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FACTSHEET F LODGINGS FOR HERRING LASSES

In the resorts of Yarmouth and Lowestoft the herring lasses lived in lodgings in town. While landladies could see the benefit of earning income from lodgers in the off-season, the price was the mess caused by the herring. Yarmouth landladies would lift carpets and cover walls in brown paper to counteract the lingering smell of fish. All would be returned to normal for the summer tourists once the lasses had gone. If a lass found good lodgings she would try to return to the same place each season.

In Shetland, however, they lived in purpose-built, wooden huts at the curing stations. The huts were watertight, each being raised from the ground with steps leading to the doorway. The living quarters could be primitive - six girls shared a hut, with beds and a coal or wood-fired stove, but no other furniture, except in some cases, a table. Their seats were the kists they had brought along containing their personal belongings. Sometimes, these also served as tables. The story is told of one group of girls who went in search of some unoccupied huts and found a large flat board, which, in spite of battling against a strong wind, they carried back and laid across two kists.

Where beds were provided these were fixed well up on the wall so that there was plenty of space underneath where the kists could be stored. A curtain over the bunks provided some small measure of privacy. If there were no beds, the girls used the warm blankets they had brought with them and "dossed down" on the floor. Empty mattress covers were provided and the girls stuffed these with straw. There being only two beds per hut, each team of three took it in turns to take over when the previous lot had had their rest.

There was always a fire in the stove, this providing not only warmth but also the heat for cooking, and boiling water for the welcome cups of tea, not to mention hot water for washing. Each hut had a corner curtained off for washing termed a *Glory Hole*. Sometimes an extra hut was provided where it was possible to do laundry, and it was also from there that the girls had to carry water to their own huts. There could also be a dry toilet placed at some distance from the huts; the girls had to empty this themselves - usually over rocks into the sea nearby.

The women took it in turns to light the fire, fetch water and do the cooking for the hut. As far as provisions were concerned, one of the girls may have been detailed to do the messages but, because the rates of pay were relatively low,

arrangements were more often made for a message boy to deliver orders. The account could be settled at the end of the season.

At weekends they would bake buns and so on to entertain the fishermen. The crews would often be men from the women's home towns who had also travelled with the fleets. Should such a boat arrive at the nearby pier, there was every likelihood that the girls would be invited on board for Sunday dinner. The social aspect of life in the huts was one of its main attractions and many girls met their future husbands while working at the curing yards.