BOATS AND BOATMEN OF ORKNEY AND SHETLAND

J. Y. Mather

He then spoke of St. Kilda, the most remote of the Hebrides. I told him I thought of buying it. JOHNSON: "Pray do, Sir. We will go and pass a winter amid the blasts there. We shall have fine fish, and we will take some dried tongues with us, and some books. We will have a strong-built vessel and some Orkney men to navigate her."

BOSWELL. "Life." *Anno* 1772.

This sea rose very high astern . . . and although the sail was laid down she run in it for a bit (like a field of snow) and took water over both sides . . . I had been brought up with boating since I was a child, but this of course was a bit extra.

CHARLES JOHNSON of North Roe, on the 1881 disaster.

The main purpose of this article is to present, as conveniently as possible, a conspectus of various types of opinion on the boats and boatmen of Orkney and Shetland. The subject is occasionally controversial and has engendered a good deal of devotion on one side or the other. We must try to offer, therefore, some balance and objectivity.

It appears to have become widely and almost conventionally accepted that the Shetland boat has achieved a certain perfection of form denied to others. Thus Captain Halcrow wrote (1950:66): "Through the centuries this *multum in parvo* fishing boat has remained at practically the same stage of development, without alteration in type, hull design, or size. This was because the hull form which gave her better sea qualities than anything else afloat had reached perfection seventeen centuries before she finally vanished from the Northern Seas." Similarly Professor Gordon Donaldson: "Well over a thousand years ago an unknown genius in Norway devised a shape of hull and a method of construction of superlative sea-worthiness. In all the centuries since it has not been found possible to improve on that ancient design in any essential" (Donaldson 1958:47).

The Orkney boat, on the other hand, is often considered to be rather graceless and heavy, and above all, to lack the authentic Norse pedigree with its essential connotation of

perfection of hull form, etc. Thus, "the Shetland boats have nothing in common with the heavily built Orkney 'flatchies' as we call them", wrote R. Stuart Bruce. "Shetland boats are true descendants of Norse longships" (Bruce 1930:200). This from a Shetlander. But even an Orcadian like James Omond (writing in 1882) had to admit that, historically at least, "the boats in use throughout the Orkneys were much inferior in model, construction and rig, to those of the present day. The smaller boats then in use were low 'flattish' things with straight stem and stern-post raking considerably . . . shallow, rudely-constructed 'plashy' things from 11 to 15 feet keel" (Omond 1883:333). And James Hornell, neither a Shetlander nor an Orcadian, and probably not emotionally concerned one way or the other, could at least write: "Shetland boats . . . have little in common with those of the Orkneys, for while the latter have been influenced largely by contact with the East Coast of Scotland, the Shetland craft have maintained the old Norwegian ideas pertaining to boat building methods and design" (Hornell 1946:123).

A somewhat more relative judgment of the virtues of the Shetland boat has been given by Charles Sandison when, in writing of the remarkable lack of Scottish influence on Shetland boat-building, he said: "The reason is clearly that a long period of development has so perfected this model for her particular work that no alteration in form has been possible for at least 70 years, possibly for ten times this period" (Sandison 1954:14). The pragmatic criterion of a perfection qualified by a suitability for a "particular work" will be noted here.

Against all this, however, can be set the developed opinion of James Omond of Stromness in his essay (already noted) on fishing boats for the International Fisheries Exhibition in Edinburgh in 1882 (Omond 1883:332). In dealing with the peculiar problems of cod, ling and haddock fishers who return to harbour daily and are often compelled to sail on a wind and with a weather-going tide, he declared roundly: "The Shetland sixern is certainly not the thing. On a wind and in a hard gale . . . she ships water over the lee side every pitch." We should remember that Omond was writing with the 1881 disaster fresh in his mind. "One is forced to the conclusion," he wrote, "that something is wrong, and the cry for a remedy is a loud one." Something had, in fact, already been heard of the danger to the lee side, for Captain Washington included as evidence in his Report after the Wick disaster of 1848 a letter

from John M. D. Skene of Banff: "The fishermen tell me that no boat was ever lost on this coast by the sea breaking in to windward, that it is invariably the lee lurch which swamps the boat, and they are of opinion that if an inner lee board or plank about 19 inches broad, was run right round the boat to catch the sea as it rolled in to leeward, and run out again as the boat righted, it would be the only improvement they require. . . ." (Washington 1849:63).

