

After reading an urgent appeal on behalf of the emptying oceans, **Helen Brown** vows to shun tuna

Don't eat them

The End of the Line: How Overfishing is Changing the World and What We Eat

by Charles Clover
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I ordered a tuna steak in a restaurant last week. It arrived, plump and juicy, on a spray of crisp rocket salad. I looked at the fatty fries on adjacent tables and felt a current of nutritional piety go through me. My companion had ordered cod, which I knew to be overfished, and so I smugly awarded myself points for environmental sensitivity. I really thought I had it all: the delicious fish, the clean arteries and the clear conscience. But having read Charles Clover's epiphanic book about the ecological atrocities we are perpetrating in the world's seas, I wish I could throw the whole meal right back up – preferably on to one of the desks in Brussels where Europe's stupid fishing policies are drawn up.

Clover begins by asking us to imagine two immense all-terrain vehicles, and strung between them a mile-long net that is dragged at speed across the plains of Africa, scooping up everything in its path: lions, cheetahs, rhinos, elephants and wildebeest. He asks us to visualise the net smashing down mountains, uprooting trees, ravaging vegetation. And he wants us to imagine industrial hunters examining the mess in their net, discarding the greater part, for which there is no market, and leaving corpses to the carrion.

A horrible hallucination. If this actually happened there would be international outrage, legislation, prosecution, boycotts. The hunters would be vilified. So here's the real shock. This does happen. We call it trawling. And because it takes place beneath the veil of the sea we don't give it much thought, beyond vaguely romanticising those bold Captain Birds Eyes bracing themselves against the ocean.

The statistics are terrifying. We are obliterating the stocks of Atlantic cod and haddock, bluefin tuna, European

hake and sea bass, North Atlantic halibut, grouper, snapper, orange roughy and scallops. The current appetite for plaice, sole, swordfish, shark, prawns, skate and rays is seriously eroding ecosystems. Greedy Europeans, North Americans, Russians and Japanese are emptying the seas, leaving nothing but poverty for developing nations – poorer countries loan out their rights and their flags in exchange for a few short-term jobs and a bit of cash.

Meanwhile, politicians seem more concerned with protecting their fishing industries (Britain's is about the size of the lawnmower industry) than with saving the seas. The irony is obvious – if we allow overfishing to continue, subsidise voyages that don't cover the fuel bills and turn a blind eye to illegal catches, there won't be any jobs for fisherman anyway.

Clover visits the big fish markets of Tokyo and Madrid, talks to trawlermen around the world, and discusses how best to manage our common resources with scientists and civil servants. Everyone confirms that our love affair with fish is unsustainable. And there are some surprises. It turns out that the McDonald's Filet-O-Fish is made of relatively sustainable Alaskan walleye pollack and New Zealand hoki – Clover suggests that the

patrons of designer restaurants might want to "get their skinny asses round to McDonald's".

At times, Clover's book seems rushed. But picking holes in his urgent prose would be like correcting the grammar of a 999 caller. And unlike more apocalyptic environmentalists, Clover has hope. He suggests marine reserves, tourism, overhauled policies and self-examination. He urges celebrity chefs to forget seabass and teach us how to wow dinner-party guests with more sustainable fish such as herring, mackerel, hoki and tilapia. He advises shoppers to check stock levels on fishbase.com before filling their trolleys, and calls on supermarkets to label fish more

clearly with their ocean sources.

We all feel appeased by tinned tuna stamped "dolphin friendly". Would we feel quite so chirpy knowing that while Flipper is safe, tuna trawlers are destroying endangered turtles, sharks and rays? We can only hope that Clover is right in his prediction that the fishermen of the future will be judged not by the fish they catch but by those they don't.



One fish, two fish, red fish, blue fish: grouper (above), red snapper (right) and Atlantic bluefin tuna (bottom)

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Cod retreat from UK as warmer waters lure tuna and sharks

BY PAUL KELBIE
Scotland Correspondent

COD AND other coldwater fish in the North Sea and North Atlantic could soon be replaced by subtropical marine species such as tuna, sharks and sea horses lured by warmer waters caused by climate change.

One of Britain's leading marine scientists has warned that a minor change in temperature of the seas off the north-west coast of Scotland and the rest of the UK is having a dramatic effect on traditional marine life.

The once-thriving cod stocks, depleted by over-fishing, are being replaced by tuna, red mullet, horse mackerel, pilchard, squid, john dory, sea horses and leatherback turtles.

Martin Angel, a government adviser and chairman of a steering group investigating marine productivity, said close examination of the tiny zooplankton species *Calanus finmarchicus*, which provides a vital food source for young cod, salmon and other coldwater species, shows it is being driven further north as the seas around Britain warm.

"*Calanus finmarchicus* used to be extremely abundant in the North Sea," Dr Angel said. "If you dipped a plankton net into the waters off Britain it would make up about 80 per cent of what was caught. But as the seas warm, the whole ecological system is changing;



Sea horses have migrated north into British waters Rex

plankton more usually associated with southern waters takes over and the species of fish which feed on it expand their traditional territories."

Dr Angel said the largest change has been in the past 15 years, and that within 10 years tuna could be almost as common in Scottish waters as cod. "These subtropical species have been migrating north at a rate of 50 kilometres a year," said the scientist who wrote the last Oslo and Paris Convention report into the health of the Atlantic and North Sea and who was the UK chairman of the International Year of the Ocean.

"The instance of leatherback turtles finding their way to Britain has increased in the last few years because they feed on jellyfish which thrive in the warmer water. Since the mid-1980s, there has also been a rise in the amount of tuna caught in Scottish waters, especially the

smaller skipjack variety. This kind of change is happening with just a minimal warming of sea temperature but it is producing quite enormous environmental changes."

