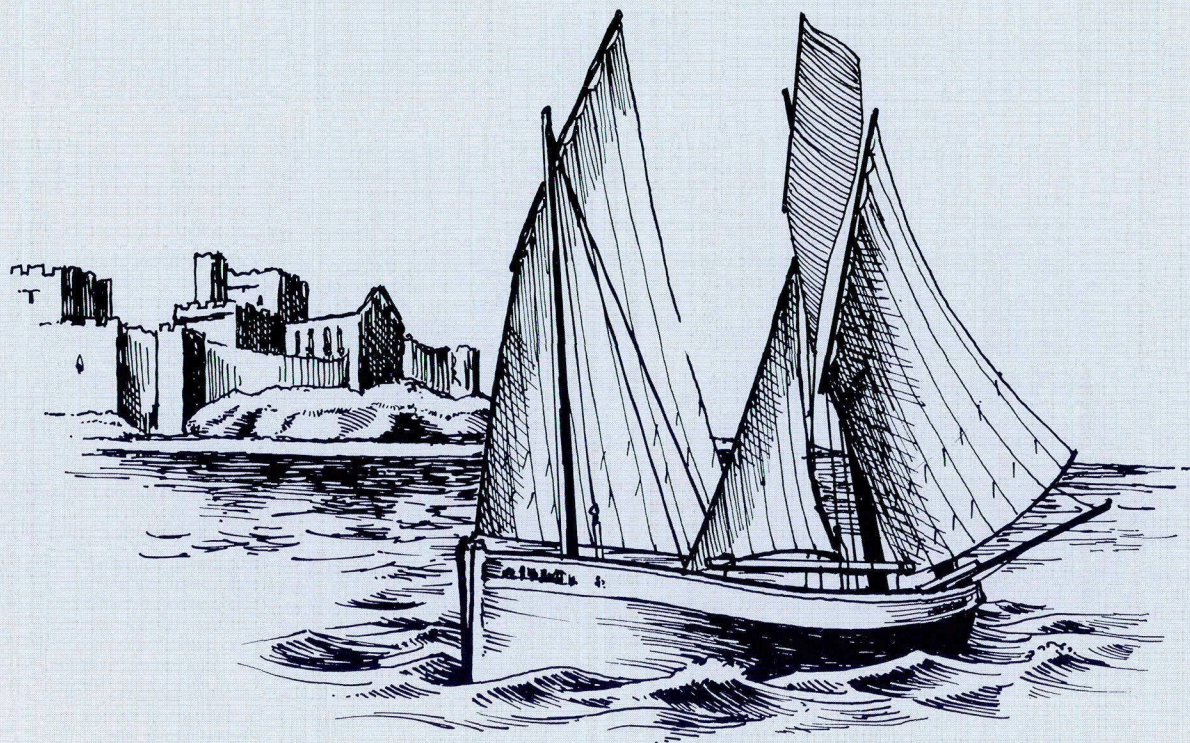
set on a mizzen mast at the stern. (A lug sail is one fastened to a yard that hangs slanting to the mast.) The foremast could be lowered so that the boat could lie quietly to the nets once fishing started. The luggers were 11.5 to 14.3 metres long and 3.7 to 4.3 metres across at the widest part. They were either half-decked (with the bow end covered), or completely decked. The first of these luggers were still built in the clinker style, but from about 1840 carvel built boats began to be adopted. Carvel built boats had their planks laid edge to edge instead of overlapping. The crew consisted of 7 men or 7 men and 1 boy.

FROM SMACKS TO LUGGERS

By the 1840's the whole of the Manx herring fishing fleet was made up of boats with dandy rig which came to be known as 'Luggers'. They normally carried four sails and two masts. They took their name from the lug sail

NICKEYS

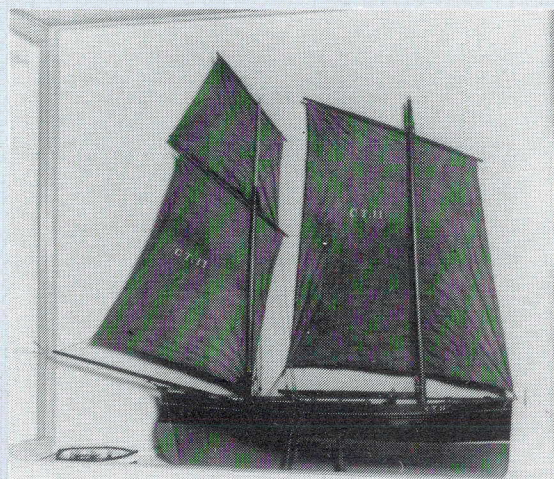
A new design of fishing boat, also from Cornwall, became very popular from the late 1860's to the 1890's. These boats were known as 'Nickeys' because Nicholas was a very



Nickey.

common name in Cornwall, and used as a nickname for Cornishmen. Manx fishermen were impressed by these Cornish vessels when they saw them at the spring mackerel fishing off the South of Ireland and also when they began to be used in the summer herring season off Peel. Nickeys carried four sails: a large dipping lugsail on the foremast, a large mizzen, a mizzen topsail and a big staysail set between the masts. The staysail was a great help in increasing speed in the light winds. In good conditions a Nickey could do 10 knots. They thought little of sailing from Port St Mary to Kinsale in 28 hours in a nickey. They were 15 – 16.8 metres long and $3\frac{1}{2}$ times as long as they were wide. These dimensions gave more space for handling nets. The foremast was about as long as the boat and sloped slightly towards the stern when the vessel was afloat. In the harbour wooden legs were required to keep these boats upright. When aground the deck was at an angle, as the hull was deeper aft than forward. Nickeys carried a small boat, or punt, for going ashore in.

