ASPECTS OF THE LINGUISTIC GEOGRAPHY OF SCOTLAND *

II: EAST COAST FISHING

J. Y. Mather

In this article I wish to set out some selected items from the results of a tentative and very incomplete lexical investigation which I was able to pursue, in the Linguistic Survey of Scotland, at the same time as my formal phonological fieldwork. Work on the Survey's phonological questionnaire, which aims at eliciting vowel and consonant systems by means of direct and personal contact with informants, can obviously be the occasion for the study of much else of dialectological interest; so that here, at least, the often vexed question of method (postal or personal) in linguistic geography does not necessarily arise. To have neglected the opportunity, and having in any case a certain predilection for the subject, would have been foolish and unnatural.

This is all the more cogent, because in the area in which the field-work was mainly concentrated—the coast and hinterland of eastern Scotland—it was still possible to find men in fishing communities who had followed their occupation within conventions uninfluenced by subsequent, and very radical, developments in their lifetime—like the rise of steam or motor power in place of sail, or the widespread and specialised use of the seine-net in place of lines, especially small-lines. This is not simply antiquarianism or even romanticism. It is, or at least it is considered to be, the conservative and stable background against which certain territorial distributions in vocabulary can be displayed. This point was also made in the first article in this series (Mather 1965:130).

Several observers of the contemporary scene on the east coast of Scotland at the beginning of last century found its conservatism both complete and depressing (Anon. 1842:296;

* The first article in this series appeared in *Scottish Studies* 9: 129-44.

Anon. 1841:229; Miller 1844); but, significantly, Hugh Miller found a liberalising influence from an unexpected source: "Great, however, as is the *vis inertiae* of this portion of our population, there exist levers powerful enough to move them.... We mean the Herring Fishery" (Miller 1844:345). The herring fishery had "not been regularly plied on the East Coast of Scotland, if we except Caithness, beyond the commencement of the present century". But now, "there are few professions less mechanical than that of our herring-fishers; and its ceaseless, ever-varying demands on their ingenuity cannot be other than favourable in developing the intellect of a class, whose mental faculties, when engaged in the round of their ordinary labours, rust for want of exercise" (Miller 1844:348).

What Hugh Miller here terms "developing the intellect" appears, perhaps more reasonably in our contemporary idiom, simply as the abandonment of older conventions and the adoption of new. But, even in the size and style of fishing craft he believed that there was a concomitant development along with the "intellect" of its crew. This applied especially to the development of the herring-boat. "The herring-boat", he wrote, "is commonly a distinct concern from the white-fishing boat. The one may have undergone no change in its style of equipment for ages; it may have been stereotyped like its crew" (*op. cit.*: 346). In this reflection, I believe, Hugh Miller somewhat overstated his case; but since my own studies cover both small-line (white-fish) and drift-net (herring) fishings, it occurred to me that for a single, and limited, article I might concentrate on one or two features of the development of the boats and gear for the herring fishery only (bearing in mind, but not always explicitly criticising, what Hugh Miller said about it) as the nucleus of a much wider study. I am, in fact, at present engaged in formulating some of these wider aspects, with the idea of including other, correlative, studies in a general, but I hope new, descriptive essay for the east coast of Scotland.

The essay will also, I hope, supplement the larger lexical work at present being prepared for publication by the Linguistic Survey. One new development, within the British Isles, which has very recently been discussed, has been the possibility of devising a fishing questionnaire in order to elicit information from all round our coasts (Wright 1964:27). In such a development the Linguistic Survey of Scotland can be expected to put forward its own particular contribution. One major

difficulty, for a field as wide as the British Isles (or even the North Sea) is the problem of *comparable* material, or what Arnold Toynbee in another connection has called "an intelligible field of study". In this problem, it is probable that small-line fishing and drift-net fishing will offer a sound initial approach. It is of crucial importance at the outset to try to examine techniques—especially boats and gear—in order to abstract whatever constants appear to be useful, and to try to exploit these in a regular questionnaire. Otherwise, no unified study is likely to ensue, but only a mass of material which will be almost impossible to set out in any coherent form. Unfortunately, the material presented here is extremely incomplete, owing to the necessarily opportunist and unsystematic way in which it was gathered. Thus, the main concentration is from Avoch in Easter Ross to Eyemouth in Berwickshire, but even here there are wide gaps. Orkney and Shetland can be regarded as a special case—a noteworthy and significant reflection in itself. Caithness and East Sutherland I have not yet been able to study sufficiently satisfactorily for the present purpose. For a few places between Gourdon and Peterhead I have made use of some of William Grant's early notes which Mr. Murison of the Scottish National Dictionary has put at my disposal.

Although linguistic geography addresses itself to particular, limited, and often internal problems (it is even prepared to limit itself to one word at a time), some of its exponents have stressed its contribution to, and dependence on, other disciplines (McIntosh 1952:20ff; 1954:173; Weinreich 1954:388). Weinreich, for example, has spoken of "external dialectology" and has developed the notion that "even more impressive results are being obtained in correlating the borders, centres, and overall dynamics of language areas with 'culture areas' in a broader sense" (Weinreich 1954:397).

It is not the purpose of this article to consider this expressly and in detail, but in the wider task of working over the phonological material already collected for the east coast it will obviously be impossible to ignore completely the sort of correlations which Weinreich has suggested. His type of approach is not, of course, universally accepted. Stankiewicz, for instance (1957:46) has summed up the commonest objection—which in fact we have also touched on in stressing the need for a conservative background—in these words: "The use of extra-linguistic criteria, which are by no means better definable than the linguistic criteria, introduces new variables in the study of

dialects which are likely to obscure and to conflict with the results obtained by linguistic methods". Furthermore (this again was emphasised in the first article), it is not usually possible to present such complete and demonstrably integrated *structures* for words as it is for sounds. Eventually, in my more fully coordinated description, I hope that structural phonological schemata will be given, grouped and critically considered. But the crucial problem will not be the demonstration of, say, a 12-vowel system in Shetland *versus* a 9-vowel system in Berwickshire, but the relative value of these within a wider descriptive statement, and the relative value of whatever we can make of the lexical and cultural evidence. Can *this* also be structured? And if not can it be of equal, or comparable, value? "Ein wanderndes Wort" wrote Gauchat in an image celebrated in linguistic geography, "gleicht dem Fremden, der sich irgendwo einnistet, wo es ihm gefällt; ein wandernder Laut klopft nur bei Verwandten an" (Gauchat 1903:377).

It is, of course, not quite impossible to discover a lexical structure. For example, the word "propellor" is, so far as one can judge, simply an *addition* to the particular vocabulary of a Scottish fisherman. It has been added as a new word (because of a new *thing*) and has displaced nothing in his technical vocabulary. It has called for no structural *adjustment*. On the other hand, it is possible to argue that where (as happened last century—see Dade 1934:206) a number of small Scottish east coast luggers were bought by Scarborough fishermen and called "keel-boats" to distinguish them from the native Yorkshire "cobles" (considered, but only implicitly, to be boats *without* keel), that this was not simply addition but structural alteration. For if Dade's assertion is true that the Scarborough men did particularly designate these imported boats, the trigger effect within the vocabulary was to make *explicit* a word for boat *without* keel ("coble") as well as a boat *with* keel ("keel-boat").

However, even if discussion of considerations such as these is to be waived for the present, it must at least be possible at this stage to set out some of the results of my lexical investigation with a minimum of critical apparatus, but on the clear understanding that they can be correlated in due course, and as critically as may be, with phonological or cultural data. On this present occasion also, we must waive all discussion on the nature of the relationship between "words" and "things". Hence, some endeavour will be made to try to describe

processes and apparatus rather than to attempt definitive interpretation, which in any case, because of its unevenness, the material is often not yet ready to bear.

