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Electric Scotland's Weekly Newsletter for May 22nd, 2015

To see what we've added to the Electric Scotland site view our What's New page at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/whatsnew.htm>

To see what we've added to the Electric Canadian site view our What's New page at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/whatsnew.htm>

For the latest news from Scotland see our ScotNews feed at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/>

Electric Scotland News

In 1986 somewhere in the woods of Bokrijk, an idea sprang for what was eventually to become the current Scottish Weekend. At the time, a mere pipe band competition. Now, almost 30 years later, a 3-day festival in celebration of the Scottish culture and traditions.

Bilzen, Belgium, would become the center of Europe on the second weekend in September, as over 12 different nations are represented at the Scottish weekend every year, clearly marking the Scottish Weekend as an event with European influence. In 2003 we witnessed a unique occurrence for the European mainland.

Never before had the European Pipe Band Championships been held on this side of the channel, but for the Scottish Weekend a one-off exception was granted.

Come September, the Scottish Weekend will celebrate its 30th birthday with – naturally – another grand pipe championship, Highland Dancing, Highland Games, Flyball, Scottish Market, Whisky tastings, Haggis and the best folk bands from all over Europe.

Oh, and the landcommandery of Alden Biesen is the gorgeous location that has hosted the Scottish Weekend for over 20 years now. Every year, there are free bus transfers from the Bilzen train station to the festival grounds at Alden Biesen for people using public transport and inhabitants of Bilzen.

The organisation is proud to have received a prestigious award from the city of Bilzen: "Special Cultural Merits of the City of Bilzen".

The event is on 11-12-13 September 2015 and for further information visit

www.scottish-weekend.be

And so if you are going to be anywhere near Belgium around these dates do add it to your diary.

Our Service

On Monday our modem proved to be faulty and while we were still accessible we were really slow. Turned out we had a 40% packet loss. The service we have been getting from Comcast has been truly terrible. On Tuesday we got yet another visit from them and it seems this time they sorted out the problems and we also got the upgrade of speed we were promised.

Due to all the problems I lost 3 days this week and the site was down for at least 2 days so quite a frustrating week all told.

The reinvention of the SNP

How Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon pulled off the political triumph of a lifetime.

I found this article in the Guardian newspaper and thought you might be interested in reading it and you can get to this at

<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/may/21/how-alex-salmond-nicola-sturgeon-pulled-off-political-triumph-lifetime>

Electric Canadian

William Osler

WHATEVER may be said of Sir William Osier in days to come, of his high position in medicine, of his gifts and versatility, to his contemporaries, love of his fellow-man, utter unselfishness, and an extraordinary capacity for friendship will always remain the characteristics which overshadow all else. Few so eminent and so industrious come in return to be so widely beloved for their own sake. Most of us do well with what Stevenson advises—a few friends and those without capitulation—but Osier had the God-given quality not only of being a friend with all, high or low, child or grown-up, professor or pupil, don or scholar, but what is more, of holding such friendships with an unforgetting tenacity—a scribbled line of remembrance with a playful twist to it, a note of congratulation to some delighted youngster on his first publication, the gift of an unexpected book, an unsolicited donation for some worthy cause (and giving promptly he gave doubly), a telegram to bring cheer or consolation, an article to help a struggling journal to get a footing, a cable such as his last on the day of his operation to his old Hopkins friends, which was given by them to the press for the benefit of countless others who shared their own anxiety—all this was characteristic of the man, whose first thoughts were invariably for others.

We have added this person to our Makers of Canada section at:

http://www.electriccanadian.com/makers/osler_william.htm where you can read more about him and also read a book about him.

Strawberry Crop in Canada

I added an article about this crop as I read an article on this crop in the UK and so wondered how we were doing in Canada. There is clearly scope to increase our own production 10 fold if Canada followed the UK model.

You can read this at <http://www.electriccanadian.com/transport/agriculture/strawberries.htm>

Electric Scotland

A Tour in Sutherlandshire

With extracts from the field-books of a Sportsman and Naturalist by Charles St. John, Esq. in two volumes 2nd Edition (1884).

We have now embarked on Volume 2 of this publication and now up to Chapter XXXII.

You can read this book at <http://www.electricscotland.com/history/sutherland/index.htm>

Clan Baird

I got a communication in from Karen Vierra who told me...

I am attaching a paper I recently completed in the hopes that you might post it on your Baird page, or anywhere you think useful. It is the result of many years of research and no small amount of funds that were required to obtain copies of original documents from many archival institutions. It has been peer reviewed by Mike Baird and Bruce Baird, Sr. In addition, I have sent an advance copy to Sir James Andrew Gardiner Baird of Saughtonhall, who is believed to be most likely in successory line to petition the Lyon Court to matriculate the arms of Auchmedden and be granted the dignity of Chief of Clan Baird.

