

# THE RISE OF AN EARLY MODERN SHIPPING INDUSTRY



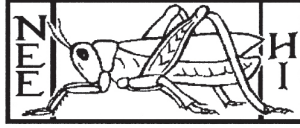
WHITBY'S GOLDEN FLEET, 1600–1750



ROSALIN BARKER

THE RISE OF AN EARLY MODERN  
SHIPPING INDUSTRY

WHITBY'S GOLDEN FLEET, 1600–1750



*Regions and Regionalism in History*

ISSN 1742–8254

This series, published in association with the AHRB Centre for North-East England History (NEEHI), aims to reflect and encourage the increasing academic and popular interest in regions and regionalism in historical perspective. It also seeks to explore the complex historical antecedents of regionalism as it appears in a wide range of international contexts.

*Series Editor*

Prof. Peter Rushton, Faculty of Education and Society, University of Sunderland

*Editorial Board*

Dr Joan Allen, School of Historical Studies, Newcastle University

Prof. Don MacRaild, School of Arts and Social Sciences, Northumbria University

Dr Christian Liddy, Department of History, University of Durham

Dr Diana Newton, School of Arts and Media, Teesside University

Proposals for future volumes may be sent to the following address:

Prof. Peter Rushton,  
Department of Social Sciences,  
Faculty of Education and Society,  
University of Sunderland,  
Priestman Building,  
New Durham Road,  
Sunderland,  
SR1 3PZ  
UK

Tel: 0191–515–2208

Fax: 0191–515–3415

[Peter.rushton@sunderland.ac.uk](mailto:Peter.rushton@sunderland.ac.uk)

# THE RISE OF AN EARLY MODERN SHIPPING INDUSTRY

WHITBY'S GOLDEN FLEET, 1600–1750

ROSALIN BARKER

THE BOYDELL PRESS

© Rosalin Barker 2011

All Rights Reserved. Except as permitted under current legislation no part of this work may be photocopied, stored in a retrieval system, published, performed in public, adapted, broadcast, transmitted, recorded or reproduced in any form or by any means, without the prior permission of the copyright owner

The right of Rosalin Barker to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

First published 2011  
The Boydell Press, Woodbridge

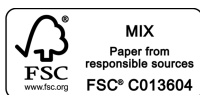
ISBN 978-1-84383-631-5

The Boydell Press is an imprint of Boydell & Brewer Ltd  
PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF, UK  
and of Boydell & Brewer Inc.  
668 Mt Hope Avenue, Rochester, NY 14620, USA  
website: [www.boydellandbrewer.com](http://www.boydellandbrewer.com)

The publisher has no responsibility for the continued existence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this book, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

A CIP record for this book is available  
from the British Library

Papers used by Boydell & Brewer Ltd are natural, recyclable products made from wood grown in sustainable forests



Typeset by  
Frances Hackeson Freelance Publishing Services, Brinscall, Lancs  
Printed in Great Britain by  
CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

# Contents

List of Illustrations	vii
Foreword	ix
Preface and Acknowledgements	xii
List of Abbreviations	xiv
Part 1: 1600–1689	
Introduction: A Small Port in Yorkshire	1
<b>1</b> Foundations	18
<b>2</b> The Early Seventeenth Century	34
<b>3</b> Upheaval	50
<b>4</b> Stabilisation and Confidence	58
<b>5</b> Overview of the Seventeenth Century	82
Part 2: 1690–1750	
<b>6</b> The Established Port	101
<b>7</b> ‘They That Go Down to the Sea in Ships’	128
Conclusion	152
Appendix 1: The Size of the Fleet	159
Appendix 2: Pressgang Instructions	165
Appendix 3: The Naming of Ships	168
Appendix 4: The Burnett Papers	171
Glossary and Definitions	172
Selected Bibliography and Further Reading	177
Index	185

