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APPRENTICED LABOUR IN THE ENGLISH FISHING INDUSTRY,
1850-1914

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Summary of Thesis submitted for PhD degree

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Apprenticed Labour in the English Fishing Industry, 1850-1914

This thesis assesses the role of apprenticed labour in the growth and development of the English fishing industry between 1850 and 1914. Although apprenticeship is a well-known facet of the fisheries, writing on the subject has focused largely on the port of Grimsby, and on the abuses of the system that were widely publicised in the 1880s and 1890s. This study provides a national perspective, examining the institution of apprenticeship as a means of labour recruitment, training and control, and comparing apprenticeship in the fishing industry with the merchant shipping industry – where, despite the undoubted importance of apprenticed labour, very little research on the subject exists – and land-based industries, where apprenticeship offered similar advantages of training and control. It applies theories of apprenticeship developed with reference to industry ashore to explain the transformation of a classically paternalistic apprenticeship system into a means of recruiting, controlling and exploiting a large number of cheap labourers. A wide range of primary sources are used, including the Board of Trade archive and registers of apprentices, fishing vessel crew agreements, numerous Parliamentary enquiries and reports on the fishing industry and contemporary writings.

Apprenticeship was an established facet of the fishing industry in the ports of Devon, the Thames and Essex. Migrants from these ports established apprenticeship in places such as Hull, Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth between the 1850s and 1870s. However, rapid growth in some of these new ports, especially on the Humber, led to a concentration of cheap labour. The resultant social problems gained the system a bad reputation and resulted in legislation to bring the system under control, which also increased the costs. However, by this time demographic shifts leading to greater availability of casual labour and technological change were beginning to undermine apprenticeship, which had all but died out by 1914.

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For Mum and Dad

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List of Abbreviations

BPP	British Parliamentary Papers
CPUE	Catch Per Unit Effort
DRO	Devon Record Office
HMAP	History of Marine Animal Populations
HCA	Hull City Archives
NAO	North Atlantic Oscillation
NELRO	North East Lincolnshire Record Office
PRO	Public Record Office
R.C.	Royal Commission
S.C.	Select Committee

**Apprenticed Labour in the English Fishing Industry,
1850-1914**

Once I was a schoolboy
And I stayed at home with ease.
Now I am a smacksman
And I plough the raging seas.
I thought I'd like seafaring life,
But very soon I found
It was not all plain sailing boys
When out on the fishing ground.

(Trad.)

Introduction

The English fishing industry underwent a process of rapid expansion and fundamental structural change during the 1850-1914 period. Between 1886, when statistical records were first collected, and 1911, the weight of fish landed in England and Wales more than doubled, from 6,412,433cwt to 14,419,000 cwt,¹ caught by a fishing fleet whose aggregate tonnage rose between 1869 and 1914 from 242,179 to 373,494.² The fleet, growing in size and efficiency, was operated by a total of 24,000 men in 1851 and 51,000 in 1911.³

This growth was a function of an expanding market for foodstuffs of all types, created by the economic and demographic shifts in nineteenth-century Britain. The population of England and Wales swelled from just under 8.9 million in 1801, to 17.9 million in mid-century, and by 1911 had reached just over 36 million. Moreover, the United Kingdom became an urban society. Only 20 per cent of the population lived in towns of over 10,000 inhabitants in 1801: half a century later over 50 per cent were classed as living in urban areas, and almost 77 per cent by 1901. Between 1851 and 1901 the number of towns containing greater than 100,000 inhabitants rose from eleven to 34, and the population of all of the major conurbations increased dramatically. Greater London, for instance, swelled from 2,685,000 inhabitants in 1851 to 6,586,000 half a century later.⁴ Not only was the United Kingdom an increasingly urban society, but also a more prosperous one. From the 1860s, a majority of the population experienced an improvement in standards of living, as incomes rose more quickly than prices. Although the improvement was geographically and occupationally uneven, some estimates suggest that real wages rose on average by 70-80 per cent between 1850 and 1914.⁵ This increasingly affluent, urban society, in which most had no means of producing their own food but had more money to buy it in the marketplace, was fed via a mass market in food of growing scale and complexity, facilitated by faster and cheaper transport with the

¹ Sea Fisheries Statistical Tables.

² Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping.

³ Census Returns 1851-1911, in B.R. Mitchell and P. Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1962), p60.

⁴ Census Returns 1851-1911, in Mitchell and Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, pp6-19; W.H. Fraser, *The Coming of the Mass Market* (London, 1981), pp1-13.

⁵ E.W.H. Hunt, *British Labour History, 1815-1914* (London, 1985).

development of the railways and the reorganisation of agriculture and other food-producing industries. One significant beneficiary of this was the fisheries.

Not only did the fishing industry grow in size throughout the 1850-1914 period, but its distribution and organisation changed, as did the range of marine species it targeted. Before the railways allowed rapid transportation of fresh fish, fish consumed inland was generally heavily cured. In the 1850s, most working-class consumption of fish was of salted herring, a pelagic species caught in large quantities around the coasts of the British Isles and the subject of a catching and curing industry of considerable size and complexity. A high proportion of white fish was dry-cured for export, but limited quantities were eaten fresh, mainly by middle-class consumers who could afford the high price of fish transported inland by cart and pannier pony. This encouraged fishers to concentrate on the most remunerative species, such as soles and turbot, using long lines to target the largest and most valuable fish and welled smacks to land them in the best possible condition. A mass market in cheaper species – cod, haddock and plaice especially – caught with the trawl net, an indiscriminate and aggressive method of fishing that targeted high- and low-value demersal species alike, emerged only in the second half of the century. The spread of trawling, driven by migrations of fishers from established bases on the Thames estuary and in Devon, led to the development of new trawling ports; Great Yarmouth, Hull, Scarborough and Grimsby in the 1850s, Lowestoft in the following decade, and later ports in the west of England and into Scotland. Growth at some of these new ports was very rapid indeed. Grimsby was little more than a village at the beginning of the nineteenth century and, until the 1850s, much of the fish landed there ended up as fertiliser on the fields of Lincolnshire for lack of a market, whereas in 1864, the Great Northern and Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railways forwarded 11,198 tons inland. In Hull, fishing smacks landed 8,159 packages of fish in 1852, but 119,489 in 1864.⁶

Rapid growth of demand led to investment in new vessels and catching technology. There were few indigenous fishing vessels on the Humber in 1840, but by 1880, more than 1,000 trawl and line smacks sailed from Hull and Grimsby. There was, however, a potential obstacle to the expansion of the

⁶ BPP 1866 XVII, R.C. on Sea Fisheries, Appendices, p12. Quoted figure for Grimsby is the aggregate of returns from the two railway companies.

fisheries at many of its new ports, and indeed at some long-established ones, which was a lack of labour. This was solved via a tried and tested means of importing and training labour: the expansion of a traditional apprenticeship system. There were only a few hundred apprentices in the 1840s, but by the mid-1870s more than 4,000, of which around 3,000 worked from Hull and Grimsby. Despite its faults, the apprenticed labour system succeeded in drawing in sufficient labour to man the expanding smack fleets. Without it, the industry could not have grown as rapidly as it did.

This thesis examines the role of apprenticed labour in the development of the fisheries, focusing on how and why this labour regime was introduced, and assessing its significance to the development of the industry during the 1850-1914 period. Attention will be afforded to the scale and the spatial and temporal distribution of the apprenticed workforce, the factors that conditioned its deployment and the economic, social, cultural and political factors underlying its decline from the mid-1870s. In addressing these issues, this study fills a significant gap in the literature on the English fisheries.

In his thesis on technological change in the British fishing industry 1830-1914, Michael Haines quoted J.K. Walton's comment that, 'a broad set of assumptions about the serious and trivial and ... "proper" subjects of academic enquiry'⁷ have led to the neglect in academic writing of less alluring facets of British maritime history, including fishing.⁸ Many of the standard general works on the fisheries, such as those by Holdsworth,⁹ Aflalo¹⁰ and Alward,¹¹ are from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and now appear very dated. Moreover, Holdsworth barely mentioned apprenticeship, whilst discussions of this vital facet of the industry in Aflalo and Alward show marked bias towards the masters' point of view, unsurprisingly in the case of Alward, who was himself a major Grimsby smackowner, albeit rather more liberal in his views on the subject than many of his contemporaries. These works have been to an extent superseded by Robb Robinson's work on the trawl fisheries, which includes a good, although brief and necessarily general, introduction to the

⁷ J.K. Walton, *Fish and Chips and the British Working Class, 1870-1914* (London, 1992), p2.

⁸ M. Haines, *Britain's Distant-Water Fishing Industry, 1830-1914: A Study in Technological Change* (Unpub. PhD Thesis, University of Hull, 1998), p15.

⁹ E.W.H. Holdsworth, *Deep Sea Fishing and Fishing Boats* (London, 1874).

¹⁰ F.G. Aflalo, *The Sea Fishing Industry of England and Wales* (London, 1904).

¹¹ G.L. Alward, *The Sea Fisheries of Great Britain and Ireland* (Grimsby, 1932).

subject.¹² More recently, *England's Sea Fisheries*, an overview of English and Welsh fisheries since 1300, discusses fishing labour in several chapters but does not analyse the apprenticeship system in depth.¹³ The present study, which focuses on the 1850-1914 period, when apprenticed labour made a key contribution to the development of the industry, aims to provide just such an analysis.

The comparative neglect of apprenticeship by fisheries historians is mirrored in the treatment afforded to the subject by labour historians. Fishing communities and fishermen feature heavily in folklore and local history, but the labour history of the industry still awaits a comprehensive, comparative national study. Most existing works are regional in scope. Tunstall's seminal study of Hull fishermen during the 1950s remains a crucial work,¹⁴ and although it relates to a period half a century later than that under discussion here, many of its arguments remain relevant. Fishing by the 1950s and 1960s was, as Tunstall described it, 'an antiquated industry,' many of its facets, including the labour regime, different only in detail from their form at the turn of the century.¹⁵ Relating directly to the pre-1914 period, Trevor Lummis's *Occupation and Society: The East Anglian Fishermen 1880-1914*¹⁶ is based largely on oral testimony and provides a rare insight into the linkage of occupation, community and economic development, albeit in a region whose trawl fisheries were at that time declining in relative, and later in absolute, terms. Moreover, its discussion of apprenticeship is limited, mainly because the apprenticeship system was all but gone in East Anglia by 1880. Lummis also contributed chapters to *Living the Fishing*,¹⁷ a work focused more on the social consequences of the development of fisheries than on the labour process itself, and which contains only a brief comment on apprenticeship.

¹² R. Robinson, *Trawling: The Rise and Fall of the British Trawl Fishery* (Exeter, 1996).

¹³ D.J. Starkey, C. Reid & N. Ashcroft (eds), *England's Sea Fisheries: The Commercial Sea Fisheries of England and Wales since 1300* (London, 2000).

¹⁴ J. Tunstall, *The Fishermen* (London, 1962).

¹⁵ J. Tunstall, *Fish: An Antiquated Industry*. Fabian Tract 380 (London, 1968).

¹⁶ T. Lummis, *Occupation and Society: The East Anglian Fishermen 1880-1914* (Cambridge, 1985).

¹⁷ P. Thompson, T. Wailey & T. Lummis, *Living the Fishing* (London, 1983).

John Rule's two essays on fishermen are both of considerable use, especially his article on 'The Smacksmen of the North Sea,'¹⁸ which includes a good discussion of the apprenticeship system. On apprenticeship in the long-line fishery, the most useful work is *The Codbangers* by Hervey Benham,¹⁹ which contains a chapter devoted to the subject based largely on oral testimony. In general, the line fisheries are less well covered in the literature than trawling, and Benham's work goes some way towards redressing the balance. The only work devoted entirely to the subject of apprenticeship is David Boswell's *Sea Fishing Apprentices of Grimsby*,²⁰ which is based on an exhaustive quantitative study of the surviving Grimsby apprentice registers from 1879 to 1936. Good though Boswell's survey is, it does illustrate how the literature concentrates heavily on individual ports, as does Pamela Horn's article on 'Pauper Apprenticeship and the Grimsby Fishing Industry, 1870-1914.'²¹ Reading either work, it is easy to forget that precisely the same apprenticeship system, legally at least, existed in several other ports.

If work on apprenticeship in fishing is limited, then that on apprenticeship elsewhere is in some ways more so, with a few exceptions. The apprenticeship system in merchant shipping, although a crucially important aspect of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century maritime labour, is largely neglected, with the exception of a useful article by Valerie Burton dealing with the decline of the system in the late nineteenth century.²² Much of the literature on apprenticeship in land-based industries is very dated, being largely based on a clutch of works written on the subject early in the twentieth century, at a time of some concern about the decline of apprenticeship and structured social and occupational training schemes for boys. However, trawl fishing was not the only developing industry to face problems of labour shortage. Nor was the strategy adopted to obtain labour

¹⁸ J. Rule, 'The Smacksmen of the North Sea: Labour Recruitment and Exploitation in British Deep Sea Fishing,' in *International Review of Social History* 21 (1976). See also J. Rule, 'The British Fisherman, 1840-1914,' in *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History* 27 (1973).

¹⁹ H. Benham, *The Codbangers* (Colchester, 1979).

²⁰ D. Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices of Grimsby* (Grimsby, 1974).

²¹ P. Horn, 'Pauper Apprenticeship and the Grimsby Fishing Industry, 1870-1914,' in *Labour History Review* 61 (1996).

²² V.C. Burton, 'Apprenticeship Regulation and Maritime Labour in the Nineteenth Century British Merchant Marine,' in *International Journal of Maritime History* 1 (1989).

unique, and work on the changing apprenticeship system in other industries helps to explain the changes that took place in the fishing industry.

Charles More developed a useful conceptual model of apprenticeship to explain the changes in the system in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²³ Following the argument of O.J. Dunlop, in her seminal, though dated, study of *English Apprenticeship and Child Labour*,²⁴ More pointed out that ‘old-style’ apprenticeship, the traditional artisan apprenticeship enshrined in the Statute of Artificers and used in many industries, was virtually dead by the nineteenth century, and formally buried with the repeal of the Statute of Artificers in 1814. This form of apprenticeship aimed to restrict entry to a trade and ensure a high degree of skill amongst its practitioners. In general, apprentices lived with, and were taught directly by, their masters, or by journeymen in a few cases, were closely supervised and learned skills that led on to gainful employment in a ‘respectable’ trade. This form of apprenticeship survived in a few ‘high-class’ trades still primarily organised along artisan lines such as hatting and cabinet-making.²⁵

Traditional apprenticeship had largely been replaced by the nineteenth century with what More termed ‘exploitative’ apprenticeship. This aimed neither to control entry to a trade nor to teach a high degree of skill, but was simply a device for obtaining, controlling and exploiting a large number of cheap labourers. Into this category falls ‘apprenticeship’ in the textile mills, where batches of children were sent from the workhouses to live in barracks and perform menial machine-minding tasks, often in appalling conditions, and were frequently sacked as soon as their apprenticeship finished and replaced by more unwaged child labour. More realised that these categories were not set in stone – he described a ‘jumble’ of apprenticeship types in industrial clusters around Sheffield, for instance – but his model of apprenticeship does help to make sense of the variety of different labour regimes known as ‘apprenticeships’ that existed during the nineteenth century.²⁶

Joan Lane, in her largely descriptive but comprehensive summary of apprenticeship between 1600 and 1914, described how with the onset of

²³ C. More, *Skill and the English Working Class, 1870-1914* (London, 1980).

²⁴ O.J. Dunlop, *English Apprenticeship and Child Labour* (London, 1912).

²⁵ Dunlop, *English Apprenticeship*, pp230-1.

²⁶ More, *Skill*, pp41-50.

industrialisation apprenticeship, as a concept and as a means of social and occupational training, became devalued:

Apprenticeship would have changed little ... but for the devaluation that was caused by the vast numbers of children, often very young, sent to work in factories and domestic sweated trades and still called apprentices. Clearly the basic details of the indenture ... were common to prosperous and pauper alike, but the abuses of the out-apprentice ... with no personal master-child relationship and with no skilled adult livelihood ahead, all meant that traditional apprenticeship was no longer well regarded by ambitious, even respectable parents. Overstocking existed by the later seventeenth century in a minority of desperately impoverished trades, but was not common across a wide range of occupations until a hundred years later, bringing apprenticeship itself into disrepute.²⁷

This exploitative variant of apprenticeship was in part a product of technological change, but also a response to labour scarcity. Evsey Domar advanced a hypothesis in 1970, drawing on writing on the establishment of serfdom in Russia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which suggested that serfdom was established at a time when capital and land were in ample supply but labour scarce.²⁸ In the light of this, it might be suggested that, in circumstances where labour is scarce but other factors of production are not, an incentive is created to exert legal control over labour. A further hypothesis advanced by Christopher Hanes explains the distribution of slave labour in domestic service and rural occupations such as agriculture and ironworking in terms of turnover costs: the costs of replacing a worker who was fired or left.²⁹ Although both of these theses were formulated with respect to slavery, they can apply to any form of bonded or indentured labour.

Conditions of labour scarcity encouraged the use of apprenticeship and other forms of legally bonded labour on a large scale. They also encouraged greater state involvement in the supply and direction of labour. In 1703, compulsory apprenticeship was introduced in merchant shipping, with the aim of increasing the supply of trained seafarers, a strategically important occupational

²⁷ J. Lane, *Apprenticeship in England, 1600-1914* (London, 1996), pp245-7.

²⁸ E.D. Domar, 'The Causes of Slavery or Serfdom: A Hypothesis,' in *Journal of Economic History* 30 (1970).

²⁹ C. Hanes, 'Turnover Cost and the Distribution of Slave Labor in Anglo-America,' in *Journal of Economic History* 56 (1996).

group. Further legislation during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries introduced restrictions on seafarers' high levels of mobility, attempting to restrict desertion and ensure that British vessels carried predominantly British crews. This was paralleled in industries ashore by various statutes passed during the eighteenth century, mainly related to the growing manufacturing trades, which facilitated and regulated the contractualisation of labour relations and specified criminal sanctions against workers deemed in breach of contract. The Master and Servant Acts were used to slow down labour turnover and to ensure the performance of contracted work. Again, these receive little mention in most books on nineteenth-century labour history, and yet they are highly significant, not only because of the number of prosecutions under them, but because they highlight how far nineteenth-century labour law differed from that of the present day.

Daphne Simon traced the origins of the Master and Servant Acts to the fourteenth century, and described them as:

The last remnant of the extra-economic compulsion to labour, the last direct acknowledgement by the law of the inferiority of the exploited servant to the exploiting master.³⁰

However, her suggestion that they were a feudal survival is hard to reconcile with the fact that the Master and Servant Act used until 1875 was, although a continuation of previous law, enacted in 1823. Nor were the Master and Servant Acts a dead letter: there were approximately 10,000 prosecutions under them annually during the 1850s and 1860s. These were heavily concentrated in northern England, in the counties of Lancashire, Staffordshire and Yorkshire.³¹ Moreover, prosecutions under the Master and Servant Acts were most common in skilled trades dominated by small masters, such as the cutlery trades around Sheffield, and most used during upturns in trade.³² Presumably, in these trades, masters had greater difficulty in engaging suitable labourers and sought to hang on to those they had as best they could. Master and Servant law was a means of

³⁰ D. Simon, 'Master and Servant,' in J. Saville (ed.) *Democracy and the Labour Movement* (London, 1954), p198.

³¹ R.J. Steinfeld, *Contract, Coercion and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2001), pp80-1.

³² Simon, 'Master and Servant,' p192.

achieving this end. The result was that in the nineteenth century, legal involvement in the labour process was significant and often coercive. As Marc W. Steinberg comments:

For working people in the mid-Victorian era an experience with criminal justice, outside of one concerning drinking or fighting, was as likely to concern work as any other sphere of life.³³

The power of the state, then, was not only enlisted to create a labour force in certain industries, but also to assist with labour discipline. This function only ended in land-based industries with the repeal of the Master and Servant Acts in 1875, and in merchant shipping, legal control of the workforce was retained well into the twentieth century.

Freedom of contract, a central principle of Victorian thinking on labour, included the freedom to bind oneself to labour for a long period of time, with liability for penal sanctions for failing to fulfil the terms of the contract, for disobedience and for absenteeism. Although there was no provision in English law for a court to order performance of contracted labour, Master and Servant law was an effective substitute because punishment under the law, even a term of imprisonment, did not release the worker from his contract. Therefore, if a worker was convicted of breach of contract and, even after a spell in prison, still refused to complete that contract, he could be convicted and imprisoned again.³⁴ Such, of course, was also the case with indentures of apprenticeship, which is why the institution lent itself well to adaptation into exploitative apprenticeship. An indenture represented a legally binding contract between master and apprentice, developed initially to oblige apprentices to serve their masters faithfully in return for board, lodging and tuition. With the transition to a more exploitative apprenticeship, the central obligation on the apprentice, to work conscientiously and without payment, or with minimum payment, survived, but the master's obligations proved far more flexible and open to abuse.

³³ M.W. Steinberg, 'The Labor Contract and Justice and Exploitation in Local Courts: The Case of Mid-Victorian Hull.' Unpublished: copy provided by author. See also M.W. Steinberg, 'Capitalist Development, The Labor Process and the Law,' in *American Journal of Sociology* 109 (2003), p458.

³⁴ Steinfeld, *Contract*, pp43, 53-7; Simon, 'Master and Servant,' p166.

The assistance of the state in creating and controlling a labour force by means of mass apprenticeship did not occur in a vacuum. Mary B. Rose's excellent article on pauper apprenticeship in the early factories suggests that apprenticeship should not be seen only from the point of view of capital, and solely as a device for obtaining labour, but as part of the wider social policy of the period.³⁵ The employment of pauper apprentices *en masse* was facilitated by social policies pursued by successive governments between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries:

The use of parish apprentices was ... the outcome of certain societal and cultural developments. The processes of proletarianisation and urbanisation, and the emergence of specific poor law measures to deal with this situation, were important preconditions for the rise of the apprentice system.³⁶

These social developments facilitated the use of apprenticeship on a large scale, and allowed the exploitative apprenticeship system described by More to develop.

Ashore, this form of apprenticeship stirred the consciences of middle class philanthropists and social reformers, and from the beginning of the nineteenth century legislation was introduced to regulate and to remove abuses of child labour, even before the Factory Acts. Maritime industries lagged behind those based on land. It was not until 1844 that even the most basic protective legislation for seafarers was introduced, and although seafarers in the second half of the century were the subject of a large amount of legislation pertaining to many aspects of living and working conditions, the fishing industry was exempt from much of this until 1883. Fishing was very much a case of 'out of sight, out of mind,' for the most part, despite the improvements in dissemination of information consequent upon the railways, the penny post, cheap newspapers and, later, the electric telegraph. Only when the worst abuses of the apprenticeship system became the subject of intense publicity was the government motivated to act.

³⁵ M.B. Rose, 'Social Policy and Business: Pauper Apprenticeship and the Early Factory System, 1750-1834,' in *Business History* 31 (1989).

³⁶ P. Bolin-Hort, *Work, Family and the State: Child Labour and the Organisation of Production in the British Cotton Industry, 1780-1920* (Lund, 1989), pp36-7.

A variety of sources have been consulted and analysed to achieve the aims of this thesis: a detailed discussion of the main ones is located in Appendix 1. Chapters 1 and 2 make use of the Board of Trade's registers of apprentices and numerous reports, on the fisheries in general and apprenticeship in particular, to provide a national overview of the operation of the system and to assess where, when and to what extent it was deployed. In smaller ports, especially those that continued to deploy sailing vessels, the system remained paternalistic and traditional, but in the largest ports such as Hull and Grimsby, rapid expansion created a demand for labour that was met by expanding and adapting the system, and sourcing apprentices from a wide variety of backgrounds. Chapter 3 develops this analysis further, using contemporary and more recent studies to consider the environmental context of the fisheries and its impact on the technological and organisational structure of the industry. Fishing is, in the end, a business that earns money from hunting and harvesting marine animal species, and their abundance or otherwise is a key determinant of the economics of the industry, and of the fortunes of fishermen. Chapter 4, drawing on Parliamentary enquiries and quantitative data from crew lists and apprentice registers, examines in more detail the industry's labour requirements, how apprenticeship was used to meet them and the effect of rapid turnover among apprentices. It then goes on to assess the extent to which steam trawling brought about a qualitative change in the labour needs of the industry, to which the institution of apprenticeship was ultimately not able to adapt, at a time when demographic changes and settlement around fishing ports affected the supply of labour to the industry. Both of these developments served to undermine the system.

Chapter 5 focuses on the social context and effects of the apprenticeship system. Utilising contemporary writings and newspaper reports, it highlights the declining acceptability of child and adolescent labour in the nineteenth century and the extent to which the rhetoric deployed against notorious abuses of juvenile labour, such as the scandal over the condition of sweeps' apprentices, surfaced in debates on the fishing apprenticeship system. The public opprobrium that notorious cases of abuse, such as the murder of two Hull apprentices in 1882, brought upon the industry played a key role in the decline of apprenticeship, depressing the supply of pauper apprentices and motivating government

intervention. Chapter 6 looks further into the relationship between government and the fisheries through the medium of various enquiries into the industry, and emphasises the extent to which the leading sector of the industry, the trawl fishery at the largest ports, was best able to influence government policy. Apprenticeship became a source of friction in the relationship between government and the trawling interest, because it ran counter to the liberalising drift of government policy on labour and because the manifest abuses of the system necessitated intervention of the sort that trawler owners were usually keen to avoid. This was resolved via gradualist, compromising legislation that attempted to place the system under better control, whilst retaining most of its advantages. Finally, apprenticeship and fishing trade unionism are considered, especially the repeated attempts on the part of smackowners to use apprenticeship as a means of undermining collective action by fishermen.

Apprenticed labour in the English fishing industry was not simply a means by which employers exploited a weak and vulnerable section of the workforce, aided by social policy that supplied them with recruits and a judiciary that supported them against their employees. It contained elements of this and was undoubtedly abused, but apprenticeship to fishing, a business in which deskilling of the sort seen in many industries ashore was not possible, never fully fitted More's exploitative model of apprenticeship, and it did offer an opportunity to individuals who would otherwise have had few chances in life. It was also a device by which a set of small-scale entrepreneurs were able to sustain expansion of their industry at a critical juncture in its development. The adoption, adaptation and expansion of a long-established recruitment and training system enabled them to meet growing demand for cheap and fresh fish. In the process, several thousand boys and young men were brought into the industry, to enjoy or to endure a variety of experiences as they sought to harvest the resources of the sea.

Chapter 1

The Operation of the Apprenticed Labour System

Although a considerable amount has been written on the fishing apprenticeship system, it has tended either to focus exclusively on the port of Grimsby, or to explain the apprenticeship system in very general terms. However, as this and the following chapter seek to demonstrate, the fishing apprenticeship system varied much across regions and ports, and between sectors of the fishing industry. The legal formalities of apprenticeship were everywhere the same, but the practical operation of the system certainly was not, conditioned as it was by regional tradition and custom, by changing technology, and economic necessity. This chapter will explain the fishing apprenticeship system, starting with the particulars of the indenture and going on to discuss the origins of apprentices and how they were recruited, their ages and terms of service, how they were lodged and remunerated, and how their careers were expected to progress.

The Terms of the Indenture

An indenture of apprenticeship was a legally binding contract between master and apprentice, with clearly defined obligations on both sides. These obligations in principle had existed since at least the sixteenth century, and the substance of a nineteenth-century indenture was little different to one of three centuries before, although the wording and some of the clauses varied across regions and trades, and over time.

Apprentices to the fishing trade were usually bound on the same indenture as apprentices to the general sea service. However, before 1883 there were in fact four different forms of indenture covering fishing apprentices in England and Wales. There was the ordinary apprentice's indenture, which covered the majority, and three forms of union or parish indenture, the differences between which were not significant. Union and parish indentures had no space for payment to be specified, and two magistrates had to oversee the binding and endorse the indenture, as did two of the guardians of the parish or union from which the apprentice originated. The obligations on master and apprentice, however, were the same.

Ordinary indentures from 1870 are reproduced in Appendices 7a and b, and a Union indenture in Appendix 7c. The master's obligations in both cases are set out as follows:

The said Master hereby covenants with the said apprentice, that during the said term he, the said Master, his Executors, Administrators, and Assigns, will and shall use all proper means to teach the said Apprentice or cause him to be taught the business of a Seaman, and provide the said Apprentice with sufficient Meat, Drink, Lodging, Washing, Medicine, and Medical or Surgical Assistance ... [indenture of WHP Salisbury, Appendix 7a]

In return for being kept and taught his trade, the apprentice was obliged to serve his master faithfully and to obey all of his lawful commands. He was to account for and pay to his master any money that he might earn through service in the armed forces. He was to protect his master's interests and safeguard his property. He was not to absent himself without leave; he was not allowed to play 'unlawful games' and he was banned from frequenting alehouses and taverns unless on his master's business. Apart from this last clause, there were no restrictions in the indenture on the apprentice's personal conduct, in contrast to indentures in some land-based trades in previous centuries, which frequently forbade the apprentice from marrying, and occasionally forbade such pursuits as dancing, listening to music and wearing certain types of clothes.¹

Once an apprentice was bound to the fishing trade, it made little difference whether he had been bound on a union or an ordinary indenture. A report into the apprenticeship system at Grimsby by Baldwyn Fleming, an Inspector of the Local Government Board, in 1873 stated:

Their [pauper apprentices'] interests and circumstances are so nearly identical with those of the other apprentices that it is impracticable to report adequately upon their conditions without considering the general position of fishing apprentices.²

In fact, although it was a legal requirement that pauper apprentices be bound upon the union indenture, the report of George Swanston, an Assistant Secretary

¹ Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, pp192-3.

² PRO, MH32/99. Baldwyn Fleming, 'The Treatment of Pauper Apprentices to the Grimsby Fishing Trade,' June 1873 (hereafter Fleming, 'Treatment of Pauper Apprentices').

of the Board of Trade, and Allen Stoneham of the Local Government Board, in 1878 pointed out that:

Whatever the number from this source [unions and public bodies] the boys bound on parish indentures at Grimsby are so few that it affords grounds for believing that boys are not unfrequently [sic] apprenticed from unions on ordinary forms of indenture. If this be the case, it is clear that the securities provided by the Merchant Shipping Act for the boys' protection, by which the guardians are made parties to the indentures, are thus got rid of, and the jurisdiction of the magistrates, as approving the arrangement, is in like manner avoided.³

Swanston himself pointed out at the 1882 enquiry into labour relations in the industry that of 4,277 apprentices bound at Grimsby between 1868 and 1877, only 242 had been bound on the union indenture, and that in 1877 and 1878 only five and one apprentices respectively had been bound on the union indenture, of totals of 576 and 508 apprentices bound in those years.⁴ The enquiry failed to pursue this line of questioning, but given that over half of Grimsby apprentices only a few years later were to come from Poor Law Unions and other public bodies it is hardly likely that the numbers of union indentures entered into in these years reflected accurately the number of apprentices recruited from such sources. It is almost certain that parish apprentices were being bound, possibly in quite large numbers, on the ordinary indenture. The laws intended for their protection were thus evaded. Stoneham described the arrangements at Grimsby, where indentures were prepared and their signing overseen by a pensioner from the customs who was paid a small fee for each indenture and who was clearly evasive on the subject of his income from the job, as 'wholly indefensible.'⁵

Clearly, there were irregularities in the process of drawing up indentures, at Grimsby and probably elsewhere, since there was no officer to oversee the binding of any other than union apprentices bound on the proper indenture, which provided an opportunity for evading the law. It was partly because of this question and partly because of other issues specific to the fishing industry, such

³ BPP 1882 XVII, Report of the Sea Fishing Trade Committee on Relations between Owners, Masters and Men (hereafter Sea Fishing Trade Committee), Appendix 37. Joint Report of Mr Swanston and Mr Stoneham.

⁴ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq5,096-108.

⁵ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 34. Memorandum by Allen Stoneham, 2 March 1878.

as the nascent 'outdoor system' of housing apprentices and the provision of adequate work clothing, which were not covered in the standard indenture, that a new form of indenture was introduced at Grimsby in 1879. This formed the basis of a specific sea-fishing indenture introduced nationally by the Merchant Shipping (Fishing Boats) Act of 1883 (See Appendix 7d).

This was a far more detailed document. It preserved the time-honoured conditions of the old indenture, but also included stipulations on issues specific to fishing. The obligation on the master to provide lodgings was reinforced, so that it was no longer permissible for masters to pay a living allowance instead of providing accommodation. It was also forbidden for apprentices to serve aboard vessels in which their masters possessed no financial interest. A probationary period was to be specified on the indenture, at the expiry of which the Board of Trade Superintendent – who was given a much stronger supervisory role by the 1883 Act – could terminate the indenture at the request of either party. Apprentices and their masters were to report to the Superintendent every six months. Clothing provided for the use of the apprentice was to remain the property of the master until the end of the term of apprenticeship, to avoid disputes over their ownership, and to make an apprentice who sold or pawned his clothes legally liable for them. Finally, space was provided on the reverse of the indenture for remuneration and payments to be laid out. Further revisions were made under the Merchant Shipping Act of 1894. The wording of the indenture was tightened up and a clause relating to holidays inserted, but the only major change was the codification of the apprentice's perquisites, and the difference between pay and spending money was made explicit (See Appendix 7e).

The thrust of these changes was to increase the amount of supervision that officers of the Board of Trade could exert over masters and apprentices, especially over the binding process, and to improve the position of the prospective apprentice. Previously, a trial trip had usually been undertaken before indentures were signed, but after 1883 there was a formal mechanism by which a boy could refuse to continue after the probationary period. Moreover, some of the larger companies began to insist on a medical examination to ensure the boy was fit for sea service. The Great Grimsby Ice Company began to

demand certificates of fitness in 1892, although, as manager Charles Jeffs noted, 'I must frankly admit that some of the certificates have not been of any value.'⁶

Before 1883, only the master could cancel indentures. Magistrates could intervene in certain circumstances, if an indenture was clearly illegal, but could not override a master's control over his apprentice.⁷ Provision was made for buying an apprentice out of his indenture, but this would involve a penal sum of anywhere up to twenty pounds, and therefore far more than an apprentice, or his parents, could usually afford. Once a boy had signed his indenture, he had no means of terminating it. Some apprentices resorted to deserting frequently, in the hope that their masters would give up and cancel their indentures, but all too many found that they were trapped. The 1883 Merchant Shipping (Fishing Boats) Act gave the Superintendent of Mercantile Marine the power to cancel indentures that he felt could not be completed.⁸

Origins of Apprentices

Swanston and Stoneham's report of 1878 identified three sources of apprentices. Firstly, 'respectable families of the labouring classes;' secondly, 'unions, workhouses, charitable institutions and, perhaps, reformatories;' and thirdly, 'the streets of large towns.'⁹ Obviously, the numbers and proportions of apprentices from these sources varied between ports and over time. Quantitative evidence is limited, with the exception of Grimsby post-1880 and Brixham 1892-1912, and the fact that Swanston and Stoneham made little attempt to assess the numbers of apprentices from each source reflects even more limited information available to contemporaries. The lack of knowledge of the sources of apprentices, and lingering suspicions that many were being recruited by dishonest means, was certainly a factor in the bad reputation the apprenticeship system acquired, especially at Grimsby. As a letter-writer in 1878 put it:

⁶ PRO, MAFI2/15. Report by Mr A.D. Berrington and Mr J.S. Davy on an Investigation of the Fishing Apprenticeship System, 1894 (hereafter 1894 Report). Letter from Charles Jeffs, in correspondence.

⁷ Robinson, *Trawling*, p58.

⁸ BPP 1883 VII, Merchant Shipping (Fishing Boats) Bill 1883, Second Schedule, p433.

⁹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 37. Report of Swanston and Stoneham.

I saw in the Lincoln paper, Mr Smethurst says the fish trade has so increased that he wants more boys; he says he can get no boys from unions, nor from respectable parents, so he gathers the street arabs.¹⁰

In fact, in varying proportions between ports, boys came from all three sources throughout the 1850-1914 period.

Apprentices recruited from 'respectable families of the labouring classes' generally comprised a higher proportion of apprentices at the smaller or more 'traditional' trawl ports such as Brixham, where many apprentices were recruited from within the locality and the fishing community. A hereditary fishing tradition tended to exist in these ports, and many boys went to sea as cabin boys with relatives before being formally apprenticed. Of 42 apprentices counted at Plymouth in the 1861 census, for example, no less than 39 were from within the town and all had been born in Devon.¹¹ Even in these ports, however, local recruitment was often not enough to satisfy the labour needs of the growing fishery and boys were obtained from public institutions to make up the shortfall.

Pauper apprenticeships were arranged between smackowner and institution. Sometimes Guardians advertised boys for apprenticeships, but more usually smackowners made the initial enquiry, sometimes through an agent. Sometimes, institutions maintained links with former inmates, some of whom became smackowners, such as John Bryant of Grimsby, a former inmate of Chase Farm Schools, Enfield, who addressed the school at prize giving day and took apprentices from it.¹² However, since many unions appear not to have maintained long-term contact with boys apprenticed from them, this was probably unusual. In later years, the larger companies began taking more control over recruitment, and sending representatives to visit unions to select suitable boys. Premiums to masters were rarely paid in the fishing industry, in contrast to many land-based occupations, with the exception of pauper apprentices who were sent with a small premium to cover clothing expenses. The premiums were never above £5 and frequently lower: in 1880-1 Sculcoates Board of Guardians

¹⁰ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 43.

¹¹ A.M. Northway, 'The Devon Fishing Industry in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,' in M. Duffy, S. Fisher, B. Greenhill, D.J. Starkey & J. Youngs (eds), *The New Maritime History of Devon* vol. 2 (Exeter, 1994), p131.

¹² PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report. Letter from Chase Farm Schools, in correspondence.

was paying premiums of only £2 10s for boys apprenticed to Hull smackowners.¹³

Training ships were another good recruiting ground for smackowners. There were in fact two forms of these: Industrial Training Ships and Reformatory ships, the difference being that the latter took only boys convicted of crimes, whereas the former, like industrial schools, took in destitute or vagrant boys to prevent them 'falling into bad company.'¹⁴ Aboard the training ship *Clio*, which supplied fourteen boys to Brixham smackowners between 1901 and 1908, boys were taught carpentry, sailmaking, tailoring and shoemaking, although facilities were inadequate to train boys fully in some of these occupations.¹⁵ They were, however, a fertile recruiting ground for smackowners as their inmates had usually received some basic training in seamanship, boat-handling skills and sometimes cookery, all of which gave them a head start on apprentices bound from other sources.

Boys 'from the streets of large towns' simply presented themselves to smackowners, looking for work. Such recruits were not usually accepted at smaller ports, but where labour was scarce they had little difficulty finding berths. Some came to the fishing industry as a last resort, and others were apparently decoyed there. It was also said that boys who ran away from home often ended up working on the smacks. How prevalent this was is unknowable, but one case that can be substantiated is that of fourteen-year-old Henry Denison, who ran away from his Dulwich home in September 1875, became destitute and took refuge with another boy in Romford Union under the name of (according to his mother) Henry Dueman. Both were there recruited by Grimsby smackowner Ebenezer Marks. The 1875 Register of Apprentices records two boys by the name of Henry and Thomas Dudman – presumably they posed as brothers, and they both gave Portsmouth as their birthplace – apprenticed to Marks on 9 October 1875. Marks, the boy's mother alleged, refused to release the boy unless

¹³ HCA, PUS/15. Minutes of Board and Committee Meetings, Sculcoates Board of Guardians, August 1880 – July 1883.

¹⁴ I.D. Cowan, *Industrial Schools and Training Ships with Special Reference to the Humber Training Ship Southampton* (Unpub. M.Ed Dissertation, University of Hull, 1980), pp2 & 7.

¹⁵ BPP 1907 LXXV, Report of the Committee Appointed by the Board of Trade on the Supply and Training of Boy Seamen (hereafter Report on the Supply and Training of Boy Seamen), Minutes, qq2,187-90.

a penal sum of twenty pounds was paid. Presumably it never was, because 'Henry Dudman's' apprenticeship ended when he absconded in July 1879.¹⁶

At many ports, smackowners made attempts to recruit boys independently of public bodies. A Ramsgate smackowner recalled how in 1873 a smackowner visited his school looking for boys.¹⁷ More sinister were numerous allegations made during the 1870s about 'decoy ducks' being sent out to lure boys to Grimsby with tales of high wages and easy living conditions. Indeed, seven letters written by parents to Leicester newspapers in 1878 were published with the 1882 enquiry, alleging that their sons had been decoyed to Grimsby and were now serving under indentures from which their parents could not afford to release them.¹⁸ Given how little protection there was for boys signing indentures, and how inadequate the arrangements, at least at Grimsby, for supervising the binding process, it is not at all surprising that some boys apprenticed themselves without much understanding of what they were committing themselves to.

Migrating fishermen frequently took their apprentices with them. The patterns of migration are not relevant here, but it is probable that the first fishing apprentices at the Humber ports arrived aboard migrant boats from Essex, Devon, Kent and the Thames ports. Harrison Mudd, Mayor of Grimsby in 1900-1, arrived in the town as cabin boy aboard a smack from Manningtree, Essex.¹⁹ Between 1875 and 1879, of the 1,998 apprentices recruited to Hull smackowners, thirteen had been born in Brixham, 24 in Great Yarmouth and 27 in Barking and Greenwich. All of these were ports that experienced considerable outward migration in this period. Some of these apprentices will also have been sons of fishermen who took their families with them when they moved.

Ages of Apprentices

The overwhelming majority of fishing apprentices were teenagers. The reasons for this were very simple: below the age of about thirteen or fourteen they were not strong enough, and apprenticeships traditionally – and legally – ended once

¹⁶ Letter reproduced in BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 43; PRO, BT150/42. Thomas and Henry Dudman, 9 October 1875.

¹⁷ J. Dyson, *Business in Great Waters* (London, 1977), pp116-7.

¹⁸ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 43.

¹⁹ Benham, *The Codbangers*, p161.

the apprentice reached his 21st birthday, unless they were contracted for a set amount of time. Many were, but apprentices bound near or after their 21st birthday and serving a fixed term did not serve as long a term as an apprentices bound in their mid-teens, which obviously did not suit the smackowners.

Table 1.1 shows the age range and the mean age of apprentices recruited nationally every fifth year between 1860 and 1914.

Table 1.1
Age Range and Mean Ages of Apprentices by Year 1860-1914

Year	Total Apprentices Recruited	Lowest/Highest Age	Mean Age
1860	607	11/21	15.1
1865	714	9/32	15.4
1870	784	11/30	16.0
1875	972	10/34	16.3
1880	809	12/30	16.1
1885	546	13/22	15.7
1890	421	13/22	15.2
1895	239	13/18	15.2
1905	173	14/19	15.3
1910	143	13/18	15.2
1914	94	13/17	14.9

Source: PRO, BT150.

Note: 1900 omitted as register for that year does not survive.

A noticeable trend in the above table is that the age range of apprentices narrowed in later years, as the apprenticeship system contracted. This occurred for legal reasons, especially the prohibition of indenture below the age of thirteen, but also because, as waged casual labour became more prevalent, older individuals were less likely to be willing to commit themselves to a lengthy term of unpaid labour.

There was far more variation by region than by year, as Table 1.2, showing the age range and mean age of apprentices at seven major ports demonstrates.

Table 1.2
Age Range and Mean Age of Apprentices by Port, 1860-1914

Port	Highest/Lowest Age	Mean Age
Barking	12/20	14.3
Brightlingsea	9/18	15.5
Brixham	10/21	14.9
Grimsby	11/34	16.0
Hull	11/31	16.2
Lowestoft	11/19	14.9
Ramsgate	11/23	15.2
Great Yarmouth	12/19	14.6

Source: PRO, BT150.

The 23-year-old at Ramsgate is one of only two apprentices aged over twenty recruited there,²⁰ and no other port employed apprentices older than 21, with the exception of the Humber ports, which employed older apprentices frequently before 1885. However, even at Hull and Grimsby between 1860 and 1914 only 2.6% and 2.2% of apprentices respectively were aged over 21, and after 1880 this dwindled to nothing.

Of more significance was apprenticeship of boys under thirteen. This was comparatively rare by the mid-nineteenth century, but anecdotal evidence suggests it was much more common in earlier years, especially in places where boys were often apprenticed to relatives. Walter Smith, Brixham smackowner, recalled in 1833 how he had been taken to sea 'for pleasure' by his father at the age of nine,²¹ before being formally apprenticed, whilst several smackowners recalled in 1866 how they had been apprenticed at eleven years of age.²² One nine-year-old was apprenticed at Brightlingsea in 1865, probably to his father.²³ However, he was the only one in the sample, and apprenticeship at such a young age was always comparatively rare because it was held that boys aged under fourteen were not strong enough, something which must have become truer as smacks grew larger and trawls bigger and heavier in the second half of the century. All of this is supported by the fact that 4.1% of Brixham apprentices

²⁰ PRO, BT150/47. Charles Marriott Horner (aged 22), 22 June 1880; PRO, BT150/45. Henry Smith (aged 23), 11 May 1875.

²¹ BPP 1833 XIV, S.C. on Channel Fisheries, Minutes, q2,174.

²² See for example BPP 1866 XVII, R.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, q7,681.

²³ PRO, BT150/35. George Shepherd, 3 January 1865.

between 1860 and 1914 were under thirteen, whereas at Hull and Grimsby, ports using larger smacks and recruiting few apprentices from within the community, the proportions were 1.8% and one per cent respectively. Indenture below the age of thirteen accounted for 4.6% of apprentices nationally in 1865, dropping to 3.1% ten years later.

There was no minimum age for ordinary apprentices, but parish boys could not be indentured before their twelfth birthday. In fact, many parish boys appear to have been apprenticed as soon as was legally possible, as Table 1.3, showing the ages of apprentices in the Parish section of the London registers for 1875-9, suggests.

Table 1.3
Ages of London Parish Apprentices, 1875-9

Ages	1875	1876	1877	1878	1879
12	14	13	14	19	12
13	6	7	4	2	8
14	7	15	7	18	3
15	2	8	4	6	7
16	1	2		2	2
Not stated		1		5	4

Source: PRO, BT150.

Parish apprentices were generally younger than ordinary apprentices, which must reflect on the desire of Guardians to be rid of able-bodied boys as quickly as possible. The high proportion of parish apprentices at Barking is the main reason why the mean age of apprentices there was lower than at other ports. The 1883 Merchant Shipping Act banned indenture below the age of thirteen, so from 1885 there are no apprentices aged below thirteen. Berrington and Davy's report suggested that even fourteen was 'somewhat too young' for an apprentice, with which Charles Jeffs concurred.²⁴ Indeed, many of the larger companies, such as the Boston Deep Sea Fishing and Ice Company and the Great Grimsby Ice Company stopped taking apprentices below the age of fourteen.

²⁴ PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report, pp11-2; see also Letter from Charles Jeffs, in correspondence.

Terms of Service

Henry Toozes stated to the 1882 Enquiry that at 21 an apprentice was freed 'by the general law of the land.'²⁵ This might be taken to imply that indentures were always made out to run until the apprentice's 21st birthday or that fixed terms were formulated to achieve the same result. These were the most common arrangements, but were not universal, and binding for a fixed term with no reference to the apprentice's age became more common in later years.

Of 714 apprentices bound in 1865, only 107 were bound until their 21st birthday and only 66 from 592 in 1885, which demonstrates that binding until the apprentice turned 21 was far from universal practice. Many more, however, were bound for a fixed term clearly intended to end on their 21st birthday. Ages and terms in the registers are frequently expressed in fractions of years, so for example a 14½ -year-old apprentice might be bound to serve a 6½ year term. Where this was the case, it is likely that the apprentice would have been freed at 21. In 1880, terms 'until 21' and for a fixed period adding up to 21 accounts for 371 of 809 indentures registered. Moreover, many more add up to roughly 21 – for example, a 16¼ year old apprentice bound for five years – which in practice would probably have led to the apprentice being freed at 21 in many cases. Making allowance for these inconsistencies, then, apprenticeship until 21 was not universal, but it applied to well over half of all apprentices in the 1850-1914 period.

The other system was that of binding apprentices for a fixed term irrespective of age. The Statute of Artificers of 1563 had specified a seven-year term for entry into the professions it covered, and from this point on seven years became a 'traditional' length of service for apprentices in many industries. In the fishing industry, boys apprenticed at fourteen would invariably serve such a term since it allowed them to be freed at 21, and boys apprenticed younger would frequently serve a fixed term as well. Of the 70 parish apprentices aged twelve between 1875 and 1879, 35 served for seven years, and another twenty for six. However, the custom of binding until 21 allowed a smackowner to recruit boys very young and bind them for a long term, and of the 70 twelve year old parish apprentices, fourteen were indentured until they were 21, which meant they

²⁵ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q51.

served a nine-year apprenticeship. There are a great many other instances of eleven- and twelve-year-old boys, parish and otherwise, being bound to serve nine- and ten-year terms. Older apprentices, those near to and over 21, were normally bound on a fixed term, usually varying between two and four years.

In later years, there was a move towards apprenticeships for fixed four or five-year terms on the part of larger companies operating in the newer trawl ports. Four- or five-year terms became the rule among companies in Fleetwood, Boston and in one firm in Hull. The disparity of wages between older apprentices and casual hands had been held up as a cause of dissatisfaction among older apprentices since the 1870s, and it was probably to alleviate this problem that the fixed-term apprenticeship was introduced. Moreover, there was a feeling on the part of boards of Guardians that apprentices served overly long terms. The Reverend P.H. Moore, a Guardian of Stockport Union who wrote to the Board of Trade in response to Berrington and Davy's report, thought a five-year term was adequate.²⁶ However, although new trawling concerns modified the system to shorten and regularise terms of service, this was not done at Ramsgate, Brixham – where twenty of 24 apprentices in 1914 were bound to serve until they were 21 – or other smaller stations such as Milford and Plymouth. Nor did it happen at Grimsby. As Charles Jeffs commented:

Six years apprenticeship instead of seven. This I feel sure would be a very great mistake. No lad should come out of his time until he is 21 years of age – at 20 they are neither men nor boys and only go to swell the already great number of unemployed. What the trade is and always has suffered from is the want of sufficient men.²⁷

Jeffs's comments conveniently ignored the fact that plenty of ex-apprentices aged under 21 were serving on his own trawlers, but his resistance to shorter terms of service is clear. It was evidently shared by other Grimsby masters, for in 1910, with the exception of three apprentices to the Ocean Steam Fishing Company bound for five years, all of the companies were still employing apprentices for variable terms.

²⁶ PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report. Letter from Revd P.H. Moore, in correspondence.

²⁷ PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report. Letter from Charles Jeffs, in correspondence.

Remuneration

In theory, apprentices were provided for by their master and paid only pocket money, if anything. However, as in many other walks of late Victorian life, by the late nineteenth century there was a strong feeling, not least within the Board of Trade, that apprentices had too much money and that this was a prime cause of desertion and misbehaviour among apprentices.

Many early indentures specify a nominal sum for the apprentice, such as that of Thomas Petherbridge to Jabez Rutter of Hull in June 1870 who was to be paid five shillings per annum.²⁸ Other indentures specify a sum of money per year that amounts to a few shillings per week, such as W.H.P. Salsbury of Brixham, who was to receive six pounds per annum (Appendix 7a). Some, however, specify only payment in kind, such as James Garwood, indentured at Lowestoft, who was to receive only clothes.²⁹ Whether or not it was specified on the indenture, however, most apprentices were given a few shillings a week in pocket money.³⁰

In addition to pocket money, apprentices shared in the crew's perquisites. The crews of cod smacks received 'score money,' a bonus of two or three pence per score of large fish caught whilst hand lining. Aboard trawlers, an allowance was paid on fish livers, which were removed when the fish was gutted, barrelled, and sold ashore. More importantly, small and unmarketable fish known as 'stocker' or 'stockerbait' were the perquisite of the crew, divided amongst them in varying ways. At Grimsby, the proceeds of the stocker were divided into four, one for each of the crew except for the deckhand and the cook, who received two thirds and one third of a share respectively,³¹ which averaged around two shillings per week.³² The same system was in force at Hull.³³ At Brixham, the apprentice's perquisite on larger trawlers was as follows:

The proceeds of all she-crabs, oysters and squids taken by the boat every week to an amount not exceeding 2/6 in any one week until employed as 3rd hand; and when employed as 3rd hand ¼ of the

²⁸ PRO, BT151/13. Indenture of Thomas Henry Petherbridge, June 1870.

²⁹ PRO, BT151/13. Indenture of James Garwood, June 1870.

³⁰ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q81.

³¹ PRO, MH32/99. Fleming, 'Treatment of Pauper Apprentices.'

³² *Grimsby Observer*, 17 April 1873, 'Our Fishery, No.2.'

³³ PRO, MAF12/14. Documents relating to new form of indenture.

proceeds of all rays taken by the boat and brought to market and sold, to an amount not exceeding 5/- in any one week.³⁴

Stockerbait, however, declined in importance at most ports as species formerly considered by-catch increased in value and ceased to be counted as stockerbait. A Hull indenture from 1910 (see Appendix 7e) makes no mention of stockerbait at all, the apprentice's only perquisite being liver money.

The variable and low payments were one of the principal causes of trouble among apprentices in the 1870s, and attempts were made to regularise the system in the Merchant Shipping Act of 1883. Regular payments to apprentices were set out on the new form of indenture. A typical example can be seen on the indenture of William Sanders (Appendix 7d), who received sixpence per week as cook, nine pence as deckhand and one shilling as third hand. This part of the indenture was revised again by the 1894 Merchant Shipping Act, with more detail being added (see Appendix 7e). A clear distinction was drawn between remuneration and spending money, the difference between which was to be paid into the Seamen's Savings Bank. On the indenture of Gerald Stephenson, spending money is capped at ten shillings per trip with the balance being paid into the bank. Perquisites and the share of salvage allowed to the apprentice were also entered on the indenture. These alterations applied mainly to apprentices serving in the largest ports. At Brixham, Ramsgate and other smaller stations they appear to have been but little observed, and although the intention was that regular payments to apprentices should be made as specified on the indenture, in many instances the traditional formula for calculating perquisites was entered on the indenture and in practice continued with little change.

Staged wage increments were introduced to reward longer-serving apprentices, these being formalised and codified in the last decades of the century. The wage scale below is that used by Grimsby liner owner W.J. Plowman in 1886.³⁵

³⁴ DRO 3287S add/6. Register of Brixham Fishing Apprentices.

³⁵ PRO, MAF12/14. Documents relating to new form of indenture.

1s per week at the end of each voyage during the	1 st year
2s	2 nd
2s 6d	3 rd
3s	4 th
3s 6d	5 th
4s	6 th

Other liner owners employed similar scales, and staged increments were also used for apprentices serving aboard trawlers, although these depended upon rank rather than length of service.

The other innovation of the 1883 Merchant Shipping Act with regard to remuneration was the extension of the Seamen's Savings Bank scheme to fishing apprentices, which had begun at Grimsby in 1880. Money due to them over and above their spending money, particularly one-off payments such as charity boxes and salvage, was to be placed into an account at the bank, to which the Superintendent held the pass book until the end of the apprentice's term. For example, these are the payments made into the bank by William Bullock, apprenticed at Grimsby in January 1881:³⁶

4 May 1881	Liver cask money	1s
7 July 1881	Liver cask money	1s 6d
3 November 1881	Liver cask money	1s
25 February 1882	Liver cask money	3s
23 August 1882	Liver cask money	4s 2d
4 January 1883	Liver cask money	5s
20 May 1883	Salvage	7s 9d
20 May 1883	Liver cask money	1s 4d
30 October 1883	Liver cask money	1s
		£1 5s 19d

The balance was withdrawn at the cancellation of the indenture in June 1885. This, however, represents one of the more heavily used accounts: many apprentices' records contain details of only a few, if any, transactions. The efficacy of the system depended heavily upon the character of the superintendent, and it is significant that Bullock's payments cease in October 1883, shortly before a new superintendent was appointed who enforced the system much less

³⁶ NELRO, 208/1/1. Register of Grimsby Fishing Apprentices. William Henry Bullock, 1 January 1881.

rigorously. A similar situation existed at other ports, giving rise to Berrington and Davy's complaint in 1894 that:

The provisions of the form of indenture to the effect that certain of these monies should be paid into the savings bank have been but little observed.³⁷

Shortly afterwards a new superintendent was appointed who took better control over the system.³⁸ Besides Grimsby, records survive only for Brixham, from which it appears that the system was still more slackly administered and the old system of paying apprentices by stockerbait alone continued unchanged. Few apprentices' records contain details of many bank transactions, and an official commented in 1894 that:

2/6 and over a week seems a large allowance for the younger boys, and so is 5s for the older ones. Perhaps the masters might gradually be brought to limit the weekly or daily spending money and pay the balance into the S.S.B.³⁹

This, however, appears to have had little effect, for the number of transactions was no greater after this date. Although it is impossible to be certain, it is likely that a similar situation existed at other smaller trawl ports, where the new regulations formalised arrangements that existed anyway, were adapted to suit local conditions, or were simply ignored if they proved inconvenient.

In the early years of the scheme there was reluctance, in line with the intentions of those who framed the law, to allow apprentices to withdraw money for their immediate use. However, around the turn of the century the Superintendent at Grimsby began to allow apprentices to withdraw money to send to parents, to buy bicycles and the like and for holidays.⁴⁰

Another intention of the Savings Bank scheme was that apprentices' savings could be used to pay fines for misconduct. A few service records from Grimsby and Brixham do show money being withdrawn for fines, but masters

³⁷ PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report, p11.

³⁸ Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices*, p138; see also Horn, 'Pauper Apprenticeship,' p179.

³⁹ PRO, MAF12/14. Documents relating to new form of indenture.

⁴⁰ Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices*, pp126-7 & 138-9.

usually appear to have preferred to stop fines out of spending money or stockerbait, as the record of Brixham apprentice Charles Kemp demonstrates:

Apprehended [had deserted]. No valid excuse. Ordered to resume duty and pay costs (savings bank deposits not to be applied in part-payment). Weekly deductions to be made from stocker until costs defrayed.⁴¹

Presumably losing his spending money was a more tangible punishment for an errant apprentice than money being removed from an account whose contents he had no immediate access to – assuming there was money in it anyway which, given how lax the operation of the system was even at Grimsby, was often not the case. Some commentators, including smackowners and Guardians, advocated corporal punishment instead of fines for the younger apprentices, the Revd. Moore arguing that, ‘a good cane is a wholesome medicine better than fines and prison,’ but magistrates had no power to order corporal punishment for desertion, although apprentices convicted of felonies were sometimes birched.⁴²

Board and Lodging

As Lane comments, the theory behind apprenticeship was that the master exercised the same rights and had the same responsibilities as a father, and the apprentice, throughout his term of service, became a member of the master’s household.⁴³ It was traditional for apprentices to be lodged in the homes of their masters or rooms in private houses rented by him and, even if masters in factory-based industries had eschewed this tradition by the nineteenth century, it was very much alive in artisan trades. So it was in the fishing industry at most ports throughout the 1850-1914 period, although most attention has focused on the circumstances during the late 1860s and 1870s under which smackowners broke with tradition and began to board their apprentices out. However, only in Grimsby from the 1880s and Brixham from the 1890s is it possible to be precise

⁴¹ DRO, 3287S add/6. Register of Brixham Fishing Apprentices. Charles Kemp, 8 February 1895.

⁴² PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report. See letters from Charles Jeffs and Revd. P.H. Moore, in correspondence; NELRO 208/1/1. Register of Grimsby Fishing Apprentices. George Humphrey, 27 October 1880.

⁴³ Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, pp2-3.

about how prevalent this system was, and from there to draw some conclusions about its use at other ports

Anywhere up to a dozen apprentices might be lodged in their master's homes,⁴⁴ under the direct supervision of the master and his wife. The paternalism of a traditional apprenticeship, which became known as the 'indoor system' to differentiate it from the 'outdoor system' to be discussed below, is well demonstrated by the comments of Brixham smackowner and builder John Upham:

I am sure you would say that they have a good home here, they come in destitute without any food or clothes, they are taken into the owner's home and treated with every comfort ... They are quite a credit to their masters and mistresses, and to see them on Saturday or Sunday there seems to be a feeling among the owners and the wives who can turn them out the best.⁴⁵

Many former smackowners' houses in Brixham have extensions to house apprentices, which is not surprising given that, of a random sample of 50 Brixham apprentices, all but one were to lodge with their masters.⁴⁶ At Lowestoft and Ramsgate, smackowners interviewed by the 1882 enquiry were adamant that they took only indoor apprentices and that no outdoor apprentices were employed there,⁴⁷ although in fact there were occasional exceptions to this rule.

Under this indoor system it was permissible for the master to lodge the boy at another house, as long as he made the arrangements and paid the rent from his own pocket. As Baldwin Fleming put it:

The master finds lodging and board for indoor apprentices, many of the smaller smackowners in their own homes. The larger proprietors cannot do this and therefore lodge them out, for the most part with respectable persons. Many of the lodging houses are kept by wives or widows of men who were formerly in the master's employ or by persons with whom they are well acquainted.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 37. Report of Swanston and Stoneham.

⁴⁵ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q6,180.

⁴⁶ DRO 3287S add/6. Register of Brixham Fishing Apprentices.

⁴⁷ See for instance the evidence of Jeremiah Crews, Lowestoft. BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q4,667.

⁴⁸ PRO, MH32/99. Fleming, 'Treatment of Pauper Apprentices.'

Taking in lodgers must have been a vital source of income for many widows. Meanwhile, the one Brixham apprentice in 50 not lodged with his master was lodged with the smack's skipper under this sort of arrangement, which was common at all trawl ports throughout the period. It could also encompass apprentices whose families lived locally. For example, a boy apprenticed to John Gidley at Grimsby in June 1880 was to live with his mother, to whom Gidley would pay a weekly sum of seven shillings for the first six months, rising to thirteen shillings for the last ten months of the term.⁴⁹ Another variation on the system was that, whether or not the apprentice lived with his master, he could be paid an allowance for clothing rather than having the master provide everything. Variations such as these effectively sit on a very blurred boundary between the archetypal indoor apprenticeship, with the master providing everything and retaining responsibility for the apprentice whilst ashore, and what became known as the outdoor system. This system was well summarised by Baldwin Fleming:

Outdoor apprentices receive wages varying from seven shillings a week up to sixteen shillings and even higher. In addition they have food while at sea. On shore they find for themselves. The houses where they lodge are of much the same description as those of indoor apprentices who do not reside with their masters and they pay about £1 per quarter for lodging and two shillings a day for food and washing when on shore ... [They] are practically independent of their masters provided that they are ready for work when wanted.⁵⁰

In the covenant on the indenture where the master's obligations in respect of food and lodgings were laid out, the caveat 'at sea' was usually inserted, making it plain that whilst ashore the apprentice was responsible for his own upkeep. Indeed, one Grimsby outdoor apprentice's indenture from 1870 says that in case of protracted illness the allowance of six shillings per week in the first year, rising to ten shillings in the last two years of the indenture, would cease after two months.⁵¹

This system was initially confined mainly to older apprentices, such as Richard Powell, interviewed by the 1882 enquiry, who started as an indoor

⁴⁹ NELRO, 208/1/1. Register of Grimsby Fishing Apprentices. Sam Bell, 22 June 1880.

⁵⁰ PRO, MH32/99. Fleming, 'Treatment of Pauper Apprentices;' see also BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q1,839.

⁵¹ PRO, BT151/13. Indenture of Joseph Cook, June 1870.

apprentice and later had his indentures altered.⁵² Indeed, this was often done at the request of an older apprentice who wanted more independence. It could also involve apprentices of all ages living with their parents, for once a boy was given his money and paid it to his mother in the form of rent he was technically an outdoor apprentice, although in practice there was very little difference between him and an indoor apprentice lodging with relatives whose master paid the money to them directly. Again, this illustrates the blurred divide between indoor and outdoor apprenticeships. By the late 1870s, however, the outdoor system had been extended to cover a large proportion of apprentices at Hull and Grimsby. It was certainly employed at other ports too, although to a lesser extent. A Ramsgate apprentice's indenture from 1870 specifies that the boy was to receive £15 12s (which equates to six shillings per week) for the first year, £20 16s (eight shillings per week) for the second, and £39 over the remaining eighteen months: the clauses obliging the master to lodge the boy are crossed out.⁵³ Clearly, then, the outdoor system did exist away from the Humber ports, with similar terms and allowances, but on a much smaller scale.

