

SALMON FISHING

Here are some photographs of salmon fishermen

5 x PHOTOS OF SALMON FISHERMEN

In Victorian times, the salmon netting season began at midnight on 14th February and continued until mid-October.

SALMON FISHING – The fishing season in the Tweed commenced yesterday. The circumstances of the opening were favourable, the weather was genial, and the river was in excellent condition. The result of the day's work equalled that of recent seasons. The major part of the fishing stations below the bridge obtained their "earlings" (their first salmon). One of them, Hallowstell, had five salmon, Tweedmouth Stell had two. The stations up the river had various success; one of them had a large number but their condition was doubtful. The retail prices are Salmon 1s 6d per lb (£4.39), Trout 9d (£2.19).

Berwick Advertiser, 17th February 1849

THE FIRST GRILSE caught this season was obtained on Wednesday at Sandstell Fishing Station, at the mouth of the river, being about two months earlier than grilse generally appear. It weighed 1¾ lbs and was sold for 8s (£17.26).

Berwick Journal, 7th April 1860

By July, the price of salmon and grilse was much reduced

TWEED SALMON NET FISHING – The produce has improved since last report, grilse now being the most plentiful. A salmon of 37 lbs has been got during the week. Salmon average 13lbs; grilse 5 lbs; and trout 5 lbs. Prices (today) Thursday were:- salmon 11d per lb; grilse 10d; and trout 10d, as compared with 1s 1d per lb for salmon; 10d for grilse; and 10d for trout on the corresponding date last year.

Berwick Journal, July 26th 1888

THE SALMON FISHING – Up to and including Wednesday the fishing was excellent, the takes on that day were very satisfactory, the proportion of salmon being greatly on the increase. On Saturday 1,300 fish were landed on the Quay; On Monday and Tuesday upwards of 1,000. A slight fresh in the water favoured the river fishings, and so long as it continues the fishing is likely to be good.

Berwick Advertiser, 30th July 1853

Weather conditions played an important part in the success or otherwise of the salmon-fishing

TWEED SALMON FISHINGS – It is somewhat singular that rain, which was so much desired by the fishermen during the summer months to flood the river and to allow the fish a free run to the higher districts, should only have fallen in sufficient quantities on the last week of the fishing season, and more heavily on the last day (Wednesday), causing a flood on the first day of the close time, which would have been of great value to the lessees of fisheries at an earlier period. All the fishing boats and nets have again been removed from the river and have been stored to await the re-opening of the fishing season in February.

Berwick Advertiser, 17th September 1864

However, there were poor fishing seasons even when the weather conditions were favourable.

THE SALMON FISHING – The fisheries on the Tweed closed for the season yesterday. The by-gone season has, we regret to add, been a very unsuccessful one, and at several of the stations the produce must have been unequal to the outlay – The weather throughout has been favourable for the prosecution of the fishing, as neither the winter's ice, nor the summer's drought have presented any of those obstructions which very few seasons are altogether free from. Notwithstanding the absence of every adverse circumstance the past season must be classed with the unproductive and the unprofitable.

Berwick Advertiser, 17th October 1846

ICE

Since the building of the first ice-houses in Berwick in the 1780s, salmon was transported to London packed in ice.

4 x PHOTOS- Ice Houses in Ravensdowne and Bankhill

Each year, some 2,000 tons of ice were brought into the town from specially constructed ponds near Berwick.

1 SLIDE OF 2 PHOTOS - cutting and storing ice

ICE FOR THE SALMON COMPANY – This week ice of considerable thickness has been carted in large quantities from Clay-hole, Scremerston, for Berwick Salmon Company.
Berwick Journal, February 16th 1888

In mild winters, ice had to be sourced from further afield.

1 x PHOTO OF NORWEGIAN ICE SHIP

SALMON FISHING – The season for fishing in the Tweed begins on the 15th instant, which being Sunday, operations will not commence till Monday morning. We hope the season will be as productive as it is likely to be agreeable. A considerable drawback however, on the gains of the fishmonger will be the want of a stock of ice, which article is so requisite for a favourable transit of the fish to market. The winter has thus far proceeded and not a single load of ice has been procured. In fact the pools which are kept for its production have never so much as been once coated.

Berwick Advertiser, 14th February 1846

SALMON FISHING –It is, we believe, contemplated to send a vessel to Norway for a cargo of ice, to supply the defect experienced at home: the quantity on hand remaining from the previous year is likely to serve the present season up to July.

