TRAD BRITISH FISHING BOATS

THE CATCH

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Belle Tout Books
Sussex England
Printed in Great Britain

ISBN 978-1-8380688-4-4 NB This refers to the hardback book

An e-book version of this title is available.
Find out more about this book at classicsailor.com

British Library Publishing Cataloguing-in-Publication Data Service:
A catalogue record for this book can be found at the British Library.

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THE CATCH

A collection of Britain's
heritage fishing vessels which
evolved over centuries to suit
the local coast and
the fishermen
who worked
them.

by
Mike Smylie

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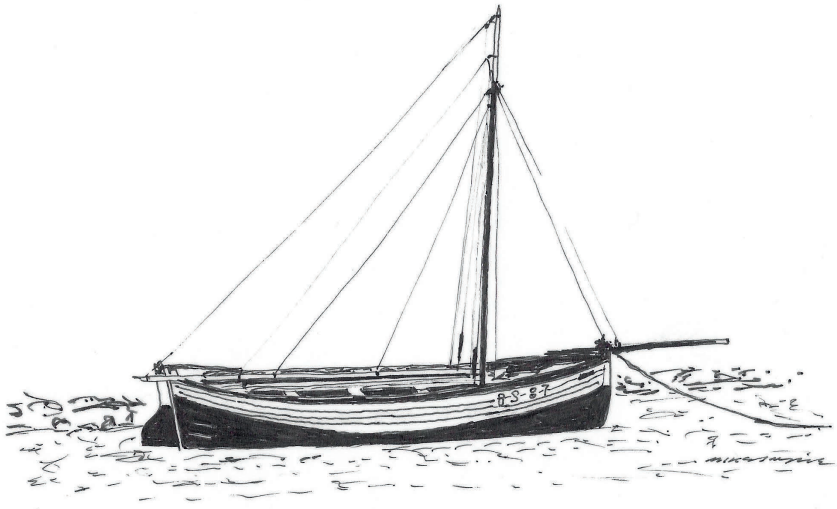
ANGLESEY BEACH BOAT *JANET*

On the beaches of the north and east coast of Anglesey, from Cemaes on the north to Red Wharf Bay on the east coast, the favoured craft were small, transom-sterned open boats of about 20ft in length… although at the end of the nineteenth century a few were built up to 30ft.

Janet, opposite, is pictured dried out on Red Wharf Bay and, like her, they were all lug or gaff rigged though oars were used when chasing the herring shoals that spawned on the sandy seabed of the east coast in the autumn.

Many of these boats were built by Matthew Owen of Menai Bridge whose boatshed still sits above the foreshore there. The only shelter along this coast was either tucked behind the harbour wall at Cemaes or in Amlwch – although the latter was often full of copper ore vessels exporting the commodity to South Wales.

Moelfre became synonymous with the herring fishery but long-lining and lobster potting was equally as occupying for the fishermen. The boats themselves were clinker built with a high dead rise in the bottom plank, enabling them to handle well in the strong currents and high winds around the island.



In summer, with the growth of tourism on the island in the second half of the nineteenth century, the boats were used for taking trippers around the bay. The herring fishing survived into the 1930s, with the daily 'herring train' from the small station at Benllech supplying the markets of Liverpool and Manchester, but the fishing didn't outlive the war.

Further down the coast, on Bardsey Island, which lies at the end of the Llŷn peninsular, similar beach boats were built locally, all double-ended until a transom was added for hauling pots over the stern.

BEER LUGGERS

I met a person once who really did think Beer Luggers were able-bodied men who raced around with barrels of ale across their shoulders. Seemingly they'd watched too many worldly TV programmes about strong men. Believe me, these people do exist.

To set the score right if that fellow is reading – I'm not sure he could read – a Beer Lugger is a boat with lug sails. Furthermore the coastal village of Beer, nestling under Beer Head, has no name-associations with the drink even if copious amounts did (does) pass through mouths of inhabitants and tourists alike. Smuggling, yes, like most of the coast between Lands End and the Isle of Wight. Contraband earned by the dastardly deeds of these locals was hidden in caves dotted around their pebbly cove. That most were fishermen is attested by the fact that fishing and lace-making were predominantly what kept the Beer men going. Presumably the wives worked the lace whilst the men were busy creating an industry that eventually made Brixham, or so the saying goes… when Beer men moved over the bay to Brixham, with its trawlers, so that the North Sea white fishery emerged.

Beer men sailed their three-masted boats, and were amongst the last to do so on the south coast. Whereas other fishers abandoned the middle mast and adapted their rig, the Beer men simply reduced

the size of their boats. One of the last of these was the *Beatrice Annie*, E80, which continued fishing up to 1918. But by then all the other boats had dropped the

middle mast to become the generic boat typical all along the south coast, with dipping lug mainsails and a standing lug mizzen.

Some will swear when they read those words. Beer luggers ARE different, angry voices will shout in unison. “We’ve the lazy sheet for tacking and the dipping bowsprit” I was once told. “Oh, and the long bumpkin,” they added, though I wasn’t convinced. But for ease of peace, “Yes then, they are entirely unique”. But lovely vessels however you view the nitty-gritty.

As with most fishing communities who raced their boats in an annual regatta, so did these boys, starting in 1915. Competition was fierce and boats were prepared for the occasion by being scrubbed and special racing sails taken out of musty sheds. These days the rules are pretty concise and boats must not be far removed from the ‘Beer Beach Boat’ design.

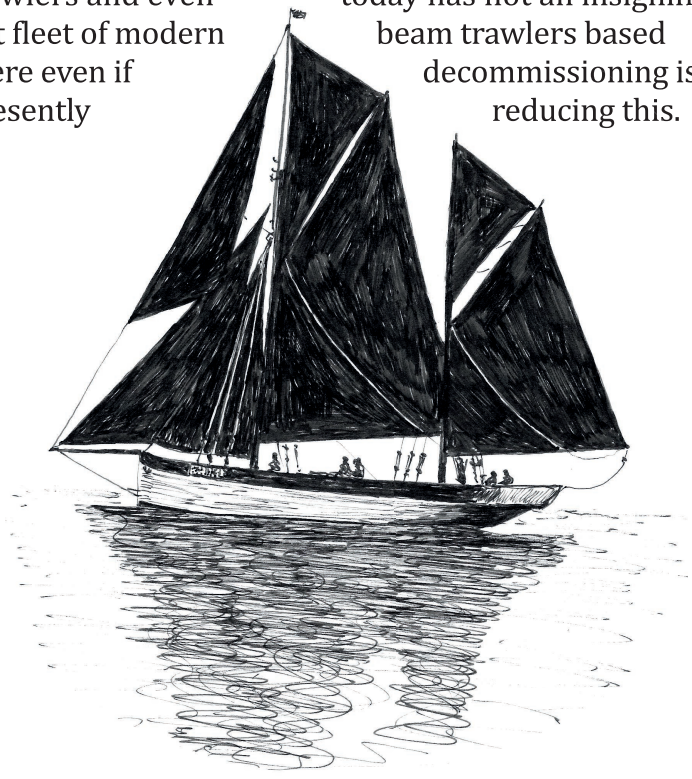
Naturally, they are still rolled down over the pebbles on greased timbers and, afterwards, the minute details of the races are dissected by those both afloat and ashore. How akin these discussions are to those of the fishermen in bygone days admitting the amount of fish they caught, I’m not sure. But I guess there’s the same mount of indiscretion in both camps as to the actual reality of fact, slugged down with beer of course.

SARDINE

BRIXHAM TRAWLER

The large first-class sailing trawlers of Brixham, Rye and Lowestoft must rate as the most effective English trawlers of the sailing era, probably closely

followed by the large Essex smacks. Brixham was the home of the one of the largest fleet of these beam trawlers and even today has not an insignificant fleet of modern beam trawlers based there even if decommissioning is presently reducing this.



The roots of the trawlers stem from the decked boats of the late eighteenth century, seventy-six of which were based in the flourishing port.

These were 46ft in length and during the first decades of the next (19th) century the boats increased sl owly in size so that mid-century they were over 50ft, and then over 60ft by about 1870. Some 120 boats were working from Brixham then, with another 136 out of Dartmouth, and by this time they'd adopted the ketch rig, for which they are renowned, though they were called the 'big sloops' by the fishermen.

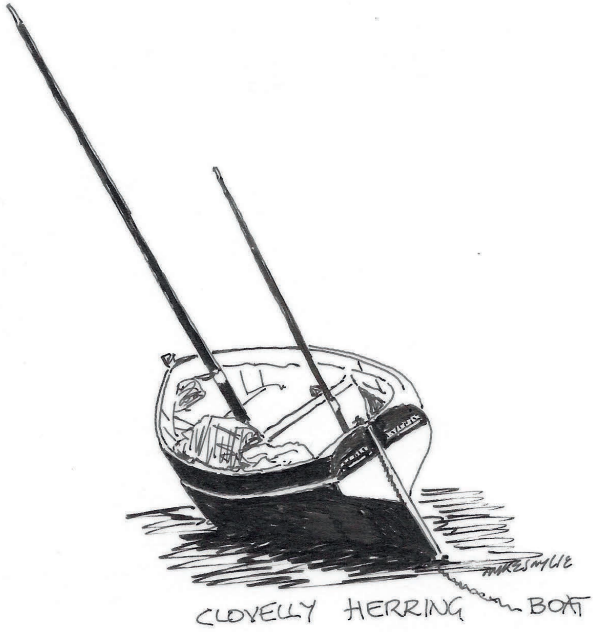
Brixham has, over the last decade, gained a fleet of these boats under an umbrella collection and it is thought some 18 vessels still remain intact, some sailing. These include *Leader*, BM156, *Vigilance*, BM76, *Pilgrim*, BM45, and *Provident*, BM28, whilst *Keewaydin*, LT1192, (built in Rye), and *Kenya Jacaranda*, BM57, (ex-*Torbay Lass*), are still around. *Ethel von Brixham*, *Gratitude*, BM9, and *Deodar*, BM313, are in Germany and Sweden, the latter two working from Lowestoft after Brixham. In Lowestoft *Excelsior*, LT472, charters whilst *City of Edinburgh* (ex-William McCann built in Hull) awaits restoration. *Sunbeam* and *Dawn of the Day*, LT565, are other Lowestoft boats, also in Scandinavia. Their legacy is ensured for now.

CLOVELLY PICAROONER

The picarooner is one of the surviving sail and oar fishing boats that still work the waters close to the shore. Having said that, there's only one working drift nets today and that picarooner is, in fact, a replica built only within the last decade. At 15ft, she's probably amongst the smallest ever built, but is none the less pretty with her delicate wine glass transom and traditional look.

The picarooner gets its name from the Spanish for 'sea robber' or 'pirate'. One story that they were the washed up tenders from the wrecked boats of the Spanish Armada – 1588 remember – seems highly unlikely, given the picarooners didn't appear until the late nineteenth century. No, I prefer the one about these being lighter boats. You see, Clovelly has a drying harbour dating back many centuries, and herring fishing has figured greatly since time immemorial when the shoals come into the bay to spawn in late autumn. The earlier herring boats were heavy, awkward boats and some enterprising fishers saw the advantage of building smaller, lighter boats which enabled them to get out to sea sooner as they could bodily lift the boats into the water whereas the heavy boats had to wait. As is always the case, he who gets out first, gets the biggest prize and it was often the case that, with the fishing literally just off the harbour

wall, the picarooners would be home with the catch before the older herring boats even set out. ‘Bloody pirates’ the old timers would shout, ‘avast you, you sea robbers’, as the picarooner fishers returned with their fine catches of the silver darlings.



Yes, all highly evocative of the power of the herring fishing. Of course it wasn’t always like that, and many a boat capsized, sometimes claiming the local lives.

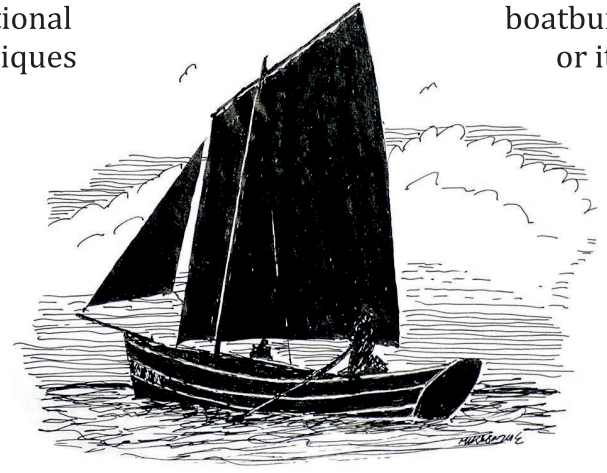
Fishing in Clovelly was at the very heart of village life; when you live on a cliff overlooking the sea, there's little other place to turn to to make a buck.

Nevertheless the picarooner, with its single dipping lug and tiny mizzen standing lug, was a successful fishing boat. At one time there were said to be 70 such craft in the harbour. Today only one traditional herring fisherman, Stephen Perham, whose family have been fishing these waters for generations, uses the 'new' picarooner. This one is called *Little Lily* and was built by students at the Falmouth Marine School and launched in 2008.

Stephen regards 'his' picarooner as perfect for the job even if she actually belongs to the Clovelly Estate Company. "She's a solid platform to fish, has plenty of room for nets and fish and," he added, "is easy to row". He should know as I've seen him scull her from half a mile downstream, against the current, loaded with TV crew and fish. The way he fishes the herring is almost carbon free and, as such, has to be one of the most sustainable fisheries in the country. So, whilst many other fishers can be regarded as 'pirates', times have changed and his little picarooner is now no more a 'sea robber' than you or me.

COBLES

I like cobles as there's something quintessentially English about them. Maybe it's because of the varied coastline they work from, or the fact the way they are built doesn't quite fit into traditional boatbuilding techniques or it's



their provenance dating from the early dawnings of English history, but there is something pure at heart in their being; the embodiment of skill, beauty and practicality. Some say they are neither one thing or another: neither a keeled vessel nor a flat-bottomed one. That, to my mind, makes them exactly what I said above.

A coble is at home on the English east coast, mainly between the two great river estuaries of the Tweed and Humber. It's a mixture of golden Northumberland

beaches and the river inlets plus the more rocky shelving of the Yorkshire coast with its fewer landings, and not to forget the short Durham coast.

Their original design is said to derive from their working specifically off a beach, to cope with the surf. Their forward keel maintains seaway, deflecting oncoming waves at launch and a ramplank strengthens their flat bottomed aft end that generally comes to the beach first when coming ashore.