It was quite possible for the master to arrange accommodation for an outdoor apprentice, again demonstrating the paucity of difference between an indoor apprentice who lodged out and an outdoor apprentice, and in some cases this did happen. However, some masters simply gave their apprentices their allowance and left them to fend for themselves. Some, perhaps most, were able to find reasonable lodgings; others drifted into the slums of the Victorian port. The medical officer for Hull borough described to the enquiry of 1882 how he had visited lodgings in Trundle Street and Union Court, in the Myton area of the city, and found 'ragged' apprentices, unsupervised and living with prostitutes.⁵⁴ That enquiry had as one of the issues for consideration the licensing of lodging houses, but it was decided that the master should, 'in every case ... be held responsible for the lodging and food of the lad on shore, as well as at sea.'⁵⁵ This amounted to a ban on the outdoor system.

Many smaller owners, certainly at Grimsby, simply reverted to the indoor system, and although comparatively few apprentices were lodged with

⁵² BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq352-72.

⁵³ PRO, BT151/13. Indenture of Henry Drayton, June 1870.

⁵⁴ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq247-66.

⁵⁵ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Report, p678.

their masters, most were lodged in private houses. There was also, however, a move towards building specialised homes for apprentices. This was already under way, but doubtless accelerated after the prohibition on outdoor apprenticeships. At Ramsgate, a Smack Boys' Home had been established by subscription in 1881 with owners paying fourteen shillings per week to lodge their boys there,⁵⁶ this being a co-operative effort between several owners. It also evidently acted as an agent for unions wishing to apprentice boys at the port.⁵⁷ Charitable efforts also provided similar institutions, such as the Smack Boys' Home at Great Yarmouth, purchased for the Columbia Fleet by Lady Burdett Coutts,⁵⁸ and a small 'home for fisherlads' in Hull founded by a Mr Thomas Stratten in the mid-1870s.⁵⁹ The larger companies that were formed at Grimsby in the 1880s and 1890s, however, began to build homes for their own apprentices, perhaps consciously following a precedent set by factory owners who housed their apprentices in barracks. The Great Grimsby Ice Company built a home for 100 boys, each with their own room, whilst the Grimsby and North Sea Steam Trawling Company's home could house 30. Although this was still technically an indoor apprenticeship, and it solved the problem of finding suitable lodgings for apprentices, it was felt at the time that the homes lacked 'homeliness,' and afforded no opportunity to build cordial relations between apprentices and masters. Supervision was also held to be lacking, as the report of a deputation from Basford Union who visited Grimsby in 1894 suggested:

In the old days, fishing apprentices were lodged, two or three together, in private homes with the widows of seamen, and the associations of home life had an excellent effect upon them. Latterly big establishments have come into vogue in connection with the larger shipping firms, and here, although everything possible is done in the way of providing home comforts, the result is not the same.⁶⁰

Letters from several boards of guardians expressed similar sentiments, the head of Chase Farm Schools, Enfield, pointing out in April 1894 that he would only apprentice boys to smaller smackowners 'who go to sea with their own vessel

⁵⁶ Robinson, *Trawling*, p61.

⁵⁷ PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report. Letter from Maidstone Union, in correspondence.

⁵⁸ PRO, MAF12/12. Report by Mr Lockwood to the Local Government Board, 1887.

⁵⁹ Anon., *The Trade and Commerce of Hull and its Ships and Shipowners* (Hull, 1878).

⁶⁰ *Nottingham Daily Guardian*, 9 April 1894.

and have the boys to live with them at their home when ashore.⁶¹ He might have done better to send them to Brixham, Ramsgate, Plymouth or another smaller port which had remained aloof from these developments and retained the classic indoor system throughout.

Careers of Apprentices

Although the word 'apprentice' can equate to 'trainee,' which would imply that apprentices filled junior positions under close supervision, in fishing this was not always the case. Apprentices frequently filled senior positions in a smack's crew, were often in a position to exercise command over casual hands and, occasionally, actually commanded smacks themselves. Apprentices aboard cod smacks and trawlers fulfilled different roles, although on both it was expected that the apprentice would move steadily up the hierarchy as he became more experienced and competent; and that whilst serving, for example, as cook, he would be learning the jobs he would perform once promoted to deckhand. At Grimsby, the only port where lining and trawling co-existed on a large scale in the later part of the century, apprentices did move between trawlers and codmen when their masters owned both, or when their indentures were transferred to another master. At least one apprentice was reprimanded for refusing to sail in a codman and demanding to be put in one of his master, Henry Smethurst's, trawlers.⁶² However, as most owners specialised in one branch of the fishery, and few ports had both codmen and trawlers, movement between the two was fairly rare.

Cod smacks carried ten or eleven hands, of which half, at least until the 1880s, were apprentices. Cod smacks were usually larger than trawlers, with two cabins, one for the skipper, mate and seamen aft, and one for the boys in the fo'c'sle. An apprentice started as the cabin boy or cook, charged with keeping the living areas clean, cooking food and assisting with baiting the long lines and the general work of the ship. He would then be promoted to ordinary seaman, and would therefore have to know how to steer by the compass, handle the small boat and assist with gutting and salting the fish under the charge of the mate. The senior apprentice filled an informal position of command in the fo'c'sle,

⁶¹ PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report. Letter from Chase Farm Schools, in correspondence.

⁶² NELRO 208/1/6. Register of Grimsby Fishing Apprentices. John Barnett, 14 September 1886.

overseeing the junior apprentices and acting as intermediary between them and the mate.⁶³ On Harwich smacks senior apprentices occupied responsible positions known as 'foreholdsman,' who looked after spare sails and gear, and subsequently 'backer-in,' who hauled and coiled down each long line as the gear was hauled in.⁶⁴ As late as 1886, four of the ten-man crew of the Grimsby cod smack *Abstainer* were apprentices, although the positions they were serving in are not given.⁶⁵

Trawlers carried crews varying between four and seven. The following summary, although descriptive of trawlers with five-man crews, is a fair representation of apprentices' duties, although crew numbers varied by region and in some places by the size of the vessel. As on codmen, apprentices invariably started as cooks, responsible for preparing food and keeping the cabin clean. When the trawl was hauled, the cook was down in the warp room, running round and round coiling down the heavy trawl warp as it came aboard. Keeping the navigation lights trimmed and burning brightly was frequently a cook's responsibility, as was assisting in reefing sail in heavy weather. Being the smallest member of the crew, the junior apprentice was often sent out onto the boom to pass the lacing through the eyelets in the sail as the halyards were slackened off, with the risk of being thrown into the sea if the sail flapped. The first promotion was to deck hand. The 'deckie' stood watches, so he would be expected to take charge of the smack under calm conditions, necessitating the ability to steer, use the compass and handle the sails and sounding lead. He helped to gut and ice the fish and, when fleeting, went in the boat to ferry fish to the cutter. The third hand, who was an apprentice in the last years of his term, and therefore aged twenty or 21, had to be a competent all-round fisherman and seaman, conversant with the fishing grounds and the Rule of the Road, able to handle the smack under normal conditions and with the trawl down. He gutted and iced the catch, took charge of repairing damage to the trawl, and managed the boat whilst taking fish to the cutter.⁶⁶ A Ramsgate owner said that on

⁶³ March, *Sailing Trawlers*, pp25-6.

⁶⁴ Benham, *Codbangers*, pp126 & 147.

⁶⁵ PRO BT144/14. Crew lists for British Fishing Vessels.

⁶⁶ Summaries of trawler apprentices' duties can be found in C. Ekberg, *Grimsby Fish* (Buckingham, 1984), pp24-5; March, *Sailing Trawlers*, pp103-4 and Dyson, *Business in Great Waters*, pp94, 108 & 113.

average twelve to eighteen months were spent as cook, two years as deck hand and then the rest of the term as third hand,⁶⁷ although this could vary greatly.

Promotion was on the basis of merit, with apprentices deemed lazy or incompetent tending to occupy junior positions for a long time. One Brixham apprentice's record commented that he was, 'lazy, sleepy and dirty, that they [the crew] did not care to eat the food he cooked; that he had made no effort to qualify for third hand.'⁶⁸ His indenture was cancelled. Conversely, some apprentices became dissatisfied with the slowness of promotion, Grimsby apprentice Henry Coe commenting in 1882 that he had once stopped the ship out of frustration at not being promoted to deck hand, and that once he was promoted he did well.⁶⁹ It was also possible for apprentices to rise further up the ranks than this, as Swanston and Stoneham commented:

Instances from time to time occur in which the boy becomes mate, and even master, before the expiry of his articles of apprenticeship, and in these cases the whole of the crew probably consists of apprentices.⁷⁰

Several smackowners who spoke at the 1882 enquiry recalled commanding smacks whilst still under indenture, the case of Henry Shepherd of Lowestoft, who received a gold medal from his master for good service, suggesting that the best apprentices were selected for this.⁷¹ After 1883, with the introduction of certification for masters, it is unlikely that apprentices continued to command vessels, although some certainly passed examinations for second hand once these were introduced in 1886.⁷² It was of course also possible for the chain of promotion to run the other way: Brixham apprentice Frank Collin was reduced to cook in consequence of being found asleep on watch.⁷³ However, in the case of a boy who proved repeatedly unable to perform his duties, his indenture would usually be cancelled.

⁶⁷ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q5,488.

⁶⁸ DRO 3287S add/6. Register of Brixham Fishing Apprentices. James Pillar, 29 January 1906.

⁶⁹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq1,990-2,006.

⁷⁰ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 37. Report of Swanston and Stoneham.

⁷¹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q4,729.

⁷² NELRO 208/1/6. Register of Grimsby Fishing Apprentices. Henry James Kew, 24 November 1886. Kew passed his second hand's examination in January 1888.

⁷³ DRO 3287S add/6. Register of Brixham Fishing Apprentices. Frank Collin, 8 April 1895.

Humber and Ramsgate trawlers usually carried crews of five, with apprentices serving as cook, deck hand and often third hand. However, with falling numbers of apprentices after 1880 this ceased to be the case, since experienced apprentices were more proficient than many of the casual hands available. Thus it became common for smacks to sail with one apprentice as third or deck hand, and casual hands filling the other positions. Few smacks, by the late 1880s, sailed with three apprentices aboard. Much the same applies to Lowestoft trawlers, although these sometimes had crews of six. In September 1886, Lowestoft smack *Patience* had teenaged apprentices serving as third and fourth hands, and a 35-year-old casual hand working as cook.⁷⁴ Brixham and Plymouth trawlers usually carried crews of four and there was no deck hand as such, with promotion being from cook to third and generally only the cook being an apprentice. Brixham trawlers joining the North Sea fleets added an extra man to the crew, but this would not always be an apprentice. Apprentices who served aboard steam trawlers, for example at Boston, started as spare hands and were promoted to deck hands during the period of indenture, but there were no opportunities for further promotion. However, some worked as stokers and trimmers and received a bonus for doing so: several Grimsby apprentices' Savings Bank transactions include a 'firing bonus' of about five shillings.⁷⁵

Career Prospects

The completion of an apprenticeship in fishing was an occasion of no great ceremony, but it was customary for a small presentation to be made to an apprentice when he 'came out of his time.' He was given his master's copy of his indenture, signifying that he was now a free man, and also (after 1883) the pass book to his account at the Seaman's Savings Bank. Reference has already been made to the presentation of Henry Shepherd with a gold medal, which was undoubtedly an exceptional case, but apprentices who completed their term would be presented with their working clothes, which after 1883 were formally the property of the master until the term expired to prevent boys pawning them. They would also receive 'a good suit of clothing, a suit of pilot cloth, three or

⁷⁴ PRO, BT144/12. Crew lists for British Fishing Vessels.

⁷⁵ See for example NELRO 208/1/11. Register of Grimsby Fishing Apprentices. Edward May, 25 April 1899.

four shifts of flannel right through, sea boots, and everything which is required,' the value of which could come to ten pounds or more.⁷⁶ This presentation of three good suits of clothing was customary at most ports.

Fishing may have offered an opening to pauper boys with few other opportunities, but it was an extraordinarily arduous occupation. Living conditions at sea were primitive, with no sanitary facilities and one small cabin to accommodate the crew, heated only by a solid fuel stove and frequently flooded for days at a time in bad weather. When steam capstans were installed to haul the trawl, the boiler was placed just ahead of the cabin, making it stiflingly hot. One visitor aboard a Brixham smack commented that never in a life largely spent travelling in the tropics had he known 'heat as stifling, as reeking with steam and oil, as I felt in the cabin of a Brixham trawler.'⁷⁷

The operation of the trawl itself was physically taxing in the extreme. Hauling in the trawl without a steam capstan could take three hours of constant effort: even with one it was 'hard enough to satisfy even the most robust of toilers.'⁷⁸ There was ample scope for accidents, since men worked on slippery wooden decks, using unguarded capstan machinery in all weathers. Gastric disorders from stodgy, hastily eaten food, salt-water sores and infections of skin rubbed by chafing oilskins and handling fish were common occupational ailments. Baldwyn Fleming described the effects of wearing wet boots for days on end, often resulting in feet so swollen the boots had to be cut away, a condition that was to become known during the First World War as 'trench foot.'⁷⁹ Before the Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen began fitting out hospital smacks in the late 1880s, no medical facilities at all were available at sea, so injured men had to be transferred to the steam cutter to be taken ashore for treatment. To quote Sir Wilfred Grenfell, who worked as a doctor on the Mission smacks:

Often it was a long journey of many days, simply fractures became compound, and limbs and faculties were often thus lost.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q5,220.

⁷⁷ Sir E.A. Lechmere, 'A Cruise of a Brixham Trawler,' in C. Gregory, *Brixham in Devonia* (Totnes, 1896), p115.

⁷⁸ W. Wood, *North Sea Fishers and Fighters* (London, 1911), p59.

⁷⁹ PRO, MH32/99. Fleming, 'Treatment of Pauper Apprentices.'

⁸⁰ Sir Wilfred Grenfell, *The Story of a Labrador Doctor* (London, 1920), p73.

Middle class observers, such as Grenfell and the later founder of the Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen, Ebenezer Mather, 'tended to react [to the working conditions of the smacksmen] with a fascinated horror which resembled the response, a generation earlier ... to the new working class of the industrial towns.'⁸¹

The death rate amongst trawlermen also gave rise to much comment, and apprentices, because of the relative inexperience of many of them, were at the greatest risk. Some of the jobs given to junior apprentices, such as climbing out on the boom whilst reefing sail and drawing water, were especially dangerous, and when smacks were struck by large waves it was often the younger apprentices who had insufficient strength to hold on. Table 1.4 shows the percentage of apprentices recruited in 1875, 1885, 1895 and 1905 to selected ports who died at work.

Table 1.4
Death Rates of Apprentices at Selected Ports, 1875-1905

Port	1875	1885	1895	1905	Average 1875-1910
Hull	3.0	4.8	0	0	3.6
Grimsby	2.8	6.8	2.9	3.8	4.0
Brixham	0	0	2.3	4.4	1.7
Ramsgate	5.6	1.9	0	3.9	4.5
Lowestoft	7.7	6.7	0	n/a	2.9

Source: PRO, BT150.

Note: Deaths from natural causes are excluded.

With the exception of Ramsgate, it is noticeable in Table 1.4 that apprentices at ports where fleeting was practised were at greatest risk, unsurprisingly given that third and fourth hands at those ports were in charge of the small boat when boarding fish, the task entailing greatest danger. Ten of the 67 Hull apprentices who died between 1878 and September 1882 drowned in accidents whilst boarding, one died from natural causes, one committed suicide and two were reported as having died in accidents but were later found to have been

⁸¹ Rule, 'Smacksmen,' p393; see also E.J. Mather, *Nor'ard of the Dogger* (London, 1888).

murdered.⁸² Nor was a death rate of five per cent of recruits considered abnormal: Hull smackowner Alfred Ansell said at a meeting in 1882 that of over 100 apprentices he had employed six had drowned, which had 'not been over the average of the rest of the seafaring population.'⁸³ Apprenticeship to fishing may have offered a faint chance of financial independence, and even wealth in a few cases, but it offered a far greater possibility of injury or death.

After finishing the apprenticeship, some apprentices remained with their masters as paid labourers. A report from Middlesbrough Board of Guardians in 1894 names two former inmates who had recently done so,⁸⁴ both of whom were by then serving as mates in their erstwhile masters' boats, and numerous examples can be found in the Grimsby and Brixham registers of apprentices. Presumably, these were instances where relations between master and apprentice had been particularly good. However, most former apprentices can have had little difficulty in finding a berth as mate or skipper within a short time of completing their term. George Fellowes of Grimsby recalled how he had been apprenticed at Ramsgate in 1840, come out of his time in 1846 and was a skipper in Hull the following year.⁸⁵ In all likelihood, the speed of promotion slowed as the labour shortage eased, but as late as 1884-6, of a sample of 32 Hull skippers, sixteen were under 30 years of age, the youngest was 22, and the mean age was only 31.9.⁸⁶

At the top of the hierarchy sat the smackowners, many of whom had been apprentices themselves and some of whom achieved ownership within a few years of completing their indentures. Osmond Brand, aged 27 when convicted of the murder of Bill Papper in 1882, was listed as a smackowner in 1878, when he would have been 23.⁸⁷ Ownership and the chance of an independent and successful life were the prospects held out to apprentices and, as the owners were keen to point out, fishing was one of very few occupations in which a man could begin with nothing and rise to the top of the profession through his own hard work. This much-reproduced quote from Grimsby owner

⁸² BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 7.

⁸³ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 31.

⁸⁴ PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report. Letter from Middlesbrough Board of Guardians, in correspondence.

⁸⁵ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q1,652.

⁸⁶ BT144/8, 10 & 11. Crew lists for British fishing vessels.

⁸⁷ Anon., *The Trade and Commerce of Hull and its Ships and Shipowners*, p145.

James Plastow is the best summary of how the progression from pauper to owner was supposed to happen:

I was an apprentice from Hackney Union in 1854, to the fishing trade in Barking, to Mr Robert Hewett of that town. I served seven years, came out of my time in 1861; a good man's wage at that time was 14s per week in summer and 16s in winter. I saved out of that amount £20 per year for two years then I came to Grimsby in 1863. I saved £65 for eight months, making a total of £105 in less than three years. I then took a smack to work out, paid £100 down, and paid the remaining part £650 and interest clear out in three years. I then went to sea for two years afterwards, and saved £700 in cash. I then had another smack built and stayed on shore. I then started as a fish salesman. I am now the owner of several smacks and represent 26 sail out of this port. I believe every lad in the fishing trade has the same chance of a successful life as I have had, providing he saves his money instead of spending it.⁸⁸

Thus was it possible for smackowners to proclaim the apprenticeship system as a real-life 'rags to riches' opportunity.

Systematic wage data for skippers and mates for the nineteenth century is almost impossible to obtain, but there is much anecdotal evidence and no doubt that skippering a trawler was comparatively well paid, although the hours were far longer and the working conditions worse than in any comparably remunerative land-based occupation. E.J. March gives a figure of £2 5s per week for trawler skippers on the Humber in the 1880s.⁸⁹ This compared well with the wages of skilled craftsmen such as joiners and masons, who could make 32-38s per week,⁹⁰ and when perquisites are taken into account the comparison is even more favourable. Perquisites are virtually unquantifiable, but if Grimsby apprentices could draw two pounds in perquisites from an eight-week fleeting trip,⁹¹ the skipper's share could have been four times that amount. It was therefore possible for skippers to follow the example of Plastow and his ilk, to save money, and to put down a deposit on a smack of their own. A Brixham man explained the system thus:

⁸⁸ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, written statement submitted after q2,538.

⁸⁹ March, *Sailing Trawlers*, p183.

⁹⁰ L. Levi, *Wages and Earnings of the Working Classes* (London, 1884), p107.

⁹¹ PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report, p11.

A man may have 150l. or 200l., and he has a new vessel built. He can find people who are willing to put the remainder of the money into that, and thus assist him. Tradesmen are ready to put their goods on board, if he is an industrious man, and they will give him credit for everything he requires.⁹²

Smacks were not expensive even new, although their increasing size, more complex rig and the fitment of steam capstans from the 1870s pushed the price up from the £750 Plastow paid for his first smack in the mid-1860s, to between £1360 and £1600 by the early 1880s.⁹³ Even so, when compared to the £28,000 needed to set up even a small factory in the 'cheap' cotton-weaving industry,⁹⁴ the relative ease of setting up as a small capitalist in fishing becomes apparent. A man could then claim the owner's share of the profits in addition to the skipper's, making the process of saving for another smack easier. As James Plastow's testimony implies, the income from two smacks made it possible to retire from going to sea and to live on the profits. The incomes from the fleets of smacks owned by the likes of Henry Smethurst of Grimsby, who had started as a pauper apprentice but owned around 50 vessels by the 1880s, were very large by any standards. With reference to Grimsby, but with applicability to Hull and other major trawl ports, a columnist for *The Times* described Grimsby's smackowning hierarchy as:

... a vigorous race, imbued with as keen an instinct for making money as the most golden of American millionaires and with a corresponding capacity for making it in their own way. There was money to be made in the fishing business ... and they made it.⁹⁵

Despite the relative cheapness of vessels and the possibility of obtaining credit, only a small minority of apprentices achieved this status. Many attempted it and failed, or ended up with a vessel too old and worn to make sufficient profit to pay off the mortgage. Ownership in some instances was little more than 'a system of perpetual hire.'⁹⁶ There is insufficient data to calculate the proportion of apprentices who became owners accurately, but a few rough

⁹² BPP 1866 XVI, R.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, q9,253.

⁹³ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q10.

⁹⁴ K.T. Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation 1846-1886* (Oxford 1998), p38.

⁹⁵ Quoted in Tunstall, *The Fishermen*, p33.

⁹⁶ Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, pp86-8.

figures give some indication of how few apprentices did so. On average, between 1860 and 1870, 203 apprentices were indentured at the port of Hull every year, making 2,030 over the decade: seven years later, there were 395 smacks owned by 188 individuals.⁹⁷ Even on these figures, fewer than one in ten apprentices could ever have achieved ownership. Moreover, an unquantifiable but high proportion of owners had started as fish merchants or outside the industry altogether and bought into smacks, which could bring the number of apprentices who became owners down to one in twenty or less. The proportion who did manage it was higher in the smaller ports, and would have been higher in the early years of the industry when vessels were cheaper and profits higher. However, it remains likely that, especially by the 1880s and 1890s, an apprentice had as much chance of drowning as achieving ownership⁹⁸ and the fact that so many attempted to escape the industry suggests that many of them knew it.

⁹⁷ PRO, BT150; Anon., *The Trade and Commerce of Hull and its Ships and Shipowners*, pp138-47.

⁹⁸ Rule, 'Smacksmen,' p407.

Chapter 2

Apprenticeship over Time, Space and Sector

A key problem with studying the fishing industry is its diversity, and its dispersed nature. This applies to all facets of the industry, including the technological, economic, environmental and social, and the apprenticeship system is no exception. As a Local Government Board official put it in 1894:

The varying circumstances under which the fishing service is carried on at different ports must always render it difficult to summarise the apprenticeship system in any general terms.¹

In this chapter, the changing scale and distribution of the apprenticeship system are assessed, beginning with a national overview and proceeding to look at individual ports. To facilitate analysis, therefore, ports are divided into groups determined by the date at which they became significant whitefish ports. The first are those ports already well established by 1820; the second are those established during the migrations of the 1820s and 1830s. The third are those established during the boom driven by the railways, and consequently the freeing of the fish trade from the necessity of being close to urban markets, and the fourth those ports established after 1860, as the fish trade adapted to the new marketing arrangements and later the technological possibilities of steam fishing. A final group deals with the few non-whitefish ports at which apprentices were employed. This structure highlights changes in the fishing industry in the second half of the nineteenth century that affected the apprenticeship system and emphasizes similarities between ports established contemporaneously, and in similar economic circumstances. It is striking that, whereas apprenticeship was near universal in the oldest ports, it was not used to any great extent at most of the ports established after 1860. It is also notable how similar the patterns of growth and development were in certain ports established at roughly the same time, Hull and Grimsby being the best examples.

¹ PRO, MA12/15. 1894 Report. Letter from Local Government Board, in correspondence.

i. The Scale and Distribution of Apprenticeship

Table 2.1 gives the national totals of recruitment and the estimated size of the apprenticed workforce from 1860 to 1914. The method by which the population estimates were made is given in Appendix 1.

Table 2.1
Recruitment and Apprentice Population, National Total, 1860-1914

Year	Recruitment	Min. Population	Max. Population	Post-1880 Max.	Estimates from Annual Reports
1860	607	1958	2529		
1865	714	2503	2303		
1870	784	2529	3267		
1875	972	3136	4050		
1880	809	2610	3371	4494	
1885	546	1761	2275	3033	
1890	421	1358	1754	2339	1672
1895	239	771	996	1328	1194
1900	111	358	463	617	613
1905	173	558	721	961	
1910	143	461	596	794	
1914	94	n/a	n/a	n/a	

Source: PRO, BT150; Annual Reports of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries.

Approximately 300 apprentices were recruited in 1850 and 1855, but the data is too rough and the identification of fishing apprentices too difficult to give a meaningful population estimate. However, the overall trend is clear. Apprenticeship had existed in the trawl and line fisheries since at least the eighteenth century, but the expansion of the system really began with the boom in the trawl fishery, beginning in the 1840s. From there, the apprenticed labour force grew steadily until the 1870s, with total recruitment peaking in 1877,² after which recruitment declined steadily for nearly 30 years. The Payment of Wages Act of 1880, which allowed apprentices to break their indentures *en masse* must have had a significant effect on the size of the

² M.H. Wilcox, *Apprenticeship in the British Trawl Fishery 1875-1890: The Case of Hull* (Unpub. M.A. Dissertation, University of Hull, 2001), p28.

apprentice population, although its impact on recruitment does not appear to have been critical. Rather than initiating decline, it reinforced a downward trend in recruitment that had begun in 1878, mainly for reasons connected with the supply of labour discussed in the next chapter. The first decade of the twentieth century witnessed a brief revival of apprenticeship, recruitment picking up again at Brixham and Ramsgate and remaining steady at Grimsby, although the 1905 figure given above exaggerates this slightly because recruitment in Brixham that year was abnormally high. The revival was in any case short-lived: after 1905, recruitment fell away again, and had dropped below 100 nationally by 1914. The Great War caused immense disruption to the fishing industry, and to its apprenticeship system. Ramsgate never recovered from the loss of a third of its fleet and faded in significance:³ the Brixham smack fishery continued into the 1930s but few apprentices were recruited after 1918, and even at Grimsby, the system was never fully revived. Appendix 3 shows the total recruitment to each of the 37 ports at which apprentices were employed in every fifth year between 1850 and 1914.

Broadly speaking, the growth and spread of the apprenticeship system from the 1840s to the 1870s closely followed the changing distribution and scale of the trawl fisheries. Hull and Grimsby, expanding rapidly, accounted for much of the growth in the system: conversely, decline in the Thames ports was reflected in decreasing recruitment of apprentices. This pattern began to break down after about 1875. In the largest ports, the apprenticeship system began to diminish in size and importance, apprenticeship came to an end altogether in the major East Anglian stations, and in many of the new ports apprentices were not employed at all.

ii. Whitefish Ports Established Before 1820

Three groups of ports were established before 1820. These were the Devon trawling ports of Brixham and Plymouth, the ports of the Thames Estuary – Barking, Greenwich, Gravesend and Deptford – and the cluster of ports in northern Essex: Mistley, Manningtree, Aldeburgh and, most importantly, Harwich. In contrast to ports established in the later periods these three groups of ports were very diverse,

³ March, *Sailing Trawlers*, p240.

with two methods of fishing being conducted on different scales and by various organisational structures. This diversity necessitates discussing the three groups separately.

Firstly, the trawling ports of Devon: Brixham and Plymouth. Devon, bounded to north and south by sea, was characterised by its proliferation of small fishing ports, mainly populated by inshore fishermen, using passive fishing methods (drift nets, seines and lines) and serving a limited local market. However, from the late eighteenth century, trawling became increasingly important at the ports of Brixham and Plymouth as turnpikes improved the county's roads and opened up markets in inland towns, none of which are more than 30 miles from the coast. There were said to be 100 trawlers at Brixham in 1786.⁴ After the Napoleonic wars, the migration of fishermen from Devon – Brixham especially – was instrumental in the establishment of trawling at ports along the south and later east coasts of England. This migration is well documented and need not be revisited here,⁵ but it is worth noting that despite the outflow of capital, labour and expertise the Devon trawl fisheries thrived throughout the 1850-1914 period. Table 2.2 gives the number and tonnage of first class vessels registered at both ports from 1871.

⁴ R. Robinson, 'The Line and Trawl Fisheries in the Age of Sail' in Starkey *et al*, *England's Sea Fisheries*, p74; Robinson, *Trawling*, p18.

⁵ See for example J.M. Bellamy, 'Pioneers of the Hull Trawl Fishing Industry,' in *Mariner's Mirror* 51 (1965); Robinson, *Trawling*, pp14-25; Gerrish, *Thesis*; Alward, *Sea Fisheries*, pp152-71.

Table 2.2
First Class Vessels Registered at Brixham and Plymouth, 1871-1910

a. Brixham

Year	No. Vessels	Tonnage
1871	138	5,515
1875	150	6,170
1880	229	10,356
1885	216	9,515
1890	245	10,185
1895	246	9,681
1900	229	7,626
1905	224	8,096
1910	215	7,567

Source: Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping

Note: Brixham included in Dartmouth until 1901: figures thereafter aggregated.

b. Plymouth

Year	No. Vessels	Tonnage
1871	67	2,254
1875	59	1,998
1880	86	3,060
1885	83	3,273
1890	92	3,688
1895	79	3,411
1900	34	1,420
1905	50	1,802
1910	24	849

Source: Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping

As Table 2.2 suggests, the fishery at Brixham was conducted on a significantly larger scale than at Plymouth. Moreover, whereas the deep-sea fisheries at Brixham were concentrated entirely on trawling, in Plymouth the trawlers shared the port facilities with a substantial pelagic fishing fleet, in addition to larger-scale commercial and naval activity. These competed with the fishery for labour, and although there is little evidence of conflict between the fisheries and mercantile shipping, fishermen complained about the Navy conducting speed trials of warships

across the fishing grounds and about shelling from the shore battery, which sank at least one smack.⁶

Capital in both Brixham and Plymouth trawl fisheries was widely dispersed. There were few large owners, and many smacks were commanded by owner-skippers, who had purchased their vessels on the mortgage system. This system was highly spoken of by both smackowners and local tradesmen who invested in smacks. It also appears to have worked well, given that it proved able to support steady growth in Brixham throughout the nineteenth century, although Alward suggests that during the 1870s there was a brief investment bubble which for a while drew outside capital into the business.⁷ If this is true it may account for the rapid rise in tonnage at the port between 1875 and 1880. Whatever did happen must have been short-lived, however, because by the early 1880s most of the smacks were owned by working fishermen.⁸

If single-ownership was a strong tradition in Brixham and Plymouth, so was apprenticeship, invariably using the indoor system. J.W. Upham, shipbuilder and smackowner, declared in 1882 that every skipper and smackowner, with 'not a single exception,' had served an apprenticeship.⁹ Although almost certainly an exaggeration, this does give some indication as to how important apprenticeship was felt to be. Table 2.3 quantifies its significance.

⁶ Aflalo, *Sea Fishing Industry*, p301.

⁷ Alward, *Sea Fisheries*, pp160-5; Gregory, *Brixham in Devon*, pp37-8.

⁸ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q6,139.

⁹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q6,182.

Table 2.3

Recruitment and Apprentice Population, Brixham and Plymouth 1860-1914

a. Brixham

Year	Number of Recruits	Min. Population	Max. Population	Post-1880 Max.	Population Estimate (An Rept)	Total no. full-time Fishermen
1860	42	136	175			
1865	33	107	138			
1870	49	158	204			
1875	45	145	188			
1880	48	155	200	267		940
1885	70	226	292	389		940
1890	56	181	233	311	198	1,104
1895	44	142	283	244	185	1,126
1900	20	64	83	111	143	900
1905	69	223	288	383		909
1910	29	94	121	161		864
1914	24	n/a	n/a	n/a		

Sources: PRO, BT150; Annual Reports of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries; Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping.

Note: For 1900-10, numbers of full-time fishermen are trawlermen only.

Note 2: These figures include Dartmouth: official figures are aggregated from 1905.

b. Plymouth

Year	Number of Recruits	Min. Population	Max. Population	Post-1880 Max.	Population Estimate (An Rept)	Total no. Full-time Fishermen
1860	13	42	54			
1865	19	61	79			
1870	26	84	108			
1875	3	10	13			
1880	10	32	42	56		852
1885	5	16	21	28		861
1890	2	7	8	11	12	801
1895	1	3	4	6	4	856
1900	1	3	4	6	3	203
1905	1	3	4	6		157
1910	0	0	0	0		190

Sources: PRO, BT150; Annual Reports of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries; Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping.

Note: For 1900-10, numbers of full-time fishermen are trawlermen only.

Three men and a boy usually manned Brixham trawlers. Often there was only one apprentice – the cook – but sometimes both third hand and cook were under indentures. The figures presented in Table 2.3 therefore appear a little low, given that if all fourth and some third hands were apprenticed, the total number of apprentices should be between a quarter and a half of the seagoing workforce. However, it was suggested in 1882 that there were 200-250 apprentices at the port,¹⁰ which supports the figures given in Table 2.3. At Plymouth, apprenticeship was less important, unsurprisingly, given that in a larger town casual labour was more readily available. Moreover, apprenticeship was ‘almost dead’ at the port by 1894,¹¹ by which time the Plymouth trawling fleet was in decline anyway. In Brixham, apprentices became increasingly difficult to find in the latter part of the century, and public institutions supplied a rising proportion of recruits. By 1930 there was one apprentice in the port,¹² and within a few years the fishery had ended.

The fisheries of the Thames ports were different to the artisan fisheries of Devon, although demersal fishing was also well established there by the 1820s. Firstly, trawling and long-lining co-existed, so the labour regime, vessel types and the fishing seasons were designed to accommodate both. Secondly, ownership was considerably more concentrated than in Devon. Owner-skippers existed to a limited extent,¹³ and some of the large concerns encouraged successful skippers to purchase their own vessels, but firms such as Hewett and Co of Barking, who owned ten vessels in 1833,¹⁴ the Starbuck family of Gravesend and the Fishers of Greenwich dominated the fishery. Some of these firms, Hewett’s especially, were innovative and successful: it was Hewett who pioneered fleeting in the 1820s, and the use of ice as a preservative from the 1840s.¹⁵ Thirdly, apart from apprentices and skippers, fishermen were waged labourers. This was unusual and potentially disadvantageous, since it rendered labour costs inflexible and offered no incentive for greater

¹⁰ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q6,145.

¹¹ PRO, MAF12/14. Documents relating to new form of indenture.

¹² H.O. Hill, ‘Brixham Trawlers,’ in *Mariner’s Mirror* 16 (1930), p154.

¹³ BPP 1866 XVII, R.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, qq13,000-3.

¹⁴ BPP 1833 XIV, S.C. on Channel Fisheries, Minutes, q1,869.

¹⁵ C.L. Cutting, *Fish Saving* (London, 1955), p224.

productivity. Table 2.4 shows the numbers of first class vessels registered in London, whose registry covered all of the Thames fishing stations.

Table 2.4
First Class Vessels Registered at London, 1871-1910

Year	No. Vessels	Tonnage
1871	141	7,195
1875	134	6,929
1880	154	8,434
1885	127	8,685
1890	77	5,518
1895	61	4,096
1900	47	3,417
1905	23	2,142
1910	56	2,146

Source: Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping.

By the time figures from the Annual Statements of Navigation become available, the London ports were already in decline. The Short Blue Fleet alone had comprised 220 smacks in the 1850s, including those owned by Hewetts and those for whom that firm acted as agents, and employed a seagoing workforce of 1,370.¹⁶

During the 1850s the Thames ports recruited more apprentices than anywhere else, mainly from public institutions in London (See Appendix 4). A 'trickle' of pauper boys were apprenticed to Barking and Greenwich smackowners in the late eighteenth century, and the numbers so indentured rose in the following century as the fishery expanded.¹⁷ Table 2.5 shows the recruitment and total numbers of apprentices at Barking and other Thames ports.

¹⁶ Benham, *Codbangers*, p41.

¹⁷ Horn, 'Pauper Apprenticeship,' p174.

Table 2.5

Recruitment and Apprentice Population, Thames Ports, 1860-1885

a. Barking

Year	Number of Recruits	Min. Population	Max. Population	Post-1880 Max.	Population Estimate (An Rept)	Total no. Full-time Fishermen
1860	91	294	379			
1865	38	123	158			
1870	11	36	46			
1875						

Sources: PRO, BT150.

b. Greenwich and Gravesend

Year	Number of Recruits	Min. Population	Max. Population	Post-1880 Max.	Population Estimate (An Rept)	Total no. Full-time Fishermen
1860	41	132	170			
1865	59	190	246			
1870	34	110	142			
1875	34	110	142			
1880	(21)	(68)	(88)	(117)		490
1885	(7)	(23)	(29)	(39)		631

Sources: PRO, BT150; Annual Reports of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries; Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping.

Note: figures in brackets are for apprentices registered in London, which first appear in 1880 and include apprentices to several Greenwich smackowners, suggesting an administrative change. Greenwich itself no longer appears in the registers.

Barking line smacks carried crews of nine to eleven, four of whom were usually apprentices.¹⁸ Some sources suggest that Hewetts alone employed 220 apprentices during the 1850 and 1860s, and the Morgan family 150,¹⁹ which is plausible, given that various members of the Hewett family recruited 26 apprentices in 1850. There is little evidence relating to how these apprentices were housed and kept when ashore, although some suggest that they were overseen by the wife of Samuel

¹⁸ March, *Sailing Trawlers*, pp17 & 148.

¹⁹ BPP 1866 XVII, R.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, qq12,705 & 12,894.

Hewett and 'a staff of women.'²⁰ Judging from recruitment figures, other family firms must also have kept large numbers of apprentices: the Forge family of Barking indentured 23 boys in 1855 and the Fishers of Greenwich eighteen in 1865, implying that they may have employed 50 or more apprentices in total.

The Thames ports peaked in the 1850s, and Tables 2.4 and 2.5 show a steady decline in the second half of the century. High and inflexible wage costs may have been partly to blame for this, and it is perhaps significant that many former London owners began utilising a variant of the shares system after moving to east coast ports. The principal causes, however, lay in the pollution of the Thames, making the storage of live line-caught cod impossible, and in the arrival of the railways. Once other ports were connected to London by rail, it was both quicker and cheaper to land fish at, for example, Hull and bring it to London by rail than to sail up the Thames.²¹ All of the Thames ports therefore went into decline, with capital and labour transferring wholesale out of Barking, especially, to Great Yarmouth, to Harwich and to Grimsby. The Short Blue Fleet transferred operations to Gorleston (Great Yarmouth) in 1854, by 1860 the Forge family were recruiting apprentices at Grimsby and Gerrish found significant numbers of migrant fishermen from Barking (20), Greenwich (8) and Deptford (5) on the 1861 Census at the same emerging port.²²

Fishing with long lines, targeting cod in the North Sea and off Iceland, was well established and significant at a cluster of ports in northern Essex during the eighteenth century. These were Manningtree, Mistley, Aldeburgh and Harwich, the latter being the largest. By the 1830s these ports were 'in a state of great decay and distress,' mainly because of competition from Barking and Greenwich, which had the crucial commercial advantage of being much closer to the London market.²³ However, the factors that caused terminal decline on the Thames worked in favour

²⁰ R. Hewett, 'Barking: A Fishing Port. The Short Blue Fleet.' Unpub. Pamphlet, c.1965. Copy in Barking Reference Library.

²¹ See M.M. Gerrish, *Special Industrial Migration in Nineteenth-Century Britain: A Case Study of the Port of Grimsby* (Unpub. PhD thesis, University of Hull, 1992); Gerrish, 'Following the Fish: Nineteenth-Century Migration and the Diffusion of Trawling,' in Starkey *et al*, *England's Sea Fisheries*; Benham, *Codbangers*; March, *Sailing Trawlers*.

²² Gerrish, *Thesis*, p299.

²³ BPP 1833 XIV, S.C. on Channel Fisheries, Report, p16.

of the Essex ports, which could take advantage of both the railways and an unpolluted salt-water harbour, and from the 1850s smackowners from the Thames began to transfer their operations to them. There were 46 Barking-owned smacks in Harwich in 1852, as opposed to just five owned locally.²⁴ The largest owners in the port were the Groom family, although their fleet numbered no more than five at any one time, in contrast to the large fleets amassed by smackowners on the Thames.²⁵ The Essex fisheries became increasingly centred on Harwich in the second half of the nineteenth century at the expense of the smaller ports, which experienced a gradual outflow of capital, partly to Harwich but also to Grimsby. Harwich, according to Holdsworth in 1874, was a useful place for storing live cod (but by implication not for a great deal else), but ceased to maintain a significant indigenous fishing fleet as the line fisheries concentrated at Grimsby, which was 'not unlikely one day to monopolise the [live cod] trade.'²⁶ Indeed, for some erstwhile Thames smackowners, Harwich was but a staging post in their northward migration, although several of the older-established Harwich owners remained and diversified into other trades, notably the carriage of live lobsters.²⁷ Table 2.6 underestimates the number of vessels at Harwich quite considerably because many Thames owners retained their vessels' London registry, but does demonstrate the limited size of the indigenous fleet.

²⁴ Benham, *Codbangers*, p37.

²⁵ Gerrish, *Thesis*, p285.

²⁶ Holdsworth, *Deep Sea Fishing*, pp127 & 156.

²⁷ Gerrish, *Thesis*, p286; Benham, *Codbangers*, p53.

Table 2.6
First Class Vessels Registered at Harwich, 1871-1910

Year	No. Vessels	Tonnage
1871	12	468
1875	12	548
1880	16	731
1885	15	749
1890	11	606
1895	6	340
1900	5	260
1905	5	168
1910	3	115

Source: Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping.

Fishermen at the Essex ports worked, as in Barking, for wages rather than shares, although Benham suggests that shares were introduced late in the century as the fishery declined and wage costs became unsustainable.²⁸ Apprenticeship was apparently a longstanding institution in the fishery – as it was on the Thames and in Devon – with the exception of Aldeburgh, where apprentices were not employed and hands ranked as boys, ordinary seamen and able seamen, suggesting an informal system of training, with recruits moving up the ranks as they gained experience. A similar system was utilised in the north west of England, as discussed below. Table 2.7 shows the numbers of apprentices at Harwich and the surrounding ports.

²⁸ Benham, *Codbangers*, p124.

Table 2.7

Recruitment and Apprentice Population, Essex Long-lining Ports, 1860-1890

Year	Number of Recruits	Min. Population	Max. Population	Post-1880 Max.	Population Estimate (An Rept)	Total no. Full-time Fishermen
1860	17	55	71			
1865	26	84	108			
1870	18	58	75			
1875	13	42	54			
1880	32	103	133	178		231
1885	7	23	29	39		225
1890	5	16	21	28	40	213

Sources: PRO, BT150; Annual Reports of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries; Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping.

As with most ports deploying apprenticeship on a small scale, most boys were recruited locally, all of the eleven 1875 recruits having come from the county and five from within the town. However, the case of the Groom family, who took up to sixteen apprentices in a year, does indicate how larger operations had to adapt the system: only their junior apprentices lived in, whilst older boys berthed in the sail loft and aboard the smacks.²⁹ As Table 2.7 shows, recruitment fell away from the 1870s, with the exception of an abnormally high intake in 1880, and by 1894 the Collector of Customs commented that owners were ‘greatly disinclined to take the time and trouble connected with apprentices.’³⁰ Nor, with a diminishing need for labour, was there much incentive for them to do so. Harwich had practically ceased to exist as a deep-sea fishing station by 1900.

iii. Whitefish Ports Established 1820-1839

After the Napoleonic Wars, high prices on the London market and the difficulties of transporting fish cross-country in the pre-railway era encouraged fishermen from Devon to move eastwards, to work at ports from where they could easily despatch fish to Billingsgate market. Initially, much of this migration was seasonal, a

²⁹ Benham, *Codbangers*, pp127 & 156.

³⁰ PRO, MAF12/14. Documents relating to new form of indenture.

Brixham man in 1833 describing how trawlers from that port worked the North Sea in winter and spring,³¹ but permanent settlement began during the 1830s and by 1840 three ports were established as regular stations.

Dover and Rye were among the first places used by Devon trawlermen. Proximity to London allowed easy market access and Rye had the advantage of prolific trawling grounds in Rye Bay. Both were also established ports, and Rye was a noted centre of high-quality smack building.³² More significant was Ramsgate, used seasonally from the eighteenth century but established as a year-round station during the 1820s. Table 2.8 gives the numbers of first-class vessels at each port, and illustrates the limited scale of fishing at Dover and Rye as opposed to the importance of Ramsgate.

Table 2.8
First Class Vessels Registered in Dover, Rye and Ramsgate 1871-1910

a. Dover

Year	No. Vessels	Tonnage
1871	20	593
1875	20	569
1880	29	917
1885	31	926
1890	25	737
1895	15	520
1900	15	425
1905	9	215
1910	5	95

Source: Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping.

³¹ BPP 1833 XIV, S.C. on Channel Fisheries, Minutes, qq2,187-9.

³² D. Butcher, *The Trawlermen* (Reading, 1980), p34; Cutting, *Fish Saving*, p219.

b. Rye

Year	No. Vessels	Tonnage
1871	26	588
1875	28	599
1880	41	966
1885	41	965
1890	31	729
1895	33	720
1900	34	715
1905	34	695
1910	25	489

Source: Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping.

Note: Rye included in Folkestone in 1885.

c. Ramsgate

Year	No. Vessels	Tonnage
1871	129	4,564
1875	147	5,154
1880	184	6,274
1885	140	5,155
1890	170	5,988
1895	183	6,148
1900	161	4,538
1905	167	4,657
1910	175	4,581

Source: Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping

In all of these ports, the ownership structure was that typical of smaller trawl ports. Capital was widely dispersed and a high proportion of owners were (or recently had been) working fishermen, purchasing smacks on a mortgage system with established smackowners and fish salesmen action as mortgagers.³³ There were exceptions, such as the Lanfear family of Ramsgate who between them owned 43 smacks by 1914,³⁴ but on the whole individual owners dominated the port. No fleets sailed from any of these ports, although some smacks joined those of other stations and there was some 'partner fishing' – groups of smacks working together and running

³³ Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, pp21 & 88.

³⁴ March, *Sailing Trawlers*, p231.

one another's catches to market – which was not uncommon at ports without the large-scale firms and capital concentration required to operate fleets.

The labour regime at all of these ports was typical of ports with widely dispersed ownership, and heavily influenced by Brixham practice. The shares system was near universal and apprenticeship the main means of recruitment until casual hands became available in the 1870s. Recruitment figures at Rye and Dover are too small to give meaningful population estimates, so Table 2.9 simply gives recruitment for these ports and the full population estimate for Ramsgate.

Table 2.9
Recruitment and Apprentice Population, Dover, Rye and Ramsgate
1860-1914

a. Dover and Rye (Recruitment only)

Year	Apprentices Recruited At Dover	Apprentices Recruited At Rye
1860	1	
1865	2	4
1870	2	1
1875	2	2

Source: PRO, BT150.

Note: Records for Rye in 1865 are unclear: figure may be an overestimate.

b. Ramsgate

Year	Number of Recruits	Min. Population	Max. Population	Post-1880 Max.	Population Estimate (An Rept)	Total no. Full-time Fishermen
1860	21	68	88			
1865	51	165	213			
1870	69	223	288			
1875	72	232	300			
1880	109	352	454	n/a		870
1885	52	168	217	289		603
1890	20	65	83	111	116	850
1895	36	116	150	200	174	900
1900	8	26	33	44	102	500
1905	26	84	108	144		640
1910	23	74	96	128		633
1914	14	n/a	n/a	n/a		

Sources: PRO, BT150; Annual Reports of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries; Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping.

Note: For 1900-10, numbers of full-time fishermen are trawlermen only.

Note: 1880 recruitment figure almost certainly too high, rendering 'post-1880' estimate meaningless.

Apprentices were, as the above table suggests, an important component of the workforce at Ramsgate. The system was conducted along the same lines as at Brixham, and indeed most other small ports. Recruitment was largely local, although all of these ports, except perhaps Dover, drew on the poor law institutions of London to a certain extent. The indoor system was predominant, a correspondent with E.J. March recalling how her smackowner father had four or five apprentices living in, supervised by her mother.³⁵ At Ramsgate a Smack Boys' Home was established in the late 1870s, paid for by mutual subscription and described in 1882 by a local smackowner as 'a most excellent institution,' which at the time housed 41 apprentices.³⁶

Apprenticeship died out early at Rye and Dover, possibly because of a rising supply of casual hands but mainly because of the declining significance of trawling. Fishing at Dover was hampered by conflict with other users of the port, especially

³⁵ March, *Sailing Trawlers*, pp230-1.

³⁶ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq5,194 & 5,588.

the cross-channel packets, and by inadequate facilities for fishing. At Ramsgate the smack fishery thrived until 1914, and the apprenticeship system with it.

iv. Whitefish Ports Established 1840-1859

The spread of the railways freed the fish trade from dependence on limited local markets and removed the imperative for fish to be landed near the point of sale. Previously, ports unsuitable for fishing had been utilised simply because of proximity to market: freed from this constraint, the fishing industry was able to establish itself at ports further from inland cities but where adequate facilities for it could be provided. The arrival of the railways also hastened the northward migration of fishermen, to ports in the north east which were close to new fishing grounds being opened up around the Dogger Bank. Four key ports were established in the two decades after 1840: Scarborough, Great Yarmouth, Hull and Grimsby.

Devon and Ramsgate trawlers had used Scarborough sporadically since the 1830s, mainly because the summer tourist traffic generated demand for high-quality fish, but trawling really took off at the port with the opening of the railway in 1846. During the 1850s, Scarborough was the leading trawl port in the north east, but it was hampered by a harbour that dried out at low tide and the fact that fish had to be carted uphill through the town to the railway station, which brought the fishing industry into conflict with the tourist trade.³⁷ Scarborough therefore suffered from strong competition from the nascent Humber ports. Many of its features remained those of smaller ports: trawler ownership was widely dispersed, although there were a few leading figures, for example James Sellers, who owned smacks, marketed fish and invested in ancillary industries and, from the 1880s, the converted paddle tugs used for inshore trawling. Table 2.10 shows the numbers and tonnage of first class fishing vessels at the port.

³⁷ Aflalo, *Sea Fishing Industry*, pp228-31.

Table 2.10
First Class Vessels Registered at Scarborough, 1871-1910

Year	No. Vessels	Tonnage
1871	113	4,300
1875	115	4,670
1880	117	5,542
1885	117	5,091
1890	95	4,375
1895	75	3,300
1900	53	1,987
1905	39	1,296
1910	26	1,064

Source: Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping

The trawl fishery at Scarborough shared the port with a substantial pelagic fishery, which drew in seasonal labour from the surrounding agricultural area. Moreover, Scarborough itself was a town of 30,500 people during the 1880s,³⁸ and it does not seem that shortage of labour was ever a pressing problem. Apprenticeship was utilised, however, in the trawl fishery, but was based mainly on local recruitment. Of the three boys indentured in 1875, two were Scarborough-born, and the other was from Plymouth and may well have been connected with the fishery already, perhaps the son of a migrant fisherman. Table 2.11 gives the numbers and estimated population of apprentices at the port.

³⁸ Annual Report of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries, 1887, p40.

Table 2.11
Recruitment and Apprentice Population, Scarborough, 1860-1895

Year	Number of Recruits	Min. Population	Max. Population	Post-1880 Max.	Population Estimate (An Rept)	Total no. Full-time Fishermen
1860	10	32	42			
1865	8	26	33			
1870	10	32	42			
1875	3	10	13			
1880	2	8	7	11		1,060
1885	5	16	21	28		950
1890	5	16	21	28	23	725
1895					2	600

Sources: PRO, BT150; Annual Reports of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries; Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping.

Tables 2.10 and 2.11 include the vessels and men of the pelagic fleet, so the numbers of trawlers and trawlermen were somewhat lower than they appear here. However, it is clear enough that apprenticeship cannot have been a prime means of manning the fleet. There were reportedly 62 trawlers working at Scarborough in 1878, and fewer than twenty apprentices – or one to every three trawlers, whilst the opposite was the case on the Humber. In 1882 the Collector of Customs commented that apprenticeship was ‘falling into desuetude,’³⁹ although it underwent a minor revival in the mid-1880s, at a time when profitability was declining and attempts on the part of owners to cut costs soured labour relations. Apprenticeship may have been seen as a means of undermining collective action, although if this was the case it was unsuccessful. In any case, the smack fishery that had employed apprentices was in precipitous decline by then, and the paddle tugs, which normally carried only one or two fishermen to supplement the normal crew, had no use for them. The collapse of several of the paddle steamer companies ‘cracked the foundations of the Scarborough fishing industry,’⁴⁰ by bankrupting several of the smackowners who had invested in them, which must have hastened the decline of apprenticeship at the

³⁹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q2,795.

⁴⁰ R. Robinson, *A History of the Yorkshire Coast Fishing Industry 1780-1914* (Hull, 1987), pp94-5.

port. Scarborough retained a small steam trawling fleet into the twentieth century, but its time as a leading fishing station was long gone.

Great Yarmouth and its close neighbour Gorleston (counted together for the purposes of this study) followed a very different path of development from nearby Lowestoft and from Scarborough. It was used as a seasonal base by Devon trawlermen, but it benefited from the same conditions that encouraged the resurgence of Harwich, and its rise as a trawl port began with the arrival of smackowners from the Thames during the 1850s. The operations of Hewett's Short Blue Fleet were transferred to the port in 1854, around the same time as those of other large owners such as Frank Leleu & Co and the Morgan family. Poor rail transport facilities from the port were of little importance since most of the fish went direct to Billingsgate by steam cutter, and the arrival of these fleets, which brought with them the capital and ancillary industries necessary to support extensive fleetings, turned Yarmouth into a fleetings centre dominated by large-scale capital, in the same mould as Barking. Table 2.12 shows the numbers of first-class fishing vessels at the port.

Table 2.12
First Class Vessels Registered at Great Yarmouth, 1871-1910

Year	No. Vessels	Tonnage
1871	474	15,412
1875	532	18,318
1880	618	23,001
1885	678	26,738
1890	476	22,977
1895	405	21,405
1900	203	9,748
1905	194	6,802
1910	219	7,922

Source: Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping

The same problem exists with these figures as for Lowestoft, since Yarmouth's trawlers shared the port with a large pelagic fishing fleet, whose vessels are

included. Moreover, many Yarmouth smacks remained London-registered. However, there were evidently around 140 trawlers at the port in 1863 and 333 by 1882, which gives an indication of the growth of the trawl fishery.⁴¹

Labour at Great Yarmouth was probably employed initially on similar terms to Barking, but by the late 1870s, an element of payment by share had been introduced, with all ranks of crews being paid a fixed wage and 'poundage.' This was a proportion of the net profit of the trip, ranging from one penny in the pound for seventh hands, to one shilling for skippers.⁴² Moreover, migrants from Barking brought with them apprenticed labour. Samuel Hewett commented to the Royal Commission of 1863-6 that, 'I believe that the Yarmouth people do not take any large number of apprentices.'⁴³ Indeed, more apprentices were recruited to Gorleston owners than those based in Yarmouth itself, as Table 2.13 shows.

Table 2.13
Recruitment of Apprentices to Great Yarmouth and Gorleston
Smackowners, 1875-80

Year	Great Yarmouth	Gorleston	Total
1875	5	13	18
1876	12	42	54
1877	13	73	86
1878	4	73	77
1879	3	40	43
1880	29	0	29

Source: PRO, BT150.

This suggests that Hewett's and other London firms accounted for the bulk of apprentices in the port. Most apprentices to the large London firms had been drawn from the Poor Law institutions of the metropolis, and this continued after the move to Great Yarmouth. However, by the period covered by Table 2.13 apprenticeship was already in decline, as Table 2.14 shows.

⁴¹ March, *Sailing Trawlers*, p154; BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Report, p671.

⁴² PRO, BT144. Crew Lists for British Fishing Vessels.

⁴³ BPP 1866 XVI, R.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, q11,104.

Table 2.14
Recruitment and Apprentice Population, Great Yarmouth and Gorleston,
1860-1914

Year	Number of Recruits	Min. Population	Max. Population	Post-1880 Max.	Population Estimate (An Rept)	Total no. Full-time Fishermen
1860	42	136	175			
1865	46	148	192			
1870	6	19	25			
1875	18	58	75			
1880	29	94	121	161		1,997
1885	2	7	8	11		4,230
1890	3	n/a	n/a	n/a	3	3,900
1895					0	3,200
1900					0	740
1905	1	3	4	n/a		150
1910						150
1914		n/a	n/a	n/a		

Sources: PRO, BT150; Annual Reports of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries; Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping.

Note: For 1900-10, numbers of full-time fishermen are trawlermen only.

Note: 1890 population estimates too high for credibility.

Apprentices do seem to have formed a significant component of the workforce in the early years of the Great Yarmouth fishery. It was estimated in 1863 that there were 100 trawlers employing 600-700 men at the port.⁴⁴ Apprentices could therefore have accounted for between a quarter and a third of trawler crews. However, by the mid-1880s the apprenticed workforce was negligible and the trawling workforce around 3,000,⁴⁵ so labour at the port was by then 'not significantly affected by apprenticeships'⁴⁶ and the fishery well able to operate without them. Casualisation had taken hold at Great Yarmouth, as at Lowestoft, during the 1870s for reasons discussed in Chapter 4, and the presence of fleeting firms and large numbers of casual labourers were contributing factors to fractious labour relations and a major strike in 1887. The underlying causes, however, were attempts by capital to cut

⁴⁴ BPP 1866 XVI, R.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, qq12,276-7.

⁴⁵ Wood, *North Sea Fishers and Fighters*, p47.

⁴⁶ Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, p27.

costs and pass risks onto labour in an industry where profits were falling. Stock depletion on the grounds usually worked by Yarmouth trawlers was worsening, and it is suggested that the fishery suffered from overinvestment as a result of the 1883 Fisheries Exhibition.⁴⁷ Lowestoft smackowners congratulated themselves on avoiding the influx of capital that they blamed for falling profits and widespread bankruptcies amongst Yarmouth owners.⁴⁸ Many of the largest fleets were broken up around the turn of the twentieth century, and by 1914, Great Yarmouth had practically ceased to exist as a trawl port.

For this survey of the fishing ports, Hull and Grimsby may be discussed together. They are geographically close and possessed the same advantages of proximity to the fishing grounds and access by rail to large inland markets in the industrial cities of the north. They developed roughly contemporaneously, Hull from the 1840s and Grimsby from around 1850. Both ports attracted large numbers of migrant fishermen, both underwent very rapid growth from the 1850s to the 1880s and became leading steam trawling stations, and the development and deployment of the apprenticeship system in both ports followed a broadly similar pattern.

There were significant differences, however. Hull initially did not welcome the fishing industry, many regarding it as a distraction from mercantile activity, and provision of facilities at the port lagged behind the growth of the industry until the opening of the St Andrew's Dock in 1883. During the 1850s, there was space for only four smacks to land fish, no dry dock, little space for ancillary trades and the railway station was a mile away.⁴⁹ Even so, the advantages of Hull, especially in terms of access to markets, were sufficient for the port to begin outstripping Scarborough as a nascent trawling station. Grimsby, on the other hand, was developed as a fishing port by the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway, which invested considerable amounts of money in developing the docks, and even went to the extent of building houses for fishermen and paying bounties to attract migrants.⁵⁰ Grimsby attracted more migrants from London than Hull, because its

⁴⁷ Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, pp29-30; March, *Sailing Trawlers*, pp156-7.

⁴⁸ BPP 1893 XIV, S.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, q1,649.

⁴⁹ Robinson, *Trawling*, p44; March, *Sailing Trawlers*, p177.

⁵⁰ Gerrish, *Thesis*, p201.

salt-water harbour allowed for the storage of live cod, and therefore benefited the long-liners.

Both ports grew rapidly from the 1850s, as Table 2.15 indicates.

Table 2.15
First Class Vessels Registered at Hull and Grimsby, 1871-1910

a. Hull

Year	No. Vessels	Tonnage
1871	264	13,933
1875	356	19,248
1880	536	33,842
1885	497	36,344
1890	458	33,295
1895	422	25,601
1900	402	24,134
1905	444	28,793
1910	456	31,490

Source: Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping

b. Grimsby

Year	No. Vessels	Tonnage
1871	264	13,216
1875	392	21,651
1880	567	31,812
1885	748	40,309
1890	777	55,124
1895	720	40,109
1900	548	37,565
1905	521	32,711
1910	585	42,717

Source: Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping

The figures above represent only trawlers and, in the case of Grimsby, long-liners, as neither port maintained a significant pelagic fishing fleet. They clearly demonstrate the very rapid growth of the fishing industry at both ports. Initially, smackowners made use of the mortgage system to finance new building. A relatively high

proportion of migrants from Devon were already smackowners: Devonian migrants accounted for only 8.6% of fishermen enumerated in Grimsby at the 1861 Census, but of these 30 per cent were owners.⁵¹ This group made extensive use of contacts in their home towns to provide capital, and many of them continued to order vessels from Brixham builders.⁵² This group made a crucial contribution to the development of both ports, not in terms of labour but in capital, technology and expertise. Moreover, profits in Hull and Grimsby appear to have been high, generating a surplus for investment in new craft. It was estimated in December 1866 that 30-40 new vessels had been added to the Hull fleet in that year.⁵³ Comparatively easy access to capital and rapid growth from the 1850s to the 1870s created an air of confidence in the industry, and allowed owners to accumulate fleets of smacks, concentrating the industry in fewer and more powerful hands. The personal status of these leading figures, and the increasing importance of the industry as a whole, made it increasingly easy to source capital from outside, and during the 1880s and 1890s the financial systems and sources of loans brought to the Humber ports by migrant smackowners were increasingly supplanted by borrowing from banks.

The contrast between these and smaller ports becomes clear when the ownership structures of Hull and Lowestoft, for which lists of registered smacks for 1878 exist, are compared.

⁵¹ Gerrish, *Thesis*, pp289 & 325.

⁵² S. Capes, 'The Contribution Made by Devonian and Kentish Migrants to the Fishing Industry and Community of Hull during the Late Nineteenth Century,' in *Maritime South West* 18 (2005), pp41-3.

⁵³ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 7 December 1866.

Table 2.16
Structure of Trawler Ownership at Hull and Lowestoft, 1878

Owners of:	Hull		Lowestoft	
	Number of Owners	Number of Smacks	Number of Owners	Number of Smacks
1 smack	93	93	55	55
2	49	98	10	20
3	22	66	3	9
4	10	40	4	16
5	5	25	1	5
6-10	7	45	1	6
11-15	1	11		
15+	1	17		
Total	188	395	74	111

Sources: Anon., *The Trade and Commerce of Hull and its Ships and Shipowners* (Hull, 1878); Olsen's *Fishermen's Practical Navigator*, 1878.

Table 2.16 neatly illustrates the contrast between the smaller ports where single-ownership remained the norm, and the larger ports. Almost exactly half of the Lowestoft fleet was in the hands of men owning only one vessel, whereas single owners accounted for only a quarter of the Hull fleet, with a further 18.5% in the hands of men who owned six or more vessels. Concentration was even more marked at Grimsby, where some individuals owned up to 50 vessels. This growth was only possible, however, if crews could be found to operate the fleets. Labour shortage was a serious problem in Hull, and worse still at Grimsby (see Chapter 4). Neither town had any tradition of fishing or an established pool of labour for the industry to draw upon. Similar circumstances in other industries as diverse as agriculture and textiles led to the development or expansion of forms of tied labour to make good the shortfall: in fishing, the solution lay in usage of the established apprenticeship system on an unprecedented scale. Table 2.17 shows the recruitment and estimated apprenticed population at both Hull and Grimsby.

