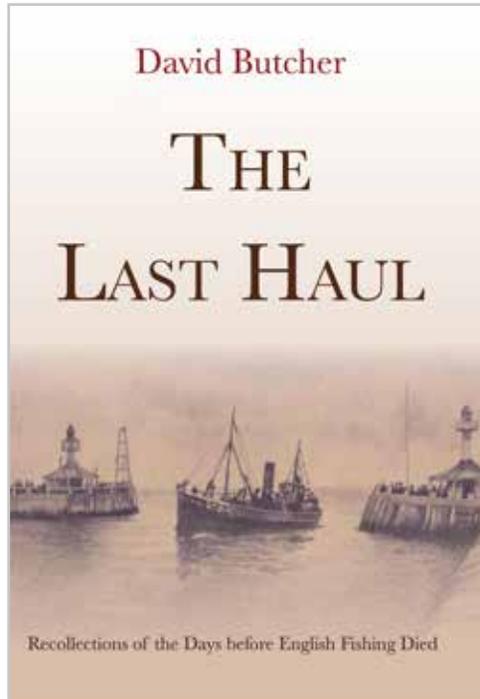


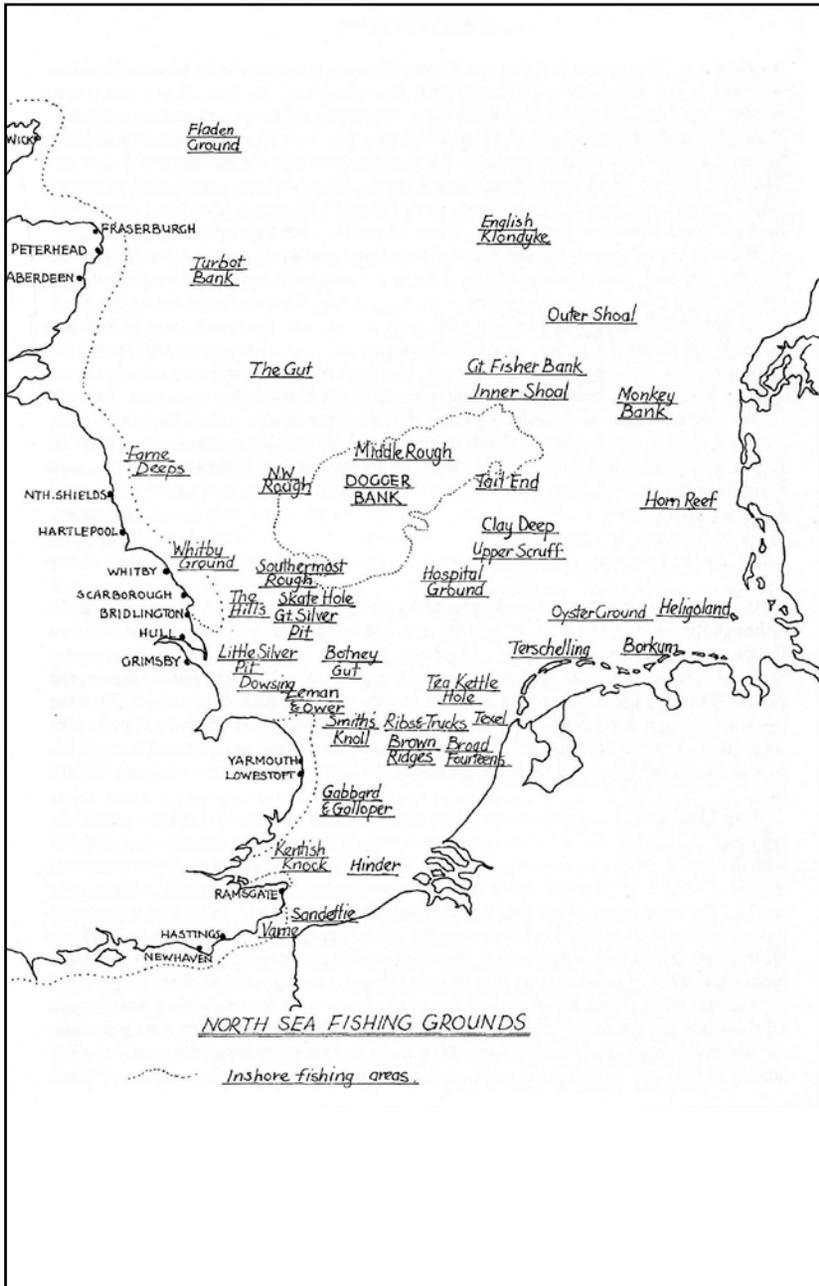
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The main fishing-grounds of the southern North Sea (not to scale). The three-mile limit (or exclusion) area for larger vessels is indicated by a dotted line, as is the famed Dogger Bank area itself.

