Aspects of the Linguistic Geography of Scotland *

III: Fishing Communities of the East Coast (Part 1)

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My main purpose, in this series of articles, has been to try to exploit the specialised linguistic findings of the Linguistic Survey of Scotland in the direction of what, in my first article, I called 'the problem of the outside world'. I suggested that although the discipline of linguistics is generally and properly directed inwards to its own internal coherence, yet particular aspects, like linguistic geography, may often be concerned with an external relationship with what, by definition, is not linguistics. Hence, some sort of relationship between one aspect of linguistics (dialectology) and a discipline as seemingly remote as ornithology was worked out in the first article; and in the second, some notice was taken of both diversity and uniformity in nomenclature in certain techniques in east coast fishing in Scotland.

If speech is regarded as a piece of observable human behaviour, it is clear that particular speech studies may be of considerable help in any sort of essay in demography. I propose, therefore, in this article to develop a particular linguistic theme and to try to apply it, as a marker, to the study of some east coast fishing communities. I wish to limit the geographical area, for this part of the article, to the stretch of coast-line which lies between the entrance to the Moray Firth and the mouth of the Tweed because, at least so far as I have been able to study the situation, there appears to be a relatively simple division there into two distinct communities defined both linguistically and culturally. I shall reserve for a second part the study of what seems to be a somewhat more complex and recondite phenomenon, namely, the origins and subsequent movement of fisher population along the east coast.

In my second article (Mather 1966:131) I touched on what the American linguist Weinreich called 'external dialectology', the dialectological aspect of the process of checking and counter-checking linguistic and cultural areas against each other (Weinreich 1954:398). Our present problem, therefore, is not merely to show the dialect areas of the east coast of Scotland, but to show their correlation with areas delimited by other criteria—for example, other cultural criteria by which people are grouped into recognisable communities, not necessarily speech communities. In the two areas of the

* The first article in this series appeared in *Scottish Studies* 9: 129–44, and the second in 10: 129–53. The substance of this present article was given in a paper to the British Association (Anthropology Section) at Dundee, 23 Aug. 1968.

east coast which I wish to examine there appears to be a remarkable coincidence between the distribution of certain conventions and techniques in the traditional small-line fishing and the use of certain vowel systems in dialect speech. Small-line fishing, as is well-known, has now ceased as an extensive enterprise on the east coast, although it is quite easy to find men who have practised it. This means that its conventions, which can now suffer no change whatsoever, are readily available to us for objective study.

This, of course, is a special case of conservatism but the general conservatism which has long dominated the outlook of east coast fishing communities is also important for our purpose since it makes for stability in our categories (Mather 1965:130; 1966: 129). Hugh Miller, born and bred in just such a community, never tired of writing about it. It was impossible not to be struck, he wrote (Miller 1844:330), with 'the stationary character of the fisherman, compared with that of all the other working men of the country. There have been scarce any improvements in the profession of the white-fisher for centuries. His circle of art is the identical circle of his great-grandfather; . . . he is acquainted with exactly the same fishing banks, and exactly the same phenomena of tides and winds; he sails in a boat of the same rude construction, and employs implements that have undergone no change.' In fact, Miller adds, it was only the beginning of the herring fishery on the Caithness coast—which required a completely different mental attitude from the fisherman—which liberated him from his 'sluggish, inert, incurious gravity' where his very motions 'appear rather automatical than efforts of volition'.

Theoretically, almost any marker—and not simply a demonstrably conservative one—will serve to show distributions of almost any phenomena, provided only that the marker is itself pragmatically effective. And it is certainly part of the advance of science deliberately to juxtapose two seemingly unlikely markers and to pray for what Radcliffe-Brown once called 'the imaginative perception of an analogy which others have not seen' (Radcliffe-Brown 1957:30). In juxtaposing vowel systems and small-line techniques I do not necessarily think I can 'prove' anything very much. I am simply trying to report certain facts as I have found them in the field in the hope that someone may have the imaginative perception to spot the analogy.

On the east coast there has been, in this past 200 years, some reflection on the origin and identity of the fishing communities, and I should like to look at this for a moment. Oddly enough, there has sometimes been a little—perhaps unconscious—attention given to this very problem of correlation by those who have concerned themselves a little with the various problems of classification. For example, H. C. Folkard who wrote much on sporting topics and also on fishing-boat types in the middle of last century, divided Scottish fishing boats into two main types. For its own sake this does not, of course, necessarily concern us here, nor was Folkard particularly original in this. What *does* concern us, however, is that he also manipulated his dichotomy to define the racial types of the men who manned the same boats (*cf.* Mather 1966:135). One

type of boat, 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', and the other is manned by 'a distinct race from the others being exclusively Celts'. (It is necessary to remember that we are dealing here only with the east—the North Sea—coast and not with a more obvious comparison between the east and west coasts of Scotland). In fact, Folkard said, the Scandinavian types 'would deem it a derogation of their creed to have a Celt among the crew in one of the first described luggers, while it would be equally so on the part of the Celts to carry a Scandinavian in their boats' (Folkard 1863:32).

Of course, the situation was no doubt not so simple as it appears from this parallelism, and Folkard was probably altogether too confident if what he was doing was extrapolating from his boat types to exact statements about the races who manned them. Nevertheless, we must concede that the boat types were readily verifiable and observable data. The racial types and their identity much less so. Perhaps the whole point would have appeared more forcibly to us if Folkard had been observing a more primitive situation—like a Malinowski in the South Seas—where all that was known were the observed characteristics of boats and the behaviour of boats' crews. It is worth mentioning, however, as a simple matter of observed distribution, that of the two boat types, Folkard's 'Scandinavian manned' type (the 'Fifie' as it is generally called) extends from Berwick to Whitehills; his 'Celtic manned' type (the 'scaffie' as it is generally called) extends from about Whitehills to Wick. Northwards from Wick and into Orkney and Shetland, the 'Scandinavian' type again obtains.

The Mythology of the Settlements

Much of the reflection on the east coast communities appears, however, not as taxonomy but as mythology or near-mythology. Invariably the communities are given some sort of origin from the other side of the North Sea—sometimes, indeed, an English origin from the southern part of the North Sea—and almost always through some simple event like a shipwreck which is held to explain the relatively few surnames which are to be found in this or that village. Aeneas Mackay (Mackay 1896:223), for example, refers to the popular tradition that the fishers of Buckhaven are 'sprung from a shipwrecked crew of Brabant in the reign of Philip II', and that the people of Tentsmuir 'were at one time called Danes'. Presumably the straight factual answer to such traditional lore is to be found in analyses like that of J. M. Houston (Houston 1948:129) or in J. R. Coull's article in this present number of *Scottish Studies* (p. 17). In fact, Dr Coull there speaks of the fact that many of the surnames of the fishing villages can be paralleled among the landward population, which 'is cogent evidence for the fisherfolk having sprung mainly from the local populace'. This may not take care of all the facts, however. Even if some few exceptions are explained—like the Fletts in Findochty as coming from Orkney—the Patiences and Skinners in the Black Isle are, I believe, still unaccounted for.

However this may be, John Leyden, in the glossary to his edition of the *Complaynt of Scotland* (Leyden 1801:347) *sub voce* 'Landwart' noted that 'along the east coast of Scotland the fishermen are chiefly of Flemish and Danish origin, and retain many words of their respective languages', and Hugh Miller supplemented this by saying that in some parts of Buchan 'the fishers are regarded as derived from an ancient colony of Flemings, and as still retaining not only national peculiarities of character, but also distinctive traits of form and feature, especially noticeable, it is said, among the women'. Indeed, for the fishers of the Firth of Forth Miller even went so far as to bring in the newly discovered photography as evidence, as shown in David Octavius Hill's 'exquisite calotypes . . . pencilled by the agency of light without exaggeration or error' (Miller 1844:329). The photographs illustrate such foreign characteristics, he says, that they remind the connoisseur 'not of the British, but of the Dutch school'. But Miller gave his own rationalisation of the romantic exclusiveness of the fishing population by imputing this to the circumstances of the occupation of fishing itself which, in fact, actually neutralised any particular tradition of Scottish nationality: 'So strongly marked is the *professional* character in this class', he wrote, 'that it is found to neutralize in them the *national* character, and to take its place *as national* in reference to some other country, in the floating traditions of the people' (Miller 1844:327). Much the same point was made by a modern writer (Green 1936:110) when he spoke of the fishing settlements as self-contained and the inhabitants 'more familiar with other parts of the British coast than with their own hinterlands'.

Anyone who has travelled much up and down the east coast will be able to add further items to the mythology. There are the alleged descendants from the ship-wrecked Armada, appropriately known as the 'Dons' (I myself know only two such families but in two widely separated places. There must be many more.) And there is the mythology of the Fair Isle knitting pattern, again derived from Spain through the Armada. Miller was perhaps on less fanciful ground when he argued that Cromarty was peopled from the south (by a plantation of James VI) and owed nothing to the Gaelic influences surrounding it. He draws his argument, not from supposed racial characteristics or shipwrecks or anything of the sort, but from social and institutional characteristics. 'The distinguishing trait in . . . the Highland population of Scotland', he wrote, 'is a species of Toryism which connects the lower to the higher classes and proves that the attachments of the feudal system may survive long after its forms are abolished. In Cromarty there is none of this; on the contrary two-thirds of the people are marked by the unyielding independent Whiggism of the English and Lowland Scotch' (Miller 1862:149).

It is beyond my competence to examine in detail what I have called (perhaps even wrongly called) the mythology of the east coast fishing communities. But I take it that it represents—some of it fanciful, some of it soundly based if rudimentary—an attempt to view the problems of description and identity of these communities. It is the purpose of this article, in looking at these problems, not so much to give evidence

of a documentary and statistical nature—which has been exploited in various places by specialist geographers or economists like O'Dell and Walton, Coull, Gray, Houston, Winn Green (as well, of course, as Anson's well-known descriptive and artistic work)—as to show what sort of evidence the linguistic markers can afford.

The Linguistic Markers

In a number of common monosyllables (whose history from OE is, in general, adequately known) the dialect reflex from an original OE ō, in the northernmost area—from about Fraserburgh to Stonehaven—is the vowel /i/.[1] That is, the word *boot* would be /bit/, *good* would be /gwid/, *roof* would be /rif/, *spoon* would be /spin/, *moon* would be /min/, *cool* would be /kil/. In the same series of words and in the relatively small area from Gourdon to Catterline the vowel is /ɷ/, *i.e.* /bɷt/, /gjɷd/, /rɷf/, /spɷn/, /mɷn/, /kjɷl/. Further south, in the area Ferryden, Arbroath and into the east neuk of Fife—Crail, Anstruther, etc.—the vowel is /e/, that is /bet/, /ged/, /ref/, /spen/, /men/, /kel/. The Berwickshire coast is a special case which I will enlarge on presently.

