



MANX SEA FISHING

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THE COMPLAINT OF THE WHITEHAVEN FISHERMEN, 1754

“... That on Monday the tenth day of September about six o'clock in the evening, the said Four Busses being then among the Shoals of Herrings in St George's Channel, at the Distance of about seven miles from Langnouse point (the nearest to them of any part of the Isle of Man) and a proper opportunity there offering for Fishing, they began to Shoot their Netts; when the Busses Lowther and Stevenson were surrounded with a great number of Manks Boats (upwards of one hundred in all) with Six or Seven Men in each Boat, who came in a hostile manner, being armed with Axes, Clubs, and other offensive Weapons, terrifying the Crews of the said Busses with their loud Shouts and threatening appearance, and, in the most insolent terms, declaring the King of Man, their Sovereign was Supreme Lord in those Seas, and that none should Fish there who did not Submit to his Jurisdiction, pay his dues for liberty of Fishing, and conform to all his Laws and Regulations; that the English Busses had no business there and if these Busses should attempt to Fish in the Manks Seas, they would not only Cut and Destroy their Netts and Hawsers, but would also Board, Sink and Destroy the Busses; frequently crying out that the Subjects of the King of Great Britain had no rights to Fish on that Coast, for

that those seas and the Fish in them belonged to their King; at the same time Cursing and abusing the people on board the said Busses calling them English Dogs and Negroes and making use of other Opprobrious and abusive Language.

That the Crews of the said Busses, seeing themselves Surrounded with so furious a Multitude and esteeming their lives in danger, were extremely Cautious not to Shew the least sign of Resentment. But then (as well as at other times) behaved towards the Manks Men in the most inoffensive manner; and, with earnest intreaties, besought them to use a peaceable behaviour. Yet as they did not immediately take in their Netts, the Manks Men proceeded to put their threatenings in Execution – by Cutting and Destroying the Buoys of the said Busses, and intimidated the Crews in such a manner that they were Constrained to take in their Netts and to remove from off the Fishing Grounds to a great distance from the Manks Boats. Neither could the Crews of the said Busses make any resistance to these Acts of force and violence, being unarmed and Defenceless, relying on the Protection of their Sovereign and reverence due to his Name and Authority in every part of the British Isles ...”

EXPLANATIONS

'Langnouse': Langness

'Busses': fishing vessels used by the English and Dutch in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These were much larger vessels than the Manx fishing boats of that period

'Hawsers': large thick ropes

QUESTIONS

1. Who was the 'King of Man' referred to by the Manx fishermen?
2. How many Manx fishing boats were said to be in the area? Why would such a large number of boats be fishing of Langness at this time of year?
3. Why do you think those who drew up the Petition mentioned St. George's Channel?
4. How many men made up the crew of a Manx fishing boat at this time?
5. Do you know of any of the Manx fishing 'Regulations' which the Manx fishermen might accuse the Whitehaven men of breaking?
6. What use was made of the buoys?
7. This incident raised a question about the seas around the Isle of Man which has only recently been settled. What is this issue?