Poppyland Publishing is pleased to announce *The Last Haul: Recollections of the Days before English Fishing Died* by David Butcher.

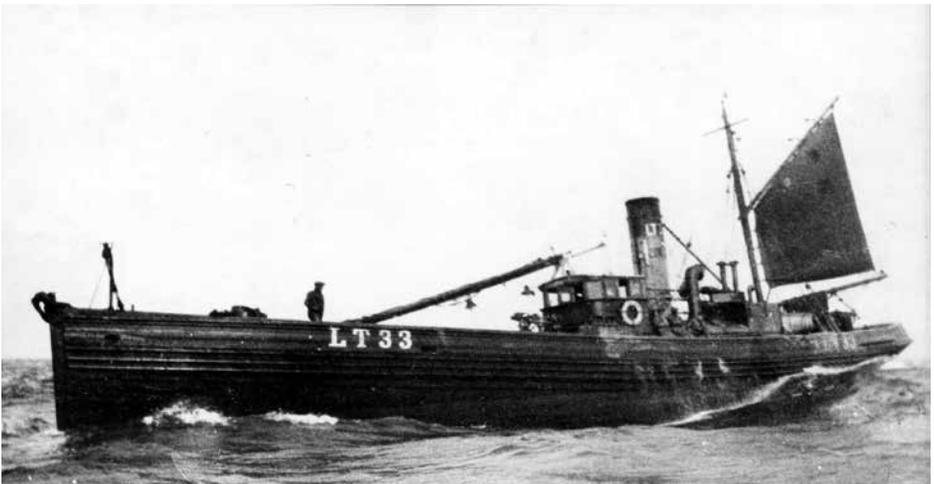
This book is the last one, in a series of five, recording the oral history of commercial fishing in East Anglia during the first half of the twentieth century. The previous four, *The Driftermen*, *The Trawlermen*, *Living from the Sea* and *Following The Fishing*, were all published between 1979 and 1987 by Tops'l Books.

Much has changed in the British fishing industry since those books were produced and, in general terms, the story has been one of consistent and continued decline. In the case of Lowestoft, that decline has been drastic.

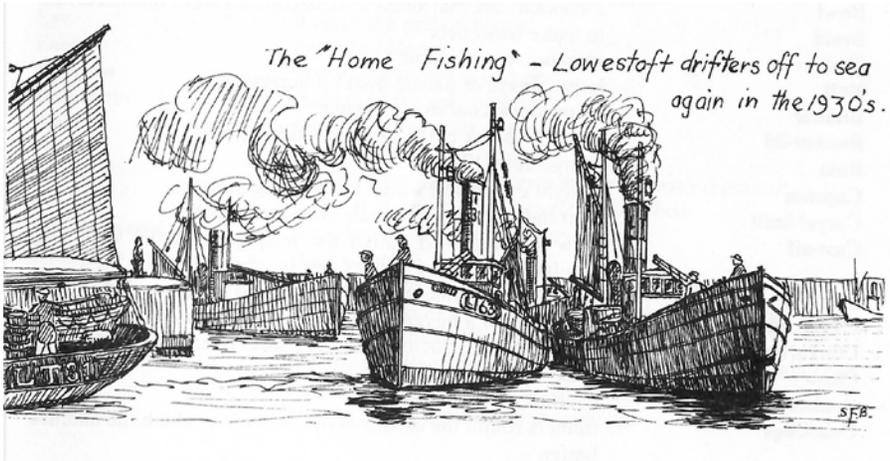
Given all that has happened in recent years regarding fishing activity in the town of Lowestoft, much of what is contained within the covers of this book will seem to reflect not only another age, but perhaps even another world! And, in a sense, the experiences recorded and presented do indeed belong to an era very different from our own. The earlier books dealt with drift-netting and the herring industry, with trawling, with the social life of shore-side communities and with land-based industries associated with fishing. This particular volume considers various types of fishing not previously covered, interesting and dangerous experiences connected with a life at sea, fisheries research, life on board Trinity House lightships and (strangest of all) a treasure-hunting expedition to Cocos Island on a converted Lowestoft herring drifter.



