The Rise of Scotland to a Position of Dominance in British Northern Whaling, 1802-1840

Chesley W. Sanger

Introduction

The transformation of Scottish Northern whaling from a limited and tentative venture into a large-scale, ongoing seasonal operation was a slow process. Nevertheless, by the beginning of the nineteenth century the trade had become a traditional mode of economic activity in parts of Scotland. Initial participation, however, was both temporary and periodic. A fairly lengthy period of cautious but continuous attachment, characterized by the ebb and flow of ports, vessels, personnel and capital, began in 1750. The Scots remained suspended between this phase of tentative involvement and commitment to a large-scale venture until the end of the French Revolutionary War. Over the next four decades, Scottish whalers not only rose to a position of complete dominance in the Northern bowhead industry but also dramatically altered its character.

This essay examines the general determinants underlying the cyclical nature of the trade, with emphasis on its seasonal, year-by-year development between 1802 and 1840, to explain how Scotland became the preeminent sup-

1A significantly abridged version of this paper appeared as part of Chesley W. Sanger, “Scottish Northern Whaling and Sealing,” in James R. Coull, Alexander Fenton and Kenneth Veitch (eds.), Boats, Fishing and the Sea (Edinburgh, 2008), 389-458. The author wishes to acknowledge with gratitude John Donald (Berlîn Lîtd.), Edinburgh, for permission to use figures 2, 5, 6 and 7 and table 1; and Charles Conway, Cartographer, Department of Geography, MUN, who contributed significantly to these illustrations and prepared figures 1, 3 and 4. Preparation of the manuscript relied heavily upon Sharon Wall and Martha Sanger. Finally, I am deeply grateful to Prof. Lewis “Skip” Fischer, Department of History, MUN, for his ongoing and always insightful comments, and to Maggie Hennessey for her work on this and many other of my manuscripts. Research for this study was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada.

2For overviews of Scottish involvement in Northern bowhead whaling between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries, see Gordon Jackson, The British Whaling Trade (London, 1978; reprint, St. John’s, 2005); and Sanger, “Scottish Northern Whaling and Sealing.”


173
plier of Arctic whale oil and baleen (bone) and provided the leadership that led to the opening of the last two significant bowhead hunting grounds at Davis Strait, Baffin Bay and the "Fall fishery" along the east coast of Baffin island, after 1817 and 1822, respectively (see figure 1).

![Map of the Northern Hunting Grounds](image)

**Figure 1:** Northern Hunting Grounds

*Source:* Courtesy of the author.

**Increased Scottish Participation at Davis Strait, 1802-1811**

Although the Montrose Whale Fishing Company fitted out one of its vessels, *Eliza Swan*, for a voyage to Davis Strait in 1787, it was not until the Peace of

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3The single most important extant statistics on British involvement in Northern whaling is a set of "Annual Whale Oil and Bone Manufacturer Lists" in the possession of Robert Kinnies and Sons, Dundee, which cover the periods 1790-1793 and 1814-1911. The lists are organized by individual port and provide for each vessel the name of the master, hunting ground, catch and quantities of whale oil and bone. Often incomplete and inaccurate, they have been updated and pushed back to 1749; see Chesley W. Sanger, "The Origins of Scottish Northern Whaling" (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Dundee, 1985). Unless otherwise indicated, however, this data set is referenced as "Kinnies Lists."
Amiens that this region became important in the scheme of Scottish Northern whaling. The *Aberdeen Journal*, for example, reported in 1801 that whales had been found at Davis Strait “in such plenty that a dozen sail might have loaded.”⁴ The following year the *Edinburgh Courant* recounted that when Raith returned with twelve whales it was “so full that the boats on deck are stowed with blubber, and the greater part of her beer and water casks are also filled.”⁵ This new hunting area, together with improved catches on the older grounds at East Greenland,⁶ higher oil and bone prices and peacetime conditions,⁷ encouraged the Scots to almost double their whaling effort between 1802 and 1805 (see figure 2).

The reopening of hostilities in 1806, however, while halting the industry’s expansion, did not initiate a period of decline as had previous conflicts.⁸ The threat of capture by French warships and privateers was significantly offset by reduced competition on the hunting grounds. While two forty-four-gun French frigates captured nineteen British whalers at East Greenland in 1806,⁹ for example, by that date enemy participation in Northern whaling had been virtually eliminated. The British naval response was immediate and

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⁴*Aberdeen Journal*, 22 June 1801.

⁵*Edinburgh Courant*, 8 July 1802.

⁶All the whaling grounds along the Greenland Sea ice edge were referred to as Greenland or East Greenland in response to the fact that many thought that Spitsbergen, where Northern whaling originated in the early part of the seventeenth century, was an eastern extension of Greenland. For information on the origins of Northern whaling, see Chesley W. Sanger, “The Origins and Development of Shore-Based Commercial Whaling at Spitsbergen during the 17th Century: A Resource Utilization Assessment,” *The Northern Mariner/Le Marin du nord*, XV, No. 3 (2005), 39-52; and Sanger, “The Origins of British Whaling: Pre-1750 English and Scottish Involvement in the Northern Whale Fishery,” *The Northern Mariner/Le Marin du nord*, V, No. 3 (1995), 15-32.

⁷National Archives of Scotland (NAS), Dalhousie Muniments (DM), “Price of Right Whale Oil at London, 1800-1840.” The Peace of Amiens, however, was too brief to cause a significant disruption to either British Northern whaling in general or the Scottish component in particular.


⁹Including *Simms* of Leith; *Dundee Advertiser*, 25 July 1806.
decisive, thus ensuring safe outward and homeward passages for the whaling fleet. In the meantime, the capture of Copenhagen in 1807 effectively ended Danish whaling. The Admiralty, in fact, offered "advantageous terms for protected seamen in the Greenland and other trades, who shall volunteer to assist in bringing home the Danish fleet." Despite the return to wartime conditions, then, the Scottish industry remained relatively stable for the rest of the decade, with the size of the fleet hovering in the range of twenty to twenty-two ships.

![Figure 2: Vessels and Catches in the Scottish Northern Whale Fishery, 1801-1840](image)

*Source:* National Archives of Scotland (NAS), Bounty Payment Certificates; Robert Kinnes and Sons, Dundee, "Annual Whale Oil and Bone Manufacturer Lists" (Kinnes Lists), various years; and newspapers (various).

Davis Strait required longer, more demanding late winter voyages by still largely inexperienced masters and crews. Not only were ships and men exposed to greater physical risks on the outward voyages and in the actual pursuit, but the new fishery also entailed much greater costs in outfitting, victualling and wages. Most owners, consequently, were reluctant to become in-

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10 In August, for example, "His Majesty's ship *Blanch* of thirty-six guns, arrived in Yarmouth Roads...with *La Guerrière*...which she captured...after a warm action of forty-five minutes, in which *La Guerrière* lost twenty killed and thirty wounded." *Ibid.*, 1 August 1806.


12 See, for example, William Scoresby, Jr., *An Account of the Arctic Regions with a History and Description of the Northern Whale-Fishery* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1820; reprint, Newton Abbot, 1969), II, 391.
volved until actually forced to do so. Nonetheless, from this point annual preparations included a consideration of whether to try the new area or continue to focus on the older and seriously depleted East Greenland grounds (see figures 1, 3 and 4).

