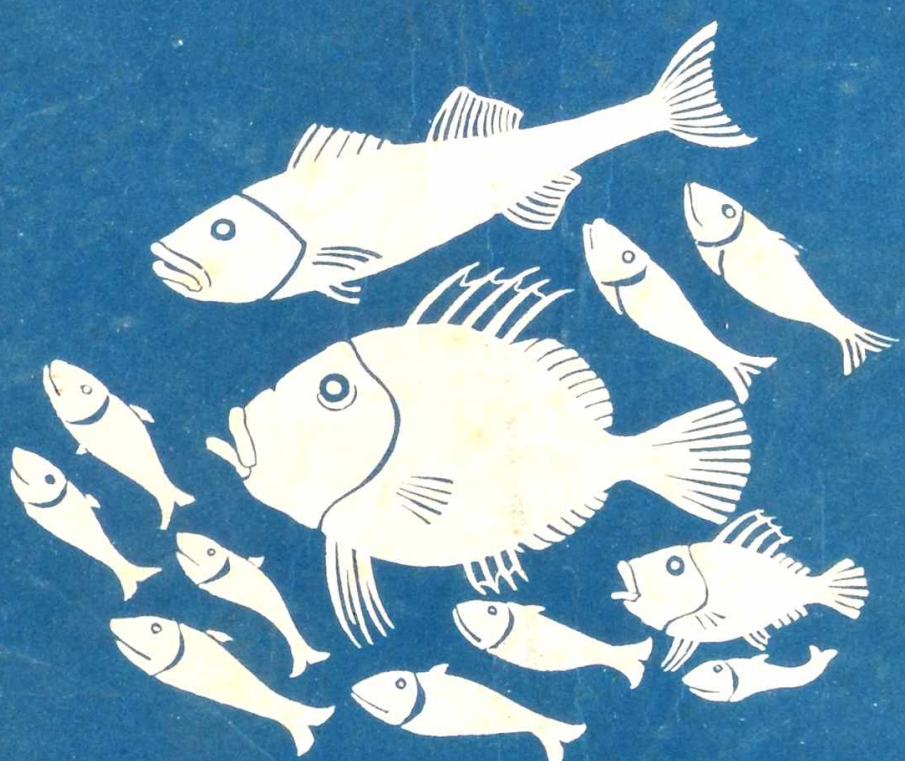
BRITISH SEA-FISHERMEN



PETER F. ANSON

BRITAIN IN PICTURES

THE BRITISH PEOPLE IN PICTURES

BRITISH SEA FISHERMEN

GENERAL EDITOR

W. J. TURNER

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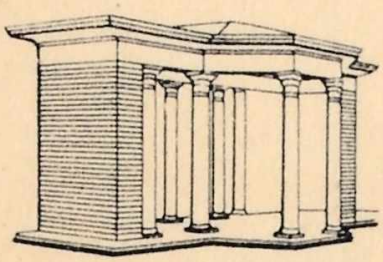
BRITISH SEA FISHERMEN

PETER F. ANSON

WITH
8 PLATES IN COLOUR
AND
23 ILLUSTRATIONS IN
BLACK & WHITE



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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PLATES IN COLOUR

BLACK AND WHITE ILLUSTRATIONS

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SHORT BIBLIOGRAPHY

F. G. Aflalo : *The Sea Fishing Industry of England and Wales*

P. F. Anson : *Fishermen and Fishing Ways ; Fishing Boats and Fisher Folk on the East Coast of Scotland*

F. M. Davis : *Fishing Gear of England and Wales*

Michael Graham : *The Fish Gate*

E. W. H. Holdsworth : *Deep-Sea Fishing and Fishing Boats*

J. T. Jenkins : *The Sea Fisheries ; The Herring and the Herring Fisheries*

H. M. Kyle : *Die Seefischerei von Grossbritannien und Irland* (This is the standard book on British Sea Fishermen)

Annual Reports and *Statistical Tables* of the Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries and the Fishery Board of Scotland

FISHING BOATS
Water colour by W. L. Wyllie

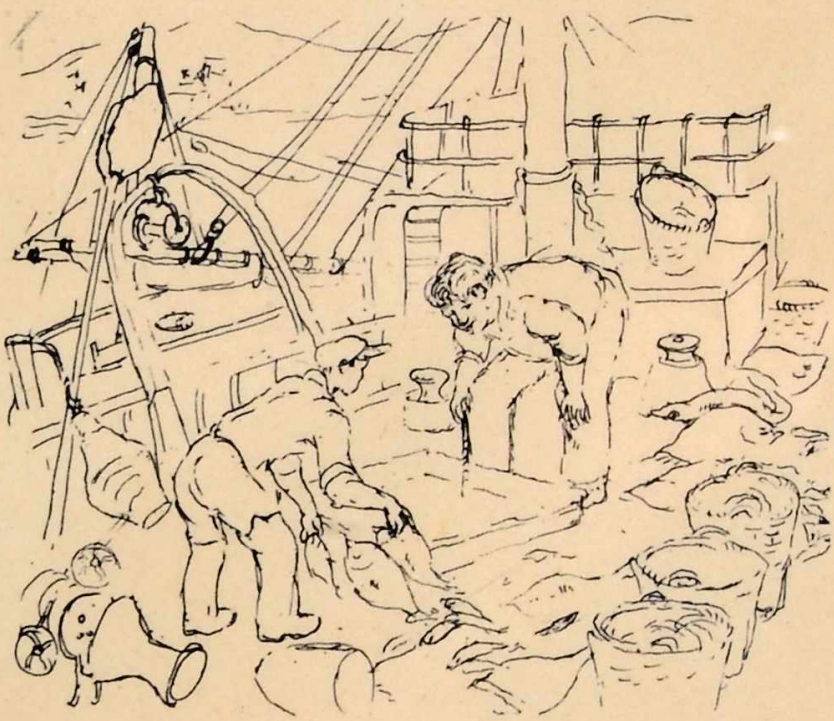
"It's no fish ye're buying. It's men's lives."
Sir Walter Scott

DURING the past forty years I have wandered round the coasts of Great Britain from the Shetlands to the Scillies and have got to know practically every port, large and small, where fishing is carried on. I have made trips with English and Scottish fishermen in almost every type of vessel. For a good many years I have made my home beside the harbour of one of the most prosperous fishing towns in the north-east of Scotland, living in the midst of fisher folk. My interest in fishermen has always been from the human aspect. So I have aimed at giving a word picture of the different types of fishermen and fishing centres, rather than an economic study of the fish trade.

By way of introduction I may as well state that the fishing industry in Great Britain gave direct employment to about 58,000 persons before the war. The industry itself falls into two main sections : (1) the catching of white fish by means of trawling ; and (2) the catching of herring by means of drift-nets. But there is the important sub-division known as inshore fishing, which covers the fishermen who catch both white fish and herrings, as well as species peculiar to inshore waters, such as salmon, lobsters, oysters, and other shell fish.

British sea fishermen have gone through some hard times in recent years and it is difficult to prophesy what is going to happen to them when times are normal once more. The majority have become little more than cog-wheels in a vast piece of industrial machinery whose efficient working depends on international politics as well as on the supply of home markets. Few fishermen, except in Scotland, now own their boats and gear. A fisherman's life is even more of a gamble than that of a farmer. He may be rich one day and poor the next. And this is as true of the deep-sea trawlerman in his big up-to-date vessel venturing far north into the Arctic Circle as of the inshore fisherman, who never goes more than a mile or two from the coast in a small open boat.

So we will follow the fishermen of Britain from the Shetlands in the far north, right round the coasts of England and back again to the Outer Hebrides. Most people have only the vaguest idea of how the fish they eat is caught, or of the lives of the men who catch it. Perhaps this little book will give them a better appreciation of the sea fishermen of Britain. This is why it has been written.

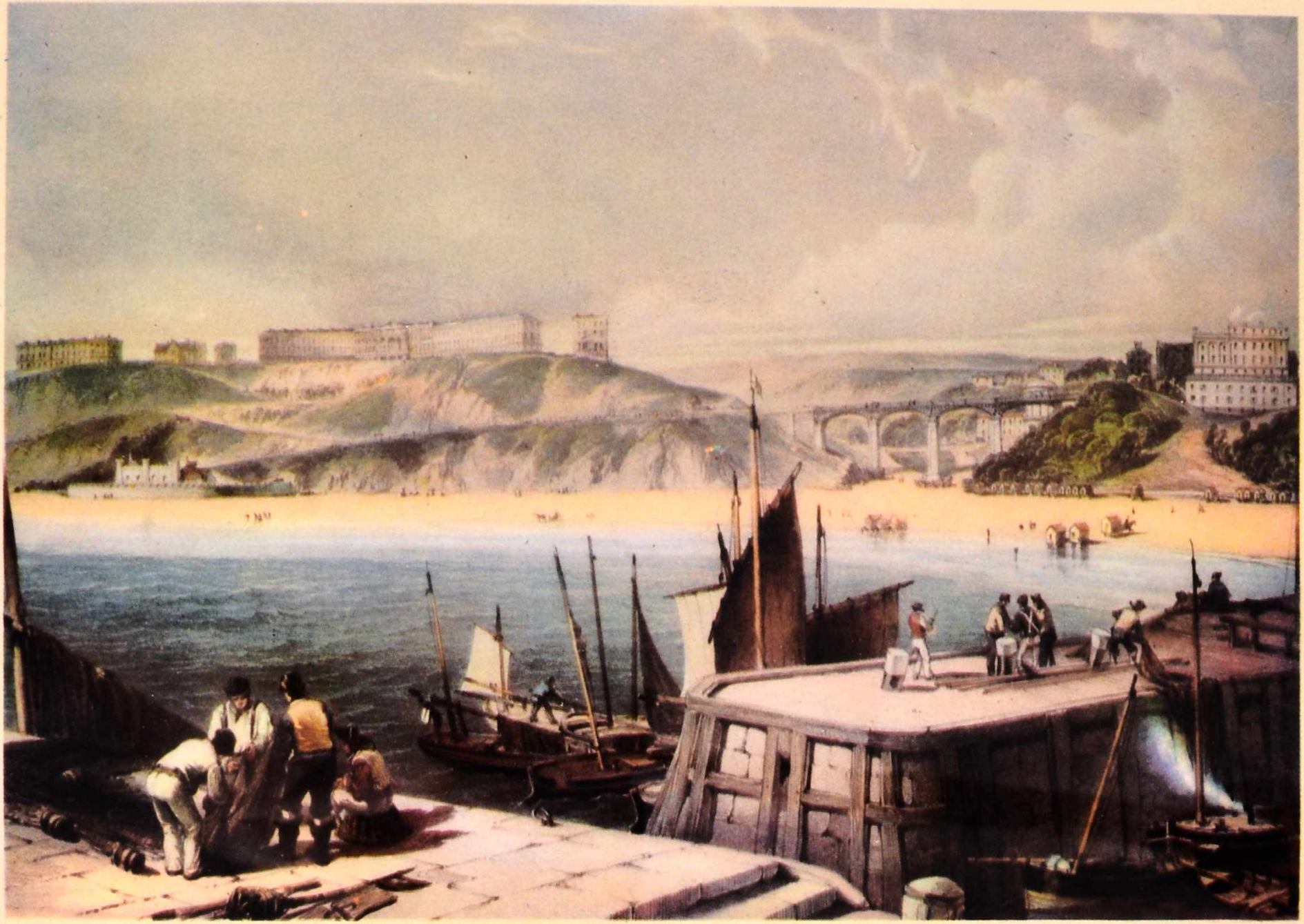


UNLOADING FISH
Pen drawing by Katerina Wilczynski, 1939

By gracious permission of H.M. The King

FISHERMEN PULLING IN THE NETS

Water colour by W. Callow, 1833



By courtesy of the Parker Gallery, London

SCARBOROUGH, YORKSHIRE, FROM THE EAST PIER
Coloured lithograph by G. Hawkins after W. Beverly, 1845

It would seem that the inhabitants of the Shetland Islands have always been fishermen. The sea is in their blood. It did not make much difference who were the rulers of Shetland—Vikings, Norsemen, Scotsmen or Englishmen.

On some of the more remote islands, such as Whalsay, of which I have the happiest memories, it is easy to form a picture of what the Shetland fisheries used to be like in olden times. Drawn up on the beach are some of those characteristic Shetland open boats, known as 'fourareens.' They have changed very little since the Norsemen first invaded these islands in the seventh century. If you were to put a dragon's head on the stem and a tail on the stern, you would transform a fourareen into a miniature Viking 'longship.' As late as the end of the eighteenth century the landed proprietors in Shetland were still bringing 'upset-boats' (as they were termed) from Norway in their own sloops. Lines, and other fishing gear were also imported from Norway or Hamburg, not forgetting the necessary 'watters,' for as one Shetland laird wrote to a friend about 1780: "my men canna go to sea without gin." These four-oared boats, as well as the larger ones, known as 'sixerns'—now obsolete—used a square sail. But the men did not depend on sail, and thought nothing of rowing twenty to forty miles to their fishing grounds. They were hardy fellows, those old-time Shetland fishers. They sat with bare feet among the fish, pulling away cheerfully at their square-loomed oars. All the stores they ever carried with them at sea consisted of a 'half anker,' filled with a drink called 'blaand,' made from butter milk, and a very thick oatcake, one for each man, and lastly a bottle of gin.

The deep-sea long-line fishing for cod, ling and tusk, carried on by these open boats was largely in the hands of German merchants from Hamburg, Bremen and Lubeck, until well on in the last century. The fish was salted and then left to dry on the beach before being put aboard vessels and shipped to the Continent. When the summer or 'haaf' fisheries came to an end, each station held a 'foy' or feast. On the night of August 15th there was much merry-making on the Skerries, North Yell, Unst, Burra Island, Dunrossness and many another centre of the 'haaf' fishing.

It was not until the early part of the nineteenth century that the Shetlanders themselves began to take an active part in the herring fisheries. Until then they had been the monopoly of the Dutch. For over two hundred years the natives had been content to catch just enough herring for bait and for home consumption. About 1820, boats from east coast ports in Scotland started to fish for herring off the Shetlands, and from then onwards Lerwick became more and more important as a centre of the export trade in cured herring. But the Dutchmen still came back, year after year, and you would have found four hundred or more 'hoogaars,'

A Map showing the Chief Fishing Ports and Harbours of Great Britain
Drawn by F. Nichols

'botters' and 'schuyts' anchored in Bressay Sound, off Lerwick, on a week-end in summer sixty years ago. So close together did this great cosmopolitan fleet lie, that it was possible to go from one side of the Sound to the other, stepping from ship to ship.

I remember my first impressions of Lerwick during the summer herring season about twenty years ago. Hundreds of steam drifters, either tied up to one of the many curing stations that extend round the north end of the harbour for nearly two miles; others lay across the water on the isle of Bressay. Motor lorries, laden with barrels of herring dashed along the roads. The streets were crowded, so too the numerous 'Rest Houses' and first-aid stations for the fish workers, male and female, supported by different religious denominations. On a windless night you would hear hymn singing—maybe Gaelic voices taking part in a prayer meeting, for Lerwick was also invaded by swarms of evangelists, as intent on saving souls as were the fish buyers and other persons on making their fortunes out of herring.

