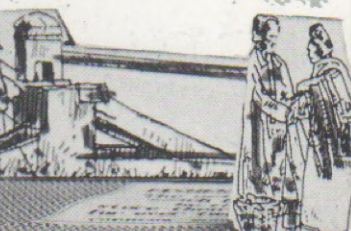
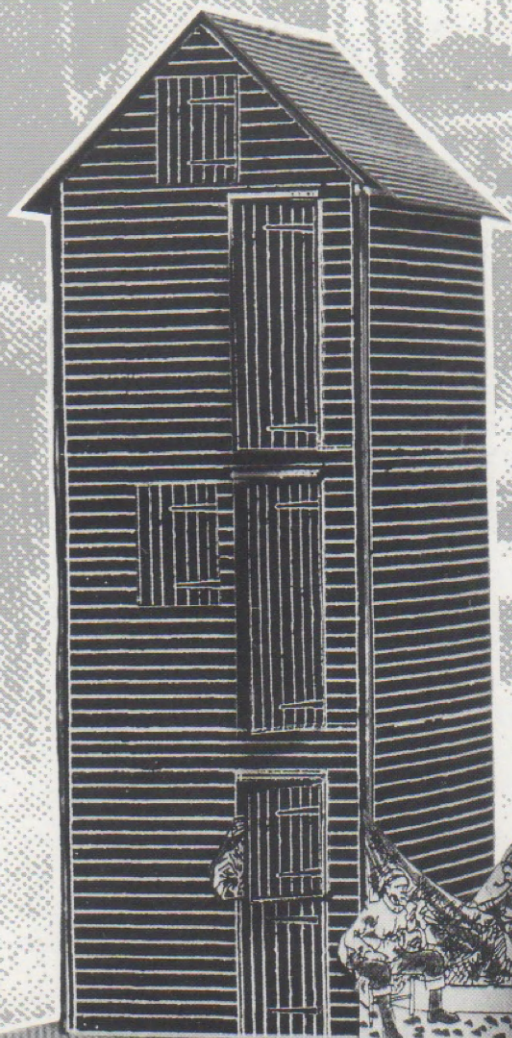


MAKE A MODEL OF
THE FAMOUS HASTINGS
**FISHERMEN'S
NET SHOPS**

AND LEARN ABOUT
THEIR UNIQUE HISTORY



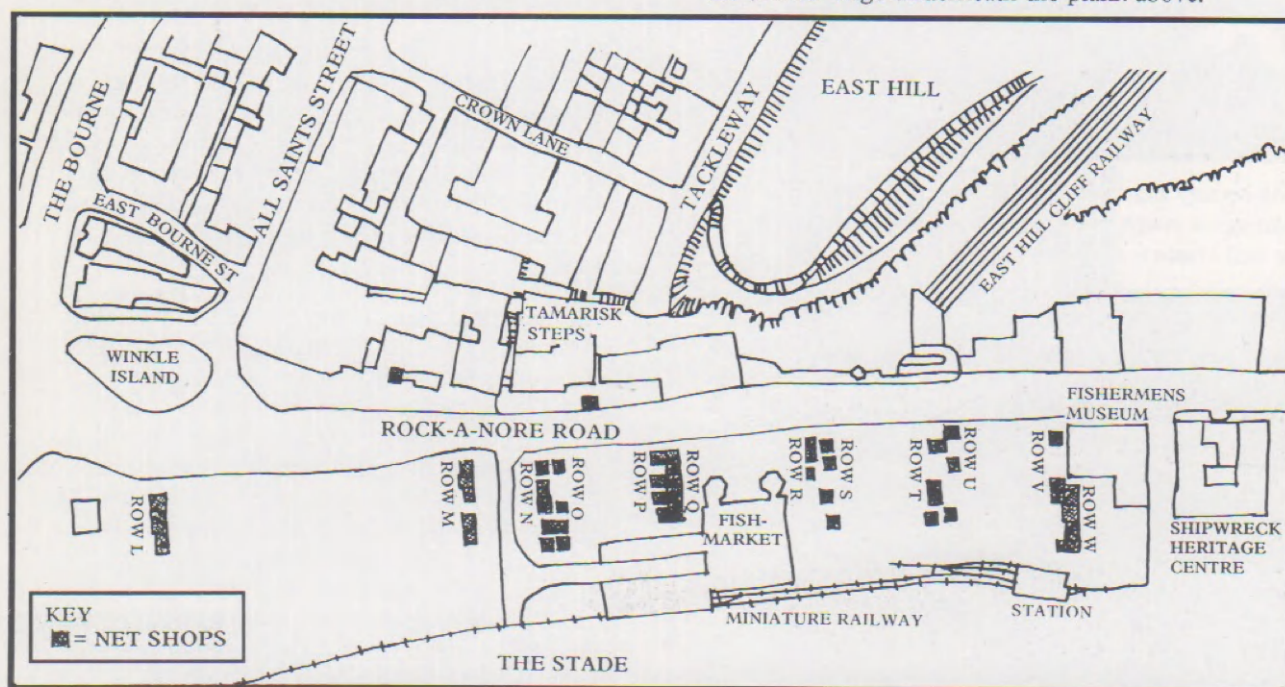
HASTINGS FISHERMEN'S NET SHOPS

Where Are They?

