

*Fishing Boats of Scotland*



**FISHING BOATS**  
*of*  
**SCOTLAND**

*Drawings by*  
**GLORIA WILSON**



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## FOREWORD

WHEN I FIRST STARTED RESEARCHING FISHING BOATS and those who work them, I was drawn to Gloria Wilson's *Scottish Fishing Craft* and her subsequent *More Scottish Fishing Craft*, both being published by Fishing News Books in the second half of the 1960s. At that time the fishing industry was coming through the postwar changeable period: the herring was in fast decline, boats were modernising and adapting whilst new techniques were coming into play. Superstitions, though, were still alive so it was hardly surprising that there were some folk highly suspicious of a young woman—Gloria Wilson—embarking on many fishing expeditions and happily trudging through boatyard and quayside alike, questioning and photographing the people and vessels that were soon almost to disappear. There must have been some fishermen who looked on in complete shock—and denial—at the twenty-five-year-old spending time at sea, in all weathers, in what was then generally regarded as a man's world. It was, we now know, pioneering work.

But Gloria Wilson was foremost an art teacher so it cannot come as any surprise that she was also producing lovely detailed line drawings of the boats she saw. Before her, her mother had been painting fishing boats and her father fishing, so the young growing-up girl must surely have had the fish/paint thing in her blood. Living alongside the sea in Staithes, on the Yorkshire coast, also provided her with ample inspiration. But with publishers preferring the more conservative photograph, it took another thirty years before these drawings first materialised in her published work: in two books from Hutton Press (*Scottish Fishing Boats* and *Fishing Boats of Whitby and District*) and even then we had only a glimpse. Photographs were still her main medium and this theme continued through the four books she has written for The History Press over the last decade, the most recent appearing in 2013.

Yet I recall contemplating these line drawings when first reading *Scottish Fishing Boats*. Looking back through past issues of the journal *Fishing Boats*, I find a review in the the Spring 1999 issue in which I wrote of *Fishing Boats of Whitby and District* “She personalises the subject—and the boats—and introduces us to the folk who live and work these fine vessels” and go on to mention “her own superb line drawings [which] also add interest to these craft”. Thinking back, I remember wondering why there weren't a lot more of them.

So, exactly half a century after she published her first book, at last we have a collection of these evocative drawings. In this book there's a nice cross-section of boats from around the north-east of Scotland and

the Yorkshire coast which, as she says in her introduction, “were the areas I know the best and where I have met the fisher people and their boats”. They represent a fishery of the rich North Sea almost gone, and many place a vessel not in isolation, but in the context of its work, with atmospheric detail. Not since Peter Anson’s *Fishing Boats & Fisherfolk on the East Coast of Scotland* (1930) and Ernest Dade’s sketch book of the North Sea, *Sail and Oar* (1933), have we seen such a fine collection of exacting and well-composed illustrations that I suggest echo Millet’s description of “the treating of the commonplace with the feelings of the sublime”. Thus it is indeed an honour to be able to recommend this book to a wide readership.

Mike Smylie

*June 2015*

## INTRODUCTION

THESE DRAWINGS CELEBRATE THE ATTRACTIVE FISHING VESSELS which have added so greatly to the character and liveliness of some of Britain's coastal towns and villages. Because they reflect my particular enthusiasms and personal experience they do not claim to be comprehensive. Largely they focus on north-east Scotland, and to a lesser extent on parts of Yorkshire, because these were the areas I know the best and where I have met the fisher people and their boats. I am fascinated by the way in which each boat has a unique personality and character. Fishermen regard their vessels as individuals and discuss their relative merits and peculiarities in critical detail. Boats have evolved to meet a wide range of local circumstances and fishing requirements.

The North Sea is among the richest fishing grounds of all the continental shelves and supports a broad diversity of fish and shellfish species. Design techniques practised by many boat builders were based on art, personal opinion and hunch rather than on science. Sometimes there were subtle shape changes from boat to boat dictated by assessment of those already fishing, and in accordance with each new vessel's catching methods and the preferences of her owners.

In making the drawings, with my own photographs for reference, I have enjoyed a mindful scrutiny of the boats and their singular spirit and magic, their idiosyncrasies and sometimes their unevenness. I feel that drawings rather than photographs are a better means of expressing these things, and I hope that the images are full of factual information and testimony, and convey a sense of the boats' essential qualities.

