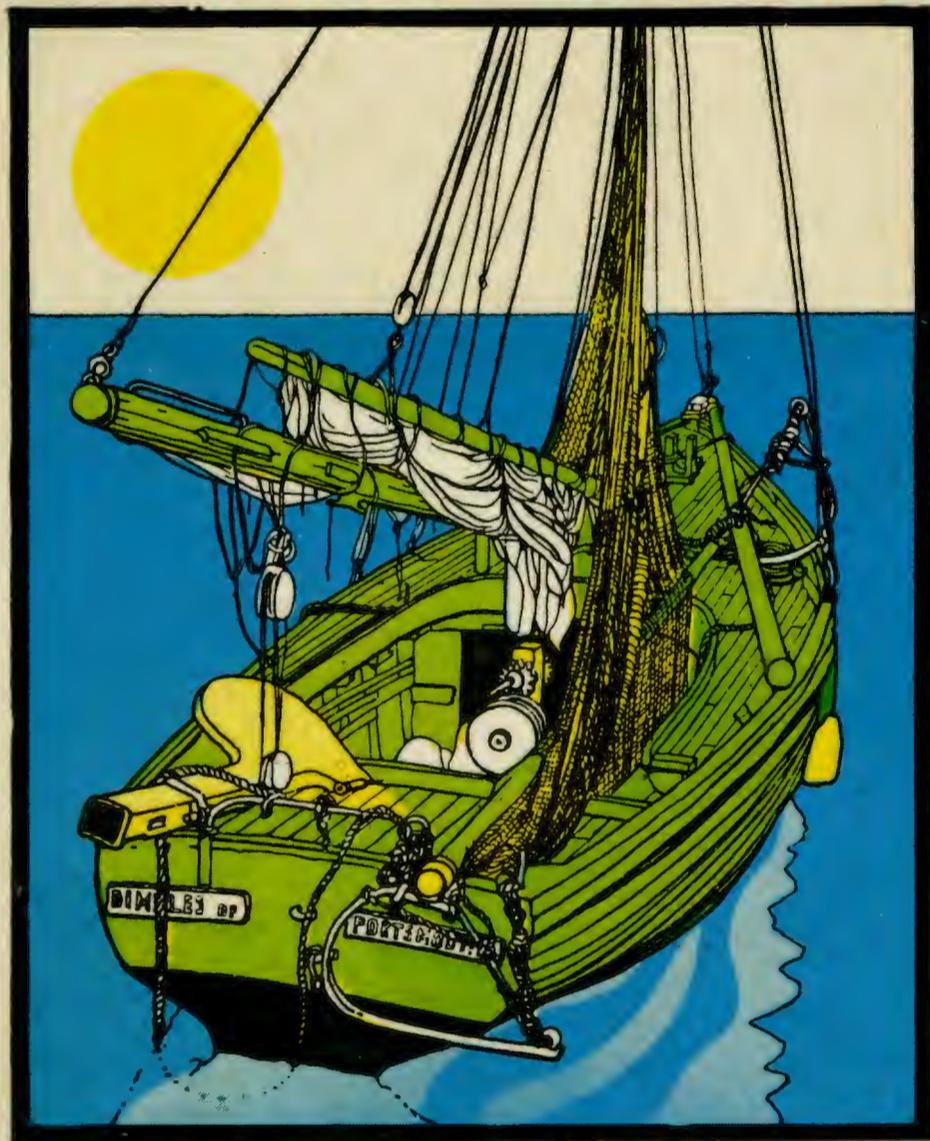


Fishermen and fishing ways



Peter F Anson

Dear Alistair,

Thank you for your interesting email.

I was away at the time you sent your requests.

We are happy for you to publish Peter Anson's book, 'Fishermen and fishing ways' on your website, with the usual copyright acknowledgement.

A link with Nunraw's website would be appreciated.
<http://www.nunraw.com/>

Your comments about the lack of religious belief in current society and its impact on the Scots may well be true, but I can imagine the reaction to such statements from the Atheist lobby. There does seem to be a change coming in our society. I think Pope Benedict XVI on his visit to the UK last September in his remarks about faith and science, and their need for each other bears out a lot of what you were saying.

Your friend, David Thomson, working in Cambodia is an enterprising man. Peter Anson, I'm sure would have been delighted to think that his book would prove useful so far away from Scotland.

We keep your work in our prayers.

