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Captain William Adams senior: whaling Master

Hugh M. Begg
Patrick Geddes Fellow, University of Dundee (hughbegg@blueyonder.co.uk)

John Watson, OBE
Archivist, The Fraternity of Masters and Seamen in Dundee

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ABSTRACT. Captain William Adams (1837–1890) was one of the exceptional whaling masters who sailed from Dundee in Scotland. This paper uses primary sources to confirm his reputation not only as a whaler but also as an adventurous explorer and wealthy businessman. He became outstandingly successful with Alexander Stephen & Sons, the Dundee shipping company that pioneered the use of auxiliary powered vessels for use in sealing in Labrador and fishing for whales in the Davis Strait and beyond. His first command was the *Arctic* in 1868, and his reputation was such that he was chosen by Albert Hastings Markham as his mentor in gaining experience for polar exploration. The unfortunate loss of the *Arctic* in Regent Sound in 1875 did no damage to this reputation and Adams was made Master of the newly built flagship of the company's fleet, the *Arctic II*. In 1883, by then a rich man, Adams became his own Master with the purchase of the *Maud*. In 1890, the vessel was returning to Dundee from Arctic waters when Captain Adams, who was accompanied by his son also William Adams (1869–1942) acting as Mate, was taken fatally ill, dying at Thurso in Caithness.

Introduction

The early history of whaling in Great Britain is well trodden ground and there is no need to go into detail here. (See for instance the website maintained by the British Arctic Whaling research unit based in the Maritime Historical Research Centre, University of Hull (http://www.hullhistorycentre.org.uk) The Dundee Whaling Project, a partnership between the Archive Services at the University of Dundee, the Local History Centre in Dundee Central Library, and the Archive and Record Centre for Dundee City Council, has succeeded in placing the City of Dundee in its rightful place in the history of whaling in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

It is sufficient to note here that whaling from Dundee began ca. 1750 following the introduction of the Crown bounty, intended as an incentive to maintain a fleet of ships which could, in an emergency, be pressed into service in the Royal Navy. It continued as a part of the economy of the city for more than 160 years before being extinguished in 1914.

There is now a considerable array of valuable secondary sources on which to draw in order to elaborate on that brief summary. To the seminal works of Lythe and Henderson (Henderson, 1972; Lythe, 1964a) have been added publications that have provided a general context (notably Watson, 2003). Others have delved deeper into particular aspects of the whaling industry and its role in the city. Studies have been published on the whalers themselves (Archibald, 2004; Smith, 1993), the voyages they undertook (Lindsay, 1911; Markham, 1874) and the vessels in which they sailed (Archibald, 2013a; Friends of Dundee City Archives, n.d.). Other authoritative works have focused on the associated ship building industry (Grace's Guide, www.gracesguide.co.uk; Lythe, 1962; Lythe, 1964b), the harbour from which the fleet sailed (Kenefick, 2000) and the jute industry whose rise it facilitated (for example, Lenman, Lythe, & Gauldie, 1969; Walker, 1979).

Less well known, but no less interesting, are the accounts of the life and times of individual masters (for example, Clark, 1986; Fairweather, 1928; Rycroft, 2005). These were remarkable men. Ocean currents and polar winds meant they needed navigational expertise, seamanship, and leadership qualities of the highest order. To meet, year after year, the challenges presented by horrific weather conditions in the Davis Strait, Baffin Bay, Melville Bay and beyond, and, on occasion, risking all to save the lives of other mariners in distress may, today, seem 'heroic' but for the Dundee whaling masters and their crews it became almost routine.

This paper adds to that last line of research by focusing on Captain William Adams who became known as the most skilled and experienced of the whaling masters of his time in the Canadian Arctic; and he was also an astute businessman.

Captain William Adams senior: some biographical details

Captain William Adams' gravestone in Barnhill Cemetery in Broughty Ferry indicates that he was born on 15 September 1837 and that he died on 6 August 1890. The obituary carried in the *Dundee Advertiser* the following day referred to him as *the most famous whaling captain in the world*. This paper sets out how that considerable reputation was built. As a starting point references to the decennial censuses, to successive Dundee directories, and to the records of the Fraternity of Masters and Seamen in Dundee (herein, the Fraternity) enables the creation of a brief biography and summary of his professional progress. His grandfather was George Adams, a school teacher in Dundee, who had married Margaret Heron. Captain Adams' father, also William Adams, was, amongst other

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things, Master of a coaster which plied between Perth and Dundee on the River Tay and he also sailed several times with the embryonic Dundee whaling fleet. Indeed, the *Dundee Courier* on 27 March 1882 noted that 'the gallant and veteran captain' who the previous year had accompanied his son to the Arctic gave a lecture on 'Sea and whale fishing' in the Good Templar Hall, Broughty Ferry. He died in 1893 at the age of 81.