## List of Illustrations

### Figures

1.1	Datum line showing excess of baptisms over burials in Whitby during the seventeenth century	30
1.2	Datum line showing excess of burials over baptisms in Harwich during the seventeenth century	31
2.1	National and local vital events, 1621–1635	42
2.2	Account from the voyage book of <i>John</i> , Browne Bushell, master	48
4.1	Occupations recorded in Whitby Parish Register, 1651–1680	62
4.2	Occupations relevant to seafaring, listed in Whitby parish registers during the seventeenth century	64
4.3	Whitby vital events, 1658–1690	67
4.4	Hearth Tax data: Hearths per household, Whitby east and west, 1673	69
4.5	Rates of exemption from Hearth Tax in the seventeenth century	71
4.6	Population estimates for Clark and Hosking's 'small towns' shown by the Compton Census and the Hearth Tax	75
4.7	Estimated size of the Whitby fleet, 1600–1675	80
4.8	Estimated population of Whitby, 1600–1689	80
5.1	Alum voyages in Whitby vessels, 1612–1678, from Whitby Port Books	84
6.1	Engineering drawing of Whitby Piers	107
6.2	Ratio of Newcastle to London chaldrons	120
6.3	Profitability, 1716–1728	122
6.4	Profitability, 1756–1786	125
7.1	Birthplace, other than Whitby, of servants recorded in Muster Rolls, 1747–1748	138
7.2	Annual wages paid aboard <i>Three Sisters</i> , 1761–1787	140
7.3	Mean annual wage costs, ten vessels, 1632–1765	142
7.4	The age range of masters, Muster Rolls, 1747–1749	150

### Maps

0.1	The coastline of England showing Whitby and major ports in the early modern period	6
-----	--	---

0.2	Lionel Charlton's map of 1778	10
3.1	Map of the Sledway and the approaches to Whitby	57

## Plates

Between pages xiv and 1

i	Argument's Yard	
ii	Ghaut, or alley, leading to harbour	
iii	Bakehouse Square	
iv	Whitby's modern piers	
v	The brig <i>Crisis</i>	
vi	Driven on to a lee shore	
vii	Ropewalks, Spital	
viii	Spital bridge	
ix (a) and (b)	'Taking the ground'	
x	Masts in a townscape	
xi (a)–(c)	Anti-scorbutic herbs growing near Whitby	
0.1	The topsail schooner <i>Alert</i> , in 1888	17
2.1 (a)	Luke Foxe and the Claim to Hudson's Bay	38
and (b)		39
5.1	An eighteenth-century drawing of a ketch	87
6.1	Whitby piers from the air in rough weather	106
6.2	Engraving of one of Whitby's eighteenth-century drawbridges	118

## Tables

1.1	Whitby vessels leaving and entering Whitby	25
2.1	The alienation of Cholmley real estate in the late 1630s	43
3.1	National and local vital events, 1654–1680	53
4.1	Home ports of colliers clearing from NE, 1614 and 1687–1688	60
4.2	Durham and Yorkshire Ports: Hearth Taxes for 1672–1674	73
5.1	The daily rate of pay at sea on the ketch <i>Judith</i> , 1679	89
5.2	The ports visited by <i>Judith</i> between September and December 1681	93
5.3	Houses with three or more hearths in West Whitby	95
5.4	Houses with three or more hearths in East Whitby	97
6.1	Tonnage owned in leading outports in 1702	109
6.2	Shareholding in <i>Hannah</i> , 1716–1718	113
6.3	Profits in <i>Hannah</i> , 1715–1718	113
6.4	Share-holders in <i>Hannah</i> , 1716–1718	114



6.5	Share-holders in <i>William and Jane</i> , 1718–1726	116
6.6	Charges for Winter-work	121
7.1	Stability of <i>Judith</i> 's Crew, 1677–82	134
7.2	Apprenticeship of Alexander Sibbald	136
7.3	William Barker's career on board <i>Three Sisters</i>	137
7.4	The voyages of <i>Archer</i> in the Transport Service, 1775–1788	144
7.5	Seamen's Hospital petitions, by type of injury or cause of death	149
Appendix 1.1	Tonnage in principal English ports	160
Appendix 1.2	Tonnage burthen for selected ports, excluding that involved in coal, salt, lime and fishing	161