In the main I focus on the years from around 1960 to the early 1990s. Generally the boats are presented in order of their building in order to give some historical continuity. Many of the drawings honour my liking for the classic Scottish wooden-hulled cruiser-sterned flydragging seine-netters, which had such superb shapes with tremendous aesthetic appeal. Developed by the Scots in the 1920s for catching haddock, whiting, cod and flatfish on or close to the sea bed, flydragging was still a principal fishing method in that country some sixty years later. During the 1950s and '60s around a dozen Scottish boatyards produced between them as many as forty to fifty such boats each year, with some larger ones being fitted for herring drifting and great-line fishing too. And particularly in the Fraserburgh area, many delightful little cruiser-sterned boats, about 30ft long, worked lines and lobster creels.

Flydragging uses a conical net attached to the boat by long ropes. As the boat moves ahead she hauls the ropes which converge and herd the fish into the path of the net. Drift-nets are hung vertically in the water like a curtain in the path of oncoming fish which are caught in the mesh by their gills. Great-lines are lengths of thin rope with baited hooks attached at intervals and capture cod, ling and halibut on rocky ground.

I grew up in the storm-battered village of Staithes, on the rugged Yorkshire coast, where in bad weather the seas blasted against the houses and stormed up the slipways and along the cobbled main street, and the air was filled with spume. Here I met my first English square-sterned cobles with their curious and complex hull form. Though primarily beach boats, ideal for launch and recovery stern-to-shore through heavy breaking surf, cobles can also negotiate rollers or turbulent water when entering or leaving unsheltered tidal harbours and creeks. Hereabouts too were numerous remarkably pretty little clinker-planked double-ended beachboats, which many fishermen found to be handier than a coble for working the lively waters close to the cliffs and for crossing the surf. They were known simply as 'double-enders', most probably to differentiate them from the part-keeled cobles.

Ten miles away from Staithes in the highly individual port of Whitby, boats of Scottish build proved to be most suitable for particular tasks. During the 1930s the fishermen acquired fully-decked carvel-planked motor-powered fifies and half-zulus. These had evolved from the lug-rigged sailing fifies and zulus but were generally smaller and not so deep, with flatter floors and harder bilges, and the rounded forefoot gave better manoeuvrability. They were fuller aft to accommodate a petrol-paraffin or diesel engine, and had a small wheelhouse and a mizzen riding sail. Motor fifies had an almost vertical sternpost whereas the motor half-zulu had a somewhat raking sternpost, but without the pronounced rake of the true sailing zulu stern.

There were other types from Scotland, akin to herring ring-netters, which needed to be light and manoeuvrable and speedy, with a quick and tight turn. They had shallow draft and rounded forefoot, an easy entry and a clean run. The propeller aperture and rudder were tucked well underneath the buoyant canoe stern to avoid entanglement with fishing gear. Ring-nets were employed to enclose herring shoals in sheltered waters, and were worked by two boats.

Scottish yards built several cruiser-sterned flydragging seine-netters for Whitby. A bluffer flared bow afforded more deck room for the safe operation of the winch and ropes, and threw the water aside rather than over the fishermen. A fuller, heavier afterbody provided more space aft and held the boat steadier in rough weather.

Whitby boatbuilders constructed vessels to Scottish pattern but also built those of a different sort, including buxom Danish-type seine-netters, which have been described as 'sea-going dumplings'. Unlike the flydragners, they hauled their gear while at anchor.

Whitby also served as a landing port for the Scottish herring fleet of ring-netters and drifters. My enthusiasm for these colourful boats led to my move to Aberdeen in 1969 and a career as a maritime writer and illustrator, and a rewarding association with Scotland's fishing communities. My interests lay largely in the north-east ports where the bulk of the Scottish commercial fishing industry was concentrated, largely owing to the relative nearness of prolific North Sea grounds, and a favourable infrastructure.

In 1970 some 250,000 metric tonnes of demersal fish was landed at Scottish ports, with haddock, cod and whiting being the principal species. Demersal fish are those which live on or close to the sea bed. Aberdeen was by far the leading port for both the weight and value of all demersal catches put ashore. During that year some 467 vessels were engaged primarily in flydragning seine-net fishing in Scotland, and supplied nearly half the demersal landings both in weight and value.

Other demersal catches came chiefly from the hundred or so traditional steel deep-sea side-winder trawlers based at Aberdeen. Trawling employs a funnel-shaped net towed through the water by wire warps and kept open by floats and otter-boards. Side-winders set and hauled their gear over the side, with the two warps passing through blocks hung from U-shaped gallows at bow and quarter. Wheelhouse and superstructure were positioned aft.