This series of words, could, of course, be extended and, to those who know and use the dialect, it would be predictable. This is so because the words used to demonstrate this point are not isolated or random but hold together in a pattern which is determined by their origin and by their history. It is this patterning which is so useful for demonstration purposes in linguistic geography, and various types of pattern can be detected, and not only one which is historically based. For instance, I recently did a small experiment to try to find out how front vowels were employed in the area we are at present considering. (Front vowels are, roughly, made in the front of the mouth. The /i/ of /bit/, /rif/, etc., is a front vowel. The /ɷ/ vowel, which we have also already noticed, is a back vowel—made, roughly, in the back of the mouth.) My experiment showed that invariably, and in all phonetic contexts, the inventory of front vowels diminished as one proceeded northwards from Gourdon to Peterhead. This simply means that a dialect speaker, say, at Boddam will use fewer front vowels in his inventory than a speaker at Gourdon. Put another way, this means that more words have levelled under one particular vowel sound (a front vowel in this case) at Boddam than at Gourdon. Because of this levelling the inventory has diminished. It is not necessary to reflect on this for whatever it might mean philologically. It is offered simply as a report from the field and as a marker to define if not absolutely distinct speech communities, at least a demonstrable gradient in speech behaviour in a given connection and in a given area.

The Small-line Techniques

For my purpose, I now want to consider, over roughly the same area of the east coast, the conventions and techniques of the small-line fishing. This type of fishing—now almost wholly given up in favour of seining or trawling methods—is one of the traditional fishing methods of the area with which we are concerned. Small-line

fishing was a winter and spring fishing for haddock, often continued into the summer for codling. It was often worked consecutively with the great-line fishing, and the gear is, in fact, a lighter version of the great-line which is prosecuted further off-shore for what were called the 'great' fish, like cod or ling. The pattern of the white-fishing early last century as it was conducted out of the Firth of Forth was set out in some of the evidence presented to Captain Washington in his Enquiry into the 1848 disaster on the east coast. It appears that the men fished with the great-line from about 1 October in 30 fathoms on the Mar Bank, drawing into the May Island about Christmas time; and thereafter with the small-line and in smaller boats, until about June. Then the herring fishing began and continued for 10 or 12 weeks (Washington 1849:60).

The small-line consists of the main line (the *back*) with shorter lengths of thinner line (the *snoods*) attached to it at intervals of about 40 to 45 inches. The line is set with an anchor (usually a stone), and a *tow* (a line without hooks) leads from this to the *bow*, which is a marking buoy (Fig. 1). The actual lengths of line vary considerably, but as

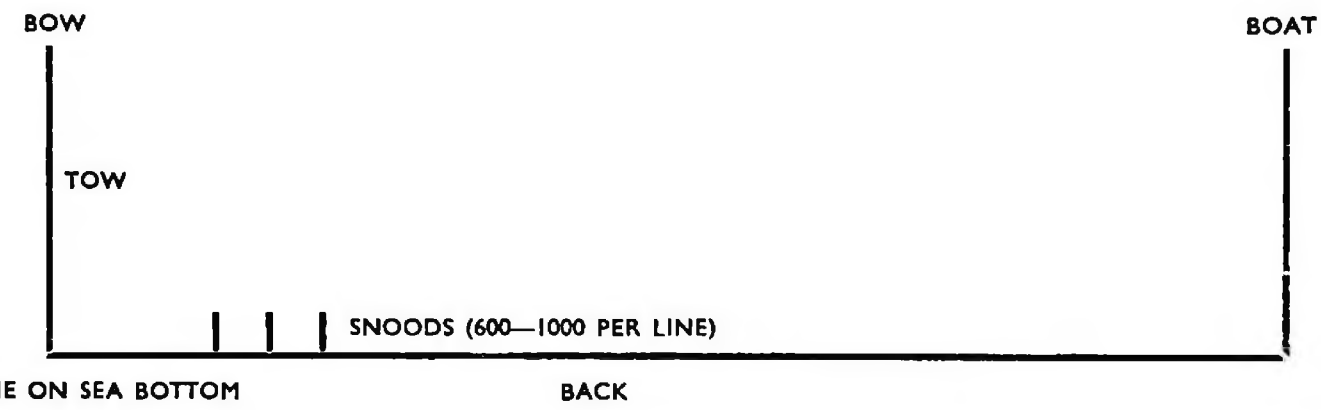

FIG. 1 Diagrammatic representation of small-line (length of line approximately 600 fathoms, and often several lines joined together).

a datum a *string* (of approximately 60 fathom) can be said to have 100 hooks and 10 *strings* can make one *line*. These figures are specific for Eyemouth, for instance, but variations range from Gamrie which has only 5 *strings* (of 100 hooks) to a line, to Arbroath which has 7 *strings* (of 200 hooks).

Plate I (i) shows a detail of a small-line, namely, a single *snood* (**s**) made fast to the *back* (**b**). The horsehair *tipping* (**t**) is a continuation of the snood and is attached to the hook by a whipping. The process of whipping is called *beating the hooks* and the technique is to work from a pirn of *beating thread* which is held close to the body with a girdle. By this means a controlled tension can be applied to the thread. The *snood* is bent on to the *back* with a clove hitch (ii), but with sufficient tail left, after the hitch has been made, to be turned back round the lay in the form of a kind of plait (**p**). This plait—which stiffens the *snood* considerably at this point and prevents ravelling and twisting—is called the /kɔnəl/ in Fife, the /stëlʃən/ in Berwickshire, the /stʌltən/ in Gourdon and the /pɛn/ in Aberdeenshire. The names for the parts of the line—*snood*, *tipping*, etc.—have also, of course, a diversified distribution. The word *tipping*

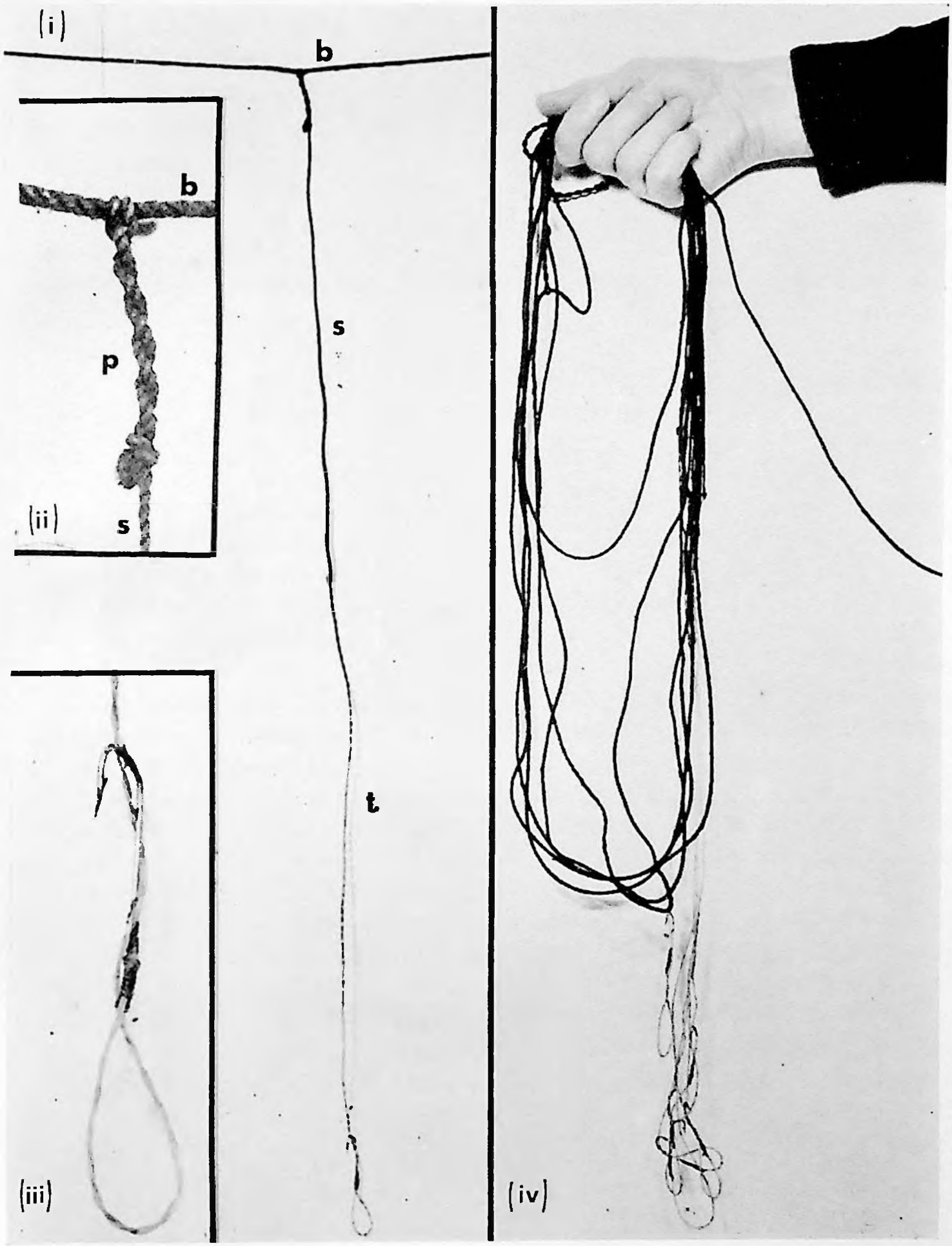

PLATE I Details of small-line.

(Photographed from a line given by Arthur Johnson, Cowdrait, Burnmouth)

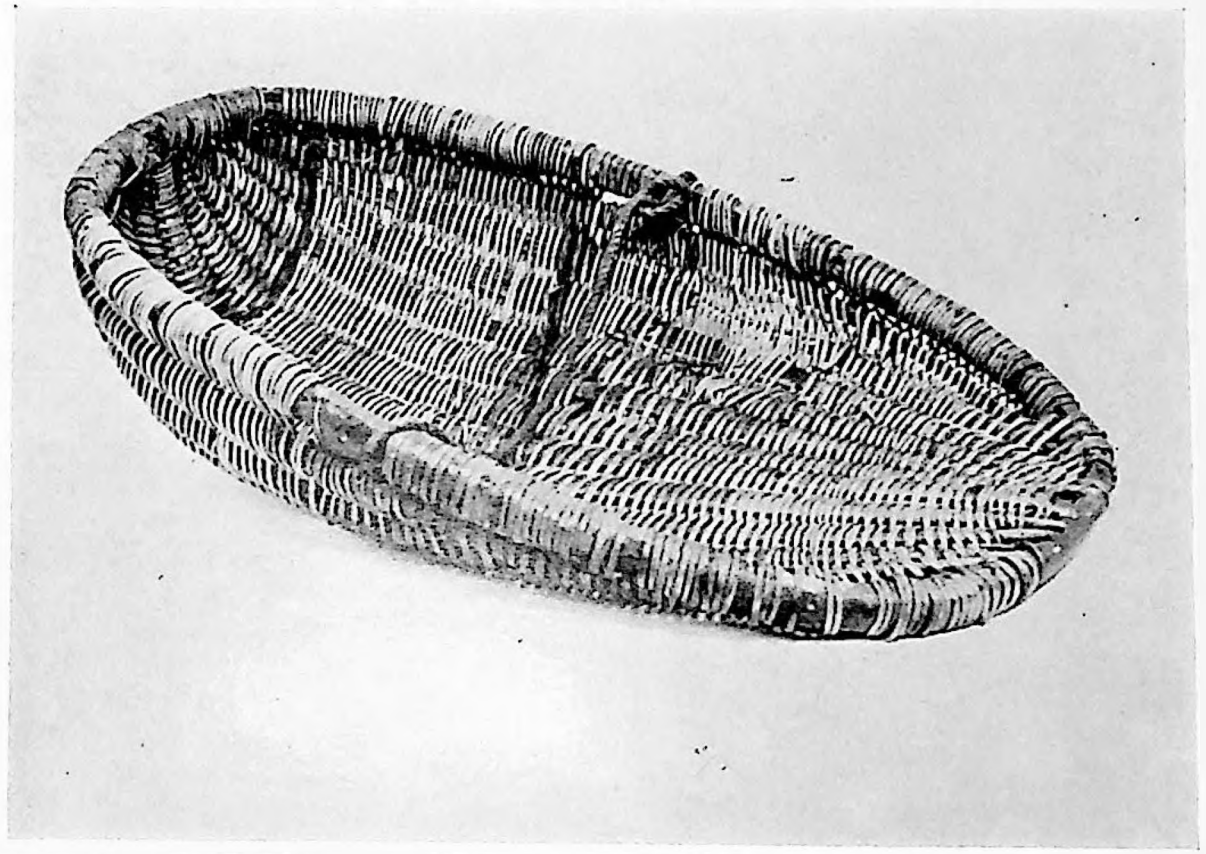

PLATE III Scull. (Reproduced by permission of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland.)