Nevertheless, since even obvious and elementary discussion is always interpretation, there is one feature of the material presented here which might be anticipated. It is that we shall not always find diversity of territorial distribution, but sometimes uniformity. In the terminology in the rig of a sailing-drifter, for example, there seems to be no diverse distribution for the words "tie" and "burton". Yet, for a particular manoeuvre executed by shifting the tack of the foresail—to be described in due course—there is a considerable diversity of lexical usage. It may be that, in discussing and assessing the uniformity of "tie" and "burton" we can use this collected, synchronic, evidence in a *diachronic* interpretation, by noting the relative stage at which the thing, or the technique, makes its appearance. If so, we must see what extra-linguistic—in this case historical—evidence can be brought to bear. It can be argued, in any case, that not all parts of a boat—hull, sails, rigging—have grown together *equally*. It is very common, for instance, for an imported type of sail or rig to be used on an indigenous hull. This, I believe, is true of Orkney in the "firthie" (*sc.* "Moray Firth") rig. It is also true (LeBaron Bowen 1953:82) of the Arab lateen sail on Arab and Indian hulls in the Indian Ocean and on Egyptian, Turkish, Greek, Italian, Spanish and French hulls in the Mediterranean. Indeed, LeBaron Bowen affirms that "the sail is one of the most easily diffused cultural traits known to man".

Finally, the interpretation of diversity or uniformity might sometimes be shown to depend on the notion that neither has an "objective" existence, but is created by a point of view. Thus, in the nineteenth century a very professional observer like Holdsworth (he was Secretary to the Royal Sea Fisheries Commission) was able to observe, quite emphatically, that "In the general style and rig of the fishing boats used in Scotland there is a much greater uniformity than on the English coast" and to ascribe this to the fact that, in Scotland, there is a "general absence of deep-water harbours, and the consequent restriction in the size of the boats which can be conveniently employed" (Holdsworth 1874:276); yet he could also observe that although "there is little difference at first sight in the appearance above water of the general run of Scotch fishing boats—there are many distinctions below the water-line"

(*op. cit.*: 211) and, furthermore, "on part of the Banff line of coast a boat locally called the 'scaith' is in use. It is altogether unlike the rest of the Scotch fishing boats . . ." (*op. cit.*: 293). Very recently, the same sort of dualist viewpoint has been hinted at by P. F. Anson. Thus, in fisher dress, "even trousers had their local distinctions. In some communities the flap was square shaped; in others the sides were slightly rounded off" (Anson 1965:31). Yet, on the other hand, Mr. Anson has stressed a general *uniformity* in dress among fishermen; "clothes —regarded as symbolic standards of multitudes united together in the same calling" (*op. cit.*: 27; cf. Bertram 1873:299).

Boats

I turn now to the examination of those aspects of boats and gear, and the techniques of sailing and fishing, together with the relevant words used on the east coast which form the bases of this study. I begin with the boats themselves.

The Norse provenance of east coast boats has been very generally asserted, and it is not part of the purpose of this article to discuss it in detail. But the conclusion of E. W. White in his Handbook of the Science Museum's collection of fishing-boat models, must be fairly stated: "Despite considerable research, it is not at present possible to trace development of the fishing craft of the mainland earlier than 1849 when, in that year, an elaborate report by Washington was presented to Parliament" (White 1952:I 44).

Holdsworth's views have already been noticed. To these can be added the positive statement of James Thomson, writing twenty years or so before him, that in the larger herring-boats, at least, there were two types: the "south built" and the "west built" (Thomson 1849:51). Thomson was Washington's contemporary—his book appeared in the same year as Washington's Report—and the two general types he gives can also be extracted from the evidence published by Washington. Buckie, Cullen, Portessie are "west", and Aberdeen, Peterhead, and Newhaven (especially) are "south". (To this day "east the coast" and "west the coast" are common directives and consciously held divisions, in the Moray Firth; and the "south firth" is the Firth of Forth.)

Now, Holdsworth's uniformity and Thomson's diversity might both be regarded as "true" if we suppose uniformity means fidelity to a generally Norse style, and diversity a concentration on a particular *stage* of its development. This

supposition would imply that the "west" type is considered to be conservative because it adheres more strictly to the Orkney North Isles Yole (full beam and raking stems)—although we can also suppose that this type is itself a liberal development from the archaic Shetland Ness Yole, or even more, the Fair Isle skiff; and the "south" type less conservative because of the development of particular features (finer lines for'ard and straight stems).

None of this, of course, solves precise problems in the origin, development, or differentiation of "south" or "west" types. H. C. Folkard, who wrote on the subject in the middle of last century, seemed to imply a solution on *racial* lines. The "south" type, he considered, was "always manned by a race of people descended from the Scandinavian colonies established in many parts along the eastern coast of Scotland". He even hinted at the main topic of our present study, for "the language spoken by these men quite confounds our south of England countrymen". On the other hand, the "west" type ("differing from the others both as to construction and rig") is manned by "a distinct race from the others, being exclusively Celts". And in fact, "the others would deem it a derogation of their creed to have a Celt among the crew in one of the first described luggers, whilst it would be equally so on the part of the Celts to carry a Scandinavian in their boats" (Folkard 1863:32).

This colourful point of view is possibly more reasonable and certainly more up to date than it appears. For there is no real argument against *any* descriptive marker, provided this can be reasonably sustained. We must treat of the *net* (to use Wittgenstein's rather appropriate figure) and not of what the net contains. The dichotomy which Folkard seems anxious to present may, also, have a dialectological basis; and we shall, in this present study, find several reasons for marking off a west-east division in the Moray Firth. Furthermore, a demographic study of the nature and composition of some of the deliberately introduced settlements of fishermen in particular places, and their linguistic correlates, will, I believe, prove to be rewarding, and I hope to conclude this series of articles by a study on these lines. At the moment, however, we must return to the specific facts presented to Washington at his public enquiry. Already, in the "south" types, like the Newhaven boat and the Fraserburgh boat, Washington had conceded, out of much that was extremely critical, that "rather less rounding" (i.e. as compared with the "Buckie boat") was a commendable

feature (Washington 1849). And by "Buckie boat" is meant the immediate descendant of Holdsworth's "scaith" which is so "altogether unlike the rest of the Scotch fishing boats"(*vid. ante*, Holdsworth 1874:293). It is the conservative "west" type.

All were, of course, open boats. This is important in considering their history, for it is most probable that they were developed for the herring fishing in point of size *only*, with all other features intact. This, certainly, is only conjectural history, but the consistent conservative argument against any form of deck, or even half-deck, which is revealed in the evidence from fishermen in Washington's Report makes it more than likely that other features were left unchanged too. In fact, even the development of size was hardly won. Mr. Kearney White of the Fraserburgh coastguard thought that boats ought to be bigger, decked, and cutter-rigged. (This last was revolutionary —east coast fishing-boats, of course, were, and remained, luggers.) Mr. Stephen, fisherman, replied: "We consider that the boats cannot be made any larger". Mr. White was then forced to remark: "Yes, but you thought so some years ago, when they were smaller than they are now, and when those who proposed to make them a few inches bigger were laughed at; and yet you in Fraserburgh were among the first to add two feet to your boats" (Washington 1849:46).

This development in size seems to have a direct linguistic reflex. We must notice presently some of the different names for the smaller boats, but the name "big boat" (or "boat", simply) is undifferentiated and universal. Of course, the names "Zulu" and "Fifie" appear for the corresponding "west" and "south" types (*i.e.* as developed in size mainly, although the "Zulu" has not *all* features of the traditional west type, but is a compromise). These names are chiefly used, however, in opposition to each other, and especially as territorial markers. (The territorial distribution is roughly the same as for the "west" and "south" types already given.) But, as a differentiation within the economy of a given fisherman—who, with the great expansion of the herring-fishery in the nineteenth century might possess, or share, both a "big" and a "small" boat—the name "big boat" applied universally to the herring boat.

