

JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL MAP COLLECTORS' SOCIETY

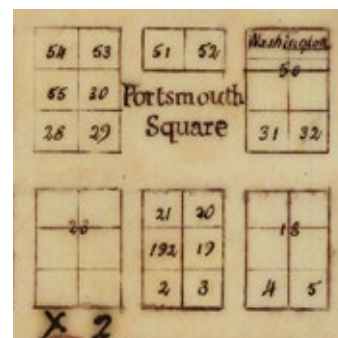
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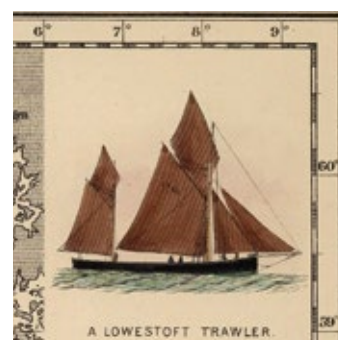
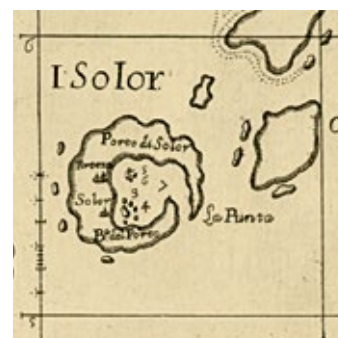
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Front cover Detail from Willem Lodewijcksz's 'Nova Tabula Insularum Iavae, Sumatrae, Borneonis et Aliarum Mallaccam usque delineata in insula Iava', 1598. The Barry Lawrence Ruderman Map Collection, courtesy Stanford University Libraries.

WORTH A LOOK

A Piscatorial Atlas of the North Sea

Ljiljana Ortolja-Baird

Norwegian born Ole Theodor Olsen (1838–1925) is the compiler and publisher of *The Piscatorial Atlas of the North Sea, English and St. George's channels*,¹ one of the first publications of maps of the North Sea fisheries to be based on comprehensive statistical information which had been collected over many years.

Olsen was a fellow of several learned societies,² including the Royal Astronomical Society which published his obituary in their monthly notices. From it we learn that Olsen went to sea as a boy learning his craft as a mariner aboard an English sailing ship trading with India.³ After his career at sea ended he settled in Grimsby on the east coast of England. It was at the time England's biggest and most advanced fishing port. From his introductory remarks to the book we glean that it was in Grimsby where he worked for US naval officer and pioneering oceanographer Lieutenant Matthew Maury collecting data of the physical conditions of the North Sea. This experience inspired the idea for his piscatorial atlas: 'I could apply like data for the benefit of our fishermen in the North Sea'.

In the early 1870s, Olsen devised a simple form which he described as 'a Fisherman's Log-Book, a kind of modification of Maury'. These he distributed to fishermen in Grimsby and Hull. In it, he requested data about location, tides, tack, and weather; quantity and description of fish; as well as information on their 'refuse' (bycatch). At the behest of Frank Buckland, a natural historian with a particular interest in fish, a data column headed 'Mr Buckland's Naturalist's column' was added with a request for specimens of species to be sent to Buckland at his London address.

In 1883, after compiling the data for over a decade, Olsen published *The Piscatorial Atlas*. It is a joint imprint of Olsen in Grimsby and Taylor & Francis in London. The book comprises fifty superbly tinted maps, each capturing at a glance the data Olsen had assiduously gathered. The first four maps illustrate the set of tides, soundings, the composition of the seabed (Fig. 1) and the names of the fisheries. The remaining forty-six cover the

species caught by the industry and their distribution in the North Sea (Fig. 2). They are organised into the five fish types: 'Silvery & Surface', 'Round & Mid-water', 'Armed & Scaled', 'Flat & Ground', 'Crustacea & Shellfish'.

Each fish is figured in the lower right-hand corner of the Chart, noting time of spawning, number of eggs, where and how caught, bait, food, size, weight, quality, when in season and other remarks chiefly based on an average of the extended information derived from the fishermen for a number of years back, verified by statements of scientific writers. (Fig. 3).⁴

Remarks include references to the diminishing stock of certain fish such as whiting, and whether, they need protection and regulation, or whether some, like the 'royal' fish, sturgeon, should be cultivated by artificial hatching; whelks 'a poor man's dish' and the conger eel are noted for their nutritious value and suitability for the poorer classes; and trends in consumer popularity of a particular fish or demand for it. Oysters, for example, were so sought after during the nineteenth century (in 1864 700 million European native oysters were consumed in London alone) that Olsen remarks supply cannot meet the demand and more oyster vessels are being added to the 'Great Grimsby Fishing Fleet' to dredge the mighty bed between Heligoland and Dogger Bank (see Fig. 1).

