

## **‘The Want of Sufficient Men:’ Labour Recruitment and Training in the British North Sea Fisheries, c1850-1950**

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In 1894, Grimsby trawler owner Charles Jeffs argued in a letter to the Board of Trade that ‘what the trade is [suffering] and always has suffered from is the want of sufficient men.’<sup>1</sup> Jeffs was one of a group of wealthy and influential trawler owners in the largest and most dynamic sector of the fisheries, who tended to be called upon to speak for the industry as a whole. In fact, while Jeffs’s comment was not a wholly inaccurate remark on his own position, it did not apply to the fishing industry as a whole. The trawl fishery, for which Jeffs spoke, had in the previous half-century seen dramatic expansion, the establishment of new ports and, from the 1880s, rapid technological change, all of which had wrought major changes in the industry’s methods of recruiting and training labour. Elsewhere, although the fisheries had expanded, development had been more in degree than in kind, and its impact upon labour had been less marked.

This fact is somewhat obscured in the literature on British fisheries labour, partly because few studies have looked at the industry as a whole, and most have tended to concentrate upon particular sectors or geographical areas. Moreover, the trawl fishery and the apprenticed labour system that played a key role in its nineteenth-century development have received a perhaps disproportionate degree of attention, notably in the works of David Boswell, John Rule, Pamela Horn and the present author.<sup>2</sup> There are few detailed studies examining recruitment and training elsewhere in the industry, although it is touched upon in some more general works.<sup>3</sup> My aim in this paper is to pull together some of the threads of fisheries

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<sup>1</sup> The National Archives (hereafter TNA), MAF 12/15. Report by A.D. Berrington and J.S. Davy on an Investigation of the Fishing Apprenticeship System, 1894 (hereafter Berrington & Davy Report). Letter from Charles Jeffs, in correspondence.

<sup>2</sup> See for example D. Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices of Grimsby* (Grimsby, 1974); J. Rule, ‘The Smacksmen of the North Sea: Labour Recruitment and Exploitation in British Deep Sea Fishing, 1850-90’, *International Review of Social History*, 21 (1976), pp.383-411; P. Horn, ‘Pauper Apprenticeship and the Grimsby Fishing Industry, 1870-1914’, *Labour History Review*, 61 (1996), pp.173-194; M.H. Wilcox, ‘Apprenticed Labour in the English Fishing Industry, 1850-1914 (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hull, 2006), and ‘The Role of Apprenticed Labour in the British Fisheries, 1850–1939’, in: Lars U. Scholl and David M. Williams (eds.), *Crisis and Transition: Maritime Sectors in the North Sea Region 1790–1940* (Bremerhaven, 2008) pp. 171-188.

<sup>3</sup> See for example, T. Lummis, *Occupation and Society: The East Anglian Fishermen, 1880-1914* (Cambridge, 1985); P. Thompson, T. Wailey and T. Lummis, *Living the Fishing* (London, 1983); M. Gray, *The Fishing Industries of Scotland, 1790-1914: A Study in Regional Adaptation* (Oxford, 1978); R. Clark, *The Longshoremen* (Newton Abbot, 1974); P. Frank, *Yorkshire Fisherfolk* (Chichester, 2002); D. Butcher, *The*

labour history, provide an overview of labour recruitment and training in the British fisheries, especially those in the North Sea, and to set developments in the trawl fishery in context. The first section will look in general terms at the development of the fisheries across the period, before moving on to look in turn at the inshore fisheries, the herring industry and the deep-sea trawl fishery between 1850 and the First World War. The final section surveys developments across the industry between 1918 and 1950.

### **Expansion and Change in the British Fisheries, 1850-1914**

The seven decades leading up to the First World War were a period of expansion and growth for the British fishing industry, albeit punctuated by periodic but usually short-lived periods of depression. Table 1, below, illustrates the increase in numbers and tonnages of vessels registered in every fifth year from 1871 to 1910.

**Table 1**

Fishing Vessels Registered under the Sea Fisheries Act 1868 and Merchant Shipping Acts

	Sail		Steam		Total	
	No. vessels	Tonnage	No. vessels	Tonnage	No. vessels	Tonnage
1871	5,248	139,197	0	0	5,248	139,197
1875	6,207	170,420	0	0	6,207	170,420
1880	9,019	243,577	0	0	9,019	243,577
1885	9,365	290,794	314	10,150	9,679	300,944
1890	8,411	279,887	425	17,673	8,836	297,560
1895	7,788	266,664	794	36,656	8,582	303,320
1900	7,124	238,947	1,500	76,807	8,624	315,754
1905	7,176	262,553	1,978	99,124	9,154	361,677
1910	7,040	281,249	2,928	145,923	9,968	427,172

Source: *Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping*

As Table 1 illustrates, the tonnage of fishing vessels registered more than trebled in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, growth was uneven between ports and areas. The ports of the east coasts of England and Scotland, whose vessels were deployed mainly in the North Sea, were usually amongst the fastest-growing. Within the trawl-fishing

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*Driftersmen* (Reading, 1979); D.J. Starkey, C. Reid and N. Ashcroft (eds.), *England's Sea Fisheries: The Commercial Sea Fisheries of England and Wales Since 1300* (London, 2000).

sector, the port of Brixham, in the south-west, saw its fleet of first-class vessels<sup>4</sup> increase from 138 in 1871 to 216 by 1885. This was overshadowed, however, by much more rapid growth on the Humber. Hull had just 20 small trawlers in 1845 and there were none at all at Grimsby, but by 1871 both ports had 264, and by 1885 Hull had 497 and Grimsby no fewer than 748.<sup>5</sup> In the herring fisheries, the East Anglian ports of Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft saw their indigenous fleets stagnate at around the 200 mark between the early 1880s and 1902, albeit after steady growth over the preceding 30 years,<sup>6</sup> whereas the Scottish fisheries, after seeing growth in the 30 years to 1884, took a decade to recover from a major depression in that year, but then expanded once again. The number of vessels actually decreased, but greater size and efficiency, especially after the introduction of steam drifters, drove total production of cured herring from an output of 1,300,000-1,400,000 in the 1880s to more than two million in the years before the outbreak of the First World War. The largest and most productive vessels were again largely located on the east coast, the ‘power-house of the Scottish fishing industry.’<sup>7</sup>

The overall increase in the numbers of vessels was matched by growth in size and catching power. New trawling smacks at ports such as Hull, Great Yarmouth and Grimsby, for example, grew from around 40-50 tons on average in the 1860s to over 80 by the 1880s, and herring drifters also saw a gradual increase in size.<sup>8</sup> Larger trawlers could carry a longer trawl beam, and therefore a larger and more effective net, whilst herring nets were made from lighter cotton rather than hemp, allowing crews to handle ‘fleets’ of nets that by the end of the century could be up to two miles long.<sup>9</sup> Efficiency was also enhanced by developments in hull form. For example, the ‘Zulu’ type of herring drifter came into use during the 1880s, representing a considerable advance on older types.<sup>10</sup> Rigs, too, were much modified, with more efficient gaff sails replacing lug rig in the herring fleets, and North Sea trawlers were increasingly rigged as two-masted ketches, or ‘dandies,’ as they were known, rather than single-masted cutters.<sup>11</sup> The application of steam power also wrought a great advance in efficiency. During the late 1870s steam capstans for handling both trawls and drift nets were

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<sup>4</sup> First-class vessels were defined officially as decked vessels of greater than fifteen tons.

