

Monthly Reports on the Fishing in the Neighbourhood of Plymouth.

By

W. L. Calderwood,

Director of the Laboratory of the Marine Biological Association.

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT.

IN these reports I shall not take into consideration the minor methods of fishing which are practised in the locality, such, for instance, as eel spearing, mullet trapping, shrimp and prawn fishing, but shall confine myself to the most important branches, in which the beam trawl, drift and seine nets, and long lines are employed, and I shall also include crab and lobster fishing.

With reference to the class of boats employed in this neighbourhood, the **trawlers**, compared to those of the North Sea, are not of large size. The average boat is about forty-three tons. They are usually rigged as ketches (dandy-rig), but the smaller ones sometimes as cutters. The dandy-rig is preferred because with it there is not the very large mainsail and heavy boom of the cutter, and also because, like the yawl, where the mizzen mast is stepped behind instead of before the stern-post, the vessel can be more easily brought under easy canvas in heavy weather. These vessels only carry four men and a boy as crew, and therefore the question of ease in handling becomes one of great importance. Steam trawling is not practised from Plymouth, nor do the sailing trawlers fish in the "fleeting" system common in the North Sea, where many boats belong to one company and remain on the fishing grounds it may be for weeks, while their fish is carried to market by special steamers.

At Plymouth each trawler is worked independently, goes out to the fishing grounds east of the Eddystone, Mounts Bay, or Bristol Channel, and returns with its catch. The mesh of the trawl-net varies from four inches at the mouth to an inch and a half at the cod end, and therefore can take very small fish.

The boats using drift-nets for catching herrings, mackerel, and pilchards, are invariably rigged as luggers. They are of various sizes, not exceeding twenty-five tons. The nets for mackerel, set by one boat, may reach two to three miles, but the pilchard and

herring nets are smaller, and do not much exceed one mile in length. The large luggers carry five men and a boy.

The boats employed in **long-line fishing**, or, to use the local term, in "**bultering**," are the most numerous. They are rigged either as luggers or cutters, a mainsail without a boom always being used in the latter case, and vary from twenty-five tons down to quite small rowing boats. A certain intermingling of classes takes place between the long-line boats or "**hookers**" and the drift-net boats, because at certain seasons a large lugger may fish by net and at another by line. In this case she carries the same crew for working the lines as she did when employing nets. A boat, however, which carries a large fleet of mackerel nets seldom has a long line on board at the same time. She may abandon one style of fishing and take up the other, but it is reserved for the herring and pilchard boats to carry both at the same time and set either. The boats which use only the long line and never venture far out into the open Channel after the shoals are of about twelve tons. These form the class of hookers proper, and work round the Hand Deeps and Eddystone. After them comes the swarm of little boats which may use set-lines, hand-lines, moored herring-nets, or shrimp trawls; but of all the boats fishing out of Plymouth the small hookers probably render the best account of themselves, not only because the price of the "**take**" has to be divided amongst fewer hands, but because the expense of keeping up a small boat of the kind required is comparatively insignificant; and, since they do not go far from land, the fish can be more quickly caught and put in the market.

For Customs purposes the limits of the port of Plymouth are from the river Erme, eight miles east of Plymouth Sound, to the river Seaton, ten miles west of Plymouth Sound. In this district there are 257 boats registered under the Sea Fisheries Acts. 180 belong to Plymouth proper, 10 to Stonehouse and Devonport, 29 to Cawsand, and 38 to Yealm. The boats are registered as follows:

Trawlers	.	.	.	72
Drift-net boats	.	.	.	36
Hookers	.	.	.	149
				<hr/>
				257

The fishing-boat harbour at Plymouth is, however, never without a considerable number of boats hailing from other ports. Brixham trawlers fishing in the west, or round in the Bristol Channel, land their fish here; and any Grimsby, Yarmouth, or Lowestoft boats, fishing on the south coast, find their market and harbour at Plymouth.

