

**KENT AND ESSEX SEA FISHERIES  
COMMITTEE. REPORT ON THE  
SEA FISHERIES AND FISHING  
INDUSTRIES ON THE THAMES  
ESTUARY**

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Kent and Essex Sea Fisheries Committee. Report on the Sea Fisheries and Fishing Industries on the Thames Estuary by Dr. James Murie

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**DR. JAMES MURIE**

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THE THAMES ESTUARY**



KENT AND ESSEX  
SEA FISHERIES COMMITTEE.

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REPORT

ON THE

SEA FISHERIES AND FISHING INDUSTRIES  
OF THE THAMES ESTUARY.

(Prepared by Dr. JAMES MURIE.)

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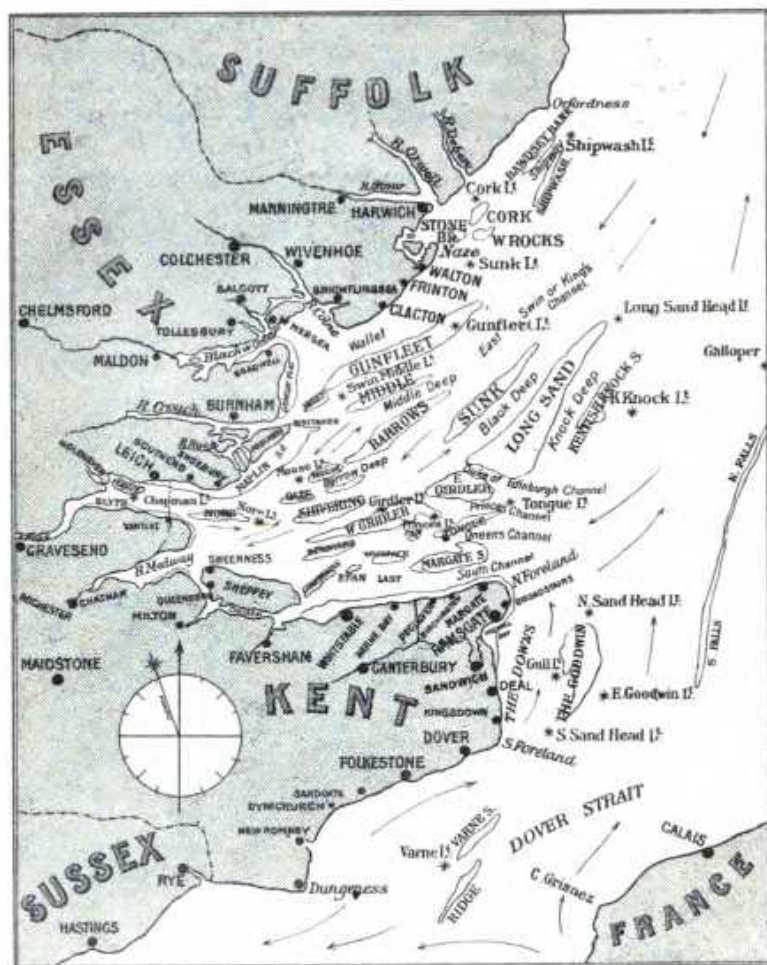
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1903.

## KENT & ESSEX SEA-FISHERIES DISTRICT.



SKETCH MAP.

Diagrammatic Chart of the area comprising Kent and Essex Sea-Fisheries District, viz., Dungeness to Harwich (Dovercourt Lights). Sands and Shoals are enclosed in outlines (capitals), the Channels between (smaller lettering). Asterisks (\*) denote Lights (Lightships and Lighthouses). Dots (●) mark Fishing Stations (save three inland towns). A Contour Line is added where extensive sands bound shore, e.g., Maplina. Arrows indicate Tide Currents generally. The Thames Conservancy boundary, Crowstone (Leigh) to Yantlet, is shown by dotted line across river.

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# I. THE THAMES ESTUARY AND LEIGH-ON-SEA FISHERIES.

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### I.—PURPORT OF REPORT.

THE Sub-Committee (composed of equal numbers of representatives from Kent and Essex) was appointed by your Committee on the motion of Captain Anderson—"To investigate the Fisheries, and recommend such steps as they may from time to time think best for their development."