Dr Angel, who is based at the Southampton Oceanography Centre, said that within the next few years sea horses will be a common sight around the Scottish coast as will several species of sharks and john dory, an olive-green spiny fish more usually associated with continental shelf waters from south-east Queensland, south and north-west Western Australia, the western Indian Ocean, eastern Atlantic, Mediterranean and the waters of New Zealand, Japan and Spain.

"The rate by which john dory-like fish are advancing up the coast is incredible," said Dr Angel. "Already they can be found off Wales and within a few years they will undoubtedly be

News

A stark warning for Britain's fishing industry: reform now or die

Report warns of disaster unless 43% of fleet is put out of action

Paul Brown Environment correspondent

Reform or see your industry die was the stark warning given to Britain's fishermen yesterday after years of argument about levels of fish stocks and the viability of the industry.

The bleak forecast came not from green organisations but from the prime minister's strategy unit, which said that overfishing and illegal landings are making an already critical situation worse — not helped by a European Union and British fishing policy that has failed.

The alarming report commissioned by Tony Blair portrays a bad situation that is getting worse: to save cod, haddock and other "white fish," 30% of the fleet should be tied up in port for four years to allow stocks a chance to recover, and another 13% of an already depleted fleet should be scrapped immediately.

To illustrate the crisis, the report says the shape and size of stocks have changed dramatically. One of the most vulnerable species, cod, used to live for 40 years and grow 6ft long. But in 2003, 90% of those caught in the North Sea were less than two years old and had not bred. The older the fish the more young they produce, but now only one in 200 cod survives to the age of five.

The report says the UK could have a viable fishing industry by 2013 — but hundreds of boats would have to be scrapped or tied up for years while stocks recover.

A first step it advocates is to put thousands more British fishermen out of work; despite a 33% cut over the past decade, it says, 12,000 is still too many.

Even though the number of trawlers is being reduced to fewer than 1,000 this year by scrapping another 80 vessels, at least another 100 will have to go if the UK is ever going to have a viable industry, the report says. But it could be still worse. If the warnings of collapsing stocks are ignored, eventually 60% of boats will be redundant.

Fishermen are not alone in facing criticism. According to the report, both the EU and UK have failed to take into account scientific advice on overfishing and their policies have failed, leaving Europe way behind the rest of the world when it comes to best practice.

But despite the gloomy picture, all is not lost, the report says. If fishing is reduced drastically over the next five years, stocks could recover sufficiently for the UK to have a sustainable and profitable industry in 10 years.

In his foreword, Tony Blair says: "This is not an industry facing inevitable decline." He strongly endorses the report's view that the existing EU fisheries policy should be scrapped in favour of a regional policy, which would enable fishermen to have more control over their own stocks.

A taskforce is being formed at the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to push for reforms.

However, Mr Blair's optimism may be misplaced. Alex Smith, president of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, dismissed plans to tie up 30% of the fleet for years as a "non-starter" and said cuts had already been made.

"We in Scotland have made the biggest



Kevin West, skipper of the Ryne Wood, unloading haddock in Peterhead, the centre of Scotland's white fishing industry. Locals fear the strategy report will end fishing in the town Photograph: Murdo MacLeod

sacrifices and we were promised that things would be better for those that were left, but the reality is that things are much, much worse," he added.

Elsewhere, the report was broadly welcomed. The government watchdog English Nature was concerned that the cuts

were still not drastic enough. Dan Laffoley, its head of marine conservation, said: "We are advocating the implementation of a network of permanent marine protected areas that are closed to all extractive uses."

Louise Heaps, head of the WWF's marine programme, said: "The report ... clearly highlights that the UK fishing industry can be profitable and sustainable in the long term. Reductions in the fleet, in both the long and short term, must be underpinned by robust levels of funding to bolster local economies and ensure that we still have a fishing industry when stocks recover."

Brendan May, of the Marine Stewardship Council, a body that awards certificates to well-managed fisheries, said: "The broad message is simple: reform or die. What is now needed is real political clout and industry vision to make the transition from severe crisis in the UK's fishing industry to a sustainable future."

The report also recognised the value of sea angling. Ted Tuckerman, chairman of the National Federation of Sea Anglers, said: "This brings us into the mainstream of government thinking on fishing, recognising that sea angling is the growth area in the British fishing industry. It contributes £1bn a year to British coastal economies — twice as much as the strategy unit believes the commercial industry can achieve by 2013."

'Fishermen are tough, but these changes could be the final straw'

Gerard Seenan

Early morning in Peterhead harbour and Kevin West has just returned from two days at sea. Gulls circle above his boat, the Ryne Wood, as he unloads his catch and tosses a fish to a seal playing nearby.

Alongside the Ryne Wood, two more boats are being unloaded. Only a few years back there would have been four times that number. At the fish market yesterday, 2,200 boxes of fish went through the market; a few years back it would have been 12,000.

Thursday, though, was a good day at Peterhead market. Last Tuesday no fish was sold for the first time in 50 years. Peterhead, the centre of Scotland's white fishing industry, is a town devastated.

James Stephen, skipper of the Harvest Hope, is despair-

ing. If the strategy unit report is implemented, he says, it will end fishing in Peterhead.

"How can any business stop its income for four years and then start up again?" he asks. "A lot of the boats that are left have financial commitments to the banks, they will never survive this. It's not the strategy unit, it's the bankruptcy unit."

Wherever you look in Peterhead, it is possible to see the effect the already strict EU quotas have had on the town.

"There was a time when this was a gold town, but not any more," says Kenny Hope, behind the counter in Caley Fisheries. "We hardly get any fishermen in now buying their supplies. We were a tanker business, too, getting fuel to the boats, but we've had to lay people off. People outside think it's just the fishing industry that has been affected

but it's all round the town."

