



Hancock, E. G. and Reilly, M. (2017) Possibly the oldest stuffed tuna in the world: Scouler's Glasgow fish-market find. *Archives of Natural History*, 44(1), pp. 170-173. (doi:[10.3366/anh.2017.0425](https://doi.org/10.3366/anh.2017.0425))

This is the author's final accepted version.

There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/160722/>

Deposited on: 08 May 2018

Enlighten – Research publications by members of the University of Glasgow
<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk>

Short notes

Possibly the oldest stuffed tuna in the world: Scouler's Glasgow fish-market find

The first description of Atlantic bluefin tuna, or tunny, *Thunnus thynnus* (L.) in British waters appears to be that of Thomas Pennant (1726–1798). One measured by him at Inverary in 1769, weighed 460lbs and was 7ft 10ins long and 5ft 6ins circumference (Pennant 1776: 276). Pennant described tunny as frequent off British coasts and when following shoals of herring into Scottish lochs were occasionally caught by the local fishing boats. Edward Donovan (1768–1837) recorded how three bluefin tuna were caught at mouth of Thames in 1801 and were sent to Billingsgate market (Donovan 1802). John Fleming (1785–1857) summarized the distribution as “Rare in England, frequent on the west coast of Scotland” (Fleming 1818: 218). A reflection of this frequency is illustrated by the tunny having a Scottish vernacular name first recorded by Robert Sibbald (1641–1722) as “Thunnus, nostratibus *Stoer-Mackerel*” (Sibbald 1696: 163). Despite being relatively commonplace, no mention appears to be made of them in any other natural history literature until John Scouler (c. 1804–1871) returned from his voyage to North America in 1829 and joined Anderson's University, Glasgow, as Professor of Natural History and Curator of its museum (Nelson 2014). He obtained a tunny at Glasgow fish market at the end of August 1830, the first notice of which was in a newspaper (Anonymous 1830a):

On Friday last a fish of the mackerel species (*Scomber Thynnus*) of enormous size was caught in a herring net in the Gaerloch. It is nearly ten feet in length, and nine in circumference. We are happy to learn that this magnificent specimen is to be preserved in the Andersonian Museum.

This report was reproduced a few days later under the headline “Fine Mackerel!” in the *The Hull packet* (Anonymous 1830b) and possibly other regional newspapers which circulated in areas where fishing was of local commercial importance. Not until 1833 did Scouler himself mention the event declaring that the species was not infrequently encountered but that “The only specimen **our emphasis** ... which I have heard of was taken in the Gairloch, nearly opposite Greenock in July, 1831” (Scouler 1833). He seems to have mis-remembered both the month and the year. As an active curator, for whom material evidence is of importance, he had the tuna stuffed and exhibited as were numerous other unusual fish species from the market. The visitor guide to the museum described cases of various fish but the tuna was free-standing (Anonymous 1831: 18); it was depicted to the left of the staircase in the fold-out frontispiece (Figure 1), supported by two short poles on a wooden base. A later catalogue (Anonymous 1865) recorded:

Cases Nos 13, 14, 15. A collection of fishes, among which are some interesting specimens taken on the West Coast. Picked up chiefly by Dr Scouler in the Glasgow Fish Market. The bonito (*Thynnus pelamys*), Tunny (*Thynnus vulgaris*) nine feet in length ... All taken in the Frith of Clyde. Purchased for the museum by Dr Scouler.

Following closure of the Andersonian Museum (then part of Glasgow Technical College, now Strathclyde University) in 1888 a number of specimens were acquired by the University of Glasgow (Reilly and Sutcliffe 2014) and incorporated into the Hunterian Museum. The tuna was itemised in a card index as “No. 537, Andersonian, Tunny, *Orcynus thynnus* (L.), Gareloch-head, 1831, stuffed skin”. The erroneous date no doubt taken from Scouler (1833) or the earliest Andersonian museum guide (Anonymous 1831).

Progress of the fish through The Hunterian is evidenced in two photographs, one from 1891 (Figure 2) and the other taken in 1950 showing a class in progress. The tuna was still mounted on its stand as part of this demonstration in the relatively new Zoology Museum to which the animal collections had been transferred in 1923. The size of the fish was given in various sources as “about nine feet in length”. The actual specimen measures 2.59m (8ft 6in). About 1975, as part of a refurbishment of The Hunterian zoology displays, it was removed from its stand and fitted with wires so that it could be suspended. The two places where the supporting poles had entered its body were filled and the surface was finished with metallic car body spray paint colours to resemble its appearance in life. To further convey the appearance of a live fish the mount, which had previously lacked eyes, was fitted with suitably shaped and painted pieces of glass. Considering its age and the generally unsatisfactory result of stuffing fish, due mainly to shrinkage and loss of colour, it is of acceptable appearance (Figure 3).