Thank you,

Karen

BairdHeritage.com

And so have now added a link to the pdf document "William Baird, 7th of Auchmeddenon" to our Clan Baird page at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/webclans/atoc/baird.html>

Clan Maitland

Got in an email from Ian Maitland, Earl of Lauderdale, Chief of the Name and Arms of Maitland to say...

For the sake of accuracy, can you amend this paragraph? and I have now done so by adding the information he sent to the clan history page. I also added the document "Mautalent to Maitland" he attached in pdf format to the clan index page at <http://www.electricscotland.com/webclans/m/maitlan.html>

Lily Blanche

A Scottish jewellery brand based in a wonderful arts & crafts era studio in the lee of Stirling Castle right in the heart of Scotland. The brand was formed in 2011 and manufacturers and retails beautiful silver, gold and precious stone jewellery with a vintage twist. The company specialises in lockets many of which have a hidden secret.

Got in a profile of this company which you can read at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/business/lilyblanche.htm>

Memoir of Alexander Henry Rhind

This person left money in his will which created the prestigious Rhind Lectures given by the Society of Antiquaries, Scotland.

You can read about him at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/history/other/rhind.htm>

You might also enjoy watching a couple of videos on the Rhind Lectures in 2015...

Rhind Lectures 2015 Taster Video at:

<http://www.socantscot.org/resource/rhind-lectures-2015-taster-video/>

and

Rhind Lectures 2015 Professor Audrey Horning keynote "Identity and Archaeology: Past, Present and Future" at:

<http://www.socantscot.org/resource/rhind-lectures-2015-professor-audrey-horning-keynote-archaeology-and-identity-past-present-and-future/>

Transactions of the Institution of Engineers in Scotland

Found 4 volumes of these transactions so now making them available with the first volume now up for you to read at

<http://www.electricscotland.com/business/engineers.htm>

Hylton Newsletter

Got in editions 11-13 of this publication which you can read at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/familytree/newsletters/indianapolis/index.htm>

Ed Means

Just learned that Ed died from a car accident on 6th May and have added this information to his page on our site where he was contributing a number of articles on Scotland during the referendum. You can learn about him at

<http://www.electricscotland.com/independence/means/means.htm>

Beth's Newfangled Family Tree

Got in the June 2015 issue which you can read at <http://www.electricscotland.com/bnft/index.htm>

Rose Douglas, Sketches of a Country Parish

Being the Autobiography of a Scotch Minister's Daughter in two volumes (1851).

I read the first half of the first volume and found it a most interesting read as it talks about the local people and way of life in a small community of Scotland. I decided this would be a great resource and make a good read so added it to the site at

<http://www.electricscotland.com/bible/rose.htm>

Robert Milligan's Difficulties

Or Struggle and Triumph, A Scotch Life Story by Rev. William Adamson (1891) (pdf)

As our site was down I ended up reading this book and really enjoyed it. I guess it's a religious text in that the author relates his life as a youth ending up spending 21 days in jail. It was as a result of this experience that he decided to look at ways of changing his life. He read the bible but it wasn't working for him and when released from jail he decided to move to an area where he wasn't know and there he ended up attending a religious service led by a local shepherd (not a minister). As a result of listening to this service he ended up spending 3 weeks with the Shepherd and his family and thus this changed his life and he ended up going home and starting temperance meetings and thus changed many people's lives.

An interesting read and you can download this book at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/bible/robertmilligan.pdf>

THE STORY

This is a book entitled "Our Fishing Heritage" by David Thomson.

A book by a former Lossie fisherman. They recount the town's fishing heritage from the 19th century and detail its fleet's rise to prosperity and its subsequent demise under the European Union's Common Fisheries Policy.

The Common Fisheries policy adopted by Britain and the EU decimated the Scottish fishing industry and this particular chapter details in moving detail what this meant for the town of Lossiemouth.

Chapter 1. The Way We Were

Come with me for a walk around the harbour of my home town. It is a relatively small harbour, and typical of scores of others which have suffered a similar fate around Scotland, England, Ireland, and Wales. You can find such desolated little coastal ports in north and south America, in Europe and Scandinavia, and in parts of Asia and Africa. Once they were havens of industry that supported succeeding generations of seafaring people whose toil and produce laid the foundations of the modern towns and their facilities. But their labours have ended and are now gradually being forgotten. They are visible only in the relics of past enterprise, and the lovingly preserved tools of their trade, together with pictures and models in the heritage museums. The names of the old pioneers are left for our contemplation on cemetery tombstones, war memorials, and records of sea disasters.