<sup>5</sup> Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping. The figure for Grimsby includes some inshore vessels.

<sup>6</sup> M. Haines, ‘The Herring Fisheries, 1750-1900’, in: Starkey, Reid and Ashcroft, *England’s Sea Fisheries*, p. 70.

<sup>7</sup> J. Coull, *The Sea Fisheries of Scotland: A Historical Geography* (Edinburgh, 1996) pp. 105, 126-134.

<sup>8</sup> *Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping*.

<sup>9</sup> Haines, ‘Herring Fisheries’, 68-70;

<sup>10</sup> E.J. March, *Sailing Drifter: The Story of the Herring Luggers of England, Scotland and the Isle of Man* (Newton Abbot, 1969) p. 253.

<sup>11</sup> March, *Sailing Drifters*, pp. 55-57; E.J. March, *Sailing Trawlers: The Story of Deep-Sea Fishing with Long Line and Trawl* (Newton Abbot, repr. 1970) pp. 61, 149.

introduced, allowing more frequent and faster hauls.<sup>12</sup> The introduction of steam propulsion of the vessel itself followed only a decade later in the case of trawling. The first steam trawlers entered service during the 1880s, whilst in the herring fleets the steam-driven drifter began to make its presence felt around the turn of the twentieth century, after which it rapidly displaced the sailing lugger.<sup>13</sup> Even the earliest and most primitive steam trawlers had four times the catching power of the smacks they replaced, and once equipped with the otter trawl, which was introduced in 1895, they were reckoned to be eight times more powerful.<sup>14</sup> The effect of all of this can be seen in Table 2, showing national landings of fish.

**Table 2**

National Landings of Fish in Selected Years, 1864-1910

Year	Landings (cwt x 1,000)
1864	2,448
1880	4,910
1886	11,131
1890	12,769
1895	14,069
1900	14,671
1905	20,164
1910	22,869

Sources: British Parliamentary Papers (BPP) 1866 XVII, *Royal Commission on Sea Fisheries*, 15; *Sea Fisheries Statistical Tables*. Returns for 1864 and 1880 are only of fish conveyed from the ports by rail, not total landings, returns of which were first compiled in 1886.

**Note:** cwt is an abbreviation for hundredweight, equalling 112lb or approximately 50.8kg.

As much as technological development and rising levels of investment fuelled this general expansion in the industry, the key driving factor was demand. In the case of the herring fishery, little of its product was consumed at home; the demand came from abroad. British herring exports grew from 600,000 barrels in 1871 to 1,500,000 in 1900, sparked especially

<sup>12</sup> March, *Sailing Drifters*, pp. 58-59; March, *Sailing Trawlers*, p. 94.

<sup>13</sup> R. Robinson, *Trawling: The Rise and Fall of the British Trawl Fishery* (Exeter, 1996) see Chapter 7; Haines, 'Herring Fisheries', 71.

<sup>14</sup> Robinson, *Trawling*, p. 112; W. Garstang, 'The Impoverishment of the Sea', *Journal of the Marine Biological Association*, 6 (1901), pp.1-69.

by strong demand from markets in Europe.<sup>15</sup> For white fish, the central developments were a growing population, rising income levels, and rapid advances in transport. From the 1840s the railways allowed fresh white fish to reach consumers in the main inland markets at affordable prices for the first time. Prices fell, and retail outlets proliferated: the number of fishmongers appearing in the decennial census rose from 3,394 in 1831 to 14,880 four decades later.<sup>16</sup> In subsequent decades the rise of the fish and chip shop provided an outlet for the vast quantities of cheap fish landed by the steam trawlers.<sup>17</sup>

Another important facet of the nineteenth-century transformation of the industry was increased government involvement. The Sea Fisheries Act of 1868, in line with the deregulatory climate of the day, swept away most of the long-established regulations governing fishing and created a climate of ‘unrestricted freedom of fishing’, but did introduce registration of fishing vessels and established rules to keep trawlers and others apart, and mechanisms to identify and punish offenders.<sup>18</sup> The Merchant Shipping (Fishing Boats) Act of 1883 brought fishing vessels within the framework of the Merchant Shipping Acts and introduced written crew lists, certification of masters and closer supervision of the apprenticeship system.<sup>19</sup> In the late 1880s District Sea Fisheries Committees were set up to regulate inshore fishing activity and resolve conflicts between users of the grounds. The collection of detailed landing statistics commenced, although these were initially of questionable reliability.<sup>20</sup>

All of the above impacted significantly upon labour, and in turn upon recruitment and training, but it did so unevenly across sectors of the industry and sometimes across regions of the country, as the next sections explore.

## The Inshore Fisheries

The term ‘inshore fishing’ covers a wide variety of activities. As a report from 1914 put it: [The inshore fisherman] as a rule goes out either for a day or a night’s fishing; he usually fishes from his own boat, which is of limited dimensions and without steam power, fishing

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<sup>15</sup> Haines, ‘Herring Fishery’, 70; Gray, *Fishing Industries of Scotland*, p. 149.

<sup>16</sup> N.W. Robinson, ‘The English Fishing Industry 1790-1914: A Case Study of the Yorkshire Coast’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Hull, 1985) 121; R. Robinson, ‘The Evolution of Railway Fish Traffic Policies, 1840-66’, *Journal of Transport History*, 7 (1986), pp.32-44.

<sup>17</sup> See J. Walton, *Fish and Chips and the British Working Class, 1870-1940* (Leicester, 1992) pp. 28-30, 43.

<sup>18</sup> See British Parliamentary Papers (hereafter BPP) 1866 XVII, *Royal Commission on Sea Fisheries*, 177; 31 and 32 Victoria, Cap. 45.