A Saturday night was the best time to view the town. Its narrow streets were crowded with fishermen from almost every port in Scotland. There were also Englishmen from Yarmouth and Lowestoft. You would knock up against fishermen from France, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Holland and even Iceland—a cosmopolitan crowd that it would have been hard to find in almost any other port in the world, at least of the small size of Lerwick. Mingling with these men were the soft voiced Gaelic-speaking lassies from the Hebrides, or Irish girls from Donegal. But it was not such a picturesque crowd as you would have found sixty or seventy years ago. The fisher-lassie, when dressed up on a Saturday night, had nothing to distinguish her from any other young lady of the same social class. Even the fishermen's best suits were ready-made, and not all of them retained the once universal blue jersey. The Dutchmen had long since discarded their petticoat trousers, canvas breeches, scarlet hose and wooden clogs, though they still puffed away at their big cigars.

Nobody can say what is to be the future of Lerwick when fishing is normal again. The herring seasons before the war had been disastrous to almost everyone concerned in the industry. White fish of all kinds can still be caught off these islands. Can it not be made more use of? Perhaps the Shetland fisheries could be reorganised on a cooperative basis as in the Scandinavian countries? If so, it might be possible for the crofter-fishermen to continue their traditional way of life, instead of being obliged to leave their island homes.

There is not much to say about Orcadian fishermen, for the islanders have usually been farmers who fish occasionally, instead of fishermen who farm—which sums up the typical Shetland crofters. Still, the Orkneys have produced bold seamen at all times. Stromness was long famous for its share in the whale fisheries off Greenland. Before the war Stronsay

was one of the chief herring curing stations, frequented by drifters from English as well as Scottish ports. Lobsters and crabs, caught from small motor boats, are perhaps the most profitable species of fish landed in these islands.

THE MORAY FIRTH

If you glance at a map, you will see how numerous are the fishing ports around the Moray Firth, especially on the south side. The most important are : Wick, Helmsdale, Avoch, Nairn, Lossiemouth, Buckie, Portknockie, Whitehills, Macduff and Fraserburgh. There is a certain affinity between all these fisher towns, though each possesses a marked individuality. Most of them grew up in the last century. Nearly all of them arose as the result of the sudden development of the herring fisheries after the Napoleonic wars. With but few exceptions they are still go-ahead and fairly prosperous. Their solid-looking stone-built houses suggest frugality and thrift. When the herring industry was at its peak about thirty years ago, the more well-to-do families built themselves opulent-looking mansions upon which no expense was spared. In their own way these fishermen's homes are interesting examples of domestic architecture. Their exteriors have elaborately carved quoins, lintels and finials, either in granite or freestone. Mahogany front doors are fairly common. The interior woodwork is usually varnished pitch-pine. In some houses there may be a stained glass window half way up the staircase, with the owner's steam-drifter depicted on the central panel. The sitting rooms are filled with the best furniture that money could purchase. The kitchen is immaculately clean and fitted with all the latest labour-saving gadgets, provided that the householder has been able to hold his own in the herring fishing in recent years. Upstairs, in addition to several bedrooms, is a spacious loft for storing nets and gear. Here the nets are mended when the drifters are laid up.

Very different are the older type of fishermen's houses of which a good many still remain in the smaller towns and villages. Here you will find the 'bun-in' bed in almost every kitchen—rather like a roomy bunk on board ship. These older houses are low and long, usually of one story, with a loft running the whole length, used for storing fishing gear. The architects responsible for most of the new houses in these Moray Firth towns, erected in recent years to replace those which have been condemned as insanitary but often with little or no apparent reason, have invariably ignored the functional requirements of a fisherman's home. The fisherman may or may not care to have a garden, but as he still owns much of his own gear, he wants a place in which to store it and where he can mend nets.

From 1813, when curing yards were opened at Helmsdale, followed soon afterwards by most of the other Moray Firth ports, the export herring

YORKSHIRE FISHERMEN, c. 1814
Coloured aquatint engraved by R. & D. Havell after G. Walter

trade developed by leaps and bounds. It reached the peak of its prosperity between 1900 and 1910. After the last war the industry began to decline. Foreign markets were lost. Prices fell. There was an alarming drop in the number of men and women employed, together with a rapid deterioration in both vessels and fishing gear. No district was so hard hit as Buckie —which includes the populous villages of Portgordon, Portessie, Findochty and Portknockie, whose inhabitants were mostly associated with the herring fisheries either directly or indirectly. The fishermen suffered all the more because they were still the owners, or at least the nominal owners of their drifters and nets. The English system of company ownership had never taken root in Scotland. In the main each herring drifter stood by itself, and there was no pooling of results, and no possibility of a loss on one boat being balanced by the success of others, as in the case of a company owning a number of vessels. This was mitigated to some extent by the fact that a small number of individuals, mostly persons on shore, had a share in several boats.

So you can picture the two hundred or more steam drifters that belonged to the Moray Firth ports before the war, each vessel more or less independent, with a complement of nine or ten men, most of whom were usually members of the same family or related to each other. On some

drifters one or two hired-men were carried. The firemen, engineer and cook were paid wages ; the rest of the crew receiving certain shares in the earnings of the vessel. These drifters were engaged in fishing at different seasons of the year, either on the west coast of Scotland, the Shetlands, in home waters, or along the east coast of England as far south as Yarmouth and Lowestoft. The crews were often away from home for about six months in the year, sometimes longer.

About twenty-five years ago, when the herring industry was still prosperous and money was still easy to make, the larger harbours on the Moray Firth coast, such as Wick, Lossiemouth, Buckie, Macduff and Fraserburgh, provided me with subjects for many a picture. Just before the summer season started I loved to watch the men daubing on more and yet more paint to funnels, buoys, capstans, ventilator cowls, or picking out with gold leaf some tiny detail of the lettering on the bows. The Buckie fishermen often adorned the funnels of their steam drifters with elaborately painted shields, depicting a landscape or heraldic device. The Moray Firth folk—more perhaps than any other class of fishermen in Britain—have a passion for colour, but nowadays they have less chance to express it. Paint is not so easy to buy, and the motor-boats, which have replaced steam-drifters in many ports do not lend themselves so readily to decorative colour schemes. At the time of writing not more than four hundred Scottish drifters remain out of the nine hundred twenty years ago, more than half of which belonged to the Moray Firth.

But it must not be supposed that the fishing industry around this arm of the North Sea is dead. At Helmsdale, Lossiemouth, Whitehills, Macduff and Fraserburgh, seine-net fishing is carried on practically all the year round by family-owned vessels. The Danish seine-net was first used in this country about 1921 and in many districts has now superseded trawl-nets. You will find these sturdy motor boats putting out to sea every day unless there is a gale blowing. They are back again in harbour after six or more hours so as to catch the market. The fish is landed at once and sent off to Aberdeen or Glasgow by road or rail. In some places the fishermen have made fantastic profits since the war. Even lads who have only left school a year or two can earn £10 to £20 a week. Their fathers and uncles do not feel it has been a good week's fishing unless they have exceeded £20. Before the war many of them were on the dole. What will happen later on ? It is likely that if the present intensive seine-net fishing goes on unchecked, with no close seasons, the Moray Firth will be exhausted of its apparently unlimited stock of haddock, whiting, plaice, sole, and other 'high-quality' white fish. About twenty years ago the fishermen used to protest that foreign trawlers were ruining their fishing. To-day they are their own enemies.

You can find vivid pictures of the old way of living among the fishermen of the Moray Firth in some of Neil M. Gunn's novels. His *Grey Coast*,

Morning Tide and *Silver Darlings* deal with the fisher families on the coast of Caithness—on the north side of the Firth—where conditions are still much more primitive and backward than on the south side.

The women and girls no longer take the same share in the actual work connected with the fishing as they used to do. Not many of them know how to bait lines, although some can still mend nets. Until the war it was still customary for girls from the Moray Firth, as from other ports on the east coast of Scotland, to spend the greater part of the summer and autumn away from home, engaged in the dirty and laborious job of curing herring. In June and July a big proportion of the lassies were in Lerwick or Stronsay. Later on they would move to Fraserburgh or elsewhere on the east coast of Scotland, ending up at Yarmouth or Lowestoft in the autumn. There are not many fish-wives left to-day, and it is becoming more and more rare to see them tramping along the country roads with heavy creels on their backs, or carrying equally heavy baskets of fish.

A Newhaven Fishwife, 1883

Look on a large-scale map and you will find from Kinnaird's Head to the mouth of the Tay there are fishing villages within a few miles of each other. Many are now derelict, others are far from prosperous and in only a few is inshore-fishing of any commercial value. The fishing *industry* has become concentrated in three towns : Peterhead, Aberdeen and Arbroath.

Until about 1820, Peterhead was famous for its whaling ships rather than for ordinary fishing boats. But once herring curing had been started this red granite built town became a serious rival to its northerly neighbour Fraserburgh, and so it still remains to-day—a busy, go-ahead port.

A stranger visiting the great fish market at Aberdeen might suppose that fishing had always been an important industry here. Any day can be found a great fleet of steam trawlers unloading their catches, and many more of these grimy, rusty, much the worse-for-wear looking ships will be noticed at their berths. But it is little more than fifty years ago since the first fish market was erected in Aberdeen and only sixty years ago that trawling was started in this port. An early nineteenth century historian tells us that in his time most of the fish eaten in Aberdeen was brought in from neighbouring villages, and that there were only a few small open boats fishing here. To-day Aberdeen supplies fish to the greater part of Scotland and also sends large quantities to England. Trawling for white fish was almost unknown in Scotland before it was started at Aberdeen in 1882. Even to-day the only other ports in Scotland where this method of fishing is carried on are Leith, Granton and Dundee. Aberdeen now ranks next to Hull and Grimsby, both in the total amount and value of the catches. Its trawlers include 'long trippers' which mostly work off Iceland, the Faröes, Orkneys and Shetlands, or off the north-west coast of Scotland ; and 'scratchers,' which fish round the east coast. Very few Aberdeen trawlers can compare with the large up-to-date vessels found at Hull and Grimsby. The majority are old and almost obsolete. Some are only fit for the scrap-heap. For some years before the war considerable anxiety was being felt about the future of the fish trade in the only big trawling port in Scotland, which, so far as its catching power was standing still and it began to look as if Aberdeen would decline and be unable to compete with ports in England and Wales. In Aberdeen, trawlers, skippers and mates are paid a share of the nett earnings. The deck and engine-room ratings are paid weekly wages, supplemented by a share of the nett earnings should these exceed a recognised amount, together with certain perquisites. The crews pay for their food at a standard rate. In some respects there is a different 'atmosphere' in most Scottish trawlers from that in some of the English vessels. This is due to the survival of the 'family spirit' which has persisted in the trawling industry as well as in every other

View of Berwick from the Carr Rock
Engraving by R. Scott after A. Carse, 1799

branch of the Scottish fisheries. Although the vessels are owned by companies, the crews are often natives of the same district or port. Some of the men may have been forced to abandon inshore or herring fishing for the sake of a living wage. This was not uncommon before the war. Most of the fisher families live in granite-built tenement houses at Torry on the south side of the river Dee. The men have a hard life, and it is not to be wondered at that some of them are hard drinkers, when they are ashore. Such an existence may require a strong stimulant to make a man forget wearisome, monotonous weeks afloat !

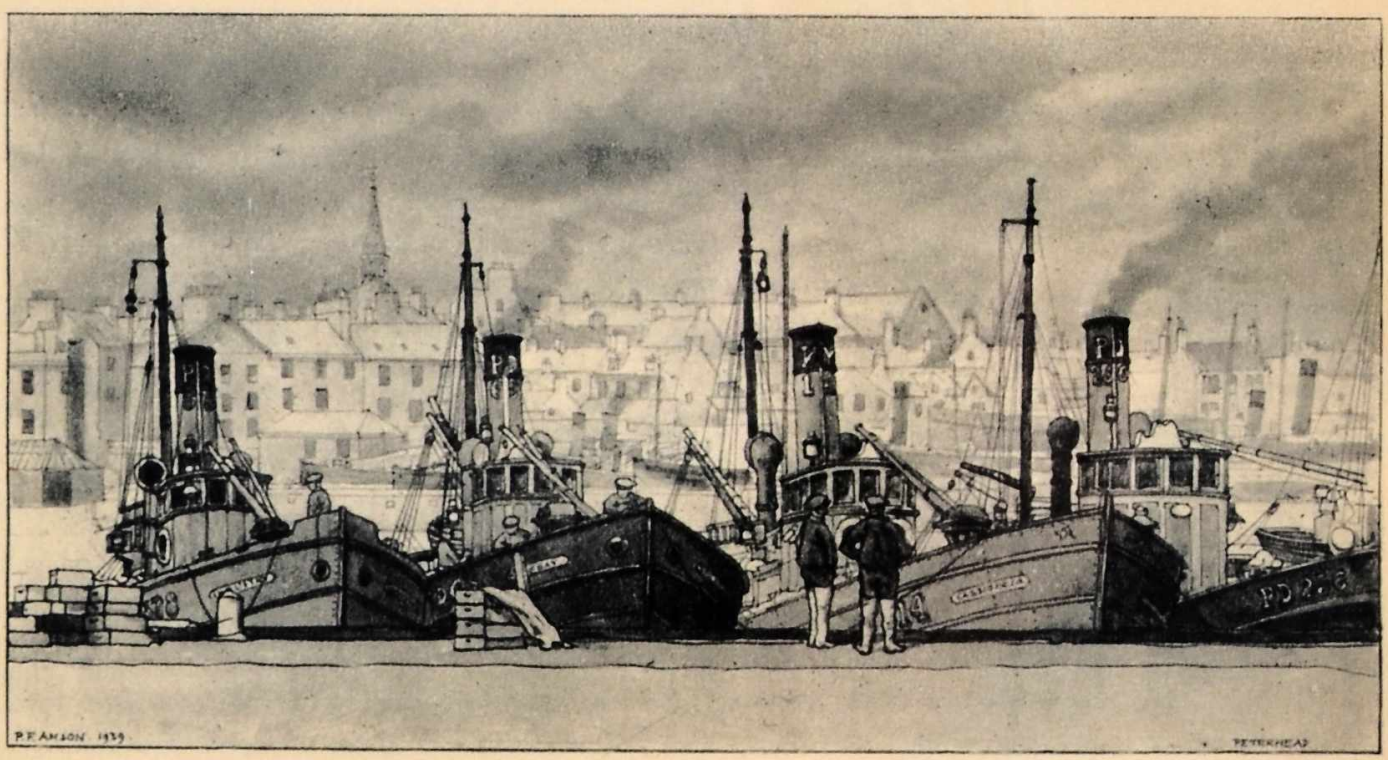
In one sense these men are aristocrats compared with the trawler crews in England, for they specialise in a high *quality* of fish. But in the long run it sometimes happens that quality does not pay so well as quantity. There is always a smaller demand for luxury goods than for mass-produced articles, and this is why Aberdeen has never been able to compete with English ports like Hull and Grimsby which have grown rich on the coarser species of fish.

The fishing villages on the eastern part of the coast of Fife—Crail, Anstruther, Pittenweem and St. Monans—are still fairly prosperous ports and are full of quaint and picturesque corners.

