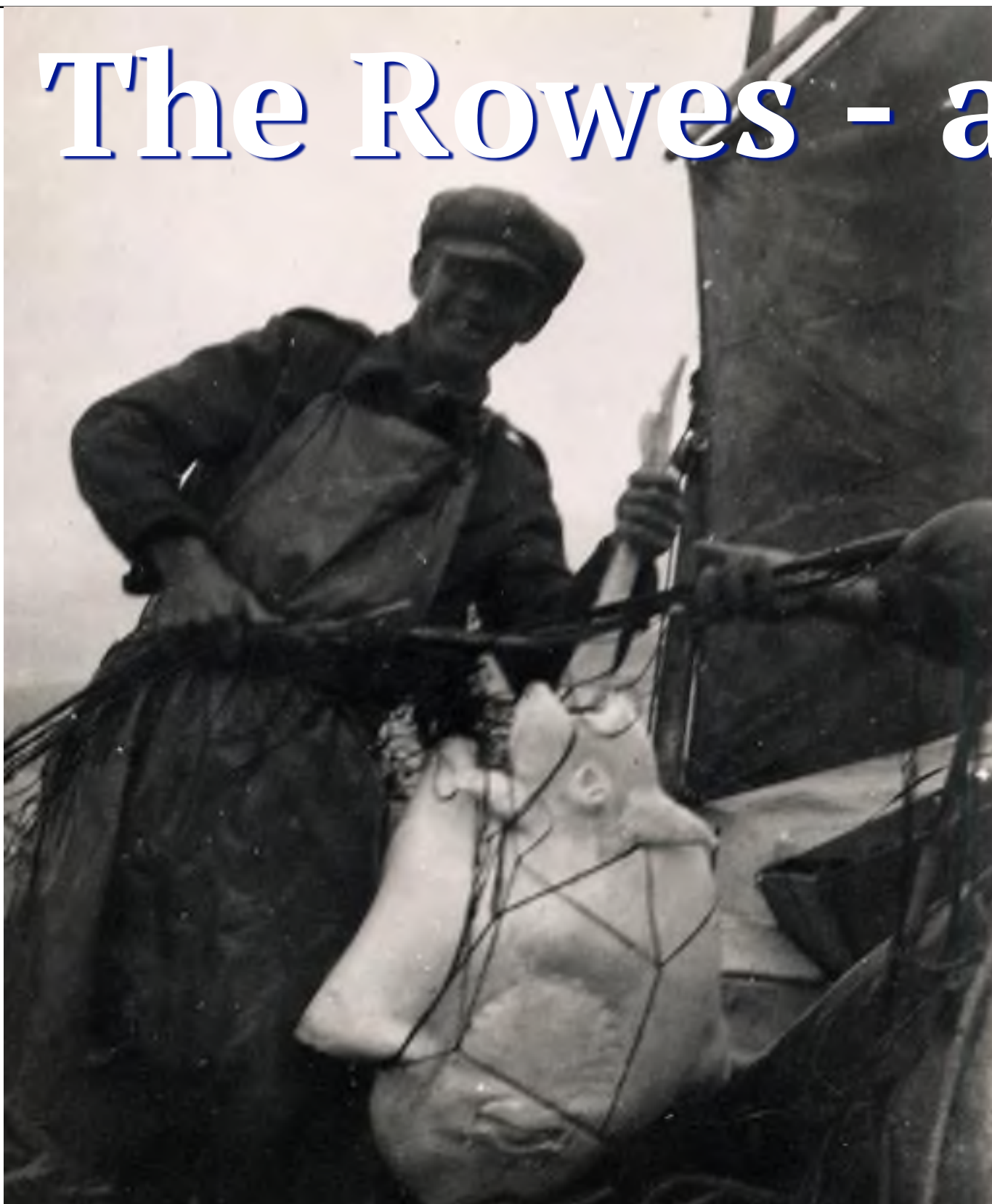


The Rowes - a Port Isaac fishing family



Family records indicate that the Rowe family have fished out of Port Isaac harbour for at least five generations. Actual printed records go back to 1895 when Richard Rowe, commissioned a fishing Lugger to be built at Padstow, partly funded by a local Doctor, William Blake.