There is a further inset in the upper right-hand corner of each map depicting the typical boat and fishing equipment used to catch the particular fish represented on that map. The variety of vessels is impressive: the three-sailed Thames Shrimper is used for fishing whitebait, a Tarbay Hooker for garfish and mackerel, a two sailed Whitby Coble for pollock, a Burnham boat for catching eels, and the list goes on.

The book is a marvellous example of thematic mapping of the latter part of the nineteenth century, a period described by geographer and cartographer Arthur Robinson as the century's 'golden age' for the visualisation of statistical data.

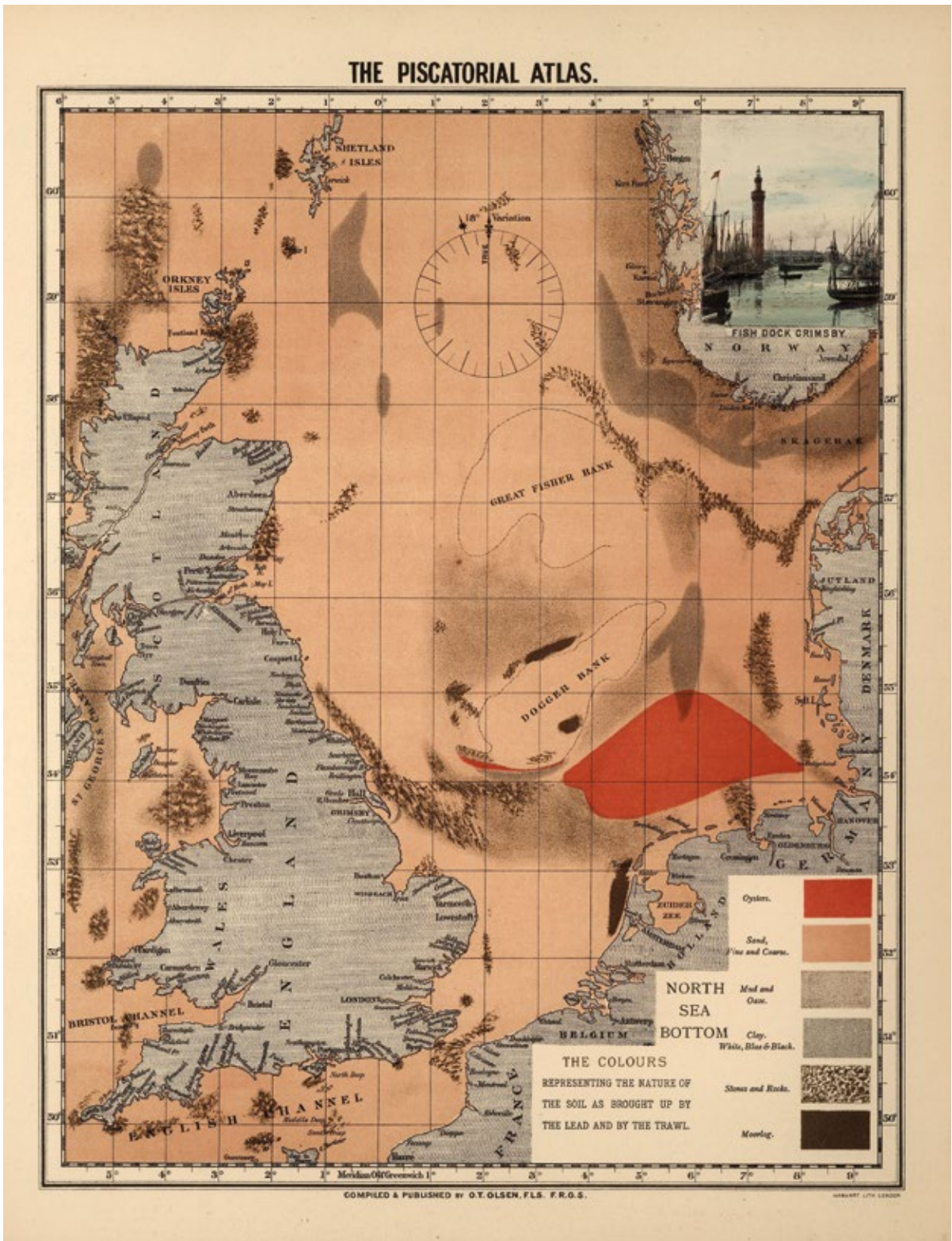


Fig. 1 'North Sea Bottom' with colours representing the nature of the soil. 55 x 45 cm. Olsen, *Piscatorial Atlas*, 1883. David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.



Fig. 2 'Lemon Sole', 55 x 45 cm. Olsen, *Piscatorial Atlas*, 1883. David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.