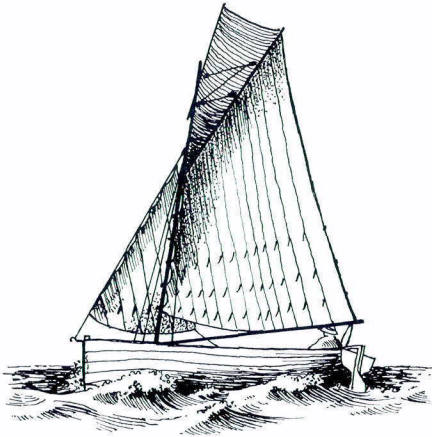




MANX SEA FISHING

8

SOME FURTHER TYPES OF FISHING



Ramsey Mackerel Boat.

RAMSEY MACKEREL FISHING

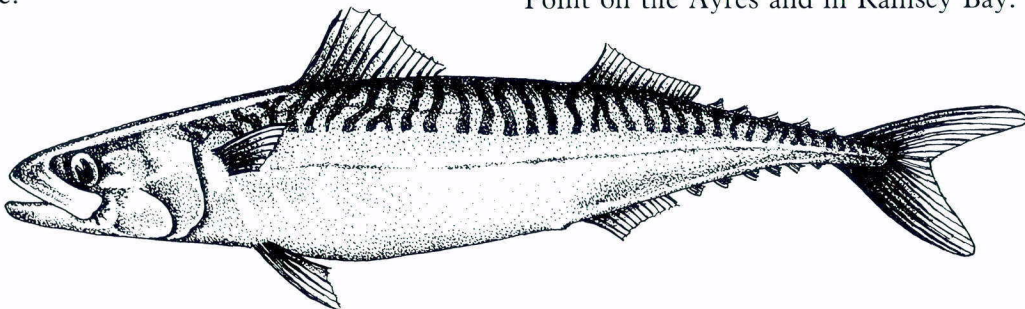
THE Ramsey fishing for mackerel was quite different from the Kinsale mackerel fishing. At Kinsale the fishing was done in spring and with drift nets. The Ramsey fishing was done in summer and lines were used instead of nets. The Kinsale drift netting for mackerel was done by night; the Ramsey line-fishing by day. At Kinsale luggers and nickeys were the typical vessels, at Ramsey there were special mackerel boats of a local type.

A typical Ramsey mackerel boat had a single mast with mainsail, topsail and staysail. It was 7 to 8 metres long, often clinker built (with the planks overlapping downwards) and had a vertical transom stern. The crew often consisted of two men. These boats were generally open, though later ones were half-decked. Two lines were generally used, but some boats were fitted with outrig poles and had four lines. Typically, two lines would be paid out over the stern baited with 'scaahs' of mackerel of a 'gibbin' shape, or even shaped silver paper on occasions. The lines carried very heavy weights – 1.5 to 2kg. Working these lines often caused blistered hands.

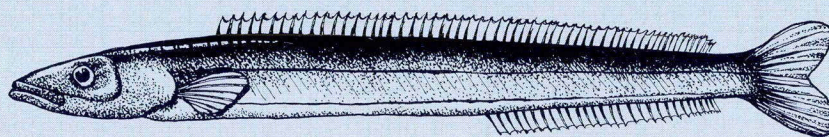
It is surprising that back in Victorian times fish could be transported so quickly as it was. Cod was regularly sent on a 7 a.m. train from Ramsey to Douglas, taken by horse and cart from Douglas railway station to the Liverpool boat at the pier, taken across by boat to be on sale in Liverpool by 2 p.m.

SAND EELS

Manx people always referred to a sand eel as a 'gibbin'. They sometimes appeared on the coast in vast numbers, particularly at the Rue Point on the Ayres and in Ramsey Bay.



Mackerel.



'Gibbin'.

Gulls, terns and curlews in great numbers over a beach were a signal that sand eels were there. All kinds of work would be abandoned so that the sand eels could be harvested. Sometimes they were caught with a mistnet (a very fine net), but more often they would be taken out of the sand. They were either dug out with a fork or flicked out with 'gibbin sickles'. The fork had three flat prongs, each about 13 cm long and the digging was done at ebb tide. The "gibbin sickles" were used, one in each hand, by drawing them forward through the sand to throw the sand eels forward to a companion who would catch them and pop them into a willow basket fastened round his waist. They were valued both as food and as bait. To prepare them for food the heads were cut off, the eel slit and gutted, then often hung on a board through an upstairs window to dry, safe from the cats. They were often stewed fresh, but also salted to be fried later. For poor people the 'gibbin' was an important supplement to the diet. They were also a good bait for cod, skate and other fish. People often went out very early in the morning to dig 'gibbin' for bait as the tide turned.