PLATE II Fishwife from Cromarty with creel (*c.* 1900).

or *tippit*, is used chiefly north of the east neuk of Fife, but in the east neuk itself, and in Berwickshire (and also further south in Holy Island and Seahouses) the word is /ɛmp/. Snood is variously /snid/ (Moray Firth), /strud/ (Black Isle) /sned/ (Angus, Fife). *Back* seems to be undifferentiated.

In the division of labour in a fishing family the position of the women was, of course, extremely important. The wife invariably baited the line and, very often, she carried it back from the boat to the dwelling after the fishing. For example, at Skateraw the women went down to the boat when it returned from sea with its catch, carrying an empty *creel* (Plate II) which the men filled with fish and carried up from the shore. (The village of Skateraw, like so many on the east coast, lies at the head of a steep path up from the harbour.) The women brought back the lines in a *scull* (Plate III). Creel and scull have to be distinguished here. The *creel* was the basket used by the women to sell fish in the country; the *scull* was the basket containing the lines. It was, of course, taken to sea in the boat. Sometimes the lines were laid in a wooden tray rather than in a *scull*. This tray was generally called a *backet*.

These details are important because they lead to the consideration of an important and significant division in the area. In *one* part of the area—the north part, from Catterline (south of Stonehaven) northwards—when the line is hauled at sea it is hauled in bights and these are carefully laid in the scull a few at a time. Plate I (iv) shows a few bights of a small-line held in the hand. The *tippings* are also seen as falling more or less together, because in hauling the *back* and the *snood* are gripped together as far as the beginning of the tipping. Thus, if there is a fish on the hook it has only the comparatively short length of the *tipping* to contain its movements as it is taken into the boat. Both *back* and *snood* are controlled.

In the *south* part of the area (*i.e.* Johnshaven, Gourdon, Arbroath, as well as the Fife ports and the Berwickshire coast) the line is hauled hand over hand and, although the same method of control is used over *back* and *snood* together, the line is not taken in bights but is allowed to fall indiscriminately.

There are reasons—at least ostensible reasons—for these differences in procedure. In the north part of the area it is argued that lines are better kept dry since they last longer and can be baited more easily; and besides this, *two* lines are employed, *i.e.* one is being fished at sea while the women are baiting the other ashore—and this is a more convenient and more efficient procedure. Indeed, as we shall see presently, sometimes *three* lines are employed—one at sea, one baiting, one drying. The method of hauling in bights makes it possible for a pole, or as it is usually called a 'spiletree' or 'line wand' to be passed through the bights and the line hung out on the pole to dry (Plate IV). In fact the 'spiletree' is often inserted in a convenient hole in the wall of a cottage, with the other end supported in a wooden crutch. Or else it is laid on projecting stones in the gable. One can still see these holes or projecting stones to this day. The stones are most noticeable, for instance, in Broadsea or Cairnbulg. Plate V is of an existing cottage at Broadsea with the stones clearly visible.

Against all this, however, is the technique of the south part of the east coast. First, although there may have been two lines used alternately there were certainly not three, for there was no stipulation that a line must be baited *dry*. Hence, with no drying of lines, there was no 'spiletree'. Furthermore, the hand over hand technique of hauling is now given a rational explanation, for with no 'spiletree' and no drying there was no necessity for hauling in bights. The line was brought ashore wet, 'redd' into a creel or basket—or 'hamper' as it is called in Gourdon—and baited, still wet. It was often argued that a wet line was easier to shoot. On the other hand, those whose way of life supported the drying of the line claimed that it was easier to bait and had greater flotation in the water. Both arguments are, no doubt, rationalisations. Naturally, all lines had to be dried sometimes in order to bark them, for barking is a necessity not only to preserve the line but to rid it of the slime which makes it almost impossible to haul. Besides, it is said that fish are rather repelled by an old and slimy line. A newly barked line always fishes better.

'North Folk' and 'South Folk'

Nevertheless, if we look at these matters a little more closely, we shall find that the ostensible rationalisations for the virtues of one technique against the other melt away before the actual basic realities of two quite different situations. It is clear that the people themselves are very aware of the differences. They call themselves 'North Folk' or 'South Folk' and note, with an obvious awareness in either case, not only the other's odd way of handling small-lines, but also the shibboleths of the different vowel systems. Some informants however point out that the 'wet'/'dry' line dichotomy is an ideal rather than a real situation, for if a man is fishing full-time and continuously, his line will be 'wet' even though he uses, alternately, a line at sea (fishing) and a line ashore (baiting). The implication is that at some point a break has been made with a conservative tradition in the interests of speed and expediency. On the other hand, it seems significant that in some 'North Folk' places (and only there) the system of *three* lines which we have already noted was commonly used: one fishing, one baiting, one drying. It may be that this is a convention which has its basis in a traditional, leisurely, subsistence type of fishing—a fishing, above all, which was not commercialised or at least only commercialised to the extent of local country sale by the fish-wife. From this point of view the drying of a line is correct fishing practice, although certain deviations from this may be thought to be expedient.

There are one or two other points which seem to be significant here. The Gourdon lines were longer—half as long again as, say, a Skateraw line, although some 'North Folk' lines—Cairnbulg, for instance—were longer than Skateraw, but not so long as Gourdon. (The lengths were: Gourdon 12 strings, Cairnbulg 10 strings, Skateraw 8 strings—a string being 60 fathoms.) A further point is that it was a 'South Folk' practice to 'stick the hooks' at sea (this is to turn the point of the hook into the horse-hair—see

Plate I (iii)) but the 'North Folk' always did this ashore in the process of 'redding' the line. This difference, it is to be noted, may mean no more than that the 'South Folk' went further into the sea, in bigger boats and therefore had more *time*, on the return passage, to 'stick the hooks'. Some informants—Eyemouth, for example—have told me that it was done if possible. Gourdon and Arbroath ('South Folk') informants insisted that it was always possible. On the other hand my informants at Gamrie and Skateraw said that even if occasionally possible it was never actually done. It was considered to be a task which was properly done ashore.

I would emphasise at this point that the information I am here considering, both on the vowel systems of the dialects and the conventions of the small-line fishing, is information I have gathered in the field from informants who have accepted as natural and proper a particular selection of vowel sounds and a particular technique in the use of a small-line. The information is thus not an inference from dialect literature or from the reports of Fishery Districts, or from the evidence of the *Statistical Accounts*, or from an early description of the Scottish fisheries like Sir Robert Sibbald's manuscript (Sibbald 1701). From this kind of direct evidence from field-work, therefore, a pattern is displayed, a particular, structured, 'set' (so to speak) given to the communities along a defined stretch of coast-line. What remains now is to see, working from this initial patterning, what amplification, commentary, interpretation or criticism can be adduced from other sources—for the dialects from written sources and from the researches and postulations of philologists on the history of the various dialect forms, and, for the fishing conventions, from important documentary material like the *Statistical Accounts* or Sibbald's manuscript.

There is, first of all, nothing directly in the results of the fieldwork which will indicate how long the reported divisions have existed, or when they became differentiated. However much we may suppose a dimension in time to be inherent in the material, the field techniques can only *display* it territorially. It is possible, however, to build up a picture from the written sources—say, from the seventeenth century for the fishing conventions and from the early sixteenth century for the dialects. A critical comparison between these two known points of time may, of course, be important and even vital for a final assessment. In the same way a critical comparison between the diachronic evidence of the written sources and the synchronic evidence of the field-work may also be vital for the purpose of checking and counter-checking.

Historical Evidence

I take it that the key concept in the historical study of the east coast fishing communities from the seventeenth century to the present day is their development from what James Thomson called the 'cottar system' of fishing—*i.e.* a part-time system, the rest of the time being given to work on the land—to a full-time, independent fully professional system (Thomson 1849). The point has also been made by modern writers like O'Dell

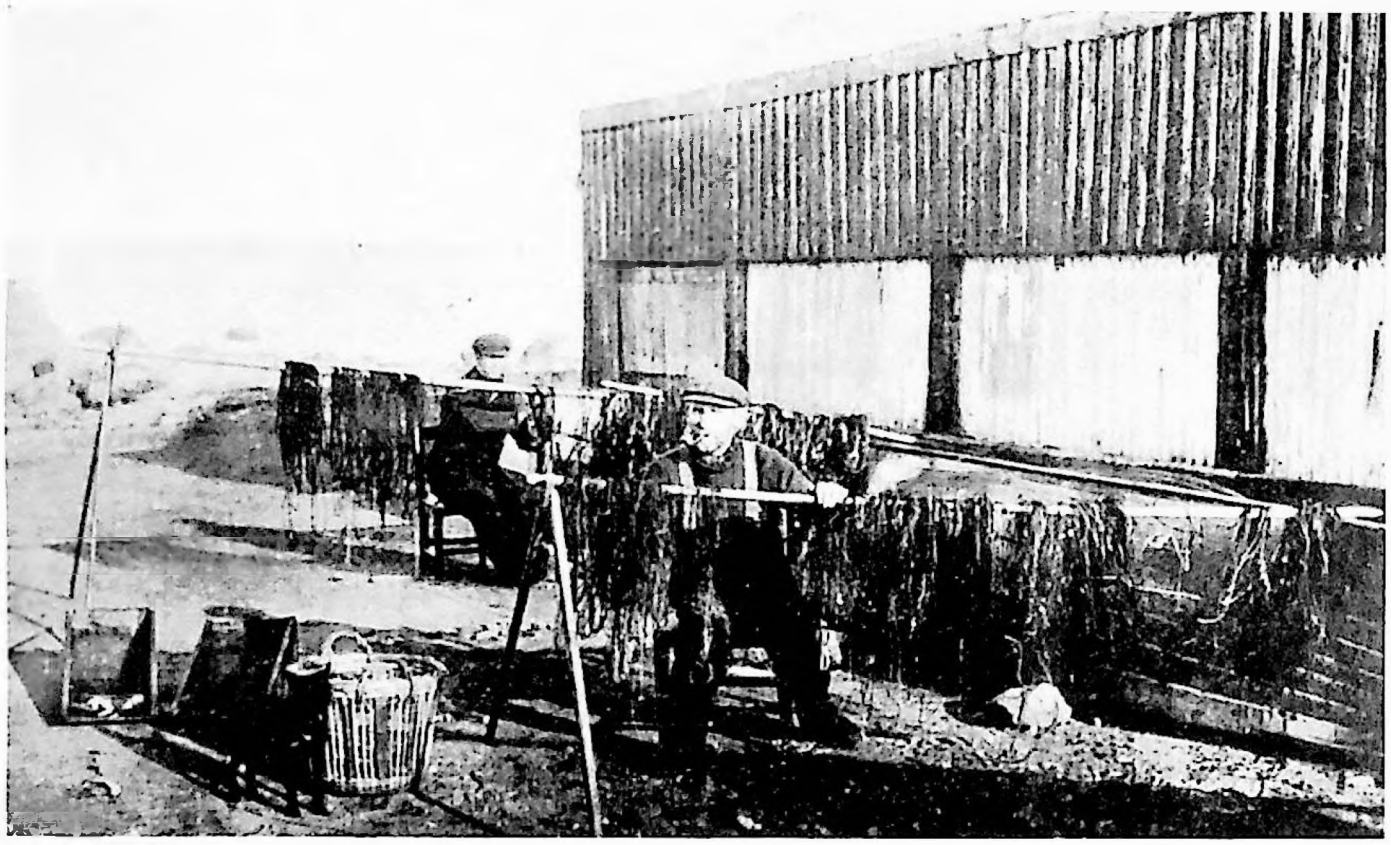

PLATE IV Lines on spiletrees at Portsoy, *c.* 1920.
(Photograph reproduced by permission of J. Slater, Portsoy.)