In 1899 John Spence gave an opinion which had also been heard in 1849. "Though accidents did occur," he wrote concerning the Shetland haaf-fishing, "yet it is matter for surprise that they were not more frequent. This was not so much owing to the seaworthiness of the boats themselves, as to the skill and dexterity with which they were handled" (Spence 1899:136). Mr. James Peate, Captain Washington's expert assessor, had given precisely this opinion about a variety of boats including the Deal Lugger, the Yarmouth Lugger and the Firth of Forth (Newhaven) boat. The virtue was in the man, he maintained, rather than in the boat. His damning remarks about the Wick herring boat as "having a form that approximates to a spheroid . . . the worst that could be given to a floating body for the useful purpose of a boat", are also well known.

In the light of these types of argument, therefore, we may enquire what sort of development took place in the boats of the Northern Islands, and what sort of influences were at work.

In the first place, we must remember that the sixareen itself is probably the product of a development which took place in Shetland. Christian Ployen, as he sailed from Faroe to Shetland in the schooner "Hector" noted the three-man Shetland boats fishing between Sumburgh Head and Fair Isle. He noted how closely they resembled the Faroese four-man type—a little smaller, that was all (Ployen 1840:3). They were, it is obvious, Ness Yoles or Fair Isle skiffs—without doubt the "true descendants" (as Stuart Bruce said) of the Norse longships. Long and lean, with considerable sheer and high ends, they were eminently suitable for pulling and for the prolific edge-of-tide fishing off Sumburgh (Ployen noted the luxury of a mat of plaited straw to relieve the discomfort of long spells on the thwarts and commended it to the Faroese). Their like might have been seen not only in Faroe, but in Iceland and Norway—in the Nordland type of boat, for instance. They were light, easily beached, and very buoyant in a seaway. They stepped a

single mast amidships and hoisted a square sail which was used for running and not for windward sailing.

Tudor, when he visited Fair Isle (Tudor 1883:438), spoke of them as being very "wet" because of their low amidships freeboard, which is exactly what James Omond said of the sixareen. But we cannot doubt that they were maintained in this very primitive form in order to fulfil a known and unchanging task. For Charles Sandison, in his pamphlet on the sixareen (1954 cit.) notes that saith fishing along the edge of the tide seems to have been confined to the Ness and Fair Isle. The men "rowed the boat as fast as possible through or along the edge of the tide and one worked the line. The boat is long and narrow and no other boat of so extreme a type is found elsewhere in Shetland" (Sandison 1954:11). Until about 1840 such boats were imported, unassembled, from Norway. Warington Smyth (1906:120) maintains that they were most probably the Norwegian three-plank type having, consequently a sharp bilge and a lack of stability under sail, although very easily pulled. (The smaller of the Nordland type is also three-plank.) The purely native boat would have twice as many planks per side and a rounder bilge.

It is this question of a native Shetland development which is crucial. It has been discussed by Sandison who uses Ployen's visit to Shetland as a datum. Now, Ployen was particularly interested in the ling fishing and visited Feideland to observe it (Ployen 1840:39). There, as Sandison notices, he made no reference to any similarity between the boats used and the Faroese type—although he had been quick to notice this on his first sight of the three-man boats off Sumburgh. He had already mentioned, in recounting his passage from Scalloway to Burra Isle in "an ordinary Shetland boat", that "the ordinary fishing boats are of a size of eight-manned boats with us, but considerably broader and rowed by six men. These circumstances evidence that the Shetlanders use the sail more than the oars, and the sail itself indicates the same fact" (Ployen 1840:23). Here, at least, is a development towards the greater use of sail in a beamier boat. Moreover, Ployen also remarked how much more effective was the Shetland bowline than the Faroese, for keeping a taut luff, so essential for sailing on the wind.