LOOE

PLYMOUTH

JANUARY

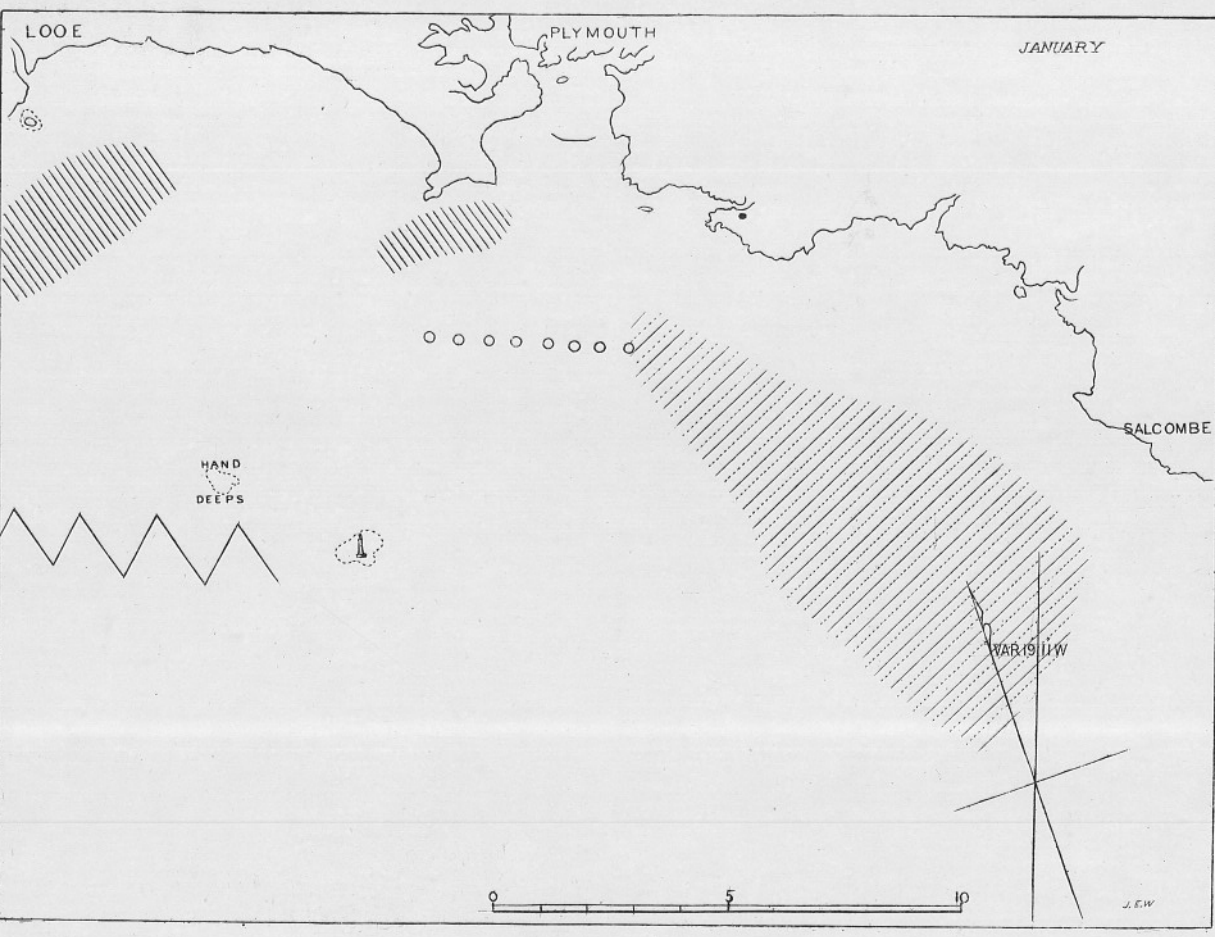
SALCOMBE

HAND
DEEPS

VAR 19 11 W

0 5 10

J.E.W



LOOE

PLYMOUTH

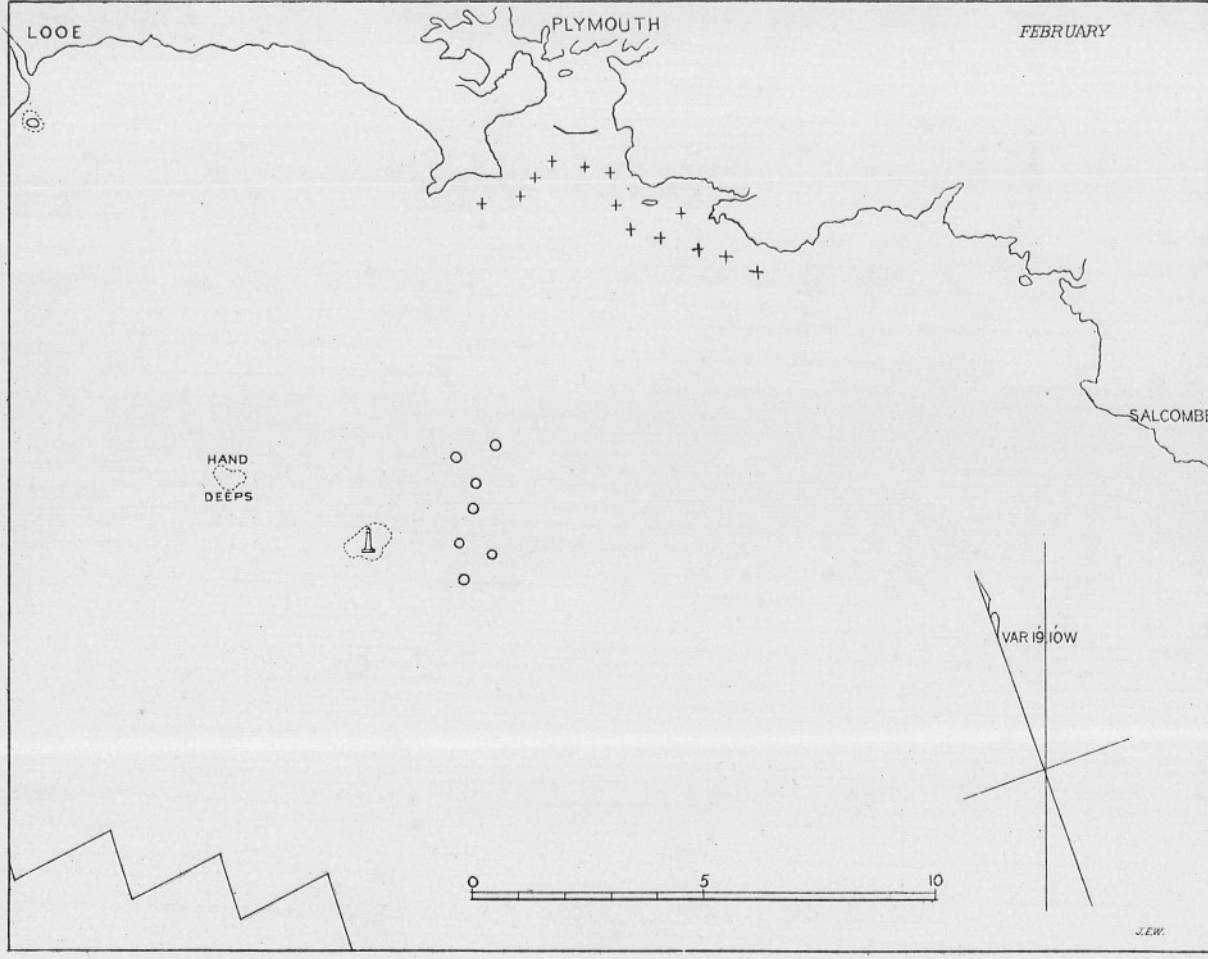
FEBRUARY

SALCOMBE

HAND
DEEPS

VAR 19° 10' W

0 5 10



LOOE

PLYMOUTH

MARCH

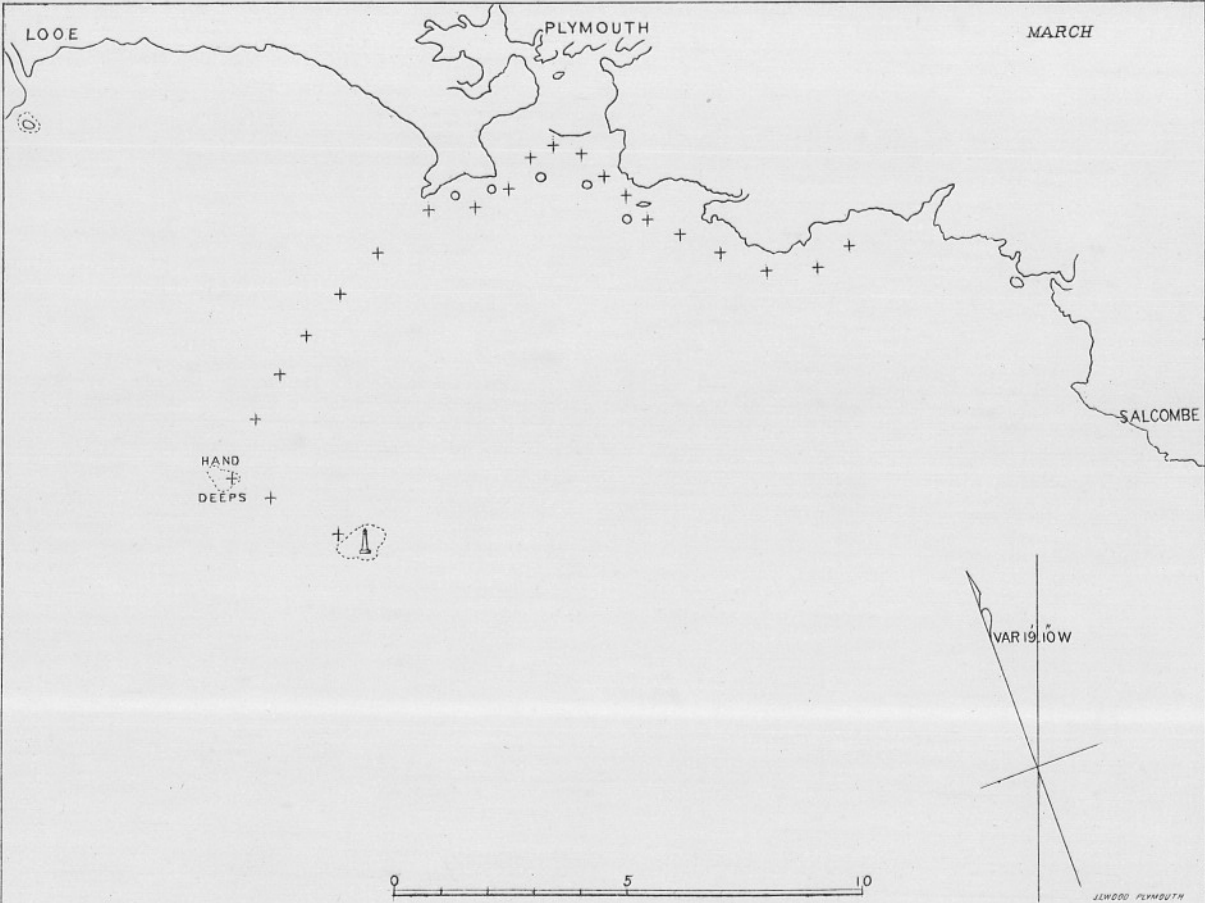
SALCOMBE

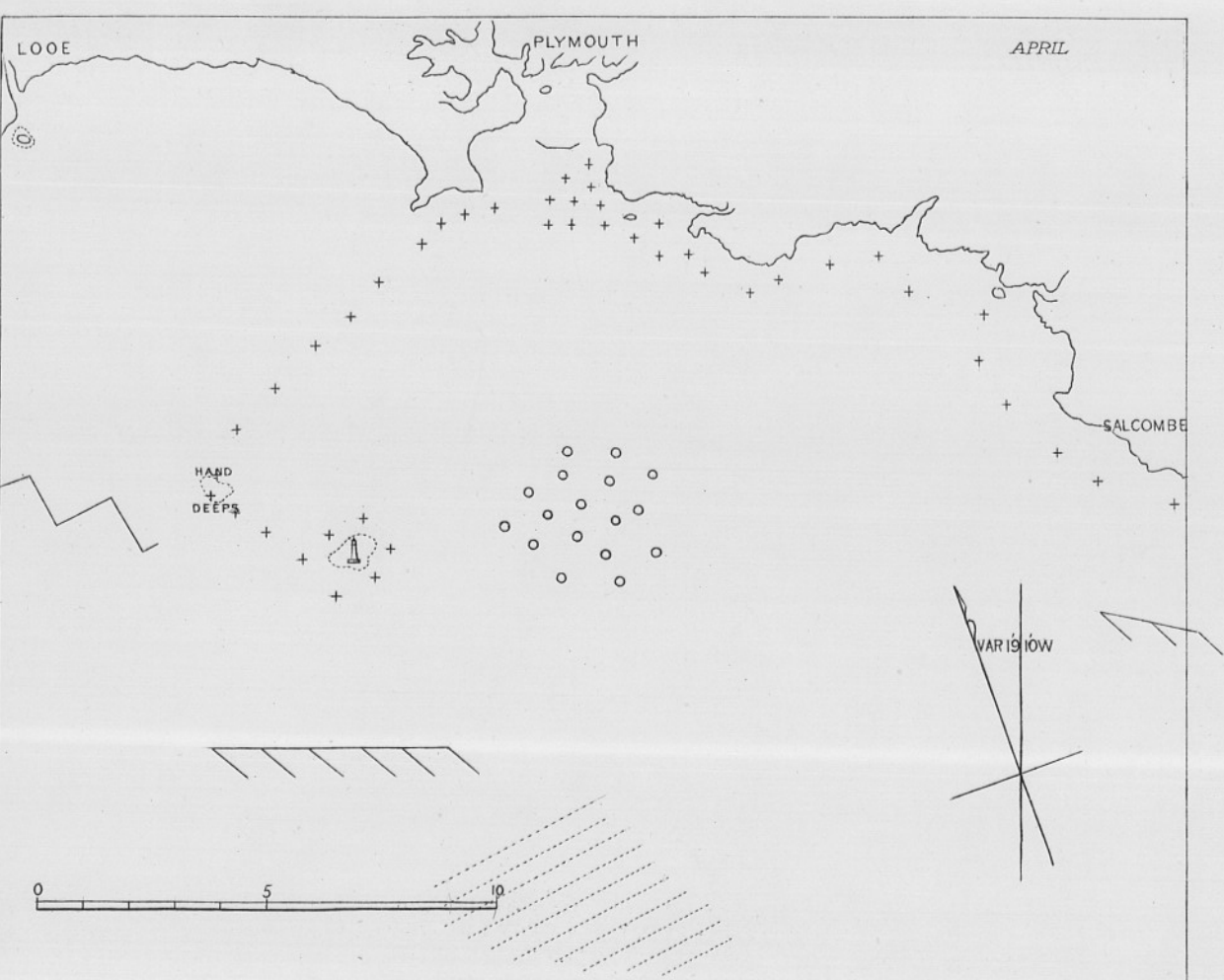
HAND
DEEPS

VAR 19.10 W

0 5 10

LEWIS PLYMOUTH









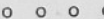

It is in the winter months, however, when the herring and mackerel season is at its height, and the Cornish boats arrive from Fowey, Looe, and