

BOOKS

Colin Bradley admires an in-depth guide to every fishing boat operating out of Westcountry Ports, harbours & Coves



IDENTIFIED: Classic fishing boats FY519 and PZ8 in Plymouth Sound

Hobby enhances safety for sailors

BARELY three years ago, retired pilot Stewart Lenton had absolutely no interest in fishing boats. But now he can tell you something about virtually every one of the 1,250 registered craft that have worked out of the Westcountry since then.

The 66-year-old served in the RAF for 16 years, during which he flew the legendary British bomber, the Canberra. Later he became an airline pilot and operated from Gatwick for 22 years before joining Plymouth-based Brymon Airways.

After 18 months of flying from the city he retired there to follow his other passion - living beside the sea and sailing on it.

With time on his hands, he became a volunteer watchkeeper at the National Coast Watch Institution's Ramsc Head station, and it was there that his interest in fishing boats was unexpectedly ignited.

Daily duties included logging every fishing vessel that passed the station, but fishing gear or rough seas sometimes obscured names and numbers.

When skippers call up on their radio it is customary for

Like painting the Forth Bridge, his task of photographing each fishing boat will never be finished

them to use their ship's name as a call sign. But without seeing the name, the watchkeepers had difficulty in visually identifying which vessel had made the call, especially when others were in the area.

To overcome the problem Stewart created a recognition aid in the form of a display of photographs that he took of local vessels.

It proved such a hit with his colleagues that he produced more for volunteers manning other lookouts in Devon and Cornwall.

The photographs became useful, too, for harbourmasters, coastguards and lifeboat crews, and now his unique study has been turned into two special volumes following interest from fishermen and others who wanted to see or own his collection in book form.

Fishing Boats and Ports in Devon and Fishing Boats and Ports in Cornwall
by Stewart and Liz Lenton
Channel View Publishing, Plymouth,
£14.90 each

The labour of love involved Stewart and his wife Liz, a retired GP, travelling hundreds of miles to every port, harbour and cove in the region.

While Stewart tracked down each vessel and photographed it, Liz helped research the stories of the safe havens in which they are moored.

The result is not only an "I Spy" guide to each fishing boat but also an in-depth look at one of the Westcountry's oldest and toughest industries, the methods of fishing adopted and the communities which make their living from it.

Stewart says that, like painting the Forth Bridge, his task of photographing each fishing boat will never be finished.

"There will always be the need to update the collection because fishing boat appearances change, vessels are de-registered and others appear either newly in service or switch ports," he says.

The couple hope that both books will encourage people to explore the region in a different way.

"We hope that they will be used as an incentive to find the boats and places illustrated," they say.

"This should provide a more interactive experience in exploring the area and encourage a build-up of knowledge about our fishing and coastal heritage, rather than just admiring the fishing boats as the colourful and picturesque addition to the wonderful scenery they undoubtedly are."

Both books are available through Stewart's website - www.fishingboats.co.uk - or his e-mail address - slenton@btinternet.com