PLATE V Cottage at Broadsea showing line-stones.

and Walton where they analyse the situation in the fishing industry in the eighteenth century: 'The dichotomy of fisher and farmer folk which was to become so prominent in later years was hardly evident, although new fishing settlements were being built' (O'Dell and Walton 1962:121).

Nevertheless, the historical evidence shows that, at least by the time of the first *Statistical Account*, this fisher/farmer dichotomy was unevenly distributed over the east coast. Certainly, this source notes that for Portlethen and Findon (*i.e.* in our 'North Folk' area) there was for a fisherman an acre, a garden, liberty of fuel and harbour for a £3 rent. And there were, at Findon two boats for six men each, and three yawls for four men each; and at Portlethen three boats and one yawl (S.A. 1792, IV:454). But there is another pattern—and this, significantly enough, at Gourdon at the very heart of where we have noted 'South Folk' conventions as showing up most strongly. Here, at the time of the first *Statistical Account—i.e.* about 1792—there was a type of person who was not a part-time fisherman/part-time crofter, but a part-time fisherman/part-time sailor. We are told that the whole-time fishermen were all decrepit old men and in fact unable to occupy themselves with anything else. There were 12 such men and they manned four small yawls. It is true that in 1760 there had been 30 men manning three large-size boats and several smaller yawls, but by 1794 it appears that the most energetic fishing was done by 24 men who manned eight small cargo vessels—in all of about 300 tons burden—which belonged to Gourdon and traded in lime, grain, and coals in the summer time, but were laid up in winter time when the 24 men betook themselves to the fishing (S.A. 1794, XIII:6). Furthermore, at Arbroath at the time of the first *Statistical Account* it seems possible to distinguish yet another category—the fisherman/pilot. Sir William Fraser (Fraser 1867:lxxxii n.) has a note, based on evidence in a private letter at Ethie House, that the first establishment of a fishing community at Arbroath was from an immigration from Auchmithie in 1705. But this failed—apparently because of the harshness of the tenure under Lord Northesk—and eventually the contributor to the first *Statistical Account* could report only three boats and 14 fishermen and even so, he said, the men depended more on pilotage than on fishing (S.A. 1793, VII:344). However, it is clear that trade, if not fishing, was increasing. George Hay (Hay 1876:322) notes, for example, the important memorial presented in 1786 to the Town Council by John Spink preses of the Seamen Fraternity and by the mercantile interests of the town, arguing that a new and enlarged harbour was vital because of increased trade. The project was, in fact, completed just before the end of the century, and it is clear from the *Statistical Account* that experienced fishermen found added work as pilots. When, in 1830, a new and more permanent and successful influx of fishermen came in from Auchmithie and established their community at the foot of the High Street in Arbroath (Hay 1876:377), there was already a flourishing seaman/pilot community in the town.

But we need not suppose that all fishers on the east coast were, at least by the end of the seventeenth century, either cottar/fishermen or (somewhat later) sailor/fishermen or

even pilot/fishermen. The Robert Sibbald manuscript (Sibbald 1701) seems to indicate that Fife, Orkney and Shetland, and the Firth of Clyde were centres of a fully professional fishing at that date. Aeneas Mackay—who does not give his source—says that the Fife fishermen 'were occupied nearly the whole of the fishers' year. There was no need as in districts farther from markets for the Fife fishermen to eke out a scanty living by agriculture' (Mackay 1896:223). There was certainly a commercialised fishing centred on the Edinburgh market even for fishermen north of the Forth (*i.e.* in Fife) at the time of the first *Statistical Account*, for it is there stated that boats from the south side met those from the north side in the middle of the Forth and the catch was transferred in order to be taken to the market at Edinburgh (S.A. 1793, IX:338). Indeed, the contributor to the *Account* for St Monance seems rather disturbed at this practice, for its effect was to raise the price of fish to country consumers in Fife. 'Formerly', he tells us, 'the practice was that out of the fleet of boats belonging to the town, two were obliged in their turn to come in to the harbour and offer market for two hours for the supply of the inhabitants. But that good regulation being now overlooked the fishers have wholly laid it aside. This has enhanced the price of fish here that it is but little below the market at Edinburgh, and they are difficult to be obtained' (S.A. 1793, IX:338). This seems to imply that the simple economy of the fish-wife had at least the virtue of being able to sell fish cheaper than at the large and centralised market. The part played by Fife in the development of such a market is further illustrated by a story in George Gourlay's *Anstruther* which recounts that in 1821 a young Anstruther grocer, Robert Taylor, noticed the demand in Edinburgh for the 'finnan haddie' (which he had never even heard of until then) and noticed, too, that they came from the north. It occurred to him that Fife haddocks might equally well be used, and so successfully was this idea exploited, Gourlay tells us, that 'on a single day (9th January, 1869) the haddock catch of the fleet at Anstruther, fifty tons by the one-and-forty boats, price 10/- per cwt., was smoked, and so far served next night for the supper tables of Glasgow' (Gourlay 1888:53).

The sort of historical and documentary evidence which can be brought to bear on the patterning which I believe my reports from the field display, may therefore reinforce the interpretation of the 'North Folk' as a community maintaining a certain stage of development—as shown in the division of their labour, the disposal of their catch and the conventions of their small-line techniques—for longer than (for instance) the 'South Folk'. Thus, for Cowie, Muchalls, Skateraw—so the first *Statistical Account* tells us—the fish caught were all locally consumed. And up to a fairly recent date—so I have been informed for Findon, Portlethen, and Cove—the catch was either all or in part sold locally, or was smoked and the relatively short journey to Aberdeen was made to sell personally in the 'yellow' market, *i.e.* the market for smoked fish. It is necessary, of course, to note here that the development of large commercial markets within the area, such as Aberdeen or Fraserburgh, rests on comparatively new seining and trawling and steam-lining methods which have exploited the traditional

fishing skills in a variety of ways. On the one hand, particular places (Torry, for instance) have tended to grow through the immigration of fishermen from outlying fishing villages in which they no longer find sufficient inducement to live; and, on the other hand, a large harbour (Fraserburgh, for instance) has been able to offer shelter for the vessel and market for the catch while the fishermen themselves continue to live in their traditional fishing villages.

Linguistic Evidence

We still have to consider the linguistic evidence. It will be clear that the line of demarcation which I set out between the /i/ vowel and the /ɷ/ vowel as markers in comparable phonetic contexts coincides almost exactly with the division in small-line techniques which I have outlined. In other words, the 'North Folk' who say /bit/ for *boot*, /rif/ for *roof* and so on, also dry their lines, haul in bights and accept certain other conventions which we have just examined; while 'South Folk' in the vicinity of Gourdon say /bɷt/, /rɷʃ/, etc., and further south (at Arbroath and into the East Neuk of Fife) say /bet/, /ref/, etc., and both have another set of small-line conventions. The demarcation is not absolutely exact because the Gourdon /ɷ/ vowel extends northwards to Catterline, which in all other respects belongs to the 'North Folk'. The case of the Berwickshire coast we shall look at presently.

Historians of the language, in considering the /i/ vowel have considered that its antecedent—which existed generally perhaps until the early sixteenth century—was a rounded vowel of the type /ɸ/. Orthographically, this is usually represented in Scots by *ui*. Thus, *buird* = English *board*; *fuird* = English *ford*, etc. Such a rounded vowel, in fact, still exists in one or two dialects in Scotland—in Roxburghshire and the Glens of Angus, for instance, and in Orkney and Shetland. It is further supposed, however, that this vowel existed in two forms, not only in different phonetic contexts but also in different areas. (*Scottish National Dictionary* 1931, I:xix). Thus, there was a close rounded vowel as /y/ and an opener rounded vowel, as /ɸ/. The /y/ type also still exists in one or two isolated dialects in Scotland—there is a pocket at Thornhill in Dumfriesshire, and also occurrences around Crieff and Comrie. When, however, in the course of their development these vowels became unrounded, one of the developments for the first type was to /i/ and for the second to /e/. The /i/ type exists, as we have already seen, in the 'North Folk' area (giving the /bit/ /rif/ series), and the /e/ type in the larger part of the 'South Folk' area (giving the /bet/, /ref/ series). The date for the first recorded instance of the unrounded /i/ is 1542 in the Council Registers of the Burgh of Aberdeen where *rief* (= *roof*) is given (Müller 1908: 62), and we must suppose that the sound existed for a considerable time before that. We seem to have here two historic speech communities, at least separate enough to be defined in this way, and dated by this marker for the fifteenth or sixteenth century. They may also, as we have seen, be established by such another market as a particular set of fishing conventions.

The /ɷ/ vowel of Gourdon and Catterline is not very easy to explain. It is a back vowel not a front vowel and it seems odd that it should occupy a relatively small area on the east coast and be surrounded by a large area having front vowels, either rounded or unrounded, in the same context. It may, of course, represent the back vowel, or at least the mid-back vowel, which A. J. Ellis received for *some* words—but by no means all—of OE ō origin from his informant in Glenfarquar (10 miles west of Stonehaven) in 1877 (Ellis 1889:762). This informant, Mr John Ross, Rector of The High School at Arbroath, but a native of Glenfarquar, seems to have been a keen and accurate observer for he gave Ellis a detailed analysis of the dialect which included a front-rounded vowel, 'the well-known Scotch sound nearly *eu* in French *peu*' (*op. cit.* 757) in a variety of words of OE ō origins such as: *broom, do, done, noon, spoon, moor, soot.* This front-rounded vowel Ellis accepted and indeed equated with the Roxburghshire vowel of the same type and the same origin. Nevertheless there were a few words in the series, such as *good, flood, stool, floor,* which, according to Ross, had a back vowel. It may be that, as a tentative hypothesis, we should look to the fisherman/sailor type of population which we have already established, which might easily have imported it along with the lime and coals. There is an entry in the Fraser Papers (Fraser 1924:55) which says that 'the fishers of Gourdon and Johnshaven have a peculiar sort of dialect occasioned by some boats' crews having been at one period brought from Yorkshire by Viscount Arbuthnot and the Earl: *Horse* they pronounce *ors*; *head, ide*; *Hand—and*; *hole—ole*; *ox, hox*; *hen, En*; *hat, at*; and so forth'. This 'peculiar sort of dialect' is thus not the vowel phenomenon we are considering, but the loss of initial h, which is generally considered to be a Cockney phenomenon but which was at one time very widespread among east coast fishermen in Scotland. (It still occurs, of course, in some places—noticeably in the Black Isle.) The loss of h, or the addition of h, therefore, does not necessarily prove anything about an immigration from Yorkshire or anywhere else. It would, however, be an interesting twist to this entry from the Fraser Papers if it turned out to be correct in a different way, since the use of the Gourdon vowel we are considering is a much odder phenomenon than the dropping of aitches.