Table 2.17

Recruitment and Apprentice Population, Hull and Grimsby, 1860-1914

a. Hull

Year	Number of Recruits	Min. Population	Max. Population	Post-1880 Max.	Population Estimate (An Rept)	Total no. Full-time Fishermen
1860	160	516	667			
1865	190	613	792			
1870	258	832	1,075			
1875	339	1,094	1,413			
1880	227	732	946	1,261		2,326
1885	83	268	346	461		3,391
1890	22	71	92	122	134	2,790
1895	9	29	38	50	38	3,050
1900						3,667
1905						3,808
1910	6	19	25	33		4,189
1914	12	n/a	n/a	n/a		

Sources: PRO, BT150; Annual Reports of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries; Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping.

Note: For 1900-10, numbers of full-time fishermen are trawlermen only.

b. Grimsby

Year	Number of Recruits	Min. Population	Max. Population	Post-1880 Max.	Population Estimate (An Rept)	Total no. Full-time Fishermen
1860	76	245	317			
1865	144	465	600			
1870	217	700	904			
1875	386	1,245	1,608			
1880	285	919	1,188	1,583		3,673
1885	294	948	1,225	1,633		4,672
1890	290	936	1,208	1,611	1,024	4,700
1895	138	445	575	767	696	4,836
1900	79	239	308	439		4,118
1905	53	171	221	294		4,206
1910	65	210	271	361		4,801
1914	22	n/a	n/a	n/a		

Sources: PRO, BT150; Annual Reports of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries; Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping.

Note: For 1900-10, numbers of full-time fishermen are trawlermen only.

The rapid expansion of the apprenticeship system and the high percentage of apprentices in the labour force are both very evident from Table 2.17. Moreover, there is some evidence to suggest that the population figures actually underestimate the size of the Grimsby apprenticed labour force in the 1870s. Table 2.18 presents figures compiled at Grimsby in 1878.

Table 2.18
The Fishing Labour Force at Grimsby, 1878

Vessels	Men	Apprentices
445 trawlers, employing:	910	1,340
57 cod smacks, employing:	280	350
98 small vessels, employing:	490	100
Total:	1,680	1,790

Source: Alward, *Sea Fisheries*, p206.

If these figures are accurate – and they are certainly plausible – the apprentices actually outnumbered full-time fishermen, comprising roughly 60 per cent of crews of trawler and liner crews. The proportion of apprentices in the workforce was not quite as high in Hull, but of the 2,300 or so trawlermen in the late 1870s, it was reckoned that around 1,200 were apprentices.⁵⁴

The size to which the apprenticed population grew, and the fact that apprentices increasingly represented not just trainees but fully trained fishermen occupying the skilled positions of third hand and sometimes mate, as well as the changing circumstances of the owners, necessitated qualitative changes in the system. Increasingly, larger owners, who were by then wealthy and influential individuals, adopted the outdoor system of housing apprentices, in preference to keeping them in their own homes. For masters with 38 apprentices, as John Holmes of Hull claimed to have in 1882,⁵⁵ keeping apprentices at home was neither practical nor desirable. Henry Tooze claimed that ‘nearly all’ Hull apprentices were outdoor

⁵⁴ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q61.

⁵⁵ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q601.

in 1882,⁵⁶ and at Grimsby George Alward estimated that 39 per cent of apprentices lived with their masters, 41 per cent were lodged out and 20 per cent lived with 'masters who are not fishermen and do not go to sea.'⁵⁷ These figures sound suspiciously precise, and Ekberg points out that many of the larger owners 'could never be pinned down as to how the majority [of their apprentices] lived when not at sea,'⁵⁸ although in fairness such details were by then being logged at Grimsby under a scheme of increased supervision trialled in 1879. Many masters did arrange lodgings for outdoor apprentices, but many left them to fend for themselves and one suspects that some masters did not really know or care where their apprentices were whilst they were ashore, provided they presented themselves for work when required. Lack of supervision, the sheer number of apprentices, indiscriminate recruitment and the proliferation of public houses, music halls and brothels in Victorian port towns provided ample opportunities for getting into trouble and contributed to the serious social problems that marked fishing apprenticeship in both Hull and Grimsby.

Apprenticeship in Hull declined rapidly after the Payment of Wages Act of 1880, which removed much of the legal control masters had over apprentices. By this time, casual labour was increasingly available and the industry able to survive without apprenticeship, although the system was briefly revived as a training scheme for deckhands by the firm of Kelsall Bros and Beeching around 1910. In Grimsby, the labour shortage remained a pressing problem, and the dominance of the town's magistracy by men financially interested in fishing ensured that the law was interpreted as favourably (to the smackowners) as possible, which limited the impact of legislation in 1880 and 1883. The final decline of the system, which had steadily recruited 300 or so apprentices per annum throughout the 1880s, began in the 1890s, and recruitment dipped below 100 for the first time in 1900. Apprenticeship had become insignificant as a means of recruitment, and the expansion of both ports, as leading steam trawling centres, was based on casual labour recruited locally. Even

⁵⁶ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 31.

⁵⁷ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q1,838.

⁵⁸ Ekberg, *Grimsby Fish*, p54.

so, there were attempts to revive the system at Grimsby between the wars, and the last apprentice did not complete his term of service until 1936.

v. Whitefish Ports Established after 1860

Much writing on the fishing industry focuses heavily on the ports that emerged as significant demersal fishing stations between 1840 and 1860. However, after 1860 the fishing industry continued to develop, grow and establish itself in new ports. On the east coast, Lowestoft emerged as a major trawling station in much the same mould as Brixham and Ramsgate, to which its trawl fishery bore many similarities. Development was more pronounced, however, on the west coast of England, in Wales and in Scotland. Some of these 'new' ports, such as Fleetwood, had maintained a small trawling fleet before 1860 but all only emerged as leading trawl ports during the 1870s, and all apart from Fleetwood on the basis of steam propulsion. Some of the ports covered here – Milford Haven, Cardiff, Swansea and Aberdeen – fall outside the strict scope of this study of English fisheries and are discussed only briefly. However, their inclusion is necessary in understanding this renewed period of growth and spread in the industry.

Fishing in Lowestoft dates back to the medieval period, but until the mid-nineteenth century was almost entirely based on drift-net fishing for pelagic species. However, in the mid-nineteenth century the port began to be used as a rendezvous for Ramsgate and Brixham vessels working in the North Sea. Lowestoft smackowner J.W. Hame suggested that:

The real rise of the trawl industry at Lowestoft commenced about the year 1860. At that period there would be about a dozen to 20 vessels ... Shortly after 1860 some of the men who had migrated from Brixham to Ramsgate commenced coming to Lowestoft with their fish, and eventually made Lowestoft their home, and this laid the foundation of the enormous trawling business now carried on at Lowestoft.⁵⁹

Table 2.19 shows the number of first-class vessels registered at Lowestoft.

⁵⁹ BPP 1893 XIV, S.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, q1,529.

Table 2.19
First Class Vessels Registered at Lowestoft, 1871-1910

Year	No. Vessels	Tonnage
1871	245	6,498
1875	325	9,829
1880	420	13,885
1885	428	14,742
1890	407	16,515
1895	454	20,538
1900	448	19,520
1905	508	22,621
1910	605	24,854

Source: Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping

Note: these figures include pelagic fishing vessels.

The figures presented in Table 2.19 include Lowestoft's substantial pelagic fleet: the trawling fleet grew from the twenty or so vessels around 1860 to 60 in 1870 and 247 by 1898.⁶⁰ The number of smacks at the port peaked at around 300 in 1908 and, although it fell slightly thereafter, new building continued until the 1920s.⁶¹

At Lowestoft, as at Grimsby, capital for developing port facilities came from a railway company, in this case the Great Eastern Railway, which invested in modern and specialised facilities for the industry, unlike in nearby Yarmouth, where the docks were municipally owned and ancillary industries built and controlled by the major trawling firms. This allowed individual smackowners 'to operate independently of large-scale fishing capital'⁶² and fostered a system of widely dispersed ownership. In 1898 only three per cent of Lowestoft's fishing vessels (drifters included) were company-owned, as opposed to 51 per cent at Great Yarmouth.⁶³ As a result of this dispersion of capital, the labour regime was much more akin to that of Brixham or Ramsgate than to Hull or Yarmouth. Nor was fleeting practised at Lowestoft, although some smacks joined the Humber and Yarmouth fleets for the summer season. In ports such as Ramsgate and Lowestoft,

⁶⁰ March, *Sailing Trawlers*, p162.

⁶¹ Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, p20; Haines, *Thesis*, p105.

⁶² Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, p21.

⁶³ Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, pp19-20.

there were no large firms to provide nuclei for fleets, and no individuals or firms with sufficient capital to invest in cutters and other necessities.

Vessels were worked on the shares system, and initially apprentices formed a significant component of the workforce, although not as large as at Grimsby or Brixham.

Table 2.20
Recruitment and Apprentice Population, Lowestoft, 1860-1914

Year	Number of Recruits	Min. Population	Max. Population	Post-1880 Max.	Population Estimate (An Rept)	Total no. Full-time Fishermen
1860	5	16	21			
1865	5	16	21			
1870	34	110	142			
1875	39	126	163			
1880	41	132	171	n/a		2,520
1885	15	48	63	83		2,654
1890	12	38	50	67	34	2,855
1895	4	12	17	22	19	5,360
1900					5	1,250
1905						1,300
1910						1,970
1914		n/a	n/a	n/a		

Sources: PRO, BT150; Annual Reports of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries; Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping.

Note: For 1900-10, numbers of full-time fishermen are trawlermen only.

Note: The 'post-1880' figure for 1880 would be too high to be credible.

As in other ports with widely dispersed ownership of vessels, apprenticeship was conducted on the indoor system, smackowner Jeremiah Crews saying in 1882 it was universal.⁶⁴ Recruitment was largely local. Eleven of the 39 apprentices recruited to the port in 1875 came from East Anglia, although significant numbers also came from London. However, apprenticeship slipped into decline during the late 1870s for reasons discussed in Chapter 4, and by the 1880s labour at the port was little influenced by apprenticeships. However, Lowestoft continued to thrive as a

⁶⁴ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q4,667.

trawling port, because grounds worked by its smacks yielded good catches of quality fish and because the port's facilities and good railway link meant that the retention of smacks was 'not the liability some commentators took it to be.'⁶⁵ Indeed, the smack fishery at Lowestoft survived, fundamentally unchanged, well into the interwar period.

Steam trawling began at North Shields in 1877, with the adaptation of a beam trawl to fit a paddle tug, temporarily unemployed because of a slump in trade.⁶⁶ The success of this venture encouraged its emulation, and established North Shields as a significant demersal fishing station. Initially, its fleet was composed entirely of converted paddle tugs engaged in inshore trawling but by 1889, there were around 70 steam vessels 'of a considerably superior class' using the port.⁶⁷ Paddle trawlers were also purchased for use at Scarborough and Aberdeen, the first arriving there in 1882, followed within the next few months by two screw steamers, and by 1890 Aberdeen was established as a leading steam-trawling port. During the 1880s, steam trawling also took root at Cardiff, Swansea and Milford Haven as tugs usually employed at those ports fitted out for trawling.⁶⁸

Aside from the technology of steam trawling, continuing migration and investment from outside the fishing industry drove the redistribution of fishing ports in the 1880s. Fleetwood already had a significant trawl fishery based on smacks, but really took off with steam trawling. Kelsall and Beeching transferred their operations to the port in 1893, followed by J. Marr and Son, both from Hull, in 1898.⁶⁹ Boston was also established as an offshoot of the Humber ports. One abortive attempt at setting up a firm in 1885 with capital and expertise from Hull, was followed by the formation of the Boston Deep Sea Fishing and Ice Company, which was the only owner in the port but which maintained a fleet of modern screw-steam trawlers.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Haines, *Thesis*, p73.

⁶⁶ Robinson, *Trawling*, p86.

⁶⁷ Annual Report of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries, 1889, pp18-9.

⁶⁸ Haines, *Thesis*, p153.

⁶⁹ Alward, *Sea Fisheries*, p284.

⁷⁰ Robinson, *Trawling*, p95; Aflalo, *Sea Fishing Industry*, pp250-1.

Investment in new facilities and greater marketing opportunities helped to attract migrants to these developing ports. At Milford Haven the Great Western Railway invested heavily in the docks and fish quays, at North Shields the trawling trade benefited from a fish quay originally built by the town Corporation for the herring trade, and at Fleetwood, improvements to the docks and the provision of coaling and cold storage were paid for by the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway.⁷¹ Railways were a 'fundamental catalyst' for changes in the distribution of the fishing industry, helping to create new ports, most notably Grimsby, and affecting the fortunes of existing places. Their policies extended as far as influencing the organisation of existing fisheries: one reason Hull persisted with fleeting after other ports had abandoned the practice was the relatively high cost of rail transport, which kept transportation of fish to Billingsgate by cutter viable.⁷²

Steam trawling required different and more extensive facilities than smacks had needed, necessitating greater provision of finance from outside, especially from the railways, and contributing to the concentration of deep-sea fishing in fewer and larger ports. Table 2.21 shows the numbers of first class vessels at Fleetwood, Milford Haven, North Shields and Boston, and clearly shows how these ports took off from the late 1880s. Milford is included, because it was the most significant of the Welsh ports and because Wales was included with England in contemporary fisheries administration: Aberdeen, coming as it did under the jurisdiction of the Scottish Fisheries Board, is excluded.

⁷¹ Aflalo, *Sea Fishing Industry*, pp219 & 340; R.K. Kelsall, H. Hamilton, F.A. Wells and K.C. Edwards, 'The White Fish Industry,' in M.P. Fogarty (ed.), *Further Studies in Industrial Organisation* (London, 1948), p158.

⁷² Haines, *Thesis*, pp65-7 & 190.

Table 2.21

**First Class Vessels Registered at Fleetwood, Milford Haven, North Shields and
Boston, 1871-1910**

a. Fleetwood

Year	No. Vessels	Tonnage
1871	42	1,337
1875	72	2,232
1880	71	2,291
1885	42	1,441
1890	67	2,748
1895	57	1,845
1900	53	1,939
1905	69	3,066
1910	100	6,351

Source: Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping

b. Milford Haven

Year	No. Vessels	Tonnage
1871	11	226
1875	13	274
1880	11	256
1885	15	427
1890	16	497
1895	26	1,004
1900	52	2,085
1905	56	2,235
1910	74	4,328

Source: Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping

c. North Shields

Year	No. Vessels	Tonnage
1871	2	34
1875	2	54
1880	30	685
1885	85	1,916
1890	81	1,079
1895	104	1,799
1900	118	2,671
1905	127	3,495
1910	117	3,775

Source: Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping

d. Boston

Year	No. Vessels	Tonnage
1871	5	94
1875	3	48
1880	3	50
1885	7	284
1890	23	1,039
1895	37	1,809
1900	45	2,437
1905	40	2,242
1910	48	2,422

Source: Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping

Fishing labour at all of these ports, including apprenticeship, was heavily influenced by the types of vessels from which trawling was conducted. The paddle-tugs employed only one or two experienced fishermen to supplement the regular crew, and had little use for apprentices. This accounts for the absence of apprenticed labour at North Shields, Swansea and Cardiff, although it was used to a limited extent at Milford Haven. At Boston, where screw-steamers requiring larger numbers of skilled fishermen were used from the outset, difficulties were experienced with shortages of skilled labour,⁷³ which was one reason why apprenticeship was used at the port. None of the ports under discussion here, however, with the partial

⁷³ Alward, *Sea Fisheries*, p335.

exception of Boston, expanded at a rate rapid enough to necessitate the recruitment of large numbers of workers from outside to the industry.

The other key determinant of the extent to which apprenticeship was deployed at these ports seems to have been the origins of the companies established there. In much the same way as Brixham and London practices had influenced the Humber ports in previous years, so working arrangements from Hull and Grimsby went with companies that transferred their operations elsewhere during the 1890s and after. No apprentices were taken in Fleetwood before the first decade of the twentieth century, but in 1914 eight of the twelve indentures were to J. Marr & Son, a firm that had originated in Hull. Moreover, in Hull in 1910 and 1914, the only firm that took apprentices was Kelsall and Beeching, which had transferred back to Hull in 1898. Boston, also established with capital and expertise from the Humber, made use of the apprenticeship system. Although hard to pin down, transfer of working practices was evidently significant.

Table 2.22 shows the numbers of apprentices recruited to Fleetwood, Milford Haven and Boston. Population estimates are not attempted, however, because of the very small numbers involved.

Table 2.22

Apprentice Recruitment to Fleetwood, Milford Haven and Boston, 1890-1914

Year	Fleetwood	Milford Haven	Boston
1890		3	
1895		2	
1900		1	2
1905			23
1910		9	10
1914	12	1	7

Source: PRO, BT150.

Apprentices at Milford Haven most probably worked aboard sailing smacks, of which there were 100 using the port in 1889,⁷⁴ many of them seasonal visitors from

⁷⁴ Annual Report of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries, 1889, p84.

Brixham but with a small number of residents. Since most apprentices were evidently indentured to small masters it seems likely that apprenticeship at the port followed Brixham practice, albeit on a very small scale, and the majority of fishermen at the port were casual labourers.

Apprenticeship was not used at Fleetwood until the arrival of firms from Hull, but there had long been an informal training scheme for boys entering the fishery. Boys were paid a few shillings at the discretion of the skipper at first, a half share after three years, then a three-quarter share and finally a full share once they were aged eighteen and fully competent. Such informal training systems were widely used in inshore and deep-sea pelagic fisheries, and in some land-based artisan trades. More gives the example of stonemasonry and some of the cutlery trades in Sheffield, where apprenticeship were common but where some young workers learned their trades through informal apprenticeships, or 'patrimony.'⁷⁵ The form of apprenticeship used around 1910 at Fleetwood was identical to that implemented at Boston: a structured training scheme for deckhands. All apprentices were between fourteen and seventeen years old, and all served fixed, four-year terms. Boston apprentices were evidently paid a small amount, as it was suggested at a 1907 enquiry that 'it is possible for anyone attending to his work to have in the bank at the completion of his time, from £30 to £40.'⁷⁶ However, there is little information on how these modified apprenticeship systems operated.

vi. Non-whitefish Ports

Apprenticeship was mainly confined to deep-sea demersal fisheries. Pelagic fisheries were usually seasonal, making the employment of tied labour uneconomic. Inshore fisheries almost invariably drew their new recruits from within established, 'traditional' communities centred on the fishing, in which the labour of women and children played an important part and in which sons frequently followed fathers to sea. In neither of these sectors of the fishing industry did the pace or patterns of growth encourage the recruitment of tied labour. There were, however, isolated

⁷⁵ More, *Skill*, pp92-3.

⁷⁶ BPP 1907 LXXV, Report on the Supply and Training of Boy Seamen, Minutes, q2,305.

cases in which apprentices were employed outside deep-sea demersal fishing, where local custom or byelaw, or where peculiar patterns of work, rendered it necessary or desirable.

By far the most significant of these cases was that of the oyster and sprat fisheries of southern Essex, which at the turn of the twentieth century caught around 70 per cent of oysters consumed in Britain.⁷⁷ These were centred on the ports of Brightlingsea, Rowhedge, Tollesbury, Wivenhoe and Colchester and its adjoining parish of East Donyland, at which a limited amount of deep-sea fishing was also conducted. These fishing stations operated all year round, but targeted different species according to season, with oyster-dredging, sometimes on the west coast, occupying the summer and stow-netting for sprats in the winter. In the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the seasonal and unpredictable nature of these fisheries led fishermen to supplement their incomes by signing on as crews on the yachts of the wealthy for the summer. Some smacks were hired out as cutters for the North Sea trawling fleets.⁷⁸

Apprenticeship was prevalent in this fishery and had been for several centuries. Since most of the smacks were under the command of owner-skippers, apprenticeship was conducted on the indoor system, although in an intriguing local variation the obligation for the master to provide clothes was lifted, and apprentices expected to find their own from the ten to twelve pounds per year they were paid.⁷⁹ Table 2.23 shows the numbers of apprentices and estimated fishing population at the southern Essex ports.

⁷⁷ *Victoria History of the Counties of England: Essex, vol. 2* (London, 1906), p426.

⁷⁸ J. Leather, *Northseamen* (Lavenham, 1971), pp26-32.

⁷⁹ E.J. March, *Inshore Craft of Britain: The Days of Sail and Oar*, vol. 1 (Newton Abbot, 1970), p197.

Table 2.23

Recruitment and Apprentice Population, Oyster and Sprat Fishery, 1860-1914

Year	Number of Recruits	Min. Population	Max. Population	Post-1880 Max.	Population Estimate (An Rept)	Total no. Full-time Fishermen
1860	78	252	325			
1865	85	274	354			
1870	48	155	200			
1875	13	42	54			
1880	5	16	21	28		812
1885	6	19	25	33		1,338
1890	3	10	13	17	88	840
1895	1	3	4	6	83	883
1900					0	781 (102)
1905						686 (136)
1910	1	3	4	6		473 (153)
1914		n/a	n/a	n/a		

Sources: PRO, BT150; Annual Reports of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries; Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping.

Note: figures for 1900-10 are totals of full-time fishermen. Figures in brackets are for trawlermen, showing the small significance of trawling at the port.

Leather comments that apprenticeship 'seemed to die out at the end of the nineteenth century,'⁸⁰ which is supported by these figures. No apprentices were recruited anywhere other than Colchester after 1875, by which time the fisheries were becoming less profitable and by 1889, 'during the summer months most of the boats [were] laid up, as their crews [went] yachting.'⁸¹ In an increasingly seasonal fishery, apprentices would only have been a drain on resources.

However, the figures presented above also pose a problem, for they are flatly contradicted by figures given in the Sea Fisheries Inspectors' annual reports. Table 2.24 gives the annual recruitment figures and numbers serving at Colchester from 1886 to 1898.

⁸⁰ Leather, *Northseamen*, p31.

⁸¹ Annual Report of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries, 1889, p37.

Table 2.24
Apprentices Recruited and Serving at Colchester, 1886-1898

Year	Apprentices Recruited	Apprentices Serving, 31 December
1886	57	
1887	31	
1888	14	
1889	20	
1890	31	64
1891	17	63
1892	29	87
1893	24	90
1894	14	85
1895	15	83
1896	5	69
1897	5	63
1898	9	64

Source: Annual Reports of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries

The Annual Report for 1898 states:

Most of the apprentices at Colchester are bound in compliance with the rules of a local oyster fishing company, and can hardly be regarded as apprentices to the sea fishing service.⁸²

This, however, does not explain why they do not appear in the Board of Trade's registers of apprentices, from whom the figures in Table 2.23 are drawn. It was a legal requirement that indentures be copied to the Board of Trade, and entries were made into the registers from them. It may be that those who do appear in the registers are the deep-sea fishing boys, of whom there were said to be nine in 1894, all lodging with their masters,⁸³ and that for some reason the oyster company apprentices were not recorded.

Apprenticeship to the Colchester Oyster Fishery Company, which accounted for most of the indentures, was purely a formality. The company rules stated that all

⁸² Annual Report of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries, 1898, p100.

⁸³ PRO MAF 12/14. Documents relating to new form of indenture.

members had to have served an apprenticeship,⁸⁴ so members 'apprenticed' their sons to themselves, although evidently many of them did no fishing whilst under these indentures. From 1899 the Oyster Company's boys were contracted as 'sea fishing boys,' as opposed to apprentices proper, and therefore disappear from the records. This satisfied the company rules without incurring the obligations upon the master that went with an apprenticeship. As these 'apprenticeships' were chiefly a legal fiction anyway, they do not really come within the scope of this study.

Apart from Colchester, apprentices were bound in isolated instances to masters at a variety of ports. In most instances these are untraceable, and of small significance. One boy was indentured in 1875 at West Hartlepool, a port used for landing catches from single-boating trawlers but which had no first-class vessels of its own. Four apprentices were bound to a Richard Williamson of Workington in 1895, although there were no first-class vessels at all there and the boys may in fact have worked from nearby Whitehaven, which maintained a small trawling fleet. John Harnden of Salcombe, Devon, recruited one boy in 1860 and 1875. Salcombe was almost exclusively a shellfish port, but a local historian suggests that they may have been employed aboard a welled smack employed in carrying crabs and lobsters to Billingsgate, a year-round trade.⁸⁵ None of these, or the other one-off apprenticeships (see Appendix 3) that occurred sporadically can have been of great significance to the fisheries of any of the ports.

By 1914, the distribution of the demersal fishing industry was much as it would remain for the next half-century, and the apprenticeship system was in terminal decline. It persisted in the smaller trawl ports of Ramsgate and Brixham, as part of the smack-based infrastructure, business organisation and labour regime that remained profitable in these limited local contexts. It persisted in Grimsby, where the labour shortage that had promoted rapid expansion of the system in previous years was still not fully solved. Finally, a modified form of apprenticeship, aimed at training deckhands in the same way as the casual 'deckie-learner' system used at Hull and Grimsby did, had been adopted by some companies in the new ports of

⁸⁴ *Victoria History, Essex*, vol. 2, p434.

⁸⁵ Personal communication from Malcolm Darch, Curator, Salcombe Maritime Museum.

Boston and Fleetwood and, perhaps as a result of these experiments, in Hull. However, the numbers involved were small, and the deep-sea fisheries by then primarily reliant on casual labour.

Chapter 3

Fishing Effort, Technology and the Marine Environment

Between 1850 and 1914, the ability of humankind to exploit the marine environment grew dramatically. As the market for fish expanded, so it paid fishers to work more intensively and to invest in more advanced technology to catch greater quantities and a wider variety of fish. As in any other industry, fishing ventures were ultimately conducted in search of profit. Initially, this search was well rewarded, leading to its more vigorous prosecution. However, the confidence of fishers and scientists in the early years of this expansion that human agency could not damage the resource base of the industry proved within two decades to be misplaced, and measures once undertaken simply to increase profits now became a means of combating their decline. Elements of both motivations could lie behind the actions of individuals, and distinguishing the two is difficult. The effects of intensive fishing were new to contemporaries, who lacked the scientific knowledge and body of theory that grew up in the twentieth century to guide their decisions, but by the late 1880s most were prepared to concede that they faced a fundamental problem and this awareness certainly influenced their activities. This chapter examines overfishing in the North Sea and its effect on the business of fishing, and consequently upon labour.

i. The Business of Fishing

Sea fish are a common property resource. Unlike crops in a field, they are owned by no individual until they are harvested, and the areas in which they are caught cannot be fenced off and demarcated as the property of any individual or company. Nor do fish respect artificial boundaries put in place by humans: even if access to a fishing area is restricted by law, there is no guarantee of any sort that the fish will remain there. Moreover, even in areas known to be good fishing grounds, there can be no certainty that good catches will be made. Historically, therefore, sea fisheries have usually operated under an open-access regime, where anyone wishing to exploit the resource is free to do so. This was the situation in all areas under discussion during the 1850-1914 period. Fisheries

inspector C.E. Fryer explained the government's approach to regulating fishing when he commented that, whilst river fish are easily enclosed and destroyed:

Instead of being virtual prisoners before they are actually netted, the [sea] fish are roaming in a state of complete liberty in an element over which man has absolutely no control ...into which he can only peer at best ... a few fathoms.¹

In these circumstances, regulation was deemed impracticable and counterproductive, and a regime of open-access thought to be the only way of managing the fisheries. In the second half of the twentieth century, access to many fishing grounds has become increasingly restricted and some of the uncertainties in the fishing operation itself have been reduced with the use of fish-finding apparatus, but the basic unpredictability remains, and impacts on the nature of fishing as a business, risky and uncertain in both financial and material terms.

Risky business ventures generally encourage strategies to reduce and to share risks. The main such strategy in fishing, and practised in virtually every sea fishery in the United Kingdom in the late nineteenth century, was payment by shares. This passes some of the risk of a bad trip onto crews, whose earnings therefore fluctuate with those of their vessels. It also gives an incentive to greater effort. Another element of risk in the fishing business is rooted in the nature of fish as a commodity – heterogeneous, fluctuating in supply and highly perishable, creating an incentive to pass the commodity, and the possibility of its deterioration, on down the supply chain. These two factors significantly influenced the development of the fast-growing white fish industry.

The white fish industry was well established in certain locations – south Devon, the Thames estuary, Harwich – by the mid-nineteenth century, but in other locations it was new. As in many other industries in the same position, a degree of vertical integration was necessary to develop the public goods of the trade. As G.J. Stigler put it, new industries are:

¹ C.E. Fryer, 'The Relations of the State with Fishermen and Fisheries,' in *International Fisheries Exhibition Literature*, vol. 9 (London, 1883), pp207-8.

Often strangers to the established economic system. They require new kinds or qualities of materials and hence make their own; they must overcome technical problems in the use of their products and cannot wait for potential users to overcome them; they must persuade customers to abandon other commodities and find no specialised merchants to undertake the task. These young industries must design their specialised equipment and often manufacture it, and they must undertake to recruit (historically, often to import) skilled labour.²

Indeed, the nascent trawl fishery did exhibit a high degree of vertical integration. Groups of smackowners formed mutual companies to provide insurance, stores and ice. The Hull Ice Company, for example, was founded in 1866 by a consortium of thirteen of the largest owners.³ There were also many linkages between smackowners and fish merchants and salesmen. Scarborough smackowner James Sellers started as a salesman and later bought into smacks, as did Christopher Pickering of Hull,⁴ whilst smackowners such as James Plastow (see above) and Henry Tooze, described as a 'clever business man,'⁵ set up as fish salesmen and merchants with the profits from their smacks, internalising such transaction costs as sales commission. This 'smackowner/fish merchant group,' as Robinson terms it, tended to represent the leading edge of the industry and its members were the driving force behind major capital projects such as steam cutters and, later, early ventures with steam trawling.⁶

This process went into reverse during the 1890s as steam trawling took off. Firstly, steam trawler firms were considerably larger and more specialised than smackowning businesses, many of which were one-man operations, although some of the larger concerns, such as Hewett and Co., had employed managers. For instance, day-to-day maintenance of wooden smacks was largely carried out by crews; in contrast, many steam trawler firms employed marine engineers. Secondly, it is suggested that vertical integration becomes less effective when successive stages of the production process are conducted on very different scales, because a firm higher up in the chain would have to manage

² G.J. Stigler, 'The Division of Labor is Limited by the Extent of the Market,' in *Journal of Political Economy* 59 (1951), p190.

³ Letter book, Hellyer Brothers, 1866-9, in possession of Mr J. Grobler.

⁴ R. Robinson, 'Investment, Ownership and Society: The Yorkshire Fishing Industry 1780-1890,' in L.M. Akveld, F.R. Looimeijer & M. Hahn-Pedersen (eds), *Financing the Maritime Sector* (Esbjerg, 2002), p343; Anon. (ed.), *Hull as a Fishing Port* (Hull, 1915), p75.

⁵ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 6 November 1873.

⁶ Robinson, 'Investment' pp344-50.

several of the smaller units in tandem, reducing scope for economies of scale.⁷ With the adoption of steam trawling, trawler ownership became increasingly specialised and capital intensive, whilst the fish wholesale and curing sectors remained labour intensive and dominated by small, often one-man, operations.⁸ Thirdly, as industries become better established, activities that were ancillaries to it tend to become 'sufficiently important to be turned over to specialists.'⁹ In the case of the fishing industry, although mutual operations survived, industries such as ice supply, cold storage, oil and fish by-products were increasingly conducted by entirely separate firms. The Great Grimsby Ice Company, for example, became an independent business in 1885.¹⁰ Fourthly, vertical integration became less important than horizontal networking of the sort described by Boyce with reference to British shipping.¹¹ Smackowner/fish merchants had frequently cross-subsidised wholesaling and catching operations, but with networking came the ability to access capital from outside the industry. In the case of Hull, the Hull Banking Company lent just £2,350 to two fishing ventures in 1876, but in 1893 lent £48,320 to eight separate ventures.¹² The larger trawling firms became part of complex webs of cross-shareholding and shared directorships with erstwhile ancillary industries and other port industries, allowing them to form a united front in dealings with port authorities, legislators and their own labour forces. Finally, and more speculatively, there were sound reasons for trawler owners to reduce their exposure to risk by withdrawing from the distributive side of the trade, leaving independent merchants to take the risks of unstable prices and deterioration. The corollary of Stigler's comments on vertical integration in new industries is that vertical disintegration tends to follow as they become better established and as former ancillary industries become established in their own right. The development of fishing as a business, despite its unusually high levels

⁷ M. Casson, 'The Theory of Vertical Integration: A Survey and Synthesis,' in *Journal of Economic Studies* 11 (1984), p32.

⁸ Kelsall *et al*, 'White Fish Industry,' pp125-8.

⁹ Stigler, 'Division of Labor,' p190.

¹⁰ Kelsall *et al*, 'White Fish Industry,' p144.

¹¹ G. Boyce, *Information, Mediation and Institutional Development: The Rise of Large-Scale Enterprise in British Shipping 1870-1919* (Manchester, 1995).

¹² P.L. Cottrell, 'Britannia's Sovereign: Banks in the Finance of British Shipbuilding and Shipping, b.c.c.1380-1894,' in Akveld *et al* (eds), *Financing the Maritime Sector*, pp226-8.

of uncertainty and risk, followed much the same pattern as many other industries.¹³

The uncertainty of returns from fishing in the long run encourages fishers to work intensively to maximise their returns, leading to what might be termed a 'bonanza mentality,' in which participants seek to maximise returns on their investment in the short term. As Iudicello, Weber and Wieland put it:

When a fishery is open to anyone, there is no assurance that a fish not caught today will be around tomorrow. In fact, it will probably be caught by someone else. So why not catch it yourself? Why invest in the long-term sustainability if what happens tomorrow or next week or next year is highly uncertain? It's not rational. The only rational thing to do is to race for the fish, to fish early and often, and to build a boat that will out-fish competitors.¹⁴

Even when fishing effort is visibly damaging stocks, it is difficult for participants to reduce the catching effort or to leave the fishery. Fishing vessels represent a major investment, increasingly so as they become more technologically advanced, and need to generate a sufficient return. Moreover, they are generally specialised vessels of limited use for anything other than their designed purpose and are often worked hard under hostile conditions, making them difficult to sell without incurring a heavy loss.¹⁵ This is more true now than a century ago, but the example of the nineteenth-century trawling smack illustrates the point. Many second-hand vessels, despite offering a cheap way for skippers to acquire their own vessels, were worn out.¹⁶ Many smacks were also sold for use as coasters, but the sharp lines that gave them speed for bringing fish home in good condition restricted their carrying capacity and made beaching to load or unload cargo hazardous.¹⁷ Moreover, in a declining fishery, which erstwhile participants are leaving, the market can become glutted with second-hand vessels, causing a collapse in prices. Hull and Grimsby smacks that had cost up to £1,800 in the

¹³ For a more detailed discussion of business organisation and vertical integration, see M.H. Wilcox, 'Concentration or Disintegration? Vessel Ownership, Fish Wholesaling and Processing in the British Trawl Fishery, 1850-1939,' forthcoming.

¹⁴ S. Iudicello, M. Weber and R. Wieland, *Fish, Markets and Fishermen: The Economics of Overfishing* (London, 1999), p. ix.

¹⁵ S. Cunningham, M. Dunn and D. Whitmarsh, *Principles of Fisheries Economics* (London, 1985), p. 21.

¹⁶ *Lowestoft Journal*, 22 June 1895. Several bankrupt smackowners stated that the poor condition of vessels purchased second hand contributed to their insolvency.

¹⁷ March, *Sailing Trawlers*, p. 161.

mid-1880s were sold for as little as £200 only a few years later once overfishing and steam trawlers had rendered them unprofitable.¹⁸ Not only does open-access fishing give an incentive for maximum effort from participants, then, but it also makes it difficult for them to reduce their activities or leave the fishery altogether.

ii. The North Sea – Climatic Variation and Fishing Effort

Surrounded by seven of the densely populated and highly industrialised countries of Northern Europe, the North Sea has for many centuries been one of the most heavily exploited sea areas in the world. It serves as both a highway for trade and a defensive barrier for the states around its rim. Its marine animal resources provide large amounts of food, sand and gravel are dredged from its floor, and in the last four decades its oil and gas reserves have been discovered and exploited. Its shores provide beaches for recreation, and its depths are used as a dumping ground for human and industrial waste, although conservation measures have in the second half of the twentieth century curbed some of the more damaging deposits. Human impacts on the North Sea ecosystem are numerous and diverse, but undoubtedly one of the most significant of these over the last two centuries has been fishing. The main demersal species caught on a commercial scale are, and were in the 1850-1914 period, cod, haddock, soles and plaice.

The North Sea, situated on the continental shelf of North-west Europe, is a shallow sea. Nowhere is it more than 700 metres deep, and at its shallowest point, near the Strait of Dover, its depth is less than 30 metres. Its water consists of 'a varying mixture of North Atlantic water and freshwater run-off' from the surrounding lands.¹⁹ The proportions of these are heavily influenced by rainfall and by flows of water in and out of the North Sea, themselves partly governed by the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO), the changing distribution of air pressure between Iceland and Portugal which influences the strength and direction of winds over the Atlantic. In turn, this influences the flows of water into and out of the North Sea, which affects the temperature and salinity of the sea. This has a significant effect on the distribution and abundance of marine life.

¹⁸ Anon. (ed.), *Hull as a Fishing Port*, p75.

¹⁹ OSPAR Commission for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic, *Quality Status Report 2000: Region II: Greater North Sea* (London, 2000), p10.

Environmental factors, therefore, need to be considered before ascribing changes in stock abundance and catches to human harvesting.

Data on such natural fluctuations is sparse for the nineteenth century, but at certain points during the nineteenth century changes in the NAO index do appear to have influenced the abundance of particular species. A negative NAO reading for 1904, for example, manifested itself in low sea surface temperatures and probably accounts for a strong cod year-class in that year and subsequently a high proportion of juvenile cod caught in the following two years. Haddock larvae are more sensitive to temperature fluctuations, which is reflected in a greater increase in juvenile landings.²⁰ Flatfish are also sensitive to changing temperatures, seeking refuge in deeper water during cold spells. This was a factor in the early development of the trawl fishery in the North Sea, since one of the attractions for migrant fishermen was the promise of large catches of soles from the newly discovered 'Silver Pits.' Bellamy has demonstrated that temperatures were lower than average during the winters of 1838, 1840-1, 1841-2 and 1844-5, which coincided with the discovery and the beginning of large-scale exploitation of these grounds.²¹ By 1863, Hull smackowners were attributing smaller catches of soles to the milder winters experienced since then.²² Low catches of soles by Grimsby vessels on certain grounds in 1878 were followed by very high catches in 1879, which smackowners attributed to the previous cold winter.²³ Example such as these illustrate the significant influence of climate on catches, and give some indication of the difficulty of separating the effects of climatic variation from those of human exploitation. Contemporaries, armed with a rudimentary understanding of marine biology and the effects of fishing, tended to ascribe too much importance to the former and underestimate humans' potential to damage the natural environment.

Open access fisheries tend to develop in accordance with the model in Figure 3.1.

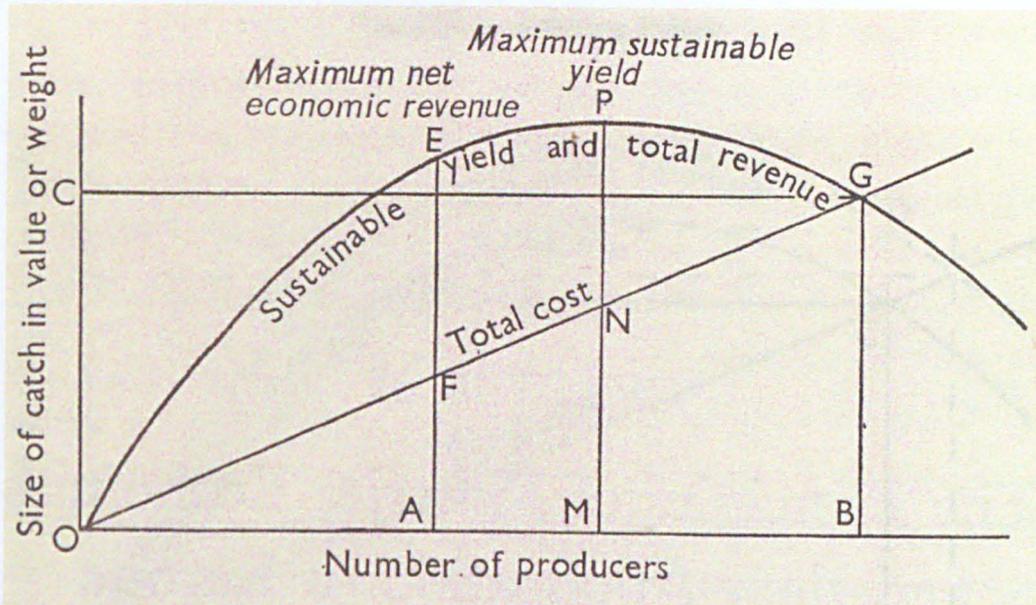
²⁰ Capes, *Thesis*, pp81-3.

²¹ Bellamy, 'Pioneers of the Hull Trawl Fishing Industry,' p186.

²² BPP 1866 XVII, R.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, q7,354.

²³ BPP 1878-9 VII, Report on Sea Fisheries of England and Wales, Minutes, pp114-6 & 146.

Figure 3.1
Costs and Yields in an Open-Access Fishery



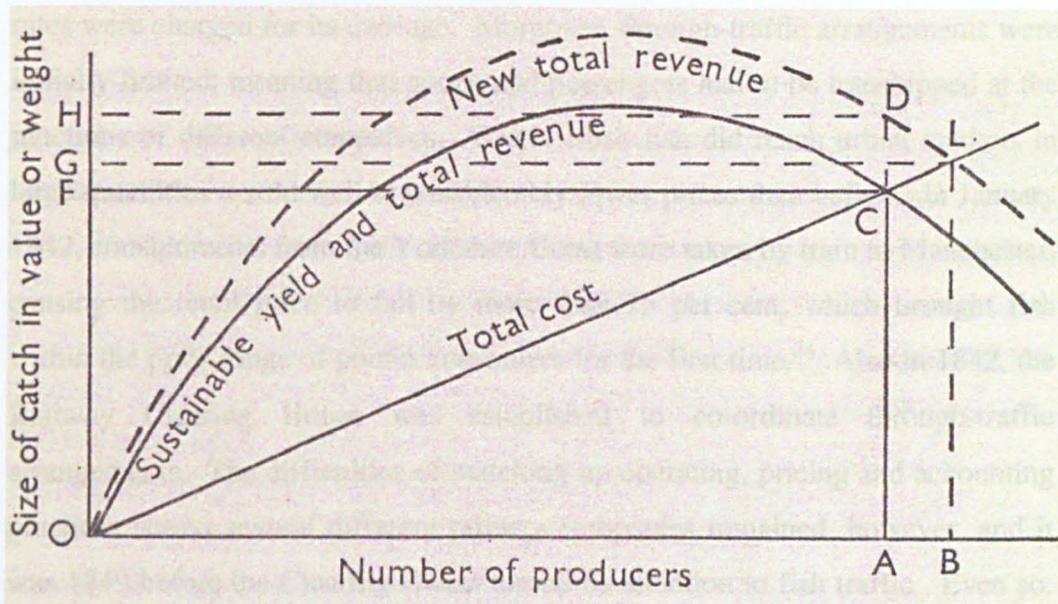
Source: J.R. Coull, *The Fisheries of Europe: An Economic Geography* (London, 1972).

Although this model of fishing effort and yield was first developed during the 1960s, it remains widely used and provides a good basis upon which to discuss the North Sea fisheries of the nineteenth century. As the number of producers, and thus the cost of exploiting the fishery, rises, the total yield will initially rise faster than the cost, because as fish are taken out of the ecosystem its carrying capacity ceases to place a ceiling on the fish population. Point E, the point of greatest difference between cost and yield, therefore represents the Maximum Economic Yield (MEY) of the fishery, the point at which it is most remunerative. Beyond this point, as Figure 3.1 shows, yields will increase more slowly than costs, until the point P is reached, which represents the greatest number of fish that can be taken from the ecosystem without affecting its capacity to reproduce. Beyond this, yield drops until point G is passed, at which point it becomes unprofitable to prosecute the fishery and participants may be expected to leave.

What the theory encapsulated in Figure 3.1 does not show is the effect of prices. In reality, fishing is a business in which participants are primarily out to make a profit, and are therefore more concerned with prices than quantities.

The effect of rising prices is to introduce a new curve, as shown in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2
The Effect of Rising Prices



Source: see Figure 3.1.

Even if prices remain stable, the ability to send increased quantities to market, as happened in Britain from the 1840s, will have much the same effect. It is therefore possible for fishers to continue exploiting a fishery, and making a profit, even though it yields fewer and fewer fish.

Before the 1840s, transport constraints limited trawling to a local market, since only the most valuable species, especially soles, were worth the cost of transport inland by pannier pony. Trawlers typically caught a mixture of 'prime' fish (soles) and 'offal,' most of which was simply thrown back. Lining, which targeted the largest and most remunerative cod and soles, was consequently the main means of taking demersal fish in the North Sea, and trawling was limited to areas close enough to inland markets to overcome the transport problem. This was the motivation behind the migration of Devon fishermen along the south coast during the 1820s and 1830s: ports such as Dover and Ramsgate offered easy access to the London market.

Railways, a much speedier means of transport than pannier ponies or fish vans operating on turnpike roads, had the potential to allow fresh fish to penetrate markets much further away. However, railway firms were initially slow to see the potential of fish traffic as a revenue-raiser, and lacked interest in developing the fish trade. Fish was generally treated as a luxury item and high rates were charged for its carriage. Moreover, through-traffic arrangements were initially limited, meaning that goods and passengers had to be transhipped at the junctions of different companies. Where fresh fish did reach urban markets in large quantities it sold well at considerably lower prices than before. In January 1842, consignments from the Yorkshire Coast were taken by train to Manchester, causing the retail price to fall by more than 75 per cent, which brought fish within the price range of poorer consumers for the first time.²⁴ Also in 1842, the Railway Clearing House was established to co-ordinate through-traffic arrangements. The difficulties of matching up operating, pricing and accounting practices across several different railway companies remained, however, and it was 1849 before the Clearing House turned its attention to fish traffic. Even so, fish was reaching inland markets in growing quantities, as Table 3.1 suggests.

Table 3.1

Numbers of Fishmongers in Selected Counties and Nationwide, 1831-1871

Year	West Riding	East Riding	North Riding	Lancashire	England
1831					3,394
1841	222	180	99	776	4,933
1851	330	196	116	1,490	9,084
1861	437	252	99	1,512	11,305
1871	784	322	181	1,667	14,880

Source: Robinson, 'Fish Traffic Policies,' p41.

Agreements on acceptable carriage rates for fish from the Humber ports were not finalised until 1857, when they provided a significant boost to the nascent fishing industry. Hull smackowner William Markcrow described in 1863 how the lowering of railway rates had allowed the carriage and sale of cheaper fish such

²⁴ R. Robinson, 'The Evolution of Railway Fish Traffic Policies, 1840-66,' in *Journal of Transport History* 7 (1986), pp35-7.

as haddock and plaice that would previously have been thrown back.²⁵ Railway development was slower in the south, but once southern ports were connected to the rail network, the effect was similar. The quantity of fish taken inland from Brixham rose from eleven tons per night at best to over fifteen tons, and better prices were obtained for it.²⁶ Clearly, this acted as a stimulus to increased fishing effort.

During the 1850s and 1860s, fishing activity at all of the major ports expanded. Although little data exists on incomes from fishing at this early date, profits were appear to have been high and were reinvested in new vessels. It was stated in 1865 that new smacks were arriving in Hull at the rate of one a week,²⁷ and although this was almost certainly an exaggeration the 1860s certainly were a period of rapid growth in Hull and elsewhere. Trawler owners at the 1863-6 Royal Commission were near-unanimous in stating that the fishery was successful, that increasing amounts of capital were being invested and showing good rates of return. This created an air of confidence in the future of the fishery, under which circumstances smackowners were keen to expand their fleets. As Hull smackowner Henry Tooze stated:

I commenced with a smack of my own. I have two now. I took it ... with a mortgage on it, and I have cleared a great portion of that mortgage off, and as soon as I get the money to get another I shall do the same.²⁸

Despite hostility to the spread of trawling – in response to which the 1863-6 Royal Commission was set up – and, especially in the case of Hull, inadequate dock and harbour provision, at this stage the trawl fishery was developing quickly.

Opposition to trawling had centred around the claim that the practice damaged fish stocks. It was alleged by line fishermen on the east coast that trawlers had fished out the Channel and the southern bight of the North Sea and were being forced further and further north in search of new grounds.²⁹

²⁵ BPP 1866, XVII, R.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, qq6,971-2.

²⁶ BPP 1866, XVII, R.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, qq8,503-4 & 9,156-67.

²⁷ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 28 December 1865.

²⁸ BPP 1866 XVII, R.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, q7,484.

²⁹ *Grimsby Free Press*, 16 January 1863.

However, this was firmly denied by most of those involved with trawling. Brixham and Ramsgate smackowners argued that they had migrated northwards not because of stock depletion, but because they obtained higher prices for fish in the northern ports. They also pointed out that trawling at their home ports was still expanding, which was inconsistent with a declining and exhausted fishery.³⁰ Hull and Grimsby owners were virtually unanimous in arguing that, despite several years' intensive working, catches were as good as ever. Joseph Potter, for example, stated that over the previous eight years catches on the Dogger Bank had risen so rapidly that:

At that time if we got two tons we thought it a good catch: now we don't consider a Dogger catch under five or six tons anything of a catch.³¹

The enquiry was hampered by limited knowledge of what was then the new science of marine biology, and as a result it accepted a lot of incorrect evidence. Thomas Huxley, its chairman, was firmly of opinion that fish were so fecund and the number of predators besides man so great, that man could exert no decisive influence on stocks. Consequently, he saw no value in restricting fishing on biological grounds and believed that it would achieve little more than a diminution of the supply of fish to the consumer.³²

Figure 3.3 gives a modified version of the model of open access fishery development.

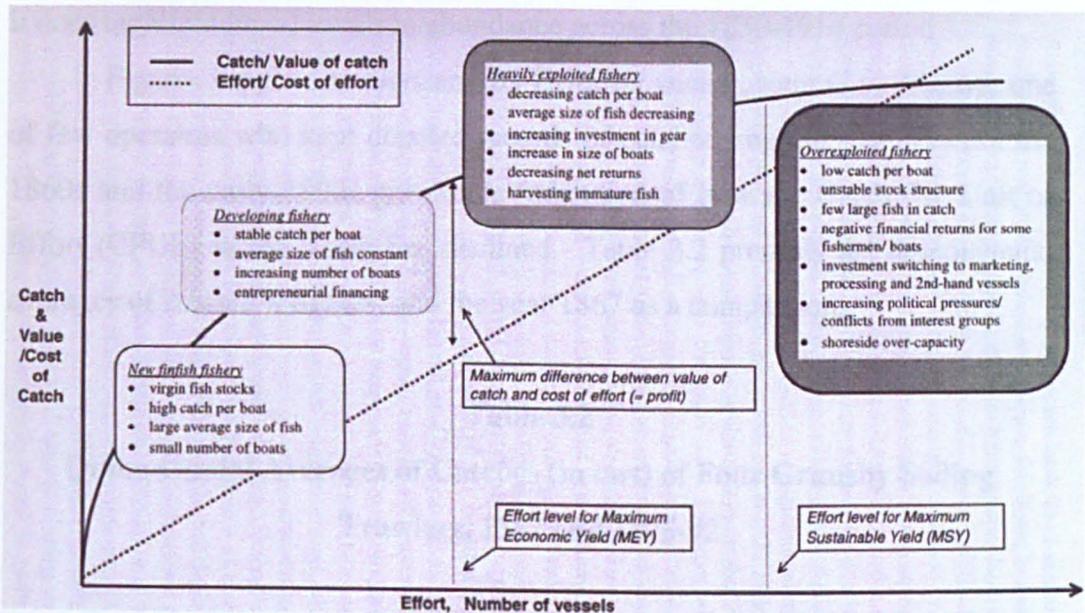
³⁰ BPP 1866 XVII, R.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, qq7,120-8, 9,354-97 & 10,352-536.

³¹ BPP 1866 XVII, R.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, q7,674.

³² BPP 1866 XVII, R.C. on Sea Fisheries, Report, pxxv.

Figure 3.3

Growth and Development of an Uncontrolled Open Access Fishery



Source: Iudicello, Weber and Wieland, *Fish, Markets and Fishermen*, p5.

As Figure 3.3 suggests, the North Sea trawl fishery during the 1850s and 1860s exhibited most of the features of a ‘Developing Fishery.’ The catch per boat was reckoned to be stable, or even increasing, and the number of vessels was rising, financed largely through reinvested profits. At this time, the fishery was probably approaching Maximum Economic Yield (MEY).

During the late 1860s and 1870s, however, the fishery appears to have moved towards, and perhaps beyond, Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY). It began to exhibit several characteristics of a ‘heavily exploited fishery,’ as set out in Figure 3.3. These features may be divided into two: firstly, indicators of dwindling fish stocks, such as falling catch per vessel and the taking of immature fish, and secondly human responses to the consequent drop in profits in the form of rising investment in gear and larger and more technologically sophisticated vessels.

Catch per vessel is a crude and unreliable measure of yields, because vessels differ widely in size, sophistication and effectiveness. Walter Garstang, in a seminal article in 1901, instead advanced the concept of units of fishing effort to account for these differences. He defined a sailing trawler as one unit

and a steam trawler as four units, or eight when fitted with the otter trawl.³³ This formula concentrates on major technological innovations such as the adoption of the otter trawl and neglects incremental increases in size of vessels and gear, but it does highlight broad trends in abundance across the 1850-1914 period.

Figures supplied to Garstang by Grimsby smackowner G.L. Alward, one of few operators who kept detailed records of catches, suggest that between the 1860s and the early 1890s give some indication of how the Catch Per Unit of Effort (CPUE) in the North Sea declined. Table 3.2 presents the quinquennial averages of Alward's figures, and the year 1867 as a comparison.

Table 3.2
Quinquennial Averages of Catches (in cwt) of Four Grimsby Sailing Trawlers, 1867 and 1875-92

Year	Plaice	Haddock	Prime	Rough	Total
1867	998	831	137	46	2,012
1875-9	425	693	75	32	1,222
1880-4	317	509	85	70	981
1885-9	225	435	67	78	805
1890-2	192	497	41	64	796

Source: Garstang, 'Impoverishment,' p24.

Figures supplied to Garstang by Henry Knott, another Grimsby owner, suggest that his vessels landed an average of 1,775 cwt between 1860 and 1864, including 345 cwt of prime fish, on average.³⁴ High catches of prime at this early date may partly reflect the fishery's early concentration on these species and higher discards of others. However, the downward trend in catches of prime fish is especially striking, especially since Knott's trawlers of the 1860s were smaller than the smacks deployed in the following decade, and not fitted with steam capstans.

At the 1878-9 enquiry into fisheries, smackowners at the North Sea trawling ports were nearly unanimous in denying that overfishing was a problem. By time of the 1885 Royal Commission on Trawling, however, the view of the

³³ W. Garstang, 'The Impoverishment of the Sea,' in *Journal of the Marine Biological Association* 6 (1901), pp28 & 46.

³⁴ Garstang, 'Impoverishment,' p21.

trawling interest had shifted. Although the final report of this Commission maintained that, 'no decrease, except in the case of soles, has been proved in the total take of the North Sea,'³⁵ many smackowners admitted that catches were declining on heavily used grounds. Lowestoft smackowner Henry Shepherd asserted that grounds were being 'trawled out,' illustrating the assertion thus:

For instance, the Dogger Bank. When we first went there we ... would get several tons and we would not have a net in the water more than three hours. Now we can have it in the water 24 hours and we would not get half a ton.³⁶

John Sims, a leading Hull smackowner who in 1878 had denied that the take of fish from the North Sea was falling, said:

In my opinion, the fish supply has, having regard to the increased number of persons and vessels engaged in the trade, greatly diminished during the past few years, especially flat fish.³⁷

Not only were fish becoming harder to find, but a considerable amount of qualitative data from the 1878-9 enquiry, 1885 Royal Commission and 1893 Select Committee on fishing suggests that the average size of fish was dropping, another indicator of overfishing. At the 1893 Select Committee, George Alward remarked:

We go systematically in search of soles and large flat fish, large plaice; and having got all the large ones, or not all, but having diminished them very materially, we are satisfied to bring to come away with a few of the smaller ones as being the only produce of our labour.³⁸

Small fish were also inevitable casualties of the search for prime fish. Grimsby fleet admiral William Normington explained in 1893 how, in attempting to catch soles, he led the fleets into grounds where he knew large numbers of immature plaice were to be found. 'Hundreds of tons' of unmarketable small fish were

³⁵ BPP 1885 XVI, R.C. on Trawling, pxxvii.

³⁶ BPP 1885 XVI, R.C. on Trawling, Minutes, qq11,017.

³⁷ BPP 1885 XVI, R.C. on Trawling, Minutes, q8,959.

³⁸ BPP 1893 XIV, S.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, q261.

thereby caught and shovelled overboard.³⁹ Table 3.3 shows the quantity of plaice caught in the North Sea between 1905 and 1908 and landed at Grimsby, sorted by trade category as large, medium and small.

Table 3.3
Plaice taken in the North Sea and Landed at Grimsby Categorised as Large, Medium and Small, 1905-8

a. By weight (kilograms)

Year	Large	Medium	Small
Oct 1905 – Sept 1906	5,538,318	5,622,747	5,947,208
Oct 1906 – Sept 1907	4,277,004	5,088,735	7,435,397
Oct 1907 – Sept 1908	4,350,717	5,337,353	7,633,305

b. Percentages

Year	Large	Medium	Small
Oct 1905 – Sept 1906	32.4	32.9	34.8
Oct 1906 – Sept 1907	25.5	30.3	44.3
Oct 1907 – Sept 1908	25.1	30.1	44.0

Source: Capes, *Thesis*, p55.

Small and immature fish were being harvested in increasing numbers, threatening the capacity of the stock to reproduce. Both in search of higher yields and greater profits, and to combat their decline, fishers adopted various strategies. Trends in catches from the North Sea increasingly came to resemble the model of a 'heavily exploited fishery' posited in Fig. 3.3, as did the response of the fishing industry.

iii. Human Responses to Environmental Change

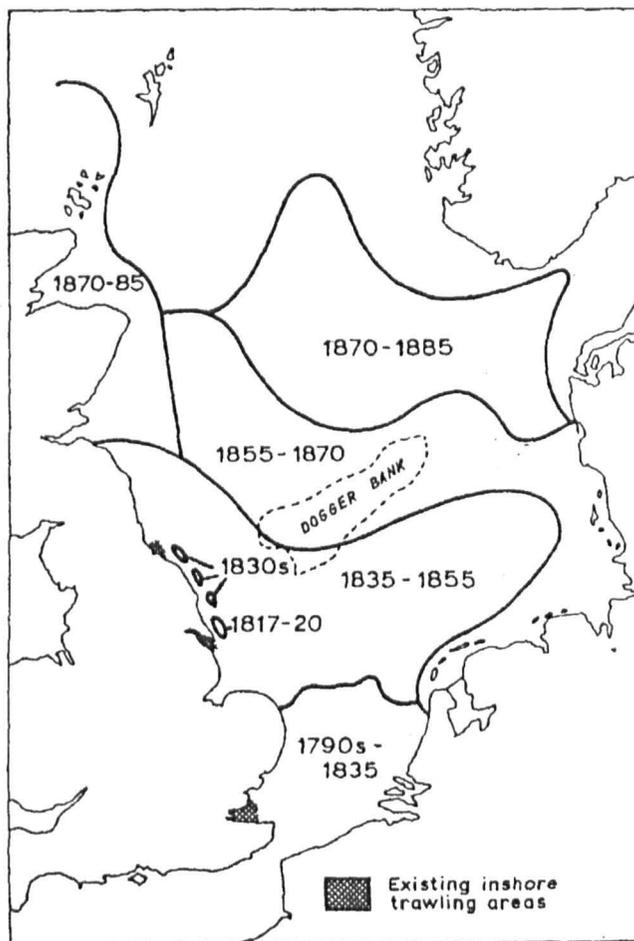
The effect of a scientific orthodoxy that held fish stocks to be inexhaustible, stable or rising fish prices and, most importantly, a lack of reliable statistical data on the fisheries had been to mask the developing problem of overfishing. Moreover, it might be suggested that trawler owners did not wish to admit the possibility of overfishing for fear of providing ammunition to the critics of trawling. However, by the 1880s the issue was too serious to deny, and even in

³⁹ BPP 1893 XIV, S.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, q1,182.

the 1870s trawler owners were taking steps to improve productivity, partly to increase profitability but in part certainly to combat falling yields. These come under four broad headings: seeking out new grounds, changing the organisation of production, increasing the technology content and supporting research to investigate, and legislation to control, the effects of fishing.

Map 3.1 shows the spread of trawl fishing across the North Sea to 1885.

Map 3.1
The Spread of Trawling



Source: R. Robinson, 'The Rise of Trawling on the Dogger Bank Grounds: The Diffusion of an Innovation,' in *Mariner's Mirror* 75 (1989), p80.

The initial shifts northward and eastward, between the 1830s and 1855, were motivated primarily by the prospect of high seasonal sole catches and buoyant

markets even for less valuable species, but later movements towards the Dutch, Danish and German coasts, and north of the Dogger Bank, were certainly motivated in part by declining yields from heavily fished grounds. During the 1870s, this was held to be a response to migrations of fish. As Grimsby smackowner James Alward said in 1878:

The fish are distributed over a wider range; they have been displaced considerably, but there is no lack of fish. There is no material decrease in the take of each smack, notwithstanding the increase in the number of smacks. The fish are in different places from what they were a few years ago, but the fish in the sea are practically as numerous as ever.⁴⁰

However, by 1886 trawlerman John Rutter was complaining that:

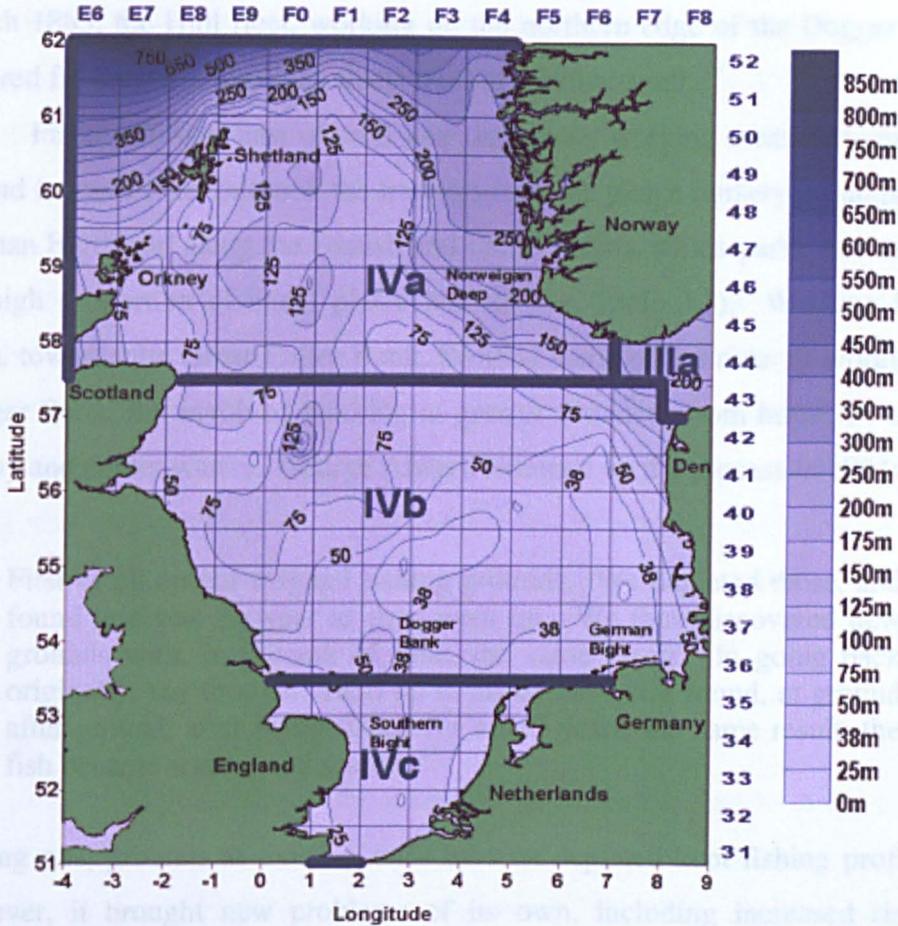
[In 1868] I came to Grimsby ... and on the Dogger Bank there were plenty of good fish ... at that time. We had no occasion to go to the Great Fisher Bank then, for there was plenty of good fish all over ... But now, in winter you can trawl all over the Dogger Bank, and all around the edges of it, and get nothing but dirt and weed ... I think myself, as an experienced fisherman, that the fish is very scarce indeed.⁴¹

Working further away from home brought new difficulties, however, both anthropogenic and as a result of differing environmental conditions.