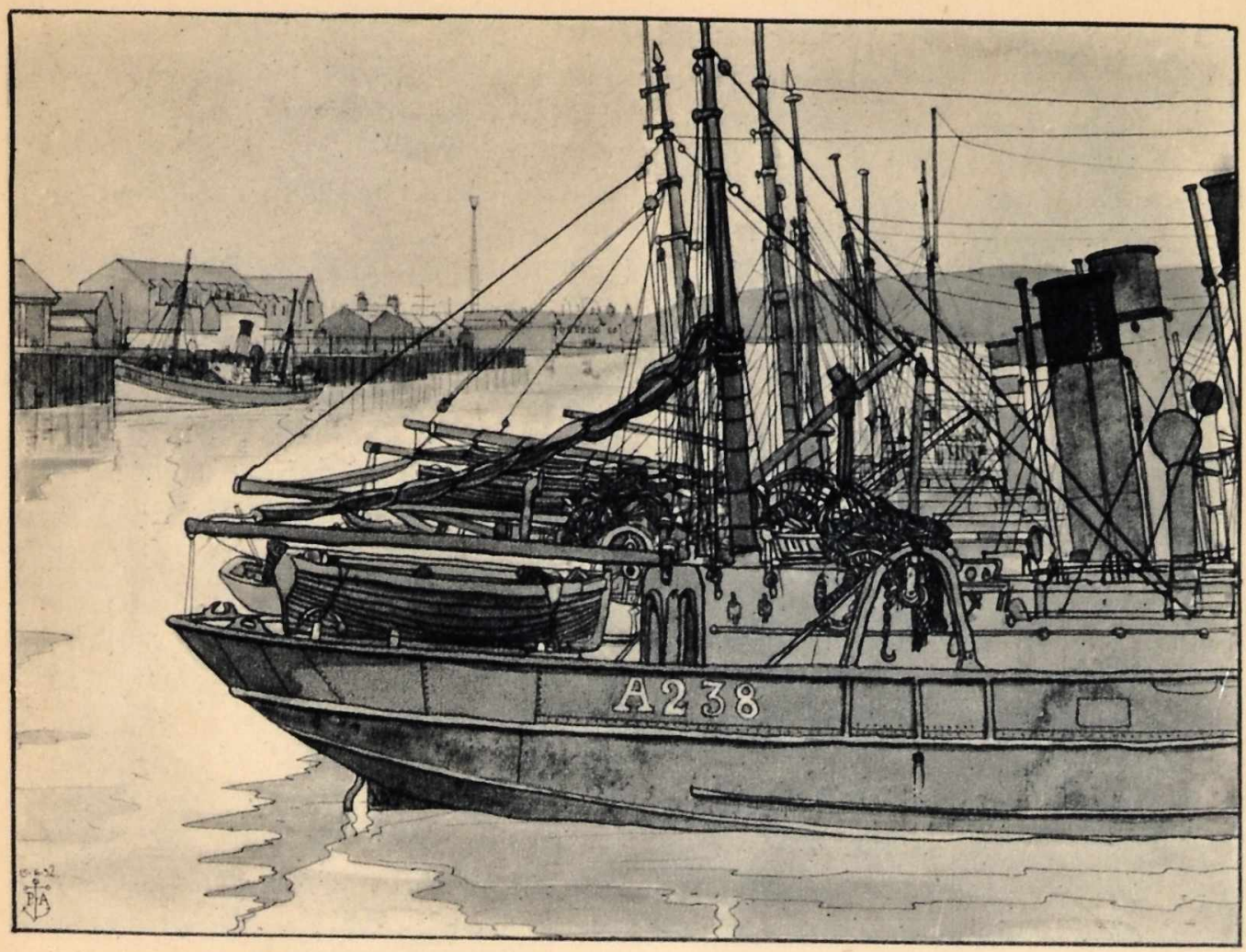
Seine-net fishing is carried on and at certain seasons of the year herring fishing with drift-nets is a source of profit. All these Fife ports have a

long history, and one could write much about them. Times have changed, so too the manners and customs of the fisher folk. Most of them are comfortably off and they would not care to go back to one of those typical fishermen's homes that were common a century ago . . . a long, narrow smoke-grimed cot, with rough and unplastered walls. The floor of the living room was just the bare earth. One or two little windows, filled with coarse green glass, did not provide much in the way of light. A big double-bed lay hidden away in a dark recess. A wooden press, a table, and a corner shelf, on which were displayed an array of dishes and ornaments brought home by seafaring sons and husbands, completed the scanty furniture. Outside, rough tarred sheds provided storing room for nets, lines and other fishing gear.

Buckhaven—at one time a very busy fishing port—is now completely derelict; coal mining has killed fishing all along the southern coast of Fife. Crossing the Forth we come to Granton—to-day a suburb of Edinburgh, with a big harbour and a small fleet of steam trawlers. Half way between Granton and Leith is Newhaven, an ancient port, and known originally as 'Our Lady's Port of Grace.' There is a tradition that the first fisher families to settle here came from Flanders. A Society of Free Fishermen was established in Newhaven at the end of the sixteenth century. When George IV visited Edinburgh he is said to have declared that the Newhaven fishwives were the handsomest women he had ever seen. On special occasions the fish-wifies still like to don the traditional costume in which a century ago they walked the streets of Edinburgh. A clean white



STEAM DRIFTERS AT PETERHEAD, 1939
Water colour by Peter F. Anson



STEAM TRAWLERS AT ABERDEEN, 1932
Water colour by Peter F. Anson

'mutch' or handkerchief tied round the head, stout navy-blue bodice and skirt, the latter kilted up, showing striped blue and white petticoat, with black shoes and stockings. A shawl is crossed over the bodice, the sleeves being tucked up as far as the elbows. When the Newhaven fish-wives wore these elaborate costumes while engaged in selling fish, they put on a serge coat to save the bodice from the drippings of the heavy creel of fish hung from the shoulders by a strap.

Newhaven to-day is merely part of Leith. Not many of the old fishermen's houses are left ; no longer is it fashionable to go there and have a fish dinner at the inn as Edinburgh folk liked to do until as late as the end of the last century. Sixty years ago you could still come across the narrow closes, with their outside stairs hung with the 'tools' of the fisherman's trade—his lines, nets, oilskins, sea boots and dozens of pairs of long blue stockings. On the stairs, in fine weather, would be the wife and daughters, mending nets and baiting lines—gossiping, of course, with neighbours across the close, who would be engaged in similar occupations. Down by the shore would be the fishermen, pottering around their small open

boats ; the older men dressed in their canvas trousers and sleeved waistcoats, smoking short clay pipes. Nowadays you find some very smart motor vessels in the little harbour, for inshore fishing is still carried on here. From the commercial point of view Granton and Leith are more important ; both having fleets of steam trawlers that provided work for about six hundred men before the war.

To the east of Edinburgh lie the Fisherrow (now part of Musselburgh), Cockenzie and Port Seton. Each has its fisher community, but the number of boats and men is declining. Dunbar—once ranking among the leading fishing ports on the east coast and described in 1784 as the "Yarmouth of Scotland" because its herring curing was so prosperous—has become a popular holiday resort. Eyemouth shows signs of becoming its rival, though it could still find employment for between two and three hundred fishermen before the war. Herring was landed by a dozen or more steam-drifters during the season, and some forty motor boats carried on inshore fishing. Travellers on the L.N.E.R. may recall the glimpse of Burnhaven as the 'Flying Scotsman' rushes past the station—a romantically situated village at the foot of steep cliffs, with a cosy little harbour.

Before crossing into England, let me sum up the position of fishermen in Scotland before the war—especially those who are engaged in the herring and inshore fisheries. First of all there was the alarming decline in personnel. About 18,000 fishermen were left out of the 33,000 in 1913 —a drop of 15,000 in twenty years. The situation was, and still remains, serious because what is at stake is not so much the carrying on or abandonment of a particular industry, but the continued existence of a race of men who by their character of independence and hardihood have made a special contribution to Scottish national life. As I shall point out later, English fishermen also have their difficulties and hardships, but for good or ill, the English fishing industry has developed along the lines of limited company ownership commanding large capital resources. The Scottish fisherman has remained an individualist. He has the defects of this quality. Yet it is just because of his individualism that we can ill afford to lose him. Is the only alternative open to Scots fishermen to follow the example of the English and go in for more widespread adoption of company control and ownership ? Or is it possible to find remedies which will give him a chance to earn a reasonable living and yet at the same time preserve his independence ?

NORTH-EAST COAST OF ENGLAND

Between Berwick and North Shields there are still about four hundred inshore fishermen who manage to earn a fairly good living by means of lines, crabbing and salmon netting. Seahouses is the most important

HARBOUR AT SCARBOROUGH
Water colour by Ernest Dade, 1865-1935

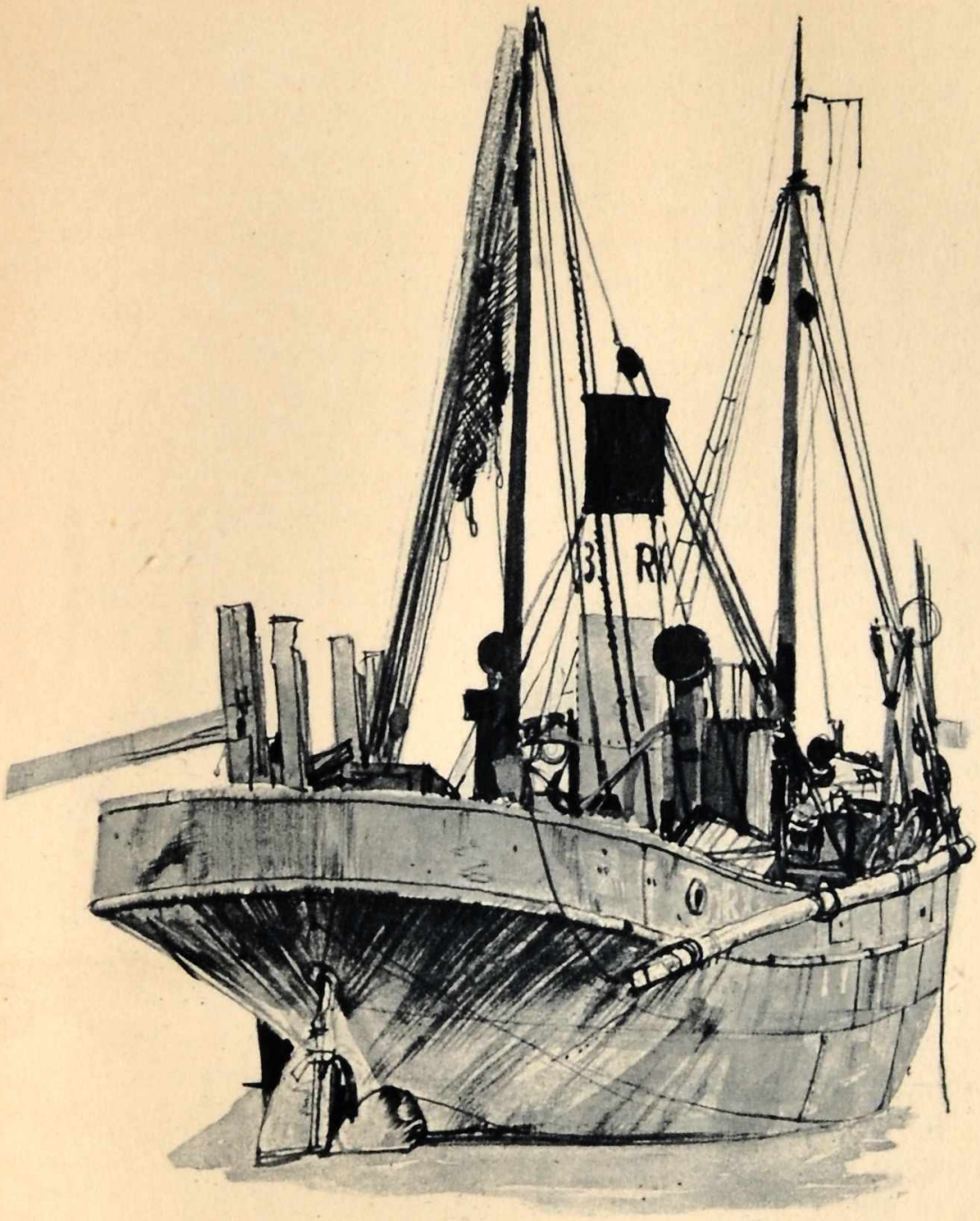
centre ; all the other twelve stations on the Northumberland coast having declined in the past fifty years or more. A century ago Cullercoats was inhabited almost entirely by fishermen. More recently Cullercoats found it more profitable to cater for visitors, and in many of the other villages the fishermen became miners. North Shields, once a prosperous centre of inshore fishing, is now a major station, frequented mainly by steam trawlers and drifters.

Very little inshore fishing is now carried on between the Tyne and the Tees ; what is left being concentrated in Sunderland and Hartlepool, the latter being the more important. On the Yorkshire coast Whitby, Scarborough and Bridlington still rank as major stations, although all of them have declined in the past fifty years. In 1904 Mr. F. G. Aflalo wrote that "Scarborough combines in an unusual degree the qualifications of a thriving fishing centre and a fashionable watering place." But as in so many other seaside towns in England where there had been competition between commercial fisheries and catering for visitors, the latter won the battle, so that inshore fishing, as well as trawling and herring fishing, has greatly declined. The same may be said of Whitby and Bridlington. None of these three ports could hold their own with either Hartlepool or Hull with their docks and transport facilities.

Trawler fishermen are largely concentrated in ten ports of England and Wales ; the most important of these being, Hull, Grimsby, Fleetwood and Milford Haven. Before the war these four ports used to handle about 85 per cent of the total quantity of white fish landed in the country. Cod, haddock, hake and plaice were the most important species of fish. Other varieties included skate, halibut, sole, lemon sole, turbot and whiting. The steam trawling industry gave employment to about 17,000 whole-time fishermen in England and Wales. The total number of vessels was about 1,600. They fished on grounds that extended from the Barents Sea and Bear Island in the far north to Morocco in the south, including most of the sea up to a depth of 250 fathoms on the west of Europe, also more remote waters off Greenland. But the greater proportion of white fish landed by steam trawlers came from the North Sea, where haddock, cod, whiting and plaice abound on the Dogger Bank. From Bear Island and Spitzbergen came large supplies of coarse cod, always in great demand in the fish and chip shops.

The reason for the concentration of fishing in a few large ports is due to the fact that steam trawling needs adequate dock and market accommodation, and above all transport facilities. It is a very highly organised industry, at least on the owner's side. Owners of steam trawlers at each port are grouped in local associations and linked up by means of the British Trawler Owners' Federation. Most trawling companies operate at one port where all their vessels land the fish. A few work from several ports. Hull is the chief port for long distance voyages (Iceland, Bear Island, etc.); Grimsby can claim to be principal from the point of view of values. It is also the chief port of landings from the North Sea. Fleetwood, Milford Haven and Swansea concentrate on hake fisheries. Lowestoft is a port where both old and new methods of fishing are found side by side.