## Foreword

Whitby is famous for St Hilda, Dracula and Captain Cook. Cook learnt his craft at Whitby. In 1747/8 he was one of no fewer than 1,256 apprentices, or as we might say today cadets, indentured with masters in the town. It was here he learnt navigation and it was here he learnt the importance of the Whitby diet of fresh vegetables, especially the wild plants growing on the cliffs to north and south containing vitamin C to ward off scurvy. Whitby in the eighteenth century was the nursery of English seamanship.

What has not been fully understood until the publication of this eye-opening work is that in the middle of the eighteenth century Whitby was the base of one of the largest merchant fleets in England. This is all the more remarkable when one considers that Whitby was a cramped harbour at the mouth of a small river with an isolated hinterland on a largely inhospitable coast. Rosalin Barker uses for the first time a remarkable collection of documents held in the town to demonstrate the importance of the fleet in England's maritime history. Starting with just two vessels in the early seventeenth century it rose to 318, with a total carrying capacity of 78,000 tons in the late eighteenth. It all began with alum, produced from the deposits of alum shale in the cliffs of northern Yorkshire. Whitby ships brought coal from Newcastle and urine from London, both vital in the production process. But the business soon expanded into a large slice of the carrying trade of the North Sea based on the transport of coals from Newcastle to London and timber from the Baltic to English ports. It extended into the Atlantic and in the eighteenth century into commissions from the navy to carry stores and troops world wide as well as into Greenland whaling. The vessels themselves were unadorned working boats, the eighteenth-century equivalent of Masefield's dirty British coasters, complete with cargoes of Tyne coal. But it was black gold to Whitby's ship owners.

Whitby was never a great port in itself. It was the home of a fleet owned by Whitby men. And until the vessels got too many and too big it was where they were built, where they wintered and were refitted. Barker's sources enable her to reveal the business side of this industry, financed through stocks and shares; the stock to provide working capital for the master to use on each trip, and to enable the burden of repairs to be carried equally by the holder of each share, the shares the division of holdings in individual vessels which were rarely owned by just one man. Their business was shipping, and they enriched the town by their business. Barker is also able to explore the seaman's life and career, dangerous but relatively well-paid and, in the Whitby fleet, relatively well cared for. All this is set in a meticulously researched account of the town's growth in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Clinging to the cliff sides

east and west of the river, it was, she suggests, an unusually healthy place to live if only because the tide regularly cleared the sewage out to sea.

Eventually Whitby was sidelined by the sheer growth in British world-wide trade, the concentration of ship owning in London, the increase in the size of ships and the isolation of its harbour. It struggled on during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, its remaining shipping captured in the haunting photographs of Frank Meadow Sutcliffe reproduced below. The railway brought a surge in fishing and tourism. Now the fishing has largely gone: tourism remains. Whitby mariners make as much money from trips around the bay in replicas of its eighteenth-century vessels as they do from the harvest of the sea.

Rosalin Barker has spent many years immersing herself in the little known shipping archives of Whitby, held by the Literary and Philosophical Society, especially the voyage books and the Seamen's Hospital papers. These hidden treasures underpin the vivid account she gives of the many men who went down to the sea in ships and brought unprecedented prosperity back to the town. They have enabled her to bring this golden age back to life, when Whitby was the home of a great international carrying fleet and a thriving maritime industrial centre. As such the work is an important contribution to British maritime history. But it is also a study of the early modern town that will become an indispensable point of reference for all its future historians.

*Professor Anthony Pollard*

## Preface and Acknowledgements

This work, *The Rise of an Early Modern Shipping Industry: Whitby's Golden Fleet, 1600–1750*, is the distillation of some twenty years of research, much of it undertaken while working in university adult education, an environment which introduces the historian to unexpected elements of history, as he or she responds to the questions raised by students with a wide experience of the communities, both geographical and professional, in which they spend their daily lives.

