

SALTCOATS



Our Town

This resource pack has been advised by

**North Ayrshire Council Educational Services
Environmental Studies Framework for Planning**

OUR TOWN People and Place P4 Level B

Strands

Where is our town? What are the major local features?

What buildings are there in our town?

How do people affect our area through work and play?

**All images and text have been supplied by
North Ayrshire Museums and SCRAN**



Where is Saltcoats?

Class Activity: Where is our Town?

Using the map, work with pupils to identify Ayrshire, Saltcoats, Glasgow, Firth of Clyde, Isle of Arran.

If pupils are familiar with compass use, work with them to describe where the above places are, rather than pointing. Eg. Glasgow is to the North of Saltcoats.

Ask pupils to describe the location of Saltcoats in Scotland to someone who had never been there before. These questions can be used to stimulate discussion:

- Is Saltcoats on the coast?
- Is it on the east or west coast?
- Is it near any large cities?
- Does it have a river?

Saltcoats from the sky!



This aerial photograph allows major features of Saltcoats to be identified.

Class Activity

Ask pupils to identify the following:

Saltcoats Harbour

A harbour is a shelter for ships and boats.

Quayside

A quayside is a landing place for the loading and unloading of ships.

Saltcoats Beach

The Railway Line

Airplane wing (visible at edge of photograph!)

Have people always lived in
Saltcoats?

How do we know this?

Class Discussion

Ask pupils to think of the ways in which they know people have always lived in Saltcoats. In other words, what signs of the past do they see every day?

- Old buildings, particularly dated buildings or those with particularly different styles e.g Town Hall or Train Station

This resource contains images of Saltcoats built heritage, however this discussion will test pupils awareness in advance.

- Old monuments, e.g. Saltcoats War Memorial

How can we find out more about these signs of the past?

- Old photographs, documents, maps or newspaper cuttings

- Ask your family or staff at North Ayrshire Museum



Do you recognise this old building?

Class Discussion: A Familiar Ruin

This is the ruin of Ardrossan Castle.

Ardrossan Castle can be seen from Saltcoats Beach. The building of the castle started in the 12th Century - over 900 years ago!

This proves that people have been living in and around Saltcoats for a very long time.

The castle was the home of the Barons of Ardross and then the Earls of Eglinton.



What was this old building used for?

Class Discussion: Past Uses of Familiar Ruins

Pupils should be familiar with this ruin, which is visible from the bus route outside Auchenharvie Academy. This was the **beam engine house**, built in 1719, almost 300 years ago. The engine house was built to house a very important piece of machinery. This piece of machinery was a steam pumping engine, which was used to drain coal mines. The engine would pump water away from the mineshaft, in order to prevent mines from being flooded and to stop the mineshaft collapsing.

The coal mines were operated by a family called the Cunninghames of Auchenharvie. The mines in Saltcoats were some of the biggest and best in Scotland at that time. The coal would be sent by ship from Saltcoats Harbour to Ireland.



What can we learn from old maps?

Class Investigation: Using Old Maps

We can find out more about the past through old maps. This old map dates back to 1747. The map is difficult to read, as it is very old, and has probably faded through time. Also, the style of writing on the map, is very different to our style of writing today. This also makes the map more difficult to read.

At the time this map was made, Saltcoats was the busiest harbour in Ayrshire and the Stevenston colliery at Saltcoats was the most successful colliery.

Class Discussion

If this map is almost 300 years old, what would definitely be missing from this map, that would be on a map today?

This can be done as a class activity, covering themes e.g.

Transport Housing Shopping Schools Leisure

What do the pictures on the coat of arms mean?



Class Investigation:

What do the pictures on the coat of arms mean?

The **lymphad (boat)** represents the time when Saltcoats was famous for shipping and shipbuilding.

The **building** represents a saltpan, a building where the salt was produced.

The **fish** represents the former fishing industry.

The **three amulets*** are taken from the coat of arms of the Earls of Eglinton and Winton.

*amulet, meaning a charm carried about the person.

The motto reads 'By Sea By Land'

Where does Saltcoats get
its name from?

From the Salt Cots!