What is really significant and important in Ployen's observations on the use of sail is the comparison he makes with the Faroese boat (which, for our purpose, can be relied on to

be of pure, conservative, Norse pedigree). So that in Shetland the tendency was towards something beamier, more adapted to sailing on the wind, and more particularly adapted to a fishing other than the traditional edge-of-tide type, with its basic requirement of a handy, pulling boat.

Some sort of support for the desirability of this tendency is to be found in a recent series of articles in the "New Shetlander" by one of Shetland's most devoted students of the sixareen, J. J. Laurenson of Aith, Fetlar, whose great fund of knowledge and tradition is most engagingly stated and should be attentively studied (Laurenson 1963). In considering the losses in the gale of 1881, Laurenson notices that although the boats of 21 feet keel did quite well (e.g. the Fetlar boats "Spray" and "Maggie"), "still it was found that the bigger boat with higher free-board fared better. This seems to be made clear when it is recalled that the island's largest boat the "Southern Air" sailed through the area where the boats had failed without any appreciable difficulty. It is believed that this sixern was the largest in the North Isles. She had a keel length of 24 feet and was full built. . . ." We can only suppose that the "higher free-board" and the "full-build" saved the "Southern Air". We can imagine that James Omond would certainly have approved.

But there is further evidence of this tendency in Shetland. Hibbert had also visited Feideland in 1817 and had spoken quite precisely of a "fleet of yawls" where "six tenants join in . . . a yawl of six oars" at the haaf-fishing (Hibbert 1822: 222). They were imported from Norway and he gives their measurements which are, Sandison states, "the proportions of a Norway yawl and not of a sixareen". Hence, he concludes, "it is certain . . . that between the years 1817 and 1839 a new type of haaf-boat came into common use, and that for this fishing at least she had by the latter date largely replaced the boats from Norway" (Sandison 1954:28).

Ployen's observations on the use of the sail in Shetland are interesting, for there is a certain body of opinion which points exactly the other way. Thus Tudor, although he noted that Sir Walter Scott seemed to have formed the opinion while travelling in the islands, that the Shetlanders were better at managing a boat under sail than the Orcadians, nevertheless remarked that "whatever it may have been then, it certainly is not the case at the present day among the regular boatmen. When in Shetland, to cross a dirty bit of firth, you require, or

are told you require, a big boat and six men; in the Southern group, where the tideways are much stronger, two men will serve your turn as well. A Shetlander almost always cuts a string of tide under oars, an Orcadian under canvas" (Tudor 1883:321). R. Stuart Bruce explains that the fine lines of the Shetland boat are maintained because the boats are greatly used for pulling, whereas the beamier Orkney boats are generally sailed (Bruce 1930:200). A recent writer in the "New Shetlander" maintained that in the early years of the haaf-fishing, sixareens were always rowed unless the wind was fair, and that tacking was unknown as a technique or at least not practised. In fact, "I have heard it said that this way of sailing was first introduced by men who had served as hands on sailing ships in the south, and had there learned to use the sail in this way" (J.H.J. 1962:12).