One may, in the end, decide to specialise in one aspect of history, in this case the history of the merchant sailing fleet of a small but important seaport on the North Sea coast of England. Inevitably, however, all the other aspects of history one has investigated over many years come into play. The study of demography and epidemiology, of urban development and agricultural practice, of religious and sectarian influences, and of fiscal, legal and probate documents, as well as the wider history of British and European history in which the merchant fleet plied its trade, reveal their importance as the links between these aspects become less tenuous, and strengthen with each new examination of apparently insignificant events.

The development of information technology has made possible the systematic collection of historical data, and even more importantly, has enabled the historian to discern connections between apparently trivial, and tiny, scraps of evidence, and produce an informed whole in which all these scraps which have been electronically squirreled away can suddenly play a significant rôle, and help the historian to make sense of long-gone events. It is the small print of local and regional history which in the end illuminates the great narrative of national and international history.

Inter-disciplinary studies are increasingly important in the modern age, when access to the work of scholars in other fields is so readily accessible, both through the traditional library and through the electronic media. Perhaps, as far as this book is concerned, the most germane is the excavation of the wreck of the *General Carleton* of Whitby, lost near Gdansk in 1785, over the last fifteen years by the marine archaeologists of the Polish National Museum of Gdansk. The artefacts and clothes which have emerged from the wreck are astonishingly well-preserved, and redolent of the lives of the thousands of Whitby and other seamen who sailed through the Sound and into the difficult Baltic Sea over many centuries.

Whitby is a community bound to the sea, but by the sea it is bound to the wider world in ways which would have bemused the people who lived in inland towns, villages and remote hamlets in the early modern period in which this

book is set. Its world-wide links are most cogently expressed by two unrelated events at the beginning and the end of the period. In 1631 Luke Foxe, mariner, of Hull, where he was born, and Whitby, where he married and lived for much of his life, sailed a 40-ton pinnace, the *Charles*, to the Arctic, in yet another search for the fabled North-west Passage. He found instead Hudson's Bay, in which he reinforced the British claim to that area of what became Canada, and called it 'New North Wales'. He made the return voyage within one year and with all his crew alive, despite the dreadful toll normally exacted by scurvy. Some 140 years later another Whitby-trained navigator, who also made his name in Canada, as a hydrographer during and after the Seven Years' War, James Cook, made landfall on the east coast of Australia, in the area now called 'New South Wales'. He too brought his crews home from their voyages of discovery, in Whitby-built ships, without losing anyone to scurvy.

The source for much of the research for this study of the town's merchant fleet is Whitby Museum, whose collection mirrors so much of Whitby's seafaring past. The ship-models, the equipment, the navigational instruments and the ship-building tools are deeply embedded in Whitby's history. So too are the exotic treasures brought from around the world by past generations of seamen. The library is full of books for the instruction of the ambitious young mariner, and has a bound copy of the mathematical notebooks of a small boy sent to sea at the start of the eighteenth century. With six-figure logarithms and elegant drawings of 'pyrit' ships and naval vessels, it is a delight. Mathematics were a good deal more important than spelling when it came to survival. From the Seamen's Hospital, sad letters survive telling of loss at sea, or incapacitating injuries, while vessels' account books and logs describe, often laconically, long voyages, at times with unlikely cargoes, such as a donkey named Sulphur, bound for Carolina, along with several horses, on board a brig called *Flora*.

The book is divided into two parts, the first of which covers the first ninety years of the seventeenth century, and charts the growth of the port and its fleet, and its increasing importance in the industry as a whole. The Introduction describes Whitby, and the sources, both primary and secondary, for the book, as well as the time frame. The first four chapters account for the early years and the difficult period of the Civil War, and the confidence which came with Whitby's dominance of the coal trade in the years leading up to the Glorious Revolution. The final chapter in this section gives an overview of the century.