It is not possible to maintain, however, that the use of the term is absolutely coincident with the gradual *specialisation* of east coast fishermen, culminating eventually in the undifferentiated herring fishing of the steam-drifter on the one

hand, and the modern seine-netter on the other. George Hutcheson (1887), referring to the internal economy of a crew at the beginning of the nineteenth century at Buckie, observed that the largest size of boat (which invariably belonged to the laird, not the crew) was for great-line fishing. The economy was, therefore, quite unspecialised, and a crew might have three sizes of boat at its disposal: a small type, probably of 15-20 feet keel for inshore fishing; a second type for haddock and herring fishing, of 28-32 feet keel; and the larger great-line boat.

In nomenclature, Hutcheson's division is simply into "boats" and "yawls". This may be a somewhat normalised division, or it may refer to a situation outside the experience and the memory of my informants, but I did not myself find the term "yawl" *consistently* remembered in a specialised professional way, from Kincardineshire to Morayshire. It was, however, given for Pennan, and for the *smallest* type at St. Combs, and these may be special, and perhaps defining, cases in that the fishing is there wholly decayed. Boddam gave "winter yole" as a secondary definition for "sma' boat". Aberdeenshire and the East Neuk of Fife gave "baldie"; Buckie and Cullen "halflin' boatie"; Cairnbulg, Inverallochy and St. Combs "sma' boat"/sma bet/;[1] Kincardineshire, Angus, Morayshire, Easter Ross, "yole" or "yolie".

The information from St. Combs is obviously interesting, for it seems to reflect the same situation as Hutcheson's three types at Buckie. This situation may, in fact, have been fairly widespread in the Moray Firth, but I have not yet sufficient information, either linguistic or material to define its limits. Sixty years or so ago, my informant at St. Combs told me, there was a three-man boat (the "yole"), a six-man boat (the "sma' boat"/sma bet/) and the "big boat"/big bet/. All existed contemporaneously—the older men generally preferred to go in the "yoles" to a less arduous type of fishing. Boddam, too, told me of this pattern. My informants at Cairnbulg, however, said they did not use the term "yole"; and at Gamrie the 24 feet haddock boat was called a "skift". White (1952:II 33) confirms this for the whole of Banffshire: "Boats or Yawls employed for small-line fishing—in Aberdeenshire—were called 'Baldies' and in Banffshire 'skiffs'." Further west—Lossiemouth, Hopeman, Burghead, Avoch, Cromarty—I found the division was simply, and it seemed quite unequivocally, "Yole" (or "Yolie")/"Big Boat".

The "halflin' boat" of Buckie and Cullen corresponds to the "baldie" elsewhere. There seems little doubt that the "baldie" is a development of a boat of intermediate size, partially decked, and often carvel built, from the "south" type of open boat—itself, as we have noticed, a particular development from a Norse original. This category of *intermediate* size, therefore, appears to fit in with the name and category "sma' bet" of Cairnbulg, St. Combs, Inverallochy, Boddam. The "baldie", it is to be observed, is the immediate ancestor of the "big", fully developed "Fifie". The name does not appear in "west built" (subsequent "Zulu") territory. As we have just seen, the name "halflin' boatie" is used at least in Buckie and Cullen.

There is one fairly simple and clear-cut marker within the terminology for parts of boats which can be conveniently introduced at this point. This is the word for "fo'castle". For our present purpose (considering an open "scaffie" of approximately one hundred years ago as a datum) this will be understood to refer to a very small space for'ard which is decked over to provide both shelter and stowage. This can be variously called "bunk" (Arbroath, Cullen, Buckie, St. Monance); "den" (Avoch, Hopeman, Burghead); "housie" (Findochty) and "huddock" (Crawton). The western corner of the Moray Firth is thus clearly marked off with the word "den". "Housie" at Findochty (which also very commonly simply says "fo'castle") is rather noteworthy, in that there are one or two other instances there of this "non-dialect" type of word. Indeed, my informant (*aet.* 84) was very conscious of this and emphasised it as a defining characteristic. Thus in the collocation (corresponding to a particular sailing technique) "take the tack to the hook", it is *this*, which seems to be its simplest form, which is the Findochty version of a variety of much more recondite substitutes for the last word, "hook". (These words will be given in due course.) And similarly for a particular operation in small-line fishing, Findochty uses the common English word "grapple" for other varieties like "creep" or "graid".

It seems that to qualify for any of the designations "bunk", "den" etc., the thing itself must necessarily be for'ard. In the later "Fifies" and "Zulus", for example, when living accommodation was arranged aft, these words seem to have been abandoned as the word "cabin" came into use. But if this description by position is accepted, the word "huddock" for the Crawton is possibly a little strange. In this form the word was very commonly used for the cabin of a Tyne keel, which

was certainly aft (see R. O. Hislop in Wright: 1898 *s.v.* "huddock": and Viall 1942:160). Jakobsen (1928) gives both "hoddek" and "horek" for the stern compartment of a boat. (Phonetically, it is entirely feasible that these two forms should occur.) In the form "horek" the most obvious usage is the aftermost of the commonly-named parts of a Shetland sixareen (beginning from for'ard)—fore-head, fore-room, mid-room, ouse-room, shott and hurrock (sometimes, kannie). In *Patience*, Jonah is represented as going, for fear of the storm

> In-to þe boþem of þe bot, & on a brede lyggede,
> Onhelde by þe hurrok . . .

and Gollancz, commenting on this, thinks that "hurrock" may be "some detachable portion of the vessel, not an integral part of it" (Gollancz 1924:40; but see also Bateson 1918:26). I am not sure that this detachable portion has ever been satisfactorily explained, but at least there was within living memory a detachable thwart aft on open boats, often called the "slip thaft" (in Orkney the "lin") which had the advantage of making more room in this, the *working* part of the boat. The history of this ought certainly to be examined. It is also worth noticing here that my information from Arbroath gave: "He's sitting in the thurrock" as the formal collocation to designate the duty of the man whose turn it is to take the fish from the hooks, in the general division of labour in the boat. Gamrie gave "he's sitting in the thaftie" (for the form "thurrock" see Gollancz *op. cit.*:41).

However, "huddock" in whatever position need cause no real concern, for there is a parallel situation where merchant seamen, at least, continued to speak of "fo'castle" long after its traditional position was transferred aft, and, indeed, until the whole idea of *common* living quarters for seamen fell into desuetude.