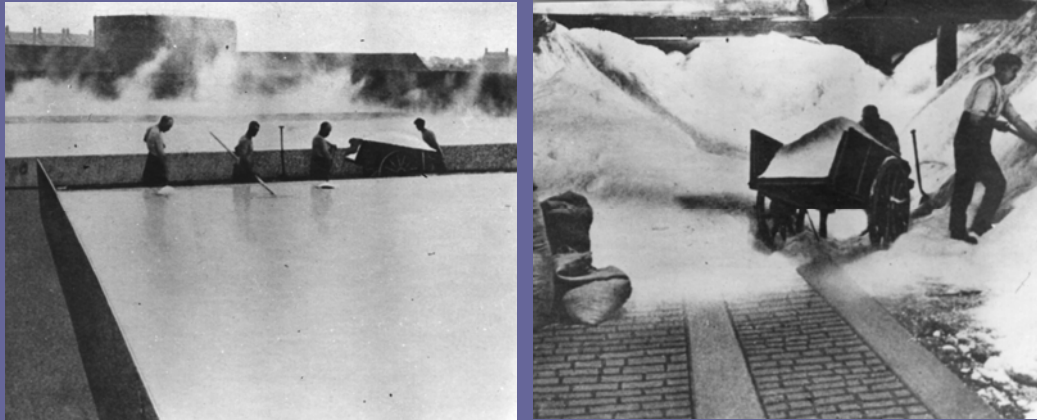
Class Discussion:

Where does Saltcoats get its name from?

Saltcoats gets its name from the ancient practice of boiling sea water to extract salt, a practice which the townspeople once carried out in their beachside houses. These houses were sometimes called 'cots' or cottages. An early name for the town was 'Saltcots'.

The production of salt was very important and many Saltcoats people worked at the Saltpans.

The salt industry gave Saltcoats world wide fame.



Saltcoats Saltpans

Saltcoats Saltpans

The salt pans were where Aldis is now. The salt pans were supplied with salt water from a reservoir. The pans were heated by coal furnaces under them, with the coal arriving from the Auchenharvie mines. Once the water had evaporated, the salt was left at the bottom of the pans. The salt would not look like salt as we know it but would be in crystals or 'icicles.' It took a night and a day to boil off all the water with men continually adding coal to the fires. During the long waits, the salters would sit round the fires telling spooky tales of long ago. The salters would be very secretive about their work and did not like being interrupted during their telling of tales. Once the salt had solidified in the bottom of the pans, the white crystals were shovelled out and the thick salt on the bottom of the pan had to be chiselled out, creating a terrible noise, known to the locals, as 'crusting the pans.'

The salt pans operated for almost two centuries until their closure in 1890.



A bottle of Saltcoats salt

This bottle of salt was produced at Saltcoats South Pans

It dates back to Victorian times

The bottle is made of glass with a cork stopper

The bottle is now kept at North Ayrshire Museum

Is salt sold in bottles like this one nowadays?

What was Saltcoats Salt used for?

Saltcoats salt was sent to England to make Epsom Salts.

Epsom Salts (magnesium sulphate) was used by people in the past to make them feel better.

Saltcoats salt was also used to “cure” fish. The fish weren’t ill! “Curing” means preserving food by covering it in salt. In the days before freezers, salted fish stayed fresher for longer.

We’ll find out more about this when we look at the history of Saltcoats Harbour.



Saltcoats Harbour

Class Discussion: Our Harbour- a major local feature

Do you recognise the building in the photograph? This building is the Customs House. It was built in 1809 and was used as the Harbour Masters house.

The Harbour Master was in charge of the harbour and would take fees from the boats who used the harbour. In 1794, 37 ships were registered at Saltcoats Harbour.

Harbours were very important in Scotland's history. In the days before travel by air, train and car, all travellers and the goods they brought with them, came in and out of the country through harbours.

Do you know what **imports** are? These are goods brought into the country. Goods brought into Saltcoats were oats, timber, limestone and butter. **Exports** are goods sent out of the country, for trading with other countries. Goods sent out of Saltcoats Harbour were coal, herring and earthenware.