Group ownership of vessels is a characteristic feature of the trawling industry. There are undoubted advantages in group ownership from the money making point of view. Coal and other supplies can be bought more cheaply ; management is easier, and equipment can be standardised. The sailings of trawlers can be regulated by the owners. In other words it has all the advantages of any other form of 'big business.' On the other hand it tends to destroy individuality. Fishermen become parts of a vast machine. Only a few have the chance of becoming responsible workmen or in any way owners of either vessels or gear. The crews of English and Welsh steam trawlers are paid on the following basis. Skippers and mates receive a share in the nett earnings, supplemented in some places by a bonus on earnings, and by certain 'perquisites.' The remainder of the crew generally receive a weekly wage. Except in the case of the 'spare-



TRAWLER, RYE HARBOUR
Water colour by Rowland Hilder

hands,' this is usually supplemented by a share in the nett earnings known as 'poundage,' also by perquisites.

As to the vessels in which these crews serve, they range from the last word in modernity and convenience to ships which ought to have been scrapped long ago. On the Arctic trawlers sailing from Hull there are bathrooms, steam heating, up-to-date wireless sets and direction finding apparatus, not to mention the best of food and comfortable accommodation. But there are many North Sea trawlers which are over thirty years old, some even more ancient and unseaworthy.

It was not until about 1844 that Hull began to develop as a trawling port when a few smacks from Brixham started to land their catches here. Before that date they had usually frequented Scarborough when working on North Sea grounds. The discovery of the famous Silver Pits off the Dogger Bank in 1850 led to many more west of England smacks making for the North Sea. Hull offered better transport facilities than other ports. By 1855 fisherfolk from Brixham had begun to migrate to Yorkshire and Hull became their permanent home. By 1880 the number of smacks working out of Hull had increased to over four hundred. Two fleets of sailing trawlers were formed, each with its own steam carriers to bring the fish to market. But owing to a lack of initiative on the part of the North Eastern Railway little was done to encourage fishermen to land their catches here, and a large proportion of the fish was sent direct to London by sea. Moreover there was no adequate dock accommodation for fishing vessels, the available space being hopelessly congested. It was not until 1882 that St. Andrew's Dock was opened for trawlers. Had the railway company supported the fish trade in the first instance there is no doubt that Hull would have far exceeded Grimsby as a fishing centre.

The first steam trawler made her appearance at Hull in 1884. Twelve years later there were about two hundred steam trawlers as compared with one hundred and sixty smacks. By the close of the century the picturesque brown-sailed smacks had disappeared from Hull. New fishing grounds began to be exploited. Trawlers began to work off the Faröes and Iceland about 1889. Then they went south as far as Spain. Northwards—still further—to Bear Island and even more distant grounds in the Arctic Circle. 'High altitude' fishing became the chief characteristic of Hull, as well as its mainstay, for after 1936 very few trawlers remained fishing on the North Sea. Hull has forged ahead almost entirely through the opening out of these far distant trawling grounds.

They have been the chief source for the supply of coarser fish needed by the fish and chip shops. Few people realise how much the fishermen of Britain now depend on these shops. Hull would certainly be the poorer without them.

Millions of pounds were spent on building new vessels in the years before the war. Factories for the manufacture of cod-liver oil and other subsidiary fish products were erected. In 1939 the Hull trawling fleet numbered some three hundred vessels. Enormous profits enabled the owners to replace old trawlers after a much shorter period than in other ports. So the result was that about half the fleet was less than ten years old. Nearly every vessel had been specially designed for fishing in northern waters. When sketching at St. Andrew's Dock, I noticed how the shape and size of the trawlers had changed from the older vessels which I had drawn elsewhere. These new ships were built to obtain high speed—essential for the rapid delivery of large quantities of fish caught on distant

By courtesy of Miss H. D. Copsey

'FIFIE' AND 'SCAFFIE' FISHING BOATS IN A SCOTTISH PORT
Water colour by H. M. Marshall, 1884

By courtesy of the Artist

MACDUFF HARBOUR, BANFFSHIRE
Water colour by Peter F. Anson

grounds. Their usual trip in peace time was from twenty-one to twenty-four days. Such trips might realise anything between £1500 and £3000, according to the state of the market. The Bear Island and Barents Sea trawlers made from thirteen to fifteen voyages a year. Iceland still provided the bulk of the catches.

In no other port in Britain was the industry so highly organised as in Hull. The Fishing Vessel Owners Association was a powerful body which regulated the interests of the trade. It administered a Widows' and Orphans' Fund, controlled the Ice Factory and the Fish Meal and Glue works. Even the fishermen's clothing stores were mainly financed by this Association. An Insurance Company possessed its own medical service, responsible for the standard of physical fitness of both fishermen and shore workers, also for the medical equipment carried on each vessel. There was a Trawler Officers Guild—the first of its kind, formed to protect the interests of skippers and mates. Before the war it was estimated that there were 4,000 fishermen based on this port, together with about 50,000 shore workers engaged in the fishing industry and allied undertakings. The war has greatly curtailed the activities of Hull ; the number of trawlers has been much reduced. Many are on Admiralty service as auxiliary Naval craft ; some have been sunk by mines or submarines.

It cannot be stressed too strongly how utterly different are the conditions of life on a modern deep-sea trawler working on distant grounds from the more familiar life of the typical inshore fisherman round our coasts. But as the majority of British sea fishermen are now engaged in this job, it is important to know something about it. The difference is not only physical but moral. The life of a skipper on one of the big Hull trawlers is one of constant nervous strain. It is not to be wondered at that practically all these skippers before the war were young men, most of them in their thirties. Their life has been vividly described by Lieut. W. B. Luard in an article which appeared some years ago in *Blackwood's Magazine*. He tells us that, "it is a life of constant and never ending tension. Downright toil. Three weeks, four weeks out ; thirty-six hours in, and work the calendar round, with the exception of a fortnight's rest and refit each year. Iceland, Bear Island, White Sea, North Sea and Faröes—blow high, blow low. Full steam ahead for fishing grounds.

"Such is the life of a twentieth century fisherman on one of the big deep-sea Hull trawlers. You start at the bottom as a 'decky-learner,' shovelling offal and heaving baskets of reeking livers into slimy casks. A year of this, then promotion, four years more as a deck-hand, bo'sun and mate, and then with hard work, combining patience with persistence, seamanship with cunning, hazard with skill, you may become a skipper. With luck you have made your pile at thirty-five and can then retire. On the other hand you may be unlucky, and then ? Well ! There's not much else in store for you."

There has long been a fierce rivalry between Hull and Grimsby. They are near neighbours, facing each other across the Humber. Hull may land the biggest quantity of fish, but Grimsby is still the first port for value. So it looks down on Hull as slightly vulgar and upstart, though casting envious glances across the river from time to time. Modern Grimsby is a huge straggling town, built on a never-ending marshy plain. It appears to consist mostly of interminable streets of two-storied red brick houses. The 'Metropolis of the Fishing Industry' is the direct antithesis of the 'quaint old-world fishing village' beloved of amateur artists. Its ancient history lies outside the scope of this book. The birth of modern Grimsby took place when the old Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway was opened. Its directors were far sighted men, when they decided to make Grimsby the terminus. They visualised the development of the port as a fishing centre and offered special facilities to the owners of vessels and the transport of catches. They even sent agents to the chief trawling ports, pointing out how advantageous it would be to transfer the vessels to Grimsby. But only one responded to the invitation—Mr. Howard of Manningtree in Essex, who agreed to send six of his smacks to this new fishing centre. By 1863 the total number of smacks working from Grimsby had risen to over a hundred. Ten years later there was a great fleet of more than five hundred brown-sailed trawlers, cod-smacks and other smaller craft. Hull gave Grimsby some of its finest pioneer fishermen. Barking provided others, and many families from Greenwich, Ramsgate and Brixham moved to the town. Thus the present day fisher community of Grimsby is largely made up of the descendants of these families from other parts of England. Very few are of pure Lincolnshire stock. Grimsby is definitely a cosmopolitan port. To-day Danish blood has been added to this already mixed breed, for after the last war a number of fishermen from across the North Sea settled here.

By 1870 a new method of fishing was started—'bulk fleeting'—by which thirty or more smacks joined together and pooled their catch. The fish was put aboard one vessel every day, and when sufficient had been caught, she would sail back to port as quickly as possible ; the fish being packed in ice. The fleeting system continued to be the normal method of fishing at Grimsby until some years after the arrival of the first steam trawlers about 1880.

The big ketch-rigged trawlers that were common about sixty years ago (there is a fine model of one of them in the Science Museum, South Kensington), seldom carried more than five hands, including several boys, whose ages ranged from twelve to seventeen. The greater part of the personnel of the Grimsby fleet during the second half of the last century was built up on the apprenticeship system, which did not finally come to an end until some thirty years ago. Most of those apprentices had been brought up in orphanages and reformatory schools. Only a small proportion

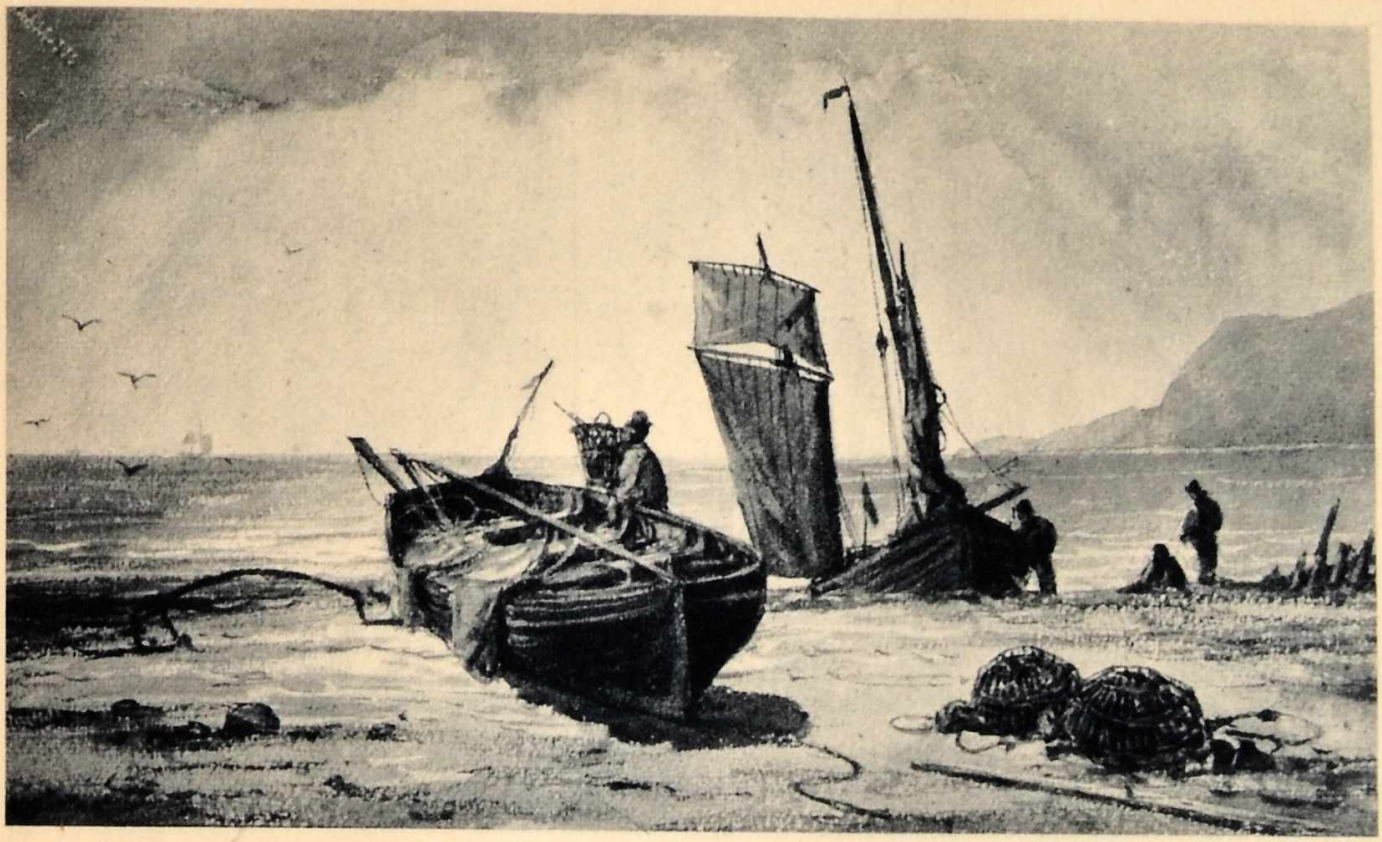
HULL
Engraving by Finden after G. Balmer, 1839

were natives of the town. The system produced splendid fishermen, but the evils were many. The boys were often brutally treated. There was little or no supervision or discipline, and a large number of apprentices ran away from sea, and if caught, were sent to prison. By 1894 the situation had become so serious that a Government Report was issued after an investigation had been made into the workings of the system.

When one considers the hardships endured by these lads, the long hours spent in gutting and packing fish in all weathers, it is amazing that most of them appear to have survived. Olsen's *Fishermen's Seamanship*, published in 1880, tells us what was expected from these young apprentices. The 'fifth hand,' as the youngest of them was sometimes called, had to cook meals, take care of the cabin and store room where the provisions were kept. He had to learn to steer by the compass, for it was one of his duties to take the helm when the trawl was being shot. He had to learn how to make and mend nets ; to take care of the reefing gear ; to coil away the trawl-warp when the net was being hauled up. With the help of the 'deck-hand' he had to prepare the lights and flares in use ; to see that they were in their proper places, and not to forget to look after the pump gear and fog signals. It could not have been easy for a boy to master all these duties, especially when, as was generally the case, he had never been to sea before.

Grimsby has gone through many ups and downs during the course of the past hundred years. In 1901 the port experienced a lock-out which lasted for several months, and which ended up with rioting, looting and the destruction of property. Never before or since has the British fishing industry been faced with such a crisis. To-day the fish docks cover an area of more than 140 acres. Before the war Grimsby had a fleet of some five hundred vessels. They did not confine their workings to the North Sea. Some ventured as far off as the Faröes, Norway, Iceland and Bear Island. Taken as a whole, it was not such a modern fleet as Hull could show. There was many a dilapidated trawler that ought to have been off the seas long ago. But others were the last word in comfort and practical convenience. On shore there were ice factories and vast stores where everything needed by fishermen and fishing vessels could be bought. There were large curing houses too and many another evidence of subsidiary piscatorial industries being carried on.

Many a time have I gone down to the pier head at high water and sketched the trawlers and long-liners arriving from sea. They were formed into sections, each of ten vessels. Their entry into the docks was regulated in a most orderly manner. When these often rusty, battered ships had entered the lock-gates, they took up their allotted berths at the Fish Market. Here were gathered those shore workers called 'lumpers,' about a thousand of whom found employment in Grimsby in peace time. As soon as the cargo was discharged, the fish-room was washed down and the fittings replaced in position. The vessels then took on coal and ice. Deck and engine-room stores were put on board, and once more they were ready to put off to sea again. It was seldom that their crews ever got more than twenty-four hours rest between trips. In the years immediately before the war between 6,000 and 7,000 fishermen could be found in Grimsby, serving in about 450 steam trawlers and 20 steam liners. A small proportion of them made up the crews of seine-net vessels and motor boats. Practically all the trawlers belonged to companies, of which there were about eighty in the port, one of them owning a fleet of a hundred vessels.