They are single-masted open boats, from 20 to 40 feet long, depending on their usage (they were measured by length of the ramplank). In the main they have a transom though the variant *mule* was a smaller double-ender whilst a *plosher* was a larger often two masted double-ender built for the herring fishery.

Most cobles – which rhyme with 'noble' in the north and 'cobble' south of their home grounds, were lug rigged though the earliest examples – mentioned in the 860AD Lindisfarne Gospels, presumably carried a large square sail. The smallest would propelled with oars. They worked setting long lines, creels or nets.

Many were motorised with props that could lift out of the water into a housing. You can still find them all along this coast, and some have travelled far around the globe. They remain unique and flourishing.

CORNISH CRABBERS

PENBERTH - FISHERMEN'S WINDLASS - CORNWALL
WITH SAILING + MOTORISED FISHING BOATS (CRABBERS)

Cornish Crabbers refer to, and not to be mixed up with children of the infamous second-homers, the various small sailing luggers that traditionally fished pots for crabs, lobsters and crayfish, as well as inshore lines, anywhere along the coast. In fact, Devonian crab boats are similar in shape, perhaps smaller versions of the Beer Lugger, which itself is no relation to the beer luggers that lurk around many a southwest coastal hostelry. There are many of the latter, I know, I've been out with them!

When PJ Oke rattled around the coast of Britain on his motorbike in the 1930s, taking lines and drawing plans of the last vestiges of the working craft on behalf of the Society for Nautical Research, he identified various of these small crabbers. Thus today we have his plans of these craft from Sennen Cove, Porthgwarra, Cadgwith, and Gorran Haven in Cornwall. But before you get all nostalgic, remember that various replicas have been built!

There's a degree of similarity in these old working vessels, as well as others that worked the small coves anywhere between the river Tamar, around Land's End, and up to Port Isaac. Generally they were transom-sterned, ranging from 16 to 20 feet LOA, rigged with a dipping lug main and standing lug mizzen. Some were flatter in the floor than others, and others deeper and beamier. As has been said many a time, differences stem from the boatbuilder's choice, the owner's preference, the beach to work off and the seas they work in.

Crab boats from Hallsands and Hope Cove, both in Devon, display similarities, and I guess if you go further along the coast east, to the river Exe and around, there will be others. The hint is in the work they did!

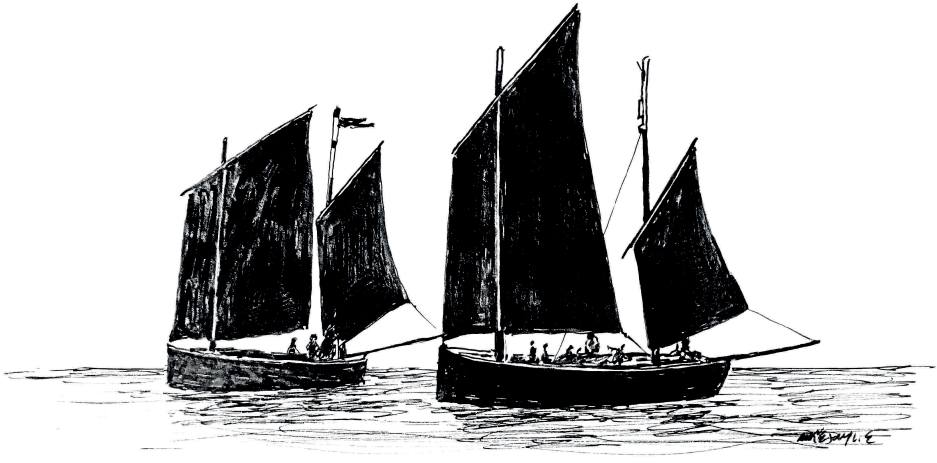
On the north coast of Cornwall, the inshore potters tended to be a little larger such as the Jumbos from St.

Ives. One such craft from Port Isaac was the *Mizpah*, built about 1895. She had dipping lugs and was typical of the craft working at the three 'ports', working crab pots in summer as well as lining, and drifting for pilchard and herring in the autumn and winter.

Motorisation served these small potters well and many survived far beyond their expected lifespan as deemed by their builders. Many wooden ones came post-motorisation, given the rich stocks of shellfish around this coast. One such vessel, the 1935-built Cadgwith crabber *Minerva*, FH58, today sails out of Penzance. She's fuller than the original sailing craft, and, as production boats gained ascendancy amongst fishermen, today's boats are not dissimilar in shape to *Minerva*.

CORNISH LUGGERS

Cornish luggers come in various shapes and sizes depending, on the whole, what part of the coast they are built to work from. Everywhere, not just here, did working vessels evolve through their intended usage, the place they worked off, the owners' requirements



BARNABAS + HAPPY RETURN

and innovation and the boatbuilders' traditions. So, in tidal St. Ives, the boats have voluptuously-rounded bottoms that can dry out and stay relatively upright on the sands whilst those from the deeper water harbours of Mounts Bay stay afloat and are sleeker

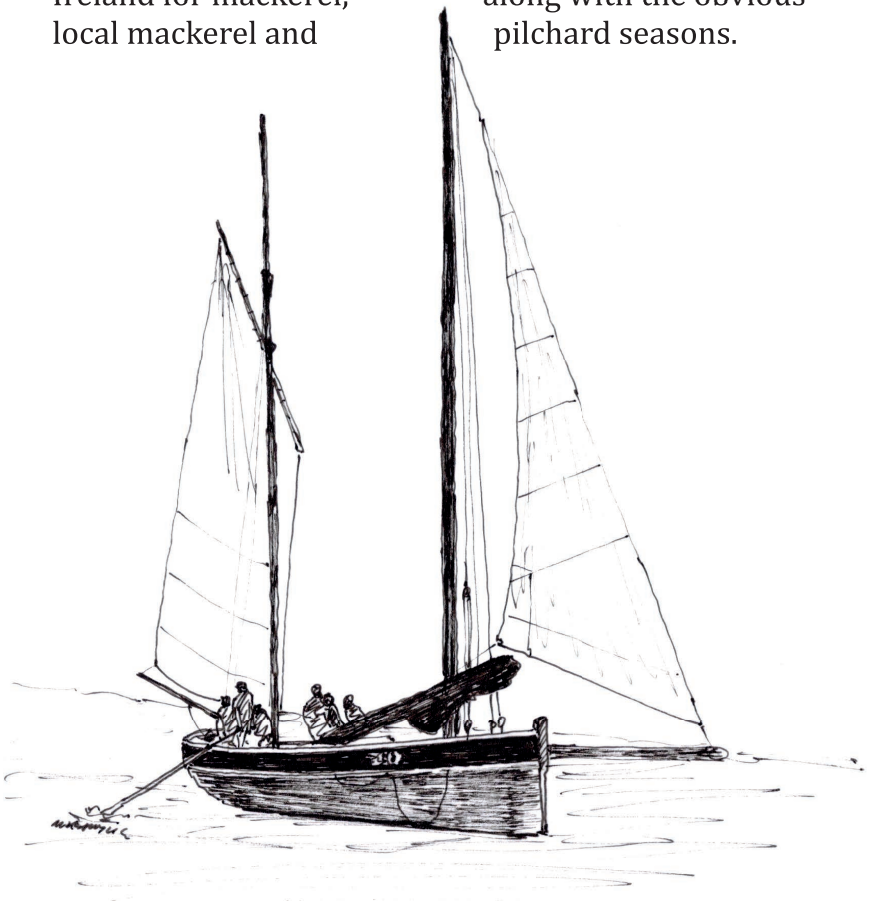
and finer, and more subtle in shape, gaining a corresponding increase in speed and manoeuvrability. Those here that do take the ground use wooden legs to stay upright.

Then there's the transom. In the west the boats tend to be double-enders, apparently to fit more snugly into the small harbours. Yes, that sounds a bit tenuous and it remains to be seen exactly why these fishermen at the southwest extremes favoured double-enders when their neighbours favoured the transom. One guess is that it's a Viking influence. But go east, around the Lizard, and they all prefer boats with transoms, albeit slightly smaller in length. It has been suggested that these evolved from the ubiquitous transom-sterned beach boats which mirror those across in the Channel in Brittany.

Another theory is that the transom developed with the introduction of the internal combustion engine which needed increased buoyancy aft to cope with the extra weight. There are two contradictions to this: the fact that transom-sterned vessels were built prior to 1915 and the practice of many Cornish fishermen fitting engines in the forward end of the boat with long shafts leading aft. I agree they simply were larger craft styled on the beach boats.

So what did these splendid craft spend their time fishing for? The larger ones were drivers, in effect drift-netters, for the fish. For half of the year they'd be

chasing the shoals, often sailing as far as the Isle of Man and the East Coast for herring, over to southern Ireland for mackerel, along with the obvious local mackerel and pilchard seasons.



GUIDE ME
2003

Outside of that they'd be long-lining and even setting pots. Some would get laid up out of season. They were the Cornish fishing workhorses.

Of all the St. Ives vessels that were once built, the *Barnabas*, SS634, stands out as the worthy and stalwart sole survivor. Built in 1881 by the famous William Paynter, on the beach, she has travelled some miles in the last decade: in 2015 almost circumnavigating Britain and, in 2024, travelling up to Ullapool to get two new masts.

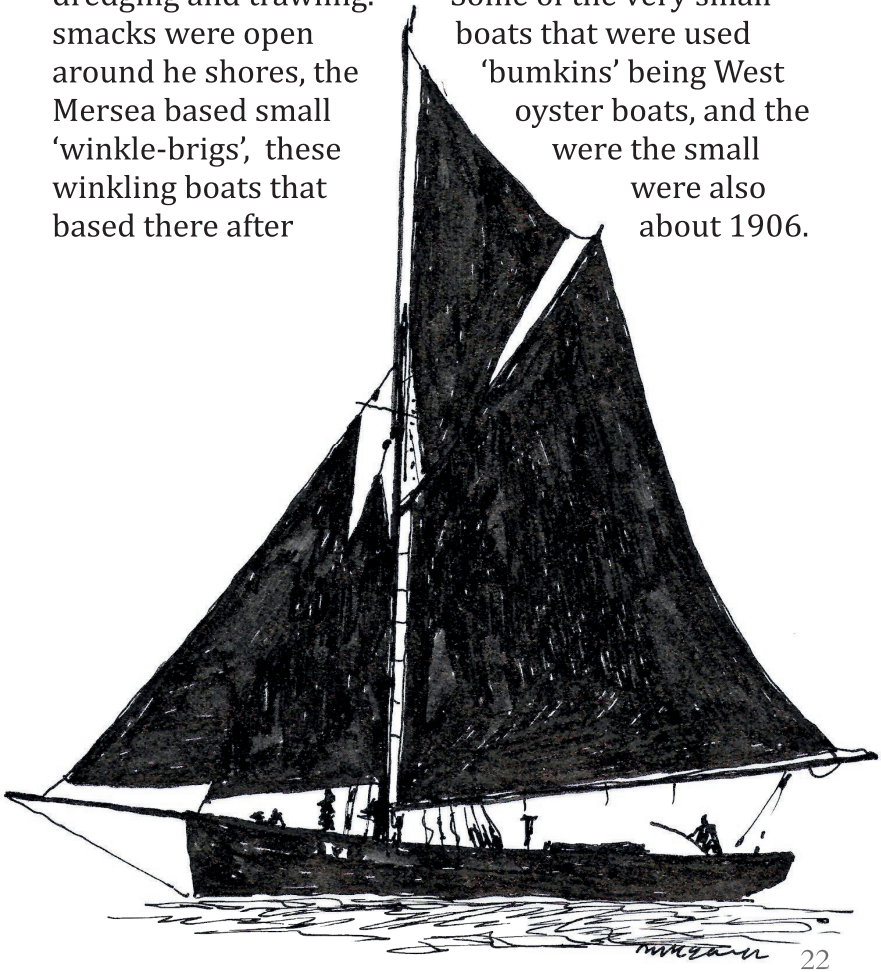
For all the luggers, as is implied, they were always lug rigged, with the largest, like *Barnabas*, sporting two big dipping lugsails, though some from the eastern ports, just to confuse, were converted to a dandy rig of gaff main with topsail and standing lug mizzen. Foresails were normal here. As survivors they've done better than most and a whole host of luggers mostly from the east I add – still sail, as well as a string of recent replicas. They race when they can at festivals both in Cornwall (Looe & Mousehole) and think nothing of crossing the Channel to join the Bretons at their festivals. *Barnabas* joins in the fun but is considerably slower. On the other hand the engineless 1911-built *Guide Me* – once sailed to South America – is the one to beat as she normally romps home first.

ESSEX SMACK

Where their beginnings arose is unclear, but that they evolved through centuries is evident. Whether fishing boats built in Wivenhoe in 1690 were herring busses or smaller vessels is unknown. Like other types of fishing craft, the Essex smack evolved through a process of shaping to its purpose, of meeting the demands of its working environment, where the tidal rivers and estuaries call for handiness, and offshore, channels and sandbanks mean a boat must be capable of good sailing performance, although the waters are relatively sheltered by these offshore hazards. Whereas the lug rig is perfect for drift-netting in the open sea, the fore-and-aft rig suited these tight channels and their fast running waters. The fishermen developed a sense by which they could navigate in fog or at night and know exactly where they were. Hence the smacks, with their long booms, underwent certain refinement, yet no substantial alteration during the 19th century.

The early types were clinker-built, and, like other craft, were bluff-bowed and square-sterned. The first carvel-hulled boat appeared in 1836 – the *Tribune*, built at Ipswich and at the same time they became finer in the bow, low in freeboard and lute-sterned. Awkward shaped sails, too, changed when the diagonal cut was invented.

Nineteenth-century smacks came in three sizes, and were all registered at either Colchester (CK) or Maldon (MN). The smallest were under 35ft and 12 tons, and these mostly worked in the oyster dredging and trawling. Some of the very small smacks were open boats that were used around he shores, the 'bumkins' being West Mersea based small oyster boats, and the 'winkle-brigs', these were the small winkling boats that were also based there after about 1906.



The midsize smack was up to 50ft and 20 tons, and these fished inshore, along the coast generally spratting with a stow-net or oyster dredging, trawling or musselling. The biggest boats were found mainly on the Rivers Colne and Crouch and these fished away from home for extended periods. Many of these became dandy or ketch rigged.