These once prosperous fishing communities are mostly stagnating now, their modest income coming from tourists or summer visitors who call at the museums or berth their yachts at the marinas which now occupy the harbour basins. The boatyards, ice plants, and marine engineering workshops, are gone, apparent only in the dilapidated sheds that remain. The fish markets that rang with the unintelligible cries of the fish auctioneers, the creak of landing derricks, and the put-put of Gardner and Kelvin marine diesel motors, - are deathly silent. Up the short road to the main street, most of the grocery stores and clothing shops are gone, - even the banks are reduced to half their former number. Those indications of economic activity have largely been replaced by bingo halls, hairdressing salons, take-away restaurants and curio shops for the visitors. Some former shops and offices are boarded up or have aging "to let" signs above them.

Yet those lovely little harbours were home to thousands of fishing boats and many thousands of hard working seafarers who made up the coastal fishing industry of much of the 20th century. They supplied the bulk of the nation's fresh fish, and supported a boat-building industry and marine workshops that were the envy of other parts of the world. The hundreds of thousands of tons of fish that were carried annually from the small ports to every corner of the country, supported road and rail transport as they once facilitated a vast sea trade in cured herring. Visiting fishery delegations from Canada to the Far East who were taken around the coastal fishing towns, expressed admiration for the fleets of beautiful seaworthy boats that were owned and operated by the fishers themselves. The absence of any signs of poverty or squalor in the tight-knit communities was also a feature that impressed. Twice in the last century, during times of war, the fishing boats were offered to the Admiralty, together with their skilled skippers and crews, for use as tenders or minesweepers, - a service they performed with distinction, and some loss of life.

What happened in the last 40 years to destroy what had been built up over generations ? What possible changes could have taken place, and who was to blame, if any ? How could any nation destroy a vital food resource base, or give it away, or sell it ? How could any government undermine and legislate against the very wealth creating industry that was built up over generations by the communities themselves through much sacrifice, years of toil, and investment of hard-earned money ? We are not talking about the indolent or shiftless, we are not talking about speculators or opportunists, - these communities were the salt of the earth in vision, enterprise, determination, commitment, and integrity. But politicians and civil servants, still alive many of them, and living comfortably on tax-payer supported pensions, said that the industry and its communities "were expendable", (as revealed in papers now made public). From the politicians perspective, membership of the European Union was far more important, and the senior banking officials urged them on, claiming that all Britain needed for the 21st century, was to maintain the dominance of the city of London's financial sector. Other industrial sectors could wither on the vine.

But we have not yet taken our stroll around this typical coastal town and the relics of its recent history. Let's walk past the old basin by the mouth of the river. It was constructed in 1837 when only sailboats were used, and built initially to accommodate small merchant ships, - barques or schooners that brought coal, iron, cement and supplies, and carried away local produce from the farms, forests and distilleries of the area. An earlier harbour, - little more than a pier or wharf on the west side of the river mouth, had been commissioned in 1683, and served the sailboat fleet and trading schooners for 150 years. In 1845 A lighthouse was erected on a headland to the west. It was designed and built by the remarkable Stevenson family of engineers, by the uncle and grandfather of Robert Louis Stevenson, the famed writer. By 1857 a second 'new' harbour basin was built to the west of the first. It was to house a fish market, a slipway and boatyard, and an engineering workshop. Five years earlier a railway line was completed to the town, connecting to the lines from Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and from London and the English cities. The rail tracks are barely visible today, but they once extended on to the east pier from where they took wagons of cargo unloaded from the coastal ships. The trains were later to carry barrels of salt herring, and boxes of fresh white fish to the southern markets. Dr Beeching put an end to that useful rail connection in the 1950's, after it had served the port and the community well for over 100 years.

Around the Seatown behind the river mouth, and on the west side of the harbour were some boatyards, and rows of fish sheds where herring were gutted and salted in barrels, or split and smoked in kipper kilns. Large fish like cod, hake, pollock and ling were often split, salted, and dried in the wind. There was also a cod liver oil plant there for some time. Forty women and girls were employed to clean and cure white fish, and a larger number to gut and salt herring during the summer season. My senses may be playing tricks on me, but to this day, when I walk along that shore, I think I can smell the kipper smoke from oak shavings and sawdust, together

with the tang of barked nets and tarred ropes. Both my grandfathers fished from the harbour, as did some great-grandfathers though the earlier ones mostly worked open boats from the west beach or the river mouth to the east. That row of buildings facing the old basin that now house a museum, a harbour office, a shop and a coffee house, were once net stores where my father's generation mended and stored their gear.

