

MANX SEA FISHING

1600-1990's



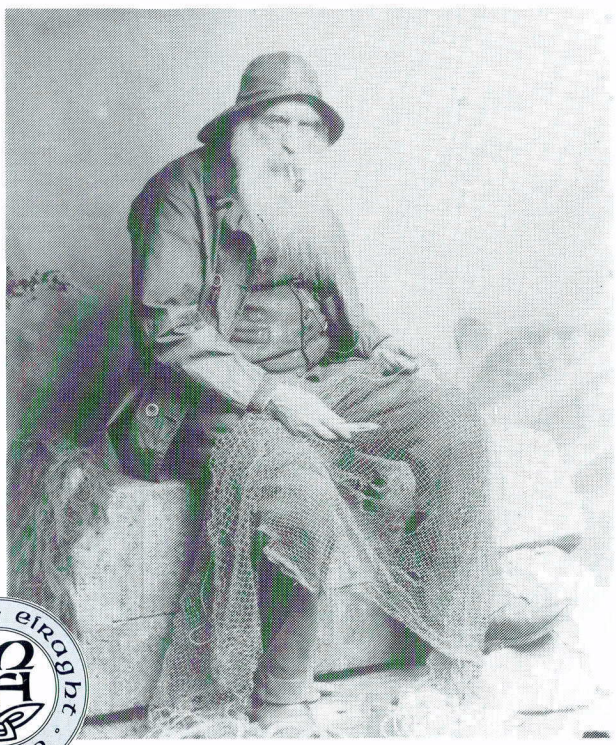
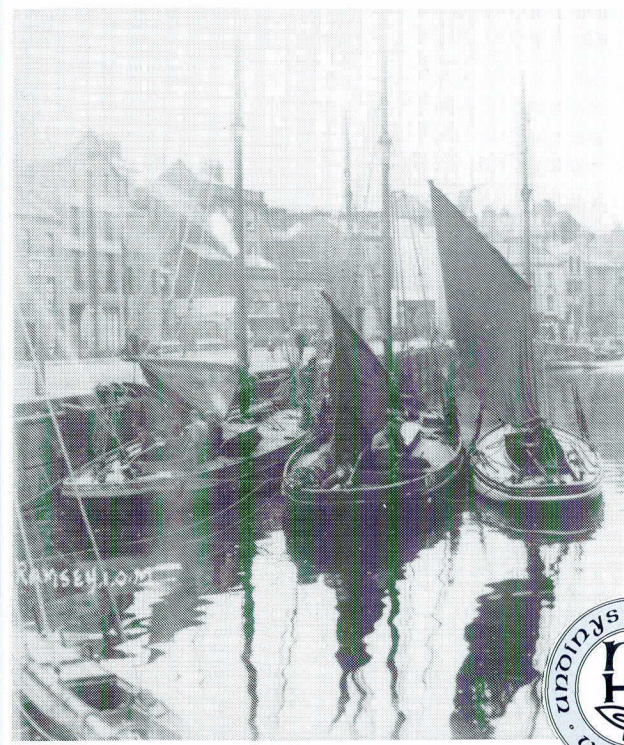
*Plenty potatoes and herring enough
Palchey phuddase as skeddán dy liooar*

*Life to man, death to fish
Bioys da dooinney as baase da east*

*The king of the sea
Ree ny marrey*

THE HERRING
Y SKEDDAN

*No herring, no wedding
Gyn skeddán, gyn bannish*



RESOURCE BOOK



MANX SEA FISHING

1600-1990's

RESOURCE BOOK

CONTENTS

A RESOURCE BOOK

Acknowledgements	4
Introduction	5
Part One – Manx Sea Fishing Before c. 1750	6
Beginnings & Early Evidence	6
Possible Norse Influences	6
The Water Bailiff & the Admiral	7
Early Fishing Vessels	8
The Castle Mazes	8
Fishing Outside Manx Waters	9
William Blundell on Manx Fishing	9
Seventeenth Century Fishermen	10
Fishing & Trade	10
Varying Fortunes of the Fishing	10
The Church & the Fishing	10
Two Eighteenth Century Fishing Regulations	11
Part Two – Manx Sea Fishing c. 1750 – c. 1850	12
The Herring Fishery & Trade	12
Manxmen & Strangers at the Fishing	13
New Types of Fishing Boats	14
The Fisherman's Life	15
Vicissitudes of the Herring Fishing	16
Numbers Involved in Herring Fishing	17
The Role of the Farmer-Fisherman	17
Herring Fishing Legislation 1750–1840	17
Other Forms of Fishing	18
Part Three – Manx Sea Fishing 1840 – 1920	19
Overview of the Period	19
Specialisation in Fishing	21
Fishing at Kinsale and Lerwick	21
Luggers, Nickeys and Nobbies	22
Nets	23
Uses for the Catch	25
The High Point of Manx Fishing	25
Fishing Other than Herring	27
The Decline of Manx Fishing	27
Part Four – Manx Sea Fishing 1920 – 1990	29
Herring Fishing: General Trends	29
Changes in Types of Fishing Boats	29
Disposal of Herring	30
Conservation of Herring Stocks	31
Other Fisheries, Pre-1940	32
New Fisheries	32
Conservation of the New Fisheries	33
Part Five – Sources and Suggestions	34

B INFORMATION CARDS

1. Early Manx Herring Boats
2. Herring Boats c. 1830 –1940
3. Herring Fishing in Manx Waters
4. Manx Fishermen in Irish and Scottish Waters
5. Nets & Equipment for Herring & Mackerel Fishing
6. Uses for the Herring Catch
7. Longlines & Shorelines
8. Some Further Types of Fishing
9. Scallops & Queenies
10. Customs & Traditions of the Manx Fisherman
11. Some Fish, Molluscs & Crustaceans of Manx Waters A–H
12. Some Fish, Molluscs & Crustaceans of Manx Waters I–Z

C DOCUMENTS

- A. Seventeenth Century Manx Fishing Regulations
- B. The Lord of the Isle's Herring Customs, 1687
- C. Fishermen Fined for Not Attending the Herring Fishing, 1705
- D. The Complaint of the Whitehaven Fishermen, 1754
- E. Richard Townley's Journal 1791 – Extracts on Fishing
- F. The Press Gang Seizes Fishermen – Douglas 1811
- G. Great International Fisheries Exhibition, 1883

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PHOTOGRAPHIC and documentary material is principally derived from the resources of the Manx Museum. The availability of these resources and the co-operation of the staff of the Manx Museum and National Trust have been of inestimable help.

Individuals who have kindly permitted the reproduction of photographs are:

Mr. P. Hill-Heaton of Ramsey
Mr. T.E. Leece of Peel
Mr. W. Clarke of Ramsey

The following additional sources for illustrations are also acknowledged:

Pupils' Cards – No. 3: The English Herring Buss is drawn after an illustration in *Hooking, Drifting & Trawling*, National Maritime Museum (1986). The Irish Sea Herring Map is based on P. Hills & R. J. R. Grainger's figure in *The Irish Sea – An Environmental Review*, Pt. 3, Liverpool University Press (1990).

No. 7 contains a reproduction of a Manx fisherman making a buckie pot on a Valentine Post Card

No. 9 all the drawings are after Mason, J., *Scallops and Queen Fisheries in the British Isles*, Fishing News Books (1983). The maps on this card are after Brand, A. R., *Scallop Biology & Culture* (1991).

Resource Book. The illustrations of the Peel Lugger and the Peel Nickey are used by courtesy of the Chairman and committee of the Peel Sailor's Shelter. Two Valentine Post Cards have been reproduced as indicated in the captions.

Dr. A. Brand, of the Marine Biological Station, Port Erin and Mr. Walter Clarke, of Ramsey have willingly given of their expertise in connection with matters of content and illustration.

Line drawings are by Julie Ashby.

Graphic design work by Ruth Sutherland.

© Manx Heritage Foundation, 1991.

Published by the Manx Heritage Foundation
in co-operation with the Manx Museum and
National Trust.

Printed by Printagraphics Ltd., Douglas.

INTRODUCTION

THIS pack for schools, prepared with funding from the Manx Heritage Foundation and in co-operation with the Trustees of the Manx Museum and National Trust, is the second in a series which aims to provide readily available materials for those who wish to incorporate learning through or about the Manx environment into their curriculum.

The topic “Manx Sea Fishing” has been selected for two main reasons. Firstly, because inquiries into the types of local topics currently covered by schools suggested its usefulness. Secondly, because of the fact that for centuries the fishing was a pillar of the Manx economy and intimately bound up with traditional ways of Manx life. It was asserted in 1883 that “In the Isle of Man one person out of every five depends on fishing for his daily bread, and one person out of every four is directly or indirectly dependent on fishing for a livelihood.”

A precursor produced by the Teachers Local Studies Group entitled *The Nineteenth Century Crofter-Fisherman* included a section on fishing for the period c. 1850-1900. The intention in planning this pack has been to trace the story of Manx fishing from the time of the first recorded information until the late twentieth century.

The production of materials for schools has its inherent problems, particularly in deciding whether to have teachers or pupils primarily in mind. This pack, consisting of a Resource Book, Pupils’ Cards and Documents, is designed partly for teachers’ use and partly for pupils’ use. The Cards and Documents have been aimed at pupils and the Resource Book at teachers. It is hoped that the Cards will be

found usable by pupils of roughly ten to fourteen years.

Some suggested lines of development of topics are included. The precise uses of the materials must be left to professionals, but it will be apparent that either cross-curricular or single subject approaches may be adopted. A variety of emphases is possible since links can be made with the broader historical scene in terms of the Napoleonic Wars and the Press Gang, the eighteenth century pattern of trade and the export of cured fish to the West Indies or the age of steam which made possible rail transit of fresh fish and also brought powerful steam trawlers to the Irish Sea.

The current issues of fisheries conservation and territorial waters will be seen to have historical perspectives. The revolution in Manx fishing which replaced the herring by the scallop in the second half of the twentieth century, associated measures for conservation and the researches at the Port Erin Marine Biological Station link current Manx fishing with future issues world-wide.

Some information on the fish of Manx waters is provided for those who wish to develop biological aspects of a fishing topic. Geographical dimensions are afforded through following the routes of eighteenth century cured fish traders and the Irish and Scottish destinations of mackerel and herring fishers in the later nineteenth century. Whatever approaches may be adopted it is hoped that the pack will stimulate investigations whether through drawing on the memories of older people, through exploring documentary material including old photographs, looking at old buildings in the fishing towns or finding out about current trends in fishing.

PART ONE

MANX SEA FISHING BEFORE c1750

THE importance of the herring to the Island since ancient times is reflected in the portion of the Deemster's oath where he promises to execute the laws of the Isle betwixt party and party "so indifferently as the herring-bone doth lie in the midst of the fish".

i) Beginnings and Early Evidence

A lead sinker from a hand-line was found amongst the grave goods in an early Norse burial at Knock-e-Dooney in Kirk Andreas.

According to a tradition preserved in the writings of William Sacheverell who was Governor of the Isle of Man, 1693–94, it was an earlier Governor named Brennus, a Scotsman in charge of the Island 1282–87, who taught the Manx people the art of fishing. Perhaps this tradition grew from the close links between Scottish and Manx ways of fishing in later time.

The first written reference to Manx fishing is contained in the Synodal Statutes of Bishop Mark, dated 1291, and concerns the fish tithe.

The *Chronicles of the Kings of Man and the Isles* tells us that Thomas, Bishop of Sodor c.1330–1348, was the first to exact from the rulers of Man one tenth of all the taxes paid to them "by all the strangers in the herring fishery". This implies that there was a sufficiently thriving fishery during the first half of the fourteenth century to attract people from outside the Island.

The *Manx Statute Book* is another source of early references to the fisheries. The Lords of Man exacted 'Castle Mazes' for feeding their garrisons in Castle Rushen and Peel. Under the date 1417 there is the following entry:

"Also we give for Law, that a Castle Maze [modern 'mease'] to be paid out of five Maze of

Herrings in a Boate taken, and Halfe a Maze out of two Maze and a Halfe in a Boate gotten, as oft as they go to Sea and gotten soe, and that is our Law by Custome and Usage, and the Lord to pay vjd. for a Maze thereof, provided that the Bringers of the first Maze shall for the same have iijs. iiijd".

An entry in the *Spiritual Statutes of the Isle of Man* under the date 1577, gives details of how the fish tythe shall be collected by the Proctor both for white fish and for herring.

(ii) Possible Norse Influences

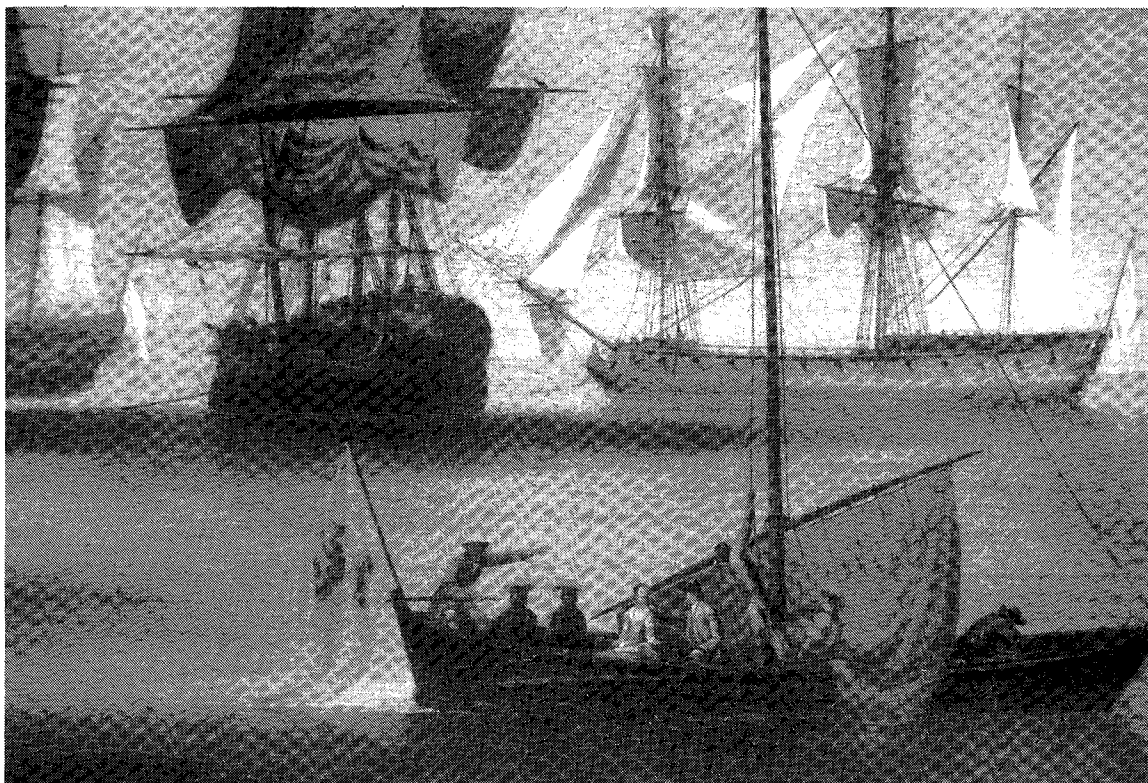
The herring fishing around the Isle of Man was very much a directed activity, almost like a military operation. The *Manx Statute Book* under the date 1610 contains a lengthy list of regulations concerning the herring fishery. These regulations seem to be a declaration of the common law, though some of them seem to reflect a later period. There was a requirement for the more substantial, or 'quarterland' farmers to provide eight fathoms of nets fitted with corks and buoys in readiness for the fishing. The date to start fishing was prescribed year by year. The Coroner or the Lockman of each sheading was to inform masters of boats when to muster with their vessels. Discipline within the herring fleets was maintained through the offices of Water Bailiff and Admirals of the Herring Fleet. This highly organised and disciplined fishing enterprise seems to have been a legacy from earlier times when a Norse King would exact his 'leidangr', or ship levy, equipped and manned by the landowners, for national defence, or a war expedition.

The type of boats used for fishing, clinker-built boats with one large square sail and carrying oars, were of the Norse type. These continued in use throughout most of the eighteenth century and were known as 'scoutes'.

This word seems to have been derived from the Old Norse word 'skuta' which denoted a small general-purpose naval vessel with sail and oars. The Manx 'scoutes' have been compared with the Shetland 'sixerns' and 'fourareens', also in the Norse traditions.

and crew members to act as jurors. He dealt with all misdemeanours committed on the sea between highwater mark and the limit of territorial waters – then understood to be three leagues from land.

It was the duty of the Admiral or Vice-



Manx fishing 'scoute' - detail from a painting, 1760.

(iii) The Water Bailiff and the Admiral

Fishermen during the herring season were under the control of the Water Bailiff ashore and the Admiral or Vice-Admiral of the Herring Fleet at sea.