Part 2 deals with the first half of the 'long' eighteenth century, until around 1750, although any exact stopping-point for what was a very dynamic industry is difficult to pinpoint. It is divided into two much longer chapters than those of Part 1. Chapter 6 is subdivided into sections describing all aspects of Whitby's fleet and, importantly, the town which it supported and which in turn supported the industry. Chapter 7 covers in detail the all-important workforce, with an examination of the sources, and the work, rewards and risks inherent in seafaring. The Conclusion is followed by four Appendices, a Glossary and Selected Bibliography.

It has been a work which has consumed many months and years, and given me great affection for this remote and often inaccessible town. It is a work which has also been a great source of pleasure, and introduced me to events and people who have, over many centuries, made this place, and above all, who enabled its 'golden fleet' to come into being.

My chief debt is to the countless master mariners, clerks, officials, writers of private letters, and public servants who kept the records on which this study is based. They are recorded in the footnotes, and in the bibliography, but without this unique record the work would have been impossible. To them must be added the members, officers and volunteers of the Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society, founded in 1823, who have assiduously gathered and recorded this archive, and the diligent officials of Whitby Seamen's Hospital Charity, founded in 1675, who kept such detailed records of the seamen who depended on them for their assistance. Thanks are also due to Michael Shaw of the Sutcliffe Gallery for his patient help with photographs by Frank Meadow Sutcliffe.

I have been willingly assisted by the professional staff of other archives from the Northern Isles to East Anglia and the home counties, as well as The National Archives and the British Library. The research was set in motion many years ago with a post-graduate grant from the Open University, and has been encouraged since by other grant-aiding bodies, notably the Marc Fitch Fund. I am also indebted to the University of Hull for its generous award of an Honorary Fellowship which has given me access to all the facilities of a major academic institution, as well as the fellowship of other academics.

To friends, colleagues and students from several universities, whose lively minds have brought great insights to my work, I give thanks, as I do to the patient master mariners and seafarers who have answered my queries about technicalities. The Cambridge Group for the Study of Population and Social Structure (CAMPOP) enabled my forays into historical demography, many years ago, and I am very grateful to them for their guidance, as I am to Professor Glyndwr Williams and Professor Anthony Pollard, who urged me to write this book. I am further indebted to Professor Peter Rushton, the commissioning editor of NEEHI for his patience and encouragement, to NEEHI itself for their financial support towards publication, and to Boydell and Brewer, the publishers.

Above all, I must thank Sophie Forgan and Victor Gray for their encouraging, and perceptive, comments on the completed manuscript, and for their suggested emendations. Surviving blots or misinterpretations are my own.

This book could not have been written without the support, patience and tolerance shown by my family to the piles of books and papers, and my general air of abstraction while I was working.

## List of Abbreviations

BL	British Library
Clark and Hosking	C. Clark and J. Hosking (eds), <i>Population Estimates of English Small Towns, 1550–1851</i> , revised edition, University of Leicester Press, 1993
Corfield	P. J. Corfield, <i>The Impact of English Towns 1700–1800</i> , Oxford University Press, 1982
Davis	R. Davis, <i>The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries</i> , Macmillan, 1962
ERO	Essex Record Office
FMS	Frank Meadow Sutcliffe
Gaskin	R. T. Gaskin, <i>The Old Seaport of Whitby</i> , first published Forth, Whitby, 1909, Caedmon reprints, 1986
HBCA	Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Winnipeg
IAB	Ian Barker
Lewis	D. B. Lewis (ed.), <i>The Yorkshire Coast</i> , Normandy Press, 1991
NAS	National Archives of Scotland
NRO	Norfolk Record Office
NS	Nan Sykes, botanist
NYCRO	North Yorkshire County Record Office
OA	Orkney Archives
RRB	the author
SBC	Scarborough Borough Council
SRO	Ipswich and Suffolk Record Office
TNA	The National Archives
TWRO	Tyne and Wear Record Office
WLP	Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society
Woodward	D. Woodward (ed.), <i>Descriptions of East Yorkshire: Leland to Defoe</i> , East Yorkshire Local History Series no. 39, 1985





Plate i: Argument's Yard. A photograph by Frank Meadow Sutcliffe of one of the most photogenic yards leading down to the harbour.