Handling the sails of nickeys called for good seamanship and much strength. The dipping lug on the foremast had to be lowered and passed round the mast whenever the boat changed tack. There were also three different sets of sails to be used according to the weather. Nickeys were divided up into net room, fish room and men's cabins. The crew of a nickey consisted of 7 men and a boy until



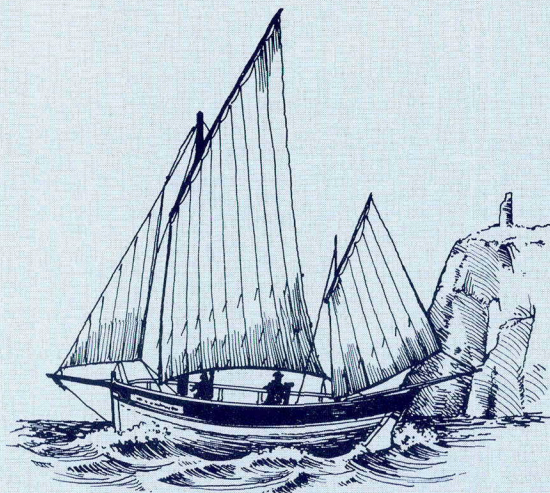
Nickey "Bonnie Lass", with Punt.

the 1880's. Steam engines were then introduced for turning the winch to haul the nets and the number of men was reduced to 6. It was not unusual for the nickeys to be rowed in calm conditions. Four men, two each side, stood and used five metre oars.

Nickeys were the main vessel used by the Manx fishermen when fishing for mackerel off Kinsale and other southern Irish ports during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The fishing grounds were sometimes 40 miles offshore and the nickeys gave the extra speed necessary to get back to port. A few nickeys continued in use until about 1920.

There were problems in sailing the nickeys by the end of last century when active young men had emigrated or no longer followed the sea. Old fishermen converted nickeys to the less demanding nobby rig for easier handling.

NOBBIES



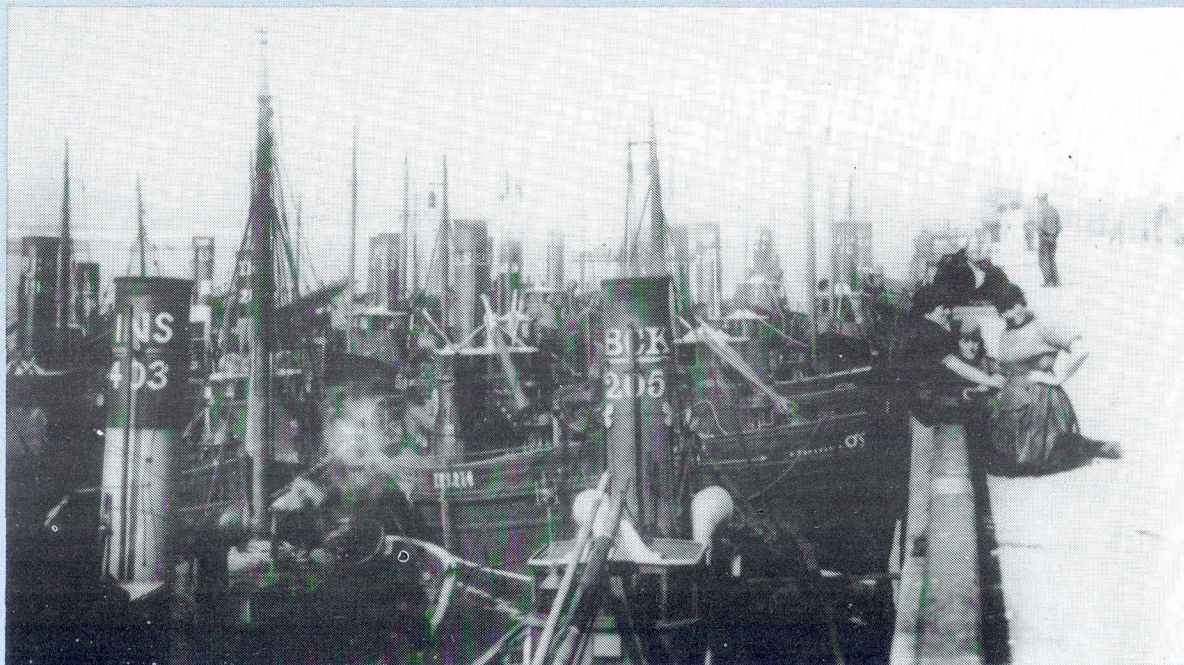
A Nobby.