<sup>19</sup> 46 and 47 Victoria, Cap. 41. See further on for more on supervision and apprenticeship. [I suggest deleting this]

<sup>20</sup> J. Johnstone, *British Fisheries: Their Administration and Problems* (London, 1905), see Chapter XIII.

within sight of land, although not necessarily of home; and he also carries on all those fisheries which do not in all cases require the use of a boat, such as fishing with stake nets and the gathering of shellfish by hand.<sup>21</sup>

Inshore fishing thus involved a range of low-tech activities with minimal capital requirements, and remained much less affected than other sectors by the developments outlined above. The steam engine, for example, was expensive and did not miniaturise well, so inshore vessels were invariably sail- and oar-powered until the arrival of the internal combustion engine between the wars. Inshore vessels continued to work with long-established forms of gear, often deploying different types to catch such species as were available at different times of year. At Flamborough on the Yorkshire coast, for instance, a fleet of 47 vessels in 1901 deployed lines for cod and haddock all year round, pots for crabs and lobsters between April and August, and small drift nets for herring from August to October.<sup>22</sup> Many inshore fishing stations had limited marketing opportunities and sold much of their produce locally. Nevertheless, in many places inshore fishermen were able to maintain their position into the early twentieth century.<sup>23</sup>

Since expansion was at best steady and the technology of inshore fishing changed little, developments in the labour regime were minor. Many vessels continued to be owned by their crews, and labour was overwhelmingly recruited locally. Many inshore fishing communities were in small towns and isolated villages offering limited employment opportunities ashore. This, coupled with a strong family tradition, continued to send men fishing. A famous example from the early twentieth century comes from Sidmouth, in south-west England, where Stephen Reynolds, an affluent Londoner with an interest in fishing, lived among the fishing community and described their lives in a series of books. He related how his host, whom he called by the pseudonym Tony Widger, initially went to work with a local shopkeeper at nine years of age, but quickly grew tired of the long hours, low pay and periodic mistreatment, and decided instead to follow his father to sea.<sup>24</sup> Outside the family community contacts also encouraged boys to go to sea. At Cleethorpes, at the mouth of the Humber, local schoolboys earned a small amount of pocket money assisting with landing

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<sup>21</sup> BPP 1914 XXX, Report of the Departmental Committee on Inshore Fisheries, 485; Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, pp. 15-17.

<sup>22</sup> Annual Report of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries, 1901.

<sup>23</sup> BPP 1914 XXX, *Departmental Committee on Inshore Fisheries*, pp. 493, 503-505.

<sup>24</sup> S. Reynolds, *A Poor Man's House* (Oxford, 1982 edition) pp. 25-27.

shrimps from the local boats and occasionally took trips to sea, which led to at least some of them entering the industry when they left school.<sup>25</sup>

Recruitment was therefore overwhelmingly local, and new recruits to the industry had been socialised into it from an early age. In many inshore fishing communities the labour of women and children, including boys too young to go to sea, was an essential support to the fishing effort. Women made and mended nets, and in some places marketed at least part of the catch, whilst children helped to gather bait for traps and lines, and sometimes to bait the hooks.<sup>26</sup> At sea, training was completely informal, through emulation and instruction from older members of the crew. Formal technical education was almost non-existent. Lancashire District Sea Fisheries Committee did run some lectures for fishermen, but with limited success.<sup>27</sup> Few other institutions in England followed their lead, and in Scotland the classes in navigation run in some coastal schools and technical colleges had little impact.<sup>28</sup> There were one or two apparent exceptions, although they had little influence in practice. The Colchester Oyster Fishery Company, for instance, had a longstanding rule that those admitted to membership must have served an apprenticeship. Accordingly, boys seeking admittance to the Company were formally indentured, but often to their own parents, and it seems that these ‘apprenticeships’ involved little, if anything, in the way of actual instruction and were primarily a legal fiction.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Herring Fisheries**

Despite the rapid expansion of the herring fishery described above, the technology of fishing changed relatively little until the turn of the century, and the labour regime accordingly evolved slowly. By the 1850s the cost of drifters had put them out of reach of most fishermen, but at around £800 not beyond the resources that a successful and creditworthy skipper or small company could command. Even after the arrival of steam drifters, owner-skippers remained commonplace.<sup>30</sup> Thus the divide between capital and labour remained limited.

The crews of herring drifters comprised, in effect, two parts; skilled full-time workers and unskilled casual labour, known as ‘joskins’ in East Anglia. Such men usually accounted for

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<sup>25</sup> J.H. Dales, *Raking up the Past: Bygones of the Humber Inshore Fishery* (Grimsby, 1985) pp. 5-6.

<sup>26</sup> Thompson, Wailey and Lummis, *Living The Fishing*, pp. 167-181.

<sup>27</sup> BPP 1893-4 XIV, *Select Committee on Sea Fisheries*, Minutes, questions (hereafter q./qq.) 2,152-3 & 2,280.

<sup>28</sup> BPP 1914 XXX, *Departmental Committee on Inshore Fisheries*, p. 511.

<sup>29</sup> *Victoria History of the Counties of England: Essex, vol. 2* (London, 1906) p. 434; Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, p. 23.

<sup>30</sup> BPP 1866 XVII, *Royal Commission on Sea Fisheries*, Minutes, qq. 14,077-91.

half of the ten-man crew. Most of these were agricultural workers who signed onto the herring boats for the autumn fishery, which fell conveniently after the harvest was finished. ‘Our men are agricultural labourers from the adjacent villages, men that can pull and haul’, Yarmouth fisherman Thomas Hammond put it.<sup>31</sup> He was speaking in 1833, but the situation had changed little by the end of the century. The ‘joskins’ were not regarded as proper fishermen and worked under the direction of the full-time crew. Although the work was physically very demanding it required little in the way of skill and accordingly virtually no training. The attraction of it was financial, for at a time of labour surplus in the region when farm labourers earned only twelve to fourteen shillings a week, the pound per week that could be earned in the herring fleets around 1910 was a significant boost to the men’s incomes.<sup>32</sup> The same was true in Scotland, although in later years, as the number of vessels contracted, the temporary hands were increasingly experienced fishermen rather than recruits from outside the industry.<sup>33</sup>

Amongst the full-timers personal connections counted for a great deal in recruitment, and in getting berths on the most successful vessels. There was a hereditary tradition whereby fishermen’s sons followed their fathers to sea, but evidently not usually on their fathers’ vessels.<sup>34</sup> Bearing the name of a well-known skipper may well have been an advantage in securing a berth, but many did go to sea who had no previous connection with the industry. Boys usually began as cooks and cabin boys. Even this was demanding, for periods of heavy fishing entailed working very long hours for days on end. One of the interviewees in Trevor Lummis’s oral history of East Anglian fishing recalled the consequences of a week’s continuous effort:

And the Friday ... the boy he was then going to cook the dinner, he was clearing up the breakfast and he sat and cried. He was only sixteen year old. The skipper came along and said, the boy’s done in, can you manage on bread and cheese for dinner? We said yes, and he told the boy to turn in. The Saturday morning we **again** hauled 130 crans ... We finished at eleven o’clock and went down to have our dinner and the mate flopped out like this ... The ambulance came down and took him – we took a new mate, a young chap, and went off to sea the Sunday morning.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> BPP 1833 XIV, *Select Committee on Channel Fisheries*, Minutes, q. 2,666.

<sup>32</sup> Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, pp. 46-56.

<sup>33</sup> Gray, *Fishing Industries of Scotland*, p. 158.

