

Extracts from local newspapers published in various years in the 19th century, illustrating the progress of the herring season from June to September.

HERRING FISHING – Five or six boats are engaged in this fishing here, most of the boats being at Ireland. On Tuesday four boats went to sea, but returned without fish. On Wednesday better success was met with, when five boats proceeded to the fishing ground. The highest catch was 5 baskets, the average being 2, while the prices realised were from 12s to 13s per basket. To-day (Thursday) one boat arrived with about a dozen fish.

Berwick Journal
18th June 1888

EYEMOUTH - Every preparation with boats and nets is going on here amongst our fishermen. They intend to commence the herring fishing next week. Their hopes of an early drave are most sanguine, there being a large shoal of herrings at present on the coast. As far as 20 miles to the offing immense numbers of them have been seen. Considerable quantities have already been caught with hooks. Their quality is excellent, and upwards of 50 barrels of them have been sent fresh to Edinburgh and Glasgow markets where they are selling from 24s to 30s per cran.

Berwick Advertiser
4th July 1846

HERRING FISHING – The first attempt at the herring fishery was made here last night, and was attended with indifferent success. Three boats were off and each of them returned with 100 herrings, which are regarded to be very small in size. A greater number of boats are to go off on Monday night. At Eyemouth four boats made a commencement on Tuesday night last; their success however being confined to a few hundreds. On Thursday morning the highest boat had 1½ crans, the others from 5 to 9 hundred each. Last night a few more boats would commence, and on Monday there will be a general turn out, between 40 and 50 boats going from this place. All our fishermen are ready to make a start, but are waiting on the half-deals men coming forward.

Berwick Advertiser
11th July 1846

THE HERRING FISHING – The poor success which attended the enterprise at the commencement of last season has, it would appear, so far acted as a salutary check upon those which habitually started sooner than the majority of their brethren. With the exception of 6 or 7 boats, the others of the fleet are yet high and dry above the Royal Border Bridge, and it will undoubtedly require larger success than what has followed the efforts of the three boats at present prosecuting the fishing to incite others to “rig out” and put to sea. During the week three boats have been indefatigable in trying to make something at the fishing, but on no occasion of their return to harbour have their take exceeded a few herrings, or at the most 100 or 200. With such a limited spread of nets, of course, it cannot excite wonder that the locality of the herring has not yet been discovered. From the appearance of the nets in the process of turning them over, it is quite apparent that the boats have only caught straggling fish at the outskirts of a shoal. The fish are of fair quality and size, consequently the price per 100 has risen considerably since the first market for herrings at our port this year. The high winds now prevalent are unfavourable to the captors of the fish; but even with light breezes, it is quite evident that a combination of the most favourable circumstances will not be tempting enough to induce a general start earlier than the beginning of July – many of the fishermen, however, are quite ready to start at once.

Berwick Journal
19th June 1868

HERRING FISHING – The enterprise has during the past week been prosecuted on the coast here under favourable circumstances, and has been attended with a considerable amount of success. On Friday night eight boats proceeded to the fishing from this port, and returned next morning tolerably well fished, the largest cargo being 12¾ barrels. These were readily sold at £2 2s a barrel. On Monday morning a similar number of boats returned with cargoes varying from 8 to 18 barrels. The price now had reduced to 30s per barrel. The favourable turn of the fishing operations set all parties interested in the herring trade astir, and the entire fleet of boats belonging to this place was got afloat, and the tackling and other material necessary for the work were brought from their store house and after a busy day in port a fleet of 52 boats left the harbour on Monday evening under most favourable weather. The evening continued serene and the atmosphere clear, so that as long as twilight lasted the tiny fleet could be seen a little to the north of the harbour, stretching along the edge of the horizon, and presenting an object of grand effect and one which was watched from the garrison ramparts till a late hour by many persons interested in and solicitous for their success. Next morning the return scene was an exciting one, and the enquiries of the curious on all hands received a gratifying answer. The fishing had been general, every boat had a share; the highest cargo being 16 barrels, and the lowest we believe, down to one. The price was now reduced to 22s.

