Introduction

This work seeks to establish an historical outline of the development of the churches' work among British fishing communities, and explores why a mission specifically concerned with fishermen was not initiated until the industry entered a period of economic decline during the early 1880s. The factors relating to the development of British fishermen's missions are complex, involving not only social and technological changes inside and outside the fishing industry, but also changing theological perceptions that had a significant impact on attitudes to social conditions. Although no organisation concerned solely with the welfare of British fishermen[1] existed until the advent of the Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen (MDSF)[2] in 1881-1882, some relevant work was undertaken by seafarers' missions, which included fishermen among their more general concerns. It should, however, be noted that, while some vessels sailed to Newfoundland to fish, the British fishing industry was generally carried on in sight of the land until the 1840s when new developments enabled the fishermen to sail further out to sea and to take advantage of the rich North Sea fishing grounds such as Dogger Bank and the Silver Pitts. Thereafter, developments gathered momentum and the numbers of men fishing increased dramatically. With the development of the railways, especially from Liverpool to Grimsby and thence to London, the market for fish quickly expanded. Ice, too, became an important commodity. Robb Robinson tells us that: 'Hewett's Barking fleet started the practice of taking ice to sea on smacks about 1847', although artificial ice was not used in the fish trade until 1874.[3]

1. Historically there were very few females working on British fishing vessels. Hence, the traditional terms 'fisherman' and 'fishermen' are used throughout this work, although the term 'fisherfolk' is used when referring to the wider fishing community.
2. The Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen received permission to use the term 'Royal' in 1897. In the preceding period the society was known as the Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen, initially as an aspect of the work of the Thames Church Mission.
3. R. Robinson, *Trawling: the Rise and Fall of the British Trawl Fishery* (Exeter: University

Prior to the English Reformation, confraternities, festivals and special shrines were central to the functions which later came under the domain of organised seafarers' missions and, until the advent of seamen's missions in the early nineteenth century, pastoral work with fishermen tended to be the responsibility of the local clergy. With the rapid development of the British fishing industry, during the middle years of the nineteenth century, there was perhaps little need for the development of fishermen's missions, as distinct from seafarers' missions. Given that Roman Catholic emancipation did not occur until 1829, the development of a modern Roman Catholic presence amongst British fishermen and seafarers was generally very limited – although some significant developments did take place in the later nineteenth century, which led, in the twentieth century, to the establishment of the Apostleship of the Sea (AOS). Some aspects of this development are discussed in Chapter 9 of the present work, although readers interested in the development of Roman Catholic maritime missions in Britain should consult R.W.H. Miller's book, *One Firm Anchor*.[1]

Early History and Symbolism

Despite the Jewish fear of the sea, perceived as a reservoir of evil forces, the Old Testament contains many maritime references, and several recorded events in the life of Jesus involved fishing. Christianity began with Jesus' invitation to some fishermen to become his disciples; he used fishing boats to cross the Sea of Galilee to talk to (or get away from) the crowds; he taught the disciples a lesson in faith by providing them with a coin from a fish's mouth; he cooked a meal of fish for the disciples following his resurrection; and most memorable among his words was his command to the first four disciples: 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.'[2] Of Jesus' twelve disciples at least four were professional fishermen, three of whom formed the inner core of his friends, and it was to one, Simon Bar-Jonah (Simon son of Jonah), that Jesus said: 'You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church.'[3] It is possible that John the disciple was a cousin of Jesus in that Matthew infers that Salome was John's mother. And the gospel of John suggests that Salome was a sister of Mary, Jesus' mother.[4] If this was indeed the case, Jesus had an uncle (Zebedee), and at least two cousins (James and John) who were fishermen.

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of Exeter Press, 1996), p.69.

1. R.W.H. Miller, *One Firm Anchor* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2012).
2. Matthew 4:19; Mark 1:17.
3. Matthew 16:18.
4. Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40, 16:1; John 19:25.

While there are several events in the Gospels to do with fishing, and there are accounts of Paul at sea in Acts, the remainder of the New Testament does not contain a great deal of note about maritime life. Nevertheless, given Peter's (and his relatives') status in the early Church, maritime symbols (such as the fish, anchor, net, ship and the sea) were a natural development and were among the earliest used by Christians – pre-dating cruciform symbolism by several centuries. C.R. Morley has noted that, while the fish symbol pre-dated Christianity and was adopted and given new symbolic meanings by the Christians, it still remains a matter of conjecture as to when it first became a generally accepted Christian symbol.[1] Peter, of course, is the symbol *par excellence* of the rough, tough working fisherman who was without any form of sophisticated education or social refinement, but who is held in great esteem by the Church and was the acknowledged leader of the early Christian community, taking precedence over Jesus' own siblings, despite James' leadership of the Jerusalem community. The Church Fathers developed this maritime symbolism further: Clement of Alexandria adopted the fish as a symbol in his ring; Tertullian called new converts '*pisciculi*' (little fishes);[2] and the Church itself became the 'ship' (nave) in which the faithful are safe and secure.[3] This use of maritime symbolism is natural given the importance of Peter and the number of disciples who were fishermen. Nevertheless, to suggest, as does Peter Anson, that the use of maritime symbolism implies an active maritime mission is misleading. There is no evidence to suggest that the early Church established specific 'missions' to seafarers, any more than to farmers and gladiators (the symbolism for both these groups is equally rich).