However this may be, it is certain that the Shetlanders used the sail with most redoubtable skill in really bad weather. Indeed, the whole subject of the dual management (towsman and steersman) of a sixareen in a gale of wind is of the deepest technical interest. There are one or two classical, and by now almost legendary, accounts. (And to these J. J. Laurenson has added one or two more.) The account given by an 1881 survivor, Charles Johnson of North Roe, for example, says, "We close-reefed the sail, put the tack forat and two men took the halyards. The sail was not meant for speed. It's to set to take her away from the seas, and they will be better able to manage her among the seas having the sail to set" (Halcrow 1950: Appendix I). Or again, in the account given to Hibbert of a voyage to the Haaf by a Feideland fisherman "we row'd oot upon him till we sank a' da laigh land . . . de'el a stane o' Shetland did we see except da tap o' Roeness hill and da Pobies o' Unst." But when the bad weather came it was "fit da mast and swift da sail" for the boat was heavy with fish, and "wha's geean ta row under her sic a dae?" Almost immediately a sea made and broke into the low waist of the sixareen almost swamping her, but eventually by sailing when conditions were suitable and rowing when not "we wrought on rowing an' sailing till, by God's Providence we gat ashore about aught o'clock at night" (Hibbert 1822:224).

These considerations in the development of the sixareen, whether indigenous or not, will serve as a convenient point to return to an examination of the opinion with which we began, namely, the *absolute* virtues of the Shetland boat.

It is possible to see, in comparing the types of boats used in the Northern Islands, a microcosm of a historical dichotomy in boat types in Europe. The study of this dichotomy has been developed in a somewhat controversial book by T. C. Lethbridge (1952) to which we now draw attention. Lethbridge's thesis is: first, the fine-lined double-ended "longship" (i.e. the Shetland type) did not originate in the North but in the Mediterranean—the Ligurian pirate galley, for instance, is such a type; and second, the "roundship" (i.e. the Orkney type), which also came from the Mediterranean is a safer, drier and altogether finer sea-boat—it is the ancient Roman trading-vessel and it has, in fact, made its way at the expense of the other type, as witness scaffies, fifies, zulus and modern motor fishing vessels. What the North *did* contribute, especially to the "longship", was clinker-build. And it is this fact which has often been a source of error on the actual provenance of the type. Thus Lethbridge writes: "In Britain itself the round Roman boat type has remained in favour everywhere. Norfolk beach-boats, Scottish skiffs, fifies, and zulus, and so on round the coast to Cornwall and the Channel, all retain the body form of the Roman type even though the build is clinker . . . . Because many of these boats are clinker-built and some are known as yawls, it has long been believed that the type originated in the North . . . I do not believe this. The type originated in the Mediterranean and the build came from the North. One has only to compare the yoles of Orkney with those of Shetland to see this. The Orkney yoles are of the round type, which can be found right down to Cornwall or East Anglia, while the Shetland boats are the long narrow form of the Faroes, Norway and Iceland" (Lethbridge 1952:144).

I am aware, of course, that there are two main types of boat in Orkney which can themselves conform to a "long" type (the Westray skiff) and the "round" type (the South Isles yole), but I do not pursue this here, except to state that Lethbridge's remarks obviously refer to the South Isles type in particular. (This is even "rounder" in form than the North Isles yole.) I add, however, for interest some measurements I took in Summer 1963 of an old North Isles yole and a Westray skiff (both over 50 years old) lying in the punds at Bewan, North Ronaldsay. The yole: overall length 15 feet (keel 12 feet 3 inches) by 6 feet 6 inches beam. The skiff: overall length 18 feet (keel 14 feet) by 6 feet 4 inches beam. Thus the yole is 3 feet shorter for approximately the same beam. There is,

incidentally, a fine selection of old Orkney craft (of ages up to about 80 years, and by builders like Scott and Oman) drawn up at Kettletoft, Sanday. And there is a fine type of South Isles yole (aged about 60 and built on Swona) at Bur Wick, South Ronaldsay.