The always important selection of a successful deployment strategy became increasingly difficult. While more vessels at Davis Strait helped reduce average yields in that region, for example, fewer competitors at East Greenland meant improved catches. Another consideration was the relative health of the two North Atlantic bowhead stocks. After more than 200 years of unregulated hunting, the average size of whales captured along the Greenland Sea ice edge was substantially smaller than those taken at Davis Strait. The surgeon on Resolution, for instance, noted in 1806 that “in the seas of Spitzbergen and [off the east coast of] Greenland...whales now seldom reach 70 feet, being generally killed before they arrive at full growth.”

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13The Davis Strait whaling grounds lay to the west of Greenland and each spring/summer followed the northward retreating ice edge (see figure 3). It included the early “Southwest Fishery” off Labrador and pursued migrating bowheads northeast to Disco Island. After 1817, hunting areas in Baffin Bay (“Northwater,” Pond Inlet, Lancaster Sound and the “Fall Fishery” along the east coast of Baffin Island) were often considered part of Davis Strait whaling. For full descriptions, including graphics, see Chesley W. Sanger, “‘Dodging in the Bight, A Good Place for a Whale:’ Environmental Factors Affecting Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Whaling in Davis Strait,” The Northern Mariner/Le Marin du Nord, IV, No. 1 (1994), 17-33; and “‘We Are Now in a Splendid Position for Whales:’ Environmental Factors Affecting Nineteenth-Century Whaling in Baffin Bay,” Mariner’s Mirror, LXXX, No. 2 (1994), 159-177.

14The East Greenland whaling grounds were generally defined by the retreating Greenland Sea ice edge that, as at Davis Strait, in the late spring and summer usually extended in a northeasterly direction from north of Iceland to Spitsbergen (see figure 4). For a full description, including graphics, see Chesley W. Sanger, “Environmental Factors Affecting 17th-19th Century Whaling in the Greenland Sea,” Polar Record, XXVII, No. 161 (1991), 77-86.


16John Laing, An Account of a Voyage to Spitzbergen; Containing A Description of that Country; of the Zoology of the North; and of the Shetland Isles; with an Account of the Whale Fishery (London, 1815; 2nd ed., Edinburgh, 1818), 90.
Figure 3: Locations of Greenland Right Whale Sightings by Month by Ten Scottish Sailing Vessels, 1830-1853

Source: See appendix I.

It is clear that given a choice, Scottish whalers still preferred the shorter, less expensive and less risky East Greenland fishery. William Scoresby, Jr., a seasoned whaling master throughout the 1820s, offered some insights into the relative advantages and disadvantages of East Greenland and Davis Strait:

...if we deduct the value of [seal] skins taken by the [East] Greenland fishers, but not estimated in their cargoes, say £20 to £30 per ship, and the additional expenses of a Davis Strait voyage, occasioned by the greater wear and tear, and the provisions and wages for a voyage longer by one or two months than that to Greenland, we shall reduce the balance in favour of the Davis Strait fishers to a very small one.\(^{17}\)

\(^{17}\)Scoresby, *Account*, 391.
The most important determining factor henceforth seems to have been the relative productivity of the two regions during the previous season.

Figure 4: Approximate Locations and Tracks of British Northern Whaling Vessels, 1822-1890 (June)

Source: See appendix 1.

By the end of the decade, a confluence of major forces, combined with a series of especially good catches at both East Greenland and Davis Strait (see figure 5), marked the beginning of a period of spectacular growth in Scottish Northern whaling. These factors included the ability of Scots to continue whaling in wartime; the collapse of Danish whaling; the entry of Scottish vessels into the eastern Canadian timber trade during the off-season fol-

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18See, for example, Chesley W. Sanger, “‘Oil is an Indispensable Necessity of Life:’ The Impact of Oscillating Oil and Baleen (Bone) Prices on Cyclical Variations in the Scale and Scope of Northern Commercial Whaling, 1600-1900,” *International Journal of Maritime History*, XV, No. 2 (2003), 147-158.
lowing the effective closure of the Baltic;\textsuperscript{19} the end-of-season participation in the growing emigrant trade to the United States and Canada;\textsuperscript{20} the continuation in 1809 of the whaling bounty for an additional five years;\textsuperscript{21} and the increased demand for whale oil and bone in both domestic and export markets.\textsuperscript{22}

\textbf{Figure 5}: Number of Greenland Right Whales Taken by Scottish Vessels in Davis Strait and East Greenland, 1801-1840

\textbf{Source}: See figure 2.

\textsuperscript{19}At the end of the 1809 season, for instance, the Dundee whaler \textit{Estridge} sailed in ballast for "St. Andrews, in North America;" \textit{Dundee Advertiser}, 22 September 1809. When \textit{Friendship} was caught in heavy seas and forced to return, its owners "were surprised and disappointed by her appearance in the river Tay in a distressed state." For greater details on the growth of the Canadian timber trade, see A.R.M. Lower, "The Trade in Square Timber," \textit{Contributions to Canadian Economics}, VI (1933), 40-61, reprinted in W.T. Easterbrook and M.H. Watkins (eds.), \textit{Approaches to Canadian Economic History} (Toronto, 1963), 28-48; Lower, \textit{Great Britain's Wood­yard: British American and the Timber Trade, 1763-1867} (Montréal, 1973); and Graeme Wynn, \textit{Timber Colony: A Historical Geography of Early Nineteenth Century New Brunswick} (Toronto, 1981).

\textsuperscript{20}Having returned to Dundee from Northern whaling on 7 April 1810, \textit{Friend­ship} was advertised as sailing for Charleston, South Carolina; \textit{Dundee Advertiser}, 17 August 1810.

\textsuperscript{21}Scoresby, \textit{Account}, 93.

Maximum Expansion, 1812-1820

The outbreak of war with the United States in 1812, despite increasing the threat of capture, further accelerated the pace at which the Scottish Northern trade expanded when the American "whaling trade shrank to zero." This and the other forces at work created an unprecedented advance in prices. At Dundee, for instance, 200 tons of whale oil was auctioned "at an average of £55 5s. per ton: the highest price ever obtained for oil in this country." The Scottish response to these developments was immediate. In just two years (1811-1813), the fleet grew in size from twenty-two to forty-five vessels, and in the next two years four more were added (see figure 2). Banff and Kirkwall entered the trade for the first time, and Dundee and Aberdeen participation expanded dramatically (see figure 6). The most significant growth, however, occurred at Peterhead.

From the beginning, Peterhead owners were inclined to send smaller vessels to the nearer and less operationally expensive East Greenland grounds which also offered an opportunity to harvest harp seals (see figure 1). The larger whaling centres, especially Dundee, with longer histories in the industry continued to deploy bigger ships, manned by increasingly experienced crews at Davis Strait. Rivalry between Dundee and Peterhead would dominate the Northern whaling trade for the next sixty years.