The ancient office of Water Bailiff existed from at least the fifteenth century until 1885. The Water Bailiff had many important duties beyond the supervision of fishermen. He controlled the activities of merchants, kept an imports inventory, dealt with wrecks, arrested debtors and collected customs for the Lord of the Isle. He was the sole judge in the Admiralty Court of the Island. His importance to the herring fishery may be gauged from a letter to the Duke of Atholl, dated 1786, where it is stated that "nearly four hundred boats sail in and out of Douglas every day, and the want of a Water Bailiff to settle disputes amongst them is greatly felt, as no other magistrate is competent to do so". The Water Bailiff held his court every Saturday during the herring season and had the power to summon skippers

Admiral of the Herring Fleet to report misdemeanours occurring at sea. The types of offences to be reported included shooting nets too soon, or across another vessel's net train, cutting buoys or corks from others' nets or taking their fish. Violent acts of any kind were also to be reported to the Water Bailiff. The records of the Courts even include fines imposed for the use of bad language under full sea mark.

The Admiral and Vice-Admiral carried distinguishing flags on their boats. Nets were shot when the Admiral's flag was lowered at sunset. Great attention was given to the avoidance of shooting nets in daylight or leaving them in the water after dawn. In later times the Admiral's duties became more nominal and nets would be shot when the Calf of Man lights went on.

Up to 1883 the Water Bailiff had power to appoint the Admiral and Vice-Admiral, usually selecting the two most experienced masters of boats. The term of office was limited to

the duration of the fishing season. In the nineteenth century at least, it was the custom to have the Admiral attached to Peel and for the Vice-Admiral to be a Port St Mary skipper. John Feltham (1798) stated that the Admiral in his time received £5 a year from the government and the Vice-Admiral £2

(iv) Early Fishing Vessels

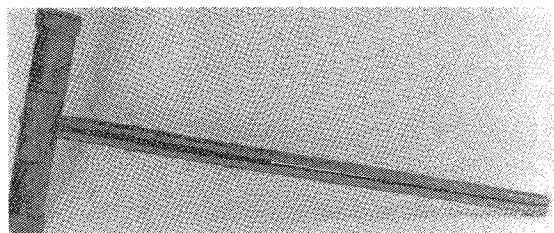
The first references to types of fishing vessels are found as sixteenth century entries in the *Spiritual Statutes*. Two of these read as follows:

“(i) First, that the Bishops shall have their Herring Scoute and their fishing Boate, freely and franckly, without any Tythes paying, wheresoever they Land in this Isle. In like manner also had the Abbot, the Priors, the Archdeacon.

(i) Alsoe, all Parsons, Viccars of the Thirds or Pention instituted shall always choose their Fishing Boate at Easter Time, and their Scoute at Herring Fishing Time, whether their fishing be about this Land or elsewhere”

These entries imply a distinction between the ‘scoutes’ used for herring fishing and the ‘fishing boates’ chiefly intended for use about Easter time, presumably for catching cod, hake, conger eels, etc. There is also the implication that some Manxmen fished away from the Island on occasion.

Our earliest illustration of a herring scout is to be found on the Richard Wright painting, “The Squadrons of Thurot and Elliot in Ramsey Bay, 1760”. Scoutes were often called ‘square-sails’ in later times.



A caulking hammer used to press oakum into a boat's seams.

The size of the fishing boats known as scoutes was intended to be at least four tons burthen according to the fishing regulations given in the *Statute Book*, under the date 1610. Bishop Wilson, however, described their average burthen as only two tons in his day. A regulation of 1679 gives the prescribed dimensions of a herring net in the seventeenth century. Nets were to be made and sold in pieces 12 fathoms long and at least 58 meshes in breadth.

(v) The Castle Mazes

According to William Blundell, who lived on the Island for several years in the 1650's, 20% of the herring catch went to the Lord of the Isle, 20% to the Church, plus a modest share to the Water Bailiff, leaving only 55–60% for the fishermen. (The Water Bailiff's share was, according to the *Statute Book*, “a kybbon full of herrings out of every boat so often as they fish”).

The Lord's herring custom was paid either at Douglas, Castletown or Peel, according to the three specified stretches of coastline where fish were taken. Peel was the custom collection point for the ‘north side’ of the Island – from the Calf of Man round to Maughold Head.

Blundell makes it clear elsewhere that in his day the Lord's levy only operated on catches of five mease or more, and did not apply to all the excess of ten mease caught.

An entry in the *Exchequer Book* dated 1613, shows that the Countess of Derby at that time considered the amount levied as Castle Mazes was deterring both locals and outsiders from pursuing the Manx fisheries and that a reduction in payments might be prudent. The Countess was “desirous to have strangers well used, and to bring entercourse or trafficke between them and the Islanders ...”. The Captain and Officers duly revised the custom herrings payments with different scales for “every small boat, whereof a Countriman is Owner” and for “evrye of the Countrimen which have boats called scowtes”. Similarly there were different scales for “evrye small boate of the Stranger” and “evrye Scowte of the stranger”. Two types of herring boat are clearly distinguished here. The entry concludes: “The tyme appointed to begin to drive for Hearing this present year [1613] is, by general Consent, to be upon the xvjth day of July next, being Fryday”.

The importance of the herring fishing both as a source of revenue to the Lord and a means of subsistence for the people is clearly stated in the preamble to the regulations for the Herring fishery in the *Statute Book* under the date 1610:

“As the herring fishery 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....”

By the eighteenth century the Castle Maze was commuted to a money payment. The records of the Lord's receipts from the herring fishing are an index of the good and bad fishing seasons. The eighteenth century method of payment was for every Manx boat that took 10 mease of herring to contribute ten shillings, with smaller payments for smaller catches. Finally, from 1771, the boats paid 10 shillings which was used on the provision of harbours.

(iv) Fishing Outside Manx Waters

The phrase "whether their fishing be about this land, or elsewhere" in the *Spiritual Statutes* reference above points to Manxmen already fishing beyond Manx waters. When around the year 1610 'Fower Ancyent Men' were, according to the *Statute Book*, asked about the old customs of the fishery, they described themselves as "Fishers driving for herring in the North of England with Mancks Fishing Boates".

The extent of Manx participation in herring fishing beyond the Island led to legislation in 1687 and the preamble to this states "that some boates (rather than they would attend the fishing about the Island to promote the good thereof) have gone over to Scotland to other places to fish for Herrings, and thereby have not only neglected the fishing at home, but also deprived our Rt. Honble. Lord of his customs and other dues arising out of the same." The Act went on to lay down that "if any person or persons whatsoever shall go over into England, Ireland or Scotland to fish there with their Boates and nets, and neglect to attend the fishing of this Isle aforesaid, to pay all such customs and other duties unto the Lord out of what fish they shall kill abroad, in as full and ample a manner, and according to the same rule that they are to pay in case they had fished about the Island aforesaid". It may well be that a series of bad fishing seasons had led the Manxmen to seek herring on other coasts. Smuggling also became an inducement to visit areas such as the Fylde Coast of Lancashire, using the fishing as a mask for "illicit trade".

(vii) William Blundell on Manx Fishing

Blundell's account of the Isle of Man during the Commonwealth period supplies our earliest detailed information. He noted the dependence of the Manx on fishing, declaring: "The sea feedeth more Manksmen than the soil". He described herring as the constant food of the people, but always in their natural state, commenting: "..... yet they are so far from having any red herings that they know

not what they mean, neither do they desire to know or learn how to make them".

He alluded to other types of fishing besides herring – "There are great store of salmons, coddcs, haddockcs, macarels, rayes, place, thornbecks, and more than I can name to you." As to how these fish were cooked he had the following to say:

"Their coddcs, thornbecks, and places, etc., they hang them upon the walls to dry in the sun, which gives them the taste of stockfish; but being dressed, minced with butter, they do yield the taste of ling or haberdine." He found very few oysters or mussels, "but of crabbs, lobsters and cockles, abundance in their seasons." The Lord of the Isle, he noted, received duty only on herrings, but the Church received tithes on "cod, ling, mackerel, thornbeck, etc."

The fishermen complained to Blundell that they were not catching half the quantity of herrings they used to take and also spoke of the great cod fishing of the past. They told him of overladen cod boats and having to cut off the cods' heads and "cast them away upon the shore, either for the poor or any yt. would take them up."

He described how Manx fishermen of that period divided the catch into eight shares "whereof he yt. furnisheth the nets hath 3 parts, he yt. is owner of the boat one part, and the other 4 parts are subdivided among the fishermen yt. assisted to catch 'em, for in every boat yt. goeth out to fish there be 4 fishermen, so as if the owner of ye boat be also the owner of the nets, he hath half of all ye herrings yt. are taken in yt. boat and in that net."

Blundell also stated that the herring was "The principal commodity which the inhabitants have in most abundance wherewith they traffick and transport to all 4 neighbouring nations, and yet more southward, unto France, all along its north and west parts ..."

His statement that "The Manksmen begin their fishing for herrings about the latter end of August, and continue the same all the month" seems dubious. Prescribed dates given in the *Statute Book* for the start of the fishing in the years 1611, 1613 and 1687 all fall in the month of July, the latest being 16th July. Nevertheless, the season was about two months shorter than what it became by c.1900.

(viii) Seventeenth Century Fishermen

There appear to have been two types of Manx fishermen in the seventeenth century – those owning their own boat and nets and those hired by boat owners to assist them for the herring season. The division of interest between farming and fishing which was so deplored by later writers was inherent in a system which enforced farmers to supply fishing equipment. Government saw the annual shoals of herring as a valuable bonus for the Island, simultaneously a source of revenue and an additional means of subsistence for the populace. This resource was to be exploited in a directed way. Failure to have boats and nets in readiness at the start of the fishing season continued to be a punishable offence into the eighteenth century.

A nineteenth century source tells us that “Formerly a watch was kept from one of the hills for the approach of large shoals ... and a signal was given by sounding a horn, which was repeated from headland to headland, to call men to their boats.” The shoals could extend for several miles and appeared as darker patches in the sea below.

The seventeenth century fishermen had a division of interest not only between farming and fishing, but as that century advanced, a new cause for the half-hearted pursuit of the herring – the growth of smuggling. As an experienced seaman with convenient pretext for being away from the Island the fisherman was well qualified for the running trade.

Not all the crew of the fishing boats were part-time farmers or crofters. No doubt Robertson’s description of the composition of the crews of Manx herring boats based on his observations when on the Island in 1793 would apply a century earlier: “Two of these [i.e. crew] are generally seamen; and the rest, at the beginning of the fishing, come from the interior parts of the country, to which, on its close, they return supremely contented if they have procured herrings...”

(ix) Fishing and Trade

Evidence that the herring fishing brought mercantile activity to the Island has already been noted both in the Countess of Derby’s concern that the Herring Customs should not deter trade in fish and Blundell’s reference to fish as an export to France. Thomas Denton’s description of the Isle of Man in 1681 speaks of Douglas as being “... a place of ye greatest resort in ye whole Island because the haven is commodious and hath a most easy entrance

and safe road for ships into wch. ye Frenchmen and other fforainers use to repair with their bay salt, having traffic again with ye Islanders, and buying of ym. leather, coarse wool and powdered beef.” Salt was an important import for curing fish amongst other things. Regulations about the import of salt occur in seventeenth century statutes. All exported fish would be salted prior to the introduction of the red herring process c. 1770. In good seasons there were regular exports of salted herrings and Bishop Wilson, writing in 1719, stated that 20,000 barrels were exported to France in one year. In the later eighteenth century the Mediterranean countries and English colonies in the West Indies became new markets for the traders in fish.

(x) Varying Fortunes of the Fishing

There is ample evidence of great variations in Manx herring catches from the seventeenth century onwards. 1648 was recorded as a year of failure, whilst 1667 was remembered as a marvellous fishing year when an immense shoal produced a catch of an estimated 180,000 mease – well over a hundred million fish. The size of the fishing fleet in 1670 is believed to have been 200 boats.

There were years of scarcity over the greater part of thirty years from 1685 and no doubt it was this circumstance which prompted Thomas Wilson, Bishop of Sodor and Man 1698–1755, to insert in the Manx Prayer Book the special petition: “That it may please Thee to restore and continue to us the blessings of the sea.”

The Lord of the Isle’s receipts from the herring fishing are the best guide to the fluctuations of the herring fishing. These indicate further bad seasons for the periods 1717–19, 1721–28 and 1732–37. The Lord’s income from this source in the last five years before the Revestment was as follows:

1760	£121 19s
1761	£92 4s
1762	£90 19s
1763	£8 1s
1764	£60 9s

(xi) The Church and the Fishing

The fisherman’s calling involved obvious elements of danger and uncertainty. The small open ‘Scoutes’ met with the inevitable disasters from time to time. A major loss of life in 1672 received only the following terse mention in a parish register: “This year the men was cast away at ye herring fishing – Septem-

ber 2nd". The fluctuations in shoal sizes and the uncertainty of the catch at the best of times, acquaintance with the power of wind and wave and all-important tides – all these factors disposed men to religious observance. Good fishing was thought of as a blessing. Religious provision for those involved in the fisheries was described in a sixteenth century statute requiring: "That the Vicar or minister of the parish whose fishing is gotten repair to the harbour every morning and evening to read them divine service, and to deliver them good admonition upon paine of every default to forfeit his tythe fish the ensuing night which is to be given to the poor at the admiral's discretion. And if any such person neglect to come to the place where such service is read, when the admiral or vice-admiral sets out his flag (which is the sign or token they are to observe for that duty) to offer their prayers and praises for such blessings, such, upon knowledge thereof is to be excluded from the benefit of the fishing that night." The degree of religious observance laid down in that statute had fallen into a state of abeyance by the end of the eighteenth century. During the first half of the eighteenth century it was probably still maintained for Bishop Wilson had devised a "Form of Prayer to be used by those Clergy who attend the Boats in the Herring Season".

Laws of 1714 and 1752 prohibited fishing on either Saturday or Sunday nights. Robertson, writer of *A Tour Through the Isle of Man*, published in 1794, considered that the loss of two nights' fishing in a week was very injurious to the fishing industry. George Woods writing in 1811, asserted that: "The prayer, or the affectation of it, on leaving harbour is fallen into disuse..." Nevertheless it was the rule on Manx herring boats to pray each evening after the nets were shot and this usage continued into the twentieth century. In the late nineteenth century some boats would go so far in observance of the Sabbath as to avoid being on passage to Kinsale on a Sunday.

The fish tithe, levied since the Middle Ages, continued until the end of the eighteenth century. When fish were landed the Proctor would collect the clergy's portion of the catch. As early as 1711 we hear of fishermen appealing against this tithe in time of poor catches. The issue recurred in 1767 and a court decision declared that fishermen must pay fish tithes even though the catch was "sold at sea many leagues from the Island". The Privy Council upheld the claim of the Church, but the fishermen resisted and eventually the matter was allowed to drop by about the year 1800.

'Creg Yaghee' (Tithe Rock) occurs as a Manx place name, applied either to designated fishing rocks along the coast where a tithe was levied on catches or, according to tradition, to a rock like that near Fenella Beach, Peel, where reluctant fishermen are said to have deposited their tithe portion of herrings just before high water for collection by the Proctor before the tide removed it.

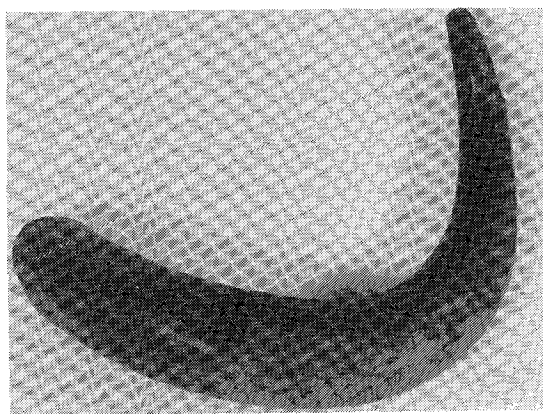
(xii) Two Eighteenth Century Fishing Regulations

With the development of the trade in salt herrings there was the risk that so many fish would be sent off the Island that natives would be unable to find enough for their winter stock. A law was promulgated in 1737, commencing as follows:

"And whereas the Herring Fishing in this Isle hath for many years past been very uncertain; and yet severall Strangers as well as Natives have bought up, used and transported fresh Herrings before the Country was supplied, whereby the Comonalty hath often been disappointed and deprived of their chief support, and obliged to buy Herrings from Abroad at high Prices, to the great Detriment of the Publick in generall"

The new law prohibited the export of herring until local people were fully supplied at a price not exceeding 1s. 2d. per hundred. In years of poor fishing herring were imported into the Island and we hear of imports from Holland in 1794.

An interesting law of 1738 required "...that when and as often as they [fishermen] do meet with a scull of herrings at sea they shall reveal the same to the next boat to them." The information was then to be transmitted from boat to boat throughout the fleet.



An oxhorn carried for signalling at sea.

PART TWO

MANX SEA FISHING c1750–c1850

THIS period is more fully documented than early times, with a number of eyewitness accounts of the fishing scene for the years c. 1790 – 1815. Trade increased greatly during this period, especially with the introduction of red herring processing c.1770. Outsiders, particularly Cornish and Irish fishermen, frequented the Manx fisheries from the early 1820's. There were two changes in fishing boat construction during this period. By c.1840 the great age of exporting cured fish was coming to an end and at the same time a new type of fisherman was emerging.