At the Fisherman's Mission, George Shaw says more and more people need support. Around 60% of Peterhead's fleet has gone. "Fishermen are tough and the fishing community is strong," he says. "But there's only so much you can throw at people. These reforms could be the final straw."

It is hard to find anyone with anything positive to say about the fishing industry's future. "I have a Polish guy on my boat because I can't get anyone local and I would say about 30% of boats are the same," says Mr Stephen. "The young people don't want to work in fishing, the future's too bleak."

Another local fisherman, Michael Park, who divides his time between fishing and fighting to keep Peterhead's fleet alive, says the proposals would do little to help. "The report

just doesn't make sense on key aspects ... How can you trust them to get things right for fishing when they can't even get their basic sums right?"

On Peterhead's main street, a dour grey collection of buildings, the report is met with bemusement. "The decisions are always made by people hundreds of miles away," Ann Geddes says. "I just can't see how they think this will help."

For Mr Stephen there is only one good thing to come out of the unit report. "I'm glad they have decided to involve fishermen more in decisions about managing stocks," he says. "They need to listen to us. I've never seen so much haddock in the sea and cod is recovering too, but I'm on half income. If they let us, not civil servants, have control of the sea we wouldn't have found ourselves in such a mess."

Taking stock

- There are **12,000** fishermen in the UK, 33% fewer than in 1995
- Another **14,000** jobs onshore are dependent on processing the UK catch. **2,000** people are employed in fish farming
- **£540m** worth of fish was caught in 2002, worth a total of **£1bn** to the economy
- **£90m to £100m** a year is spent on managing the industry, against a gross profit from fishing to UK of **£130m**
- **932** boats currently chase ever smaller cod, haddock, sole and plaice stocks. The number of these white fish boats needs to be cut to **801** by 2013 if stocks are properly managed — but only **405** will remain if stocks collapse



Marine biologists are warning that tuna may replace the cod in northern waters

in Scotland." The UK crab and lobster fisheries are thriving as the crustaceans enjoy the warmer waters and other fish species traditionally more popular in Spain and France are being caught in the North Sea.

"A squid fishery is developing off the coast of Aberdeen," a spokeswoman for WWF Scotland said. "There have been re-

ports of squid in Scottish waters for years but now it's actually reaching big enough proportions for fishermen to make money from it. It's not just the temperature of the sea; the chemical balance of the water is also changing and having an effect on the ecological system which is attracting different fish."

The influx of new species is

not necessarily good news for the beleaguered fishing industry. Dr Angel said: "It's not just about replacing one species with another as these new species are not as productive as cod. Even if the fishermen could fish as much as they wanted they would never catch as much; there are just not the numbers to sustain that."

North Sea cod stock is nearly exhausted

THERE are virtually no cod left in the North Sea because of overfishing, conservationists warned yesterday.

The supply has dwindled to below the level of the 1950s, making cod fishing economically unviable for British trawlermen.

As a result, wholesale prices have soared to nearly three times what they were in the 1980s.

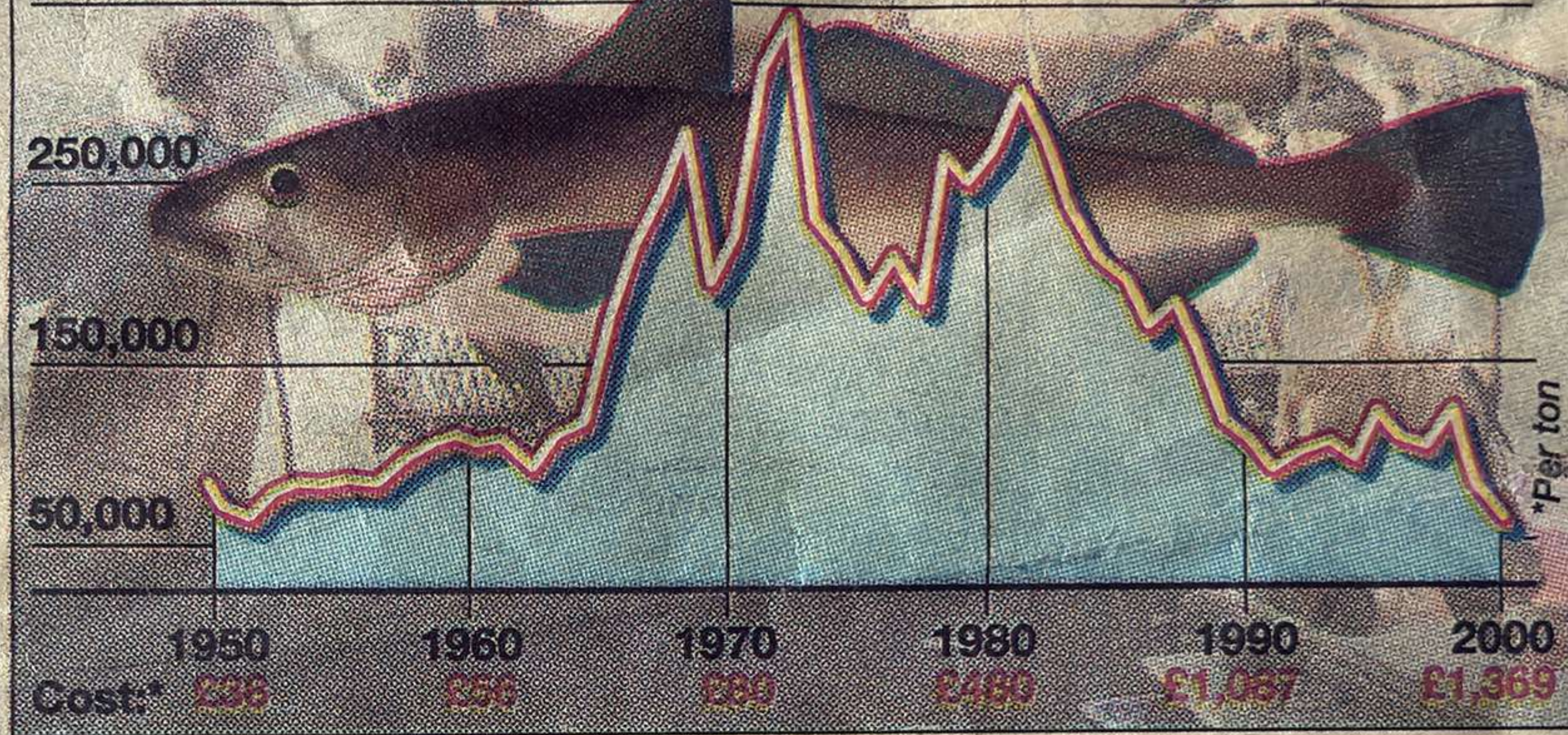
Most cod eaten in Britain now comes from Iceland.