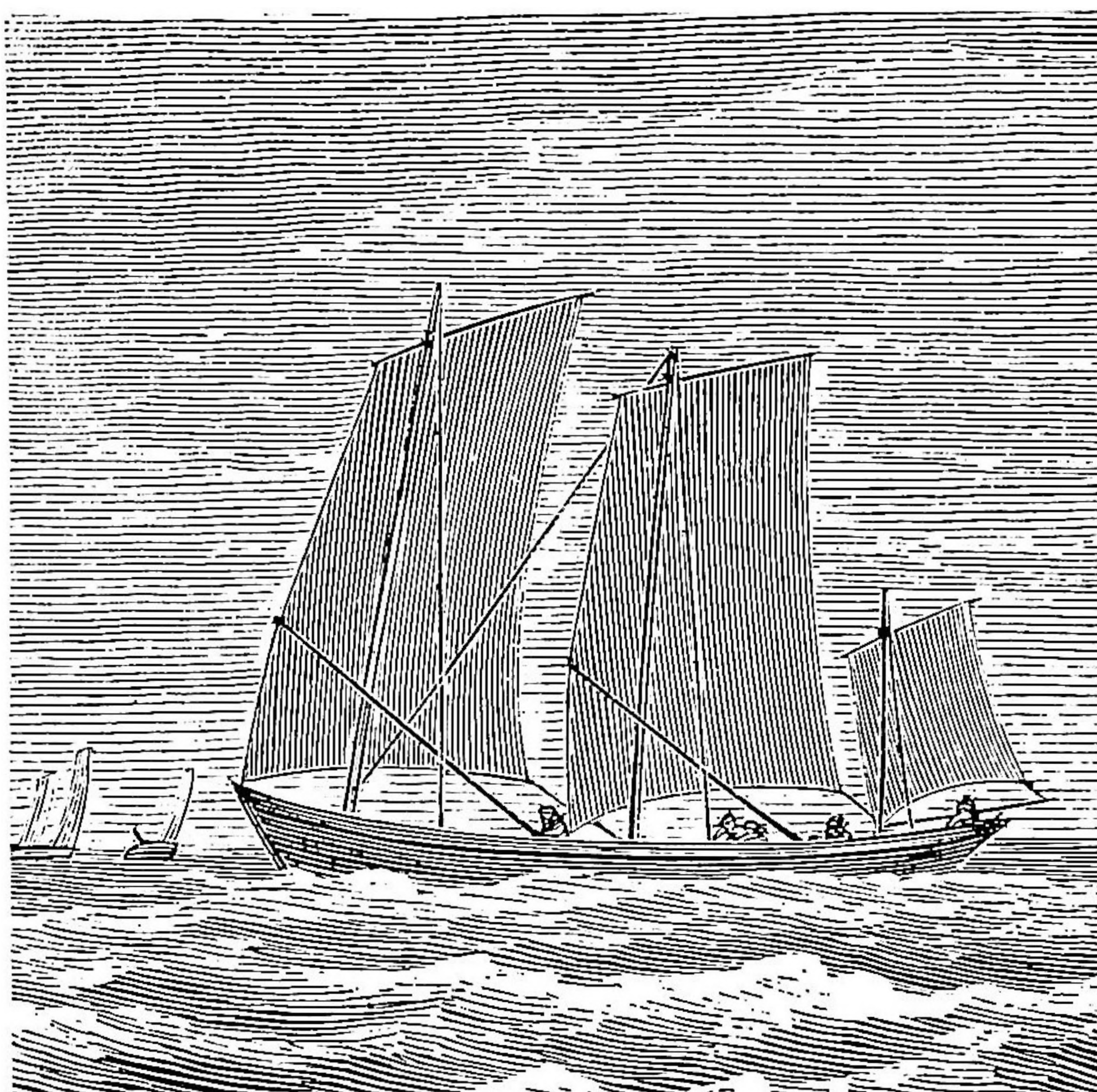
On fishing vessels, especially those engaged in small-line fishing with obviously specialised duties which resulted, as we have just seen, in formal and almost ritual collocations, the various named portions of the boat were very widely and functionally used in actual working. Such usages exist to-day only very vestigially. Grant's notes of fifty years ago show a general understanding of the common designations for the position of oarsmen, as "forinfit-air", "efterinfit-air" etc. Nowadays, informants know nothing of this. Even the working words for "starboard" and "port" ("forin" and "efterin") are

hardly remembered. Of these traditional working words I found "foreroom" at St. Monance for the space immediately abaft the "fo'castle"; and "fore-hole" at Gamrie.

Rig

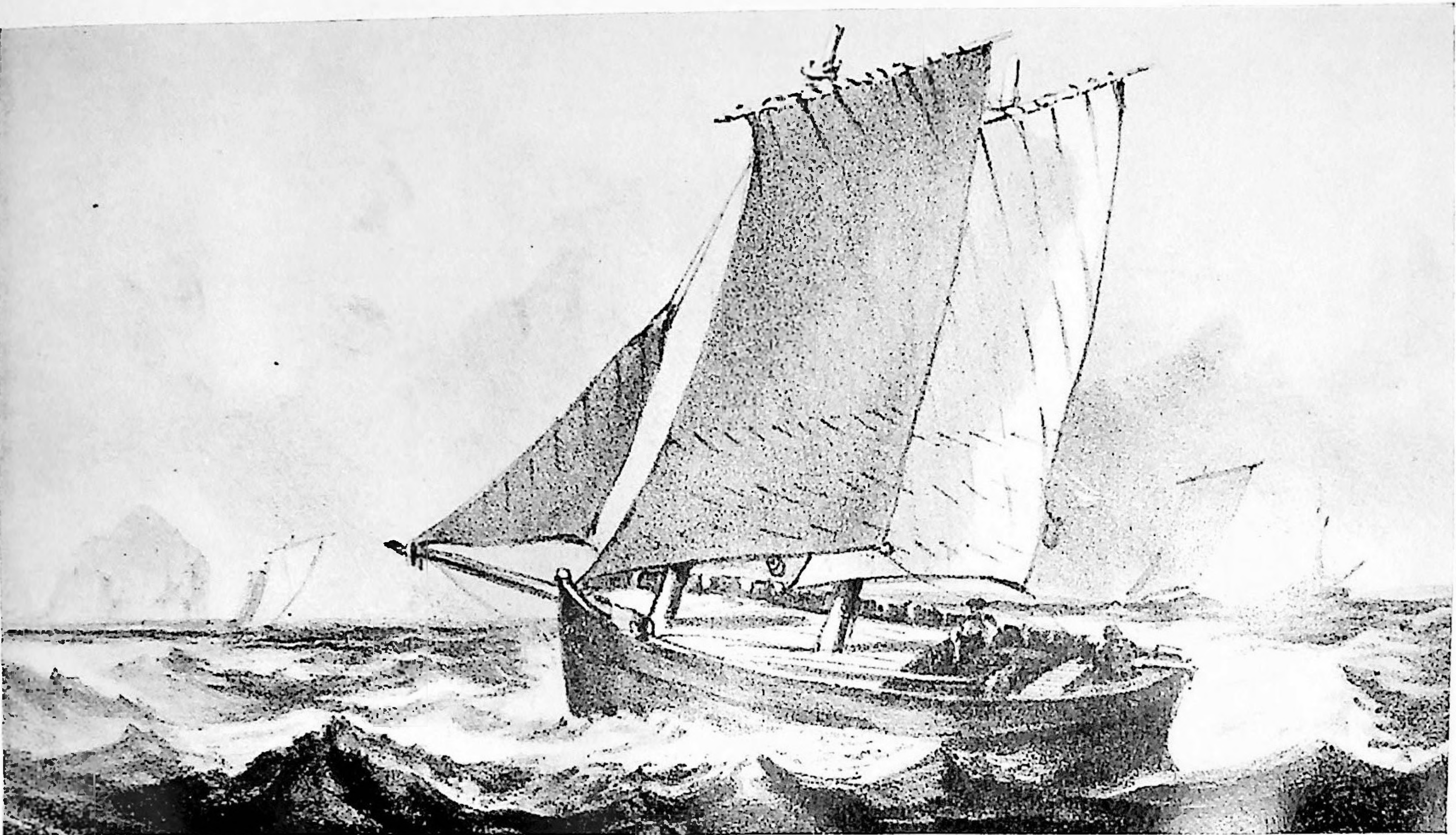
I turn now to some features of rig. The dipping-lug was, and remained until the final disappearance of sail altogether, the characteristic rig for fishing vessels on the Scottish east coast. Occasionally in the nineteenth century, some experiments were made with smack-rig (i.e. with gaff instead of yard), often with an appeal to handiness and even safety, but these experiments made no steady advance and left no decided influence on vocabulary. Yet, in spite of this general uniformity in rig there was one broad division which old sail-boat men may yet be heard to speak about, viz., the high-peaked sails of the Moray Firth and the noticeably squarer sails of the coast from Peterhead southwards. (This, of course, is roughly the "west/south" or "Zulu/Fifie" division.) The descent of this north country type of sail is undoubtedly from the "Scaffie" (Holdsworth's "Scaith") which, with its shorter keel, required a considerable breadth in the foot of the sail, with a higher peak to balance, in order to keep the boat to the wind.