Plate ii (above): A narrow ghaut, or alley, leading down to the harbour, photographed by Frank Meadow Sutcliffe. These were gradually filled in with housing as the population grew. Plate iii (below): Bakehouse Square, showing evidence of infill on the west side, photographed by Frank Meadow Sutcliffe.





Plate iv (above): Whitby's present day piers in a northerly gale, showing their effectiveness at calming the harbour, and also their piecemeal construction over the centuries. (photograph: Scarborough Borough Council). Plate v (below): *Crisis*, a brig launched in the slump after the Napoleonic Wars, and named accordingly. This pierhead painting is one of Whitby Museum's fine collection of the genre.

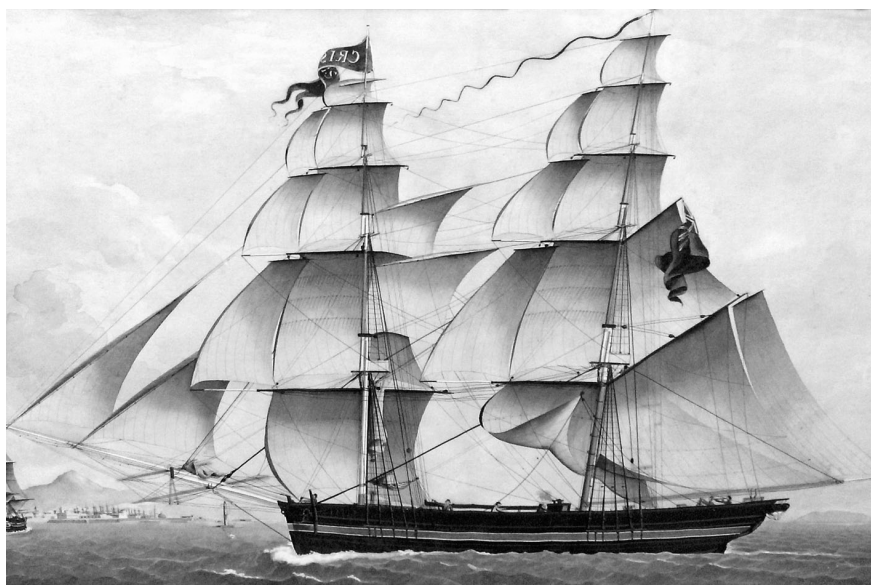








Plate vi (opposite, above): Driven on to a lee shore; this was one of the most dangerous fates for a sailing vessel. It occurred when an on-shore gale proved stronger than the anchor and cable holding her to ride out the storm, which either failed or dragged, or when a rudder broke in similar circumstances. Photographed by Frank Meadow Sutcliffe.

Plate vii (opposite, below): Ropewalks, Spital. At Spital bridge, near the site of the mediaeval leper hospital, there was a timber pond where baulks of timber could be stored; by the time Frank Meadow Sutcliffe took this photograph it was used as a haven for cobs. Alongside can be seen the covered shed of a lengthy ropewalk.

Plate viii (above): Spital bridge as it is now, with signs in the walls of the sluice-gate system which kept the pond's level at the right height. (Photograph: the author)



Plate ix (a) (above) and (b) (opposite, above): 'Taking the ground'. Not every small importer had access to a quay, and vessels often came aground and unloaded coal into wagons on the beach. The vessel sitting almost upright next to the pier (a) shows just why these vessels were so popular with the government as transports. They could be grounded safely for unloading (b) where no harbours existed or for repairs to the hull, and they did not topple over while they were aground. Photographs by Frank Meadow Sutcliffe.



Plate x (below): It is difficult now to imagine what a seaport like Whitby looked like in the days of sail. Masts were often tall enough for their tops to be level with the parish churchyard on the east cliff. A large number of them in port at once would have a dramatic effect on the townscape. Photograph by Frank Meadow

