

Extracts from 19th century local newspapers relating to winter fishing

A DESCRIPTION OF EYEMOUTH IN 1846 - A lucrative fishery is carried on off the coast; the fish usually taken are, cod, haddock, and herrings. In the cod and haddock fishery about fifteen boats are regularly engaged, each of which is managed by six men, and the yearly produce is estimated at £3000. The herring-fishery is also very productive, and in 1820 afforded employment to more than 100 boats, whose cargoes in that year amounted to 10,000 barrels; but since that time it has materially diminished. The cod, either dried or pickled, is generally sent to London; the red or smoked herrings to London, Hull, Glasgow, and Newcastle; and the white or pickled herrings to Ireland, and the ports of the Baltic.

Topographical Survey of Scotland, 1846

THE HADDOCK FISHING AT EYEMOUTH - The enterprising and industrious fishermen of Eyemouth have for several weeks past met with extraordinary success in the prosecution of the haddock fishing, though within these few days it has greatly declined. This pursuit they carry on throughout the winter and during very rough weather, using their large herring boats, with a crew of six men in each boat. They leave the harbour generally about two or three in the morning, proceed often to fishing-grounds twenty miles off the land, and return again at six or seven in the evening. It is gratifying to be able to state that, in the present year at least, their exertions have met with a fair reward. During the greater part of last month, all the boats, with few exceptions, had each day as high as from 2,400 to 3,000 haddocks; and in one week in which a reckoning was kept it was ascertained that nearly 240,000 of that fish were caught by the boats belonging to this small place. The winter's fishing, as a whole, has not been equalled even in the memory of the "oldest fisherman" in the village. The fish were of a superior quality, and the general run of them was very large, numbers weighing as high as from six to nine pounds, which last is an enormous weight for a haddock. The prices varied from 8d to 1s 2d per score. Taking 2,500 as the average daily take of each boat during the best of the season, at 11d per score as an average price, each boat's crew would in each week realise nearly £34, or more than £4 16s each man. It may perhaps be expected that this success of the Eyemouth men will act as an incentive to some of their neighbours a few miles southward, against whom pursuing a similar course throughout the winter months there is surely no obstacle which a little enterprise and exertion could not remove.

Berwick Advertiser
6th March 1841

EYEMOUTH - Eyemouth is a growing seaport town, with a population of 1400; distant a little more than two miles from the Station. The inhabitants of this place, like those of Burnmouth, are chiefly engaged in fishing, the greater part of the produce of which is conveyed by sea to Leith, and thence forwarded on either to Glasgow or London. The harbour affords shelter to vessels in all winds, and admits them at every stage of the tide, in which respects it has an advantage over most others.

Berwick Advertiser
13th June 1846

TO FISH CURERS TO BE LET

ON MONDAY THE 1st INSTANT
THE HADDOCK, COD and LING
taken at HOLY ISLAND during the
ensuing season.

Apply to James Allan, Fisherman. Holy
Island

Berwick Advertiser
3rd October 1846

EYEMOUTH - The herring drave of 1887 has now closed. There has been no want of fish on the coast throughout the whole season, but prices have not been remunerative. The quality, and the consequent low prices given for cured fish on the Continent, have been the cause of the depression. When boats and gear are stored for the winter, the haddock fishing will at once be proceeded with. The merchants' stocks of cured herrings are all shipped and their preparations will now be for the cured haddocks for the Glasgow market.

Berwick Advertiser
23rd September 1887

FISHING STATISTICS – During April there were landed by the fishermen in the Eyemouth District 481 cwt of cod worth £217; 7 cwt of ling worth £5; 5 cwt of saith or coal fish worth £1; 4,571 cwt of haddocks worth £2,514; 477 cwt of whiting worth £334; one cwt of halibut worth £2; 22 cwt of flounder, plaice and brill worth £7; 5 cwt of skate worth £1; 23 cwts of other kinds of white fish worth £5; 100 lobsters worth £5; 2,500 crabs worth £19; and 150 cwt of other kinds of shell fish worth £23. The total value, therefore, of the fish landed was £3,133.