During the early 1800s, the industry had a very significant impact on the Scottish economy in general and the east coast in particular. An editorial in the Aberdeen Journal captured the essence of the optimism then prevailing: "We hail their [whalers] success! The man who takes up a fish [whale] out of the water draws up a piece of silver. Within these two years [1811-12] our

\[\text{23}^{23}\text{The Dundee Advertiser, 23 July 1813, reported that "[o]ur Northern Seas, it seems, have lately borne the renowned American Commodore Rodgers...[who sailed from Bergen] with a view, as was supposed, to intercept some of our Greenland fishing-vessels." Later that year, the US warship President took Eliza Swan of Montrose, "and after robbing her of fishing-lines, spare sails, bread etc, ransomed her for the sum of five thousand guineas." \textit{Ibid.}, 13 August 1813.}\]

\[\text{24}^{24}\text{J. Travis Jenkins, \textit{A History of the Whale Fisheries: From the Basque Fisheries of the Tenth Century to the Hunting of the Finner Whale at the Present Date} (London, 1921; reprint, Port Washington, NY, 1971), 233. See also Alexander Starbuck, \textit{History of the American Whale Fishery: From its Earliest Inception to the Year 1876} (2 vols., Waltham, MA, 1878; reprint, New York, 1964), I, 92-95.}\]

\[\text{25}^{25}\text{Dundee Advertiser, 20 August 1813. See also Edinburgh Courant, 21 August 1813; and Aberdeen Journal, 25 August 1813.}\]

\[\text{26}^{26}\text{For a full discussion, see Sanger, "Scottish Northern Whaling and Sealing."}\]
Townsmen have laid out upwards of One Hundred Thousand Pounds sterling in that speculation, which will, we hope, soon return." 27 Furthermore, in the downturn following the war, the trade became even more important. A Dundee newspaper, for example, noted that "the success of our whale fisheries is at all times an interesting consideration; it is remarkably so at present, when the manufactures and trade of the town are reduced to so low an ebb." 28 Although the pace of economic growth slackened after 1813, the Scottish whaling effort actually increased to fifty-seven vessels by 1820. As throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century, however, their English competitors continued to dominate.

![Figure 6: Scottish Whaling Vessels by Port, 1802-1840](image)

Source: See figure 2.

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27 *Aberdeen Journal*, 20 January 1813.

28 *Dundee Advertiser*, 30 August 1816.
The increased scale of the industry placed additional stress on an already severely depleted resource. The greatest pressure was inflicted at East Greenland, the more vulnerable of the two stocks. Nevertheless, masters, both at Davis Strait and East Greenland, were increasingly required to make longer, more costly voyages to catch fewer and smaller bowheads (see figure 7).29

Peace in 1815 brought renewed competition from foreigners at East Greenland. The Dutch introduced a bounty which was “extremely judicious and liberal.”30 Along with the increased quantities of oil and bone conveyed home by both Northern and Southern whalers, this caused prices to decline dramatically.31 Inflation following the wartime “boom” was partly fuelled by

29The six Aberdeen whalers at East Greenland in 1812, for example, did not return until August.

30Scoresby, *Account*, 94. See also John Leslie, Robert Jameson and Hugh Murray, *Narrative of Discovery and Adventure in the Polar Seas and Regions: with Illustrations of Their Climate, Geology, and Natural History; and an Account of the Whale-Fishery* (Edinburgh, 1830), 371.

31Southern whaling collectively was often used to refer to subsequent traditional sperm and right whale fisheries that developed “south” of the northern North Atlantic (Arctic, Northern, East Greenland, Davis Strait, Baffin Bay), including those of the Pacific and Indian oceans. See also NAS, DM, “Price of Right Whale at Lon-
rising interest rates and fitting-out costs. Under similar circumstances, many Scottish investors formerly had been forced to withdraw. Before the exploitation effort could reach a “normal” overexploitation adjustment level, developments at Davis Strait initiated yet another period of expansion. Also important were the five-year extension of the bounty to 1820 and the continuation of the policy that permitted Northern whalers “to complete their crews at Orkney or Shetland, etc., in the same proportion and manner as in time of war.”

While hunting conditions at Davis Strait were generally good in 1817, fewer bowheads and increased competition contributed to lower average yields on the traditional grounds off Disco and southwest along the ice edge (see figures 1, 5 and 7). Nonetheless, two of the most enterprising of the Scottish masters, G. Muirhead of Leith and G. Valentine of Aberdeen, both of whom had poor seasons, decided to take advantage of favourable ice conditions “after the season when it was usual for ships to depart.” They sailed north between the land-fast ice along the west coast of Greenland and the eastern edge of the mid-ice pack, discovering what became known as the “Northwater” (see figures 1 and 3). The following year, Muirhead visited HMS Alexander, a member of a government-sponsored northern exploratory expedition, on 16 June as it was attempting to cross Melville Bay. Commander Edward Parry’s journal recorded that “this gentleman proceeded last year as far north in this country [Baffin Bay] as 75° 30’, and found the sea there quite clear of ice.” Thus began an entirely new chapter in the evolution of Davis Strait whaling of which the Scots were the principal beneficiaries.

In 1818, the additional security of the presence of two naval vessels intent on exploring Baffin Bay was sufficient enticement for the majority of the whalers to attempt to follow in Muirhead and Valentine’s wakes. On 17 June,

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33Scoresby, Account, 93.

34See Aberdeen Journal, 6 August 1817; and Dundee Courier, 12 September 1817.

35Scoresby, Account, 184-185.

36William Edward Parry, Journal of a Voyage of Discovery to the Arctic Regions: Performed Between the 4th of April and the 18th of November, 1818, in His Majesty’s Ship Alexander (London, 1819), 25.
for instance, "between thirty and forty ships," according to Parry, were "fast to the icebergs along the shore" north of Disco waiting for an opportunity to cross Melville Bay. Despite difficult and sometimes treacherous conditions, a significant number gained access to the Northwater in time to intercept the bowheads before the breakup of the land-fast ice to the west enabled them to move onto their summer feeding grounds throughout the Eastern Canadian Arctic archipelago. All made excellent catches. As Parry explained while in company with *Bon Accord* (Aberdeen) and *Everthorpe* (Hull), "as proof of the vast number of whales by which we are surrounded at present, each of these ships killed four today; and had there been twenty ships here, I am persuaded that each might have killed as many."

Echoing these sentiments, a Dundee newspaper editorial written after the return of the Northwater whalers noted that "our navigators, in their progress round this dreary bay [Baffin], saw numerous whales; and due advantage will no doubt be taken of this valuable discovery by the fishers next season." These successes moved Scoresby to observe in 1819 that the new Baffin Bay whaling grounds were "likely to prove an era of great importance in the fishery of Davis Strait."

The full potential of Baffin Bay, however, was not immediately realized, nor was the increased risk fully understood. The added danger, and the need to strengthen vessels and develop new strategies, became apparent only through trial, error and tragedy. In 1819, a master whose vessel was crushed by ice in Melville Bay wrote a lengthy account explaining that "no blame whatsoever can be attributed to the different captains as they used every effort to save the ships committed to their charge; in fact, the general destruction is proof sufficient of this." Clearly, after sixty-eight years of continuous involvement in Northern whaling the Scots had embarked on a significantly more challenging venture. Whereas previously the Arctic industry had been an ice-edge operation, timely entry to the new Baffin Bay grounds required a passage where the threat of opposing ice faces colliding with ship-crushing force was always imminent. As one observer commented, "[n]o person who has not visited those northern regions can form...a just idea of those immense masses of ice called icebergs, and of those heavy sheets of ice called floes, which, when set in motion by gales of wind, spread destruction wherever they are wafted."

In 1819, for instance, six Scottish and four English whalers were

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38 *Dundee Courier*, 20 November 1818.