The subject in question was amply discussed from various points of view. Among others, one fact was brought prominently into consideration, namely: that within our Sea Fisheries District there is included quite a variety of methods and conditions of fishing; notwithstanding a considerable amount of sameness and flatness of aspect in the greater part of the coast. For example, we have North Sea or Deep Sea Trawlers (Ramsgate, Dover, Folkestone and Brightlingsea); offshore and

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inshore fisheries (Harwich, Tollesbury, West Mersea, Margate, Deal, Dungeness, &c.); estuarine fisheries (Maldon, Sheerness, Queenborough, Southend and Leigh); besides the great shell-fish industries (Whitstable, Faversham, Burnham, &c.), so characteristic of the conjoint counties. Expressed otherwise there are in use, beam trawl and drift-net, long-line and hand-line, seine, bag or stow-net; Leigh shrimp-net, shove-net, dredge and kettle-net, crab and lobster pots, and, even to a limited degree, rod, leger-line and hoop-net may be included—altogether a very goodly array.

In short, it would seem that the interests involved, and thereby modes adopted, whether at the greater or lesser fishing centres, are to some extent occasionally antagonistic; speciality of fishery and peculiarity of method depending greatly on locality, its surroundings and prevalence of kinds of fish at certain seasons. It follows and becomes evident that difficulties beset any hard-and-fast lines of recommendation strictly applicable, and equally beneficial to all stations concerned.

Whilst one member of Sub-Committee submitted that the destruction of immature fish was the crying evil to be redressed, another supported the view that in our area the catch was plentiful enough with no diminution on the average, spite of supposed over-fishing; a third thought reduction of carriage and better markets were points worth inquiring into; a fourth held that it was essential, especially in the case of shell-fish, that a Government measure alone was the touchstone of improvement. But notwithstanding this seeming diversity of convictions, there was quite a consensus of opinion that deficiency of reliable information was the great drawback. Indeed, until such data are acquired, there can be no solid basis whereon to found recommendations, as to the fisheries development.

Of places which may be regarded as fishing stations there are about thirty; Kent and Essex having nearly equal numbers. Some are important centres, others quite the reverse. Of the



latter out-of-the-way corners, however, all the more necessary is it that something further should be learned regarding them.

From the constitution of the Sea Fisheries Committees, whereof half the members are appointed by the County Council, the other by the Board of Trade, and the drawback that members' travelling expenses shall not be paid for them, there arises an acknowledged difficulty. It is this: that in nearly all the other Fisheries' Committees, as well as our own, attendance on the part of practical fishermen, who live at a distance, and who cannot afford to be present at the meetings, is consequently hindered. Hence, unfortunately, the fishermen class are not so thoroughly represented as they should be. This state of things seems incongruous, for the Sea Fisheries Act of 1888 was but an appendix to the Local Government Act of the same year, primarily to ensure the popular representation of the fishermen and "fishing interests"—so to say a mixed branch Committee of the County Council with limited jurisdiction and powers. Thus it is all the more clearly needful that positive information should be furnished as to the present actual status, the history, the prospects, and the requirements of every fishery locality within the bounds of the Fisheries District. Such at least was the view taken by a majority of the Sub-Committee.

The Sub-Committee further came to the determination—and it was unanimously resolved—that instead of merely outlining what should be the basis of the facts to be acquired at each special fishery station, the more business-like way of proceeding would be to present to your Committee data concerning a single locality. This, perhaps, varied with considerable abbreviations, according to circumstances, might serve as an example of the kind of thing they are inclined to recommend should be done in other instances. As to how this wider phase of the question may best be accomplished, and from what source the funds necessary are to be derived, these doubtless your Committee hereafter will take into consideration; meantime our colleague Dr. Murie has volunteered this contribution on the estuarine fishery station he represents.

Choice thus fell on Leigh:—(a) Its fishing grounds lie both in Kent and Essex waters; (b) Besides flat and round fisheries, and its speciality of shrimping, it also combines oyster storing, cockling, and mussel and winkle beds; (c) In certain aspects it offers material for study, and throws a side-light on the brood and undersized fish questions; (d) Its history demonstrates the difficulties attendant on the rights of public *versus* private fisheries; (e) In adjoining the Thames Conservancy and Rochester Corporation, the occasional friction of boundaries interests receives illustration; (f) Data incident to changes in type, in methods of, and in apparatus can be traced pretty closely; (g) Pollutions and other troublous matters furnish object lessons. Thus Leigh-on-Sea, so far, presents a kind of epitome of most of those topics affecting the working of the Sea Fisheries Districts generally—and which are so keenly discussed annually at the meetings of representatives of authorities under the Sea Fisheries Regulations Act, 1888.