Berwick Advertiser, 21st February 1846

ICE – The schooners King William and Stately, which three weeks ago sailed from this port for the coast of Norway to procure a supply of ice (which the fishing company have not been able this season to procure at home) have this week returned with cargoes of the article. There have also arrived two other vessels chartered from that country. By these vessels about 900 tons of ice have been received. Three or four vessels more are on their passage hither, whose cargoes will amount to nearly as much as that received. These cargoes will, we hope repair the defect occasioned by the mildness of the late winter.

Berwick Advertiser, 21st March 1846

The introduction in 1838 of steam-ships to the Berwick to London voyage brought great advantages to the Tweed salmon fishermen.

THE SALMON FISHING – With Monday terminates the fishing for the season, and we are happy in being able to state that the season about to close has been more successful than several previous ones. Throughout the season there has been a ready market, and prices have been always good. There has also been another advantage, namely a speedy and certain conveyance to market by means of the steam-vessels, thereby avoiding frequent and severe losses from the depreciated state in which the fish reached their market.

Berwick Advertiser, 12th October 1838

TWEED FISHING –The fishing on Friday last week was declared to be the best which had been experienced for several years. The boats as they arrived at the quay from the different stations were so heavily laden as to bring the gunwales nearly even with the water. The Manchester steamer, which sailed on Saturday evening, had upwards of 250 boxes; and the Rapid, which left yesterday, had a similar number.

Berwick Advertiser, 27th July 1839

The coming of the railways opened up new markets for Berwick's salmon trade.

1 SET OF 2 PHOTOS – Locomotives

Only a few days after the opening of the line from Edinburgh to Berwick, the Berwick Advertiser reported the quantity of fresh salmon being sent northwards by train - By means of the railway a daily supply of Tweed Salmon has this week been maintained in the Edinburgh Market, where the article has been produced in prime condition, in some instances within 3 hours of its being taken from the river. One of our fishmongers, Mr. Weatherburn of Sandgate, has supplied that market with 18 hundredweight in the course of the week.

Berwick Advertiser, 27th June 1846

The railway also brought to Berwick new customers for Tweed salmon as this advertisement placed only three weeks after the opening of the line from Edinburgh shows.

R. N. WEATHERHEAD

WHOLESALE AND RETAIL SALMON

FISHMONGER

NAG'S HEAD INN, SANDGATE

Respectfully intimates to Gentlemen and Parties visiting Berwick, or Parties residing

In the town or vicinity, that he can accommodate Them with FRESH KETTLED SALMON at any hour in the Day or Evening.

SALMON, GRILSE and TROUT, Wholesale and Retail. Price always moderate.

Berwick Advertiser, 18th July 1846

A week later the Advertiser reported:

VISITORS - On Friday a party from Glasgow, amounting to nearly 400, arrived by rail, and though the weather as unfavourable, still they appeared to enjoy a ramble through the streets and around the town. On Monday, a larger party arrived from Edinburgh, amounting to about 800. They were conveyed in 32 carriages drawn by four engines. The strangers having been acquainted with the excellence of Tweed salmon, not only enjoyed that delicacy while here, but a great proportion of the party provided themselves with a supply to be conveyed home; consequently there was a brisk demand for the article on Monday, and the quantity conveyed from this to Edinburgh has been estimated at about 150 stones.

Berwick Advertiser, 25th July 1846

When Queen Victoria came in 1850 to officially open the Royal Border Railway Bridge, there was one gift for Her Majesty that Berwick folk considered suitable for the occasion.

PRESENT OF A SALMON TO HER MAJESTY - Yesterday, while the Royal Train waited at the station during Her majesty's stay in the Pavilion, a fine large salmon, 18lbs weight, a true "monarch of the Tweed" – a present from the Berwick Shipping Company to the Queen – was deposited in the train and conveyed to Edinburgh for her Majesty's Dinner in the evening.

Berwick Advertiser, 30th August 1850

Six years later, a similar gift for the Queen mysteriously went astray.

WHO STOLE THE QUEEN'S DINNER? – No little consternation was occasioned here two weeks ago, among the fishers who had right loyally exerted themselves in obtaining a fine 20 lb salmon for their Sovereign's dinner, at Holyrood, on the following day. While one of them was on his way to the station with it, he was so much pleased with being able to send such a fine fish in such good order to her majesty that he laid down his valuable berthen at the door of the house where his manager resides, and he went into the house to apprise that gentleman of their success, who, along with the fisher came out to inspect the silvery monster; but judge their surprise when, upon looking into the creel which had contained him, they found that the fish had disappeared; whether it swam or flew away we know not, but we strongly suspect that less royal palates have since enjoyed the taste and flavour of the king of fishes.

