



# MANX SEA FISHING

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THE PRESS GANG SEIZES FISHERMEN - DOUGLAS, 1811

No. 7  
 This day personally appeared James Thomas Merchant in Douglas, in the vice of Manx, maketh oath & deposes that on the morning of the ninth day of August, that on the deposition, with others, accompanied by the high bailiffs of said town of Douglas, and went down the quay, at the side of the harbour, to Douglas, and there, met with Lieut. Ancher, Commander of the tender, Maria, the said vessel, has arrived, in the Bay of Douglas, that the said high bailiffs, presented to the said Lieut. Ancher, the great alarm, the fishermen had taken at the arrival of the said tender, upon which Lieut. Ancher did declare, to the said high bailiffs, that it was not his intention to improve, any of the fishermen, or to interfere with the carrying of fishery - That upon the faith of the said declaration, the said high bailiffs, together with the said James Thomas, returned to the fishermen, and the said Lieut. Ancher had so told them - upon which the fishermen appeared perfectly satisfied & went on following their occupation -

The deponent further saith, that he lives in a house, on the South side of Douglas, distant that on the morning of the nineteenth, instant, between the hour of three & four o'clock, the deponent was awakened, by hearing a great noise in the harbour, upon which he got up, and on looking through the window of his bed room, he the deponent saw several soldiers, with great coats upon them, standing in their hands, upon the South side of said harbour, (the tender then lying at anchor

on the North side of said harbour) - That he the deponent, saw several soldiers, on South side of said harbour, throwing large stones, upon the forecables of the fishing boats - that lying in the S. harbour, for the purpose as the deponent verily believes of awakening the fishermen & make them come up out of the said boats - That the deponent, after some time had elapsed, put on his clothes, and went out at the back door of the house, & went up the hill, behind his S. house & saw soldiers, on the North side of Douglas harbour, running after men - That deponent afterwards went down upon the South side of the said harbour & there saw soldiers only in their hands, running after men, which deponent believes were fishermen - and that the deponent, did not see any of the Press-gang, along with the soldiers, upon the South side of the said harbour, after this deponent went into his house, and did not see any thing further take place -

Signed James Thomas

the said James Thomas maketh further oath & deposes that afterwards on the 10th inst he went on board the said tender then lying in Douglas Bay, and before the sailing from the Bay and dismissed the observation of the deponent

No. 8.

This day personally appeared William Kelly of Bellinagh master of the Felicity of Peel fishing boat - saith that between two & three o'clock on the morning of the fourteenth of August inst. deponent was pressed on board his boat in Douglas, ordered by the Press-gang of the Maria tender and by three or four soldiers and deponent jumped over board into the harbour from them and got away but was pursued by one of the soldiers to the outlet of Lough on the Peel road with no drawn bayonet and he then seized deponent and deponent offered to give him money, to let him go which he agreed to and deponent gave him all the money he had about him and the soldier then told deponent that he would give him another shilling, he would let him go - and deponent not having it, went with the soldier to the house of John Crowley and called at the window for the shilling which he sent to the soldier who then let deponent go - & deponent then went to the point out and ascertain the S. soldier -

fishermen upon which Lieut. Ancher refused saying he would take any man that was not a man, or which age did not protest  
 Signed Jas. Thomas

19th Aug 1811

This day personally appeared James Holmes Merchant in Douglas, in the Isle of Man, maketh oath & saith that on the morning of the ninth day of August Instant, he the deponent, with others accompanied by the high bailiff, of said town, Norris Moore Esq., and went down the quay on the North side of the harbour, of Douglas, and there, met with Lieut. Hawkes, Commander of the Tender, Maria the second; which had arrived in the Bay of Douglas, that the said high bailiff, represented to the said Lieut. Hawkes the great alarm the fishermen had taken at the arrival of the said tender, upon which Lieut. Hawkes did declare, to the sd. high bailiff that it was not his intention to Impress any of the Fishermen, or to Interfere with the herring fishery – That upon the faith of the said declaration ye. dep. did as well as the sd. high bailiff & other Gentlemen, declare and make known to the Fishermen what Lieut. Hawkes had so told them – upon which the Fishermen appeared perfectly satisfied and went on following their occupation.

The deponent further saith, that he lives in a house, on the South side of Douglas harbour, that on the morning of the fourteenth Instant, between the hour of three & four o'clock, he the deponent was awakened by hearing a great noise in the harbour, upon which he the deponent, rose out of his bed, and on looking through the window of his bed room he the deponent saw several soldiers with great coats upon them, bayonets in their hands, upon the south side of said harbour, (the tender then laying low down on the North side of said harbour) – That he the deponent saw several soldiers on South side of said harbour, throwing large stones, upon the forecastles of fishing boats – then laying in the sd. harbour for the purpose as the deponent verily believes of awakening the fishermen and make them come up out of the said boats – That the deponent after some time had elapsed, put on his clothes, and went out at the back door of the house, and went up the hill, behind his sd. house and saw soldiers on the North side of Douglas harbour, running after men – That deponent afterwards went down upon the South side of the said harbour and there saw soldiers on the South side of said Harbour,

with Bayonets only in their hands, running after men, which deponent believes were fishermen – and that deponent did not see any of the Press Gang, along with the Soldiers upon the South side of the said harbour, after this deponent went into his house, and did not see anything further take place.

Signed,  
James Holmes

The Said Jas. Holmes further maketh oath and saith that afterwards on the 14th Inst, he went on board the said Tender then laying in Douglas Bay and before she sailed from the said Bay and demanded the liberation of the Impressed Fishermen upon which Lieut. Hawkes refused saying that he would take away any man that was not a master or whose age did not protect them.

Signed,  
Jas. Holmes

This day personally appeared William Kelly of Ballaugh, master of the Felicity of Peel, fishing boat – saith that between two and three o'clock in the morning of the fourteenth of August Inst. deponent was pressed on board his boat in Douglas harbour by the Press gang of the "Maria" tender aided by three or four soldiers and deponent jumped overboard into the harbour from them and got away but was pursued by one of the Soldiers to the outlet of the Town on the Peel road with his drawn bayonet and he there seized deponent and deponent offered to give him money to let him go which he agreed to and deponent gave him all the money he had about him and the Soldier then told deponent that if he would give him another Shilling he would let him go and Deponent not having it, went with the Soldiers to the house of John Cowley and called at the window for the shilling which he sent out to deponent & deponent gave the shilling to the Soldier who then let deponent go.

## EXPLANATIONS

These extracts are part of the court evidence given at an inquiry into the activities of the Press Gang in Douglas in August 1811.

'the deponent': A person giving evidence in Court, especially written evidence

'tender': A boat attending a larger vessel eg. a man-of-war

'instant': this month

## QUESTIONS

1. What evidence is there that the Manx fishing boats concerned in this incident were at least partially decked?
2. Why do you think William Kelly from Ballaugh would be on board his Peel registered fishing boat in Douglas during the month of August?
3. Can you find any special reason why William Kelly might have been released if he had been taken to the tender?
4. Why would the Press Gang be so active in the Isle of Man at this time?