<sup>34</sup> Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, p. 56.

<sup>35</sup> Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, pp. 61-62.

Doubtless some concluded after such experiences that herring fishing was not for them, or were judged insufficiently tough and motivated to continue and never found another ship. Those who remained moved onto the deck, where they learned by emulation, watching more senior members of the crew and moving up the hierarchy as they became more skilled and experienced.

Engineers were added to crews with the arrival of steam drifters, although they were known as 'drivers', a term carrying none of the status of 'engineer'. No formal qualifications for the job were required at first. Some went to sea initially as stokers and graduated to driver after a few years, whilst others had no previous seagoing experience and had learned their craft on agricultural traction engines.<sup>36</sup> By and large this seems to have been sufficient, and there is little evidence that incompetence amongst drivers was a serious issue. There are stories attributing occasional losses of drifters to drivers weighing down safety valves to increase boiler pressure and hence power when racing back to port, with a disastrous boiler explosion as the result, but these may be apocryphal.<sup>37</sup> In later years drivers were required to carry certificates of competence, an extension of similar measures introduced in merchant shipping. In fishing, the way was paved for this by the introduction of certification for skippers and mates; initially for trawlers only, but later for herring drifters too.

In no part of the drift-net fishery does there appear to have been much of a problem with the supply of labour, which from the 1870s was augmented by the agricultural depression which affected the arable farming areas of eastern England particularly severely. The acreage of land under cultivation in Norfolk fell from 458,527 to 444,476 between 1871 and 1880,<sup>38</sup> and between 1871 and 1881 the number of agricultural labourers fell from 45,505 to 42,189.<sup>39</sup> Thousands also left the land in neighbouring Suffolk. In both counties there was an influx of population to the towns, including the fishing ports.<sup>40</sup> This gave fishing vessel owners a wide choice of recruits, although, as a report from 1887 noted, they were not always of the highest quality.<sup>41</sup> The same depression must also have reduced demand for traction engines and probably facilitated the recruitment of their crews as drivers, although the higher wages offered at sea were doubtless also an incentive. Some difficulties arose in East Anglia in the

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<sup>36</sup> D. Butcher, *A Living from the Sea* (Reading, 1982), p. 42; D. Butcher, *The Driftersmen* (Reading, 1979) p. 48.

<sup>37</sup> J. Dyson, *Business in Great Waters: The Story of British Fishermen* (London, 1977) p. 275.

<sup>38</sup> BPP 1880 LXXVI, *Agricultural Returns of Great Britain, 1880*.

<sup>39</sup> BPP 1895 XVII, *Royal Commission on Agriculture. England*. Report by Mr. R. Henry Rew (assistant commissioner) on the county of Norfolk, p. 39.

<sup>40</sup> BPP 1895 XVI, *Royal Commission on Agriculture. England*. Report by Mr. Wilson Fox (assistant commissioner) on the county of Suffolk, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> TNA, MAF12/12. Report to the Local Government Board by Mr J. Lockwood, 1887.

early 1880s, with crews deserting and playing skippers off against one another to bid up wages,<sup>42</sup> but this does not appear to have been a long-lasting or particularly serious situation. Throughout the nineteenth century, then, and well into the twentieth, recruitment in much of the fishing industry was community-based. Connections of family and kinship, especially a strong hereditary tradition in many inshore fisheries, played an important role in attracting workers into the industry, augmented in the case of the East Anglian herring fishery by high wages that served to secure the large numbers of temporary, unskilled labourers needed during the season. Fishing was usually a highly skilled business, but most fishermen learned their craft through informal instruction from older members of vessels' crews, and through emulation, starting at the bottom of the hierarchy and rising up it as their skills developed. There was, however, one sector of the industry where the situation was completely different.

### **The Trawl and Line Fisheries**

The deep-sea demersal fisheries, using trawl nets and to a lesser extent lines to target demersal species such as cod, haddock and soles, were the principal beneficiaries of the transformation of transport during the nineteenth century. Cured white fish was not a major item of consumption in the United Kingdom, but fresh white fish, being highly perishable, was limited to local markets in coastal areas by the cost and slowness of transport. The situation began to change in the late eighteenth century, as turnpiking wrought improvements to the road network that allowed the trawl fishery of south Devon to expand, while the vast London market supported a large trawl and line fishery centred on the Thames ports of Barking and Greenwich, and at Harwich. It was Hewett & Co of Barking that pioneered the use of ice to keep fish fresh for longer, and **they also pioneered** the system of fleeting, whereby trawlers worked in large fleets and sent fish into market daily via fast sailing, and later steam, cutters. During the 1830s Ramsgate was also established as a trawling centre, supplying London and the towns of Kent.<sup>43</sup> From the 1840s, however, the pace of change quickened as the spread of railways broke the geographical link between fishing ports and markets, and allowed a series of new ports to develop. Scarborough, Hull and Grimsby were established as trawling centres during the 1840s and 1850s. Hewett & Co moved its operations to Great Yarmouth in 1854 and sent fish into London via cutters. Others followed them, although many also went to Grimsby, which by late-century had become the main base

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<sup>42</sup> BPP 1882 XVII, *Report of the Sea Fishing Trade Committee on Relations between Owners, Masters and Men* (hereafter *Sea Fishing Trade Committee*), Appendices 14 and 23.

<sup>43</sup> Robinson, *Trawling*, pp. 18-22.

for the shrinking long-line fisheries.<sup>44</sup> Lowestoft was established as a trawl port by migrants from Devon around 1860.<sup>45</sup> Later in the century ports such as Fleetwood, Milford Haven, North Shields and Aberdeen developed substantial trawling interests, mainly on the basis of steam trawling.<sup>46</sup> As Table 3 indicates, growth at some of these new ports was very rapid.

**Table 3**

First-Class Fishing Vessels Registered at Selected Ports, 1871-1910

i. Number of Vessels

Year	Hull	Grimsby	Brixham	Ramsgate	Lowestoft	Great Yarmouth
1871	264	264	138	129	245	474
1875	356	392	150	147	325	532
1880	536	567	229	184	420	618
1885	497	748	216	140	428	678
1890	458	777	245	170	407	476
1895	422	720	246	183	454	405
1900	402	548	229	161	448	203
1905	444	521	224	167	508	194
1910	456	585	215	175	605	219

ii. Tonnage registered

Year	Hull	Grimsby	Brixham	Ramsgate	Lowestoft	Great Yarmouth
1871	13,933	13,216	5,515	4,564	6,498	15,412

<sup>44</sup> See M.M. Gerrish, 'Special Industrial Migration in Nineteenth-Century Britain: A Case Study of the Port of Grimsby, 1841-1861' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Hull, 1991), 298-306; E.W.H. Holdsworth, *Deep-Sea Fishing and Fishing Boats* (London, 1874) pp. 251-252; H. Benham, *The Codbangers* (Colchester, 1979) pp. 60-70.

