

COBLEGRAM

The Newsletter of the Coble and Keelboat Society 02/2023



Special Issue: The Future of our Coastal Communities

Does inshore fishing have a future? A report on the inequalities that are blighting our coastal communities due to be published on 1st February stresses the need for investment in tourism, green technology, and critical infrastructure without highlighting the potential of the inshore fishing industry that historically has been at the heart of the economy and identity of many of the communities for hundreds of years. Sustainable locally produced seafood could be the catalyst for an economic revival in many places but too often the industry is seen as part of the problem rather than part of the solution. The decline of inshore fishing is not inevitable and public's growing appetite for high quality, sustainable, locally produced food is an opportunity the industry needs to grasp with both hands. It's disappointing to see that in the plan for a Highly Protected Marine Area around Holy Island seems to ignore the interests of the island's own fishing community. It's also disappointing that the independent inquiry into the catastrophic crab and lobster deaths has produced a report which will only satisfy politicians promoting the Tees Freeport as the answer to the areas economic problems and does nothing to clarify the causes of the disaster or reach out to the fishermen and women whose livelihoods are threatened. The industry in North Yorkshire desperately needs support if it is to survive this threat to its future and generally there needs to be a long-term plan for the future of inshore fishing on the Coble Coast putting fishing communities at the centre of the management of the coast. Small scale inshore fishing isn't a threat to fish stocks, wildlife or the environment and local communities are the best people to protect their own environment as they more than anyone else have a long term stake in its future.



The Report of the Inquiry into Crab and Lobster Deaths

It is worth reading the report of the *Independent Expert Assessment into Unusual Crustacean Mortality in the North East of England in 2021 and 2022* in full (download a copy here - https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1131769/Independent_Expert_Assessment_of_Unusual_Crustacean_Mortality_in_the_north-east_of_England_in_2021_and_2022.pdf) if only to understand how little is known about the causes of the event that devastated the inshore fishing industry of Teesside and North Yorkshire. The report's conclusion that it is *exceptionally unlikely* (less than 1% probability) that Tees Capital Dredging was the cause of the disaster has been widely publicised as has its speculation that it is *as likely as not* (33% to 66% probability) that the unprecedented deaths of the most commercially valuable crustaceans was due to a pathogen new to UK waters. There is no direct evidence of the presence of a pathogen in the crustaceans washed up on the coast and it is of course impossible now to identify it retrospectively so local fishermen are understandably skeptical of the report's conclusions which have left the matter in an unsatisfactory state of limbo. We note the suggestion that the event could be due to a combination of circumstances which made the local population of crabs and lobsters uniquely vulnerable and think that this could be the way forward. The map included in the report (above) shows that the washups were centered on the Tees which lent credibility of the theory that they were caused by dredging or pollution. A study commissioned by local fishermen showed that dispersal of sediment from Tees dredging corresponded to the area of the event but in the absence of any possible source of Pyridine or any other toxin in sufficient quantity to cause the deaths the inquiry concluded that this was *very unlikely* (<10%) to be the cause. More research is urgently needed into what amounts to the collapse of commercially the most important part of the marine ecology of the wider Tees Estuary and the report has not ruled out the theory that industrial toxins were the cause, it just failed to identify a source, just as it failed to identify the pathogen which it regarded as the most likely cause of the unprecedented phenomena.