Experts at the Wildlife Trusts group say the situation is so bad new laws are needed to protect our waters and wildlife. Commercial trawler nets

BRITAIN'S DWINDLING FISH SUPPLY

350,000 tons caught

Source: Defra



are also blamed for a dramatic rise in the number of dolphins drowned or injured around Britain, with the bottle-nosed species almost extinct.

The Wildlife Trusts said a record 500 dolphins were hurt by fishing nets this year, while the number of bottle-nosed dolphins off the Cornish coast has fallen by two-thirds in ten years, to about 350.

Its report – Our Dying Seas? –

says continued fishing for sand eels, used in animal feed and margarine, has meant a dwindling supply of food for several fish and bird species, putting them at risk.

Smaller species are also affected. The habitat of the horse mussel, found only in Strangford Lough in Northern Ireland, has been 'irreparably damaged' by dredging for queen scallops, the report adds.

MSD 3017 13 2007 p 9

TRAWLERMEN OF RYE

By DENIS CLARK

WHEN war came only two trawlers were fishing from the little Sussex port of Rye. There was not a living for more. Now there are round about sixty. Some months ago there were a hundred. From Cornwall, Wales and Scotland, from Brighton, Lowestoft and Brixham, fishermen came with their vessels, attracted by the rich harvest of plaice to be caught on the ocean shelf, six to ten miles out of Rye. All fishing had come to a halt on the Dogger Bank. Steam trawlers (foreigners mainly) no longer swept our seas clean. And great shoals of sole and plaice found their way down to be caught in the trawls of those hardy souls who dared mines and E boats and the cannon of enemy aircraft.

Steering towards Dungeness lighthouse, I can see from the *Expert's* tiny wheelhouse the trawlers which left the Strand at three o'clock of this fine morning to chug down the Rother with us into Rye's crescent bay. The *Dracoena*, *Susanne Annette* and *Morwenna* and twenty more are bucking and rolling their heavy course, trawls down and braking their progress. Our motion is not very different from that I knew well not so long ago in the tail of a Stirling bomber. Once again, demobbed, I am only a "sprog," learning my job from its beginning as a deckhand.

"Feelin' crarny?" Bill asks me.

"Crarny" is East Coast for seasick.

I shake my head. Bill shouts to Horace, engineer and third crew member, and together they shoot the trawling gear over the side while I put the wheel hard over so that the *Expert* chases her stern round and round in a narrow circle. When I straighten her on course again the trawl is trailing a hundred fathoms behind us. The trawl is shaped like a string bag, its mouth kept gaping wide in a ten-fathom spread by two heavy, iron-shod otter boards. The top of its mouth is held open by the head ropes, swimming buoyant on lifting corks. Its bottom sweeps the sea's floor, weighted down by the heavy, thick sixty-five foot ground-rope, burdened with chain. Surging ahead, we are hopeful that that yawning mouth is gathering fish by the score.

Unfortunately, there are other probable catches beside prime fish. The sea-bed here is littered with wreckage of aircraft, "doodlebugs" and ships. All sorts of curious objects get caught in the trawl and, only too often, the trawl itself is trapped fast and a total loss.

It takes a good skipper to know where the fish will be found and where wrecks may best be avoided. Bill is such a one. He has fished as a trawlerman since he was quite a small boy and his father was a fisherman, too. He wears gold earrings and he is steeped in the superstitions attached to his calling. I knew that whistling aboard ship is likely to bring on a gale, but I had to learn that hatch covers turned upside down are fraught with ill omen, while as for rabbits—if you mention rabbits Bill will not let you on to his trawler. I wonder if this superstition by any chance dates from the Saracen corsairs, far-ranging seamen whose Moslem law, like the Mosaic, looked on rabbits and hares as "unclean."

Bill has fished for most of his fifty-odd years. He went to Dunkirk and St. Valerie. But even Bill had to leave fishing, the craft of which he is master, in the bad times before the war. Ridiculous as it appears when you see the man devoted to his destined task, Bill had to go to London to make what living he could in a stuffy and sterile factory.

