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Review of *Fishermen, the Fishing Industry and the Great War at Sea: A Forgotten History?* by Robb Robinson

**Christopher Phillips**

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The volume is distinctive in the field for a number of reasons: first for its thematic approach, which allows it to move beyond the study of particular nation states and the best-known theatres of war and, importantly, to consider the way gender impacted on both men and women; secondly for the range and coherence of the volume due to its origins in linked round table presentations; and thirdly for the consistency of the contributions in terms of clarity of writing and level of scholarship. Taken as a whole, the volume both reflects and shapes the interest in new historical perspectives prompted by the centenary of the First World War and will be of interest to established scholars as well as those new to the field.

INGRID SHARP  
University of Leeds, UK

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**Robb Robinson, *Fishermen, the Fishing Industry and the Great War at Sea: A Forgotten History?* Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2019. 216pp. ISBN 978-1786941756 (hardback). Price £75.00.**

In *Fishermen, the Fishing Industry and the Great War at Sea*, Robb Robinson seeks to rectify a 'traditional' view of the First World War at sea that has tended to focus on the Royal Navy, the U-boat menace, and the vituperative debate over the use of convoys. Over the course of eight chapters, Robinson draws upon a combination of Admiralty records, newspaper reports, and parliamentary papers to present a lively account of the role played by Britain's 100,000-strong fishing industry in the conflict. Readers new to the subject will learn much about the experiences of civilians thrust into the challenging circumstances of a global war, and Robinson's ability to narrate the fates and fortunes of numerous vessels provides much of great value to the historian of the period.

After a very brief introduction, the first chapter concentrates on the fishing industry before the war and stresses the size and complexity of the work undertaken all around the British coast alongside the nascent links between the industry and the Royal Navy in what turned out to be the final years of peace. The book then records the activities of civilian fishermen mobilised to augment Britain's naval strength in three chapters, which concentrate on events around the British coast to the end of 1917. The narrative is then interrupted with two chapters, which cover events further afield and the impact of the war upon the fishing industry, before the final year of the war and

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the aftermath of the conflict are dealt with. A brief conclusion provides the reader with statistical information that could have been more fruitfully deployed within the main body of the text. There are a number of photographs reproduced in the book, but in many cases the content of the images does not align with the narrative.

The chief frustration with *Fishermen, the Fishing Industry and the Great War at Sea*, however, is that it does not go beyond alluding to some of the more fascinating insights that the subject has to offer. 'The class and cultural gap between working fishermen and many R[oyal] N[avy] officers was enormous', notes the book's abstract. Yet the ways in which these challenges of civil-military relations were navigated remains unexplored. Robinson notes (pp. 53–4) that 'Royal Navy concepts of discipline, service, and smartness were in many ways quite alien to the fishermen', and that 'Fishermen generally cared little for the niceties of uniform and traditional service discipline', but does not provide concrete evidence of how the two groups learned to co-exist as the war developed. Further, there is much potential within the subject for an examination both of the various roles played by civil society in the prosecution of a total war effort and of the manner by which industrial expertise was applied to the challenges of industrial warfare.

In this sense, the absence of introductory and concluding sections to each chapter is a real handicap for the book, as the wider context and significance of the material discussed within it is often buried – if not omitted altogether. As a result, Robinson's contention that the contribution Britain's fishermen 'made to the British maritime war effort was actually much wider and more fundamentally important than has previously been supposed' (p. 3) is not convincingly demonstrated by what follows. Instead, *Fishermen, the Fishing Industry and the Great War at Sea* provides a stable harbour from which further examinations of the topic could be launched.

CHRISTOPHER PHILLIPS  
Aberystwyth University, UK

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**Michael James Nugent, *A Long Week in March: The 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division in the German Spring Offensive, March 1918*. Warwick: Helion & Company, 2019. xviii + 272pp. ISBN 978-1921390571 (paperback). Price £19.95.**

The premise of Michael Nugent's *A Long Week in March* is that there is no comprehensive analysis of the experiences of the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division in the week