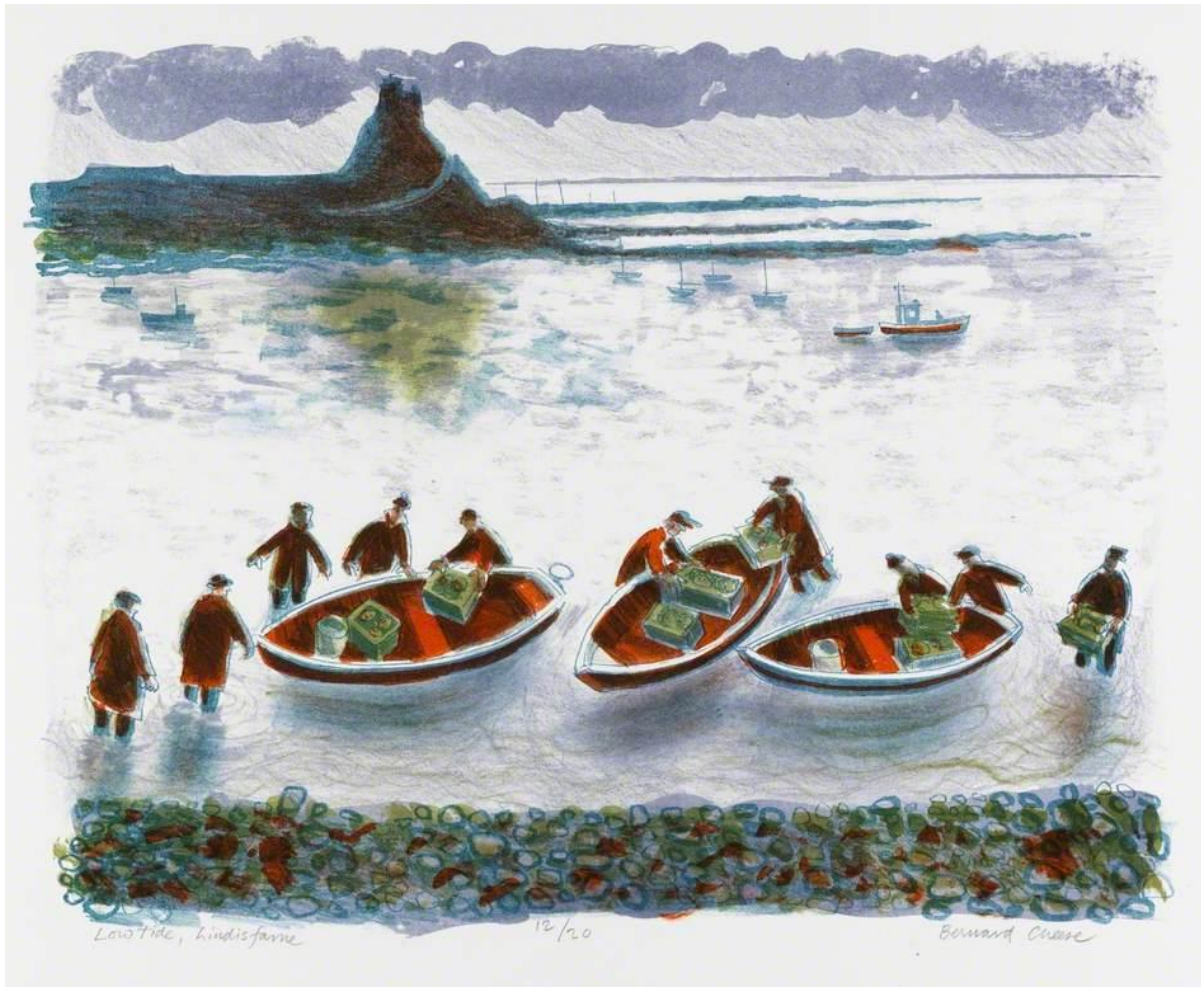


Picture The Dredger Orca which worked in the Tees for ten days in September 2021. The Inquiry concluded that maintenance dredging was *very unlikely* to have been the cause of the washups although they did not rule it out.

What about Global Warming?

The ecology of the North Sea is changing due to global warming which could have made populations of crabs and lobsters more vulnerable to toxins and pathogens than they were in the past. Crustacean wash ups while rare are not unknown in the North East and seem to be associated with seasonal changes water temperature which effect the behaviour of crabs and lobsters. The crustaceans move to deeper water and enter a semi dormant state and are vulnerable to storms as the temperature drops unless they are in a secure location. Typically large wash ups are occasionally seen on the south coast associated with the degradation of kelp forests and unseasonably violent early autumn storms. With sea temperatures rising and the intensity of weather events of all kinds increasing we need to know more about what is happening to our sea, historically one of the most polluted in the world, where populations might be uniquely vulnerable to new pathogens whose range might be increasing due to generally rising sea temperatures.

The Inquiry's conclusions finally gave little comfort to local fishermen whose livelihoods are threatened by the disaster and whose future seems uncertain due to the lack of any meaningful explanation for the phenomena which might inform future policy. The industry needs support now so that it can survive while (if) stocks recover and a plan to promote the recovery of stocks and ensure that the phenomena does not recur.



A Case Study in Conservation and Fishing: Holy Island

The proposal for a Highly Protected Marine Area at Holy Island seems to have pitted local fishermen against conservationists but are the two necessarily incompatible? We do not think so. The fishermen on Holy Island are keen to emphasise in their campaign that the controversy shouldn't be seen as 'fishing against environment'. They argue they are small scale sustainable fishermen with a strong sense of environmental stewardship who want to protect the resource on which they and their families depend. Important allies not enemies in protecting the oceans. We agree and we think what is needed is cooperation and agreement not the imposition of regulations from outside not supported by the local community. Tourist hotspots like Holy Island need industries like fishing to stop the community being hollowed out by high property prices, low wages, and seasonal employment which make it difficult for young people to make a life in the place they were born. Small coastal communities need a vision if they hope to survive in an economy which often seems to leave them behind and ignore the interests of local people and fishing must be part of that vision. It is at Holy Island and the industry needs to be at the centre of environmental protection not threatened by conservation measures.

