



MANX SEA FISHING

A

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY MANX FISHING REGULATIONS

As the Herring Fishing is as great a Blessing as this poor Island receives, in enabling the Tenants for the better and speedier Payment of their Rents, and other Impositions, and have wherewithal to supply their other Wants and Occasions, when as all other their Endeavours and Husbandry would scarce advance any such Advantages and Gains unto them: So it hath been the incessant Care and Regard of the Government of this Isle always, when the Season of such Fishing falls out, and rather before, upon the Tynwald holden in June every Year, to make open and publick Proclamation to the whole Assembly of the Island, to remind them to be careful in providing their Boats and Netts to be in Readiness, whensoever it pleaseth God to send them that Blessing: And for the great Furtherance and Means to obtain such, it was the Care of the then Government, in the Year 1610,

1. That every Farmer or Tenant within this Island, whether Lord's or Baron's Tenants, should provide eight Fathoms of Netts, (when as then there was not so many that kept Boats and Netts as now), furnished with Buoys and Corks ready for Fishing, out of every Quarter of Ground, containing three Deepings of nine Score Meshes upon the Rope, to be as an Imposition upon the Tennants for the more effectual obtaining of a Blessing as aforesaid.

2. And lest that some Persons should be too forward to fish before the Fish should well ground about the Land, and so might frighten it away, it was also provided that no Person or Persons whatsoever should attempt to shoot for the Fish till after the sixteenth of July, which then was apprehended to be the Season for such Fishing.

3. And when it pleaseth God to send this Blessing of Fish about the Isle, the Water Bailiff, upon Notice thereof, as he is termed Admiral, is to take immediate Care and Course

to have all the Boats of the Island or Fleet to come to such a Place as the Fish is, to drive for the same, and to see after my Lord's Custom Fish; and that there be good Orders observed amongst them, (which he is to Redress if there be not), and to hold and observe these Courses and Orders following, viz.

4. That none shall be admitted to Fish from Saturday Morning till Sunday at Night, after Sun-set, upon Pain of Forfeiture of his Boat and Netts : Or Fish in the Day Time without special Liberty from the Officers or Water Bailiff; or that there be a great Necessity for it.

5. And no Man is to shoot his Netts till the Admiral or Vice-Admiral have first taken in their Flags, or to give a Watchword if the Night be dark, that they may know when to shoot their Netts; and whosoever is found to offend herein, forfeiteth Ten Shillings to the Lord and Twenty Days Imprisonment.

6. And whosoever shall wilfully shoot his Netts across, over the Netts of another, or shall use any Draw-Netts or Stake-Netts during the Time of the Fishing, shall forfeit Ten Shillings.

7. And if any shall cut any Buoys or Corks off any Man's Netts, or shake or take any Herrings out of the same, and it sufficiently proved, shall be proceeded against by a Jury as in the Nature of Felony.

8. And if any of the Fleet do, by God's Blessing, meet with the Scul of Fish, or get good Store thereof, and reveal not the same to the next Boat to him, that so the same might be discovered from Boat to Boat throughout the whole Fleet, to the End every of them might be Partakers of that Blessing, that every One so offending is to be fined Forty Shillings besides Imprisonment.

- Continued on reverse

9. Also, that if any shall lay violent Hands upon or strike any of his Fellows, or give him uncharitable Language on Sea-board, or under the full-sea Mark, such Person to be punished by Forty Days Imprisonment, and to be fined besides, at the Water Bailiff's Discretion.

10. And if any draw Blood by violent Strokes on Seaboard, or under full-sea Mark, [he] shall forfeit his Goods to the Lord's Pleasure.

11. Also, the Water Bayliff shall have out of every Boat, as oft as they Fish, a certain Measure called a Kybbon-full of Herrings; and whosoever refuseth to give the same, or Twelve Pence in Money in lieu thereof, shall be excluded from the Fleet.

12. And that the Water Bailiff shall impanel forth Jurors of Enquiry to present all such as either contemn or break any of these Orders, or commit any other Offences or Misdemeanors in the Herring Fishing Time; and at the Admiral Court to give in these Presentments, that Fines may be imposed upon them by the Court. And that upon every Saturday, by Two o'Clock in

the Afternoon, during the Fishing Time, the Water Bailiff is to sit and hold an Admiral Court, as well to inflict Punishments upon all Offenders, as to reform all Wrongs committed through the Fleet.

13. And every Master of a Boat, and all others his Fishermen, are to attend the same Court, to serve upon Jurors or other necessary Occasions, as they shall be required unto, upon Pain of Fineing.

14. And the Water Bailiff may also, as oft as such Occasions fall out, call a Court and impanel Jurors to determine all Controversies that concern Seafaring or Maritime Affairs, betwixt Party and Party, at any other Time, in what convenient Place he pleaseth to sit, the same by Virtue of his Office, either upon the Suit of any Party, or in Pursuance of any Order, for the transmitting of any Case from Chancery, to be so determined, as most incident and proper to that Course of Determination.

An Abstract from the Statute Laws of the Isle of Man: Geo. Savage

EXPLANATIONS

'Husbandry': cultivation of the land
'the Tynwald holden in June': Tynwald was held on 24th June until 1753
'Baron's Tennants': farmers on the Bishop's lands or the ancient Abbeylands
'Eight Fathoms': 14.6 metres
'Quarter of Ground': quarterland; a farm of c.40 – 150 acres (c. 16-60 ha)
'Deepings': the depth of fishing nets
'Mashes': meshes; the openings between the threads of a fishing net
'he is termed Admiral': The Water Bailiff was judge in the Manx Admiralty Court. The 'Admiral' in Section 5 below is the Admiral of the Herring Fleet

'my Lord's Custom Fish': The Lord of the Isle received one mace out of every five caught
'Scul of Fish': a shoal
'Kybbon-full': perhaps a 'kishan' or peck

QUESTIONS

1. Two reasons are given for pursuing the herring fishing. What are they?
2. Why was it thought necessary to have an official start for the herring fishing season?
3. What evidence is there that parts, at least, of these regulations are later than 1610?
4. Which duty of the Admiral of the Herring Fleet is mentioned in this document?