They dredged for oysters in such far off places as Luce Bay, the Menai Straits, and at Swansea and the River Fal, in the Firth of Forth and off the Fife coast, and nearer to home off Shoreham and along the Norfolk coast, and the locals were so impressed that many adopted similar rigs. They even worked off the French and Dutch coast. The boats working off the latter at Terschelling were nicknamed 'skillingers'. The catches were also nicknamed 'skillings'. The catches here were superb, but the area was dangerous and three out of fifteen boats failed to return in the worst disaster of 1883.

The advent of yachting gave employment to many fishermen during the summer months, encouraging them to lay up their boats. Like the Solent and Clyde fishermen, they lived aboard racing yachts in similar cramped conditions to their own boats, but they gained experience in the art of tuning these vessels, so that once they returned to their own boats they perfected their own ability and speed. Each return to

port became a regatta in itself, not only did they race home to land first, but also to show off their skills.

The Essex smack, then, is an all round workhorse of the rivers and backwaters of this low lying coast. They were as suited to trawling in deep water as they were in navigating around the sand banks with an oyster dredge behind. Whether these Essex boats were the forerunners of all the other smack-rigged vessels in Britain is not certain. But judging by the enthusiasm for sailing these smacks today, and the fact that there are many ex-sailing fishing boats off this coast still sailing, it is certainly feasible that these Men of Essex did have the skill and knowledge to have influenced many of Britain's other fishing fleets.

FALMOUTH WORKING BOAT

The waters of the river Fal and around the Carrick Roads are home to a unique oyster fishery that, for more than 500 years, has been fished by sailing boats or under oar, and continues in the same manner due to a local by-law of 1876 and some other restrictions. In the shallow water, small punts are used to drag a dredge across the beds but in the deeper water the Falmouth Working Boat is used. On average these craft are 23 feet in length though some are larger, up to 30 feet in fact. They are all gaff-rigged, transom-sterned and carvel built, many with a cuddy under the foredeck. Many were built specifically for the job locally but others had been imported from around Britain making the fleet one of the most diverse in Britain in the sailing era. One boat, the *Zigeuner*, FH89, was famously built in Germany, then rebuilt in Restronguet in the 1840s and fished up to the 1940s. The fishery still survives, albeit the number of boats working dredges are a mere handful – depleted through pollution, stress of the job, retirement and unwillingness from newcomers to persevere.

Back in 2014 I ventured out into the Carrick Roads to see what this dredging was all about, crewing aboard the working boat *Holly Ann*. We dredged from about level with Restronquet Passage down to just below Mylor Creek, taking it in turns to haul a dredge.

The boat, sails set to produce the tiniest of forward movement, has the dredges set so that the boat drifts with the current, almost beam on if the wind is in the favourable direction. The dredges, which are simple

steel affairs with net bags, are light enough to be handled over the side, and are hauled alternatively, remaining down for ten minutes or so which is the time it takes to haul in the other, empty the dredge, shoot it again and sort through the catch. Fishing is restricted to the months of October to March and daily from 9am to 3pm except Saturday which is 9am

to 1pm. and no fishing on Sunday. The timings are strict and all trawls should be up out of these hours.

On average there are some 12 working boats that work the fishery, and all do dredge under sail. They might motor from port to fishing ground and home, but once the dredges are lowered, they must have their sails set and woe betide anyone who even looks at their engine when dredging. It's closely monitored by the authorities, there's the bailiff around, as well as other fishers and none would look forgivingly on you if so much as a phut-phut was heard.

Two dredges are used, each being hauled by hand and the oysters handpicked. Undersized oysters must be returned to the seabed if they cannot sit on a brass ring 67mm in diameter. They make a fine sight, these folk sailing back and forth around the bay, knowing that they, perhaps unwittingly, are keeping alive old traditions which, in turn, help to regulate the fishery.

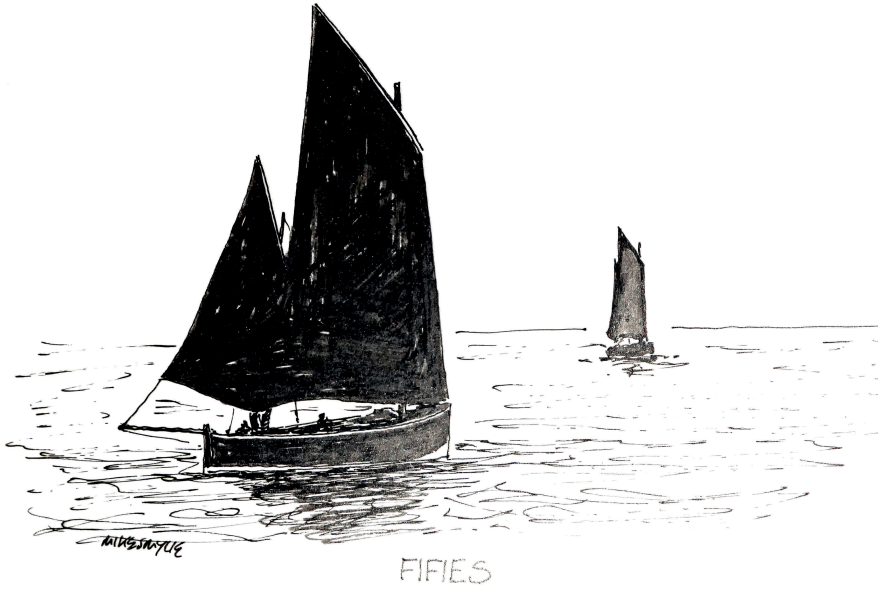
Fibreglass versions of these craft have been built at Heard's boatyard in Mylor Creek and many of these, with a heightened rig, race out of St. Mawes during the summer months when there's no oyster dredging. When working, Falmouth Working Boats carry about 300sq ft of sail but when racing this increases to the voluntary limit of a massive 1000sq ft. Most have no engines and are very handy boats to race.

FIFIES

It doesn't take a huge imagination to link the fifie sailing fishing boats to the Kingdom of Fife, the ancient land that lies to the north of the Firth of Forth. Here a whole host of fishing ports line the coast, from Burntisland to the river Tay, each having an association with the herring fishery. The Fifers are said to have been fishing when the Vikings were busy invading parts of Britain and that, in the 17th century, Fifers emigrated to Holland to teach the Dutch how to fish.

But they didn't all disappear and the fishing continued to flourish. These fishers adopted a very upright type of boat, probably from Dutch influence even if the link is unclear at a glance. Studying the uprightness of some of the Low Country beach boats such as the *bomschuit* though there is a similarity, albeit without some of the fullness of body. Washington, in his 1849 report, considered these fifies to be the most seaworthy of the east Scottish boats he studied. In a nutshell they were upright both ends with a wide beam, giving good stability. Early boats were clinker-built open yawls though size (and use) increased rapidly in the second half of the 19th century due partly to the expansion in the herring fishery and partly to improved building techniques. Decking made boats safer once the fishermen had been convinced of its advantages. Previously they regarded full decks as a

luxury at the expense of the amount of herring they could get aboard. On the other hand they were able to house a full complement of crew and thus sail further. By 1870, with carvel construction, they were in excess of 70ft and rigged with two huge dipping lugsails that took at least seven men to haul. The mainmast was so



massive that a man couldn't wrap his arms wholly around it. These boats sailed far and wide around the British coasts, fishing anywhere from the North Sea, Channel and west coast, setting drift-nets that took hours to haul aboard. Only with the advent of steam

capstans did the job of hauling, and raising sail, ease but often this just meant they could set more nets.

Today's *Reaper*, FR958, owned by the Scottish Fisheries Museum in Anstruther, is the prime survivor. There are other smaller versions such as Wick's *Isabel Fortuna*, WK499, and Lerwick's *Swan*, LK243.

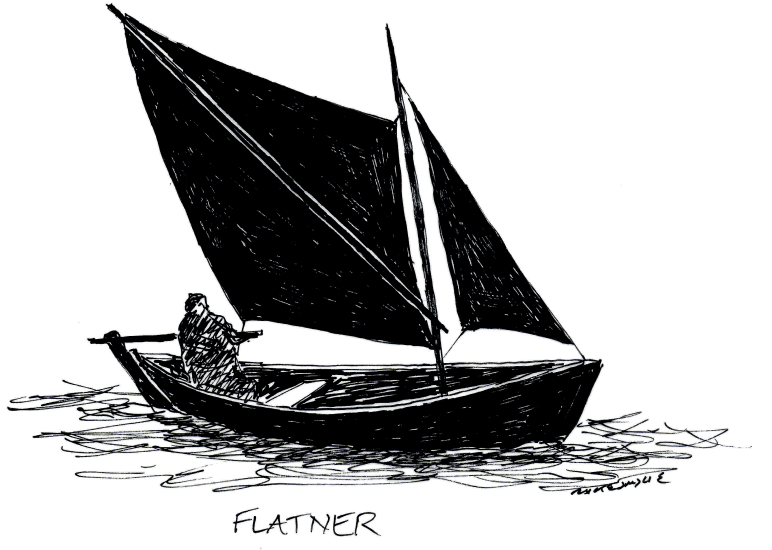
There were variations in design. In Shetland they adopted the gaff rig and the *Swan*, built in 1900, is the sole survivor of that type. Meanwhile the 'bauldie' was a shortened single-lug version developed for the inshore fisheries of which some are survivors. The name came from Guiseppe Garibaldi, the Italian patriot who gained notoriety in the 1850s in the war for the unification of Italy. He was also an accomplished mariner who sailed the oceans, including to Tyneside in 1854 where he was welcomed enthusiastically by local working people, and where perhaps he impressed the Fife fishers. Not for the first nor last time were the fishermen in Britain so moved to name a new type of fishing vessel after a newsworthy event somewhere about the globe. If we had more than a modicum of a fishing fleet today, one wonders which of our current global upheavals would be remembered in boats!

SARDINE

FLATNER

Flatners in general come in two types with the one shown here, sometimes known as the river Parrett flatner, being perhaps the most interesting of the two. The other, often called the Weston-super-Mare flatner, is a typical clinker open boat – probably used as much as a tripping boat off the beach as a fishing boat, that isn't particularly special in any way. Mind you, although I write 'is', the only example I know of lies in the museum at Weston so it's a moot point whether to use a past or present tense! The only characteristic they shared was that both set a spritsail when under sail. The Parrett flatner, though, has enjoyed a renaissance in recent years, thanks largely to *Yankee Jack*, a new flatner built and then launched in 1997, and which has since been sailed right along the Somerset, North Devon and Cornish coasts under the skippership of owner Tony James (see his book *Yankee Jack Sails Again*, published by Seafarer Books, 2006).

These boats are simply built on a flat bottom with no keel and are said to have evolved from the dories of the Newfoundland cod fisheries; some of the large ships working that fishery sailed from these parts. They are general workboats in that small versions – up to 16 feet in length, were used on the Somerset levels to carry turf and withies; larger river boats – again of about 16 feet, were launched off the steep muddy



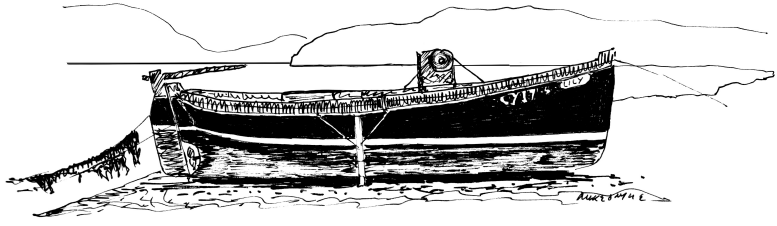
banks of the river, and fished, while the big sea boats – up to 20 feet, were sailed around Bridgwater Bay. Some are said to have carried sheep and coal across from South Wales although the majority seem to have fished for mackerel, sprats, salmon and shrimps. At Watchet they were known as 'flatties' where several can be seen in the Watchet Boast Museum including new boats which today are invariably built from plywood instead of elm.

GRIMSAY LOBSTER BOATS

For a tiny Outer Hebridean island with a small population, Grimsay has had an incredible amount of boats locally built for the lobster fishery. In 1846 the census showed 269 inhabitants, and this had reduced to 169 by 2011, despite the building of a causeway connecting the island to North Uist and Benbecula. There's just one circular road around which isn't much more than a mile in length, nevertheless there were at one time in the early twentieth century three boatbuilders working at Kenary (*Ceannaridh*) on the southwest side of the island. These were all members of the Stewart family, renowned local builders who were descendants of the first Stewart who moved from Argyllshire to the island in the 1840s. Five generations later they are said to have built in excess of 1000 boats. The last survivor, Charles Stewart was still building a decade or so ago when I last visited him.

These open boats, differing in length but not over 22 feet, were all specifically built for the local lobster fishery that was centred on the nearby Monach Isles (Heisker), a small group of two main islands and a few offshoots that lie a couple of miles west of North Uist. To get there, the Grimsay boats had to navigate through the waters of *Oitir Mhor*, the channel leading out into the Atlantic where they would always encounter a stiff surf and their design allowed them to

ride over this, sail to the islands with enough fishing gear for a week's fishing, haul in creels and return with their catch. Rigged with two gaff sails, the fishermen sometimes raced each other home on the Saturday. Whilst working they would leave the mizzen mast ashore.

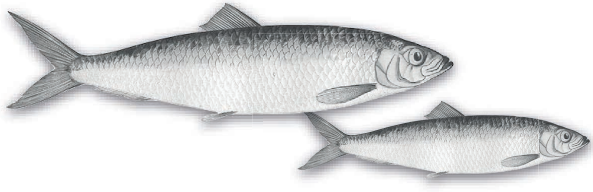


GRIMSAY BOAT LILY CY173
2001

As usual motorisation had its impact, bringing a fuller hull shape and a transom (*geola*), although some boats retained the double-ended (*eathar*) influence that is longstanding hereabout. They were renowned of their seaworthiness , their lightness and fineness, especially at entry. The boat shown here is the *Lily*, CY173, which was drawn languishing in a bay on the north side of the island in 2001. Since then, boatbuilding has recommenced on the island and the

fishing industry survives although the route out to the Monach Isles is today blocked by the causeway that brought so much hope to the island in 1960. Many of the boats working from the new harbour at Kallin are deepsea vessels although a healthy fleet of the small Grimsay boats remain moored in the inner harbour and work creels, mostly on a part-time basis.

It's worth mentioning that the Barra boats working long-lines around the southern end of the Outer Hebrides are similar in shape and are presumed to evolved through influence from Grimsay. The Stewart tradition, then, has travelled long and wide, from the far reaches of the southwest highlands to the far-flung outposts in the western islands.