(i) The Herring Fishery and Trade

The later eighteenth century saw a great expansion of that trade in cured herring which had its beginnings in the seventeenth century exports to France. Evidence that Manx merchants were already aware of the possibilities of exporting salt herrings to the West Indies by the mid-eighteenth century is contained in a letter of J.J. Bacon to the Duke of Atholl, dated 1758. Bacon, a Douglas merchant, informed the Duke that a cargo of herrings, shipped to St Christopher in the vessel "Lady Charlotte" was seized by the Customs on arrival there, ship and cargo later being sold. Bacon and his partners had fallen foul of the Navigation Act. An appeal had been made to the King and Bacon sought the Duke of Atholl's support for this. The herrings were intended for sale to plantation owners, to be consumed by their slaves.

After the Revestment (1765) certain legislation of the Imperial Parliament affected Manx merchants – particularly the bounties on cured fish exported. The suppression of smuggling consequent upon the Revestment led Manx merchants to turn to the red and white herring trades as alternatives to the formerly lucrative running trade. Bounties were

first granted in 1767, with awards for those who caught the first mease in the season and for those who fished the greatest number of herring. These bounties were repealed in 1771, but an important Act of 1772 gave payments per barrel on salted herring and red herrings exported. Herrings could also now be freely exported to the British colonies and restrictions on the import of salt were eased. Bounties were intended to promote the British fish trade and to ensure a supply of experienced seamen who could be recruited into the navy in time of war. The operations of press gangs amongst Manx fishermen during the Napoleonic Wars were to create problems. The bounties system, in varying forms, continued to operate until 1833.

The Yarmouth process of making red herrings was introduced to the Island by a Mr. Woodhouse c. 1770. An interesting letter to the Duke of Atholl dated 28th February, 1795 and signed by fifteen Manx merchants asked help for Mr. John Woodhouse, Merchant, who was petitioning for part of a Spanish vessel and cargo captured by the French. The Duke was being asked to use his influence in favour of Mr. Woodhouse as: "He was the first person that erected a Red Herring House upon it [i.e. the Isle of Man] and introduced the Yarmouth method of curing Red Herrings and by whose instigation many large sums of money have been paid and expended amongst Your Grace's Poor Tennants and some Thousands of Hardy Seamen have been brought up in this Fishery since the commencement of Curing Red Herrings which is now about twenty five years ago".

The bounties were great inducements to the curers of both white (or salted) herrings and red herrings. By 1815 there were five large red herring houses in Douglas, and others at Derbyhaven, Port St. Mary, Laxey and Peel. Both salt-cured and red herrings constituted

an important element in the diet of poorer people in the villages and inland towns of Britain before the coming of the railways, which made the transport of fresh fish possible. As well as supplying the British market and having some share in the West Indian trade, Manx merchants expanded their business into the Mediterranean.

John Feltham, who visited the Island 1797–8, described the making of red herrings, which were "... first piled up with a layer of salt between each row, and remain to purify some days. They are then washed, and when drained sufficiently, are fixed by the mouth on small rods, (somewhat like yarn wicks for making candles, and hung up in large houses for the purpose, in length about 90 feet and about 60 broad. Here the herring rods are hung as close as admissible, and reach from the roof till within eight feet of the floor. Their regularity and lustre make a very beautiful appearance: fires are kept under them continually smoking for four or five weeks, made of dried roots of oak; when being sufficiently reddened, they are shipped for the Mediterranean ports, from whence the vessels return with a cargo to Liverpool and the Island." Feltham mentions that salmon as well as herring were exported to Mediterranean countries. A Leghorn merchant had told him that at that port they received an average three cargoes of red herrings a year from the Isle of Man. Italian ports visited by Manx merchants included Leghorn, Florence, Venice, Genoa and Palermo, according to Richard Townley (1791).

George Woods (1811) witnessed the preparation of white, or salt, herring at Douglas, on his visit. He wrote: "The fish are by women rubbed with salt and left in heaps till the following morning. They are then in equal regularity packed in barrels, with a layer of salt between each row.

Much of the excellence of a herring is thought to depend on its being salted immediately after its being caught. The Dutch and the Scotch imitating them have adopted the practice of salting their fish on board the fishing vessels, and of throwing overboard at sunrise all that are remaining fresh."

The trade in cured fish continued until the 1830's. Two factors led to its decline – the end of the bounties system of incentives in 1833 and the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire which became effective by 1838. The emancipated slaves were no longer prepared to consume the cured herrings which had once been such a prominent part of their

diet. The state of fishing was such that Henry Holmes and Son of Liverpool, extensively engaged in fish curing and exporting, declared in 1836 "that as an object of commercial speculation, the Fisheries of Scotland and the Isle of Man have ceased to yield a remunerating profit; and that even to the takers, the late price can hardly be considered sufficient to afford a scanty subsistence, after paying for an extensive outfit." The firm's books showed a decline in prices per barrel since 1820. The demand from Jamaica had fallen sharply. "The working classes in the manufacturing districts of this country have also ceased in great measure to consume the article [cured herrings] owing probably to the reduced prices of meat."

(ii) Manxmen and Strangers at the Fishing

When William Blundell described the duties of the Water Bailiff he mentioned: "It is his place, as he is admirall, to order all ye business of ye herring fishing, to see yt. strangers and all other have no wrong done to them during yt. season...". An interesting correspondence took place between the Fishery Chamber of Whitehaven and the Duke of Atholl's officials following a clash off Langness in September 1753 between four Whitehaven fishing busses and Manx fishermen. The Whitehaven men alleged that their boats were attacked by the crews of about 100 Manx boats. The Manxmen were said to have driven them away and threatened to sink their boats, "saying that the British subjects had no right to fish off the Manx coast as the seas belonged to the King of Man". There was a lengthy correspondence and the Whitehaven people felt that the Water Bailiff had not dealt drastically enough with some identified ringleaders. Issues concerning territorial waters and the payment of herring custom by visiting fishermen were raised. The Manx fishermen in return complained that the Englishmen were shooting their nets by day, fishing on Sundays and throwing fish gut overboard on the fishing grounds. They contended that the Whitehaven boats fished amongst the Manx boats which "seldom go above two leagues off, sometimes scarcely one".

In their replies to the Fishery Chamber of Whitehaven the Duke of Atholl's officials adopted a conciliatory tone, promising to do all they could to prevent further trouble, avoiding any dispute about territorial waters and promising attention to any future complaints they might receive. In return they hoped that "... your busses will behave carefully, tenderly and cautiously towards our poor litle shells ... so as not to distress them."

The size of the Manx 'squaresails' or 'scoutes' was obviously diminutive in comparison with the 45-80 ton Whitehaven fishing busses.

When the Island came directly under the British Crown, it was placed under the jurisdiction of the British Fisheries Board and could no longer enforce its own regulations. A letter in 1823 from J. Mackenzie, of the Office for the Herring Fishery in Douglas complained to the British Fisheries Board that Irish boats were poaching off the Manx coast and shooting their nets by day. A British cruiser was appealed for to prevent this. It was requested that the vessel be well manned and armed as "the Irishmen are desperate characters who during the last season made a furious attack on the town and people of Peel."

By 1836, according to the *Report of the Irish and Scottish Fisheries*, the Irish boats "...could easily be induced to observe the regulations [i.e. Manx regulations], but both the Cornish and Scotch boats wholly disregard them." Starting the fishing before July was considered detrimental to the fishing. The old law preventing fishing before Tynwald Day "... was transgressed, first by the Cornish, and sometimes by the Irish, but soon after by the boats of the Island indiscriminately; their owners conceiving that when the law was broken by strangers over whom there was no control, they might as well participate in whatever fish was going."

Trawling off the east coast of the Island was also blamed at this time for the marked decline of catches after 1823. The trawlers were held to be destroying spawn on the 'coral banks' off Douglas.

(iii) New Types of Fishing Boats

There were two changes in the types of Manx fishing boats in this period:

- (i) From Squaresails or Scoutes to Smacks, starting in the late 1780's.
- (ii) From Smacks to Dandy Rig, c. 1830.

The 'squaresails' or 'scoutes' of the period prior to the 1780's are described retrospectively in an article in the *Manx Liberal* written in 1847, which states: "Many years ago the Manx Square-sails as the then herring fleet were called, were open boats, say, from five to seven tons, with four sweeps and the squaresail as their motive power; their size about that of our present cod-line or baulk-yawls, lumbered with nets, corks, buoys, and

the take of fish strewn upon the unsealed ballast, and pitched against the tarred sides, we can believe the condition a hardship and the toil to have been a state of drudgery; this was the sort of fleet which was wrecked by the sudden storm of 1787."

The disaster on the 20th September, 1787 occurred when the sudden onset of a S.E. gale overtook approximately 300 fishing boats at the Douglas 'back fishing'. An unspecified number of vessels and lives were lost as the squaresails tried to find shelter in Douglas harbour. The old pier with its brick-built lighthouse together with part of Douglas quay had been demolished in a storm of the previous year so that only a lamp fixed on the ruins of the old quay acted as a substitute light. When this was struck down by the first boat making for the harbour, chaos followed and it seems that fifty to sixty boats were lost. A newspaper account stated that the crews consisted of seven, with some larger boats carrying eight or nine men. This disaster was a turning point in boat construction. The replacement vessels were to be Smacks.

The new smacks were half-decked instead of being open like their predecessors and cutter-rigged. Smacks, the chief Manx fishing vessels from c. 1790 to c. 1830, were a type of vessel common up the West coast of Britain from the Bristol Channel to Morecambe Bay. Feltham, writing in 1798, described them as 23-33 feet (7-10m) keel and 13 ft (4m) beam, with a 6 foot hold. He stated that they were remarkably fast and withstood a heavy sea. He remarked that Manx boatbuilders were uncommonly clever, "constructing entirely by eye, making no use of line or rule, unless in laying the keel". He said that the boats seldom exceeded 8 tons and cost, including the nets, about 70 guineas. He put the number of boats in the Manx herring fleet as upwards of 400. Perhaps the cutter rig of the new smacks was copied from the 'fresh buyer' boats (cp. the Port St. Mary smack "Maria").

A local writer in 1815, however, describes the Manx fleet at that time as consisting of clinker-built boats of from 24 - 30 tons. He described the owners of the fishing boats on the North side of the Island as "mostly snug farmers, who for the most part get them built the largest and strongest of any in the Island; they have the fewest old boats, as they commonly sell them before they become so, to the people from the neighbouring parts of England, Ireland and Scotland....."

In addition to the fishermen's smacks there

were schooner-rigged wherries, used as fast-sailing vessels by the 'fresh buyers' who accompanied the fishing fleet, buying the fresh herring at sea and carrying them back to ports on the Island, to Liverpool and Dublin. These wherries would carry forty to a hundred mease at a time. It is estimated that in 1800 there were 40 to 50 'fresh buyers' boats, employing at least 200 men. There were also larger vessels such as Richard Karran's "Maria" of Port St Mary, built in 1797 and of 46 tons burthen. We hear of a 60 ton smack launched from Crellin's shipyard at Peel in 1793. Such vessels were red herring traders, visiting Mediterranean ports. By the 1840's the fresh buyers' sailing vessels were encountering stiff opposition from steam boats on the Liverpool run. A news item in the *Manx Sun* (21.9.1844) reflects this, stating: "Yesterday the smacks – fresh buyers' – in the harbour displayed their best and brightest bunting, in rejoicing at a rumour that the steam packets are to be prohibited from carrying fresh fish to Liverpool unless they pay dock-dues at that port."



The smack "Maria" shown on an eighteenth century platter.

The change from single-masted smacks to two-masted dandy smacks or luggers began around 1830. One of the beneficial effects of the arrival of strangers at the Manx fishing grounds was improvement in the design of local boats. Imitation of the Cornishmen lay behind the change to the dandy rig c. 1830 as it did to the later adoption of nickeys. Captain Quilliam, of Trafalgar fame, was one of those who took a keen interest in having the Manx fleet refitted in the fashion of the Cornish boats which had frequented the Island since 1823. The great advantage of the dandy smack was that the main mast could be lowered aft to enable the vessel to lie quietly to the nets whilst fishing. Dandy smacks had evolved from the smacks of the earlier period by cutting down the length of the main boom,

adding a mizzen mast and putting a small standing lug on the mizzen mast. The rig of the dandy smack was to persist to the end of the nineteenth century, though boats of this type were latterly called "Luggers". This name is rather misleading since the mainsail was set on a gaff and only the small standing mizzen was a lug sail. The dandy smack derived from the craft of Mounts Bay and St. Ives in Cornwall. The Manx boat builders adapted the Cornish style, producing similar double-ended boats, but at the same time making the upper strakes aft more curved than the west Cornish vessels.

The *Manx Sun* in July 1836 described four boats of this type owned by Caesar Corris of Peel. They were of 22 tons burthen, carvel built, half decked and copper fastened. They carried 19 pieces of net each of 1150 yards. The nets were barked three times before the commencement of the season, afterwards every second Saturday. There were 6 men in each boat. There were 14½ shares: 2½ for the boat, 6 for the net and 6 between the crew.

The practice of carrying loose ballast in fishing boats ceased after the loss of the "Peel Castle" in 1824 with all hands, as a result of the ballast moving in a violent storm.

A Manx fishing report of 1827 suggested the use of riding-lights on fishing boats as the fishing grounds lay near to the track of many of the new steam vessels.

(iv) The Fisherman's Life

One of the hazards of the fisherman's life was liability to be carried off by a press gang for service in the British Navy. A letter, dated 30th November 1776 in the *Atholl Papers* is headed "Copy of a Letter from the Lords of Admiralty to the Earl of Suffolk indicating that captains of H.M. Ships would be restrained from impressing the landowners employed in the Manx Herring Fishery". The letter contains an interesting section which reads: "... by which it appears that most of the Landowners, during the season, betake themselves with their sons and servants in their small boats to the Herring Fishery on that coast for the subsistence of their families, that they are the rest of the year employed in agriculture....".

A letter from a Lieutenant J. Clark, R.N., to the Duke of Atholl in 1803 submitted a plan whereby more men from the fishing fleet might be induced to join the Royal Navy if the bounty was to be increased. Matters seem to

have come to a head in 1807 when a memorial from the fish curers, merchants and traders of Douglas was submitted to Governor Smelt to be forwarded to the Secretary of State to prevent the impressment of "Persons concerned in the Herring Fishery".

As elsewhere in Britain at this time, alcoholism was a major problem. The recent prevalence of smuggling based on the Island and the general cheapness of spirits had had demoralising effects. The 'back fishing' at Douglas seems to have been a particular occasion for 'ebriety', as Robertson expressed it, in 1793. The fishermen would be based at Douglas inns at this time of year, and according to eye-witnesses a good night's catch was followed by drinking bouts causing further fishing, however good the prospects, to be neglected. Earlier in the season at Peel and Port St. Mary too, there would be problems since drink was given on credit to fishermen and their families at a particular public house where the 'shot' was started at the start of the herring season. The account was to be settled at the end of the season. Rum was carried on fishing boats, and spirits passed round the crew as an 'earnest' of payment when a 'fresh buyer' came along to buy fish for quick transport to Liverpool.

Indolence and intemperance were said by various observers to be the curse of the Island. When four months of activity gave the necessities of life for the year, there was no great incentive for farming.

By the end of the period under review, however, changes for the good were occurring. *Mylrea's Guide* of 1853 remarks that "Temperance has had good effect." The boats were now in the hands of men of substance and character who paid the fishermen a fair proportion of the returns.

The old system of each man bringing his own food supply for the week ended about 1835. A new system of 'shares' was adopted and the cost of food was paid for out of the gross earnings. Caesar Corris, the Peel boat owner, allowed 16 shillings per week, or 2s. 8d. per man per week for provisions. (Bread would cost 1½d a pound, eggs 5d a dozen and butter 8d a pound in the early 1840's).

Loss of life at the fishing continued and did not excite the attention we might expect. An entry in the *Manx Sun* in August 1844 states only: "A fishing boat, belonging to Peel, which sailed thence some 10 days ago, has not since been heard of; it is supposed that she has been run down while riding at her nets. She

had a crew of seven."

(v) Vicissitudes of the Herring Fishing

At the beginning of this period an account in the *Manchester Mercury* of 1754 describes the busy scene at Douglas where Whitehaven busses and about fifty Irish wherries had joined around three hundred Manx boats. Six splendid weeks of fishing provided sufficient fish to export 500 tons of salted fish to Ireland and several thousand barrels to the West Indies.

1765 was another outstanding year with more than 20,000 barrels of salted herring exported abroad. 1789 was a similar year, whilst 1793 was long remembered and alluded to thus in *Laughton's Guide* (1852) "The memory of persons still living recalls a season [1793] when herring were so abundant that they were caught with the hand on the beach after being sold at 4d. a hundred, until purchasers could not be found and they were carted off for manure." Other bumper seasons occurred in 1803, 1807, 1813 and 1823. At least four of the outstanding herring seasons reached their climax in September and October – the traditional time of the 'back fishing'.