Berwick Advertiser
23rd July 1853

THE HERRING FISHING – The prosecution of the fishing having been interrupted by the recent feast and regatta, very little change is noteworthy as compared with the remarks of last week. The takes are not heavy but prospects are good for an average fishing should the weather prove propitious. With very few exceptions, all the boats are engaged in the enterprise, and the fleet has been considerably augmented by the arrival of a number of Scotch boats. Frenchmen are also hovering about the coast, and now that the fishing is at “full swing” it is expected that soon some good takes will be landed. Some fair cargoes were landed on Wednesday morning. All the boats put out to sea on Wednesday night, but, the wind changing to NE, the sea became lumpy, and twenty boats were compelled to run for Berwick again – those which remained out were generally, but not heavily fished.

The following are the weekly returns:-

		Boats out	Best boat	Price per cran
July	17	32	4 crans 3	6s to 42s
	18	38	4½ crans	32s to 38s
	20	2	200 herrings	-
	21	NONE		
	22	40	10 crans	28s to 44s
	23	47	7¼ crans	38s to 40s

Berwick Journal
24th July 1868

THE HERRING FISHING – The prosecution of the fishing having been interrupted by the recent feast and regatta, very little change is noteworthy as compared with the remarks of last week. The takes are not heavy but prospects are good for an average fishing should the weather prove propitious. With very few exceptions, all the boats are engaged in the enterprise, and the fleet has been considerably augmented by the arrival of a number of Scotch boats. Frenchmen are also hovering about the coast, and now that the fishing is at “full swing” it is expected that soon some good takes will be landed. Some fair cargoes were landed on Wednesday morning. All the boats put out to sea on Wednesday night, but, the wind changing to NE, the sea became lumpy, and twenty boats were compelled to run for Berwick again – those which remained out were generally, but not heavily fished.

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Berwick Journal
24th July 1868

THE HERRING FISHING – The herring fishing season has now commenced in earnest on the North-east coast, and, this being the case, it may be well to touch on the suggestion of a recent writer – whose arguments have some force of truth – regarding the injurious effects on the herring trade of the use of the small meshed nets by fishermen. We notice that Professor COSSAR EWART is of the same opinion; but the case is overstated when it is asserted that “these nets only take the very smallest herrings that are for no use in the markets.” Through these nets there is a preponderance caught of what are known in the trade as “matties”, that is, smaller immature fish. This, however, is a matter largely of the curers’ own fostering, and which the curers have still in their own hands. In those recent days when they were able to command lavish bank credits, and when there were good markets, curers could not get enough of fish, and matties were taken as greedily as the largest fish. To meet the demand, fishermen gradually departed from the old large-sized mesh, and laid in stores of the smaller size; and now the small meshed nets are in general use. No doubt it would be well if the Board of Trade should fall back on the old regulation mesh of 25 years ago, and make its use imperative, and besides compel a close time, but a close time exists already on the North-east coast in the customs of the trade, and Stornoway has this season adopted one of its own. The curers have the matter of the size of nets in their own hands, for they need only employ boats with the larger-mesh nets or accept the larger fish if they choose; and while there is a fair market even in Germany for matties, there is an abundant market for them in the great centres of population in our country, if these could only be reached. At the same time the change to the reintroduction of the large sized mesh would at present entail ruinous suffering on the fishermen, who are already the greatest sufferers. It must be remembered that each new net costs about £3, and that fifty at least are required for a boat’s proper equipment. The present expenditure of £150 on the part of the owners of a boat for a new drift of nets, when about 10s is only got for a cran of herrings, for which 20s or 22s 6d were readily obtained formerly, and when out of that pittance the owner has to meet the wages of the crew, the upkeep of the boat, and the disastrous losses he may meet with in a single night, it is, we think, slightly unreasonable on the part of those who do not feel disposed to take any share of the present disastrous condition of the trade upon their own shoulders.

Berwick Journal
26th July 1888

HERRING FISHING – The season has now fairly begun, and the shots have improved very materially.

Returns for the week:-

	Boats off	Largest catch	Average	Prices per cran
Monday	7	8	5	9s to 12s
Tuesday	35	20	5½	10s to 23s
Wednesday	60	30	8	3s 6d to 10s
Today	35	7	3	10s

Berwick Journal
26th July 1888

SOUTH COAST BOATS - On Saturday, a larger number of south coast boats arrived in the river for the herring fishing, the fleet now numbering 30 or 40 craft.