There is one further point to be made in considering the /i/ vowel. Further south on the east coast—on the coast of Berwickshire—there are two places which can be significantly compared: Burnmouth, a fishing village; and Flemington, separated from it by half a mile of very steep hill, an agricultural village. The places differ linguistically in at least one important phonological aspect, namely, precisely this vowel that we have been considering. The dialect reflex of OE ō in Burnmouth is again /i/—as in /bit/ = *boot*, /rif/ = *roof*, /gid/ = *good*, /min/ = *moon*, /til/ = *tool* and so on. But in Flemington it is /ë/, *i.e.* /bët/, /rëf/, /gëd/, etc. The pronunciation in Flemington is, in fact, the general dialect pronunciation in the inland parts of Berwickshire, and, indeed, even on the coast /bët/, /rëf/, etc. reappears at Coldingham and St Abbs, so that there is only a relatively short portion of the Berwickshire coast with this particular vowel in this particular connection.

Are we then to link Burnmouth in any direct way with the 'North Folk'—postulating, that is, some sort of sea connection which would make it feasible, and also make feasible the overleaping of the 'South Folk' area which we have already established? I do not think that any of this can be maintained, for there was no special sea link, that I am aware of, to support it. And, if we wanted to bring in the evidence from small-line techniques at this point, this would be against us, for we must note that Burnmouth has a 'South Folk' set of conventions. They do not use the 'spiletree' or haul in bights, or dry their lines. In fact, if we look a little further south still, we shall probably find a clue. The vowel exists, in precisely those contexts we are here considering, in western Northumberland (*cf.* Hinds 1896:19). It also exists, for example, at Norham and in one very important professional word in the Tweed salmon fishery, namely, the word /tilz/ which is the word for the machine for making ropes—/ðə tilz/. It is, of course, the word 'tools' which has become fossilised, so to speak, in this particular traditional and professional connection. The word, as it happens, is one of the series which we have set up for our purpose. The whole series also exists, with this particular vowel, at the Greenses harbour at Berwick. (This harbour, and not the river, is the traditional line-fishing community in Berwick.) With all this in mind, therefore, it is possible for us to assume that the speech community as it presents itself to us today stretches at least from the region of Norham on the Tweed down the river and northward along the coast to Burnmouth and Eyemouth. And it is perhaps the history of this which we ought to consider for the history of the fishing communities of the Berwickshire coast. At least, the /i/ vowel we are considering seems to follow just this course, *i.e.* down the river and northwards along part of the Berwickshire coast. The fact that there is a different vowel, in comparable words, on the Northumbrian coast, from that in the Northumbrian hill country may mean that there has been a more recent 'push', so to speak, from the south and up the coast leaving a more archaic form in the interior, which has turned down the river and then northwards. In fact, the vowel of the coast of Northumberland is of the same type as the Gourdon vowel we have already examined, and it may be that its presence in Gourdon is an extreme and somewhat more complicated example of this 'push' up the coast. The /ë/ vowel of the landward parts of Berwickshire (and, as we have seen, of *some* parts of its coast) is the result of a more general development in southern Scotland which has, nevertheless, not wholly succeeded even yet in ousting the /i/ vowel.

If this explanation for the occurrence of this vowel on part of the Berwickshire coast is accepted and if the hypothesis I have suggested for the occurrence of the /ɷ/ vowel in the Gourdon area is also accepted, then this leaves us with two major areas—an /i/ area and an /e/ area which coincide fairly well with what we have already discussed for the small-line techniques, *i.e.* a distinct 'North Folk' and 'South Folk' patterning with the division more or less at Stonehaven. I do not know how this will commend itself to those with more extensive and detailed knowledge of the area than I, but I hope at least that I have reported the facts fairly, even if my hypotheses about certain aspects

of them are questioned. One thing I believe ought to be said: it is that there has been altogether too little of *real* value on Scottish speech in ostensible descriptions of Scottish regions, local customs, life and manners. Even if (with some well-known exceptions, notably the footnote to the account for Duffus, Morayshire, in the first *Statistical Account*) the first two *Statistical Accounts* are considered to be too old for this sort of thing, it is still possible to hear either nothing at all on the subject (as in the current *Third Statistical Account*), or a description so resoundingly metaphorical as to stun us into believing that we have at last learnt something (about, for example, the speech of Aberdeenshire and Banffshire described in a recent book on the east coast, as 'an arsenal of the broadest, coarsest Scots, hard, concrete words that hit . . . like clods of earth'). Somewhere between dead silence on the one hand and the thud of earth and concrete on the other, there must be an occasion for a middling sort of voice to be heard, which will try to describe, as coolly and objectively as possible, ordinary people who have been doing ordinary things all their lives, like baiting lines or just speaking to each other; and which will also try to develop some sort of reasonable technique for the comparison of both the conventions and the speech.

NOTE

1 Type within oblique brackets signifies a phonemic transcription (using the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet) of the word rendered in conventional orthography. The following key words may assist readers to identify the phonetic symbols used here and later in this article:

/i/ as the vowel sound in English *beet*
/ʊ/ as the vowel sound in English *put*, as distinguished from the more characteristically Scottish sound in the same word which is most often the vowel of English *loot*.
/e/ as the vowel sound in English *hate* when pronounced as a 'pure' vowel and not as a diphthong.
/ë/ as the vowel sound in English *bit*.
/y/ as the vowel sound in French *lune*.
/ɸ/ as the vowel sound in German *schön*.
/ɔ/ as the vowel sound in English *sawn*.
/ʌ/ as the vowel sound in English *but*.
/ə/ as the first (unstressed) vowel sound in English *about*.
/ʃ/ as the *sh* of English *hush*.
/j̇/ as the *y* of English *yard*.
/ð/ as the *th* of *the*.

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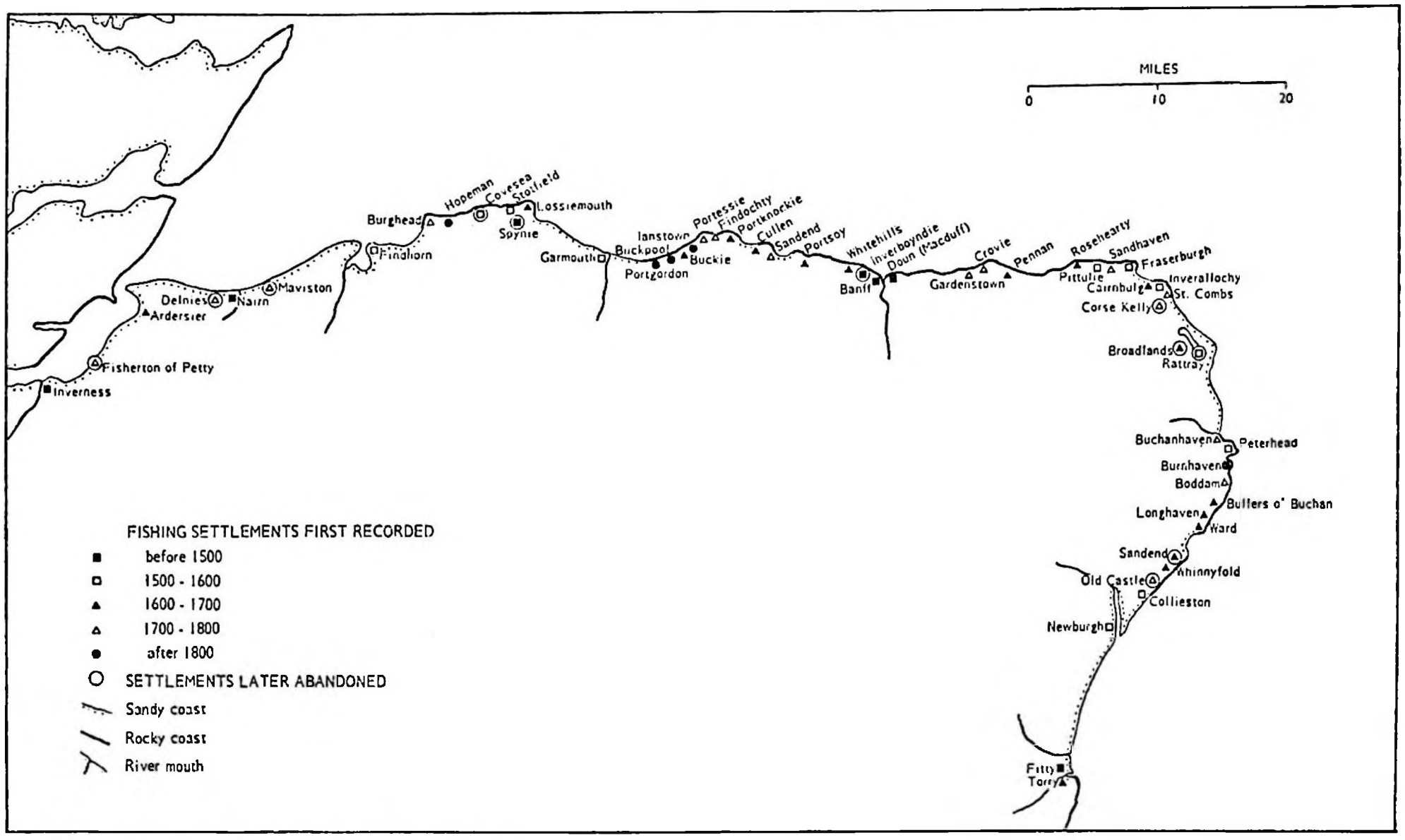
Fisheries in the North-East of Scotland before 1800

J. R. COULL

The spectacular increase in activity in fishing in the North-East of Scotland (here defined as the area north of the Mounth and as far west as Inverness) in the nineteenth century is well known to those even casually acquainted with the modern growth of the region. It is less well known, however, that this area has been involved in fishing since the beginning of recorded history, and sporadic archaeological traces suggest that fish have featured in the food supply since the earliest human settlement. The indications are that through the great part of history fishing has been practised in association with farming, and the development of it as a highly specialised occupation is a relatively modern phenomenon, not more than two or three centuries old. While the main early effort appears to have been directed at the easier goal of taking fish in the rivers, there is evidence that shell and other sea fish were exploited in the early centuries of our era during the Iron Age, and medieval documents indicate the catching of both white fish and herring. Sea fisheries become better known in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which appear to have been a period of slow expansion in harmony with national economic trends; and this expansion was certainly projected into the eighteenth century, when the way of life of the fisherfolk becomes clearer, especially in the pages of the Old Statistical Account. By 1800, the foundations had been laid on which the vigorous growth of the nineteenth century, associated with the famous Scottish herring fishery, could take place. In the rise of the fisheries, the lairds of coastal estates were the prime movers as organisers and entrepreneurs, and the fisherfolk on their part eventually developed into distinctive communities separate from their farming neighbours, and in them the work was organised on a family basis.