Coast Scene with Fishing Boats and Lobster Pots
Water colour by Richard Nibbs, c. 1816-1893

LINCOLNSHIRE AND NORFOLK

The inshore fisheries on the coast of Lincolnshire are of little commercial importance these days, though at one time Boston had a big fleet of boats. The same may be said of Norfolk, except for Kings Lynn, Sheringham and Cromer. Lynn, and some of the neighbouring villages, still do a profitable business with shrimps and shell fish. Sheringham and Cromer fishermen specialise in crabs and lobsters. Elsewhere, catering for summer visitors is usually found to pay better than catching fish, but a certain amount of crabbing, shrimping and line fishing is done in some places on the Norfolk coast. The majority of the fishermen found it more remunerative to work in Yarmouth herring drifters during the years before the war.

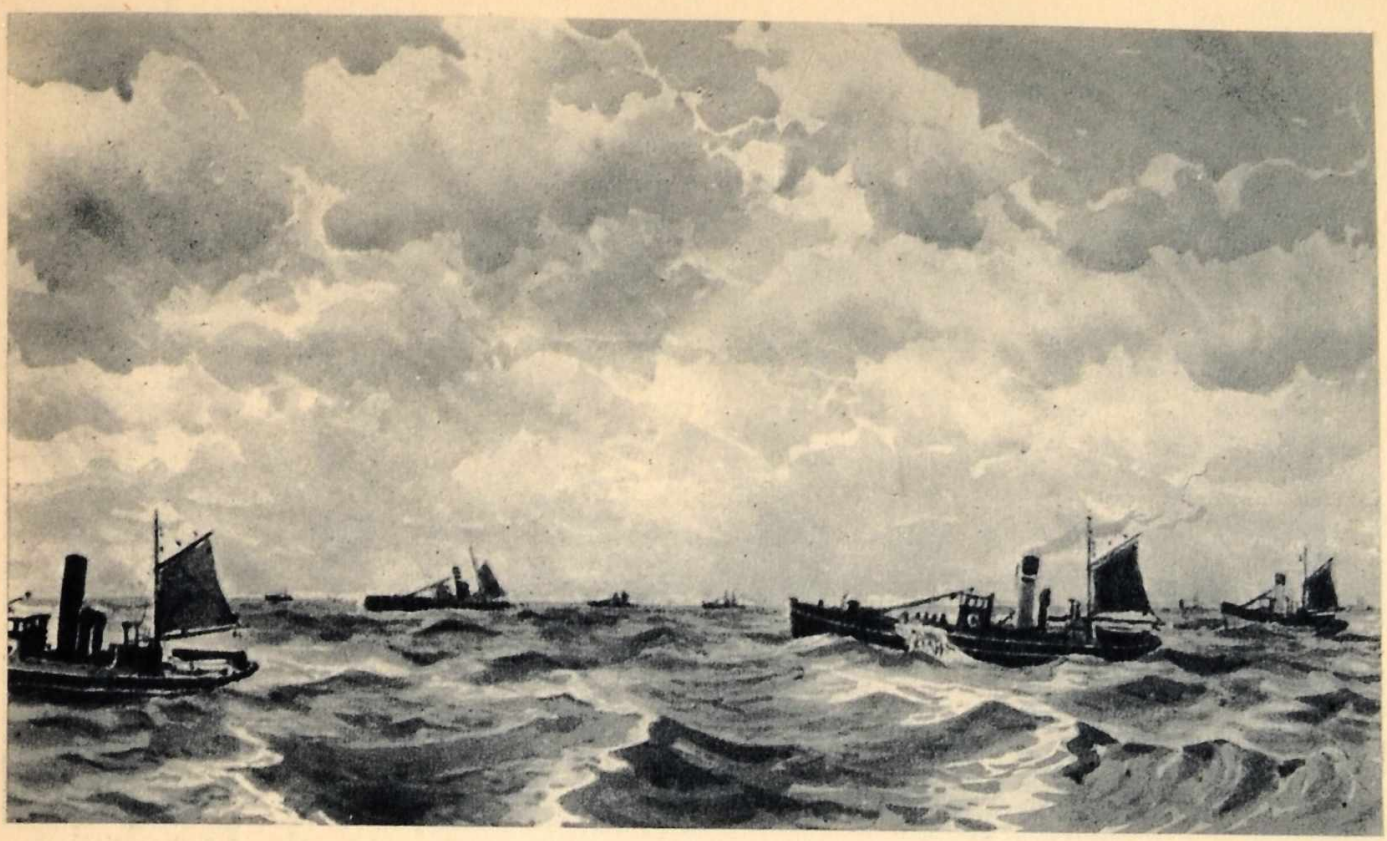
At Sheringham and Cromer it is interesting to note how a particular type of boat has been evolved in the course of centuries to suit the nature of the steep beach. These boats are double-ended and clinker built; their most curious feature being hole or oar-ports in the upper strakes, which take the place of rowlocks. The holes are also used when dragging the boats up the beach, oars being passed through them from one side to the other. The 'coble'—found everywhere between the Tweed and Flamborough Head—is another interesting craft designed to suit functional requirements. She is quite different from any other type of English

inshore-fishing boat. She is fitted with two side keels instead of one central keel, because the North East coast men beach their boats stern first. The stern is low, with a flat raking transom, while the bow is raised at some height above the water. Cobles are clinker built, with curious curves—how difficult they are to draw in perspective ! A peculiar feature is the very long, narrow rudder, set at a raking angle, projecting under the stern. In these days most larger cobles are fitted with motors, but at one time they depended on their dipping tug sail.

YARMOUTH AND LOWESTOFT

Great Yarmouth has been associated with the herring fisheries since the time of the Roman occupation of Britain. It is not certain when the famous 'Free Fair' was first held at Yarmouth, but it is mentioned during the eleventh century. Daniel Defoe tells us that in 1724, "during the Fishing Fair, as they call it, one sees the land covered with people and the river with barks and boats, busy day and night, landing and carrying off the herrings, taken the night before ; and this, over and above what was brought on shore on the Dean (that is the sea side of the town) by open boats. . . . The barks come from the coast of Kent and Sussex and let themselves out to fish for the merchants at the said Fair, as the cobles (open boats) do from the north." Just as in Scotland, so too in England, the herring fisheries suffered from the control exercised over them by the Dutch. If Britain happened to be at war with Holland, the herring fishing collapsed.

Political relations with France also affected the export trade in cured herring, and it was not until after the Napoleonic wars that Yarmouth began to revive and regained its former status as the chief centre of the industry. The town reached the peak of its prosperity during the first years of this century, shortly before the last war. About 1910 it was no uncommon thing to find five or six hundred drifters packed in the river over the week-end during the autumn herring fisheries. The old 'Free Fair'—in another form was still very much alive. In 1913 about 3,000,000 cwt. of herring was landed at Yarmouth ; in 1934 the landings had dropped to about 1,000,000 cwt. ; for the export trade had collapsed by about 55 per cent and the sale for home consumption by about 45 per cent. Nobody seemed to want this most nutritious fish, either fresh or cured. This catastrophic fall in markets placed the drifter fishermen, as well as everybody else connected with the industry, in acute financial distress. The Government stepped in eventually and more than one detailed *Report* appeared, but in spite of the many excellent schemes that were proposed to revive the herring trade, the situation remained very much the same until the outbreak of war. It was decided that there



DRIFTERS OFF YARMOUTH
Water colour by Peter F. Anson

were far too many vessels engaged in this type of fishing. An "orderly contraction" of the fleet was deemed to be "imperative." Many sturdy old drifters which I had recorded in drawings or paintings were broken up or sold abroad. Thousands of fishermen found themselves on the dole.

The life of a herring fisherman is very different from that of a trawlerman. For one thing, drifters are seldom away from port for more than twenty-four hours, often much less. Herring and mackerel, being what is known as pelagic fish, *i.e.* usually swimming near the surface of the water, especially at night, have to be taken in long walls of netting, kept upright in the water by floats on the surface and weights below. These nets—maybe two or three miles in length—drift with the tide after they have been shot ; the vessel remaining stationary. Herring and mackerel are very perishable fish and must be landed as soon as possible. The East Anglian herring fisheries, concentrated at Yarmouth and Lowestoft, are at their height during October and November.

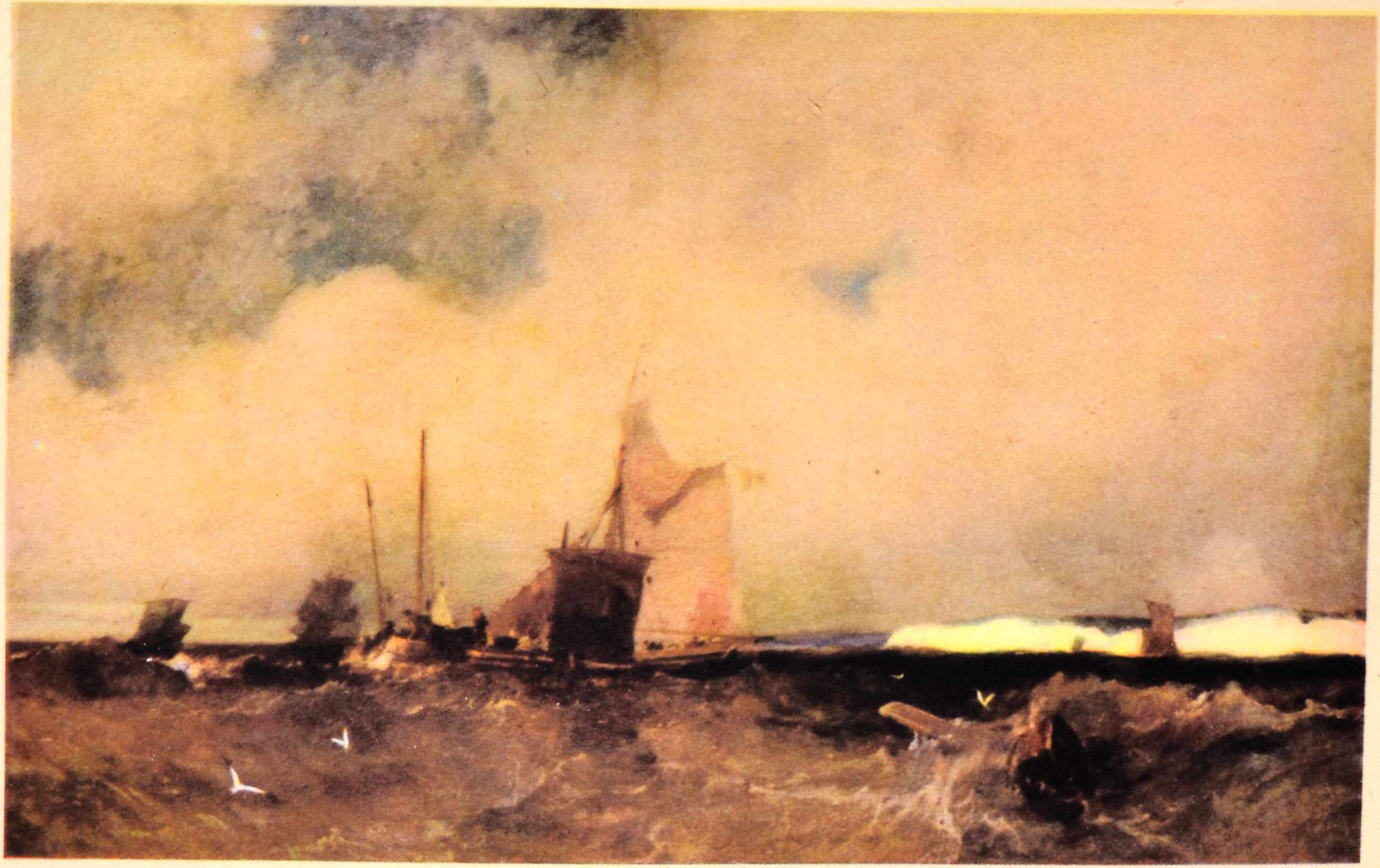
The English drifters, unlike the Scottish ones, are mostly owned by companies. Their crews are paid on a share basis. The owners provide all necessary gear and the cost of provisions is included in the deductions for expenses made before the men are paid. The skipper, mate, engineer, fireman, deck hands and cook all receive shares in the proceeds, allotted according to the functions they discharge. The typical English steam-drifter is built on much the same lines as those in Scotland, but she is

usually more squat in appearance and, to those familiar with both types, quite easy to distinguish. It is curious that unlike practically every other country in northern Europe which engages in herring fishing, Britain has so far clung on to steam driven drifters instead of replacing them by motor-craft, except to a very limited degree.

The war has killed the herring fishing off East Anglia, but sooner or later I hope to make some more sketches of that great fleet at Yarmouth. It was a fascinating sight of which I never wearied. The actual work of shooting and hauling the nets is hard enough, but it has little or nothing of that cruel racket and that unceasing strain which make up so much of life on a big Hull trawler. It needs long practice and skill to shoot drift nets ; the movements are so complicated and elusive that when watching the men I have often thought that they looked like ballet dancers. Each man has his own particular share in the job ; each has to keep in time with the others. In some ways, hauling is less exciting, being more straightforward, though much longer and more laborious. Should there be a big shot of herring it may take from four to five hours. As soon as the last net has been brought on board, the drifter steams back to port to land the catch. So the work goes on, night after night while the shoals of herring are plentiful. It's a gamble, for the herring is a fickle fish—here to-day and gone to-morrow, disappearing without warning, though more or less certain to be found in definite areas at different times of the year.

Yarmouth was proud of its status as the 'Premier Herring Port in the British Isles.' In normal times when the foreign export trade was still flourishing, more than 8,000 women would be working in the town during the autumn, engaged in gutting and curing the fish. In those endless curing houses work was also found for 2,000 or more men, while others found employment as net makers, shipwrights, basket, box and barrel makers. From the middle of October till early in December one could not escape from herring. Nor was it easy to get away from fishermen and fish workers, male and female. The streets were thronged with them. The Scottish drifters were always in the majority, some years there might be 650 drifters from ports in Scotland and about 200 belonging to Yarmouth itself. This annual invasion from north of the Border brought money into the town. Even the bakers found it paid them to sell the long tinned loaves that the Scots were used to in their own country. The ordinary English cottage loaf was despised.

Lowestoft, until its fisheries were brought to a standstill by the war, was a port of much greater interest than Yarmouth because one found all types of fishing going on there. It did not concentrate on herring, although it was always a serious rival to Yarmouth. It held the proud position of the port in Great Britain where the greatest number of steam drifters were registered—nearly two hundred—and with the greatest number of fishermen catching herring. Its history, though not quite so ancient



By courtesy of the Wallace Collection

A SEA PIECE

Water colour by R. P. Bonington, 1802–1828

By gracious permission of H.M. The King

THE CATCH

Nineteenth-century water colour by an unknown artist

as that of Yarmouth, can be traced back for more than a thousand years ; a history that is mostly bound up with litigation with Yarmouth, at times leading to riots and bloodshed.

