

# HASTINGS PIER CHARITY



## Fishing Industry in Hastings



Tush Hamilton, a famous local fisherman in the 1960s (HPC068.096)



Supported by  
**The National Lottery**<sup>®</sup>  
through the Heritage Lottery Fund



[www.hastingspier.org.uk](http://www.hastingspier.org.uk)

## **Fishing Industry in Hastings**

It is highly unlikely that the Hastings Pier has been used for commercial fishing, there is of course a long history of locals and holiday makers using the Pier for rod and line fishing, it was a very popular venue, and it was much missed by these anglers.

The notes below relate to the Hastings fishing industry, and are by no means comprehensive. The Fishermen's Museum in the Old Town is the place to obtain detailed information.

### **Brief History of Old Hastings**

When William the Conqueror arrived in Hastings, prior to the famous Battle in 1066, he would have found a fishing community, probably based in the natural harbour, which would have been where the shopping centre is now. William built his castle overlooking the harbour, and Hastings would have been one of his departure points back to Normandy.

Hastings was also a Cinque Port, one of five established initially by Edward the Confessor, in return for certain Rights and Privileges, the town had to supply boats and men for coastal protection. Other towns were Romney, Hythe, Dover and Sandwich, plus Rye and Winchelsea. These Rights were reinforced later by Henry the Second, enabling, amongst other things to have a blind eye turned to piracy and smuggling.

In Feb 1287, there was a storm so devastating that it wrought havoc along the Sussex and Kent coast, changing the coastline for all time. In Hastings, a large part of the castle was brought down, and the harbour was blocked forever, bringing to an end Hastings status as an important town, although it clung on the Cinque Port Rights for as long as the Crown continued to grant them!



The East Hill and Hastings fish market around 1900 (HPC113.010)

The fishing community then moved to where the "Old Town" is now, and where the fishing industry has been ever since. The town now boasts of the largest beach launched fishing fleet in Europe.

#### WHY RX?

All fishing boats in the UK have to be registered at a port this has been the situation since the end of the 18th Century. As previously explained, Hastings is not a port, our nearest port is at Rye, so the "R" stands for RYE, and the "X" for SUSSEX.

Each boat also has a number, so for instance outside of Hastings Station is the RX53. Each boat also has a name, the RX53 is the Dorothy Melinda, the name is displayed on the stern, as "Dorothy Melinda, Port of Rye." Some boats will have a variation of this the stern will show the name, then "Hastings, Port of Rye".

As well as RX boats, some of the fleet has been registered at other ports, such as NN [Newhaven] or PH [Plymouth]. Fishing boats will always be passing the Pier, and it should be possible to spot the registration numbers.

If fish have been caught, the fishermen will clean the fish whilst travelling back to base, eager gulls often follow the boats, anxious to have a free meal of fish entrails.

## **Black Flags in the Water**

The fish are caught by using a variety of methods, for fishing close to shore a Trammel net is often employed. This net, or rather a number of them are fixed vertically to the seabed by using weights and floats on the net, and anchors to hold the nets in place.

To enable the fishermen to find their nets, they deploy a marker with a flag called a "DAN", the flags are coloured, often black and are a good visual aid. These are frequently seen bobbing in the water, and will be easily be observed from the pier.

## **What else might be seen from the Pier**

On the odd occasion shoals of mackerel appear, and can be seen breaking the surface in a tight knit group. Gulls may indicate the presence of these.

There have been regular sightings of dolphins and porpoises along the Sussex coast, porpoises were seen near the harbour on 10/7/15. Birds, such as Herring Gulls, Lesser and Greater Black Back Gulls, Cormorants can be seen on a daily basis, roosting in the old pier buildings was a flock of starlings, and at dusk would create a "mumuration" an acrobatic display before settling down for the night.



Hastings Pier from the East Hill 1896 (HPC041.001)

Please note that this information is provided free of charge and whilst Hastings Pier Charity makes every effort to keep the information on the website accurate, the majority of the information comes from the general public and volunteers. We therefore disclaim any warranty or representation, express or implied about its accuracy, completeness or appropriateness for a particular purpose. If there are any errors, please contact Hastings Pier by email [info@hpcharity.co.uk](mailto:info@hpcharity.co.uk)

[www.hastingspier.org.uk](http://www.hastingspier.org.uk)