But big changes were taking place. Introduced in the 1960s, the transom stern was a radical design alteration in Scottish wooden-hulled boats, in that the part of the hull abaft the sternpost ended square. The beam of the boat was carried further aft and the run of the buttocks flattened out to provide greater width and space aft. Onwards from 1969 there was also a huge demand for welded steel boats in the 40ft to 90ft size range. By 1973 at least fifteen British yards as far apart as Campbeltown, Aberdeen and London were building steel vessels for Scotland. Others came from overseas. The material has advantages in terms of strength and homogeneity, and resistance to hard knocks from fishing gear. Some steel vessels broadly resembled their wooden counterparts in shape, although they did not always have the subtleties of line associated with wooden craft, owing to the different working properties of the two materials.

All these developments took place against a background of prosperity, technological advance and political and economic change in the fishing industry, and the adoption of new catching techniques. There was a growing awareness of the value of fish as a nutrient-rich protein food. Demand and value rose steeply.

Seine-netters fished new grounds further afield in worse weather. Nets made from synthetic fibres yielded massive hauls. There was a growth in pair-trawling, whereby two boats towed a net between them. It caught cod and coley on rocky ground and also colossal amounts of pelagic species such as herring and mackerel, which swim in shoals in mid-water or near the surface. Some new boats were built specifically for purse-seining, in which a net shaped like an enormous bowl is set around a pelagic shoal. Drift-net and ring-net fishing, once the chief methods of herring capture, declined. In the demersal sector there was a trend towards single-boat trawling by boats under 90ft long, and many now served double duty as seiner-trawlers.

There was a call for capacious, hefty, powerful boats with greater sea range and catch-carrying capability. The use of hydraulic rather than mechanical power for gear-hauling gave skippers independent control of winch and propeller, and thus more flexibility in working the fishing gear. This led to use of the power block to lift the net aboard, and seine rope storage reels which eliminated the dangerous manhandling of coils.

With changes in fishing methods and an increase in top weight, boats were now beamier and more full-bodied, with deep draft and more freeboard. They were broader at entry and quarters and had bigger propeller apertures. Their bilges were harder and floors less hollow, and the rise of floor was flatter for buoyancy. Catch quality became a priority and fishroom chilling plants kept fish at just above freezing point. Skippers were provided with increasingly sophisticated electronic navigation, fish-finding and communication instruments, and deck shelters enabled crew members to work under cover.

Scottish ports themselves were in transition too. From being a failed and bedraggled herring fishing centre in the 1960s with weeds growing on its quaysides, the pink granite town of Peterhead became the principal British port for the weight and value of all fish landings. This awe-inspiring rise to prominence began in 1970 when many seine-net skippers boycotted Aberdeen in protest against high landing charges in the grey granite city. Peterhead built up a mighty infrastructure for the fleet, with major harbour and fish market improvements and by 1980 almost four hundred boats and 2,700 fishermen worked from the port.

The fishing industry is extraordinarily complex. Fishermen were to become increasingly beset by bureaucracy and politics. They were however very concerned about the dangers of overfishing and they always sought to bring about workable fish conservation policies which nevertheless would uphold their livelihoods.

Gloria Wilson

*June 2015*

# LIST OF DRAWINGS

1:	ON THE SLIPWAY	<i>Olive</i> BF123 & <i>Monarch</i> BF179
2:	CHOSEN FOR WHITBY	<i>Galilee</i> WY68
3:	HOME FROM THE FISHING	<i>Prosperity</i> WY59 & <i>Galilee</i> WY68
4:	NOT UNLIKE	<i>Endeavour</i> WY1
5:	ASHORE IN STAITHES	<i>Merina</i> WY19
6:	BUXOM AND DUMPLING-LIKE	<i>Bay Wyke</i> WY10 & <i>Van Wyke</i> WY30
7:	UNLOADING THE CATCH	<i>Quest III</i> ME61
8:	READY FOR THE HERRING DRIFTING	<i>Golden Harvest</i> FR337
9:	BRINGING IN THE CATCH	<i>Ocean Dawn</i> YH77
10:	A YOKE IN FRASERBURGH	<i>Gracious</i> FR167
11:	OF SCOTTISH CONCEPT	<i>Accord</i> WY130
12:	TAKING ON ICE	<i>Fear Not</i> PD81
13:	COMING INTO PETERHEAD	<i>Delightful</i> BF121
14:	SLIPPED FOR REPAIRS	<i>Constant Hope</i> BF138
15:	FITTED FOR TRAWLING	<i>Golden Sceptre</i> BF152
16:	BUILT IN THE OLDEST BOATYARD	<i>Golden Hope</i> WY141
17:	ANOTHER YOKE	<i>Lenten Rose</i> FR90
18:	HANDY FOR MANY THINGS	<i>Success</i> KY211
19:	A GOOD LITTLE THING	<i>Christina P</i>
20:	AT REST IN PETERHEAD	<i>The Way</i> PD268
21:	SWEET OF LINE	<i>Gardenia II</i> MH202
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28:	BUILT OF STEEL	<i>Argosy</i> INS82
29:	FROM AN ABERDEEN BUILDER	<i>Sundari</i> PD93
30:	LOW TIDE IN STAITHES	<i>Endurance</i> WY89
31:	LENGTHENED	<i>Persevere</i> LH444
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36:	CURVACEOUS	<i>Sarepta</i> FR207
37:	POCKET TRAWLER	<i>Glen Clova</i> A607
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39:	GOD OF THE WINDS	<i>Aeolus</i> BCK143
40:	FROM THE OUTSET	<i>Challenger II</i> PD212
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42:	PART OF A VAST FLEET	<i>Resplendent</i> PD298
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44:	VOLUMINOUS	<i>Shalimar</i> INS184
45:	A FAREWELL	<i>Tyleana</i> BF61
46:	FIRST STEEL ONE	<i>Heather Sprig</i> BCK181
47:	UNUSUAL SHAPE	<i>Incentive</i> WY373
48:	EXCEPTIONALLY BEAMY	<i>Rose Anne</i> WY164