A general Report on the entire District might result in statements, opinions or suggestions being somewhat modified.\*

\* Whilst upon your Sub-Committee, as a body, necessarily devolves the responsibility of this Report—which they have examined and freely criticised in MS. and printed proof—yet they desire to emphasise the fact that its conception and carrying out have vested solely with one of their members (Dr. Murie). They would here also express their combined thanks to the undermentioned individuals who have contributed such information, on local matters and otherwise, as has enabled the Report to be drawn up in its present form.

*Fishermen.*

|                   |                        |                   |
|-------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Baxter, Bernard   | Emery, George W., jun. | Meddle, Stephen   |
| Bundock, Albert   | Frederick              | Murrel, Henry (?) |
| Beaumont          | Gilson, George         | William (?)       |
| Bridge, Frederick | John                   | Noakes, Archer    |
| Cotgrove, Henry   | Harvey, John           | Palmer, Charles   |
| James             | Robert                 | Partridge, Samuel |
| Nathan, sen.      | William                | Robinson, Abraham |
| Thomas            | Johnson, Robert, sen.  | Ritchie, Henry    |
| William           | Robert, jun.           | Turnidge, Samuel  |
| Deal, Joe         | Kirby, George          | Tyrrel, James     |
| Emery, Benjamin   | Stephen                | Wilder, Harry     |
| George, sen.      | Little, William        | Mark              |

For much assistance, and quite a variety of communications and hints, among the above, R. Johnson, sen., and J. Tyrrel deserves special mention.

*Old Residents, Officials, Boat Builders, Ship-Chandlers, &c.*

|                     |                          |                   |
|---------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Bradley, George     | Dennis, Edward           | Kirby, Frederick  |
| Brown, Charles      | (Station Master)         | Partridge, Nathan |
| Walter              | Eppe, Albert             | Thomson, Henry    |
| (Fisherman's Agent) | Foster, William          | Mrs. H.           |
| Bundock, Thomas A.  | Harris, John (?)         | Tomlin, Thomas    |
| Walter              | House Officer, Southend) | Rev. Michael      |
| Cotgrove, Arthur    | Harrison, George, sen.   |                   |

## II.—THAMES ESTUARY AND ITS PHYSICAL FORMATION.

ON casual thought the connection between the physical formation of the Thames Estuary and its fisheries may not at once seem quite apparent. But on further inquiry and reflection on the subject, their intimate relationship becomes more manifest and appreciable.

1. *Limits.*—What are the precise limits of the Estuary? is a question easier asked than answered. As a matter of fact, there are no positive boundaries agreed on by authorities, and the discrepancies of the latter only show that convenience of purpose in view has been the sole guide. For instance, among others, this has been acknowledged by such a sound authority as Captain Tizard, R.N., in his extensive Hydrographical Surveys in the "Triton," 1882-9.\*

He assumes and adopts as a western boundary a line drawn from Southend across to Sheerness; for an eastern line of demarcation the meridian of the Kentish Knock Light-vessel; for the south, Kent [to N. Foreland]; and for a northern limit the coast of Essex. This area contains some 800 square nautical miles, and is crowded with sandbanks. Viewed from a hydrographical standpoint, Tizard's eastern boundary may be accepted; but his western is merely an arbitrary or nominal one, chosen possibly as including Sheerness and naval interests.

The Thames Conservancy's limit (Crowstone to Yantlet) is merely a formal divisionary line, serving to define sharply where their and the Trinity Board's jurisdiction abut, irrespective of estuarine demarcation. Notwithstanding it has a certain historic importance, not only as concerns the ancient septennial water pageants of the Corporation of the City of London, but likewise as denoting the Isle of Grain's exemption from the City's jurisdiction.†

\* Summarised in his paper on "The Thames Estuary" [its channel changes], "Nature," 1890.

† Consult Fletcher, *Jour. Statist. Soc.*, Vol. IV. (1841) — "Ancient Prescriptive Jurisdictions over the Thames possessed by the Corporation of London."