

**THE HERRING  
FISHERIES  
OF SCOTLAND**

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The Herring Fisheries of Scotland by R. W. Duff

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*International Fisheries Exhibition*

LONDON, 1883

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BY  
R. W. DUFF, M.P.

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and to such improvements for their development as a nautical experience of twelve years in the Navy suggests.

Now the treatment of the subject from the point of view I have indicated, necessitates a reference to statistics. I regret to say that the only reliable figures I can find are those relating to the Scotch Herring Fisheries, compiled by the Fishery Board for Scotland, and I may here remark that I think it is a matter of very great regret that no attention has hitherto been paid to the recommendation of the Sea Fisheries Commission of 1866, who say, "We think it a matter of great importance that Fishery statistics should be systematically collected. It is only by such means that the constant recurrence of the panics to which the Sea Fishery interests have hitherto been subjected can be prevented, and that any trustworthy conclusion can be arrived at regarding the effects of the modes of fishing which are in use. It is probable that the existing Coast Guard or Customs organisation may be utilised to collect statistics, as is now to some extent the case in Ireland."

The necessity for fuller information than we possess concerning our Sea Fisheries must, I feel sure, be impressed on us by the able and interesting paper read on Tuesday by Professor Brown Goode, as the result of the application of improved modes of capture and transit of fish in the United States could not have been established without the elaborate statistics he was able to put before us.

My general observations may be taken as applying to the Herring Fisheries of the United Kingdom, but for the reason I have mentioned they are made with particular reference to what is undoubtedly our most important Herring Fisheries, viz., those of Scotland.

Dealing, in the first instance, with the progress of the

Scotch Herring Fisheries I shall only take you back to the year 1810, when I find by the statistics of the Scotch Fishery Board the number of herrings cured were as follows :

	Barrels cured.	Barrels exported.
1810 . . . . .	90,185	35,848
1830 . . . . .	326,557	181,654
1850 . . . . .	770,698	340,255
1880 . . . . .	1,473,600	1,009,811

I may here mention that a barrel contains 32 gallons English Wine measure, and it is calculated that each barrel contains from 800 to 900 herrings. A barrel of salted herrings, taking the average of the different qualities, represents herrings to the value of 25s. According to this estimate the value of the herrings cured in Scotland in 1880 represents £1,842,000. It is calculated that 20 per cent. of the herrings are sold fresh, assuming the fresh herring to be only worth as much as the cured, although it is probably more valuable, the total quantity taken off the Coast of Scotland in 1880 would represent a money value of £2,210,460.\* In the valuable paper prepared for this Conference by the Duke of Edinburgh, His Royal Highness estimates the money value of the fish taken off the Coast of these Islands at £7,380,000. It will thus be seen that the produce of the Scotch Herring Fisheries bears a large proportion to the total value of the fish brought to our shores.

The Herring Fishery of 1880 was the most productive ever experienced in Scotland, and it was one which enabled

\* Professor Brown Goode estimates the American Oyster Fisheries as producing £2,799,790 a year, £589,330 more than the Scotch Herring Fisheries, the latter being twice as valuable as any other single American Fishery.

the Scotch curer to export a greater quantity of cured herrings to the Continent than either the Norwegians or the Dutch, who have long been the established and worthy rivals of the Scotch in the Continental markets. I find, from the statistics laid before the Herring Brand Committee of 1881, the relative quantity of herrings imported at Stettin was :

	Scotland.	Norway.	Holland.
1869 to 1874, average of 6 years	569,741	936,105	161,961
1875 „ 1880 „ 6 „	629,101	694,502	148,663

The Norwegian barrel is  $\frac{1}{4}$ th less than the Scotch; the Dutch barrel is the same size.

These figures do not, of course, represent the total export of each country. A quantity of Dutch herrings are sent up the Rhine, and Holland, like Norway and Scotland, has a considerable export trade in cured herrings with most European countries. The Baltic ports, however, take the large proportion of the Scotch and, I believe, also of the Norwegian herrings; a comparison, therefore, of the imports at these ports may be taken as indicating the relative prosperity of the herring trade of the two countries. The demand for cured herrings in the interior of Europe may be shown by a statement of Mr. Reid, the British Vice-Consul at Stettin. Speaking of Scotch herrings imported at Stettin, he said, before the Committee of 1881: "We send them all round, beginning with Poland and Warsaw and the territory between Stettin and Warsaw, the south of Russia, Galicia, round by Vienna, along to Bavaria, and then as far round until we get to Magdeburg, when the imports of Hamburg come in and compete with our offers."