The net shops are unique tall, black wooden buildings standing on the beach in the Old Town, Hastings, in East Sussex. This beach is known as the Stade, an Anglo-Saxon word more than a thousand years old meaning 'shore'. Pulled up on the Stade are the 40 Hastings fishing boats, the largest fleet of beach-launched boats in Britain. Hastings has probably had fishing boats since the town was founded more than 11 centuries ago. The net shops are the store-sheds of these boats, the place where all the fishing boats' gear

in the open near the boats. But even today many fishermen still use the net shops to store some spare gear.

The net shops are made entirely of wood. Inside each one is a simple framework of timbers, braced to give strength against the wind. Overlapping planks are nailed onto the framework, a building method called 'weather-boarding' which is almost identical to the traditional 'clinker' construction of the Hastings fishing boats. The net shops' planks are described as 'feather-edged' because they taper in thickness, with the thinner edge underneath the plank above.



A map of the present Hastings Old Town showing the Stade, the remaining rows of net shops L-W and other

mentioned in the text.

was kept in bygone years. There are 43 net shops. Most of them stand back-to-back in rows close under the East Cliff in Rock-a-Nore Road. A hundred years ago there was much less beach and the waves almost reached the net shops; today the sea is some distance away.

What are they?

Until the 1950s the net shops were used to hold all the fishing boats' ropes and nets. These were made of cotton, hemp, or other natural materials that quickly rotted if they were stored wet. The fishermen first laid their gear on the beach to dry and then hung it up in their net shop. Today nets and ropes are made of nylon, polythene and other synthetic substances that are not affected by the weather, and can safely be left

Each of the shops is about 2.5 metres (8 feet) square and anything up to 8 metres (26 feet) high. They have either two or three floors, with one room on each floor. The rooms are about 2 metres (6 feet 6 inches) high. A ladder-like arrangement of wooden slats nailed to the inside of each net shop passes through square holes in the floors so that fishermen can reach the upper rooms. Each room also has an outside door through which heavy gear is brought after being hauled up the outside of the shop.

Although some net shops only have two floors, a traditional net shop has three floors. This is because, until World War I (1914-1918), fishermen had three types of net: herring nets, mackerel nets, and trawls. The boats fished for herring in the early winter and mackerel in the spring and early summer. The rest of

the year they trawled for flat fish such as soles and plaice. Each form of fishing needed its own set of nets, which the fishermen liked to keep on separate floors of their net shops. Some shops had a cellar, used for storing chain and other ironwork, plus salted herrings in the winter. Herring and mackerel fishing declined after World War I because the markets for these fish disappeared.



19th century engraving of fishing vessels returning to Hastings in rough weather. The cliffs by Rock-a-Nore are well drawn – and look exactly the same today.



A possible originator of the net shops – an old boat has been cut in half, and up-ended as a store for nets and gear. As you can see, families sometimes also lived in these shelters. This drawing was made about 1820.



Fishermen mending their nets. These photographs were taken by George Woods, who built up a beautiful photographic record of Hastings in the 1890s.

Their History

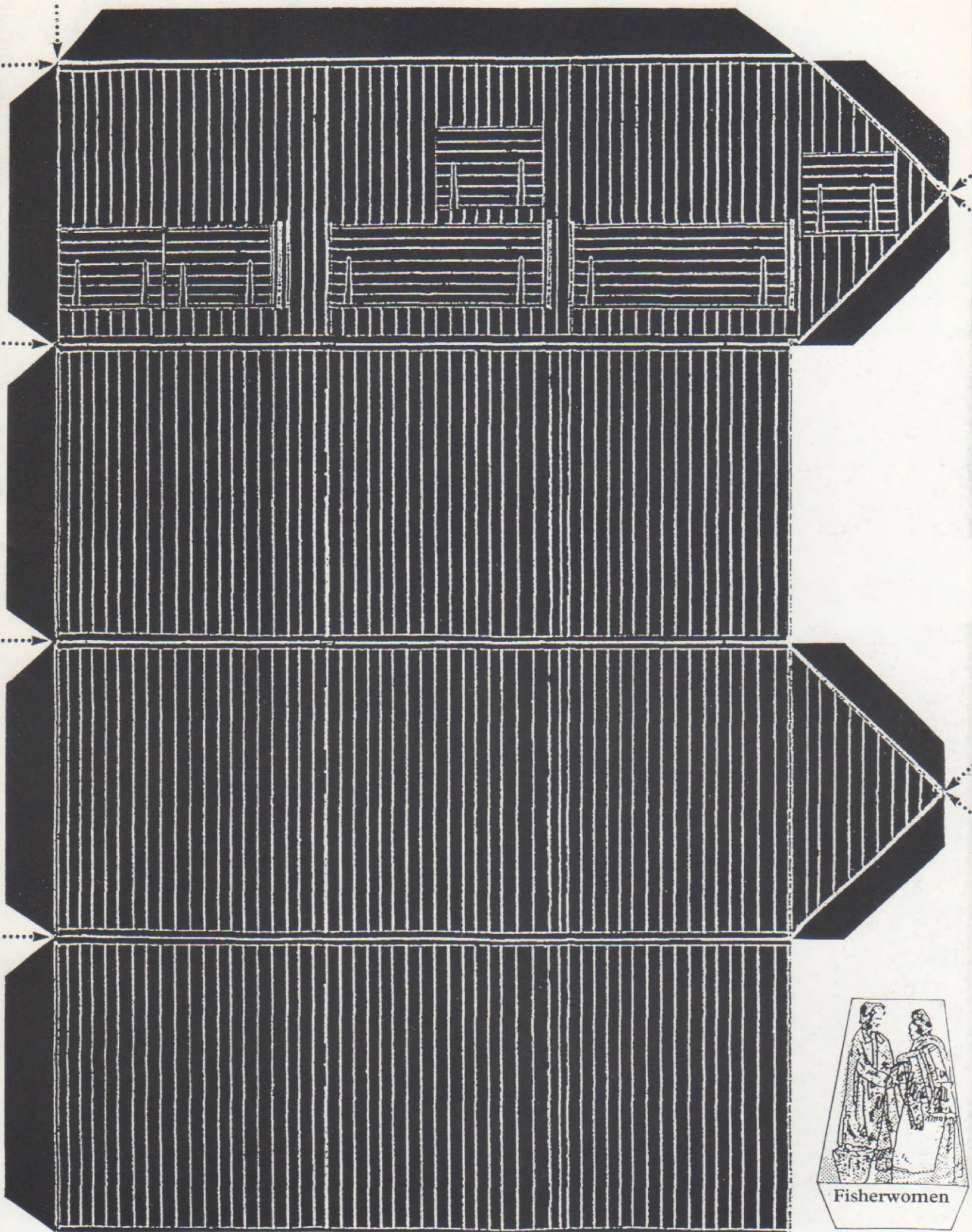
Wooden weather boarded sheds are a common sight, on British farms, in gardens and at old fishing harbours. But in Hastings these sheds have become unique buildings – the net shops – because they have grown so tall and thin, and have been arranged in neat rows. Their early history is unclear, but they have existed in their present form since at least the 1830s.

