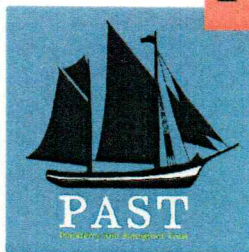


# A wee bit of maritime history... 13

FREE



## The Kelp Industry in Strangford Lough

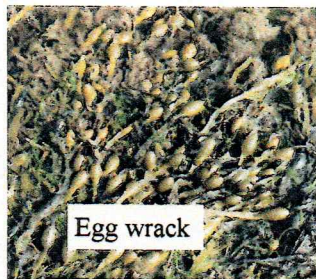
### What is kelp?

It is the hard material left when seaweed is burned and then cooled. The word was later used to describe a family of flat brown seaweeds, mainly the *Laminarias*.

*There were two phases in the kelp industry:*

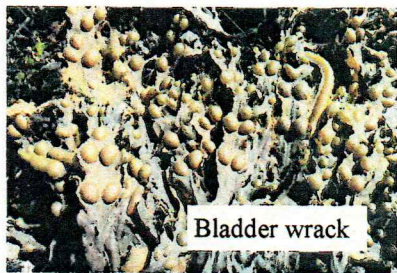
### 1700 - 1830...Soda-ash from kelp

Mainly used as an agent in linen bleaching at bleach greens in counties Down and Antrim, but significant quantities were also exported for use in the manu-



Egg wrack

facture of soap and glass. It was derived from bladder wrack (*fucus vesiculosus*) and egg wrack (*ascophyllum nodosum*) found



Bladder wrack

between the high and low tide mark.

20 tons of seaweed allowed the production of 1 ton of kelp. The kelpers, who cut and burned the seaweed, were paid £1 per ton between 1779 – 1812. The kelp sold for between £3 and £8 a ton.

It was the largest industry carried out around Strangford Lough, employing at least 300 people. At its peak, in the early 1820s, about 1000 tons were produced (presumably per season) and its environmental impact was significant.



## 1850 – 1930... *Iodine from kelp*

Of less economic importance. Used in the manufacture of photographic film, dyes and medicines. Derived mainly from oar weed (*laminaria digitata*), also known as 'tangles' which grows around the low tide mark.



tangles

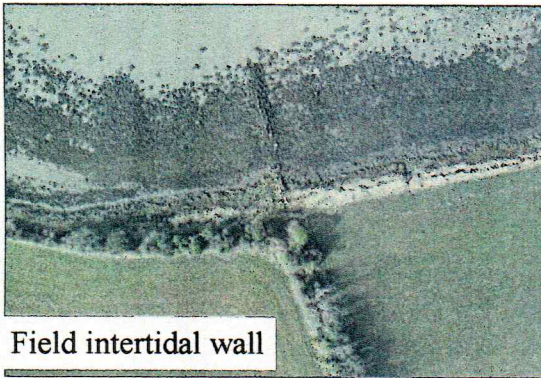


Kelp grids

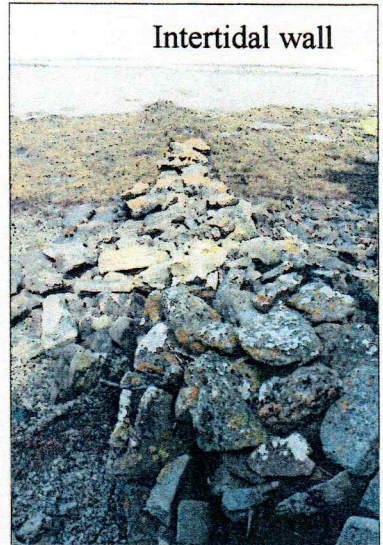
### *The Process*

The seaweeds used in kelp production grow attached to large stones. On sandy shores lines of rocks (kelp grids) were often laid out. Landowners either produced kelp themselves or rented out sections of shore to others for the purpose.

Sections of the shore were bounded by intertidal walls and appear to have been used in a year rotation, allowing each one time to recover before it was next harvested.



Field intertidal wall



Intertidal wall

3-

Production involved the labour-intensive harvesting by *cutting* of the weed, followed by *drying*, then *burning* and finally *storage*.



*Harvesting* was carried out in the summer at times when the tide permitted.



*Drying* was at the top of the shore and involved laying the weed out on grass or over a wall. Once dry, it was stacked in ricks.

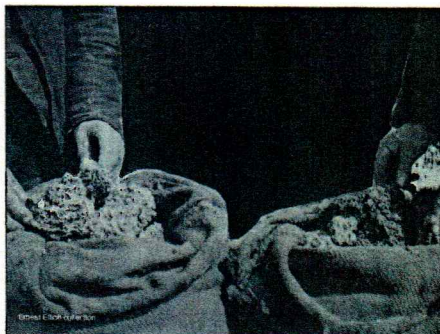


*Burning* was in a kiln that simply consisted of a shallow, stone-lined pit in the ground.



A fire was lit and the seaweed added and slowly burnt, giving off oily, smelly, white smoke.

The process took 8 – 12 hours and required the continuous presence of 2 - 4 people. The sludge produced was raked and allowed to cool. Once hard, it was broken up into manageable chunks.



*Storage* in a kelp store/house protected it from rotting and the leaching effect of rain while awaiting transport.



“For over 200 years kelp, used initially in linen bleaching and for the manufacture of soap and glass and later in the production of photographic film, dyes and medicines, was produced around the shores of Strangford Lough, employing large numbers of people and generating a substantial amount of money. The white smoke from the kelp fires was a common sight. Now, all that survives is a large number of intertidal walls, some kelp grids, a few inconspicuous kelp kilns and the remains of one or two kelp stores.”



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