The steam drifter "Boy Ben" (LT 212), shown on her trial trip, with a multitude of people on board (no Health & Safety constraints in those days!). Built at Lowestoft in 1906, she was later renamed "Girl Phyllis".



The steam drifter "Faithful Friend" (LT 33): built at Lowestoft in 1913: shown under way, at sea, with the foremast typically secured to its resting-place on top of the wheelhouse. Its main use when erected (in tandem with the steam capstan) was to have the boom serve as derrick to run catches ashore when landing.



About the author

David Butcher grew up in Bungay, graduated in General Arts at Durham University and was awarded a M.Phil from the University of East Anglia. A well known local historian, his books include *The Driftersmen*, *The Trawlermen*, *Living from the Sea*, *The Ocean's Gift*, *Lowestoft 1550-1750 – Development and Change in a Suffolk Coastal Town*, *Medieval Lowestoft – The Origins and Growth of a Suffolk Coastal Community* and *Fishing Talk*. He is an Associate member of the Centre for East Anglian Studies at the University of East Anglia and a member of the Suffolk Local History Council.



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CHAPTER TWO

Hook, Line and Anchor

*Come, come, my lads, and listen here.
A fisherman's tale you soon shall hear.
What I didn't undergo
When first I went a-cod-banging- o!
To my la-fol-di-day, riddle-all-day.
This is a smacksman's life at sea.
(Traditional Essex folksong: Cod Banging)*

Using hook and line is probably one of the most ancient methods of catching fish, with precedents in Europe certainly dating back to Neolithic times. The concern here is not to investigate an ancient, subsistence mode of fishing, but to look at a much later development of it. Commercial hand-lining voyages to Iceland and the Faeroe Islands for cod and other demersal species—notably, ling—were carried out periodically from various East Coast ports (especially ones in Suffolk, Norfolk and Yorkshire) from the first half of the fifteenth century onwards and were continued with, in one form or other, for the next three hundred years. There were a number of reasons for the development of this fishery, which took place during the spring and summer months. One was the ever-increasing demand for fish in Roman Catholic Europe as its population recovered from the ravages of The Black Death, another the relatively imperishable nature of cod and its versatility with regard to both curing and cooking.¹ Account also has to be taken of the improvement in vessel design which made journeys to northern waters possible. And, finally, there was the importance of an alternative fishery to Newfoundland (especially from the sixteenth century onwards), which was dominated largely by Basques and Frenchmen and which was only exploited effectively in England by craft based in ports on the west side of the country.

The gear mainly used on the cod-fishing voyages, whether to Newfoundland or to Iceland, was known as the *great-line*—a ninety fathom length of stout hempen twine, with an iron *cross-piece* fixed to one end, which acted as a weight and which also supported a *hook* tied on at either extremity [i.e. four hooks in all]. This was operated, by hand, over the side of the vessel, and the cod (or whatever other species took the bait) drawn up through the water and landed on the deck. The bait used was probably a pelagic species such as herring and mackerel to

¹ Even after the Reformation, the consumption of fish remained important in Protestant countries—especially those like England and Holland, which saw the strategic significance of having a strong fishing industry to act as a back-up to conventional naval forces, both in terms of vessels and suitably trained men. The consumption of cod in its many dried and salted forms remained important over the whole of Europe.

begin with; but, as the fishing got under way, waste from the decapitation and gutting process was probably employed, as well as any lesser or unwanted species that were caught.² Once a vessel had taken a sufficient amount of fish on board (the catches were salted down and stored in compartments in the hold), it returned to its home-part and the cargo was re-processed, as required, into the different forms of dried and salted fish which were eaten at the time, such as *stockfish* and *haberdines* etc. All the cod livers, which had been carefully stored in small wooden casks, were rendered down for *train oil*—which was used, in turn, to dress leather and provide the fuel for household lamps.