Berwick Journal, 8th November 1856

Poaching was common and the Tweed Commissioners employed bailiffs to patrol the river, supported by Royal Navy gunboats .

PHOTO - "HMS Ariel" in 1873

SALMON POACHING – On Monday evening last, the Tweed water-bailiffs apprehended a man named William McAdam, at Sandstell, with a net in his possession. McAdam offered great resistance, but was conveyed on board the Commissioners' steamer, which was in attendance to co-operate with the bailiffs. He was fined £1 7s for having a salmon net illegally in his possession, and as a second charge of offering forcible opposition to the bailiffs was fined £8 7s. The Commissioners' steamer is frequently assaulted with volleys of stones from the Spittal fishermen, but by the precautions taken by erecting netting, the bailiffs on board the vessel are completely protected.

Berwick Journal, 8th October 1859

The tradition of the "salmon kettle" became popular in the Victorian period.

TRADESMEN'S KETTLE – The gathering which is normally held on some convenient spot on the banks of the Tweed by the party of tradesmen from this town associated together for the purpose, took place on Tuesday on Yarrow Haugh. The company amounted to about sixty, and all the arrangements made were of the most satisfactory description. Salmon, the staple of the feast, were abundant, and were cooked to perfection. Other viands were provided, while the liquors were both plentiful and of excellent quality. The weather was fine and clear and being favoured with the cool air from the stream the party were enabled to enjoy a variety of athletic exercises.

Berwick Advertiser, 13th August 1853

The fishermen themselves celebrated the end of the salmon netting season.

END OF SALMON FISHING – As usual a number of Salmon Suppers were held in Spittal on Thursday of last week, denoting the close of the season 1887. Conspicuous was one held at the Albion House by Mr. Wm. Swinney and crew of the Sandstell fishing. The supper was provided by Mrs. Weightman's best style, and was fully appreciated by all present. After the tables were cleared a very enjoyable evening was spent with songs and recitations. Dancing was engaged in with great zest to music supplied with a violin. Punctually at 11 o'clock the company broke up with the greatest decorum.

Berwick Advertiser, 23rd September 1887

BREAK

BEGINNING OF THE SEASON

Berwick's fishing fleet was based partly at The Greenses and partly in Spittal. Over the winter months, the majority of the boats were laid up beyond the Royal Border Bridge

1 x PHOTO ROYAL BORDER BRIDGE AND HERRING BOATS

The migration of the herring down the East Coast began off the north of Scotland in May. The first signs of the shoals of “silver darlings” of Berwickshire would usually be in late June, but the height of the season for the boats working out of the Greenses and Spittal was from the end of July until mid-September.

We can follow the fortunes of the local fleet during the herring “drave” of 1868, through the pages of the Berwick Journal.

THE HERRING FISHING – For about a fortnight past herrings caught north from Berwick have been sold by cadgers in the town and neighbourhood at 6d a dozen. The quality of the fish meshed at present is only middling. Those brought to port on Wednesday were much mixed, the majority being small, rather soft and immature looking, and comparatively useless for anything else but immediate consumption. None of the Berwick or Spittal fishermen have yet made a trial, but the promising success of their northern brethren will doubtless incite a few of them to make a start on an early day. Only one boat is launched preparatory to being equipped for the season, but a number of others are quite ready for launching.

Berwick Journal, 5th June 1868

THE HERRING FISHING – With the exception of 6 or 7 boats, the others of the fleet are yet high and dry above the Royal Border Bridge. During the week three boats have been 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.

Berwick Journal, 19th June 1868

THE HERRING FISHING – This enterprise still continues unproductive. The strong easterly winds and slight in the sea on Tuesday would, it was thought, have a beneficial effect upon the fishing by rousing the herring from the bottom. After Monday night no boats put to sea till Wednesday evening, and on Tuesday morning, contrary to expectation, most of them returned clean. Prices are good. The few fish caught are of excellent quality, and are generally retailed by cadgers at 8d per dozen (£1.52). A greater number of boats are now engaged, and before another fortnight passes, the whole fleet will be ready for sea.

Berwick Journal, 10th July 1868

1 x PHOTO HERRING BOAT AND CARTS AT QUAYSIDE

The fishing fleet followed the herring shoals as they migrated down the North Sea, and ports like Berwick hosted boats from as far afield as Fife, Cornwall and the Isle of Man.

THE HERRING FISHING – 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.

Berwick Journal, 24th July 1868

An article in the Berwick Advertiser from July 1853 gives a vivid picture of the height of the herring season.

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. 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 their success. 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 (£64.38).