HERRING

HASTINGS LUGGER

The tall dark-coloured net houses are distinctive landmarks of Hastings, and the shore below them still has the remnants of a fishing industry working directly off the beach. However, recent upheavals in the industry have severely depleted the fleet. Of those that do remain, a few betray the shape of the traditional boats that Hastings is well known for.

The first documented Hastings luggers were three-masted. Many were built close to the beach by boat-builders George Tot and Robert Kent, the latter building from 1835. Similar luggers worked from beaches all along the Sussex coast, and further afield. By the middle of the century the foremast had been discarded but the fishing was in decline until the railway arrived in the town in 1851. Trawling then began in earnest and a smaller lugger of about 28ft evolved, specifically suited to trawling although they also drifted for the autumn herring. In 1892 the first elliptical sterned lugger, the *Clupidae*, RX126, arrived, the stern being influenced from successful yachting designs. Previous to that many of the luggers had lute sterns but the elliptical was deemed better for beaching in a following sea – the water tended to flood up around the rudder post. Both sterns had been designed to make running ashore and launching into surf safer by allowing the oncoming wave to run smoothly over

the surface of the boat rather that smashing against a transom. This elliptical stern gained precedence so that, excepting the modern designs now seen on the beach, those motorised 'luggers' (they carry no sail)

HASTINGS LUGGER

exhibit the same shape. The last true sailing lugger built was the *Enterprise* in 1912 exhibited in the Hastings Fishermen's Museum. Subsequent boats were fitted with motors so that they were fuller in shape.

ITCHEN FERRIES

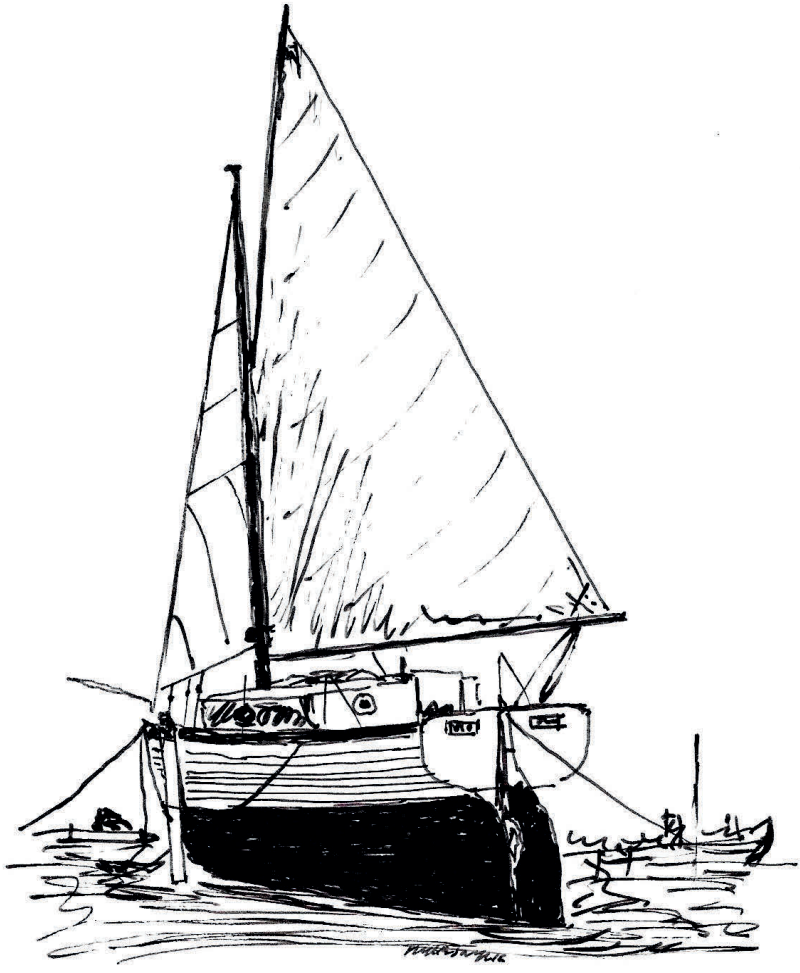
I owned an Itchen Ferry once and have fond memories of her beached alongside the old Supermarine shed at Woolston, across the river from Southampton. *Pal of Itchen* she was called though she was no pal of the new bridge they were building at the time. We – me and my *Pal* that is – were the first ones to crash into one of the support pillars. This was mostly down to two facts: that the sails didn't really fit the boat and the Stuart-Turner engine never started throughout my time with the boat. It was, though, a great learning experience on 'why not to buy a boat'. I often wonder what happened to her.

Speaking of *Wonder,* she was, a fine example of an Itchen Ferry. Built by the great Dan Hatcher in 1860, *Wonder*, SU120, has been lovingly restored and sails from Faversham. I remember seeing her a few years back during the Swale Barge Match. Daniel G. Hatcher, known as King Dan to his contemporaries, was a very successful builder of yachts at his Belvedere yard between 1845 and 1880 and thus his working boats were equally renowned for their speed. Not that *Wonder* was necessarily his fastest, but speedy she was.

The roots (and name) of these craft came from the small fishing village of Itchen Ferry lying on the river Itchen in the eighteenth century. Small sprit-rigged clinker-boats worked off the beach, fishing out as far

as the Isle of Wight. Their size grew as they trawled further away from their base. Consequently they adopted the gaff rig as many working fellows did. The boats were three-quarter decked with a small cuddy with two berths, cupboard and coal stove to wile away the hours when not fishing. Gaff-rigged with a long-boom over the stern and two headsails, some were as long as 30ft in length. Much of the catch was shrimps and oysters and they raced home to land. In 1872, according to the fishing registers, there were 570 second-class boats working the Solent and another 61 in Poole where the boats were similar. The design was widespread around Southampton Water and the Solent – some being referred to as Hythe fishing cutters. Other well known builders were Alfred Payne and Fay, both of Northam and Lukes, the yard at about the same spot as I kept *Pal* – before they moved to Hamble. They were mostly worked by fishermen who crewed for the yacht-racing fraternity during the regatta season, and the fishermen too raced aboard their own craft.

Itchen Ferries have been survivors: *Freda*, CS110, *Black Bess*, CS32, *Nellie*, SU71, but see www.itchen-ferry.org for more, as they adapted to engine power quite well and others lurk in way-out places. One day I'll ask them if anyone knows whatever happened to my *Pal of Itchen*.



PAL OF ITCHEN
c 1976

LANCASHIRE NOBBY

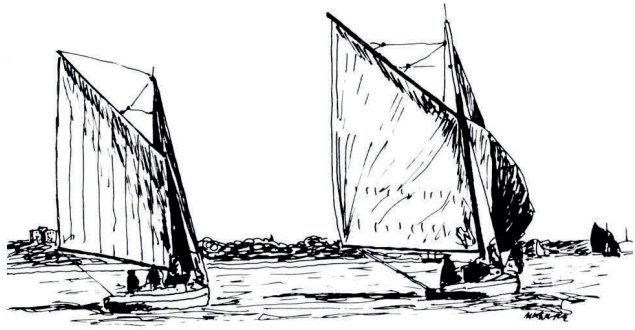
Also known as a Morecambe Bay Prawner, or more generally a shrimper or even a sprawner, these shallow hulled vessels were generally designed to work shrimp trawls over Morecambe Bay and the Solway Firth though they were adapted to work as far south as Cardigan Bay.

Originally long-keeled cutter-rigged vessels, their design developed in the latter half of the 19th century into a counter-sterned vessel of between 25 and about 34 feet for shrimping – although several larger ones were built well over 40ft for offshore work. They had a raked sternpost and, helped by their owners' at times crewing racing yachts, became somewhat yacht-like, with a good turn of speed.

Naval architect William Stoba is recognised as being a lead in the design of these craft when he favoured the cutaway forefoot and rockered keel after he started an apprenticeship with William Anderson in Millom in 1869, remaining there for 36 years at which time he moved to James Armour at Fleetwood.

But it is the Arnside builder Francis John Crossfield who is renowned for his nobbies when he began his working from a shed alongside the estuary in 1848. This turned into a family enterprise with openings in both Hoylake and Conwy.

As a kid one of my first sails on the Menai Strait was on the nobby *Pastime,* owned by a friend of my dad's. We sailed from Beaumaris out towards Puffin Island and past the lighthouse at Penmon Point. The NE wind was strong and the sea choppy. I still recall staggering



NOBBY RACE

down to the heads in the bow of the boat, through the low cabin and kneeling down. I was sick as a dog. I was eight years old; my first experience with seasickness!

Still, I've been on a couple of these fine sea-going vessels since… without throwing up. I recall racing on *Hearts of Oak* in the Mersey Regatta when we came last; a great afternoon's sail! That vessel was later bought by the Hearts of Oak Trust and rebuilt by Scott Metcalfe at his yard in Port Penrhyn, Bangor, with a lottery grant. Scott has rebuilt a few and, as I write, is rebuilding the Stoba-designed 1911 nobby *Mystery II.*

LOCHFYNE SKIFF

Dubbed the prettiest of British fishing boats by many, including me – but I'm a bit biased towards them – the Lochfyne skiffs of Argyllshire and Ayrshire were neither pioneering nor extraordinary in design when the first one was introduced into Campbeltown in 1884. Developed purely to fish with the ring-net, the first boat was basically a larger version of the earlier trawl skiffs, the main difference being the addition of a cuddy under the foredeck where fishermen could cook and sleep, allowing them to be at sea longer. The introduction of the ring-net had caused upheaval on Loch Fyne.

The first experiments at Tarbert soon spread, much to the annoyance of the drift-net fishermen who were used to their age-old methods. Within a decade or two the method was banned, it being considered as trawling and destructive to the shoals. During a period of prohibition, as with anything (drinking, drugs, smoking!) there are those that persevere and thus they worked at night to be undetected. Those that were caught had their boat and nets confiscated. Boats then became more manoeuvrable to escape detection. When the fishery was eventually legalised in 1867, the use of the ring-net spread quickly so that even those that were opposed to it two decades earlier – presumably the older intransigent fishermen had

LOCH FYNE SKIFF SETTING SAIL

retired or died – swapped their drift-net for a ring-net. Trawl skiffs were built in place of the earlier wherries. But, as is often the case, it was the introduction of the first larger skiff that brought about a wholesale uptake of the newer design. A trawl skiff had been some 25-30ft whereas the Lochfyne skiff was at least 10ft longer, enabling the sleeping space to be incorporated. They were rigged with a standing lugsail set on a mast – which had adjustable rake.

In 1908 the first Lochfyne skiff had an engine installed, set over to the starboard side as the net was always handled over the port side, the sternpost not being suited to receiving an aperture. However, in 1922 the first of a new breed of canoe-sterned ring-net boat was introduced which began the decline in the skiffs. Thus, over not much more than a generation, the skiffs came and went as a working boat, one of the shortest lived boats in the fishing industry. Today only a handful have survived.

SARDINES

LUNE WHAMMEL BOAT

Whammel-netting is a form of drift-netting (or hang-netting as it's often called) that seems to have originated in the rivers of Morecambe Bay and most likely in the river Lune. Two Morecambe Bay fishermen called Woodman and Willacy took whammel-netting to the Solway about 1855 which shows it was already in existence prior to that date. My late mate Tom Smith, told me it was a form of drift-netting as the fish become trapped by their gills.

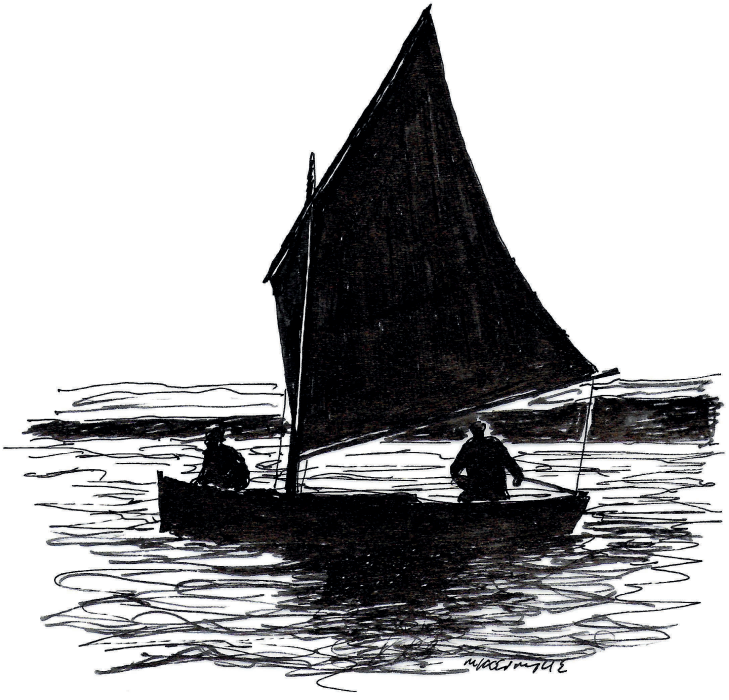
The method, I remember Tom telling me, was worked three hours after high water as the whammel boats made their way downriver to the 'baiting buoys' in the estuary. Once there, starting from one side of the channel, the fisherman makes his way across the river, paying his net out as he goes. On reaching the far side, the sail is lowered and boat and net drift down on the ebb for about one mile. Beyond this there is a shallow bar across the river bed and the net must be hauled in to avoid snagging. Once across, another shot will be made before hauling in and heading back up for another go. On the spring tide, the first boat may get five shots before the tide is in flood, the last boat only three. On a neap, no boat will manage more than one or two before the tide turns.

The intention of whammelling was to meet the salmon coming up river to spawn. It sounds easy – just

drifting down while fish swim into the net – but, like most of these traditional fishing methods, it was highly skilled work. The nets were very light even though they were 300 ft in length and 12ft deep. To hold them in shape, they were kept afloat along the top rope with floats and held down with small weights along the foot rope. Both boat and net must be controlled in a line across the channel as they drift down tide: if the net goes faster, it will collapse in the middle, if the reverse is allowed to happen it will stream uselessly behind the boat. For Tom, this meant keeping the oars shipped and dipping them to speed up or slow down. Towards low water, the net is allowed to curve to a U. But as Tom explained: "It doesn't matter if your net ends are in the slack because for a while the fish come down to meet the flood – if you've got a U shape, they'll swim into the narrow."