AT 83 FISHERMAN FRANK IS STILL HAULING POTS

Most people see the North Cornish coast from the high cliffs and beaches, the rocks and the coastal footpaths, and it evokes different feelings in all.

But from the sea, the coast is far different, more exciting, more gripping than it could ever be from the land.

It is against this backdrop that Frank Rowe has worked all his life, hauling nets, lobster pots and handlines. "I've never wanted to work anywhere else," he says. "Who could want a more beautiful place?"

Just turned 83, Frank still goes out from Port Isaac to haul the pots every day. It's an effort in his 70's but he still has his father's look, and he built in Padstow at the end of the last century.

There's been rain on for about 20 years now," he said, "but she's still as good as the day she was built."

He left school in 1916 at the age of 14, to work with his father. In those days, they worked the three new, more catching different fish as they came to the Cornish coast.

SAILED SCHOONERS

When he was 18, the first world war started, and he joined the merchant navy, sailing schooners. "It was very hard work," he said. "There would be only four or five crew and we were kept hard at it all the time."

One of the schooners he sailed on was the Olive Branch from Truro, and he remembers the day when it was a fishing port. "I carried about 1500 lb of fish, and they lay up to Hancock, and back down again, and were left on the pier for the night."

When the war was over, Frank went back to fishing, and spent two summers crewing the large schooner of the merchant navy. Many of the young men went off in the summer of 1918, but he stayed in the merchant navy, but they always get back to Port Isaac in the winter, he said.

Between the wars, the fishing industry was very big business. One boat I worked on landed 25000 lb of fish, and they were all drift pots, he said, "and the water had landed on the pier a little before I joined her. That's the biggest catch I can remember."

The fish were taken to Port Isaac Road station for transportation along the old North Cornwall line and eventually to the markets all over the country.

OVER-FISHING

The fishing started to disappear before the last war, Frank believes, through over-fishing. The stocks built up a little again during and just after the war but

Built at Padstow in 1888 from mahogany for the grand sum of £10, this sturdy clinker hulled vessel displaced 1.01 tons, had a draft of 2 feet 6 inches, beam of 5 and 4 tenths and length of 16 feet. She proudly sported a fine 3.5 HP Kelvin engine - only the second boat in the port to have an engine fitted at that time up to 1911. In 1914, Richard Rowe became the sole owner of Annie and fished her throughout the First World War until 1928 when his son, Frank Rowe (Jack and Peter's father) took over ownership. He continued to fish her through to the late 1950s when she was laid up in the Port Gaverne Fish sheds. In 1989 the family donated Annie to Exeter Maritime Museum together with her documentation where she was put on exhibition to the public. Sadly after a number of years the Museum ran into financial problems and had to close and the historic collection of boats were split up. It is thought that Annie is now residing somewhere in Scotland.

However, Frank continued to keep his hand in, continuing to go out to sea fishing with his son Peter from his 13 foot open Del Quay Dory named Fulmar. This was the first fibreglass boats to join the fishing fleet at Port Isaac and started the movement away from traditional wooden built boats towards the higher powered fibreglass vessels in the harbour today.

Frank's other son, Jack, took up fishing full-time in 1970, launching a 17 foot Dell Quay Dory named Serene, working her along the North Cornwall coast from Port Isaac up as far as Bude.

Eight years later Jack and his brother Peter decided to join together commissioning local boat builder, Rod Baker, founder of Port Isaac Bay Marine, to design and build a 38 foot fast Potting Dory to be named Francis. In addition to the families long association with fishing, father Frank Rowe served as an Auxiliary Coastguard as did Jack and Peter for a number of years and both sons were also volunteer crew members of the original D Class lifeboat when the Lifeboat Station re-opened in 1967. Jack had the honour of helming the new boat out on demonstration at the RNLI Service of dedication on what proved to be a very lively day at sea ... but that's another story!