These vessels, introduced in the 1890's, were the last type of sail boats built in the Isle of Man for herring fishing. They could be handled by older men or by a reduced crew. Smaller than the nickeys, they were not so

suitable for the exposed conditions off Southern Ireland. Nobbies were built in two sizes and some of the larger ones would join the spring mackerel fishing using especially the more sheltered Valencia fishing grounds rather than Kinsale. In the main the nobbies were confined to the herring fishing.

Nobbies were developed from the old skiffs of western Scotland. The word 'nobby' itself came from Scotland too, where the early open fishing boats were called 'nabbies'. The bigger type of nobby averaged about 10.7 metres in length and the smaller ones 7.6 metres. The crew (of 4 or 5) was less than the nickey's and the skipper was usually the owner. The sails were simpler to handle, with a standing instead of a dipping lug and there was no mizzen topsail. When small steam engines came into use for hauling the nets the nobbies were unable to have these because of lack of space. The 'iron man' or capstan operated by two men, one on each handle, had to haul in the nets manually.

By around 1910 paraffin engines of 26h.p. were being installed in the nobbies. At first the sails were still used as a safeguard in case of engine failure, but gradually they disappeared. Manx shipbuilding declined after 1900 and ceased in the 1930's. The last nobbies to be built on the Island were for the Irish fisheries. Nobbies built after the introduction of engines had a distinctive motor-boat canoe stern in place of the raked sternpost of the sailing nobbies. The Manx version



Steam Drifters at Peel, 1920's.

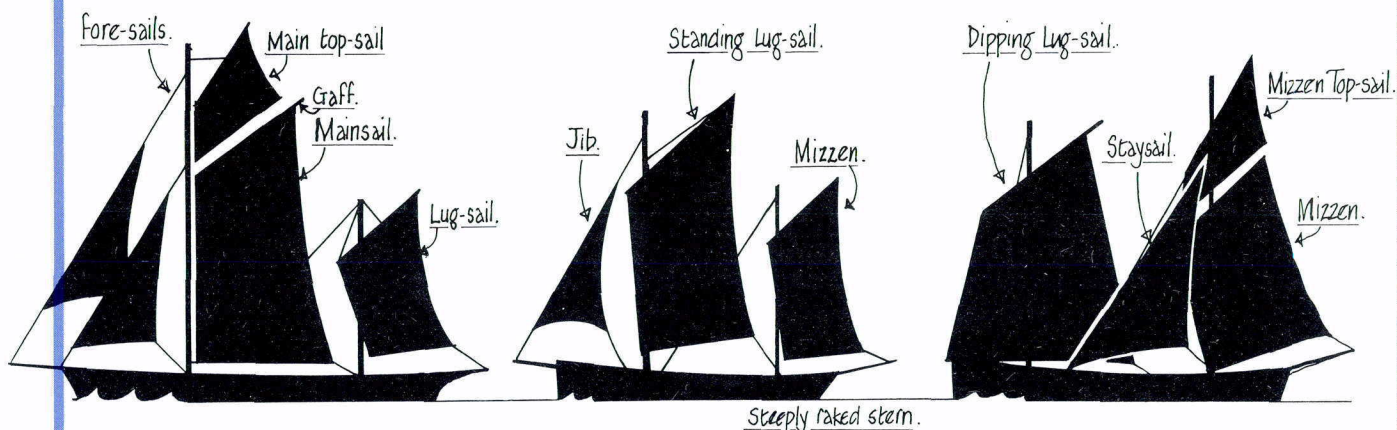
of the nobby was popular in Ireland, so much so that it was said that the only way to tell a nobby from a Dublin trawler was by the registration letters. Motor nobbies continued to be the typical Manx fishing boat up to World War 2.

Steam Drifters came in during the late nineteenth century and some were built in Manx shipyards. The typical steam drifters seen around the Isle of Man came from English or Scottish ports and were known simply as 'drifters'. They were most common in Manx ports between 1924 and 1928 and around the outbreak of World War 2.

Ringnet Boats became important about 1937. They were a larger type of motor nobby, with 66h.p. diesel engines and about 15 metres

long, carrying a crew of 6 men. They came from Scotland where the technique of catching herring with paired boats, using ring nets, had been developed. Some Clyde ringers were even larger and had more powerful engines. Boats longer than 50 feet (c 15.5m) were not permitted to fish within 3 miles of the Manx coasts. Ringnet vessels, with their row of suspended motor tyres along the side remained the typical fishing vessel until well into the 1960's. Manxmen remained faithful to the older method of drift-netting.

Different fishing areas of Britain have always developed their own versions of boat design to suit local conditions. Manx boat builders, though drawing on Cornish and Scottish designs, introduced their own variations.



Lugger, 1880

Nobby

Nickey