

Who were the Port Isaac Fishermen 400 years ago

Whilst the great and the good will often be recorded, it is rare to find the actual names of ordinary working folk surviving from early documents ...

In 1626 Francis Basset, as Vice-Admiral of the north of Cornwall, was charged with compiling a survey of the maritime resources within his area (*from St Ives up to Boscastle*). The latter half of the 1620s saw England again at war with Spain and France and the government needed to know what ships and seamen were available to help protect our shores. On 20th June 1626 the Council of War requested the Lord High Admiral, the Duke of Buckingham, to require a 'general muster' from each Vice-Admiral *'of all such mariners, sailors and seafaring men as are within their jurisdiction and to return true certificates to his Grace of their numbers, names, ages and dwelling places'*. This survey was repeated in 1629, and between the two surveys Basset records the names of 64 separate fishermen in St Endellion parish (*which he called St. Ellion*).

It would have been pretty clear to everyone that these government compiled surveys were intended for use by the press-masters as an aide-memoire of the seamen available at each port for forcing into naval service. There had been longstanding difficulties in pressing the mariners of the southwest, who, perhaps surprisingly, received ample support from local mayors and prominent persons in obstructing government demands.

Local needs above national ones

At a time when fish was such a staple diet, the decision to put local needs above national ones was a serious one, no doubt influenced by the genuine concerns as to who would catch the fish needed for the local people if the able-bodied were all press-ganged, or perhaps a less worthy reason as to who would provide the (*smuggled*) fine wines and spirits for his lordship's table. In April 1625 Sir James Bagg reported that Sir John Eliot (*the Vice-Admiral for south Cornwall, and Bagg's rival for the job*) frustrated a muster of 600 pressed seamen by sending the men home, putting forward the excuse that he understood the death of James I and accession of Charles I on 27th March 1625 negated the impressment orders. Captain John Pennington wrote on 9th April 1627 that he had sent warrants to Sir John Drake, Vice-Admiral for Devon, and the Mayor of Dartmouth for the pressing of 160 men, but both replied they could find none.

He clearly thought there was collusion, as his letter continued

'I know there to be men and good men, which do absent themselves and are winked at'.

On 2nd April 1628 it was Sir John Drake who wrote to Edward Nicholas, Secretary to the Admiralty, *'to press men is in vain for they will not go'*. That same month the Mayor of Saltash was reported to have treated the impressment order with contempt. He encouraged the seamen to avoid the press by publicly reading the impressment warrant and then openly declaring in the street that he did not know where to find any seamen!

Francis Basset's Surveys of North Cornwall Mariners, Sailors and Fishermen FISHERMEN IN THE PARISH OF ENDELLION [ST ELLION]

1626 Survey		
Name	Age	Notes
John Auger	46	at sea
Ralph Billinge	60	
Richard Billinge	16	
John Bray	60	
Nicholas Browne	30	at sea
Richard Browne	62	
John Browning jun.	20	at sea
John Browninge sen.	70	at sea
Richard Carveth	37	
John Chevalle	40	at sea
Thomas Collen	23	
Ferdinand Collinge	35	at sea
Robert Davies	50	at sea
Nicholas Emott	68	at sea
Thomas Emott	30	at sea
Richard Forde	20	at sea
John Gilbert	65	
Christopher Grigg	50	at sea
Francis Grigg	46	at sea
William Grigge	40	at sea
Thomas Guy	30	at sea
Raphe Guy	40	
George Hicks	45	
William Hicces	35	at sea
Humphrey Jackett	27	
John James	50	at sea
Thomas James	38	
George Jefferie	44	
Oliver Moyle	60	at sea
Christopher Olver	26	at sea
John Olver	20	at sea
Nicholas Parson	20	at sea
John Pearse	60	at sea
John Rowe	45	
Anthony Stone	61	
John Tom	27	at sea
William Trefry	24	at sea
William Trefry	20	
John Trenden	25	at sea
Thomas Trenoden sen.	50	at sea
John Triplett	23	at sea
John Waye	60	at sea
Robert Wills	44	at sea
Total 43 Seamen		

1629 Survey		
Name	Age	Notes
John Anger	40	Sailor
Ralph Billing	54	Sailor
Richard Billing	20	Sailor
Thomas Billing	16	Sailor
Christopher Brea	20	Sailor
William Browne	30	Sailor
William Browne	50	Fisherman
John Browninge	25	Fisherman
Richard Carveth	38	Fisherman
John Colline	20	Fisherman
Thomas Colline	27	Sailor
Joseph Collins	34	Sailor
Ferdinand Collen	30	Sailor
Richard Couch	18	Fisherman
Robert Davye	40	Sailor
Roger Davys	50	Mariner
John Dea	18	Fisherman
Thomas Denman	45	Sailor
Thomas Emmett	30	Sailor
William Emmett	20	Sailor
Christopher Grigge	50	Sailor
John Grigge	22	Fisherman
William Grigge	40	Sailor
Thomas Guy	30	Sailor
Ralph Guy	40	Fisherman
George Hicces	43	Fisherman
John Hicces	52	Sailor
William Hicces	40	Fisherman
Humphrey Jackett	32	Sailor
John James	40	Sailor
Thomas James	40	Sailor
George Jeffery	47	Sailor
Gilbart Jeffery	15	Sailor
Christopher Olliver	30	Sailor
John Olliver	26	Sailor
Richard Olliver	20	Sailor
Thomas Oliver	16	Fisherman
John Parker	18	Fisherman
Nicholas Parson	19	Sailor
Edward Poulstagg	30	Sailor
John Rawe	50	Fisherman
Anthony Stone	60	Sailor
John Tom	25	Sailor
Anthony Trebell	60	Sailor
William Trefry	30	Sailor
William Trefry	21	Fisherman
Thomas Trenoden	20	Sailor
Arthur Triplett	25	Sailor
John Triplett	35	Sailor
John Waye	50	Sailor
Total 50 Seamen		