Years when the fishing was a failure feature in the *Atholl Papers*. Governor Shaw wrote to the Duke of Atholl in 1794 to inform him of the import of 1000 barrels of foreign herring "owing to the failure of the herring fishery". In September 1796 he was again informing the Duke of herring failure. A *Memorial to the Duke of Atholl* dated January 1823, with the signatures of boat owners and fishermen, draws his attention to the decay of the herring fishing: "... which was the staple and almost only trade carried on by the inhabitants for centuries past ...". It goes on to say: "That from the great failure of the fishing for some years past and particularly the present season on our coasts the Fishermen are at length reduced to the utmost poverty and distress and many of them and their families in some parts of the Island are reduced to a state bordering on starvation, few of whom will be able to procure fishing tackle for the ensuing season". Most boat owners were said to be unable to fit out boats and the fleet to be little more than half its former number. The *Memorial* adds that Irish and Scots, attracted by the bounties, are on the Island fishing herring, cod and ling. As it turned out, 1823 proved to be an abundant year, attracting adventurers from Cornwall to the Island.

In 1827, a serious failure of the herring usher-

ed in a period of decline and it was quarter of a century before full recovery was made in the fishing industry. Herring failure was a factor in causing the emigration of Manx pioneers to Ohio.

(vi) Numbers Involved in Herring Fishing

Statements vary as to the number of herring boats during this period and the problem is to differentiate between larger vessels which were purely herring boats and small boats engaged in general fishing.

Robertson (1793) spoke of upwards of 400 boats in the Manx fleet, "not including, smacks, brigs etc." George Woods (1811) stated that "Between four and five hundred fishing boats, usually about sixteen tons burden each, and not decked, compose the Manx fleet".

The number of boats had fallen to less than 200 by 1835. Some had taken to coastal trade; many vessels were laid up.

An estimate of the number of Manx people dependent in one form or another on fishing for their livelihood c. 1800 is approximately two fifths of the population.

(vii) The Role of the Farmer-Fisherman

Writers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century followed one another in referring to the indolence and melancholy of the Manx. Feltham (1798) exemplifies this, writing: "But it is herrings which are their great support; it is these only can rouse the dormant energy of the Manksman's mind, stimulate him to industry, and enliven the whole Island." Robertson (1793) spoke of the countrymen who formed the majority of the fishing boats' crews as returning to their homes "supremely contented if they have procured herrings, and the women in their absence, cultivated potatoes, barely adequate to the maintenance of the family till next fishing". George Woods (1811), describing the crews of herring boats, wrote "Two seamen and four countrymen are the number usually employed. From two to three thousand of the latter annually quit their inland habitations for the sea-ports, for three or four summer or autumnal months. They leave their wives to turn the soil, to reap, to thresh, and dig potatoes ..". The Liverpool merchant, John Drinkwater, differed from all contemporary writers in asserting that even an abundance of herring did not animate the Manx. "There are many herrings on the coast", he wrote to the Duke of Atholl in July 1807, "but according to

custom the Manx fishermen are not prepared to go and take them – poverty certainly does not stimulate them to industry, otherwise they would adopt a very different mode of proceeding."

Hainings Guide (1822) gave a fair sample of opinions of the time on the consequences of combining farming and fishing. "Another disadvantage", wrote Hainings, "is the mania for the fishery which pervades all classes in the country, draining it of those who ought to be employed in the cultivation of the ground, and in reaping the fruits of the earth. It is nothing uncommon for proprietors of land to desert it, and to follow the fishing for uncertain gain; and thus agriculture is deprived of the capital, time and labour which ought to be devoted to it." Hainings saw involvement in the fishing, along with lack of capital and payment of tithes in kind as the three main checks on agricultural improvement.

In analysing the pros and cons of Manx fishing, Hainings saw two main disadvantages: (1) the investment of "too much capital in an uncertain traffic" and (2) the adverse social consequences in that "those employed in it acquire habits of indolence and drunkenness, contract debts for their outfit which are unpaid for years, and the consequences are litigation and poverty."

At the same time he saw three arguments in favour of the fishing: (1) It could bring benefit to the country in the way that prosperity had been brought to Holland by its fisheries (2) Government bounties were assigned to promote fishing and therefore it was a worthy enterprise (3) "Under proper regulation it increases means of subsistence, creates a consumption of products of the land, gives employment and so must bring considerable sums of money into circulation which is beneficial to all classes."

By the 1840's forces were at work which were to turn fishing into an almost year-round activity. The coming of outsiders with better equipped boats meant investment in improved boats and more expensive equipment. Such investment necessitated a longer fishing season than the traditional three to four months of the Manx fishing. Specialisation became more necessary.

(viii) Herring Fishing Legislation 1750 – 1840

In addition to the important legislation of the Imperial Parliament affecting trade with the

British colonies and the incentive bounties for curing, there were a number of new Manx fishing regulations. Acts of 1794 and 1796 for the Better Regulation of the Herring Fishery provided respectively for the shooting of nets from the starboard side of boats and the prohibition of nets preserved by tarring. The Act of 1796 also removed the 1737 restrictions on herring export, whilst providing for an embargo on export in time of scarcity.

An Act of 1817 contained a number of new provisions including the clear numbering of fishing boats and the registration of the name of the boat and master's name at the Custom House. Herrings were in future to be sold by the cran (42 gallons wine measure) because of frauds in the 'tale' method of counting. The number of herrings to the cran averaged around 10 'hundred' but could be as low as 7 and as high as 20. (Metric 'units' replaced the cran in 1974. 'Units' = 100kg or 0.56 cran). The method of counting by 'long hundreds', however, persisted. Legislation against the tarring of nets was strengthened.



Baulk yawls at Castletown c. 1840.

(ix) Other Forms of Fishing

In addition to the herring fishing there was 'baulk yawl' fishing from almost every beach around the Island. 'Baulk' meant longline; the 'yawls' were small versions of the original 'scoutes' once used in larger form for the herring fishing. Longline fishing for cod was particularly important during the winter.

Vicar-General Wilks, describing life in his parish of Ballaugh in 1774, referred to "about 6 small yawls, employed in catching grey fish, manned mostly by old men". He also listed the fish of Manx waters: "We have many sorts of fish caught, such as herrings, cod, haddock, ling, whiting, polllocks, sea carp, mackerel, gurnets, rays, flounders, congers and some-

times, but seldom, turbot, soles and John Doreys..."

Sometimes there were tensions between the longline fishermen and the herring fishers. The High Bailiff of Peel informed the Duke of Atholl in 1813 that the fishermen of Peel considered that the scarcity of herrings off Peel was due to the stench from the decomposed whelks used as bait by the longline men of Dalby. As late as the mid-nineteenth century the Niarbyl was a busy port with a fleet of about thirty boats. There were five thatched cottages, three of which sold ale and spirits. Boats with crews of eight men, fished for herring in summer in the 'Baie Mooar' – the 'Big Bay' between Niarbyl and Bradda. In winter and spring they fished for cod and haddock with longlines. 'Fresh buyers' would take the herring on board out in the bay in favourable weather and race one another to Liverpool, their chief market.

Much light is thrown on the non-herring fishing of the Island c. 1830-1840 through the verbal evidence from elderly fishermen who were interviewed in producing a Tynwald Committee Report on Fisheries in 1849. These men were drawn from all round the coast of the Island and many had fished from yawls all their lives. Also giving evidence was Rev. David Nelson of Kirk Bride, who spoke of the advantage to the poor of his parish from the use of draw nets. The take of fish "not only furnishing them with food, but also with light by means of the oil extracted from the fish". Most types of fishing were described including crab and lobster. A Surby fisherman spoke of his lobster creels "of osier, black sally, and the currant tree."

The longline fishermen used horse-hair lines variously known as 'scrabanes', 'darrags' or 'gorstiags' and operated in the traditional baulk yawls throughout this period. The widely dispersed fishing around the coast was already on the decline by the mid-nineteenth century. The *Manx Liberal* of 1849, referring to this decline, cited Derbyhaven where thirty years prior there had been ten boats and forty men, all hand-liners.

PART THREE

MANX SEA FISHING c1840–1920



The skipper of the lugger "Swift" of Port St Mary. His boat sailed from the Calf to Kinsale in 37 hours.

(i) Overview of the Period

THE herring fishing which had declined in the late 1820's and early 1830's recovered steadily in the 1840's and enjoyed considerable revival in the 1850's. Not only did the number of vessels increase, but they were of greater size and carried improved equipment. By 1864 there were almost 300 boats in the herring fleet. The zenith of Manx fishing was attained in the early 1880's with boats attending the spring mackerel fishing off southern Ireland and autumn fishing off the east coast of Ireland.

The 1890's were a time of poor catches in Manx waters and the relentless decline of the herring fisheries had set in. By 1914 the number of Manx vessels had shrunk to 57 and it was outsiders who caught the bulk of the herrings landed on the Island. After 1900 curing and kippering had replaced fresh sales as the main outlets for the catch.

This period included the era of the nickeys and nobbies, the peak of Manx boat building, followed by its decline and the end of the sail fishing boat.

(ii) Specialisation in Fishing

An accurate picture of the state of Manx fishing after the mid-nineteenth century revival is to be found in the 1864 *Royal Commissioners' Inquiry into the Sea Fisheries of the United Kingdom* which contains a section on the Manx fisheries. It states: "There are 170 numbered fishing boats belonging to Peel; a few old boats not numbered; none belonging to Douglas or Ramsey; 120 belonging to Castletown, including Port St. Mary, Derbyhaven and Port Erin, making a total of c. 300 boats, of from 15 to 30 tons each, belonging to the Island. Fishing boats under 15 tons are not numbered. The average cost of a herring boat, including nets and everything ready for work, is £240 or £250. The nets cost about £100."

Manx, Cornish and Irish boats together on the grounds around the Island numbered about 600 sail.

The boats belonged to the fishermen, whereas "... twenty years ago capitalists owned the boats". The report goes on to state: "The capital invested in boats engaged in the herring fishing is double what it was twenty years since. The boats are larger than formerly ... There are seven men and a boy forming the crew."

The nets are described as 100 yards long and 300 or 400 meshes deep, with 32 meshes to the yard. Twenty years previously the length had been 71 yards and the depth 200 meshes. 20 pieces of net were accounted as equal to one share of the takings. Gross earnings were at this time divided into 20 parts. 10 shares went to the net-owners, 7½ to the crew and 2½

shares to the boat. Provisions were taken out of gross earnings.

Some fished as early as the 20th May, but the middle of June was considered the proper time to commence. The price of fish was the same as 30 years earlier. Herrings were generally sent to England by steamer by this time.

A comment on the fishermen themselves states: "The standard of the Manx fishermen has been considerably raised, their comforts increased, and their boats much superior to those formerly possessed. Much of this is due to their industry, frugality and temperance".

A little later, in 1877, E.W.H. Holdsworth described the thriving Manx fishermen of his days as follows: "For many years past habits of sobriety have been general amongst them, and the effects have appeared in their having better houses and a general improved condition; while their surplus money has been put into the savings bank, or profitably employed in providing better boats and gear. The change has been gradual but steady; and they have been indebted for it to no exceptional circumstances of constant abundance of fish on their coasts, and freedom from dangers and difficulties to which all seagoing men are liable; for they have been subject to years of scarcity like other people, and their fishing grounds are in as stormy seas as will be found on any part of our coasts." The effects of the temperance movement on the Island, along with other factors, had led to a general decrease in alcohol consumption in the previous generation.

The new type of fisherman was not only one of greater sobriety and the holder of a more substantial stake in the fishing, but also a man with more of a year-long commitment to his calling. Whilst it is true that countrymen continued to have some role in the Manx fishing, this element was on the decrease. The age when a landowner and his staff might take to the local fishing to obtain winter stocks was now of the past.

The 1871 Census enumerates the fishermen who had left Peel for the Kinsale mackerel fishing at the time of the Census – March 7th. There were 95 boats with aggregate crews of 788. Of these 420 were Peel men and the great majority of the others came from the adjacent parishes of German and Patrick. The numbers from the other country districts were small. This affords additional evidence for the emergence of specialisation in fishing.

Specialisation was most pronounced at Peel. An article in the *Peel City Guardian* in December 1886 drew attention to the difference between Peel and Port St. Mary fishermen, stating: "The fishermen of these two ports represent two entirely different classes of persons. Those of Port St. Mary are for the most part crofters, as so many of the fishermen used to be also in this part of the Island, going to sea part of the year, and working on their plots of land during the winter and early spring. Thus it comes to pass that there are probably not more than forty or fifty men in Port St. Mary wholly dependent on the 'harvest of the sea' for a living. But the case of the Peel men is utterly different. Not many years ago quite half of those who followed the herring in Peel belonged also the crofter class, who have, however, disappeared from among them, having left the country for the town and, in this way, been the cause of Peel having doubled its population within the last fifteen years."

At the same time the specialist fisherman was more vulnerable in a year of herring failure. At least a hundred Peel families were estimated to be in distress during the winter of 1886, following a bad season.

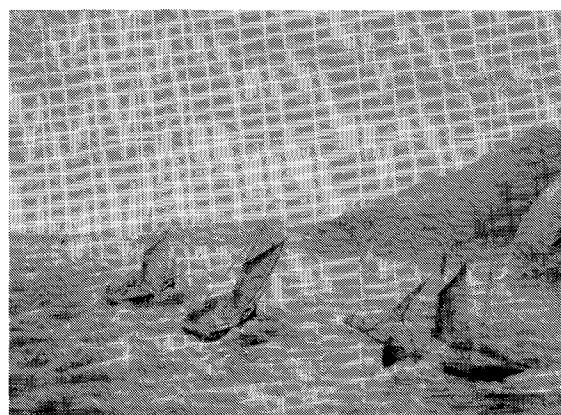
There were many fishermen who followed a calendar of the following type in the 1860's and 1870's.

March – late June : Kinsale mackerel fishing or herring fishing out of Stornoway.

July – October : Manx Herring fishing or Shetlands and East Coast.

Late October – December : Howth herring fishing.

January – March : some engaged in longline fishing for cod.

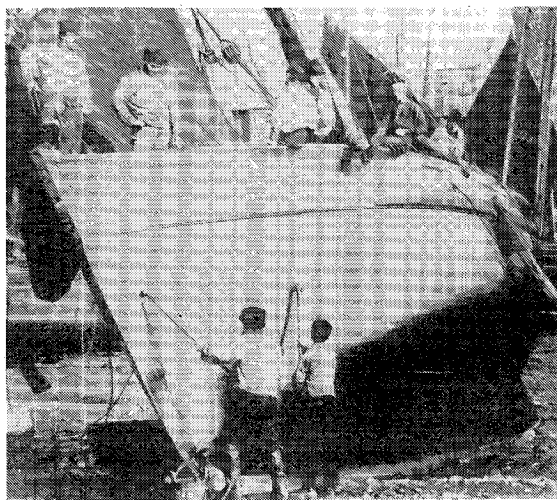


Manx herring boats in home waters.

(iii) Fishing at Kinsale and Lerwick

Though Kinsale and Lerwick are the two best known fishing centres frequented by Manxmen at this period, the new breed of full-time fishermen operated at times from other bases in Ireland, Scotland and the east coast of England. Some skippers of this period were particularly enterprising. The "Eclipse", of Peel, fished for cod off Iceland in the summer of 1859 and returned with several seals taken on the ice. The 'Rockall' fishing grounds were visited from 1862 onwards.

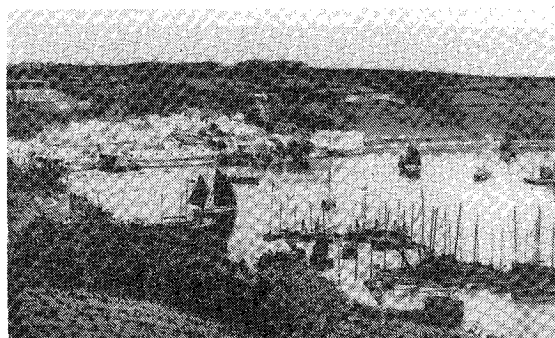
Manxmen fished for mackerel off southern Ireland in the spring of the year from 1861 onwards. It was Robert Corrin of Peel who made the suggestion that the summer shoals of mackerel which appeared in the Irish Sea might be found earlier in the year off southern Ireland. The spring mackerel fishing at Kinsale was soon attracting 800 vessels from Cornwall, Ireland, Scotland, the Isle of Man and France. By 1876 we hear of the buyers at Kinsale maintaining a fleet of "six powerful steamers and a dozen smart Jersey cutters to carry fish to the English markets." By 1895, however, the mackerel fishing was in serious decline, owing to a succession of bad seasons, and less vessels ventured to southern Ireland. Manx participation in the Kinsale fishing continued in a very diminished degree until the beginning of the First World War.



Taring a boat in Peel harbour using Turk's head brushes

The boats would set off for Kinsale early in March. The pre-Kinsale scene at Peel was described from memory as follows: "Michael Street was a busy scene with fishermen and handcarts getting provisions and the Quay was a mass of nets, ropes, carts and men. At night there would be a lot of people on the Quay. Young people would be after sea biscuits. There would be a lot of melodians playing on

the boats". The farewell religious services were remembered too: "It used to be that a service was held, and the parsons would be there, and the Methodist minister, and there would be prayers and hymns. The names of the boats were brought into the hymns, and each one was mentioned." Supplies for the vessels recalled by one ex-Kinsale fisherman included 8 cwt. of beef, 50 tins of milk, flour, sugar by the sackful and a side of bacon. In 1877 and 1878 the number of Port St. Mary boats at Kinsale was estimated at 100 with 180 more from Peel. These were the years of peak fishing off southern Ireland. The voyage to Kinsale was reckoned to average 50 to 60 hours, though faster sailing boats could do it in 40 hours. Fast voyages by particular vessels were recalled long afterwards by old fishermen. Boats usually set out on a night tide, went straight across the Channel and hugged the Irish coast. They often stopped at Kings-town (now Dun Laoghaire) and went ashore, then resumed and spread out along the southern coast making for the ports of their choice.