An idea of what the fisher quarter of Lowestoft looked like a hundred years ago could still be obtained before the war by wandering through those quaint old streets north of the harbour below High Street. A picturesque district of flint-walled, red-tiled houses. Here lived 'Posh' Fletcher, the fisherman-friend of Edward Fitzgerald, the eccentric mid-Victorian poet-squire. The two of them were joint owners of a herring lugger for three years. Fitzgerald liked to sit in the kitchen of the old Suffolk Inn and in other hostelries frequented by fishermen. Dressed in his tall silk hat with a lady's boa round his neck he must have been an odd sight as he drank his tankard of ale and smoked a clay pipe with the rest of the company. The fisher quarter of Lowestoft had not changed much when I last saw it before the war, but how much is left to-day I do not know. I can recall the bright colours of the newly-painted bowls for the nets, hung out to dry, the tanning yards, the old men on the North Beach in their brown jumpers with a fringe of hair running beneath their shaven chins—the once fashionable form of beard with East Anglian fishermen. I can see them loafing round the wooden sheds ; the head-quarters of the ancient Beach Companies. I hope that the quaint figure-heads and name boards of *Auguste et Marie*, *Trinidad* and other wrecks have not suffered from enemy action.

Lowestoft became a trawling centre about 1860. The development of deep-sea trawling here was due to the Brixham, Barking and Ramsgate smacks-men who found that it was a better market for their fish. After the last war this great fleet of sailing vessels declined. Some were broken up, others were sold abroad (many to the Faröes), the remainder had motors installed. Until fairly recently the trawler and drifter fishermen at Lowestoft formed almost distinct communities. The former were mostly of local birth or origin, unlike the latter whose forbears had moved to East Anglia from the south coast. The trawlers kept apart from the drifters ; the former being moored alongside the Fish Wharf, the latter berthed in the Waveney and Hamilton Docks. Ten years ago there were some 2,500 deep-sea fishermen in Lowestoft ; about 500 men still being engaged in inshore fishing.

SUFFOLK TO KENT

Lowestoft has swallowed up most of the once prosperous fishing centres on the coast of Suffolk. Only Southwold and Aldeburgh are left to-day, and they are of little commercial importance. Apart from oysters, the inshore fisheries of Essex do not count for much. On the estuaries of the Colne, Blackwater, Crouch and Roach, graceful yacht-like vessels

make up the still fairly numerous oyster-dredging fleet. Harwich was formerly one of the chief fishing ports on the East Coast. Its glory has departed and before the war one could only find a few small boats engaged in inshore fishing. Leigh-on-Sea declined when the demand for shrimps and shell fish grew less. Cockles and winkles went out of favour ; fried fish and chips took their place, or else tinned salmon. It must be a long time since the last young fisher lad at Leigh decked himself out on a Sunday in white duck trousers with wide-fringed bottoms, a zebra-striped smock, with his full name embroidered across the front, white cotton stockings, slippers tied with red ribbons, and a jaunty red jersey-cap. But Dr. James Murie—who has written so much about the history of Leigh—tells us of such a figure. No longer is Greenwich famous for its whitebait dinners. Nothing is left to remind one that Barking was once the home of a great fleet of smacks that worked on the Dogger Bank. Gravesend's shrimp fishermen are now a mere handful, and their 'bawleys' no longer sail up and down the Thames, for all have been fitted with motors, and their masts cut down.

Whitstable is now the chief centre of oyster fisheries in Great Britain; the history of this town has been closely bound up with oyster dredging. Along the north coast of Kent such places as Herne Bay and Margate were formerly known as fishing centres. It is difficult to visualise Broadstairs as a rival to Hull or Grimsby, yet vessels were fitted out here for the Iceland cod fisheries during the eighteenth century. When Charles Dickens stayed at Broadstairs in 1845 he found "all manner of boats in the harbour." But whether much business was done here is rather doubtful, for he tells us that the fishermen were "for ever hovering about the pier, with their hands in their pockets in obstinate and inflexible pantaloons, apparently made of wood." Ramsgate was one of the chief ports for deep-sea trawling until the last war. It had a fine fleet of sailing-smacks, but many were lost by enemy action, and Ramsgate never regained its importance as a fish market.

THE ENGLISH CHANNEL — KENT TO DEVONSHIRE

Daniel Defoe, writing about 1700, informs us that Folkestone was "eminent chiefly for the multitude of fishing boats belonging to it."

Before the war, one got the impression that Folkestone was not doing so badly with its fishing and there was plenty of life around the harbour. Rye once had a famous fleet of smacks, but they are now but a memory of the past. Hastings is one of the most interesting fishing centres on the South Coast and if one studies early nineteenth century paintings and drawings one realises that Hastings beach cannot have changed very much in the past hundred years. Even the boats have retained their general lines, their squat and beamy appearance. There are venerable 'tackle sheds'

RAMSGATE HARBOUR
Etching by D. E. Bradford

by the shore, built of wood and tarred, three stories in height. On the east side of the narrow High Street is a labyrinth of alleys, known as 'Twittens,' where the fisher folk live. They still land their catches in open boats, for there is no harbour. A few boats of similar build can be found on the shingly beach at Eastbourne. Newhaven was much frequented by Kent and Sussex boats before the war because of its good harbour and transport facilities.

The Brighton fishermen and their boats have been recorded for us by many early nineteenth century artists, such as R. H. Nibbs, Joshua Cristall, and E. W. Cooke. But if they were to return to-day they would not find many boats or fishermen to sketch, although the vessels have not altered very much in type ; they are still hauled up on the shingly beach. Worthing, Littlehampton and Bognor have for a long time concentrated on exploiting summer visitors and have given up fishing ; but on Selsey Bill there are still profitable crab, lobster and prawn fisheries. Hampshire

has never taken its place as a centre of the fishing industry, maybe because its seafaring sons preferred to serve in the Royal Navy or Mercantile Marine. But George Morland found inspiration for many a picture when he lived among the Isle of Wight fishermen a hundred and fifty years ago. On the mainland, the 'Crab and Lobster Inn' at Warsash reminds one of the once fairly prosperous fisheries on Southampton Water.

It is difficult to picture upwards of seventy sail of vessels setting out from Poole for the Newfoundland cod fisheries, but this is what Daniel Defoe found here early in the eighteenth century. "The good number of ships," to which he refers, are now reduced to a few inshore fishing boats. Swanage, Weymouth, Bridport and Lyme Regis, once famous as fishing centres, have long since discovered that it pays better to cater for visitors.

DEVONSHIRE

The late Stephen Reynolds, who died in 1919, lived among the fisher folk of Sidmouth as one of themselves. Some of his books form a valuable historical and sociological record of a class of men, much neglected by other authors. In one of these books—*Alongshore*—he wrote: "An analysis of the trade of our fishery, which is fairly varied and typical, will probably convey the clearest idea of the longshoreman's situation and of the difficulties with which he has to contend. Sidmouth is both fishing port and watering place, growing less and less of the former and more of the latter. Indeed, were it not for some pleasure boating in summer, as a stand-by, fishing could hardly continue. The largest boats used, open boats under twenty-five feet in length, are the herring and mackerel drifters. Whereas twenty years ago upwards of thirty drifters used to put out to sea, there are now fewer than ten in active service. *Fishing has become sad.*" And this is what has happened almost everywhere along the English Channel, from the Straits of Dover to the coast of Devonshire—"fishing has become sad."

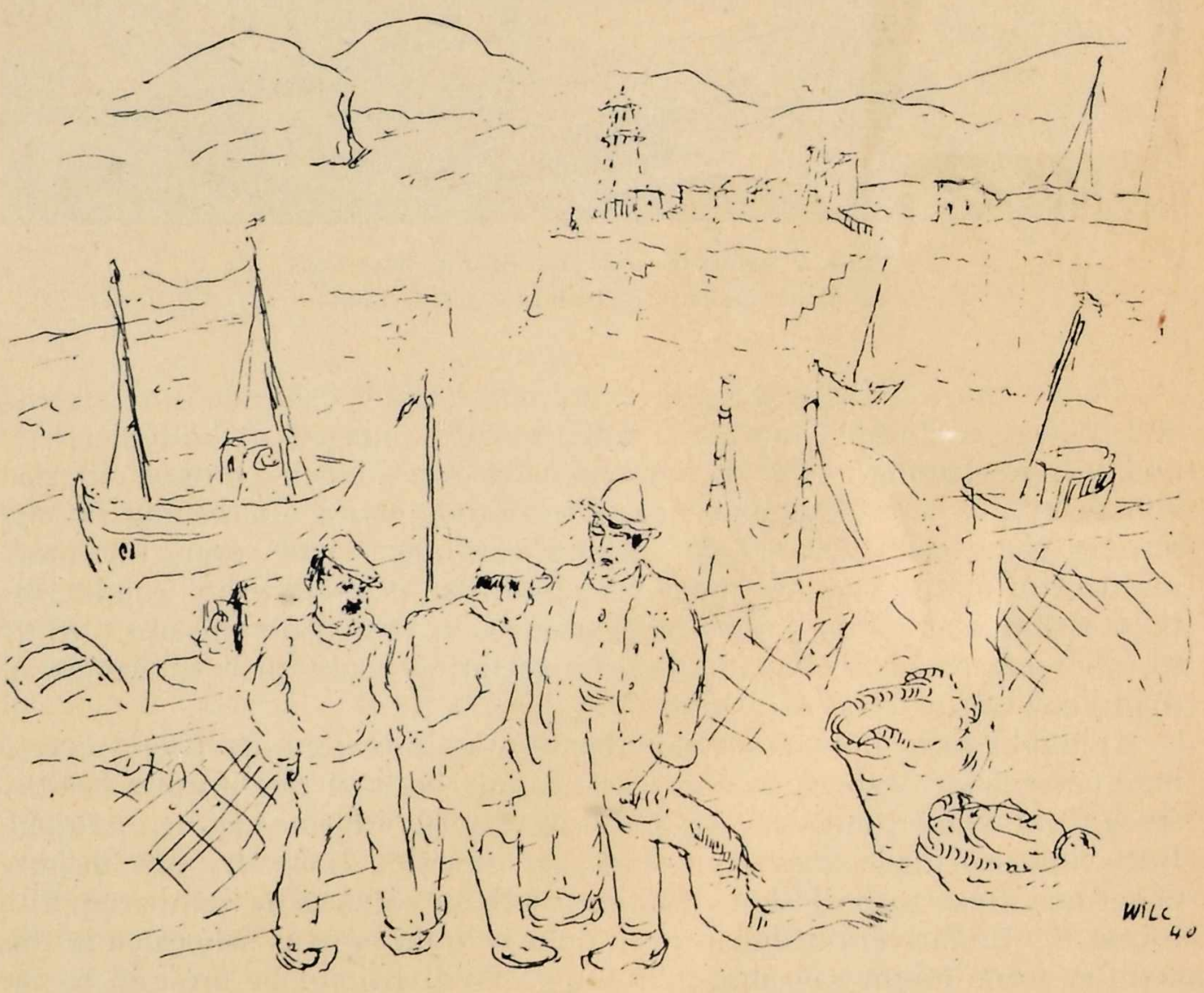
What is the explanation of this situation? It may be found in the fact that the highly industrialised trawling and drift-net fisheries now supply the greater part of the fish food consumed in Britain which once came from inshore fisheries. *Before the war only* 1 *per cent of the total amount of white fish landed in England and Wales came from inshore fishing vessels, i.e.* small boats that work at a short distance from the land. In most of the towns and villages I have mentioned on the past few pages, except in special instances, the men use trawls, lines, drifts and seine nets, unless engaged in taking lobsters and crabs, for which creels are needed. The only reason why this class of fisherman persists is because inshore fish is always fresher and commands a higher price for the limited amount available.

THE FISHMARKET ON THE BEACH, HASTINGS
Water colour by Joshua Cristall, 1808

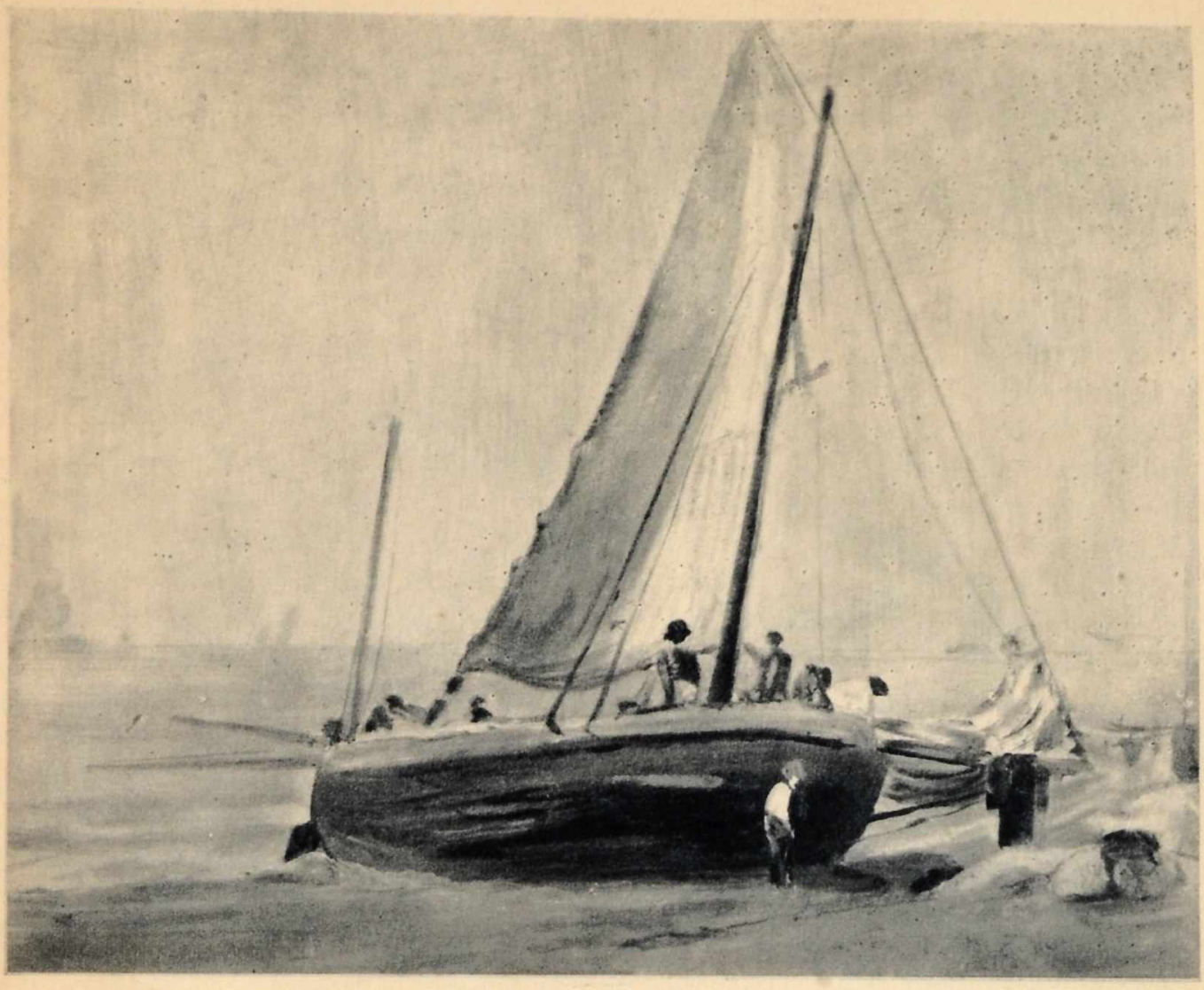
Before the war there were about 11,000 inshore fishermen in England and Wales, excluding another 2,000 partially engaged in both deep-sea and inshore fishing. The Economic Advisory Council pointed out that almost everywhere "the older men are either giving up fishing or else finding themselves limited to meagre earnings; and, even the more resourceful of the younger men, who purchase new craft, are conducting these fishings at a loss. Sons of fishermen, as they grow up, are turning to other means of livelihood, and the seafaring tradition is in danger of dying out in this class of fishing."

