



## **FishNet Blog #4: What's in a Name? Themes in Fishing Boat Naming**

*Though it is unfair to say that the Museum's photo collection is only made up of boats, it is true that a large portion of the images we have are of boats. After seeing hundreds, some themes begin to emerge, especially in the names. This blog post will highlight and discuss a few.*

This will hardly be a highly in-depth look, and some themes may be missed, as there are more boat names than could possibly be listed. None of the names highlighted are meant to mock these names. Decisions such as what to call anything are highly personal and deserve our respect, and each boat name was chosen by the owner or skipper for a reason.

### **Names of People**

Traditionally, boats have female names, and our collection boats plenty of those. These can just be a name or the name of a women in the owner/skipper's life, like "Elspeth Smith" below. Some names are prefaced with "Girl" to make it clear they are meant to be feminine, such as "Girl Jean".



*"Elspeth Smith," KY38, skippered by  
Thomas Smith*



*"Girl Jean", AH76*

It is a common belief that boats must always be named female, or else it will bring bad luck. Not true: these boats were either named after men or have masculine-sounding names, like these boats: "Welsh Prince" and "Lord Collingwood".



*"Welsh Prince", M137 and "Lord Collingwood", M42*

### **Aspirational Names**

Almost equally as common are names which reflect the aspirations and wishes of the owner or skipper for their boats. Hopes such as a good harvest of fish, from a boat called, well, "Harvest Hope".



*"Harvest Hope", PD120*

A boat's name can also reflect the precarious and dangerous nature of the fishing industry. For the crew, the vessel is the only thing that stands between them and death at times. It is no surprise then, to find direct appeals to the boat in its name, best exemplified by this simple statement: "Protect Us."



*"Protect Us, KY156, seen here with the crew who rely on her so much.*

Alternatively, instead of aspirations, the boat's name may reflect the owner's feelings about it, such as "Pride O' Fife".



"Pride O' Fife", KY218.

### Nautical names

Given the environment in which they operate, and how much fishermen depend on the sea, boats with sea-related or nautical themes are also common. This is probably the most varied and flexible name category of them all. There are boats which reference their role on the sea, such as the "Ocean Gleaner", or aspirations for the sea like "Quiet Waters":



"Ocean Gleaner", INS42



"Quiet Waters, KY309

Naming boats after seabirds or animals is also not uncommon. Below is the "Kittiwake", BA239 which I believe is a fitting name for a small, delicate vessel like this one.



"Kittiwake", BA239

### Names of Places

A boat can also be named after a place, like a city, region, or country, and not necessarily one from which the boat must sail. A rather ironic example is the "City of Aberdeen", whose registration, PD, betrays her as a Peterhead vessel.



"City of Aberdeen", PD299

Or how about "Odessa", named after a city which is not even in the same country!



"Odessa", BA221. It is worth mentioning that the correct spelling is "Odesa", but this is a relic of the time it was named.

Of course, it does not have to be a city. Here is a boat named after the now uninhabited Scottish archipelago of St Kilda.



"St Kilda", INS47

The only limit is knowledge of geography!

### **Classical, Literary, and Biblical References**

Many boat crews, especially the skippers, are highly intelligent and well-read. No wonder that they sometimes draw upon more supposedly high-brow inspirations for their boat names. An excellent example, and another combination with the nautical theme above, is "Neptune", named after the Roman god of the sea.



"Neptune", SO715

Literature can also serve as a source of good boat names. Below is "Oberon", the fairy king best known from Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream".



*"Oberon", BF471*

Biblical references can also be found adorning the sides of boats. The most fascinating I was able to find was this one, inspired by the martyrdom of Saint Peter: the story goes that long after the crucifixion, Peter flees Rome after trying to spread Christianity there. Along the way, he meets a vision of Jesus going down the road towards Rome. Saint Peter asks him where he is going, and Jesus replies that he is going to be crucified again. Inspired by this, Peter turns around and heads back to Rome to face his death and martyrdom.

Written in Latin, the Church language, "Where are you going?" translates to "Quo vadis?". Hence how we get the name of this boat: "Quo Vadis", N778.



*"Quo Vadis", N778*

## Just Plain Odd Ones

This blog post has covered only a fraction of boats names and themes. The sample size is also constrained by the fact that all these boats come from our photo database. However, I could not speak about boat names in our collection without mentioning my favourite: "La Petit Mousse".



*"La Petit Mousse", PH328*

An adorable name for an equally adorable boat.

Why not find your favourite, or explore the large variety of boat names we have in our collection? Come look through our [photo database](#)!