The Church and Fishing Communities Prior to the Nineteenth Century

By the Middle Ages a rich tapestry of folklore and legend had grown up surrounding the saints of the early Christian era, and many of these were associated with the sea. Perhaps not surprisingly, chapels and shrines in fishing ports tended to be named after saints with a maritime connection, especially St Peter, St Andrew and St Nicholas. Mary, Jesus' mother, also achieved an honourable status quite early among fisherfolk with numerous chapels and shrines being erected in her name, and she was given the honorific title of Stella Maris (Star of the Sea). There were also important

1. C.R. Morley, 'The Origin of the Fish Symbol', *Princeton Theological Review*, viii (1910), pp.93-106.
2. Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, recorded in Morley, *op. cit.*, pp.403-406.
3. J. Danielou SJ, *Primitive Christian Symbols* (Dartmouth: Compass Books, 1961), ch.4, 'The Ship of the Church'.

annual festivals such as the 'Blessing of the Sea', 'Blessing of the Nets' and the 'Blessing of the Boats'. Fishermen were organised into guilds (often spelt 'gilds' in Medieval writings) and confraternities. In such a high-risk occupation the sense of communal support provided by guilds was of course important, and Roald Kverndal has made the point that membership of seafarers' guilds provided an important educational function through participation in processions, pageants and plays.[1] Membership required obedience to Church fasts, and those 'who neglected to fast on specific days, or who worked on Saturdays after the Vesper Bell had rung, were fined'.[2] Monks around the coast of Britain performed an important role in establishing warning lights at dangerous locations. The monks on St Michael's Mount in Cornwall, for example, displayed warning lights during the fishing season. The Church's aiding of shipping also led to an important role in the development of sea-laws, many of which were established during the Medieval period.[3]

During the sixteenth century the establishment of 'Fish Days' ensured an increase in the number of fishermen who were available to swell the ranks of the country's navy when this became necessary.[4] As well as being a natural alternative to expensive meat, fish also functioned as an important symbolic reminder of Christ's passion, and in 1549 the new legislation stated:

> No person or persons shall [. . .] willingly or wittingly eat any manner of flesh on Friday or Saturday, or the Embering Days, or on any day in the time commonly called Lent, nor at any such other as is or shall be at any time hereafter commonly reputed and accepted as a Fish Day.[5]

Those people who did not observe the Act were fined. Queen Elizabeth I later expanded the Act to include the statement that 'every Wednesday of every week should also be a Fish Day'.

Although the fishing industry experienced an expansion during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the practice of religious observance at sea was rare, and by the late 1700s practically unheard of. Yet in the fishing ports we hear little of the moral degeneration that was later said to have

1. Roald Kverndal, *Seamen's Missions* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1986), p.17.
2. Peter F. Anson, *The Sea Apostolate in the Port of London* (published posthumously, London: Apostleship of the Sea, 1991), p.3.
3. R.F. Wright, 'The High Seas and the Church in the Middle Ages, Parts 1 and 2', *Mariner's Mirror*, 1967, p.117.
4. 5 Eliz. Stat. I Cap. V, recorded in *The Nautical Magazine*, April 1974, p.203.
5. *Ibid*.

occurred among naval personnel. Given the stability of fishing communities up until the mid-nineteenth century, we can only conjecture that there was indeed little to compare the fishermen with their naval contemporaries. Daniel Defoe, on his tour around Britain, gave no indication that moral behaviour in fishing communities was in any sense outrageous, and of the various merchants and seafarers at Great Yarmouth he said:

> The merchants, and even the generality of traders of Yarmouth, have a very good reputation in trade, as well abroad as at home, for men of fair and honourable dealing, punctual and just in their performing their engagements, and in discharging commissions; and their seamen, as well master as mariners, are justly esteemed among the ablest and most expert navigators in England.[1]

One wonders to whom Defoe spoke! He went on to make the point that, despite the large population, there was only one parish church and one recently built church in the south end of town. Even so, of behaviour on the Sabbath, he remarked: 'I have nowhere in England observed the Sabbath-Day so exactly kept, or the breach so continually punished as in this place, which I name to their honour.'

By the beginning of the nineteenth century the Church's influence over the British seafaring population had declined to such an extent that many never entered a church. Horace Mann, in his report on the religious census of 1851, said that the 'habitual neglecters of the public ordinances of religion' belonged to the working class – although they were seen as indifferent rather than antagonistic.[2] But, as the working class generally complained that they felt excluded from attending church services, it is not surprising that seamen were seen as indifferent to religion. It was partly this attitude that had initially given rise to the establishment of organised missions to seafarers and the adaption of old hulks as 'floating churches', and with the rapid growth of the fishing industry after mid-century the various seafarers' missions began to develop work more actively within the fishing communities. Nevertheless, it has been too readily assumed that these missions were simply a response to a perceived lack of religious sensibility amongst fishermen. Economic and technological developments on the one hand and poor social conditions on the other were equally important factors in the development.

1. Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, first published in 1724 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p.91.
2. Hugh McLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1984).

Christian seafarers' organisations, which developed following the period of the Anglo-French wars after the French Revolution in 1789, employed missionaries to visit the fishermen in their home ports, and in some cases at sea, although little thought was initially given to help improve the social conditions of fishermen at sea. It was during the 1880s that the Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen undertook this task by providing literature, warm clothes, medical aid, religious services and in due course tobacco. While the MDSF, in the face of public criticism, regularly stated that its primary objective was to evangelise, it is significant that the words 'Preach the Word' and 'Heal the Sick' were emblazoned on the bows of their vessels, although in the mid-1880s an emphasis was increasingly placed on its medical work. This example of concern for the fishermen's physical well-being was followed in the 1890s by other organisations, especially those represented by the Anglo-Catholics, and as a result there tended to be some conflict between the Nonconformists and the Ritualists.

Records, Documents and Publications

It is ironic that the social and economic aspects of the British fishing industry began to interest historians at a time, especially since the 1970s, when the industry experienced a sharp decline. Although many records and documents have been lost or destroyed, there are numerous extant documents carefully preserved and indexed in specific institutions, for example, the Hull History Centre, Greenwich Maritime Museum and the Liverpool Maritime Museum.

The task, however, is made more difficult because there is no comprehensive history of the sea fisheries in Britain. Peter Heath, writing in 1965, for example, pointed out that: 'None of the general histories of the fishing industry at present available can be called satisfactory.'[1] Some recent publications have helped to fill the gap, such as Starkey, Reid and Ashcroft's book, *The Commercial Sea Fisheries of England and Wales since 1300*.[2]

Many of the maritime missions have produced their own histories, sometimes with the help of outsiders, and each society has kept minutes and other important documents, which have helped to inform these histories. There are also newspaper articles, letters and official reports. Alongside this material there are other publications, such as: the Rev. George Charles Smith's *Sailors' Magazine and Naval Miscellany* (1820–1827) and his *New Sailors' Magazine and Naval Chronicle* (1827–), which eventually metamorphosed

1. P. Heath, 'North Sea Fishing in the Fifteenth Century: the Scarborough Fleet', *Northern History*, vol. 3 (1968), fn p.53.
2. D.J. Starkey, C. Reid and N. Ashcroft (eds), *England's Sea Fisheries* (London: Chatham, 2000).

into the British and Foreign Sailors' Society (BFSS) magazine, the *Chart and Compass* in 1879; the Thames Church Mission (TCM) published *Light from Aloft*; the Missions to Seamen (MS), the *Word on the Waters*; and the MDSF published *Toilers of the Deep*. Each society also produced an annual report, giving details of its work, expenses, accounts *etc*. These and other publications help to fill in many of the gaps and provide an insight into the overall early work of such missions, although, perhaps inevitably, they do tend to exaggerate the positive side of the work. There were also some early attempts at a general history of seafarers' missions, notably those by the Rev. G.C. Smith and later by his son, Theophilus, but these were never completed.[1] Hence, despite the losses, there still remains a wealth of material that researchers can utilise (and which is becoming more easily accessible), so long as great care is taken with the interpretation of this data.

While popular histories were produced by the various maritime mission societies, it was not until the mid-twentieth century that a more thorough approach began to materialise. The pioneer here was the English Benedictine oblate, Peter Anson, who wrote in an unpublished manuscript that: 'For reasons difficult to understand, maritime missiology – to use a clumsy expression – has never attracted historians.'[2] Even he encountered problems and never published his major work on maritime missions, although he did publish several relevant books and articles. For example, his *The Church and the Sailor* (1948) contains some interesting material on missions among fishing communities.[3]

There have been a few short biographies of Anson, and he wrote about his life and work in several of his books (especially in *Life on Low Shore*), but there has not been any attempt at a major biography – although Miller's book, '*One Firm Anchor' (2012), includes an important chapter* on Anson's work (as does his MPhil thesis).[4] Miller has pointed out that, while 'succeeding authors have depended heavily upon Anson's work, his writings are not always reliable and are usually unsourced'.[5]

1. See the preface to Kverndal's *Seamen's Missions*, 1986.
2. Peter Anson, Foreword, in an unpublished typescript entitled *The Church Maritime*, c.1974. (The British *Apostleship of the Sea* archives, including works by Anson, have now been relocated at the Hull History Centre.) Unfortunately, much of Anson's material in *The Church Maritime* is now very out of date, and his personal views do not always sit comfortably with present-day attitudes.
3. Peter Anson, *The Church and the Sailor* (London: John Gifford, 1948).
4. Miller, *op. cit.*, ch. 15 (*One Firm Anchor* is a significant update of Miller's earlier work, *From Shore to Shore*, 1989); Miller, 'Ship of Peter', MPhil Thesis, Institute of Marine Studies, University of Plymouth, April 1995. But see especially Peter Anson, *Life on Low Shore* (Banff: The Banffshire Journal Ltd, 1969).
5. R.W.H. Miller, 'The *Société des Oeuvres de Mer*', *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*, no.

Peter Anson (1889-1975).