Folkard who, as we have seen, had positive views about the manning of east coast vessels also had positive views about their rig. In the "south" type, which is rigged with two masts, "the longest or main-mast is placed forward and within a foot or two of the stem, and raking slightly aft: on this mast the main lug-sail is set. The mizzen-mast and sail are small in comparison with the wide spread of canvas forward" (Folkard 1864:32). But the "west" boats "carry larger sails than the others, which are placed exactly the reverse—the small sail being placed forward and the large or main-lug aft". For the "west" type, at least, this is confirmed in a lengthy note on boats and fishing in the First Statistical Account for Avoch (1795), where after mentioning the "immense oblong sail" on the mainmast, the writer adds that there is "a foresail besides, on a pole at the boat stem, of the same oblong form, but only a tenth part of the size of the other". This is certainly not what Holdsworth saw (but he was writing twenty years after Folkard and eighty after the Statistical Account) and he adds his Plate XIII to his text, so that there can be no doubt. What he *does* say is that his "scaith" has three masts: "She carries a mizzen in addition to the fore and main lugs; and with poles



A Moray Firth "Scaith" of *c.* 1870
Detail of engraving, Holdsworth, *Deep-Sea Fishing and Fishing Boats*
(See page 141)

PLATE VI



"Newhaven Decked Fishing Boat off the Bass", *c.* 1864

Lithograph from J. M. Mitchell, *The Herring—its Natural History and National Importance*

(See page 141)

rigged up to act as bow-lines, she has the quaint appearance represented by the distant boat in Plate XIII" (Holdsworth 1874:294. See Plate V, which shows the boat he refers to). Yet, however quaint, it is obvious that the fore and main lugs are not at all as Folkard described them. Hugh Miller, writing ten years before Folkard, declared that he had already seen the disappearance of the small foresail: "When two lug-sails have been used for centuries, as in the Moray Firth the one of small size on a short foremast, the other large and unwieldy, on a mainmast nearly thrice as tall, the foresail is seen gradually to become larger, the mainsail smaller, until in about ten or

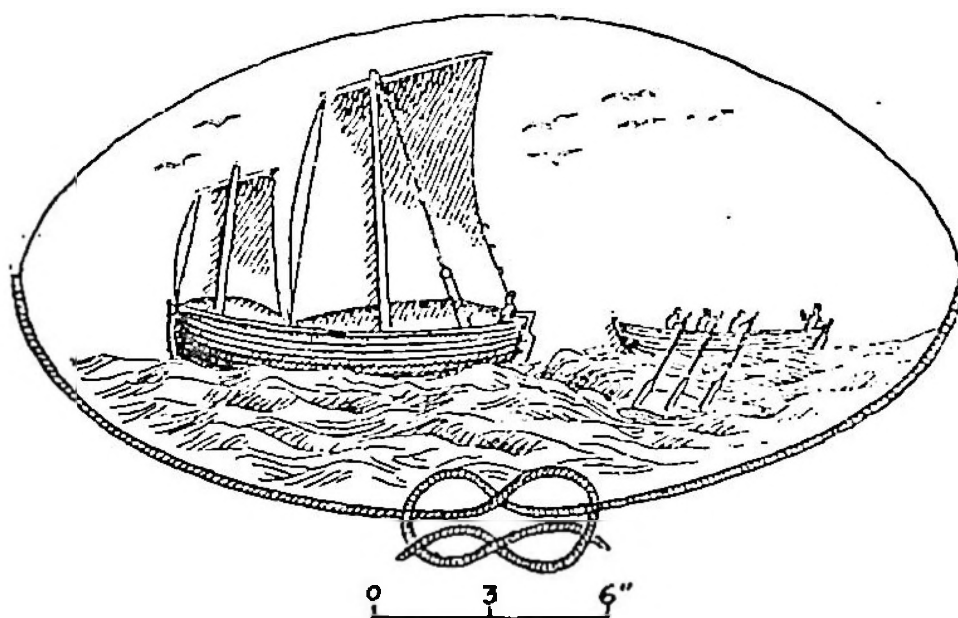


Fig. 1.

fifteen years the two masts and sails come to be of nearly equal size and there is a third sail added on a sort of outrigger astern" (Miller 1844:347). Now, there is a kirkyard monument, dated 1811 (thirty years before Miller wrote) at Bervie (Kincardineshire) to Andrew Watt, "some time white fisher in Gourdon", which shows a boat with a very small foresail and a large mainsail (Fig. 1). If this is really a true, and local, representation rather than a generalised artistic conception, the type of boat is either well out of the area in which Folkard said it ought to appear, or he is writing too late to have remembered an *earlier* "south" type. By 1864 there was undoubtedly a developed "south" type, for in this year John M. Mitchell's book on the herring fisheries appeared which included a lithographed drawing by J. R. Prentice showing a "Newhaven Decked Fishing Boat off the Bass", with two lug-sails and jib (Plate VI). The main-mast is stepped very obviously amidships and there is no striking difference between the foresail and mainsail,

although close inspection shows that the foot of the former is somewhat longer (Mitchell 1864:297).

The main interest in all this for our present purpose, is that there is some correlative *linguistic* evidence to support the proposition that both "south" and "west" types must have had some form of small foresail at some point in their development. Folkard said of the "south" type that "the longest, or main-mast is placed far forward. . . ." But it was never—and is never—so *called.* Even though its size shows that it is obviously the "main" mast, it was always called the *foremast* and carried the *foresail.* And this usage continued, quite uniformly I believe, in the area I investigated. In fact, the name "mainsail" disappears and we are left with "foresail" and "mizzen"—which is the linguistic reflex of the situation which Holdsworth observed where there were *three* masts, "fore", "main" and "mizzen".

Now let us consider what, in general nautical parlance, is called the *traveller.* This is a strop of rope, or a hinged ring of iron, encircling the mast, to which the yard is attached. (If the strop is of rope, it is usually protected against chafe by a series of *lignum vitae* balls. On the Shetland sixareen, it is very often a cow's horn.) The purpose of the traveller is to keep the yard close to the mast and yet permit free movement up and down. (See March 1952:p. 21, fig. 6. Also, what appears to be a rather primitive type is to be seen in Plate VI of this present article.) In my investigation, I found it was variously called "rack", "parrel" or "parley", "cranse", "grommet", "sweel" and "traveller".

In order both to understand these variations and to comment on their distribution, it is necessary to describe the process of lowering and dipping the yard which an east coast fishing vessel (by definition, a *dipping* lugger) must necessarily do when going about. Briefly, in going from one tack to the other the yard must be lowered and re-hoisted on the opposite side of the mast (i.e. the new lee side). There are two ways of doing this—either to lower the yard completely and pull it aft, so that its fore end can come clear of the mast and so pass to the other side; or to push the yard for'ard—at the same time peaking it up considerably, which in common sea-language is called "cock billing"—so that its after end comes clear. It is necessary in the first method (and, of course possible, for the yard is lowered) to unhook the yard from the traveller; in the second method, this is unnecessary provided the strop and hook

are swivelled. And in any case the yard is not lowered to the deck.