Berwick Advertiser, 23rd July, 1853

1 x PHOTO OF BERWICK QUAYSIDE AND FISHING FLEET

THE HERRING FISHING – The fishing on Friday and Saturday has brought vividly to mind the herring fishing of fifteen or twenty years ago, when 30, 40, and 60 crans were oftener landed than they have been for a few years back. Very heavy cargoes were landed, 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. 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. 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.

Berwick Journal, 28th August 1868

Interference from foreign fishing boats is nothing new, and our fishermen even put the blame for some poor catches on the Berwick Artillery Volunteers.

1 x PHOTO – ARTILLERY VOLUNTEERS

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.

Berwick Advertiser, 27th August 1864

By September, the shoals had moved further south towards Yorkshire and then East Anglia, where the season ended in October.

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. 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.

Berwick Journal, 11th September 1868

1 x PHOTO BOATS AT ROYAL BORDER BRIDGE

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 –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 (£39.99) being the highest, and 12s per cran (£27.42) 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. 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.

Berwick Journal, 18th September 1868

This is an account of the end of the herring season twenty years earlier, in 1846.

HERRING FISHING - BERWICK SEPTEMBER 11 – Our herring fishing seems now to be over for this season. 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. This week two small cargoes have been brought here from Holy Island station, and several from Dunbar. One of the latter bought by one of our curers in a roused state, has turned out excellent fish and will we trust remunerate the purchaser. Pickled herrings are selling at 21s per barrel (£61.46).

Berwick Advertiser, 12th September 1846

It was much the same twenty years later, in 1887.

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, September 15th 1887

1 x PHOTO – HERRING FLEET AT QUAYSIDE (2)

By the 1880s, the new fleets of powerful steam drifters and the use of smaller meshed nets caused overfishing of the herring stocks and a fall in prices.

1 x PHOTO – SPITTAL QUAY WITH STEAM DRIFTERS

HERRINGS FOR MANURE – On Tuesday night a Spittal herring boat arrived at the Carr Rock with a shot of 70 crans of herrings of good quality. This large catch was sold to Messrs Black & Co, as manure, for 2s per cran (£5.99).

Berwick Journal, August 25th 1887

HERRING FISHING – 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. To the great majority of the fishermen the season will be an unprofitable one on account of the low prices they obtained for their herrings. Although curers purchased their herrings at very moderate rates, they will realise little or no profit from the business, in consequence of the almost nominal prices they are obtaining for the lower descriptions of herrings, which unfortunately formed the bulk of this season's catch.

Berwick Advertiser, 23rd September 1887

HERRING FISHING STATISTICS – Last week 190 boats were fishing in this district, 50 of which were engaged at Eyemouth, 82 at Berwick, 22 at North Sunderland, 14 at Craster, and the remainder at the other stations. This total number of boats is 45 less than the number employed in similar week of last year. Quality very indifferent during the week; greater part of the herrings consisting of soft oily matties unfit for curing purposes. An occasional shot of fine herring was, however, secured; particularly one of nearly 80 crans caught by a Burnmouth boat inshore off Marshall Meadows, and which was delivered to Messrs Boston at Spittal. Such was the inferior character of most of the catches during the week that some hundreds of crans were sold at 1s to 2s per cran (£2.99-£5.99) and sent to the manure works at Berwick and Eyemouth, a most disheartening circumstance to the fishermen. For the better classes of herring, prices at the various stations varied from 6s to 12s per cran (£17.97-£35.93), still very poor for the fishermen.

Berwick Journal, August 9th 1888

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.

Berwick Journal, September 6th 1888

Proposals to conserve the herring stocks came to nothing.

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 injurious effects on the herring trade of the use of the small meshed nets by fishermen. 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.

Berwick Journal, July 26th 1888

PROCESSING AND CURING THE HERRING

The herrings were sold either “green” (fresh), “red” (kippered) , or “white” (pickled).

The export trade in pickled or “white” herrings had been encouraged and regulated by government since 1806 but, until the middle of the 19th century, it seemed that the market for “green” herrings would be the most profitable, with the railways allowing transportation to the growing towns.

HERRING FISHING –The number of boats engaged has been fully equal to that of former years, namely eighty, equally divided between the Greenses and those at Spittal. If we set down the average of their earnings for the season at £110 (£6,438.30) each boat, and this sum we feel fully warranted in stating, we arrive at a grand total of £8,800 (£515,064.00) 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 (£52.68) for red and 22s (£64.38) for white.