⁴⁰ BPP 1878-9 VII, Report on Sea Fisheries of England and Wales, Minutes, p115.

⁴¹ *Grimsby Observer*, 13 October 1886.

Map 3.2
North Sea Depth Contours



Source: 'About Fisheries and Aquaculture Activities: North Sea Stocks, Depth Contours,'
<http://www.cefas.co.uk/fishinfo/depth.htm>

Trawling further north involved working in deeper waters. However, the depth in which trawlers could operate was limited by the technology then being deployed. It is noticeable from a comparison of Maps 3.1 and 3.2 that the northern limit of trawling 1870-85 roughly follows the 125m contour line. Sailing trawlers could not work in water deeper than this. Not only did this limit their ability to seek out new grounds as others became exhausted, but it confined them to the crowded North Sea, which was considerably busier a century ago than now and collision was an ever-present risk. From examination of shipping registers March found that, between 1879 and 1913, 87 Grimsby, 38 Lowestoft and 86 Great Yarmouth trawlers were lost through collisions, with both merchant

vessels and other trawlers.⁴² Nor was collision the only risk: the Dogger Bank, a submarine plateau, tended to throw up steep, confused waves 'of unusual size and violence,' especially around the northern edge. During the Great Gale of March 1883, the Hull fleet, working on the northern edge of the Dogger Bank, suffered far greater losses than fleets working further south.⁴³

Fishing further east offered less dangerous working areas and smoother ground to trawl over, but took the trawlers onto the plaice nursery grounds in the German Bight and along the Danish and Dutch coasts, which partly accounts for the high proportion of small plaice landed (see Table 3.3). Working further north, towards the Great Fisher Bank, avoided some of the risks of working the Dogger Bank, but involved working at greater distances from home, in equally stormy and colder waters. George Alward summed up the process in 1904:

First of all on our original fishing grounds. We depleted those, and found less year by year as time went on. We then discovered new grounds with, in process of time, the same result. In going back originally, say to about 1830 up to about 1890, we found, at ground after ground, after being fished for a few years, the same result: the fish became scarcer and scarcer.⁴⁴

Finding new grounds as existing ones became depleted kept fishing profitable. However, it brought new problems of its own, including increased risks of collisions and strandings in some areas, exposure to worse weather conditions and greater distances to be travelled. The technology of the sailing smack, dependent as it was on favourable weather, placed a ceiling on the distance that a vessel could travel from port, beyond which it became impossible to guarantee returning with the catch in a marketable condition. Moreover, time spent sailing between grounds was unproductive time. By the late 1870s, it was estimated that a smack working alone, 'single-boating,' could spend as little as a sixth of her time at sea actually fishing, and her efficiency declined the further away she worked.⁴⁵ As a Grimsby newspaper commented:

⁴² March, *Sailing Trawlers*, pp162, 172 & 192.

⁴³ BPP 1883 XVIII, Report on the System of Deep Sea Trawl Fishing in the North Sea, p434.

⁴⁴ BPP 1904 VII, S.C. of the House of Lords on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, q1,423.

⁴⁵ *Grimsby News*, 30 October 1878.

Fishing vessels have not, as a rule, proved as remunerative as formerly. Their catches have been uncertain in quantity, and the average length of the voyages has considerably increased.⁴⁶

Aside from shifting grounds, trawler owners followed two strategies to combat depletion and falling profits: they changed the organisation of production and deployed new technology to boost the effectiveness of the catching effort. In fact, both were already happening, but falling yields from the North Sea hastened the process.

The system of fleetting had been developed at Barking during the 1820s. It became the main means of operating trawlers at Great Yarmouth, because of the influence of Barking smackowners who based their operations at the port, and during the late 1850s it began on the Humber. At this time, depletion of fish stocks was not regarded as a problem by smackowners and the adoption of fleetting had more to do with the fact that fleetting allowed fish to reach the market in a fresher condition and therefore command higher prices.⁴⁷ It also cut the amount of unproductive time vessels spent sailing between port and fishing grounds.

Fleetting was limited to the summer season initially, but by the late 1870s smackowners had decided to keep the fleets in operation all year round. Table 3.2 indicates the difficulties facing smackowners as catches declined and rising costs, discussed below, squeezed profits. Smackowner Christopher Pickering wrote in 1915 that fleetting was a response to 'a great depression over the business,' the underlying cause of which seems to have been depleted stocks and falling profits.⁴⁸ This is borne out by comments in Grimsby newspapers from the late 1870s about how the fishing was proving less remunerative than formerly, and the system of single-boating was 'straining the patience and the pockets' of the owners, in response to which they had ordered steam cutters to service the fleets.⁴⁹ Their willingness to do so was sharpened by an organisational change to the system, whereby each smack's catch was carried in marked boxes, the vessel being credited individually for the proceeds, as opposed to the fish from the whole fleet being sold in bulk, and the profits divided equally. One benefit of

⁴⁶ *Grimsby Observer*, 17 April 1878.

⁴⁷ BPP 1866 XVII, R.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, q7,950.

⁴⁸ Anon. (ed.), *Hull as a Fishing Port*, p73.

⁴⁹ *Grimsby Observer*, 18 April 1878.

this was that the fish reached the market in better condition: perhaps more important was the incentive that payment by results gave to increased effort.⁵⁰ However, fleeting was highly unpopular with crews, since it involved much longer trips, poorer living conditions and greater risks. It also represented a major increase in the intensity of the labour process. Smacks working with fleets spent far more time actually trawling than those working alone, and made two or three hauls in each 24-hour period. Since the actual operation of trawling was the most demanding part of the smacksman's occupation, this obviously made the work of the crews harder. The resultant strikes are discussed in Chapter 6.

Fleeting, a costly operation to establish, also encouraged the concentration of the industry into larger business units. Four steam cutters commissioned for the Grimsby fleets in 1878 cost £32,000, or roughly the price of 20 smacks.⁵¹ This sort of outlay was beyond any but the wealthiest owners, and as a result, limited liability firms were formed to raise the necessary capital. The impetus for this came from within the 'smackowner/fish merchant group,' but capital was increasingly sought from outside the industry, as the figures for loans to fishing ventures from the Hull Banking Company, given above, suggest. The firms formed to operate steam cutters provided the basis for the wider restructuring of the industry during the 1880s to finance the building and operation of steam trawlers.

As with the development of the fleeting system, the application of improved technology to fishing operations was an ongoing process that speeded up during the late nineteenth century. Technological change was both a contributor to and a product of stock depletion: as fishing vessels became more productive, so the underlying problem of overfishing was exacerbated and, in response, the technology content was raised still further. This continued until the 1890s, at which point the adoption of steam trawlers made it possible to work grounds outside the North Sea, at which point the process began again.

The size and shape of fishing vessels, and details of rig and hull form, varied regionally according to local conditions, especially harbour accommodation and the nature of the grounds to be worked. Brixham vessels were designed to work off the South East coast, and were therefore built to

⁵⁰ Robinson, *Trawling*, p72.

⁵¹ *Eastern Morning News*, 12 April 1880.

withstand the long, rolling waves of the eastern Atlantic. In contrast, North Sea vessels had to cope with shorter, steeper wave patterns and were built deeper and often larger. Moreover, fleeting reduced the need for speed, so Grimsby and Yarmouth vessels tended to carry less canvas than those designed exclusively for single-boating.⁵² Robinson's analysis of Scarborough smacks illustrates a general upward drift in size, the 45 foot average length of vessels registered between 1850 and 1854 growing to 74 between 1875 and 1879.⁵³ In Hull the average tonnage of smacks rose from 55 in 1863 to 66 in 1877,⁵⁴ by which time vessels of 80 tons and above were being built. Larger smacks could deploy a longer trawl beam and therefore a larger net. However, as smacks grew in size, the long mainsail boom of the cutter rig proved increasingly difficult to handle and from around 1867/8 smacks were rigged as two-masted ketches, breaking the sail plan down into smaller units that were easier to handle and allowed for greater flexibility in setting sails appropriate to the weather.⁵⁵ However, cutter-rigged smacks remained standard at the Devon ports, where speed was more important than size, until the 1890s. Ports such as Ramsgate and Lowestoft, where smacks single-boated, often on grounds closer inshore, tended to deploy smaller vessels than ports further north.

The next major innovation was the installation of steam capstans in the late 1870s. This reduced the time needed to haul the trawl from three hours to around twenty minutes, which allowed smacks to make three hauls in 24 hours, as opposed to two when the trawl had to be hauled manually. Effectively, this gave a 50 per cent increase in catching power, which made the £150 outlay worthwhile.⁵⁶ Again, this had implications for crews. Although the capstan eliminated much of the hardest manual labour, it increased the intensity of work and shortened rest periods. Moreover, the cost of the capstan and its fuel were defrayed by the allocation of five per cent of gross earnings, which was not popular. Crews were paid on the net proceeds of a trip, and suspected smackowners of inflating the prices of commodities and services deducted from the gross profits, including fuel for the capstan, to reduce the crew's share.

⁵² March, *Sailing Trawlers*, p58.

⁵³ N.W. Robinson, *The English Fishing Industry 1780-1914: A Case Study of the Yorkshire Coast* (Unpub. PhD Thesis, University of Hull, 1984), p164.

⁵⁴ March, *Sailing Trawlers*, p178.

⁵⁵ Robinson, *Trawling*, p67.

⁵⁶ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q261.

Devon smacks were not generally fitted with steam capstans until the twentieth century because of the resistance of crews.⁵⁷ The implications of technological change for labour relations are discussed further in Chapter 6. In terms of business organisation, the increased size and sophistication of smacks led to a steady increase in their cost, from around £750 in the 1860s to between £1,300 and £1,600 by the early 1880s.⁵⁸ Ownership became an increasingly remote possibility for working skippers who, in previous years, could hope to save enough to buy their own vessel on mortgage. This was always an ambition achieved only by a minority – Rule has calculated that over 90 per cent of trawlermen had no share in vessel ownership in the late 1870s – but had become practically impossible by the 1890s. As Rule says:

The separation of capital and labour was already clear in the days of sail. Steam needed only to apply the finishing touches.⁵⁹

The application of steam propulsion to fishing came first with the building of steam cutters to service the fleets. Fast sailing cutters initially performed this task, but the greater reliability of steamships and independence of the weather provided an obvious incentive to use them to bring a perishable commodity like fish to market. In the 1860s Hull and Grimsby smackowners regarded their use as unworkable, voicing the opinion that they would be too expensive and that a disproportionately large vessel would be needed to keep ice and fish away from the heat of the boilers.⁶⁰ Such reservations were misplaced, for they were used successfully at Barking from 1864. However, none were built for Humber owners until 1878, and the expense of building and operating them was one reason for the adoption of year-round fleetings. Fleetings were held to ensure a steadier supply of fish to consumers, and to the owners it was more profitable than single-boating.⁶¹ However, intensification of the catching effort served only to worsen the underlying problem of overfishing in the North Sea that were in part behind the adoption of fleetings in the first place.

⁵⁷ Aflalo, *Sea Fishing Industry*, p271.

⁵⁸ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq10 & 2,538.

⁵⁹ Rule, 'Smacksmen,' p407.

⁶⁰ BPP 1866 XVII, R.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, qq7,908-9.

⁶¹ BPP 1883 XVIII, Report on the System of Deep Sea Trawl Fishing in the North Sea, p434.

By the early 1880s, trawler owners were aware that fish were not as abundant as formerly. As well as stimulating increased investment in technology to offset the decline, one effect of this was to promote interest in conservation measures. The National Sea Fisheries Protection Association was formed in 1882, stock depletion being one of the principal issues it sought to address, and at conferences in 1888 and 1890, delegates from all of the major North Sea trawling ports called for 'legislative interference of a national and international character' to protect fish stocks and prevent the sale of immature fish. At the latter conference a self-denying ordinance was agreed by which trawlers would refrain from working certain grounds during the summer season. Without legislative backing, however, this initiative was only modestly successful, but the fact that the industry was calling for regulation in 1890 demonstrated a marked shift in attitudes since the end of the 1870s, at which time most participants had maintained a determinedly *laissez-faire* stance.⁶² In this climate, legislation creating District Sea Fisheries Committees with the power to ban trawling within their jurisdiction and the closure of the Moray Firth to trawlers, which might have been expected to meet resistance, went unchallenged.

Overfishing also promoted interest in the application of steam to catching vessels. Converted paddle tugs had been working profitably on inshore grounds since 1877, to the fury of inshore fishermen whose gear was often damaged and who blamed the tugs for declining catches. However, paddle tugs had but a short range, consumed coal heavily and could not 'contend with bad weather,' and their success was largely ignored by smackowners, some of whom expressed doubts that steam vessels would ever be effective for fishing offshore.⁶³ Smackowners by then were willing to concede that trawling inshore could harm stocks and were willing to see it banned, which would have crippled the paddle tugs but had little effect on their own operations, which were almost always conducted beyond the three-mile limit of territorial waters. Despite their doubts, Hull and Grimsby smackowners, perhaps foreseeing the potential for further expansion of the industry to be restricted by the technological constraints of

⁶² Robinson, *Trawling*, pp102-3.

⁶³ This was the view of James Sellers, a leading Scarborough smackowner also financially interested in paddle tugs at the port. BPP 1878-9 XVII, Report on Sea Fisheries of England and Wales, Minutes, p395. This view was still being expressed in the early 1880s. See BPP 1885 XVI, R.C. on Trawling, Minutes, q9,454.

sailing vessels, began developing purpose-built steam vessels to combine the dependability of the steamship with the speed and seaworthiness of the classic smack design. The first such vessels were *Zodiac* and *Aries*, built for the Great Grimsby Steam Trawling Company in 1881-2. These were dual-purpose vessels, designed to trawl in winter and serve as cutters for the smack fleets in the summer, and the provision of disconnecting engines and a full sailing rig suggests that commitment to steam power was tempered with caution.⁶⁴ However, they proved successful, able to trawl in deeper water than the smacks and to fish in weather too calm for sailing vessels to operate. Since smacks could be confined to port for days at a time by adverse winds, this represented a major increase in catching power, as did the steam trawler's ability to work against the wind. Consequently, four more were ordered the following year and building for Hull owners began shortly afterwards. Early steam trawlers cost around £3,500 each, or twice the price of the largest smack, but by the turn of the century the price had risen to £10,000, with running costs at around £5,000 per year.⁶⁵

Capital was initially raised from within the smackowner/fish merchant group, but was increasingly sourced from outside the industry as costs rose. During the late 1880s and 1890s, increasing numbers of trawler concerns were converted to limited-liability firms, often based on the businesses of existing smackowners such as Thomas Hamling and Co. (formed 1891) and the Guzzwell Steam Fishing Company (1897). It was at this point that links of vertical integration within the fishing industry broke down. As steam trawling became increasingly specialised and capital-intensive, cross-subsidisation with fish marketing was no longer possible or necessary, and increasing amounts of capital were raised from outside the industry, in what has been described as 'the alliance of practical fishermen and shore-based capitalists.'⁶⁶ This never occurred in pelagic fisheries, since the cost of even the most advanced steam drifters was far less than that of trawlers, allowing the means of production to remain in the hands of working fishermen. In the trawl fishery it was a product of financial necessity, but there was widespread regret at the passing of the industry out of

⁶⁴ Haines, *Thesis*, p142.

⁶⁵ Alward, *Sea Fisheries*, p228; see also Haines, *Thesis*, p214.

⁶⁶ M. Barnard and R. Mumby-Croft, 'An Antiquated Relationship? Trawler Owners and Trawlers, c1880-1980,' in Starkey *et al*, *England's Sea Fisheries*, p126.

the hands of working fishermen. Plymouth smackowner John Little described the steam trawlers as 'sinners,' and argued that:

The steam trawlers have ... brought the capitalist into the business who does not understand fishing and the supply and demand ... Where vessels have been so owned by men in the trade they know the requirements, they know when there has been a bad season and when a particular ground has been overfished.⁶⁷

Extensive use of steam trawlers in the North Sea could only have exacerbated the underlying problems of stock depletion, as Little's comments suggest. However, it soon became clear that they had much greater range than the smacks. They were also able to trawl in deeper water, both of which allowed fishing operations to be conducted further north than smacks could operate. Experimental voyages to southern Icelandic waters were made first by the Grimsby trawler *Aquarius* in 1891, followed in 1892 by nine more vessels. These early voyages were risky ventures, and involved working right at the edge of the early steam trawlers' range. However, their success stimulated the building of larger and more efficient vessels to work grounds north of Iceland and further afield. During the 1890s a Hull fleet worked the Bay of Biscay, landing catches at Plymouth, and by 1914 fishing operations had been conducted in the Barents Sea and around the coast of northern Norway.

Steam trawling raised the quantity of fish that could be taken but necessitated larger-scale and more expensive operations, and thereby raised the threshold at which grounds became uneconomic to operate.⁶⁸ Robinson suggests that in 1906 the catch per day's fishing in the North Sea was 17.6cwt, compared to 44.2 at Iceland and 40.2 from the Barents Sea.⁶⁹ This is supported by data collated by Capes, showing the CPUE of demersal fish landed at various ports on the east coast, comparing ports whose operations were confined to the North Sea with those operating in distant waters.

⁶⁷ BPP 1893 XIV, S.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, q1,284 & 1,353.

⁶⁸ Haines, *Thesis*, p219.

⁶⁹ Robinson, *Trawling*, p111.

Table 3.4
Average Catch per Smack Unit (in cwt) of Demersal Fish Landed at
North Sea and Distant-Water Ports, 1891-1901

Year	Distant-Water Ports	North Sea Ports
1891	958.46	525.62
1892	889.38	412.49
1893	758.47	463.17
1894	816.02	382.18
1895	700.29	351.63
1896	769.57	316.53
1897	749.87	306.55
1898	649.80	287.06
1899	600.12	319.91
1900	591.84	340.90
1901	595.39	365.56

Source: Capes, *Thesis*, p39 and data supplied by author.

Note: **Distant-Water Ports** are Hull, Grimsby and Boston

North Sea Ports are North Shields, Sunderland, Hartlepool, Scarborough, Yarmouth, Lowestoft and Ramsgate.

With the exception of Boston, the ports counted as 'Distant-Water ports' still deployed part of their fleets in the North Sea, so Table 3.4 will if anything understate the difference in yields between operations in distant waters and those in the North Sea. The large quantities of fish needed to keep steam trawler operations profitable were increasingly sourced from distant waters, and steam trawling operations came to concentrate on cheaper and coarser varieties of fish to supply the mass market, especially the growing fish and chip trade.

With the ability to access waters outside the North Sea, the interest of the smackowners in conservation measures in the North Sea declined. The 1893 Select Committee on Sea Fisheries recommended that the British government seek agreement with other states bordering the North Sea to extend the three-mile limit of territorial waters in the interests of restricting fishing effort on grounds where immature fish were taken, such as those off Heligoland and an in the German Bight,⁷⁰ but this was never implemented. Moreover, trawlers working beyond the North Sea increasingly worked within the territorial waters of other nations, especially around Iceland, then a part of the Kingdom of Denmark. In

⁷⁰ BPP 1893 XIV, S.C. on Sea Fisheries, Report, pv & Minutes, q232

the face of protests from Iceland, and arrests of British trawlers by Danish gunboats, trawler owners reversed their previous position on conservation and sought successfully to maintain the three-mile limit.⁷¹

Aside from putting an end to the prospect of ownership, steam trawlers fundamentally affected the character of the fisherman's occupation. They offered safer working conditions, and although living conditions aboard early examples were primitive, these improved as vessels became larger. Steam trawlers were often more reliable in terms of earnings than smacks as well, since their independence of wind and tide removed the long spells of idleness forced upon smacksmen by calm weather. However, this did mean an increase in the intensity of work for all concerned. For deckhands, the greater quantities of fish caught by the steam trawler represented an increase in the amount of work to be performed in gutting and stowing it. Lummis calculated that each deckhand on a Hull trawler of the 1950s had around 8cwt of fish to process per day, as opposed to around 0.5 to 0.75cwt aboard a Lowestoft smack in the 1890s.⁷² Although steam trawlers of the 1890s caught much less fish than those in use 60 years later, they also carried crews of nine or ten, as opposed to twenty, so the amount of fish to be handled by each man may not have been much smaller. More fundamentally, steam trawling rendered many of the skills of the smacksmen redundant, especially those concerned with handling a sailing vessel. Lummis suggests, based on recollections of many of his interviewees, that 'the skill needed and exercised in handling these craft [smacks] imparted a very real sense of achievement.'⁷³ These skills were supplanted by those of the engineer and stoker, specialised positions occupied by men separate from the deck hierarchy. The implications of this in terms of labour relations, and for an apprenticeship system designed to provide and train labour for a sail-based fishery without such a division of labour were profound.

Although the leading sector of the industry transferred much of its effort out of the North Sea, fishing effort there remained significant. However, with the exception of the steam boxing fleet at Hull, large-scale fleeting operations came to an end at the turn of the twentieth century. During the 1890s the

⁷¹ See R. Robinson, 'The Evolution of Some Key Elements of British Fisheries Policy,' in *International Journal of Maritime History* 9 (1997), pp146-7.

⁷² Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, p27.

⁷³ Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, p65.

Grimsby fleets were broken up and the Great Yarmouth trawl fishery began to contract. In 1901, the last of its fleets, Hewett's Short Blue Fleet, was laid up, effectively marking the end of Great Yarmouth as a trawl port. Although the operating costs of smacks were far lower than steam trawlers, operation of fleets still required considerable investment and therefore needed large catches to generate a sufficient return, and as the grounds worked by smack fleets became depleted, so profits fell below the threshold at which they were viable to operate. Moreover, the sheer quantities of fish landed by steam trawlers brought down prices. The wholesale price of one hundredweight of cod, for example, fell from 15s 6½d in 1886, to 14s 8d in 1900 and as low as 10s 0d by 1910.⁷⁴ Steam vessels caught sufficient quantities to make a profit even at these low prices, but sailing trawlers confined to heavily-worked North Sea grounds became less and less able to do so. Grimsby trawler owner Charles Jeffs suggested in 1893 that the Dogger Bank grounds, upon which the Humber fleets worked, were exhausted, and that sailing trawlers could no longer make a profit.⁷⁵ The large fleet amassed by the Grimsby Ice Company, of which Jeffs was a director, were laid up in 1896, because 'we could not catch sufficient with sailing craft to keep the carriers supplied and make the thing pay.'⁷⁶

The situation appears to have been worse still in the Southern Bight of the North Sea, which had been subject to trawling operations for a longer period of time. At the 1878-9 enquiry, several Yarmouth smackowners acknowledged that the catch per smack was declining, whereas those from the northern ports did not,⁷⁷ whilst one leading Hull smackowner explained the port's concentration on northern waters by saying that, 'when we get southward of 55 [degrees – effectively, south of the Dogger Bank] we cannot get a living.'⁷⁸ Ports whose fisheries were centred on these grounds did not adopt steam trawling. As J.T. Cunningham observed in 1896:

The grounds in the vicinity are not extensive enough, nor productive enough, to enable a steamer to pay a profit on her working, and if she is to work the grounds more to the northward, she finds a more

⁷⁴ Sea Fisheries Statistical Tables.

⁷⁵ BPP 1893 XIV, S.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, qq624 & 630.

⁷⁶ BPP 1900 VIII, S.C. on the Sea Fisheries Bill, Minutes, qq2,506-14.

⁷⁷ BPP 1878-9 XVII, Report on Sea Fisheries of England and Wales, Minutes, p15.

⁷⁸ BPP 1885 XVI, R.C. on Trawling, Minutes, qq9,458-9.

convenient port for landing and working from, in Hull, Grimsby, or Boston.⁷⁹

As Cunningham's comment suggests, an infrastructure geared to the working of smacks, combined with relatively unproductive fishing grounds, rendered the working of steam trawlers from southern North Sea ports uneconomic. The cost of coal has also been cited as a factor, but fails to explain why in the pelagic fisheries of East Anglia steam power rapidly displaced sail around the turn of the twentieth century. However, the sole attempt at operating steam trawlers from East Anglia was an unmitigated disaster, losing £10,000 in three years.⁸⁰

On the other hand, the North Sea, including the southern bight, remained a source of prime fish to serve the high-quality end of the market. Aberdeen and Grimsby retained a substantial number of smaller trawlers and line vessels to service this end of the market, and some of the grounds in the southern North Sea did remain profitable for smacks, allowing Lowestoft and Ramsgate to survive as trawl ports. As Cunningham's comments suggest, they were unable to support steam trawlers or large-scale fleeting operations, but could provide prime fish enough to support a fishery based on single-boating. Ramsgate smackowner W.R. Caseley argued in 1893 that Hull and Grimsby trawlers were 'too big and expensive' to operate profitably on the grounds worked by Ramsgate smacks, a view shared by Lowestoft and Plymouth owners.⁸¹ Smacks cost little to operate, and remained effective at catching prime fish on these comparatively small grounds, leading to concentration on the high-quality end of the market. A former Lowestoft smacksman commented that, 'you'd think it [the prime fish] was gold dust the way the old skipper used to look after it.' This, as Lummis commented, is in sharp contrast to the picture given by Tunstall of Hull trawler deckhands hurling heaps of fish around the deck, perhaps illustrating the difference in priorities and working practices between steam trawling and the surviving smack fisheries.⁸²

Table 3.5 shows the average value per hundredweight of demersal fish landed at Lowestoft and Hull.

⁷⁹ J.T. Cunningham, 'North Sea Investigations,' in *Journal of the Marine Biological Association* 4 (1896), p125.

⁸⁰ BPP 1893 XIV, S.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, q1,535.

⁸¹ BPP 1893 XIV, S.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, qq1,337 & 1,772.

⁸² Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, p26.

Table 3.5
Average Value per cwt of Demersal Fish Landed at
Lowestoft and Hull, 1903-1910

Year	Average Value at Lowestoft (d/cwt)	Average Value at Hull (d/cwt)
1903	262	111
1904	262	109
1905	262	125
1906	306	115
1907	304	117
1908	280	110
1909	252	111
1910	285	124

Source: Annual Report of Proceedings under Acts Relating to Sea Fisheries, 1903-1910; see also Capes, *Thesis*, p37.

Average values at Grimsby were higher than Hull, but still significantly lower than at Lowestoft. These figures help to illustrate how, whilst steam trawlers aimed at catching in bulk for the mass market, concentration on high-value fish and low operating costs kept sail trawling viable in the southern ports, although profit margins were tight and bankruptcies of owners not infrequent. Figures given by Lummis suggest that at least one smackowner went bankrupt in most years between 1894 and 1913, including ten in 1895.⁸³

The contrast between the 'industrial' trawling ports of the Humber, and newer ports such as Fleetwood and North Shields, which concentrated on steam trawling in distant waters, became more marked during the early twentieth century. Sailing trawlers, although still viable in some ports, became 'a romantic anachronism.'⁸⁴ Their contribution to fish landings nationwide became smaller and smaller, and with them the self-financing business structure and the labour regime they fostered faded away. Already, as Rule suggests, the concentration of the industry and rising costs had spelled the end for the individual owner-skipper and, as Chapter 6 discusses, promoted more antagonistic labour relations. Steam trawling consolidated this process. The new distant-water grounds they opened up offered sufficient quantities of fish to generate good returns for trawler owners, despite its being mainly the cheaper species, such as haddock, and none

⁸³ Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, p86.

⁸⁴ Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, p64.

too fresh at the end of a three-week trip. However, this proved to be temporary relief. By the late 1930s, stocks on even these grounds were starting to become depleted, and the cycle of depletion, increased effort and technology and migration to new grounds began again.

Chapter 4

Skilled Labour: Supply and Demand

Before 1850, most fishing stations, whether engaged in inshore or deep-sea fishing, recruited the bulk of their labour force from the surrounding area, and in many cases from communities centred around the fishing. The one major exception to this was the large scale trawl and line fishery centred around the Thames ports of Barking and Greenwich, which relied on pauper apprentices from the public institutions of London for around half of its recruits. These established patterns of recruitment broke down as the spatial distribution of the fishery changed and as new ports were established. Labour shortage was a potential hindrance to growth at many of these ports, especially the isolated, single-industry town of Grimsby, and it was here that the apprenticeship system was expanded, modified and used as a means of drawing in labour from a wide geographical area. This chapter examines the industry's demand for skilled labour and the role of apprenticed labour in meeting it. During the 1870s and 1880s the fishing industry's demand for labour underwent a significant qualitative shift with the arrival of steam trawling, and supply-side conditions changed because of migration and increasing settlement around the newer fishing stations, which form the final subject of this chapter.

i. Skill Requirements and the Demand for Labour

Fishing was, and is, a highly skilled occupation. This is asserted in the literature on the nineteenth-century fisheries, but without qualification and without addressing the question of what 'skill' actually is, how the new fisherman acquired his skills in comparison to new recruits in other skilled occupations, or how the business structure of the fishing industry affected the means of acquiring skill. To address the first question, this is the definition of skill advanced by H. Renold and since used by other historians of skilled labour, and which is accepted for the purposes of this study:

Any combination, useful to industry, of mental and physical qualities which require considerable training to acquire.¹

In the case of fishing, such qualities would include knowledge of different species of fish; the grounds upon which they were found; whether they were of commercial value and if so how to catch and process them; understanding of and ability to operate fishing gear and ability to perform the tasks necessary to navigate and handle the vessel and maintain it at sea for as long as necessary. Before steam trawling there was no division of labour between handling the ship and catching fish: all of the crew were involved in both, and all therefore needed suitable skills. This was the rationale behind the apprenticeship system and the career progression outlined in Chapter 1. As a boy progressed from cook to deckhand, and then to third hand, he was at each stage acquiring not only the skills needed for that rank but observing those of the next man up the hierarchy and learning them in readiness for promotion, so that by the time the apprenticeship ended he was competent both to handle the smack and to operate the fishing gear.

In effect, an indenture of apprenticeship formalised the career progression followed by fishermen in branches of the industry that did not utilise apprenticeship. The same applied in merchant shipping and many land-based industries. There was little theoretical training and both apprenticed and non-apprenticed trainees learned their skills through watching qualified workers and through practical experience. In all cases, learning a skilled trade could take several years, with trainees becoming increasingly valuable to their employers as they gained experience. Apprenticeships in woodworking and engineering in the late nineteenth century usually lasted five years, with workers becoming productive after three years.² Similarly, in merchant shipping before the repeal of the Navigation Laws, apprentices were reckoned as a cost rather than a benefit for the first year or two of their service. Only after that did they become useful, and at that point they frequently absconded to seek paid work aboard other ships.³ Much the same was the case in fishing. There was a general consensus

¹ H. Renolds, 'The Nature and Present Position of Skill in Industry,' in *Economic Journal* 38 (1928), p593.

² More, *Skill*, pp143-4.

³ BPP 1847-8 XX, Lords S.C. on Navigation Laws, Minutes, q6,504.

amongst smackowners that apprentices were more of a burden than a benefit for the first year or two of their terms, but that by the time a boy was promoted to third hand at the age of nineteen or 20 he was 'productive.'⁴ Indeed, boys of this age were sometimes sufficiently well trained to act as mates and skippers. At that stage apprenticeships often became problematic, since the apprentices wanted to 'get clear' and earn wages as casual hands, but masters wished to retain them to recoup their investment in the boys' training, board and lodgings. All through the 1850-1914 period, masters were reluctant to let even the most recalcitrant apprentices leave.

There was a fundamental difference in the nature of the demand for labour between different branches of the fishing industry, which explains the prevalence of apprenticeship in the trawl and line fisheries but its absence elsewhere. The trawl and line fisheries, which targeted exclusively demersal species, operated all year round, whereas most other fisheries were seasonal. In many inshore fisheries, boats followed demersal and pelagic species at different times of the year and were laid up over the winter, and the movement of the shoals governed the activities of deep-sea pelagic fishers. Even in the East Anglian herring fishery, the largest of the pelagic fisheries, boats were usually laid up over the winter.⁵ A similar situation had faced merchant shipowners before the repeal of the Navigation Laws. As shipowner Duncan Dunbar complained:

It [compulsory apprenticeship] entails very considerable expense and very considerable inconvenience. When our ships are at home here, lying idle for six months, and we cannot get employment for them, I must maintain the apprentices for the whole time they are here.⁶

The same seasonality of occupation that made apprenticeship unprofitable in many deep-sea trades operated in pelagic fisheries. Moreover, much of the work was unskilled and sheer muscle power was the priority. As Yarmouth herring fisherman Thomas Hammond said in 1833, 'our men are agricultural labourers from the adjacent villages, men that can pull and haul.'⁷ These factors promoted

⁴ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Report, p673, Minutes, qq23-7, 92 & 5,488-90;

⁵ Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, p39.

⁶ BPP 1847 X, S.C. on Navigation Laws, Minutes, q5,010.

⁷ BPP 1833 XIV, S.C. on Channel Fisheries, Minutes, q2,666.

a system of casual labour that existed throughout the period. After 1880, some owners began working their vessels all year round, sending them to the West Country for the winter fishery, but even when employed all year round there was no need for apprenticeship: the men known as 'joskins' or 'younkers,' who could 'pull and haul' but took no part in working the ship, had no need of a long period of training.

Apprenticeship was not the only way of acquiring the skills of a demersal fisherman. Inshore fishermen and those working in deep-sea pelagic fisheries never served apprenticeships and yet there is no suggestion that they were less competent than those in the trawl and line fisheries who did. In most inshore fisheries, there was a strong family tradition, and boys frequently went to sea with relatives from an early age, learning their craft through emulation and informal instruction. In the deep-sea pelagic fisheries, the skilled element in the crew again learned their business informally. In many instances, they shipped as cooks or cabin boys, remunerated by a smaller share of the catch than the men, by whom they were instructed, and permitted a full share after a set period, two years being typical.⁸ Even in the trawl and line fisheries there were areas with no apprenticeship system, such as the trawling port of Fleetwood, where new entrants were shipped as cabin boys and were admitted a full share once they had gained sufficient experience. The tasks performed by these boys were identical to those undertaken by apprentices and the outcome the same. The only material difference between these training systems and apprenticeship, therefore, was the absence of a legally binding contract.

Fishing, before the expansion and capitalisation of the industry that started in the 1840s, was principally an artisanal trade. The trawler skipper, and indeed the drifter skipper or inshore fisherman, was usually also the owner, or at least part owner, of his vessel and was therefore a small capitalist in his own right in much the same way as was a shore-based artisan such as a carpenter or watchmaker. Ownership of the means of production, albeit on a small scale, was a realistic ambition for apprentices and journeymen in such industries. The tools and raw materials of a blacksmith's or a hatter's trade were well within reach of a journeyman of modest means who was prepared to save. Nor was there any

⁸ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Report, p670.

great division of labour, so in most of these artisan industries, apprenticeship was a means of all-round training in much the same way as it was in fishing. Moreover, because industrial units were of small size, the owner was usually a direct participant in production and was in personal charge of the training and supervision of apprentices, who would usually live in his house and towards whom he would act in *loco parentis*. This is reflected in various pieces of legislation passed during the eighteenth century that sought to control, among other things, the level of personal correction (corporal punishment) the master was allowed to administer and prohibitions on hunting and games of hazard.⁹ Apprenticeship in these industries was a classically paternalistic system of training, and so it was in the fisheries.

There were, however, two significant differences between the fisheries and artisanal trades ashore. In the first place, many journeymen in land-based craft industries owned their own tools, whereas in fishing the vessel owner invariably owned the trawl or the long-lines. Secondly, and perhaps more fundamentally, the ratio of apprentices to journeymen was higher in the fishing industry than in most craft industries. One in four of the crew of a Brixham trawler were usually apprentices, rising to up to three in five in the more concentrated fisheries of the Humber. Lining vessels, too, carried a high proportion of apprentices in their crews. These caveats mark the demersal fisheries' shift away from a craft structure towards organisation on more capitalistic lines, which became increasingly pronounced throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.

In many industries conducted along craft lines, rapid growth and technological development promoted change in business organisation and in the relative positions of master and apprentice. Increasingly, industrial units became larger, and the master withdrew from the workshop and was no longer able to provide direct training for the apprentices, this function being left to skilled wage labourers. Such was the case in, for example, the printing trade and engineering.¹⁰ Growth in a given trade was not incompatible with the maintenance of the traditional apprenticeship system as long as units of production remained small and the means of production little changed.

⁹ Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, pp3-5.

¹⁰ More, *Skill*, p82.

However, in industries where water or steam power was introduced, necessitating larger productive units, the priorities of apprenticeship changed. Historically, skilled trades had used apprenticeship as a means of limiting entry and ensuring a high level of skill. These trades had often been controlled by guilds that guarded their privileges jealously, although similar apprenticeship systems existed in trades not so controlled, as the example of fishing demonstrates. However, as the power of the guilds waned in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and as certain trades moved towards a factory-based mode of production, controlling entry ceased to be important and the all-round training provided by a classical apprenticeship became increasingly irrelevant. The division of labour consequent upon mechanisation meant that whereas, for example, a weaver might have prepared his own wool as well as operating the loom, he now became solely a machine operator engaged in one stage of the productive process. 'Apprenticeship' in these factory-based trades no longer offered training in a skilled occupation: instead, batches of pauper children were indentured to factory owners to act as machine-minders and cleaners, occupations requiring little skill and offering no prospect of entry to a 'respectable' trade at the end. Technological change, coupled with a shortage of labour, promoted exploitative apprenticeship. However, until the introduction of steam trawling in the 1880s, the means of production in fishing underwent no fundamental change. Even when they did, fishing still depended to a considerable degree on manual labour involving considerable knowledge and skill.

The fishing interests of the major trawl and line ports grew markedly between the 1840s and the 1880s, and some very rapidly indeed, as is evident from the tables of first-class fishing vessels in Chapter 2. Growth was most marked in the ports of Brixham, Ramsgate, Lowestoft, Great Yarmouth, Hull and Grimsby. Features common to most of these ports were the lack of a tradition of fishing and the absence of a pool of skilled local labour from which to man the fishing vessels. In Brixham this was less so, because the trawl fishery had existed since the eighteenth century, and because Brixham was a town dominated by its maritime industries – commercial shipping and fishing, between which many of the seafarer's skills were transferable. In 1875, for example, Brixham's fishing fleet, 150 first-class vessels, shared the port with 187 merchant sailing

vessels, including a significant number of schooners engaged in trades such as fruit, ores and, after 1873, ice for the fisheries.¹¹

Although the Brixham trawl fishery grew throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, there is little evidence that this caused a serious labour shortage despite the outflow of capital and labour consequent upon migration to the east coast ports. Ramsgate was an established fishing port by the 1840s, several Devon smackowners having settled there in the 1830s and 1840s. As at Brixham, growth was not apparently much hindered by a dearth of labour. In Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth, the trawl fishery had to share both port facilities and the local labour supply with long-established pelagic fisheries. However, the situation there was greatly affected both by developments inland and in-migration of fishermen from Devon and the declining Thames ports. It was in Hull and Grimsby that growth was most rapid and the local labour supply least able to meet spiralling demand. A pool of skilled labour to operate the trawlers had to be established where it had not previously existed, and a fishing community to be established from scratch.

Table 4.1
Population of Hull and Grimsby 1841-1911

Year	Population of Hull	Population of Grimsby
1841	41,000	3,700
1851	85,000	8,860
1861	98,000	11,000
1871	122,000	24,000
1881	154,000	42,000
1891	200,000	56,000
1901	240,000	75,000
1911	278,000	77,000

Source: Gillett, *History of Grimsby*, p301; Mitchell & Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*.

Hull, as Table 4.1 suggests, was a large settlement long before the fishing industry arrived. It was also a thriving port, and the fishing industry had to share its facilities, its communications and its labour supply with other maritime

¹¹ Annual Statement of Navigation, 1875; B. Greenhill, *The Merchant Schooners* (London, 1988), pp242-3.

activities, in addition to burgeoning industries such as transport, flour milling and engineering. Fishing accounted for only 1.75% of occupied males on average between 1841 and 1911.¹² Grimsby, on the other hand, was a small town with little in the way of indigenous industries and a small population, and it owed its rapid growth in the second half of the nineteenth century almost entirely to the fishing industry. Figures on occupations comparable to those in Hull are not available, but the fishing labour force in 1883, 3,673 persons, would alone have accounted for 8.8% of the town's population as enumerated in 1881. In fact, many smackowners and some crews lived outside the town boundary, but even so, this figure gives an indication of the fisheries' importance as an employer at Grimsby, how shortage of labour could have inhibited the growth of the industry, and why it proved necessary to recruit fishermen from such a wide range of sources.

The apprenticeship system was already known and understood by smackowners at all of these ports. Many had originated in Brixham and Barking, where it was the main means of recruiting boys to the industry. Many, if not most, had served apprenticeships themselves and attributed their success at least in part to the training they had received. Boswell attributes their adoption of the apprenticeship system on a large scale to natural conservatism and an unwillingness to solve their labour difficulties by 'original thinking,' and most probably their own experiences led them to consider apprenticeship first as a means of obtaining labour. As Boswell suggests, some of them were probably aware – almost certainly so in the case of London smackowners – of the practice of apprenticing large numbers of pauper children to industrialists and saw how this system could be adapted to suit their needs.¹³ However, attributing this solely to blind conservatism is unfair. No other system of importing and training large numbers of skilled labourers existed, and it is hard to see how the small master could have established one. When factory owners, establishing their businesses in locations devoid of a suitable pool of labour, faced a labour shortage they adapted an established recruitment system to suit their needs, and the early smackowners did much the same.

¹² J.M. Bellamy, 'Occupations in Kingston Upon Hull, 1841-1948,' in *Yorkshire Bulletin of Economic and Social Research* 4 (1952), p39. 1881 excluded as not comparable with other years.

¹³ Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices*, p26.

The speed at which the industry was growing placed the emphasis on quantity, rather than quality, of labour, and training probably declined in effectiveness as the proportion of apprentices in trawler crews rose. There is no way to quantify this, but in many instances apprentices were ordered to perform tasks they were not capable of. Several apprentices at the 1882 enquiry recalled being ill-treated when they proved unable to do their jobs, either through weakness or lack of knowledge,¹⁴ and one Hull apprentice stated that the reason he had not been promoted to third hand after nine years was that, 'I was not fit for it ... they never learned me.'¹⁵ Moreover, there were many instances of apprentices, especially on Hull and Grimsby smacks, being dragged overboard from fast-moving vessels and drowned simply because no-one had thought to warn them of the dangers of using a bucket to draw water.¹⁶ Cases such as these suggest that training in many cases became slipshod. However, apprentices at both Grimsby and Brixham argued that they learned their trades better than the casual hands,¹⁷ which was also the opinion of most skippers and owners. Although many of the tasks they performed were basically semi-skilled manual jobs, they were also expected to be learning the tasks of the men higher up the hierarchy in preparation for promotion, and the number of apprentices who served as skippers and mates suggests that many successfully did so. Someone who is competent to command a vessel cannot really be considered a trainee. Moreover, there is no reason why apprentices should have been any less effective at deck jobs such as operating the trawl and handling the catch than casual deckhands. Both, in the end, learned their tasks through emulation and instruction from more experienced hands.

The lack of an established pool of skilled labour to support a fast-growing industry was the driving factor behind the expansion of the apprenticeship system. However, the labour shortage was exacerbated by the financial structure of the industry, and by the operation of the apprenticeship system itself. In the first place, many smackowners were heavily indebted. They had purchased their vessels with a mortgage and were under pressure to pay it off out of their operating profits, which therefore had to be as high as possible. In the 1860s a

¹⁴ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq494 & 943.

¹⁵ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq979-82.

¹⁶ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q1,762.

¹⁷ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq1,930 & 6,448.

new smack cost below £900, but the price rose throughout the 1870s and 1880s as smacks became larger and more sophisticated, until by the mid-1880s they could cost £1,700 or more.¹⁸ Moreover, it was apparently not uncommon for prospective smackowners to borrow almost the whole amount, putting down only the minimum possible deposit¹⁹ and relying on successful fishing to pay off the mortgage and the interest, typically at a rate of five per cent at Lowestoft in the 1890s.²⁰ This promoted both intensive fishing, increasingly so as fish stocks became depleted, and cost cutting wherever possible.

Since apprentices were unpaid, apprenticeship represented an apparently ideal means of holding down labour costs. Although apprenticeship carried hidden costs in the form of liability for medical fees, the obligation to provide work clothing and the need to feed and house the apprentice, it is highly unlikely that these costs amounted to more than the wage of fourteen to sixteen shillings per week paid to non-apprenticed deckhands in the 1860s.²¹ In 1882, Grimsby smackowner C.M. Mundahl argued that casual hands' wages were 'far too much,' giving this as a reason for taking apprentices.²² Cheap labour was the priority, considerations of suitability and willingness being subordinated to this.

Moreover, apprentices were legally bound to their masters and forbidden from changing employer or absenting themselves from duty. This, theoretically at least, reduced turnover costs, the cost of hiring and training new hands to replace leavers. It also prevented labour from taking advantage of scarcity and playing employers off against one another to bid up wages, a situation outlined by the manager of the Short Blue Fleet at Great Yarmouth in 1882:

[I hired] a man, a fourth hand with 10s a week [wage] and 4d [poundage], he was drunk and could not go. I had to ship a third hand at 14s a week, an increase of 4s, and then the [first] man came back again and promised to go the next morning, but he would not go under 12s, and we were obliged to take him as hands were so scarce.²³

¹⁸ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Report, p671 and Minutes, qq9-10.

¹⁹ Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, p86.

²⁰ *Lowestoft Journal*, 22 June 1895.

²¹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, written statement submitted after q2,538.

²² BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q2,331.

²³ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q3,294.

Some owners were evidently complicit in this, poaching men from other vessels to complete crews on their own.²⁴ The early smacks carried crews of four: as North Sea smacks became larger they began carrying a fifth hand, which can only have exacerbated the situation, although this was not the case at the East Anglian ports, where smacks could carry six- or seven-man crews.

Apprenticeship, therefore, was an attractive source of cheap labour, with the added merit of producing skilled fishermen. However, although theoretically apprenticeship obviated turnover costs and restricted free movement of labour between employers, the reality was rather more complex. Data from before 1875 is too patchy to give a reliable estimate, but from data for apprentices recruited in 1875 it is apparent that turnover was high. This was especially the case in the first two or three years of the term of service. Tables 4.2a-c show the numbers and percentages of apprentices at three selected ports who left in the first six years of the term. Grimsby is used as an example of the largest trawling ports with the highest numbers of apprentices, Lowestoft illustrates the East Anglian ports, and Ramsgate the smaller ports. Calculations for Hull give very similar results to Grimsby, and for Brixham very similar to Ramsgate. No comparison of Great Yarmouth with Lowestoft was attempted, since the numbers of apprentices involved was too small to give a meaningful result.

Table 4.2
Numbers of Apprentices Recruited at Selected Ports in 1875
Leaving Before 1880

a. Grimsby

Number of Apprentices recruited, 1875: 386

Number of apprentices leaving at unspecified date: 38

Year	Completed term	Deserted	Cancelled	Other Causes	Percentage Leaving
1875		21	15	3	10.1
1876	9	14	11	1	9.1
1877	38	8	6	4	14.5
1878	35	4	11	3	13.7
1879	36	2	4	1	11.1
1880	47		1	1	12.7

²⁴ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq3,823-5.

b. Lowestoft

Number of Apprentices recruited, 1875: 39

Number of apprentices leaving at unspecified date: 2

Year	Completed term	Deserted	Cancelled	Other Causes	Percentage Leaving
1875		2	1	1	10.3
1876		1	2		7.7
1877		1		1	5.1
1878	2		1		7.7
1879	4		1	1	15.4
1880	6			1	18.0

c. Ramsgate

Number of Apprentices recruited, 1875: 72

Number of apprentices leaving at unspecified date: 1

Year	Completed term	Deserted	Cancelled	Other Causes	Percentage Leaving
1875		2	3		6.9
1876		3	6		12.5
1877	1	1	3		6.9
1878	5		2	2	12.5
1879	6		2		11.1
1880	11	1	1		18.1

Source: PRO, BT150.

A circular was sent to masters in 1878 requiring them to inform the Board of Trade of the status of their current apprentices, many entries being marked 'absconded' or 'no longer serving' as a result, but without giving a date, the numbers of which are marked as leaving 'at an unspecified date.' Therefore, the percentage figures for the first four years are in most cases an underestimate, especially in the case of Grimsby (and also Hull). What is readily apparent from Table 4.2a is that, on the Humber especially, around a third of apprentices served less than three years. Apprentices bound at an older age would complete their short terms, and a high proportion of cancellations and desertions happened in those years. The situation was little different in 1895, despite changes in the system that should, in theory, have increased completion rates and reduced desertions. The apprenticeship system had ceased at Lowestoft by this time, so Table 4.3 covers Grimsby and Ramsgate only.

Table 4.3
Numbers of Apprentices Recruited at Selected Ports in 1895
Leaving Before 1900

a. Grimsby

Number of Apprentices recruited, 1895: 138

Number of apprentices leaving at unspecified date: 0

Year	Completed term	Deserted	Cancelled	Other Causes	Percentage Leaving
1895		9	24	1	24.6
1896		4	24	1	21.0
1897		4	10	2	11.6
1898	7	2	6		10.9
1899	5	3	4		8.7
1900	15	2	5		15.9

b. Ramsgate

Number of Apprentices recruited, 1895: 36

Number of apprentices leaving at unspecified date: 0

Year	Completed term	Deserted	Cancelled	Other Causes	Percentage Leaving
1895			2		5.6
1896		1	5		16.7
1897			2		5.6
1898			1		2.8
1899	1	1	1		8.3
1900	7		2		25.0

Source: PRO, BT150.

Turnover among apprentices was very high, especially in the ports with the largest numbers of apprentices, many of whom were working on the outdoor system, the lack of supervision inherent in which exacerbated the situation. In these ports demand for apprentices was greatest, and rapid turnover can only have increased it, since every apprentice who deserted, died or had his indentures cancelled needed to be replaced. Before the 1880s or 1890s, by which time casual labour was increasingly available, this meant further recruitment via the apprenticeship system.

However, although turnover amongst apprentices was high, evidence from crew lists suggests that crews composed partly of apprentices were more stable than those made up of casual hands. For instance, in 1885 the Brixham

smacks *Adela*, *Star of Hope* and *Mystery* all employed apprentices as cooks. They remained with the vessels throughout the six months covered by the lists, whereas two casual third hands served aboard *Adela* and three aboard the other smacks in that time. In Hull in the same year, the smack *Flower of the Forest* carried an apprenticed third hand who was transferred to another vessel: after he left, three different casual hands worked in his place in four months. Apprentices were also carried as cook and fourth hand and remained with the vessel for six months, whereas aboard *Star of Peace*, which carried no apprentices, three cooks and three deckhands served in six months.²⁵ Although turnover amongst apprentices themselves was rapid, then, it appears to have been generally lower than amongst casual hands. This obviously relieved smackowners of the cost and trouble of replacing hands who left, and taking on numerous casual hands of unknown ability and trustworthiness. As Christopher Hanes's hypothesis suggests, indentured labour was a means of cutting turnover costs.²⁶

Growth in the fishing industry continued unabated until the late 1870s. Table 4.4 shows the percentage change in numbers of first class boats at four leading trawl ports between 1875 and 1880. The East Anglian ports are excluded, because of the difficulty in distinguishing trawlers from vessels engaged in the pelagic fisheries.

Table 4.4

Growth in Four selected Trawling Ports, 1875-1880, by Number of Boats

Port	First-class boats registered		Percentage change
	1875	1880	
Hull	356	536	+50.6
Grimsby	392	567	+44.6
Ramsgate	147	184	+25.2
Brixham	150	229	+52.7

Source: Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping.

Despite continuing growth, which in theory should have been accompanied by growth in the apprenticeship system, the 1875-1880 period was when the apprenticeship system began to decline. In Hull and Grimsby a third fewer

²⁵ PRO BT144/7 & 13. Crew lists for British Fishing Vessels.

²⁶ Hanes, 'Turnover Cost.'

apprentices were recruited in 1880 than 1875. Moreover, closer examination of the 1875-9 registers suggests that recruitment peaked in 1877-8 at these ports, and in the East Anglian ports, and began thereafter to fall away. Table 4.5 illustrates this.

Table 4.5
Apprentice Recruitment at Seven Trawling Ports, 1875-1880

Port	1875	1876	1877	1878	1879	1880
Hull	339	408	494	408	310	227
Grimsby	386	505	547	482	417	285
Brixham	45	33	46	33	32	48
Ramsgate	72	85	73	84	72	(109)
Great Yarmouth/Gorleston	18	54	86	77	43	29
Lowestoft	39	60	59	67	59	41
Greenwich/London	34	41	25	25	16	21

Source: PRO, BT150.

Note: 1880 figure for Ramsgate (in brackets) probably too high.

Supply-side factors in part drove this slackening in recruitment, and are discussed in the next section. However, closely following the beginnings of the decline came two major changes on the demand side. The first of these was the Payment of Wages Act of 1880, which loosened masters' legal control over apprentices and increased the attractiveness of casual labour. This is discussed in Chapter 6. Secondly, steam trawling was introduced in the decade following the Payment of Wages Act, and changed the industry's demand for labour in a direction less conducive to continuation of the apprenticeship system.

Steam trawling did not effect a reduction in demand for labour. Although there were fewer steam trawlers, they were larger than the smacks and carried ten-man crews. Taking the figures in first-class vessels for Hull from Chapter 2, the 536 first-class vessels at the port in 1880 should have employed just under 2,700 hands, assuming that each carried five men, as was usual on the Humber. Arthur Rollitt, president of the Smackowners' Association of Hull, estimated the seagoing labour force to be about 3,000 in 1883.²⁷ By 1900 the smacks were gone and the 405 steam trawlers would have needed a seagoing population of

²⁷ BPP 1885 XVI, R.C. on Trawling, Minutes, q8,631.

around 4,000, an estimate supported by the figure of 3,827 full-time fishermen given that year.²⁸ As late as 1904 the operating reports of the Kingston Steam Trawling Company were complaining of trawlers being delayed through lack of crews.²⁹ However, apprenticeship had become a less attractive solution to the difficulty than it had been a quarter of a century before, not only because the legal position of the master was less advantageous than before 1880, but also because the labour required was different in qualitative terms.

Steam trawling introduced a more complex division of labour into fishing, as it had in the mercantile marine. A division was created between the deck and the engine room, with deck workers handling the fish and rising through the hierarchy to command of vessels, whereas engine room workers took no part in the fishing operation but possessed the skills needed to propel the vessel to the fishing grounds and back. Tension between deck and engine room staff was noted by Tunstall in his seminal study of the Hull fishermen in the 1950s, and almost certainly emerged right at the start of the steam trawling era. At this stage, the separateness of deck and engine room was reinforced by different methods of payment, deckhands being remunerated by a combination of a low basic wage and a share of net profits (poundage), whereas engineers were paid solely by wage, 45s for a chief engineer and 35s for second engineer being typical aboard a Hull trawler around 1910.³⁰ The comparatively high wages and status of the trawler engineer right from the start of steam trawling contrasted with the low regard in which engineers were initially held on steam merchant ships, and aboard drifters, where engineers, whose experience of engines and boilers had frequently been gained on agricultural traction engines, were known as 'drivers.'³¹

Trawler engineers usually served engineering apprenticeships before seeking work on trawlers, whereas training in the deck hierarchy was overwhelmingly of the practical, 'learning by experience' variety. As merchant sailing ships declined and deckhands in the mercantile marine were no longer

²⁸ Annual Statement of Navigation and Shipping, 1900.

²⁹ HCA, DBHB/5/3. Kingston Steam Trawling Co., Directors' Minute Book 1900-1908.

³⁰ PRO, BT144/167-8. Crew lists for British Fishing Vessels.

³¹ H.C. McMurray, 'Technology and Social Change at Sea: The Status and Position of the Ship's Engineer, c1830-1860,' in R. Ommer & G. Panting (eds), *Working Men Who Got Wet* (Newfoundland, 1980), pp38-9; D. Butcher, *Living from the Sea* (Reading, 1982), p42; Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, p56.

required to operate the ship's propulsive machinery, apprenticeship died out. The rationale behind apprenticeship, that of all-round training fitting its subject to do all jobs aboard, was no longer applicable. In fishing, this was not entirely the case. Although the skills of sail handling were no longer necessary, deck work remained highly skilled. The operation of the fishing gear was difficult and complex, and the need to handle and gut the catch was unaffected by the change in propulsion. Gutting was an operation that required considerable dexterity and physical stamina, and the quantities of fish for the deck crew to handle at each haul rose as steam replaced sail and the otter trawl superseded the beam trawl. Tunstall described how deck work during spells of good fishing conditions had to be conducted as efficiently and as quickly as possible, and the nature of the job had changed little in the preceding half-century.³² The rationale behind apprenticeship was not therefore undermined by the transition to steam power in fishing to the same extent it was in merchant shipping, or in industries ashore. Apprentices did serve aboard steam trawlers at Grimsby, Hull, Boston and Fleetwood. The system was modified to serve solely as a training system for deckhands and the old aspiration of serving immediately as mate once an apprentice was out of his time was removed: in effect, apprentices aboard steam trawlers occupied the same position as 'deckie-learners' did in later years.

At ports that grew on the basis of steam trawling, apprenticeship was always used to a lesser extent than at sail-trawling ports. Converted paddle tugs, such as those used at North Shields carried only one or two experienced fishermen to supplement the tug crew³³ and therefore had no need of apprentices. Indeed, any but senior, fully trained apprentices would have been a liability. At Fleetwood, shortage of labour may have stimulated use of apprenticeship, but another factor was the presence of migrant trawler firms from Hull, where apprenticeship had been the key means of manning the fleet. Before 1860, migrants from Brixham and the Thames had taken their apprenticeship systems with them; in the 1880s and 1890s firms from Hull did the same.

Steam trawlers and smacks operated side by side for a considerable period of time, 22 years in the case of Grimsby, between the arrival of *Zodiac* and *Aries* in 1881 and the departure of the last smack in 1903, and during that

³² Tunstall, *The Fishermen*, pp64-6.

³³ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq2,777-8.

time the economic climate became much harsher for those adhering to sail. Even in ports where the steam trawler was never adopted, 'low profits and tight margins' were the rule.³⁴ Cost cutting was the order of the day, and if apprentices represented a cost saving over casual hands, as they sometimes did, they became an attractive proposition. Boston, struggling to establish itself as a steam trawling port and lacking experienced trawlermen, used apprentices; the same reason may have contributed to the introduction of apprentices at Fleetwood, although sail trawling had been conducted at the port since the 1840s.

In Grimsby, where the labour shortage remained acute, several of the companies formed in the 1880s used apprenticeship on a large scale, resorting to methods similar to those of early mill owners to keep them. The barracks seen at textile mills during the late eighteenth century were paralleled by 'homes' for boys, the Great Grimsby Ice Company's home housing up to 100 apprentices. This company was formed to wring the last ounce of profit from obsolete and rapidly depreciating capital stock through intensive operation and economies of scale. Owning 66 smacks in 1886, 58 of them purchased from directors of the company such as Henry Smethurst who effectively sold their smacks to the company to insure themselves against the inevitable depreciation, it reintroduced winter fleeting in 1885, provoking and defeating a large-scale strike in the process, and continued the practice until 1896, when falling catches made it uneconomic.³⁵ The Ice Company was also an aggressive user of the apprenticeship system. It took on 22 apprentices in 1885 and 76 in 1890, 26 per cent of all of those recruited to the port, not including those indentured to individuals involved in the company who may have served on its vessels. In 1894 the company had 222 apprentices, and managing director Charles Jeffs visited public institutions all over the country to select suitable boys.³⁶ Henry Smethurst alone recruited 26 apprentices in 1885 and seventeen in 1890. Other companies followed the Ice Company's lead, 21 apprentices being recruited by the Grimsby and North Sea Steam Trawling Company in 1895. In 1905, of the 53 apprentices indentured at Grimsby, 49 are identified as apprentices to companies rather than individuals. The apprenticeship system, at sea as ashore,

³⁴ Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, p85.

³⁵ Ekberg, *Grimsby Fish*, p34; E. Gillett, *A History of Grimsby* (Hull, 1970), p269.

³⁶ PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report, p7.

had grown up in an economy composed of small firms and owner-masters, but proved adaptable enough to use by large companies.

The need to adapt the apprenticeship system to a regime of steam trawlers and large firms never arose at ports where the smack-based infrastructure and business organisation of the industry survived. Apprenticeship was gone at Lowestoft by 1900, undermined by supply-side changes, but remained an integral part of the industry at Ramsgate and Brixham until 1914. Only one owner at either port took more than three apprentices in 1910 or 1914, this being Alfred Lanfear, a leading player in the Ramsgate fishery who took six in 1914. These ports retained sailing smacks and skill requirements thus remained unchanged. Moreover, apprenticeship to small masters on the indoor system was less problematic and more effective a means of training than the industrial-style apprenticeship pioneered in the steam-trawling ports. This, coupled to the conservatism of the small smackowners and their strong belief in the efficacy of the apprenticeship system that many themselves had come through, ensured its continuation. A few apprentices remained at Brixham until the 1930s.

ii. The Supply of Labour

Apprenticeship served both as a device for training boys from an existing, local pool of labour and as a means of drawing in labour from a wide variety of sources.

Before 1850, most deep-sea fishing ports recruited the bulk of their labour force locally, with any shortfall being made up from unions and other public bodies in the surrounding area. Although evidence for the early years of the period is sparse, there is no evidence to suggest that the Brixham fisheries needed to draw in much of their labour from outside the town, and much to suggest that recruitment took place from within established communities. David Boswell neatly sums up this area of recruitment:

By the mid-years of the nineteenth century the practice had coalesced to provide a stable close-knit fishing community. Its characteristics were its comparatively small size and the blood or marital relationships that existed within the group. It was traditional that young boys followed the calling of their fathers and that they were taught the trade by some member of their family, and that while

learning they lived with the master of the vessel upon which they sailed.³⁷

Many Brixham fishermen interviewed by the 1833 Select Committee and 1863-6 Royal Commission on fisheries recalled being taken to sea by relatives at early ages before they were formally apprenticed, suggesting the existence of a strong hereditary tradition.³⁸ Between 1892 and 1912, 46 boys at Brixham were indentured to their fathers, and a majority of apprentices were local in origin.³⁹ This existed within a local economy strongly geared to maritime industries: at this time, the Brixham trawl fishery shared the port with mercantile shipping activity, especially in the fruit trade with southern Europe. Smackowner Eliezer Johnson commented at the 1866 Royal Commission how sons of fishermen who did not follow their fathers into the fishery went in 'foreign-going ships.'⁴⁰ No Brixham apprentices between 1850 and 1860 are recorded as parish apprentices.

The situation in the more heavily capitalised Barking fishery was rather different. Recruitment from Unions was a much more important component of the labour supply, as Table 4.6 shows.