For hundreds of years before the 1830s, the Stade was home to a jumble of buildings that served the fishing boats and trading vessels working off the beach. These buildings seem to have been called 'shops' (as in 'workshops'). They came in a wide variety of shapes and sizes, including the cheapest of all sheds: half an old boat upended. Amongst all these buildings were shops for storing the nets and rope used on boats. These shops were usually only about 2.5 metres (8 feet square), although some had an upper floor making them about 4.5 metres (15 feet) high. Most of them stood on large stones at each corner, or had wheels, so that they could be moved. Some were in short rows on the open beach. Hastings Corporation allowed boat owners to put rope shops near the boats because coils of rope were heavy and difficult to move.

Until the 1830s most net and rope shops stood further west, particularly around the bottom of the High Street, which was then the site of the fishmarket. But when Hastings developed as a popular seaside resort in the decades after 1815, Hastings Corporation decided to smarten up this area by sending the fishing boats and their shops to Rock-a-Nore where they stand today.

In 1834 a groyne was built into the sea at Rock-a-Nore. This low wooden wall stopped the shingle moving east past the Old Town. Within a few months a large, new area of land had been claimed from the sea. The Corporation decided that this should be the future home of the rope and net shops. They passed regulations stating that shops should only be about 8

MAIN NET SHOP STRUCTURE, SHOWING THE OUTSIDE

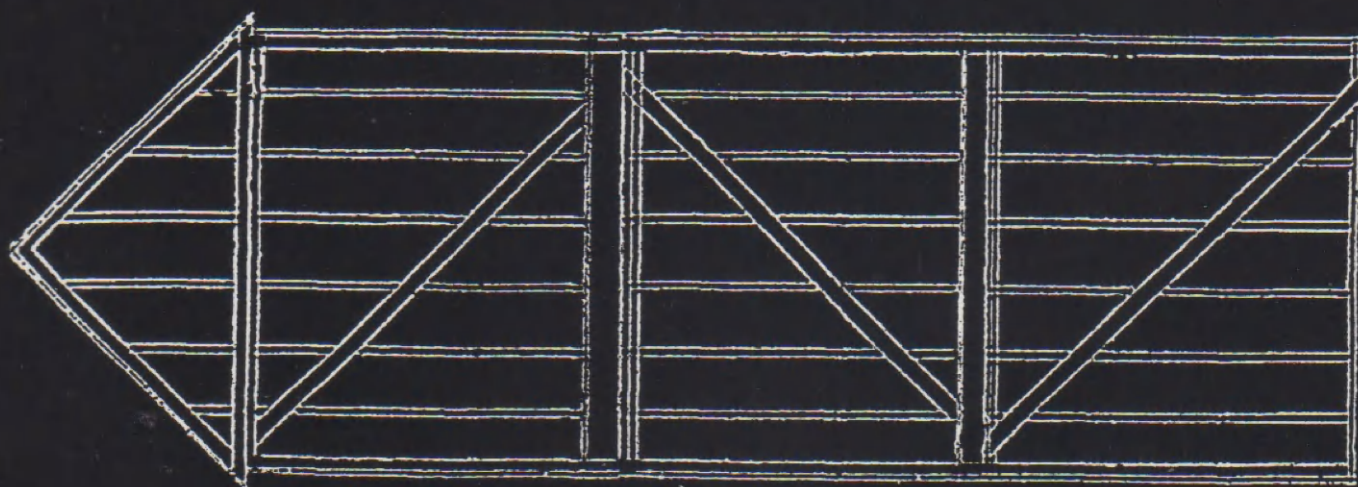


Fisherwomen

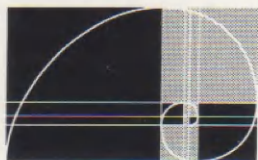


Basket carrier





This model is made from the
HASTINGS FISHERMEN'S NET SHOPS
book published by:



**HASTINGS
TRUST**

58a High Street
Hastings
East Sussex
TN34 3EN

Hastings Trust is an initiative to improve the environment in Hastings and St Leonards and promote good practice in community based regeneration everywhere.

Capstan and horse

Net shop base

Fishermen
mending nets

HASTINGS FISHERMEN'S NET SHOPS

The net shops on Hastings beach
have been used by fishermen
to store their nets and tackle
for over two hundred years.

(approximate model scale 1:38)

Basket
carrier

Fisherwomen

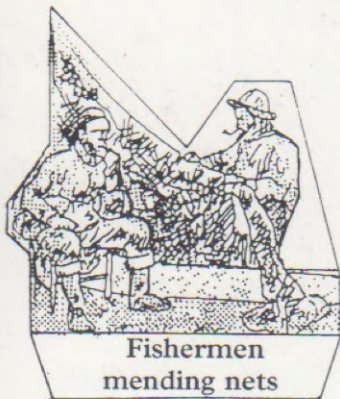
BEACH BASE

FLOOR 1



stick
this tab
on the
inside of
bottom
door

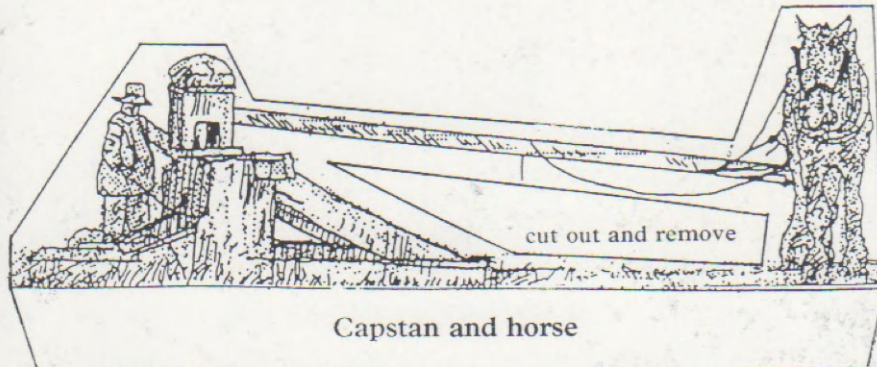
Old
Fisherman



Fishermen
mending nets



ROOF



cut out and remove

Capstan and horse

FLOOR 2



Fierce storms smashing into the net shops in the early 1880s and nearly flooding the Old Town.

feet square, their normal size until then, and they had to be laid out in rows.