Kind regards,

Fr Mark Caira
(abbot)

PREFACE

THIS book makes no pretence to be an exhaustive treatise on sea-fisheries. It merely tries to give landsmen who have neither the inclination nor the opportunity to find out for themselves some idea of how fish are caught and the chief methods employed in their capture. I have also collected a few of the more interesting points connected with the folk-lore of fishermen, and have tried to show how their lives are dominated (at least those of the older generation now rapidly disappearing) almost as much by heterodox superstitions as by orthodox religious beliefs and practices. I have drawn largely on my own personal experiences at sea to explain the various methods of sea-fishing and the daily life of fisherfolk. Indeed, this book could never have been written or illustrated if it had not been for the co-operation given me by fishermen themselves, not only in the British Isles, but in other parts of the world where I have been privileged to gain their friendship. My only regret is that, in the limits imposed by the publishers, I have been obliged to omit so many other interesting facts connected with fishermen and fishing ways that I have gathered during past years along the sea-coasts of both hemispheres.

P. F. A.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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reports of the Fishery Boards of other countries dealt with in these pages.

Thanks are due also to the Canadian National Railways for information; to Frith and Co., the Great Grimsby Coal, Salt, and Tanning Company, Valentine and Co., and Mr C. F. Baldry, for supplying valuable photographs of types of fishing craft, many of which are now extinct; to many friends, especially Mr F. W. J. Saunders, who have supplied information and criticisms; and, lastly, to the fishermen themselves, without whose help it would have been difficult for these pages to be written.

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DEDICATION

DEAR A. F. C.,

Here is a book that, I think, will interest you. And in a certain sense these pages owe a good deal to your inspiration, although you might not realize it. For when you used to let me join you in the *Stella Maris* and in the old *Firefly* you were doing your best to encourage that boyish love of the sea and ships that nothing has ever been able to eradicate in me. And it was you who first taught me to bait mackerel-lines! Have you forgotten those long summer afternoons we spent fishing off St Margaret's Isle, Giltar Point, or Drinkim Bay? I don't suppose so!

Twenty-one years have come and gone since then, and on this May evening once more am I sitting on the cliffs of Caldey, gazing out over the Western Ocean, with Lundy Island and the heights of Exmoor dimly visible on the far horizon. Look at that brown-sailed smack some five miles off, beating up against the wind toward St Govan's Head. How she brings back to mind the days and nights spent on the Brixham trawler *Fiery Cross* after I had embarked from Caldey on an evening just like this over ten years ago. That was my first real experience of trawling. What better initiation could I have had into the life and ways of deep-sea fishermen? With these 'Devon sea-dogs' I sailed across the Bristol Channel, round Land's End, and owing to bad weather it was not until after a week that we finally made Berry Head and moored in the little port that claims to be the birthplace of trawling.

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But this didn't prevent me from wanting to be off again, and before long there was another trip across to Bideford with a cargo of stone, this time in our own ketch *Elizabeth*. These are but two of the many seafaring experiences that I owe to the years spent at Caldey.

On these same cliffs by the lighthouse, watching the ever-changing procession of shipping on the horizon, how often have I not felt the symptoms of that incurable 'sea-fever' which, since then, has driven me round the world in ships of every nation and with seamen of every class? Some fruit of these voyages you will find in my stories of fishermen and fishing ways and the drawings that illustrate them.

You too have voyaged since then: beyond where the last rays of the setting sun will soon disappear in the far west. When you read these lines you will be nearer the Pacific than the Atlantic, in your lonely mission, dedicated to Peter the Fisherman, beside the Similkameen river. In a certain sense, like Peter, you are still "going a-fishing," no longer for mackerel, however, but for the souls of men. Do they bite so readily as did the fish in Carmarthen Bay nearly a quarter of a century ago? I wonder.

Ever yours,

P. F. A.

CALDEY ISLAND, SOUTH WALES

Feast of St Brendan the Voyager,

1931

FISHERMEN AND FISHING WAYS

CHAPTER I

Prehistoric Fishermen

THE history of fishing is bound up with the story of mankind, for from the very beginning fishing has been one of the primary methods of obtaining food, like hunting.

At what exact stage in the evolution of the human race did fishing begin? We have no definite means of finding out. And what were the first methods employed for the capture of fish? It would appear likely that man first caught fish by what may be called the 'direct method'—*i.e.*, by throwing a stone at the fish, or by seizing it by hand when it was reposing in some rocky pool in a river or on the edge of the seashore.

These simple methods still persist. And not only among primitive tribes, for the poacher in the Scottish hills may occasionally be surprised in the act of tickling, or, as he would term it, 'guddling,' a fat trout as it basks lazily in some rocky pool. Salmon, carp, tunny, and other large fish can easily be captured by means of a lance or spear hurled with sure aim. Many of the primitive flint spear-heads used by the fishermen of the Stone Age are to be seen in museums.