It might have been supposed that it was imperative to take steps to maintain inshore fishermen as a class, if only because they form a healthy stock from which the Royal Navy and Mercantile Marine can be recruited. But enquiries made about ten years ago revealed that very few inshore fishermen were to be found in either of these services as compared with formerly. So far very little has been done to train boys as fishermen in this country—one might say almost nothing. Will Britain be aroused to the urgent need for such education and training by the evacuation of the world-famous Belgian Fishery School from Ostend to a port in South Devon

where it is now established, until it can return to its own country? The last time I visited this port, about ten years ago, it seemed so sad and derelict that I felt I never wished to see it again. From being one of the greatest fishing ports in England, with a great fleet of brown-sailed trawlers, it was fast sinking to the level of a second-class holiday resort. Few of the sons of fishermen could be induced to follow their fathers' career. It looked as if it would not be long before the last of the big ketch-rigged smacks and smaller 'Mumble Bees' had vanished for ever and there would be none left for me to sketch. But a friend tells me that I should not recognise it if I were to return there to-day. I gather that the Belgian fishermen have quite transformed the atmosphere of this port with their native costumes and customs and general 'Continental' gaiety. What is more, so impressed is the Devon Sea Fisheries Committee that it has recommended that the Education Committee of this county should set up a school for sea training, where boys can be given technical education



BELGIAN FISHERMEN IN CORNWALL
Pen drawing by Katerina Wilczynski, 1940



FISHING BOAT AND CREW
Oil painting by John Constable, 1824

for the fishing industry, on the lines of the Belgian *Ecole libre de Pêche*, founded by the abbé Pype, the *Ecole des Mousses de l'Etat*, and the '*Ecole Ibis*, perhaps the most complete of all the Belgian schools, and intended for the orphans of fishermen. Ever since the apprenticeship system of training fishermen became extinct—bad as it was in some ways—there has been no means of educating a boy for this career. In both large and small fishing ports of Great Britain thousands of lads and boys have drifted into jobs on shore because no encouragement or help was given them to learn the trade of a fisherman. Take the small port on the Moray Firth in Scotland which is my own home, with its fleet of nearly seventy steam and motor fishing craft. There is no form of sea training for the local boys, and if any of them want to learn how to pull an oar or handle a small boat, their only chance to do so is under my tuition, for mine is now the only undecked fishing boat in the harbour !

But to get back to Devonshire : it was from here that the present-day deep-sea trawling industry developed. The pioneer spirit of its

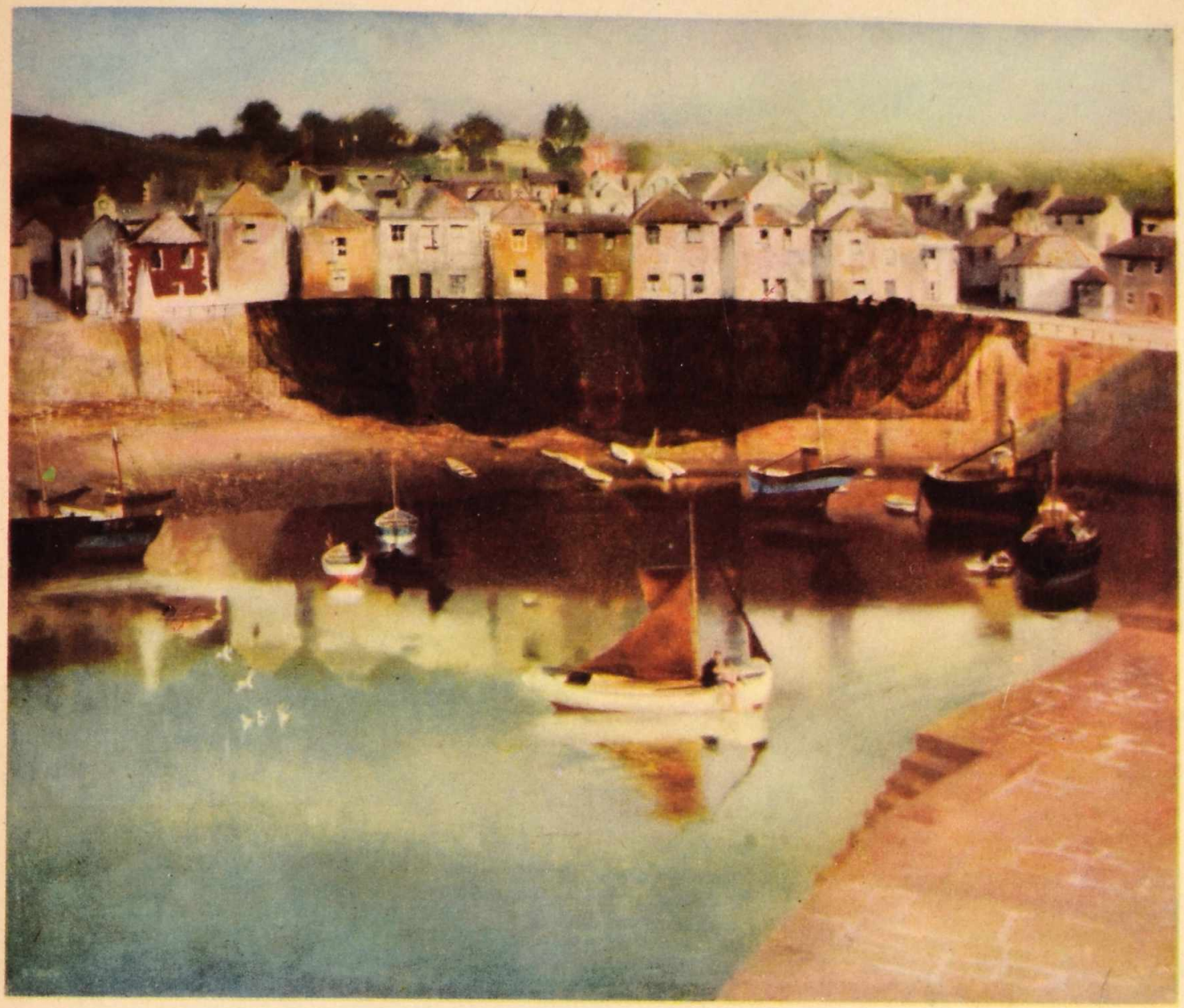
fishermen led to the opening up of new grounds on the North Sea and in the Bristol Channel. Plymouth is another Devonshire port where the fishing industry was formerly carried on on a big scale, but which has declined in recent years. There are many other places such as Beer, Exmouth and Seaton which might have been mentioned, but in few of them is inshore fishing of any real commercial importance to-day.

CORNWALL

The inshore fisheries of Cornwall still remain the most important in England. They may be classified as follows: pilchard, mackerel and herring; long and hand lines; and crabbing. The latter is probably the most remunerative in these days. The condition of Cornish fisheries has always been precarious. They depend largely on migratory fish, such as pilchards, herring and mackerel. The result is that one finds periods of feverish activity succeeded by intervals of idleness. Again, the Cornish fisherman is handicapped by the constantly changing weather, and may be kept in port by Atlantic storms in which his small boats cannot venture out.

At Looe, Polperro and Mevagissey there still exist communities of fisherfolk. The men work off shore with motor luggers, using lines, drift-nets and crab-pots. My recollections of Polperro are that it was so fantastically 'picturesque' that it was hard to take its fisheries seriously, even if the little harbour provided me with some interesting cutter-rigged boats to draw. I felt the same about some of those equally romantic fishing villages on the Lizard peninsula, such as Coverack, Cadgwith and Mullion. Porthlethen, with its up-to-date fleet of motor vessels, was much more alive.

Newlyn is the chief fishing port in Cornwall. It is equally famous for its 'artists' colony,' established in 1882 by Walter Langley, Stanhope Forbes, H. S. Tuke and T. C. Gotch. Their paintings, as well as those of later disciples and followers have recorded the boats and fishermen. Mr. Eden Philpotts described Newlyn about twenty-five years ago in his novel *The Haven*. He pictured it as "a village of grey stone and blue, with slate roofs shining bright under the morning sunlight. . . . the mighty blocks of the old breakwater, no more than a *rialto* for ancient gossips now, and far beyond it new piers encircling arms of granite round a new harbour. . . . Within this harbour, when the fishing fleet is at home lie jungles of masts, row upon row, with here and there a sail, carrying on the colour of the ploughed fields above the village, and elsewhere scraps of flaming bunting flashing like flowers in a reed bed. . . . a smell of fish where split pollacks hang drying in the sun; of tar, tan and twine, where nets and cordage lie spread upon low walls and open spaces, gives to Newlyn an odour of its own." But there are few sail boats left here to-day. They have been replaced by motor vessels. In normal times Newlyn is



By courtesy of the Artist and the Redfern Gallery, London

MOUSEHOLE, CORNWALL
Oil painting by Richard Eurich

By courtesy of the Redfern Gallery, London

ST. IVES, CORNWALL

Oil painting by Christopher Wood, 1901–1930

also frequented by steam drifters and trawlers. The number of resident fishermen has declined, and Newlyn depends more on fish landed by 'foreign' vessels, that is non-Cornish, than on those belonging to the natives. Mousehole—the most westerly fishing port on the south coast of Cornwall—nestles in a valley, and its little harbour has been painted by many artists.

St. Ives, once given over entirely to fishing, has now become one of the most popular holiday resorts in Cornwall. But I have drawings of some fine motor-boats in this port, and I agree with Mr. H. Jenkins who writes in *Cornish Seafarers* that "to visit St. Ives in the fall of a winter's afternoon, and to watch the herring fleet as it goes streaking out across the darkening waters of the bay, is to recapture something of the spirit of the old sea-life of the past. True, the days of mast and sail are over, and the throb of the petrol engines has replaced the creaking of ropes in the pulley blocks, and the strain of canvas tautening in the winds, but the appearance of the men on deck in their heavy oilskins and great sea boots, or the proud and anxious women, who with shawls about their heads, stand watching them off from the end of the granite quays, has little changed in all the centuries of similarly enacted scenes which such ancient ports have witnessed." The great inshore pilchard fisheries are now almost forgotten as elsewhere in Cornwall. St. Ives at one time had the monopoly of curing pilchards for the Italian market.

Padstow has been much frequented in winter months by drifters, but there are now no inshore fishing stations of any importance on the north coast of Cornwall. The same must be said of the north coast of Devon and Somerset, although a different story could be told of past centuries.

Before motors were installed the majority of Cornish fishing craft were rigged with lug-sails. Looe, Mevagissey and Fowey each had its own type of lugger—open boats, with wide transom sterns with a marked rake. The long outrigger on the mizzen-mast was a special feature. The Polperro boats differed from those in any other Cornish ports because they were cutter-rigged. The Mount's Bay luggers, found at Newlyn, Porthlethen and Mousehole, were double-ended, rigged with a dipping lug-sail forward and a standing lug-sail aft, sometimes with a top-sail. A special type of open boat was used for the pilchard fishing.

When I first went to Cornwall it struck me that the fishing vessels looked very funereal when compared with those from the north-east coast of Scotland. Unlike the latter which are painted with almost as many brilliant primary colours as the Italian fishing boats on the Adriatic, the former are generally black, relieved with a little white, blue or buff. Has the Celtic seafarer any reason for avoiding bright colour on his fishing boats ? For one finds the same liking for black all along most of the coast of Brittany, even if this sombre hue is relieved by the blue nets of the sardine boats and the gay red or pink jumpers and trousers of the crews.

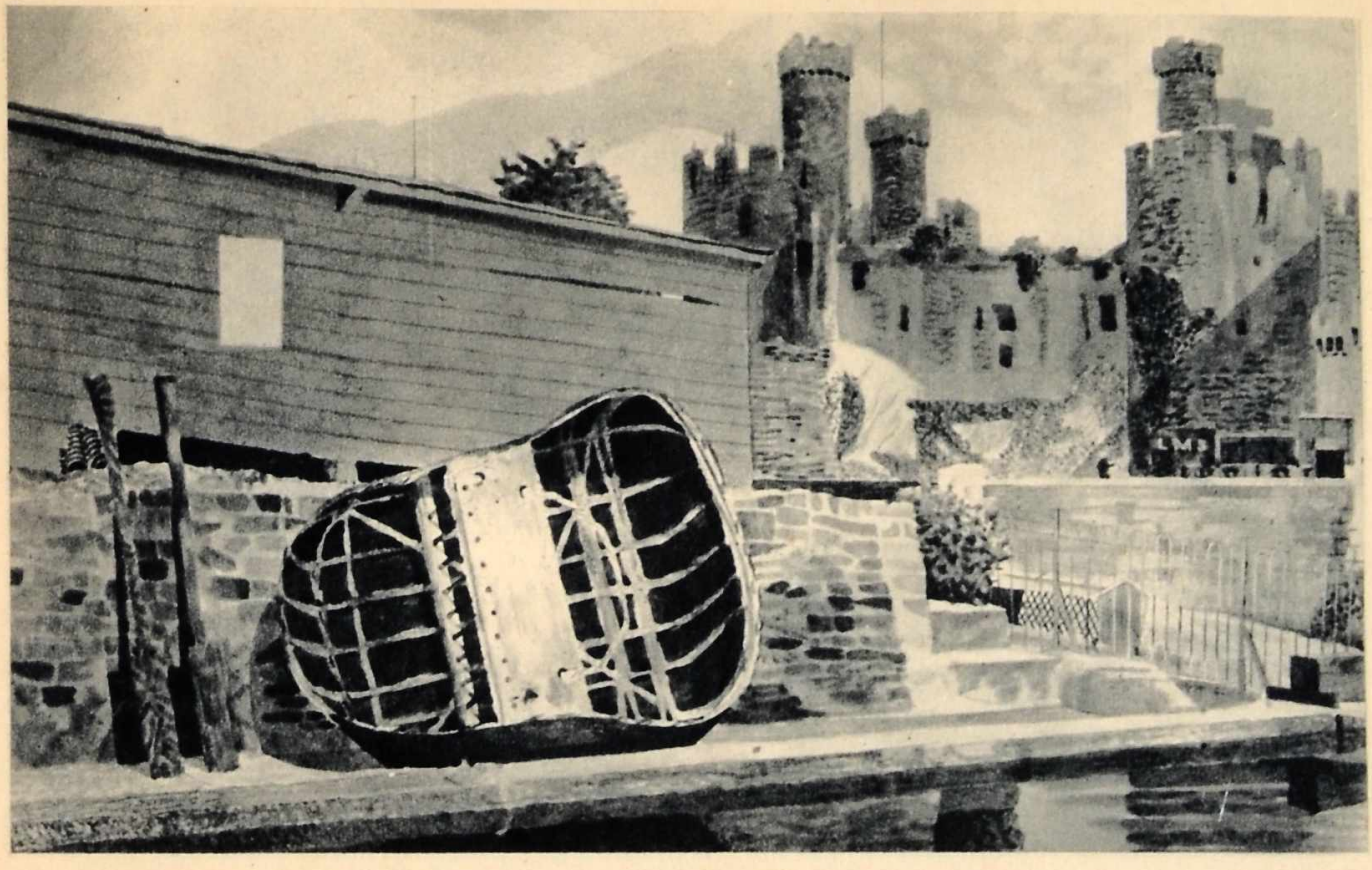
But if so, why are the Breton tunny boats so vividly painted and their sails equally variegated in colour ? It has always puzzled me.