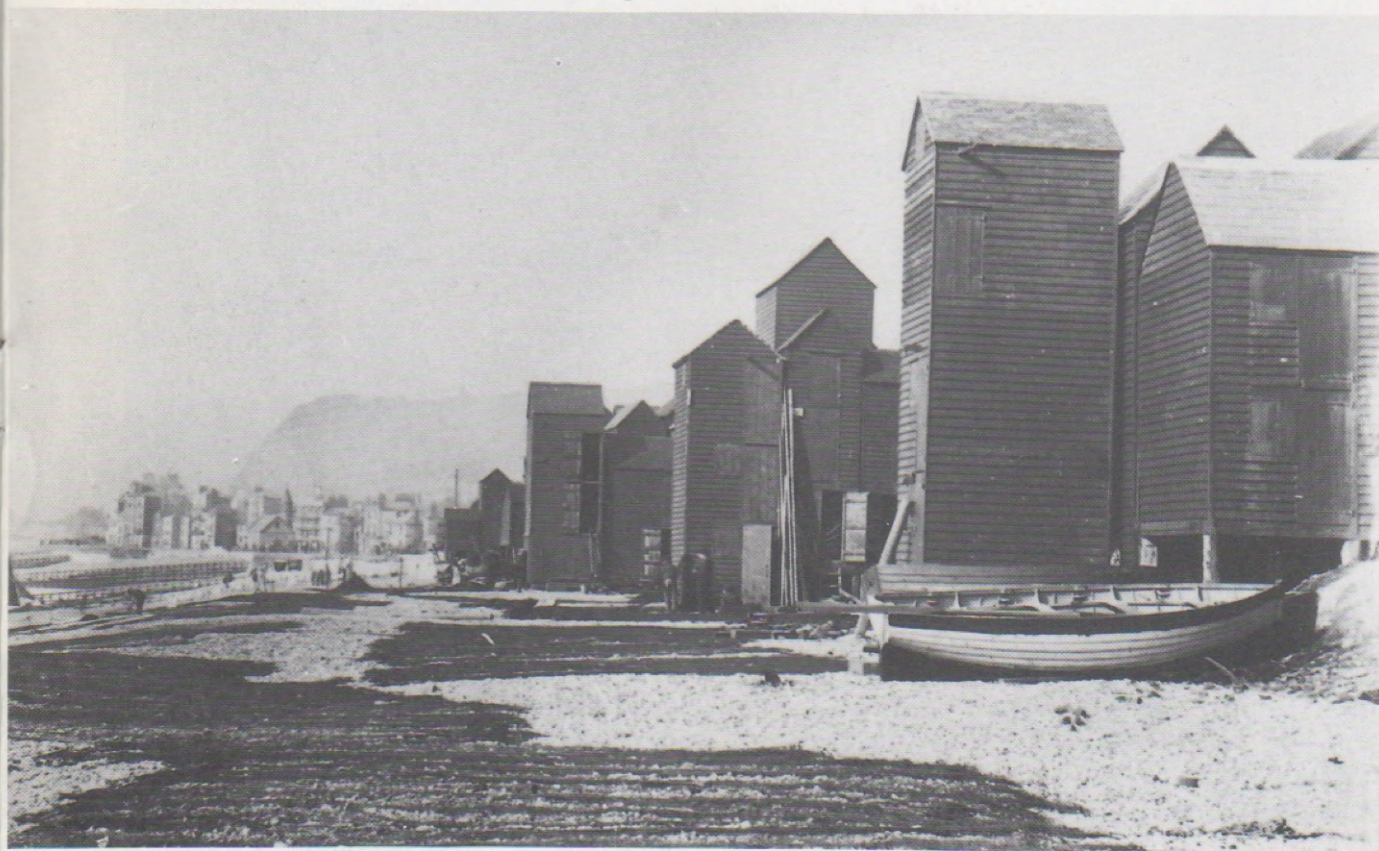
This rule meant that from the late 1840s, when the fishing industry expanded, the fishermen could only find more storage space for their new gear by building the shops upwards instead of outwards. This is the main reason why the shops are so tall and thin.

The regulations saying the shops had to be in rows was designed to bring some order to the Stade, where growing numbers of boats, buildings and capstans were competing for a small space. The shops were placed in back-to-back rows, with room for a horse capstan in each gap. Each row was given an identifying letter, and each shop in the row was numbered; this method of identifying each shop is

still used today. Today the 43 surviving shops are parts of the rows L-W. But, in 1850-75, during their heyday, there were as many as 112 net shops in about 20 rows. Row L(a) stood on the north side of Rock-a-Nore Road, just west of Tamarisk Steps, and one shop still remains there. This is the only freehold net shop; the others all stand on land owned by Hastings Council, although the fishermen still believe they may have ancient rights to the free use of this area. The small buildings that you can see in a row to the east of the pub, the 'London Trader', at the bottom of the Bourne were probably also originally net shops. In 1846 about 20 net shops opposite the Bourne were destroyed by fire, one of the worst fires ever seen on the Stade. Members of the public donated money to rebuild all the shops, and enough was left over to build the East Well in Rock-a-Nore Road

Between 1875 and 1950 the number of net shops halved to around 55. In the 15 years after 1875, about 34 net shops were washed away because the Corporation refused to build sea defences. Until the 1950s Hastings Corporation also tried to demolish or shift the shops because they stood in the way of various redevelopment plans. The Corporation even had a giant, hand-powered trolley that could move net shops when the opportunity arose.

In the late 1920s the largest net shop group of all was lost. This was the area known as Mercers Bank, a long-established collection of net and rope shops, smithies, stores, carpenters' shops, and other buildings opposite, the ends of the Bourne and All Saints Street. Nearly all were demolished to widen Rock-a-Nore



The net shops at the beginning of this century during the height of their use. Note the nets laid out to dry and how