The Evolution of the Settlement Pattern

Archaeological evidence of early activity in sea fishing is scanty. It is known that the community which lived at Forvie (on the north side of the Ythan mouth) were gathering shell fish from the beds in the estuary before the start of the Christian era, as well as catching river fish (Kirk 1953–4:170). In the area too there are several promontory forts of the Iron Age, the inhabitants of which would have had the opportunity to exploit sea fisheries, and at one of those at Dundarg (Simpson 1954:46–7) excavation has revealed fish bones which are probably those of cod. Also in a cave at Covesea have been



Fishing Settlements in the North-East of Scotland.

found bones from the head of a fish of the cod family, although their age is uncertain (Neill 1930–1:207–8).

The earliest documentary references to specific settlements in the coastal zone occur in the context of churches founded in them, such as that at Aberdour (Aberdeenshire) in the late sixth century (Scott 1928:209) and those of Fordyce (Banffshire) and Forres (Moray) at the end of the seventh century (Simpson 1935:79). These indicate a population living in the coastal area, which may have obtained part of its sustenance from fish.

From medieval times onwards, fishing is referred to in a variety of documents, although right until the latter part of the seventeenth century seldom in a manner which gives any clear indication of its importance. While rights to fishings are mentioned occasionally in the context of charters, the most frequent early mention is in trade—especially when fish were exported and customs levied on them; but it is more than likely that the proportion of the catch recorded in trade represents but a minor proportion of the whole. Evidence for coastal settlement from the earlier maps, beginning with those of Pont in the early seventeenth century, can be brought to bear on the issue. However, it is frequently not clear on the maps of Pont and Gordon (1654) whether settlements are in fact coastal or some distance inland; and even when the situation becomes clearer with Roy's map of the mid-eighteenth century, the existence of a settlement at the coast is not an absolute guarantee of its involvement in fishing. Even so, the map evidence is a useful complement to that from other documents. In several cases the existence of a settlement later concerned with fishing can be shown earlier than fishing itself; and an additional complication here is that some of the villages first come on record as 'Seatown of...' or 'Fishertown of...', indicating a later origin than the main place of the name: this occurs, for example, at Cullen, Boddam, Pennan and Petty, and on occasion it can be difficult to discern which of the two settlements is implied.

The first definite indication appears to be the right to white fish included in the charter granted by Robert the Bruce to the burgh of Aberdeen in the early fourteenth century (Gordon 1842:appendix, 30), and in the same century the ancient right of the See of Moray to the fishing in the Loch of Spynie, which then communicated with the sea, is mentioned in a letter of Bishop Bar (Cramond 1888:16). It is also in the Ecclesiastical context that mention is made of the distinctive fishing quarter of Aberdeen—the village of Fittie which occurs in the Registrum Episcopatus Aberdoniensis in the thirteenth century (Alexander 1952:58), and which is also mentioned in 1441 when both the white and salmon fishings were in the hands of the Crown during a vacancy of the See of Aberdeen (Exchequer Rolls 1882:95). The fairly frequent references to the export of 'mulones' (cod) from Aberdeen also in the fifteenth century suggest that it was the main centre of commercial white fishing at this stage, and there is also a record of stockfish being brought from Aberdeen to the King in 1457 (Exchequer Rolls 1883: 231). The involvement of Banff at the same period is shown by the custom levied on

cod in 1486 (Exchequer Rolls 1886:446), while Down (now Macduff) is referred to as a 'fish-town' as early as 1440 (Cramond 1893:2), and the tithes of white fish were included in a lease of the lands of Innerbundy (*i.e.* Inverboyndie, Banffshire) in 1458 (Cramond 1886:4). Herring fishing was also prosecuted at this time in the inner Moray Firth, as export of the fish from Inverness was recorded on two occasions (Exchequer Rolls 1882:231; 1883:469), and in the early part of the sixteenth century the importance of this fishery is also mentioned by Hector Boece (Boece 1821:xxxiii). A fact of undoubted significance is that the earliest records of sea-fishing occur at settlements located at river mouths, including Aberdeen, Banff, and Inverness, which were also involved in the salmon fisheries on the lower reaches of the rivers (Coull 1967:33): and it appears probable that the men who caught the salmon also ventured beyond the river mouths—no doubt outside the main salmon season—to fish the sea as well. It may well be that the other river-mouth settlements of Nairn, Findhorn, Peterhead and Newburgh were all involved from an early date in both river and sea-fishing, as they certainly were in later times.

However vague the earlier phases of activity may be, there are records of fishing at sixteen points on the coast in the sixteenth century, and from this time at least there was an increase in both the number and size of fishing settlements. A possible stimulus to the fisheries was the occurrence of years of bad harvests on land, which was all too well known in Scotland in earlier times. Most of the places mentioned in the sixteenth century are on the Aberdeenshire coast, although it is not certain whether this represents the true balance of effort, as the more sheltered waters of the inner Moray Firth may have been relatively intensely exploited. Certainly the fisheries of this section of the coast greatly impressed Robert Gordon of Straloch in the middle of the seventeenth century (Gordon 1907:309); but in the sixteenth century there appear to be definite records of only half-a-dozen places on the coast west of the Spey. Between Aberdeenshire and the inner Moray Firth, there was activity at Banff itself, and probably also at the burghs of Cullen and Portsoy; and in the Enzie district, which was to become one of the main centres of activity and advance, 'fishing takis' were included in a grant of tack at Rannes in 1579 (Cramond 1890:3).

With the economic growth and increasing prosperity in Scotland during the seventeenth century, activity in fishing expanded, and there was some proliferation of villages along the coast: it is, however, impossible to gauge precisely the number of new settlements created, as some which appear in records for the first time may be earlier foundations. Thus the Aberdeenshire Poll Book (1696) reveals that by the end of the century the number of communities engaged in fishing in the county was eighteen, and descriptions of the coast in 1683 (Garden 1843:100–7) and 1721 (Hepburn 1843:98–100) show an active and valuable fishery; at the latter date it was stated that every coastal parish had at least one 'fisher toun', and many of them had two. In the coastal area of Banffshire, in the same century, the granting of rights to white fishing in a number of seisins at the coast was prominent (Bell 1812:54), and by 1700 there were

eight fishing villages on this section of the coast. At the same date there were at least eight other settlements concerned with fishing west of the Spey.

The fuller records from the eighteenth century show more clearly the prolongation of expansion towards the modern period and the prominent hand of the lairds in shaping it; and by 1800 the number of fishing settlements at nearly fifty was coming close to that of today. During the century the great majority of the settlements expanded considerably and there was the founding of several completely new villages; there was also the building of more adequate cottages for the fisherfolk, and by the end of the century the appearance of villages planned on a regular geometric layout: the Improving Movement wrought changes at the coast as important as those inland.

The early 1700s saw the new foundations in Banffshire of Gardenstown (N.S.A. XIII:291), Portessie and Findochty (O.S.A. XIII:401). These had mainly the old type of layout with houses huddled by the beach, but Buchanhaven (Aberdeenshire), built from 1780 (Neish 1950:75), was laid out in orderly rows, as was the village of St. Combs which was built to a plan from 1771 (T.S.A. Aberdeen 1960:313) to replace the older nearby village of Corsekelly, and at about the same time too Collieston was rebuilt. One of the best examples of eighteenth-century growth occurred on the east side of the mouth of the Deveron, where the old settlement of Down was rebuilt and greatly expanded, and the laird's name incorporated into the new name of Macduff (Cramond 1893:1–9). The mark of planning was to become more obvious after 1800, with the grid layout of the rebuilt Burghead (N.S.A. XIII:40–1) and of the 'new town' of Cullen (N.S.A. XIII:342) which is planned around a square, and overlooks the older seatown down by the beach; at Aberdeen too, the site of the fishing quarter of Fittie was moved in 1808, and a new village built around two squares (N.S.A. XIII:73–4). On a bigger scale, this grid layout was to be seen even more prominently in the larger fishing towns, and Peterhead, Fraserburgh, Macduff, Buckie and Lossiemouth all were to have nineteenth-century expansion on a grid plan.

If expansion, both in number and size, was the keynote of the settlements, it was not so in every case. Thus the village of Corsekelly (as stated above) was abandoned, possibly because the accumulation of coastal sand had rendered it too far from the sea and made it difficult to bring boats ashore. Three miles to the south, the village of Rattray which had been erected a burgh of regality in the sixteenth century (Cumine 1887–90:118), had its outlet to the sea blocked by the accumulation of sand which closed off the Loch of Strathbeg, and disappeared from the map in the early years of the century. Sandend (on the Aberdeenshire coast) ceases to be recorded as a fishing settlement also at about the same time. The burgh of Findhorn had to be rebuilt twice with the coastal changes at the river mouth (T.S.A. Moray and Nairn 1965:328), and on the inner firth the centres of Delnies, Maviston and Fisherton of Petty were all in decline by 1800 and ultimately ceased to have any concern with fishing. A main reason for the abandonment of settlement appears to have been natural selection, the open shores and points liable to sand accumulation being rejected in favour of those with

better landing places and harbours. The changes in the Culbin Sands, which culminated with the destructive encroachment of sand at the end of the seventeenth century, are well known, and old iron fishing hooks are still to be found among them (Bain [n.d.]: 13).

In the north-east, there is prominent alternation of sandy coastal stretches with ones which are rocky, and often cliffed; and in fishing settlements there was a marked preference for the latter. Sand could be eroded away or built up over the years, and did not give good sites for house building; open sandy shores too could be difficult to approach from the sea, and a boat could bed down in drifting sand once it had been pulled upon the beach. Rocky stretches, on the other hand, gave more stable house foundations, and shelter was often available on a raised beach ledge at a cliff-foot. With these sites it was the general rule that if there was at all sufficient space houses were huddled, gable-end to the sea, at the cliff-foot, as at Pennan, Crovie and Sandend, for example; otherwise the houses would be built on the cliff-top (as at Whinnyfold and Portknockie), whence the landing beach would be reached by steep and often slippery paths. However, this was obviously less convenient as the work of baiting lines and gutting and splitting fish was done in the houses, and the baited lines had to be carried down to the boats, while the catch had to be carried back to the houses. Another advantage that the rocky stretches of coast had was that on the rocks and shingle beaches split fish could be spread to dry, and dried fish was already a considerable trade item in the eighteenth century.

The earliest houses in the villages were very simple structures, like those of nearly all the poorer classes in Scotland before the Industrial Revolution: to judge from the foundations which were cleared from the site of Corsekelly in the 1950s, and from occasional buildings which have survived elsewhere, the houses were only four or five yards in length, and had earthen floors with central fire-places and thatched roofs; and at least in Buckie there were examples with the door in the gable-end (Hutcheson 1887:64). With the Improving Movement, the houses of the fisherfolk improved with those of the rest of the Scottish people, and the usual house-style became a more substantial 'but-and-ben' with walls of stone and lime, although earthen floors and thatched roofs generally continued to the end of the period under review.