<sup>45</sup> BPP 1893-4 XIV, Select Committee on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, q. 1,529.

<sup>46</sup> Robinson, *Trawling*, pp. 93-94; G. Glasfurd, 'The "Northern Fleet" at Fleetwood: Fishing Boom and Bust, 1936-1937', in: P. Holm and D.J. Starkey (eds.), *North Atlantic Fisheries: Markets and Modernisation* (Esbjerg, 1998) p. 121; F.G. Aflalo, *The Sea Fishing Industry of England and Wales* (London, 1905) pp. 340-345, 347-351.

1875	19,248	21,651	6,170	5,154	9,829	18,318
1880	33,842	31,812	10,356	6,274	13,885	23,001
1885	36,344	40,309	9,515	5,155	14,742	26,738
1890	33,295	55,124	10,185	5,988	16,515	22,977
1895	25,601	40,109	9,681	6,148	20,538	21,405
1900	24,134	37,565	7,626	4,538	19,520	9,748
1905	28,793	32,711	8,096	4,657	22,621	6,802
1910	31,490	42,717	7,567	4,581	24,854	7,922

Source: *Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping*.

Note: Figures for Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth include the ports' pelagic drifter fleets.

Like drifters, trawlers were generally owned by their skippers, with the exception that already by the early nineteenth century several large family companies had been formed in the Thames estuary, owning several trawlers. Most famous of these is Hewett & Co of Barking, whose 'Short Blue' fleet numbered 220 vessels and employed 1,370 men and boys.<sup>47</sup> For the most part, however, successful skippers were able to save enough to put down a deposit and take out a mortgage which could be paid off over a period of years from operating profits. A man who had two smacks was said to be able to retire from going to sea and live off the proceeds, at which point many also set themselves up as fish salesmen.<sup>48</sup> Rapid growth between the 1840s and 1880s, especially in the Humber ports, facilitated this process, until by the 1880s the largest owners had amassed large fleets of vessels. John Holmes, the largest owner in Hull, had seventeen in 1878, whilst Henry Smethurst of Grimsby, together with his son and son-in-law, owned more than 50. Single owners, most of them owner-skippers, accounted for a quarter of the Hull fleet, whereas in Lowestoft in the same year half of all smackowners owned one vessel and none had more than six.<sup>49</sup>

Once the transport bottleneck had been broken by the railways, the prime obstacle to the nascent trawl fishery's expansion was lack of labour. Trawling developed quickly in ports with no tradition of fishing, and no pool of skilled labour upon which to draw. Grimsby, the fastest-growing of all, was a prime example, as the figures in Table 4 indicate.

<sup>47</sup> Benham, *Codbangers*, p. 41.

<sup>48</sup> See M.H. Wilcox, 'Concentration or Disintegration? Vessel Ownership, Fish Wholesaling and Processing in the British Trawl Fishery, 1850-1939', in: D.J. Starkey and J.E. Candow (eds.), *The North Atlantic Fisheries: Supply, Marketing and Consumption, 1560-1990* (Hull, 2007), pp.50-71.

<sup>49</sup> *Eastern Morning News, The Trade and Commerce of Hull and its Ships and Shipowners Past and Present* (Hull, 1878) p. 138; O.T. Olsen, *Olsen's Fisherman's Practical Navigator* (Lowestoft, 1878); BPP 1882 XVII, *Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes*, qq. 2,271-2.

**Table 4**

Population and Fishing Vessels Registered at Grimsby, 1841-1911

Year	Population	New Vessels Registered	1st Class Vessels Registered	Tonnage	Men Employed at Sea
1841	3,700	5			
1851	8,860	10			
1861	11,000	27			
1871	24,000	81	264	13,216	
1881	42,000	40	587	35,006	3,746
1891	56,000		811	56,825	5,140
1901	75,000		528	32,250	4,394
1911	77,000		599	43,731	5,869

Source: *Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping*; D. Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices of Grimsby* (Grimsby, 1974), 25; Census Returns 1841-1911.

The trade, then, faced the need to import and train labour on a very large scale. In the eighteenth century owners of early textile mills had faced the same imperatives, and in response expanded the traditional system of apprenticeship.<sup>50</sup> Half a century later, trawler owners did the same. Many smackowners had themselves served apprenticeships, which had existed in fishing since at least the sixteenth century,<sup>51</sup> and tended to attribute their success to the training they had received. There was, as a report from 1882 put it, ‘a very general consensus of opinion... in favour of the system of apprenticeship’, and some felt that the industry could not be managed without it.<sup>52</sup> In casting around for an answer to a severe labour shortage, expanding the familiar apprenticeship system was an obvious move. The other major factor that promoted the use of apprenticeship in the white fisheries was that they operated all year round, whereas in most other sectors, the drift-net fisheries in particular, boats were usually laid up for a few months of the year. Apprentices could

<sup>50</sup> M.B. Rose, ‘Social Policy and Business: Pauper Apprenticeship and the Early Factory System, 1750-1834’, *Business History*, 31 (1989), pp.5-32.

<sup>51</sup> C.A. Fury, *Tides in the Affairs of Men: The Social History of Elizabethan Seamen, 1580-1603* (London, 2002) pp. 5-20.

<sup>52</sup> BPP 1882 XVII, *Sea Fishing Trade Committee*, 673; see also Minutes, q. 599.

therefore be employed constantly, whereas elsewhere they would have had to be maintained through the off-season, when they would have been only a drain on their masters' resources. In training terms, apprentices learned their business in much the same way as recruits elsewhere, by instruction from older members of the crew. The main difference was the presence of a legally binding indenture, and the fact that apprentices usually lived with their masters. Boys started as cooks, usually between the ages of thirteen and sixteen, responsible for keeping the cabin and living areas clean, tending the navigation lights and coiling down the trawl warp. After a year or eighteen months, they were promoted to deckhand, who assisted with handling the catch and had to be able to handle the smack under normal conditions. The last couple of years of the term, which usually ended at the age of 21, were spent as third hand.<sup>53</sup> In the years of rapid growth in the industry mates' berths were not hard to obtain for those who had recently completed apprenticeships, and many became skippers – and even in some cases owners – before they turned 30.

Charles More developed a useful, if simplified, conceptualisation of apprenticeship. He drew a distinction between 'traditional' apprenticeship, a means of restricting entry to a profession and ensuring a high degree of skill on the part of its practitioners, and what he termed 'exploitative' apprenticeship, which was simply a device for importing and disciplining cheap labour, famously in the early factories and textile mills.<sup>54</sup> Fishing apprenticeship historically had closely resembled the first type but from the 1850s, in the years of rapid expansion of the trawl fisheries, especially on the Humber, it began to assume a form closer to the second. As Table 5 indicates, the priority was numbers. Some apprentices did receive a thorough grounding in their business and did go on to successful careers in the industry, but their wellbeing and training came well down the priority list.