The rise of the herring industry at the end of the 19th century brought the first real wave of prosperity to the town and its people. Cotton drift nets developed by the Dutch over the two preceding centuries were the most effective gear then for harvesting the silver darlings in quantity. Some sailboats used them effectively, but the advent of the steam drifter brought a vessel that was ideal for that service. It was fast, had good carrying capacity, and could shoot many hundreds of drift nets in one night. The drifters' steam-driven capstan enabled the crews to haul many more nets than before. By the turn of the century they appeared in the little port, first built in wood, but later in steel. Steam drifters were not cheap, but local farmers and coal merchants helped the fishers to finance their purchase or construction. The first drifter bought for the port was the Success which arrived in 1900.

My grandfather's family drifter had the colourful name Flow'r of Moray. It was built in 1904 by a coal merchant W. Stewart, whose house Cloverdale, my wife and I bought 90 years later. Lately we have resided in a cottage of a former dairy farm. The farm's previous owner, Alistair Adam and his wife, had each invested in seine boats between the two world wars, two of them being the Renown, and the Kia-Ora.

Fish curers and coopers who made the barrels, moved into town. Local herring curers numbered over 8, and there were additional curers from out of town who set up seasonal operations as well. Before the First World War, cured herrings and kippers were being sent far and wide from the little fishing community. In 1913 Scots drifters landed 200,000 tons of herring, a record production that was not to be exceeded that century.

We wander up between the basins to where we can look out at the harbour entrance with its magnificent north pier. Facing east it leaves the port vulnerable to the worst kind of sea experienced in the Firth which arises from a south-east gale or north-east winds and swell. When those conditions prevail the harbour is closed, but at all other times it is a safe haven. Entering between the north and south piers during times of bad weather or heavy seas, skippers have to keep up speed. If one reduces speed before safely inside the entrance, he loses steering control, and the boat is in danger of being swept on the rocks behind the south pier. The rocks there are known as the "Maggie Duncan", from the name of a sloop that was wrecked there in 1840, the first of several dozen boats to meet their end on the treacherous shore. My father, then a teenage deckhand, was rescued by 'breeches buoy, from the drifter "Flow'r o' Moray" after it hit the south pier rocks over 80 years ago. The seine netter, Palm, was wrecked there 60 years ago.

Christmas eve, 1935, the Fern, a 53 foot, 2-year old fishing boat built in Macduff, was swept on to the rocks in a 60 mph gale, and was smashed to pieces in hours, but the crew were all hauled to safety on the south pier. Margaret Rowe, the skipper's granddaughter, was six years old at the time. She later told me how friends and neighbours rallied round in typical fishing community fashion, to make their Christmas day special, as the family had lost their lifetime investment. Her uncle Jimmy who was 26 at the time, later sailed with my father for over ten years. A Peterhead herring trawler, the Ugievale, carrying a load of sprats, got into trouble outside the harbour in the 1960's. It managed to evade the rocks but was swept onto the beach beyond and became a total loss. Fortunately, none of these harbour entrance wrecks involved loss of life. At least 5 seiners, 4 drifters, and 1 trawler were wrecked there outside the harbour mouth between 1919 and 1961.

Even when a boat enters safely in bad weather, the following sea, assisted by the vessel's speed, can sweep it up on to the spending beach ahead, before it can make the sharp turn into the inner harbour. This happened to the Briar Rose, and also to the Strathyre which broke away from its moorings inside the harbour during a winter storm. Both boats became total wrecks. The south pier wall has been breached more than once, and people have been known to be swept into the sea from there during severe weather.

To our left lies the fish market, - now deserted, but which for over half a century saw 9 or 10 sales a week of many hundreds of boxes of fresh fish, - chiefly haddock, but with lots of other species also on offer. Cod and whiting were plentiful at times, and minor species included plaice, lemon sole, prawns, skate, monkfish, hake, saithe, dogfish, and occasional halibut, turbot, and brill. The fish buyers who supported the fleet were mostly first class individuals though in the early days there were a few that manipulated auctions in their favour. Over 70 years ago my uncle Alex, stood here following such a sale, and approached a Prime Minister on one of his brief visits home, and asked for advice on how to deal with that problem. Ramsay Macdonald advised him that the fishers would have to form their own association so they could negotiate with merchants from a position of unity and strength. It was not long after that we had our local fish producers' association formed and functioning.