Follow the campaign here on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/SavetheHolyIslandFishermen/videos/save-the-holy-island-fishermen/654778919425718/>

Picture: Bernard Cheese "Low Tide Lindisfarne" Fry Art Gallery, Saffron Walden



Levelling Up Coastal Communities

Imagine for a moment that you were a young person born and brought up in one of the many small fishing villages on the North East Coast. Your life might be blighted by poor public transport, poor education and poor health facilities and you could have little chance of finding a well-paid job or an affordable home unless you moved house. That's expected to be the bleak message of a new report commissioned by the Coastal Communities Alliance, the Local Government Association Coastal Special Interest Group and the Coastal Partnerships Network which will be published on 1st February. The report - called *Communities on the Edge* – warns that the government's levelling up policy's focus on regions means "massive challenges" faced by smaller communities in the more remote parts of the country especially on the coast are "hidden" and likely to be missed by the government's high-profile initiatives. Coastal communities it says face multiple challenges and this leads to:

- Low wages due to jobs being seasonal and part-time in the tourism sector, or with small firms.
- A lower proportion of children achieving GCSE qualifications in maths and English, with a more likely to regularly miss school.
- Higher living costs as many people have to rely on private rentals due to lack of social housing, and travel by car due to poor public transport.

As a result, despite the idea that moving to the coast is good for your health, coastal areas tend to have higher rates of depression, suicide, alcohol-related hospital admissions and generally increased demand for health facilities which are sometimes more difficult to access due to poor public transport.

The report calls on the government to target deprived areas by changing its levelling-up criteria and funding formulas. It also recommends helping projects financially over their full lifespan rather than for a short, defined period. The right support, it argues, "would boost growth and see coastal areas contribute far more to the wider UK economy".

Among the opportunities it identifies are the move to hybrid and home working which it says gives younger people the chance to remain in their local areas rather than move away to find work, and with coastal areas already involved in industries such as offshore wind, it argues the transition to green energy could provide hundreds of thousands of highly skilled, well-paid jobs. Additionally, it says developing ways to extend traditional tourist seasons beyond summer months would enable areas to benefit from the current growth in UK trips and visitors.

We would add that a revival of inshore fishing coupled with a promotion of the historic connection of fishing villages like Staithes to art and literature could make a big contribution adding value to existing tourism and putting former fishing villages back in touch with their heritage and environment. Communities will need help to identify viable projects and put forward proposals that can compete with the bids of larger towns and cities for funding. Perhaps a start could be made by linking the development of offshore wind directly to projects supporting local sustainable fishing and environmental management. Depressed and disadvantaged communities can't do this on their own, but they must be involved in the planning process otherwise any initiatives driven by outsiders are unlikely to succeed. Above all affordable housing must be provided for local people, especially in tourist hotspots where the cost of housing is well beyond local wages.

Picture (above) The future of inshore fishing – a catamaran at Redcar

Picture (below) Traditional mule coble with windfarm at Redcar





Bait (2019) A Film by Mark Jenkin

“Bait” by Mark Jenkin director of the acclaimed new “Cornish Horror” film “Enys Men” is a landmark film in British Cinema. It’s a thoughtful and poetic exploration of the tensions that arise between outsiders and locals in a Cornish fishing village due to the growth of tourism, second homes, short term lets and the general gentrification of a holiday hotspot fast losing its identity in the face of a flood of incomers. Shot with a vintage hand cranked Bolex 16mm camera on hand processed black and white celluloid film Bait is in its very DNA a challenge to modern digital technology and all it represents. Its sympathies are profoundly with the fisherman whose world view is reflected in the grainy black and white images on the screen and the edgy non-synchronised sound which raise it to the level of high art comparable in ambition and execution to Winslow Homer’s Cullercoats pictures. In his review in the Guardian Mark Kermode called Bait “a masterpiece” and “One of the Defining British Films of the Decade”, high praise indeed for such an unusual production about a marginalised character at odds with the world. The issues it raises go to the core of the future of fishing communities in the NE and it’s not to be missed. Watch it here on BFI player <https://player.bfi.org.uk/subscription/film/watch-bait-2019-online> . Look out also on the player which you can sign up for a free 14 day trial for another interesting Cornish film “Haunters of the Deep” made by the Children’s Film Foundation in 1884 in which a new mining enterprise comes into conflict with traditional beliefs in a Cornish fishing village.