Anson's pioneering work was taken up in the 1970s and 1980s by several scholars who found themselves working on different aspects of maritime mission history: Roald Kverndal, Alston Kennerley, Robert Miller, Stephen Friend and Paul Mooney all completed university theses on maritime missions, and all have published their work in a variety of forms. Kverndal pointed to the difficulty of undertaking such research in that the primary and secondary sources were widely disseminated and often difficult to locate and view – not to mention the many documents lost or destroyed. Nevertheless, a significant development took place in 1990 when Kverndal met with other scholars who together founded the International Association for the Study of Maritime Mission (IASMM), listing its aims as follows:

1. To promote the study and research of maritime mission;
2. To catalogue, encourage presentation and publicise sources for research in maritime mission;
3. To encourage the interdisciplinary integration of maritime mission in places of learning;
4. To provide a forum for debate and discussion by conferences and publications;
5. To stimulate and facilitate publications on maritime mission.

After successful meetings, a popular newsletter and biannual conferences, a meeting was organised in 1996 on the topic of 'Maritime Mission Archives: Problem or Opportunity', chaired by Bishop Bill Down. Members of IASMM subsequently worked hard to ensure the preservation of these archives and many have now been relocated with relevant archives in Britain and the USA.

Since 1970 there have been five major threads in the scholarly approach to maritime mission studies and, while there is a good deal of overlap between these threads, the paradigm will help us to explore the overall

20 (2005), 2, n.49. There are currently two biographies of Anson: Stanley Bruce and Tina Harris, *Back to the Sea* (Bard Books, 2009); and Michael Yelton, *Peter Anson: Monk, Writer and Artist* (Anglo-Catholic History Society, 2005).

development. It should also be noted that the following is a selective list as numerous articles have appeared in various journals by the stated authors and others.

The first thread saw publications and theses about the history of the Church maritime by Alston Kennerley, Roald Kverndal, Robert Miller and Stephen Friend.[1] Kennerley completed his Master's thesis in 1978, entitled

Founding members of the International Association for the Study of Maritime Mission at IASMM's First Biannual Conference at Tilbury, at the Stella Maris Hostel, Essex, 5 April 1988.
Back Row: Dr Stephen Friend, Rev. Dr Roald Kverndal, Fr John McGuire
Front Row: Stephen Twycross, Rev. Dr Robert Miller, Howard Bloch and Dr Alston Kennerley.

'The Education of the Merchant Seaman in the Nineteenth Century', and followed this in 1989 with a doctoral thesis, 'British Seamen's Missions and Sailors' Homes, 1815–1970', which explored the various aspects of voluntary welfare provision for seafarers. The results of Kverndal's doctoral work were published in 1986 under the title, *Seamen's Missions: their Origin and Early Growth*. Miller published his general history of seafarers' missions in 1989 under the title, *From Shore to Shore: a History of the Church and the*

1. Robert Miller, *From Shore to Shore*, published privately (Newmarket: Ladycroft, 1989); Alston Kennerley, 'British Seamen's Missions and Sailors Homes, 1815–1970', PhD thesis, CNAA, September 1989; Stephen Friend, 'The Rise and Development of Christian Missions Amongst British Fishing Communities during the Nineteenth Century', MPhil thesis, University of Leeds, January 1994.

Merchant Seafarer, and in 1995 he completed a Master of Philosophy thesis, entitled 'Ship of Peter: the Catholic Sea Apostolate and the Apostleship of the Sea'. In 2002 Miller also completed his doctoral thesis with an exploration of the work of the Medieval Church with seafarers entitled 'The Man at the Helm: the Faith and Practice of the Medieval Seafarer'. This was followed in 2012 with an update and expansion of his earlier publication, entitled *One Firm Anchor: the Church and the Merchant Seafarer, an Introductory History*. In 1994 Friend completed a Master of Philosophy degree with a study about the rise and development of fishermen's missions in Britain. Some aspects of this thesis were later explored further in Friend's PhD in 2010, which examined the relationship between identity and religion in three Yorkshire fishing communities.[1]

A second thread resulted in a number of studies exploring the work of particular individuals and organisations: Kverndal provided various studies of significant seafarers' missionaries in his book on *Seamen's Missions*, and more recently published a biography about the Rev. George Charles Smith.[2] In 1992 Miller offered an assessment of the work of the life and work of Charles Plomer Hopkins in his MA thesis, entitled 'Charles Plomer Hopkins and the Seamen's Union with Particular Reference to the 1911 Strike', then published a book on this topic in 2010 entitled *Priest in Deep Water*. His most recent book is a biography of Rev. Dr John Ashley[3]; Ronald Rompkey examined the life and work of Wilfred Grenfell;[4] and Sinclair Oubre completed a Licenciate in Canon Law thesis in 1998 on the topic of 'The *Apostolatus Maris*: its Structural Development Including its 1997 Reorganisation';[5] Friend examined the life and work of Ebenezer Joseph Mather, the founder of the Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen;[6] and Miller, in his recent book, *One Firm Anchor*, provided a helpful analysis of Peter Anson's work.[7]