FISHERIES OF THE PALEOLITHIC AGE. During the Paleolithic Age, which ended about 10,000 B.C., various primitive kinds of fishing-gear were evolved, including

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spear-heads of wood and bone, many of them delicately carved and chiselled or decorated with waving lines. Spear-heads of this type have been discovered in all parts of Europe and America, but especially in France and Switzerland. They do not differ much in shape from those in use to-day among the Eskimos and Australian aborigines. They are quite an efficient means



PRIMITIVE FISHING VILLAGE IN DAHOMEY, SIMILAR TO PREHISTORIC REMAINS FOUND IN SWITZERLAND

for capturing large fish, but something else is required for smaller species.

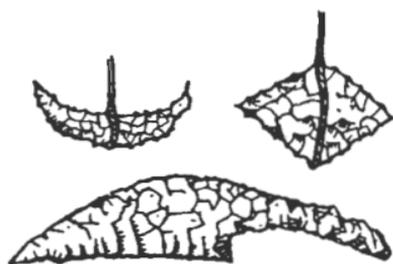
Even in that remote period of history man had learned how to fish with lines, and had discovered how to make fish-hooks. He took a piece of flint, chipped it in such a way that a piece of twine could be fastened round it, and into this he fixed his bait. Such were the primitive fish-hooks of the Paleolithic Age. Toward the close of this era flint fish-hooks were superseded by those of ivory, bone, or wood. Nets may also have been used, but so far no traces have been discovered.

NEOLITHIC AGE. We now reach the Neolithic period. In Scandinavia and other parts of Northern Europe

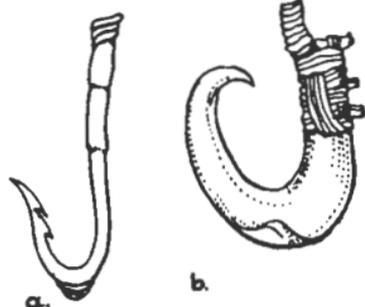
Prehistoric Fishermen

pointed fish-hooks of a more or less modern type which certainly date from this time have been dug up. They are generally of flint. It is not difficult to reconstruct in imagination the daily life of a fisherman of the Neolithic Age, thanks to the discoveries made during the last fifty years.

On the Lake of Zürich, for instance, the remains of primitive fishing-stations are extraordinarily complete. Here we find ourselves in actual contact with the fisherfolk of four thousand years before Christ. But not all the remains discovered on these Swiss fishing-stations belong to the same epoch. Some are Neolithic, others date from the Bronze Age. The lake villages were of large extent. The houses were built of wood, round in shape and roofed with straw. They stood on wooden piles, either close to the shore or out in the middle of the water, not unlike the lake villages of Dahomey at the present day. Access to the land was by means of pirogues—*i.e.*, boats fashioned out of tree-trunks. These I will describe in detail later on.



FLINT FISH-HOOKS



(a) WOODEN HOOK FROM NEW GUINEA. (b) HOOK OF SHELL FROM POLYNESIA

We do not know for certain if the inhabitants of these strange villages were fishermen by profession, or merely tribes who built their homes where it would be more difficult for their neighbours to attack them; most probably the latter. But from the remains that have been dug up it is quite clear that fish was their chief article of food, for layers and layers of shells and bones

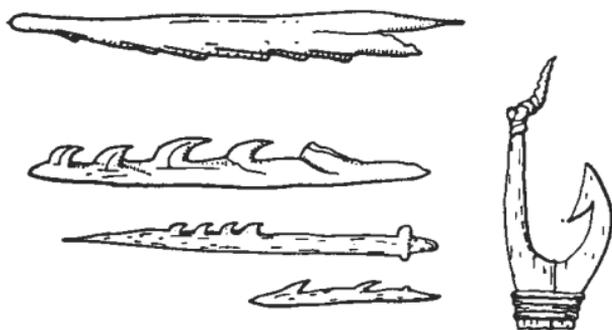
Fishermen and Fishing Ways

have been found on the site of all these settlements. Enormous numbers of spear- and harpoon-heads have also been discovered, not to mention primitive fish-hooks and even nets. The mesh of the latter varies considerably in size. The nets seem to have been of the same type as the seine-nets in actual use among certain savage races of Africa and Oceania. Floats have been brought to light, also weights to keep the nets under water. The former are made of pine-wood, pierced with a hole in the centre. The latter are generally formed of rough pieces of calcareous rock, pebbles, or small stones, shaped so that ropes or cord could be attached to them. The nets themselves were made of flax, and differ very little from the modern fishing-net. Most of the spear- or harpoon-heads found on the sites of these lake villages in Switzerland are made of flint and bone.

On the seashores of many Northern European countries, notably Denmark, Sweden, Ireland, and France, also in North and South America, we sometimes come across the remains of another type of prehistoric fishing village. Some of the most remarkable of these are to be found in Denmark. They contain enormous heaps of sea-shells (known as 'kitchen middens'), among which are embedded tools in bone or chipped stone, bits of broken pottery, human or animal bones, the latter generally charred by fire. It seems fairly clear that Neolithic man, certainly toward the latter part of the age in which he lived, preferred cooked fish to raw. And broken fragments of large dishes in which fish was either cooked or served have been discovered among the *débris* of these kitchen middens. Interesting specimens of fish-hooks belonging to this period have been dug up; some of them are of bone, or horn, others of polished black slate.

