

Extracts from 19th century local newspapers relating to the herring industry, markets for herring and the decline of the herring fleets

THE HERRING FISHING – The fishing on Friday and Saturday has brought vividly to mind the herring fishing of fifteen or twenty years ago, when, at the meridian of the season, 30, 40, and 60 crans were oftener landed than they have been for a few years back. Very heavy cargoes were landed on the days above mentioned, some of those at Spittal exceeding 70 crans, and many takes of 20, 30, 40 and upwards of 50 crans were landed on Berwick Quay. On Saturday the takes were very general, and not confined to a few boats as on the preceding day. The fish were of most excellent quality, and were rapidly bought up notwithstanding their late arrival and the unpropitious weather which prevailed throughout the entire day, and which rendered gutting and curing operations excessively disagreeable. The heavy influx of fish on Friday and Saturday brought prices down considerably – 16s, 18s, and 20s per cran being the chief quotations on the latter day; but on Tuesday a notable rise took place, good fish being purchased at 32s. The drum was hoisted at the railway Station on Saturday and Sunday, and, in consequence of a heavy gale following the pelting rain, no further attempt was made at the fishing until Monday night, when most of the boats put to sea, but the return on Tuesday showed numerous blanks. On Wednesday morning there was a good general fishing, not many heavy takes, but all the boats had some herrings – takes ranging from 1 to 20 and 30 crans, the great bulk of the fish being of good quality. Several nets were lost on Saturday morning last; a few from the weight of fish they contained, sunk and had to be cast away; and others by being entangled among the rocks and some sunken wreck at the fishing ground were almost totally destroyed. A stranger boat was reported to have lost no less than 25 nets. A very important addition has during the past week been made to the total catch for the season, and had the weather held good the whole of last week the average for the season would have been higher than any average for several years past at the same date, and as there are two or three weeks of the season yet to run, should the weather prove favourable some good fishing is expected.

Appended are the returns for the past week:-

	Boats out	Best boat	Prices per cran
Aug. 21	100	56 crans	20s to 30s
22	100	65 crans	14s to 17s
24	-		
25	80	17 crans	28s to 37s
26	100	60 crans	16s to 20s
27	40	10 crans	20s to 25s

Berwick Journal
28th August 1868

HERRING FISHING - On Thursday night the Cockenzie boat, Chieftain, arrived with 130 crans of herrings, which realised 10s per cran. Another boat from Cockenzie landed 92 crans, but gave away 15 nets which contained 38 crans. It also lost 17 nets which sank with the weight of herrings in them. The 92 crans realised 11s per cran. These two catches are the largest ever got in this district. Two years ago a Coldingham boat took 117 crans into Eyemouth. The returns for the week are as follows:-

	Boats off	Largest catch	Prices per cran
Friday	30	60 crans	8s to 15s
Saturday	40	30 cran	14s to 15s
Tuesday	20	18 crans	12s 6d to 15s
Wednesday	30	76 crans	14s to 17s
Thursday	22	30 crans	15s to 17s

Berwick Journal
6th September 1888

HERRING FISHING - All hopes of the present season resulting in a successful fishing seem now to be abandoned. On Sunday evening the boats put to sea about six o'clock but the wind freshening from the north east, and a heavy rain, prevented the boats from getting to sea. The boats returned to the shore about 10 o'clock, and a trial of fishing from some of the stations, and towards the coast, during the day, were unsuccessful only 137 crans being landed for the week. On Monday night, last, some boats also went out, but caught nothing, which has terminated for the season, and further trials by the fishermen. The total catch in the district extending from St. Abb's Head to the Coquet is 46,109 crans, and part of that with 62,852 crans for last year, showing a material falling off of our fishing grounds and shore. This deficiency has been chiefly occasioned by bad weather, keeping the fleet of boats ashore during greater part of the week, ending 13th August. One of the principal fishing weeks, of the season, and by the abundance of herrings on the coast. It is rare indeed that the fishing grounds in the vicinity of the Farne Islands and about Craster Smooth have wanted shoals of herrings in September until this season. The following is the estimated totals catch at the various stations:- Eyemouth 11,470 crans; Burnmouth 714 crans; Berwick 15,760 crans; Holy Island 83 crans; North Sunderland 10,939 crans; Beadnell 1,579 crans; Newton 64 crans; Craster 2,606 crans; Boulmer 373 crans; and Amble 1,711 crans.

Berwick Journal
5th September 1862

HERRING FISHING EYEMOUTH - The season of the fishing at this station is closed for the year, and the boats have returned to the shore. The average for the season is 320 crans, and the almost nominal prices have obtained from £200 to £220 and on lowest, which compares very favorably with the better season of herring, respecting the abundance of the fish, and the high prices for the fish and abundance of them. The fish has been of a quality seldom equalled on this coast. Prices for cured white are from 2 to 3s 6d, and for red 2s 6d to 3s 6d. There is no appearance of prices declining other Scotch ports, from the south has offered 1000 guineas for 1000 crans, which has not been accepted.

Berwick Advertiser
23th September 1857

HERRING FISHING - The season for this fishing of our coast has now been brought to a close, and its result is exceedingly gratifying and pleasing. It has extended over nine weeks, fully an average duration. The number of boats engaged has been fully equal to that of former years, and to Ireland, about 8,000 of which went to the Continent, and those at Spittal, and nearly 3,100 to the latter country, and this sum we feel fully warranted in stating, we arrive at a grand total of £8,800 gained by the fishermen alone, exclusive of course of the earnings of the workers on land, and the dealers in the fishing wholesale and retail. The quantity of herrings disposed of in a green state has been beyond all precedent, and this mode of sale will for the future, in all probability be the rule, and not the exception of the market. The quantity of barrelled herrings in the hands of curers is not very large, and we may safely estimate it at 5,000 barrels of red and 700 barrels of white, the prices of which per barrel are now quoted at 18s for red and 22s for white. With the exception of the annoyances caused to our fishermen by the presence of the French boats in the early part of the season, sad cases of loss in nets in some instances thereby sustained, and which might have been avoided if our government had acted with the promptitude the occasion required, and such as was evinced by the French government in their own behalf, not a casualty has occurred to mar the satisfaction which so prosperous a season's fishing occasions.

Berwick Advertiser
23rd September 1887

HERRING FISHING - About 11,000 barrels of herrings have been exported direct from this district to the Continent and Ireland, about 8,000 of which went abroad, and nearly 3,100 to the latter country, and this sum we feel fully warranted in stating, we arrive at a grand total of £8,800 gained by the fishermen alone, exclusive of course of the earnings of the workers on land, and the dealers in the fishing wholesale and retail. The quantity of herrings disposed of in a green state has been beyond all precedent, and this mode of sale will for the future, in all probability be the rule, and not the exception of the market. The quantity of barrelled herrings in the hands of curers is not very large, and we may safely estimate it at 5,000 barrels of red and 700 barrels of white, the prices of which per barrel are now quoted at 18s for red and 22s for white. With the exception of the annoyances caused to our fishermen by the presence of the French boats in the early part of the season, sad cases of loss in nets in some instances thereby sustained, and which might have been avoided if our government had acted with the promptitude the occasion required, and such as was evinced by the French government in their own behalf, not a casualty has occurred to mar the satisfaction which so prosperous a season's fishing occasions.

Berwick Journal
27th September 1888

Berwick Advertiser
1st October 1853