1. Stephen Friend, 'A Sense of Belonging: Religion and Identity in Yorkshire and Humber Fishing Communities, c.1815–1914', University of Hull, May 2010.
2. Roald Kverndal, *George Charles Smith of Penzance* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2012).
3. Robert Miller, *Dr Ashley's Pleasure Yacht: John Ashley, the Bristol Channel Mission and All that Followed* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2017).
4. Ronald Rompkey, *Grenfell of Labrador* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991). Grenfell was a doctor at the London Hospital who trained under Frederick Treves. Treves was on the Committee of the Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen and encouraged Grenfell to spend some time at sea doing medical work among the fishing fleets.
5. Sinclaire K. Oubre, 'The *Apostolatus Maris*: its Structural Development Including its 1997 Reorganisation', in part-fulfilment of the Licenciate in Canon Law thesis, Catholic University of America, Washington DC, 1998.
6. Stephen Friend, see the biography of 'Ebenezer Joseph Mather' in the *New Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
7. R.W.H. Miller, 'Charles Plomer Hopkins and the Seamen's Union with Particular

The third thread explores the work of maritime missions in various countries. For example, Jonah Won Jong Choi and David Chul-Han Jun explored the role of maritime missions in Korea;[1] Vincent Yzermans published a study of *The American Catholic Seafarers' Church*;[2] and Michael L. Hadley provided a history of the Columbia Coast Mission in Canada, called *God's Little Ships*.[3] Alain Cabantous has examined maritime missions in France;[4] and Kverndal has provided a history of the Nordic seamen's missions in the *Norwegian Yearbook of Maritime History*.[5]

Fourthly, Bishop Bill Down, the Very Rev. Paul Mooney and the Rev. Dr Roald Kverndal have focussed on developments in the twentieth century, especially the work of the International Christian Maritime Association (Down); and Mooney has taken a lead from Liberation Theology by providing a helpful analysis of a new paradigm that puts greater emphasis on the pastoral and mission role of seafarers themselves.[6] Kverndal has also edited a collection of articles on aspects of maritime mission, entitled *The Way of the Sea: the Changing Shape of Mission in the Seafaring World*.[7]

A fifth thread covers a range of meetings, conferences, discussions, talks, presentations and displays. All the people mentioned above, and numerous others, have actively engaged in discussion and the presentation of maritime mission topics in a range of countries, including England, Ireland, the US, Spain and South Africa. There has also been some involvement with organisations concerned with relevant aspects of seafaring.

Reference to the 1911 Strike', MA thesis, University of Warwick, 1992; 'The Man at the Helm: the Faith and Practice of the Medieval Seafarer', PhD thesis, University of London, 2002.

1. Jonah Won Jong Choi, 'Shalom and the Church Maritime', 9 May 1996, DMin thesis, New York Theological Seminary; David Chul-Han Jun, 'An Historical and Contextual Approach to Seafarers by Korean Churches with Special Reference to Muslim Seafarers', 7 June 2001, DMiss thesis, Fuller School of World Mission, Pasadena, California.
2. Vincent A. Yzermans, 'American Catholic Seafarers' Church: a Narrative History of the Apostleship of the Sea' (The National Catholic Conference for Seafarers in the United States, 1995). Sinclair Oubre, *op.cit., 1998.*
3. Michael L. Hadley, *God's Little Ships* (Madeira Park, BC, Canada: Harbour Publishing, 1995).
4. Alain Cabantous, 'Religion et monde maritime au Havre dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle', *Annales de Normandie*, 33 (1983), p.3.
5. Kverndal, 'The Origin and Nature of Nordic Missions to Seamen', in the *Norwegian Yearbook of Maritime History* (1977), pp.103-134.
6. Bill Down, *On Course Together* (Norwich: The Canterbury Press, 1989); Paul Mooney, *Maritime Mission* (Zoetermeer, the Netherlands: Uitgeverij Bockencentrum, 2005).
7. R. Kverndal, *The Way of the Sea* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2008).

There is, of course, a good deal of overlap between these strands. For example, Rompkey's study discusses not only Grenfell's work in Britain and Labrador with the Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen (RNMDSF), but also the development of the International Grenfell Association. However, each of these strands provides a scholarly balance to the more subjective approaches taken by the various societies and their supporters.

Following the establishment of the International Association for the Study of Maritime Mission in 1990, a twice-yearly newsletter was published until 2010. The work under the secretaryship of Stephen Friend (1990–2010), and now under the caretaker role of the Rev. Clint Padgett in New York, provided the growing number of researchers with an opportunity to explore issues and publish short accounts of their work and research.[1]

Despite this encouraging activity there is still much to be published on the development of missions amongst fishing communities. Hence, the present study is concerned specifically with this development during the nineteenth century and confines itself mainly to mission work in Britain. Nevertheless, Chapter 10 offers a brief overview of some of the maritime missions, influenced by the work of the RNMDSF, and developed in France, Germany, Scandinavia and the US. Given the complexity of the relationships between the many maritime missions in Britain a helpful one-page chart has been included in Appendix 1a.