Fishing in Saltcoats

Fishing in Saltcoats

There has been fishing in Scotland for hundreds of years. In the 19th century and early 20th century vast **shoals of herring** formed at various points around the British Coast. Fishing communities developed around the east and west coast of Scotland. Saltcoats was a town with a fishing community. **Stress to pupils that this kind of fishing was not a hobby that they might be familiar with today - but an important industry for the town.**

Fishing families usually owned their own boat. The boats were built of wood and had one or two sails. They were cheap to build and the fishermen did their own repairs. These boats were usually small. Larger boats cost more money to build and many fishermen in Saltcoats did not have enough money to buy them. Fishing families would sell the catch and divide the profit amongst themselves.



The Silver Darlings!

The people of Saltcoats called the herring **Silver Darlings**. Silver because of their distinctive colour and Darling because they were such an important source of protein to their diet.

Herring is a pelagic fish. This means that it swims near the surface to feed on plankton. Pelagic fish always swim in shoals. Herring has an annual migration cycle. Fishermen followed the shoals as they migrated around the coast.

Gauge what the class know about fish. Are all fish:

The same colour / shape? (themes: markings, camouflage)

The same size? (themes: position on food chain)

Are all fish found in the same place?

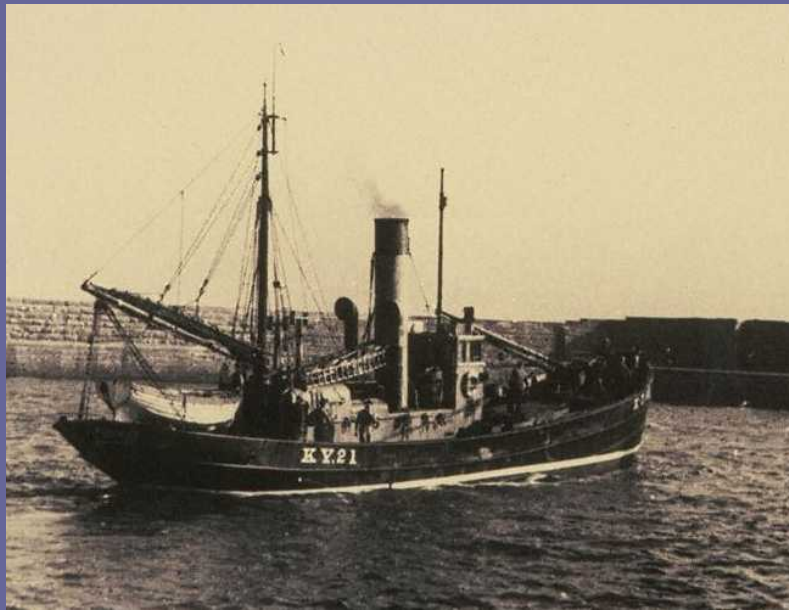
Are all fish caught by the same methods?

Do all fish taste the same?

Which fish do you eat and how often?

How many different species can you name that you eat?

Do you eat fish fingers? What kinds of fish have fingers!!?



This steam powered fishing boat was built in 1918.

Did fishermen always use Zulu fishing boats?

No, new kinds of fishing boats were developed. By the 1930s, many fishermen worked from steam drifters.

Why were steam powered boats better?

Because they could sail on days when there was no wind. The Zulu needed the wind to sail out to sea and to return to the Harbour. If there was no wind, the fishermen would have to row the boat to shore. Using steam power meant that fishermen could get their catch back to the market faster.

The steam power could even be used to raise and lower the sails. All of his made life much easier for the fishermen!

The only bad points of using steam powered boats were that they cost a lot of money to run. They used a lot of water and coal, which was expensive.

In time, even steam drifters became old fashioned, and motor powered boats were built.



Fishermen hauling in the nets
on a calm day c.1920

Using Nets

The fishermen used nets called drift nets to catch the herring. The nets were put out at dusk and were left to drift. The nets hung vertically like a curtain. When the herring rose to feed at dusk, they swam directly into the nets. At the end of the night the nets were hauled in and the fish were shaken out. It was very hard work. Once all the fish were onboard, the boat headed for shore as fast as possible. It was important that the fish were fresh.



Who would make the nets?

Who would make the nets?

