Whaling

For over 130 years, ‘Arctic cowboys’ sailed uncharted seas and risked their lives to hunt whales and seals. Whalers travelled to places barely on the map in the Arctic and brought back huge catches which oiled the wheels of industry.

Whale oil for a period of time was indispensable and was used for lighting and heating, soap, and also for softening the raw jute fibres that Dundee made into sacking in the city’s mills. The whale bone could change hands for up to £3,000 a ton and had scores of uses, from whips to chair backs to the bristles of brushes, but its main use was corsets in the female fashion industry.

In the whaling heyday, almost 20 whaling ships sailed from Dundee, and the townsfolk abandoned desk, bench and loom to wave them farewell, throwing oranges and pennies on to the decks for luck as the boats left the quays.

By the late 1830s overfishing had seriously affected the industry and Aberdeen vessels gradually abandoned the trade. After the mid 1880s Dundee was the only remaining whaling port in the UK and by the 1890s lost ships were not being replaced.

Vegetative and mineral oils, which were a great deal cheaper, had started to take whale oil’s place and this was a factor in the decline of the whaling industry which came to a close in Dundee just before the First World War in 1914.

https://thecourieruk.shorthandstories.com/scotlands-whaling-history/

Farewell to Tarwathie

Attributed to George Scroggie near Aberdeen in or around 1850, this song was popularized by Ewan MacColl and A.L. Lloyd. Lloyd credits the song to Scroggie in the liner notes for his album Leviathan, saying of it:

The stereotype of the oldtime whalemens is a hairychested ring-tailed roarer, hard worker, hard drinker, hard fighter. No doubt the description fitted many of them; nevertheless they often showed a strong liking for gentle meditative songs. Perhaps alone among all the songs on this record, Farewell to Tarwathie was made not by a whaeman, but by a miller, George Scroggie of Federate, near Aberdeen, around the middle of the 19th century.

Farewell to Tarwathie, adieu Mormond Hill
And the dear land o' Crimond, I bid you farewell
For I'm bound out for Greenland and ready to sail
In hopes to find riches in hunting the whale
Farewell to my comrades, for a while we must part
And likewise the dear lass who first won my heart
For the cold coast of Greenland, my love will not chill
And the longer my absence, more loving she'll feel

Our ship is well rigged and ready to sail
and the crew they are anxious to follow the whale
Where the icebergs do fall and the stormy winds blow
and the land and the ocean are covered in snow

The cold coast of Greenland is barren and bare
No seed time nor harvest is ever known there
And the birds here sing sweetly in mountain and dale
But there’s no bird in Greenland to sing for the whale

There is no habitation for a man to live there
And the king of that country is the fierce Greenland bear
And there will be no temptation to tarry long there
With our ship bumper full, we will homeward repair

Farewell to Tarwathie, adieu Mormond Hill
And the dear land o’ Crimond, I bid you farewell
For we’re bound out for Greenland and ready to sail
In hopes to find riches in hunting the whale

https://thelongestsong.fandom.com/wiki/Farewell_to_Tarwathie

Bonnie Ship the Diamond
Immortalized in song and story in the 19th century, the Bonnie Ship the Diamond is a traditional folk ballad penned to commemorate a whaling ship.

The song was popularized by Ewan MacColl and A.L. Lloyd in 1957. According to Lloyd in the liner notes for his album Leviathan in 1967, the Diamond sailed out of Peterhead beginning in 1825 and was one of many vessels in a fleet lost to the crush of ice floes in the Davis Straits in 1830. The Resolution and the Eliza Swan were also among such a fleet, with the Rattler of Leigh (not the Battler of Montrose as the some versions of the song suggest.) Lloyd claims the song must have only been written a season or two before the tragedy, given the timeline from the ship’s maiden voyage to the disaster that claimed her.

The Diamond is a ship, me lads, for Greenland she is bound,
the quay it is all garnished with bonnie lasses ‘round;
Captain Thompson gives the orders to sail the ocean wide,
Where the sun it never sets, me lads, nor darkness dims the sky

And it’s cheer up me lads, let your hearts never fail,
For the bonny ship, the Diamond, goes a-fishing for the whale.
Along the quay of Peterhead, the lasses stand around,
Wi' their shawls around their necks and salt tears runnin' down;
Well don't you weep, my bonny lass, though you'll be left behind,
For the rose will grow in Greenland's ice before we change our minds.

And here's to the Resolution, likewise the Eliza Swan,
And here's to the Battle of Montrose and the Diamond, ship of fame;
We wear the trousers of the white, the jackets of the blue,
When we return to Peterhead, we'll have sweethearts anew,

Oh, it'll be bright both day and night when Greenland lads come hame,
With the ships all full with oil, my lads, and money to our name;
We'll make the cradles for to rock and the blankets for to tear,
And every lass in Peterhead sing: "Hushabye, my dear"

https://thelongestsong.fandom.com/wiki/Bonnie_Ship_the_Diamond