40 *Dundee Courier*, 24 September 1819.
lost when “nipped.” While only two lives were lost, the Scots had their first real exposure to the dangers of “the dreaded Melville Bay.”

The financial rewards Baffin Bay could provide, however, were sufficiently compelling for owners to replace their lost vessels and by 1820 to add three ships to the fleet, now fifty-seven strong. Indicating the annual fluctuations in catches that characterized Northern whaling, favourable environmental conditions that year allowed most masters to reach the Northwater west land hunting grounds off Pond Inlet and Lancaster Sound for the very first time, and all were richly rewarded (see figures 5 and 7). The Aberdeen Journal offered the following assessment upon the return of Alexander with a bumper cargo of bone and blubber: “...most of the ships at the Strait are well fished; Captain, W. [Webster] could have taken many more, had his vessel been larger.” Baffin Bay now became the main focus of Scottish Northern whaling. East Greenland would not again gain favour until the late 1830s when the Davis Strait bowhead stock had also been seriously compromised.

Transition from East Greenland to Davis Strait/Baffin Bay, 1821-1827

The period between 1821 and 1827 was characterized by extreme volatility and adjustment. Nonetheless, the Scottish Northern whaling industry was finally able to outstrip the English. The sixty vessels fitted out in 1821 marked their maximum involvement. Although the number dropped to fifty-six a year later, the Scottish proportion of the total British effort actually increased to forty-six percent. An editorial in the Aberdeen Journal, commenting on the increased importance of Northern whaling to the east coast of Scotland, noted that “in the course of a few years a total change will have taken place in this branch of business.” When the bounty was withdrawn in 1823, Scottish whalers outnumbered the English for the first time.

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41 For full details, see Dundee Advertiser, 20 August 1819, Captain Deuchars’ letter to the Dundee owners of the lost Mary Anne; and Dundee Courier, 24 September 1819. See also Kings College, Aberdeen, University Library, entry of the journal kept by the medical officer of Hercules of Aberdeen, 28 June 1831.

42 For full details, see Aberdeen Journal, 13 and 27 September and 4 October 1820; and Dundee Advertiser, 22 September 1820.

43 Aberdeen Journal, 13 September 1820.

44 Ibid., 28 November 1821.

45 For public assessments of the importance of the withdrawal of the bounty and other factors negatively impacting the British Northern trade throughout the 1820s, see, for example, ibid., 17 September 1823; and Dundee Advertiser, 28 September
While complex forces and circumstances helped shape the industry throughout the 1820s, the overall trend was towards consolidation, especially in the English component of the British whaling fleet. An 1821 editorial in the *Aberdeen Journal* provides the following assessment:

> We hear that ten ships belonging to Hull are to abandon the Greenland trade; and nine of that same port, have been lost this year...It appears the trade has been overdone; and we believe we may venture to say, that half the number of ships, with the exertions and successes we have seen for some years, is fully equal to the national demand of the country...In the course of a few years a total change will have taken place in this branch of business.  

Altogether, average catches declined and voyages became longer and often more dangerous and expensive. The difficulties confronting the whalers were compounded further by commodity substitution in the forms of rapeseed oil and coal gas. A letter in a Dundee newspaper simply signed “Subscriber” lauded the virtues of coal and rape seed oils as alternatives to whale products:

> [They] may be used freely in the most exposed situations...[and] will not only enlarge the sphere and efficiency of an industrious society, but contribute to give great additional security to life and property. It has been proposed, I understand, to...[offset] the consequences of unsuccessful fishing [whaling] seasons, and the consequent high prices of oil by substituting vegetable oils for whale-oil – without noting the deficiency of the illuminating power, or adversity to the circumstance that vegetable-oil must necessarily advance in price with other oils.

1826. Jackson, *British Whaling Trade*, 66, provides a full discussion of the importance to the industry of direct government support.

46 *Aberdeen Journal*, 28 November 1821.

47 For a full discussion of the substitution of rape seed oil for whale oil, see Jackson, *British Whaling Trade*, 119-125. The growing threat of coal gas is well described in a letter to the *Dundee Advertiser* signed “A Subscriber to the Dundee Gas-Light Company,” 20 November 1823.

48 *Dundee Advertiser*, 20 November 1823 and 21 October 1824.
Equally important was the government’s move toward “free trade” in
whale oil and bone,\(^49\) particularly with the United States. As Stackpole ex­
plained, “in the bustling decade of 1815 to 1825 America’s economic fortunes
became vigorous and steady. It was during this time that New England at
length wrested from Old England control of the Southern Whale Fishery.”\(^50\)
Oil prices in particular were reduced significantly. In a letter to D. Brown,
manager of the Tay Whale Fishing Company of Dundee on 5 February 1821,
F. Deveraux, a London oil and bone broker, lamented the fact that “our whale
oil mkt is most dreadfully flat.”\(^51\)

Decimated oil markets were offset to some degree by resurgence
in demand for whalebone. Baleen prices had declined dramatically towards the
end of the eighteenth century, but they rose sharply in the postwar years in
response to new industrial demands. According to Gordon Jackson, this was
due to the fact that the “elasticity and flexibility that endeared whalebone to the
stay makers were attractive in other areas where a combination of great
strength and lightness were needed.”\(^52\)

Despite an increase in the number of vessels at Davis Strait in 1821,
average catches were slightly better than the previous year. Success, however,
was not shared equally among the fleet. The early part of the season was ham­
pered by heavy pack ice and unfavourable winds.\(^53\) Sixteen vessels “had been
completely hemmed in...and none had more than two or three fish in July; and
the greatest number [were] clean.”\(^54\) Eight, however, made safe northward
passages through Melville Bay and were able to hunt off “the entrance to Lan­

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\(^49\)During the 1820s, the government proposed a series of measures which
started the process of dismantling the protective barriers which had once helped British
industry. The pros and cons of reintroducing the whaling bounty shortly after it had
been withdrawn are discussed in editorials in Dundee Advertiser, 28 September 1826;
and Dundee Courier, 29 September 1826.

\(^50\)Edouard A. Stackpole, Whales and Destiny: The Rivalry between America,
France and Britain for Control of the Southern Whale Fishery, 1785-1825 (Amherst,
MA, 1972), 371.

\(^51\)Appended to an 1820 whale oil and bone manufacturer report in the posses­sion of R. Kinnes and Son, Dundee.

\(^52\)Jackson, British Whaling Trade, 84-85.

\(^53\)For the impact which variable ice and wind conditions had on whaling in
Davis Strait and Baffin Bay, see Sanger, “Dodging in the Bight, A Good Place for a
Whale;” and Sanger, “We Are Now in a Splendid Position for Whales.”

\(^54\)Dundee Advertiser, 21 September 1821.
caster Sound.” Their success was tempered somewhat, though, by the loss of *Elizabeth* of Aberdeen and *Dexterity* and *Larkins*, both of Leith.

Meanwhile, the East Greenland fleet, though greatly reduced, continued to suffer poor catches in 1821, primarily because of the scarcity of bowheads. As one master complained, “the winds were chiefly from the Northward, and few fish to be seen.” A week later, following the return of *London* to Montrose, the *Aberdeen Journal* reported that “we are sorry to state the brig’s very bad account of the fishery. Of fifty-two ships which she saw, they only had 142 fish.” Environmental conditions the following year were better, yet the master of the Leith whaler *Juno* reported that while hunting conditions were favourable, few whales had been sighted. This account was confirmed by another captain who stated that “the fishery in general...[had been] rather unsuccessful.”