Table 4.6
Percentage of Apprentices Bound from Poor Law Institutions at Barking, 1850-1860

Year	Number of Apprentices Bound	Number of Pauper Apprentices Bound	Percentage
1850	157	67	42.7
1855	149	79	53
1860	91	48	52.7

Source: PRO, BT150.

A detailed breakdown of the sources from which pauper apprentices were bound is presented in Appendix 4a, which emphasises the fact that Barking had ready access to the poor law institutions of London, with parishes in Westminster and

³⁷ Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices*, p24.

³⁸ BPP 1833 XIV, S.C. on Channel Fisheries, Minutes, q2,174.

³⁹ DRO 3287S add/6. Register of Brixham Fishing Apprentices.

⁴⁰ BPP 1866 XVII, R.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, q8,164.

Middlesex being generally the heaviest suppliers of apprentices. Barking smackowners had no need to recruit from elsewhere, as London parishes could well meet their demand for labour. The four apprentices recruited from the parishes of Waltham Abbey and Waltham Cross, in Norfolk, probably worked from Great Yarmouth, to which several Barking smackowners transferred their operations during the 1850s.

Migration not only led to the establishment of fishing centres in places without an established pool of labour, but also cut migrant smackowners off from their former recruiting grounds. This was less the case for Thames smackowners settling in East Anglia because London was still close enough for its institutions to send boys to the fishery, which they continued to do until the 1870s, but for owners settling further north it was a major problem, and necessitated tapping into alternative sources of supply. Increasing numbers of apprentices were recruited from marginal sectors of the working class, not only workhouses but also the urban poor, inmates of disciplinary institutions such as reformatories and training ships, and foreign workers.

Poor Law institutions such as workhouses had a long history of supplying boys to the fishing industry, and in the second half of the nineteenth century their willingness to do so was sharpened by a lack of alternatives and the rising cost of supporting the urban poor. Between 1844 and 1874, Poor Law expenditure in England and Wales rose from £6.99 million to £12.85 million.⁴¹ Meanwhile, many of the craft trades to which boys had been apprenticed were declining, mass apprenticeship to the factories was largely over by 1850, and the abolition of compulsory apprenticeship in merchant shipping was followed by a sharp fall in numbers recruited.⁴² Moreover, under the Poor Law of 1601, Guardians had the power to compel employers to take apprentices, which must have made the task of finding suitable openings for their charges easier. This power was repealed in 1844, exacerbating the difficulties caused by declining opportunities. Berwick upon Tweed Union complained that:

At the present time we have not in this Union but little other opportunity for obtaining employment for the boys trained in the

⁴¹ D. Fraser (ed.), *The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1976), p22.

⁴² Burton, 'Apprenticeship Regulation,' p36.

Workhouse, and are glad to avail ourselves of this opening for them.⁴³

Several other Unions made similar remarks, leading Berrington and Davy to comment:

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.⁴⁴

Charles Jeffs complained in response to this report that 'the notion still prevails with many Guardians that any bad boy will do for the fishery,'⁴⁵ and certainly from the Grimsby registers of apprentices it appears that Guardians were willing to send boys even with physical or psychological problems that made them manifestly unsuitable. Comments on apprentices with bad eyes, epilepsy, rheumatism or other physical conditions, many of which must have been known to Guardians, appear frequently.⁴⁶ Poor Law institutions were only too glad to use the fishing industry as a means of disposing of boys in their care, and appear often to have done so with scant regard to their suitability for the occupation and, quite possibly in some cases, their willingness. Pauper apprentices had no parents to speak up for them and Guardians often took little interest in their welfare, meaning they had few places to go for advice if they were mistreated or exploited. For this reason, they were often felt to be more compliant than boys from other sources, making them an attractive proposition for smackowners.

It is difficult, for reasons outlined in Chapter 1, to be sure of the proportion of apprentices who came to the industry from public institutions, but it was certainly significant. Estimates during the 1870s placed the proportion at

⁴³ PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report, p3; Letter from Berwick upon Tweed Union, in correspondence.

⁴⁴ PRO, MAF12/15, 1894 Report, p3.

⁴⁵ PRO, MAF12/15, 1894 Report. Letter from Charles Jeffs, in correspondence.

⁴⁶ NELRO 208/1/1. Register of Grimsby Fishing Apprentices. Thomas Dixon, 25 June 1880; Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices*, p58.

Grimsby anywhere between an improbably low 10 per cent⁴⁷ and 60 per cent,⁴⁸ the latter figure being broadly true of Barking in the 1850s, Brixham and Grimsby during the 1890s, and plausible for previous years and the ports of Hull, Ramsgate and Lowestoft. In the first instance, pauper boys were recruited from unions close to the port. Appendix 4a illustrates that this was certainly the case at Barking. The East Anglian ports and Ramsgate were close enough to London to rely heavily on its institutions, as well as those of nearby towns. Henry Shepherd, Lowestoft smackowner, spoke in 1882 of apprentices from Medway Union at Chatham, and the mayor of Great Yarmouth commented on Lowestoft owners' use of London unions.⁴⁹ Brixham owners made remarkably little use of Poor Law institutions close to the port between 1892 and 1912, as Table 4.7 shows.

Table 4.7
Apprentices to Brixham Smackowners Bound from Institutions in Devon
1892 – 1912

Source	Boys Bound
Plymouth Union	10
Exeter Union	8
Newton Abbot Union	7
Tiverton Workhouse	2
Exeter Reformatory	1
Kingsbridge Union	1
Brixham Orphans' Home	1
Totnes Union	1

Source: DRO, 3287S add/6. Register of Brixham Fishing Apprentices (see also Appendix 4b).

This comprises only four per cent of Brixham apprentices, against 54.3% of the total who came from public bodies nationwide, including 23 boys each from London and Cardiff and several from Glasgow.

The largest trawling ports, Hull and Grimsby, had to recruit from a very wide range of sources. After 1880, boys were apprenticed to Grimsby smackowners from 394 separate public bodies, of which only six were in

⁴⁷ PRO, MH32/99. Fleming, 'Treatment of Pauper Apprentices.'

⁴⁸ *Grimsby Observer* 10 April 1873, 'Our Fishery,' part 1.

⁴⁹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq3,191 & 4,739.

Lincolnshire. Industrial towns naturally featured heavily, there being five separate such bodies in Manchester and three in Liverpool.⁵⁰ However, Boswell does not give the numbers of apprentices from each place. Overall, between 1889 and 1893 Grimsby recruited 715 of a total of 1,420 boys from poor law institutions, 74 from reformatories and industrial schools, and 68 from Greenwich Hospital Schools, training ships and other bodies, making a total of 857 apprentices - 60.4% - from public bodies.⁵¹ Unfortunately, no comparable data for Hull survives. Between 1867 and 1882, 52 boys were bound from Hull workhouse, and another 40 from nearby Sculcoates Union,⁵² an average of only six boys per year in a town recruiting 300 or more apprentices annually. However, Henry Toozes stated that only about 50 per cent of boys were indentured by their parents, suggesting that many of the rest were from public institutions.⁵³

The other key public bodies that supplied apprentices to the fisheries were training ships. Boswell lists six training ships supplying apprentices to Grimsby, and the *Southampton* training ship, on the Humber, was a regular supplier of hands to Hull smackowners. Ten boys were apprenticed and one 'hired' to smackowners in 1869-71,⁵⁴ the first three years of the institution, and by 1882, there were reckoned to be about 40 ex-*Southampton* inmates working in the Hull trawl fishery.⁵⁵ In 1884, the Committee of the *Southampton* estimated their former inmates numbered twenty skippers, 40 mates, 70 third hands, 70 deck hands and 40 cooks serving aboard smacks at Hull, Grimsby and Great Yarmouth.⁵⁶ Training ships were especially important at Brixham, as Table 4.8 demonstrates.

⁵⁰ Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices*, Appendix III.

⁵¹ PRO, MAF12/15, 1894 Report, pp16-18.

⁵² BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq217 & 515.

⁵³ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq139-41.

⁵⁴ Cowan, *Thesis*, Appendix XVIII.

⁵⁵ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 31.

⁵⁶ *Hull and Lincolnshire Times*, 1 March 1884.

Table 4.8

Brixham Apprentices Bound from Training Ships, 1892-1912

Training Ship	Number of Apprentices Recruited
<i>Formidable</i>	106
<i>Empress</i>	47
<i>Arethusa</i>	35
<i>Mount Edgecumbe</i>	33
<i>Clio</i>	14
<i>Indefatigable</i>	5

Source: DRO 3287S add/6. Brixham Register of Fishing Apprentices (see also Appendix 4b).

A total of 240 apprentices, no less than 30.9% of the total, came to Brixham from training ships between 1892 and 1912. However, before 1897 only T.S. *Formidable* was supplying boys to Brixham, and it seems that smackowners there resorted to training ships when the local supply of labour began to dry up, which supports comments made by Aflalo on the shortage of apprentices at Brixham by the early 1900s (see page 160). Training ships were also a significant recruiting ground for apprentices to the Boston Deep Sea Fishing and Ice Company. As their manager stated in 1907:

At the present time we have eleven of your "*Clio*" boys serving as apprentices, and all of these are sailing as full deck hands. Altogether, we believe we have had thirteen, but two completed their time of four years some eighteen months or two years ago.⁵⁷

Training ships were, of course, disciplinary institutions to which boys from poor backgrounds could be sent 'to prevent [them] from falling into bad company, and ... to give some form of industrial training,' or as an alternative to reformatories.⁵⁸ Although Swanston and Stoneham were unsure about recruitment from reformatories, it was undoubtedly a fact at both Grimsby and Brixham, and in all probability elsewhere. Seventeen boys were sent to the Devon port between 1892 and 1912 from the Hardwicke Reformatory at Gloucester, and another one each from reformatories in Exeter and Bedfordshire. On the other hand, although many authors have commented that apprentices were

⁵⁷ BPP 1907 LXXV, Report on the Supply and Training of Boy Seamen, Minutes, q2305.

⁵⁸ Cowan, *Thesis*, p2.

recruited from prisons, this was very rare. Between 1889 and 1893, of the 1,420 apprentices recruited to Grimsby, only one is recorded as having come from a prison.⁵⁹

Homeless street children were a much remarked-upon phenomenon during the nineteenth century, unsurprisingly given that there may have been over 5,600 such individuals in the late 1860s.⁶⁰ Swanston and Stoneham believed that this was the main source of apprentices: another more credible estimate suggests that 'waifs and strays' may have accounted for fifteen to twenty per cent of apprentices in large ports in the early 1870s.⁶¹ Whatever the precise percentage of apprentices coming from this source, it gave rise to a great deal of adverse comment. As the Chief Constable of Grimsby, his opinion no doubt coloured by the frequency with which fishing apprentices came to his officers' notice, remarked to the 1882 enquiry:

I believe smackowners take a class of boys that no-one else would look at ... They are nearly all from the dangerous classes, they are street arabs from large towns, convicted over and over again, they are tramping thieves without a bit of shoe on their foot or clothes on their back very often.⁶²

Great Yarmouth police held much the same opinion, the Chief Constable bewailing the ineffectiveness of the legal sanctions allowed and saying that many young fishermen were from 'a class which imprisonment has no terror for.'⁶³ Those involved in the trade were less hostile, but Henry Tooze described such apprentices as 'gutter lads,'⁶⁴ and numerous witnesses at smaller ports were at pains to emphasise that they avoided recruiting such boys. "We steer clear as far as possible from picking up boys – quay walkers," as Brixham skipper H.S. Smith commented,⁶⁵ although at Ramsgate boys were occasionally recruited from the streets.⁶⁶ Nor did Brixham and Ramsgate smackowners need to resort to such sources: at Brixham only two boys are recorded as having tramped to the

⁵⁹ PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report, Appendix V.

⁶⁰ L. Rose, *The Erosion of Childhood: Child Oppression in Britain, 1860-1918* (London, 1991), p91.

⁶¹ *Grimsby Observer*, 10 April 1873, 'Our Fishery,' part 1.

⁶² BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq2,379 &2,383.

⁶³ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q3,611.

⁶⁴ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q43.

⁶⁵ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q6,269.

⁶⁶ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q5,386.

port after 1892, whereas 112 had come from elsewhere with the consent of their parents.⁶⁷

The last of these marginal sources of supply was foreign labour, mostly employed at the Humber ports. Of the 1,998 apprentices bound at Hull between 1875 and 1879, 96 (5.5%) were foreign. Of these, 76 were from Europe, mostly from northern Germany, the Netherlands and Scandinavia, but there were also twenty non-Europeans including six Jamaicans and four Americans. In 1875 alone, Hull and Grimsby each took seven foreign apprentices; all were Scandinavians except an Australian and a Jamaican indentured at Hull, and a boy from Mugatavai, Russia, bound at Grimsby. Grimsby and Hull both had extensive trading links with northern Europe, so many of them are likely to have arrived by sea. Moreover, some Danish fishermen took jobs aboard the English trawling smacks working off the Danish coast. Accordingly,

Danish coastal fishermen were invited aboard the smacks, which led some of them to take an interest in English fishing and, later, jobs aboard the smacks. One young man from Holmslands Klit started his fishing career on board an English smack which was anchored off the coast.⁶⁸

The cod smacks called at Icelandic and Faeroese ports for provisions and to sell their catches, which is likely to account for the recruitment of an Icelander and a Faeroese boy to Grimsby smackowners in 1875. Vacancies in the crew created by injuries and desertions would have to be filled with local labour, and some of these men evidently decided to move to England and apprentice themselves to their employers.

By the mid-1870s, then, the fishing industry had settled into a new recruitment pattern whereby the smaller ports continued to recruit locally from within established communities, making up the shortfall with recruits from public bodies as required. In the largest ports, where the surrounding area could not hope to meet the demands of the fast-growing industry, recruitment was from a much wider geographical range, and a greater variety of sources. Table 4.9, showing the proportions of apprentices indentured to selected ports in 1875,

⁶⁷ DRO, 3287S add/6. Register of Brixham Fishing Apprentices.

⁶⁸ A.H. Rasmussen, "The Triumph of Deep Sea Fishing in the North Sea," in A. Bang-Anderson, B. Greenhill and E.H. Grude (eds), *The North Sea* (Oslo, 1985), p218.

drawn from within the town and the country, irrespective of whether paupers or otherwise, demonstrates this.

Table 4.9
Numbers of Apprentices Drawn from Within Town and County
At Six Major Trawl Ports, 1875

Port	Total Apprentices Recruited, 1875	Born Within Town (%)	Born Within County (%)
Brixham	45	16 (36)	36 (80)
Great Yarmouth	18	7 (39)	11 (61)
Lowestoft	39	4 (10)	11 (28)
Ramsgate	72	24 (33)	47 (65)
Hull	339	58 (17)	75 (22)
Grimsby	386	11 (3)	50 (13)

Source: PRO, BT150.

The samples for the ports of Yarmouth and Lowestoft are small, and anecdotal evidence suggests that 1875 was an atypical year for them, in that an abnormally high percentage of Great Yarmouth and low percentage of Lowestoft apprentices were local. However, the contrast between Brixham and Ramsgate and the Humber ports is clear. To illustrate further, Table 4.10 shows the seven largest urban sources of Hull apprentices between 1875 and 1879.

Table 4.10
Principal Urban Sources of Hull Apprentices, 1875-1879

City	Number of Apprentices	Percentage
Hull	342	17.1
London	224	11.2
Sheffield	73	3.7
Leeds	71	3.5
Bradford	56	2.8
Manchester	51	2.6
Liverpool	44	2.2

Total apprentices bound to Hull smackowners, 1875-9: 1,998.

Source: PRO, BT150.

Grimsby was even more dependent on London, with 28.2% of its 1875 apprentices drawn from the capital, although Sheffield, Leeds, Bradford, Manchester and Liverpool supplied only another nineteen apprentices between them and Grimsby appears in the mid-1870s to have depended for much of its intake on smaller towns across the country, especially in Lincolnshire.

It was noted in Chapter 2 how the growth and spread of the apprenticeship system between the 1850s and 1870s followed the development of the trawl fishery, and that this pattern broke down after the mid-1870s. This coincided with, and appears to have been a result of, several interlinked regional and national developments, both inside and outside the fishing industry, which impacted upon the apprenticeship system. In some places these factors sent the system into decline and started the process of casualisation that replaced apprenticeship in most ports by 1914: in others they altered the supply of apprentices without sending the system into decline, although as Table 4.5 shows total recruitment peaked in 1877 and fell thereafter. Differences in the way the fishery was conducted in different locations, in terms of labour supply, business organisation and the way the apprenticeship system was conducted are key to understanding this process.

The first of these factors, and the most significant for the fishing industry in the long term, and indeed the British economy as a whole, was the effect of the restructuring of international trade in foodstuffs during the 1870s, and the profound effect it had on British agriculture. The development of the efficient compound-engined steamship and the opening up of the American prairies facilitated large-scale imports of cheap wheat, and British arable farmers found themselves unable to compete. Wheat accounted for 12 per cent of crop acreage in 1867 but only 4 per cent by 1895.⁶⁹ The number of people employed in agriculture fell from 1,634,000 in 1871 to 1,517,000 ten years later.⁷⁰ The effect was at its most profound in areas of eastern England dominated by arable farming, such as Lincolnshire and East Anglia. Falling agricultural wages and rural unemployment caused outward migration, especially among young males: the populations of Norfolk and Suffolk rose by only four and fourteen per cent

⁶⁹ P. Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation: The Economic History of Britain 1700-1914*, second edition (London, 1983), p315.

⁷⁰ Mitchell and Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, p60.

respectively between 1851 and 1911, against a national increase of about 100 per cent. The comparatively lucrative fishing industry could therefore exert a strong 'pull' on a locality where depression was pushing workers off the land. Seasonal migration of agricultural labourers to the fishing ports for the herring season, during which they could sometimes earn more than twice a labourer's annual wage in eight months,⁷¹ was a longstanding feature of the East Anglian fisheries. During the 1870s and 1880s, permanent migration set in on a larger scale, to the advantage of trawler owners who found themselves with a surplus of cheap labour. As H. Lockwood, a Local Government Board official, wrote in a report on the apprenticeship system at Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft in 1887:

Depression in agriculture and trade generally has caused an influx of unemployed of all ages, giving [smack] owners a large choice, though not of the best material.⁷²

'The best material' these migrants may not have been, but they could be employed cheaply, as is apparent from an examination of fishing vessel crew lists. Table 4.11 compares remuneration of crews aboard Great Yarmouth and Grimsby smacks in 1885-6. Skippers and mates are excluded, because aboard Grimsby smacks they sailed entirely on share, their wages therefore being very variable. Moreover, they were subject to deductions for food, which are difficult to quantify, so this comparison focuses on third hands and those junior to them. On Hull and Grimsby smacks, these crew members were paid weekly wages, whereas on most Yarmouth vessels they were paid a basic wage and a share of the profits known as 'poundage.' In both cases, an eight-week fleeting voyage is assumed, and for Yarmouth the calculations have been made for a voyage that made £120 after costs, a good trip, and for one that made £100. Crews remunerated by wages alone are included, which tends to pull the average poundage downward and average wage up, but calculations run on individual cases indicate that the errors cancel each other out and the figures presented in Table 4.11 may be taken as a fair average.

⁷¹ Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, p51.

⁷² PRO, MAF12/12, Report to the Local Government Board by Mr Lockwood, 12 October 1887.

Table 4.11
Remuneration of Crews, Grimsby and Great Yarmouth, 1885

a Grimsby 1885

Crew Member	Number of Cases	Lowest/Highest Wage (shillings)	Mean Wage	Wage for Eight-week trip
3 rd hand	44	16/20	19.86 (19s 10d)	£7 18s 11d
4 th hand	49	13/17	15.9 (15s 11d)	£6 7s 2d
5 th hand	42	8/14	12.21 (12s 3d)	£3 17s 8d
Total				£18 3s 9d

b. Great Yarmouth 1885

Crew member	No. of cases	Highest/Lowest wage (shillings)	Mean wage (Shillings)	Highest/lowest poundage (d per £)	Mean pound-Age (d per £)
3 rd hand	28	14/20	15.21	0/6	2.68
4 th hand	27	10/17	12.63	0/4	2.07
5 th hand	30	10/16	11.83	0/3	0.83
6 th hand	33	8/13	9.67	0/4	0.55

b (continued)

Crew member	Wage for trip making £120	Wage for trip making £100
3 rd hand	£7s 8s 5d	£7 3s 2d
4 th hand	£6 1s 9d	£5 18s 4d
5 th hand	£5 2s 11d	£5 1s 6d
6 th hand	£4 2s 10d	£4 1s 11d
Total	£22 15 10d	£22 5s 1d

Source: PRO, BT144. Crew lists for British fishing vessels.

Although the total wage bill for Yarmouth smacks is higher, this is because of the extra hand (itself an indication of how readily labour was available at the East Anglian ports: almost no Humber smacks carried six-man crews) and it is evident that third and fourth hands at Yarmouth were paid less than those at Grimsby. Examples where Yarmouth crews were paid on wages alone illustrate this. The third hands of the Yarmouth smacks *Teazer* and *Henrietta* were both paid sixteen

shillings a week without poundage, the third hand on *Rescue* nineteen shillings:⁷³ all but two of the 44 Grimsby third hands checked were paid twenty shillings.

Another indicator of the extent to which the system of apprenticeship had broken down in East Anglia is that by the 1880s older men no longer fit enough for work on deck frequently filled the junior positions in the crew. Trevor Lummis found an age range of 13/51 among sixth hands, and 13/57 amongst cooks, pointing out that in few other occupations could a 57-year-old man expect to earn the same wages, for doing the same job, as a teenager.⁷⁴ Where apprentices served at all, they occupied more junior positions. For example, aboard the Yarmouth smack *Colne* apprentices were fifth and sixth hands, with a 30-year-old casual hand serving as "boy."⁷⁵ This would have been most unusual aboard trawlers at Brixham, or even at the Humber ports. With a ready supply of labour, and wages lower on average than at Hull and Grimsby, the process of casualisation was well under way at Great Yarmouth by 1880.

The second change on the supply side, which affected Grimsby particularly, was a depression in the supply of boys from Unions and poor law institutions during the 1870s. Robinson comments how 'for a while the supply of recruits from the poor law unions dried up,'⁷⁶ whilst Gillett says that there were almost no boys from unions being indentured at Grimsby by 1876.⁷⁷ However, his evidence for suggesting as much is limited to the estimates on pauper apprenticeships given to the 1882 enquiry. As suggested in Chapter 1, these are questionable at best. There is, therefore, no way of quantifying the extent of the shortage, but there is enough circumstantial evidence to suggest that it was a serious problem for smackowners during the 1870s.

The cause was the number of disquieting reports about the treatment of apprentices that began to circulate in the late 1860s and early 1870s. It was in response to these that Baldwyn Fleming was sent by the Local Government Board in 1872 to make enquiry into the Grimsby apprenticeship system. His report was broadly favourable to the system, although it made several suggestions for improving it, mainly concerned with increasing the supervision

⁷³ PRO, BT144/6. Crew lists for British Fishing Vessels.

⁷⁴ Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, p25.

⁷⁵ PRO, BT144/8. Crew lists for British Fishing Vessels.

⁷⁶ Robinson, *Trawling*, p60.

⁷⁷ Gillett, *History of Grimsby*, pp248-9.

of boys by Guardians, but it failed to stop the rumours of routine cruelty and rampant desertion. Only the following year a Lincoln newspaper protested in strong terms about the lines of handcuffed Grimsby apprentices marched through the town to the prison,⁷⁸ which was echoed in the London newspapers, whilst a rash of letters to Leicester newspapers in 1878 complained about the 'kidnapping' of boys by Grimsby smackowners and the appalling treatment the boys received.⁷⁹ The situation was serious enough to warrant Swanston and Stoneham being sent to make a further report on the situation at Grimsby in 1878, and it was this report which suggested that boys from the streets were the principal source of apprentices.⁸⁰ This may have been the case at this time, if it is true that the supply of boys from poor law institutions had dried up to the extent that Gillett alleges. However, two things make this unlikely. The first is the under-recording of Union apprentices, which Swanston and Stoneham themselves acknowledged as a problem, and a symptom of how little control there was over the binding process. Secondly, if we accept Baldwyn Fleming's figures on pauper apprentices, the proportion of apprentices bound from Poor Law institutions rose from about one tenth in 1872 to 37.9% in 1880-4.⁸¹ It seems unlikely that union recruitment could drop from ten per cent to almost zero by about 1877, and then rise to well over a third in the next five years. Admittedly, Horn calculates that pauper apprentices accounted for only 4.9% of total recruitment in 1879,⁸² but Boswell's figures suggest that the proportion the following year was just under a quarter, and again the sudden increase in recruitment seems too big to be credible. It is more likely that the cessation in the supply of pauper boys, serious though it was for a while, was not as severe as Gillett suggests. However, it is likely to have increased smackowners' willingness to take on 'waifs and strays,' and perhaps explains the rash of complaints about 'kidnappings' of boys in the late 1870s as smackowners took increasingly drastic measures to procure labour.

Thirdly, although the waves of migration of the 1840s to 1860s that established the ports of the Humber, East Anglia and Ramsgate as trawling

⁷⁸ Quoted in Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices*, p82.

⁷⁹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 43.

⁸⁰ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 37.

⁸¹ PRO, MH32/99. Fleming, 'Treatment of Pauper Apprentices'; 1880-4 calculated from figures given in Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices*, p43.

⁸² Horn, 'Pauper Apprenticeship,' p190.

stations were largely over by the 1870s, migration did not come to a complete halt, and had some part in altering the supply of labour to the fishing industry. The decline of the Great Yarmouth trawl fishery and its complete collapse around the turn of the century caused a large number of trawlermen to migrate to other trawling stations. Many moved to Grimsby, 24 men of a sample of 270 serving on Grimsby trawlers between 1899 and 1910 having been born in Norfolk.⁸³ Many others moved further north and were instrumental in establishing Aberdeen as a leading trawl-fishing port. Recruitment of foreign hands, especially at Hull and Grimsby, seems to have increased. Rasmussen suggests that at Hull in 1890 there were fifteen Danish skippers and about twenty Danish mates and third hands.⁸⁴ In later years, the employment of foreigners was to become more contentious. Foreigners (and indeed apprentices) were used as blacklegs during the 1901 lockout at Grimsby, and two years later a witness at the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration reported that the employment of Swedes aboard Grimsby trawlers was commonplace and 'very unpopular.'⁸⁵

All of these developments, and perhaps most importantly the influx of apprentices from the 1840s to the 1880s, contributed to the establishment of fishing communities such as the Hessle Road area of Hull, from which an increasing proportion of the labour force was drawn. Capes found that 40 per cent of trawlermen resident in Hessle Road had been born in Hull in 1881, rising to 62.5% in 1901. Over the same period, the proportion of locally-born ancillary workers rose from 33.3% to 60.7%. Moreover, in 1881 all fishermen in Capes's sample were household heads, whereas by 1901, 21 were sons. A similar process was evident amongst ancillary workers.⁸⁶ The high birth rate in the Hessle Road area – 54 per 1,000 occupants in 1887 in the Newington ward⁸⁷ – undoubtedly contributed to the process of community formation.

In contrast to the rather romanticised images of 'traditional' inshore fishing communities, in which a high proportion of fishermen had a share of ownership of the means of production, and the unwaged labour of women was important in performing tasks such as baiting long-lines and even marketing the

⁸³ PRO, BT144/140, 150, 167, 168. Crew lists for British Fishing Vessels.

⁸⁴ Rasmussen, "Triumph of Deep Sea Fishing," in Bang-Anderson *et al* (eds), *The North Sea*, p222.

⁸⁵ BPP 1903 IX, R.C. on Alien Immigration, Minutes, q21,713.

⁸⁶ Capes, 'Contribution,' pp58-9.

⁸⁷ E. Gillett and K.A. MacMahon, *A History of Hull* (Hull, 1980), p309.

catch, communities such as Hessle Road more closely fitted the concept of working class 'occupational' communities.⁸⁸ As Bailey commented, with reference to Hull:

But the spatial isolation of the district at the western end of the town and common dependence on one industry created a tight-knit community, the likes of which were not normally met with outside coal-mining villages. Although fishermen were only a small proportion of the Hessle Road population, the industry dominated the area. The occupational bond was strengthened by internal recruitment: fishermen begat fishermen. Ancillary trades, even pubs and shops, moved to the beat of fishing.⁸⁹

Tunstall characterised the Hessle Road area in much the same terms during the 1950s, commenting on the close kinship networks amongst residents and the all-pervasive influence of the fishing industry, even though fishermen accounted for only 10 per cent of adult males in the area in 1955.⁹⁰ By this time, the fishing industry in Hull operated under conditions of labour surplus. In 1956, a total of 2,900 men were required to provide full crews for every trawler in Hull: the actual number of fishermen was around 3,500.⁹¹ In the late nineteenth century, labour was still scarce, but the community from which most fishermen would later be drawn was already establishing itself.

A sample of Hull and Grimsby fishing vessel crew lists for 1884-5 and 1910 illustrates the extent to which fishermen were increasingly recruited from within the community.

⁸⁸ J.K. Walton, 'Fishing Communities, 1850-1950,' in Starkey *et al*, *England's Sea Fisheries*, p128.

⁸⁹ V. Bailey, *This Rash Act: Suicide Across the Victorian City* (Stanford, 1998), pp119-20. Quoted in Walton, 'Fishing Communities,' p128.

⁹⁰ Tunstall, *The Fishermen*, p85.

⁹¹ G.W. Horobin, 'Community and Occupation in the Hull Fishing Industry,' in *British Journal of Sociology* 8 (1963), p344.

Table 4.12
Percentages of Locally Born Fishermen in Hull and Grimsby,
1885-6 and 1910-11

Year	Percentage of fishermen born in Hull (number of cases)	Percentage of fishermen born in Grimsby (number of cases)
1885-6	25.3 (146)	4.6 (153)
1910-11	53.1 (145)	27.6 (123)

Source: PRO, BT144/6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 (1884-5), BT144/167, 168, 170, 171,175 (1910). Crew lists for British fishing vessels.

This strongly supports the contention that, as 'occupational communities' became established in the major fishing ports, the supply of labour available locally increased and the need to source new recruits from all over the country waned. This was less the case at Grimsby, Table 4.12 showing clearly that Grimsby was still far more dependent than Hull on in-migrants as late as 1910. As Berrington and Davy commented in 1894:

If there had been at Grimsby the same supply of weekly hands as there is at Hull and Lowestoft it is probable that the apprentice system would have died out as it has in those ports.⁹²

However, this should not be taken entirely at face value. Apprenticeship was not solely a device for obtaining cheap labour that was unavailable locally, and its use did not therefore depend entirely on the absence of local labour. After all, a majority of Brixham apprentices were local in origin, as were apprentices at many other small ports, and between 1880 and 1914 an increasing proportion of Grimsby apprentices were drawn from within the town.

⁹² PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report, p6.

Table 4.13**Grimsby Apprentices Born Within the Town, 1881-1901**

Year	Total Apprentices Bound	Number from Grimsby	Percentage from Grimsby
1881	277	26	9.4
1886	344	19	5.5
1891	215	26	9.5
1896	151	29	19.2
1901	61	14	23.0
1906	43	9	20.9
1911	28	8	28.6

Source: Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices*, pp43-4.

However, the advantages of cheapness and control over the workforce that apprenticeship had offered had diminished by this time, and increasingly the fishery in Grimsby, as in Hull, became dependent on casual labour recruited from an established local community. This was also the case in Lowestoft and Ramsgate, although in the latter port apprenticeship continued until 1914.

Casualisation never took hold at Brixham, and apprenticeship remained the main means of recruiting young fishermen. However, in contrast to the situation at other ports, recruitment became less local, as Table 4.14 shows.

Table 4.14**Sources of Apprentices Indentured at Brixham 1892-1912**

Source	1892	1897	1902	1907	1912
Devon address	27	18	8	4	4
Training ship	2	14	5	14	9
Other public body	3	6	11	15	4
Non-local address	2	3	2	5	6
Not known	6	4	-	2	1
Total	40	45	26	40	24

Source: DRO 3287S add/6. Brixham Register of Fishing Apprentices (see also Appendix 4b).

Over the 1892-1912 period as a whole, 54.3% of apprentices were drawn from public bodies. This is in all probability a far higher proportion than had been recruited from such sources in previous years, although there is insufficient

evidence to prove this. Commenting on the survival of apprenticeship at Brixham, F.G. Aflalo commented in 1904 that:

The apprentice ... is still a feature of the industry at Brixham and Plymouth ... in many cases a son or nephew of the skipper or one of the crew. Not that Brixham is self-supporting in the matter of apprentices, for there is increasing difficulty in finding recruits, such distant institutions as Plymouth workhouse and Dr. Barnardo's Homes being laid under contribution, with excellent results. The spread of education, with its by-product of discontent, as well as the extra inducements held out of late years to join H.M. Navy, has not lessened the difficulty.⁹³

The Brixham trawl fishery, still geared to the operation of smacks and using the self-financing structure that had died out on the Humber twenty years previously, was becoming increasingly anachronistic, and in a more affluent, mobile and educated society fishing was becoming a less attractive option for young men. Brixham smackowners found themselves facing a similar situation to those of the Humber ports half a century before, that of finding labour for an unattractive occupation, when it could not be procured locally. To solve the difficulty, they adopted many of the same methods as the Humber smackowners had and as a result encountered many of the same problems, to be discussed in the next chapter.

By 1914, the fishing industry had again settled into a new pattern of labour recruitment, with most ports taking the majority of their new recruits from communities that had been established around the fishing industry in the previous few decades. Apprenticeship and recruitment at a distance persisted at Ramsgate, Brixham and Grimsby, but were less and less important features of the industry as a whole. The process of migration, establishment of the industry in new ports, capitalisation and the creation of a local labour force to staff it was by and large complete. The existence of a local pool of labour was not, however, the only determinant of the use of apprenticeship. Various social, cultural and legal changes over the 1850-1914 period influenced the use of apprenticed labour in the fishing industry, and eventually played a central role in its demise.

⁹³ Aflalo, *Sea Fishing Industry*, pp293-4.

Chapter 5

Social and Cultural Influences

Social and cultural factors were important drivers of change in the fishing industry as a whole in the nineteenth century. Social relations changed as branches of the industry were organised along increasingly capitalist lines, although the speed and extent of capitalisation and the effect on social relations were far from uniform, and for the first time a clear divide between capital and labour emerged, especially in the trawl and line fisheries. Apprenticeship is an important facet of this process. Apprenticeship, broadly speaking, was a pre-capitalist institution which had to be reshaped and adapted to suit a capitalised industry, and which put apprentices in an uneasy position somewhere between free waged labour and bonded servitude, although it might be suggested that the boundary between the two is blurred anyway. Various forms of legal coercion existed within 'free' British labour markets in the nineteenth century, and 'unfree' workers – slaves, apprentices – were sometimes given pecuniary incentives for increased productivity.¹ Moreover, fishing apprenticeship developed and declined in a maturing industrial economy and society in which attitudes towards matters such as child and adolescent labour were changing and apprenticeship was beginning to be regarded as outmoded. When Hull and Grimsby smackowners fought to keep intact their system of labour recruitment and control, which by then had a reputation for abuse and poor conditions, they found few supporters in government or elsewhere, although what most people objected to was abuse of the apprenticeship system rather than apprenticeship as a whole. This chapter examines social change both within the fishing industry and outside it, and seeks to explain why the climate of opinion shifted away from apprenticeship and in favour of adult waged labour.

i. Tradition and Precedent

Apprenticeship in Britain has a long and varied history. O.J. Dunlop and Joan Lane have traced its origins to the medieval period. References to apprentices in

¹ Steinfeld, *Contract*, pp1-26; P. Craven & D. Hay, 'The Criminalisation of 'Free' Labour: Master and Servant in Comparative Perspective,' in P.E. Lovejoy & D. Hay, *Unfree Labour in the Development of the Atlantic World* (Ilford, 1994), pp71-101.

particular occupations such as masonry and tailoring exist from the mid-thirteenth century, and it seems that an increasing range of trades began to make use of apprenticeship as a scheme of recruitment and training during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It was at first a 'local custom,' a private institution ungoverned by national laws and subject mainly to the control of guilds. By the sixteenth century, apprenticeship had become 'the most usual method of entering a trade,'² and was found in virtually every skilled trade from weaving to clock making. Terms and conditions varied regionally and between industries, but usually masters had to be full members of their guilds and sometimes also householders: apprentices paid some form of premium, and were usually lodged with their masters throughout the term of indenture. The master was bound to provide board and lodging and teach the apprentice his trade: in return, the apprentice was bound to serve his master faithfully and obediently, and not absent himself from work without permission. Precise terms of indentures varied, and some included restrictions on apprentices' behaviour, including prohibitions on dancing and entering public houses. In many instances, apprentices were forbidden to marry.

The Statute of Artificers, passed in 1563, removed total control of apprenticeship from the guilds and enforced on a national scale many of the features of apprenticeship as it then existed in London. The Statute was 'a code intended to meet the economic and social needs of the time.'³ It sought to address issues such as rural unemployment, poverty and instability, the decay of towns, a perceived decline in the skill of English workmen and growing problems of destitution and vagrancy. This latter problem was also addressed by the Poor Law of 1601, which in some respects extended and strengthened the provisions of the Statute of Artificers. The main strategy for combating vagrancy was compulsory apprenticeship, along the lines used by London guilds. Under the statute, anyone who wished to enter any of a range of named trades had to serve an apprenticeship of at least seven years, under a legally binding written indenture, to a master who was a full member of a guild, and a householder.⁴ The 1601 Poor Law entitled Churchwardens and Overseers to

² Dunlop, *English Apprenticeship*, p50.

³ Dunlop, *English Apprenticeship*, p60; Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, pp2-3.

⁴ Dunlop, *English Apprenticeship*, pp63-6.

compel pauper children to enter apprenticeships and allowed for penal sanctions against masters who refused to take them. In both of these acts, and in subsequent legislation affecting apprenticeship, there was a very strong element of social control. The principle was established that government was entitled to intervene in the economy with the aim of increasing and controlling the labour force, and setting the poor to work.

Many of the provisions of the Statute of Artificers were never fully implemented. Its enforcement depended on local justices, who by and large had neither the ability nor the willingness to hold masters to the law. Even by the early seventeenth century, the system of universal apprenticeship was beginning to break down, and it never fully recovered from the disruption engendered by the English Revolution and civil war between 1642 and 1649. Dunlop gives the example of the Cutlers' Company of Sheffield. During the 1630s, this guild had admitted freemen at the rate of over 50 per year, but this fell to just three in 1642.⁵ After the civil war, despite attempts by the guilds to reinstate universal apprenticeship, the system went into steady decline. Attempts to suppress the growing numbers of illegal workmen in industries such as textiles were ineffective, and by the eighteenth century, even some guilds turned a blind eye to them. By 1800, argues Dunlop, the system was all but dead, and the final repeal of the Statute of Artificers in 1814 merely formalised a situation that existed anyway.⁶ Apprenticeship did not die away after this, but it did change. In some artisan industries, especially those involving a considerable degree of skill, old-style apprenticeship survived even into the twentieth century. However, even before 1814 the concept of apprenticeship was becoming devalued by its exploitative variant as large numbers of pauper children were indentured to employers in mass production industries.⁷

The Statute of Artificers did not cover maritime industries. Apprenticeship in merchant shipping had existed since at least the sixteenth century, but formal apprenticeships seem to have been rare and mainly confined to boys indentured to captains on payment of a premium, with most boys destined to serve as common seamen serving informal apprenticeships, if any at

⁵ Dunlop, *English Apprenticeship*, p100.

⁶ Dunlop, *English Apprenticeship*, pp240-7.

⁷ More, *Skill*, pp42-3; Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, pp241-7.

all.⁸ The lack of a guild for seamen accounts for the lack of regulations relating to apprenticeship: terms of service, premiums and conditions of apprenticeships varied widely. Premiums in the seventeenth century were not high – £10-20 could secure an apprenticeship to the master of a small ship⁹ – but enough to restrict apprenticeship to captains to the relatively small number who could afford them. Apprenticeships for ordinary seamen and artisans, themselves often the sons of seafarers, were often ‘nothing more than introductions to the lower ranks of seafaring,’¹⁰ although they could still involve the acquisition of considerable skill. Most ships’ carpenters, for example, had served an apprenticeship either as ‘carpenter’s mate’ or to a shipwright.

Concern over the supply of seafaring labour had existed since at least the sixteenth century, but until the early eighteenth century, there was no legislative means of influencing it. However, as in land-based industries in the previous century and a half, extra-economic force began to be applied, by government and by private concerns, to increase and to control a labour force. In 1703 the first Seaman’s Apprentice Law was passed, which obliged British ships to carry a number of apprentices proportional to the vessel’s size. This Act, one of the clutch of statutes known collectively as the Navigation Laws, was revised in 1823 to take account of the increasing size of merchant vessels. Table 5.1 shows the scales of apprentices to be carried under the laws of 1703 and 1823.

Table 5.1

Numbers of Apprentices to be Carried on British Ships 1703-1850

a. 1703-1823

Tonnage	Apprentices Carried
50 - 100	1
100 - 200	2
For every additional 100	1

⁸ C. Fury, *Tides in the Affairs of Men: The Social History of Elizabethan Seamen, 1580-1603* (London, 2002), pp5-20.

⁹ R.W. Davis, *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London, 1962), p118.

¹⁰ Davis, *Rise of the English Shipping Industry*, p118.

b. 1823-1850

Tonnage	Apprentices Carried
80 - 200	1
200 - 400	2
400 - 500	3
500 - 700	4
700 and above	5

Source: Burton, 'Apprenticeship Regulation,' p30.

The aim of the Seaman's Apprentice Laws was to increase the supply of seafarers, the number of whom seems to have grown little in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Davis estimated that there were roughly 50,000 British seafarers in 1686, whilst Starkey estimates that by 1736 the total was 51,863, an increase of less than two thousand.¹¹ How effective the apprenticeship regulations were in increasing the supply of trained seafarers is a question that requires more research before it can be answered fully. Compulsory apprenticeship did effect an increase in numbers of people at least training to be seafarers, but desertion among apprentices was a serious problem and it is likely that a considerable proportion of apprentices never served out their terms of service and did not end up making a career at sea.¹² Moreover, the demands of war in the eighteenth century strained the maritime labour market to its limits, employment levels in the wars of 1739-48, 1756-63 and 1776-83 rising by 52 per cent, 99 per cent and 68 per cent respectively, the shortfall in supply being made up from marginal sources of supply: immature and elderly seafarers, foreigners and landsmen.¹³

The apprenticeship laws did not solve the problem of manning the merchant marine: nor did they allow it to act as a 'nursery for seamen' for the Navy, at least not to the extent that it could rely solely on the mercantile marine for its supply of trained seafarers. In every war of the eighteenth century the Navy, like the mercantile marine, was forced to recruit landsmen and foreigners

¹¹ R.W. Davis, 'Merchant Shipping in the Economy of the Late Seventeenth Century,' in *Economic History Review* IX (1956), p72; D.J. Starkey, 'War and the Market for Seafarers in Britain, 1736-1792,' in L.R. Fischer & H.W. Nordvik (eds), *Shipping and Trade, 1750-1950: Essays in International Maritime Economic History* (Pontefract, 1990), p40.

¹² BPP 1847-8 XX, Lords S.C. on Navigation Laws, Minutes, qq2,000, 5,405, 6,503 & 7,563. Many shipowners complained of the frequency with which apprentices deserted, especially in American ports where wages were high and berths easy to find.

¹³ Starkey, 'War and the Market for Seafarers,' p28.

to supplement trained seamen procured for it by the Impress Service. However, although no quantification of the effect of the apprentice laws has yet been attempted, it is likely that compulsory apprenticeship did increase the supply of trained men and, although it did not solve the manning problem, the situation would probably have been worse without it. Far too much attention has been given to impressment as a means of increasing the seafaring population, especially by Marcus Rediker, who downplays the fact that it operated only in wartime and impacted largely on existing seafarers. Far more 'crucial to the making of a maritime working class'¹⁴ was apprenticeship.

Aside from creating a system of labour recruitment, another aim of apprenticeship, first introduced in the 1530s, confirmed by the Statute of Artificers and reinforced by the Poor Law of 1601, was to reduce the need for parishes to support pauper children by setting them to work, thus reducing vagrancy. The Statute of Artificers obliged craftsmen and householders with a minimum of half a 'ploughland' to take apprentices. This was extended in an act of 1597 and the Poor Law Act of 1601, which stipulated that parishes had the right to arrange apprenticeships for destitute children, and that masters were obliged to take them.¹⁵ This system was designed to cope with relatively modest levels of poverty, but with rising population and growing rural unemployment the cost spiralled. In 1650, expenditure on poor relief totalled £250,000: by 1783 this had swollen to £4,267,925.¹⁶ Obviously, this created the incentive discussed in the previous chapter for parishes and, after the New Poor Law of 1834, Unions, to apprentice children to occupations regardless of their suitability or future prospects. Moreover, once a child was apprenticed at a distance from his or her home parish, the parish authorities ceased to be responsible for them, which created an incentive to bind children to masters far from the parish. Accordingly, batches of pauper children were apprenticed to the early textile mills in remote areas of the country, and many boys sent to sea. Between 1845 and 1849, 54 per cent of boy paupers in Liverpool were indentured to

¹⁴ M. Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World 1700-1750* (Cambridge, 1987), p31.

¹⁵ Lane, *Apprenticeship*, p3; Rose, 'Social Policy and Business,' p6.

¹⁶ G. Taylor, *The Problem of Poverty 1660-1834* (London, 1969), p12.

shipowners.¹⁷ However, with the repeal of the Navigation Laws apprenticeship declined rapidly, as Table 5.2 shows.

Table 5.2
Apprentices Registered and Serving on British Ships, 1840-1900

Year	Total Apprentices Serving	Apprentices as % Seafarers
1840	26,750	12.7
1850	24,394	16.3
1860	20,183	11.8
1870	18,303	9.3
1880	14,667	7.6
1890	8,650	3.7
1900	5,617	2.3

Source: Burton, 'Apprenticeship Regulation,' p46.

Note: These figures include the fishing industry.

As the merchant shipping industry became a less fruitful source of apprenticeships, as factory apprenticeships were subjected to closer control and as craft trades in which apprenticeship remained strong declined, the expanding trawl fishing industry became an increasingly attractive option for Poor Law institutions seeking employment for boys in their care.

The Navigation Laws did not cover fishing. Fishermen were regarded as potential recruits to the Navy, although in many instances they were also exempt from impressment, but their vessels were too small to fall under the terms of the apprentice laws. As in the mercantile marine, however, apprentices were carried before they were a legal requirement. There are references to the apprentices of fishermen from the sixteenth century,¹⁸ and by the eighteenth century it appears that pauper apprenticeship to fishermen was established. This is suggested in George Crabbe's narrative poem *The Borough*, written in 1782, which tells of two pauper boys apprenticed by overstretched poor law authorities keen to rid themselves of able-bodied boys to Suffolk fisherman Peter Grimes, who murdered both of them.¹⁹ Apprentices were thought to have comprised half the crews of Harwich smacks in the late eighteenth century, before the port slipped

¹⁷ Burton, 'Apprenticeship Regulation,' p33.

¹⁸ *Fury, Tides in the Affairs of Men*, p14.

¹⁹ G. Crabbe, *The Borough* (1782).

into decline because of competition from the Thames ports.²⁰ It was at Barking and Brixham, however, that the apprenticeship system was most important. It is impossible to assess the number of apprentices or the proportion of fishermen under indenture before the 1820s, but it was certainly considerable. Brixham smackowner J.W. Upham asserted in 1882 that every smackowner in the port without exception had served an apprenticeship.²¹ Although this was almost certainly an exaggeration it was not contradicted and does shed light on how prevalent apprenticeship was considered to be. It would have been even more so fifty years earlier, when there were more owner-skipper and fewer land-based capitalists in the business. At Barking, there is little reference to apprenticeship before the mid-nineteenth century, but there were reckoned to be around 200 apprentices employed by Hewett's alone among the 1,370 men and boys employed at the port in 1850.²² Samuel Hewett himself, son of the firm's founder Scrymgeour Hewett, had been apprenticed in 1812.²³ The fact that even the sons of wealthy smackowners, like Hewett himself, were serving apprenticeships strongly suggests that apprenticeship was regarded as important for those entering the business. Moreover, the sheer number of institutions that apprenticed boys to the fishery (see Appendix 4a) suggests that apprenticeship was well established, given that such a network of contacts would have taken time to build up.

It was discussed in Chapter 2 how different the apprenticeship systems were at Brixham and Barking in 1850, but the point should be reinforced because the apprenticeship system as it grew up on the Humber from the 1840s contained elements of both 'models' of apprenticeship. At Brixham, and indeed at the small ports in Essex such as Brightlingsea and Rowhedge, the predominance of the owner-skipper and the situation of the fishery in a small town dominated by maritime interests from which a high proportion of recruits were drawn promoted the classically paternalistic type of apprenticeship often associated with craft trades. In Barking, on the other hand, the fishery was conducted on a larger scale altogether. Recruitment was largely from Poor Law institutions outside the community and, if Hewett's really did have the 200 apprentices they are said to

²⁰ BPP 1833 XIV, S.C. on Channel Fisheries, Minutes, q1,631.

²¹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q6,182.

²² Benham, *Codbangers*, p41; Alward, *Sea Fisheries*, p148.

²³ BPP 1866 XVII, R.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, q11,194.

have employed, there was certainly not the close, paternalistic connection between master and apprentice that there was in Brixham and other small ports. Apprenticeship was already coming to resemble the more 'exploitative' system employed by factory owners.

Apprentices employed on both variants of the system settled in new ports, along with their masters, during the waves of migration from the 1830s to the 1870s, and the features of both variants quickly appeared in the newly established ports. Taking Grimsby as an example, Gerrish confirmed in her analysis of the 1861 census that there was substantial migration to Grimsby from Devon, London and Essex, but in her analysis of migrants' birthplaces did not distinguish between apprentices and non-apprentices. She did, however, mention apprentices born in London parishes such as Wandsworth, Stepney and Greenwich, many of whom are more than likely to have come to the port with their masters.²⁴ James Howard arrived in the port from Manningtree, Essex, in about 1851, bringing his apprentices with him, including cabin boy Harrison Mudd, who ended up as a wealthy smackowner and Mayor of Grimsby in 1900 to 1901.²⁵

The careers of men such as Harrison Mudd, who had started as apprentices and worked their way up the hierarchy to become skippers and owners, help to explain why smackowners were so keen to defend the apprenticeship system and so resistant to casualisation. As the report of the 1882 Enquiry put it:

There is a very general consensus of opinion ... in favour of the system of apprenticeship ... We had it in evidence that trawlers are now generally commanded, and not infrequently owned, by men who have commenced life in very humble circumstances, and who attribute their success to their apprenticeship.²⁶

Apprenticeship was held by most within the trawl fisheries, at least in the ports where it was widely used, to be the best, or even the only, means of recruiting competent fishermen. As J.W. Upham of Brixham said:

²⁴ Gerrish, *Thesis*, p258.

²⁵ Ekberg, *Grimsby Fish*, p20.

²⁶ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Report, p673.

I ... would say as my experience that these lads that are apprenticed and serve in a proper manner, they are the only ones that come to be good men.²⁷

John Holmes, the largest smackowner in Hull, said that the trade could not survive unless apprenticeship was reinstated,²⁸ and he was not alone in expressing this view. Many more smackowners said that apprenticeship should be made more general²⁹ and a few even suggested it should be made compulsory,³⁰ although the largest Grimsby owner, Henry Smethurst, himself the master of '80-100' apprentices, said this 'would not be necessary or proper.'³¹ Those who had never served apprenticeships were less convinced of the merits of the system. George Angell, a Yarmouth skipper, pointed out that a casual hand who applied himself to his work would learn the job in the same way as an apprentice, and described apprentices as 'a lot of trouble' and little different in conduct to the casuals.³² However, although he was not the only witness to take this view, the consensus in favour of apprenticeship was clear.

The 1882 Enquiry represented a chance for smackowners to press for the reinstatement of their recruitment system and they were unlikely to volunteer comments likely to cast it in a bad light, just as apprentices who spoke at the Enquiry were unlikely to 'volunteer statements likely to be distasteful to their masters,' many of whom were present.³³ What smackowners privately thought and what they were prepared to say to a Board of Trade committee were in all likelihood two different things. However, every government enquiry from Baldwyn Fleming in 1872 through to Berrington and Davy's enquiry of 1894 stressed the advantages of the system to smackowners, as did witnesses not involved in the industry at the 1882 Enquiry. Where smackowners owners spoke at government enquiries they often went out of their way to mention apprenticeship, even when it was not directly relevant: Hull smackowner W.L. Robins stressed the advantages of the system at the 1885 Royal Commission on

²⁷ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, p6,234.

²⁸ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q600.

²⁹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q1,746.

³⁰ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q5,416.

³¹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq2,241 & 2,261.

³² BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq3,765-3,769.

³³ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Report, p674.

Trawling.³⁴ As late as 1907, Charles Hellyer, who himself had not taken an apprentice for thirty years, bemoaned the decline of apprenticeship at the enquiry on the supply and training of young seafarers.³⁵ Nor was the belief in the efficacy of apprentices limited to smackowners: Reuben Manton, speaking for the National Federation of Fishermen, a trade union representing sharemen, spoke in favour of the system at the Royal Commission on Labour in 1891.³⁶

Along with this belief in apprenticeship on the part of smackowners went a lack of faith in casual labour. Casual hands were regarded with suspicion, and in ports where the supply of apprentices was sufficient they were rarely recruited. Casuals were held to be incompetent, overpaid and often dishonest, and a bad influence on the apprentices. Thomas Stratton, a Justice of the Peace who took an interest in the Hull fishing industry and established a home for apprentices, spoke for many when he said that:

There are a few very respectable weekly boys [casual hands] whose parents reside in Hull, but as a rule the weekly hands are of a very low type indeed, both as to their ability, character, cleanliness and habit.³⁷

Moreover, casual labour was a fairly new departure for owners whose origins were in the West Country, where those who were not sharemen (skippers, mates and third hands) were almost invariably apprentices. Casual labour, to them, had thus far been a poor second best, resorted to in the absence of sufficient apprentices, and it had brought problem of its own because casual hands had no legal obligations to employers and therefore terminated their employment as and when they chose, sometimes taking the owner's property with them. Moreover, casual hands were in a position to demand higher wages, and refuse to work if they were denied them, as H. Harvey George of Great Yarmouth (quoted in Chapter 2) and William Pattison of Scarborough³⁸ complained. Given that cheap labour was the priority of the smackowners, this was obviously highly unpopular, especially combined with their dim view of the abilities of casual labour.

³⁴ BPP 1885 XVI, R.C. on Trawling, Minutes, qq8,907-8,912.

³⁵ BPP 1907 LXXV, Report on the Supply and Training of Boy Seamen, Minutes, evidence of Charles Hellyer.

³⁶ BPP 1894 XXXIV, R.C. on Labour, Minutes, q11,154.

³⁷ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q1,195.

³⁸ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q2,947.

'Casual hands are not worth a tenth of what they receive,' declared Grimsby skipper Thomas Freer.³⁹ In the early 1880s, there was 'a remarkable consensus of opinion' amongst smackowners and fishermen in believing that crews composed of casual hands were less efficient than those composed largely of apprentices. This was held to be a factor in the exceptionally great losses of vessels and lives during the gale of March 1883.⁴⁰

However, by the late 1880s attitudes were beginning to change as it became apparent that deep-sea fishing could be managed without apprenticeship. Ports such as North Shields and Fleetwood, where apprenticeship had never been used, were increasing in importance. At the nascent trawl port of North Shields, based entirely on steam trawling using converted paddle tugs, recruitment was overwhelmingly local in character and often family-based. Fleetwood, to which a few Hull firms transferred their operations in the 1890s, had long depended on a system of informal training. A few apprentices were recruited there in the first decade of the twentieth century, but the expansion of Fleetwood as a trawling port was predominantly based on casual labour. There were approximately 2,000 fishermen at Fleetwood in the 1890s,⁴¹ but no apprentices until the Hull firm of J. Marr and Sons began recruiting them in the early twentieth century. Aberdeen, which boomed as a trawling port from the 1890s, never employed apprentices and recruited labour mainly from nearby fishing communities, a process traced by Paul Thompson.⁴² Casual labour may have been problematic for trawler owners in Hull and Grimsby, and anathema to conservative smackowners in Brixham and Ramsgate, but it proved effective elsewhere. This must have helped to change attitudes towards recruitment and training.

ii. Social Relations and Social Status

It has been noted above that, with the arguable exception of the Barking trawl fishery, the white fishing industry of the mid-nineteenth century was a craft industry, and its apprenticeship system had most of the features of apprenticeships in other such industries. This model survived all through the 1850-1914 period in small ports, but progressively broke down in the larger

³⁹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q2,168.

⁴⁰ BPP 1883 XVIII, Report on the System of Deep Sea Trawl Fishing in the North Sea, p440.

⁴¹ P. Horsley and A. Hirst, *Fleetwood's Fishing Industry* (Cherry Burton, 1991), pp17-9.

⁴² Thompson *et al*, *Living the Fishing*, p118.

centres. There were, again, precedents from outside the industry for many of the changes. Expansion of the system, leading to outdoor apprenticeship once masters could no longer keep apprentices under their own roofs had happened in many other industries. Lane gives the example of the watch making trade, where 'debauchery' and 'corruption' among apprentices were blamed in part on the adoption of the outdoor system.⁴³ The results were much the same in the fishing industry.

In the early years of the fishing industry on the Humber, the social divide between owners and fishermen remained limited and bridgeable. Ownership was an attainable, although difficult, ambition for working fishermen, and there were many owner-skipper. Geographically, this manifested itself in the fact that smackowners tended to live amongst their employees and keep apprentices in their houses. In Hull in 1858, for example, leading smackowners such as Thomas Halfyard, Robert Hellyer and W.I. Markcrow lived in the streets around the Humber Dock, then the base of the industry.⁴⁴ A similar situation existed in Grimsby in the early years of the industry there. The 1861 census showed the large majority of the fishing population, smackowners and fishermen alike, living in an area near the old dock. In both towns, the tendency for in-migrant groups to cluster together was very apparent. Gerrish attributes this to the shared occupational identity of the fishing community, and the need for people to live near to their places of business,⁴⁵ although in Grimsby the limited size of the town and consequent shortage of housing may have made such clustering a response to necessity rather than a conscious choice.

By the 1880s the situation was very different. Smackowners, the largest of whom were by then wealthy and influential, were beginning to move out of the fishing community, and this process speeded up as the transition to steam trawling raised the financial stakes and increased the amounts of money to be made. Moreover, the development of trams and suburban railways made it possible for the middle classes to live further from their places of work and stimulated the development of affluent and fashionable suburbs. However, although by the first decade of the twentieth century the wealthiest of the trawler

⁴³ Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, p162.

⁴⁴ White's General Directory and Topography of Kingston upon Hull and the City of York, 1859; White's Directory of Hull and District, 1859.

⁴⁵ Gerrish, *Thesis*, pp272-4.

owners were moving further out, such as Charles Hellyer, who retired to a villa in the village of Kirk Ella, most continued to live relatively close to Hessle Road, although in the more affluent streets. In 1910, steam trawler owner William Leyman lived on The Boulevard, and many more owners lived in nearby districts such as Anlaby Road.⁴⁶ In Grimsby, many smackowners based themselves in the suburb of New Clee, close to the town. Moreover, in addition to their new-found wealth, smackowners were acquiring social status and moving into the commercial and civic mainstream of the ports they had settled in. By 1881, at least eight of Grimsby's seventeen magistrates were financially interested in fishing:⁴⁷ smackowner Henry Smethurst was Mayor of the town in 1885-6, and in Hull, Henry Toozes, a councillor for the South Myton ward since 1873,⁴⁸ became Mayor in 1887.

The growing social divide between master and apprentice was one reason for many smackowners' growing disinclination to keep apprentices in their own homes, although smaller smackowners continued to do so. Another was that it was no longer possible. Many Hull and Grimsby owners, by the 1860s, had several smacks and sufficient apprentices to provide crews for them. Assuming each smack required two or three apprentices, a man who had ten smacks could have twenty or 30 apprentices. Even those with large houses could not house this number even if they were prepared to do so, which increasingly few were. As the industry grew, recruitment became less discriminate, and many of the apprentices taken on, especially those who had arrived in the port as tramps, were unhealthy and poorly socialised. It is not hard to imagine how a man aspiring to be Mayor of Hull would not want them in his house. As one Grimsby smackowner reputedly said to R.H. Sherard, a campaigner against child labour, in 1904:

These boys are the scum of the earth, for the most part, many, the children of degraded and drunken parents reared in the mire, many, full of the most vicious instincts.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Capes, 'Contribution,' p53; Post Office Directory of Hull, 1910.

⁴⁷ Gillett, *History of Grimsby*, p253.

⁴⁸ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 6 November 1873.

⁴⁹ R.H. Sherard, *Child Slaves of Britain* (London, 1905), p145.

Many of the early smackowners originated from the background of which this individual was so contemptuous. The largest owner in the port, Henry Smethurst, had come as a pauper apprentice from Newark Union.⁵⁰ However, by the early twentieth century, many of the major owners were sons of the pioneers or outside financiers, usually without seagoing experience, and the humble origins of many of the industry's prominent figures were easily overlooked. Either way, attitudes such as these explain why the indoor system fell out of favour with the larger owners. As Berrington and Davy's report had it:

The owners live more comfortably than they used to do, and naturally enough they and their wives more frequently refuse to undertake the trouble of boarding the apprentices in their own homes. The boys have to live in lodgings, and the domestic control which formerly existed, and which bound boys to their masters by other ties than those which are set out in the indentures, is lost.⁵¹

Boarding apprentices out, either as indoor apprentices in arranged lodgings or by making them outdoor apprentices and leaving them to fend for themselves, became the only viable option, but the effect was to break the close, paternal connection between master and apprentice that had formerly been one of the system's strengths. Lack of supervision and unsuitable lodgings were felt to be contributing factors to the social problems that began to afflict the apprenticeship system. Baldwyn Fleming said that lodging out outdoor apprentices in public houses and other 'objectionable' places was 'probably a fact,'⁵² and as the number of apprentices rose during the 1870s the resulting problems became more acute. As Henry Webster, acting Inspector of the Hull police, said:

Some of [the apprentices] are well cared for, but some are boarded out; a widow woman will take care of some of them, and she has not proper control over them; they are let to run the streets at night and get into brothels, young boys about sixteen.⁵³

⁵⁰ Horn, 'Pauper Apprenticeship,' p175.

⁵¹ PRO MAF12/15. 1894 Report, p6.

⁵² PRO, MH32/99. Fleming, 'Treatment of Pauper Apprentices.'

⁵³ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q817.

Although the outdoor system was banned under the 1883 Merchant Shipping (Fishing Boats) Act, there was still little to stop an indoor apprentice being boarded out and not fully supervised. Moreover, the barracks in which apprentices to the large Grimsby companies were housed brought problems of their own. Although there was a superintendent and matron, supervision was still felt to be lacking. As Stockport Guardian the Reverend Moore, put it:

The homely management of the owner's wife was better for the lad than the gathering of them into barracks under a superintendent.⁵⁴

Mixing of older and younger apprentices in barracks was frowned upon, since it was felt that the older boys led the younger ones astray. Moreover, speaking of the Grimsby Ice Company's quarters, Berrington and Davy commented:

There are ... no books and few games; and apparently no attempt it made to induce the boys to look upon the place as their home, or to stay there during the evenings. In fact, the boys' money is paid to them in the evenings, and they naturally go into the town to get rid of it.⁵⁵

Despite the attractions of the Fisherlads' Institute, which offered some practical training in addition to its recreational function, most apprentices seem to have spent more time in the town, often in music halls and public houses, where their antics frustrated smackowners and the authorities alike:

Came home drunk on 8 November 1906 and vomited on bedroom floor, and on 6 December 1906 joined his vessel after being out all night and vomited on cabin floor.⁵⁶

Before Magistrates for brawling, fined 15/- ... Drunkenness and threats at home.⁵⁷

Complaints such as the above were frequent, as were convictions for drunkenness and fighting. These problems were held to be worse in large

⁵⁴ PRO MAF12/15. 1894 Report. Annotated copy of report, in correspondence.