Now, one way of interpreting the significance of Ployen's observation of the beamier Shetland boat is to think of it as developing, quite pragmatically, in the direction of the "round" type. It is interesting to notice that such a development did in fact take place within the historic Norse tradition. G. J. Marcus, for instance, notes the existence of a *byrðingr*, which was not a *langskip*, but "which was short and broad in the beam . . . (it) was largely employed in the coasting trade, notably in the carriage of stockfish from the Lofoten Islands to Bergen" (1953:115). Professor Brøgger also directs attention to the early similarity and subsequent differentiation of Norse warships and merchant ships. "Till about 1300," he writes, "there was no great difference of basic type . . . . But the different use led by degrees to an inevitable change in shape. . . . The main object in the warships was sailing speed, in the merchant ships a large capacity. And gradually another standard of measurement creeps in for them than we are used to with warships, which are measured in rooms. The trading ships are measured in *lasts* according to capacity. . . . They had a rounder form, a bigger free-board and a deeper draught than the longships. As they were designed almost exclusively for sailing, in most cases the mast was fixed" (Brøgger and Shetelig 1951:234).

Omond maintained that the development in Orkney from the flat "plashy" vessels to something more seaworthy was a deliberate development to meet particular conditions. The South Isles yole was developed in the strong tidal conditions of the Pentland Firth as the Stroma and Swona pilot-boat. (Here, Omond claims to speak with special knowledge as having lived on Swona for some time.) The main hazards here, perhaps even more than in Shetland, were the dangerous "tide-lumps" and the menace of swamping leewater which Omond considered such a weakness in the sixareen. So that the Orkney boat developed, as he said, with a deeper hold, "and the mould fuller in general". Furthermore, it is now sprit-rigged. Although these boats are still wet when close-reefed in a head sea, yet "their qualities are swiftness, they carry a good cargo, scud well and are fairly weatherly under

double reefs. . . . My object in drawing attention to these smaller boats is to bring under notice their qualities, and because they are the origin of the larger herring fishing-boat peculiar to the Orkneys" (Omond 1883:335).

This last is the important point. We must remember that a herring-fishing vessel, especially when working in the offing, must have all the virtues, including the virtue of carrying-capacity for her catch. She must be *byrðingr* as well as *langskip*. And this, at least, was the direction in which the Pentland pilot-boat was developing. Now, "fifty years ago" says Omond, (i.e. just about the time of Ployen's visit to Shetland) "the boats employed in the Orkney herring-fishing . . . were the exact counterpart of the pilot-boat previously mentioned, a trifle fuller built in some instances, with more depth of hold, but almost identical in mould and rig" (*ibid*). So much for Orkney. But, if we follow the evidence of Ployen, we shall find that Shetland had come to no sort of certainty about the best type of boat with which to prosecute the herring fishing. In the first place, Ployen noticed that they were smaller than the herring boats of Orkney and Scotland, but although more or less consistent in size were variable in build and rig. "Some of them are sharp both fore and aft, some have a flat stern and broad bow, some have one mast with a large spret sail, foresail and jib, others have two masts and a big lug sail—in short, there is the greatest variety. It is clear that the herring fishery, being still a new industry in Shetland, the people have not yet come to any fixed persuasion as to which is best adapted for the purpose" (Ployen 1840:170).

Nevertheless, these varied types seemed to indicate a growing desire for something new. Gradually the "half-deckers" appeared, i.e. vessels having a short decked fo'castle, but with all else open. It was maintained by many that for the working of nets an open boat with a clear gunwale which could serve as a fulcrum for a man's chest, gave balance and security to the fisherman (Anon. 1851:595). Halcrow calls these half-deckers the "hybrid link between sixearn and smack". And, clearly, some sort of development was required. The fishing tenures in Shetland were becoming exploited by landlords in the direction of this "new industry" of herring fishing—and for this the sixareen was very much less than perfect. Herrings can be caught in vast quantities, and the actual catching and carrying capacity of the sixareen was inadequate. It is true that there were spectacular, if somewhat isolated successes. Captain