Fishing boats at Kinsale

The fishing ports used apart from the famous Kinsale were Castletown Bere, Baltimore, Fenit, Tralee, Valencia, Bearhaven, Castlehaven, Bantry, Dingle and Smerwick. Valencia was particularly used by the smaller boats from Peel between 1890 and 1910. Crookhaven was another port especially favoured by the Manxmen. Here, in 1890, a Manx fishing company had their own 'hulk', where the mackerel were boxed and iced prior to dispatch to Milford Haven. The company also engaged steamers to transport the fish from the 'hulks'. The 'hulks' were big condemned sailing ships used for packing. A hundred mackerel were packed in a box and a layer of ice placed on them. Norwegian vessels delivered cargoes of ice for use on the 'hulks'. At Crookhaven there was a mission ship with a doctor to attend to the sick and injured. The fishing boats were sometimes 40 miles offshore and exposed to Atlantic waves of the order of 10 metres in height. Whilst lying to the nets at night there was the risk of being

run down by transatlantic liners or having the nets cut away. Boats would sometimes have to stay out for several days, even a week, if there were few fish.

A good catch would be two or three thousand mackerel, though up to about 16,000 were taken on occasion. The mackerel season lasted 14 weeks on average. £25 a man was reckoned as the reward for a good season; £15 for an average and £9 or £10 for a poor season. (This at a time when 4d. would buy a dozen eggs; 7d. a pound of butter and 2d. or 3d. a stone of potatoes).

The boats returned to the Island in time for Tynwald Fair at the latest. The train of mackerel nets would be replaced by a shorter train of herring nets of finer mesh and double the depth of the mackerel nets. The herring fishing was then followed either in home waters or from Stornoway and Lerwick.

By 1900 a large fleet of steam trawlers was operating off southern Ireland, as elsewhere, and the markets were flooded with flat and other varieties of fish. The result was that mackerel was not in such demand, prices fell and the fleets dwindled away rapidly. Manx boats, at the instigation of Robert Corrin, sought mackerel off the mouth of the Shannon. By the end of the period the Peel boats were once more using Kinsale and it was from there that the last of them fished in 1916.

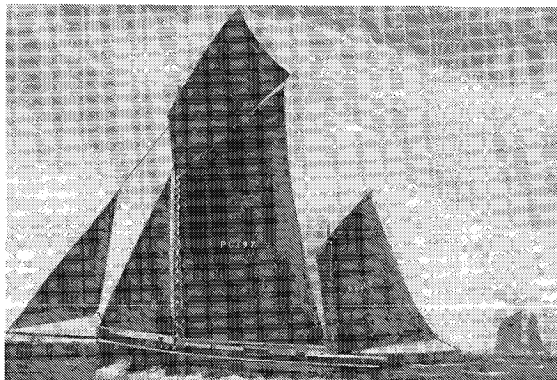
The Shetland fishing engaged 70 to 80 Manx herring boats, of which about 50 came from Peel. The voyage of about 600 miles was usually made about the second week in July and took a week on average. The sail up through the Inner Hebrides in fine summer weather was remembered as pleasant. Lerwick was the base for the Shetlands fishing and the grounds were normally 10-12 miles off the coast. Once the nets were shot men would fish with hand-lines for cod and ling, later to be salted and stored and divided when the boats arrived home. Lerwick drew fishermen from many countries, especially the Dutch; whales also frequented the Shetlands. Most of the Shetlands herring catch was cleaned and salted at Lerwick for dispatch to the Continent. The advent of steam drifters at Lerwick in 1899 heralded the end of fishing there by sail boats and Manxmen did not go to the Shetlands after 1910.

The Manx boats generally set out for home in the third week in September. The fishermen would note that the Shetland cornfields were still green when they left, while on arrival

back in the Isle of Man, the ripened corn was usually already gathered in. The journey home took 10 days to a fortnight. In favourable conditions boats would come via Cape Wrath and the Minch, but often conditions were bad and the Caledonian Canal was used. Five or six men would walk along the banks in the canal sections towing the fishing boat behind them. Ports of shelter used by the Manxmen on their way home included St. Margaret's Hope in Orkney, Loch Erribol, Loch Laxford, Kyleakin and Tobermory.

Autumn fishing to follow the Douglas 'back fishing' or the Shetland season was to be found off the east coast of Ireland. The Howth fishing off the north point of Dublin Bay was particularly exploited by the Manx fishermen between October and December, reaching its peak in the years 1860 – 1874.

(iv) Luggers, Nickeys and Nobbies

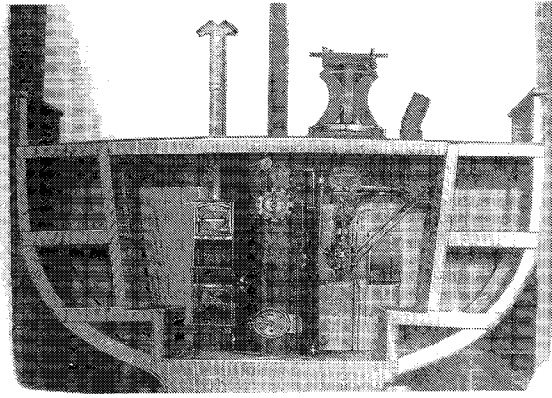


A Peel lugger.

These were the three types of vessel used during the heyday of the Manx herring fishing in the second half of the nineteenth century.

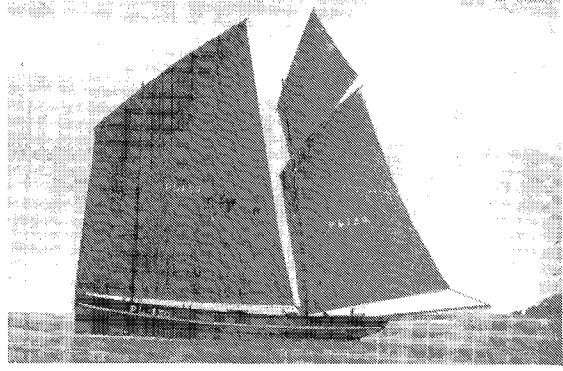
The dandy smack of the 1830's was increased in size and fully decked and was latterly known as the 'Lugger'. In the 1840's the tonnage was 12 to 18; by 1864 15 to 25 tons was the average. In the 1870's nickeys practically superseded the luggers, but towards the end of the century this older rig returned to favour when fishing ceased to recruit young men and older crews had to cope with the sails. There was some conversion of nickeys back to the dandy rig.

Nickeys were another introduction from Cornwall and derived their name from the common Cornish name, Nicholas. They were first built by William Paynter of St. Ives. When the first one arrived for the spring mackerel fishing off southern Ireland and later



Manx-made steam net hauling equipment of the 1880's

in the summer at the herring fishing in Manx ports, Paynter was inundated with orders from the Manxmen and others. He opened a yard at Kilkeel in Ireland in 1876 to meet demand. There is a story of how the superintendent at Graves' shipyard in Peel, never having seen a nickey, sent one of his carpenters to Castletown to get the dimensions of one lying in that port, and from those he was able to construct the first Manx-built nickey. Manx boat builders copied the basic plan of the Cornish nickey, but modified it to the extent of making the hull slightly larger and usually adding a mizzen staysail. The Manx nickeys were some of the largest fishing vessels used in British waters. They were 13.5 – 16.5 metres long with a beam of 4.5 metres. They were fast, achieving 10 knots in good conditions and could lie close to the wind. The nickeys were very suitable for the Kinsale fishing where the mackerel boats had to lie well out to sea and had long distances to make back to port with their catches. Nickeys carried three sets of lugsails, and required disciplined seamanship both for changing sails according to weather conditions and because the fore lug had to be dipped every time a tack was changed. The greater size of the nickeys made possible better accommodation. There was a net room, fish room and men's cabins with sliding panels for privacy. There was also space for the installation of a steam engine for hauling the nets. In 1883 more than 40 Peel nickeys were fitted with steam engines for this purpose. Freshwater was used in the boilers at first, later seawater. With the new equipment a two-mile mackerel train could now be hauled in two hours. The engines cost £10 each and were supplied by W. Knox of Douglas. The manually operated capstan or "iron man" continued in use on the smaller nobbies. With the introduction of engines for hauling the nets the number of men on the nickeys was reduced from seven to six.



A Peel nickey

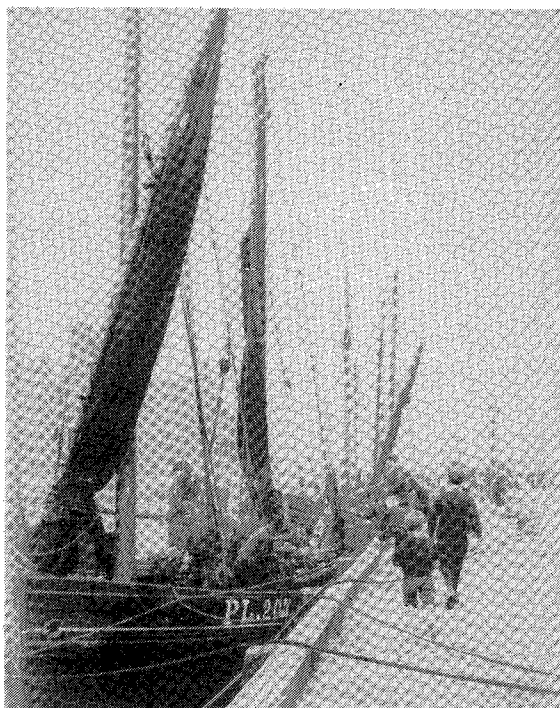
Nobbies were introduced in the 1890's. These were lighter rigged and smaller than the nickeys. The nobbies had reef points for shortening sails and no changing of sets of sails was necessary. They were 2½ – 3 metres shorter and had a standing lug instead of a dipping one. In the later nobbies a round or elliptical counter stern (ie. the stern projected behind the stern post, or overhung) was adopted in order to provide more deck space. The stern-post was sharply raked. The larger versions of the nobby went to Kinsale and the other Irish ports. Nobbies were all the vogue in the local herring fishing around 1900. They were the last of the sail fishing boats built on the Island. In 1911 the nobbies began to be converted to motor boats; by 1914 30 out of the 57 vessels in the Manx fishing fleet had auxiliary engines.

(v) Nets

Cotton nets in place of the older linen ones were introduced to the Island by Robert Corrin of Peel in 1854. It was in that year that Corrin brought over from Scotland the first net-making looms and the establishment of other net-making factories in Peel and Port St. Mary soon followed. We hear of women in Port St. Mary in the 1890's earning eight shillings for each completed net. There were three foot pedals to operate on the looms and the work was heavy. It took approximately a week to make one net. A contemporary writer referred to children fitting bobbins in Corrin's net factory at Peel 'at certain hours of the day'.

The old linen nets ('jeebin') had been much heavier and had required more frequent barking than the later cotton ones. It seems to have been a long battle to end the tarring of nets; since the 1827 Fishery Report, drawn up thirty years after the legal prohibition of tarring referred to "The injudicious practice of tarring nets, or boiling them in a mixture of bark and tar; and there is a still more recent practice of soaking them in oil or other nauseous mixtures probably offensive to fish, cer-

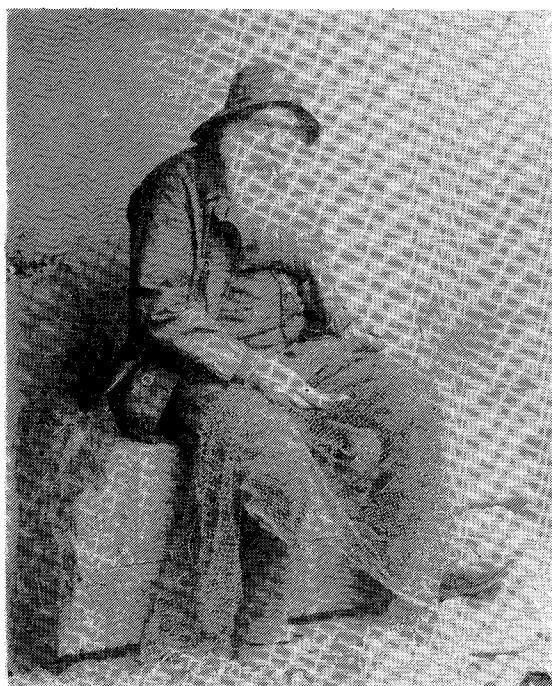
tainly so to its consumer and seriously affecting its commercial value". The cotton nets proved more efficient and it was with their introduction that the length of the trains was increased.



Nobbies at Peel Quay.

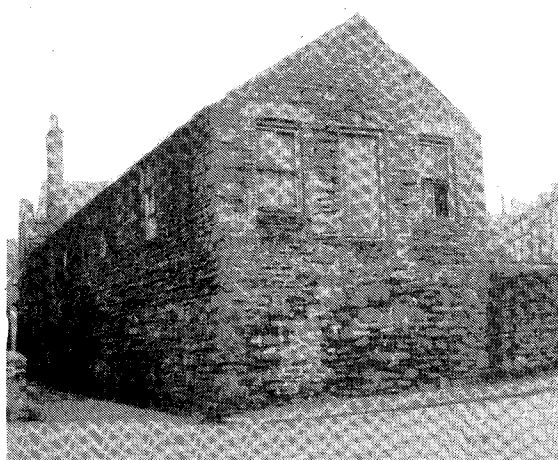
In hauling nets the boat was actually pulled by the weight of the nets and for this reason, a heavy tarred rope known locally as the 'springback' was used when nickeys came into use. 'Springbacks' were known as 'footlines' in Cornwall, but generally called 'warps' in England. They were to hold together the complete train of nets. Less massive ropes known as 'sole ropes' were adequate on nobbies. In the days of linen nets the warp had been above the nets, which hung under their own weight. When lighter cotton nets were adopted, the heavy warp was attached to the bottom of the nets. An article in the *Manx Liberal* in 1846 refers to the use of stones to weight herring nets in earlier times: "Our older fishers used to sling oblong stones to the skirt [of the net], 1½ to 2 lb. weight and two heavier 'clash stones' to the outskirt, to constrain a vertical set, but especially in strong currents and deep waters ..."

The size of herring nets and the number of nets in a train varied over time. The traditional hand-made 'jeebin' had been a sixteenth part of a piece of net. A 'jeebin' was 18 yards long and 52 meshes deep. Four lengths of 'jeebin' and four depths were joined together to form the piece of net 72 yards long 208



Mending a net.

meshes deep. A typical first class Manx herring boat in the 1880's had a train of 24 cotton nets each 100 yards long and 400 meshes deep. There were 32/33 meshes to the yard. A second class boat's train would be 18 nets of the same depth. At the Kinsale mackerel fishing a total train of 5,000 yards was typical with half the depth of the herring nets. The top of a



Joughin's net loft, Peel.

herring drift net would often be suspended four metres or so below the surface of the water when fishing off the west coast of the Island; much lower for the 'back fishing' of Douglas in late summer. Mackerel nets were hung from the surface of the water.

The net lofts were busy places. A Peel newspaper report in January, 1886 stated that 'Between two and three hundred fishermen are now actively employed on the various 'lofts' in

the town, in repairing and getting ready the nets for next season."

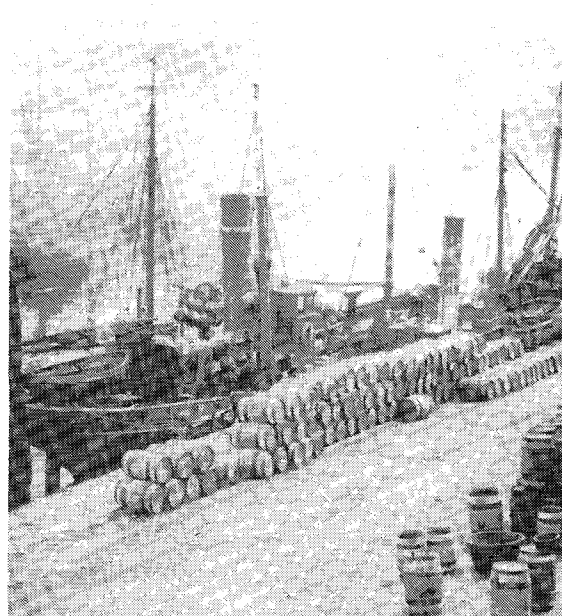
(vi) Uses for the Catch

It was not only the fish-eating habits of the former West Indian slaves which changed during the nineteenth century. In Britain the development of railways brought fresh fish within reach of most of the inhabitants of the country. By 1848 London was receiving 70 tons of fresh fish a day. The wide acceptability of salted or redded herrings rapidly diminished. Holdsworth (1877) wrote: "There is little curing done on the Island, almost all the herrings caught on that coast being sent with just a sprinkling of salt over them to Liverpool or some port in Wales." During the 1860's we hear of large steam paddle tug boats being used to transport the fresh fish from the fishing grounds to Liverpool. Sailing vessels still plied between the Manx fishing fleet and the English ports. The *Manx Sun* (21.07.1860) records the launch from the Lake Shipyard at Douglas of a 50 ton clipper smack "to be used as a 'fresh buyer' or carrier of fish to the English markets".