E. J. March (March 1952:20) has described three ways of going about with a dipping lug. His addition is a variation of the first method I have described. The yard is not lowered, but the halliards are slacked off sufficiently to allow the yard to swing round to the other side—but still round the *after* side of the mast. I have simply made a division—i.e. yard comes round the after side or fore side, of the mast. It is interesting, however, that March describes the fore side of the mast technique as "that adopted by West Cornishmen and the Royal Navy for boat work". This method I have called "cock-billing". To set a yard "a-cock-bill" is certainly "big ship" language—on a sailing vessel, in port, it was necessary to peak up the yards in this way to keep them clear of the holds, and this was also occasionally done, formally, as a sign of mourning—and the word is also very usually applied, by transference, to something not quite straight. In my investigation I found the *word* used in two places—Gamrie and Boddam—although the *technique* was understood universally. But if understood, it was not necessarily *practised* universally—or at least not practised within the memory of my informants.

This unequal memory-span (which could, of course, apply to the word as well as the technique) may be the clue to a fuller understanding of some of the complexities which this brief examination has revealed. Let us look at this more closely.

One of the concomitant problems in the increase in the size of fishing vessels was the increase in the weight of the yard, and this, in practice, meant that only the first of the two methods could be used (yard lowered and pulled aft). March (*ante*) noted that the other method was used for *boat* work, that is, with a light yard. The first method, in fact, was eventually made much easier when steam capstans came into use, which could be rigged with a handy tackle for the purpose. There was, in any case, a further complication—a heavy yard required a sixfold purchase which, unless the yard was lowered and the traveller unhooked, got a turn in it when passing from one side of the mast to the other. Apparently, about the same time as this increase in the size and weight of the yard, Buckie adopted the use of the *lignum vitae* balls on the strop. My informants on the Moray Firth, and especially at Buckie, regarded this as a characteristic "north" development, not to be found on "south firth" boats; and, certainly, an examination of the models of

east coast craft in the Royal Scottish Museum will show that the Newhaven boats shown there (dated *c.* 1880) have *not* the balls but the iron traveller. But there is no reason to suppose that Buckie *never* practised the "cock-billing" technique, even though it and the iron type of traveller are now, to my informants, generally associated with the "south firth". In Buckie, it may have been discontinued relatively early because, as we have just observed, of the simple fact of increased size and weight. My East Neuk informants in Fife declared that eventually—early in this century perhaps—the balls *did* make their appearance in the Firth of Forth. For instance, my information from Crail is that the iron traveller itself is called the "parrel"/pɔrəl/ but the addition of balls makes it a "Buckie parrel"/bʌke pɔrəl/. St. Monance gave /pɔrel/, simply, for this but "cranse" for the iron ring type. Information from William Grant's notes gives "cranse", "parrel" and "grommet" at Stonehaven (all presumably equivalent, but the types are not, unfortunately, specified precisely), but with "rack" given as "the oldest". For Johnshaven, Grant noted "parrel" in common use (again, however, the note is not specific), with "rack not now used". This type of information—"not now used"—obviously makes exact assessment very difficult for it, too, is contingent on memory span. We do not know, for instance, if "rack" was ever used in the Firth of Forth *just* because it is not remembered by an informant—and *a fortiori* because the thing *itself* has been replaced by something different. It is perhaps worth recollecting here that this is the same sort of difficulty which occurred in the first article in this series, where the Statistical Accounts were seen to be unreliable as evidence for the occurrence of the chaffinch, because writers were not *specifically* required to take note of it. This sort of difficulty is crucial for our assessment of: rope grommet, rope plus balls, iron plus swivel, cow's horn.

My informants in Buckie and Lossiemouth gave no other possibility than "parrel", or "parley"/parle/ as it is usually rendered. This was the strop with balls, and other forms of the *thing* (especially the iron ring) were understood to belong to other places—to the "south firth", for instance, as we have already noticed. Boddam and Gamrie (who both spoke of "cock-billing") both gave "parrel" *only*, as referring either to the iron ring or the balls. Only one place—Arbroath—gave a word which seemed to imply the necessity for a swivel in the "cock-billing" technique. This was the word "sweel"/swil/, as

applied to the iron ring, with the word "parrel" reserved for the "Buckie" type on the bigger boats—indeed on the "big boats" properly so called. At the Downies I found the word "traveller", and Grant's notes, incidentally, confirmed this. "Rack" or "rackie" (*cf.* O.N. "raki") is commonly used in Shetland and I found it also at Avoch, Hopeman, Cairnbulg, Ferryden and Portlethan for the rope strop with wooden balls. In these places "parrel" appears for the *iron* apparatus. This rather gives the impression that the rope grommet—the simplest and presumably the oldest form—has been furnished with balls and the name "rack" retained, and that the iron ring is newer or at least differentiated.

Uniformity and Diversity

All this, however difficult its analysis, shows considerable diversity. We can turn at this point to consider the two important, and connected, items in east coast lug-rig which have already been mentioned (the "burton" and the "tie") and which, so far as I am aware, show only uniformity. The first is a form of backstay for the foremast and comprises a long pendant from the mast-head to which a luff-tackle (usually) is attached, for purchase. The second is part of the fore-halliards system and also comprises a long pendant (the "tie") which is rove through a sheave at the mast-head and thereafter is attached to the yard. The other end is attached to a six-fold purchase, which forms the halliards. It must be remembered that the vessels we are considering have no *standing* rigging and the burton and the halliards are deliberately used to stay the mast since they are made fast to the weather side on each tack. Hence, when going about, both have to be shifted to the new weather side. In the manoeuvre the mast stands momentarily with no stay whatever. The burton, incidentally, is brought into service, at this point, to support the yard when it is lowered, in the first of the methods we have already described, while the tie is unhooked.

I have said that my findings, at least so far, show that these words have no territorial variation. If it is argued that this uniformity is due to a relatively late borrowing both of word and thing from mercantile or naval usage, then it is worth pointing out something of their history in this connection. Carr Laughton (Laughton 1914:60) has argued that although the lug-sail itself may be fairly modern yet "the tie and halliard arrangement . . . is not peculiar to it, but, with unessential

differences, has been in use for square sails since at any rate the fourteenth century and probably much earlier. Also the tie when first met with was called the 'tie' or 'up tie'. Burton is undoubtedly a variant of Breton. Breton tackles . . . occur in many early inventories. The original meaning of the term has for long been so far forgotten that such a variant as 'Spanish burton' has become possible." R. Morton Nance is of the same opinion (*op. cit.*: 93), but adds (from the evidence of the inventories of the *Regent*, 1487, and the *Sovereign*, 1495) that "brytton takles" were distinct from swifting tackles (to swift, is to set up taut, as for example, standing rigging with a tackle), and were almost invariably preventer shrouds. Hence—and we have already noted the use of the burton as a preventer backstay—"the fisherman . . . is probably nearer to the original meaning and is using the name applied by his ancestors to the backstays of their square rigged craft, for in Spanish *burda* still means a backstay, and in Dutch *perdoen* has the same meaning". However this may be, the immediate problem for us is to discover whether or not these words (and also words like "cock-billing") are borrowings into east coast fishing vocabulary. In any case some research into the rig, and the terminology of the rig, is clearly necessary.