The origins of the fisherfolk constitute a problem closely bound up with the origins of their settlements. There appears to be little to substantiate the colourful tales to be heard at various points of the coast which would trace their roots to such sources as the Norse settlement. The dialects spoken in the fishing villages are, in fact, characteristic of the North-East division of Lowland Scots, and many of the surnames of the villages can be paralleled among the landward population. These constitute cogent evidence for the fisherfolk having sprung mainly from the local populace. In the matter of surnames it is an outstanding fact that each village has only a very few traditional surnames, suggesting that it was only handfuls of families from which each community was descended: thus in St Combs there were Buchans, Cowes, Bruces and Strachans;

Portknockie had its Mains, Woods, Slaters and Piries, while Boddam had its Cordiners, Sellars and Stephens; and virtually every village is similar. However, there have been incomers who have become integrated into these coastal communities: the Fletts and Slaters of the Buckie area are descended from early eighteenth-century immigrants from the North Isles, while the Murrays came from Helmsdale (Hutcheson 1887:17), and there may have been some incomers from Fife. Although at least in Portessie there are fishing families which are known to have been engaged in farming at an earlier date (Hutcheson 1887:17), most of the new foundations recorded appear to have been settled in the first instance from fishing villages already in existence. Thus the first people in Portknockie moved the short distance from Cullen, while those at Findochty came from Fraserburgh, and Findhorn provided the fishermen who commenced operations at Portessie (O.S.A. XIII:408): all these were founded in the half-century up to 1727, while at the end of the century some of the Nairn fishermen resettled in Ardersier (O.S.A. XII:388). These movements appear to reflect the enterprise of landowners on different parts of the coast in promoting fishing as a means of economic betterment; and the migration of fishermen and fishing families is a frequent occurrence when records become fuller after 1800.

The Fisherfolk and the Land

If it is not easy to state when many of the various fishing settlements originated, it is a good deal more difficult to investigate the way of life of the people in them right until the time of the Old Statistical Account. No doubt some of the distinctive practices and superstitions of the fisherfolk recorded from the later eighteenth century onwards go back a considerable time into the past. A very prominent feature of the more modern period is the social separation of the fishing from the farming population, which was certainly fostered by the very different ways of life of the two groups: 'The cod and the corn dinna mix' is one of the traditional sayings of the Moray Firth coast. But if apart at the deeper levels of community life, and with inter-marriage between the two groups virtually unknown, there were trading links between the fisherfolk and their farming neighbours which were vital in securing their food supply.

There are indications, however, that the separation between farming and fishing was at one time much less severe, and that it is largely related to the growth of more specialised commercial fisheries in the last two or three centuries. Crofter-fishers were formerly more common, and indeed examples of them were still to be found in the inter-war years of the twentieth century in the area of Gardenstown.

The early burghs, where fishing is first recorded, all had their farm-land, and the fishers certainly had some of this. Thus the first feuars of Peterhead (Arbuthnott 1815: 18), mentioned on the town's erection to a burgh of barony in 1593, were fishermen who had small plots (each about one-fifth of an acre), with the right to common pasture and peat-cutting on the town moss, while the burgh of Rattray was involved in fishing at the same period, and had infield, outfield and common land (Cumine 1887–90:18).

The first map of the burgh of Aberdeen, made by James Gordon in 1661, shows plots attached to the fishermen's houses in the village of Fitty, and in 1683 Garden of Troup referred to the farming practice of the fisher towns on the north coast of Aberdeenshire, which included the growing of oats and barley (Garden 1843:106). Significant too, is that in the entries in the Aberdeenshire poll-book of 1696, five fishers are recorded resident in ferm-touns in the vicinity of Rattray, while there are four others at Sandend in Cruden parish, and in 1759 Down (later Macduff) was a community of thirty-four crofter-fishers (Cramond 1893:5). In the Buckie area, there are several instances of families of farming extraction who took to fishing in the early eighteenth century, and in the same century every fisherman in Buckie had at least half-an-acre of ground, mostly in the 'Yardie' (Hutcheson 1887: 62), a strip of ground at a low level by the beach: but by this time most of the fishermen hired local crofters to cultivate their land. As late as 1771, the village of St Combs was laid out with plots for potatoes attached to the houses, and there are also several instances in the Old Statistical Account of villages with their cultivation plots; while in Whitehills in Banffshire, long noted for its prowess in fishing, the men had plots of $1\frac{1}{4}$ acres each as late as 1840 (N.S.A. XIII:237). The cultivation up to the mid-eighteenth century was for the production of oats and (more especially) barley for meal, although from that time potatoes were to become the main crop. In this context too, it is of significance that to this day a part of the golf course at Inverallochy in Aberdeenshire is still known as the 'Hempland', and in former times grew hemp which was used in making lines.

While there is ample evidence to demonstrate the necessary earlier connection of the fishing population with the soil, there were by the latter eighteenth century interesting contrasts. Thus in the parish of Rathen (Aberdeenshire), the fisherfolk of the villages of Cairnbulg and Inverallochy were conspicuous in being the only section of the population without land, although some of them rented potato ground from farmers (O.S.A. XI:15). In the nearby parish of Crimond, on the other hand, the only fishing was done by members of the farming community living near the coast, who went out only in fine weather to catch for domestic use (O.S.A. XI:49).

Fishermen appear to have been like a great part of the Scottish tenantry of the period under review in being tenants at will subject to the laird or to a tacksman to whom he sublet the fishings. This persisted into the latter part of the eighteenth century, as is instanced at Fraserburgh, where the fisherman was bound to serve for a fixed period in a boat (Cranna 1914:56); and at Buckie it is reported that the laird Dunbar drove the men to sea when they were reluctant to go out in adverse weather (Hutcheson 1887:62). As well as those with the formal status of tenants, squatters may have been included in some of the villages; and indeed in 1780 the first settlers in the village of Buchanhaven (now part of Peterhead) were squatters (Neish 1950:75).

The boats were usually supplied by the lairds, although in the decades before 1800 it had become usual for the fishermen themselves to own the smaller yawls which were often employed for inshore winter fishing. A usual system was that the fisherman paid

a single rent for his shared boat, and his house and yard (Bell 1812:54), and the laird undertook to replace the boat every seven years. There is evidence that in earlier times part of the rent was paid in fish and in services, as occurred in Peterhead where the original feuars of the burgh teind fish (N.S.A. XII:370), and at Cullen in 1642 four fishing skippers incurred the displeasure of the Earl of Findlater for their failure to pay their dues of 'two dissoun fishes' for each day spent in fishing (Cramond 1888:41). At Buckie, about 1800, an annual token payment of six dried cod or ling (Hutcheson 1887: 19) were still included in the fishermen's rents, although at the same time the old payments of teind fish at Fraserburgh seem to have fallen into desuetude (Cranna 1914:56); and Buckie men were still liable for the service of 'binnage' freights to the laird (Hutcheson, 1887:19), which chiefly involved the transport of building materials (stone and timber) along the coast of the Moray Firth. At the close of the eighteenth century, the annual rents paid by the fishermen were in the region of £5 to £6; at this time the value of the boats which they got every seven years was around £15 to £20, and at Buckie a boat fitted out with necessary gear for fishing cost £24 (O.S.A. XIII:402), suggesting that about half the rent was reckoned for house and ground, the other half being for the boat. At the same time, it was usual to allot a share of the catch to the maintenance of the boat; thus at Torry the boat got an equal share with each of the six-man crew (one-seventh) (O.S.A. VII:206), while at Fraserburgh the proportion was one-sixth (Cranna 1914:56).

The regulation and organisation of fishing was not, however, entirely within the hands of lay lords, as it was never the practice to fish on Sundays. This was prohibited for river salmon fishing as early as the reign of Alexander II, and the ruling of the Kirk Session of Aberdour in 1699 that the local boats should not stay out later than sunset on Saturday nights shows a similar practice in the area after the Reformation. At the same time complaints were recorded against two fishwives who had sold fish on a Sunday (Cramond 1896:29).

The Work of Fishing

The actual work of fishing was a specialist craft, and as this emerges more clearly in the eighteenth century, it shows organisation on a family basis with a considerable measure of self-sufficiency in the fishing communities, and with a pattern of activity related to the cycle of the seasons. By the later eighteenth century too it represented in total an economic effort of considerable moment, with hundreds of boats involved, and prices for fish which the Old Statistical Account shows to have been relatively high.

While there were variations from one part of the coast to another, the main effort was always directed to the catching of white fish by lines of different types, and there was an intimate knowledge of the various grounds (such as the 'Coral' and 'Hill Ground' in the Moray Firth, and the 'Castle Hard' off Aberdeenshire), and of the fish they provided at different times of year. The type of boat most generally used was from 23 to 30 feet, up to 4 tons burthen and was crewed by six men and sometimes a

boy; but even at the end of the eighteenth century there were few villages with more than six or seven of these boats. They had masts and sails, but oars were also much used in propelling them. All villages appear to have had a smaller size of boat, too, of about 17 feet long, crewed by four men and used mainly for winter fishing close inshore, but also used by boys and older men at other times. By the latter part of the century, however, bigger boats were also in use in the centres of Peterhead (Arbuthnott 1815: 42), Fraserburgh (Cranna 1914:56) and Buckie (Hutcheson 1867:17): these were over 30 feet long with two or three masts and crews of eight or nine men, but, like the smaller craft, they were open boats. The origin of these boats of the East Coast 'fifie' type is problematical, as there are no descriptions of them earlier than the mid-nineteenth century (Mather 1966:134). Most of the boats were sufficiently big to require the efforts of more than their crews to launch and beach them, and the womenfolk often helped although the work was very heavy. Bad weather not infrequently halted operations, especially in winter. At such times, the worst hazard was often coming in to land, as this generally involved approaching open beaches through the breakers. There were some harbour works from at least the sixteenth century at the bigger centres, although storms frequently caused severe damage to these early structures. From as far east as the Buckie area, boats might even run to the Comarty Firth in adverse weather (Hutcheson 1887:64), as it was easy to negotiate its wide entrance into the sheltered waters beyond. However, all the villages have their own grim record of disasters: as a single illustration, at least twenty boats were lost during the eighteenth century in the Buckie area, mostly with all hands. In some villages there were more deaths at sea than on land (Hutcheson 1887:18).

A considerable variety of white fish could be caught at most times of the year, although the 'Back of Eel' period from about January to March could be a difficult time through shortage of fish on the grounds (little else than cod being available) and bad weather. Where they were fished, herring and mackerel had a pronounced summer season, as had the dog-fish which tended to follow the herring shoals. The same also applied to the shell fish—lobster and crab.

Particular grounds could be noted for the fish they yielded. Rattray cod were much sought after in Aberdeenshire, while in the Moray Firth the 'Skate Hole' is self-explanatory, and turbot were caught off the Bullers o' Buchan. The grounds were generally located by lining up landmarks on shore, of which the most prominent were Mormond Hill, the Durn and the Bin Hill of Cullen, although reference was also made to features on the west side of the Moray Firth, such as the Sutors of Cromarty. If the practice at Fraserburgh is at all typical, there were also cases where the fishing on particular banks was recognised as belonging to particular crews (Cranna 1914:59).