**Table 5**

Apprentices Recruited Nationally and to Selected Ports, 1850-1914

Year	National Total	Hull	Grimsby	Brixham	Ramsgate	Lowestoft	Great Yarmouth

<sup>53</sup> BPP 1882 XVII, *Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes*, q. 5,488. Summaries of trawler apprentices' duties can be found in C. Ekberg, *Grimsby Fish* (Buckingham, 1984) pp. 24-25; E.J. March, *Sailing Trawlers* (Newton Abbot, 1953) pp. 103-104; and J. Dyson, *Business in Great Waters* (London, 1977) pp. 94, 108, 113.

<sup>54</sup> C. More, *Skill and the English Working Class, 1870-1914* (London, 1980). See also Rose, 'Social Policy and Business'.

1850	286	35	0	27	19	0	n/a
1855	330	53	7	31	9	0	n/a
1860	607	160	76	42	21	5	42
1865	714	190	144	33	51	5	46
1870	784	258	217	49	69	34	6
1875	972	339	386	45	72	39	18
1880	809	227	285	48	109	41	29
1885	546	83	294	70	52	15	2
1890	421	22	190	56	20	12	3
1895	239	9	138	44	36	4	0
1900	111	0	79	20	8	0	0
1905	173	0	53	70	26	0	1
1910	143	6	65	29	23	0	0
1914	94	12	22	24	14	0	0

Source: PRO, BT 150. *Board of Trade Registers of Apprentices; Annual Reports of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries.*

Notes: 1900 figures are from Annual Reports of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries, as the Apprentice Registers for that year do not survive. Brixham figures include Dartmouth.

At Brixham and other smaller trawling centres apprentices were generally recruited locally, sons followed fathers to sea, and some later recalled how they had taken trips ‘for pleasure’ aboard their fathers’ vessels before being apprenticed either to them or to friends and relatives.<sup>55</sup> This remained the case until late in the century, although by 1900 more attractive opportunities ashore had led to a drop in recruitment to which owners responded by turning to workhouses, training ships and other public institutions.<sup>56</sup> The Barking companies, however, recruited half their apprentices from London workhouses by 1850,<sup>57</sup> and their example was followed by smackowners at the newer ports. In the early 1890s more than 60 per cent of Grimsby apprentices came from workhouses, reformatories, training ships, industrial schools and similar institutions.<sup>58</sup> Many of these recruits might be described as ‘difficult’, and as a report from 1894 put it:

<sup>55</sup> BPP 1833 XIV, *Select Committee on Channel Fisheries*, Minutes, q. 2,174.

<sup>56</sup> Devon Record Office, DRO 3287S add/6. Register of Brixham Fishing Apprentices; Aflalo, *Sea Fishing Industry*, p. 294.

<sup>57</sup> TNA, BT150/6-7. Board of Trade Registers of Apprentices, 1850-55.

<sup>58</sup> TNA, MAF12/15, Berrington & Davy Report, 16-18.

Boards of Guardians find the greatest trouble in obtaining suitable employment for boys who come into the workhouse at the age of 14 or 15 and who from having been brought up among vicious surroundings or from some defect of character are not fit for domestic service. They are too young for the Army, and not well grown enough to pass the high physical standard required for the Navy... The fact is that for certain boys an apprenticeship to the fishing trade is their last chance.<sup>59</sup>

Many more apprentices to the large ports were waifs and strays from the industrial cities. Undoubtedly, many signed indentures without fully understanding what they were committing themselves to, which is one reason why desertion rates rocketed. Another reason is that increasingly wealthy masters became more reluctant to keep them in their own homes, and those with large numbers of apprentices, such as Smethurst, who claimed to have '80 to 100' in 1882 could not.<sup>60</sup> Instead, apprentices were given a living allowance and expected to fend for themselves under what became known as the 'outdoor system'. Unsupervised, many drifted into the slums of the port towns, living in dubious boarding houses and sometimes inns and brothels. 'Quite small boys', remarked a Local Government Board inspector in 1873, 'told me they could without difficulty get served with as much beer as they wanted'.<sup>61</sup> Predictably enough, drunkenness, brawling and prostitution became all too common, and smackowners took little interest in their apprentices' welfare as long as they were available for work when needed.

Moreover, many trawlermen, working under pressure in harsh conditions, had little patience with resentful, inexperienced and sometimes frightened youths they were meant to be training. Bullying and occasional serious assaults were the result. Some owners quite openly admitted that their apprentices preferred to be in prison than at sea in winter,<sup>62</sup> and since breaking indentures was a criminal offence punishable by up to three months' imprisonment this was not hard to achieve, especially since in Grimsby more than half of the town's magistrates were also smackowners.<sup>63</sup> Around fifteen per cent of the apprentices at the Humber Ports served at least one prison sentence, and some served up to nine.<sup>64</sup> Such was the need for labour, however, that masters were reluctant to let even the most recalcitrant apprentices leave. By the 1870s, then, in most of the major trawl ports, a large proportion of

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<sup>59</sup> TNA, MAF12/15, Berrington & Davy Report, 3.

<sup>60</sup> BPP 1882 XVII, *Sea Fishing Trade Committee*, Minutes, q.2,241.

<sup>61</sup> PRO, MH32/99. Report to the Local Government Board by Baldwin Fleming, 'The Treatment of Pauper Apprentices to the Grimsby Fishing Trade', 1873.

<sup>62</sup> *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 15 December 1864.

<sup>63</sup> E. Gillett, *A History of Grimsby* (Oxford, 1970) p. 253.

<sup>64</sup> Wilcox, 'Apprenticed Labour', 240-242; Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices of Grimsby*, p. 85.

the workforce were recruited and retained in large measure by compulsion. Apprenticeship, however, was never the sole means of recruiting fishermen, even at ports where it was dominant, for even at Hull and Grimsby a significant proportion of young fishermen were waged casual hands. Meanwhile, at Fleetwood and other smaller ports new recruits shipped as cabin boys, taking a half share, and were admitted to a full share after a year or two, when they had gained sufficient experience.<sup>65</sup>

The apprenticeship system was also a catalyst for greater state intervention in the fishing industry. In 1880, an Act of Parliament aimed mainly at merchant shipping removed the power of summary arrest and detention which had served to keep some resentful apprentices at work, causing a spike in desertion. Two years later the industry made national headlines in the wake of two murders of apprentices on Hull trawlers.<sup>66</sup> In response the government launched an enquiry into the industry.<sup>67</sup> On its recommendation the Merchant Shipping (Fishing Boats) Act of 1883 introduced greater oversight of apprenticeships by local officers of the Board of Trade, who were expected to interview both master and apprentice every six months and were empowered to investigate any complaints of ill treatment and cancel indentures they felt were not in the best interests of the apprentice. The ‘outdoor system’ was banned and masters made legally responsible for finding accommodation for their apprentices, which the largest did by building boarding houses. This followed the letter of the law, but the homes were felt to lack ‘homeliness’ and many felt them a poor substitute for lodging apprentices in their masters’ homes.<sup>68</sup> The same Act also introduced written crew agreements for fishing vessels of over 25 tons, and compulsory certification for their masters. Certification of mates followed three years later.<sup>69</sup> Those who could prove a certain length of prior service in either capacity were entitled to the certificates as of right, but over time the examinations for ‘tickets’ – as the qualifications were colloquially known – were tightened up and required greater knowledge not only of practical seamanship but also of navigation, something in which few fishermen had previously had any formal training.<sup>70</sup> **These certificates were intended to replace the local certification schemes operated by some trawler insurance clubs. Many insurance clubs continued to issue certificates, however, to the chagrin of trawler officers who felt that the system was prone to favouritism and the**

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<sup>65</sup> Wilcox, ‘Apprenticed Labour’, 126.