Penzance, that the neighbourhood of Plymouth assumes its busiest aspect. The drift-net fleet alone is then composed of between three and four hundred sail.

In order that the fishing prosecuted around Plymouth may be known, and the various fishing grounds worked upon at different times of the year clearly demonstrated, I have thought it advisable to attempt the construction of monthly charts, each one showing, as nearly as possible, the average condition for that month. It must, of course, be understood that in these charts it is impossible to show all the minor fluctuations of the fishing.

There must always be a certain number of boats which, not succeeding in one place, try others, it may be far removed from the locality in which the majority of boats are fishing; or the shoals of fish themselves may suddenly alter their positions, so that the boats have for some days to scatter in all directions in search of them. Still, the fishing of one month is so distinct from that of another, and the alterations take place in such regular order, that it seems to me to be quite possible to construct charts which will represent exactly what grounds may be expected to be worked over in any particular season.

In this, the first attempt at anything of the kind for this locality, I do not say that the markings or positions of the various fishing boats may require no alteration, since it is possible or probable that some exceptional condition may be included in what is only meant to be an average condition; but a basis will, at all events, have been constructed from which to work.

Key to Symbols used in Monthly Fishery Charts.

	=	position of herring boats.
	=	„ of mackerel boats.
	=	„ of pilchard boats.
	=	„ of trawlers.
	=	„ of whiting boats.
	=	„ of crab and lobster boats.