The progress of the Dutch Herring Fisheries is indicated by the statistics in the Exhibition, showing that since 1857



they have increased in value from £47,908 to £147,788 per annum.

Returning to the Scotch Herring Fisheries, I should mention that the herrings cured in 1881 (the last year for which I have reliable statistics) showed a decrease as compared with 1880, of 362,445 barrels, but an increase as compared with the average of the last ten years of 21 per cent.

Besides producing the large revenue I have referred to the Scotch Herring Fisheries give employment to 48,000 fishermen, 2,400 coopers, 18,854 salters and packers. There are 14,800 boats employed, while the value of the boats, nets, and lines is estimated at £1,500,000.

An industry conducted on so large a scale must be of great value to any country. It is difficult to exaggerate its importance to the North of Scotland, where the industries are few, and where the soil is frequently sterile and unproductive.

Professor Huxley in his opening address referred to the large proportion of food frequently taken from the sea as compared with the land. This is well illustrated by the relative products of our Northern Counties.

I once made a calculation, taking my figures from the Domesday Book, that the annual rental of the nine Northern Counties in Scotland, amounted to £1,299,704, being half a million less than the value of the cured herrings in Scotland, already referred to, in 1880, and the value of herrings cured at three stations, in the same year, on the Aberdeenshire Coast, viz.: Aberdeen, Peterhead, and Frazerburgh, exceeded the rental of the County of Aberdeen (the City of Aberdeen alone excepted) by £69,000.

The statistics I have given I think prove the national importance of the Herring Fisheries, they also show that the progress of the Scotch Fisheries, although subject to

some slight fluctuations, has been rapid and continuous. I will now consider the conditions under which they have prospered and under which the trade in cured herrings has so greatly increased.

The Herring Fisheries Commission of 1878 reports that up to 1829 it had been the policy of the legislation to encourage the Herring Fisheries by bounties, but the bounties were discontinued, Mr. McCulloch expressing an opinion that the fishermen often went to sea to catch the bounties and not the fish.

From 1829 to 1851 the Fisheries were free from Government sources of encouragement and were subject to no restrictive regulations of importance. From '51 to '67 a series of restrictive measures were passed to regulate the Fishery and to prevent the capture of herrings at certain seasons and in certain ways. Since 1867, again, when the first of the liberating Acts were passed (due in a great degree to the report of the Commission in '62, presided over by my right hon. friend in the chair), the Fisheries on the coast of Scotland have practically been free and subject to no restrictive legislation whatever.

I find that from—

	Average number of barrels cured annually.
1829-51, period of unrestricted fishing . . .	521,880
1851-68 „ restrictive legislation . . .	657,160
1868-1881 „ unrestricted fishing . . .	827,580

These figures show that the average increase per annum in 13 years of unrestricted legislation exceeded that of 17 years of restrictive legislation by 170,420 barrels.

The two systems were tried for sufficient periods to justify the conclusion of the Commissioners of '78, viz.—“That legislation in past periods has had no appreciable effect, and that nothing that man has yet done, and nothing

man is likely to do, has diminished or is likely to diminish the general stock of herrings in the sea."

If further evidence be needed in support of a policy of unrestricted fishing, it appears to me to be supplied by a consideration of the insignificant proportion of herrings captured by man as compared with that effected by agencies over which man has no control. I need say little on this point, as it was amply dealt with by Professor Huxley in his opening address, but in support of his view I may quote a short extract from the Report of Messrs. Buckland, Walpole and Young in '78. They say: "The Scotch gannets must consume 37 per cent. more herrings than all the Scotch fishermen catch in their nets."

The Commissioners add: "Whales, porpoises, seals, coal fish, predaceous fish of every description are constantly feeding on them (the herrings) from the moment of their birth. The shoals of herrings in the ocean are always accompanied by flocks of gulls and other sea birds, which are continuously preying upon them, and it seems therefore no exaggeration to conclude that man does not destroy one herring for every fifty destroyed by other enemies." In quoting these opinions I am aware that I am only repeating what has frequently been urged before by those who have advocated unrestricted freedom of fishing. My apology for repetition is that I am often being told that "the sea is over-fished," and am frequently appealed to to use my influence in Parliament in support of various restrictive measures for regulating our Sea Fisheries, and the most effective reply to these statements and demands appears to me to be the conclusions arrived at by competent Commissioners, who have made exhaustive inquiries into the subject. Only the other day I read a most interesting book which I purchased in the Exhibition,