The boom days are ending in Rye and hard times threaten again. Little by little even now the fleet is decreasing. Dogger Bank fishing reopened is cutting off the rich inflow of fish. Deep-sea steam trawlers will soon be sweeping the Channel. Even now large French vessels

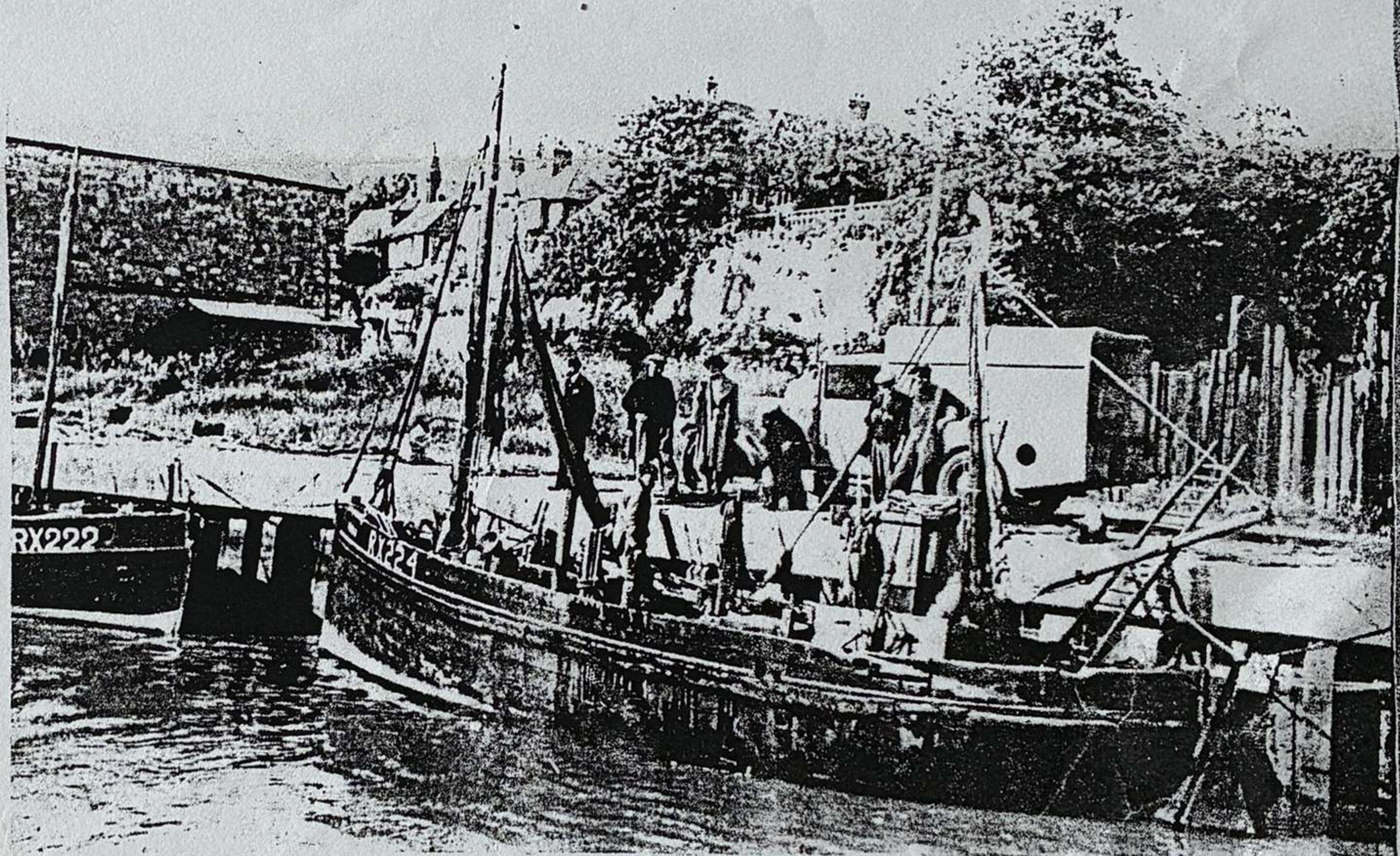
with fine mesh nets (much finer than we are allowed) are poaching busily. But chief complaint of the fishermen is what they consider to be the unfair Government control of fish prices. Before the war, sole and turbot were sold for as much as two guineas a stone, mainly to a privileged market of clubs and restaurants. Now these prime, fresh inshore fish are pooled and priced with fish caught by deep-sea trawlers, whose catch is ice-packed and arrives on the market in a very different condition from that of Rye. And the price is steadily dropping, while heavy expenses for loss and replacement of gear render profits less and less possible. Bill grumbles that, if things go on the way they are heading, once again there'll be only a couple of fishing vessels at Rye.

He is pulling on his oilskin jumper, a sign that he is going to haul in the trawl. I lash the wheel and run forward to bend the trawl warp round the capstan. Fathom on fathom of stiff rope is coiled away and presently the three of

kettlemar are set on one side to be sold as the crew's perquisite—for "storker" money which will be paid out as soon as our catch is disposed of.

Pay-day is Friday and pay is allotted for each catch divided by five. Two-fifths go to owner and upkeep of vessel, one-fifth to each of the three who make up the crew. A crew may make forty to seventy pounds between them on a good single day's catch, but this amount may have to carry them through for a month or longer of stormy weather and indifferent success. One post-war fisherman out of the Merchant Navy lost five sets of gear (value about twenty-five pounds a set) in the first six weeks of his fishing. But it is not always the novice who comes off worst. Bill, after fishing for a year without losing a trawl, lost two in ten days.

It is time to haul in the last trawl, to dish out the last round of sweet, hot tea and to make for the tide-filling harbour. The afternoon tide



THE RYE TRAWLER *EXPERT* UNLOADING HER CATCH

us crouch at the side, bending to grip the net as the *Expert* rolls over, holding with our rubber-clad knees what we have gained as she rolls away. It is hard, rough work, but at last the "cod-end" is heaved in sight, bellied out with a tight mass of fish. The capstan swings it aloft. Presently out pour its riches, a flapping, slithery deluge of plaice and sole, skate and dogfish, through which wriggles a sinister conger.

The net is straightened up. No time is lost in shooting the trawl once again. Then, back on our course, we set down to gutting fish. In this there is a definite art. Bill grips a wriggling plaice, snicks it, and throws it cleaned into its appointed box in one compact lightning movement. I can't do as well as that, though I am learning fast. Cleaning skate is the most horrid task. Their fat lips have a sulky, disdainful expression. Gulls scream about us, delighted. We are all pleased. That last haul must have been twenty stone at the very least.