Kipperering appears to have been known on the Island from mid-Victorian times, but was probably only practised on a small scale until the Kelsall firm was established at Peel in the early 1880's. Kippers became of major importance after 1900.

Fresh herrings for immediate consumption, or for salt curing for the winter 'stock' continued to be in demand on the Isle of Man until well into the twentieth century.

It is sometimes stated that all the herring catch was disposed of fresh in the period c. 1840 – 1900, but there is evidence of salt curing during that period. We hear of Peel schooners taking cargoes of salt herrings to the Baltic. The following 1953 Folk Life Survey record also confirms this: "There were women coming from Scotland, to give a hand with the herring – coming over every year to do that, a hundred years ago. They came over in little boats with the fishermen, then when the season was over they were going back. There was a big wooden house built for them to live in, a big building down by the harbour." A newspaper account of a visit to Peel in 1859 refers to "The good fishwives" spoiling the place "by using the beautiful shore of the bay for their fish shambles, where they cut up, clean, and salt their finny treasures, leaving the sands covered along the whole front of the town with offal of every description..."



Steam drifters.

It was mainly after 1900 that curing became re-established with the setting up of a curing station at Port St. Mary in 1909. By 1914 there were four curing-houses at Port St. Mary, four at Douglas and five at Peel. The German and Baltic markets were the main destinations.

(vii) The High Point of Manx Fishing

The late 1870's and early 1880's were the peak period of activity for the Manx fishing industry – the days when Peel harbour was crammed with local and visiting fishing boats. Peel attained its population peak in 1891.

In 1883 (see Document G) it was estimated that 13 000 out of a population of 53 000 were either directly or indirectly dependent on fishing for their livelihood. Whereas in Britain as a whole at that time it was calculated that one in 75 was dependent on the fisheries, in the Isle of Man it was one person out of every 4. People born c. 1860 who lived on until 1940 in Port St. Mary or Peel recalled the busy scenes of their youth and contrasted them with the almost deserted quays of later times.

One of the trades closely linked with the herring fishing was shipbuilding. The shipyards turned out vessels of all kinds but it was luggers and nickeys which were their main output during the peak years. According to a newspaper report of December 1882 the Peel shipyards had produced 120 vessels in the previous five years. Work could be carried out very rapidly in these yards. It is recorded that the nobby "Gladys" was completed from keel to launching in one month. We hear of two

vessels a month being launched from Graves' yard at Peel. "They would be taking the quay up the day before the boat was launched. Of course it wasn't all built up like it is now" recalled one man who had watched the launchings as a boy. Similar busy scenes were replicated at Ramsey, Castletown and Port St. Mary. School children were sometimes used as ballast when larger vessels were launched from the shipyard above Peel harbour bridge and had difficulty in negotiating their way under the bridge at high tide. Even steam drifters were launched at Peel. Timber ships delivered Scandinavian pine for planking or Irish oak for the frames. The pit saws were recalled. A boy would be down below to pull the saw as it moved up and down and a veil was worn to keep the sawdust out of his eyes. Within the shipyards there were specialised trades such as block-making. Blocks were pulleys used for rigging and sails. Others worked on lathes making the rollers for shooting nets. Riggers specialised in making wire rope.

The net lofts were tall quayside buildings where nets were hoisted for storage and repair. The rooms had long floors where new nets could be stretched out when the ropes were being attached to them. A special place was allotted for each boat's train of nets to avoid confusion. Men would be employed in the lofts in winter to mend nets.

Net making was an important employment. Peel alone had three net factories. When the required lengths of net were made they were removed from the loom for "breasting" and "hazzling", an operation carried on by men or women as a domestic industry.

Nets might be taken to a 'Bark House' attached to the factory to be dipped in preservative solution, though there were also barking pits attached to private houses.

Rope manufacture was closely linked to the fishing industry and to general shipbuilding. Apart from Quiggin's well-known Douglas rope works there were 'rope walks' at Peel and Port St Mary. Everything from the thin ropes used for mounting fishing nets to thick mooring ropes was made. Rope making was mainly an occupation for men, though boys were employed to attend to the wheels at either end of the long 'rope walk' to put the twist in the rope. Packs of manilla, hemp and sisal were imported for making the rope. Locally made rope was also exported. In the 1880's a man at Peel Rope Works earned 19 shillings a week; a boy 3 shillings. The spinners walked backwards, spinning as they went, the long strands wound round their waists. A 'rope walk' was

often 1000 feet (300m) long.

Sail-making was all done by hand, using a 'palm' and needle. A 'palm' was a piece of leather fitting stiffly round the hand with a hole for the thumb. It was fitted with a rounded piece of metal like a thimble, dotted with



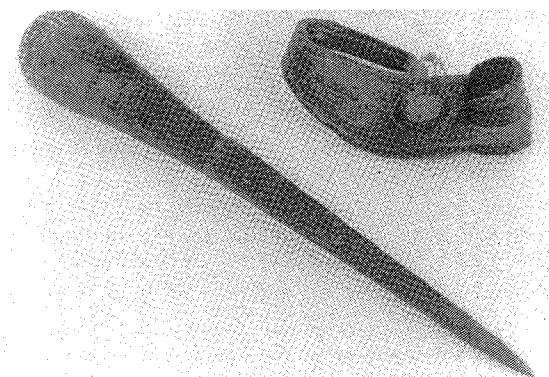
A sail-maker at work.

small holes, for pressing the needle through the canvas. The sailmakers sat on long low benches in a room lit by skylights during daylight hours and by suspended oil lamps in the evening. The smell of the Stockholm tar applied to the ropes pervaded the sail-loft. Flax canvas from Moore's sailcloth factory at Tromode was used. Different thicknesses of needles were used for sewing canvas and for sewing rope on canvas. The sailmaker spliced ropes using a 'phid'. He also spliced wire cables.

Blacksmiths on the quayside supplied anchors and rudder irons, as well as galvanizing nails for the shipyards and supplying metal components for the block-makers.

Some firms were simultaneously engaged in a variety of industries allied to the fishing. The Corris family of Peel, for example, had a shipyard close to the present St German's Cathedral, but also tanned nets and made leather. Their boats for launching were pulled along Atholl Street then down "The Gill" (now Bridge Street) to be launched on the shore at low water. There was a barrel of beer from which helpers could refresh themselves as the new boat was hauled along skids. (It was not uncommon for boats to be built some distance from the launching point).

The needs of the fishing boat crews created much business in the ports. Local grocers benefited from their needs of provisions. Cobblers hand-sewed the black leather knee boots. Oilskins were made to measure by the tailors. Even hatters found business making 'bellshiners' for the skippers.



A sail-maker's "palm" and "fid".

(viii) Fishing Other than Herring

Fishing from baulk yawls continued all around the Island. The traditional yawls which were really scaled-down versions of the ancient clinker-built 'scoutes' were modified from c. 1850, producing boats with a fairly straight stem and a raked transom stern which was an asset when boats were launched. The original yawls had been 'double-ended'. The sail became a broad lug in place of the older square sail. Two pairs of oars were carried. The yawls were normally used within a mile or two of the beach and had to accommodate only a few line baskets. According to the description given by a man who had fished in one from the Lhen beach, the baulk yawls were about 6 metres long and 1 3/4m beam. The crew would be four to six men. In the early part of this period farmers still periodically went fishing in yawls. Bay fishing by farmers using small-meshed draught nets and trammel nets was asserted by fishermen to be a cause of fishing failures. In the 1860's there were about 15 vessels fishing for cod between Blue Point and Jurby Head. Boats were still built by the beach, and we hear, for instance of the 'Gob Gorrym Shipyard' in Andreas where baulk yawls and even partly decked boats were built.

The cod fishing was 'Low Sea' from September to December; i.e. within 4 or 5 miles of the shore, and 'on the Banks' in the spring. The spring cod fishing was often carried on by men who had fished for herring in the summer and fished off the east coast of Ireland from October to December. The deep sea cod fishing required larger boats. When cod prices were low on the Island fishermen often took their catch to Whitehaven.

As well as the longline fishermen, there were others operating with shore lines and trawls. The Ramsey line fishing for mackerel was carried on in the daytime and a distinctive type of vessel had been evolved. It was clinker-built and generally open, though later versions were half-decked. The stem and transom stern were

vertical. It was sloop-rigged with a mainsail and jackyard topsail plus a staysail.



Ramsey mackerel boats.

(ix) The Decline of Manx Fishing

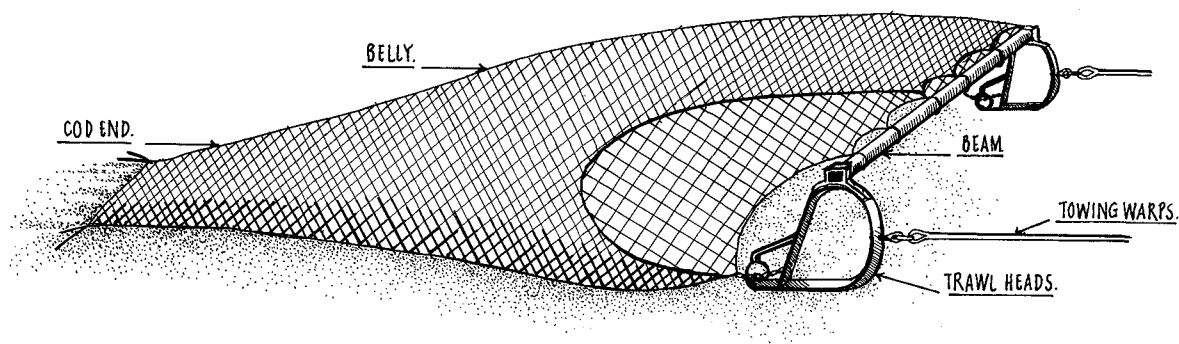
One of the periodic failures of the Manx herring fishery occurred between 1891 and 1897 resulting in a marked contraction of activity. An index of this is the decline in the number of Peel herring boats and the numbers of men and boys employed there.

Year	No. of Boats	No. of Men & Boys Employed	Value of Catch
1883	240	1680	£23314
1886	205	1420	£3118
1889	169	1138	£3570
1892	174	1128	£2254
1895	90	510	£3500

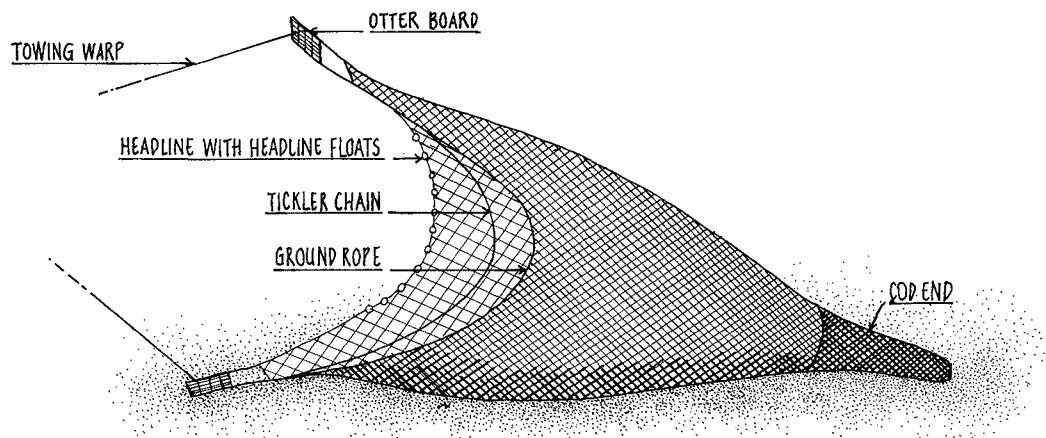
There were various inquiries into the state of the herring and other fisheries during the nineteenth century and the periodic declines were assigned to a variety of causes. Trawlers were often blamed for damaging the fish spawning grounds. Beam trawls were used for most of the century, but the more efficient otter trawls were in use by 1894. The first steam trawlers had appeared in the Irish Sea in 1888.

Though catches in Manx waters improved between 1900 and 1914, the industry continued to go downhill. Tourism was providing an alternative to fishing – and a less demanding

one. Manx fishermen were in direct competition with the larger-scale, more commercially advanced British fishing industry and expensive re-equipment was necessary. The local failure of Dumbell's Bank in 1900 had adverse effects on the investment of capital in ship-building and equipment. When the fishing declined Manx ship-builders often emigrated to places such as Barrow, Birkenhead or the U.S.A. Many former fishermen ended up in the coasting trade.



Beam Trawl.



Otter Trawl.

PART FOUR

MANX SEA FISHING 1920 – 1990

BY the outbreak of the First World War the Manx herring fishing had become largely the province of the stranger.

(i) Herring Fishing : General Trends

In 1914 there were 57 vessels in the Manx herring fleet, carrying crews of about 350 men. About 30 steam drifters and 30-50 sail and motor boats from Scotland and Ireland attended the Manx fishing, with crews totalling c. 500 men. The Manx component in the total herring fleet in local waters continued to diminish and by the 1930's a low point was reached with only an outdated vestige of a Manx fleet unable to compete effectively with the other fleets in the north Irish Sea. In more recent times scallop and queenie fishing has become the prime object for Manx fishermen and the traditional herring fishing has only attracted them significantly in periods of sudden revivals such as 1977-79 when up to 40 boats would divert to the herrings in summer months. The point has now been reached where over 90% of the first sale value of all fish landed in the Island is derived from scallops and queenies.

This period has seen the abandonment of the traditional drift net fishing. The last nickey fished in 1927 and the last (motor) nobby in 1945. Ringers first appeared in Manx waters in 1935 and largely replaced drifters as the main fishing vessels in the post World War 2 period. Ring-netting was the dominant fishing method until the mid-1960's. By 1974 the ringers had disappeared and been replaced by the modern pair trawlers.

New methods of catch disposal have supplemented the long-established pickle-curing and kippering. A fish meal and oil factory functioned at Peel from 1955 to 1973. The freezing process was introduced in 1960. Klondyking reached its peak in the 1970's.

There has been a great intensification of fishing methods with sophisticated equipment and great pressure was put upon Irish Sea fishing after the closure of North Sea grounds. The 1970's saw the greatest catches ever from the Manx fishing grounds, with the total value of the catch from the Manx fishing at first sale topping £1 million in 1973 and a record catch of over 25,000 tonnes from the Manx grounds in 1974. Conservation measures had to be brought in from 1973 onwards and these in turn affected the uses of the catch and the type of vessels attracted to Manx waters.

(ii) Changes in Types of Fishing Boats

The change-over from sail to motor boats commenced locally in 1911. Small Dan paraffin engines of less than 30 horse power were used at first as auxiliary engines along with sail. In due course confidence in these led to the abandonment of sail in the 1920's.

Old fishermen felt that with the passing of sail real seamanship was lost, but at the same time they spoke of the great physical hardship in the days of sails. "Between the weather and the work they had a middling tough time of it", commented a Peel man who had fished in the Shetlands. "It was no easy job sailing a boat in a squall – lowering and reefing sails, dragging all that heavy canvas about, and big seas coming over. Handling heavy nets on a cold morning". Some of those who had operated the man-powered capstan, or "iron man" to haul in the train of nets lived on to modern times to witness herrings being shot into the hold by pumps.

Motor nobbies were the standard vessels of the Manxmen who stayed with the herring fishing until the Second World War. Similar motor nobbies from Scotland and Ireland came to outnumber them. The Scottish ports from which the vessels came mainly in the

1920's and 1930's were Girvan, Kircaldy, Inverness, Banff, Buckie, Methil, Leith, Campbelltown, Peterhead and Berwick. Irish boats from Dublin, Newry, Portavogie, Port Patrick and Ardglass were prominent. Many of the Irish nobbies had originally been built in Manx shipyards. Typical motor drifters of this period were 35-45 ft long, 12-15 tons draught and carried crews of 5 men.

Ringnet fishing, introduced by the Scotsmen in 1935, had been developed on Loch Fyne during the nineteenth century, and by the 1930's had become a sophisticated deep-water technique requiring pairs of powerful motor boats. The Clyde-built ringers were usually 50-60 ft long over all, 16-30 tons burthen, with diesel engines of 88-114 h.p. and a crew of 6. The first ringers were all from the Clyde area; later others came from the East Coast of Scotland and others from Northern Ireland. The arrival of the ringers in Peel led to a special Fisheries Enquiry. Local fishermen adhered to the traditional drift netting and believed that the drowned herring from the ring nets would be of inferior quality to those caught by the gills in drift nets. With the advent of more expensive boats the day of the privately owned craft were at an end. An old-style skipper giving evidence at the 1935 Fisheries Inquiry described his vessel as built by himself 45 years previously. He had sailed to Ireland, Scotland and England in her, but principally to the Kerry coast, fishing in all about 50 years. "Up to the last five years I used to go round Kerry and many a time I have carried a cargo in this boat to Dingle. I have slept many a night in it off the Shannon." He was a crofter-fisherman and sometimes brought home animals from Ireland in his nobby.