At Davis Strait in 1822, ice and wind, following two successful seasons, again hindered whaling significantly. Not only was the fleet prevented from reaching the Northwater but seven vessels were lost, including *Invincible* of Peterhead, *Hero* of Montrose and *Calypso* of Dundee. According to the captain of *Letitia*, “none of the ships had been able to get to the Westland, owing to the impenetrable barrier of ice.” Nevertheless, catches in that area were still substantially better, indicating the comparative state of the two

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55 Ibid.; and *Aberdeen Journal*, 19 October 1821.

56 See, for example, *Aberdeen Journal*, 25 July and 1 August 1821. An excellent account of the 1821 Greenland Sea fishery is provided by George Manby, who sailed with Scoresby, master of the *Baffin*, Liverpool, in order to test a harpoon gun he had developed. See George William Manby, *Journal of a Voyage to Greenland in the Year 1821* (London, 1822).


58 Ibid., 1 August 1821.


60 *Aberdeen Journal*, 7 August 1822.

61 Ibid., 4 and 11 September 1822; and *Dundee Advertiser*, 17 October 1822.

62 Several masters obtained profitable cargoes on the traditional Southwest ground; *Aberdeen Journal*, 4 September 1822.
stocks. In an effort to revive the East Greenland fishery, several of the more enterprising captains, including Scoresby, attempted to emulate Muir and Valentine's initiatives at Davis Strait five years earlier by sailing westward through the Greenland Sea ice pack towards the east coast of Greenland because they felt it was no longer "prudent to remain in the unproductive stations of the north."\(^63\) Unfortunately, so few bowheads remained in that region that their attempts to develop new hunting grounds were doomed to failure. Meanwhile, the Davis Strait stock, despite lessons that should have been learned at East Greenland, was also being depleted.\(^64\) After just half a decade, many masters, obliged to linger into the fall at Baffin Bay to make profitable voyages, were now opportunistically able to intercept the bowheads as they migrated onto their southern winter range, adding a new hunting strategy.\(^65\) Even though Captain Ireland of the Dundee vessel *Friendship* had "only two fish when the other Dundee whalers left the Arctic Seas," he, "not withstanding the stormy weather attendant on the lateness of the season," returned with ten whales.\(^66\) The "Fall Fishery" along the east coast of Baffin Island became the last major innovation of the Northern whalers (see figures 1 and 3).\(^67\)

Scottish deployment ratios between the two hunting areas remained unchanged in 1823. As two years previously, the majority of the vessels got into the Northwater before the break-up of the land-fast ice to the west and, following the lead of the most successful captains the previous year, continued "much longer at the fishery... than usual."\(^68\) Well positioned, they were able to

\(^{63}\)Scoresby, *Journal*, 64.

\(^{64}\)See, for example, Sanger, "Scottish Northern Whaling and Sealing," table 21.7 and accompanying text.

\(^{65}\)For a full discussion of bowhead migrations, see Chesley W. Sanger, "'On Good Fishing Ground but Too Early for Whales I Think:' The Impact of Greenland Right Whale (Bowhead) Migration Patterns on Hunting Strategies Employed in the Northern Whale Fishery during the 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries," *American Neptune*, LI, No. 4 (1991), 221-240.

\(^{66}\)Dundee Advertiser, 17 October 1822.


\(^{68}\)Dundee Advertiser, 25 September 1823.
kill 974 whales (see figure 5). As the *Aberdeen Journal* commented, “the fishing at the Strait, this season, has been the most successful of many years past. No accident has happened up to a late date [September]; and all the ships are well fished.” The four Montrose whalers had “bumper” catches, “a circumstance unprecedented at that port.”

On the other hand, at East Greenland, where hunting conditions were also good, the catch was barely one-third that of Davis Strait (see figures 5 and 7). A 6 July letter from Captain Small of the Aberdeen whaler *Henrietta* explained that “to date the fishing had been very unsuccessful...[and that] several vessels had got a number of small fish, but that none of them exceeded 100 tuns of oil.” This outcome finally convinced the majority of the Scots to make Davis Strait/Baffin Bay their favoured target (see figure 2).

In 1824, only nine ships sailed to East Greenland where the weather was “very severe.” Environmental conditions at Davis Strait and Baffin Bay were also poor. *Mary Frances* of Hull returned in October with “very unfavourable accounts of the fishing...and at that late date...much additional success could not be looked for.” Compared to the previous season, returns from both regions were poor. The following year, six Scottish masters at East Greenland captured only three whales, primarily because “of the strong north-easterly winds, which had occasioned the strong ice to come down, which would not be penetrated.” The English fared no better. According to the master of the Whitby whaler *Lively*, of the twenty-five whalers “twelve were clean...and ten other vessels...had only 14 fish among them...The weather was extremely thick, and little prospect of further success [as of early August].” Catches at Baffin Bay, meanwhile, were the worst since those grounds were first hunted. In a letter to his owners forwarded from Copenhagen,

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70 *Aberdeen Journal*, 24 September and 1 October 1823.

71 Reported in *ibid.*, 30 July 1823.


73 For conditions at East Greenland, see *ibid.*, 11 August 1824. Details of the failure of the Baffin Bay whale fishery are provided by *ibid.*, 29 September and 15 October 1824; and *Dundee Courier*, 28 October 1824.

74 *Dundee Advertiser*, 4 August 1826; *Aberdeen Journal*, 24 August and 14 September 1825; and *Dundee Courier*, 2 September 1825.

75 *Dundee Advertiser*, 18 August 1825.
gen and dated 3 July, a Hull captain indicated that "his vessel was clean; and that twenty-nine Hull vessels had only twenty-two fish among them. Several vessels had been stoved, and the Estridge of Dundee lost, crew saved."  

Yields in 1826 were only marginally better.77 This, and the forces discussed earlier, had a dramatic impact on the Scottish industry. "The whale-fishing speculators, which were at one time a source of considerable profit," complained a Dundee newspaper, "are now the reverse."78 This assessment was confirmed by the Dundee Courier.

The arduous and fatiguing nature of the whale fishing would require to be well rewarded, to say nothing of the danger to which the lives and property engaged in it are exposed; but of late years neither the mariners or ship owners have been undiminished, besides the loss of lives, sustained this season. It seems, therefore, doubtful how for a perseverance in the fishery, to such an extent as has been carried on of late years, is prudent.79

Not surprisingly, the Scottish fleet in 1827 was reduced to forty-seven ships, more than twenty percent fewer than at its 1821 peak. Before the trend towards greater consolidation was well established, however, normal supply-and-demand forces again intervened. Three successive poor fishing seasons had not only kept prices high for oil and whalebone80 but also had slowed the pace at which the Davis Strait bowhead stock was being depleted. Natural environmental constraints to whaling in the years 1824-1826 had effectively acted as a hunting moratorium. While catch increases also occurred on the older East Greenland grounds in 1827, they still paled in comparison to those at Baffin

76 Reproduced in Aberdeen Journal, 12 October 1825.

77 A detailed account of the 1826 East Greenland whale fishery is provided by James Cumming, A Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Jean, of Peterhead, at Greenland, 18th April 1826 (Aberdeen, 1826). See also Aberdeen Journal, 26 August 1826; and Dundee Advertiser, 10 August 1826. For conditions at Davis Strait in 1826, see Aberdeen Journal, 20 September and 11 October 1826; and Dundee Courier, 15 September and 2 October 1826.