Berwick Journal
26th July 1888.

HERRING FISHING, NORTH SUNDERLAND – Owing to the thick foggy weather, the herring boats have only got out twice during the present week, when several of the boats got 5 or 6 barrels, but most of them had only a few hundred herrings. The fishermen say the herring are plenty, but the sea is considered too smooth. Prices 18s per barrel.

Berwick Advertiser
8th August 1846

YOUNG HERRING INSHORE – Large numbers of small herrings and “podlars” have been captured in the salmon nets used near the mouth of the river and in Berwick Bay. The latter fish have been feeding on the young herring.

Berwick Journal
18th August 1887

HERRING FISHING, BERWICK – We have this week had a very poor fishing. The highest take for a night's fishing has been 10 crans; most of the boats, however, not having got even one cran for the whole week's labour. The boats which went out on Wednesday night did not get out of the harbour till Thursday night, and then with a great deal of toil and labour contending with the strong run of fresh water out of the river.

EYEMOUTH JULY 30 – On Saturday last we had an excellent fishing; highest boat 40 crans, price 25s per cran, but as the morning advanced and the boats arrived with good takes the price came down to 18s per cran. Two Yarmouth vessels got cargoes and sailed. On Tuesday and Wednesday morning the fishing was not so heavy, but a general take from 3 to 9 crans per boat was obtained. This morning highest boat 14 crans, with general take varying from 2 to 10 crans. None of the boats returned without fish. Price today 16s per cran. One lugger sailed today for Yarmouth with a cargo. Should the wind continue moderately from the North East for a few days our fishermen are in high expectations of a good week's fishing.

NORTH SUNDERLAND – Our fishing in the latter end of last week was indifferent, but on Tuesday and Wednesday this week it was greatly improved; highest boat 30 crans. This morning (Thursday) has fallen greatly off; highest boat 4 crans. The fish yesterday and today was of a very middling quality, prices ranging from 10s to 18s per cran.

HOLY ISLAND JULY 30 – The boats have now begun the fishing in good earnest but as yet the take has not been great. Yesterday (Wednesday) was the best day they have had since they began; the highest boat being 12 crans, but all the boats having fish, and of excellent quality. This morning they have fallen off, the highest we hear of having only 4 crans. As the season is early we yet anticipate a good fishing.

Berwick Advertiser
1st August 1846

HERRING FISHING – The Quay during Monday presented a most busy and exciting scene from the large number of herrings which were landed and despatched to the railway station, while not a few were secured by our local dealers. The French luggers were reported to have captured large quantities of herrings on Saturday night. A boat belonging to Eyemouth gave thirteen nets to a French boat, being unable to carry the large quantity of fish which they contained, but instead of returning the nets as was agreed upon, the French boat has made off with them, and we believe has as yet evaded capture. A most beautiful spectacle was presented on Monday night by the hundreds of boats which had come from various quarters for a share of the great shoal of herrings in Berwick Bay. To many, however, the hopes of a successful fishing were not realised. It is stated, as has been advanced by the fishermen on former occasions, that the firing of the great guns by the Artillery Volunteers have the effect of keeping the herrings at the bottom of the sea, and at least the alleged cause has been followed by the effect stated on this occasion.

Berwick Advertiser
27th August 1864

HERRING FISHING NOTES – About 250 boats were fishing in our district during the past week, the greater part being employed at Berwick and North Sunderland. Owing to the weather most of these were ashore on two days of the week. On the other days they were indifferently fished, for, whilst a number of heavy takes of from 50 to 90 crans were landed, some of the boats caught only a few crans, and many were blank, the result being that only about 4,500 crans were landed by the fleet for the week, against 14,100 on the corresponding week last year. Part of the takes were of fair quality, whilst many others were poor stuff, mostly of matties with a few "shotten" herrings. Prices varied from 4s to 17s per cran. The herrings are chiefly caught off the Farne Islands and off Boulmer and Craster, where they are very "spotty" or congregated in small detached dense shoals. Such was the density of these small bodies of herrings, that several crews suffered heavy loss of netting by weight of the herrings meshed in them. Two Burnmouth boats, of which Peter Johnston and Thomas Aitchison are masters respectively, lost about 35 nets each and Thomas Wilson, Coldingham, lost 22. Several other crews also lost a few. With favourable weather during the week, some good may yet be done, and prices will also be more satisfactory to the fishermen as the fishing on the Scotch coast is approaching its termination with a total catch far under that of last year. The Cornish boats are beginning to leave our district, but their places are filled with boats from Scottish stations. The fishing will now be principally carried on from North Sunderland and stations south thereof. Total catch for the season in the district 22,600 crans, against 43,290 at same period of last year, thus showing the large decrease of about 20,000 crans.

