

## Our Fishing Heritage

Life on Scalpay for the first crofters in the 1840s was tough and soon reached a crisis. The rocky land was inhospitable and a fry cry from fertile Pabbay from where many of them had been displaced. Scalpay, with its two superb natural harbours and many sheltered inlets, threw them a lifeline. They turned to the sea for their living and took up lobster and long-line fishing.

By the 1920s the island was a thriving port and had up to 12 herring curing stations. It attracted boats from all over Europe and came to be recognised by fishermen as a prominent port where they could land their catches. There were so many boats in the harbour that, it was said, “you could walk across from one boat to the other”.

The herring trade declined during the Second World War as the boats struggled to find crews. It revived in the early 1960s when driftnets gave way to ring-nets. The Highland and Islands Development Board and the Herring Industry Board helped the local fishermen to buy boats and once again Scalpay was a busy and prosperous fishing port.

Recent years have seen many changes in the local fishing industry. Who would have thought years ago that there would be a demand for velvet crab? Prawns, clams and lobsters are now keeping the few remaining boats busy these days with markets in Spain and our growing tourist industry.

Our exhibition told the story of our fishing heritage in the words of our fisherfolk and in photographs from our archives. The story covered the:

- “tale of two harbours”
- type of boats that were used
- fishing techniques
- type of fishing from herring, white fish, lobsters, prawns and velvet crabs
- boyhood memories
- superstitions
- use of fishing boats for other purposes.