Last of the catch to be dealt with is an enormous creature, all head and no body, its mouth gaping like any lion's and on its top jaw a curious decoration or lure, a long, thin, gristly fishing-rod with a luminous tassel atop. This is a female angler-fish (the male is a pigmy in comparative size). Bill calls it a kettlemar and says it makes delicate eating. At last all the fish are disposed in their various boxes. The rough-skinned, spotted husses, skate and

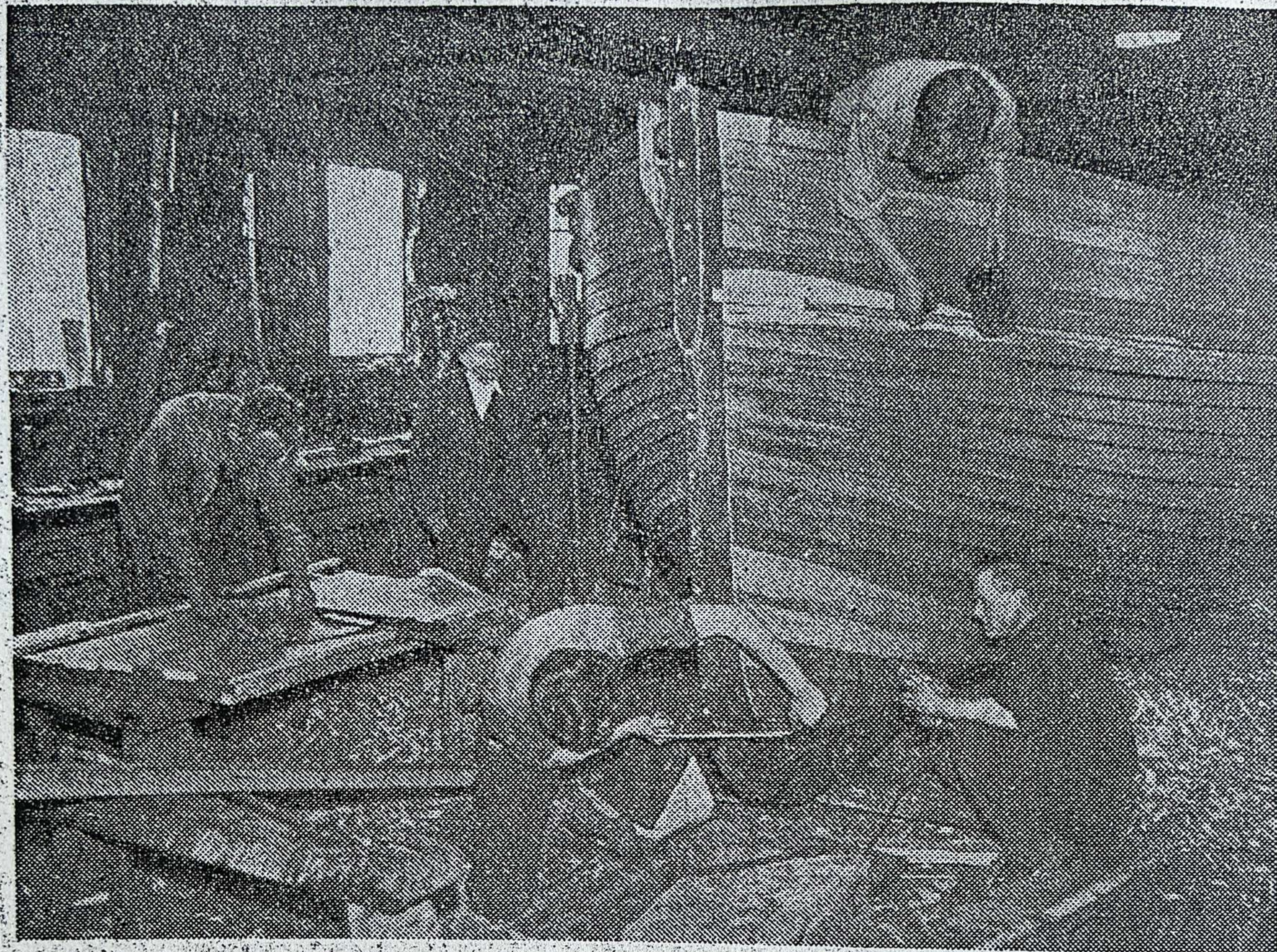
must be caught or we shall be forced to stay out for another twelve hours. Rye trawlers sometimes remain at sea for twenty-four or even thirty-six hours. But, as a general rule, they sail in and out on the tide. The scattered boats draw together as they make for the harbour mouth. Soon we are in and jockeying our way up the fast filling Rother towards the Strand. Many boats stay at the harbour, but the rest have a comical race, bumping and scraping on sandbanks and passing and repassing each other as the channels fill up from the sea. At last we tie up at our berth and heave the heavy fish-boxes on to the jetty. Gear stowed and hatches closed down, we drive our catch down to the Rye Fishermen Society's depot, where it is weighed and a check made out and handed to Bill.

We are free men now—for ten hours. The ground still rocks under my feet.

"I'm goin' to bed," Horace yawns. "You doing the same?"

Yes, I am when I've eaten my dinner (it's half-past four). We roll off to our various lodgings, to meet again at the boat in the darkness of morning. It's a good life—long may it continue; but if Bill and the fishermen like him are not to be thrown out of business the Government must give an ear to the case for the Rye trawlermen. At present this industry, like many another, is being strangled in the robot grip of controls.

24/12/39



A RECENT survey of the Rye shipbuilding industry has revealed that the once large body of master craftsmen, who around slipways on the banks of the River Rother gained world-wide fame with their skill and ingenuity, has dwindled to only five.