Berwick Advertiser, 1st October 1853

RED HERRINGS AND KIPPERS

PHOTO – KIPPERING AT BOSTON'S YARD

HERRING FISHING STATISTICS – There was a very successful fishing last week at Berwick and Eyemouth. The weather being favourable, the boats were regularly at sea. The 78 boats fishing at Berwick landed 4,567 crans for the week, and 8,803 for the season. The herrings were to a large extent of indifferent quality and consequently many shots sold for as low as from 3s to 6s per cran (£8.98-£17.97), but the general prices varied from 5s to 10s (£14.97-£29.95). A considerable proportion of this week's catch were gutted and kippered, the quantity dispatched fresh to the home markets being small owing to the unsatisfactory returns obtained therefrom.

Berwick Journal, August 11th 1887

The pickled, or “white” herrings were packed in barrels, called crans, the dimensions of which were carefully controlled.

1 x PHOTO – COOPER + 1 x PHOTO HERRING LASS ON BARREL

The Herring Trade – A barrel must hold 32 gallons, a half barrel 16 gallons - liquid measure. The length of the barrel must be about 30 inches and the circumference at the bilge about 60 inches: the length of the half barrel must be about 22½ inches and the circumference at the bilge about 48 inches.

Berwick Advertiser, 1st December 1838

The gutting and curing process was carried out by crews of herring-girls.

1 x PHOTO – HERRING LASSES

The fresh, or “green” herrings were taken from the boats to the curer's yard and thrown into a long wooden trough called a farlin, where the herring-girls stood.

PHOTO – HERRING-GIRLS AT A FARLIN

The gills and guts were removed with a single movement of a sharp knife. An experienced worker could gut 40 to 60 fish per minute.

The herring guts were thrown into a tub, or cog” to be collected by farmers to use as fertilizer or taken to make margarine, soap, fish paste or manure in the factories on Spittal Point.

After gutting, the herrings were sorted according to size and quality.

PHOTO – SORTING HERRING AT BOSTON’S YARD

The fish were then put into a tub. Salt was added and the fish and brine “roused”, or mixed together. Then the fish were packed in the barrels.

Each layer was laid in the form of a rosette, the heads pointing outwards in the first layer then the arrangement reversed in the next layer and so on until the barrel was filled. coarse salt was put between the layers. An efficient team could fill one barrel containing 850 to 1,000 fish every 10 minutes.

PHOTO – PACKING THE BARRELS

The filled barrels were then left to stand for several days while a chemical reaction took place between salt and juices that caused the fish to shrink.

PHOTO – FILLED BARRELS AT BOSTON BROS YARD

After standing, the brine was poured off and the barrel was filled to the top with more fish. This “tiering” was carried out particularly neatly so the fish would look good when the barrel was opened.

A Fishery Officer inspected each full barrel before the lid was fitted by a cooper. The barrel was then laid on its side, the bung removed and the barrel filled up with brine.

The lid was branded by the Fishery Officer to show the curer’s name and the quality of the herrings. The best quality barrels were branded with a Crown symbol.

WINTER FISHING

When the herring season finished, white fish was caught using long lines, baited with mussels and limpets.

PHOTO – BAITING LINES

Before Victorian times, little deep sea fishing was carried out during the winter months. It was considered too dangerous to go to sea in the open decked boats of the time. Berwick never became a deep-water port for a large fleet of trawlers and the local fishermen continued to work from traditional cobbles using long lines, and potting for crabs and lobsters.

THE FISH TRADE – The cobbles have at last got to sea, having been off twice during the week. Their takes were fair, haddocks selling at 2s per stone (£5.99 or 43p per lb); and crabs at 3s per score (£8.98). Few lobsters are being landed. The Greenses fishermen have lost many of their crab pots, which were set just before the bad weather broke, but the Spittal fishermen generally found their creives unmoved.

Berwick Journal, March 22nd 1888

WHITE FISHING – During the week steam trawlers had their catches sold by auction, as follows:- large haddocks 5s 6d to 6s 9d per basket; medium do 3s 6d to 4s 3d; small do 6d to 1s 6d; lemon soles 11s to 14s; plaice 8s to 10s; codlings 2s 3d to 4s 6d; whittings 2s 3d; soles 4s per pair; cod 1s 6d to 2s each; skate 1s 9d; turbot 3s 3d to 7s; catfish 6d. The cobbles have done little or nothing, the fishermen having suffered a deal of loss of their crab creels during the bad weather of the past week, and they are, consequently, busy repairing. Up to 7 and 8 score of crabs have been landed, and these sold at from 2s to 2s 6d per score.

Berwick Journal, July 5th 1888

PHOTO – COBBLES AT BERWICK PIER