Views from the Deck

The maritime mission societies have not unnaturally tended to paint a positive picture about their work, although there are a few instances that suggest a less than positive image. Anson has provided some dissenting examples. For example, he commented: 'On one occasion [the chaplain] had a dog set on him, and on another was pelted with pieces of pork rolled up in his own tracts.'[2] Kennerley also came across the following extract in a book written by a seaman (the spelling and grammar are original and retained; the words are generally written as they sound):

> [We] shuve in to the cost, drops the hook and work in this boar like a fiar engine, swet and swet next thing i knowed it this mishuonry come Down on you. i knowed he would soon as you was to give him a chanse but I did not give him anney chanse but they come At you without one. i packs up, I was mearly going forward and

1. The website for the IASMM is now: www.iasmm.org.
2. Peter F. Anson, *op.cit.*, 1974, p.165.

> come by some pawk and beens from cookie, comes down on you which he said it is a nise evining isent it. says i didant like the looks of it soe much Why not he said. tells him I do not know but it looks omnerous. he said ar yes, they do say ar a lot these mishuonries. says ar twise, shuve his head Up and Down, says i suppose you sailors can tell by the heavonley boddies. replyes which bodies. which he said the stars and cetra, well god damnit i thort he meaned some angels as was loombing into vieuws some wheres. goes on says you can tell the weather by the stars carnt you. Tells him not if the sun is Up they goes Out then, ar yes he said. which come a stop in the conversashin, i did think i might of got of, come by my pawk and beens but they inter lope in your live, he said well my young friend it is a fine live. what is i said because i knowed what he were after, but mersey on us i do not see why this specious of mithooselumb should be aloud to go and say it is a fine live and never done a hands turn scrubbing decks onley with their foot and Durtey it.[1]

Such written views are uncommon, although there are a few hints given by writers on aspects of maritime history. The following comments were written by Ole Mortensøn reflecting on a paper read by Alston Kennerley at Stavanger, Norway, in 1992:

> Kennerley hints at the conflict between missionaries as social workers or as guardians of established morals. And he also touches on a related issue – how effective were the missionaries? [. . .] I have interviewed many Danish seamen from the days of sail and they generally seem little impressed by the missions. Zealous missionaries were scorned or at least left in a social vacuum when they boarded the ships. Many seamen disliked the well-fed, complacent missionary as well as the learned, fanatical delegate of God. Most successful were the missionaries who knew life at sea from experience. 'God's own donkeyman' was a well-known and beloved missionary, a former fireman. The seamen visited seamen's churches, but more often to speak to countrymen, read national papers and get a good cup of coffee sitting in a chair than to listen to the word of God.[2]

1. William P. Taplow, in Hamish Maclaren (ed.), *The Private Opinions of a British Bluejacket* (London: Peter Davies, 1929).
2. Alston Kennerley, 'British Seamen's Missions in the Nineteenth Century', in *The North Sea: Twelve Essays on Social History of Maritime Labour* (Stavanger, Norway: Stavanger Maritime Museum/The Association of North Sea Societies, 1992),

Walter Wood has also provided an indication of some attitudes of fishermen who visited the Mission ship during a religious service:

> At one meeting I attended, after a deputation had waited upon me with a request that I would play the harmonium for them, I could not help being amused at the attitude of a smacksman who evidently was not considered by the others to be 'converted'. A fellow-skipper was praying earnestly for him by name, a fact which did not disconcert him in the least, for all through the prayer he conversed with a friend in his normal voice, evidently about the course of some vessel, for at intervals I could plainly hear such expressions as 'nowth-east by nowth', and 'lost his gear', showing very decidedly that the fears for his soul's safety expressed by his seafaring brethren were not shared by him.[1]

There were, of course, also many seamen who welcomed the maritime missions, and there were many who benefited from the medical help provided at sea, the free literature, services, refreshment and entertainment. But Mortensøn's observation is pertinent and more research needs to be undertaken in this area in order to gain a balanced view.

Women in Fishing Communities

Another under-researched topic is the role of women in fishing communities. While many books concentrate on fishermen, their vessels and catches, there is very little on the women of the fishing communities, other than photogenic young women, such as those recorded by Frank Meadow Sutcliffe, and other nineteenth-century photographers, who portrayed fishwives in traditional dress often carrying very heavy fish baskets. There is very little on the ordinary, everyday lives of the women.

The present author, and his research assistants, over a four-year period has tried to redress the balance by conducting an oral history project along the Yorkshire coast that allowed women to tell their own stories. An initial study was produced as chapter 11 in Kim and Kollontai's book, *Community Identity*[2] in 2007. A DVD was also produced, and other similar research projects have since appeared in print, especially *The Women They Left Behind*, by Nick Triplow, Tina Bramhill and Jade Shepherd.[3] Nevertheless, the culture of the fishing

pp.79-95.

1. Walter Wood, *North Sea Fishers and Fighters* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd, 1911), p.218.
2. Sebastian Kim, Pauline Kollontai (Eds.), *Community Identity: Dynamics of Religion in Context* (London: T&T Clark, 2007).
3. Nick Triplow, Tina Bramhill and Jade Shepherd, *The Women They Left Behind*

A Whitby fishwife.
Photograph by Frank Meadow Sutcliffe, c.1880.

industry is male dominated and the role of the womenfolk within that culture is perhaps most underrated This is usually by omission in that most books about the fishing industry tend to concentrate on men and boats. Indeed, until recently many memorial statues only featured fishermen – although this seems to be being rectified in some communities where women have been portrayed in various roles (for example, at Fleetwood a mother and her two children are looking out for the returning fishing vessels, at Bridlington a girl is knitting a gansey, and at Stornoway a herring girl is portrayed).