Lowestoft, among other East Coast ports, participated in this distant-water fishery and, even as late as the 1730s, was still sending a handful of vessels down to Iceland on an occasional basis.³ However, long before this, it had begun a less risky and expensive lining voyage closer to home in the central and southern sectors of the North Sea and was content to devote the majority of its larger fishing craft to this activity. The parish tithes accounts show that this fishery was well established by the end of the seventeenth century and also reveal that many of the small, off-the-beach vessels (crewed by about three or four men as opposed to ten or twelve on board the larger boats) had adopted a lining technique of their own. This involved laying a continuous length of baited lines on the seabed, with small anchors at periodic intervals to weight everything down, and leaving them there for a period of time in order for various demersal species to become hooked. These lines were more slender than *great-lines* (and were, in fact, known as *small-lines*) and they had the hooks fixed to them at regular intervals on lengths of twine known as *snoods*. It was a way of fishing that was to prove more effective than the single, hand-held line, and it gradually replaced the older method, not only in East Anglia but in many other parts of the country as well—eventually becoming as much used in deep water as it was in the shallower, inshore reaches.⁴

As things turned out, Lowestoft never developed into a lining port of any significance. Its nineteenth century development, especially during the second half, was very much geared to herring and mackerel catching and to trawling. However, the smaller, *longshore* vessels continued to work *longlines*, as they had now become known, and during the 1920s and 30s it was not unknown for

2 Iceland vessels from East Anglia always carried a *bait-net*, which was either some kind of *seine* or a type of *drift-net*. This was obviously used to catch fish with which to bait the hooks. There is a good description of the lining gear used in a late seventeenth century publication: John Collins, *Salt and Fishery: a Discourse Thereof* (London, 1682), pp. 106-7.

3 According to the parish tithes accounts (Norfolk Record Office, PD 589/80), the last recorded voyage took place in 1743, when a single craft ventured north.

4 There is a detailed explanation of longlining methods and the different types of gear used in Davis, *Fishing Gear*, pp. 140-4. Some of the larger English vessels working Iceland also used longlines as early as the sixteenth century, leading to complaints from the Icelanders themselves that the gear fished too effectively and reduced cod stocks.

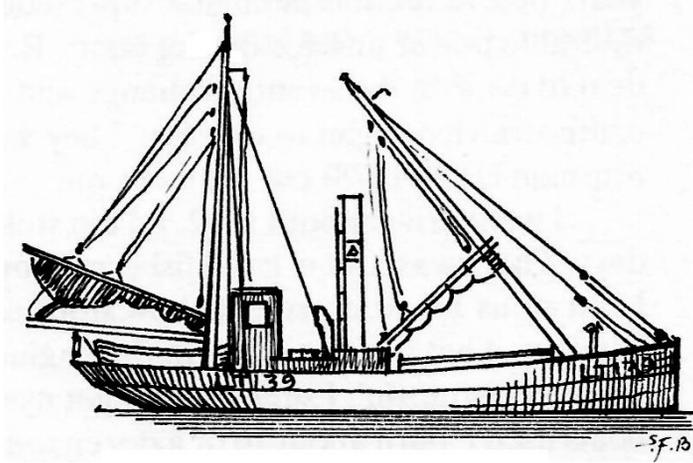


Fig. 3: Early Steam Drifter Cameo: *Narcissus* (LT 139)

A line-drawing of the early Lowestoft steam drifter "Narcissus" (LT 139). Built in the town in 1901, she was typical of the first generation of vessels constructed, with funnel for 'ad of the wheelhouse.

some of the herring drifters to be equipped for lining voyages.⁵ This was done to keep the vessels working at times when they might otherwise have been laid up, especially between the end of the *Home Fishing* in December and the start of the summer herring voyage to Shetland, in June. Again, as with *seine-netting*, it was a relatively easy matter to convert a steam drifter to lining, and it also involved less expense.

Ned Mullender went on a lining voyage during the winter and spring of 1919, after his discharge from the Royal Naval Patrol Service in the First World War and it is his experience which is recounted here. His recollections will run in an unbroken sequence, mainly because there is very little need for interpolated comments. The quality of the oral testimony is of a high order and, though some re-sequencing has had to be done in a number of places, in order to create a more logical structure, the commentary is solely that of the man himself. He was an excellent respondent to work with, having an extremely good memory concerning his working life and a very clear mode of delivery—both in terms of voice projection and the recounting of detail in an ordered way. Some of the information included in this chapter comes from the first tape-recording made

⁵ This was especially true of vessels which had been built in the earliest years of the twentieth century and which usually had *compound* steam engines of less capacity (often no more than fifteen horse-power) than the later *triple-expansion* models.



Plate 3: *Excelsior* (LT 698)

The steam drifter "Excelsior" (LT 698), seen leaving her home port, where she was constructed in the year 1904. The "Woodbine funnel" is a prominent feature of her appearance, as she heads out into the North Sea. .