<sup>66</sup> Robinson, *Trawling*, p. 62; *The Times*, 5 and 6 May 1882.

<sup>67</sup> BPP 1882 XVII, *Sea Fishing Trade Committee*.

<sup>68</sup> TNA, MAF12/15, Berrington & Davy Report, p. 7; see also letters from Basford Union and Chase Farm School, Enfield, in file of correspondence with the report.

<sup>69</sup> 46 & 47 Victoria, Cap. 41.

<sup>70</sup> March, *Sailing Trawlers*, 52; J. Runciman, ‘Our Fishermen’, *English Illustrated Magazine* (March 1887), 388.

promotion of compliant men.<sup>71</sup> Instruction for all of these certificates was usually given at local institutions such as Grimsby Nautical School, founded in 1907, and the School for Fishermen in Hull. This latter institution opened in January 1914 and replaced the previous lecture series and short courses for prospective and serving fishermen run by Hull Municipal Technical School since the mid-1890s.<sup>72</sup>

None of this served, as its founders hoped, to revive the apprenticeship system. In some ports it had the opposite effect as trawler owners decided that they could do without the legal obligations conferred by an apprenticeship and simply hired older casual hands, or employed the 'sea fishing boys' permitted by the 1883 Act. These could be under sixteen years of age but were hired only by the voyage rather than for a term of years, although they were still subject to oversight from Board of Trade officers.<sup>73</sup> In any case, by then the apprenticeship system was slipping into terminal decline. Settlement around the fish docks created working-class fishing communities such as the Hessle Road in Hull, marked by a young population and high birth rate, provided a growing pool of casual labour from which the industry came to draw most of its recruits.<sup>74</sup> The agricultural depression of the 1870s and 1880s augmented this supply, especially in the East Anglian ports, where the apprenticeship system had almost entirely disappeared by the mid-1880s.<sup>75</sup> The coming of the steam trawler, too, wrought major changes, rendering irrelevant the all-round training provided by an apprenticeship in a more specialised and divided workforce. **Trawler engineers in the late nineteenth century had generally trained ashore, often via apprenticeships to engineering firms, whilst stokers had no need of an extended period of training.**<sup>76</sup> Later, in oil-burning trawlers, engineers tended to train on the job and were instructed in their business whilst serving formally as stokers.<sup>77</sup> Unlike their counterparts in merchant shipping, fishing vessel engineers were not required to hold certificates from the Board of Trade, as fishing vessels were too small for the relevant legislation to apply to them.

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<sup>71</sup> BPP 1883 XVIII, Report on the System of Deep Sea Trawl Fishing in the North Sea, p441; TNA, MAF 382/11, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food: Committee of Inquiry into the Fishing Industry, Oral Evidence of Trawler Officers' Guilds, 6 Jan 1959.

<sup>72</sup> N. Tripplow, T. Bramhill and S. Jones, *Distant Water: Stories from Grimsby's Fishing Fleet* (Grimsby, 2011), p.27; R. Barnard, *A History of Further Education in Hull* (Beverley, 1996), pp. 113-5; Hull History Centre (hereafter HHC), Minutes of Proceedings of the Education Committee, Higher Education Sub-Committee, 13 Jan, 12 May 1914.

<sup>73</sup> TNA, MAF 12/20. Agreements with boys aged under 16.

<sup>74</sup> E. Gillett and K.A. MacMahon, *A History of Hull* (Hull, 1980) p. 309.

<sup>75</sup> TNA, MAF 12/12. Report to the Local Government Board by Mr J. Lockwood, 1887.

<sup>76</sup> BPP 1896 LXXV, Correspondence between Board of Trade and Societies of Shipowners and Engineers on Apprenticeship for Applicants for Board of Trade Certificates of Competency as Marine Engineers; Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, p.56.

<sup>77</sup> Great Britain, Home Department, Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Fishing Industry (hereafter 'Fleck Committee') (London, 1961), p.50.

Among the deck crew, galley boys, effectively cooks' assistants, could begin at fifteen, but the majority joined at sixteen as 'deckie learners.' They learned by instruction from older deckhands and the bosun, and were promoted to full deckhands once they became competent. How long this took varied depending on ability and the amount of time spent at sea, but most were promoted to deckhand within two years. Fishing remained a hard and dangerous occupation, but compared to the jobs available to unskilled workers ashore it was well paid, and carried more social status. All of this proved adequate to draw sufficient labour into the industry right up to its contraction and eventual near-demise late in the twentieth century.<sup>78</sup>

### **Post-1918**

The apprenticeship system, and the more traditional and ultimately sustainable means of recruitment that sufficed elsewhere, coped with a period of growth in the nineteenth century. After 1918, however, the economic climate was much less favourable. Many inshore fisheries slipped into a process of gentle decline, whilst the herring fishery was hamstrung by the loss of its key export markets in Russia and Eastern Europe amid the political turmoil of the years following the First World War.<sup>79</sup> Trawling, meanwhile, was depressed by overcapacity and falling prices, which deterred investment and, with the exception of the burgeoning distant-water fisheries based on the Humber, caused a gradual shrinkage in numbers of vessels and men employed. This was especially so amongst the smaller vessels working the increasingly overfished North Sea, the average age of which crept up steadily.<sup>80</sup>

Across the fishing industry as a whole the number of registered boats fell from 9,584 in 1921 to 6,514 in 1937, and seagoing employment from 34,844 to 27,561 across the same period.<sup>81</sup> Inevitably, demand for new recruits fell away, placing even the strong hereditary traditions that had sufficed to recruit young men to the inshore fisheries under severe pressure. As the Commission on Sea Fisheries chaired by Sir Andrew Rae Duncan noted in 1936:

The older men are either giving up fishing or finding themselves limited to meagre earnings... 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.<sup>82</sup>

Elsewhere in the industry the mechanisms of recruitment developed in the nineteenth century continued, except in the herring fishery, where high earnings no longer existed to attract seasonal labourers, who in any case were no longer needed in anywhere near such numbers as

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<sup>78</sup> J. Tunstall, *The Fishermen* (London, 1962) Chapter IV.