Berwick Journal
17th May 1888

DEEP SEA FISHING – The information contained in the following paragraph, which we copy from the Arbroath Guide is, we learn, perfectly correct. The company alluded to is composed of parties resident in the borough and in Eyemouth: they have already bought one vessel, which is expected here shortly, when operations will be commenced. She is about 5 tons burthen, about 50 feet long and expected to be an excellent sea-boat. The success of the experiment will no doubt induce others to engage in the trade and very probably this may be the commencement of an important business:- “It is with satisfaction that we learn there is an intention on the part of several gentlemen connected with Berwickshire to form an association for the purpose of prosecuting Deep Sea Fishing, from Holy Island to the Bell Rock, and along the coast to Arbroath, including the Dogger Bank, and the numerous Banks in the Frith, which are well known to yield a most abundant supply of fish of the very best description. Looking at the great facilities that will be afforded by the railways when the communication between Edinburgh, Berwick and Newcastle is opened, and whereby the fish caught during the day can be on the following morning exposed for sale in the very best condition in the markets of the great manufacturing towns of Glasgow, Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield, Manchester, &c, it is evident that a prodigious demand will arise and a great benefit derived by the fishermen and the consumers in the inland manufacturing districts, who have been almost disbarred hitherto from the consumption of fish in a perfectly fresh state, and at a moderate price. Much suffering and privation were suffered by the fishermen of Berwick, Spittal and the vicinity from their unsuccessful herring fishing last season. With a view to stimulate their exertions, the gentlemen alluded to are very desirous of setting agoing the Deep Sea Fishing with a suitable decked vessel, securing at same time safety of the fishermen, and an opportunity of following up the fishing at all seasons of the year, to the greatest advantage. We sincerely hope the experiment may be a successful one and, if so, the fishermen will then see it to be their interest to follow up the example set them, with industry and perseverance. Their risk from exposure in undecked boats has been great hitherto, and much loss of life has frequently occurred, as also continual loss of time and labour in getting to and from the fishing grounds daily, from the necessity of returning every night for safety and shelter. Whether successful or not in their fishing with suitable decked vessels, this necessity will be obviated, and an advantage gained of being able to fish during two tides in place of one, within 24 hours. The Dutch and French have for a very long period of time resorted to our coasts to fish: and surely, if it answers the object, it would pay well our fishermen who have at all seasons of the year inexhaustible stores of fish on their own shores, and especially now when such extensive markets are about being available for the disposal of them. What Frenchmen and Dutchmen can do, we are sure the Englishmen and Scotsmen can do as well, or better, and it becomes an object not only of local, but national interest when we reflect that the importation of foreign cured fish will be greatly increased when the reduced duty by the new tariff has had time to operate. Our fishermen will only be able to meet the competition by greatly increased exertion on their part, and by adoption of a better system of fishing. Much has been written regarding the Deep Sea Fishing but one really practical undertaking, successfully carried out, will be worth hundreds of theoretical essays on the subject. In this belief, we wish that every success may attend so laudable an enterprise.”