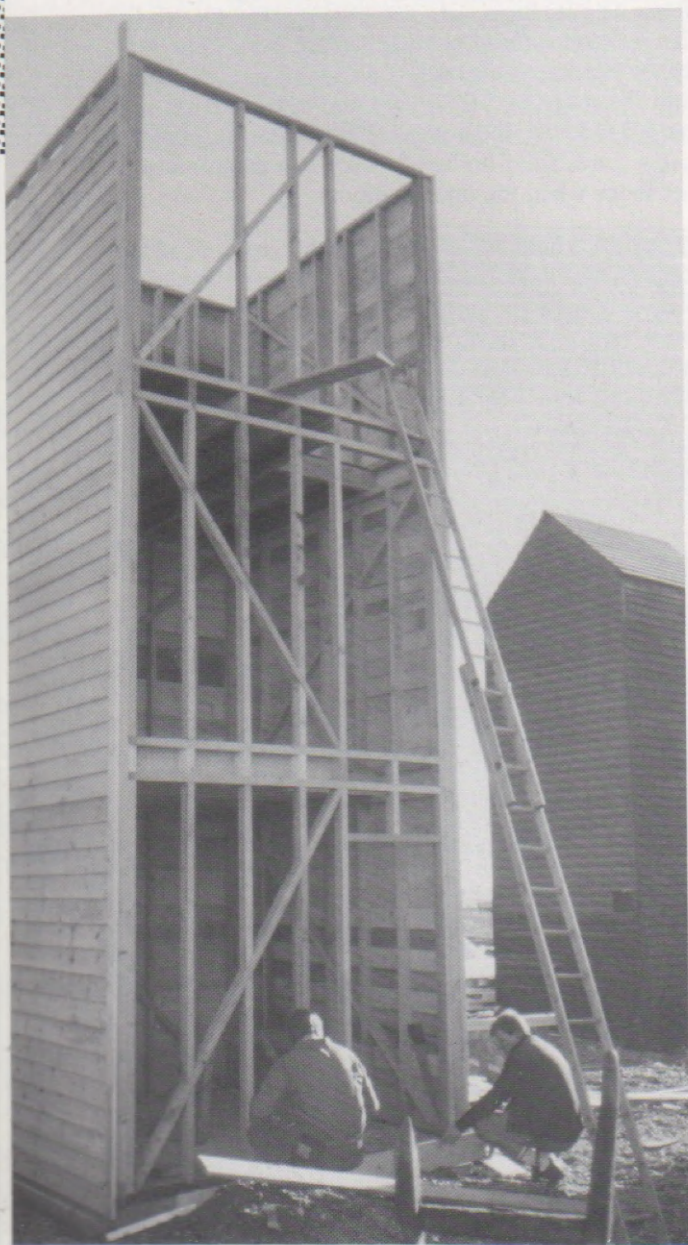
the beach was very narrow.

Road, and today the only survivors are the three net shops in row L.

From the 1880s until the mid 1940s the net shops also suffered because the Hastings fishing industry was in decline and many shops were not maintained properly. In the 1950s, when the industry revived, synthetic materials had replaced natural fibres in fishing gear, and the net shops were no longer essential to the fishermen. Fortunately, just as it looked as though these unique buildings might be lost, positive steps were taken to save them.

Building New Net Shops

In 1956, when the Old Hastings Preservation Society opened the Fishermen's Museum, it also started a fund to maintain the net shops. This fund was used to look after the net shops until 1985, when the society organised a full restoration programme.



You can clearly see the way the net shops are built from this photograph of reconstruction during 1987-88.



Over 40 fishing boats are still operating off Hastings beach. These days they are all driven by diesel engines. This is a recent photograph of the fleet on the shingle beach looking eastwards.

Funding came from the society, Hastings Council and English Heritage. Over the next six years all the net shops were repaired, rebuilt or, in the worst cases, demolished and replaced with new ones.

Several new net shops have been built since the 1950s. Five were erected in 1961 to replace those lost in a spectacular fire in rows T and U. Three more were built during the six-year restoration programme, with several of the restored ones being almost new.

In 1986 the fishermen built the only non-wooden net shop. This is the Fishermen's Co-operative double shop in row M. It is made of concrete blocks, faced on the outside with weather-boarding, so that it looks just the same as the wooden shops.

The new and restored net shops are slightly different to the old shops because they are a standard design, whereas in the past each net shop was different. The shops also used to be coated with thick black tar from the Hastings gas works after it opened in 1830. But when North Sea gas replaced coal gas in the 1970s, tar disappeared, and since then the net shops have been painted with less flammable materials.

Hastings Trust

The Hastings Trust is an initiative to improve the environment in Hastings and St Leonards and promote good practice in community regeneration. It was launched in 1991 to continue and extend the work of the award-winning Hastings Urban Conservation Project.

The Hastings Trust, 58a High Street, Hastings, East Sussex, TN34 3EN Tel: (0424) 446373 Fax: (0424) 434206

Old Hastings Preservation Society

The society was formed in 1951 to protect the historic architecture of Hastings Old Town, and to ensure future development is sympathetic to local traditions. The society has successfully restored Pelham Crescent, developed the Fishermen's Museum and refurbished the net shops.

Address: c/o All Saints Hall, All Saints Street, Hastings, East Sussex, TN34 3EN.

Acknowledgements

Original concept, book and model design by Roger Gates (with thanks to Jeremy Brook). History text by Steve Peak. Illustrations reproduced by kind permission of Hastings Museum and Art Gallery.

For further copies of this book please contact: Hastings Trust

ISBN 0 9514094 41

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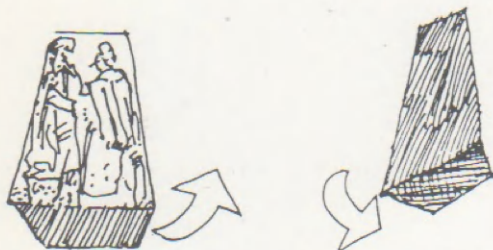
Beach Base

If possible stick the beach base onto thicker card. Artists and framers mounting card would be ideal. (A picture framer should be able to give a spare piece of mounting card.)

Fisherfolk Figures

Cut out all five figure groups and colour the edges with the pen. Stick in the positions on the beach base as shown.