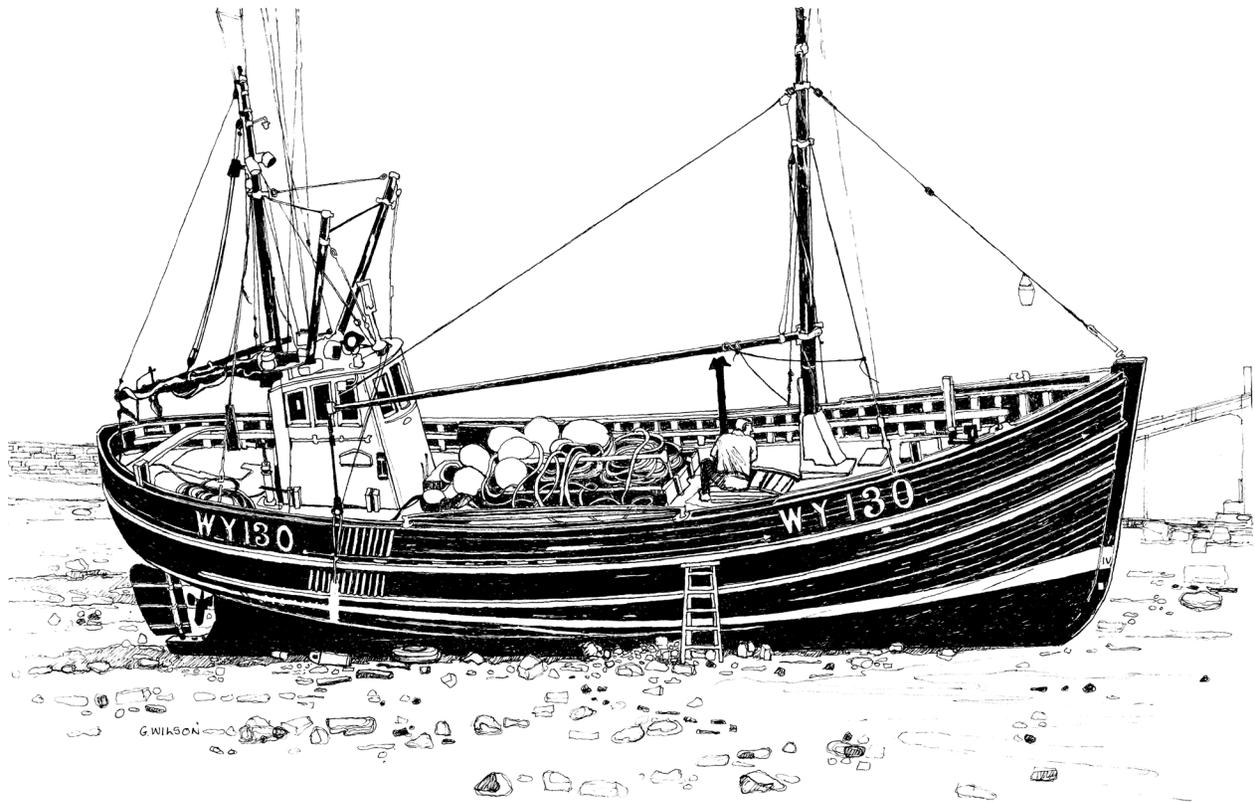
*Fishing Boats of Scotland*





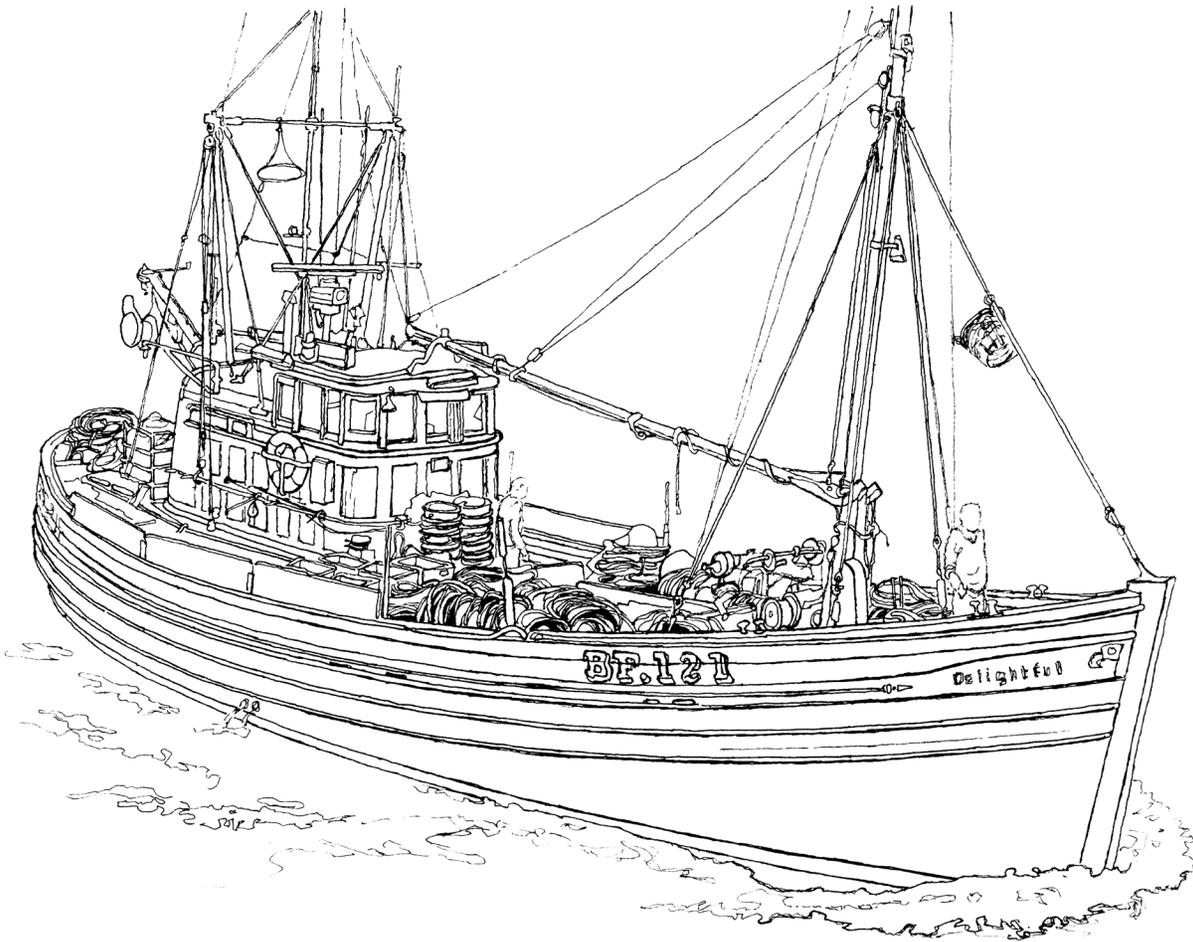
**5: ASHORE IN STAITHES** — My father's 19ft double ended beach boat *Merina* WY19 was built in the late 1940s by Whitby Boatbuilding and Repairing Company and was used for part-time fishing, with a dozen lobster pots and some hand-lines. I remember trips on green choppy seas amid clouds of spray.





**11: OF SCOTTISH CONCEPT** — Whitby Boatbuilding produced some vessels of Scottish type. Designed with fly-dragging seining in mind, the 50ft *Accord* WY130 was delivered in 1958 to Skipper William Graham. She cost about £13,500 to construct.





**13: COMING INTO PETERHEAD** — Comely and exemplary 60ft flydragging seine-netter *Delightful* BF121 had a cruiser stern and was built in 1958 by Jones' Buckie Shipyard Ltd for skipper John McKay. With a beam of 18ft 6in she was powered by a Gardner 114hp diesel motor. Fitted on a derrick abaft her superstructure, and used for net hauling, the power block was a later addition.