'FLUKE' FISHING

'Flukes' meant flatfish, particularly plaice. They were fished out of Port Erin, Peel and Ramsey. Lines and trawls were used in earlier times, seine nets coming into use in the 1930's. The seine 'flake' nets had two end ('wings'), a corked 'head rope' at the top of the net and a weighted 'foot rope' at the bottom. Seine netting was an active method of fishing unlike net fishing where a the drift net was hung waiting for the fish to swim towards it. Like the ring net in the herring fishing, the seine net was used to encircle the fish.

Another interesting method of catching 'flukes' could be used in very calm weather. A glass bottomed box was used to locate the fish, which were then speared, using a 'listyr', or wooden fishing spear. The 'listyr' was six to seven metres long and often had barbed metal points. A man could put his coat over

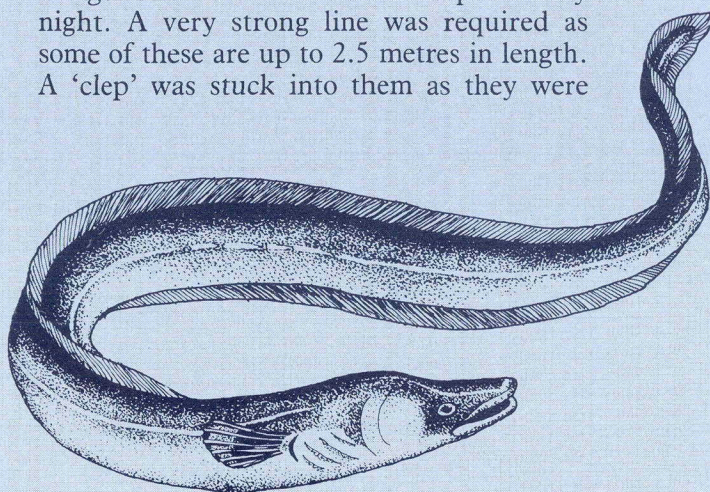
his head, look down at the bottom of the glass box behind the boat and see the plaice in the sandbank with the film of sand which had settled on top of them.



The End of a 'Listyr'.

CATCHING CONGERS

Conger eels were fished for in deep water by night. A very strong line was required as some of these are up to 2.5 metres in length. A 'clep' was stuck into them as they were



Conger Eel.

hauled thrashing into the boat. Conger eels, like big hake, were often preserved by being smoked in the chimney.

FISHING FROM BEACHES AND CREEKS

Small boats fished off beaches all around the Island for conger, cod, skate and carp. On many rocky shores it is still possible to see the 'barra' or channel cut in the rocks to allow boats to pass. An 'iron man', or capstan, often stood on the beach for hauling boats. Fishing from small open boats could be dangerous. A memorial stone at Bride Church recalls four local fishermen whose boat was swept away from Manx waters and lost on the coast of Cumbria.

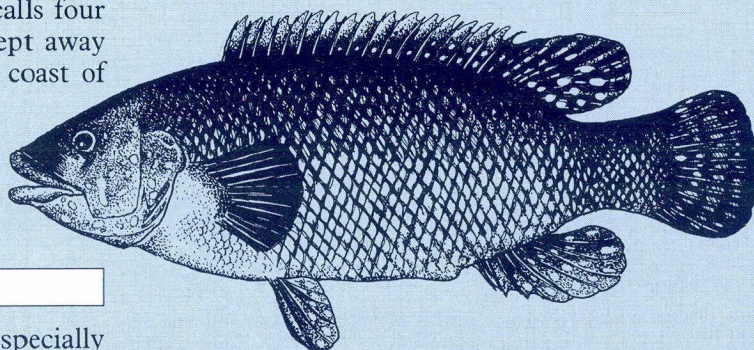
ROCK FISHING

Rock fishing was also widespread, especially

for bollan. Fishermen claimed a right of way from a bollan rock to another. This is not a fish which is eaten today, but in times past it was commonly eaten on the south side of the Island. A Manx saying reminded people of the time to start fishing for sand eels and bollan:

"Lhoob 'sy renniagh, gibbin ' sy gheinniagh;
Sleggan slieau foshlit, bollan er y chreg"

= A crook in the fern, gibbin in the sand;
Foxglove open, bollan on the rock.



Ballan Wrasse.