⁵⁵ PRO MAF12/15. 1894 Report, p7.

⁵⁶ NELRO 208/2/11. Register of Grimsby Fishing Apprentices. John Foster Walton, 1 December 1903.

⁵⁷ NELRO 208/1/11. Register of Grimsby Fishing Apprentices. George Henry Carter, 3 April 1901.

establishments because of the lack of supervision, and by the 1890s, some Guardians had decided to stop sending boys to large companies and to indenture them only to small masters who housed their own apprentices.⁵⁸

Smackowners never acknowledged the weakening of the connection between master and apprentice. They complained vigorously about the effects of it, in terms of desertion and misconduct, but tended to blame it – publicly, at least – on drink and prostitutes who ‘allured’ the apprentices away from their business.⁵⁹ As Gillett points out, if mistreatment and the harshness of the occupation could not be admitted to be the causes of desertion, then another explanation had to be found, and ‘the most satisfactory explanation ... was that the woman tempted him and he fell.’⁶⁰ There was certainly a strong element of this in what some witnesses said to the 1882 Enquiry, although many also acknowledged the monotony and the severity of the occupation. Most witnesses seem to have felt that the indoor system was preferable, because it allowed greater supervision.⁶¹ However, none of them addressed the wider issue of how, as the divide between capital and labour widened, the ties of common experience between owners, apprentices and crews were breaking down. This promoted changes in labour relations as a whole, which the next chapter examines, and increasing problems within the apprenticeship system.

iii. Abuse of Apprentices

Initially ‘out of sight, out of mind,’ by the 1870s apprenticeship had acquired a bad reputation, which worsened during the 1880s and fed into what would now be termed a ‘media campaign’ to have apprenticeship at Grimsby abolished altogether. Much of this was based on the prevalence of violence and cruel treatment of apprentices. Moreover, the best remembered and most often remarked-upon aspects of apprenticeship are the notorious cases of violence towards apprentices, especially the murder of Bill Papper in January 1882.

Young workers in many industries were, and are, vulnerable to abuse. Factories and mines were notorious for poor conditions and cruel treatment but,

⁵⁸ PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report. Letters from Chase Farm Schools and Middlesbrough Union, in correspondence.

⁵⁹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q175.

⁶⁰ Gillett and MacMahon, *History of Hull*, p313.

⁶¹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q1,090.

as Rose points out, exploitation and abuse were often worse in small workshops and domestic workplaces, which were less visible and less tightly regulated, and where small employers working with tight profit margins sought to wring as much labour as possible from young, low-paid workers.⁶² Conditions in small bleaching and dyeing works were very bad, and Rose gives the example of domestic service, where cruelty to young servants, especially ex-workhouse girls, was a persistent problem. There were several cases of girls who died as a result of overwork, starvation and beatings.⁶³ Short of deliberate abuse, many young workers were, and sometimes still are, subjected to humiliating or painful initiation ceremonies. Examples of these in engineering before World War One included trainees being sent on hoax errands, having Epsom salts put in their tea and having their genitals coated in oil, dye or cotton waste.⁶⁴

The fishing industry had many of the features that promoted mistreatment of young workers in sweatshops and other small workplaces. It was lightly regulated and its workers were isolated from the mainstream of society so their condition was very much 'out of sight, out of mind' for much of the time. It was a highly competitive business, in which small masters, often heavily indebted and working with increasingly tight profit margins as the industry's resource base became depleted and operating costs rose, had good reason to squeeze as much effort out of their crews as possible. Moreover, the sheer uncertainty of fishing always creates an incentive to catch as much fish whilst the opportunity is there, which inevitably meant driving crews hard. Fishing contained a high proportion of young and vulnerable workers, especially pauper apprentices. Perhaps most important of all, the crew of a fishing vessel lived in cramped and uncomfortable conditions for long periods of time, short of sleep, facing frequent danger in bad weather and boredom and frustration when calm weather prevented fishing, all of which tended to shorten tempers. Tunstall noted much of this in his study of Hull fishermen in the 1950s, and pointed out how certain members of the crew – the radio operator especially – tended to become

⁶² Rose, *Erosion of Childhood*, p19.

⁶³ Rose, *Erosion of Childhood*, pp42-3.

⁶⁴ Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, p252.

scapegoats.⁶⁵ In the nineteenth century, the younger apprentices more often than not filled this position.

'Fishermen were hard cases.'⁶⁶ Many of them had been brought up in a harsh environment and a tough industry, and many of them clearly viewed this as a contributory factor in their success. As Baldwin Fleming commented, many were 'too apt to think that the rope's end which taught them their work is the best means of teaching it to others.'⁶⁷ One Grimsby skipper commented to the 1882 enquiry:

I should like apprentices to go through the same hard school we went through. They are too well treated, I think, now. They are more like gentlemen's sons than apprentices to the fishing trade.⁶⁸

Many fishermen, conditioned by their own apprenticeship and under pressure to work as intensively as possible, had little patience with the growing numbers of unskilled and resentful apprentices they were supposed to train.

'Petty tyranny' and 'horseplay of a rough nature'⁶⁹ were the most common result of this, not always from skippers and mates, but among the apprentices themselves. Tunstall described the 'unmerciful' bullying of young or ineffectual deckie-learners on Hull trawlers in the 1950s, commenting that the attitude of the older deckhands was:

that a deckhand must learn to be tough, and anyhow the boy deserved anything he got because he was a poor worker on deck. In the hard world of the deckhands there is no room for pity.⁷⁰

Much the same attitude lay behind bullying of apprentices on fishing vessels in the nineteenth century. 'Brightening up' of apprentices who were slow or cheeky was common practice, and apprentices who proved unable to do their work, or who made mistakes, frequently paid a heavy price. At the 1882 Enquiry, the governor of Hull prison spoke of encountering an apprentice with 'marks on his back of a very serious character' as a result of beating with a

⁶⁵ Tunstall, *The Fishermen*, pp119-34.

⁶⁶ Ekberg, *Grimsby Fish*, p54.

⁶⁷ PRO, MH32/99. Fleming, 'Treatment of Pauper Apprentices.'

⁶⁸ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q2,155.

⁶⁹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Report, p674.

⁷⁰ Tunstall, *The Fishermen*, p115.

rope's end, the most common means of driving slow or incapable apprentices to work. Hull apprentice James Hammond recounted being 'landed' two or three times a day because he was not strong enough to do his work, whilst Brixham apprentice Joseph Tribble was struck by the skipper on several occasions because he was seasick, to give but a few examples.⁷¹

Along with the bullying went intimidation: the superintendent of the Grimsby Fisherlads' Institute said that he had encountered boys who had been 'beaten black and blue,' but were too scared of those who had inflicted the beatings to allow him to investigate. He was of opinion that deliberate cruelty was not the practice of the majority of men, but that it was a frequent occurrence,⁷² in which judgement he was probably correct. Even non-apprenticed workers faced rough treatment: Peter Rooney, a young casual hand on a Hull trawler, was kicked around the deck and doused with water because he allowed the navigation lamp glasses to break.⁷³ Casual hands and apprentices were mistreated alike, but the latter were in a worse position because they could not respond by leaving their employment, which under a system of casual labour was a means of defusing or avoiding personal conflicts within crews.

A problem that exacerbated the situation was that apprentices usually had little redress against ill-treatment. Even if a skipper was dismissed for mistreating apprentices, no record of this was kept and he could quite possibly be taken on by another owner and sent to sea, in charge of apprentices, the same day.⁷⁴ Owner-skippers could not be dismissed their employment and were therefore immune from sanctions unless criminal proceedings were taken against them, which was rare. Apprentices did have the same recourse to the legal system as any other individual, so it was possible for an apprentice to summon his master for neglect or mistreatment, but few seem to have done so. In December 1866 a Hull apprentice was granted a summons against his master David Palmer, having shown scars on his head as evidence of cruelty.⁷⁵ Apprentices were usually discharged from charges of absconding if they could demonstrate mistreatment as a cause, such as Frederick James, who gave

⁷¹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq872-9 & 6,420-2.

⁷² BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq1,584-6 & 1,615-7.

⁷³ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq1,057-8.

⁷⁴ PRO, MH32/99. Fleming, 'Treatment of Pauper Apprentices.'

⁷⁵ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 6 December 1866.

mistreatment as an excuse for absconding in September 1870 and whose story was believed because he had a black eye.⁷⁶ However, unless an apprentice could produce evidence of mistreatment – usually scars – he was rarely believed. Moreover, many apprentices had little faith in a legal system that so often supported the interests of the smackowners. As Boswell points out, ‘many of the apprentices would [have been] only too familiar with the bench in a punitive role,’⁷⁷ and many would have been well aware that a high proportion of magistrates, in Grimsby especially, were financially interested in the fishing trade. In Hull, although some of the magistrates said they were ‘determined that [the] fisherlads should not be treated like dogs,’⁷⁸ the stipendiary magistrate said openly that his sympathies were usually with the masters. He was, he claimed, ready to intervene when apprentices were mistreated, but ‘the balance of good was decidedly with the masters.’⁷⁹

The magistrates, as Gillett comments, ‘were not often oppressed by the solemnity of their task,’⁸⁰ and cheerfully presented apprentices with the choice between going to sea and going to prison. The Hull stipendiary magistrate told an apprentice reputed to have won prizes for dancing at a music hall that he could go and ‘practice his steps’ on the prison treadmill.⁸¹ Some apprentices, for their part, showed what they thought of the legal system by referring to prison as ‘college,’ and being cheeky in court. One Grimsby apprentice sentenced to a month’s imprisonment for desertion retorted, ‘you can make it two months next time.’⁸² A Hull apprentice in 1867 had his sentence extended from 21 to 50 days for cheeking the court, whilst in 1865 four Hull apprentices deserted and sent their master an insulting letter: on being convicted and sentenced to prison, they walked out of court singing.⁸³

After 1883, port superintendents were tasked with investigating complaints of ill-treatment. This is likely to have discouraged physical abuse, but it appears from the Grimsby and Brixham registers of apprentices that

⁷⁶ HCA, DPM/1/88. Hull Magistrates Court Minute Books. Frederick James, September 1870.

⁷⁷ Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices*, p107.

⁷⁸ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 16 July 1874.

⁷⁹ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 6 March 1873.

⁸⁰ Gillett, *History of Grimsby*, p253.

⁸¹ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 1 August 1867.

⁸² NELRO 208/1/6. Register of Grimsby Fishing Apprentices. John Thomas Robinson, 6 July 1886.

⁸³ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 7 September 1865, 7 February 1867.

violence was still commonplace, although the superintendents did intervene when necessary. A typical entry from the Brixham register reads:

Master severely chastised boy for disobedience and impudence. Boy appeared at Custom house showing marks of excessive punishment and strong reprimand given to [his master] Mr Crocker.⁸⁴

Similar cases arise frequently in Grimsby where, according to Boswell, there is 'not the slightest doubt' that the appointment of the superintendent gave apprentices greater protection against mistreatment, and more chance of redress if it did occur. It was in the largest ports that abuse of apprentices had been most prevalent anyway, because of the sheer numbers involved and because there was not the close-knit community that existed in smaller ports, where abuses would be detected more quickly. As Ramsgate smackowner Philip Emmett commented in 1882, a high proportion of Ramsgate apprentices were local and had frequent contact with their parents, who would certainly find out and complain if their sons were being mistreated. Moreover:

Illtreatment [sic] of a boy is a thing unknown in the Cornish Fisheries; it is practically impossible. Each fishing community is so much one family that a case of the sort would bring the greatest social disgrace on the offender, let alone the law.⁸⁵

These comments, although perhaps somewhat hyperbolic, could apply equally well to many of the small trawl and line ports where apprentices were employed. It was in the largest ports, where apprentices had no roots and few contacts in the community, and no-one to take an interest in them and take action if they were being mistreated, that the worst problems arose.

Although many apprentices were treated roughly, and often punished harshly for small mistakes or acts of insubordination, deliberate, sadistic violence was undoubtedly rare. There were, however, enough cases to suggest that it was a persistent problem, at least in the Humber ports. As early as 1850, the skipper, mate and third hand of a Hull smack were convicted of a 'barbarous' assault on

⁸⁴ DRO 3287S add/6. Register of Brixham Fishing Apprentices. Walter Heywood, 13 May 1905.

⁸⁵ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 51 and Minutes, q5,296.

apprentice Isaac Nill,⁸⁶ and throughout the 1860s and 1870s cases arose periodically of manslaughter and severe assaults on apprentices on both Hull and Grimsby trawlers. The mate of the Hull smack *Comet*, skippered by future leading smackowner Thomas Hamling, was convicted of the manslaughter of apprentice Jacob Kiesler in 1864;⁸⁷ skippers of Grimsby trawlers were convicted of assault in 1875, 1876 and two in 1878,⁸⁸ and in 1882, the murders of Hull apprentices William Papper and Peter Hughes caused a national outcry. Moreover, during the 1870s there were a 'disquieting' number of suicides amongst apprentices. Two Grimsby apprentices jumped overboard from their smacks in 1873, and in July 1878 a Hull apprentice jumped overboard to escape a beating from the skipper.⁸⁹

Rumours of mistreatment of apprentices at Grimsby had in part motivated the enquiries of 1872 and 1878, and the opprobrium brought upon the industry by these two cases encouraged the government to order the 1882 labour relations enquiry, which many within the industry supported in the belief that it would dispel some of the 'prejudice' that existed against the trade.⁹⁰ Again, the introduction of port superintendents after 1883 helped to curb extreme mistreatment, but probably did not stop it all together. In 1884, a boy hired to a Hull smackowner from the *Southampton* training ship died from beatings and lack of food.⁹¹ Cruelty, then, was a persistent problem in the Humber ports. It is significant that there were no major abuse or murder cases at Brixham, Ramsgate or any other smaller trawling port. As Boswell points out, the sheer number of men involved in fishing from the Humber ports made it inevitable that there would be men of all characters amongst them, ranging from men of high moral principle, basically fair men who 'dispensed justice with a firm hand,' who comprised the majority, right through to sadists, paedophiles and psychopaths.⁹² There was little to restrain such characters. Moreover, the police often had a low

⁸⁶ *Hull Advertiser*, 22 March 1850.

⁸⁷ *Hull Advertiser*, 28 December 1864.

⁸⁸ Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices*, p104.

⁸⁹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 7; Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices*, p104; Robinson, *Trawling*, p58; Robinson, 'Line and Trawl,' pp78-9.

⁹⁰ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 31 & Minutes, q2,326.

⁹¹ *Hull and Lincolnshire Times*, 1 March 1884.

⁹² Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices*, p103.

opinion of the apprentices and may not have taken allegations made by them too seriously unless they were presented with hard evidence.

Henry Toozes commented in 1882 that most fishermen would never give cause for a charge of cruelty to be brought against them, and there was no more reason for a stain on their collective character than there was for the medical men of the town to be tarred with the same brush as the murderous Dr Lamson.⁹³ In this assessment he was correct, but equally there was, as there rarely is, no smoke without fire, and the scandal over the fate of Bill Papper was far from unjustified. Every report, from Baldwyn Fleming in 1872, through to the report of Berrington and Davy in 1894, found no evidence of systematic cruelty, but cruelty does not have to be systematic to be damaging or to destroy confidence in an institution. In any case, the way the apprenticeship system evolved in the Humber ports destroyed many of the safeguards built into classical apprenticeship and placed apprentices in a vulnerable position with little means of redress if they were abused. With indiscriminate recruitment on a large scale from many sources, a weak sense of community and the predominance of the outdoor system, there were few people to take an interest in the welfare of apprentices, and in all too many cases they were 'regarded as merely part of the machinery for taking fish.'⁹⁴

iv. Social Problems

Aside from cruelty, fishing apprenticeship system is best remembered for the social problems it caused and contributed to. The bad reputation it acquired at the time has clouded any analysis of what the precise causes and effects of its social problems were. What seems clear, however, is that social problems were initially a symptom of changes within the system but became factors driving change in themselves, reinforcing the decline that set in from the 1870s and militating against the revival of apprenticeship.

The root cause of many of the social problems that began to afflict the fishing apprenticeship system from the 1860s lay in the attitudes of smackowners and Guardians to recruitment. In the drive to create a labour force, quantity of

⁹³ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 31.

⁹⁴ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 37. Report of Swanston and Stoneham.

labour was prioritised over suitability, aptitude and inclination. As the first Annual Report of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries stated, 'such indiscriminate recruitment is naturally productive of great evil.'⁹⁵ The sheer number of apprentices of varying abilities and characters created problems of housing and supervision, which only served to exacerbate the situation.

This, obviously, was primarily a feature of the industry in the largest ports, especially Grimsby and Hull, where apprentices were recruited at the rate of 200 a year and more throughout the 1860s and 1870s. Amongst these were boys of a great variety of backgrounds, temperaments and aptitudes. Some of them, as suggested in the previous chapter, were physically unsuited to the occupation of fishing. Many more of them were psychologically unsuited to it, and some might fairly be described as 'disturbed.' A few comments from apprentices' service records illustrate the point:

Boy attempted to commit suicide on two occasions [during first three months], by cutting his throat and trying to jump overboard. Indenture annulled – lad not safe to take to sea.⁹⁶

[Indenture not confirmed] Filthy in habits and a little 'dotty.'⁹⁷

Only a small minority had definite psychological problems, but a great many might today would be termed 'difficult.' The 1882 report spoke of boys who had been 'in trouble' before finding their way to the fishery, commenting that they were 'too often the cause of trouble and mischief,'⁹⁸ and the comments of Berrington and Davy and various smackowners referred to in the previous section illustrate the point with reference to boys bound from Poor Law institutions. The fishing industry, in effect, became a dumping ground for 'difficult' boys from public institutions, and an employer for boys from the streets, many of them already involved in petty crime. Small wonder, then, that problems arose as a result.

⁹⁵ Annual Report of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries, 1886, p13.

⁹⁶ NELRO 208/1/6. Register of Grimsby Fishing Apprentices. James Nye, 12 July 1887.

⁹⁷ NELRO 208/1/6. Register of Grimsby Fishing Apprentices. Henry George Crayford, 7 October 1887.

⁹⁸ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Report, p669.

Besides the character of individual apprentices, there was also the fact that a great many were there, if not involuntarily, then not wholly of their own volition. Before the 1883 Merchant Shipping Act there was virtually no protection for a boy signing indentures: there was no obligatory trial trip, no-one to oversee the binding process and, as a result, some apprentices signed indentures without any clear idea of what they were binding themselves to. Many, after all, had tramped to the ports or been sent from parishes inland, and in all probability had never even seen the sea before their arrival at the port. Two apprentices of the eleven interviewed by the 1882 Enquiry had not even seen their indentures and had only a general idea of their provisions.⁹⁹ If the allegations made about boys apprenticing themselves at Grimsby without realising what they were doing were true – and at least one of them can be substantiated – it seems likely that this was far from uncommon. Moreover, even for boys who were aware of what their indentures entailed, although the process of indenture was in theory purely voluntary, the choice for many boys was between the workhouse, and a life of ‘less eligibility,’ or the fishing industry.¹⁰⁰ As Rule points out, ‘only a minority of apprentices can be regarded as having had total freedom of choice.’¹⁰¹

No enquiry into the industry found any proof that boys were being pressured into signing indentures. However, Swanston and Stoneham’s report showed widespread evasion of laws intended for the protection of pauper apprentices in Grimsby. Although the man who oversaw the signing of indentures claimed that he ‘would refuse to attest any indenture if he perceived reluctance on the part of the lad,’¹⁰² they questioned his honesty on the subject of how much he earned from doing so and pointed out that it was in his financial interests to get as many boys bound as possible. Given how little protection there was, therefore, for boys signing indentures, it is far from inconceivable that some of them were pressured into signing. Before 1883, then, because of

⁹⁹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq5,275 & 6,401-2.

¹⁰⁰ PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report. Report by Basford Guardians, in correspondence. ‘The Guardians had every year thrown upon their hands a lot of youths whose education and morals were of the lowest and most depraved character ... There were two choices for the lads – either the workhouse or Grimsby.’

¹⁰¹ Rule, ‘Smacksmen,’ p399.

¹⁰² PRO, MH32/99. Fleming, ‘Treatment of Pauper Apprentices;’ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendices 34-7.

asymmetric information and the possibility of coercion, it is reasonable to suggest that many apprentices were not there entirely voluntarily. The 1883 Merchant Shipping Act empowered Board of Trade superintendents to oversee the binding process and mandated a trial trip of at least one month, after which the indenture could be terminated at the request of either apprentice or master. Many seem to have taken advantage of this: dislike of the sea and the business is a common reason given in the Grimsby and Brixham registers for annulment of indentures (see Appendix 6).

In smaller ports, recruitment was generally more discriminate, because demand for apprentices was lower and a much higher proportion were recruited from within the community and were accustomed to its codes of behaviour, and even those who were not were better supervised. However, an example from Brixham shows that even smaller ports were not immune from social problems, and that indiscriminate recruitment could prove disruptive anywhere. In 1905, Brixham smackowners recruited 70 apprentices, more than double the number recruited in any of the previous six years, and 44 of these came from training ships, as opposed to no more than 15 in any previous year, with another sixteen drawn from various other public bodies. This seems to have caused a considerable amount of trouble, as Table 5.3 suggests.

Table 5.3
Brixham Apprentices 1895-1910: Absconding, Imprisonment and Non-Completion

	1895	1900	1905	1910
Apprentices recruited	45	20	70	29
No. (%) from public bodies	17 (37.7)	14 (70)	60 (85.7)	24 (82.8)
No. (%) local	22 (48.8)	6 (30)	6 (8.8)	2 (6.9)
No. (%) absconded	6 (13.3)	9 (45)	22 (31.4)	5 (17.2)
No. (%) imprisoned	-	1 (5)	8 (11.4)	1 (3.4)
No. (%) indentures cancelled	15 (33.3)	10 (50)	38 (54.3)	17 (58.6)

Source: DRO 3287S add/6. Register of Brixham Fishing Apprentices

Although the percentage of absconding apprentices was very high in 1900, this in part reflects the small intake in that year, and high rates of cancellation in 1910 are partly explained by the large number of apprentices whose indentures were cancelled when they enlisted for military service on the outbreak of World War One. After these anomalies are accounted for, it seems that the large number of apprentices recruited from reformatories and training ships were a source of problems. This was certainly the view of contemporaries. As the *Western Guardian* said, in response to 'disorderly scenes' in the town, leading to an assault on a police officer:

The apprentices, the majority of whom come from Reformatories and Training Ships, have given the police trouble on previous occasions. The work of the police in suppressing their unseemly conduct is greatly handicapped through the youths going about in gangs.¹⁰³

Small ports were therefore not immune from social problems caused by the apprenticeship system, but this was a relatively isolated instance, and the problems of indiscriminate recruitment were for the most part confined to the largest ports. However, if a comparatively small number of apprentices could cause considerable trouble at Brixham, it is not hard to see how an intake of over 200 apprentices in a year could cause much more serious problems in Grimsby or Hull.

Location made a great difference in many ways to the experience of apprenticed fishermen. On the whole, it must have been an easier, or at least more bearable, life in smaller ports where the fleeting system was little used (meaning better conditions at sea and more time ashore), where there were fewer apprentices and where the indoor system prevailed. However, fishing remained a hard and dangerous business from whichever port it was conducted, and whichever branch of the fisheries was followed. Moreover, although smackowners trumpeted the virtues of the apprenticeship system and the prospects of ownership and wealth it supposedly offered, where the personal connection between master and apprentice was remote there was no-one to inculcate outdoor apprentices with the values of thrift, hard work and self-discipline that they attributed their own success to. For many apprentices, the

¹⁰³ *Western Guardian*, 16 November 1905.

prospect of actually owning a smack and achieving an independent life must have seemed minimal, and the term of apprenticeship interminable. As Robinson comments, 'little about their lives encouraged a long-term view.'¹⁰⁴ Returning from eight-week fleeting trips, most apprentices were more interested in taking a few days' pleasure while they could than in thinking about a vague future. Escapism was the main motive behind many of the problems that the system became increasingly notorious for during the 1860s and 1870s.

The boundary between social problems and labour resistance is a blurred one: desertion, which is discussed in the next chapter, could be a consequence of 'debauchery' ashore, but was more often a conscious tactic for resisting exploitation. Moreover, social problems are very difficult to quantify. No figures exist on rates of alcoholism or prostitution among fishermen, although they were clearly significant, and records of prosecution and imprisonment only cover those who fell foul of the law. However, a great deal of qualitative evidence suggests that the problems were serious and widespread, and such quantitative evidence as exists points the same way.

Port towns have always had a reputation for containing insalubrious areas, and the fishing ports of nineteenth-century Britain were no exception. Again, however, this was more true of the largest ports, such as Hull and Great Yarmouth, with their docks and large mercantile maritime sector, and Grimsby, 'a port replete with drinking dens and brothels with a small police force and somewhat short on law and order.'¹⁰⁵ Contemporaries blamed these places for many of the problems: as the sailor's missionary at Grimsby said, 'when they get into these wretched places they seem to have no ambition.'¹⁰⁶ Bad company was often blamed for desertion and drunkenness, sometimes even by apprentices themselves. Moreover, middle class observers were horrified by the fact that many apprentices shared these quarters with girls, referring to one another as 'pals' or 'chums.' Promiscuity, aside from offending Victorian middle class moral sensibilities, brought its own problems. Many smackowners complained of the prevalence of sexually transmitted disease among apprentices, especially

¹⁰⁴ Robinson, *Trawling*, p56.

¹⁰⁵ Ekberg, *Grimsby Fish*, p54.

¹⁰⁶ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q1,478.

because of the expense in medical fees, for which they were responsible.¹⁰⁷ Of 154 Grimsby fishing apprentices admitted to Lindsey Prison in June 1872 – June 1873, 34 required treatment for venereal disease.¹⁰⁸ In fact, it was felt that some apprentices deliberately got themselves imprisoned because they were then certain to receive treatment that, presumably, their master would have withheld.

A related factor was alcohol abuse, both at sea and ashore. Drinking at sea, with alcohol purchased from 'copers' or 'bumboats' was a serious problem and a factor in many accidents. However, although drinking at sea affected apprentices, especially those who were on the receiving end of drunken violence or left in charge of smacks while crews drank themselves insensible, it was a wider problem and not specific to apprentices. It was treated as a separate issue. Drinking on shore, however, was a subject explored by every enquiry into the apprenticeship system and a matter of particular concern. Baldwyn Fleming stated in 1873 that, 'quite small boys told me they could without difficulty get served with as much beer as they wanted,'¹⁰⁹ and although there were attempts to clamp down on the availability of alcohol the situation was little better by the end of the century. Berrington and Davy complained of the fact that younger apprentices were under no more restrictions on their movements than older ones, and were therefore able to frequent music halls and public houses.¹¹⁰ Of a random sample of the service records of 50 Grimsby apprentices from 1886-8 and 1899-1903, ten contain references to frequent drunkenness or drunken incidents.¹¹¹ A couple of examples shed light on the situation:

Lad inexpressibly filthy at the home, especially towards female servants there. Continually drunk and in every way bestial.¹¹²

Drunk and assaulted master – locked up.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ See for example the comments of Henry Smethurst, BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq2,299-2,301.

¹⁰⁸ PRO, MH32/99. Fleming, 'Treatment of Pauper Apprentices.'

¹⁰⁹ PRO, MH32/99. Fleming, 'Treatment of Pauper Apprentices.'

¹¹⁰ PRO MAF12/15. 1894 Report, p7.

¹¹¹ NELRO 208/1/6 & 208/1/11. Registers of Grimsby Fishing Apprentices.

¹¹² NELRO 208/1/11. Register of Grimsby Fishing Apprentices. Albert Thomas Fytche, 25 June 1903.

¹¹³ NELRO 208/1/6. Register of Grimsby Fishing Apprentices. John Thomas Robinson, 6 July 1886.

Boswell cites many more instances of this sort, and since drunkenness was rarely reported unless it led to other incidents, the true proportion of apprentices who drank heavily is likely to have been higher. Even in the smaller ports, drunkenness among apprentices was far from unknown: several Brixham apprentices' service records contain complaints of drunken behaviour.¹¹⁴ However, in smaller towns there were fewer places to obtain alcohol, and an apprentice was more likely to be recognised and taken home than in Hull or Grimsby. Just as societal pressure limited cruelty on the part of masters in smaller places, so it acted as a check on the actions of apprentices.

Drink was a problem in itself, and it contributed to desertion, criminality and violence. Tunstall, writing of the 1950s, portrayed heavy drinking amongst Hull fishermen as both escapism and a way of buying status to compensate for the fisherman's 'lowly position in society.'¹¹⁵ It is not possible to say whether nineteenth-century fishermen, apprentices or otherwise, drank to buy status, but escapism must certainly have been a factor in the level of alcohol abuse. Moreover, Tunstall pointed to the large amounts of money fishermen possessed between trips as a contributory factor. This was also true of the nineteenth-century apprentice, whose stockerbait could amount to two pounds after a fleeting trip.¹¹⁶ Few apprentices saved that money: much of it seems to have been spent on alcohol, which is why most observers – masters, officials, police officers, Guardians of the poor and some members of the public – felt that the apprentices had too much money to spend.

Those who worried about the amount of money apprentices had were also greatly concerned with the moral condition of the apprentices. Indeed, individual morality was widely held to be the key not only to personal improvement but also to national success and prosperity. As Samuel Smiles wrote:

National progress is the sum of individual industry, energy, and uprightness, as national decay is of individual idleness, selfishness and vice ... If this view be correct, then it follows that the highest patriotism and philanthropy consist, not so much in altering laws and

¹¹⁴ For example, an apprentice was cautioned for running the small boat into the side of his smack when drunk. DRO 3287S add/6. Register of Brixham Fishing Apprentices. George Lovell, 25 March 1895.

¹¹⁵ Tunstall, *The Fishermen*, pp135-8.

¹¹⁶ PRO MAF12/15. 1894 Report, p11.

modifying institutions, as in helping and stimulating men to elevate and improve themselves by their own free will and independent action.¹¹⁷

Fishing apprenticeship fitted neatly into this ideological framework. It was seen as a way for pauper boys to improve themselves, free themselves from the stigma of pauperism and achieve independence, respectability and even wealth. The reverse of this was that immorality and vice was seen by some as the underlying cause of the system's problems. Thus, the likes of Henry Tooze could blame the antics of their apprentices on the prostitutes who lured them away from their employment and the bad characters they lodged with in low boarding houses in the slums of Victorian port towns. Concern for the moral state of the apprenticed population was evident everywhere, but most strongly in Hull and Grimsby, where the problem was most apparent and the moral 'contamination' of apprentices by casual hands much lamented. Guardians fretted about the lack of supervision and moral guidance in the barracks, and sexual impropriety in various forms was noted widely and disapprovingly. A common complaint in apprentices' service records is 'filthy habits,' which in many cases was probably a product of boys being brought up in insalubrious surroundings, but in some was certainly a euphemism for masturbation. One Brixham apprentice was rejected after a month for his 'beastly habit of self-abuse,'¹¹⁸ whilst Charles Jeffs even suggested that:

Quite two thirds of our lads from workhouses or schools have inherited or contracted the habit of self-abuse, the result of which if not stopped is that phthisis sets in and they die or their reason gives way. I have made a special study of this dire disease and there is scarcely a day goes over my head but what I have to take one or more of the lads aside and endeavour to teach them the dangers of this practice.¹¹⁹

This was supposed to account for several deaths among apprentices; perhaps a more extreme version of the contemporaneous belief that 'self abuse' caused blindness. Many of the successful smackowners were strict teetotallers and

¹¹⁷ S. Smiles, *Self-Help* (London, 1859), p3.

¹¹⁸ DRO 3287S add/6. Register of Brixham Fishing Apprentices. William James Blackmore, 23 March 1898.

¹¹⁹ PRO MAF12/15. 1894 Report. Letter from Charles Jeffs, in correspondence.

moralists, strong believers in Smilesian self-help and firm self-discipline, including sexual self-restraint. These beliefs chimed in with the cost to them of apprentices' antics ashore.

Aside from direct contact with their masters, which faded with the more widespread adoption of the outdoor system, most attempts to inculcate apprentices with the accepted moral values of the time came through the fisherlads' institutes and philanthropic religious institutions. In Hull, Fish Street Chapel opened an Apprentices' Bethel Room in 1868, at which religious services and social events were held,¹²⁰ and the institutes for apprentices at Grimsby and Ramsgate included strong elements of religious instruction. The vicar of Ramsgate was heavily involved in the Smack Boys' Home at the port and supported apprentices against their masters if he felt it necessary.¹²¹ At Grimsby, the port missionary and the superintendent of the Fisherlads' Home spoke up for apprentices, contradicting many of the smackowners and the police by suggesting that fishing apprentices were no worse than many other lads, and bemoaning the poor conditions in which many of them lived. Judging by letters reproduced in the Fisherlads' Home report of 1893, religious instruction was also given there.¹²² However, religious instruction was widely felt to be lacking. Stockport Guardian the Reverend P.H. Moore complained:

Nothing of any moment appeared to be done by way of keeping up any good moral or religious impressions.¹²³

Indeed, Catholic clergy in Grimsby asked of certain Guardians that no more Catholic boys be sent to the port, because there was no supervision and, 'the boys were exposed to great temptation to neglect their religious duties and go astray.'¹²⁴ Nor was the Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen a particularly strong influence. Most of its early activities were based in Great Yarmouth, where by the 1880s, there were few apprentices, and by 1888, there were only eight Mission smacks to service nineteen North Sea trawling fleets.¹²⁵ Smacksmen

¹²⁰ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 15 April 1869.

¹²¹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq5,332-4 & 5,356-7.

¹²² PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report. Annual report of Fisherlads' Institute, in correspondence.

¹²³ PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report. Annotated copy of report, in correspondence.

¹²⁴ PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report. Letter from Birkenhead Union, in correspondence.

¹²⁵ Rule, 'Smacksmen,' p408.

certainly did benefit from the services, especially the medical care, that the Mission provided, but their efforts were spread too thinly to be of constant benefit to most apprentices. As with practical supervision on the part of smackowners, religious and moral guidance was provided sparsely and unevenly, and did little to ameliorate the effects of rapid expansion and the influx of large numbers of 'undisciplined mind and unstable habits.'¹²⁶

The effect of social problems was fourfold. In the first place, contemporaries made little or no distinction between social problems and labour resistance on the part of apprentices, and used the law as a means of disciplining the workforce. This strategy, one certainly not specific to the fishing industry, is discussed in the next chapter.

Secondly, the supply of apprentices from public institutions was depressed by the bad reputation which the apprenticeship system acquired because of numerous stories of drunkenness, desertion and cruelty. Although, as suggested in Chapter 4, the decrease of recruits was not as severe as has sometimes been thought, it did cause considerable concern among smackowners, and it led to a change in recruitment patterns as more apprentices were recruited from amongst the 'gutter lads' to compensate, which is more likely than not to have made the problems worse still.

Thirdly, social problems pushed up the cost of apprenticeship. An apprentice was only of value to his master whilst he was working, so time spent in prison or ashore after absconding represented a financial loss and a practical nuisance. Although an apprentice cost nothing in food and clothing whilst in prison, the court appearance, at which the owner would usually appear, represented time away from work, and when an apprentice came out of prison, someone would usually have to be sent to fetch him,¹²⁷ since some took the opportunity of an unsupervised journey to abscond. The cost was also increased by the fourth effect of social problems: legislation. The government found itself forced to act because of the public outcry consequent upon the murder of Bill Papper, setting up the 1882 enquiry into labour relations, which led to the 1883 Merchant Shipping (Fishing Boats) Act. Again, this will be discussed in more

¹²⁶ Alward, *Sea Fishing Industry*, p210.

¹²⁷ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q737.

detail in the next chapter: the motives behind legislation were more complex than simply a desire to improve the moral and social conditions of the apprentices.

v. Wider Social Changes

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the concept of childhood as a distinct phase of life, separate from the world of work, became common currency. Previous to this, 'the childhood of the lower orders had been regarded largely as a preparation for ... work.'¹²⁸ Upper class children might have enjoyed a 'childhood,' in the modern sense of the word, but working class children had been set to work as soon as they were capable. The idea of childhood as something all children could and should enjoy germinated in the first half of the century, 'but only later [was it] expressed in its fullest vigour,'¹²⁹ and only in the second half of the century did wide-ranging restrictions on child labour come into force. Childhood, in the late nineteenth century, was reckoned to end at fourteen, so most fishing apprentices were too old to be counted as children proper, or as child labourers. However, similar concern to that which motivated child labour laws, and some of the same paternalistic rhetoric, were from the 1870s applied to the fishing industry, and to its youngest and most vulnerable workers. Moreover, adolescent boys were increasingly regarded as a distinct group, for whom special provision needed to be made.

Child and adolescent labour as a whole became less prevalent during the nineteenth century. Between 1851 and 1911, the number of boys and girls aged under fifteen years fell from 660,000 to 546,000, and the proportion of ten to fifteen-year-olds in employment from 28 per cent to fourteen per cent.¹³⁰ The proportion of the workforce aged fifteen or under in many industries declined markedly in the second half of the century, as Table 5.4 demonstrates.

¹²⁸ P. Horn, *Children's Work and Welfare 1780-1880s* (Basingstoke, 1994), p92.

¹²⁹ H. Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor: Representations of Childhood since the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1991), p152.

¹³⁰ Hunt, *British Labour History*, pp9-16.

Table 5.4
Percentage of Labour Force Aged Fifteen or Under in Selected Industries,
1861-1881

	1861	1871	1881
Agriculture	7.6	7.2	5.5
Mining (Males only)	11.9	9.5	5.7
Metal trades	7.9	5.5	3.1
Quarrying/brick making (males only)	7.3	5.9	3.8
Bricklaying/labouring (males only)	3.2	2.8	2.2
Textiles and dyeing	15.4	15.7	12.2
Indoor domestic service	8.8	8.9	7.7

Source: F. Musgrove, *Youth and the Social Order* (London, 1964), p75.

Although the decline in child labour is often attributed to increasingly restrictive legislation on child workers, the effect of this is likely to have been 'grossly overstated.'¹³¹ Most of the legislation on child labour from the first half of the century applied to very specific groups of workers, such as Peel's Health and Morals of Apprentices Act of 1802, which applied solely to pauper apprentices in textile mills. Much also applied only to large factories, such as the Ten Hours' Bill, which applied only to textile mills, or to mines, whereas the majority of the population in mid-century, especially juveniles, were still employed in premises employing less than 50 people. Effective legislation on hours and conditions did not cover these workplaces until at least the 1860s, and it was 1878 before the Ten Hours' Bill was extended to all factories and workshops.¹³² Even then, the difficulty of inspecting geographically dispersed small workshops meant that many escaped effective regulation until well into the twentieth century. Authors such as Mary B. Rose and Clark Nardinelli instead stress economic factors as key to the decline in child labour, especially the locational shift towards large centres of population, which removed the need for pauper apprenticeships on a large scale, and changing production techniques that reduced the need for large numbers of child labourers.¹³³ In some respects, this could be said of the fishing industry, in that the employment of large numbers of adolescent apprentices was

¹³¹ P. Kirby, *Child Labour in Britain, 1750-1870* (London, 2003), p132.

¹³² Mathias, *First Industrial Nation*, pp182-3.

¹³³ Rose, 'Social Policy and Business,' C. Nardinelli, *Child Labor and the Industrial Revolution* (Indianapolis, 1991).

a convenient solution to a serious labour shortage. Subsequently it died out because of the development of communities that came to supply most of the necessary labour, as well as technological changes which altered the skill requirements of the industry and rendered the products of the apprenticeship system unsuitable for the industry's needs.

Moreover, the legislation on fisheries, much like that on factories 50 years before, reflected a climate in which juvenile labour was decreasing in acceptability. Whereas in 1714 Mandeville could argue that going to school was idleness, and children brought up this way would never be fit for labour, and Jonas Hanway in 1766 could say that children were better dead than idle,¹³⁴ by the nineteenth century child labour was being compared to slavery, and characterised as an aberration in a free country. The plight of young children bound apprentices to chimney sweeps was an early example – William Wilberforce described young chimney sweeps as 'the little black slaves' of Britain in 1803¹³⁵ - but the comparison with slavery was soon extended to other areas of juvenile employment. Robert Owen argued in 1818 that the factory employment of children was 'worse than any slavery of the same extent to which the human race has been hitherto afflicted,' literary figures such as Wordsworth and Coleridge made use of the same sort of imagery. It also featured prominently in the Parliamentary agitation for the Ten Hours' Bill. Michael Sadler MP, for example, commented thus:

You have limited the labour of the black [slave] to nine hours, but when I propose that the labour of the young white slave shall not exceed ten hours, why the proposition is deemed monstrous.¹³⁶

Much of this sort of rhetoric reflected middle-class concerns about social problems, in which a certain sentimentalism about children and childhood was evident. It was this concern, and this rhetoric, which surfaced again with reference to fishing apprentices in the 1870s. In the wake of a series of stories about boys being decoyed to Grimsby, the *Leicester Daily Mercury* opined:

¹³⁴ Cunningham, *Children of the Poor*, pp22-3; Rose, 'Social Policy and Business,' p7.

¹³⁵ K.H. Strange, *The Climbing Boys: A Study of Sweeps' Apprentices 1773-1875* (London, 1982), p 43.

¹³⁶ Cunningham, *Children of the Poor*, pp74-9.

By a strange misnomer the very 'infant' who in the eye of the law is considered irresponsible for the slightest debt he may contract, is entitled to be beguiled, cozened and cheated into a white slavery as coarse as it is cruel and degrading: while his hapless parent, though withal liable for his maintenance, is utterly powerless to prevent his self-immolation.¹³⁷

Nor was this the only one of a collection of letters and articles on the subject, all published in the appendices to the 1882 enquiry, which presented the apprenticeship system in this light. Another described the law that permitted the fishing apprenticeship system to operate as it did as:

A disgrace to the statute book, more especially in a country like ours with its boasted liberty, its free institutions, its freedom of the press and other safeguards superior to any other country in Europe.¹³⁸

The 1882 enquiry itself was set up in response to the murder of Bill Papper, which generated a public outcry that the murder of Peter Hughes a couple of months later served to intensify. Regional and national newspapers covered the trial of Papper's killer, Osmond Brand, and the public reaction to it, in lurid detail.¹³⁹ Under these circumstances, lobbying by the fishing trade for a change in the law to favour the apprenticeship system was bound to fail.

The rhetoric of child slavery surfaced again in 1894, in reaction to the report of Berrington and Davy on the Grimsby apprenticeship system. The crusading paper *Truth* spoke of an 'iniquitous traffic in juvenile pauper labour,'¹⁴⁰ connived in by the Board of Trade, Poor Law Unions and smackowners; *Reynolds' Weekly Newspaper* invoked an image of the 'poor little uncared-for waif'¹⁴¹ at the mercy of the rapacious smackowner and the *Daily Chronicle* compared the system with 'the early days of the factory system.'¹⁴² For the first time since the murder of Bill Papper in 1882, the fishing apprenticeship system was headline news. In this climate, something akin to a

¹³⁷ *Leicester Daily Mercury*, 13 February 1878, in BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 43.

¹³⁸ *Leicester Daily Mercury*, undated, in BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 43.

¹³⁹ See for example *The Times*, 5 & 6 May 1882; *Hull and Lincolnshire Times*, 4, 11, 18, 25 March, 6 May, 15 July 1882.

¹⁴⁰ *Truth*, 6 September 1894, in PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report.

¹⁴¹ *Reynolds' Weekly Newspaper*, 2 September 1894, in PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report.

¹⁴² *Daily Chronicle*, 16 June 1894, in PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report.

modern media campaign to abolish it took shape, although it was limited to the crusading end of the press: *The Times* and other major papers such as the *Eastern Morning News* took a more moderate line.

The fishing industry was propelled into the public eye to a far greater extent than ever before in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Its own growing size and importance as a food supplier, the fact that it dominated towns such as Grimsby, where it constituted the main employer, the activities of philanthropists such as the Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen and the rise of the crusading press all helped to boost its public profile and to change public perceptions of fishing and fishermen. Before this:

If the inland consumer ever gave thought to the fisherman who supplied his table, he probably conjured up a picture of a weather-beaten village fisherman going daily to the fishing grounds to return in the evening to his waiting wife and children.¹⁴³

Such a romanticised picture had ceased to be tenable by about 1890. The scandal over the murder of Bill Papper was the first to make national headlines, but thereafter the fishing industry, and conditions within it, were not infrequently commented upon. Labour conditions in the fishing industry shocked people in much the same way as conditions in early factories and mines, and the fishing apprentices, suitably romanticised by the crusading press, came to be regarded in some quarters in much the same light as the sweeps' apprentices. The pressure for change was strong, especially among the philanthropic elements of the middle class, and among MPs. Stories of cruelty and desertion had prompted the enquiries of 1872 and 1878, and the 1882 Enquiry committee were instructed to:

consider themselves precluded from entertaining any proposals for reverting to the system [of summary imprisonment] which has been condemned by Parliament and which her Majesty's Government are unwilling, under any circumstances to re-establish.¹⁴⁴

However, against the desire for change had to be balanced the needs of the fishing industry, an important supplier of food and a significant employer, and

¹⁴³ Rule, 'Smacksmen,' p383.

¹⁴⁴ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Report, p667.

the continuing problem of finding suitable employment for pauper boys. Moreover, the populist press were as sensationalistic and as selective in their coverage as they are today. In response to their campaign, a scathing broadside from Reuben Manton, fishing trade unionist and himself a former apprentice, pointed out various inaccuracies and the absurdity of some of the images presented by the papers, including that of an apprentice, for some unknown reason, trudging through Grimsby with a large cod slung over his shoulder.¹⁴⁵ Manton was strongly pro-apprenticeship, but his criticisms of the press coverage were forceful and largely justified. Moreover, the media censure of the Grimsby apprenticeship system – although not wholly unfounded – failed to acknowledge that precisely the same system, legally and in theory, existed in several other places and functioned effectively as a training and recruitment system. Public opinion was shocked by some features of the apprenticeship system, but not enough so to provoke a coherent or sustained campaign for abolition, especially when many of the calls for action were based on shaky factual evidence.

The opprobrium the apprenticeship system attracted was motivated by the same sentiments that had stimulated calls for greater regulation of child labour in previous decades. However, apprenticeship as a social and economic institution in general was under attack from another direction. It was seen in some quarters as outmoded, an in decline. This did not dispose the government towards abolition of apprenticeship, but it did discourage moves to strengthen it.

Ideological and economic opposition to apprenticeship had existed since the eighteenth century. Complaints about the idleness and insubordination of apprentices appeared early in that century, with commentators such as Daniel Defoe describing many apprentices as ‘more like gentlemen than tradesmen; more like companions to their masters, than like servants.’¹⁴⁶ Apprentices came to be seen as unruly, occasionally politically threatening and, sometimes, to be pitied as sweated labour. Later in the century, scepticism about the value of apprenticeships combined with the emerging political economy of figures such as Adam Smith. Smith regarded apprenticeship as a distortion of the labour market, and held that it must be an ineffective means of training because security of tenure acted as a disincentive to hard work. Apprentices, according to Smith,

¹⁴⁵ PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report. Untraced article by Reuben Manton, in correspondence.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, p242.

'generally turn out very idle and worthless.'¹⁴⁷ This economic criticism of apprenticeship grew in influence in the early nineteenth century, with the growing power of the free trade lobby. In 1863 the National Association for the Promotion of Progressive Sciences observed:

Apprenticeship should be discontinued as a worn-out vestige of the past, and instead a system of pupilage should be instituted compatible with freedom of action, the intelligence of the present age, and the progressive state of modern institutions.¹⁴⁸

Much the same attitude had already led to the repeal of the Statute of Artificers. In 1814 an attempt by craftsmen in declining trades to persuade Parliament to enforce the apprenticeship clauses of the Statute of Artificers, which had been falling steadily into desuetude for a century, backfired. The commission appointed to consider the question decided, far from recommending enforcement of the Statute, to repeal it altogether.¹⁴⁹ Similar thinking – and committees similarly weighted in favour of the free trade argument – motivated the repeal of the Navigation Laws in 1850. Although there was strong opposition to statutory apprenticeships, there was no move to abolish apprenticeship in general, including theoretically voluntary systems such as that in the fishing industry. On the other hand, when in 1882 it was suggested to Thomas Gray of the Board of Trade that the Payment of Wages Act had 'abolished the indenture altogether,' his response was:

That is following what seems to me to be the inevitable in all trades – that apprenticeships are gradually being abolished.¹⁵⁰

The Board of Trade recognised the utility of apprenticeship as a training scheme and as an opening for pauper boys with few other chances, but they were not convinced, as the smackowners argued, that it was vital to the continuance of the trade. Certainly, they were not sufficiently convinced to swim against the ideological tide of the day and make it compulsory.

¹⁴⁷ A. Smith, *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London, 1776), p224.

¹⁴⁸ Quoted in Lane, *Apprenticeship in England*, p241.

¹⁴⁹ Dunlop, *English Apprenticeship*, pp243-5.

¹⁵⁰ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 31.

Chapter 6

Political Influences

The relationship between government and the fishing industry changed fundamentally between 1850 and 1914. Fishing became a significant enough industry to warrant systematic government enquiry and sometimes intervention. In this period, too, some of the key elements of British fisheries policy evolved and assumed the form that, by and large, they maintained for the best part of a century.

Initially, the fishing industry was regulated by the same legislation as merchant shipping, although the vessels used were often too small to fall under the terms of certain acts. Compulsory apprenticeship, for example, applied only to vessels of 80 tons or above, at a time when few fishing vessels were larger than 40 tons. When the Navigation Laws were abolished, the 1854 Merchant Shipping Act, in addition to various local customs and by-laws, covered the fishing industry. These local regulations were abolished under the 1868 Sea Fisheries Act, which attempted to apply *laissez-faire* principles to fishing, keeping regulation to a bare minimum of rules designed to keep trawlers and vessels employing passive catching methods apart. However, *laissez-faire* in fishing proved unworkable, because as the industry grew it threw up conflicts that only government was able to resolve. Amongst these was the issue of labour relations, which became pressing after modifications to the 1854 Merchant Shipping Act under the 1880 Merchant Seamen (Payment of Wages and Ratings) Act, the consequences of which are discussed below. In response, the Merchant Shipping (Fishing Boats) Act of 1883 made further modifications to the 1854 Act. Under the 1883 legislation, crew lists were introduced for fishing vessels of 25 tons and above, certificates of competence were mandated for skippers and various measures were put in place to regulate the relationship between master and apprentice, including greater supervision by Board of Trade superintendents and a new form of indenture. A further Fishing Boats Act in 1886 extended certificates of competence to second hands. Finally, the Merchant Shipping Act of 1894 revised and updated the 1854 Act in many areas. Although on the whole this Act contained little that was entirely new, it did include some fresh

provisions relating to fishing, including the introduction of a slightly revised apprenticeship indenture.

This chapter examines the interaction of government and fisheries, and sets the apprenticeship system and legislation governing it in this context. It then goes on to examine the emergence of political pressure from within the fishing workforce and the extent to which smackowners attempted to use apprenticeship as a device to neutralise and to undermine organised labour.

i. Government and the Fishing Industry

Fisheries have long had considerable political significance. Fishing provides food, the supply of which has usually interested governments; it generates conflicts between resource users, which have often necessitated mediation between conflicting parties, and fishermen have long been seen as a workforce with potential strategic utility. The first known reference to a trawl net in Britain dates from 1376, in a petition presented to King Edward III requesting that the 'wondyrchoun,' as it was known, be banned because of its wasteful destructiveness and the damage it caused to marine life in the river.¹ In the sixteenth century, a range of mercantilist laws enforced the eating of fish on 152 days per year, 'Political Lent,' to generate demand for fish and increase the numbers of fishermen, who were seen as a strategic reserve for the Navy.² In the eighteenth century, certain fishermen were exempt from impressment because of their utility as food suppliers, although the need of the Navy for skilled seamen sometimes led them to ignore their protections.³ In these three examples, the potential political significance of fishing, and sometimes the need to balance the demand for fishermen's skills against the need for the food they provided, are very apparent. Broadly speaking, these three considerations conditioned the relationship between government and fisheries until well into the nineteenth century. In some respects they still do, despite the change in the relationship in the second half of that century.

¹ Robinson, *Trawling*, p15.

² G. Jackson, 'State Concern for the Fisheries, 1485-1815,' in Starkey *et al* (eds), *England's Sea Fisheries*, p47. Dyson, *Business*, p41.

³ Robinson, *Yorkshire Coast*, p25.

Trawling had been the subject of complaints by other fishermen since the fourteenth century. In the early nineteenth century, as trawl fishermen began working from new ports, such as Great Yarmouth and Scarborough, complaints about the use of trawls multiplied. Early trawling ventures were met with hostility and sometimes violence from local line and drift fishermen who feared the destruction of their livelihoods, culminating in the stabbing of a visiting trawlerman at Scarborough in 1832.⁴ As the trawl fishery expanded, its opponents became still more vocal and an organised campaign to abolish it, or at least restrict it, got under way in 1862. It was alleged that trawlers had fished out the Channel and the southern North Sea, and were now being forced further and further north.⁵ This campaign was countered by a campaign in support of trawling, centred on the ports of Hull and Brixham. This spurred Palmerston's government into setting up the Royal Commission on Sea Fisheries in 1863. The environmental questions this addressed have been noted above, as has the fact that the Commission saw no good environmental grounds to justify restrictions on fishing. However, the Royal Commission was as much about politics as it was about fish stocks: all three of its members were committed free trade advocates, and inevitably this coloured their conclusions. Limited understanding of marine biology and strong, even dogmatic, economic opinions were combined in a report that Barback described as 'the true and final apotheosis of classical *laissez-faire*.'⁶ Its principal recommendation was:

We advise that all Acts of Parliament which profess to regulate, or restrict, the modes of fishing pursued in the open sea be repealed; and that unrestricted freedom of fishing be permitted hereafter.⁷

The report's recommendations, except that which called for systematic collection of statistics, were translated into practice in the Sea Fisheries Act of 1868. Freedom of fishing was enshrined in law. However, this rapidly proved unsustainable for two reasons. In the first place, despite the confidence expressed in 1863-6 that the

⁴ Robinson, *Trawling*, pp15 & 21.

⁵ *Grimsby Free Press*, 16 January 1863.

⁶ Barback, *Political Economy*, p17.

⁷ BPP 1866 XVI, R.C. on Sea Fisheries, pcvii.

fisheries were inexhaustible it quickly became apparent that they were not. Within a decade of the Act being passed the government was forced to set up an enquiry into stock depletion in inshore fisheries, which was the first of several enquiries into the declining health of fish stocks before 1914.

Secondly, conflicts between users of fishing grounds became increasingly common and serious. The 1878 enquiry found that such conflicts fell into four main categories: trawlers against seine netters, drifters against trawlers and *vice versa*, and liners against trawlers. The most common of these were that trawlers frequently cut through the nets of drifters and swept away long lines, especially on inshore grounds worked intensively by converted paddle tugs. Several inshore fishermen, especially on the East Coast, expressed a desire to see trawling done away with altogether, or at least banned from inshore waters. At least one witness argued that trawlers should be kept twenty to 25 miles offshore.⁸ Many witnesses argued that the provisions in the 1868 Act intended to keep trawlers and drifters apart were inadequate, and that although in theory they had legal redress against damage done by trawlers, the cost and trouble of pursuing a case through the courts were too great to make it worthwhile.⁹ The report acknowledged the damage done by trawling, conceded it might be banned in some inshore areas and made recommendations on improving lights so that drifters and trawlers should clash less often. Well-intentioned though this was, it was not sufficient and complaints of injury done by trawlers to liners and drifters continued.

Inshore fishermen, and to a lesser extent drift-net fishermen, faced problems with trawlers on two fronts. In the first place, there was the fact that trawlers frequently damaged their gear; in the second, they lacked a viable means of redress against damage, and a political means to advance their interests. Inshore fisheries, by their nature, were based in geographically dispersed, often isolated small settlements, with men of limited means pursuing different species with a variety of gear types. When they spoke at enquiries into fish stocks and conflicts between fishers they were politely listened to and sometimes was action taken in their favour,

⁸ BPP 1878-9 XVII, Report on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, pp420-5.

⁹ See for example evidence of Andrew Taylor, Cullercoats. BPP 1878 XVII, Report on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, p370.

but they lacked a coherent voice and had no permanent organisation to represent them.

The trawling smackowners of the Humber ports and similar places, on the other hand, had no such difficulties. The fishery they pursued was concentrating in larger ports, and the leading trawler owners in those ports were wealthy and influential men. Moreover, their geographical proximity and the close networks of contacts amongst themselves made it easy for them to form a united front. At the 1878-9 Enquiry, a succession of Hull and Grimsby smackowners, almost without exception, advanced precisely the same arguments about fish stocks and blamed drift-net fishermen for getting in the way of the trawlers.¹⁰ At the 1882 enquiry, it was evident that leading Grimsby smackowners Henry Smethurst and Carl Magnus Mundahl had agreed beforehand what they were to say,¹¹ perhaps unsurprisingly, given that Mundahl was Smethurst's son in law. At the 1891 Royal Commission on Labour, the fishing interest was represented by trawling trade unionist Reuben Manton, and at the 1907 enquiry into the supply of boy labour to merchant shipping, Charles Hellyer, who spoke at virtually every enquiry into fishing from the late 1870s until the First World War, represented the fishing industry. The trawling interest had a few highly influential figures who acted as its spokesmen whenever the opinion of the trade was sought. Moreover, it was possessed of a few influential permanent organisations that existed to advance its interests. Smackowners' associations existed in all of the major trawling ports, two examples being the Hull smackowners' Fisheries Protection League, later the Hull Fishing Vessel Owners' Association, and the Grimsby Smackowners' Association. These were established to advance the smackowners' interests not only against organised labour – of which more below – and against other participants in the fish trades, but to the government. In 1882 the National Sea Fisheries Protection Association was founded, which primarily represented the trawling interest; most of its affiliated companies were based in major trawling ports, and most of them were involved in trawler ownership,

¹⁰ BPP 1878-9 XVII, Report on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, pp402-9. See for example the evidence of A.K. Rollitt, Henry Smethurst, John Gidley and James Alward.

¹¹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq2,284-5.

insurance or the sale of trawled fish.¹² Charles Hellyer, J.H. Robins and numerous other leading figures in Hull and Grimsby were Presidents of this Association in the first three decades of its existence. The National Sea Fisheries Protection Association was a powerful vehicle for advancing the interests of the trade; inshore fishermen, and even the driftermen of East Anglia, who pursued an extensive fishery but on a small-scale business basis, had no such organisation.

The leading trawling capitalists were, in the main, committed free-traders and hostile to government regulation. At almost every enquiry, but especially that of 1882, they grumbled about interference in the fishing industry, and warned anyone who would listen that even minor impositions such as the obligation to provide crew lists would be 'the means of harassing the business.'¹³ Few of them were overtly in favour of regulation, although many of the more pragmatic individuals, such as G.L. Alward of Grimsby, clearly recognised that it was inevitable and co-operated in the hope of persuading the committee to pass an Act as favourable to them, and as suitable for the unique circumstances of the fishing industry, as possible. Many of the Grimsby smackowners also realised that something had to be done about the apprenticeship system, and supported limited legislation to control its worst excesses. Most smackowners, however, resented any regulation of the fishing trade – or, rather, resented any government interference that was not perceived to be in their immediate interest. They were resentful of attempts to strengthen the position of apprentices, refused to open their books to men and arbitrators alike during the 1901 dispute at Grimsby and complained bitterly about legislation regarding navigation lights and the obligation to keep clear of drifters.¹⁴ However, they advocated legislation to control overfishing, were very happy to accept government support during disputes over fishing in the territorial waters of other nations and were willing to co-operate with attempts to improve the collection of sea fisheries statistics. Most strikingly, Humber smackowners called for a training ship to be placed at their disposal for the housing of apprentices who could not be trusted ashore. This idea was first aired at the 1882 enquiry by Carl Magnus Mundahl, who

¹² Aflalo, *Sea Fishing Industry*, pp119-120.

¹³ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q102.

¹⁴ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 31.

in proposing the scheme said he felt that 'the government ought to assist us with regard to the apprentices,' but proceeded to say, 'I like the fishing trade to be able to conduct their affairs as any other trade and not be interfered with.'¹⁵ In other words, Mundahl and his ilk were happy for the government to act, provided it did roughly what they wanted. The same attitude came across nearly a quarter of a century later, when Charles Hellyer advocated a similar scheme at an enquiry into boy labour at sea, although wholly without success.¹⁶ It is not, therefore, strictly accurate to describe smackowners as opponents of government intervention. Like many businessmen, including merchant shipowners, they were strongly opposed to attempts to restrict their activities, but not at all averse to government action which would benefit them.

ii. Apprenticeship and Legislation

Apprenticeship represented something of an exception to the generally constructive relationship between government and the fishing industry. Apprenticeship ran counter to the generally liberalising approach to labour laws that successive governments pursued in the 1860s and 1870s, with the repeal of the Master and Servant Acts in 1875 and, in maritime industries, the Payment of Wages and Ratings Act of 1880. It was also regarded by many in government, including those in the Board of Trade who oversaw fisheries, as an outdated institution.

The Local Government Board, responsible for enquiring into the circumstances of pauper apprentices, initiated investigations of the apprenticeship system at Grimsby in response to allegations of cruelty and mistreatment. The first report, in 1872, led to no action, but port authorities at Grimsby, with the support of smackowners, implemented some of the recommendations of the second in 1879, including greater supervision of masters and apprentices by Board of Trade officials. Legislation was required to enforce many of these provisions nationally, however, especially those relating to certification of skippers and mates and written crew agreements, and work began on preparing draft clauses of a bill to regulate fishing

¹⁵ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq2,314-9 & 2,339.

¹⁶ BPP 1907 LXXV, Report on the Supply and Training of Boy Seamen, Minutes, qq5,122-231.

labour. The effects of the Payment of Wages Act hastened the process, and the outcry over the murders of Hull apprentices Bill Papper and Peter Hughes in 1882 finally precipitated the setting up of a full, national enquiry into labour in the fisheries. It was at this enquiry that the draft clauses were debated, and modified to form the basis of the 1883 Merchant Shipping (Fishing Boats) Act.¹⁷

To some extent, this represented a genuine attempt to reform a situation that was clearly unacceptable to both Parliament and public opinion. On the other hand, smackowners generally received a very friendly hearing from the committee, and the resulting legislation reflected their wishes to a great extent. Far from any moves to abolish the apprenticeship system, the resulting legislation was gradualist and compromising and sought to support it, whilst checking some of its worst abuses.

Until 1883, there were no laws relating specifically to apprenticeship in the fishing industry, and it was governed by the general laws of the land relating to apprenticeship, and by the customs of the industry. Apprentices were bound on the standard seafaring apprenticeship indenture, the special provisions relating to fishing being entered by hand. Even after 1883, salvage payments were usually entered as 'according to the custom of the port.' However, as in many other industries over the previous century, custom was increasingly replaced by written contract as employers sought to end customary rights and perquisites that impacted upon profits, and to extend legal control over employees. Capitalisation, and the widening gulf between capital and labour, weakened personal connections between employer and employed, rendering verbal contracts between them inadequate or non-existent. Increasing numbers of workers, many new to the industry and not imbued with its customs and traditions, had to be controlled and disciplined and rising levels of literacy made written contracts more feasible and desirable.

In fishing, this began to happen from the 1870s. Written crew agreements were 'in general use' among the larger operators at Great Yarmouth and elsewhere by the early 1880s,¹⁸ although none were used at Ramsgate or, in all probability,

¹⁷ Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices*, pp31-2; BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendices 31, 37-46.