Steam drifters visited Manx waters from 1900 onwards. Although one or two steam drifters were built in Peel shipyards locally owned drifters were generally used elsewhere and were beyond the means of owners of the old nickies and nobbies. Steam drifters from Lowestoft, Yarmouth and the Moray Firth, however, at times played an important part in the Manx fisheries. When they came to Manx waters in significant numbers, as in the later 1920's, their catches gave a considerable boost to total landings. On occasion up to 75% of the season's landings would come from steam drifters and fish processors were concerned that they should continue to frequent Manx waters. The last year in which they attended the Manx herring fishing in considerable numbers was 1939. The steam drifters used to go further offshore and fished the grounds to the S.W. of the Calf. The motor nobbies of the

1920's and 1930's fished mostly three to six miles offshore between Peel and the Calf. From 1928 to 1943 the Douglas "back fishing" was not exploited.

New Manx boats of the Clyde type were introduced in 1937 by the Manx Fisheries Board.

These boats were designed for use as either ringers or drift netters. They were 47 foot over all, with a beam of 15 ft and a burthen of 16 tons. They had crews of six and 66 hp diesel engines. The new vessels were used, in the main, for drift netting. Since a Fisheries Act of 1927 the Isle of Man Government has had the right to grant permits to fish within the three mile limit and also restricted permits to vessels under 50 ft in length. This dictated the maximum length for the new vessels.

Ringers came to dominate the Manx herring fishing. By 1950 they made up 77% of the fleet in Manx waters. Paired mid-water trawlers first made an effective contribution to the fishery in 1959 and by the mid-1960's they were replacing ringers as the main type of herring boat. 1977 was the first year in the history of Manx fishing when no drifters took part. The ringers had been unable to fish successfully on the same grounds as the trawlers and in the period before their abandonment of Manx waters in 1974 had been forced to fish where herrings were less abundant. Manx scallop fishermen often used secondhand Dutch beam-trawlers by the early 1970's and were able to switch to trawling when there was a sudden revival of the herring fishing from 1977 to 1979.

Although the shoals of herring in recent times may not be on the scale of those in previous centuries, with modern methods of locating fish (Manx herring boats began to use echo sounders in 1966) and the vastly more efficient fishing methods, catches have exceeded those landed at the zenith of Manx fishing in the 1870's. The hundreds of Manx drift netting boats of former times were not efficient in terms of man-hours fished by comparison with modern methods.

(iii) Disposal of Herring

Pickle-curing and kippering remained the two main outlets for herring until the 1950's. World War I had dealt a severe blow to the flourishing pickle-curing era with the loss of German and Baltic markets. By the mid 1920's the pickle-curiers had regained their lost ground and benefited from the activities of the steam drifters then frequenting the Manx

fishing grounds. Between 1925 and 1939 the pickle curers took c. 67% of the catch. About 30% went to kipperers during this period. After the Second World War, however, kipperers had supplanted pickled herrings as the main use for the catch. At this period the quantity of herrings landed in the Isle of Man depended mainly on the price for kipperers or fresh fish. When prices were considered poor on the Island boats would make for Port Patrick or Whitehaven with their fish.

In 1955 a new outlet for part of the herring catch was created by the establishment of an oil and fish meal factory at Peel, operated by the Herring and Industry Board. The establishment of the fish meal factory led to a reversal of the tendency for more and more of the catch to be taken to Irish or English ports. This method of disposal of the excess catch was useful for a time. It never handled anything like the 20,000 crans which it was capable of processing in a season. The massive development of klondyking in the 1970's followed by the imposition of fishing quotas meant that it only had a short life.

The quick freezing process, introduced in 1960, became an important use for the catch in the 1970's, even outstripping the amounts kippered during the bumper seasons of 1977-79.

Pickle-curing and klondyking far exceeded other outlets from the late 1960's to 1980. Pickle curers had employed 250 men and women in the years before the Second World War. Many of the workers – gutters and coopers – came from the North Shields – Newcastle area or from Scotland. With the advent of herring splitting machines in the 1950's less workers were required. Klondyking, known in the 1930's, assumed major importance in the 1970's. The fish were packed in ice and sprinkled with salt, but not first gutted as in pickle-curing. The destination of the klondykers were mainly Germany, Baltic countries and Russia. Later processing was carried out in the countries to which the ships sailed. In the peak year 91% of the herring catch went to continental pickle-curers and klondykers.

Since the introduction of Total Allowable Catches (TAC's) pickle-curers and klondykers are no longer attracted. The lowness of the quotas and the attainment of these before the opening of the fishing season on the east coast spawning grounds have been the deterrents. In the present situation all herring landed in the Isle of Man go for kippering or to

supply the market for fresh herring.

(iv) Conservation of Herring Stocks

The fishing grounds around the Isle of Man had come under intense pressure by the 1970's with the closure of the North Sea, the operations of trawlers with sophisticated equipment and the demand from pickle-curers and klondykers for fish caught off the east coast of the Island at spawning time. These fish were in the right condition and their whereabouts at spawning time were much more predictable than at other times of year, though the trawlers took some throughout the year. The old-time drifters had operated only at night, but the trawlers could catch in daylight hours as well. In the attempt to allow part at least of the Manx stock to spawn, bans on fishing within 12 miles of the Manx coast between the beginning of October or earlier and mid-November have been applied since 1973.

The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) now recommends a Total Allowable Catch which is applied subject to EEC approval. Biological sampling is carried out by the Department of Marine Biology of the University of Liverpool. The biological sampling programmes provide the data for ICES recommendations. A Total Allowable Catch for the North Irish Sea is set each year. Of this a small allocation is especially allocated to be fished by drift nets over the Mourne spawning grounds. The U.K. and I.O.M. Governments claim 90% of the balance and fishing has to stop when the T.A.C. has been reached. Enforcement of the regulations is carried out by a Ministry Control Officer on board a control vessel, assisted by inshore patrol aircraft.

An example of how quotas are actually applied may be taken from 1984 when boats were allowed fortnightly totals as follows:

Under 50ft registered length	10 tonnes
Under 65ft but under 80ft:	18 tonnes
Over 80ft:	22 tonnes

Some TAC's for the North Irish Sea in the 1980's have been as follows:

1981:	3800 tonnes
1983:	3800 tonnes
1985:	5000 tonnes

(The quota for 1991 was 4440 tonnes.)

Conservation measures have varied in detail from year to year. One effect of the TACs has been to concentrate herring fishing on the

feeding grounds between the Isle of Man and Northern Ireland and near the Mull of Galloway. Over-fishing has made it necessary to have strict conservation restrictions for a number of years. If the fish stock recovers permitted catches will once more return to economic levels.

(v) Other Fisheries, Pre-1940



Fish sale, Ramsey, c. 1910 (Valentine Post Card).

The pattern of fishing for catches other than herring in the 1930's was as follows:

Cod were fished from October to May, with the main season February to April, generally peaking in March. Douglas became the chief centre for this, followed by Ramsey, Peel and Port Erin. In 1934 cod fishing employed 59 men with longlines operating from 18 motor boats.

Plaice were fished from April to December, with Peel as the main centre. In 1934 there were 40 Peel men employed, using seine nets. 20 boats were in use, 18 of which were motor boats. A changeover from rowing boats to motor boats occurred between 1928 and 1934. Catches were declining by the 1930's.

Skate were caught by Ramsey longlines. The season was April to September.



Fishing from an open boat, 1902.

Mackerel were caught by handlines from Ramsey boats.

Pollack and coalfish were caught by handline from the southern ports. Crabs and lobsters were caught all year from Port St Mary and Port Erin.

(vi) New Fisheries

At the time when Manx fishing was at a low point in the 1930's the beginnings of scallop fishing were made and since then the development of scallop and quennie fishing has paralleled the decline in the herring fishing, the new fishing's prosperity compensating for the decline of the old.

It was in 1937 that a visiting Irish fisherman alerted Manxmen to the commercial possibilities of the dense scallop beds off Bradda Head. Within one season the new scallop fishery became the most important one for Manx vessels.

In 1937 nine small motor boats (c. 7.0–10.5 metres) fished for scallops off Port Erin using 1–3 fixed tooth bar triangular-framed dredges towed on sisal ropes and hauled by hand. In 1938 four larger boats of the Scottish ring-netter type joined the fishery from the ports of Peel and Ramsey. These were 49ft long, 50ft being the limit on the length of vessels allowed to fish within the 3 mile limit. At this time the scallops were sent live to Billingsgate Market. The onset of the Second World War practically halted scallop fishing because of transport problems.

In the immediate post-war period the main fishing ground continued to be off Bradda Head. The boats were still of the same size and the only modifications to the gear were that wire warps and power winches were used.

The 1960's saw considerable changes. Few of the small motor boats were now left and larger boats were fishing two 'gangs' of three dredges. Fleet size doubled between 1962 and 1969. New grounds were discovered and shore-based processing facilities developed. The old in-shell export of sacks of scallops to Billingsgate was replaced by the export of 'shucked' (extracted) scallop meat to Belgium and France. The scallop meat sent by air to Brussels and Paris commanded good prices and this coupled with the discovery of the new scallop grounds was responsible for the rapid expansion of the scallop fleet at that time.

A new development in 1969 was to maintain

fleet expansion in the 1970's. This was the start of the fishery for queen scallops. Queen scallops had been used as bait by longline fishermen in Victorian times, but queenies brought up in the scallop dredges had always been discarded. Suddenly a market for frozen queenie meat was discovered in the United States and queenies became a profitable fishery. Because shore-based facilities for processing scallops on the Island already existed queenie fishing was able to develop very rapidly. Since soon after the commencement of scallop fishing there had been a closed season during the summer months (currently 1st June – 31st October), fishermen's attention naturally turned to queenie fishing during the summer, as there was no closed season for queenies. Another effect of the start of queenie fishing was that scallops were also taken as a by-catch from grounds where they were not exploited before because their density was not sufficient. Fishermen invested in larger vessels, especially secondhand Dutch beam trawlers, which could tow a wider spread of gear and handle the heavy dredges used for queenies. Queenie fishing went on all year and the maximum number of boats involved in queenie and scallop fishing had risen to some 70 boats by 1983/4.

Since then there has been some contraction in the number of boats, with numbers down to 50 at times. Due to competition from other countries, including Australia and Japan, the U.S.A. market has not maintained its early promise. There were poor catches and prices in the 1980's and attempts were made in the late 1980's to diversify to other fisheries. Some larger scallop vessels have been sold. A hopeful sign has been the discovery of a new European outlet for queenie meat and roes.

Over recent years scallop catches have been fairly constant at around 1300 to 2000 tonnes, the variations mainly due to fluctuations in market demand. It was also notable that during the 1977–79 herring revival there was a switch from summer queenie fishing to herring fishing. Best prices for scallops are obtained in spring and early autumn just prior to their spawning times. (Adult scallops spawn twice during the year). Boats supply one or two processing factories by private agreement. Fishermen are paid according to the weight of shucked meat and roe obtained from their catch.

Today scallops and queenies comprise over 90% of the value of all fish landed in the Isle of Man. Virtually all the landings are by Manx vessels. This is a marked contrast to the posi-

tion in the latter days of the herring fishery, when only a small proportion of the catch was landed from Manx boats. The size of the workforce involved is very tiny in comparison with that a century ago in the herring fishery. In 1985 it was estimated that 200 men fished for scallops and queenies and another 250 people were employed ashore in processing the catch.

Other new fisheries attempted in recent years have included trawling for Norway Lobsters also known as Dublin Bay Prawns (*Nephrops*). These burrowing animals live in areas where the bottom consists of silty mud. They are found particularly off the coasts of Co. Down and Co. Louth. They used to be discarded as a nuisance when caught in the whiting fishery until a valuable market developed in the 1960's. There were valuable catches in 1979, when 369 tons, worth over £1 million were landed on the Island and in 1982. These landings have not been sustained and currently the scallop and queenie appear set to remain the basis of Manx fishing.

(vii) Conservation of the New Fisheries

It has been found that the older age groups of scallops and queenies have become depleted. The fact that a viable fishery for scallop still exists after over fifty years of fishing is partly due to the closed season and partly to a minimum landing size (currently a shell length of 110 mm) being imposed. Queenie fishing in Manx waters is not restricted by any regulations except for boat size. In practice, processors usually require a shell height of at least 55 mm, a size normally attained in 14–18 months. Queenies spawn from the age of one year. They spawn three times annually from their second year onwards. Mechanical sorters used on the boats enable small queenies to be returned to the seabed.

The idea of cultivating scallops and queenies with a view to re-stocking certain areas is now under consideration. An area of 1 km² within the Bradda Head scallop fishing ground has been closed to dredging and trawling. Experiments are being carried out in this area on artificially increasing the scallop stock. One of the problems is difficulty in collecting sufficient spat from local scallop grounds. It could be that the future of Manx scallop fishing will depend on artificial restocking of the inshore beds and management with areas closed on a rotation basis. Thus the story of Manx fishing beginning with a regulated herring fishing enterprise in the late middle ages could culminate in managed 'sea farming' for scallops and queenies.

PART FIVE

SOURCES AND SUGGESTIONS

1. MANX SEA FISHING TO C.1750

A *BOOK of the Castle Mazes* (1671) Manx Museum Manuscript 2161A, containing names of boat owners
Blundell, W. *Manx Society*, Vol XXV (1876), describes conditions 1648-56

Chaloner, J. *A Short Treatise of the Isle of Man*, Manx Society, Vol X, describes conditions c.1656

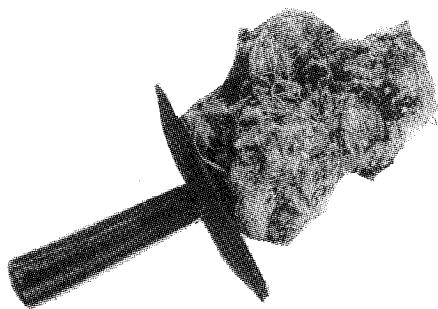
Moore, G.E. *The Ancient Office of Water Bailiff*, Proceedings I.O.M. Natural History & Antiquarian Society, Vol VII, No. 3 (1971)

Sacheverell, W. *An Account of the Isle of Man* (1703), Manx Society, Vol 1 (1859)

Wilson, T. *The History of the Isle of Man*, Manx Society, Vol XVIII, describes eighteenth century conditions

The Statutes of the Isle of Man, J.F. Gill's Edition (1883), contain many interesting references to early fishing legislation.

The contrast between the primitive type of fishing at this time and sophisticated modern fish detection techniques etc. could be developed.



A fishing boat's flare.

Links with the Norse period are apparent in the boatbuilding tradition and in the levy on landowners to produce fishing equipment and boats in readiness for fishing.

The importance of herring in terms of food supply and a means of trade on an island of largely subsistence agriculture, as a source of income to the Lord of the Isle and supplies for his castle garrisons should be noted.

2. MANX SEA FISHING C.1750-C.1840

Bullock, H.A. *History of the Isle of Man*, London (1816)

Callister, T. *The Herring Fishery of the Isle of Man* (1815)

Feltham, J. *A Tour Through the Isle of Man*, 1797 & 1798, Manx Society, Vol VI

Forster, R.E. *The Press Gang in the Isle of Man*, Proceedings of the I.O.M. Natural History & Antiquarian Society Vol VIII No. 2 (1979)

Garrad, L.S. et al *The Industrial Archaeology of the Isle of Man*, David & Charles (1972)

Harrison, W. *An Account of the Loss of the Manx Herring Fleet on 21st September 1787* Manx Museum ref. B158 J815 (This contains Manx and English versions of the Ballad on the Loss of the Herring Fleet)

Jefferys, N. *A Descriptive and Historical Account of the Isle of Man* (c. 1808)

Sergeant, W.R. *A Whitehaven - Isle of Man Fishing Dispute in 1753* Transactions of the Cumberland & Westmorland Antiquarian & Archaeological Society Vol LVII (1958)

The Manx Fisheries in *Fisheries Commission Report*, 1792 -

Townley, R. *A Journal Kept in the Isle of Man* (1791)

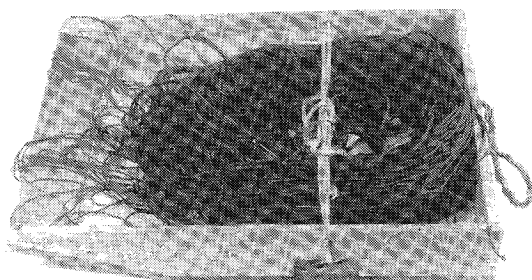
Train, J. *An Historical and Statistical Account of the Isle of Man*, Douglas (1845) Vol II, Appendix for details of Manx fishing, including recommendations of Manx Fisheries Report of 1827

Woods, G. *An Account of the Past and Present State of the Isle of Man* (1811)

There are many links between the history of Manx fishing at this period and general British history, including the following: the export of cured herring is connected with slavery in the British colonies and the famous 'Triangle of Trade'; the activities of the press gangs afford a link with the Napoleonic wars.