At the west end of the market lies the "bunker", a meeting room for retired fishers. Just below where it stands there used to be a wooden market café that served the tastiest buttery rolls and tea I ever experienced. Countless skippers and buyers refreshed themselves there in between sales of their catches. Having visited fish markets on five continents, I can say that they have much in common. There is an atmosphere at an early morning fish market that is unique. Fishing boats lie side by side along the pier, boxes or tubs of fish are laid out neatly according to the species they contain and the boats they came from. Buyers, auctioneers, fishermen, merchants and lumpers who despatch the sold fish speedily on to lorries, mingle with each other in a jumble of seemingly random activity. The sale starts and proceeds with rapidity, and shortly after it is over, the last few boxes are removed, and the market floor

hosed down to be clean for the next lot of fish landings.

Such was our fish market, but now all is silent. The last fish sale took place some 20 years ago. That was shortly after the structure was improved to conform to EC standards. But our government then introduced a 'designated ports' regulation that forbade the landing of fish at any but a small number of selected ports like Peterhead, Aberdeen, Hull, Grimsby and a few other favoured places. The very freedom to sell its produce was taken from our town. Scores of small harbours were similarly denied the right to operate. The measure also put dozens of local fish merchants and small processors out of business. When I was at sea Scottish boats could land their fish at any of over a hundred harbours. The government reduced that to a mere 19 designated ports for white fish. Four more were added in 2004.

The port once had some fine premises engaged in primary fish processing managed by merchants and buyers like John West, Jimmy and Peter Gault, Wiseman's, Edwards, and a number of smaller merchants we termed 'cadgers' who supplied local shops and restaurants. There were also a number of buyers who were agents of English fish merchants, and who purchased according to the needs of the southern markets. When landings were heavy I used to assist in John West's fish shed, packing and icing fish for transport south. This was usually on Friday evenings and Saturdays, although I had just completed a full week's work at sea. My co-worker there was a classmate, Lewis Smith who went on to be a skipper and who lost his life on the Arcadia off Lochinver in 1983.

We continue to the west side of the new harbour. The remains of a slipway are still there and behind it, what is left of four boatyards, which together built over 125 boats in 100 years. Two of the yards had a significant nautical history. Vessel types were designed and built there that were to dominate the Scots fishing fleets for over half a century each. The first prototype was launched in the late 19th century, and the second in the early 20th century. Together, these boats enabled Scottish fishers to prosecute the pelagic and demersal fisheries effectively and economically. The first was mainly used for drift netting and line fishing, and the second, for bottom seining, or Scottish seining as it came to be known to differentiate it from the Danish technique. Both were built by the Wood family whose boatyards functioned from around 1875 till 1935. The boatyards that were the birthplace of these craft now lie derelict, as do the great yards that built the fishing schooners of the same period, over on the other side of the Atlantic. As we stroll over the ground where many a keel was laid, we can still pick up a few wood chips from the soil, and the odd rusting nail or bolt from the ground.

Fishing boats and coastal vessels were being built by the river mouth as far back as 1800, by a James Geddes. (Some records refer to the Geddes boatbuilder family as 'Geddie'). I am probably related to them since my mother's middle name was Geddes. By 1873 some 31 trading vessels had been constructed there, before the focus changed to the need for fishing boats which were to be built in large numbers.

At that time, the Moray Firth coast from Inverness to Fraserburgh had a large number of active boatyards. Around 1880 the Wood brothers had two yards in the Seatown by the river mouth, and three yards by the slipway on the west side of the harbour, where the Slater family later had their yard. The Woods built Scaffies in the 19th century. These were small open boats with rounded stems and raked sterns, designed mainly for line fishing. They had a short keel, 2 masts carrying a dipping lugsail and a mizzen sail. The other main type of fishing boat on Scotland's east coast, was the Fifie which was better suited for drift net fishing, though not ideal. It had vertical stem and stern, and from the later 1800's were fully decked and of carvel planking. Fifies of up to 70 feet were fast sailboats.

In 1878 the first of a new generation of sail fishing boats was constructed here by Alexander Wood, to the order of one "Daad" Campbell. The vessel incorporated the best features of both the Fifie and the Scaffie, and soon proved to be more seaworthy and more acceptable, out-sailing and out-manoeuving the other boats. The new design had a vertical stem and steeply raked stern. They were of carvel planking and measured up to 80 feet in length, the bigger ones carrying a 60 foot mast. The first boat was named "Nonsuch", and the design came to be known as the "Zulu", possibly an indication of Scots sympathy for the African tribe under pressure then from empire troops. I met Joe, a grandson of "Daad" Campbell, in Portland Oregon, 40 years ago. He was over 80 years of age then, but could tell me how it was seaworthy features that determined the design, and not as some silly anecdotes have it, - a disagreement between 'Daad' Campbell and his wife. A newspaper report of September 1901 described the launch of a Zulu sailboat from one of the five Wood brothers yards : "There was launched on Friday from the yard of Mr John Wood (formerly the Geddes yard, in old Lossie), a fine Zulu boat of 80 feet, with a 60 foot keel and 20 feet of beam. The broadside launching into the river, witnessed by hundreds of spectators, was a great success. A beautiful specimen, she is the second boat to be built by this new Wood yard, and was constructed for owners in Cullen". The Zulu sailboat was to dominate the Scots fleet till sail was superseded by power in the form of steam drifters and trawlers, and by diesel engines from the 1920's. Some Zulus were motorised then and continued to operate till WW2.