78 Dundee Advertiser, 28 September 1826.

79 Dundee Courier, 15 September 1826.

80 Aberdeen Journal, 24 August 1825; and Dundee Courier, 16 December 1825.
Position of Dominance in British Northern Whaling

Bay. Of particular significance was the fact that Peterhead whalers at Davis Strait fared significantly better than those at East Greenland under what were essentially the very best hunting conditions either ground could offer (see table 1). This success is best illustrated by the return of Traveler "from Davis' Straits, with [27.5] fish, for 290 to 300 tons of oil. This is the largest quantity that has been brought to Peterhead, for many years, in one vessel; and we believe few such cargoes have ever come to this country." It is therefore understandable that all Scottish ports were gradually becoming increasingly committed to Davis Strait and Baffin Bay. In the process, the decline in the trade was arrested, even if only briefly.

Table 1
Average Size of Bowhead Whales Captured by Scottish Vessels at East Greenland and Davis Strait, 1787-1840

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>East Greenland</th>
<th></th>
<th>Davis Strait</th>
<th></th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of Whales Used</td>
<td>Average Number of Casks of Blubber</td>
<td>Number of Whales Used</td>
<td>Average Number of Casks of Blubber</td>
<td>EG:DS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1787</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>1:17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1788</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>1:1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1789</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>1:1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1790</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>1:3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1791</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>1:1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1792</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>1:2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1793</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>1:1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1794</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>1:0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1795</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>1:0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1796</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>1:1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>(no data)</td>
<td>(no data)</td>
<td>(no data)</td>
<td>(no data)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1805</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>1:1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1806</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>110.5</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>1:1.9</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(no data)</td>
<td>(no data)</td>
<td>(no data)</td>
<td>(no data)</td>
<td>(no data)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1810</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>1:1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1811</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>1:1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1812</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>1:1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1813</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>1:1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1814</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>1:1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1815</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>1:1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

81 Aberdeen Journal, 1 and 31 August, and 26 September 1827; Dundee Advertiser, 2 August and 27 September 1827; and Dundee Courier, 21 September 1827.

82 Aberdeen Journal, 17 October 1827.
Last Phase of Unsubsidized Scottish Northern Bowhead Whaling, 1828-1840

True to form, Scottish whalers were still somewhat reluctant to abandon well-established practices until the advantages of the new hunting areas were fully proven and the futility of the older, worn-out grounds finally accepted. A contributing factor was that the potential of the Baffin Bay fishery, as noted earlier, was realized very slowly. Even a decade after their discovery, many features of the new grounds were still not fully understood. By the late 1820s, however, it had become obvious that of the two exploitable North Atlantic bowhead stocks, only those at Davis Strait could now sustain a large-scale operation. Amazingly, the industry, failing to learn from the experiences at East Greenland, embarked on yet another period of rapid expansion and unregulated
Position of Dominance in British Northern Whaling

killing. In less than two decades, every advantage of Baffin Bay whaling was thus rendered uneconomic.

Peterhead investors, despite success at Davis Strait in 1827, were still the most tentative participants in the more distant whaling venture, fitting out most of their vessels for East Greenland the next year. While the smallest of these, Mary, captured 3000 harp seals, bowhead whales proved scarce. Consequently, most of the Peterhead masters sailed on to Baffin Bay. Captain Hutchinson, for example, reported that "the fishery at Greenland, up to the middle of May, was very poor, and the prospect of making a cargo there was so bad that he had bore up for the Straits." All got bumper loads. Two of the Peterhead vessels, Alphens and Enterprise, after testing East Greenland were lost in Melville Bay, and another, Active, foundered on the north coast of Iceland, "and eight of the crew perished, while bearing away from Greenland for Davis Strait." These losses partially explain why Peterhead, although in the ascendency at that date, was reluctant to embrace west of Greenland whaling fully. The worst fears of local investors were soon to come to pass.

Once Davis Strait finally became the main focus of the Scottish effort, Northern whaling became a significantly more expensive and risky venture. Although profits in 1829 were reduced significantly, the following year was an absolute disaster. An 1830 editorial in the Aberdeen Journal towards the end of the season read, in part: "We subjoin a list of the ships lost at the Northern Whale Fishery since the year 1819, when they first attempted to cross Davis' Straits. It speaks, we think, volumes; for before that time the casualties at Greenland and Davis' Straits scarcely averaged two or three ships in a season." Owners attempted to reduce wages, provisioning and fitting-out

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83 Dundee Advertiser, 4 September 1828.

84 Dundee Courier, 5 July 1828.

85 For full details, see Aberdeen Journal, 3 September 1828; and Dundee Advertiser, 4 September, 2 October and 6 November 1828.

86 Lengthy accounts of the loss of Alphens and Enterprise were carried by Scottish newspapers. Aberdeen Journal, 3 September 1828; and Dundee Advertiser, 25 September 1828.

87 For full details, see Dundee Advertiser, 3 July 1828; and Dundee Courier, 4 July 1828.

88 As the Aberdeen Journal, 11 November 1829, explained, last year the cargoes of the nine vessels belonging to Dundee "amounted to about 1800 tons...estimated to be worth about £70,000. This year they will not much exceed 900 tons."

89 Aberdeen Journal, 13 October 1830.
costs by later sailings, but this strategy meant that voyages often had to be extended into late fall, thus becoming longer, riskier and more expensive.  

Baffin Bay whaling also required larger, ice-strengthened ships, and with the western North Atlantic bowhead stock in decline and intensified hunting pressure, competition made it imperative that masters gain early access to the whaling grounds. A timely crossing of Melville Bay thus became even more critical. The importance of this passage was noted by a Dundee newspaper which explained that “it has generally happened that the ships which were fortunate enough to get first through the barrier, found plenty of whales.” Many captains now routinely took risks that were not compensated by their stronger vessels and increasingly experienced crews. In 1830, for instance, twelve Scottish and seven English whalers were lost “from the prevalence of S.W. winds, the ships got beset in the ice...[Melville Bay] where they remained from the 10th June to the 10th Sept., and, during this interval, the scenes of damage and destruction which took place, baffle all description...it is miraculous that so few lives were lost.” The scale of destruction was without parallel and led not only to increased replacement and salvage costs but also to sharply rising insurance premiums.

The years 1831-1834, a period of favourable environmental conditions, profitable voyages and relative stability, brought a brief respite. Nevertheless, the scale of the industry was clearly reducing bowhead numbers to uneconomic levels. As at East Greenland, the typical cycles of feast and famine were characterized by increasingly shallower peaks and deeper troughs. By 1835, masters were taking even more desperate measures. Not able to make the Northwater before September, for example, many for the first time attempted to sail southwest around the mid-ice to prosecute the Fall Fishery.