Nets have been used to catch fish for hundreds of years. Until the 19th Century netmaking was a cottage industry. This means that the fishermen and their wives made and mended the nets in their own homes.

What were nets made from?

Early nets were made from a coarse fibre called hemp. The needles used to make the nets were made from bone or wood. Later on, nets were made from cotton. This was better as cotton was lighter, allowing the boats to carry more nets, and so catch more fish.

Why weren't the nets made of plastic?

Because plastic wasn't invented!



Dipping the nets in alum

Looking after the nets

This photograph shows four men dipping their nets in alum. The alum coloured the net white, which was preferred for winter fishing.

Fishing nets also had to be protected from the harmful effects of the sea. To stop the nets from rotting the fishermen soaked them in a solution of bark to protect them.

Once the fishermen were back onshore, they would hang the nets out to dry. They would also check them for damage, and mend any tears.



What happened when the herring was brought ashore?

What happened when the herring was brought ashore?

Fish is an important source of food but the problem is that it does not keep well. In Scotland, the main method of preserving fish was by gutting and salting it. This was known as curing and it took place in curing yards. Women played a big part in curing the fish. They worked in teams of three: two to gut and one to pack. The gutters gutted the fish with a sharp knife. When the tubs of gutted and sorted fish were full, the packers took over. They mixed the fish with very salty water and packed them in barrels.

Can you think of any other ways that fish is preserved?

Frozen Dried Chilled Canned Smoked



Gutters and packers c. 1900

Learning from Photographs

This photograph shows three herring gutters and packers. Even with the oilskin aprons, gutting was a hard, dirty job. The women wore their old clothes and often protected their fingers from cuts with pieces of rag. These rag bandages protected their hands from the sharp gutting knives, the salt water and the cold.

What else does this photograph tell us about life in the past? Other points for discussion could be:

The girls hairstyles and dress

The Policeman's uniform

The gas lamp - no electricity!

The containers holding the fish are wooden barrels made by coopers. No plastic or polystyrene packaging was available.

Gutters and Packers at work

(if working from mac, clip will play automatically,
if working from pc double click on image to play clip)



Gutters and Packers at Work

This film clip has been included to show pupils how hard working life was in the fishing industry.

The film clip shows men and women working on the decks of the boats, and young women gutting herring. They work at a furious rate, 65 fish per minute, that's less than one second per fish! Scottish fisherwomen could gut and salt enough fish to fill a barrel in only ten minutes.

When the barrels were full, a fishery officer checked them. He made sure the fish was good quality. High-quality herring sold better and for a higher price. Once the fishery officer was happy, barrels were stamped with the official crown brand. They could now be sold.



The life of a Fisherwoman

Saltcoats fisherwomen would wait for the arrival of the fishing fleet at the quayside. Fishwives were never lazy and would always keep themselves busy by knitting. Their husbands would need thick knitted jumpers and socks to keep them warm while out at sea.

When they finally arrived home at night, they still had to do the household chores and look after the children! A fishwives' life was not an easy one.

However fishwives were famous for their strength and stamina. They often 'hawked' fish from a large basket which they carried on their back. Hawking is another name for selling. The fishwives would have to walk many miles carrying the heavy basket, which was sometimes called a 'creel'.



Travelling to find work

Travelling to find work

Do you remember that herring has an annual migration cycle? The fishermen would have to follow the shoals of herring as they migrated around the coast.

The women would follow the fishermen to find work as gutters and packers. The Scottish women in the photograph have travelled down to Great Yarmouth in England to process the autumn catch.



Saltcoats Harbour today

Why are there no fishing boats at Saltcoats nowadays?

As time passed, fishing boats were designed much bigger. These boats needed bigger harbours. This meant fishermen had to move away from small harbours like Saltcoats to towns with bigger harbours.

Life in the big towns was very different for the fishermen and their families. Factories were built to cure the fish, so women who used to gut and pack the fish no longer had a job to do. Trains and lorries took the fish from the market and fishwives could no longer sell fish from their creels.

Fishing is still very important to Scotland, but far less men and women work as fishermen and women nowadays. Because of this, the fishing community in Saltcoats has now disappeared.