Berwick Advertiser
9th May 1846

OUR SEA FISHERIES – The following communication has been sent us by a gentleman interested in the success of our sea fishing:- “We hear that it is in contemplation to form a company in this neighbourhood, whose object will be to give regular and permanent employment to the fishermen on this coast, and to supply the great towns and populous districts in the centre and western parts of the island with fresh turbot, cod, haddocks, &c, &c. The uninterrupted and regular communication by railway which, in the course of a few months, will be opened between this place and the great and populous manufacturing towns and surrounding districts cannot fail to create a great demand for fresh sea fish, and be alike advantageous to the fishermen on our coasts, the parties about to engage in this trade, the railway companies as carriers, and the inhabitants of the towns and districts inland, as well as of those towns on or near the west coast of England. It is well known that the sea on the west coast of England yields few or no turbot, cod or haddocks, and those of inferior quality, and that the Liverpool and Manchester markets, as well as those of all the great manufacturing towns in Lancashire and the West Riding of York are very inadequately supplied with fresh sea fish. The price of fish in those towns and districts is so enormously high as to confine the consumption of this valuable and wholesome food entirely to the tables of the opulent, and the middle and lower classes being shut out from the market, the demand is consequently extremely narrowed. The supply of fish even in Liverpool is of a very inferior description to that caught on this coast and yet is sold there at very high prices. In Cheshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Herefordshire, the fish markets are supplied for the most part from London, thus enhancing the cost of the article to the consumer by the exorbitant profits of the London fish-merchants. To furnish a supply of wholesome and nutritious food at a moderate cost to the inhabitants of the populous districts referred to, and to afford a regular and permanent as well as lucrative employment to the hardy fishermen on our own coasts, must be considered a most laudable undertaking, and one which cannot fail to prove highly remunerative to the spirited proprietors of the scheme we have indicated. From the want of a regular demand for sea fish beyond our own small and unimportant markets, the prices of cod and haddocks have fallen so low that the fishermen have for some years ceased to follow their hazardous occupation with the spirit and industry formerly evinced by them: and in no place has this want of energy been more manifested than at Holy Island, a place formed by nature as the ideal of a fishing station. We hope to hear that no impediments will be allowed to frustrate the intentions of the proprietors of “The Northumberland Sea Fishing Company” and that by the successful development of their scheme the industrial energies of our fishermen will be restored to their former vigour, and a large portion of our poorer countrymen supplied with a cheap and wholesome article of food.”

Berwick Advertiser
17th October 1846

HOLY ISLAND FISHERY - MR. DONALDSON SELBY of Cheswick having observed with regret that the fishermen of Holy Island do not pursue their avocation for fishing for Turbot, Cod, Haddock, &c., with which the sea on the coast there abounds, with the same spirit and energy evinced by them in former years, and that to the prejudice of themselves and their families they lead an idle and inactive life during great part of the winter, when the Fish are in the greatest perfection, proposes to offer, as a small stimulus to exertion, the undermentioned Prizes or Premiums to those fishermen resident at Holy Island, who most frequently and successfully employ themselves in fishing for Cod, Turbot, Haddocks and Whittings, during the Winter and Spring seasons, viz:-

To the Crew of the Coble who shall most frequently go to sea to fish for Turbot, Cod, Haddock and Whiting between the 1st October 1846 and the 1st July 1847, FIVE SOVEREIGNS.

To the Crew of the second Coble as above mentioned, TWO SOVEREIGNS

To the Crew of the Coble who shall between the periods above named catch the greatest number of Cod Fish, THREE SOVEREIGNS.

To the Crew of the Coble who shall in the same period catch the greatest number of Haddocks and Whittings, TWO SOVEREIGNS.

The Prizes to be adjudicated by Judges who will be named by Mr. Selby on the 1st August 1847.

The Harbour Master will take account of the number of times each coble goes to sea, and the quantity of fish caught by each during the season and it is expected that a true and faithful account will be rendered to him by the Crew of each Boat.

Berwick Advertiser
17th October 1846

EYEMOUTH WHITE FISHING - The haddock fishing, in which forty large decked boats manned by 260 men, have been employed since October last, has just closed. The season has been the poorest one for very many years, and the shortcoming has been severely felt by the fishermen and the people in town generally, who are all more or less dependent upon the fishing. The deficiency in the year's gains is ascertained to be from £25 to £30 a man, and if the loss to carters, coopers, and other workers is added, the gross deficiency in the year's income is at least £10,000. The fishermen in the face of much discouragement, have struggled manfully against the depressed circumstances of their calling, and good weather and bad have prosecuted the fishing with perseverance worthy of better results.

Berwick Journal
5th June 1868

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 cobles 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 sold at from 2s to 2s 6d per score.

Berwick Journal
July 5th 1888