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90 See, for example, Dundee Advertiser, 29 October 1829 and 8 November 1833.
91 See, for example, ibid., 25 January 1833.
92 Ibid., 14 October 1830.
93 Aberdeen Journal, 13 October 1830. See also Dundee Advertiser, 14 and 28 October 1830. A full account of the 1830 whaling season at Davis Strait is provided by Scottish Fishery Museum, Anstruther, logbook of William and Ann, Captain Smith.
94 Dundee Courier, 12 October 1839.
95 For a full discussion of the cyclical nature of all ineffective whale fisheries, which includes a model, see Sanger, “Origins of the Scottish Northern Whale Fishery.”
96 Aberdeen Journal, 28 October 1835; Dundee Advertiser, 23 October 1835; and Dundee Courier, 13 October 1835. For a full discussion, with graphics, of seasonal ice advance and retreat in Davis Strait and Baffin Bay, see Sanger, “Dodging in the
Having delayed their departure for home, eleven whalers, including *Middleton* of Aberdeen and *Viewforth* of Kirkcaldy, became trapped in the southern part of the pack. Two were crushed. Although the shipwrecked crews were distributed among the remaining nine ships, owners had provided supplies sufficient only for a regular voyage. While all with the exception of *Wm. Torr* of Hull managed to break free before the end of February, many crew members suffered severely from hunger, scurvy and frostbite, and fourteen of the stranded men who had taken refuge on *Viewforth* died.\(^{97}\)

With no news of the missing whalers by the end of November, a public outcry ensued for government to mount a rescue mission.\(^{98}\) At Aberdeen it was reported that “public sympathy has been generally excited throughout the country by the situation, and, probably, miserable suffering, of upwards of five hundred of our brave countrymen, who, in their prosecution of the Whale Fishery, have been ‘beset’ and detained by the thick-ribbed ice.”\(^{99}\) Government stalled, however, citing difficulties posed by the lateness of the season.\(^{100}\) A vessel commanded by James Clark Ross, recently returned from a four-year expedition in search of a Northwest Passage,\(^{101}\) was dispatched in early January 1836. Although the majority of the missing whalers had reached Stromness in the Orkneys, he was able to render much needed medical assistance.\(^{102}\)

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\(^{97}\)Their ordeal is described by an officer (probably the surgeon) of *Viewforth*; see *Sufferings of the Ice-Bound Whalers: Containing Copious Extracts from a Journal Taken on the Spot by an Officer of the Viewforth of Kirkcaldy; and Embracing Full Details of the Jane of Hull, and of the Wreck of the Middleton of Aberdeen* (Edinburgh, 1836). See also *Aberdeen Journal*, 11 November 1835, and 24 February 1836; and *Dundee Courier*, 1 March 1836.

\(^{98}\) *Aberdeen Journal*, 2 and 9 December 1835; and *Dundee Advertiser*, 4, 11 and 18 December 1835.

\(^{99}\) *Aberdeen Journal*, 9 December 1835.

\(^{100}\) *Dundee Advertiser*, 11 December 1835.

\(^{101}\) Ironically, but significantly, Ross had been rescued by his old discovery ship, *Isabella*, now a Hull whaler. For full details see John Ross, *Narrative of a Second Voyage in Search of North-West Passage, and of a Residence in the Arctic Regions During the Years 1829, 1830, 1831, 1832 and 1833; Including the Reports of James Clark Ross and the Discovery of the Northern Magnetic Pole* (London, 1835).

\(^{102}\) *Aberdeen Journal*, 23 December 1835; *Dundee Advertiser*, 25 March 1836; and *Dundee Courier*, 22 December 1835 and 22 March 1836.
Ross was unable to locate Wm. Torr and returned from Davis Strait in August, reporting that conditions appeared to be even worse than 1835, with only ten whales taken on the older traditional southern grounds and that "the Country was full of ice." This since captains were under orders not to leave for home until 15 October unless they had 100 tons of oil, this created a formula for an even greater disaster. Compounding the situation, owners amazingly had again failed to provide emergency provisions.

Meanwhile, in the heavy ice and unfavourable winds only twelve whalers managed to reach the Northwater towards the end of the 1836 season. All but one, however, were too late to save their voyages. Despite the experience of the previous year, six masters, three of them Scots, unable to make the northern passage again attempted to get west through the mid-ice pack. As Captain Taylor of Grenville Bay explained, on 19 June he was in South East Bay just south of Disko and with "no likelihood of a Northern Passage...I am going south and if I do not get round [the mid-ice], it may be necessary to look north again." Strangely, he and five other captains, having failed to recognize the disastrous consequences of this strategy, also became entrapped. A council of commanders was convened on 10 October to discuss their predicament. Short on supplies and 500 miles further north than those trapped in 1835, strict rationing was imposed, and the men set about winterizing the vessels. The loss of Thomas, with two men, on 12 December put additional pressure on the remainder of the fleet to feed and shelter the shipwrecked crew.

Public response this time was tempered somewhat by the belief that the missing whalers would make their way home safely. By early December, though, newspapers again took up the call for a relief effort. In Aberdeen, for instance, one editorial stated that "a meeting of the Shipowners and Mer-

\[\text{References}\]

103 Dundee Courier, 30 August 1836.


105 Aberdeen Journal, 31 August 1836.

106 Also beset were Norfolk of Berwick; Advice and Thomas of Dundee; and Dee of Aberdeen.

107 David Gibb, *A Narrative of the Suffering of the Crew of the Dee, while Beset in the Ice at Davis' Strait, during the Winter of 1836; with Other Interesting and Important Particulars, Drawn from Notes, Taken at the Time, by One of the Seamen on Board* (Aberdeen, 1837), 6. For additional details, see Aberdeen Journal, 31 August 1836; Dundee Advertiser, 14 October 1836; and Dundee Courier, 18 October 1836.

108 See, for example, Aberdeen Journal, 7 December 1836; and Dundee Courier, 27 December 1836.
chants...should be immediately called, to memorialize Government on the sub-
ject.109 Not surprisingly given the previous year's experience, Westminster
refused these somewhat muted requests, reasoning that the owners would have
"undoubtedly" ensured that their ships had been "properly provisioned" and,
in any event, the Admiralty, explaining its rational for not following the action
that had been taken in 1835, felt that the trade should solve its own prob-
lems.110 This view, however, was rebuffed by industry supporters, who argued
that Northern whaling was "an undertaking of national importance."111 In Feb-
ruary, still with no news, the government finally offered financial incentives to
owners who were prepared to have their whaling ships clear earlier than nor-
mal for Davis Strait. The first to sail was Traveller of Peterhead, with "extra
hands and stores, etc."112 Five in total were fitted out to provide assistance to
the missing whalers, but only Princess Charlotte of Dundee was able to do so.
On 14 May, one of its boat crews helped free Swan of Hull, the only ship that
had been unable to escape the grip of the mid-ice pack by that date. Conditions
on board were so bad that, according to its logbook, "not one of our men, with
the exception of the cabin people...[were] able to be on deck."113

The first of the trapped ships, Dee, did not get free until the end of
March and was unable to reach the Orkneys until a month later because there
were so few men capable of working the vessel. Altogether, "out of a crew of
forty-seven persons, no less than thirty-five have lamentably perished through
the hardships to which they have been exposed."114 In fact, of the sixty-five on
board, including those from the lost Thomas, only fifteen survived.115 Simi-
larly, all but seven of the fifty-nine on board Advise of Dundee perished.116

109Aberdeen Journal, 7 December 1836.

110Letter to the MP for Aberdeen published in Dundee Advertiser, 30 Decem-
ber 1836.

111Dundee Courier, 27 December 1836.

112Aberdeen Journal, 1 March 1837.

113Logbook of Swan, Hull, 21 May 1837, cited in Lubbock, Arctic Whalers,
340.