¹⁸ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q3,925a.

other smaller ports.¹⁹ Many of the larger owners at Hull and Grimsby questioned by the 1882 enquiry were not averse to their statutory introduction, although some, including Henry Tooze, quoted above, regarded them as undue interference. Wage disputes were common, although again the trade was beginning to regulate itself with the use of written 'settling sheets' at Grimsby.²⁰ In many ports, smackowners' associations were issuing certificates of competence to skippers. Although useful in weeding out incompetent skippers, the system lent itself to abuse, favouritism and the promotion of compliant men:

The holders of these certificates complain ... that the power of granting and dealing with them is entirely in the hands of the smackowners, and that it is exercised in an informal and arbitrary manner, and they strongly urge that it should be exercised by a more independent authority.²¹

Under the Merchant Shipping (Fishing Boats) Act of 1883, the power of granting certificates was given to the Board of Trade.

Contractualisation of labour relations was therefore increasing within the industry and the provisions of the Fishing Boats Act should be seen as an extension and a consolidation of this trend. That it was limited to the most heavily capitalised end of the trade, and that with the highest proportion of casual labourers, is made clear in a letter from the Board of Trade to Brixham smackowners, which commented that:

The Board of Trade [are] fully aware that regulations in force and necessary for Grimsby and Hull trawlers are wholly unnecessary in the case of many other trawlers.²²

The letter went on to explain that the rule exempting trawlers of less than 25 tons from the regulations, and the special provision for trawlers making voyages of less than a week in duration (as most Brixham trawlers and those from other small ports usually did) had been devised for this reason. The legislation of 1883, 1886 and

¹⁹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q5,243.

²⁰ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q1,782.

²¹ BPP 1883 XVIII, Report on the System of Deep Sea Trawl Fishing in the North Sea, p441.

²² *Exeter Flying Post*, 28 November 1883.

1894 relating to apprenticeship should therefore be viewed in the light of this increasing contractualisation of labour in the leading sector of the fisheries.

The fishing industry was also affected by the general liberalisation of employment law in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, beginning with the repeal of the Master and Servant Acts. These had been amended in 1867, in response to trade union pressure, to remove some of their most 'objectionable' features, such as the ability of magistrates to hear cases in private in their own homes. The 1867 amendment also restricted imprisonment for breach of contract to 'aggravated' cases.²³ However, the fundamental inequality in the law remained: breach of contract on the part of the worker remained a criminal offence, whilst an employer in breach of contract was liable only to civil penalties. The issue resurfaced in the early 1870s, and under the influence of a House of Commons now 'more thoroughly representative of big industrial capital and more sensitive to the demands of the now partially enfranchised workers,'²⁴ the law was repealed against limited opposition. Its use had mainly been confined to small employers: with Parliament now more representative of large-scale capital, it was unlikely to be looked upon as a priority.

Liberalisation of employment law was extended to merchant seamen with the Merchant Seamen (Payment of Wages and Ratings) Act of 1880. Seafarers had long been subject to criminal penalties for breach of contracts: the Act for the Better Regulation and Governance of the Merchants Service of 1729 had specified criminal penalties for desertion and absenteeism, including forfeiture of pay and committal to a house of correction, with hard labour.²⁵ These, and numerous other regulations, were incorporated in the Merchant Shipping Acts of 1850 and 1854. Under Section 246 of the 1854 Act, deserters could be arrested without a warrant, conveyed aboard their vessels and held there or in a place of detention whilst they awaited trial. It was these provisions that were amended by the 1880 Act, which repealed Section 246 of the 1854 Act and thereby abolished the powers of arrest without warrant and

²³ BPP 1866 XIII, S.C. on Master and Servant, Report, p2; Simon, 'Master and Servant,' pp171 & 185.

²⁴ Simon, 'Master and Servant,' p199.

²⁵ Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, p121.

summary detention. It also allowed seamen or apprentices to give 48 hours' notice of intention to absent themselves from duty, thus exempting themselves from a charge of desertion.²⁶ This liberalisation of the law relieved the worker from criminal penalties for absence from duty and was in some ways analogous to the relaxation and then repeal of the Master and Servant Acts. However, the provisions of the Payment of Wages Act applied only ashore, and merchant seamen remained liable to criminal penalties for disobedience to orders and refusal to work at sea until the second half of the twentieth century. Seafarers were strategically important and highly mobile, which led the state to take an interest in controlling them: if economic pressure was not enough to keep them to their contracts, judicial coercion was kept available as an alternative.

In merchant shipping, the effect of the Payment of Wages Act was limited. There were relatively few apprentices to be affected by it, and in any case it left in force the provisions of the 1854 Act (themselves based on far older legislation) which allowed for the forfeiture of any personal effects a deserter left aboard, as well as any pay owing to him. Moreover, the 48-hour notice period gave time enough for shipowners to engage substitutes for men who absented themselves, which 'was doubtless the intention of the framers of the clause.'²⁷ Little has been written on the effect of the Payment of Wages Act on merchant shipping, which suggests that it was not great, and there were few complaints by shipowners that it encouraged desertion. The situation in the fishing industry was very different. Labour was in short supply at the largest ports, and because of this the labour force consisted in large measure of apprentices who had neither property nor wages to forfeit. In the fishing industry, the effect was profound and, from the point of view of the smackowners, disastrous. As the 1882 report put it:

The result of this legislation ... was that the hands, on becoming aware that imprisonment could no longer be inflicted for deserting ... proceeded to break their engagements (whether articles of apprenticeship or other agreements) in large numbers ... and they have done this with impunity, inasmuch as the necessary delay in procuring a warrant gave

²⁶ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Report, p674.

²⁷ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Report, p676.

ample time for evading arrest, and the absence of power to detain gave them ample opportunities of getting away.²⁸

Smackowners were near unanimous in their view that the Payment of Wages Act had removed the control over their labour force – apprenticed and otherwise – that they had formerly exercised. Henry Tooze estimated that there were less than 100 apprentices in Hull in 1882, compared with 1,200 before 1880 and, nationwide, the Committee felt that the number of apprentices had dropped to less than a quarter of its pre-1880 level.²⁹ Nor was the problem confined only to the large ports employing a high proportion of apprentices: smackowners at Brixham, Ramsgate and Lowestoft all complained of rising desertion rates and, in some instances, apprentices standing on the quay watching their masters sail but, knowing they were immune from prosecution, refusing to go aboard. Nor was the problem confined to apprentices. Casual hands were also free to leave their employment at will, whereas previously Section 246 of the 1854 Act also covered them once they had agreed to sail. This allowed them to desert at short notice, and gave rise to the complaints among smackowners that casual hands were playing off smackowners against one another in an attempt to bid up wages. Nor was the problem confined to the trawl fishery: in Great Yarmouth it was pointed out in 1882 that the majority of cases of desertion since the Payment of Wages Act had actually occurred in the herring fishery.³⁰ Clearly, then, the fishing industry faced a more generalised labour dispute than just the mass desertion of trawling apprentices complained of by smackowners. Although they were the primary concern, the 1882 enquiry was not only about apprentices. General labour relations and safety at sea were also covered.

Desertion reduced the proportion of a vessel's time spent in productive activity, as it usually caused delays whilst deserters were recovered or replaced, and smacks frequently missed the tide and had to linger for a further twelve hours, consuming stores and paying the crew whilst they sat idle. The secretary of the Great Yarmouth Steam Tug Company and two 'smack and fishing boat [insurance] clubs'

²⁸ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Report, p676.

²⁹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Report, p676 & Minutes, q61.

³⁰ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q3,153.

handed in a return of losses from vessels associated with his clubs between 1880 and 1882. In that time, 134 hands had deserted from 32 vessels, entailing a total loss to the owners of £2,649 14s 10d.³¹

However, there is some evidence to suggest that the effect of the Payment of Wages Act has been overstated. At some ports, including Grimsby and Ramsgate, recruitment of apprentices actually rose in the years following 1880. In Grimsby there were legal reasons for this – discussed below – but in other ports it is hard to see why smackowners should increase their recruitment of apprentices if they had no more control over them than casual hands, the employment of whom entailed fewer obligations. In Hull, the Payment of Wages Act had limited effect on recruitment, as Table 6.1 shows.

Table 6.1
Annual Recruitment of Apprentices in Hull, 1875-1885

Year	Recruitment	Year	Recruitment
1875	339	1881	161
1876	408	1882	86
1877	494	1883	66
1878	408	1884	95
1879	310	1885	83
1880	227		

Source: PRO, BT150; Annual Reports of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries.

A downward trend had set in from 1877 and continued steadily until 1883, with the rate of decline actually slowing after 1880.³² It would seem, then, that rather than causing the decline in apprenticeship the Payment of Wages Act merely reinforced a decline that was taking place anyway. Moreover, there is some evidence to suggest that the rise in desertion consequent upon the Payment of Wages Act was neither as severe nor as universal as it is often held to have been.

³¹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 20.

³² Wilcox, *Thesis*, p46.

Table 6.2
Desertion Rates Among Apprentices Recruited in 1875 and 1880,
at Selected Ports

Port	Recruitment 1875	Percentage of Apprentices Absconding	Recruitment 1880	Percentage of Apprentices Absconding
Brixham	45	17.8	48	8.3
Hull	339	20.7	227	1.3
Grimsby	386	18.4	285	3.6
Lowestoft	39	15.4	41	17.1
Ramsgate	72	11.1	109	19.3
London	34	20.6	21	19.1
Great Yarmouth	18	5.6	29	10.3
Harwich	11	9.1	32	3.1
Average		14.8		10.3

Source: PRO, BT150.

It should be stressed that Table 6.2 covers only apprentices who are marked as having absconded in the Apprentice Registers, who presumably were only those who were never recovered. However, it is still significant that a greater proportion of boys who served their apprenticeship under the 'old' system of imprisonment deserted than those who served under a regime where they could, apparently, desert with impunity. It appears that, serious as the loss of control over apprentices consequent upon the Payment of Wages Act was, it was not quite as serious as the smackowners claimed. On the other hand, the loss of legal redress against deserting apprentices, which had become one of the main pillars of the system in the largest ports, undoubtedly undermined apprenticeship. Once it had become far more difficult to retrieve apprentices who had absconded, smackowners ceased to take them.

The exception was the port of Grimsby, where the apprenticeship system remained strong until the twentieth century. Central to this was the interpretation of the Payment of Wages Act by Grimsby magistrates, who claimed that Section 243 of the 1854 Merchant Shipping Act, which specified imprisonment as a penalty for

'wilful disobedience' to orders applied ashore as well as at sea, and therefore applied to the command to join ship. The effect of this becomes clear when the numbers of committals of apprentices to Hull Prison under the Merchant Shipping Acts from Hull and Grimsby for 1878-1882 are compared.

Table 6.3
Committals of Hull and Grimsby Apprentices to Hull Prison, 1878-1882

Year Ending	Hull	Grimsby
1 August 1879	269	Not stated
1 August 1880	284	177
1 August 1881	15	159
1 August 1882	3	121

Source: BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee Report, Appendix 6.

Note: Grimsby apprentices were also sent to prisons in Lincolnshire. However, evidence from the 1886 Annual Report suggests that the 1882 figure at least does represent the full number of imprisonments of apprentices in that year.

It is apparent from Table 6.3 that, whereas prosecutions of apprentices for desertion at Hull declined rapidly after 1880, those at Grimsby did not. Local conditions were the reason for this. Grimsby owed its growth and status to fishing. As a result, its political life was dominated by a 'fishocracy' of smackowners and fish merchants, and so was its magistracy. In 1881, eight of the town's seventeen magistrates were financially interested in fishing and Grimsby, unlike Hull, had no stipendiary magistrate.³³ Alderman and smackowner Harrison Mudd toasted the magistrates at a banquet in 1890, congratulating them on their 'excellent administration of justice,' and on preserving the apprenticeship system at Grimsby whilst it had died out in most other ports.³⁴ Certainly, the magistrates had done the smackowners a service, but their 'justice' was almost certainly illegal. William Holt, solicitor and clerk to the magistrates at Great Yarmouth, was adamant that 'you are expressly prevented

³³ Gillett, *History of Grimsby*, p253.

³⁴ Gillett, *History of Grimsby*, p273.

from imprisoning a man for that [refusal to join ship],³⁵ which was the view taken by the magistracy at every port except Grimsby. A complaint often raised against the Master and Servant Acts had been that the sympathies of the magistracy lay with the masters. Magistrates were generally drawn from the same middle-class social background and were themselves frequently employers of labour, sometimes even in the same line of business as, and personally acquainted with, an employer bringing a prosecution against a workman. Hay gives the example of south Staffordshire, where local Justices of the Peace, often churchmen but sometimes employers, worked closely with manufacturers in Master and Servant cases. Appeals to paternalism were the main means of keeping order; when that failed, the criminal law was readily used instead.³⁶ Similarly, as the vertical ties of the paternalistic apprenticeship system broke down in the fishing industry, masters resorted to the law that in Grimsby, because of their status and importance within the town's civic hierarchy, they were in a good position to enforce to their benefit.

The Government was not sympathetic to demands from smackowners for the reinstatement of summary detention. Joseph Chamberlain, President of the Board of Trade and committed free-trade advocate, berated a delegation of smackowners thus:

Then you mean to tell me that one-fourth of the whole of the people engaged in your fishing industry break away from their engagements with their employers. Surely such a state of affairs does not exist in any other trade or business. What can be the reason of it? Either the men do not like your bargains, or they must be the very worst class of men to be found. What you say is this – that unless you have the power of summarily taking a man up and putting him in prison you cannot get him to carry out his bargain – that you cannot get men to work except under threat of imprisonment. That would be reducing matters to a state of serfdom.³⁷

Chamberlain also commented that, when he was an employer, the idea of compelling men to remain at work 'never entered [his] head.' In point of fact, until 1875 Chamberlain as an employer could have resorted to the Master and Servant laws to

³⁵ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q3,103.

³⁶ D. Hay, 'Patronage, Paternalism and Welfare: Masters, Workers and Magistrates in Eighteenth Century England,' in *International Labour and Working Class History* 53 (1998).

³⁷ *Eastern Morning News*, 22 July 1882.

do exactly that. That it was looked on as a form of 'serfdom' only seven years after their repeal perhaps illustrates how anachronistic the Master and Servant laws had become by the time of their repeal and how the climate of political opinion had shifted against the use of criminal sanctions for breach of employment contract. It is worth noting, however, that Chamberlain made no reference to merchant shipping, where criminal penalties continued to be inflicted for desertion. The 1883 Merchant Shipping (Fishing Boats) Act applied these regulations to fishermen as well.

If the government was not prepared to do quite what the smackowners wanted, nor were they keen to damage the fishing industry by introducing legislation directly harmful to its interests. Exemptions from the provisions of the Factory Acts on the employment of women and children were retained, for example, so as not to damage the migratory herring fishery, which depended to a great extent on the labour of women to gut and pack the fish.³⁸ With regard to apprenticeship, Thomas Gray, an 'unrepentant free trader,'³⁹ was at pains to stress at a meeting of Hull smackowners in 1882, in preparation for the full enquiry, that:

I should wish you to understand, and it is Mr Chamberlain's desire that I should mention this, that he is not proceeding in this matter in a way to harassing any interest [but] ... solely because it appears to him and his advisers, as it appears to you, gentlemen, that some regulation of the deep-sea fishing trade is necessary, not only in the interest of the boys, but of the owners themselves, and also of the British flag, and of decency and order.⁴⁰

Although apprenticeship in general was not looked upon with great favour by government, abolishing it outright would have soured relations between government and industry and probably damaged the fisheries. However, many in the industry were prepared to accept legislation aimed specifically at the fisheries to bring the system under better control. When G.L. Alward suggested at the 1882 enquiry that, 'it would be most desirable to give us a fishing Act all to ourselves,'⁴¹ this was what

³⁸ Fryer, 'Relations of the State,' p205.

³⁹ D.M. Williams, 'State Policy and Maritime Business in Britain, 1860-1914,' in R. Ertesvåg, D.J. Starkey & A.T. Austbø (eds), *Maritime Industries and Public Intervention* (Stavanger, 1995), p65.

⁴⁰ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 31.

⁴¹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q1,876.

he had in mind and with this the government was happy to co-operate. Legislation was informed by the 1882 Sea Fishing Trade Committee, which shared the smackowners' stated belief in the efficacy of apprenticeship. As the report said:

We coincide with the opinion repeatedly expressed before us that the condition of the apprentice, on the whole, is more satisfactory than that of the lad employed as a weekly hand in the same description of vessel. He is, as a rule, better clothed, fed, housed, and looked after; and where the lad conducts himself respectably, and faithfully fulfils the conditions of his indenture, we believe that in the great majority of cases his success in his profession is assured.⁴²

Given the rates of death and desertion amongst apprentices, this was decidedly optimistic. However, the committee did not share the view of some that apprenticeship was essential to the continuation of the trade, and recommended legislation to strengthen and control it, in line with the scheme trialled at Grimsby in 1879.⁴³ This gradualist approach, which aimed to regulate the apprenticeship system rather than abolish it, informed the 1883 Merchant Shipping Act. This set labour in the fishing industry firmly within the jurisdiction of the 1854 Merchant Shipping Act, and modifications to its provisions under further Acts in 1886 and 1894.

The 1883 Act sought to redress the masters' most fundamental grievance – that they had lost control over their workforce. As one of the 1882 Committee's recommendations had it:

That the provisions of the ... [Payment of Wages] Act of 1880, by which a seaman or apprentice may give 48 hours' notice ... of his intention to absent himself from duty, shall be repealed so far as respects apprentices, inasmuch as it appears to us to be at variance with the spirit of articles of apprenticeship.⁴⁴

In other words, the Act actually aimed to weaken the position of apprentices *vis-à-vis* their masters by reinstating some of the restrictions on them that had existed prior to 1880. The trade-off was that masters were to be under stricter control and have

⁴² BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Report, p679.

⁴³ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Report, pp672-3.

⁴⁴ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Report, p679.

more obligations regarding the welfare of their apprentices. In the end, however, the provisions of the Fishing Boats Act were fairly feeble. Concessions were obtained from smackowners, but no great restrictions were placed upon employment of apprentices and the system was allowed to continue much as it had before.

Legislation in the 1880s and 1890s did improve conditions, although the advent of steam vessels with better accommodation and a safer working environment, and the palliative efforts of philanthropists, also played a part. Legislatively, there was little or nothing that could be done about working hours, food and living conditions aboard the smacks, or about the monotony, danger and physical hardship of the occupation, but in areas such as mistreatment, lodgings ashore and disputes over spending money the 1883 Act, in particular, appears to have had some effect. Boswell argues that there can be 'not the slightest doubt' that the appointment of a local Board of Trade officer at Grimsby reduced the extent of mistreatment of apprentices.⁴⁵ Although this may overstate the case, it is certainly significant that far fewer cases of severe mistreatment arose after the 1883 Act. Moreover, local superintendents did intervene when boys complained of excessive punishment or bullying, which must have prevented instances of antagonism between crews escalating. There were also fewer complaints about apprentices being lodged in insalubrious places, and certainly the Grimsby superintendent did exercise his power to compel masters to provide decent accommodation on several occasions.⁴⁶ The precise extent of these improvements, however, is impossible to quantify.

However, legislation also increased the costs of apprenticeship. Several Grimsby firms spent large – though unspecified – sums of money on building barracks for their apprentices.⁴⁷ Legislation also restricted the master's freedom to employ his apprentices as he liked, or as was most profitable to him. Prior to the 1883 Act, masters who had more apprentices than they could employ 'made a trade' of hiring their apprentices to other masters, a practice which the 1883 Act made illegal by stipulating that an apprentice could only be employed on a vessel in which

⁴⁵ Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices*, p107.

⁴⁶ Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices*, p129.

⁴⁷ PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report, p7.

his master held at least a one eighth share.⁴⁸ Finally, the provisions of the 1883 Act that encouraged apprentices to save money were not fully observed anywhere, and barely observed at all in smaller ports. Of a sample of 50 Grimsby apprentices indentured between 1880 and 1886, only twelve made use of the savings bank, and Boswell shows that use of the savings scheme fell further in the second half of the decade. In 1875, 89 of the 200 apprentices who attended a tea for fisherlads at Fish Street Chapel in Hull had had deposits in the savings bank.⁴⁹ This does not suggest that the savings scheme was a conspicuous success, although the comparison is perhaps not an entirely fair one since the Hull apprentices who took the trouble to attend the tea would have been to some extent a self-selecting group of the more conscientious characters.

Seafarers were a much legislated-for occupational group in the second half of the nineteenth century. In much the same way as fishing smackowners, shipowners were in general resentful of government intervention that was likely to cost them money, and legislation was 'resisted or at best reluctantly accepted.'⁵⁰ However, Williams argues that legislation was generally effective and that by the turn of the twentieth century British ships were safer and offered better conditions for crews than those of most other nations. In this respect, the fisheries legislation of the 1880s and 1890s can be seen as part of a wider, and successful, move towards a better-regulated shipping industry, and its effects were much the same. That said, it might be argued that in some respects the fishing industry offered less of a challenge to legislators since it was far smaller and employed fewer people working in a more restricted geographical area, albeit often in more dangerous conditions. Moreover, persistent problems of merchant shipping, such as unsafe cargoes, unseaworthy vessels and poor food did not arise to the same extent in fishing. There were few complaints about the provisions provided aboard smacks, no dangerous deck cargoes and, although it was suggested that unseaworthy smacks were sometimes sent to sea, especially when profit margins were tight, on the whole fishing smacks were

⁴⁸ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, qq5,692-5,697; BPP 1883 VII, Merchant Shipping (Fishing Boats) Bill, Second Schedule, p432.

⁴⁹ NELRO 208/1/1 and 208/1/6. Registers of Grimsby Fishing Apprentices; Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices*, p136; *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 4 August 1875.

⁵⁰ Williams, 'State Policy and Maritime Business,' p62.

reckoned to 'compare very favourably ... with other vessels of the same size engaged in other trades.'⁵¹ Either way, fisheries legislation of the 1880s and 1890s fitted the general pattern of government intervention in maritime industries, in that it was part of the general liberalising trend in employment law at the time, it was undertaken with some reluctance by government and was not particularly radical in its recommendations. Although in some areas it was not closely observed, it does seem to have been broadly effective in improving safety and conditions.

If the 1883 Merchant Shipping (Fishing Boats) Act was partially successful in improving conditions, however, in its other aim, of encouraging and fostering the apprenticeship system, it was a failure. Great Yarmouth smackowners ceased to take apprentices almost completely after 1883, smackowners complaining to a Local Government Board inspector about the 'restrictions and obligations' that the 1883 Act imposed upon them, although it was also apparent from his report that changes in the supply of labour had much to do with the decline of apprenticeship. Similar remarks might be made about Hull. The provisions of the Act were enough, then, to discourage the continuation of apprenticeship in ports where the casual labour supply was becoming able to meet the industry's demands for labour. Although it prohibited employment of boys aged under sixteen unless they were either indentured or sailing under special agreement, this seems to have presented little problem in these ports: owners simply employed older hands, the availability of which again suggests that the labour shortage that had encouraged mass apprenticeship in the first place was lessening. As Boswell says,

Although it was not recognised at the time, the Act was passed too late for it to be truly beneficial for by the time its provisions became effective the apprenticeship system ... had already entered its decline.⁵²

Many of its provisions never became effective at all. Certainly, those pertaining to payments and the Seaman's Savings Bank, were ignored at Brixham and other small ports. As the Board of Trade acknowledged, the circumstances of apprentices at

⁵¹ BPP 1883 XVIII, Report on the System of Deep-Sea Trawl Fishing in the North Sea, p433.

⁵² Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices*, p37.

ports such as Brixham and Ramsgate were very different to those at Hull and Grimsby, and there was tacit acknowledgement that some of the rules were barely applicable in the former case.

Just as legislation to protect workers in land-based trades and in merchant shipping had often been received with a bad grace by employers, so the Fishing Boats Act was not universally popular with smackowners. Some Lowestoft owners complained bitterly and suggested they would transfer their vessels to the Belgian flag,⁵³ Hewett and Co of Yarmouth argued that the law was 'one-sided and unfair to the masters'⁵⁴ and stated that they would not take apprentices under it. Some smackowners even objected to being answerable to the Superintendent in wage disputes. Grimsby smackowner John Gidley was prosecuted and fined after he first ignored two summonses to attend, and then 'appeared at the office in a most abusive manner, cursed and swore, and said he positively refused for the Board of Trade, or anyone else, to attend at the office.'⁵⁵ Gidley's ill-tempered outburst reflected suspicion and resentment of government 'interference' on the part of a group of self-made entrepreneurs, who attributed their success to their own hard work and sound judgement. Interference in their affairs was something they were keen to avoid, whether it came from government or, as the next section explores, from within the ranks of their labour force.

iii. Political Pressure from the Workforce

Fishing, before the second half of the nineteenth century, had little tradition of labour organisation, mainly because there was no clear divide between capital and labour. Ownership was largely small-scale and dispersed, labour relations were personalised and those who were not owners usually worked on shares. Those who were not masters could hope to be in the foreseeable future: ownership was never easy to attain, but evidently enough people managed it for it to be seen as a possibility, which created a 'community of interest'⁵⁶ between smackowners and

⁵³ PRO MAF 12/2. Report of visit to fishing ports: Fishing Boats Act, 1887.

⁵⁴ PRO, MAF 12/20. Agreements with boys aged under 16.

⁵⁵ PRO, MAF 12/2. COMPLAINTS, OFFENCES Etc.: Prosecutions: payment of wages

⁵⁶ H. Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism* (London, 1987), p7.

crews. Those who were apprentices, in an apprenticeship system that at the time closely paralleled apprenticeship in artisan industries ashore, could see a clear progression from apprentice to journeyman, and on to master. All of this tended to militate against labour organisation and effective trade unionism.

By 1914, however, industrial action on a large scale was a feature of the fishing industry at most of the largest ports. This change was rooted in the concentration of the industry in fewer and more powerful hands, the consequent emergence of a much more visible gulf between a handful of wealthy fishing capitalists and the labouring majority for whom ownership and independence had become virtually impossible. The enforcement of fleeting and its associated dangers and hardships and the formation of occupational trawling communities bound together by horizontal ties of shared experience also served to divide employers and employed. Looking at the difference in labour relations between the Lowestoft and Yarmouth trawl fisheries in the 1880s, Lummis comments:

The difference in how industrial relations were handled is instructive and there can be little doubt of the crucial importance of the structure of ownership. For, whereas, at Yarmouth some 160 crews had the same employer and needed unity to resist exploitation, in Lowestoft there were few owners with more than two or three vessels and so the power of capital was as dispersed as the power of labour. Both employees and employers saw labour relationships in personal terms ... When capital is widely dispersed it is not only less easily perceived to be a *system*; it is less easily *managed* as a system.⁵⁷

In precisely the same terms can the difference in labour relations between the Humber ports and places such as Brixham, Harwich or Ramsgate be explained. There were disputes and occasional strikes at smaller ports, but the most serious conflicts emerged in ports where capital was increasingly concentrated in a few, powerful hands, and where fishermen were concentrating in working class 'occupational communities,' separated geographically and psychologically from their employers. Apprentices were bound to their masters by legal agreements which supposedly, should have fostered a close, paternal connection between them;

⁵⁷ Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, p32.

yet they worked alongside waged labour, often doing the worst jobs for the least money. Again, apprentices can be seen as occupying an uneasy position somewhere between free labour and bonded servitude, and as a major component of the labour force they were a significant factor in labour disputes in the industry all through the 1850-1914 period.

One crucial problem faced by smackowners in the second half of the nineteenth century was the disciplining of labour. Capitalisation, as in many other industries, entailed:

the conversion of labour ... into an efficient and disciplined factor of production: one that would respond to the technical requirements of the system, and also to the material incentives which in the medium and long run it would be able to offer.⁵⁸

In many industries, skilled workers proved more able to assert their customary rights and privileges, and to resist the 'discipline' of capitalism, than less skilled workers. Skilled workers, for instance, continued to observe 'Saint Monday,' well into the second half of the nineteenth century, in the case of artisans working in the metal trades in Sheffield.⁵⁹ Artisans and skilled labourers by definition possessed abilities and talents that employers found it difficult to find substitutes for, giving them greater autonomy than unskilled workers, and greater freedom to manage their own time. Fishermen were no exception to this, especially in the economic climate of the 1860s and 1870s, with the fishing industry growing rapidly and skilled labour at a premium. Attempts by employers to curb traditional perquisites and rights of fishermen were an ongoing source of conflict in the industry.

Time discipline was one such area of disagreement. Obviously, the rhythms of fishing depended much on wind and tide, so precise timekeeping of the sort imposed on factory workers was not possible, but attempts to clamp down on lateness and absenteeism were commonplace. In smaller ports, again, this was much less of an issue. Social pressure, a relatively small and cohesive workforce and the fact that, in most instances, crews consisted solely of sharemen (who had a direct

⁵⁸ J. Saville, *The Consolidation of the Capitalist State* (London, 1994), p14.

⁵⁹ Saville, *Consolidation*, p15.

interest in the success of the voyage) and apprentices, all militated against absenteeism on a large scale. They also ensured that formal sanctions against it were not needed. In Hull, however, as early as 1852 the Fisheries Protection Society – a smackowners' organisation – imposed a rule that 'any Master or Man leaving his vessel when on a tide-sail at Hull, or at any other port, or at sea, shall be suspended from any of the society's vessels for the term of one month.'⁶⁰ A further rule prohibited men from leaving their vessels whilst lying in the Humber waiting to discharge fish, which was a particular problem in Hull at this time because of the inadequacy of port facilities and consequent delays in landing. This was much resented by crews and a contributory factor to a strike in 1852.

By the 1880s, owners at all of the large ports had developed rules to curb various forms of absenteeism at sea and ashore. Skippers in many insurance clubs were banned from leaving their vessels at sea except in cases of strict necessity.⁶¹ For smacks of the Short Blue Fleet, the penalty for a 'broken voyage' was halved poundage payments to deter crews from returning early, which bore hard on those forced to return through damage.⁶² Under the 1883 Merchant Shipping Act, it was made explicit that failure to join a fishing vessel, or absenting oneself before being formally discharged, would be treated as desertion, leaving the offender liable to forfeiture of up to two weeks' wages, or to imprisonment.⁶³ Thus were fishermen brought under the disciplinary code imposed on merchant seamen by a series of statutes dating back to the early eighteenth century, and judicial coercion to labour extended from apprentices to all ranks of fishermen.

Perquisites were another area of conflict. Again, a comparison can be drawn with skilled labourers in other industries, such as the growing prohibitions in the first half of the nineteenth century on, for example, tailors taking home 'cabbage' (waste cloth) and shipwrights and other dock workers being allowed waste wood – 'chips' – and other sundry materials. In the fishing industry, fish was naturally enough the source of conflict. It was regarded, customarily, as a fisherman's right to give fish to

⁶⁰ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 22 April 1852.

⁶¹ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 24.

⁶² PRO, BT144. Crew lists for British Fishing Vessels.

⁶³ BPP 1883 VII, Merchant Shipping (Fishing Boats) Bill, pp418-9.

visitors, and to take away some for his own consumption. This was another customary right that the Hull Fisheries Protection Society's rules sought to curb, stipulating either exclusion from Society vessels for a month or prosecution for theft as penalties, although it was stated that, 'the Owners do not ... object to the Men taking a mess of fish home to their Families.'⁶⁴ By 1894, Lowestoft owners had formed a 'collective front of sorts' to address this practice, and issued a notice prohibiting men from taking fish from vessels between 6 p.m. and 9 a.m.. This was qualified by an assurance that there was no wish to prevent fishermen taking a little fish for themselves, and seems to have been aimed at the giving away of fish 'in a very free manner' to casual visitors.⁶⁵

Smackowners increasingly became conscious of the pecuniary loss to them that the customary privileges asserted by the men could entail, and took steps to curb them. There were further conflicts over stockerbait, a complex issue but generally rooted in the increasing commercial value of fish that had been considered unmarketable and therefore allowed to the crew, but which later acquired commercial value. There was, for example, a brief strike at Plymouth in January 1913 after smackowners decided to appropriate a proportion of the value of monkfish – once worthless, but by then in demand from fish fryers – for themselves. There was also a brief strike over stockerbait at Brixham in the 1880s.⁶⁶ The Great Grimsby Ice Company in 1894 began a system whereby liver money was paid to the owners and the men remunerated accordingly, ostensibly to stop 'dishonest second hands' appropriating the apprentices' liver money. A Board of Trade official noted on the letter that:

He speaks of the boys being defrauded ... but the sudden appearance of zeal is probably due to the idea that the opportunity is a good one for getting the perquisites of the men into the hands of the company.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 22 April 1852.

⁶⁵ Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, pp32-3.

⁶⁶ Aflalo, *Sea Fishing Industry*, p295.

⁶⁷ PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report. Letter from Charles Jeffs, in correspondence.

Given how keen owners were to gain control of perquisites, the cynicism of the anonymous civil servant was probably justified.

If the erosion of customary rights and perquisites was the first source of industrial conflict in the trawl fisheries, the other causes were equally familiar. Firstly, there was the issue of the share of profits accruing to capital and labour. Lummis argues that the adoption of the share system in the East Anglian drift fishery 'had the effect of neutralising the issue of the proportion of the product which should go to capital or to labour.'⁶⁸ In the sense that it obviated wage bargaining this was true of the trawl fishery: on the other hand, it could itself prove a point of conflict, usually when changed to increase the share of profits going to capital or to include certain costs previously borne by the owner alone in the crew's share. The steam capstan caused conflict of this type, since its cost was defrayed at some ports through modifications to the share system to allocate a share to the 'iron man.' Such was the case at Scarborough in 1887, when the shares system was altered to give the owner an extra 1.5% of gross profits on top of the five per cent already taken by the capstan. This provoked a brief strike that ended in a compromise, with the capstan's share increase being scrapped in return for the men paying a share of the fuel bill.⁶⁹ Resistance to steam capstans lasted into the twentieth century in Devon ports, because crews resented paying their shares.⁷⁰ Charging crews for the cost of nets could also cause conflict, as at Grimsby in 1880, when a 'gum slip' was attached to crew agreements detailing extra deductions, which provoked a strike, and at Great Yarmouth in 1887. However, the root cause of the 1887 Great Yarmouth dispute was that the owners were attempting to change the system of remuneration from one of wages and poundage to one of shares alone, thus offloading some of the risk of a bad trip onto the crews. The same motivation underlay the attempt by Grimsby trawler owners to alter the payment system in 1901, resulting in a lengthy dispute discussed below.

The next key cause of labour disputes was attempts on the part of capital to increase the intensity of the labour process via fleeting. Fears of this prompted

⁶⁸ Lummis *Occupation and Society*, p47.

⁶⁹ Robinson, *Yorkshire Coast*, pp94-5.

⁷⁰ Aflalo, *Sea Fishing Industry*, p271.

conflict early on, resistance among Hull fishermen to the use of ice in the 1850s being based on the fear that the owners wished to 'usurp and tyrannise' over crews, and keep them at sea for longer.⁷¹ However, ice was primarily a means of extending the elasticity of supply of fish by keeping it fresh for longer: the real device for increasing the intensity of the labour process was fleeting. Fleeting, which required comparatively large business units to operate effectively and therefore created a situation such as that at Yarmouth described by Lummis, caused conflict at an early stage. The exception to the impression given above of the fishery as an artisan occupation before 1850 is the Barking trawl fishery, where large concerns dominated the fishery from the early nineteenth century, and where fishermen were predominantly waged labourers. Barking was also the place where innovations such as ice and fleeting were introduced. The latter innovation provoked the first major strike in the fishing industry, in 1844.⁷² It was also the flashpoint for major strikes in Grimsby and Hull in 1880: the Grimsby dispute resulted in a victory for the men and winter fleeting was suspended, whereas the Hull strike, opposed by a stronger organisation of owners, resulted in defeat. Further disputes in Hull in 1883 and Grimsby in 1885 resulted in a compromise in Hull, with winter fleets being limited in size to reduce the danger of collisions and prevented from working on more dangerous grounds north of 55 degrees, but defeat for strikers in Grimsby.⁷³

Fleeting soured labour relations for several reasons. Fishermen disliked it because of:

The loss of working autonomy and judgement which subjected them to a routine similar to factory production.⁷⁴

In particular, this affected skippers who, when single-boating, were free to exercise their own judgement on where and when to fish. The power to exercise this judgement distinguished them from the rest of the crews, and created a divergence of interests that owners were able to exploit, for instance during the Fleetwood strike of

⁷¹ BPP 1866 XVI, R.C. on Sea Fisheries, Minutes, q8,525.

⁷² March, *Sailing Trawlers*, p144.

⁷³ Robinson, *Trawling*, pp78-81.

⁷⁴ Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, p22.

1920.⁷⁵ Fleeting subjected skippers to the same discipline as the rest of the labour force, making concurrent action between them more likely. On the other side of the divide, fleeting was only practicable where companies existed of sufficient size to provide ice, steam cutters, boxes and other necessaries. Many of these companies were mutual ventures owned between consortia of leading smackowners, or were sometimes major owners in themselves, the Great Grimsby Ice Company being a case in point. These large and highly visible concerns acted as foci for the discontent of the crews, and made collective action both more likely and often more effective. The principal reasons why fleeting caused conflict, however, lay in its effect on working conditions, and its inbuilt dangers. Conditions in the fleets are well documented,⁷⁶ but something of how fleeting increased the dangers inherent in fishing can be seen in figures presented to the Fisheries Exhibition in 1883 by the Duke of Edinburgh. Table 6.4 shows the death rates per 1,000 men per annum in the areas into which he divided the coast.

Table 6.4
Death Rates of English and Scottish Fishermen, 1883

District (Boundaries)	Deaths per 1,000 men
Hull (Berwick-upon-tweed to Cromer)	9.58
Harwich (Cromer to Dover)	11.31
Newhaven (Dover to Christchurch, including IoW)	0.75
Weymouth (Christchurch to St Ives)	2.26
Liverpool (St Ives to Solway Firth)	1.97
England	7.55
Scotland	1.8
Ireland	1.5
UK, excluding Channel Islands and Isle of Man	3.9

Source: Duke of Edinburgh, 'Notes on the Sea Fisheries and Fishing Population of the United Kingdom,' in *Fisheries Exhibition Literature*, vol. 4 (London, 1883).

⁷⁵ Thompson *et al*, *Living the Fishing*, pp69-70.

⁷⁶ See for example Dyson, *Business*, pp91-103; Mather, *Nor'ard of the Dogger*, pp14-53; Rule, 'Smacksmen,' pp383-411.

From Table 6.4 it is readily apparent that the districts containing the major fleeting ports of the east coast – Hull, Grimsby and Great Yarmouth – had much higher death rates than those where fleeting was not practised. The dangers of fleeting, especially those of boarding fish, and the risk of collisions when up to 100 smacks were working in close proximity, were instrumental in creating opposition to the practice. The second strike against fleeting in Hull, for example, was triggered by the Great Gale of March 1883, in which 250 fishermen are thought to have died, 180 of them from Hull, including sixteen apprentices.⁷⁷

None of the strikes of the 1880s gave rise to a permanent organisation of fishermen. Such unions as did exist were predominantly of the craft type, concerned with protecting the position of skippers and mates. These were moderate, desiring to be ‘co-partners’ with owners in fishing ventures, according to Reuben Manton of the National Federation of Fishermen,⁷⁸ and took little part in industrial action. Although some, such as the National Federation of Fishermen, aspired to nationwide membership, the difficulties of organising a national union were for the time being insuperable, and even the Federation was confined to the east coast.⁷⁹

The bulk of the casual hands remained unorganised except for brief periods during disputes. Such unions as they did form predated the ‘New Unionism’ movement of the late 1880s, but did bear some similarities to it. The new unions, such as the General Labourers’ Union, catered for the lower skilled and lower-paid, who had previously been far less organised than skilled workers, as did the fishing unions. Both also favoured more militant tactics, as opposed to the conciliatory approach of the craft unions. Both were also largely organisations of casual workers. However, there were crucial differences as well. Whereas the surge in union activity in the late 1880s was largely caused by an upturn in the trade cycle and falling unemployment, labour militancy in fishing was sparked by worsening conditions and attempts on the part of capital to reduce the proportion of the product

⁷⁷ Robinson, *Trawling*, p80; PRO, BT150.

⁷⁸ BPP 1894 XXXIV, R.C. on Labour, Minutes, q11,158.

⁷⁹ M.G. Barnard, ‘Trade Unionism in Grimsby’s Trawling Industry, 1850-1970,’ in D.J. Starkey, P. Holm, J.Th. Thor & B. Andersson (eds), *Politics and People in the North Atlantic Fisheries since 1485* (Hull, 2003), p108.

accruing to labour at a time when profit margins were tight.⁸⁰ Most smacksmen's unions were formed during periods of conflict and rarely lasted long once disputes were settled. The reasons for this were much the same in the 1880 as they were when Tunstall wrote of the difficulties of organising fishermen in the 1950s. Fishermen spent long periods of time at sea, with little time ashore to spare for union meetings and activities. Their individualism has often been remarked upon, and certainly acted as a hindrance to collective organisation, as did the fact that the hardship and unpredictability of their occupation 'tended to concentrate trawlermen's minds on the pleasures of the here and now.'⁸¹ Perhaps most importantly, the share system pitted each boat and crew against the others, even when fleeting, which demonstrates the limitations of the oft-made comparison between fleeting and the discipline of factory labour. Little of the labour militancy of the early 1880s therefore survived to give rise to a permanent organisation of fishermen, but it does go to show the extent to which smackowners in the 1880s were losing control of their workforces. Scarborough smackowner Henry Woodger perhaps spoke for many when he complained in 1883 that 'the management of the crews is ... vexatious,' giving this as a reason for wishing to leave the industry.⁸²

Apprentices were legally bound to their labour and therefore prohibited from striking. In the more traditional fisheries of Brixham and Ramsgate, the issue did not arise, because the combination of dispersed capital and a high proportion of sharemen ensured that labour disputes were usually settled domestically and rarely, if ever, spilled over into wider action. Unfortunately, little evidence survives of the role of apprentices in the 1844 Barking strike, which might have provided an instructive comparison. However, as early as 1852, smackowners attempted to break the Hull fishermen's strike using smacks manned entirely by apprentices,⁸³ although the strategy was evidently not successful. Nor is it at all apparent that apprentices were conspicuously successful as blacklegs in the strikes of the early

⁸⁰ See Hunt, *British Labour History*, p304; Barnard, 'Trade Unionism, pp104-6; Lummis, *Occupation and Society*, pp29-31.

⁸¹ Robinson, *Trawling*, pp116-7; Tunstall, *The Fishermen*, pp244-7; Thompson *et al*, *Living the Fishing*, pp50-5.

⁸² *The Times*, 11 August 1883.

⁸³ *Hull Advertiser*, 23 April 1852.

1880s. Despite the presence of 1,500 apprentices, comprising around half of the fishing labour force and still under the threat of criminal penalties for refusing to work, the Grimsby strike of 1880 resulted in defeat for the smackowners. The Great Grimsby Ice Company made increased use of apprenticed labour after the unsuccessful 1885 strike, citing the greater compliance of apprentices,⁸⁴ but there is no evidence that their presence was crucial in the Ice Company's victory. Apprentices were a factor in the defeat of a strike amongst crews of cod smacks in 1892, although crews imported from other ports also helped to undermine the strike, which involved only around 200 men.⁸⁵ In Hull, apprentices were even more of an irrelevance, because after the Payment of Wages Act they were under no more effective compulsion to work than any other hand, and there is no record of apprentices influencing the outcome of the strike. Moreover, even if apprentices were potentially useful as blacklegs in the sailing smack era, the adoption of the steam trawler and the arrival of the engineers removed this potential utility.

Trawler engineers were generally regarded as separate from the deckhands. Tunstall remarked on the conflicts between deckhands and engine room staff, whose workload was significantly less whilst on the fishing grounds and who, it was often commented, were well paid despite the fact that they took no part in the labour of actually catching the fish.⁸⁶ The roots of this sense of separateness and occasional antagonism lie at the beginning of steam trawling in the 1880s and 1890s, and can clearly be seen in the events of the 1901 Lockout at Grimsby.

Engineers had usually served apprenticeships ashore. They regarded themselves as distinct from the deckhands and belonged to separate unions 'in the mould of skilled engineering trade unions,'⁸⁷ such as the Humber Amalgamated Engineers' and Firemen's Union, founded in 1893, and the Grimsby Steam Fishing Vessel Engineers' and Firemen's Union, founded in 1898.⁸⁸ They were paid a fixed wage, in contrast to the shares system by which deck crews were remunerated.

⁸⁴ Gillett, *History of Grimsby*, p273.

⁸⁵ Haines, *Thesis*, p251; Gillett, *History of Grimsby*, pp272-3; Goddard and Spalding, *Fish'n'Ships*, p22.

⁸⁶ Tunstall, *The Fishermen*, pp122-3.

⁸⁷ Robinson, *Trawling*, p116.

⁸⁸ Barnard, 'Trade Unionism,' p111.

However, facing rising costs of fuel and nets, Grimsby trawler owners attempted to alter the payment system so that all members of the crew would be paid a basic wage, plus poundage on the net profits of the trip. Aflalo, sympathetic to the owners' point of view, suggested that even 'in moderately favourable circumstances' it would result in better earnings for the engineers.⁸⁹ However, as he went some way towards conceding, the grievance of the men was that it passed some of the risk of a bad trip onto them. This, principally, was why the engineers refused to sign on under these conditions on 1 July 1901, precipitating what the owners described as a 'strike' and the men as a 'lockout,' which lasted fourteen weeks. Initially the dispute was peaceful, but during September Henry Smethurst, 'with his usual degree of tact,' attempted to use foreign crews to get his vessels to sea. The result was several days of violence, during which the offices of the Trawler Owners' federation were ransacked and burned down, the Riot Act was read in the street – although not by the Mayor, trawler owner Harrison Mudd – and the army and extra police had to be drafted in to restore order.⁹⁰

Throughout the dispute the owners had the advantage of unity, whereas four organisations, including the engineers' unions, the National Seamen's and Firemen's Union and Gasworkers' Union and an association of sharemen – skippers and mates – represented the men. The owners were able to exploit divisions between these organisations, as well as demonstrating the intransigent attitude towards organised labour and refusal to deal with trade unions or allow investigation into their affairs that was remarked upon again in disputes between the wars. The dispute finally ended in arbitration. The pay scales set out by the owners were modified slightly to increase the basic wage and reduce the percentage paid by poundage, and a minimum wage was introduced. The men claimed a victory, but in the long run the owners were the main beneficiaries of the settlement, as payment by poundage had successfully been imposed on all members of the crew.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Aflalo, *Sea Fishing Industry*, p245.

⁹⁰ J. Goddard and R. Spalding, *Fish'n'Ships: The Rise and Fall of Grimsby, the World's Premier Fishing Port* (Clapham, 1987), p24.

⁹¹ Barnard & Mumby-Croft, 'An Antiquated Relationship?' pp121-3; Tunstall, *The Fishermen*, p33; Ekberg, *Grimsby Fish*, pp88-9; Aflalo, *Sea Fishing Industry*, p245.

The division of labour introduced by steam trawling did make the workforce less homogenous and more divided, but its parts remained co-dependent and stoppages by one group would interrupt the work of the others. At Grimsby, it was the engineers who instigated the action but the sharemen whose refusal to go to arbitration prolonged it. The labour of one group was worthless without that of the others, since no trawler could go to sea without an engineer or skipper. Conversely, owners could play the groups – and the separate unions representing them – off against one another, as happened at Grimsby and again at Fleetwood in 1920.⁹² In these circumstances, apprentices were of no advantage to trawler owners, since even if they could be coerced into working, without engineers their labour was of no value. Moreover, insofar as apprentices could have been (and were) used to manipulate organised labour, this function also became superfluous once the presence of separate organisations for skippers, deckhands and engineers made ‘divide and rule’ an effective tactic.

Apprentices could not strike but there were other means of resistance open to them. In fact, they resorted to most of the tactics of labour resistance as seamen in the previous two centuries, especially desertion and, less commonly, sabotage.⁹³ Non-apprenticed fishermen took advantage of these tactics too on occasion, although the more desperate tactics were usually confined to apprentices, barred by their indentures from simply refusing to work, or leaving to seek better opportunities with another owner or at another port.

Sabotage usually took the form of damage to the trawl whilst at sea, usually cutting the trawl warp. Smacks only carried one trawl, so if that was lost or irreparably damaged the smack had to return to port with the trip unfinished. Given that a complete set of trawling gear cost about £80 in the early 1870s, it also entailed a substantial loss for the owner.⁹⁴ Aboard steam trawlers, meddling with the engine was not unknown, one Grimsby apprentice in 1902 being reported for throwing ashes onto the bearings.⁹⁵ Other forms of sabotage involved throwing various items

⁹² Thompson *et al*, *Living the Fishing*, pp70-4.

⁹³ Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, pp96-115.

⁹⁴ *Grimsby Observer*, 24 April 1873.

⁹⁵ NELRO 208/1/11. Register of Grimsby Fishing Apprentices. Alfred Flatt, 19 September 1899.

of gear overboard, ranging from just the cooking utensils, via parts of the capstan machinery, to virtually everything to hand:

Charged before magistrates with wilful destruction of stores of ship – threw overboard spindle wheel of capstan, jib topsail halyard, ash pan, flare and tin and a large ham (24lb).⁹⁶

Sabotage was harshly punished, invariably by imprisonment. This apprentice was gaoled for three months, the maximum sentence allowed, as was another Grimsby apprentice who threw the pinion wheel of the capstan overboard.⁹⁷ However, although remarked upon at the time, sabotage was not widespread. It was most common in the Humber ports, but even in Grimsby, of the 251 apprentices imprisoned between May 1872 and May 1873, none were imprisoned for sabotage, although three were imprisoned for ‘felony,’ which may include acts of sabotage.⁹⁸ Nor does a return of the 155 Grimsby apprentices imprisoned in 1893 mention it, with the partial exception of one apprentice who was locked up for wilful damage at home whilst drunk.⁹⁹ Only two apprentices were imprisoned at Brixham for acts of sabotage of the 777 recruited at the port between 1892 and 1912, one for an unspecified act of wilful damage, and one for trying to scuttle the smack.¹⁰⁰ Another was fined for throwing the cooking utensils overboard.¹⁰¹ Although figures for imprisonment do not reflect the full number of crimes committed, it is clear that sabotage was not a common tactic of resistance, but it was an effective one in the short term since it could force a smack to return home immediately.

The most common means of resistance for fishermen, as with merchant seafarers, was desertion. However, the circumstances of, and motivations for, desertion in the fishing industry, and especially among apprentices, were somewhat different. For merchant seafarers, desertion was a means of exploiting the inherent mobility of their occupation to their advantage. Rediker, referring to the eighteenth

⁹⁶ Quoted in Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices*, p87.

⁹⁷ NELRO 208/1/6. Register of Grimsby Fishing Apprentices. Amos William Davies, 27 April 1886.

⁹⁸ PRO, MH32/99. Fleming, ‘Treatment of Pauper Apprentices.’

⁹⁹ PRO, MAF12/15. Return of Grimsby Apprentices Sent to Gaol in year ending 31 December 1893.

¹⁰⁰ DRO 3287S add/6. Register of Brixham Fishing Apprentices. William Frederick Freeman, 18 April 1911; James Gunshon, 16 May 1898.

¹⁰¹ DRO 3287S add/6. Brixham Register of Fishing Apprentices. Henry Crawford, 16 January 1907.

century, asserts that seafarers used desertion to seek out better pay and conditions.¹⁰² Fischer found evidence of desertion for the same reasons amongst seafarers at some Atlantic ports in the late nineteenth century, although he rightly pointed out the complexity of the issue and the many variables, short and long term, influencing the decision to desert.¹⁰³ Fishermen deserted for the same reasons as merchant seamen. However, fishermen were generally less mobile, and wage variations between British fishing ports were generally small in the late nineteenth century. Table 6.5 compares the wage variation in 1885 of able seamen (ABs) in three ports around the North Sea, with that of third hands on trawlers at the fleeting ports of the East Coast.

Table 6.5

Wage Variations in Merchant Shipping and Trawling, 1885

a. Merchant Shipping

	London	Antwerp	Copenhagen
Wage (£/month)	2.16	2.95	2.74
Wage (index)	100	137	127

b. Trawling

	Hull	Grimsby	Great Yarmouth
Wage (s/week)	19.48	19.86	15.21
Wage (index)	100	102	72

Sources: PRO, BT144. Crew lists for British fishing vessels 1884-1914; L.R. Fischer, 'Around the Rim: Seamen's Wages in North Sea Ports, 1863-1900,' in Fischer *et al* (eds), *The North Sea*.

Although wages were 28 per cent lower in Great Yarmouth, which is one reason why there was substantial migration to the Humber ports during the 1890s and 1900s, the variations were not as pronounced as between merchant shipping in North Sea ports. Nor was it at all common for British fishermen to ship on foreign vessels, whereas merchant seamen did so frequently. Fishermen's motives for desertion

¹⁰² Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, p291.

¹⁰³ L.R. Fischer, 'A Dereliction of Duty: The Problem of Desertion on Nineteenth-Century Sailing Vessels,' in Ommer & Panting (eds), *Working Men Who Got Wet*, pp53-68.

were more to do with shifting from owner to owner within a particular port, exploiting conditions of labour scarcity to bid up wages. Much as this might have annoyed smackowners, after 1880 there was little they could do about it.

The motivations of apprentices were different again. Some deserted and went to other ports to work as casual hands; some ran and indentured themselves to other masters, sometimes in the same port but more usually elsewhere; many tried to escape from the industry altogether, and some were simply trying to annoy their masters. As Robinson points out, there were two forms of desertion, although the boundary between them was blurred. In the first place, there was 'stopping the ship,' which was being absent just as the smack was due to sail, usually in the hope of gaining extra time on shore; secondly, there was desertion proper, sometimes referred to as absconding, in an attempt to escape altogether.¹⁰⁴

Smackowners, police and other interested parties often suggested that apprentices stopped ship for frivolous reasons. True as this may have been in many cases, such as the Hull apprentice who ran away as his smack was going to sea and was picked up in a theatre later in the day,¹⁰⁵ many had rational reasons for their actions. Stopping the ship was frequently undertaken as a means of drawing attention to specific grievances. Many Hull and Grimsby apprentices stated in court that they ran because of a lack of suitable clothing, that the smack was unseaworthy or that they had been, or feared being, mistreated. In many instances, this was dismissed as an excuse, especially if the master or skipper denied it, as in the case of two Hull apprentices tried for stopping the ship in 1865. They alleged that the smack was leaky and unfit for sea; the skipper appeared in court and said it was perfectly safe and that he would not go if it were not. Both apprentices were imprisoned.¹⁰⁶ As one apprentice put it in 1882, when he went to court, 'the gaffer had all the talk.'¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, if an apprentice could produce evidence in support of his claims he would usually escape punishment. Apprentice William Barron was forgiven a charge of desertion in 1871 after proving that he had an

¹⁰⁴ Robinson, *Trawling*, pp59-60.

¹⁰⁵ HCA, DPM/1/91. Hull Magistrates' Court Minute Books. Charles Rasby, 6 January 1872.

¹⁰⁶ HCA, DPM/1/79. Hull Magistrates' Court Minute Books. James Farrow and William Searle, 14 September 1865.

¹⁰⁷ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q898.

infected hand.¹⁰⁸ The Grimsby superintendent appears usually to have given apprentices a fairer hearing and attempted to rectify any specific grievances. For instance, an apprentice who refused to go to sea on account of lack of suitable shoregoing clothes was sent to sea, but with the caveat that his master was instructed to provide 'evening clothes.'¹⁰⁹

Lack of clothes was an irritant that provoked boys into refusing service: fear was perhaps a more deep-seated motive. A considerable number of boys absconded soon after being bound, suggesting that the experience of their trial trip, if any, had given them a false impression of the industry, and that once they were faced with the harsh reality of the industry their reaction was to get away at once. Among Grimsby apprentices after 1880, 37 per cent of boys who absconded did so in the first year of their term; in Brixham, the corresponding percentage was 40.2.¹¹⁰ Presumably, once they had become accustomed to the occupation, boys became less inclined to abscond. There was another 'blip' in absconding among apprentices later in their term, once they were trained and able to earn wages, and chafed under the restrictions of their indentures. Between times, boys deserted for a variety of reasons, both short- and long-term.

Many boys ran to try and avoid trips in bad weather. Leading Hull smackowner Alfred Ansell said openly that many apprentices preferred to be in prison rather than at sea in winter,¹¹¹ and some committed felonies or allowed themselves to be caught absconding in expectation of a month in prison.¹¹² On the other hand, Boswell found no greater prevalence of absconding among Grimsby apprentices in winter; nor did Brixham apprentices abscond noticeably more often in winter than summer. Either way, most apprentices were fully aware of the uses of desertion as a tactic of resistance. Some apprentices ran away repeatedly, in the hope that the master would lose patience and cancel their indentures. Sometimes this worked, as in the case of Brixham apprentice who caused his master 'plenty of

¹⁰⁸ HCA, DPM/1/89. Hull Magistrates' Court Minute Books. William Barron, 15 February 1871.

¹⁰⁹ NELRO 208/1/1. Register of Grimsby Fishing Apprentices. George Miller, 18 August 1880.

¹¹⁰ Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices*, p72; DRO, 3287S add/6. Register of Brixham Fishing Apprentices.

¹¹¹ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 15 December 1864.

¹¹² BPP 1882 XVI, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 37. Report of Swanston and Stoneham.

trouble' by deserting three times and serving a month in prison before his indentures were cancelled. Another made his intention to 'get clear' quite explicit, refusing work and saying to his master and the superintendent he would run at the first opportunity.¹¹³ This was uncommon at Brixham, but far less so in Grimsby where, because of the extent of the labour shortage, masters were more reluctant to lose trained hands, even if they were troublesome. Some ended up serving several prison terms and still completed their indentures, such as Grimsby apprentice Frederick Hawkrige, who was imprisoned nine times, for a total of 171 days, during his six-year apprenticeship.¹¹⁴ However, in cases where a particularly troublesome apprentice absconded, his master would frequently not bother to apply for an arrest warrant.¹¹⁵

However, stopping the ship was not always a conscious tactic of resistance. Sometimes it was undertaken without any regard to the consequences and with no longer-term aims in mind, out of 'want of better sense,' as one Ramsgate apprentice admitted, or 'pure perversity,' as a smackowner at the same port put it.¹¹⁶ The apprentice registers of Grimsby and Brixham, and the court records of Hull, are replete with cases of apprentices who stopped the ship after a night's drinking, or who absconded for purely short-term reasons. Many of the apprentices used here as examples successfully completed their indentures, which suggests that in many instances short-term desire to miss a trip were more significant factors in the decision to desert than intention to get away from the industry altogether. Many former deserters went on to successful careers in fishing. Reuben Manton, future skipper and secretary of the National Federation of Fishermen was imprisoned for desertion as an apprentice in 1870, whilst future Hull smackowner George Antcliff served at least two prison sentences.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ DRO 3287S add/6. Register of Brixham Fishing Apprentices. William Aldridge, 21 August 1893; Charles Derry, 25 October 1900.

¹¹⁴ NELRO 208/1/11. Register of Grimsby Fishing Apprentices. Frederick Hawkrige, 12 August 1902.

¹¹⁵ For example, NELRO 208/1/6. Register of Grimsby Fishing Apprentices. Peter Warner, 17 April 1888.

¹¹⁶ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q5,193 & 5,674.

¹¹⁷ *Hull and Eastern Counties Herald*, 25 July 1867, 17 February 1868, 12 May 1870.

It is not easy to assess the proportion of apprentices who stopped the ship. The only reliable quantitative data, aside from the Grimsby and Brixham apprentice registers, comes from court records that, by definition, only include those cases that came to court. Many did not. In the smaller ports, especially, many cases were dealt with domestically. However, in the Humber ports especially, a high proportion of apprentices were proceeded against for stopping ship. Table 6.6 shows the proportion of Hull apprentices prosecuted in every fifth year from 1865 to 1880. This includes prosecutions for offences other than desertion and refusal to work, but these represented only a small proportion of cases.

Table 6.6
Proportion of Hull Fishing Apprentices Prosecuted for
Offences Against Indentures, 1865-80

Year	Number of Apprentices Min/Max	Number of Prosecutions	Percentage of Apprentices Prosecuted
1865	613/792	118	19.3/14.9
1870	832/1075	97	11.7/9.0
1875	1094/1413	198	18.1/14.0
1880	732/946	284	38.9/30.0

Source: PRO, BT150; BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 6; M. Steinberg, 'The Labor Contract and Justice and Exploitation in Local Courts: The Case of Mid-Victorian Hull' (unpublished).

The 1880 figure may reflect the temporary chaos caused by the Payment of Wages Act, but from the figures for 1865-75 it is clear that between ten and twenty per cent of apprentices in Hull were prosecuted for desertion or similar offences. The figures for prosecutions are derived from research into the legal process in Hull, and comparable figures do not exist for other ports.¹¹⁸ However, in Grimsby 248 apprentices were imprisoned in 1872-3 for desertion, disobedience or refusal to work. If the often-quoted figure of 1,350 apprentices at the port in 1872 is accurate,

¹¹⁸ Steinberg, 'Labor Contract.'

this suggests that 18.3% of Grimsby apprentices were embroiled in the legal system, which appears plausible and suggests that the scale of the problem was even greater, given that the Hull figures include those not imprisoned.¹¹⁹ The scale of the problem at the Humber ports in the 1870s compares starkly with the figures for imprisonments at smaller ports such as Lowestoft, as Table 6.7 shows.

Table 6.7
Committals of Apprentices to Prison at Selected Ports, 1875-6

Port	Number of committals, 1875	Number of committals, 1876	Percentage of 1875 apprentices imprisoned (min/max)
Grimsby	205	221	12.8/16.5
Hull	166	216	11.8/15.2
Lowestoft	7	15	4.3/5.6
Ramsgate	32	25	10.6/13.7

Source: BPP 1877 LXIX. Return of Number of Committals of Fishing Vessel Apprentices to Prison for Refusing to Go to Sea; PRO, BT150.

Ramsgate, although a small port, appears to have experienced problems in its apprenticeship system in the 1870s that had largely disappeared by the 1890s. In 1878, ten per cent of its apprentices are said to have been imprisoned, whereas in 1892 only one of the 150 apprentices at the port was imprisoned. Table 6.8 also shows desertion rates generally falling after 1880. Berrington and Davy attributed this to the greater supervision of boys in the port, through the provision of lodgings in the Fisherlads' home, and through the 'carrying out of the provisions of the Act of 1883 in a sympathetic spirit.'¹²⁰ This has a ring of truth, given that at Grimsby supervision remained lax, lodgings less well supervised and the apprenticeship system far larger, all of which contributed to the ongoing problems of desertion and poor labour relations at the port.

Desertion proper was harder to accomplish than stopping ship, since it usually involved leaving the port altogether. This was not easy to do, since

¹¹⁹ Gillett, *History of Grimsby*, p247; PRO, MH32/99. Fleming, 'Treatment of Pauper Apprentices.'

¹²⁰ PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report, p6.

apprentices were distinctive in dress and language, and were liable to be seen and arrested if they tried to leave by road or railway. However, many did manage it. Table 6.8 gives the percentages of apprentices recruited in every fifth year at particular ports who are marked in the registers as having absconded. Some of these may later have returned, but it is unlikely that, before 1883, many masters went to the trouble of informing the Board of Trade that an apprentice had absconded if they expected him back. Table 6.8, then, covers those who deserted and were never retrieved.

Table 6.8
Percentage of Apprentices Deserting at Selected Ports, 1875-1910

a. Grimsby

Year	Apprentices Recruited	Number who deserted	Percentage
1875	386	71	18.4
1880	285	11	3.6
1885	294	42	14.3
1890	290	63	21.7
1895	138	25	18.1
1905	53	16	30.2
1910	65	10	15.4

b. Hull

Year	Apprentices Recruited	Number who deserted	Percentage
1875	339	70	20.7
1880	227	3	1.3
1885	83	7	8.4
1890	22	2	9.1
1895	9	0	0

c. Ramsgate

Year	Apprentices Recruited	Number who deserted	Percentage
1875	72	8	11.1
1880	109	21	19.3
1885	52	3	5.8
1890	20	1	5.0
1895	36	2	5.6
1905	26	3	11.5
1910	23	1	4.4

d. Lowestoft

Year	Apprentices Recruited	Number who deserted	Percentage
1875	39	6	15.4
1880	41	7	17.1
1885	15	1	6.7
1890	12	1	8.3
1895	4	0	0

e. Brixham

Year	Apprentices Recruited	Number who deserted	Percentage
1875	45	8	17.8
1880	48	4	8.3
1885	70	1	1.4
1890	56	0	0
1895	44	0	0
1905	69	3	4.4
1910	29	0	0

f. Greenwich/London

Year	Apprentices Recruited	Number who deserted	Percentage
1875	34	7	20.6
1880	21	4	19.1
1885	7	0	0

Source: PRO, BT150.