The other significant prototype fishing boat was constructed by Wm Wood and Sons in 1927 for a member of the Daad Campbell extended family, 'Admiral' John Campbell. The Marigold, was the first custom-built seine net boat in Scotland, designed to use the new and dramatically efficient method of harvesting fish that swim near the sea bed, like haddock, cod, plaice and sole. It was built at the end of the steam drifter era and was fitted with a 3 cylinder Gardner semi-diesel engine. A single mast and a mechanical winch completed its deck fittings. The 50 foot, 36 hp Marigold performed well and set the pattern for similar vessels to be built in their hundreds in Scottish boatyards. A second similar vessel, the Briar, was built the following year for another local skipper, James MacLeod.

Seine netters, designed to fish with light nets and rope warps for all kinds of bottom fish, were to become the most common kind of fishing vessel in the country. From the 1930's till the 1980's, our port had 70 to 90 such boats, several of which fished much of the year on the west coast or out of Peterhead. Wood, Slater, and Dunn, another builder, were to complete 48 similar seine net boats before the end of the 1930's. By 1939 there were over 80 such boats operating from the port.

From 1900 to 1925 the Woods and Slaters boatyards also constructed 34 steam drifters of wood, each measuring over 80 feet in length. These steam powered vessels were fast and able to handle scores of large drift nets, and hold over 200 crans of herring. (A cran was a measure of four herring baskets (in volume) and would approximate to 36 or 37 tons). But the steam drifter had a relatively short life due to the decline of the continental market for salt-cured herring between the wars, and to the rising cost of coal. By 1935 that once great fleet of herring fishers was redundant.

The German and Russian markets for salt herring had collapsed after WW1, and fishermen were finding the coal-powered drifter to be expensive to operate. A smaller more lightly powered fishing boat was needed, one that was more versatile and could target demersal fish with nets instead of lines, rather than pelagic fish like the herring. The seine netters and their gear were later contrasted with more powerful units they out-fished. Heavier otter trawls were often out-fished by the light bottom seine nets and this was described as "brute force out-matched by cunning". The late Aberdeen marine scientist, Bill Dickson, called the light seines and their rope warps, "the nearest thing to the dust-pan and brush in fishing". Today, with oil prices skyrocketing to unprecedented levels, and many boats tied up in port rather than operate at a loss, the need for economical fishing units is greater than ever. We need to recapture the simplicity and the "small is beautiful" approach of the Scots fishers of the 1920's and 1930's.

The Danish seine had been introduced to England after WW1 By boats from Esbjerg which landed their fish in Grimsby. Scots fishers soon adopted the gear, and adapted it for greater versatility, by fly-dragging instead of anchor-dragging as the Danes did. This required the use of a strong 4 or 6 gear winch to draw in the mile to mile and a half of manila rope warp on each side of the net. For over 40 years these winches were made by David Sutherland engineers at their workshop once located across the road from the boatyard. That small but productive factory is now also gone.

South and west coast fishers tended to prefer Kelvin engines, but our fleet went wholly for Gardners which they regarded as the 'Rolls Royce' of marine diesel motors. (The Rolls Royce company actually did make a marine engine of the same size, but it was never a success like the workhorse Gardner). The local marine engineer business that serviced the fleet was that of Henry Fleetwood and his sons, John and Henry junior who gave sterling service to the port and who also made most of the stern gear (shafts and stern tubes) for Gardner powered boats in Scotland. Only in later years, when larger steel vessels required more power, were Caterpillar propulsion engines and Volvo auxiliaries installed in the fleet.

Following the retirement of the Wood family, the Slaters had the only boatyard until, after their passing, it was taken over by the Buckie Jones yard. Among the vessels constructed by the Slater family after the second world war were six seine netters with the attractive names of, Rival, Lodestar, Crusader, Unity, Diligence, and Better Hope. Sandy Slater, born 1858, took over the Slater boat building business on the death of his father in 1875 when Sandy was just 17 years old. He was still taking an active interest in the yard in his nineties, and lived to see his 99th birthday. The Slater slipway continued to serve the fleet after boat-building ceased there in 1951. Up to three vessels could be accommodated on it at any one time. As boys we enjoyed a trip "up the slip" or, more exciting, "down the slip", before and after the boats had their upper sides painted, and their hulls scrubbed clean of barnacles and algae, and coated with anti-fouling paint. A quaint steam engine was used to haul the slipway cradles up out of the water at high tide. It was a 'Heath-Robinson' machine that belched steam and uttered strange clanking noises ! But it served well for as long as the slipway was in use. Such a pity it was not preserved as a museum exhibit.