114Aberdeen Journal, 3 May 1837.

115The return of the missing whalers received wide coverage in Scottish news-
papers. See, for example, Aberdeen Journal, 10 May 1837; and Dundee Advertiser, 5
and 12 May and 23 June 1837.

116A detailed account of the voyage of Advise and the reaction of the local
populace is provided in Dundee Advertiser, 14 July 1837.
The other trapped vessels also suffered horrific losses. The events of 1835 and 1836 were a clear manifestation of how severely bowhead numbers at Davis Strait had been reduced following the development of the Northwater component of the industry and the pressure this placed on masters who increasingly felt driven to take greater risks. In response, the industry entered another phase of consolidation (see figures 2 and 6).

Given the events of the previous two years, the Scottish Northern whaling fleet in 1837 was reduced to thirty-one vessels from thirty-nine the pervious year. With only modest success the following year, just twenty-four were fitted out in 1839, and eleven of these were deployed at East Greenland. Henceforth, Davis Straits, with its much diminished resource, greater risks to men and ships and higher fitting-out and labour costs, was fished by only a few of the more experienced and better financed companies, mostly from Dundee. With all the haunts of the North Atlantic bowhead now breached and both stocks seriously compromised, the Scottish industry turned to a new Arctic strategy, one that first had been forged by their European competitors – the harp seal fishery. Peterhead investors led this new initiative.

After more than two decades of tentative involvement in the new venture at East Greenland, Peterhead was finally prepared to build upon this experience and successfully mount a challenge to its Continental rivals. Sealing could be conducted by smaller vessels with substantially less risk. Additionally, earlier and shorter voyages, besides incurring less expensive wage and fitting-out costs, permitted the returning whalers to be employed in the Baltic and coastal trades. Equally important, though, masters could still capture bowheads when opportunity presented.

At Baffin Bay, reduced competition helped the few remaining participants to manage relatively profitable voyages on a fairly regular basis (see figures 5 and 7 and table 1). Consequently, while the Dundee owners also sent smaller ships to East Greenland in search of harp seals, they continued to make Davis Strait their preferred whaling option. The success of their Dundee counterparts also motivated Peterhead investors to on occasion fit out whaling voyages to that region. Scottish investors now focussed increasingly on sealing, first at East Greenland and then at Newfoundland, to subsidize the whaling effort. The success of the new strategy enabled the Scots to remain the principal suppliers of Northern whale oil and bone until the outbreak of World War I brought the industry to a close.

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117See, for example, Aberdeen Journal, 25 July 1838.

118Aberdeen Journal, 1 August and 5 September 1838.

119Chesley W. Sanger, "Changing Resources and Hunting Locations of Scottish Whaling-Sealing Vessels in the Second Half of the 19th Century," Scottish Geo-
Conclusion

For most of the 1600s the Dutch dominated Northern bowhead whaling. Although British whalers had attempted to gain a foothold throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, the English and Scots did not enjoy sustained, uninterrupted growth until the government raised the bounty to forty shillings per ton in 1749. It was not until 1801, however, that Scottish whalemen had finally served their apprenticeship and were poised and ready to outstrip their English and Continental rivals.

An increased emphasis on Davis Strait brought improved catches and motivated the Scots to double their efforts between 1802 and 1805. The fleet remained stable at between twenty and twenty-two vessels for the remainder of the decade. A series of exceptionally good results at both East Greenland and Davis Strait, combined with the elimination of their major foreign competitors, the Dutch and Danes, the continuation of the bounty for an additional five years from 1809 and higher oil and bone prices then caused a period of unprecedented growth. With the American whale fishery decimated by the War of 1812, the number of Scottish Northern whalers reached forty-nine in 1815. Unfortunately, by this date bowhead stocks on all of the traditional grounds at both East Greenland and Davis Strait had been significantly reduced.

Rather than contracting, however, the Scots developed new fisheries in Baffin Bay in 1817 and along the east coast of Baffin Island five years later, thus initiating another period of rapid expansion. Participation peaked at sixty in 1821; and two years later, when the bounty was finally eliminated, they replaced the English as the dominant suppliers of Northern oil and bone. Unfortunately, with the last refuge of the two North Atlantic bowhead stocks now breached, catches declined at an even faster pace than previously. The need to purchase and fit out larger and stronger ships for longer and more dangerous voyages that were increasingly likely to yield poor returns consequently had a negative impact on Scottish Northern whaling.

Forced to take greater risks, the loss of men and vessels in the early 1830s quickly reached disastrous proportions. Only thirty-four Scottish whalers sailed in 1837 and two years later this number dropped to twenty-four. After almost two and a half centuries, the Northern fishery could no longer be sustained by the pursuit of bowheads alone. "Arctic whaling" hereafter would be subsidized by activities such as sealing. Peterhead and Dundee entrepreneurs provided the leadership throughout the transition. By subsequently taking advantage of new technology in the form of steamers and by embracing other

economic opportunities, such as the pursuit of bottle-nosed dolphins and nar­whales, fitting out over-wintering voyages, opening land stations and bartering with indigenous populations, the Scots continued to participate in "Northern whaling" until World War I finally brought the industry to a close.

Appendix I

The following logbooks and journals, in the archives of Broughty Castle Museum, Dundee (BCM); Dundee Public Library (DPL); Kirkcaldy Public Library (KPL); Peterhead Public Library (PPL); Scottish Fisheries Museum (SFM); and University Library, King's College, University of Aberdeen (ULKC), as well as related publications listed below, were used in the preparation of figures 3 and 4 in this article.

Logbooks

**Active** (1853 Peterhead); Sail; Captain D. Gray; East Greenland; Journal kept by J.B. Arbuthnot; PPL.

**Caledonia** (1834 Kirkcaldy); Sail; Captain D. Gray; Davis Strait; SFM.

**Chieftain** (1841 Kirkcaldy); Sail; Captain R. Todd; Davis Strait; Log book kept by D. Kerr, first mate; KPL.

**Chieftain** (1842 Kirkcaldy); Sail; Captain R. Todd; Davis Strait; Log book kept by D. Kerr, first mate; KPL.

**Chieftain** (1852 Kirkcaldy); Sail; Captain W. Archibald; Davis Strait; KPL.

**Dorothy** (1834 Dundee); Sail; Captain D. Davidson; Davis Strait; DPL.

**Fairy** (1838 Dundee); Sail; Captain D. Davidson; Davis Strait; DPL.

**Hercules** (1831 Aberdeen); Sail; Captain Allen; Davis Strait; Journal kept by medical officer; ULKC.

**Princess Charlotte** (1853 Dundee); Sail; Captain G. Deuchars; Davis Strait; DPL.

**Thomas** (1833 Dundee); Sail; Captain Thomas; Davis Strait; Journal (incomplete) kept by medical officer; BCM.

**William and Ann** (1830 Leith/Edinburgh); Sail; Captain Smith; Davis Strait; SFM.

Secondary Sources

Gray, Robert W. "Peterhead Sealers and Whalers: A Contribution to the History of the Whaling Industry." *The Scottish Naturalist* (September-October 1932), 129-133; (November-December 1932), 157-162; (January-February 1933), 1-10; (March-April 1933), 33-38; (July-August 1933), 97-104; (September-October 1933), 129-138; and (November-December 1933), 167-170.