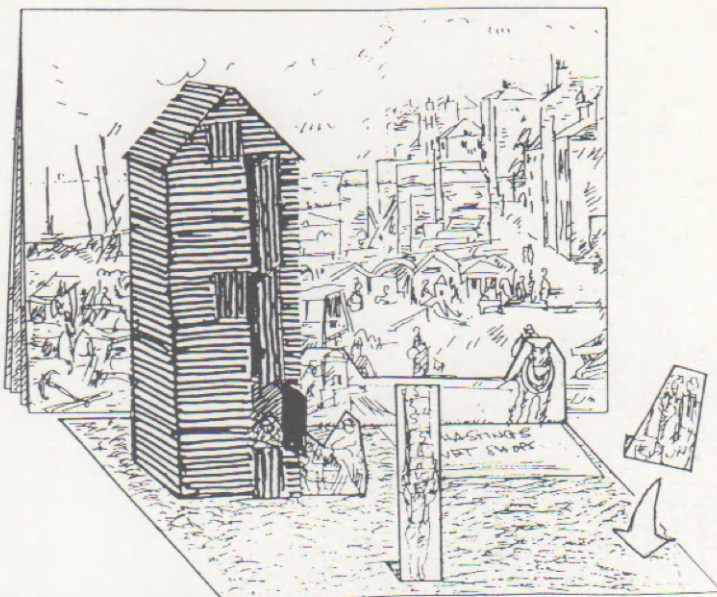
Note that the man carrying the pile of baskets, has an extra support tab, because of his overall height.



Diorama

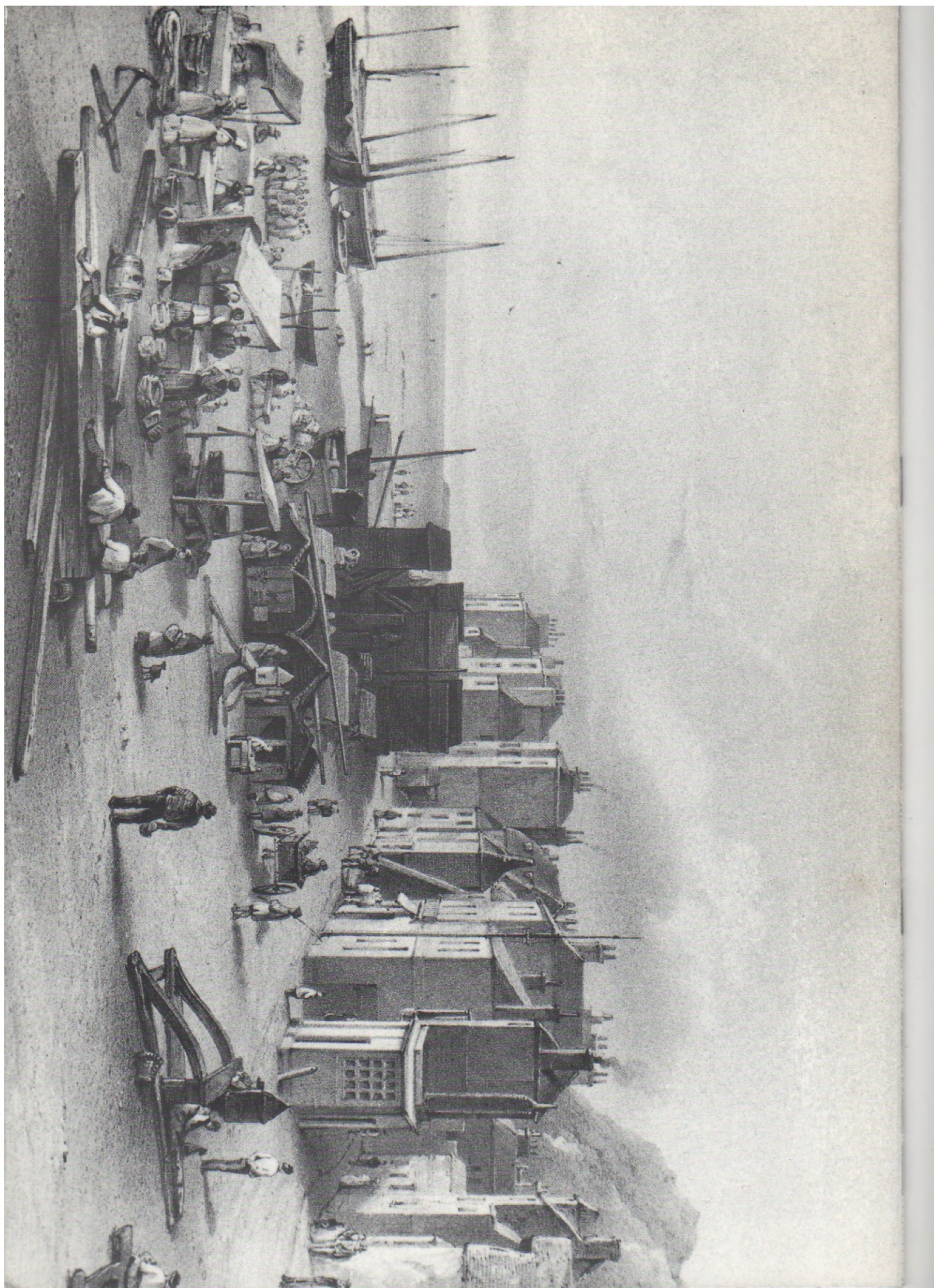
After finishing the model, stand the book behind it with the picture on the back page showing. This will create a 'diorama', which means the model and figures are given a background.