The next item I wish to examine is a particular technique used only with a dipping lug. It is far from uniform and shows considerable local variation in its designation. The technique consists of taking the tack of the sail from the stem-head—where in a dipping lug it performs most efficiently, unless, for some purposes, it is taken to the weather bow—to a point considerably further aft, where it performs less efficiently, but efficiently enough for a particular and convenient purpose. It is convenient, for example, when beating up a narrow channel which calls for constant lowering and dipping, to limit this labour by converting the dipping lug into a temporary *standing* lug. This is done by the aforesaid technique of making the tack fast at a point somewhere between the foremast and the stem-head—usually just before the foremast. In East Anglia—where it is extensively practised because of narrow channels between sandbanks—it is called "setting the foresail a-monk". On the east coast of Scotland it is described by some final variation in the conventional formula: "take the tack to the. . . ." The final word can here be "stellum", "kratch", "breast", "fore-sheet brodd", "back o' the balk", "hook", "step", "grips", or simply "take the tack aft".

Most of these words refer ultimately to the structural arrangements of the open boat before decking. It may be, in fact, that closer study both of the words and their distributions will add to our knowledge of the evolution of some structural details, but in one word at least—the word "stellum"—I have not yet been able to arrive at a precise definition. I found it at the Crawton, Skateraw, the Downies, Ferryden, Crail and Cellardyke. At two places—Ferryden and the Crawton—my informants made it clear that the word referred to the hook *itself*, and not to the balk or thwart on which it was placed. The balk was, of course, of prime importance in strengthening and stiffening the boat in the way of the mast. Even after decking it was retained—*above* the deck, not below it. At the Crawton I elicited the expression "she took a stellum board" /ʃi tuk ɐ stɛləm berd/, meaning, "the boat missed stays", but was unable to analyse it further. At Arbroath, an old informant (*aet.* 85) spoke of a "stellum board"/stɛləm berd/, as a fore-and-aft shifting board (as it would be called in the merchant service) about three feet high, which ran along the top of the keelson to prevent the catch of herring moving about in a seaway.

The taking of the tack to the balk, with no particular reference to a possible hook, is reflected in the expression "tack to the balk"/tek tə ðə ba:k/ which I was given at St. Combs, Avoch, and Hopeman; and "tack to the back o' the balk" at Buckie and Lossiemouth. Findochty, as we have already particularly noticed, simply gave "tack to the hook".

At one place only—Pittenweem—I was given the expression "tack to the fore-sheet brodd"/tek tə ðə fɔr ʃit brɔd/ and this peculiarity was noticed, and in fact pointed out to me, by other informants in the East Neuk of Fife—Crail, Anstruther, etc.—who themselves used "tack to the stellum". It appears that in the oldest type of open boats remembered by my informants, there was a kind of small platform, raised up some six inches from the floor-boards, *for'ard*, and this was known as the /fɔr ʃit brɔd/. It seems that it might have been particularly useful in tending the fore sheet in a type of vessel with the mast stepped well for'ard. Can it be, then, a vestige of the *small* foresail, which as we have already seen, is historically attested? Further —at St. Monance the equivalent expression is "tack to the stap", i.e. the mast-step, which is, by definition, at the foot of the mast and on the keel or, keelson, and at any rate *somewhere* near the same place as the "fore-sheet brodd". In short, in an open boat, are we to understand that the technique we are

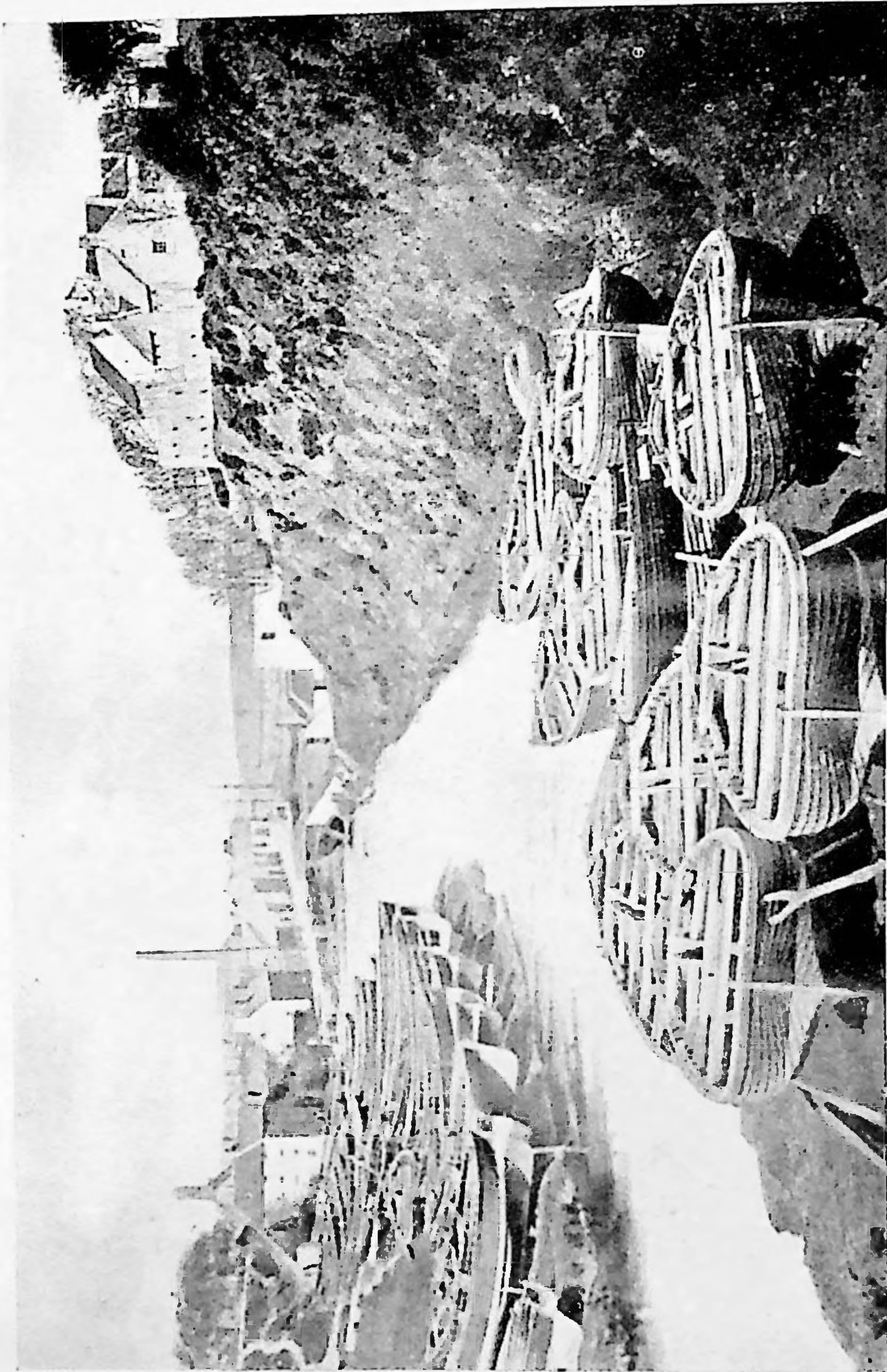
discussing involved making the tack fast at a point at least rather lower than a thwart?

Local Phonetic Development

I have already suggested that all of these words can refer to particular structural features of the open boat; and that they were retained after decking. Thus, a word like "kratch", by its use in the expression "take the tack to the kratch hook", may be identified as a structural feature of this kind. It seems, on linguistic evidence alone, that this must be somewhere close to the foot of the foremast, and perhaps structurally associated with it. I now therefore wish to examine some details of construction of the point where the mast either enters the deck of a decked vessel, or meets the balk of an open vessel, together with the associated words. In both cases it is the means of achieving rigidity in the mast which is under consideration.