Of these, one is 82-year-old Mr. Herbert Phillips, owner of the shipyard (seen above on left of boat), still works in his Rock Channel yard, and is assisted by his son Harry, Mr. Roy Guan and two apprentices, John Kingsmill and Ron Wright.

Even before the days of the Spanish Armada, Rye's shipbuilding industry was renowned, and many of the ideas built into Rye vessels were copied and used by builders all over the world.

Not many centuries ago, Rye shipyards were completely self-contained. The wood they used was from local hewn timber, their own blacksmiths forged the necessary iron work, and sailmakers fashioned the stout sails which would embrace the

MASTERS OF THEIR CRAFT

winds of the seven seas and speed the wheels of commerce.

Through minor wars and years of peace, the old craftsmen continued to ply their skill while the yards passed alternately through phases of prosperity and then deep depression. Work was slackening off just before the recent war, and it was the Admiralty who did their best to revive the industry.

Smaller craft were built by veritable armies of men, and gunboats engaged in harassing the enemy's coastal forces across the Channel put into Rye for urgent repairs. Petrol tanks punctured by machine and cannon fire had to be replaced at short notice, and the men of Rye shipyards made a name for themselves with their speed and efficiency.

Then the war was over and for a time the industry flourished. But the orders did not last and one by one men left the yards and moved away from the town to use their talents in other fields. One shipyard

changed over to building caravans, but even this did not last.

Now all but the Phillips slipways are deserted and empty, and only memories of the gallant ships created on them by prideful craftsmen remain.

Occasionally, as a few weeks ago, a fishing boat is completed by the Phillips team, but mostly the five men are engaged on repair work. Many Rye-built boats — some half a century old — are returned to the town for renovation by descendants of the men who laid their keels.

Fishing is an industry closely allied to shipbuilding, and here again numbers are decreasing monthly as boats silently disappear from the Rye jetties. Of the 120 vessels registered at the port of Rye, only 20 are usually berthed at Rye or Rye Harbour, and fewer than that number regularly go out fishing.

It may be a sad thought, but it is very probable that in two generations' time the industries of shipbuilding and fishing which flourished in the Antient Town for many hundreds of years, will be dead industries, and only to be read about in the history books.

THE YARDS ARE SILENT NOW

INDUSTRY DYING

IN the ancient cobbled town of Rye, Sussex, the once-flourishing shipbuilding industry is dying out.

Men-o'-war built of Sussex oak in Rye shipyards carried English knights to the Crusades, fought the Armada with Drake and Howard, were under Nelson at Trafalgar.

Now the shipyards and slipways along the banks of the Rother are silent and deserted—all except one.

The last remaining master shipwright in Rye is Mr. Herber Phillips, who at 82 is still building small fishing vessels in much the same way as his father did 100 years ago. He is helped by his son Harry, Mr. Roy Guan and two apprentices.

Forty years ago, Mr. Phillips recalls, Rye was a town of shipwrights and fishermen.

6/1/52

The River Rother was alive with the sights and sounds of windjammers are recalled by old ledgers held by Rye harbour-master Carl Bagwell.

The two earliest record books start in the late 1890s, painting a picture of a port then still bustling with sailing craft of all kinds. The ledger titled 'Smacks Dues' lists all 51 fishing boats based in Rye, far more than there are today.

Most were sailing vessels but two, the Pioneer and Crusader, were steam-powered. They led double lives, partly trawling and partly acting as tugs helping the sailers in and out of the tricky harbour entrance.

Trading vessels using the port are recorded in another ledger starting in June 1899. That month saw 26 cargo trips by mostly 'tall ships nearly all were working cargoes for Rye merchants Vidler and Sons.

Amongst them was a fleet of big two-masted sailing barges owned by local traders. These vessels — the Enterprise, Surprise, Sunrise, Mountsfield, Diana and Unity — were built between 1887 and 1891 at G&T Smith's shipyard in Rock Channel. Most were lost at sea within a few years. The Mountsfield and Diana were sold to Cardiff owners in 1917.

Largest cargoes worked through the port between 1899 and 1950 were the two 217 ton loads shipped out by a vessel called Sapphire in October 1900.

STEVE PEAK delves into Rye Harbour's dusty ledgers

Most of the numerous sailing coasters visiting Rye had disappeared by the 1920s. Their place had been taken by the new motor lorry. But right up to the Second World War the harbour attracted a small but steady flow of trading vessels like the Thames sailing barge Olive May, which brought in coal for the gas works by the Strand Quay, and took out beach.

Coal was the main import for many years. Also coming in were timber, stone, bricks, slag and cement. Chief exports were beach, gravel, blue flints for making glass, bark and pitch.

Rye was famous for its shipbuilding industry right up to the Second World War. Its heavily-built wooden sailing trawlers were found in all the big North Sea fishing ports for many decades. 'Built at Rye' was a recommendation second to none.

The first steam-powered vessel built at Rye probably took to the water in the 1850s. But it was not until 1913 that the first motor-driven craft left the slipway. This was the coasting barge Sarah Colebrooke, launched from G&T Smith's yard in early October 1913. She was named after the mother of

her owner W E Colebrooke, mayor of Rye. Her engine was small, so she carried a full rig of sails as well.

She was commandeered by the Navy during the First World War and was last recorded visiting Rye on January 18, 1931, with 113 tons of coal.

Alas the Rye fishing fleet was to collapse in the 1920s and '30s. By the end of the 1920s all but Harry Crampton's big sailing smack Meteor had been laid up.