<sup>79</sup> Great Britain, Sea Fish Commission, *First Report: The Herring Industry* (London, 1933) pp. 9, 23.

<sup>80</sup> Great Britain, Sea Fish Commission, *Second Report: The White Fish Industry* (London, 1936) (hereafter 'Duncan Commission') p. 17.

<sup>81</sup> Sea Fisheries Statistical Tables, 1921 and 1937.

<sup>82</sup> Duncan Commission, p. 33

before the war. The regulations on apprenticeships and 'sea fishing boys' developed in the 1880s continued, although falling steadily into disuse. Only on the surviving Brixham smacks and at Grimsby, where the labour shortage remained a problem, did a small and shrinking number of apprentices remain into the 1930s.<sup>83</sup>

The 'system of recruitment and training', observed the Duncan report, 'is practically non-existent at present'.<sup>84</sup> Despite this lament, neither Duncan's report nor an earlier report into the industry by the Economic Advisory Committee<sup>85</sup> devoted any space to discussing it. Nor do either of the two development bodies set up to assist sectors of the industry, the Herring Industry Board and White Fish Commission, seem to have regarded it as a priority. This despite growing awareness of the difficulties a lack of trained men might pose the industry in the future, and also the need for skilled seamen in the increasingly likely event of war.<sup>86</sup>

Indeed, the interwar period is remarkable for how little innovation there was in either field, mainly because falling entry levels gave little incentive, and such limited technical innovations as occurred did not demand it. The most significant technical development between the wars was the adoption of the internal combustion engine in some inshore fisheries, but this required little expertise to operate. Some consideration was given to the revival of apprenticeships at certain ports. **A scheme proposed by Hull trawler owners in 1920 aimed to combine education ashore with time at sea, leading to a guaranteed position as Bosun at the completion of the term, but it came to nothing and was abandoned in 1923.**<sup>87</sup> **Fifteen years later proposals for reviving apprenticeship were advanced at Brixham, but the scheme, launched amid the increasingly threatening international situation of the mid-1930s, was designed as much with drumming up recruits for the Royal Naval Reserve in mind as training good fishermen, and no action followed.**<sup>88</sup> **The only significant change was the expansion of pre-entry training and instruction for particular crew members in certain ports.**

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<sup>83</sup> Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices of Grimsby*, p. 40; H.O. Hill, 'Brixham Trawlers', *Mariner's Mirror*, 16 (1930), 154.

<sup>84</sup> Duncan Commission, p. 29.

<sup>85</sup> Great Britain, Economic Advisory Council, *Committee on the Fishing Industry* (London, 1932).

<sup>86</sup> TNA, MAF 23/3/6. White Fish Commission: First Annual Report, 1939; Herring Industry Board, *First Annual Report for the Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1936* (London, 1936); Hansard HC Debates, 18 November 1937, vol. 329, cols. 597-713, comments by William Adamson (Lab., Cannock); HC Debates, 19 May 1938, vol. 336, cols. 609-700, comments by Pierse Loftus (Con., Lowestoft).

<sup>87</sup> Barnard, *Further Education in Hull*, pp.116-8.

<sup>88</sup> Devon Record Office, R2360A add 2/Z8, Devon Sea Fisheries Committee: Scheme for Resuscitation of Fishing Industry in Devon, Ministry of Labour to M. Noel Ford, 8 October 1936, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries to M. Noel Ford, 13 October 1936; *Western Morning News*, 15 October 1936.

The School for Fishermen in Hull, for example, introduced courses for trawler engineers in 1935, and an evening class series for deckhands two years later.<sup>89</sup>

Only after the Second World War did things begin to change again, as full employment took hold, leading to renewed concern about the near- and middle-water trawler fleets whose elderly vessels offered dismal working and living conditions, which threatened to deter recruits.<sup>90</sup> This was addressed via schemes of grants and loans for building new vessels and improving old ones. Moreover, increasing emphasis was placed upon technical education in general, especially in ports where training institutions had not previously existed. A navigation school was established at Lowestoft in 1947 and certification of engineers began there three years later. By 1951 vessel owners at the port were considering proposals to introduce a new-style apprenticeship system to increase the proficiency of crews in general.<sup>91</sup> This did not happen, but a new government body set up in that year to regulate and develop the industry, the White Fish Authority, did begin to give grants to fishermen undertaking training courses, both for Board of Trade certificates and local certification schemes.<sup>92</sup> Training was beginning to move up the agenda, especially as the technology content of fishing vessels began to rise, and in later years the Authority was to develop a series of measures ranging from a mobile training unit, which toured the ports giving instruction in electronic fish-finders, to the world's largest flume tank for practical gear demonstrations.<sup>93</sup>

## Conclusion

The fishing industry's mechanisms of recruitment and training had developed organically over centuries as the industry evolved. Fishing communities, where boys followed their fathers to sea, provided much of the labour required, and because they were socialised into the industry from an early age, little formal training was required or given. This remained true of inshore fishing throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and it was true for much of the rest of the industry. Even in one of its big growth sectors, the herring fishery, such recruitment methods were adequate to meet its demands for skilled labour, and high

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<sup>89</sup> HHC, C DBTH/7/3, Thomas Hamling & Co Archive, Outline of the Hull Education Committee scheme for courses of training for trawler engineers and firemen, 1934; Minutes of Proceedings of the Education Committee, Higher Education Sub-Committee, 15, 23 Jan, 12, 22 Mar, 15 Oct 1935, 14 Jan 1936, 12 Jan 1937.

<sup>90</sup> White Fish Authority (hereafter WFA), *First Annual Report and Accounts for the period ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 1952* (London, 1952), p.11.

<sup>91</sup> Suffolk Record Office, 1757/2/2, Lowestoft Fishing Vessel Owners' Association, Directors' Minutes, see 19 Feb 1946, 13 Aug, 30 Nov 1948, 9 May 1950, 20 Mar 1951.

<sup>92</sup> WFA, *First Annual Report*, p.22; WFA, *Second Annual Report and Accounts for the period ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 1953* (London, 1953), p.26.

<sup>93</sup> WFA, *Twenty-fifth Annual Report and Accounts for the period ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 1976* (London, 1976), pp. 12-15.

wages were enough to draw in the unskilled, seasonal labour needed. Only in the trawl fishery, and only for a relatively brief period, did 'the want of sufficient men' lead to the expansion of a previously localised apprenticeship system, its adaptation into a means of importing and training labour, and to keeping recruits at work through legal compulsion. Eventually this form of apprenticeship proved self-destructive, and it was partly in response that a greater degree of state regulation was imposed on the industry, including standards of competence that those commanding seagoing fishing vessels had to meet. Yet throughout the first half of the twentieth century recruitment and training were not regarded as major priorities either by the industry itself or by those charged with regulating it, and only in subsequent years did government bodies play a more proactive and interventionist role.