Prehistoric Fishermen

THE BRONZE AGE. Centuries elapse, and man gradually develops his artistic sense and mechanical knowledge until we arrive at what is known as the Bronze Age. One day some unknown fisherman invents a netting-needle, and thus the whole process of making nets is simplified. Until now the first finger of the left hand had been used instead of a needle when making knots in a net. Many of these primitive needles have been found on the shores of Swiss lakes and in



BONE FISH-HOOKS

The hook on the right is of human bone, from Easter Island.

other parts of the world. Some are made of metal and are shaped like pronged forks, hardly differing from those in actual use to-day among fisherfolk all the world over.

The discovery of metal must have improved greatly the conditions of a fisherman's life and facilitated his craft. No longer are his spears, harpoons, and fish-hooks made of chipped flint or polished bone, but of bronze. On Lake Constance many hooks of this metal have been found, constructed on the same lines as those of an earlier period. Similar hooks have been dug up in kitchen middens in America and other parts of the world. One wonders how they were actually made. Perhaps the fisherman bought a lump of metal from a bronze-founder and made the hooks himself in the long

Fishermen and Fishing Ways

winter evenings when sitting by the fire on his open hearth. Quite a number of the fish-hooks of the Bronze Age have been fashioned out of bent pins, just in the same way as a boy angler will make them to-day when he has not got the money to buy hooks from a shop.

THE IRON AGE. We now reach the beginning of the Iron Age, nine hundred years B.C. The lake villages have disappeared. Fishermen are now living on land, and not in villages built on piles in the water. So far as one can judge from the existing remains of fishing villages of the Iron Age they do not seem to have differed in any great degree from those one finds



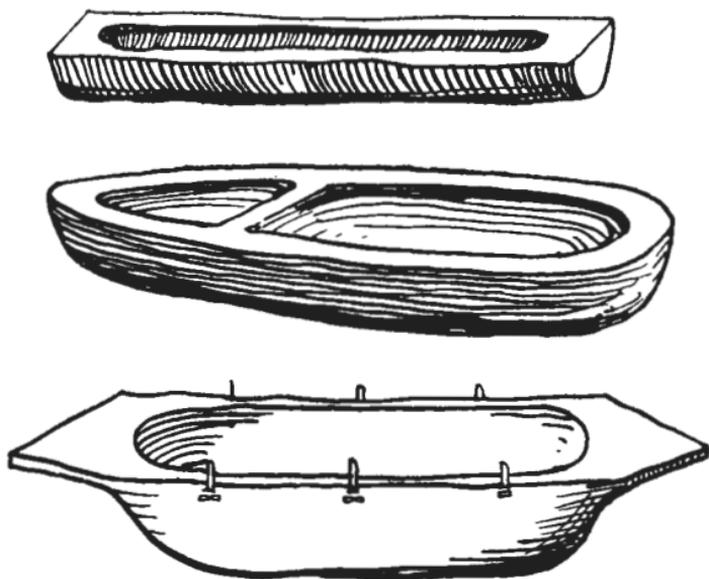
IRON AND BRONZE FISH-HOOKS

to-day in Dahomey or on Lake Tchad.

In Switzerland have been discovered iron spears, tridents, harpoons, floats, nets, and fishing-boats, all belonging to this epoch in the history of fishermen and fishing ways. The primitive fishing-vessels, precursors of the modern steam-trawler or motor-drifter, were invariably constructed out of hollowed-out tree-trunks. But perhaps the first fishing-vessel that ever ventured out to sea was nothing more than a branch of a tree upon which the fisherman balanced himself while propelling his unstable craft by means of his feet and hands. Some of the early craft, 'pirogues,' as they are called, are just tree-trunks with the inside burned or hacked out with flint tools. Gradually, as time went on and knowledge increased and tools improved, man discovered greater refinements of construction. The square end of the dug-out gave place to round. Speed was

Prehistoric Fishermen

achieved by hacking away one end of the trunk, so as to form a sharp-pointed stem. Then emerged a kind of seat or thwart amidships, with room for the fisherman's feet and legs. Many of the pirogues that have been dug



PREHISTORIC FISHING CRAFT

up are quite large vessels, varying from fifteen to thirty-six feet in length. It seems that they were first propelled by means of the hands and feet. Then branches fashioned into the shape of oars and sculls were evolved, and so at last the prehistoric fisherman found himself in possession of a vessel and fishing gear quite up to the standard and efficiency of those in use among many so-called primitive races still living in remote parts of the world to-day.