During the 1930s only four larger fishing boats were at work, between spells of laying up. They were the two Colebrookes, the Meteor and the sailing smack Three Brothers. The Alfred Colebrooke finally stopped work in mid-1935. The Kent Colebrooke was broken up in the spring of 1936. The Three Brothers was converted into a yacht late that same year. And the Meteor survived as the last of the old-style Rye smacks until the spring of 1937, when she was dismantled.

Fishing then almost stopped at Rye until the industry revived in the middle of World War Two.



The big Rye smack Conster RX 99, recorded as lost at sea on November 8, 1918. Picture taken from *George Woods, Photographs from the 1890s* by Steve Peak and Irene Rhoden.

Boat Building For 68 Years



EIGHTY years old and still building boats is the proud record of Mr. Herbert James Phillips, of Rye.

Born in the town, Mr. Phillips started work for his father as an apprentice boat builder when he was 12 years old. At first he earned 2s. a week, and for seven years he was taught a craft now carried on in Rye only by himself, his son, Harry, and their three employees.

Mr. Phillips told an "Express-Herald" reporter this week: "After 68 years of boat-building, I've come to the conclusion that I like the work—I don't think I'll change now."

When Mr. Phillips started there was a lot of boat-building done in his father's yard, but now his trade is mostly in repairs. Mr. Phillips took over the business when his father died 53 years ago, and has actively conducted it ever since.

Eighty, and still working.

Fishing rights upheld

FISHING rights dateing back to the Middle Ages have been upheld following legal action. For centuries only freemen who carry out a seven-year apprenticeship have been allowed to fish on the River Medway between Sheerness and Hawkwood Stone, near Snodland. Medway Council and Rochester Oyster and Floating Fishery successfully obtained an injunction against a man caught illegally fishing on the Medway. Shane Hales, chamberlain of Rochester Oyster Floating Fishery, said: "The river is a small fishery that is important to the Thames Estuary as a breeding area. Trawlers and poachers who damage fish stock are only interested in what they can earn today – not the consequences for tomorrow." Medway Council's historic role in regulating the river is demonstrated every year with Admiralty Court, held in July, which regulates the fishery and appoints freeman and dredgers.

Making a living the keddle-netter



Net profit: Jimper Sutton checks his fish traps, right

THE WAY HE tells it, Jimper Sutton has a harsh enough life, struggling to earn a living from the sea.

As we walk down the beach to gather his nets, following a receding tide in the gathering dusk, Sutton tells his stories: the time he drowned a fox that tried to steal his catch, the day it grew so cold that he could snap the herring like twigs, and those run-ins with bailiffs on the lookout for stolen salmon...

"The best thing about this job," he half-shouts in the darkness, "is that nobody tells me what to do." No one would dare, I think to myself.

Sutton is 59, uses string for his belt, smokes hand-rolled cigarettes, and has a fiercely stubbled chin. Here, in the secluded waters of an East Sussex bay, he relies on a form of trapping that predates the Norman invasion, using "keddle nets" to catch fish that drift close to shore. Plaice, cod, whiting, herring, bass and even an occasional basking shark turn up in the oddly shaped traps.

He is thought to be the only man left in the country fishing with keddle nets, continuing a family tradition that has spanned generations. His parents first brought him to this beach when he was three weeks' old, keeping him safe



When the tide drops, Sutton arrives to scoop up the catch, which he describes as 'a pretty kettle of fish'

and warm in a wicker basket. Now, Sutton says, "we are here to enjoy ourselves", a sign that life has changed over the decades with the introduction of fishing laws and the decline of cod stocks.

The sheltered, gently sloping bay runs for miles. Almost the only building in sight is an old, decaying lifeboat hut. Next to this ramshackle structure Sutton

keeps a wooden fish-cart chained to a small tree. Netting and some boxes can be seen near by.

Offshore, he has laid more than a hundred yards of net which is tethered by "fraps" — wooden slats — buried beneath the sand. The netting stretches to the surface along a line of small white floats to form a "range". Fish entering the bay and following the

eastward tidal flow try to avoid this obstruction and turn back out to sea — only to be trapped at the end of the range in a huge circular net called a "pound". Here they will remain — a seething mass — until the tide drops. Then Sutton arrives to scoop up the catch, which he describes as a "pretty kettle of fish".

Similar beach-based trapping systems have been used along this coastline for centuries, but the practice has declined sharply in recent years as skills have been lost and economic demands have taken a toll on small fishing ventures.

Sutton says that keddle netting began to disappear during the Second World War. Now, he complains, bureaucracy is trying to wipe out his own stake in this idiosyncratic trade. Length of nets, mesh size, and the fish species he is allowed to land increasingly are subject to control. He is licensed by Rother District Council, with a £150 fee for five years, and policed by fisheries inspectors.

"They have told me that they want to stop me. They want to stop the boys catching salmon and sea trout," he says. Sutton releases any salmon that appear in his nets. If the fish are dead, he smashes the bodies to a pulp, which is eaten by birds.

That way, he says, there is nothing left to complain about.

As we continue our walk seawards, Sutton pounces on trapped fish revealed by the starlight: herrings mostly, then a sardine, some flounder, two small sea bass which are thrown back, and a garfish with a spiky nose. As he splashes on through the tide, sparks of phosphorescence illuminate his boots. Looking back to shore, the rocky dunes appear dark and empty, save for the lights of Rye Harbour and Dungeness power station to the east.

The work is strenuous, but Sutton welcomes it. He enjoys sitting on the beach having a smoke while the receding tide deposits his nets like flotsam on the new shore. He used to make £16,000 a year, but reckons his income is a fraction of that now. Sometimes, though, the nets are so full he hasn't time to empty them before the sea returns.

Tonight, he has a small haul that will go to his brother Hugh, who runs a fish shop near the beach at Winchelsea. He also gives me six herring for my tea.

Nicholas Roe

● Sutton's Fish Shop, Sea Road, Winchelsea, East Sussex. Call 01797 226261