

**NOTES ON THE SEA
FISHERIES AND FISHING
POPULATION OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM, PP. 3-64**

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Notes on the Sea Fisheries and Fishing Population of the United Kingdom, pp. 3-64 by Alfred Ernest Albert

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ALFRED ERNEST ALBERT

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International Fisheries Exhibition,

LONDON, 1883.

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SEA FISHERIES AND FISHING POPULATION

OF

THE UNITED KINGDOM.

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ARISING FROM INFORMATION AND EXPERIENCE GAINED
DURING THREE YEARS' COMMAND OF THE
NAVAL RESERVES.

BY

VICE-ADMIRAL

H.R.H. THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH, K.G.

Alfred, Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha

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International Fisheries Exhibition,
LONDON, 1883.

CONFERENCE ON TUESDAY, JUNE 19, 1883.

H.R.H. THE PRINCE OF WALES read the Paper which had been prepared by H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh on 'British Fisheries and Fishermen.'

NOTES ON THE SEA FISHERIES AND
FISHING POPULATION OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM.

1-4-38 11.111.
In fulfilment of my intention expressed at the public meeting held at Willis's Rooms on the 27th of February, 1882, for the promotion of this Exhibition, it will now be my endeavour to place before you an account of the extent and condition of our fishing population, with a view to interest you in its welfare and to draw your attention to the great importance of our sea fisheries.

In order clearly to point out the hardships, dangers, and disadvantages to which our fishermen are exposed, and to draw attention especially to those occurrences which are in a measure preventible, more particularly where lives are apparently needlessly sacrificed, I have thought it best to accompany my remarks by some slight account of the principal kinds of fisheries in

which the men are engaged. This account, though very imperfect, may also perhaps be of service to those quite unacquainted with the subject, when inspecting all the appliances for the capture of fish which are exhibited in this splendid range of buildings.

My paper has thus become much larger than I intended; I have therefore divided it into two parts, the first of which, relating more particularly to the fishing population, I will now read.

In dealing with the enormous mass of statistical information which has been furnished to me from different points on the coast, I have often felt the great disadvantage of want of experience in work of this kind; but I have in this paper attempted to furnish you with an idea of the great importance to the nation of the prosperity of our fishing industry.

It appeared to me that, to arrive at a just appreciation of this importance, you should have brought under your notice facts as to the number of persons dependent upon fishing for their livelihood, the methods of capture employed, the description and number of boats and vessels used, the quantities of fish taken annually, the manner of its disposal, and its commercial value.

If I succeed in imparting information to any of my hearers or readers, or in suggesting to their minds any ideas for the moral or material benefit of our fishing population, or the diminishing of the dangers to which our fishermen are exposed; for the improvement of the fishing-vessels and boats, for the further development of the fishing industry, either by improved methods of capture or otherwise, which it is the object of this

Exhibition to promote,—it will be a source of great satisfaction to me.

Throughout the period of three years, commencing November, 1879, during which I held the command of our Naval Reserves, my duties necessitated my frequent presence on the British coasts, both by sea and by land, giving me occasion to visit a very large number of our fishing villages.

I was thus afforded opportunities of observing our fishing population in the labours of their occupation afloat and ashore, and of realising more and more thoroughly the great importance of our sea fisheries, as one of the many forms of that maritime industry the steady pursuit of which has contributed so much to the welfare, prosperity, and glory of the British Empire.

Our sea fisheries are of great importance, not only in obtaining for us a considerable portion of our food supply, but in providing a means of subsistence for a large section of our population, and in keeping within our borders a skilful, brave, and hardy race of seamen, trained from their earliest boyhood to seek their livelihood from, and to contend with, the most stormy and tempestuous of seas.

My duties, however, obliged me to be so constantly moving from place to place when on the coast, that it was not in my power to obtain personally all the information I required relating to our fisheries and fishermen. I therefore requested the Divisional and Station Officers of H.M. Coastguard to make inquiries within the limits of their several commands, to collect statistics relating to the sea fisheries of their vicinity, and to furnish me with such information as they could obtain

on the subject. I also addressed a similar request to the officers in command of H.M. revenue cruisers.

I take this opportunity of expressing to the officers above referred to, my appreciation of the careful and painstaking manner in which they collected the information I asked them for, and for the very valuable observations and suggestions with which, in many instances, the statistical returns were supplemented.

These returns were furnished from nearly 800 different places on the coasts of the United Kingdom, the majority of which had some interest, though it might be a very small one, in our sea fisheries.

Even then I found that some very important centres of the industry were not included in the returns at my disposal; for information with regard to these I had to depend on other authorities and apply to other sources. For the kindly manner in which my appeals were responded to I must here express my sincere thanks.

The wonderful development of the railway system in these Islands which has taken place in the course of the last fifty years has amongst other benefits had the effect of familiarising the present generation, even those residing at places the farthest removed from the coasts, with the various species of fish inhabiting our seas which are used as food.

Fish which are to-day disporting themselves in their native waters off Wick, in the extreme north of Scotland, may be to-morrow displayed on the slabs of the fishmongers' shops in Birmingham, Bath, or Taunton; the cod to-day on the Dogger Bank may be to-morrow in Stafford with a lobster from the Hebrides at its head, a barrel of oysters from Whitstable at its tail,

whilst a mackerel from Kinsale and a hake from Mount's Bay may repose on either side of it.

An inhabitant of any of these towns, who possibly has never seen the sea, would probably be able to name at a glance almost any fish ordinarily offered for sale; he would also know the price he usually has to pay for them, according to the estimation in which they are held for the table; but there his knowledge would most likely end.

If asked to explain the process of capture, or for information as to those who make it the business of their lives to reap the precarious harvest of the sea, he would be unable to furnish a reply to the inquirer. How many of the inhabitants of these Islands, even including our dwellers on the sea-coast, have a conception that if, from any cause, the myriads of fish at present swarming in our seas were this afternoon to retreat to the depths of the ocean, beyond the range of man's appliances for capturing them, to-morrow over half a million of our fellow-subjects would be looking starvation in the face! Such, however, is the case, and such is the magnitude of this kingdom's stake in the Sea Fisheries.

In stating that over half a million of our fellow-subjects depend each day for their bread upon the fish taken from the sea over night, I allude only to the fishermen, their wives and families, and do not include the buyers, curers, gutters, coopers, carters, porters, boat-builders, net-makers, wholesale and retail dealers in the towns, with their assistants, and various others more or less dependent on the success of our fisheries for a livelihood. The very wide distribution of the