

PROJECT TITLE

Building knowledge from historical UK Arctic whaling activities

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Do you have an interest in history, the polar regions or marine mammals? If so read on as we may have a 6 month internship that could be of interest to you.

Britain was both the first, in 1611, and last, in 1913, European State to hunt Bowhead whales (*Balaena mysticetus*) in Arctic waters for commercial gain. Whale oil and bone were valuable commodities, and as a result of the profits to be made numerous British ships would sail to the whaling grounds of the Greenland Sea and Baffin Bay each year. The whale hunting business had grown so large that at its peak, over 300 UK vessels were harvesting over 2000 whales a year from this small region of the Arctic. This harvest was obviously not sustainable, and over-exploitation pushed the Bowhead whale population to near extinction. Since the commercial hunt of bowhead whales by the British ceased, there has been substantial changes in both the oceanographic and sea ice regimes where the bowhead whales live. For example, sea ice no longer remains in Baffin Bay during summer, and its extent is greatly reduced in the Greenland Sea. Whaling records, and associated whaling log books, can give us a very clear picture of where the whales were caught, their size, specific locations, or time of the year, where age- and/or sex-based segregation occurred, as well as information on the ice and oceanographic conditions at the time. By gathering and analysing these past records we can improve our knowledge of the Bowhead population, their movements, and their habitat (oceanographic and sea ice regimes) from the past. This knowledge is critical to understand the implications of climate induced changes on the present and in the future populations of the bowhead whale species.

As all this information lies buried within the historical records of the UK Arctic whaling industry, and only time and patience are needed to extract this knowledge. Also, historical record-keeping has been found to be incomplete, and thus multiple sources are needed to fill in some of the gaps. The digital revolution has brought new opportunities to access whaling history records as the contents of many important archives are now searchable online, and the digitisation of rare documents and books is moving forward at a tremendous speed. The aim of this internship is to embrace this revolution, especially through the online access to the British Newspaper Archive which delivers online searchable access to millions of pages of historical newspapers and important records such as Lloyds Lists of UK sailings (i.e., see <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>).

SUGGESTED LENGTH – A 6 month project is anticipated, which should be completed by 31 March 2022. We envisage the first 3 months to be focused on searches within the British Newspaper Archive or other archives, with the remaining 3 months to be focused upon a research project based around the candidates interests ignited through compiling the additional data for our UK Arctic whaling database.

JOB DESCRIPTION

This internship has a two-fold objective (1) perform on-line historical searches to help to fill in gaps within the UK Arctic whaling database and (2) allow the candidate to follow their interests in interpreting data from this database. This could range from an examination of numbers of whales caught over time, to changes in the sizes of whales caught, through to a more societal study of the transient nature of the UK towns involved in the whaling industry. It will be up to the internship

candidate(s) to decide, in discussion and guidance with other team members. Part of this process will be the drafting of achievable objectives, weekly milestones and the final delivery of their research (possible as a scientific paper).

They will be required to:

- Find and catalogue whaling records from digitised newspapers and reports using searchable key words and phrases
- Input findings into the database
- Research historical events
- Attend planning meetings (virtually or in person)
- Write and present their findings

WHAT ARE WE LOOKING FOR?

We are looking for a reliable and hard-working individual to join our friendly team. The ideal candidate should be interested in the polar regions, marine mammals, and history. They need to be self-motivated, have an eye for detail, good problem-solving abilities, and be able to work without close supervision. The candidate will need to be numerate and literate.

In addition to contributing to the overall project results, the internship holder will gain a broad understanding of how the Arctic marine environment has changed over the past few hundred years; and will understand how to perform academic research.

This project can be performed through home-working if desirable. Part-time or job share will be considered.