Halcrow (1950:134) mentions a sixareen, rowed and sailed to Wick from Northmavine in 1862, which completed a very successful season. And there was even a large sixareen, owned by Robert Irvine, which was built with a foredeck. Nevertheless, the half-deckers brought up from Scotland had the virtue of adaptability for both haaf and herring fishing, and they afforded in addition some slight protection for the men and some facilities for cooking food. Even so the men were conservative. The Scots boats were heavy and could not be hauled up, but had to lie to an anchor and be manned and watched. Nor, to quote Captain Halcrow "did the lugger appeal to the square-rig complex of the Shetlander, who was both fisher and sailor. For once the landmasters do not appear to have pressed the point, nevertheless they brought the luggers north as fast as they could find skippers and crews to assume financial responsibility. Those craft soon proved their value as herring fishers, having twice the catching capacity of the sixearn. This fact and the terrible disaster of 1832 gave the land magnates their opportunity. Realising that a fleet of half-deckers would have a better chance of survival in the same circumstances, the grief-subdued fishermen gave way and accepted them without further protest. But they never ousted the sixearn, although the two fishings were no longer on the same economic plane" (Halcrow 1950:131).

Eventually, at least one "fixed persuasion" to which the Shetlanders came, was the adoption of smack rig, i.e. gaff and boom as against the Scottish dipping lug (Halcrow 1950:136; Norton 1960:97; Warington Smyth 1906:104). Indeed, many luggers brought from Scotland were immediately converted to smacks. Orkney, certainly by 1882, had abandoned the pilot-boat rig, for Omond observed that "at present scarce one of the old yawls remains, being almost if not entirely supplanted by the firthy and the smack rig".

The "firthy" (sc. Moray Firth) rig can possibly still be seen in Orkney. It is usually a dipping high-peaked, free-footed foresail with the tack to the stem-head, and jib, and a standing-lug mizzen with boom. One advantage is that the fore-mast can be shorter and still achieve a considerable peak in the sail. The mizzen can be dispensed with altogether in wintertime. One wonders, incidentally, for just how long two masts have been common on small vessels in Orkney. (The Shetland sixareen, it will be recalled, in conformity with her Norse ancestry, only had one.) The sketches which accompany

Omond's article, even of the old "plashy" vessels, all show two masts. And an interesting entry given by Dr. Hugh Marwick (1926:15) speaks of a boat ordered to be built and "readie upon the shoare of Kirkwall" by March 1633, as being required to have "twa masts, twa raes, and sex oares".

What of the boatmen of Orkney and Shetland? J. J. Laurenson's list of the names and exploits of the Fetlar skippers of old reads like Paul's citation in the eleventh of Hebrews. We have already referred to one or two accounts of quite heroic incident. Hibbert was perverse enough to dismiss the terse and artless account of the incident at the haaf from the Northmavine man (which he included in his "Description" apparently only as a sample of Shetland dialect) as possessing "little or no interest as a mere narrative" and as given "in all its native rudeness and prolixity" (1822:223). This was not the attitude of a hundred years later when Charles Johnson's account of the 1881 disaster, recounted fifty years after the event, was printed in Manson's *Nautical Almanac and Directory* for 1932 and is treasured on the shelves of a thousand Shetland homes. There we can feel all the controlled excitement—terror even—of incidents such as running a breaking sea ("like a field of snow") upon which Johnson comments in a style as laconic as the Sagas themselves: "I had been brought up with boating since I was a child, but this of course was a bit extra". In the same way we feel that Hibbert would have done better to have marked the seamanlike adaptability (as well as the seamanlike piety) of his Feideland fisherman, conveyed in such a gem as:

> "So I guid i' the starn, and just as we gae sail, he made a watter aff o' da fore kaib, and when he brook, he took Hackie aff o' da skair taft, and laid him i' da shott. Dan I cried to Gibbie, for God's sake to strik da head oot o' da drink kig and ouse da boat; da watter wis up at da fasta bands, bit wi' God's help we gat her toom'd before anither watter cam. When the east tide ran aff, noo said I, lads, we'll tak doon da sail an row in upon him. So we did sae,—and when da wast tide made, we gae sail agin and ran east upon him, and faith we lay upo' Vallyfield in Unst, and we wrought on rowing an' sailing till, by God's Providence, we gat ashore about aught o'clock at night. O man, dat wis a foul dae!" (1822:224.)

