

Object: Poster

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This 1930s paper poster by Kenneth D. Shoesmith was part of a variety of items found by the donor in the attic of his fish shop. Shoesmith was a cadet on HMS Conway and later started working for Royal Mail.¹ He was a self-taught artist who produced scenes of popular tourist sites before creating postcards for Cunard Line cruise ships, and so had various

¹ "Kenneth D Shoesmith | Science Museum Group Collection". 2021.
Collection. Sciencemuseumgroup.Org.Uk.
<https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/people/cp19059/kenneth-d-shoesmith>.

connections to the seafaring industries.² The poster depicts British fishing boats at sea during a storm, emphasizing the difficult conditions fisherman had to endure to provide fish for British citizens and encouraged consumers to purchase more fish. It plays on the theme of patriotism by implying that shoppers should support their local industries and therefore the country's economy. This was particularly important as the country was experiencing *The Great Depression* or *The Great Slump* in the early 1930s, as the cost of post-war reconstruction was further compounded by the 1929 Wall Street Crash and decline of British exports.³

The fishing industry was in particularly bad shape during the early 1930s, and as prices dropped so did demand.⁴ As many of the self-employed individuals who worked in the industry were already at the mercy of the seasons, the economic downturn saw the number of active fishermen in East Anglia between 1921 and 1931 fall by approximately 20 percent.⁵

Following government scrutiny and numerous official reports, the Sea Fishing Industry Act of 1933 was implemented and the Sea Fisheries Commission established to investigate the industry.⁶ The Act restricted the capturing of immature fish and distant water fishing, ensuring greater sustainability and quality.⁷ This was largely necessary, as the perishable nature of fish caught in waters as far away as the Icelandic coast was often stale and inedible by the time it was unloaded in British ports.⁸

Similar images and literature were also produced during the decade as part of the government's "Eat More Herrings" campaign. This included recipe books to promote the use of the fish, following the creation of the Herring Industry Board in 1935, which was tasked with preventing further decline of the UK trade in herring.⁹ The utilisation of local food sources was also encouraged due to the fears of a Second World War breaking out. With British self-sufficiency down to 30-40% in the 1930s, the dependence on international trade

² "Kenneth D Shoesmith | Science Museum Group Collection". 2021. *Collection.Sciencemuseumgroup.Org.Uk* [Accessed 25 June 2021].
<https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/people/cp19059/kenneth-d-shoesmith>.

³ The British Library, "The Great Depression". 2021. *Bl.Uk*.
<https://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item107595.html#:~:text=1929%20%2D%201932&text=The%20value%20of%20British%20exports,and%20cost%20even%20more%20jobs> [Accessed 25 June 2021].

⁴ The National Archives, Interwar and postwar fishing
<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/interwar-post-war-fishing.htm> [Accessed 28 August 2021]

⁵ John Greenacre "The Admiralty's interwar planning with the British fishing industry, 1925–1940" *Journal for Maritime Research* p149

⁶ The National Archives, Interwar and postwar fishing
<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/interwar-post-war-fishing.htm> [Accessed 28 August 2021]

⁷ The National Archives, Interwar and postwar fishing
<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/interwar-post-war-fishing.htm> [Accessed 28 August 2021]

⁸ John Greenacre "The Admiralty's interwar planning with the British fishing industry, 1925–1940" *Journal for Maritime Research* <https://doi.org/10.1080/21533369.2019.1706270> p148

⁹ Craster Local History Group "The Herring Industry Board". 2021. *Crasterhistory.Org.Uk*.
<http://www.crasterhistory.org.uk/Walks/Fishing/Herring%20Industry%20Board.html> [Accessed 25 June 2021].

to sustain the nation was evident. This made people vulnerable to blockades and trade bans, which could have happened in an attempt to starve the country into submission.¹⁰ Therefore, the stimulation of local agricultural industries was essential to the survival of the country, much like it had been during the First World War.

The 1920s and 1930s also saw the rise of “the newer knowledge of nutrition”, with around 5000 papers on the subject published in 1933 alone.¹¹ Although early dietary guidelines were beginning to emerge, these coincided with hunger marches as unemployment and poverty were on the rise.¹² Although it was becoming clearer what the average family needed to eat in order to avoid malnutrition, and in some cases death, this was not always affordable or feasible. Therefore, the advertisement of certain food products such as fish may have been seen by many, but it would depend on whether this was a luxury which they could afford.

Given that the item was found in the attic of the donor’s fish shop, it was possible that it was displayed there too. However, this is not known for certain, nor the location or the affluence of the individuals who shopped there.

Overall the need to promote fish was on a patriotic but also economic basis, which grew out of necessity to save the industry and the British economy, but it was out of reach to those suffering unemployment and poverty which plagued the 1930s.

¹⁰ Defra Food Security and the UK: An Evidence and Analysis Paper, December, Food Chain Analysis Group, (2006) London: Defra
https://www.soilassociation.org/media/4963/policy_report_2008_rethinking_britains_food_security.pdf
in David Barling, Rosalind Sharpe, Tim Lang *Rethinking Britain's Food Security*, City University London (November 2008)
https://www.soilassociation.org/media/4963/policy_report_2008_rethinking_britains_food_security.pdf
[Accessed 19 October 2021]

¹¹ M. Mayhew, (1988). The 1930s nutrition controversy. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23, p446.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/260692>

¹² Ingrid Jeacle, *The Diet of the Nation: The State, Family Budgets and the 1930s Nutritional Crisis in Britain* (2016), p12.