Berwick Journal
30th August 30th 1888

HERRING FISHING – The returns for the week are as follows:-

	Boats off	Largest catch	Average	Prices per cran
Friday	25	60 crans	12 crans	5s to 16s
Saturday	2	55 crans	50 crans	10s to 15s
Monday	24	60 crans	25 crans	5s to 16s
Tuesday	28	86 crans	46 crans	14s 6d to 15s
Wednesday	29	76 crans	30 crans	15s to 16s
Thursday	30	70 crans	40 crans	12s to 16s

Berwick Journal
30th August 1888

HERRING FISHING - NORTH

SUNDERLAND - The fishermen have not been nearly so successful during the last week as they were during the previous week. On Monday night only one half of the boats belonging to the port got out in consequence of their crews leaving for Yarmouth fishing, which reduced the fleet to sixty.

Berwick Advertise
3rd September 1853

HERRING FISHING –

NORTH SUNDERLAND - The weather during the past week having been very favourable, the fishing has been prosecuted at this place with great vigour and success and a rich harvest has rewarded the fishermen for their labour. The season is far advanced, but if the present good weather continue over next week a considerable quantity may yet be got. On Friday, Saturday and Monday mornings the boats brought in from 5 to 30 barrels, and two were said to have 50 and 70 each. Tuesday and Wednesday the herring being close in amongst the rocks, several of the boats lost three, four, five and six nets each, and one crew their whole fleet. The general take was from 6 to 10, and a few boats had nearly 20 barrels each. Thursday very little was done here; some of the Newton and Beadnell boats had good shots, but the fishing was not general. The prices are looking up from 11s 6d to 12s. There has not been many spent herrings got yet.

Berwick Advertiser
5th September 1846

HERRING FISHING- HOLY ISLAND –

SEPTEMBER 6 – We had very poor fishing all last week except Thursday, when several boats had good shots. A report having reached us on Monday last that there were herring at Craster, the boats proceeded to that place, but found no fish at the ground. The highest take was 8 crans. None of the boats were at sea last night.

Berwick Advertiser
8th September 1848

FISHING STATISTICS - There appears to be no shoals of herrings of any consequence on the fishing grounds at present, and, although some boats will make trial of the fishing during the current week, the industry is considered about virtually terminated for the season. Nearly all the strange crews have left the district. About 40 Cornish and Isle of Man boats were fishing at Berwick, a good many of which caught from 200 to 250 crans, but their gross money earnings are small owing to the exceeding low prices they obtained for their herrings.

Berwick Journal
15th September 1887

THE HERRING FISHING – The fishing for the season is now gradually drawing to a conclusion and will in all probability terminate next week. The takes since our last report, with the exception of a pretty general fishing on Monday morning, have been of an exceedingly partial nature, the most of the fish spent and poor in quality. After all the boats got to sea on Monday night a strong wind came away from the north, and rain and wildfire prevailing, a number of the crews hauled and put back to harbour. The boats that remained out brought a quantity of herring to market superior in quality to those of the preceding morning. Several of the English merchants have left town in the course of the past week, but the fish still meet a ready sale for the fresh markets and curing purposes at fair average quotations. The great majority of the boats did not remain at sea on Wednesday night, consequently the average for yesterday was trifling.