The last boat to be built at our port was launched in 1980 from the Jones yard. The managing director of that yard gave a speech then urging the people to vote for the EU in a scheduled referendum. He saw membership of the European Union as the only hope for the future of fishing from our coasts. He could not have been more mistaken. Britain remained in the EU, and its Common Fisheries Policy was applied to the full, ultimately decimating the white fish fleet, and making their crews redundant. An EU MAGP programme was established to reduce the size of the entire EU fleet. Scotland was to have its fleet decimated over the years as fine vessel after fine vessel, with years of further possible service ahead of them, were sent to the scrap yard. A designated ports rule was introduced forbidding the landing and sale of fish at our harbour and other similar markets around the country. The last of the boats in our local fleet, once 70 vessels strong, were sold or decommissioned by the 1990's, and most of the active fishermen went to work on oil rig service ships. A handful of boats that remained continued to fish from other ports where fish landings were permitted.

The north side of the new harbour had an area where nets and gear were taken ashore during annual boat overhauls. You can still see some of the graffiti on the pier wall and bollards, where deckhands amused themselves with leftover paint. Also on that side was the box pool where hundreds of fish boxes were washed and scrubbed and piled in order for later collection. Each boat had its name and number painted or stamped on its boxes. Apart from herring in former days, which were put ashore basket by basket, all fish landed at our market were packed neatly in clean boxes. If the boat's trip was in summertime or had lasted more than 12 hours, then ice was also applied. Tripper boats spending four or five days at sea, would take from 3 to 6 tons of ice on board to keep the catch fresh.

We walk on towards the fine concrete tower at the west end of the north pier, from the top of which there is a magnificent view of the bay and the firth beyond. It is a favourite spot of mine.

To the east the port of Buckie is seen, a mere 20 miles away, and to the west and north-west lie Cromarty, Dornoch, Helmsdale and Wick, with the Orkney Islands visible on a particularly clear day. As small boys we fished there with little hooks and lines for young saithe and conger eels. In those days the fleet would not fish on Sundays. Crowds of people would throng the pier on Sunday summer nights to wave goodbye as the boats left port one by one after midnight. It was on such a memorable evening, a year after I left the sea, when I had my first date with the lovely lassie I was to marry. We joined the group of locals and summer visitors at the north pier, bidding farewell to the boats heading out to sea, - north and north-east to the dawn, and to the waiting fishing grounds.

But our community has long since bid its last farewell to the fleet. No fishing grounds await the boats over the horizon. The whole fleet has gone, - sold, decommissioned, scrapped, or otherwise put out of service before their time. More than a century of productive fishing activity and support industry is now a fading memory.

Huge fleets from a few big ports and other EU countries now harvest most of the fish wealth in our waters. Powerful large-impact boats whose owners have bought up quotas and licenses, now catch what several smaller seine netters would before. Despite all the official talk about conservation and an end to excess fishing pressure and environmental damage, the UK and the EU have pushed most of the small boats out of service and allowed the growth of a powerful fleet of fish catchers. More profits in fewer hands appears to be the goal. And from the perspective of Westminster or Brussels, if that means less employment and the decline of small fishing towns, so be it. Our governments are applying the modern economic concept of constant growth and bigger profits in fewer hands, to a sector which depends on the yields of mother nature which have distinct environmental limits, and that is a formula that eventually kills the goose that lays the golden eggs.

Some far-sighted observers saw the negative government attitudes long before they assumed the brazen destructiveness of the EU common fisheries policy. Peter F Anson, an Admiral's son from Portsmouth, was a Benedictine monk for 11 years, yet had a life-long interest in and love for fishermen, fishing boats, and fishing communities, and founded the Apostleship of the Sea in 1921. A gifted writer and artist, he set up the Society of Marine Artists. He wrote and illustrated 35 books, and was made a knight of the order of St Gregory in recognition of his marine work. His books cover marine art, the church and sailors, and harbours, boats, and fishermen from Brittany to the Shetland Isles. But it was Scotland's fisheries that absorbed most of his attention, and for most of his working life he lived on the Moray Firth coast. His drawings of sailboats, steam drifters and the early motor fishing vessels, are now a classic historical record, as are his descriptions of life on the fishing boats and in the coastal communities. Among his best known publications are : Fishermen and Fishing Ways; Scots Fisherfolk; and Fishing Boats and Fisher Folk on the East Coast of Scotland.

