



Netting on the Tweed



The salmon of the Tweed have been an important food source from the very earliest human settlements in the area. The earliest human record made of any fish species in the Tweed is the Salmon carved onto the standing stone near Roberton. This Pictish symbol stone is thought to date from the 7th to 8th centuries.





Salmon netting can be traced back to the 12th century through the records of the Bishop of Durham which mentions the fishings of "*Haliwarstelle*" (now Hallowstell) and "*Eldredene*" (now Allerdean). Hallowstell, on Spittal Beach was still fished occasionally in the 1990s, giving it a recorded history of around 800 years.

Not all of the estuary stations were always or exclusively net fisheries. In 1670 there is a reference to "Tweedmouth Stell and Gard", a "stell" is a netting station and a "gard" is a fish trap. Further upriver, no less than 13 mediaeval or earlier "Yairs" (fish traps) owned by the church of Durham have been identified along the southern bank of the Tweed in the 13 miles (21 kms) between Tweedmouth and Cornhill. Nets are set by being rowed out in a circle behind a boat, then they are winched in. The fish caught in the net are killed and packed in ice to keep them fresh. In the early days the salmon were pickled so that they could be transported, packing in ice didn't start until 1788.

At the end of the 18th century around 800 local men were employed in the Salmon netting industry. Since the Tweed Act of 1857 the right to catch and sell wild Tweed salmon is only held by net fisheries, rod-caught salmon cannot be sold commercially. Before the Tweed Act three different types of gear could be used. These were "Wear-shot", "Stell-nets" and "Ring or Bob-nets". The first of these is the type still in use today, the others are no longer allowed.

The significance of the salmon locally was considerable with customs such as 'blessing the salmon' at the opening of the Tweed salmon netting season. In Norham at midnight on the 14th February the vicar carried out the blessing. This tradition ended in 1987 when the fishery in the parish closed.



'Blessing the Salmon', Norham 1946

In the 1960s there were over 30 working netting stations on the river. However, netting on the Tweed changed dramatically in the 1980s. In 1981 the Berwick Salmon Fishing Company closed and later in 1987 there was an organised buy out of the netting stations on the river. Not all of the netting stations that have closed have stopped netting, some continue to net salmon for conservation and scientific purposes, Paxton is an example of this.





Questions

1. Name three methods of catching salmon that were used on netting stations.
2. Which one of these is still allowed today?
3. What methods were used to stop the salmon from going off were used so that they could be transported?
4. Name two Tweed netting stations.
5. When were the netting stations bought out?
6. What special custom did the vicar at Norham perform?