Subjoined is the weekly return:-

		Boats out	Best boat	Prices per cran
Sept	4	100	64 crans	16s to 20s
	6	80	6 crans	17s to 26s
	7	80	16 crans	12s to 13s
	8	38	7 crans	14s to 23s
	9	100	6 crans	20s to 24s
	10	80	16 crans	17s to 27s

Berwick Journal
11th September 1868

BERWICK SEPTEMBER 11 – Our herring fishing seems now to be over for this season. The average quantity obtained by each boat has been about 100 crans. For this take the fishermen have been out to sea about 40 times and the weather has never prevented their going, a circumstance that very rarely occurs. The highest boat has fished about 200 crans, but many have not about 50. We regret to learn that there has been a great loss of nets. Last night two boats went out, but as they went south we have not yet heard what success they have met with. Two others have sailed to the Yorkshire coast to see what can be done there. We are very much surprised that the fishermen do not all muster and give the fishing one more good trial before washing up their nets: in some former years, even at a later period than this our boats have got as high as 100 crans each.

NORTH SUNDERLAND – All the strange boats have now left, and only a few of the Sunderland boats have tried the fishing during the week just ended. They have met with trifling success in consequence of the shoal having shifted. All our men are now busy employed in drying and sorting their nets, preparatory to laying them past for the next season. The fishing here may be considered finished, if a shoal of herrings do not appear in two or three days, as every thing will be laid up by that time.

Berwick Advertiser
12th September 1846

THE HERRING FISHING – Almost an entire cessation of the herring fishing has taken place during the past week, only a few boats having ventured out a night or two since the setting in of the NE winds, and these have met with no encouraging success – not such as to induce a greater number of boats to cast their nets even once more before going into winter quarters, the fishing is therefore now considered closed for 1868. The majority of the Scotch boats have taken advantage of the favourable winds to proceed home – most of them having had a good average fishing – and very few now remain in Berwick harbour. In the course of a few days our own boats will be dismantled, nets and other gear stored, and the boats taken to their usual strand above the railway bridge. A retrospective note of the season's fishing may be given in few words. A goodly number of the boats have fished exceedingly well; two at least have a total of about 200 crans; a quota have had middling fishing, and the remainder will barely cover expenses. The total catch has amounted to 7,781 crans – an excess over that of 1867 of 1,966 crans. The average number of boats fishing nightly has been 75; to which the total catch gives an individual average of about 104 crans – an increase over that of 1867 of 23 crans. Prices have maintained a good average – 17s 6d per basket being the highest, and 12s per cran being the lowest price given during the season. About two-thirds of the gross catch has been sent away fresh to the English markets – the remainder being purchased by curers, cadgers and private individuals, and more than one half of the 6,450 crans landed at Berwick have been brought to harbour by strange boats. The quality of the fish has been very good, and only on five or six mornings has the quality been so inferior that merchants were not over anxious to purchase. Upon the whole the fishing has been a fair average one as compared with past years, and but for a grievous intermission of several nights, through unsettled weather, when the season was most productive, the average catch would have been higher by several crans than it is. Comparatively speaking, very little gear has been lost or damaged; and the only damage to boats was in the case of a Spittal craft, which was run into by a schooner near Holy Island. Compared with some of their brethren stationed on the north coast, the fishermen of Berwick have in many respects great cause for congratulation and thankfulness. Subjoined is the report for the past week:-

	Boats out	Best catch	Prices per cran
September 11	80	18 crans	15s to 24s
13	2	-	15s to 24s
14	1	6 crans -	
16	5	1½ baskets	

Berwick Journal
18th September 1868

GLOSS OF THE HERRING FISHING SEASON – The herring fishing season of 1887 has now closed, and has not been over remunerative either to fishermen or buyers. The quantity of fish landed has been short of preceding years, but during the last two weeks of August, herrings of really good quality were caught. Prices, however, have all along been poor, while bad weather has not been wanting during the season. The largest number of boats which arrived on one day this season was 90, the next highest numbers being 80, 75 and 70. The highest shot of the season was 80 crans got on the 29th July on which day the fish sold at from 8s to 15s per cran. The average catch that day over the 70 boats which arrived was 20 crans. Prices were as low during the season as 3s and 4s per cran, while the highest sum realised was 26s and 28s per cran. The quantity of herrings cured this year at Berwick and the other stations is far below the usual. The fishermen are now busy preparing for the white fishing.

Berwick Journal
29th September 1887