

Working Boats of the Fleet Lagoon and Chesil Bank

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Fishing the Fleet Lagoon and off Chesil Bank required two special boats, traditionally protected by a 'holy stone' for good luck. Fleet Trows are flat bottomed, rowed by 'copsed' oars" or punted with 'quant' poles. Used by fishermen to cross the 'Little Sea' to their lerrets, the boats they used in the 'Big Sea', and to bring their catch back to the mainland. Also built as gentlemen's fishing boats and even for the King to shoot wildfowl, they were also employed to catch a shrimp known as 'Billy Winter' and eels using 'fyke' nets or 'eel-peckers'.

Lerrets, unique to this area, were first recorded in 1615, but no doubt existed in medieval times. Used for 'seine fishing' mackerel, as lifeboats and in rowing races between crews at local regattas, they were kept on Chesil Bank and doubled up as fishermen's shelters in bad weather. To aid launching and recovery they were double-ended with a full bow and stern, a high stern post and a "start-rope" through the keel. Propelled by 4, 6 or 8 'copsed oars' pivoted on thole pins, sometimes assisted by a simple sailing rig, the oars broad counterbalance was used as a firm surface when pulling the lerrets over the pebbles.



Square-stern & double ended trows



Trow eel fishing in Fleet



Trow rowed with copsed oars & thole pins



A trow built for Edward VII



Trows with quant poles & copsed oars



Trow moored in the Fleet



Fyke-nets



Eel-peckers

'Holy stone' carried for luck



Lerrets saving lives from the 'Avalanche'



Lerrets stored on Chesil Bank



Lerret ready for sea



1846 lerret racing poster



Lerret's characteristic high sternpost



Launching a lerret through the surf



Boxing-up the catch of mackerel