A search for other preserved tuna in British and Irish museum collections and published references to them has not revealed one of an earlier date. The next museum record appears to be a catalogue entry in the British Museum for 1842. Perhaps one of the eyes is from this specimen as the next record in Günther (1860) states an eye four inches in diameter had been taken from a stuffed example. In the same year a nine-foot long tuna was said to be in Marischal College, Aberdeen (Yarrell 1859) but no specimen exists today. Thereafter a considerable number of sightings, landings and the occasional museum specimens were recorded during the remainder of the nineteenth century. There was a short-lived period of game fishing for the species in the North Sea which peaked in the 1930s, mainly from Scarborough and other fishing ports on the Yorkshire coast. A number of museum or country house exhibits dating from this activity have been examined and mostly these are casts rather than stuffed specimens as the results are generally more life-like. Usually each is accompanied by a photograph of the angler with his fishing rod next to the dead fish and a weighing machine on the quayside. This sport fishing also gave an opportunity for scientific investigations (Russell 1933, 1934).

It is not certain by what technique the specimen at The Hunterian was prepared. It is very heavy but sounds hollow in places when tapped. Through a few small gaps in the skin dried grass or straw can be seen but plaster also may have been used which could account for its weight. It appears to be the oldest example of Atlantic bluefin tuna from British waters and an early example of ichthyological taxidermy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A number of museum colleagues are thanked for their responses to queries regarding old stuffed

fish; Oliver Crimmen generously made available the collection files and records in the Natural History Museum, London. Dr David Houston provided his reminiscences of making The Hunterian bluefin tuna suitable for re-display in 1975. A series of useful comments by a reviewer added some back ground facts and improved the flow of the narrative.

REFERENCES

- ANONYMOUS, 1830a *The Scotsman*, 1 September 1830 (no. 1111) p. ?.
- ANONYMOUS, 1830b *The Hull packet and Humber Mercury*, 14 September 1830 (no. 2391), p. ?.
- ANONYMOUS, 1831 *Account of the Andersonian museum, Glasgow*. Glasgow.
- ANONYMOUS, 1865 *Catalogue of the museum of Anderson's University*. Glasgow.
- DONOVAN, E., 1802 *The natural history of British fishes*. London.
- FLEMING, J., 1828 *A history of British animals, exhibiting the descriptive characters and systematical arrangement of the genera and species of quadrupeds, birds, reptiles, fishes, Mollusca and Radiata of the United Kingdom*. Edinburgh.
- GÜNTHER, A., 1860 *Catalogue of the acanthopterygian fishes in the collection of the British Museum*. London
- NELSON, E. C., 2014 *John Scouler (c. 1804–1871), Scottish naturalist: a life, with two voyages*. Glasgow.
- PENNANT, T., 1776 *British zoology*. Volume 3 Reptiles and fishes. ????
- REILLY, M. and SUTCLIFFE, R., 2014 Appendix 3, Fate of the Andersonian Museum, pp 122–127 in NELSON, E.C., 2014. *John Scouler (c. 1804–1871), Scottish naturalist: a life, with two voyages*. Glasgow.
- RUSSELL, F. S., 1933 Tunny in the North Sea. *Nature* **132** (3342): 786.
- RUSSELL, F. S., 1934 Tunny investigations made in the North Sea on Col. E.T. Peel's Yacht, "St. George," Summer, 1933. Part I. Biometric data. *Journal of the Marine Biological Association of the United Kingdom* **19** (2): 503–522.
- SCOULER, J., 1833 The tunny (*Scomber thynnus* L.). *Magazine of natural history* **6** (36): 529.
- SIBBALD, R., 1696 *Scotia illustrata*. Edinburgh.
- YARRELL, W., 1859 *A history of British fishes*. Third edition. London.

Received 2015. Accepted 00 April 2016.

E. GEOFFREY HANCOCK and MARGARET REILLY

The Hunterian (Zoology Museum), Graham Kerr Building, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, G12 8QQ.

DOI: 10.3366/anh.2017.0000

Wolfgang Helmgard von Hohberg (1612–1688) and John Woodward (1665–1728): first records of using arsenic and mercury for the preservation of natural history collections.

Collecting and preservation of natural history specimens were an important part of the culture of curiosities that flourished in the seventeenth century. However, before 1700 very few instructions for the preservation of the zoological specimens existed in printed form (Schulze-Hagen *et al.* 2003). This note focuses on the only two available pre-1700 sources that propose using toxic elements – arsenic and mercury – for the preservation of taxidermy specimens.