The influence of fishermen from other areas made itself felt in changes in fishing boat design, in the competitive conditions leading to full-time fishing and in the breakdown of traditional regulations concerning the herring fishery.

The role of the farmer/fisherman characteristic of island communities can be thought about. Compare one of the verses of the *Manx Fishermen's Evening Hymn* with actual conditions. What were the pros and cons of crofting and fishing?



Horse hair longline coiled in a wooden tray.

3. MANX SEA FISHING C. 1840–1920

Atholl Papers (1) The amount of herrings being consumed in the Island (letter) 1826. Manx Museum ref. 49(4TH)-20

(2) A complaint against the Irish fishermen (letter), 1824. Manx Museum ref. III-28

Chambers Journal, December 1878: Peel and Its Fishermen

Cummings, J.G. *The Isle of Man: Its History, Physical, Ecclesiastical, Civil and Legendary*, London (1848), Appendix L for numbers employed, size of fleet, uses of the catch

Green, H.J. *The Herring Fisheries*, prize-winning essay of the 1883 International Fisheries Exhibition

Hogarth, R. *The Herring Fishery*, London, 1884

Holdsworth, E.W.H. *Sea Fisheries* (1877) describes in detail methods of fishing around Britain at the time of greatest activity in Manx fishing

'Land and Water' (1901) *Trawling in the Isle of Man*

March, E.J. *Sailing Drifters* David & Charles (1969) Chapter 10 deals very fully with Manx herring fishing

Marine Engineer (1.10.1883) – for details of W. Knox's net handling gear and windlass

Munro, R.J. *The Herring Fishing*, London, 1884

Teare, E.M. *Old Peel*, Proceedings of the I.O.M. Natural History & Antiquarian Society, Vol VI, No. 3 (1963) contains much information for the period c. 1890 – 1910

Waldron, G. *A Description of the Isle of Man*, Manx Society XI (1865). The appendix to this book contains valuable information on Manx fishing in the 1860s

Walpole & Buckland, Inspectors of Fisheries and Commissioners for Sea Fisheries, in *The Sea Fisheries of England and Wales* (1879). This includes evidence taken at all the Manx ports from local fishermen – see pp 159-175. (Robert Corrin of Peel's contribution is particularly valuable)

Local newspapers, especially the *Peel City Guardian*, contain much information, especially for the late summer months.

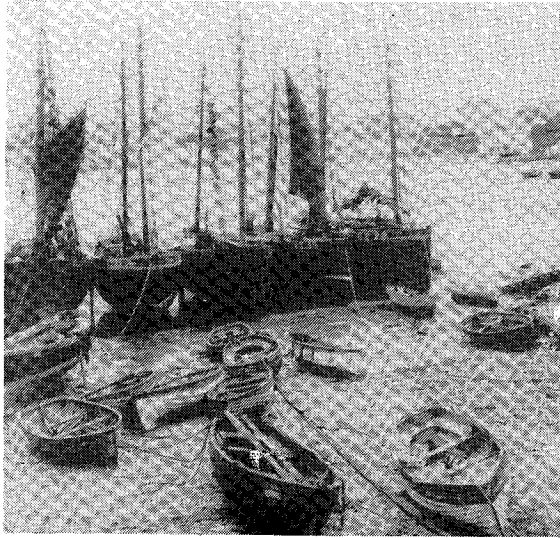
The *Manx Sun* of 20.8.1864 contains a very informative account of the visit of the Royal Commission on Sea Fisheries to the Isle of Man. There is a full account of evidence taken in Peel with the famous Professor T.H. Huxley as Chairman.

Old buildings which were once net factories, rope walks, net stores or barking houses can be sought out.

The building of fishing boats can be linked with general ship building activities in the Isle of Man.

Moore's sailcloth factory at Tromode supplied the material for local sailmakers and much has been recorded about conditions in this factory.

The 1871 and 1881 Census Returns can be used to find the parts of the Island from which most Manx fishermen setting out for Kinsale in March of those years came from – see information for Peel and Port St. Mary. Names of fishing boats, size of crews and location of crofting areas from which large numbers of men came can be deduced from these returns.



Fishing boats at Port Erin. Note the 'mollags' suspended from the rigging.

4. MANX FISHING, 1920 TO RECENT TIMES

Birch, J.W. *The Isle of Man: A Study in Economic Geography* (University of Bristol, 1964)

Brand, A.R., Allison, E.H. & Murphy, E.J., *North Irish Sea Scallop Fisheries: a review of changes* (1991)

Kinvig, R.H. *The Isle of Man: A Social, Cultural and Political History*, (Liverpool University Press, 1975)

The Isle of Man Government Reports on the Fisheries, issued annually, give the most up-to-date information.

Numerous publications associated with the Liverpool University's Marine Biological Station at Port Erin contain information on the habits of herring. The papers produced by A.B. Bowers and D.I. Williamson are particularly relevant on the biological side. Papers by A.R. Brand deal with both herring and scallop fishing in recent times.

W.C. Smith's lecture: *The Story of the Manx Herring Fishery* (1928) contains information on all periods up to 1928.

The issues of conservation of fish stocks dominate the story of fishing in recent times.

Current research at Port Erin associated with 'fish farming' brings the fishing story on towards the 21st century.



A sample of the catch (Valentine Post Card of c.1900).

SOURCES AND SUGGESTIONS PUPILS' CARDS

CARD 1 – EARLY MANX HERRING BOATS

- Callister, T. *The Herring Fishery of the Isle of Man* (1815)
- Feltham, J. *A Tour through the Isle of Man in 1797 and 1798* Manx Society, VI (1861)
- Hooking, Drifting & Trawling – 500 Years of British Deep Sea Fishing*, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich (1986) ISBN 0905555996
- Manchester Mercury*, 2.10.1787
- The Manx Liberal*, Dec. 1848 – May 1849 (especially 23.12.1848 and 5.5.1849)
- Megaw, E. & B. *Early Manx Fishing Craft in The Mariner's Mirror*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (1941)
- Megaw E.M. *Manx Fishing Craft*, Journal of the Manx Museum, Vol V. No. 64 (1941)
- Robertson, D. *A Tour Through the Isle of Man* (1794)
- Smith, W.C. *The Story of the Manx Herring Fishery* (1928) Manx Museum MSS No. 1611C
- The Whitehaven Pacquet*, 3.10.1787 and 21.11.1787 (available on microfilm at the Manx Museum)
- Tour of a Lady's Voyage from England to Ireland* (1802) Manx Museum Reference No. 5875A

LINKS & TOPICS

1. Viking ships and Manx herring scouts compared. Compare Shetlands boat builder's model at the Nautical Museum, Castletown, with the Manx square sail model. Clinker (clincher) and carvel methods of boat building. Manx Viking ship burials.
2. Differing accounts of the same event – compare the differing accounts of the loss of the Manx herring fleet in 1787, using Feltham, the *Manchester Mercury* and the *Whitehaven Pacquet* accounts.

3. Lighthouses and safety at sea – the hazards: mist, storms and darkness – primitive fire baskets e.g. Fort Island – the long wait for lighthouses.

CARD 2 – HERRING FISHING BOATS, c. 1840-1940

See first three sources for Card 1.

- McCaughan, M. *Ulster Boat Types in Old Photographs* – Ulster Folk Life Vol 28 (1982)
- Teare, E.M. *Old Peel*, I.O.M. Natural History & Antiquarian Society Proceedings, Vol VI, No. 3 (1963)

LINKS AND TOPICS

1. Contrasts between sophisticated modern fishing methods and those of the old-time fishermen. The loss of skills such as sail handling. Changes in fish location methods. Modern intensive fishing methods and the great efficiency of a few modern ships compared with the more numerous boats of former times.
2. Transport by sea. The different rigs of ships and handling of sails e.g. dipping lug sails, reefing etc. Model luggers, nickkeys and nobbies are displayed at the Manx Museum and the Nautical Museum.
3. The activities at a Manx fishing port in the heyday of the herring fishing. Old bark houses, net stores and factories, remains of rope walks still exist. Old photographs of quayside scenes. Visit the sailmaker's workshop at the Nautical Museum.
4. The significant place of the Isle of Man in the story of British fishing. Manx boat-builders adapting Cornish craft and export-

ing their ships to supply Irish ports. Robert Corrin and the development of the mackerel fishing off southern Ireland. The substantial numbers of Manx boats in the Irish fisheries.

CARD 3 – HERRING FISHING IN MANX WATERS

A Night at the Herrings (essay in *The Aulean*, 1883) Manx Museum ref. 13306 L6/A1

Atholl Papers: Trouble at Langness, 1753, Ref. X27-2

The Manx Liberal, December 1848-May 1849, a series of detailed articles on all aspects of herring fishing c. 1848

The Peel City Guardian: review of previous century's fishing articles from 20.11.1953

Roeder, C. *Manx Notes and Queries*, (1904)

Smith, W.C. *A Short History of the Irish Sea Herring Fishery during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, University of Liverpool Press (1923)

Smith, W.C. *The Story of the Manx Herring Fishery*, Journal of the Manx Museum, Vol 1, (1928) pp. 122-125

Smith, W.C. *Behaviour in Shoals and Growth of Manx Herring* (1944)

The following songs have associations with the Manx fishing.

Arrane y Skeddan / The Herring Song

Coayl Jeh ny Baatyn Skeddan / The Loss of the Herring Boats

Mannanan Beg Mac y Leir / Little Manannan Son of Leir

Mannin Veg Veen / Dear Little Mannin

The Sea Invocation

Three Eeasteyryn Boghtey / Three Poor Fishermen

Yn Chenn Dolphin / The Old "Dolphin"

All these songs may be found in *Kiaull yn Theay 1 or 2, Manx Music and Songs for Folk Instruments*, arranged by Colin Jerry.

The I.O.M. Government Herring Fishery Reports for the 1980's contain references to the Manx and Mourne stocks, their feeding and spawning grounds.

LINKS & TOPICS

The Leece Museum in Castle Street, Peel, which is open during summer months contains a variety of items connected with fishing.

Irish Sea charts, showing water depths and the location of fishing banks could be examined.

Habits of the herring can be part of a study of fishes.

Think about the traditional Manx fishing rules – were there any elements contained in them which operated to conserve herring stocks?

CARD 4 – MANX FISHERMEN IN IRISH AND SCOTTISH WATERS

Birch, J.W. *The Isle of Man: a Study of Economic Geography*, Bristol University Press (1964)

Killip, I.M. *Going to Kinsale*, Journal of the Manx Museum, Vol VI, No. 75 (1958)

Kinvig, R.H. *The Isle of Man A Social Cultural and Political History*, Liverpool University Press (1975)

Peel City Guardian issues for the later nineteenth century record spring departures for Kinsale, autumn returns from Lerwick along with many other contemporary fishing matters

LINKS & TOPICS

The 1871 and 1881 Census Returns give details of fishermen en route the mackerel fishing off Southern Ireland. The census returns give the size of all boats' crews and the parishes from which men came. The returns for the parishes of German with Peel, and Rushen with Port St. Mary are those to examine. Crofting communities can be deduced from the clusters of home addresses of the fishermen, e.g. Cregneash, the Howe and Surby.

Think about the life of the boy cooks at Kinsale and their duties.

CARD 5 – NETS AND EQUIPMENT FOR THE HERRING AND MACKEREL FISHING

Manx Liberal issues during 1849 described contemporary practices, especially 20.1.1849 (Mollags); 6.1.1849 (Nets), 27.1.49 and 10.2.1849 (Nets and Barking)

Martin, A. *The Ring Net Fishermen*, John Donald, Edinburgh (1981)

Teare, E.M. *Old Peel*, Proceedings I.O.M. Natural History & Antiquarian Society, Vol VI, No. 3 (1963)

Walpole & Buckland in *Sea Fisheries of England and Wales* (1879)

LINKS & TOPICS

Try to do some practical net making – contact the Manx Museum. Make a list of all the trades in a fishing port.

Think about what material is used for fishing nets today and which materials were used in the past. What steps had to be taken to preserve nets in the past?

Why was a standardised size of net considered important?

Why were nets suspended sometimes high in the water and at other times near the bottom?

Try to see the wooden net mesh measurers at the Nautical Museum.

CARD 6 – USES FOR THE HERRING CATCH

I.O.M. Government Reports on the Herring Industry (Dept. of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (annual reports – see period 1960-1985 for changing uses)

Bowden, Garrad, Qualtrough & Scatchard: *Industrial Archaeology of the Isle of Man*, David & Charles (1972)

Garrad, L.S. *Red Herring Houses at Derbyhaven and South Quay*, Douglas. Proceedings I.O.M. Natural History & Antiquarian Society, Vol IX, No. 1 (1982)

LINKS & TOPICS

The late eighteenth century exporters of salted and red herrings had trade links with the Mediterranean and the West Indies which can be related to the broader historical scene.

Think about the effects of the development of railways for the distribution of fish and changes in fish consumption habits; also the availability of a greater variety of fish as trawlers became more efficient in the later nineteenth century.

What links were there between Manx fishing and the Baltic and Eastern Europe?

Why have freezing and fish meal/oil production not been very successful in recent years?

Try to see kippers being made.

The various methods of preserving fish might be associated with a general topic on food preservation.

CARDS 7 & 8 – LONGLINE AND OTHER FISHING

Dillon's Isle of Man Guide, 1846

Killip, I.M. *The Osier Garden*, Journal of the Manx Museum, Vol III, No. 89, (1980) – for information on making buckie cages

Marshall, M.W. *Fishing – The Coastal Tradition*, Batsford (1987)

Megaw, E.M. *Manx Fishing Craft*, Journal of the Manx Museum Vol V, No. 64 (1941) – for details of Ramsey mackerel boats

Specimens of longlines can be seen at the Manx Museum or the Nautical Museum.

LINKS & TOPICS

Longline fishing was a winter occupation for some of the herring fishers. What alternative forms of fishing have been adopted in more recent times?

Contrast the Ramsey mackerel fishing technique with that used at Kinsale.

How did the habits of the cod and the mackerel require different techniques from those for herring fishing?

CARD 9 – SCALLOPS AND QUEENIES

Brand, A.R. et al, *North Irish Sea Scallop Fisheries: A Review of Changes* – in 'Scallop Biology & Culture' (1991)

Mason, J. *Scallops and Queen Fisheries in the British Isles*, Fishing News Books, Farnham, (1983)

Mills, P. *Irish Sea Study Group*, 1990 Section 5: The Species Exploited

Robinson, V. & McCarroll, D. (edit) *The Isle of Man – Celebrating a Sense of Place*, Liverpool University Press (1990) pp 216-217

LINKS & TOPICS

Scallop fishing replaced herring fishing as the prime object of Manx fishing in the second half of the twentieth century.

Think about the conservation of fisheries. Is fishing man's last predatory activity and will some form of 'fish farming' be developed?

Try to get first-hand information from scallop fishers – equipment changes rapidly.

Find out how scallops/queenies are used in cooking and how there are different market requirements in different countries.

What were the only uses made of scallops in the past? What other types of fishing have been tried in the Irish Sea in recent times?

CARD 10 – CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS OF THE MANX FISHERMEN

Cashen, W. *Manx Folk Lore* (1912)
Clague, J. *Manx Reminiscences* (1911) – see especially the section on the Boat Supper
Gill, W.W. *Second Manx Scrapbook*, Arrow-smith, London (1932)
Moore, A.W. *The Folk Lore of the Isle of Man* (1891 and addition, 1899)
Roeder, C. *Manx Notes and Queries* (1904)

LINKS & TOPICS

What agreed practices would be necessary for a fleet of several hundred boats with long trains of nets to operate on the same fishing ground? What laws were there? Why was there an Admiral of the Fishing Fleet?

How could a fisherman return to the same fishing spot at sea where he had previously found fishing to be good, even without a compass.

Why did the fishing boats of olden days always have a horn on board?

How did boats locate shoals of fish in the days before echo-sounders, etc?

Why do you think fishermen were so superstitious?

CARDS 11 & 12 – SOME FISH, MOLLUSCS AND CRUSTACEANS OF MANXWATERS

Crebbin, D. *Fishing in the Isle of Man*, Angling Times Book, (1964)
Crellin, J.C. *Notes on the Fishes of the Isle of Man*, Transactions of the I.O.M. Natural History & Antiquarian Society (1879-84)
Fargher, D.C. *The Manx Have a Word for It – Book 2: Marine Flora and Fauna* (1969)
Gill, W.W. *Manx Dialect Words*
Herdman, W.A. & Dawson, R.A. *Fishes and Fishing of the Irish Sea* (1902)

Kermode, P.M.C. *Vertebrate Fauna of the Isle of Man* (1893)

Nixon, M. *The Oxford Book of Vertebrates*, O.U.P. (1972) – this book includes illustrations of many fish

LINKS & TOPICS

Compare the various local names of fish in use today, as these vary considerably within the Island.

Use the I.O.M. Government's Fisheries Statistics for 1988 to find which species of fish, other than scallops feature in today's catches.

Think about the different depths at which various fish live and how this affects methods of catching.

Which fish in the list on this card were once eaten, but no longer. Which were not eaten in the past, but are now?