WALES

Swansea and Milford Haven are the two chief fishing centres in Wales and their development has taken place in the past sixty years. Both can be described as smaller editions of Grimsby, for they concentrate on deep-sea trawling. There are some interesting cockle and mussel fisheries on the estuaries of the Teify and Towy, and on the north of the Gower peninsula. In some places men can still be seen fishing in coracles—the most primitive fishing craft in Britain. These queer-looking boats are made of canvas, stretched on a frame of rods, and rendered water-tight with tar or pitch. They are so light that they can be carried on a man's back. Coracles fish in pairs with a net between them. It is many years since the picturesque little harbour at Tenby was crowded with Brixham smacks during the summer months, but I can vividly recall the scene about thirty years ago. The smacks have vanished from the Bristol Channel and Milford Haven and Swansea have replaced Tenby as trawling ports. A certain amount of inshore fishing is carried on in many places on Cardigan Bay and on the north coast of Wales, but apart from the mussel beds at Conway, it is of no great commercial importance in these times. Mr. Colin Matheson's *Wales and the Sea Fisheries* deals with the subject in an exhaustive manner, and cannot be recommended too highly. He sums up the reason for the comparative neglect of fishing in Wales by the somewhat controversial statement that, "The Celtic attitude towards the sea, so different to that of the Teutonic races, has inclined the Welshman to earn his living ashore when possible rather than afloat."

THE MERSEY TO THE SOLWAY FIRTH

Lancashire has long been famous for its shrimp trawling, formerly engaged in by large numbers of boats from Liverpool, Southport, Lytham, Fleetwood and Morecambe. But the industry has declined, although in such villages as Flookburgh on Morecambe Bay, and Banks, near Southport, I believe that a living can still be made out of gathering cockles. Dr. J. T. Jenkins—the recognised authority on Lancashire fisheries—tells us that the cockle gatherers form a class *sui generis*, "quaint in their habits and speech, hard-working, extremely conservative and suspicious of strangers, yet withal not devoid of charm when their reserve is broken down." Fleetwood, which started to develop about 1850, is a very busy port, with fine docks and excellent transport facilities and is the home of a big fleet of more than 100 steam trawlers, which specialise in the capture of hake. It has most of the characteristics of Hull or Grimsby, and is typical of the highly industrialised deep-sea trawling industry.



CONWAY, SHOWING THE CASTLE AND A CORACLE
Water colour by Kenneth Rowntree

The shrimp trawlers, based at Whitehaven and Maryport, and in small ports on the coast of Cumberland, are graceful yacht-like boats. But in recent years the decreasing number of fishermen have found that it pays better to go in more for inshore trawling for white fish on the Solway Firth.

About ten years ago I visited the Isle of Man, hoping to find some old types of fishing craft to sketch. I was disappointed, for I discovered that I might have saved myself the journey and gone to the Science Museum, South Kensington, where there are good models of the once famous, now obsolete, Manx boats. At Castletown there were no more than a few small craft left ; at Port Erin and Port St. Mary a similar state of affairs. Peel supplied me with some subjects, but I could well understand that less fish is now landed here than in any other 'major' station on the west of Britain. But if I were to start writing about the ancient history of the Manx fisheries there would be no knowing when to stop !

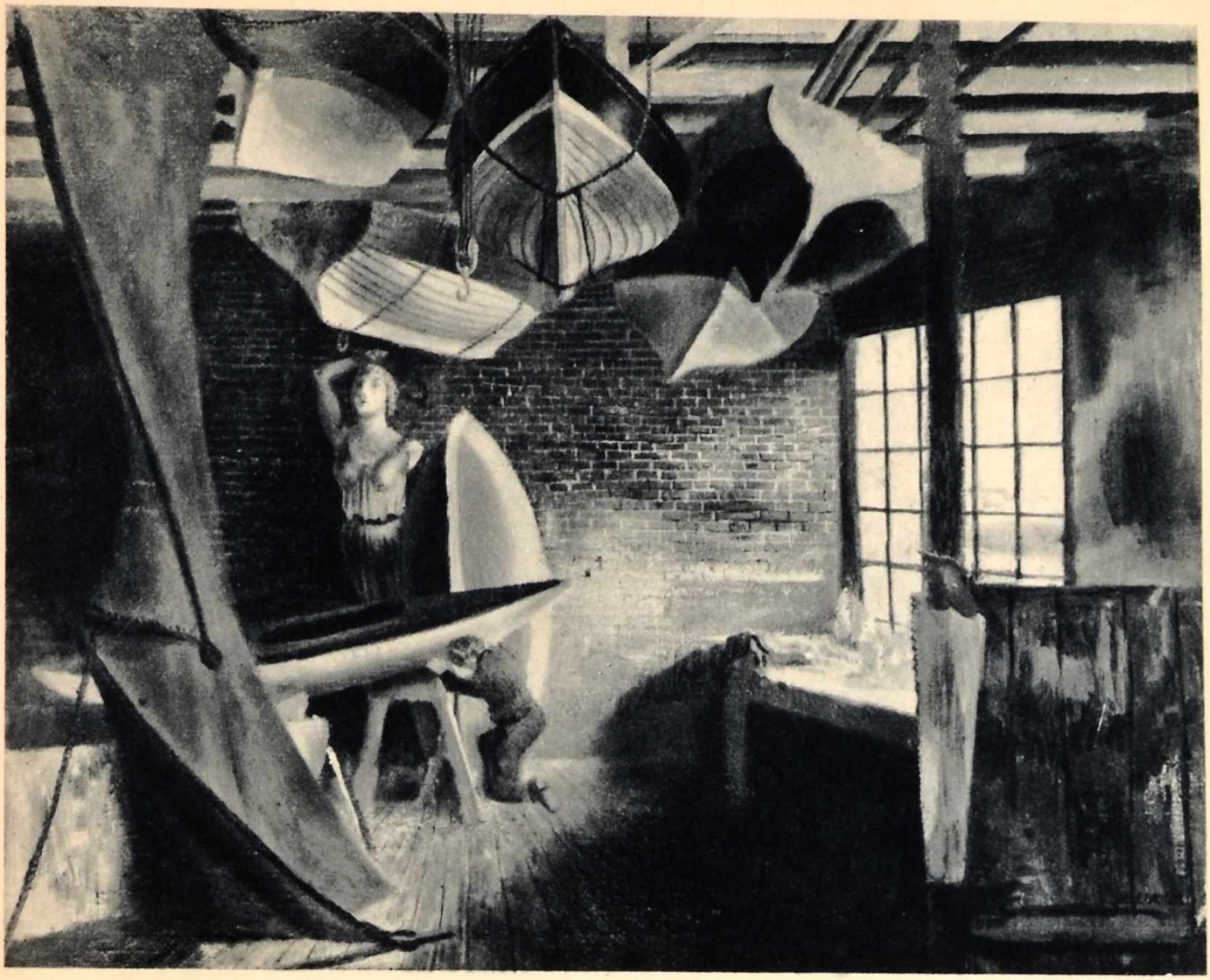
SCOTLAND — WEST COAST

There are very few parts of the coast of Britain where so little fishing is carried on as the south-west of Scotland, *i.e.* from the Solway Firth to the Clyde though the shallow waters of the Firth abound in fish, especially shrimps. I enjoyed making drawings of some of the small cutter-rigged

boats, similar to those working from English ports on the Solway Firth and Morecambe Bay, which I found at Annan, and it was apparent that a certain amount of inshore fishing was still going on at Port William, Drummore, Portpatrick and Stranraer, when I was wandering round Galloway about six years ago. Loch Ryan has been famous for its oyster beds for centuries ; Girvan is the chief fishing centre in the southern part of the Firth of Clyde ; Ballantrae, Maidens and Dunure also having a few good motor boats engaged in white fishing. Dunure is a most attractive little place ; its well-kept boats and picturesque harbour have induced me to sketch here on several occasions. Ayr is a busy fish market at certain seasons.

Herring fishing has been carried on in the Firth of Clyde and Loch Fyne for hundreds of years, and unlike the herring industry on the east coast, has always been controlled by Scotsmen. Ring-nets are used in these districts instead of drift-nets. They are worked by two boats at the same time. The chief ports that engage in this ring-net fishing for herring are : Ardrishaig, Tarbert, Carradale, Campbeltown, Rothesay, and those already mentioned. The herring shoals are uncertain and the profits made by the fishermen are precarious. There are no smarter fishing vessels in Britain than the modern Firth of Clyde motor-boats—most of them brightly varnished, with perhaps a black, red, or dark brown sheer-strake. They are very fine lined, and many of them have curved sterns. These vessels have been evolved from the old type of Clyde 'skiff' and are generally referred to by this name, although very different from the primitive clinker-built undecked boats with their raking masts and lug-sails.

Very little fishing is carried on off the coast of Argyll and its many islands, apart from lobsters, and the same can be said of the enormous area covered by the Fort William district, which includes many islands. But in normal times Oban and Mallaig were busy enough during the herring season, when they were frequented by hundreds of steam and motor drifters from the east coast ports. Herring was also landed at Kyle of Lochalsh. Ullapool was established by the British Fisheries Association in 1788 as a curing station for herring—one of several attempts to develop the fishing in the Highlands which proved a failure. All along the indented coast line of Ross-shire and Sutherland, crofter-fishermen fish inshore at certain seasons of the year, mostly with hand-lines. But their boats are too small to remain long at sea, or to venture out in bad weather. The catch is of little value for commercial purposes and is usually for home consumption only. The fishing grounds, often so prolific, are exploited far more by fishermen from the East Coast of Scotland, whom the natives regard as poachers, just as they do the English trawlers, which, so they maintain, have ruined their inshore fisheries, despite a fairly efficient Patrol Service. Strong representations have been made again and again that the Minch should be closed to all trawlers. One would



BOATBUILDERS SHED
Oil painting by Richard Eurich

be told by the natives that the reason why no steps had been taken to close the Minch was that vested interests (that is the trawler owners, mostly English) were too strong and, themselves wanting to make inroads on Norwegian waters, feared reprisals if the Minch were closed.

The inshore fisheries round the north-west coasts of Scotland are still much neglected. But as was pointed out in the Report on the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, published in 1928 by the Scottish Economic Committee, the present state of inshore fishing is not due so much to a lack of initiative on the part of the inhabitants as to an "adequate measure of encouragement and assistance." Most of the crofter-fishermen cannot afford to buy new and larger boats. Communication with markets is for geographical reasons difficult; in many parts of the north-west Highlands it is infrequent and always expensive. Even the lobster fisheries, which might be so remunerative, are handicapped everywhere by rail and sea transport, as well as by almost prohibitive rates. There is a great lack of good harbours and piers.

Again and again during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries companies were formed to exploit the Hebridean herring fisheries which, like those on the East Coast, were controlled by the Dutch. But not one of them was a success. The islanders themselves were far too poor to purchase large boats by which they might have developed the inshore fisheries. Incredible as it may sound, the natives of North Uist used to gather cockles off the rocks and make them into stews, when other food was lacking, because they could not venture out to sea to catch fish. In summer, when they might have been at sea, they were too busy working on their crofts ; in winter the seas were too dangerous, their boats being so frail. But the Barra fishermen appear to have been more venturesome during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They took large quantities of cod and ling, and what they did not need for home consumption, was dried and sent to Glasgow.

The Hebridean fishermen have never shown the same enterprise or initiative as compared with those in the Shetlands or on the east coast of Scotland. These islanders may understand the moods of the sea, but they have never been able to put this knowledge to any real practical use. Such well meaning efforts, as that of Lord Leverhulme who purchased Lewis and Harris in 1918, hoping to modernise both farming and fishing on the Long Island, have invariably failed. At Obbe, Lord Leverhulme spent vast sums in constructing piers, laying light railways, erecting houses, stores, curing stations, laying buoys and beacons in the Sound of Harris. But the whole thing proved a fiasco. Leverburgh was abandoned.

It was not until about 1850 that the Hebridean herring fisheries were properly established on a commercial basis. Loch Boisdale (South Uist), Stornoway and Castlebay (Isle of Barra) became the chief centres. All these places were busy enough during the season and it was difficult to find accommodation for the vast crowds of male and female shore workers—coopers, gutters, fish buyers, etc. Stornoway became a cosmopolitan town, where Dutch, Germans and Russians could be found among the buyers of herring. Steam drifters belonging to ports on the east coasts of Scotland and England, gradually replaced the great fleets of sail, and then the internal combustion engine replaced steam. But every year the landing, curing and exporting of herring went on, although on a much smaller scale in the years immediately before the war.

Both on the west and east coasts of Scotland, as in certain districts in England, salmon netting is carried on, and provides employment for about 2,000 men during the spring and summer. They are wage earners, for the salmon fisheries can only be worked by companies or by persons holding licenses from them. It is a curious situation that salmon is treated as a special kind of fish and cannot be landed except by those who have the requisite permit.

* * * *

RETURN OF THE FISHING FLEET
Water colour by Ernest Dade, 1865-1935

So we have got back nearly to where we started. From the cliffs of Caithness we look across the Pentland Firth to the Orkneys, with the majestic hills of Hoy some ten miles to the north—"great rock-battleships, bare and austere," as Neil M. Gunn has called them. Steam trawlers, on their way to or from Iceland and more distant fishing grounds in the Arctic Circle, are battling against the fiercely running tide, or slipping past without effort. There are some herring drifters, too, and a few small boats with brown lugsails—a picture that includes each section of the sea fisheries of Britain. From day to day, year in, year out, the life of our fishermen goes on; ever contending with the sea, in fair weather as in foul; ever faced with the uncertainty of good or bad markets; rich to-day and poor to-morrow—a ceaseless gamble. As one of the characters in Leo Walmsley's novel—*Three Fevers*—expresses it: "Fishing is just like a game of snakes and ladders. You throw a dice, and make so many moves across a board, and maybe you find yourself on a ladder, and up you go. Next throw may land you on another ladder; and then, just when you're doing well, and hoping for a throw that will land you on top of the board, damned if you don't hit a snake, and come down to the

bottom, and have to start all over again ; while the chap who's missed every ladder, and hit almost every snake, lands home." Well ! This sums up the life of the average fisherman of Britain—it is a never ending "game of snakes and ladders," and so accustomed is a fisherman to playing this game from the time he first goes to sea, that I am inclined to doubt if he would be happy if he was certain of always finding himself on a ladder. He throws the dice each time he leaves the harbour, and what happens is just what Leo Walmsley describes—more often than not it's "the chap who's missed every ladder and hit almost every snake" who "lands home." Perhaps this is the explanation of the fact that few fishermen take much interest in schemes for the reconstruction of the industry drawn up by economic experts which look so fool proof and utterly convincing on paper. When they do discuss such schemes I have often noticed how little faith they appear to have in the best of them.