Whammelling created a distinct type of boat – 17 feet in length, very shallow in draught, flat in the floors, and rigged with one high-peaked boomed lugsail and a small foresail. That was before the days of engines. Tom had two boats, *Mary*, LR53, built in 1927 and named after his mother and *Sirius*, LR33, built in 1923. Both came from Jack Woodhouse's yard in the middle of Overton village where a variety of boats were built – whammels, prawners, mussel boats and pleasure craft. *Mary* was used as a tripping boat when Sunderland Point became known as 'Little Brighton on the Lune'

and Tom's father would charge two shillings each to take ten or fifteen people out and round the lighthouse, upstream to Glasson Dock and back, which was good



LUNE WHAMMEL-NET BOAT

money considering most folk around at that time were earning a pound a week.

MANX NICKEYS

Disaster struck the Isle of Man in 1787 when much of the fishing fleet was destroyed in a terrible gale at Douglas. These were the older *scoute* type of vessel, an offshoot of the Viking influence of centuries before.

They then briefly adopted the smack in desperation until they encountered the Cornishmen during sojourns to the spring mackerel off Southern Ireland. The Cornish, in their powerful luggers, impressed the Manxmen and when these Cornishmen ventured north for the first time in the 1820s to participate in the Manx summer herring fishery – they were getting more adventurous in their quest for fish – they so impressed the Manx fishers that they decided to adapt their own vessels and dandy-rigged them by adding a lug mizzen. One man, Captain Quilliam, is renowned as being in the forefront of the change, he being the man who steered HMS *Victory* during the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. By the 1840s these boats had become known as 'luggers'.

Within a generation the Manx were building their own luggers, the first being built by William Qualtrough of Port St. Mary in 1869. She was modelled on these Cornish boats and after others had been added, these began to be referred to as *nickeys*, even if it does seem a slightly bizarre name for a type of vessel. One favoured notion is that, when the Manx first encountered the Cornish off the Irish coast, they noticed that many of the Cornish were called Nicholas and thus 'nickey' soon became the nickname for the Cornish fishers. Thus when they arrived off their coast to fish, it simply passed from fisher to fishing boat. Others can tell you that the first lugger fishing these waters was

itself called *Nicholas*, but that seems a bit too tenuous and I tend to favour the former.

Like their Cornish counterparts, and indeed those from the east coast of Scotland, these were powerful luggers, though, unlike the Scots, they set a mizzen topsail and a large staysail between the two masts. These were fast boats, though equally matched by the Cornish, and 10 knots was easily achievable. It is said they sailed from Port St. Mary to Kinsale in 28 hours.

The crew consisted of seven men and a boy until steam capstans reduced the crew to six. Accommodation was cramped, as always, and was just abaft of the fish hold, accessible from a companionway just forward of the mizzen mast. But they were a popular boat as their numbers prove. In 1879 – just a decade after they were introduced – there were said to be in excess of 300 based on the island. That same year there were over 1000 boats from Scotland, Ireland and Cornwall, as well as the island, fishing in the Irish Sea between the isle of Man and Ireland. But within another decade they had become too burdensome, and the Manxmen had, once again, turned to another type of boat to rebuild their fishing fleet. Theirs, then, was a short life indeed, coming just in the nickey of time, so to speak, before the Manxmen abandoned them in favour of the later nobbies. But that's another story.

MANX NOBBY

The etymology of the word ‘nobby’ is just as uncertain. However, the design of this Manx boat came about after the first Clyde ‘nabby’ arrived to fish in Peel in 1884, hailing from Girvan. This was two years after the first Lochfyne skiff had been built, and the ‘nabby’ was

a variation on the skiff, confined to the eastern side of the Clyde and generally used as line skiffs.

One alternative for the word nabby is that it comes from 'nabbing the fish' although another possibility is that it is the Scots variation of 'nobby' which has been taken to mean 'smart and elegant, from the trim, stylish appearance'. Furthermore it could refer to the wealth of those – the nobs – owning them! Who knows! What is certain is that they were modelled on the Clyde boats after the nickeys had become too expensive to run. Manx nobbies – not to be confused with Morecambe Bay nobbies which are altogether a different breed of boat – were two-masted, lug-rigged double-enders with a sloping sternpost. Several are still sailing today, including the oldest, the 1901-built *Gladys*, PL61, recently returned from a period languishing on the west coast of Ireland.

MACKEREL

MEVAGISSEY TOSHER

TOSHER COMING INTO MEVAGISSEY
WITH ONE REEF IN

The shape of the Mevagissey tosher was a smaller version of the lugger, kept to under 20ft in length, as is generally thought, to avoid the payment of harbour

dues. These small open transom-sterned boats, rigged with one gaff sail, were used for inshore general long-lining, drift-netting and hand-lining for mackerel and hake, and I guess anything else they could catch. They would work inshore waters between the Lizard and the Fowey river.

Many were built by Percy Mitchell in the nearby yard at Portmellon. He became one of the best known of Cornish boatbuilders, working there until his retirement in the late 1960s. Described as 'an artist in wood' and as 'one of the finest traditional boatbuilders in the world', he produced some of the best Cornish fishing boats, even after the transition to motors.

One Mitchell vessel still surviving, albeit in Cornwall's National Maritime Museum, is the *Sea Queen*, built by him in 1924 as the first boat in his 'new' yard he had established after his three-year apprenticeship. It is carvel built, as they all were, but the planks fitted so closely that there's no caulking . She had a two-masted lug rig which many did have in their early days. There's a tosher surviving from 1900 still sailing under private ownership although she had undergone a thorough rebuild in about 2007.

NESS SGOTH NISEACH

You can easily imagine bearded Viking warrior-like invaders, adorned in their horned helmets, arriving in boats such as the *Sgoth Niseach*. To explain: *Niseach* (Gaelic) is the Port of Ness which lies almost at the very top of the island of Lewis, and is actually a conglomeration of sixteen villages. *Sgoth* translates literally to 'skiff'. Ness skiff then.

These were open boats, clinker-built and rigged with very square lugsails which did almost resemble square-sails. They were somewhere in the region of 32ft long on a much shorter, 21ft, keel and therefore exhibited long overhangs aft and curved stems, and, as such, were the largest of Britain's traditional beach boats. They had to be beached for the harbour at Ness is little more than a beach with a wall protecting it. Silting was a constant problem there. Still is really, not that many craft venture this far north these days.

The boats took part in the deep-sea fishery where they sailed offshore to long-line for ling and cod. They were excellent sailing craft with an ability to sail close-hauled. Surprisingly, there were 237 of these craft registered between 1868 and 1901. The fishermen were generally croft tenants who couldn't afford to operate larger vessels although the 1883 Napier Report suggested that they should have boats up to 60ft long even if there were no harbours to house them. Which just goes to show that these crofters must have had the sea in their blood. Proper deep sea fishers and sailors they were: some say amongst the very best of seamen.

John MacLeod was a boatbuilder who gave evidence to the Napier Commission that he could build six or seven sgoths a year at a cost of £30 each. The custom was that the boats were bought by the curers and leased to the fishermen at £10 a year for 3 years.

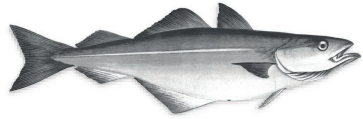
If they could pay this off, then the boat was theirs. Another £12 bought them sails and fishing gear enough to work the boat.

The sgoths were simply not suited to motorisation because of the shape of the stern with its heavily raking sternpost. Thus the era of the local fishing, and indeed boatbuilding, finished although just one original remains. *Jubilee*, SY233, built in 1935 as the last vessel, was rebuilt in 2010. One replica, *An Sulaire*, was built by John Murdo MacLeod, grandson of the builder of *Jubilee*, and his apprentice Angus Smith in 1995, and today both boats sail alongside each other as part of various local festivals. However you look at them, though, these boats have more in common with those from Shetland rather than those from the nearest point on the mainland which from Lewis is, I believe, Rubha Reidh in Wester Ross.

COD

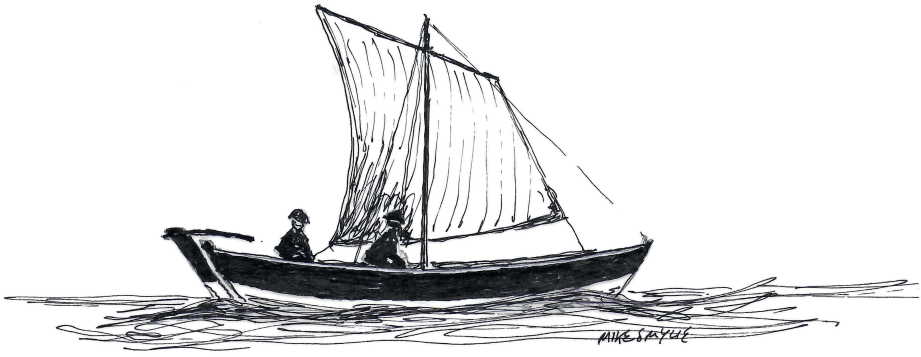
NESS YOLE

Around the southern parts of Shetland, in Dunrossness, a type of craft slightly different to its counterparts from the north was to be found and it was said to have been the most elegant of all the Shetland boats. The Ness Yole (jol or yoal) was popular for fishing with hand-lines for saithe (below) in the inshore waters especially between Sumburgh Head and Fitful Head to the north-west. Here the current runs swiftly between the islands and a reliable, well found craft is still a must to ensure that it is not thrown onto one of the many hazards.



SAITHE

At 22ft overall, they had keel lengths of around 15ft, a beam of 5½ ft and a draught of 18 inches. The construction was similar in that the frames or bands were not through-bolted to the keel, fixed only to the garboards in true Viking fashion, and they were built with very wide planks using only five per side in comparison to a sixareen which normally had nine.



NESS YOLE

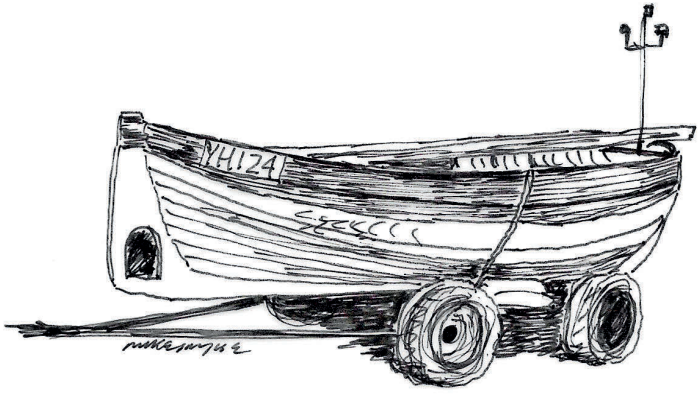
These Ness yoles were often raced by the fishermen owing to their turn of speed, due in the main to their narrowness. In races with the other Shetland boats it has been said that the Ness boats were often disqualified because of their different shape from the sixareen and fourereen – possibly an excuse as it seems that the Ness boats always won the races. Today, although some boatbuilders built these yoles in the traditional style, others have developed it for racing purposes so that many villages have commissioned their own boat to join in with the rowing regattas that take place most weekends during the summer.

NORTH NORFOLK CRABBERS

Often you'll find these boats referred to as simply Cromer Crabbers, as if the small town on the northern sweep of the Norfolk coast was the only home of these beamy, rounded craft. I guess some of the blame must be put upon travellers such as Daniel Defoe who, in 1724, didn't have much to say for the place except that it supplied Norwich with plentiful supplies of lobsters. No mention of crabs? However a 1820-lithograph by Robert Dixon shows lug-rigged crab boats on the shore line by a dilapidated jetty. Buckland, in 1875, reported that crab and lobster fisheries were centred on Cromer, Sheringham, Runton, Weybourne and all the neighbouring coastal villages.

It has been written that the traditional double-ended North Norfolk fishing boat has been around for at least 200 years. Indeed, one suggestion is that fishers came down south from from the Lincolnshire/Yorkshire coast and was heavily influenced by the cobles. However the coble itself was deemed unsuited to the sandy beach conditions and so the crab boat, as we now know it, evolved. The important factor in its evolution was to cope with working directly off the beach for harbours are few and far between herewith. These boats are almost symmetrically pointed at either end and have the ability to lie beam on to the sea when they come onto the shore. One man would often sit on the

gunwale to balance the boat whilst the others went in search of a tractor to haul the boat out.



CROMER CRAB BOAT 1995

Of course, in the early days there were no tractors, and the fishermen devised a handy way of carrying the boat away from the beaches of the surf. Holes in the top stake called 'orrucks' allowed them to pass oars through from side to side buy which a team of fishermen were able to lift the boat and walk it up-beach. The same holes were used in place of rollocks or thole pins to row the.

I remember in the 1990s watching one particular boat coming ashore and taking a series of photographs

from the point at which the boat arrived back and was lying beam on, to when it was safely aboard a trailer and trundling its way towards a row of such vessels atop the beach. Although I counted less than a dozen boats, records tell us that there was once 125 boats working from both the Cromer and Sheringham beaches alone. I love the local terms for the fishermen here: Crabs for the men of Cromer and Shannocks for those from Sheringham.

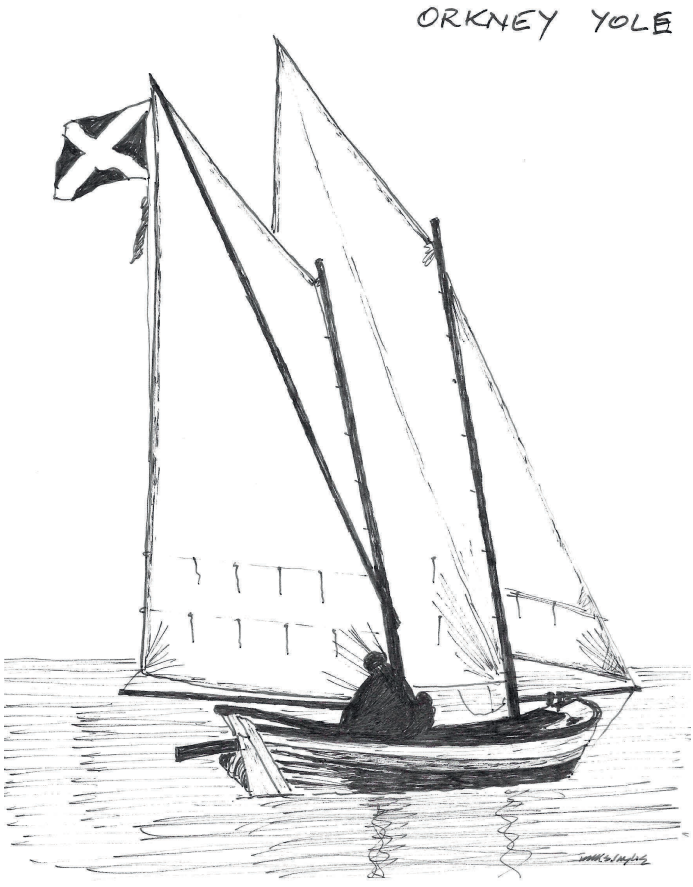
The boats themselves have distinct Norse influence: clinker construction, wide strakes and built skin first with oak ribs being added to strengthen the hull. Before motorisation which saw an increase in beam, they were rigged with one lugsail. Lengths were in the region of 15ft though, post motorisation, larger boats were built.

