

P172 Wick Herring Queen
RECORDS' IDENTITY STATEMENT

Reference number: P172
Alternative reference number:
Title: Wick Herring Queen
Dates of creation: 1939-1949
Level of description: Fonds
Extent: 2 booklets
Format: Paper

RECORDS' CONTEXT

Name of creators:

Administrative history:

This event was first held in 1937 and was organised by a sub-committee of The Wick Riverside and Town Improvements which has been in existence since the reclamation of tidal lands in the centre of the town early in the twentieth century. The idea seems to have come from the Coronation of King George V1, which had been held earlier the same year, and the fact that there was nothing in the form of pageantry on the north Scottish mainland.

Another factor was that the fishing in Wick had been very bad for the previous six years and the fishing fleet had dwindled to a handful of boats. The Herring Queen committee resolved to try to bring a little pageantry and cheer to the town and organised a festival which succeeded beyond their most optimistic hopes.

A girl, who to begin with, had to have at least one parent connected with the herring industry, was elected Queen on the day of her crowning, which took place at the Braehead, she was taken to sea on a drifter, escorted by as many of the fleet as wished to join. They carried passengers and the flotilla went as far as the mouth of Wick Bay where they turned to present a very impressive spectacle as they steamed in convoy back to the

harbour. While the exact number of spectators was not counted, about 8000 people watched the arrival of the first Herring Queen. On landing she was greeted by the Provost and other dignitaries, escorted to the crowning platform, where the crown was placed on her head by the previous year's Queen.

The crown itself is made of tinned copper with Ensign Armorial of Wick surrounded by symbols of the town's connection with the sea and the fishing industry. The insignia is surrounded by a rope, supported by two dolphins and is leaning on crossed tridents. The frame of the crown is in the form of a net, with herring superimposed, a design drawn from the arms of the Burgh of Pulteneytown, which lies on the south side of the river and amalgamated with Wick in 1901, when the ceremony was over a procession of decorated lorries and carts went through the main streets of the town to gather money for local causes. Many local organisations took part in the parade and this tradition is still carried on the Queen was elected for a year and in this capacity she attended many local functions during that period, opening sales of work, garden fetes and other fund-raising activities.

There were no festivals from 1939 to 1948 but by then the herring fishing in Wick was in terminal decline. The last Herring Queen was elected in 1953, the same year as the herring fishing ceased in the traditional way. The organisers saw no point in holding a Herring Queen ceremony when no herring were being landed, so the committee was dissolved and responsibility passed back to the Town Improvements Committee, who changed the name to Gala Queen and continue to hold this ceremony and procession in July every year. It is still one of the largest in Scotland.

The Crown, cup and cloak loaned by Wick Riverside and Town Improvements Committee on 20th September 2000 is on display at Wick Heritage Museum.

Custodial history:

RECORDS' CONTENT

Description: Wick Herring Queen, souvenir programme of events booklet

Appraisal:

Accruals:

RECORDS' CONDITION OF ACCESS AND USE

Access: open

Closed until:

Access conditions: Available within the Archive searchroom

Copying: Copying permitted within standard Copyright Act parameters

Finding aids: Available in Archive searchroom

ALLIED MATERIALS

Related material:

Publication:

Notes:

Date of catalogue: October 2011

Ref.	Description	Dates
P172	Wick Herring Queen	1939-1949
P172/1	Wick Herring Queen, souvenir programme of events [1 booklet]	1939
P172/2	Wick Herring Queen, souvenir programme of events [1 booklet]	1949