Dr. Johnson, it is obvious, held the Orkneymen in high esteem as seamen. Indeed, they seem to have been in some demand in the latter half of the eighteenth century. For example, there is a postscript to a letter of Captain Forbes,

factor on the Cromarty (forfeited) estate dated at Beaufort 2nd August, 1763: "None of the sailors will agree to go to Lewis. I have other two boats ready which will be delivered this week, but I am afraid to provide more least the Orkney people don't come" (Miller 1909:113). Later, their public image became somewhat dulled by the devastating opposition of "fisherman" and "farmer" which Tudor popularised. He quoted for his readers what is now a familiar enough aphorism: "The Shetlander is a fisherman who has a farm; the Orcadian a farmer who has a boat" (Tudor 1883:104). Perhaps the opposition was unfortunate. Readers of "Captains Courageous" will remember that it was said of Uncle Salters that "there ain't water enough 'tween here an' Hatt'rus to wash the furrer-mould off'n his boots. He's jest everlasting farmer". Yet Uncle Salters was also a splendid, if somewhat unlucky, seaman—and the finest cod-splitter on the Grand Banks, we are told.

Of course, in these matters there is much that is contingent upon circumstance. Scott, for example (Lockhart 1837:205), observed that the Orcadians neglected fishing in favour of agriculture, which was the very reverse of the Shetlanders. But already, in the First Statistical Account, the Rev. William Clouston had assured his readers that it was kelp-burning which was really to blame, at least on Sanday and North Ronaldsay, where the inhabitants could not even find time to fish for lobsters, at least for commerce. (Dogfish were always fished for and eaten by the Orcadians which apparently earned them the hearty contempt of the Shetlanders.) At the very beginning of the nineteenth century, in 1804, Patrick Neill observed that the shoals of herring which came annually into the Pentland Firth and Scapa Flow were not taken by the Orcadians because they could not afford suitable nets. Hence in parishes like Orphir and Holm, adjacent to Scapa Flow, he observed people starving from want, while the seas teemed with food (1806:64). Seventy years later a professional observer like Holdsworth also observed that cultivation absorbed most of the Orcadians' energies to the great neglect of the fishing. He wrote: "There is no reason to doubt that there are plenty of fish of various kinds on the coast, but they change their localities a good deal, and the Orcadians are not all such thoroughbred fishermen as to follow up their profession under many difficulties" (1874:301).

There has been a rather persistent attitude of mind which

has imputed to fishermen (and, indeed, to all seamen) much that they would not have claimed for themselves. Very often, for instance, they have been thought to possess a mysterious skill in pilotage which in fact is only the unconscious application of an experience patiently and consciously acquired. It can be observed in machine-minders no less than in seamen. Similarly, much has been made of "the call of the sea" or "the sea in the blood", which (in my experience) falls with a somewhat precious jingle on seamen's ears. Latterly, we have schooled ourselves to be unromantic and hard-headed about these fishermen, and we believe that the discipline has enabled us to penetrate, quite realistically, to the heart of their situation. Our analyses show them as fishing, or cultivating, or burning kelp or rendering dog-fish livers for oil, but we forget that these are *our* analyses, not theirs, and they reflect our own preoccupation with society—a society which is also dedicated, in one of its academic aspects at least, to the systematic analysis of theirs. Whitehead, it will be remembered, thought of Gibbon as writing not one but two, histories—the history of the Roman Empire and the history of his own situation in the climate of opinion of the eighteenth century. Thus, in our own limited field, although we scorn the mysterious skills, we hypostatise the sociological patterning. Truly, as R. G. Collingwood observed "the historian's data are the entire present". Hence, a principle of indeterminacy forever dogs us, so that of the matters we have been discussing we might say what Masefield said of sailing ships, but possibly in a more recondite sense than he intended:

> They mark our passage as a race of men,
> Earth will not see such ships as those agen.

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