Edward Cooke, in 1828, produced some fine representations of these crab boats. Others have followed over the years but, by the twenty-first century they have almost all been made of fibreglass. Then in 2014, a new 17ft wooden crab boat, the *Auk*, was built by Stiffkey boatbuilder David Hewitt, without any drawings to work from. Maybe we'll see a renaissance in these lovely North Norfolk craft, possibly even outside of Cromer!

ORKNEY/STROMA YOLE

In Orkney it is the open yoles that stand out as the typical small boat although there are other craft such as the 'whill' which is more or less a smaller version of the yole. Two quite separate yoles – the North Isles and South Isles – worked the different conditions. In the north, where much of the fishing was carried out amongst the islands and relatively sheltered waters, the yole was standing lug-rigged, with less rake and slightly lighter in construction. They say the best way of identifying one is by the framing where the timbers run alternatively over the floors so that one timber runs from the gunwale to the turn of the bilge and another from the turn of the bilge over the floor, the overlap being over two planks. On the other hand, the South Isles yoles had to work in and around the notorious Pentland Firth and Scapa Flow, where fierce tides run and the seas can be hideous. These were sprit-rigged.

Similar yoles were built on the small island of Stroma which sits slap bang in the middle of the the Pentland Firth. I recall coming across one called the *Hope* belonging to Willie Mowatt who was living at the very bottom end of Orkney, on the southern tip of South Ronaldsay. Showing me the boat, he recounted his tale of sailing across the Firth to John O'Groats on a perfect day and returning to be caught out halfway


ORKNEY YOLE

across in some hideous conditions. Well Willie soon realised he'd have to get the sail off and run before it.

"I can still hear that wind today, and I'd never thought I'd witness the foam, like soap suds, and water falling out in lumps," he told me. The boat tore along the waves as they built up behind. "Mind," he said, "those fellas in the front were too frightened to move although one of them had a camera. The other was back astern with me, pumping the bilge. I was facing forward. The sound was frightening enough but I had complete confidence in the boat."

They headed east towards the Pentland Skerries that lie almost halfway between Duncansby Head and South Ronaldsay. He'd have gone to Norway if needs be. But they got into the skerries, into Scartan Bay on Muckle Skerry where the surprised lighthouse keepers asked them where'd they come from.

Assuming the lifeboat from Longhope would have been sent out to search for them, Willie asked the keepers to get a message through to the Coastguards to tell them not to send out the lifeboat. "I guessed they'd all think that a small boat couldna survive those seas." The lifeboat was about to launch before the call and the Coastguard informed them that the wind had been logged at over 75 mph. "It was bloody more where we were," was Willie's reply to that!

They stayed on the skerries for two days until the wind veered to the northwest. Fearing it might go

northeast which would leave them horribly exposed, he decided to make a run out northeast from the skerries – this entire Scottish coast fears the NE gale – and loop round to the north and then west to miss the worst of the seas. Only when the houses of Grimness were in view did he turn west to get close in under Auld Head and creep back to Burwick to awaiting relatives. The *Hope* proved her worth then according to Willie, and he firmly believes that no other small boat of 23ft in length could have survived such seas. He seems to put this down to Donald Brown whom, he said, built the best.

According to him, Donald Smith was the first builder on Stroma after he moved over from Caithness in the early 1800s. However this seems disputed as others say it was John Duncan who moved over from South Ronaldsay, although Willie simply says that he was apprenticed to Donald Smith. John Duncan later moved to Herston, to the north of South Ronaldsay and one member of his family eventually moved to Burray where the family yard has only recently ceased work after the retirement of Robin Duncan two years ago. Burray was once an important herring station during the boom of the late 1800s and photographs in the Kirkwall Museum show what is now the slip burdened with barrels of herring and gutting lassies busy at work.

PLYMOUTH HOOKER

The Plymouth hookers worked out of Dartmouth and Brixham as well. These heavily-built cutters were called hookers to denote fishing by hook and line, a term that has been traced back to 1567. When long-lining, they set lines with up to 3000 hooks, and at other times they hand-lined for whiting and bream. In the season they fished for mackerel with extra lines and for hake at certain times of the year.

There were two classes of hooker differing in size, but otherwise the same – transom-sterned, deep-heeled and carrying a boomless mainsail. The bigger boats were up to just over forty feet, and were dandy-rigged with a standing lug on a small mizzen mast. They were fully decked, and had accommodation at the after end. The smaller boats were about 31ft overall and only had a small cuddy under the fore-deck and with waterways aft. Both types set a topsail, with a jib and foresail on a long bowsprit. In the late nineteenth century there were some forty hookers working from Sutton Pool.

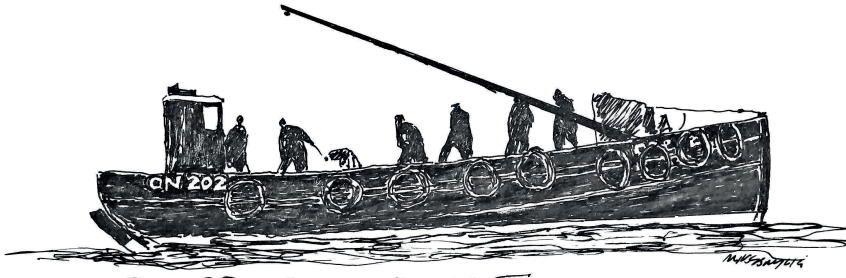
The hookers sailed up to fifty miles outside the Eddystone into deep water away from where the trawlers worked. Others worked close inshore along the coast as far as Looe where the bottom was rocky so that trawling was impossible.

Similar hookers worked out of Brixham where there were 70 such vessels in 1833. At Dartmouth, where a local byelaw stated that 'the foreshore had to be cleared of all moorings and obstructions between Bayard's Cove and Warfleet by Michaelmas' for the autumnal sprat fishery, there were small 20ft carvel-built, sprit-rigged, open boats with transom-sterns working this fishery up to the beginning of this century. The town had its own fleet of hookers working from the harbour. And as a naval town, I bet it did!

A bit west is Polperro where, before the late 19th century, the fishermen preferred to rig their boats with spritsails. Up to about 1860 these craft had been clinker-built, thus showing the same as the Plymouth boats. At about 30ft in length, they also set a foresail and in some cases a topsail and small mizzen. Due to severe weather in 1891 when most of the fleet of some dozen vessels had been wrecked, the fishermen turned to gaff-rigged carvel boats when replacing their craft, many of these coming from boatbuilders at Looe and Mevagissey. Rigged with a boomless main and topsail, these boats were about 25ft in length and became known as the Polperro Gaffers. So a Plymouth hooker with a gaff-rig in everything except name!

RINGER *GLAD TIDINGS*

This boat came from the east coast of Scotland in 1922 and appears to be a small 'scaffie' type of 40ft in length with a sloping sternpost and she was owned by the Blair family whilst in Campbeltown, registered as CN202 and ring-netted under power. According to Angus Martin in *Fish and Fisherfolk* (House of Lochar, 2004) she was previously registered as INS162 and came from Avoch on the north coast of the Moray Firth.

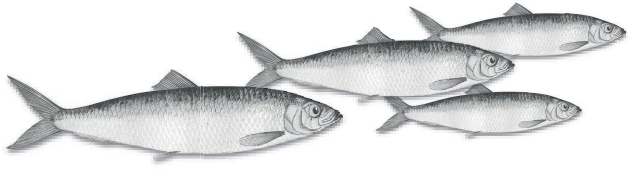


RINGER GLAD TIDINGS III
HAULING IN A RING-NET (DRAWING FROM PHOTOGRAPH)

Robert Ross is quoted in the book as recalling her to have a rounded stem "for sailin' over the drift nets in the Inverness Firth". That description of her shallow forefoot would suggest she was indeed a 'scaffie' type. In the summer of 1996 I travelled up to the

Cromarty Firth to take the lines off a boat called *Wisp*. Although her lineage was unknown, it was discovered that she had acted as a ferryboat between Meikle Ferry and Skibo on the Dornoch Firth.

Deciding to call her a Moray Firth yawl for no other reason than we didn't know what else to, I took off the lines and drew her up. Her sternpost raked at a much more extreme angle than *Glad Tidings* although there are many other similarities. *Wisp*'s owner thought she had been built at Nairn and was over a hundred years old although I discovered references to such boats being based at Avoch. *Wisp* was only 32ft long, 8 feet shorter than *Glad Tidings*. However they made a useful comparison even if we still do not know the exact ancestry of both boats and, in all probability, never will.



HERRING

SCAFFIE – SCAITH, SCAFF

MORAY FIRTH or BUCKIE HERRING BOAT

It's a slightly bizarre fact that, from all the Washington plans of Scottish boats produced in his 1849 Report, it is the Moray Firth or Buckie boat that best resembles the scaffie, given that they are often presumed to be *the* herring boats of Wick. Now, there's a wonderfully-explicit and well-known photograph of Wick, taken in 1865, with hundreds of open boats lying in the new harbour at Pultneytown, Wick, which had been built by the British Fisheries Society. Although the boats are said to be scaffies, closer inspection reveals that they are not in fact exhibiting the idealised raked sternpost. These boats resemble the yoles (yawls) of that area, and share a common ancestry from the Viking era, though with a influence from the north coast and Orkney which made them a wee more upright.

Yet, however you look at it, scaffies are most definitely Norse in design, initially being clinker-built double-enders, therefore having the same ancestry as these Wick yoles. The scaffies were renowned for their raking sternposts and rounded forefeet, often said to reflect the tendency for harbours to charge fees related to keel lengths. Rigged with a single lugsail (though the odd one was two-masted) these craft

SCAFFIE

evolved from the earlier schooner-rigged open 'Great boats' that, although little is known about them, are said to have fished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Herring was king off the northeast Scottish coast, and the boats developed purely for this fishery. From the smallest at 20ft to larger ones over 40ft, the

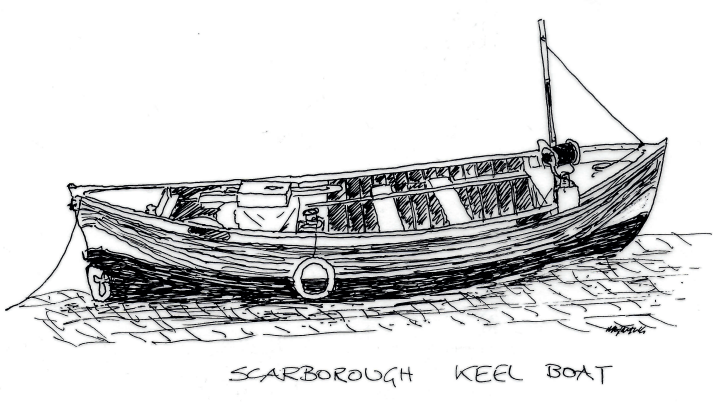
scaffies were the herring boats of the Moray Firth, from, say, Cromarty to Macduff.

Decking of boats did not gain favour amongst the fleets until the 1860s despite evidence from various quarters, including Washington, that decks did improve safety. Fishermen tended to believe decks got in the way of loading the boats with fish even if some capsized from overloading. There's nothing like going back to harbour after a night's fishing, loaded up to the ears with herring! Nevertheless, with persuasion, they eventually saw the obvious advantages of decks. At the same time carvel building gained precedence and boats in excess of 40ft were built. Only a very few passed through the motorisation phase as their hulls were deemed unsuitable for conversion, and today it appears that only various replica scaffies remain.

THE SILVER DARLINGS
(HERRING)

SCARBOROUGH KEEL BOAT

Otherwise often known as a mule, a Yorkshire keelboat – this one drawn at Scarborough, is a double-ended coble, originating from Viking influence, possibly brought down by Scottish visitors. North of the Scottish border, a mule is a crossbreed of boat such as a fifie/zulu cross, and it is probable that in Yorkshire the same mule/crossbreed meaning is true.



Some say the keelboat is a cross between a coble and a whaling boat and this appears to me quite likely given the importance of whaling on this coast.

However, the first keelboats seem to have appeared about 1875, and were introduced through the need to stay at sea longer so that larger catches could be taken. This meant the crews needed some form of

protection from the elements. The boats also tended to carry more gear. Early mules were around 30ft overall, half-decked with a tiny forecastle. They retained much from the cobles such as the ram plank and clinker construction, but the cobles' transom was replaced with a sharply sloping sternpost, similar to the Scots' boats. The hull shape became fuller, giving better sailing abilities, yet the boats were unsuited to beaching. This, however, was not important at Whitby, from where many sailed.

The rig remained unaltered, the dipping lug staying, and all but the smallest craft still setting a jib on a bowsprit. A few even set a small mizzen sail.

By 1900, these mules were fully decked. Like the Scots, the coble men had seen the advantages of decking-in their boats when fishing the herring. Previously they deemed it a disadvantage. Within the 20 years or so that the boats had evolved they had adopted a full length keel instead of the ram plank, and had in fact become, not cobles, but keel boats, as their name implies. The planking was narrower, the sternpost became more upright, and then some were carvel-built. They changed so much that in time they were hardly distinguishable from the Scotch and Cornish boats during the herring season. These keelboats are not to be confused with the small beach boats that are to be found at places such as Staithes today, although there are many similarities.

