



## Discovery of the New Scotch Cure

The discovery of the new 'Scotch-cure' came about as a result of a competition sponsored by the Arts Society of London when they offered a reward for the best method of curing quality herring to a standard equal to, if not higher than, the secret 'Dutch-cure' which enabled the Dutch to monopolise the European Market for cured herring.

In 1819 J.F. Donovan of Leith who had hired six Dutch curers, claimed the reward with his 'Scotch-cure' and he was paid fifty guineas. The new cure soon set a standard that was adopted by the Fisheries Board. Before 1819 the herring, when caught, was lightly salted at sea and afterwards packed into barrels with an additional quantity of salt. Gutting of the herring was only done when it was considered necessary. After the discovery of the 'Scotch-cure' gutting before curing was adopted as a general practice, and eventually the curers would on no account touch any herring that was in contact with salt before being landed. This was because salt softened the fish, which they preferred to get in a firm, fresh state. Earlier on gutting was done with the fingers, but by 1815 it was necessary to use a knife called 'cutag'.

The 'Scotch-Cure' provided a breakthrough to successful large-scale herring fishing in Scotland and from then on the Industry grew rapidly. It grew from 90,000 barrels of cured herring in Scotland in the 1880s to two and a half million in the peak year of 1908.

The state recognised the value of the British fishing industry, not only for the considerable wealth it was capable of generating, but more particularly as a training ground for large numbers of recruits for the Merchant Marine as well as the Merchant Navy. Many writers pointed out the peculiar value of the fishing industry in providing training in seamanship, including the Napier Commission report on crofting 'A National basis for the naval defence of the country, the value of which, in possible emergencies, cannot be overrated'. The truth of the statement was clearly demonstrated in the subsequent two World Wars when the fishing fleet provided not only experienced seamen but also a fleet of manned fishing vessels for minesweeping services etc.

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