David Kidd

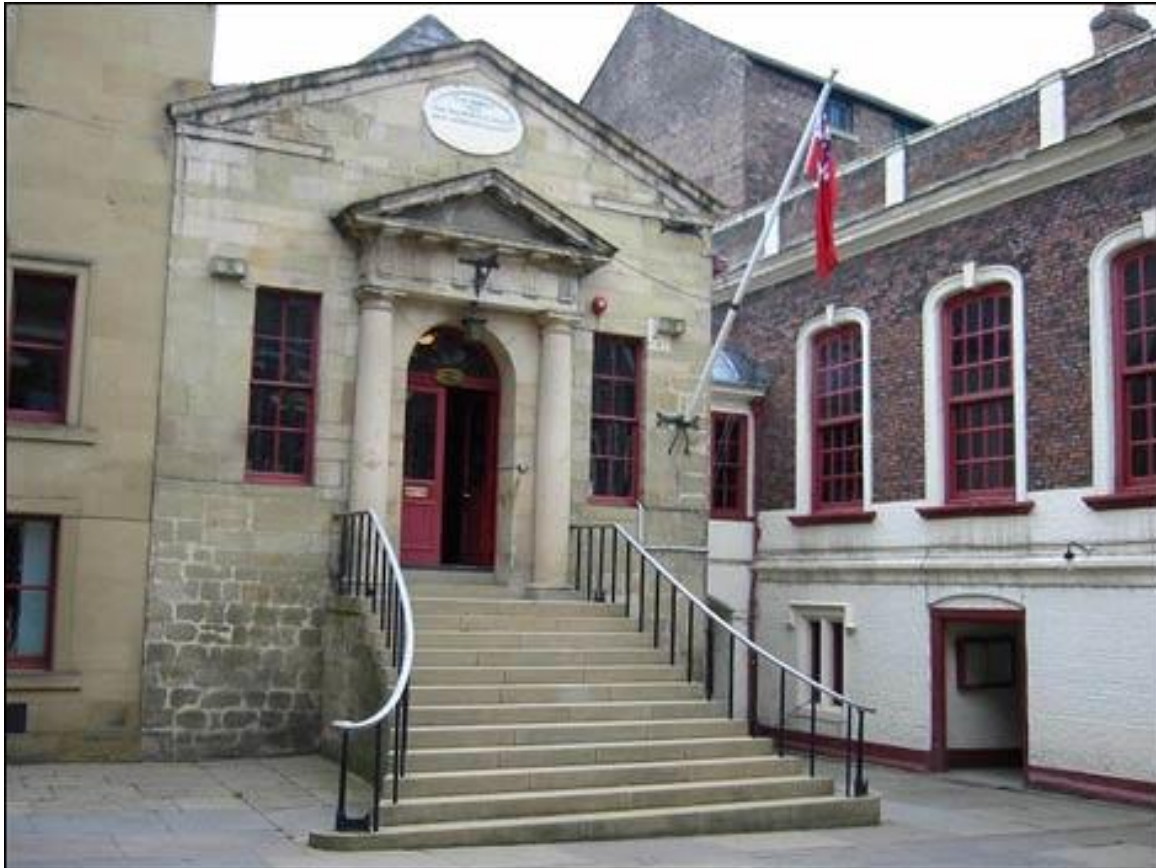


In Memorium: Coble Losses February

01/02/1794	Flamborough	16 men lost in 4 cobbles
02/02/1848	Cullercoats	7 men lost in a pilot coble*
04/02/1768	Shields	1 man lost in a pilot coble returning from a ship*
05/03/1909	Yorkshire Coast	12 men lost in 4 cobbles*
08/02/1765	Boulmer	3 men lost*

*More details held including names

Picture Winslow Homer "Returning Fishing Boats" (1883) Fogg Museum USA



Trinity House Newcastle

The CKS Chair David Kidd recently gave a talk to the North East Coast Joint Branch of the Royal Institution of Naval Architects and Institute of Marine Engineers at Trinity House Newcastle (picture above) and took the opportunity to take a tour of this historic building which was at the heart of the Tyne's maritime community for nearly than 500 years. It's not normally open to members but a tour could be arranged if at least 10 members were interested. For more details, please contact David by email at treasurer@coble-keelboatsociety.org

David's talk was titled "The Nineteenth Century Fisherman's Coble Boat" and if any group or organisation is interested, he would be happy repeat it – contact him by email at the above address for more details.

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