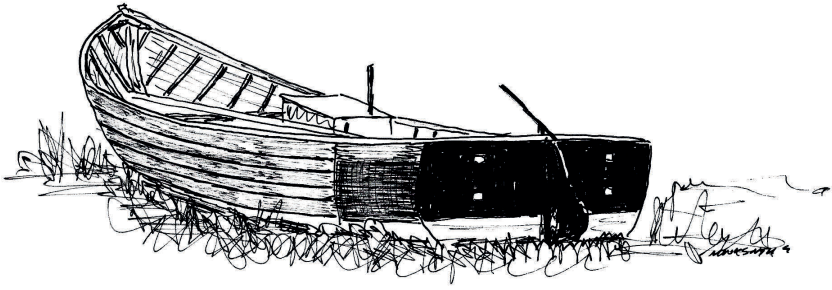
SCOTTISH SALMON COBLES

A few pages back we looked at the cobles of the coast of Eastern England and now we'll travel over the border to investigate the just-as-unusual cobles used, in the main, for the Scottish inshore and river salmon fishery. Although the etymology of the word is unclear – some say it's from the Celtic *ceubal* which in turn comes from the Latin *caupulus* for a small boat; others direct us to the Lindisfarne Gospels where a *cuople* is mentioned – there are similarities between both types. Both have quite a distinctive shape in the flat bottom and high bow, characteristics necessary for beach launching and recovery, although the salmon cobles are generally beamier and shallower.

Their build is more basic as they were seldom worked more than a mile offshore. Furthermore they have a wide transom to counteract the weight of the net in the stern.

These salmon cobles worked seine nets in and around the estuaries of the well-known salmon rivers such as the Tweed, Tay and Esk, as well as upstream. Others worked from the beaches where drift-nets were set – i.e. anywhere from Arbroath in the south to Aberdeen up north and in many parts of the Moray Firth. I remember a few years ago travelling around the Easter Ross peninsula and coming across many cobles in places such as Portmahomack and Balintore.

In fact, find a sandy Scottish cove and a supply of salmon, and you'd have been guaranteed to find a coble. That was in the days before commercial salmon fishing licences were removed from commercial fishers in favour of the riparian estate owners and their habit of charging absurd amounts for fishing their rivers.



SALMON COBLE -2001

Many were built by the salmon companies who used them, in their own boat sheds, as that was mostly how the fishery was organised. The companies owned the licences and gear whilst the crews earned their share of the catch. Of course the cobles they employed all came in varying sizes and construction. Upriver they were in the region of 14ft long, 18ft

downstream and 21ft in the estuary. the older boats were simply flat-bottomed, with longitudinal planking and oak floors and displayed similar characteristics to river and estuary boats of Scandinavia – the Swedish e*ka* comes foremost to mind. When engine power was deemed a necessity over oars, outboards were slung on the transom. However, like their Yorkshire and Northumberland counterparts, the later motorised Scottish cobles had a ram plank and a tunnel to receive an inboard engine. And just to confuse you further, dear reader, there's also another type of river coble, propelled by oars, that is built with a ramplank and a flat bottom on floors, with clinker planking in the Norse style: the sort of boat a ghillie would use on a river.

There we have it: a variant or a counterpart to the English coble? I prefer the latter!

SALMON

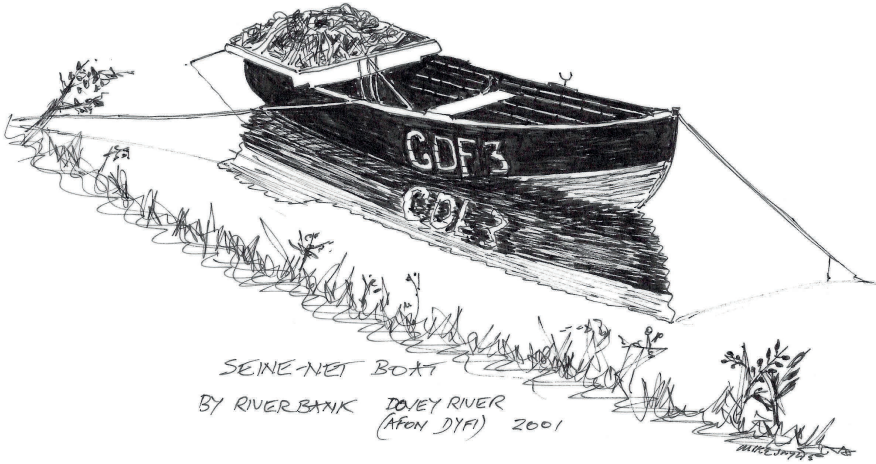
SEINE NET BOAT

The use of a seine-net is one of the oldest forms of fishing, and probably the earliest when it comes down to using a net. Sometimes known as a 'circling net' for that is what it does – it is set around a shoal in a sort of circle so that both ends meet up. Seines are set out from beaches all around the world.

However, here, the small boat was captured one time moored on the river Dyfi in west Wales. Seines were set around the mouths of most of these Welsh rivers – sometimes illegally of course, though no fisherman would leave a net in his boat if he wasn't licensed!

One end of the net is left ashore whilst the other sits on an after platform on the seine-net boat which is then fed out as the rower propels the vessel forwards and around in a large circle to come back to the beach near to his starting point. That end of the net would be brought ashore and hauling-in could begin.

I remember one twilight in Southern India listening to the chant of fishermen as they hauled in. Following my ear, I came across maybe a dozen or so men on each end of the net as they pulled in unison to their song. It was both eerie and exciting. The vessel there was a log boat which had one plank extended all round which they referred to as a *vhodi*; translates directly as 'boat'! Still the river Dyfi seine boat was moored in a wonderfully quiet and idyllic part of the



river so it was pleasing to sit there and sketch for a while. I knew nothing more about her although you could say any small rowing boat of equal size with a transom stern enabling a platform to be built could be used to fish like that. A generic small boat then!

I later met the owner of the Dyfi boat and fished with him, though not in that boat. It was lying by his fish hut, and is over 100 years old, he told me.

SENNEN CRABBER

The students of the Falmouth Marine School built two replicas of a Sennen Cove crab boat back in 2004 and I recall seeing these two boats sailing in the Looe Lugger regatta some years ago and they sailed pretty well. It's been said these 20ft luggers were unique, but I'm not sure quite why for aren't most types?

I know we've already covered Cornish crabbers but decided to go one step further with these from Sennen. Why? Because they are one of my favourite but also because they worked from a Cove that nestles sleepily in the coastline of Land's End, one of the wildest parts of the British coastline where huge seas funnel up the Western Approaches. So these small craft must have had some very special sea keeping qualities and, furthermore, some very brave fishermen to crew them. And yes, many other types worked off similarly exposed coasts… but my excuse is I'm biased!

What was perhaps an innovation in these craft was the addition of wooden shutters that closed off their cut-outs in the gunwale which the oars sit in whilst rowing. A sign of the wild seas necessitating having to have a higher freeboard? As we've seen, Cornwall was of course full of small potting boats, with those of Cadgwith, Gorran Haven and Port Isaac all recognised as individual types but I suspect each boat from each beach fishery or each builder was slightly different.

They all followed a basic shape reflected in the larger mackerel and pilchard boats, and the smaller Mevagissey toshers, all transom-sterned and lug-rigged, ignoring, of course, those double-ended boats scattered around the tip of Cornwall.

SENNEN COVE CRABBER

There were 18 Sennen Cove crabbers in 1850 said to have employed 80 fishermen, although I doubt that each boat had between four and five crew. During the summer they worked pots as far as the Scillies but seldom ventured far in winter. Who can blame them!

SHETLAND FOUREREEN

A craft that was common to the Shetland fishery was the fourereen or fourern which, as its name implies, was simply a four-oared vessel of about 26ft in length. Some call them were smaller versions of the sixareen which is included here. They were mainly used for the winter haddock fishing and tended not to sail more than 20 miles or so offshore and returned home every night. Their construction was similar to that of the bigger boats and, like them also, they were later rigged with a small dipping lugsail on a mast mounted farther forward than when a square-sail was set. This forward movement of the mast also gave the boat a better performance when running before the wind. The fourereens were crewed by three, and although sturdy little craft it appears they did not survive at the fishing much beyond the decline in the winter haddock near the end of the nineteenth century. It was found that there were other jobs available that were more congenial than working out in the North Sea in winter in a small open boat.

FOUREEN -
SHETLAND BOAT

SHETLAND HERRING BOAT

Another form of the fifie appeared in Shetland. Because many of the Shetland boats were small open boats, as the herring fishery developed there was a need for much larger vessels and so the fifie, that was already fishing out of Lerwick and other harbours, was found to suit the conditions. At first they retained the two dipping lugs but some were converted to dandy rig – a gaff main and lug mizzen. Many even dropped the mizzen, reverting to smack rig which was found to be more powerful in confined waters. One such vessel, albeit dandy-rigged although she was a lug-rigged at her launch in 1900, is the *Swan*, LK243, built by Hay & Co at their Freefield yard in Lerwick. She fished under sail until 1935, after which she had a motor fitted and was later requisitioned for war service until 1945. She continued herring fishing again in season until a seine net winch was installed in 1953. She fished successfully for a few years until being withdrawn in 1956 and languished for several years, changing hands on several occasions, before arriving in Hartlepool. Her owner there attempted to sail her to Spain, twice aborting through difficulties. She was then taken to Grimsby where she was bought for £400 in 1974 and a certain amount of restoration work completed, but eight years later was back in Hartlepool and sold once again. There she languished once again for several years until being

bought by the Swan Trust in 1990. Subsequently they raised money to restore her back to her original state. She sailed again in 1996 and today sails out of Lerwick, promoting Shetland fishing heritage and teaching seamanship skills, 'thus keeping alive the techniques of sailing and working a traditional fifie'.

SIXAREEN

Of all British fishing craft, the sixareens are probably the ones nearest to their Viking ancestors, largely due to the Shetland Isles remaining part of the Norse kingdom until 1469, at which time they were returned to Scottish rule as part of the dowry of a Danish princess to her betrothed Scotsman. Incredible, isn't it, to think that a group of islands can be treated in such a way! Mind you, that didn't stop exploitation over the next 500 years or so, and the sixareens were part of this abuse in that landowners forced generations of their tenants to sail out in their sixareens to long-line for whitefish, sometimes 30 or 40 miles offshore. In return, they paid them in vouchers only redeemable in their own shops. If they refused, the family were evicted from their family homes. It wasn't until the 1872 Truck Report that things began to change. This offshore fishery is often referred to as the *haaf* fishery: the deep-sea fishery. The sixareens – six-oared vessels, were some 24ft long in 1774 but a century later they were 35ft. In the early days they were brought in direct from Norway by ship (although 40ft sixareens are said to have sailed over) because of the lack of timber on treeless Shetland. They came in pieces to be assembled on the islands and cost £6 in the late 18th century. By 1830 the locals had begun to import their own timber from Norway and later mainland Scotland and build their

SIXEREENS ANCHORED AT FEDELAND
COPIED FROM A PHOTOGRAPH OF MR. J.D. RATTAR

own craft. In true Viking fashion they used wide planks of larch, fastened with iron nails, giving the boats that impressive feeling of strength and tradition. They needed this toughness for their venturing into the North Atlantic for sometimes days at a time.

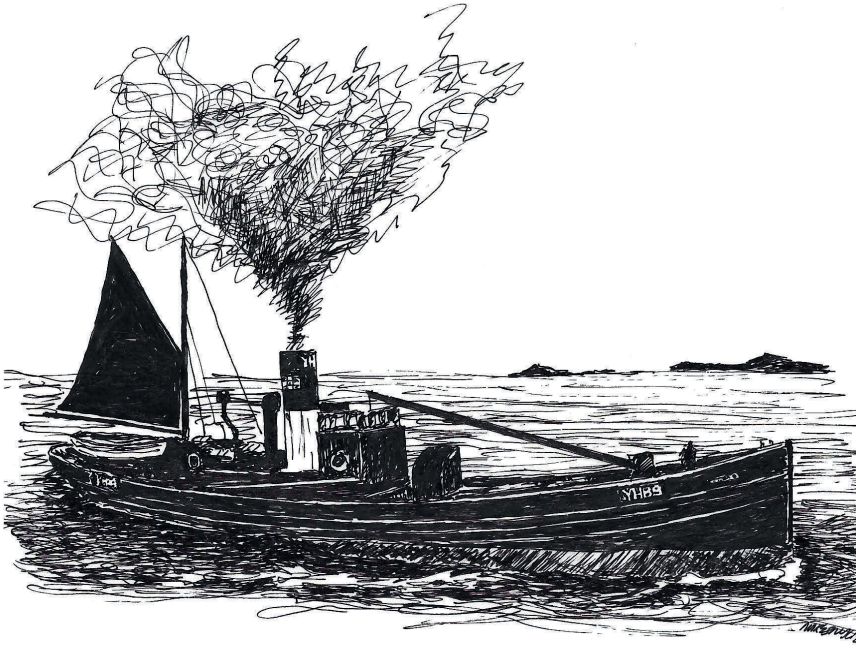
They would fish, eat and sleep in the boat that was rigged with a simple squaresail until lug rig was adopted. Some say the sixareen is the most tested of British fishing boats because of this ocean sailing and fishing, and the men themselves were amongst the finest seamen to have lived on these shores. Strong words, but that they were a special breed of men, willing or not, is for sure. The best place today to learn about the sixareens and other Shetland boats is at the Unst Boat Haven in Unst, the most northerly of the Shetland Isles. The *Far Haaf*, the 1993-built sixareen belonging to Duncan Sandison, is on display there.

STEAM DRIFTER *LYDIA EVA*

The 1930-built 95ft steam drifter *Lydia Eva* is one of a very few of these superb looking craft still around and she won a Heritage Lottery grant to be restored so is well worth a mention here.

Built for fisherman Harry Eastick to replace three earlier vessels (*Harry & Leonard, Young Ernie* and *H.F.E*), she was ordered from the King's Lynn Slipway Company and originally intended to fish in the prolific fishing grounds off the Norwegian coast. However, Eastick considered her to be too bluff in the bow for working these exposed grounds, the heavy swell he believed would ruin his drift nets. Thus he added 60 tons of ballast and her first trip was round to Castlebay in the Outer Hebrides where, in July 1930, he fished for seven weeks and earned £3000, a massive amount of money then.

She returned to her home port of Yarmouth where she made another £3000 over the winter. Since she has been restored, she is run by the Lydia Eva & Mincarlo Charitable Trust and is on display at alternatively, Lowestoft and Yarmouth where visitors are welcome aboard, for a fee. Search the trust for details of visiting times.



LYDIA EVA YH89

SUFFOLK BEACH BOATS

One of my very favourite boats is the 18ft Suffolk beach boat *Three Sisters*, IH81, built in Thorpeness for a Mr. Ralph. Several times I've been out off the coast between Aldeburgh and Felixstowe drift-netting for herring aboard this boat, with her owner Robert Simper. Ok, so she's been rebuilt but she remains as much in spirit now as she was when she was first built for fishing off and around Thorpeness back in 1896.