The winter period, from about October to February, was generally the time for working close inshore from the smaller boats mainly for haddock and codling, although in Buckie the bigger boats were used the whole year round. 'Small lines' were mainly employed, the term indicating that the actual lines were relatively thin and light, the

hooks small and more closely spaced, and it was generally a smaller class of fish that were caught. Even so, boats would shoot up to two miles of line, with up to 3,000 hooks (Arbuthnott 1815:39), to catch cod, haddock and flat fish. February and March tended to be a less active period, and men spent a good deal of time ashore in the maintenance of boats and gear, but there followed the most important spring great-line season, in the prosecution of which Buckie and Peterhead were outstanding. For this boats would venture up to 40 miles offshore, and might stay out two or three days at a time, shooting their lines once a day. Each crew member had his own line, and at Peterhead the total number of hooks was over 400 (Arbuthnott 1815:39), but at Buckie each man in a crew of eight or nine had a line with 100 to 120 hooks (O.S.A. XIII:402). In this fishery, cod and ling were the main fish sought, but halibut and skate were also important. Great-lining went on until well into June, and afterwards the inshore and small-line fishing might be resumed, although in the Buckie area the men then prepared for the summer herring season. Another variation occurred in some years on the north coast of Aberdeenshire, where mackerel were fished with unbaited hooks if they appeared; and from at least the mid-seventeenth century (Garden 1843:100) there was also a fishery for dog-fish which might last into November. In the late eighteenth century this latter was on a considerable scale all along the coast: the fish was dried for winter food and its liver-oil provided fuel for lamps; and before 1800 it was being sought as fertiliser by farmers improving their land (Cranna 1914:58).

Lobster and 'partan' crabs were caught on the lines in earlier times, or simply gathered inshore at low tide, and only in the late eighteenth century is there any record of creels being introduced (O.S.A. VII:206). By 1800 there was an organised trade with the London market, and in 1792 two English companies engaged Buckie fishermen to catch lobsters (O.S.A. XIII:405), and at Peterhead (O.S.A. XVI:548) and elsewhere men were involved in catering for the same market.

Although there is an isolated reference to fishing for herring in Peterhead in 1733 (Anon 1907:71), and in Aberdeen between 1787 and 1797 ten boats big enough to qualify for the Government's tonnage bounty (minimum burthen 20 tons) were fitted out (*Parliamentary Papers* 1803:294–5), the only serious efforts in this field were by craft on the Moray Firth. Inverness had been sporadically involved in it for centuries, and tradition has it that men from Fife introduced the drift-net fishery for herring to Buckie before 1700 (Hutcheson 1887:34); while in Nairn a company was formed to promote it in 1712 (Bain 1928:246) with a fair measure of success. The main early fishery was in the inner Firth where most were caught in August, although in Pennant's time (1769) they were already being fished through the winter as well (Pennant 1771: 178). In Buckie the older method of working was with four-men crews, each man having a net, the nets being of linen and having stones fixed to their lower end to make them sink and requiring to be dried almost daily to minimise the deterioration caused by salt water. Here, in a six-week season beginning about 20 July, men in a good year might earn as much as in all the other forty-six weeks (Hutcheson 1887:18), and there

were specialist curers ashore who dealt with the catch. Such a situation obviously encouraged expansion in herring fishing, and to this end in Inverness twenty-two boats qualifying for the tonnage bounty were fitted out between 1771 and 1797 (*Parliamentary Papers* 1803:294–5). Greater success was still at this stage enjoyed by smaller craft, and by the end of the century there were between 200 and 300 herring boats in all the Moray Firth coasts (with crews of 7 or 8 men) (*Parliamentary Papers* 1803: 140), and the main fishery was already moving to Caithness where the Buckie fleet played a prominent part. The stage was being set for the great nineteenth-century expansion, and fishermen were already developing the greater degree of mobility which was an essential concomitant.

However, the boldest ventures before 1800 in the North-East were made from other bases. Peterhead (O.S.A. XVI:609–10) and Fraserburgh (Cranna 1914:56) had fitted out bigger boats to go to Barra Head cod fishing in summer; and, from the former, some boats actually ventured as far as Iceland, herring fishing on the West Coast was attempted, and fifty years of whaling effort in the Arctic was begun as the century ended. But these developments were less enduring than the rising herring fisheries of the Moray Firth coasts.

Essential for successful white fisheries were adequate supplies of bait for the lines: the main sources of supply were the mussel beds of the estuaries, especially of the Ythan and Findhorn, but mussels were also collected on the foreshore of the Inverness Firth, and indeed brought into the area from the extensive beds of the Montrose Basin and the Cromarty and Dornoch Firths. Prior to about 1700, they were also collected from the inlet at Rattray (Hepburn 1843:98), before it was finally closed off from the sea by the bay-bar which now impounds the Loch of Strathbeg. At the end of the eighteenth century fishermen from all the villages made periodic trips to load their boats with mussels which, on their return, they 'sowed' on scalps on their own village foreshores to keep them fresh until required. At Torry, for example, it was the practice to make two or three trips a year to the Montrose Basin for this purpose (O.S.A. VII: 205–6).

In earlier times reliance on more local supplies was usual, and as early as 1570 fish bait on the foreshores were among the appurtenances of lands granted to Alexander Fraser of 'Pettowlie' (Pittulie) in the north-east of Aberdeenshire (Aberdeen and Banff Collections 1843:101). A century later in the same area, Garden of Troup speaks of gathering shell-bait off the rocks, and of transplanting it from the outer rocks to those nearer the shore for winter use (Garden 1843:100); lug-worm and sand-eels were also used in summer, and salted mackerel and saithe in winter. Butcher offal is also recorded as having been used by the fishermen of Torry (O.S.A. VII:205).

Traditionally, the work of baiting the lines, and of gathering and shelling the bait beforehand, was the work of the women, helped by the children. A significant illustration of this is that the school roll in the Aberdeenshire parish of Slains fell markedly in summer at the end of the eighteenth century, when everyone over six or seven years

old in the villages of Collieston and Old Castle was fully occupied in baiting (O.S.A. V:280).

Till the end of the eighteenth century too, there was a large element of self-sufficiency among the fishermen in making their own gear, including their lines of hemp with horsehair snoods, and also their own hooks (Hutcheson 1887:30). Where herring were fished, the men made their own nets, and sails for the boats were also made, although the boats themselves were built at a few of the bigger centres on the coast, including Cullen, Peterhead, Banff and Garmouth.

Disposal of the Catch

A considerable proportion of the fish caught was always consumed fresh in the coastal villages and towns, and in their immediate farming hinterlands; and prior to the eighteenth century, this certainly accounted for the major part of the catch. However, storage for winter use and for longer-distance trade required that part of the catch be preserved. The main method here was by splitting and drying the fish on rocks and shingle beaches, usually with some salting to improve preservation. This process took upwards of a month, and it was the work of the women and children to spread the fish out in dry weather and collect them together again in wet (N.S.A. XIII:338). Particularly in winter when drying was impracticable fish were also cured in barrels, and smoked.

The local trade was generally the responsibility of the fish-wife, a well-known figure in traditional Scottish life. Right into the nineteenth century (and even the twentieth) a proportion of this was by barter, the fish being exchanged for meal, butter, cheese and eggs in the fermtouns, giving a necessary supplement to what the fishers produced from their own plots. The fish-wife might carry her creel a return distance of 16 miles in a day (Pennant 1771:147), and Francis Douglas noted that they came before breakfast to Aberdeen from the village of Newburgh (13 miles away) to sell their wares in the weekly Friday market (Douglas 1782:150).

Although the restriction of market privileges to the burghs no doubt hampered the growth of commerce in fish, there was some longer distance trade from early times; and the purchase of 1,000 skate by the merchant William Buddith of Inverness at Fraserburgh in 1568 (MacKay and Boyd 1911:lxxvii) is an indication of the scale this could attain. This trade increased as activity in fishing expanded, and by the early eighteenth century Peterhead was especially prominent as an exporter. The fuller records of the later part of the eighteenth century reveal a trade which had grown to quite remarkable proportions: prices were rising, and the levels instanced in the Old Statistical Account suggest that the fishermen were not without a considerable incentive. At Collieston, the bigger fish like ling and turbot were fetching 1s. or more each, while skate and cod and sole were all worth 6d. each (O.S.A. V:275), although smaller fish and those less desired by the market realised considerably lower prices; at Peterhead cod fetched between £1 and £1 10s. per dozen (O.S.A. XVI:541), while lobsters at different

points on the coast were worth 2½d. each. It is noteworthy that in Robert Fergusson's poem 'Leith Races', written in the mid-eighteenth century, the following verse occurs:

> The Buchan bodies through the beach
> Their bunch o' Findrams cry
> And skirl oot bauld, in Norland speech,
> 'Gweed speldins—fa' will buy?'

The reference is obviously to visitors from the North-East who were hawking their fish; and speldings (dried whitings) were a traditional product of Collieston especially. Regular contacts had been forged with the ports of the Forth and Tay, and also with London; and while it is impossible to assess the total volume of this trade, there are available illustrations of its scale. Thus from Whitehills the annual value of outgoing trade was between £500 and £600 (O.S.A. XIX:307), while Portsoy and Cullen between them sent away fish to a value of about £840 (O.S.A. XII:143), and about one-half the catch from the Aberdeenshire parish of Slains (*i.e.* the villages of Collieston and Old Castle) were disposed of in the same way (O.S.A. V:275). Salt evaporated on the Forth, needed in the preservation of the fish, was one of the main return cargoes, and hemp for lines is also recorded, along with the domestic requirements of wool and coal. Buckie men went in May to Glasgow, and even to Ireland with a part of their catch, as well as making shorter trips to the ports of the inner Moray Firth to sell dried fish in summer and dog-fish liver oil in winter, and a return cargo here was bark for preserving the lines (Hutcheson 1887:23–24). There was also a regular trade from Peterhead to London, which took the form of 400 to 600 barrels of salt cod and haddock (O.S.A. XVI:541); and dried dog-fish were sent from Rosehearty and Pittulie (O.S.A. V:98) to the same destination.

In sum, by 1800 there had already developed on the North-East of Scotland considerable fisheries; the numbers of the fisherfolk had increased to be a reservoir of skilled manpower despite the hardships and periodic disasters of their life, and had achieved by the standards of the time a fair measure of prosperity. They were also involved in, and to some extent backed by a commercial organisation which gave scope for further expansion. After 1800 the fishermen were finally to achieve their independence of the lairds, their numbers to continue to grow and the whole scale of operations to expand; their boats were to increase in size and become decked over. This was to be accompanied by a large-scale turn-over to herring fishing in response to further government encouragement, together with centralisation of operations as the main centres acquired better harbours and other facilities which the larger boats needed. A mobility was also to develop, which took many of the fishermen (and numbers of their dependents) as far as the voes of Shetland, the wharves of Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft in East Anglia, and to fishing harbours in Ireland. There was, however, a necessary formative period of slower growth before the foundations were well and truly laid for the pattern of fishing we know in modern times.

NOTE

An important source in the preparation of the paper has been that of oral tradition. The majority of former practices recorded here are either within the memories of the older fisherfolk, or have been handed down by their forebears. Such information has been a main guide to research, and the attempt has been made to corroborate oral tradition with documentary evidence wherever possible.

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