

Foreword

In 1995, Robb Robinson and I presented a paper to the inaugural conference of the North Atlantic Fisheries History Association (NAFHA) under the title of “The Sea Fisheries of the British Isles, 1376-1976: A Preliminary Survey” (subsequently published in *Studia Atlantica* 1). Participants at that meeting, which was held in the Westman Islands, Iceland, perhaps wondered why the start and end dates of this survey were so precise. It was explained to them that the period under review extended from the first known documentary reference to trawling gear in a petition submitted to Edward III, to the cessation of British trawling in Icelandic waters after the last of the so-called “cod wars.” We had to admit, however, that the chronological neatness of this 1376-1976 timespan informed our decision, while the fact that it enabled us to refer to the early trawl gear by name - the “wondrychoun” – was also hugely influential. Wondrychoun! What a wonderful word, and what a wonderful opportunity it gave us to impress colleagues with our knowledge of the language, as well as the catching techniques, used by our medieval forbears. Whether or not this linguistic allusion strengthened our paper is uncertain. But I have no doubt that it would have carried more conviction had Robb and I been able to access the researcher’s guide that David Butcher presents in the pages that follow. For here, in its appropriate alphabetical setting, the wondrychoun surfaces once more in a *Studia Atlantica* volume. This time it comes replete with a definition that was not readily available in 1995, for now we are informed that the wondrychoun was not just a trawl net, but to contemporaries it was quite literally “a wonderful device.”

Countless other papers and publications would have benefited in like manner from *Rigged for River and Sea*. Built upon David Butcher’s extensive and unrivalled knowledge of England’s medieval and early modern fish trade – which itself informed by a long carers of painstaking research into archival and contemporary printed sources - this compilation is at not just a glossary of terms and a dictionary of definitions. It is also an encyclopedia of information relating to the mix of catching, processing, marketing and consumption activities that comprised the fisheries undertaken in the 1300-1800 period. As such, the book is a research product as much as a guide to other researchers, for it adds substantially to our knowledge and understanding of the behaviour of the prey and the predators at the heart of this enduringly significant business. This is evident with regard to each of the four principal modes of fishery that were practised in the North Atlantic before the nineteenth century. In terms of shore fishing, for instance, the entries for “pilcher”, “herring-pilchard”, “huer”, “cellar” and “pilchard palace” together provide a good insight into the pilchard fishery, which was an important facet of Cornwall’s economy through the medieval and early modern eras. The inshore fisheries – those conducted within a day’s sail from port – are also illuminated by virtue of the 325 or so references to herring, most notably under “yawll”, “herring”, “red herring”, “white herring” and “alec”. The character and scale of the distant-water fisheries prosecuted off Iceland and Newfoundland are discussed in some detail, largely in the “Iceland fishing” and “Newfoundland” entries, but also under “banks”, “cod” and “last”. A fourth broad mode of production undertaken in the period before 1800 was the offshore fishery, which entailed the despatch of comparatively large vessels on voyages of up to six months’ duration in which catches were cured aboard. Although the English did not participate strongly in such activity – except, perhaps, as consumers - it was prosecuted with vigour off British coasts by the Dutch and is discussed in this volume under such terms as “Great Fishery”, “bounty”, “buss” and “ventager”.

Amidst the ??? or so definitions, explanations and appraisals contained in this book, readers will find numerous literary references. Lines penned by William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, John Donne, Samuel Pepys and Daniel Defoe therefore appear alongside the lines (and nets and traps) cast by hosts of fishers over many centuries. Far from simply garnishing a text that deals with prosaic issues of production, marketing and consumption, these references make a

further statement about the fisheries. As well as generating income, employment and protein for a large proportion of the population, this multi-faceted business, with its particular language, meanings and symbols, permeated the popular consciousness and was thereby integral to the cultural literacy of medieval and early modern England. In illuminating these broad themes in the form of an encyclopadic researcher's guide, *Rigged for River and Sea* marks a new departure for the *Studia Atlantica* series. I am therefore delighted to add David Butcher's high-quality study to NAFHA's publication list, especially as it goes to press exactly thirteen years to the day since Dr Robinson and I addressed the conference in the Westman Islands – another example of the chronological neatness that is much liked by fisheries historians.

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The Author

David Butcher is a graduate of the universities of Durham and East Anglia, UK. A schoolteacher for 37 years prior to his retirement in 2002, he continues to lecture occasionally on the English Local History and Landscape History programmes at the University of East Anglia. David is a highly-regarded local and regional historian, whose research into the history of East Anglia in general, and the fisheries of Lowestoft in particular, has yielded numerous publications. Among the most notable of his works are:

The Driftersmen (Reading, 1979). A study of Lowestoft's herring fisheries, c. 1910-60, based on oral testimony.

The Trawlermen (Reading, 1980). A study of Lowestoft's sail and steam fisheries, c. 1910-60, based on oral testimony.

Living from the Sea (Reading, 1982). A study of maritime community life, c. 1910-60, based on oral testimony.

Following the Fishing (Newton Abbot, 1987). A study of Lowestoft's fish and allied trades, c. 1910-60, based on oral testimony.

The Ocean's Gift (Norwich, 1995). A study of the fisheries in pre-industrial Lowestoft.

Lowestoft, 1550-1750: Development & Change in a Suffolk Coastal Town (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2008). This is a comprehensive analysis of the development of the town and its inhabitants during the early modern period. As well as examining the character and significance of Lowestoft's fisheries, it focuses on themes such as the occupational structure, social geography, wealth and urban identity of the town.