(21 September 1976), which was intended as an introductory session and which covered a number of his early fishing experiences, but most of the narration derives from a later, follow-up tape which dealt specifically with longlining (4 January 1979). Such had been the interest generated by the first interview that it was necessary to elicit further information, in order to build up a more detailed picture of the activity. What follows is an in-depth account of a mode of fishing that dated back over centuries and is still in regular use today on inshore craft all around the British Isles.

"I come hoom in 1918, just afore Christmas, and I'd gotta find a job.⁶ I got into Low'stoft on the Saturday afore Christmas and, over the weekend, I see a friend o' mine and he say, 'George Rushmore want a crew for *linin*'. And, o' course, I accepted the job and went and got demobbed. There wun't right a lot o' *linin*' done out o' Low'stoft, not to my knowledge, and this wuz 1919, but anyway I got a *berth* in the the little ol' *Excelsior* (LT 698). She wuz one o' them little ol' drifters with the wheelhouse aft and she belonged to about five people.⁷ I wuz the *whilk-cracker*, as well as bein' *second engineer*. Yeah, I used to go on deck and help bait the lines and haul the lines and put the fish away.

⁶ Ned Mullender had been serving abroad, in the Mediterranean and the Adriatic Sea, with the Royal Naval Patrol Service.

⁷ This vessel was a wooden steam drifter, built at Lowestoft in 1904 and having a fifteen horse-power compound engine made by Elliott & Garrod Ltd. of Beccles. The wheelhouse was situated aft-side of the funnel, as it was in a number of the early steam drifters, but it was much more common in such vessels to have these positions reversed.

HOOK, LINE AND ANCHOR

“Now, we started orf in the Hamilton Dock, gittin’ riddy, and we took an old man for a *pilot* ’cause none of us had been before. But this ol’ pilot had been durin’ the war or some other time. His name wuz Billy Peak and he wuz mate wi’ my father in 1911 and 1912. He wuz a Pakefield man and he wuz the one who wuz goin’ to show us how it wuz goin’ to be done. He wuz goin’ to have a month with us, see, and then he wuz goin’ to finish. Well, after we got started, we found that instead o’ havin’ a crew o’ seven, we wanted eight. We wanted nine really, if we coulda had ’em because we were all strangers to it. The baitin’ took us a lot longer, see, and o’ course wi’ me crackin’ the whilks—well, that wuz a job on its own, when we first started. Anyway, we kept the pilot on so he wuz with us all the time, and he wuz the man who used to *shoot* the lines.

“When we started, we *coiled* the lines on wooden *hoops* about that much round [indicating about a fifteen inch diameter with the hands]. They had a canvas bottom sewn onto ’em and they dint have no sides—just *lashins* [lashings] to keep the lines in place, until you unlashed ’em to use. And you coiled your lines round and round, and as you come up you laid your hooks to the front, all down one side. So, when you shot, all your hooks were on that side. Well, we had so many foul lines with the hoops that we packed ’em in. Yeah, we started usin’ a box thing, a *chute*, which wuz tapered orf at an angle, with nothin’ in front of it but built up at the sides and the back. That wuz about eighteen inches across at the front, and the back would be about twenty-four, and that wuz what you used to coil yuh lines in.⁸ But instead o’ coilin’ ’em like you did on the hoops, where yuh hooks were all in rows, on one side, as you went up the coils, you coiled the lines so yuh hooks were all in rows facin’ outwards at the front o’ the chute.

“Each hoop or chute had seven *shanks* o’ line in it to make up what wuz called a *peck*. See, a shank wuz sixty fathom long, so you had 420 fathoms each peck, and you allus baited thirty-two pecks up—which meant that you shot fifteen mile o’ line, with hooks every twelve foot on *snoods* about two and a half to three foot long. So that meant you’d hev 210 hooks in a chute. They were an ordinary cod hook, not as big as the big lines had—the *deep-water lines*.⁹ No. These were more of a half-size hook. I dun’t know the actual number [i.e. the official, specified size], but if you had a good-sized whilk that wuz all you put on one hook. But, o’ course, if they were smaller ones, you baited up with more on.

“We used to shoot the whilks down below onta *coca mattin*’ [i.e. coconut fibre]. See, in the *fore-room*, on the bottom, wuz coca mattin’, and we used to put the whilks onta this, all wet, so they could suck orf that and keep alive. That wuz if you were in port and couldn’t git out to fish. But, normally, you’d start to bait up

8 Both the pieces of equipment described here are well illustrated in Davis, *Fishing Gear*, p. 141.

9 The lines referred to here were the ones used on the lining voyages to Milford Haven, to catch conger eels and other species.

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