On very small open boats it is not usually necessary to keep the mast rigid by any means other than a clamp or wedge (or both) in the way of the balk at the point where the mast is supported by it. In the rather larger vessels with which we are concerned there is likewise no standing rigging. There is only, as we have seen, the burton and the halliards. Even *prima facie*, therefore, there is some necessity for a strengthening structural feature, and this, in fact, is to be found in open boats, in baldies, and skiffs, and in the fully developed "Fifies" and "Zulus". It takes the form of a close-fitting box which surrounds the mast from the deck (or balk) downwards to the keelson. The mast is, of course, free to move within the box if required —as in raising or lowering it for example—and the whole arrangement is usually freely lubricated with grease or soft-soap. It is known variously on the east coast as /pɛdləs/, /pɛtlədʒ/, /pɛrtlənz/, "skegs", "box", "fishings", "cheeks", "back skratch", "spails" and "staple". Plate VII is an early photograph (*c.* 1860) from McIver's *An Old Time Fishing Town: Eyemouth.* All the boats in the foreground show the top of the "box" very clearly.

In general nautical parlance the entire arrangement is usually spoken of as "the mast partners". Thus, Admiral Smyth's "Sailor's Word Book" (1867: *s.v.* Partners) defines it as: "A framework of thick plank, fitted round the several scuttles or holes in a ship's decks, through which the masts, capstans, etc. pass; but particularly to support it when the mast leans against it." The word /pɛrtlənz/ which I found was



Fishing vessels drawn up at Eyemouth, Berwickshire, *c.* 1860
From Daniel McIver, *An Old Time Fishing Town: Eyemouth*
(See page 148)

used in Lossiemouth is probably a version of "partners", /pɛrtnərz/. So also, very probably, /pɛdləs/ which is from Hopeman and Burghead, and /pɛtlədʒ/ which is from Avoch—although these are obviously somewhat more remote. From Burghead I obtained the additional information that /pɛdləs/ could be further qualified by the words "side" or "back" (or perhaps "balk"?)—thus /sɛid pɛdləs/ or /ba:k pɛdləs/, referring to the sides or the fore part of the box-like arrangement. This rather tends to confirm the supposition that /pɛdləs/ is, in fact, "partners", for the N.E.D. quotes Thearle *Naval Architecture* (1874) as saying (*s.v.* Partners): "The mast holes of a ship with wood beams are framed with a series of carlings termed fore and aft partners, cross partners . . .".

It is interesting to note that whatever *phonetic* explanation is given for /pɛdləs/, /pɛtlədʒ/, or/ pɛrtlənz/ as a version of /pɛrtnərz/ —e.g. the homorganic substitution of one alveolar consonant for another as [d] or [t] for [r], or [l] for [n]—these changes can be observed in a particular distribution, viz., Hopeman, Burghead, Avoch, Lossiemouth; and also that each version is institutionalised, in its own way, within a particular fishing community. Outside the western corner of the Moray Firth the words do not seem to be found, but this corner is precisely where a good deal of deliberate planting of Highland population, for the express purpose of prosecuting the fishing, took place. It is, therefore, another example of a distinctive usage for this area.

East of Lossiemouth none of the varieties of "partners" is to be found. Buckie and Findochty, for instance, gave "cheeks" (with the alternative "side balks" at Findochty). Cairnbulg gave "side skratch" or "back (balk?) skratch"; Boddam and Ferryden gave "box"; the Crawton, Gourdon and the Downies "side spails"; Arbroath, "fishings"; the East Neuk, "skegs"; but Cromarty, "staple".

It is perhaps worth remarking that "partners", in whatever version, may be a mercantile or naval borrowing in the same way as "cock-billing", "burton" and "parrel". If this is considered to be so, one outstanding problem is to determine which words, in general, are thus borrowed; and, in particular, at what stage in the development of east coast craft this took place. Was it only when the vessels became larger and the yard and mast became heavier? Or are the borrowings directly traceable to the annual East Anglian fishing? Or is the influence from the outside, for instance from the exploitation of the

fisheries by companies like the Northumberland Fishing Company, or Messrs. Falls of Dunbar? There is some account of the activities of these companies in Avoch in the First Statistical Account (Vol. XV, p. 627 n.); and in Buckie, with Selby and Co. of London also, in George Hutcheson (*op. cit.*).

One further marker will give another positive indication of the rather distinct area in the west of the Moray Firth which has already been noticed once or twice. This is the use of the word "corse" as referring to the top part of the sail after all possible reefs have been taken in. The citation in the Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue, dated 1614, is: "For XXV dussoun of canues to be cors and bonet of ane main saill . . .". This refers to two parts of a sail, with a detachable "bonet" for shortening sail. In the Scottish National Dictionary there is a citation from Banff, 1937, which says: "A fite squall cam' doon the Firth, an' we ran afor't wi' only the corse o' the sail". My information from Banffshire would certainly confirm this—Gamrie, for example, gave "doon tae the hinmost corse"—but west of Buckie the word seems not to be used. Indeed, it was considered to be a word used "east the coast". Thus, Hopeman, Burghead, Lossiemouth and Avoch spoke of "doon til the bowlin' ring", although Nairn gave the information that "corse" was very much used there. I have, at present, no further information for the use of this word from Fraserburgh southwards, but I have some cognate information on the words "reefs", "rings", "heads", as used in the technique of shortening sail. Shetland, it may be worth remembering, does not use the word "reef" in this connection. Hibbert's celebrated account of a voyage to the Haaf from a Feideland fisherman spoke of weather impossible to row in, so that it was necessary to "fit da mast and swift da sail" (Hibbert 1822:224). But, in another account of high endeavour at sea, which has now passed into the folk-literature of the Moray Firth, we read that on the sail-boat *Glide* of Lossiemouth, "after the first shock, and when in a measure we had become somewhat accustomed to the darkness, the snow, the wind, and the sea, with great difficulty we gave our vessel two rings of the foresail". And later, "the sail was raised just the least degree possible—the 'eemost ring'" (J. Campbell 1893). It will be noticed first of all that—as coming from Lossiemouth—there is no mention of "down to the corse" here. The "rings" refer to the reef cringles, which are eyes worked into the luff and leech of the sail, which is then reefed down, as necessary, to any given pair. Sometimes the word

"heads" rather than "rings" is used, and although there are some places where either word seems to be acceptable (I noted the Crawton, the Downies, and Arbroath in particular) yet the western area of the Moray Firth seems quite positive with "heads" only, although the special collocation "doon til the bowlin' ring" is used in the particular sense we have already noticed. Nairn, which seemed to be anomalous in the area in its use of "corse", is nevertheless, in line with Hopeman, Burghead, Lossiemouth and Avoch for "heads".

There is, finally, the category "reefs" instead of either "rings" or "heads". Probably sufficient has already been said in other connections to make such a "non-dialect" category a reasonable expectation. Gourdon seems only to have "reefs" (together with expressions like "close-reefed", etc.) and Grant's notes confirm this. Cairnbulg gave "reefs" (but, "doon tae the bowlin' ring"). So did Gamrie (but, "doon tae the hinmost corse"). Ferryden gave both "reefs" and "rings".

This is as far as I propose to take the discussion at the moment. I have tried to state, rather than solve problems, and it may be that enough has already emerged out of the somewhat scattered material I have presented, to make this clear. I would stress my main general conclusion, which is that the inequality of development of craft and rig makes necessary very considerable refinement of method. Thus, to think like Hugh Miller of a great loosening of the bands of custom which emancipated men and boats together is much too simple. Yet, all we can ever say will, inevitably, be too simple. This is the judgment on all observation and interpretation. If we cannot escape it we can at least busy ourselves with multiplying such entities as seem most fitting—words, speech-sounds, artefacts, techniques, customs—and, even more important, try to erect these into some sort of seemly structure. It will be impermanent, but it is worth the attempt.

NOTE

[1] Type within oblique brackets signifies a phonemic transcription of the preceding orthographic rendering.

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