

SCOTTISH ARCTIC WHALING. By CHESLEY W. SANGER. Edinburgh, Scotland: John Donald, Birlinn Limited, 2016. ISBN 978-1-906566-77-7. xx + 220 p., maps and graphs, notes, bib., index. Softbound. £20.

Scotland's involvement with Arctic whaling endured for 250 years until the onset of the First World War, but because of its minor economic contribution, it has been treated mostly as a narrative side note in the history of the trade. It was not until the cessation of English involvement in the mid 19th century that Scotland finally ascended to dominance over the declining trade.

This work, a product of nearly four decades of research, was first inspired by the author's interest in the dynamics of the Newfoundland harp seal hunt. After more than 200 years of exploitation had driven the bowhead whale to near-extinction, Scottish whalers began to subsidize their low catches with harp seals harvested from the pack ice and shorefast ice around Newfoundland and Labrador. They brought new technology in the form of steam-propelled vessels, which proved more efficient, expanding and altering the commercial sealing industry based in St. John's. Sanger earned his MA from Memorial University of Newfoundland in 1973 studying the Newfoundland sealing trade and went on to complete his PhD (1985) at the University of Dundee, Scotland, by investigating the origins of Scottish Arctic whaling. Sanger published extensively on this topic in the decades that followed, receiving recognition for his work from both the Canadian Nautical Research Society (Best Book Award in 2006) and the New Bedford Whaling Museum (Waterman Award in 2008).

Sanger's approach draws on a wide array of primary source material, using the continuous records of the trade's activities published in four Scottish newspapers as his cornerstone. Detailed personal accounts of day-to-day life aboard Scottish Arctic whaling ships from rare extant journals and logbooks enrich this material; letting the whalers speak for themselves produces a more comprehensive history of the offshore element of Arctic whaling. *Scottish Arctic Whaling* is presented chronologically from origin to end, highlighting the tenacity of Scotland's ports and investors. Despite the continual underperformance of Scottish ports against their English counterparts for much of the trade, the Scottish whalers' willingness to diversify allowed them to surpass England's involvement in the early 19th century and hold a virtual monopoly for the last 50 years of the Arctic whaling trade.

The history of the British Arctic whaling industry has been written with primary focus on the English ports that first engaged in and then upheld the industry. Sanger identifies several distinct phases of Scotland's involvement with Arctic whaling. Initially Scotland was not far behind the first organized attempt to procure the Arctic fishery by the Muscovy Company of London. However, blocked by a royal charter held by that company, Scotland did not truly enter the whaling trade until the "Glasgow Soaperie" was

established in 1667, whale oil being a key ingredient in the manufacture of soap at that time.

This early period of Arctic whaling was dominated by the Dutch, who capitalized on the newly discovered resource to control much of its trade, leaving few successes for either the English or Scottish. When the British government established a bounty to invigorate the trade, Arctic whaling began to grow, but still Scotland's involvement was cautious. Sanger reveals that the combination of wars in the latter part of the 18th century did much to bolster the market for whale oil and Scotland's involvement in the trade. Following the American War of Independence, during which New England sperm whaling had temporarily ceased, demand for whale oil was high, and tariffs on American imports meant that the demand was not being met. Scottish ports went from fitting out a total of three vessels for Arctic whaling in 1779 to 31 in 1787—Scotland had finally arrived.

By the turn of the 19th century, bowhead stocks at the traditional "Greenland" fishery had been overexploited to uneconomic levels. Both the English and Scottish expanded operations to the Davis Strait, west of Greenland. Here unexploited stocks allowed potential profits to offset the greater voyage length and harsher conditions experienced. Two Scottish masters, G. Muirhead of Leith and G. Valentine of Aberdeen, pioneered the expansion of this fishery in 1817. Sailing north into Melville Bay after the end of the Disko Bay fishery, which up to this point had signaled the end of the season, they discovered the last refuge of the North Atlantic bowhead whale. This discovery paved the way for the Scottish to gain dominance over their English counterparts and provided the arena for diversification that allowed Scotland's whaling trade to endure for more than 50 years after the core Arctic whaling trade had ended.

By the mid 19th century, the decline in whale stocks was enough to deter investors and British whaling began to flounder. With whale catch numbers drastically falling, the Scots, working mainly out of Peterhead, began to target harp seals from areas off Jan Mayen and Newfoundland to increase profitability. These locations proved to be effective stopovers en route to the bowhead fishery in Baffin Bay. The introduction of steam-powered screw vessels, along with the reduction in size of the whaling fleet, led to increased success for the few remaining Scottish boats. The familiar cycle of discovery, exploitation, and decline was soon evident, and seal hunting quickly became an uneconomic addition to whaling endeavours.

The final stage in Scottish Arctic whaling was defined by the practice of overwintering in Cumberland Sound in preparation for an early start on harvesting the few remaining bowheads. This endeavour was short-lived, and the final years of the early 20th century saw only a handful of voyages leaving Scotland. While these voyages entertained the opportunity of hunting bowheads, they were principally engaged with land-based hunting and trade with Indigenous communities, and they finally ceased with the onset of World War One.

*Scottish Arctic Whaling* is the authoritative text on the subject. Its extensive use of primary source materials, particularly logbooks and journals, provides significant insights into the spatial and temporal components of the trade that are lacking in other, often socio-economically based histories of Britain's involvement. This well-researched book is detailed and heavily referenced, appealing to both the expert and the casual reader. I recommend this text to all with an interest in the history of the Arctic, and it deserves a place in all polar libraries.

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