Being typical for working craft along this coast, it is said that these small but solid craft were originally double-enders and evolved from the Norse influence we've seen throughout our travels around the northern part of the UK. In fact, this boatbuilding influence is apparent anywhere north-about from the Thames through to Southern Ireland and the Bristol Channel.

They adopted the transom in the first half of the 19th century through the need for more space aboard to carry fish, and to improve sailing performance as they were seldom just rowed when working. In Aldeburgh these were called 'boats' in contrast to Southwold and Walberswick where they were 'punts'. These clinker-built two-masters were common anywhere from around Lowestoft to the river Deben, including tiny beach landings such as Bawdsey, Hollesley and Shingle Beach. All showed the characteristics of being good sailers, capable of working off the steep

'THREE SISTERS' IH81

Suffolk beaches and set a dipping lug main and small standing lug mizzen on a bumpkin.

If you read some historical information on these craft, you could be forgiven for thinking that they simply fished for sprats as those from Aldeburgh have been termed sprat boats. In truth, even if sprats were vital to an Aldeburgh fisherman's survival, like most

beach-based fishing communities, these vessels were general workhorses. They were used to drift for herring in autumn, going spratting in winter, trawling in spring and summer, as well as sometimes shrimping and setting the odd pot for lobsters and crabs. Come the summer, serving the local tourists with a hour's sail was more fruitful for many than several hours fishing, and thus taking trippers out was a normal pastime.

Three Sisters had an engine fitted in the 1920s, a time when new boats were fattened up to counterbalance the weight of the units. As the boats increased in weight – and hauling up the beach became almost impossible, most of the beach-based communities disappeared, with the boats being kept in the river Deben. Aldeburgh was the exception, and the odd boat still operates directly off the beach there, though numbers have severely declined just as the general UK fishing industry has.

The added problem today is unchanged from a century ago – the lack of access to market, and it's no wonder that these small communities failed. Many had to travel miles to sell the catch they'd achieved from a day's fishing, and traipsing around the neighbourhood was often the only choice. Today's 'elf & safety' wouldn't even let you, even if you'd the energy to do so! A good thing, then, that each time I've been drifting for herring in *Three Sisters*, we haven't caught more than we can eat in a few sessions of chomping!

TENBY LUGGERS

Tucked into a quiet corner of Pembrokeshire, Tenby was once the greatest fishing harbour in Wales and its Welsh name of *Dinbych-y-pysgod* (little fort of the fishes) gives a clue to that ancient provenance. Back in the 17th century the county was noted for its immense stocks of fish with, according to George Owen, its coast 'enclosed by a hedge of herring'.

Oysters were also prolific in the beds off Caldey Island and off Stackpole Head to the west. Small shallow-keeled boats were developed for dredging these shellfish although they were also used off-season for a number of other activities – mostly fishing (long-lining, trawling, drifting for herring and mackerel and lobstering). They also serviced shipping in the bay and did some smuggling. After Tenby became a 'fair and fashionable' place, they found a lucrative trade in taking trippers out around the bay during summer, and even over to Caldey to visit the monks.

Artist Charles Norris was in and around Tenby from 1805-1858 and his evidence shows these luggers were initially some 20ft in length, clinker-built with two square sails and sporting a small wine-glass transom. As the lug superseded the old square sail, so did construction. Carvel building allowed greater length, a wider transom, more buoyancy aft and a small forepeak cuddy, giving a smidgeon of shelter

when fishing. Plans of the clinker-built boat registered M170 – said to be *Three Sisters/Seahorse* built by James Newt in 1886, disputed by some, show a solidly-built vessel on a massive keel, heavy floors, upright stem, raked transom, very short cuddy, three rowing thwarts and one in the sternsheets, lug main, foresail on bowsprit and very small mizzen-sprit set on a bumpkin. The rudder was outboard of course, and some photographs of latter-day boats show the decking extending well over half of the boat and rigged with a single pole mast. Nevertheless these boats continued to be referred to as the luggers whilst smaller ones, under 20ft, became the punts!

In 1891 there were forty-nine luggers and seldom did the numbers exceed this. Thomas George was the last of the family of renowned local builders and he was succeeded by Patrick Wickland. Some had engines added and some became pleasure boats as the fortunes of Tenby fishermen faded. Many of these were those converted to gaff half-deckers.

Into the 21st century only two originals are rumoured to exist (one being clouded in fog, the other at Pembroke Dock awaiting restoration and likely to be the one mentioned above). Furthermore students at the Mitec College in Milford Haven planned to build one, although wrangles between various government funded authorities have resulted on the project being on hold for some time.

THAMES BAWLEY

The word 'bawley' probably is a derivative of 'boiler' for these boats are the shrimp boats of the Thames although they went whelking outside of the shrimp season. They developed from the earlier Peter boats, the original fishing boats of the river. It has been suggested that these were originally built to transport the congregation of St Peter's cathedral from across the river, hence the name, and that they worked peter nets which are deemed to be seine nets. Documented evidence comes from the 16th century that they were 12ft rowing boats but, as they desired to venture further down river, they built bigger boats with a small spritsail. They even had a small wet-well, one of the first European fishing craft to do so.

Originally double-enders, they adopted the transom, some having forecastles with accommodation. But by 1840 the bigger smack-rigged bawley had gained favour and the Peter boats faded from popularity. The bawley has a long straight keel, transom with little rake, high freeboard and initially little sheer until this became more pronounced at the bow. The short mast sets a loose footed gaff sail on long gaff boom so that the leech is almost vertical. A topsail is set on a very long topmast and the foresails are set on a long bowsprit. I use the present tense because, although there were once 100 bawleys working out of Leigh-on-Sea alone as well as many from other parts of the estuary, there are several still sailing.

YARMOUTH SHRIMPER

This Yarmouth shrimper – *Crangon*, YH55, was once owned by Robert Simper's son Jonathan. Shrimpers were half-deckers, a tiny cuddy below the foredeck extending back to the mast. I sailed aboard her, trawling for shrimps in the river. Generally, though, these shrimpers worked out of Yarmouth, catching brown shrimp in spring and pink shrimp during the summer, their fishing season being over by October, after which the boats were laid up until the following year. Unlike many shrimping boats, these did not carry a boiler aboard, the catch being landed into Yarmouth and cooked by the fishermen at home before being sold to holidaymakers outside their houses. Unlike most of the local punts, the shrimpers adapted a gaff-rig for manoeuvring up and down the river at Yarmouth, especially around the entrance where strong streams could cause havoc. In 1900 there were some 65 shrimpers at work, and a few further south at Lowestoft, but by 1931 this fleet had been reduced to 31, most of which had engines. During the Second World War many were requisitioned by the Admiralty to be moored on Oulton Broad preventing enemy seaplanes from landing. Sadly few survived that treatment so today only a few, including *Crangon*, have survived. Jonathan sold *Crangon* a few years ago and now she's based between Holland and Germany.

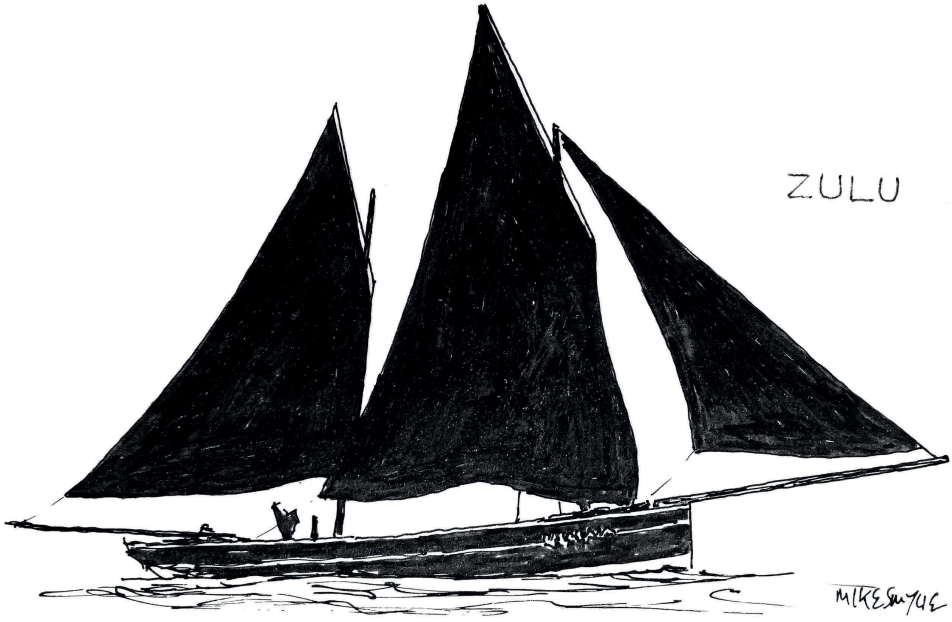
YARMOUTH SHRIMPER
CRANGON YH55

THE MIGHTY ZULUS

From the start here I must admit to being somewhat biased. Why? Because it's my opinion that the zulu – sometimes referred to as the Moray Firth fishing vessel – was the mightiest of all British sailing fishing craft. Built up to 85ft long (on deck) they were the King of the Seaboats, so to speak, comparable to the very herring, the kings of the sea… the silver darlings, they sought. Argue the point as much as you want, I can't be persuaded. What cannot be disputed is that they were perfected machines for catching the herring before the advent of steam and petrol/paraffin engines.

Their name comes from Scottish sympathy for the Zulus of South Africa during the wars of the same name; the first vessel of the type appeared in 1879. It seems many soldiers in the Scots regiments were being killed in a war that was considered an English act of aggravation (again!) and public opinion erred on the side of the natives.

The old well-worn story is that the zulu, was a cross-breed between the scaffie and the fifie, though there are different versions of how that came about. The one I prefer, albeit slightly tongue in cheek, is that when a Lossiemouth family wanted a new boat, the wife preferred the fifie type and husband the scaffie so they combined the best features of both. The resultant vessel – *Nonesuch* – had the fifie upright stem and a very



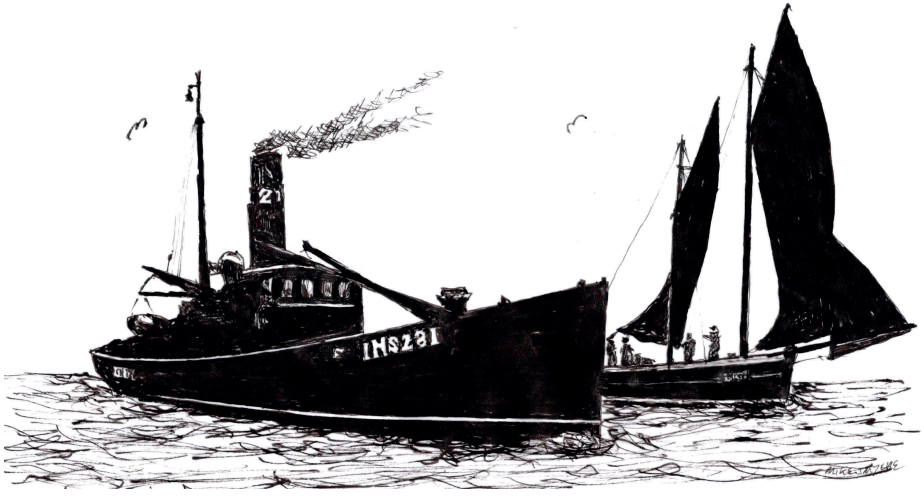
"WHAT AN INCREDIBLE SIGHT IT WOULD BE IF A FULL-SIZE 80FT-PLUS ZULU WERE BUILT AND ABLE TO SAIL AROUND THE COASTS TO REPRESENT BRITAIN AT MARITIME FESTIVALS"

heavily raking sternpost – typical of the scaffie. At 39ft on the keel she was relatively small compared to later boats. The later craft had huge overhangs aft. Rigged with two massive dipping lugs like the fifie, these boats were renowned for their speed which meant they could get their herring back to market quickly to get the best price. Some of the descriptions by those who saw these spectacular craft suggest that they were awe-inspiring vessels to say the least.

They certainly impressed Lt Col Charles L Spencer, a commodore of the Clyde Cruising club, and owner of the 1928 62ft *Ron of Argyll*, who once told Frank Carr, the author and second director of the National Maritime Museum, he'd seen big zulus "come romping in from sea, passing the steam drifters and leaving them standing". Not many of the larger zulus appear to have been built after 1904, though smaller ones were in build just before the first world war.

In 2015 a graveyard of 35 of these boats were found in Findhorn Bay. Reportedly they were abandoned there in 1914 as their crews went off to fight.

St Vincent is a 1910-built smaller zulu, made for herring drifting, and is still sailing. *Violet*, built in 1911, is currently in the US. Both these boats are around the 48ft mark, thus nowhere near as impressive as an 80ft version! Unfortunately no full-sized zulus survive afloat today, although the 1903-built *Research* sits as an exhibit in the Scottish Fisheries Museum, which is

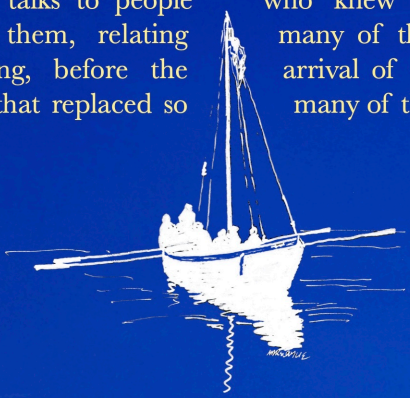


HERRING DRIFTER AND ZULU UNDER SAIL

at Anstruther, Fife. Other smaller half-zulus (as they've become called) and zulu skiffs have been restored to sailing order.

What an incredible sight it would be if, as a national vessel, a replica full-sized 80ft plus zulu was built and able to sail around the coasts to represent Britain at the numerous maritime festivals. Instead we just get a concrete-encased throwback Cutty Sark hanging in the air stripped of all dignity, an object to serve tourism, lost of all integrity. A zulu would change all that, so bring on www.giveusazulu.org!

This book is like a voyage around Britain – learning about the many different fishing boats bringing their catch home to market under sail and oar. Mike Smylie depicts a lost world with whole fishing fleets leaving harbour to go and hunt fish. He describes how the boats evolved to suit their own part of the coast and the communities they served. It was hard work and often dangerous – money was made on the size of the catch. Each boat type here has her own chapter with a lively, and accurate, pen and ink drawing. Mike draws from life, as much as from the naval architecture – of these special boats – so few of which remain. And he talks to people who knew them and worked them, relating many of the lost arts of fishing, before the arrival of the marine engine, that replaced so many of those skills.



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