There were, however, a number of women who owned businesses associated with the industry, including Baroness Burdett-Coutts who established the short-lived Columbia fishing fleet and the Columbia fish market (1881–1884), and opened a fishing school for boys at Baltimore. In some cases

(Fathom Press, 2009).

Mrs Clark on her fish stall in 'The Vaults', Scarborough, c.1950.

women were responsible for their own Christian missions, including Dame Agnes Weston, who, along with her colleague Sophia G. Wintz, established the Royal Sailors' Rests in Portsmouth and Devonport. The Hon. Elizabeth Waldegrave was involved in work among seafarers at Southsea, and Sarah Robinson at Portsmouth. Agnes Hedenstrom was also appointed by the Swedish Free Church as a missionary to the London Docklands in 1875. Other Scandinavian women, such as Emma Leijonhelm (1847–1937) and Andrea Franks (1857–1942) also ran sailors' homes.[1]

There were also the wives of fishermen who took over their husband's business following his death. One example is Mrs Clark who ran her stall in 'The Vaults' at Scarborough for many years in the mid-twentieth century. Several fishermen's wives also ran crab stalls at Scarborough. These are modern examples of nineteenth-century labour where the wives of fishermen trundled from village to village with heavy baskets full of fish for sale. Hence, the women, from the highest to the lowest classes were very much involved in the economic activity of the fishing communities.

There were even a few women who engaged in fishing at sea, such as Jane Witty of Hull during the 1850s and 1860s[2] and Dora Walker who built her own boat, the *Good Faith*, and fished off Whitby between the 1930s

1. Kverndal, *op. cit.* (1986), p.606; 'Women on the Waterfront', *Maritime Mission Studies*, vol. 2 (Spring 2000), p.21.
2. Robinson, *op. cit.* (1996), p.44.

and the 1950s. While Walker initially experienced opposition from the local fishermen, she eventually earned their respect and became known as 'Skipper Dora'. In later years, she was actively involved in the Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society and was a member of the local Committee of the Missions to Seamen.[1]

Paul Thompson has referred to the fisherwomen who worked on the *She Cruiser* in County Down, Ireland, during the 1980s, and the female fishing skipper at Helvik, Waterford.[2] A few women also occasionally crewed for their husbands, such as the fisherman's wife at Hastings, when the male crew members failed to turn up.[3] But British women were generally absent from fishing work on the vessels, and indeed many fishermen held it a poor omen should a women step on board their vessel before it left for the fishing grounds.

Ironically, perhaps, many of the Christian missions among fishing and other seafaring communities were initiated by women, who provided the necessary finance to get the societies off the ground or to support the founders of maritime missions. An important example here is Lady Mary Grey (the wife of the Commissioner of the Portsmouth Naval Dockyard) who sponsored the early career of the Rev. G.C. Smith.[4] Others provided the funds to purchase vessels. There was also an army of women who provided knitted items and raised funds for the missions via drawing-room meetings and charity events. In most cases these women remain anonymous, and much of the credit for the work has been given to the men who are usually cited as founders of the various societies. Yet other women became scripture readers. Anson has pointed out that Mother Lydia Sellon's Sisters appear to have been the 'first female ship-visitors'. Miss Sellon established several organisations including, in 1848, a Church of England Sisterhood of Mercy of Devonport and Plymouth and, the following year, she founded two 'Houses of Peace' as refuges for 'fallen women', where they could be looked after and trained for domestic service. Other developments followed including St George's College for Sailor Boys. The boys were taught to dance the polka and hornpipe and were encouraged to engage in play-acting, and she 'regaled them with tales of wild adventure' – activities that shocked and upset the local evangelicals! Another aspect of her work included a Home for Old Sailors and their Wives.[5]

1. Marian Durrans, *The Life and Times of Miss Dora Walker, F.R.S.A., 1890–1980* (Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society, 1998).
2. Paul Thompson, 'Women in the Fishing', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 27 (1985), p.7.
3. Beatrice Cloves MA, *Loving the Fishing* (Old Hastings Preservation Society, October 2003).
4. Kverndal, *op. cit.* (2000), p.19.
5. Anson, *op. cit.* (1974), pp.40-41.

There were also countless women who worked as fishergirls in the herring industry, travelling around the coast with their relatives to work in the ports where the fishermen brought in the herring. Much has already been written about this group, although mission work with the herring girls (and the individuals and organisations involved, such as the Scottish Episcopal Mission to Fisherfolk) has not been to any great extent examined. The material here is sparse although some brief notes have been included in Chapter 5.[1]

Finally, it should not be forgotten that the wives of the fishermen took on the main responsibility for the family and home, including looking after the finance. And, before the advent of a universal welfare system, the women lived daily with the fear that their husbands might be lost at sea, leaving them destitute, apart from the small claims that might be made to a relevant charity. Paul Thompson, in his book, *Living the Fishing*, devotes a chapter to the women in fishing communities, this he begins with the words: 'Fishing is commonly thought of as a man's trade. In fact, it is an occupation peculiarly dependent on the work of women.'[2] His study explores, *inter alia*, the role of women leading demands for better pay and conditions, especially during the twentieth century.

