

Whitbourne held Courts of Vice-Admiralty around the Island and received "presentments" from the masters of 170 English fishing ships. He had, however, no means of enforcing his decisions.

In an attempt to bring some order to the Island the Star Chamber regulations of 1633 legalized the old custom of rule by the "Fishing Admirals". The Admiral was now empowered to act as a kind of governor—to allot places in the harbour and to judge disputes. Regardless of their fitness, these men had virtually absolute power over fishermen and settlers alike and ruled by a system of fines, whipping and imprisonment, with no appeal from their judgments.

The Colony enjoyed a brief respite from their rule when Cromwell, in 1653, sent a Commission of fourteen men to govern the Island. All British ships on the coast were put under their control and the collection of taxes on fish and oil was entrusted to them. Under the able management of John Treworgie, head of the Commission, settlement grew, the fisheries increased, and trade was promoted with the colonies on the mainland.

The rule of the Fishing Admirals was confirmed afresh by Charles II in 1670, though by this time the settlers, increased in numbers and strength, succeeded in getting a ruling that they were to be left in possession of their property. The power of the Fishing Admirals decreased with the appointment of naval governors in the 18th century and gradually fell into disuse. The last vestige of their authority was swept away by statute in 1809, a few years before the appointment of the first year-round resident governor.

The French Occupation.—In the long struggle between England and France for supremacy in North America, Newfoundland was an important prize, not merely for the fishing, but because of its location at the entrance to the Gulf of St. Lawrence and alongside the main sea route to the New England colonies. The French had begun annual fishing voyages to Newfoundland before the middle of the 16th century, but did not dispute England's possession of the Island for more than a century.

In 1662 the French, without warning, landed soldiers and settlers at Placentia and proceeded to fortify the harbour, forcing the English residents to move away. The petitions of the anxious settlers to the English Government received only a polite acknowledgment, and the situation continued to be officially ignored until the French raids became so troublesome that the English finally made an unsuccessful attempt to take Placentia. After this the French intensified their efforts to take the Island. In the autumn of 1692 the Governor of New France sent his chief naval officer with a force of Canadians and Indians to assist the French Governor at Placentia in an attack on St. John's. The attack was made simultaneously by land and sea. For the latter the English were prepared, but the land attack took them completely by surprise. St. John's was taken and burned and the French continued around the peninsula to Trinity Bay, burning and pillaging as they went. When an English