Comments made by Peter in 1971 (at the age of 82), have a strangely prophetic relevance to the situation we face today : "I described what is now a vanished world, for the fishing industry on the east coast of Scotland, and everything connected with it, have undergone tremendous changes. Fisheries are now concentrated in (a few) major ports; the numbers of fishermen and vessels have dropped to half what they were 40 years ago; and many of the harbours are now empty, except for a few small yachts, and haunted by the ghosts of long-dead fishermen. Nevertheless, (Scottish) fishermen have preserved those qualities of sturdy independence and shrewdness which enable them to fight against the forces of nature as well as London bureaucracy, always trying to tie them up with 'red tape'."

Later we will speak about the financial losses many families suffered. Some fishers who invested a lifetime of work and savings into a fishing boat, found themselves unexpectedly excluded from their traditional fishing grounds. Non-quota species they intended to target had quotas suddenly placed on them, and the quotas given to foreign (EU) fleets. I know several who lost not only their boat, but their house and the little capital they had left. A number of such left the town, and some emigrated. In the 60 years between 1935 and 1995, my father and seven of my uncles and up to eleven cousins or their sons, built and / or operated over 23 fishing vessels. These boats landed thousands of tons of prime food fish annually, and gave years of employment to scores of men. Yet not one of them, or any of their sons or grandsons, remains in the industry today, - no men and no boats. My cousins and their sons were the last in seven generations of my extended family to serve in the industry. They did not leave willingly. They were betrayed and sold out by their own government.

Gazing north-west from the top of the pier, we can see across the Moray Firth to Caithness and Sutherland. The distinctive 700 metre mount of Morven rises above the other lesser hills. Referred to as "the main tap", it was used as a landmark by fishers before the advent of electronic navigation. Along the Caithness coast below, in the early 19th century, bands of tenant farmers, evicted by their greedy landlords, settled on tiny plots of land by the sea and sought a new source of livelihood. The writer Neil Gunn described their situation : "They had come from beyond the mountain (Morven) which rose up behind them, from inland valleys and swelling pastures where they and their people before them had lived from time immemorial. The landlord had driven them from these valleys and pastures, and burned their houses, and set them here against the sea-shore to live if they could and, if not, to die. ... Yet it was out of that very sea that hope was now coming to them. All along these coasts there was a new stirring of sea life. ... The people would yet live, the people themselves, for no landlord owns the sea, and what the people caught there would be their own."

But a new landlord did emerge, and has claimed the right to the sea's resources and the right to take the very freedom away, to harvest the sea before them. He took it away from those crofter villages that were settled after the Highland Clearances. And the same landlord has taken away the right to fish from my own community, and many coastal towns like it. The new landlord has given it to foreign fleets, or allowed it to be sold on the markets of greed and opportunism, like any other material commodity. In lands across the sea, a similar pattern has emerged, as monetarism and globalism triumph over all other considerations of social justice and preservation of our planet's life-support system.

Our little port remains, and retains some of the attractive features of a seaboard town. The fisher cottages have been modernised, and the former fish sheds and stores converted into or replaced by modern flats, houses, curio shops, or cafes. The harbour itself contains a fleet of small yachts which venture to sea only in fine weather. There is hardly any marine life or fish to be observed along the coast, only a few hardy limpets, mussels, and crabs. The inshore waters have become largely sterile after half a century of growing contamination from domestic waste with its cocktail of chemicals and disinfectants our housewives have been persuaded must be applied in ever increasing strength to keep us clean.

Most of our young people leave home to seek work elsewhere after completing their education. Some who find employment in the offshore oil industry, are able to retain a home in the town, but commute each month to their work on the service vessels or oil rigs. The presence of a large RAF station has brought hundreds of service personnel into the locality. They and their families have maintained the local economy, and contributed to social life. The Virgin entrepreneur, Richard Branson, has even talked of using that air station or its environs for his planned commercial spaceship venture for wealthy and intrepid tourists.

In 1999 the Chief Executive of the Scottish Fisheries Organisation, Iain MacSween said of the effect of the commercial trade in the very right to harvest fish, individual transferrable quotas, "ITQs will do for fishing what the Highland Clearances did for agriculture". Referring to the Clearances, a Scots Canadian, Hugh MacLennan, wrote in 1960, "Above the 60th parallel in Canada you feel that nobody but God has ever been there before you; but in a deserted Highland glen you feel that everyone who ever mattered is dead and gone".

You can read other chapters from this book at <http://www.electricscotland.com/thomson/fishing.htm>

And that's it for this week and hope you all enjoy your weekend.

Alastair