The picture is an engraving made in about 1854 showing the Stade, the open-air fishmarket, East Parade and East Street.



Fishermen mending their nets on the Stade, Hastings in

the 1890s. Photograph by George Woods.



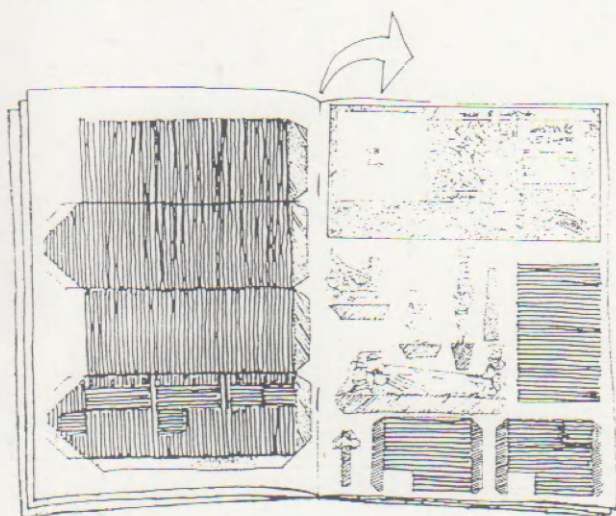
Net Shop Model Instructions

You will need:

- Craft Knife
- Steel Rule
- UHU glue
- Black felt tip pen
- Thick card to cut on



Carefully open up the book flat, and open up the staples from the inside with a blunt knife. But do not take them out. Take out the central card model section. Carefully close up the staples again, to keep the rest of the book together.



Cut out one section of the model at a time – including all tabs. Cut out model parts using the craft knife and steel rule. Place the model section on thick card cutting surface. Cut out one section of the model at a time – including all tabs.

Using the craft knife cut or score each model line as shown:

cut through this line

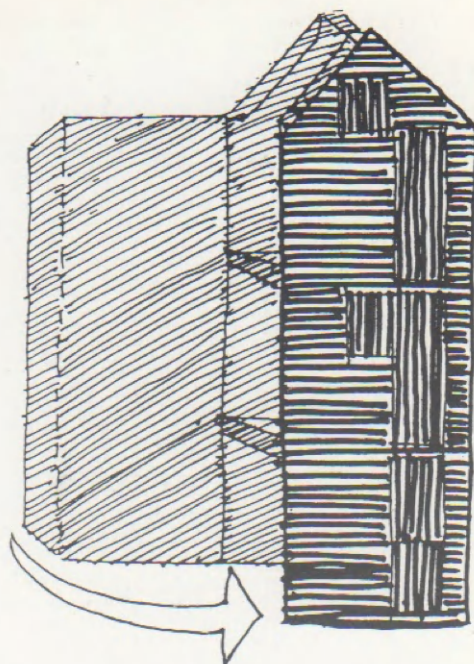
score and fold this line towards you

score and fold this line away from you

Net Shop

Cut out the main Net Shop walls section and lightly score all lines as shown. Turn the model over to show the inside, and cut through the door lines as indicated.

Stick floors 1 and 2, by the right tabs only at this stage, on the inside of the net shop where shown. (For ease of assembly, the floors can be left out all together.)

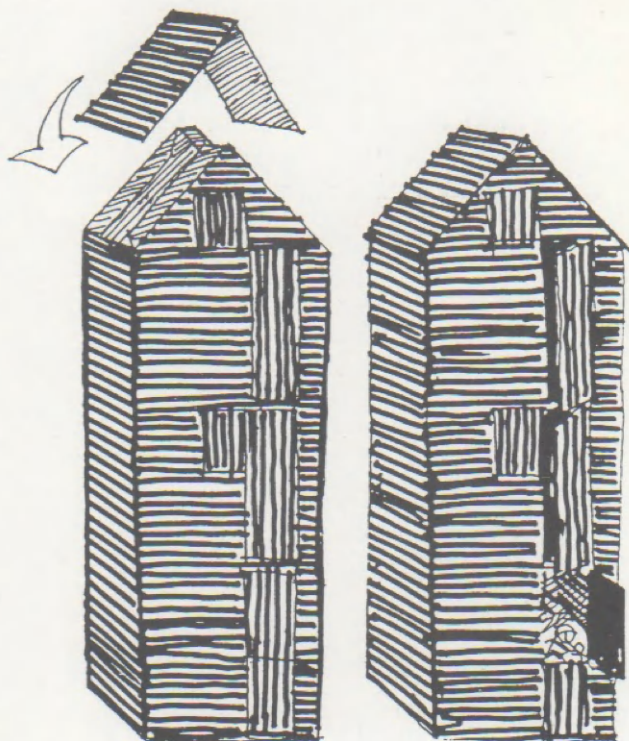


Fold the walls to form a box shape. Prise the doors open. Stick the left floor tabs in position. Stick the old fisherman in position now, so that he leans out of the bottom door.

Stick the main Net Shop together with the main upright corner tab. Make sure the building is square. Hold in position, until the glue is set hard.

Fold and stick the roof in position.

Colour *all* white card edges with the black felt tip pen.



(The instructions are continued on the inside back cover.)