Note: Figures predating 1875 are too sparse to provide meaningful estimates: 1900 is excluded, because the Register of Apprentices for that year does not survive.

Although there are anomalies in particular years – such as the improbable 3.6% desertion rate among recruits from 1880 at Grimsby – and the small size of the sample at some ports skews the figures, on the whole it is apparent that the larger ports experienced much worse problems of desertion than smaller ports. Indiscriminate recruitment, capitalisation, lack of supervision, the hardships of fleeting and the conversion of the apprenticeship system from a classically paternalistic training scheme into a system for acquiring and disciplining cheap labour combined to destroy what advantages, from the apprentice's point of view, the system once had (and still did have in small ports), and encourage desertion. Moreover, in 1879, 310 apprentices were recruited to Hull. In the same year, apprentices at the port received between them 284 prison sentences. Robinson comments that 'the apprenticeship system became steadily less economic and more troublesome,'¹²¹ as figures such as these strongly suggest.

During the 1880s, as the apprenticeship system at many ports faded away and casualisation took hold, the motives for apprentices to desert grew stronger. Why remain in one port, working for nothing, when it was possible to abscond, go to another port and find paid work? It was said in the 1890s that deserters from Grimsby manned the Hull fleet, as Berrington and Davy commented, explaining the situation thus:

An apprentices who is bound until he is 21 is ... worth good wages long before he gets to that age. He sees weekly hands who may be inferior in every way to himself receiving amounts many times larger than his scanty spending money. He forgets that his master has provided him with clothes, food and medical attention when his services were of little value, and is still bound to do so until he is out of his indentures. That he should abscond and seek independent employment in another port may be short-sighted and unreasonable, but it is not unnatural.¹²²

It may well be that, since the 1883 Act introduced greater protection for boys against being pressured to enter indentures, those who remained were more motivated. However, any boy would balance the longer-term advantages of completing the

¹²¹ Robinson, *Trawling*, p65; BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Appendix 6.

¹²² PRO, MAF12/15. 1894 Report, p5.

apprenticeship, which declined as the system became less prevalent, against the prospect of independence and greater remuneration in the short term. Small wonder so many decided to desert. Moreover, at Grimsby there is evidence – albeit not conclusive – that antipathy between apprentices and casual hands began to emerge during the 1880s. Fishermen suspected owners of using apprenticeship to overstock the labour market and drive down wages.¹²³ This is possible, especially when the actions of the Great Grimsby Ice Company, who became increasingly aggressive users of the apprenticeship system after the 1885 strike, are considered. However, the trade union that represented sharemen remained in favour of apprenticeship, and if it suspected that apprenticeship was being used to undermine the union it would in all likelihood have spoken out. Most of the antagonism seems to have come from casual hands, whose position vis-à-vis the owners was less secure, and who would have been most affected by downward pressure on wages. No convincing evidence was ever advanced to suggest a collective effort on the part of owners to use apprenticeship to undermine wages and the issue faded away, perhaps in part because of the fast-diminishing significance of the apprenticeship system. Later, hostility was directed towards the importation of foreign crews for much the same reasons, especially after the 1901 lockout.¹²⁴

Casualisation was not a solution favoured by many trawler owners who, for reasons discussed previously, were strong supporters of the apprenticeship system. However, they successfully adapted to a system of casual labour and developed disciplinary strategies to manipulate it. The power to grant and revoke certificates of competence had been appropriated by the Board of Trade after 1883, but informal blacklisting of men regarded as troublesome, known as being given a spell ‘walking about,’ was a persistent feature of the industry well into the twentieth century. Trawler owners continued to take advantage of divisions within the workforce, exploiting the opposition of skippers to unionisation of the deckhands in case it undermined their authority at sea, whilst avoiding as far as possible any dealings with trade unions. As late as 1935, a representative of the Transport and General

¹²³ Gillett, *History of Grimsby*, p272; PRO, MAF 12/5. 1894 Report. Letter from Birkenhead Union, in correspondence.

¹²⁴ BPP 1903 IX, R.C. on Alien Immigration, Minutes, q21,713.

Workers' Union could get no closer to the Hull Fishing Vessel Owners' Association than the office boy.¹²⁵ Moreover, the shares system imposed on all crew members after 1901 gave an incentive for maximum productivity and increased the volatility of crews' earnings. Neither of these was conducive to effective organisation, and the end of fleeting in every port except Hull, where it persisted into the 1930s, removed one aspect of the industry's labour organisation that tended to promote collective action. By 1914, trawler owners were in an exceptionally strong position vis-à-vis their own workforce, one which they largely held until the contraction of the deep-sea trawl fishery in the 1970s.

Laissez-faire was 'everywhere in retreat' by the 1880s, not least in the fishing industry.¹²⁶ Government intervention – in the form of regulations covering safety, working conditions, mediation between conflicting users of fishing grounds and generally increased monitoring of the industry – was a fact of life by the turn of the twentieth century. It was a fact which most of the leading trawler owners, despite their professed free trade beliefs, had benefited from and even, in some instances, requested. It had also had a broadly beneficial effect on the industry, and especially those working within it. The generally liberalising drift in employment law from the 1870s manifested itself in the Payment of Wages Act, which freed apprentices at most ports from their indentures and facilitated the process of casualisation then taking place. Although casualisation worked in the owners' favour more often than not, it did at least end the bonded servitude of a high proportion of the workforce. For those who remained, there was marginally better protection from abuse and someone tasked with representing their interests to authority. These were primarily palliative measures, and apprenticeship to the fisheries remained a hard way to earn a living, but they were certainly an improvement on the lot of apprentices before 1880. However, by the time legislation to regulate it came into force, apprenticeship was in decline, and the most fundamental effect of government action was to oblige trawler owners to recognise this and to adapt to a regime of casual labour.

¹²⁵ Barnard & Mumby-Croft, 'An Antiquated Relationship?' p123.

¹²⁶ Hunt, *British Labour History*, p304.

Conclusion

Apprenticed labour in the English fishing industry in the late nineteenth century is significant in two respects. It was the key means by which a labour force was accumulated and controlled to man the fast-expanding fishing industry, which could not have developed as it did without the contribution made by the thousands of youths drawn into it. It also sheds light on the institution of apprenticeship itself, an ancient and, in the literature, somewhat neglected institution that underwent great change during the economic, demographic and social upheavals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The fishing industry faced three key obstacles to its development in the nineteenth century. The first of these was transport, which the railways largely solved. Removal of the transport bottleneck caused demand for fish to expand, stimulating investment in the industry and growth that, potentially, could have been stymied by the second obstacle: a shortage of labour. The key contribution of apprenticeship was to allow the industry to surmount this obstruction and continue growing. As in many land-based industries, this involved the coercion and exploitation of vulnerable workers and generated social problems that eventually forced changes in the industry's labour regime as a whole, but in importing and training an appropriate labour force it was undoubtedly effective. The third obstacle was in some ways the most fundamental: the industry began to erode its own resource base. Apprenticeship formed part of the response to this problem too, in the case of some of the large Grimsby firms, which combated dwindling profits with ruthless cost-cutting, including greater use of apprenticed labour. However, the solution to the mounting problem of overfishing was, in the short to medium term at least, technology. Steam trawling allowed the industry to revert to its old response to overfishing, seeking out new grounds and increasing the intensity of the catching effort. This strategy ultimately undermined the apprenticeship system.

Apprenticeship was influential in other ways too. It had a significant effect on labour relations. The remuneration system used in the industry in the nineteenth century, developed for use with sailing vessels but adapted to fit steam trawlers as well, originated in fisheries where those who were not sharemen were usually apprentices. Waged labour was added onto this system at

a later date. Moreover, the presence or absence of apprentices influenced how fishing capitalists dealt with labour disputes. Although attempts to break strikes with apprentices were not always successful, apprentices certainly represented a significant factor in disputes, and retained their usefulness as such until the arrival of steam trawlers and a more complex and diverse workforce rendered them an irrelevance. Apprenticeship influenced government policy towards the fisheries, especially in the field of labour. The first labour legislation aimed at the industry, after all, was formulated in response to a crisis caused in large measure by changes within the apprenticeship system, and remained in force for several decades thereafter. Apprenticeship also affected popular perceptions of the fisheries. Fishers are an easy group to romanticise: the image of the independent, conservative inshore fisherman is a powerful and influential one. The publicity surrounding the worst abuses of the apprenticeship system made this romantic picture untenable. The public of the nineteenth century reacted in precisely the same way as people would today when confronted with the image of teenaged boys being starved and beaten to death, as happened to the unfortunate William Papper – with shock and anger. Indeed, scandals such as that over Papper still condition perceptions of the nineteenth-century fishing industry, just as the image of apprenticeship in general was, and in some ways still is, affected by the fictitious *Oliver Twist* and the all too real scandals of the textile mills' and chimney sweeps' apprentices. Not only was apprenticeship central to the development of the fishing industry itself, but also to how it was perceived.

More broadly, the fishing apprenticeship system provides a case study of the changes in apprenticeship during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the effect of expansion within a given industry on its methods of recruiting and training young workers in varying technological and social contexts. Fundamentally, the need for labour in an expanding industry changed the priorities of those seeking to recruit labour within it, and caused the traditional apprenticeship to shift towards a more exploitative form. Pamela Horn, in discussing the applicability of More's models of apprenticeship to the apprenticeship system at Grimsby, argued that:

The Grimsby fishing industry did not fit either of these models [traditional and exploitative apprenticeship], but combined elements of both. Although apprenticeship was not used to limit entry to the trade, for those who stayed the course it did lead to the transmission of useful skills which could provide a satisfactory livelihood in later life, albeit in a harsh and demanding occupation.¹

With reference to Grimsby, and by extension to Hull, since its apprenticeship system functioned in much the same way, More's characterisation of different sorts of apprenticeship emerges as something of a false dichotomy. Nor does it fit merchant shipping well, since apprenticeship before the repeal of Navigation Laws was a state-imposed institution designed to increase the supply of labour, although again it did transmit useful skills. Deskilling, of the sort that promoted the use of exploitative apprenticeship in factories, was not possible in an industry that depended to a great extent on manual work requiring considerable technical knowledge and dexterity. However, in the ports where the industry expanded most rapidly from the 1840s to the 1880s, the need for cheap labour caused fishing apprenticeship to shift towards the 'exploitative' model and acquire some of its features.

Moreover, by focusing exclusively on Grimsby, Horn missed a more fundamental problem in More's thesis; that is that the degree to which an apprenticeship was 'exploitative' could vary even within a given industry. More suggested that the type of apprenticeship varied from trade to trade, pointing out that trades such as carriage-building and cabinet-making continued to deploy a very traditional form of apprenticeship. He suggested that it existed also in the high-class end of trades such as shoemaking and tailoring, although the mass-production end of these trades used non-apprenticed labour.² He did not make explicit, however, that the two forms of apprenticeship coexisted; nor did he attempt to assess how changing conditions within a given trade could effect a qualitative change in its apprenticeship system. The case of the fishing industry suggests that this change took place in response to quantitative and qualitative shifts in the industry's labour requirements. Where mechanisation changed the necessary skill set and expansion created a much greater demand for labour, this inevitably impacted upon recruitment and training policies. Despite these

¹ Horn, 'Pauper Apprenticeship,' p173.

² More, *Skill*, p42.

caveats. However, More's model of apprenticeship remains a useful abstraction, and helps to explain the changes in apprenticeship and training within given industries.

Eventually, exploitative apprenticeship proved unsatisfactory as a means of training and socialising young people. Writing in 1911, R.A. Bray suggested that 'an apprenticeship system worthy of the name' should fulfil three criteria. Firstly, it must provide adequate supervision of young people. Secondly, it must 'offer full opportunities of training, both general and special – the training of the citizen and the training of the worker.' Thirdly, it must:

Lead forward to some opening in the ranks of adult labour, for which definite preparation has been made, and in which good character may find reasonable prospects of permanent employment.³

These were broadly the aims of the national apprenticeship system established under the Statute of Artificers in the sixteenth century, and despite changes in the system, they remained applicable to apprenticeships in numerous artisan trades and similar – including the surviving smack fisheries – well into the twentieth century.

The tone of Bray's remarks, and those of commentators like him, reflected regret at the passing of this structured system of training, at a time when adolescent males were coming to be seen as a distinctive and sometimes problematic group, for whom special provisions needed to be made. Bray discussed at some length the issue of boys entering 'blind-alley' jobs immediately after leaving school, missing opportunities for training and advancement and ending up as unskilled labour.⁴ Indeed, a century later, the issue has not gone away, as persistent complaints are aired about skills shortages in essential craft trades, plumbing being a case in point, and society in general debates the question of how best to educate and train young people beyond the compulsory school leaving age. Some sense of the advantages of the old apprenticeship system, along with a degree of romanticism about it, still exists.

However, this system lent itself well to adaptation into a labour regime much less advantageous to the apprentice, and much more exploitative. Under

³ R.A. Bray, *Boy Labour and Apprenticeship* (London, 1912), p2.

⁴ Bray, *Boy Labour and Apprenticeship*, pp123-30.

circumstances of labour scarcity an established legal construct was adapted to provide the maximum supply of cheap and compliant labourers. Within the letter, if not the spirit, of the apprenticeship indenture, the obligation upon the apprentice to work could be rigidly enforced, but the obligations upon the master proved much more easily circumvented. Apprentices could be fed and lodged cheaply by housing them in barracks, or on some variant of the outdoor system, and where unskilled machine-minding tasks were prevalent the obligation to train the apprentice could be fulfilled with minimal cost and effort.

In comparing the lot of a typical Grimsby and Brixham apprentice, the contrast, within one industry and at the same time, between the variants of apprenticeship becomes very clear. The Brixham apprentice, living with his master, received far greater supervision. It did not always work to the apprentice's benefit, and there certainly were cases of neglect and mistreatment of apprentices under the indoor system. It worked better on the whole, though, than the lot of a Grimsby apprentice living in lodgings, or in a company home, left to roam the streets, drink and catch venereal disease. Ironically, a much higher proportion of apprentices at the large ports like Grimsby were those from very deprived backgrounds, and most in need of the sort of close supervision the indoor system could have provided. In terms of training, the supervision inherent in the indoor system, especially in smaller ports where community ties were closer and pressure to conform to expected standards of behaviour greater, meant that apprentices in these circumstances generally received far better training as a citizen (to use Bray's words) than apprentices in larger ports. The sheer number of apprentices arrested in Hull and Grimsby for drunkenness and fighting illustrate the point. Occupational training, on the other hand, was common to both variants of fishing apprenticeship. It had to be, simply because unlike the herring fisheries there was no place aboard a trawler for people who were capable only of pulling and hauling at the direction of others. However, it is likely that training was better provided in smaller ports, where the ratio of apprentices to full-time fishermen was lower. Training could not be completely neglected: fishing apprentices were not in the same position as those in land-based industries, doing jobs that would previously have been skilled but were now reduced to mere machine-minding tasks. Deskilling of that sort was not possible in fishing, because deck work could not be automated and still relied to

a great extent on the skill and judgement of its practitioners. Finally, 'an opening in the ranks of adult labour' was available to former apprentices at all ports, because of the need of the expanding industry for skilled men.

Apprenticeship in fishing never fully fitted the 'exploitative model,' then, but certainly came to demonstrate many of its features. Moreover, as with apprenticeships in certain land-based trades, exploitative apprenticeship in fishing proved in the end to be self-destructive. The sheer weight of social problems it created rendered it increasingly uneconomic and brought public opprobrium on the industry. So serious was the controversy that it even depressed the labour supply for a while in the 1870s. Moreover, it stirred the conscience of middle-class reformers, and necessitated government intervention to control the system that restricted its use and drove up the cost. Eventually, fishing apprenticeship in its exploitative form broke down because of its own internal contradictions, social pressure and, crucially, technological change that rendered it irrelevant. However, by then it had made a key contribution to the creation of a labour force that, 40 years before, had not existed, and contributed to the development of occupational communities that in time became adequate to meet the industry's need for labour.

As the apprenticeship system broke down in the 1890s and 1900s, trawler owners came to accept and adapt to a regime of casual labour, and to develop strategies to manipulate and to control it, especially in terms of remuneration and the ability to play one faction of the labour force off against others. These solutions proved durable enough to last, with minor modifications, until the contraction of the industry. When, in 1968, Tunstall described the labour regime in the trawl fisheries as 'antiquated, vicious, corrupt and lethal,'⁵ it was precisely these strategies, and the working practices they fostered, to which he was referring. In the end, once the labour supply question was solved the issue was one of control and, like employers in many other industries, trawler owners came to understand that informal means of control were at least as effective as direct legal compulsion.

⁵ Tunstall, *Fish: An Antiquated Industry*, p2.

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Appendix 1

Sources and Methodology

The fishing industry came under increasing scrutiny and government supervision in the second half of the nineteenth century, driven by its growing importance and some of the conflicts that a growing industry created. Naturally, this increasing attention generated growing amounts of records, which gradually became more systematic, more comprehensive and generally more reliable as time passed. The turning point was really 1866, when the Royal Commission on Sea Fisheries advocated the repeal of all restrictive legislation pertaining to the fisheries, but called for the systematic collection of statistical information so that future enquiries could be informed by evidence and fact, as opposed to speculation.¹ Figures on the numbers and types of fishing craft were easily collected and were published from 1871 in the Annual Statements of Navigation and Shipping, but the collection of national statistics on landings was not implemented until 1886, and even then the statistics were of dubious provenance and questionable reliability.² They remain, however, the only comprehensive statistics of fish landings in the United Kingdom. They are complemented by the Annual Reports of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries, which include increasingly detailed summaries of the state of the industry and investigations of particular aspects of it, as well as comments from local officers on the condition of the industry at every fishing station in England and Wales from 1889. They also include useful quantitative data on matters such as loss of life, numbers of vessels working (as opposed to registered) at each port and numbers of apprentices serving. Apprenticeship is mentioned in every report from 1886, generally just to comment on its continuing decline, until it disappears from the reports in 1902. Presumably, by then it was deemed too insignificant to warrant inclusion.

Secondly, the actual operation of the industry was subject to increasing examination after 1850. Between 1866 and 1894 there were six enquiries into various aspects of the industry, and fishing was discussed at other enquiries on subjects as diverse as labour relations and immigration. Broadly speaking, these

¹ BPP 1866 XVII, R.C. on Sea Fisheries, pcvi.

² J. Johnstone, *British Fisheries: Their Administration and Problems* (London, 1905), pp222-242.

enquiries come under three headings: fish stocks, conflicts between resource users and labour. The last of these is obviously most relevant to this discussion, but at all enquiries fishing vessel owners were questioned about the nature of their businesses, including the labour regime, making the minutes of evidence of these enquiries a most valuable resource, albeit a problematic one since witnesses naturally sought to present themselves in the best possible light. Thus did trawler owners almost unanimously express the belief that their activities were not harmful to fish stocks, despite mounting evidence and the expressed opinion of inshore and pelagic fishermen that they most certainly were. With this in mind, however, the minutes of the Parliamentary enquiries on fish stocks and landings from 1866 and 1893-4, and the 1878-9 enquiry, concerned mainly with conflicts between inshore and trawl fishermen, include a wealth of detail on the operation of the fishing business. This is especially true of the period before 1880, before detailed information on the operation of the industry becomes available via the Annual Reports and sundry literary sources such as the Fisheries Exhibition Literature and the records of the Fisheries Department of the Board of Trade.

The most important single source for an examination of fishing apprenticeship is the 1882 Board of Trade committee on labour relations. This was the only place at which participants in the fishing industry discussed the apprenticeship system in detail, and virtually the only source of comment from apprentices themselves. However, as Rule points out:

In sifting through the mass of material collected in the minutes ... the historian needs to watch carefully the marked bias towards the owners which the committee showed.³

Gillett echoes this criticism of the enquiry, pointing out that smackowners such as Henry Tooze received 'a very friendly hearing' and that the apprentices called to the enquiry 'parroted' their answers in response to leading questions. At least one witness was silenced on the subject of ill-treatment, ostensibly because he had only been indentured a month and was too inexperienced to give an informed opinion.⁴ Moreover, at least one of the apprentices questioned gave his evidence in the presence of his master and was therefore unlikely to offer

³ Rule, 'The British Fisherman 1840-1914,' p57.

⁴ Gillett and MacMahon, *History of Hull*, pp304-15; Rule, 'Smacksmen,' p395.

information that might offend him. Despite these caveats, however, the 1882 enquiry remains an immensely useful source. Certainly the answers given by apprentices were, as Gillett says, often monosyllabic, but intimidation at being called to speak must account for part of this and some of the apprentice witnesses demonstrated more independence and willingness to contradict the committee. Moreover, several witnesses were called who did speak in their favour, such as the superintendent of the Grimsby Fisherlads' Home, who commented that cruelty was frequent and described some of the injuries caused by ill-treatment that he had encountered.⁵ Some of the smackowners' own answers were perhaps unintentionally revealing as well, such as those of a Grimsby skipper who felt that apprentices were too well treated and 'more like gentlemen's sons than apprentices to the fishing trade.'⁶ Although many witnesses' evidence was clearly tendentious and self-serving, the sheer amount of detail and the variety of views expressed make the 1882 report the essential starting point for any examination of fishing labour in the late nineteenth century.

Two other enquiries into the apprenticeship system offer useful insights. Local Government Board inspector Baldwyn Fleming's report on apprenticeship at Grimsby from 1872 is useful primarily because it is the only detailed exploration of the apprenticeship system available from such an early date. Enquiries to libraries in Grimsby failed to locate a copy, so the version consulted here is a handwritten draft in the National Archives (MH32/99). Secondly, there is a report by A.D. Berrington and J.S. Davy from 1894, again mainly focused on Grimsby. The copy in the National Archives (MAF12/15) includes a considerable file of additional material, including letters from Guardians giving their views on the apprenticeship system, a letter from the Great Grimsby Ice Company responding to the report and a file of newspaper cuttings containing reactions to it. The report is a useful summary of apprenticeship as it existed in the 1890s but, as Boswell comments, it can 'hardly be counted as being a momentous document.'⁷ In taking a determinedly moderate stance, it failed both to make recommendations to improve the system and to dispel the allegations of systematic abuse levelled at it. One further report in the MAF archive (MAF

⁵ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q1,585.

⁶ BPP 1882 XVII, Sea Fishing Trade Committee, Minutes, q2,155.

⁷ Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices*, p39.

12/12) is that of J. Lockwood, another Local Government Board inspector, on apprenticeship at Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft. It is brief and based on little more than discussions with a few smackowners, but does make clear the connection between labour migration and casualisation at Great Yarmouth.

The 1882 enquiry informed the 1883 Merchant Shipping (Fishing Boats) Act, under which the amount of information collected on fishing labour was extended. Firstly, the system of crew lists used for merchant vessels was extended to the fisheries. The utility of these crew lists to historians has been discussed elsewhere⁸ and need not be revisited, except to point out that they are of limited use in relation to apprenticeship because only the names and capacities of apprentices were noted in a box on the front of the form, and the sort of detailed information kept for other crew members was not required and rarely entered.

Another, and for this study more useful, outcome of the 1883 Act was the keeping of registers of apprentices at each port. These actually began at Grimsby in 1879, as part of a package of measures to bring the apprenticeship system under better control, and the system was extended to all ports from 1884. These registers record each apprentice's name, dates of birth and indenture, term, the name and address of his master, where he was to lodge, where he had come from and sometimes details of known relatives. Space is provided for the apprentice's savings bank transactions to be noted, and for particulars of termination of the indenture. In addition, each apprentice's biannual meeting with the superintendent was supposed to be recorded, together with any other relevant detail such as convictions, instances of desertion and disputes with the master. These are, then, a very detailed resource for studying the apprenticed population. However, only the registers from Grimsby (1879-1936) and Brixham (1892-1912) survive, both in local record offices, and provide something of an insight into how the 1883 regulations were implemented at different ports. At Grimsby the regulations appear to have been followed conscientiously and the information given is very full, sometimes well beyond what was required by law. A physical description of many boys is given, there are newspaper cuttings and written remarks pertaining to trials of apprentices and sundry other scraps of detail. At

⁸ N. Cox, 'The Records of the Registrar-General of Shipping and Seamen,' in *Maritime History* 2 (1971-2).

Brixham the information given is far sparser and the impression given is that the regulations were not closely adhered to. Many apprentices' entries have no records of meetings at all. That said, in almost all cases the basic personal details and origins are entered, as are the terminations of indentures. Although less useful than the Grimsby registers, then, the Brixham register remains a valuable and under-utilised resource.

The port registers complement the registers of apprentices kept by the Board of Trade and held at the National Archives. These run from 1824 to 1953, those from 1850 to 1914 having been used for this study (see Appendix 2 for details of books used). The format changes several times between 1850 and 1914 but all include basic data on every apprentice to maritime industries in Britain, such as name, dates of birth and indenture, port of registry and name of master. The 1875-9 registers give the birthplace of each apprentice and sometimes details of voyages made and ships served on for the first few years of the indenture.

These registers are the only place from which this information can be obtained. However, they are not an unproblematic source. Many of the pre-1860 registers are in poor condition, some entries are duplicated from 1869-74 and throughout the period the amount of data fluctuates, apparently according to who was entering it. The books for the early 1870s, for example, are considerably more detailed than those from 1876-8, which are completed in a different hand. From 1879 the hand changes again and the detail is more comprehensive. Judging from comments in the 'remarks' column, a circular was sent round masters in 1878 asking them to notify the Board of Trade of the status of current apprentices. Many are thus marked as having deserted or died. Before this, information on the termination of indentures is rarely entered, so rates of death and desertion cannot accurately be calculated. After 1880, space is provided for the termination of indentures to be noted, which it almost always is.

Surprisingly little use has been made of the registers of apprentices, despite the fact that they offer considerable scope for research on apprenticeship in all maritime industries. Only apprentices to the fishing industry were recorded for the purposes of this study, but the same techniques could be applied to research apprentices in merchant shipping, shipbuilding or various port industries, apprentices to all of which appear in the registers. Apprenticeship in

merchant shipping is an important but under-researched subject, and the registers offer ample scope for a comprehensive study.

Identifying Fishing Apprentices

Data from the Board of Trade registers of apprentices was entered into separate spreadsheets for each sample year, to facilitate analysis of recruitment patterns, ages and the like. The software chosen for doing this was Microsoft Excel, which was more than adequate for the task. Identifying fishing apprentices, however, was problematic since before 1880 they were often not marked. In the absence of identifying marks, 'possible' fishing apprentices were entered and marked for further investigation using a four-stage process of elimination.

- i. The occupation of the master is sometimes given, as 'MM' (Master Mariner), 'SO' (Shipowner) or SmkO (Smackowner). However, in a few instances, known smackowners were marked MM.
- ii. Where given, the pattern of voyages provided a clue. However, this was often of little help and never definitive, since coastal trading vessels, like fishing vessels, had crew lists drawn up every six months. However, this did avoid inadvertent inclusion of any apprentices on deep-sea merchant vessels.
- iii. A list of known smackowners was drawn up for each port and year. For those still marked as 'possible,' names of masters were checked against trade directories and other sources (such as Parliamentary papers or newspaper reports) for inclusion or elimination from the spreadsheets.
- iv. Where given, names and official numbers of apprentices' vessels were noted and checked against Lloyd's Register and lists of smacks for given ports, where available.

This process allowed fishing apprentices to be identified accurately, and my totals of apprentices recruited in sample years tally well with estimates from other sources, where available. It is possible that some apprentices to small and non-trawling ports were missed, simply because unless they were marked as fishermen it had to be assumed they were not: the sheer number of entries was too great to trace every individual in an unspecified occupation. However, this would represent only a small number of apprentices.

Estimating Apprentice Numbers

Before the Annual Reports of the Inspectors of Sea Fisheries become available in 1886, there are no figures on numbers of apprentices serving at most ports with the exception of a few isolated estimates for individual ports from the 1870s. Therefore, some means of estimating the apprenticed population had to be devised using recruitment data. The disadvantage of this method is that it is vulnerable to year-on-year fluctuations in recruitment (although steps were taken to smooth these out as far as possible) and does not allow for an exact estimate. On the other hand, it allows for at least as good an estimate as the only other possible method of estimating population, which would be to multiply the number of smacks by the number of apprentices serving aboard each, which would take no account of the differing sizes and crew structures of vessels, especially cod smacks.

The immediate aim, therefore, was to work out the percentage of the apprenticed labour force in each port who were new recruits in each year, and from there to arrive at a 'minimum' figure, with a high proportion of new recruits, and a 'maximum' figure to describe a population with relatively few new recruits. Obviously, this was complicated by the fact that the years 1886-1901, for which both recruitment and population data were available, were for most ports a period of rapid decline in the apprenticeship system. Moreover, the dynamics of the apprenticed population varied between ports, with certain ports (especially on the Humber) experiencing much higher desertion rates than others, so these estimates had to allow for that.

For each port, a 'stability period' was identified in the 1886-1901 figures, during which the apprenticed workforce changed in size by no more than ten per cent, with the aim of establishing a percentage of recruits that would keep the apprenticed population stable. This also had the effect of smoothing over fluctuations in recruitment. This returned figures of between 30.7% (Grimsby) and 24.7% (Brixham), which were then tested against recruitment and population figures for various ports and found to work well in estimating population figures for the 1870s, although the lower percentage figure was rounded down to 24 per cent, since this proved more accurate than rounding up to 25%.

The final problem was that, although 'minimum size' figures of 31 and 'maximum' of 24 per cent recruitment proved as accurate as could be expected

for the 1870s, the 1880s saw dwindling recruitment in many ports, and even the figure of 24% recruitment produced population figures considerably lower than those given in the Annual Reports. To compensate for this, a 'post-1880' figure of 18% was adopted, which was about the average figure for several ports experiencing decline in the apprenticeship system during the 1880s and 1890s.

The population estimates given in Chapter Two, therefore, are not definitive but they are as accurate as possible. Where abnormally low or high recruitment figures in sample years affected the estimates, such as at Ramsgate in 1880 or Brixham in 1900 and 1905, this is highlighted in the text. Estimates of numbers of apprentices from the Annual Reports and other sources are also given in the text for comparison purposes. To avoid confusion with pagination, which in some registers is not given, where an individual is mentioned in the text the archive source is given, together with the name and date of indenture.

Appendix 2

Board of Trade Registers of Apprentices Consulted.

a. London and Parish

BT150/6	Apprentices' Names A - L	1850 - 1857
BT150/7	Apprentices' Names M - Z	1850 - 1857
BT150/8	Apprentices' Names A - Z	1857 - 1860
BT150/10	Apprentices' Names A - Z	1865 - 1869
BT150/11	Apprentices' Names A - Z	c1867 - c1874
BT150/12	Apprentices' Names A - Z	1870 - 1874
BT150/13	Apprentices' Names A - L	1875 - 1879
BT150/14	Apprentices' Names M - Z	1875 - 1879

b. Outports

BT150/26	Apprentices' Names A - J	1849 - 1853
BT150/27	Apprentices' Names K - Z	1849 - 1853
BT150/28	Apprentices' Names A - J	1853 - 1857
BT150/29	Apprentices' Names K - Z	1853 - 1857
BT150/30	Apprentices' Names A - J	1857 - 1860
BT150/31	Apprentices' Names K - Z	1857 - 1860
BT150/33	Apprentices' Names K - Z	c1859 - 1864
BT150/34	Apprentices' Names A - J	1864 - 1869
BT150/35	Apprentices' Names K - Z	1864 - 1869
BT150/36	Apprentices' Names A - F	1865 - 1874
BT150/37	Apprentices' Names G - N	1865 - 1874
BT150/38	Apprentices' Names O - Z	1865 - 1874
BT150/39	Apprentices' Names A - J	c1869 - 1874
BT150/40	Apprentices' Names K - Z	c1869 - 1874
BT150/41	Apprentices' Names A - B	1875 - 1879
BT150/42	Apprentices' Names C - F	1875 - 1879
BT150/43	Apprentices' Names G - K	1875 - 1879
BT150/44	Apprentices' Names L - O	1875 - 1879
BT150/45	Apprentices' Names P - S	1875 - 1879
BT150/46	Apprentices' Names T - Z	1875 - 1879

c. London and Outports

BT150/47	Apprentices' Names A - Z	1880 - 1881
BT150/49	Apprentices' Names A - Z	1885 - 1888
BT150/50	Apprentices' Names A - Z	1889 - 1892
BT150/51	Apprentices' Names A - Z	1893 - 1897
MISSING	Apprentices' Names A - Z	1898 - 1904
BT150/53	Apprentices' Names A - Z	1905 - 1910
BT150/54	Apprentices' Names A - Z	1911 - 1917

Appendix 3

Total Recruitment of Apprentices, 1860-1914

Port	1860	1865	1870	1875	1880	1885	1890	1895	1900	1905	1910	1914
Barking	91	38	11									
Boston									2	23	10	7
Brightlingsea	30	52	30	10								
Brixham	39	28	45	43	1	68	56	44	20	69	29	24
Colchester	6	10	6		5	6	3	1			1	
Dartmouth	3	5	4	2	47	2						
Deptford												
Dover	1	2	2	2								
Dovercourt				1								
East Donyland	20	14	12	1								
Fleetwood												12
Gorleston	8	5	2	13								
Gravesend	5	2										
Greenwich	36	57	34	34								
Grimsbay	76	144	217	386	285	294	290	138	79	53	65	22
Harwich	9	18	18	11	32	7	5					
Hull	160	190	258	339	227	83	22	9			6	12
London	9	3			21	7						
Lowestoft	5	5	34	39	41	15	12	4				
Manningtree	1	5										
Milford							3	2	1		9	1
Mistley	7	3										
Neyland												1
Plymouth	13	19	26	3	10	5	2	1	1	1		1
Ramsgate	21	51	69	72	109	52	20	36	8	26	23	14
Rowhedge		2										
Rye		4	1	2								
Salcombe	1			1								
Scarborough	10	8	10	3	2	5	5					
Tollesbury	13	7		2								
Wells			1	1								
West Hartlepool				1								
Whitstable				1								
Wivenhoe	9											
Woodbridge												
Workington								4				
Yarmouth	34	41	4	5	29	2	3			1		
Devon - unspecified		1										
Total	607	714	784	972	809	546	421	239	111	173	143	94

Source: PRO, BT150.

Appendix 4
Origins of Apprentices

a. Pauper Apprentices recruited to Barking smackowners, 1850 – 1860

	1850	1855	1860
Parish of Marylebone	11	7	14
East London Union	4		
Parish of St Mary, Islington	2	1	2
Parish of St Mary Magdalen, Bermondsey	11		
Parish of St Pancras	2	3	1
Parish of St George, Hannover Square	10	3	1
Parishes of St John the Evangelist and St Margaret's, Westminster	5	7	1
Parish of St Olave, Southwark	3	1	
Parish of All Saints, Poplar	1		1
Parish of St John, Hackney	3	1	
Parish of St Luke, Chelsea	2		
Parish of St Mary, Whitechapel	2	3	1
Parish of Barking	5		1
Parish of St Botolph, Aldgate	1	1	
Parish of Guiltcross, Norfolk	2		
Parish of St James, Westminster	1		1
Parish of Tottenham		1	
Parish of Greenwich	2	1	2
Parish of St Leonard's, Shoreditch		1	2
Parish of St John, Hampstead		8	1
Parish of Christchurch, Middlesex		1	
Parish of Waltham Cross		1	
Parish of St James, Middlesex		1	
Parish of St Mary, Newington		2	
Precinct of St Catherine's, Middlesex		1	
Parish of St Paul, Deptford		2	1
Parish of Norton Falgate, Middlesex		1	
Parish of Hornsey, Middlesex		4	
Parish of St Margaret's, Westminster		1	4
Parish of St Andrew, Holborn		2	
Parish of St Luke, Middlesex		1	1
Liberty of Hallow Garden		1	
Parishes of St Andrew, Holborn, and St George the Martyr, Middx.		1	
Parish of Edmonton, Middlesex		1	
Parish of Hatton Garden, Middlesex		1	
Parish of Stratford le Bow		1	
Parish of St George, Middlesex		15	1
Parish of St Matthew, Bethnal Green		1	6
Parish of Camberwell		1	
Parish of Waltham Abbey		2	
Parish of Finsbury			1
Parish of St James, Clerkenwell			1
Parish – not stated	15	5	5
Total	67	79	48
Total apprentices bound in Barking that year:	157	149	91
Percentage of apprentices coming from poor law institutions:	42.7	53	52.7

Source: PRO, BT150.

b. Apprentices recruited to Brixham smackowners, 1892-1912.

	1892	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897	1898	1899	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910	1911	1912	Totals
T.S. Empress											1	5	5	14	3	5	2	6	2	3	1	47
T.S. Clio										5			1		1	6	1					14
T.S. Mount Edgecumbe						2	11	4		1	1							1		5	8	33
T.S. Formidable	2	23	6	8	6	12	8		8	2	3	6	4	6	2	1		2	2	5		106
T.S. Arethusa														24	7	2	2					35
T.S. Indefatigable															2			3				5
Ely Schools, Cardiff											7	2	4	2		2	1	1		2	1	22
Hardwicke Reformatory						1				3						1	2	6	2	2		17
Exeter Union								1			2		1			1	1	2				8
Plymouth Union			1	4	2	2										1						10
Indenture to father	5	4	3	4	4	5	5	3		2	2	3	1	2	1		1			1		46
Local (Devon) address	22	11	17	18	12	13	14	9	6	4	6	12	7	4	8	4	11	5	2	8	4	197
Dr Barnardo's Home		3			1	1																5
Newton Abbot Union							1				1	1	1	1	1			1				7
National Nautical School																		3			1	4
Exeter Reformatory						1																1
King Edward's School	1			1	1	1			1													5
Christchurch Union											1						1	2			1	5
Lambeth Workhouse/school												1				4			1	2		8
Bedfordshire Reformatory																			1			1
St Marylebone Schools													3	3	2	3						11
Shepton Mallet Union																			1		1	2
Luton Guardians																			1	2		3
Cardiff Union																			1			1
Kingsbridge Union	1																					1
Gloucester Union																				1		1
Salvation Army Homes		1																				1
Hackney Infirmary		1																				1
Brixham Orphans' Home			1																			1
Slough Industrial Home				1																		1
Totnes Union					1																	1
Whipton Reformatory														1								1
Seaman's Institute, Runcorn																1						1
Tiverton Workhouse																1		1				2
Bristol Union																	1					1
Wellington Guardians																	1					1
Gordon Road Workhouse, Peckham																	1					1
St Giles' Mission Homes																		3				3
Kingswood Reform School																		2	1	1		4
Tramped the roads									1	1												2
Union/school/workhouse - no location	1													2	1	2						6
Only parents' address given (not local)	2	8	2	3	1	3	9	6	4	6	2	2	3	9	7	5	6	8	11	7	6	110
No origin given	6	2	3	6		4	6						5	2	1	2	1		3	3	1	45
Total	40	53	33	45	28	45	54	23	20	24	26	32	32	70	37	40	35	46	29	41	24	777

Source: DRO 3287S add/6. Register of Brixham Fishing Apprentices.

Appendix 5

Rates of Non-completion of Apprenticeships at Selected Ports, 1875-1914

All of these figures are derived from the Board of Trade registers of apprentices (PRO, BT150: see separate appendix for details on volumes consulted). Data on completion of indentures before 1875 is too sparse to give meaningful results, and the register for the year 1900 is missing.

'Not completed' refers to apprentices who did not finish their indentures for reasons not given in the registers, the 'total non-finishers' row gives the total of those whose indentures were cancelled or annulled, who absconded, died or otherwise did not finish their terms of service. 'Percentage completed' is the percentage of recruits in the sample year that did finish their indentures.

a. Grimsby

	1875	1880	1885	1890	1895	1905	1910	1914
Number recruited	386	285	294	290	138	53	65	22
Indenture cancelled	50	49	74	104	49	8	16	5
Indenture annulled					23	9	14	8
Absconded	71	11	42	63	25	16	10	
Died – accident	11	11	20	19	4	2	1	2
Died – natural causes	1	1		4		1		
Not completed	17			1		1	3	
Total non-finishers	150	72	136	191	101	37	44	15
Percentage completed	61.1	74.7	53.7	34.1	26.8	30.2	29.2	31.8

b. Hull

	1875	1880	1885	1890	1895	1905	1910	1914
Number recruited	339	227	83	22	9	2	12	12
Indenture cancelled	61	29	26	11	4	1	1	1
Indenture annulled							1	
Absconded	70	3	7	2				
Died – accident	10	10	4	1			1	
Died – natural causes			2					
Not completed	5						1	
Total non-finishers	146	42	39	14	4		4	1
Percentage completed	56.9	81.5	53.0	36.4	55.6	50.0	66.7	91.7

c. Brixham

	1875	1880	1885	1890	1895	1905	1910	1914
Number recruited	45	48	70	56	44	70	29	24
Indenture cancelled	10	12	36	15	6	40	19	20
Indenture annulled					2		1	
Absconded	8	4	1			3		
Died – accident				3	1	3		
Died – natural causes	2							
Not completed		1						
Total non-finishers	20	17	37	18	9	46	20	20
Percentage completed	55.6	64.6	47.1	67.9	79.5	33.3	31.0	16.7

d. Ramsgate

	1875	1880	1885	1890	1895	1905	1910	1914
Number recruited	72	109	52	20	36	26	23	14
Indenture cancelled	17	20	15	5	12	3	9	4
Indenture annulled					1			1
Absconded	8	21	3	1	2	3	1	1
Died – accident	4	7	1	2		1	2	2
Died – natural causes							1	
Not completed							1	
Total non-finishers	29	48	19	8	15	7	14	8
Percentage completed	59.7	56.0	63.5	60.0	58.3	73.1	39.1	42.9

e. Great Yarmouth and Gorleston

	1875	1880	1885	1890	1895	1905	1910	1914
Number recruited	18	29	2	3		1		
Indenture cancelled	1	2	1					
Indenture annulled								
Absconded	1	3						
Died – accident	1	3						
Died – natural causes								
Not completed	1							
Total non-finishers	4	8	1					
Percentage completed	77.8	72.4	50.0	100		100		

f. Lowestoft

	1875	1880	1885	1890	1895	1905	1910	1914
Number recruited	39	41	15	12	4			
Indenture cancelled	4	3	5	5	3			
Indenture annulled								
Absconded	6	7	1	1				
Died – accident	3		1					
Died – natural causes	1							
Not completed	2							
Total non-finishers	16	10	7	6	3			
Percentage completed	59.0	75.6	53.3	50.0	25.0			

g. Boston

	1875	1880	1885	1890	1895	1905	1910	1914
Number recruited						23	10	7
Indenture cancelled						2	5	3
Indenture annulled						8	2	
Absconded						2		
Died – accident								1
Died – natural causes								
Not completed						3		
Total non-finishers						15	7	4
Percentage completed						34.8	30.0	42.9

h. Harwich

	1875	1880	1885	1890	1895	1905	1910	1914
Number recruited	11	32	7	5				
Indenture cancelled		3	2					
Indenture annulled								
Absconded	1	1						
Died – accident								
Died – natural causes	1							
Not completed								
Total non-finishers	2	4	2					
Percentage completed	81.8	87.5	71.4	100				

Appendix 6

Reasons for Non-Completion of Apprenticeships at Grimsby (1882) and Brixham (1892-1901)

Reason	Grimsby, 1882		Brixham, 1892-1901	
	Indenture Cancelled	Indenture Annulled	Indenture Cancelled	Indenture Annulled
Parents' request		4		1
Disobedience/ bad conduct	14	6	6	4
Dislike the sea	2	1	2	4
Illness	1	4	5	1
Over 21	3		2	
Master bankrupt	8			
Master has no ship	2		14	2
Master absconded	2			2
Master cannot employ	6		4	
Mutual consent	13	7	43	4
Absconded		5	9	9
Indenture invalid	1	2		
Disagreed with crew	1			
Unfit	1	3	6	3
Filthy habits	2	3		4
Laziness		1		
No reason given			1	4
Total	56	36	92	38
Total Signed	419		365	

Sources: Boswell, *Sea Fishing Apprentices*, p50; DRO 3287S add/6. Register of Brixham Fishing Apprentices.

a. William Henry Pike Salsbury, Brixham (Ordinary Apprentice's Indenture, 1870)

(I) ORDINARY APPRENTICE'S INDENTURE.

This Indenture, made the Eleventh day of June 1870 between William Henry Pike Salsbury of Brixham in the county of Devon of the first part, and George Thomas Barry of Brixham in the county of Devon of the second part, and George T. Barry of the third part, WITNESSETH, That the said William H. P. Salsbury hereby voluntarily binds himself Apprentice unto the said George T. Barry, his Executors, Administrators, and Assigns, for the term of eight years from the date hereof; And the said Apprentice hereby covenants that, during such time, the said Apprentice will faithfully serve his said Master, his Executors, Administrators, and Assigns, and obey his and their lawful commands, and keep his and their secrets, and will, when required, give to him and them true accounts of his or their goods and money which may be committed to the charge, or come into the hands, of the said Apprentice; and will, in case the said Apprentice enters Her Majesty's Service during the said term, duly account for and pay, or cause to be paid, to his said Master, his Executors, Administrators, or Assigns, all such Wages, Prize Money, and other Monies as may become payable to the said Apprentice for such service; and that the said Apprentice will not, during the said term, do any damage to his said Master, his Executors, Administrators, or Assigns, nor will he consent to any such damage being done by others, but will, if possible, prevent the same, and give warning thereof; and will not embezzle or waste the Goods of his Master, his Executors, Administrators, or Assigns, nor give or lend the same to others without his or their licence; nor absent himself from his or their service without leave; nor frequent Taverns or Alehouses, unless upon his or their business; nor play at Unlawful Games: In CONSIDERATION WHEREOF, the said Master hereby covenants with the said Apprentice, that during the said term he, the said Master, his Executors, Administrators, and Assigns, will and shall use all proper means to teach the said Apprentice or cause him to be taught the business of a Seaman, and provide the said Apprentice with sufficient Meat, Drink, Lodging, Washing, Medicines, and Medical and Surgical Assistance, and pay to the said Apprentice the sum of £ 10 in manner following: (that is to say) for the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth year the sum of £10 per annum in the apprentice not to make in any trade that may be carried by the vessel the said Apprentice providing for himself all sea-bedding, wearing apparel, and necessaries (except such as are herein-before specially agreed to be provided by the said Master); AND IT IS HEREBY AGREED, that if, at any time during the said term, the said Master, his Executors, Administrators, or Assigns provide any necessary apparel, or sea-bedding for the said Apprentice, he and they may deduct any sums properly expended thereon by him or them from the sums so agreed to be paid to the said Apprentice as aforesaid: And for the performance of the Agreements herein contained, each of them, the said William H. P. Salsbury and George T. Barry doth hereby bind himself, his Heirs, Executors, and Administrators, unto the other of them, his Executors and Administrators, in the penal sum of £ 20; and for the performance of the covenants on the part of the said Apprentice herein contained, the said George T. Barry doth hereby bind himself, his Heirs, Executors, and Administrators, unto the said William H. P. Salsbury, his Executors and Administrators, in the penal sum of £ 20: Provided, that notwithstanding the penal stipulations herein contained any Justice or Justices of the Peace may exercise such jurisdiction in respect of the said Apprentice as he or they might have exercised if no such stipulations had been herein contained.

In witness whereof, the said parties have hereunto set their hands and seals, the day and year above written.

Signed, sealed, and delivered, in the presence of

J. Handley Dep. Sup. C. M. (Master).
William H. P. Salsbury (Apprentice).

L.S. (Surety).
 RECEIVED 22 JUN 70 G.A. & R.O.

NOTE.— This Indenture must be executed in duplicate, both copies must be taken to the Registrar General of Seamen; or if in the Outports to some Shipping Master; one copy will then be retained and recorded, and the other returned to the Master with the necessary indorsement.

LONDON: Printed by GEORGE K. FRYER and WILLIAM SPOTTISWOODE, Printers to the Queen's most Excellent Majesty.

SEALED BY THE REGISTRAR GENERAL OF SEAMEN
 LONDON
 22 JUN 70
 G.A. & R.O.

RECEIVED
20. 1870
G. R. & CO.

(I) ORDINARY APPRENTICE'S INDENTURE.

This Indenture, made the 4th day of June 1870 between Albert Fellowes aged seventeen years, a native of Hull, in the county of York, of the first part, and James Home of Hull, in the county of York, of the second part, and James Home of Hull, in the county of York, of the third part, WITNESSETH, That the said Albert Fellowes hereby voluntarily binds himself Apprentice unto the said James Home, his Executors, Administrators, and Assigns, for the term of four years from the date hereof; And the said Apprentice hereby covenants that, during such time, the said Apprentice will faithfully serve his said Master, his Executors, Administrators, and Assigns, and obey his and their lawful commands, and keep his and their secrets, and will, when required, give to him and them true accounts of his or their goods and money which may be committed to the charge, or come into the hands, of the said Apprentice; and will, in case the said Apprentice enters Her Majesty's Service during the said term, duly account for and pay, or cause to be paid, to his said Master, his Executors, Administrators, or Assigns, all such Wages, Prize Money, and other Monies as may become payable to the said Apprentice for such service; and that the said Apprentice will not, during the said term, do any damage to his said Master, his Executors, Administrators, or Assigns, nor will he consent to any such damage being done by others, but will, if possible, prevent the same, and give warning thereof; and will not embezzle or waste the Goods of his Master, his Executors, Administrators, or Assigns, nor give or lend the same to others without his or their licence; nor absent himself from his or their service without leave; nor frequent Taverns or Alehouses, unless upon his or their business; nor play at Unlawful Games: IN CONSIDERATION WHEREOF, the said Master hereby covenants with the said Apprentice, that during the said term he, the said Master, his Executors, Administrators, and Assigns, will and shall use all proper means to teach the said Apprentice or cause him to be taught the business of a Seaman, and provide the said Apprentice with sufficient Meat, Drink, Lodging, Washing, Medicine, and Medical and Surgical Assistance, and pay to the said Apprentice the sum of £ 10, in manner following: (that is to say) for each consecutive year the sum of five shillings; and do further provide

the said Apprentice providing for himself all sea-bedding, wearing apparel, and necessaries (except such as are herein-before specially agreed to be provided by the said Master): And in any case, that if, at any time during the said term, the said Master, his Executors, Administrators, or Assigns provide any necessary apparel or sea-bedding for the said Apprentice, he and they may deduct any sums properly expended thereon by him or them from the sum so agreed to be paid to the said Apprentice as aforesaid: And for the performance of the Agreements herein contained, each of them, the said Albert Fellowes and James Home doth hereby bind himself, his Heirs, Executors, and Administrators, unto the other of them, his Executors and Administrators, in the penal sum of £ 10; and for the performance of the covenants on the part of the said Apprentice herein contained, the said James Home as surety, doth hereby bind himself, his Heirs, Executors, and Administrators, unto the said James Home, his Executors and Administrators, in the penal sum of £ 10: Provided, that notwithstanding the penal stipulations herein contained any Justice or Justices of the Peace may exercise such jurisdiction in respect of the said Apprentice as he or they might have exercised if no such stipulations had been herein contained.

In witness whereof, the said parties have hereunto set their hands and seals, the day and year above written.

Signed, sealed, and delivered, in the presence of

J. Foreman
Capt.
Mstr. Gen. Office, Hull.

James Home (Master).

Albert Fellowes (Apprentice).
mastr

Home (Surety).

NOTE.—This Indenture must be executed in duplicate, both copies must be taken to the Registrar General of Seamen; or if in the Outports to some Shipping Master; one copy will then be retained and the other returned to the Master with the necessary indorsement.

LONDON:—Printed by GEORGE T. SENE and WILLIAM SPOTTISWOOD, PRINTERS to the Queen's most Excellent Majesty.

b. Albert Fellowes, Hull (Ordinary Apprentice's Indenture, 1870)

d. William George Sanders, Hull (Sea Fishing Indenture, 1885)

APPRENTICESHIP INDENTURE.

SEA FISHING SERVICE.

Indenture, made the Eighth day of September 1885 Between William George Sanders ... Apprentice, of the first part, and Peter Bates ... in the county of ...

Witnesseth, That the said Apprentice hereby voluntarily binds himself Apprentice unto the said Master, Executors, Administrators, and Assigns (which said Master, his Heirs, Executors, Administrators, and Assigns, are herein-after included in the term "Master") for the term of ... years from the date hereof: until he shall have attained the age of twenty-one years

(1.) And the said Apprentice hereby covenants and agrees that, during such time, he, the said Apprentice, will faithfully serve his said Master, and obey his commands, and keep his secrets, and will, when required, give to him true accounts of his goods and money which may be committed to the charge, me into the hands of the said Apprentice; and will, in case the said Apprentice enters Her Majesty's Service during the said term, duly account for pay, or cause to be paid, to his said Master, all such Wages, Prize Money, and other Moneys as may become payable to the said Apprentice for such term; and that the said Apprentice will not, during the said term, do any damage to his said Master, nor will he consent to any such damage being done by him, but will, if possible, prevent the same, and give warning thereof; and will not embezzle or waste the Goods of his Master, nor give or lend the same to any person without his licence; nor absent himself from his service without leave; nor frequent Taverns or Alehouses, unless upon his Master's business;

(2.) In consideration whereof, the said Master hereby covenants and agrees with the said Apprentice, that he, the said Master, will and shall during the said term use all proper means to teach the said Apprentice or cause him to be taught the business of a Seaman and Fisherman, and will and shall provide said Apprentice with sufficient Meat, Drink, Lodging, Washing, Medicine, and Medical and Surgical Assistance, Sea-bedding, Wearing Apparel, and Amusement, and Payments referred to in the Endorsement marked A. on the back hereof;

(3.) AND IT IS HEREBY AGREED, that all wearing apparel provided by the said Master for the use of the said Apprentice shall, during the said term, remain the property of the said Master, provided, however, that the said Apprentice shall, during such term, have full and undisputed right and title to the free and entire use thereof at all times for his own sole personal use and wear, but shall, prior to the expiration of the said term, acquire no right or title thereto for the purpose of selling, pledging, or otherwise disposing thereof; at the expiration of the apprenticeship the apparel shall become the Apprentice's property;

(4.) And it is hereby further agreed, that the said Master shall not, during the said term, pay to the said Apprentice any wages or moneys wherewith to provide food and lodging for himself, but shall and will provide him with suitable and sufficient board and lodging to the satisfaction of the Superintendent of the Mercantile Marine Office at the port where the Apprentice stays when on shore; or if there is not a Superintendent at that port the Superintendent at the next port thereto;

(5.) And it is hereby further agreed that all moneys to which the said Apprentice shall become entitled as Spending-Money shall be paid by the said Master, and when the same become due, into the hands of the said Apprentice; Provided, however, that if the said Apprentice shall, through misconduct, have in the opinion of the Superintendent forfeited his right to receive the same, the said moneys shall be paid to the said Superintendent, to be by him placed to the credit of the said Apprentice in the Seaman's Savings Bank; and that the Remuneration and Payments, as well as any Share of salvage earned by the Vessel in which the said Apprentice may be employed at the time such salvage is earned, referred to in the Endorsement marked A. on the back hereof, to which the said Apprentice shall become entitled, shall be forthwith paid by the said Master to the said Superintendent, and by him placed to the credit of the said Apprentice in the Seaman's Savings Bank, there to remain until the expiration or sooner determination of the term of Apprenticeship, subject, nevertheless, to the deduction of any fine or forfeiture inflicted by a competent Court upon the said Apprentice, and of any fees paid by the said Master to the Mercantile Marine Office in respect of the said Apprentice;

(6.) And it is hereby further agreed and understood that the said Apprentice shall not be required to serve in any Smack or Vessel in which such Master, or during the continuance of such service himself serving as Master, Mate, or Seaman, or in which such Master, if not so serving, does not during the continuance of the said Apprentice's Service in such Smack or Vessel, possess an interest of at least one eighth of the value of such Smack or Vessel; and the said Master may, in cases where the Master is, in his opinion, unable to provide the Apprentice with such service as is by this clause permitted, within a reasonable time cancel this indenture and adjudge a sum to be paid to the Apprentice by the Master as compensation, which shall be recoverable as and to be wages due to the Apprentice;

(7.) And the said Master hereby undertakes to attend with the said Apprentice once at least in every half-year, during the continuance of this Indenture, to the said Superintendent with a view to the investigation by him of questions affecting the earnings and service of such Apprentice, and at such times to furnish to the said Superintendent a full, true, and faithful report of the character, conduct and efficiency of the said Apprentice;

(8.) And it is hereby further agreed that within 28 days after the expiration of the probationary period herein-after mentioned, or if the boat (on board of which the Apprentice is) is at sea during the whole of the twenty-eight days then immediately upon her return to port, this Indenture and the said Apprentice shall be brought to the said Superintendent for his Signature to the Endorsement marked C. on the back hereof, and that in the event of the Superintendent seeing sufficient grounds for withholding his Signature, the Apprenticeship shall cease from a date to be named by the said Superintendent, and upon the terms and conditions to be by him prescribed, which said date and terms and conditions shall be recorded in the Register of Apprentices kept by the said Superintendent, and shall be notified to and observed by the said Master and the said Apprentice;

(9.) And it is hereby further agreed that the said Superintendent shall have power, if the circumstances of the case appear to him to warrant such a course, any time within the Probationary period to decide that he will be unable to sign the said Endorsement marked C, and thereupon the Apprenticeship shall cease from a date to be named by the said Superintendent and upon the terms and conditions to be by him prescribed; which said date and terms and conditions shall be recorded in the said Register of Apprentices, and shall be notified to and observed by the said Master and the said Apprentice;

(10.) And it is hereby further agreed that breaches of Agreement or discipline alleged to have been committed by the said Apprentice within the said probationary period, shall not be taken before any Court for adjudication unless and until the said Superintendent shall have first had an opportunity of inquiring into the same, and have declined so to inquire, or shall upon inquiry determine to send the same for adjudication;

(11.) And the said Master and Apprentice hereby consent to and undertake to abide by the Covenants, Obligations, Agreements, and Provisions herein contained;

(12.) The probationary period of one month shall be allowed to the Apprentice under this Indenture, and if at the end of that period or the next return from sea thereafter he applies to the said Superintendent to put an end to the Apprenticeship, the Superintendent may after communicating with the Master, if he sees sufficient grounds for cancelling this indenture and ending the Apprenticeship, cancel and end the same, and thereupon the indenture shall be cancelled, and the Apprenticeship ended from the date to be endorsed thereon by the said Superintendent.

And for the performance of the said Covenants, Obligations, Agreements, and Provisions, the said Master doth hereby bind himself, his Heirs, Executors, Administrators, and Assigns, in the penal sum of £5000: Provided, that notwithstanding the said stipulations herein contained any Justice or Justices of the Peace may exercise such jurisdiction in respect of the said Apprentice as he or they might lawfully exercise if no such stipulations had been herein contained.

witness whereof, the said parties have hereunto set their hands and seals the day and year above written.

Signed, sealed, and delivered in the presence of and approved by Superintendent of the Mercantile Marine Office. Peter Bates (Master). Wm George Sanders (Apprentice).

This Indenture must be executed in triplicate, one copy will be retained and recorded by the Superintendent above referred to, one retained by the Master, and the other retained by the Apprentice.

Merchant Shipping (Fishing Boats) Act, 1883.

*Endorsements referred to in the body of this Indenture
and in the Act.*

**A.—Particulars of Spending-Money, Remuneration, and
Payments.**

SPENDING-MONEY.

*(Here are to be entered full particulars of the amounts to be from time to time paid to the Apprentice as
spending-money during the term of the Apprenticeship.)*

*Six pence per week whilst serving as Cook.
Nine pence per week whilst serving as Deckhand.
One Shilling per week whilst serving as 3^d Hand.*

REMUNERATION AND PAYMENTS.

*(Here are to be entered full particulars of all allowances, perquisites, shares or proportions of Salvage
if earned by the Snack, or other payments or emoluments to which the Apprentice may become
entitled in the course of his Apprenticeship.)*

*Share of Salvage according to the custom
of the Port.*



B.—(Here state pursuant to Section 4 whether the nearest relations or the guardian or guardians assent, and such other particulars as the Act requires. If the Superintendent acts as guardian he should state that the nearest relations, or guardian or guardians cannot readily be found, or are not known, or that there are none, and that he has acted as guardian). *The nearest relations not being readily found, the Perfct. has acted as Guardian.*

C.—I hereby certify that, after full inquiry made by me, I see no sufficient grounds for interfering with this Apprenticeship.

Dated this _____ day of _____ 188__.

Superintendent.

Mercantile Marine Office, Port of _____

MERCHANT SHIPPING ACT, 1894.

ENDORSEMENTS referred to in the Body of this INDENTURE and in the Act.

A.

Particulars of Remuneration, viz.:

1. Spending money or allowance in the nature of wages per week during the continuance of the Indenture.

How these full particulars of the accounts to be from time to time paid by the Master on account of the apprentice during the term of the apprenticeship under the Act are to be made.

2/1 per week during 1st year of service.
 2/6 " " " 2nd " " " "
 3/6 " " " 3rd " " " "
 4/1 " " " 4th " " " "
 5/1 " " " 5th " " " "

2. Shares of salvage or salvage services.

According to the Custom of the Port

3. Perquisites and other emoluments if any.

Share of Bivvy-money according to the Custom of the Port

B.

Daily or Weekly sums to be paid by the Master into the hands of the Apprentice subject to the provisions of Clause 6.

The sums accrued due under I.A. and those under 3.A. which, together with the former do not exceed 10/-, to be paid to the Apprentice by his Master at the end of each day.

C.

I hereby certify, pursuant to Section 395 of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1894, that
 (a) this Indenture complies with all the requirements of Part IV. of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.
 (b) the Master with whom the Indenture is made is a fit person for the purpose.
 (c) the Apprentice is not under the age of thirteen years and is of sufficient health and strength,

(d) the nearest relations of the Apprentice or his guardians assent to this apprenticeship and to the stipulations in the Indenture of Apprenticeship.
 (e) no nearest relations or guardians of the Apprentice { can readily be found } and in their absence { are known } * Strike out the words which do not apply.

I have acted as guardian for the occasion.
 Dated this *15th* day of *February* 19*16*.
A. F. [Signature] Superintendent.

D.

The Apprentice having this day been brought before me I hereby certify that upon full inquiry I see no sufficient grounds for interfering with this Indenture.

Certificate to be signed by Superintendent if Indenture not cancelled at expiration of probationary period.

Dated this *18th* day of *April* 19*16*.
[Signature] Superintendent.

E.

I certify that in my opinion in all the circumstances of the case it will not be desirable in the interests of the Apprentice to allow the within written Indenture to remain in force, and I hereby cancel and determine the same accordingly from the *19* day of *19* (upon the terms and conditions and subject to the payments following, viz. :-

Certificate to be signed if Indenture cancelled during probationary period or upon first cancellation before Superintendent. Strike out the words in brackets if not wanted.

Dated this *19* day of *19*.
 Superintendent.

I certify that in my opinion the Master is or will be unable within a reasonable period to provide the Apprentice with such service as is intended and permitted under the within written Indenture. And I hereby cancel and determine the same accordingly from the *19* day of *19* (upon the terms and conditions and subject to the payments following, viz. :-

Certificate to be signed if Indenture cancelled on account of inability of Master to provide service. Strike out the words in brackets if not wanted.

Dated this *19* day of *19*.
 Superintendent.

Sources: PRO, BT151 (a-c) and BT152 (d-e).

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