

The Sea, The Sea

Simon Schama

OYSTER FARMING
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My earliest childhood memory is of my father standing on the other side of the French doors, which led from our grandiose sitting room out into the garden, lighting fireworks for Guy Fawkes' night. Beyond there were Catherine wheels and Roman candles but for the four-year-old me there were just sparklers. The next memory, though, is of the sea, infinite, steely grey, with washes of green, and the smell of it too, iodine strong with wracks of weed, which draped the beaches between Southend and Leigh-on-Sea.

It was one of my father's intermittent periods of prosperity, handsome enough to allow him to buy the big

OYSTER FARMING

Large European native oysters were eaten across Scotland during their heyday in 18th and 19th centuries. They were so plentiful and cheap that many recipes demanded up to 60 oysters per dish. The beds became polluted and over-fished, and were almost wiped out by mid-20th century. Their revival is down to farming commercially-cultivated – predominantly gigas – oysters although some farms are now experimenting with natives in sheltered sea lochs on the Scotland's west coast. Lochs must have shelter and be pollution-free with a rich supply of natural nutrients. The young seeds are placed in mesh bags which are put on wooden trestles at the low-water mark, or on plastic trays stacked on the sea bed. They are usually harvested after two to three summers' feeding.