

Hamble's Crab and Lobster Trade



A Hamble crab & lobster boat in an Irish Sea snow storm 1822

In the 1800s Hamble was prominent in the crab and lobster industry and in 1842 it supplied the metropolitan markets with nearly 90,000 lobsters and crabs. It delivered an average of 40 baskets daily and each basket contained between 30 to 40 shellfish. At this time, it was now possible to supply such a large number due to the new railway link between London and Southampton as previously they had to be sent by carts which took 24 hours by road. It was always necessary to send the shellfish alive to render them saleable in London.

The crabs and lobsters were not caught locally but bought from local fishermen in the west country, Ireland or Brittany and brought back in sailing smacks with wet holds and watertight bulkheads. Holes were drilled through the hull to allow sea water to circulate to keep the catch alive for the journey. Each smack could carry between 7,000 to 9,000 shellfish without food for up to a month. The risk to the shellfish came from becoming becalmed for a long time when the water did not circulate, as well as thunder or fresh water that would kill them when in the smack's wells.

When at Hamble they were kept alive in large wooden vessels or boxes known as carbs but they could only be kept for a limited period and the London markets wanted an equitable supply and not all at once. Therefore, at the beginning of the 1850s the Scovell fishing merchant family spent £1,300 on constructing a crab and lobster pond at Hamble Point to preserve a large quantity of shellfish until there was a demand from the metropolitan markets. The lobster pond was said to be able to hold two to three hundred thousand shellfish. A small house was built next to it for a man to live in to feed the shellfish. If they were not fed sufficiently they would kill one another.

The picture above shows Hamble skipper Giles Strugnell in the fishing smack 'Friendship' in the Irish Sea during a winter snow storm in 1822. Giles

continued skippering fishing smacks all his life and unfortunately after being at sea for 70 years he drowned when the Hamble fishing smack 'Providence' he was sailing foundered during a heavy gale in the Irish Sea in 1874. Along with him his crew died which included his son George who left a widow and seven children and a boy crew member William Vant both from Hamble. The other member of crew that drowned was William Bevis from Bursledon and he left a widow and a child.

As can be seen it was a hazardous trade and this was not the only loss of a boat with all hands from the river but fortunately in some other incidents the crew were picked up after sinking. The crab & lobster trade gradually decline with the improvement of rail and road transport that subsequently superseded sail and it ceased after the First World War.

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