British Seamen's Missions after 1850

As the British fishing industry began its rapid expansion in the mid-nineteenth century, especially in the North Sea, the increase in social problems and abuses led to a concern for practical intervention by seafarers' missions. It was also the period during which significant innovations and discoveries led to the development of the modern British fishing industry. An overview in this study is also offered of the example and influence of seafarers' missions in the early part of the nineteenth century, in that methods used by later, more specialised missions to fishing communities drew upon the work and techniques of this earlier activity.

By 1900 the nature of fishermen's missions was changing from a predominantly sea-centred enterprise to shore-based work, although the process had already begun in the early nineteenth century with Rev. G.C. Smith's various organisations and societies for seafarers. With the rising costs of obtaining an appropriate vessel by the end of the nineteenth century, it became increasingly difficult for the various fishermen's

1. The only references viewed so far come from comments in the correspondence of the Missions to Seafarers Archives, Hull History Centre; and Peter Anson's paper entitled *Seamen's Welfare Work in Scottish Ports*, c.1949, Apostleship of the Sea Archives, Hull History Centre, U DAPS/12/1/HIST.
2. Paul Thompson, Tony Wailey and Trevor Lummis, *Living the Fishing* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p.167.

missions to maintain their work at sea, or indeed to maintain their work at all. Hence, by the beginning of the twentieth century, while all the main organisations were in place – despite some times of crisis and innovations in organisational procedures – some inevitably fell by the wayside. The fleeting system (a system of fishing developed by Hewett in the 1850s, which involved vessels sailing for the fishing grounds together and working there under the control of an 'admiral') was abandoned, a fact symbolised by Hewett's disbanding of their 'Short Blue Fleet' c.1902, and, although smaller fleets continued to work the Dogger Bank for several years after, the heady days of fleeting had come to an end.

Late Victorian Britain saw a period during which the sea-fishing industry developed to such a remarkable extent that it was acknowledged as the largest and most successful the world had ever known. It was no accident, therefore, that during this period the Church and the public began to take an interest in the welfare of the men and women who were employed by, and dependent upon, this industry. This interest, however, did not take place in a vacuum, and we must note the marked changes in social, economic and theological perspectives that occurred throughout the Victorian era, and the influence these changes had upon the attitudes of those engaged in ministering to the members of fishing communities.

The structure of this study therefore explores the development of the various organisations established to look after the spiritual and physical welfare of fishermen and their families. Chapter 1 looks briefly at the development of the British fishing industry. Chapter 2 examines the nature of the social and theological contexts in which a concern for the physical and spiritual welfare of fishermen was generated. Chapters 3 to 5 examine the development of maritime missions in Britain, with particular emphasis on their involvement with fishing communities, and provide an overview of the development of seafarers', especially fishermen's, missions throughout the nineteenth century. The period is divided for convenience into three sections: 1800–56, 1856–80, 1880–1900 – although Chapter 5 also examines some of the main developments in the early years of the twentieth century. While in this section we will examine in detail the first ten years of the Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen, 1881–91, it is important to remember that the MDSF has very few documents in its archives relating to its formative years, and the correspondence between the MDSF and the Family Welfare Association has sadly been destroyed. In Chapter 6 there is an examination of the development and demise of the copering trade. Chapter 7 follows with an examination of the MDSF's medical work at sea. The resignation of the society's founder, Ebenezer Joseph Mather, is examined in Chapter 8. He was similar in many ways to founders of

other seafarers' organisations, and his relationship with his Committee, and his eventual downfall, reflects the problems faced by earlier seafarers' missionaries, the Rev. George Charles Smith and the Rev. Dr John Ashley.[1] Chapter 9 offers a brief overview of the Roman Catholic work at sea; and Chapter 10 identifies briefly those missions influenced by the work of the RNMDSF.

Inevitably, later writers tend to simplify complex issues, and often telescope and juxtapose events that originally bore no such direct relationship. From this arises the 'myth'. This is no less true of the RNMDSF than it is for other organisations, and some published accounts of the early days of the RNMDSF have created much that is fictitious. Fictions are relatively easy to discredit; truth is never easy to ascertain, facts are always interpreted by the participants and later researchers, and we are left to make judgements as to the most likely course of events. The difficulty is in simplifying events without losing contact with reality. The myth, of course, serves a useful purpose in giving a sense of identity and uniqueness to the beginning of an organisation or movement and reinforcing its role. But there are times when it is necessary to reflect upon the origins, and to attempt to recapture a clear sense of the early vision if reconstruction and future development are to occur. This process is often painful – many people would prefer to continue living with a myth, but when the myth loses contact with reality it is in danger of becoming meaningless or irrelevant. This study, therefore, is an attempt to offer a coherent outline of the development of missions to fishermen in Britain and to analyse some of the events which led to and influenced this missionary activity.

1. Miller, *op. cit.* (2017).