His son, Captain Adams, the focus of this paper, was twice married and had five children by his two wives. Three sons were associated with the whaling industry. The best known is William Adams junior. Thomas died at sea aged 18, and Hector, a son from his second marriage, also became a whaler.

Captain Adams and his first family lived at 8 James Place in Broughty Ferry, which was, by then, readily accessible from Dundee but still a prosperous independent burgh in its own right. In the terraced property enjoying uninterrupted views across the Tay, and situated close to the long established fisher village, Adams' wife bore him two sons and one daughter.

Around 1877 the Dundee directories confirm that Adams' financial success as a whaling master enabled him to move house to 12 (now renumbered 28) Duntrune Terrace in the wealthier area of West Ferry. Successive Dundee directories show him in that property until 1888. However, sometime after that it seems that he had moved to an even larger property nearby on Strathern Road paying a yearly rent of £52.5.0 to John P. Kyd Solicitors. By then Captain Adams had married for a second time to Elizabeth ('Eliza') Beattie. Born on the 14 September 1852, she was rather younger than William; she bore him two sons and one daughter.

A posthumous portrait in oils of William Adams senior, painted by William Ferrier in 1891, was commissioned by his son, William Adams junior. Dundee Galleries and Museums confirms that it was donated to their collection in 1941. Adams is presented in the prime of life, confident and successful both as a whaling master and businessman. He appears to be seated within his mansion in West Ferry, which he named 'Disco' after the island in the Davis Strait off the west coast of Greenland and a chart of the vicinity is open on the table to his left. The small Danish administrative settlement of Lievely was located on the south coast of Disko Island (also known as Disco) in the harbour of Goodhavn, which provided a haven for whalers en route to the whaling grounds in Baffin Bay, Melville Bay, Lancaster Sound, Prince Regent's Sound and beyond.

Adams appearance, solemn and at ease in his home in West Ferry, contrasts with his description by Albert Markham as Master on the whaler *Active* in 1873:

> To enhance the general wintry aspect, snow was falling heavily in the forenoon, the deck and rigging being completely covered; the captain himself with his beard and whiskers so encrusted as to resemble, with his portly person and jovial face, the drawings of Father Christmas (Markham, 1874, p. 65).

Albert Hastings Markham, the cousin of Clements Markham and later an Admiral, had joined the *Active* to gain polar experience. While performing his share of whaling duties, he also kept detailed notes on weather and ice conditions, topography and cartography. His account of the voyage provides fascinating insights not only into the character of William Adams senior but also his conduct of a whaling voyage in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The introduction to the book by Rear Admiral Sherard Osborn, written from his desk in London, suggests that the book 'can be read with much interest by all who relish an unadorned tale of adventure' (Markham, 1874, p. xvii). The voyage demonstrates 'the boldness and skill with which her dashing captain, William Adams, pursued his mighty and valuable prey through ice, storm, and dangers' (Markham, 1874, p. xvi). (Interesting comparisons can be made with Lindsay's account of his voyage to the Arctic in the whaler *Aurora* in 1874 with James Fairweather as Master [Lindsay, 1911].)

Markham's diaries provide insights into Captain Adams' approach to his duties as Master of a whaling ship. After a characteristic send off from Dundee, the *Active* had anchored at Broughty Ferry 'at which place the captain allowed himself a brief leave-taking of his wife' at 8 James Place (Markham, 1874, p. 17). (An interlude at Broughty Ferry was not uncommon for out-going vessels to disembark adventurous young stowaways, and to allow those of the crew who had over imbibed during their leave-taking to come to their senses.)

Closely observed by Markham, Captain Adams displayed many of the traits characteristic of his fellow whaling masters who, along with their crews, were notoriously superstitious. Thus, for instance, although all set to leave on 2 May the sailing of the *Active* was put off until the next day, Saturday, because of the pervading view that to set sail on a Friday was unlucky. Then again:

> Our captain always carries about with him what he calls a 'lucky penny', one of those huge coins in circulation in the reign of George III. With this, from the first thing in the morning until the last thing at night, whether on deck or below, he is always anxious to toss with the doctor for the best of five successive guesses. It is most amusing to watch the cunning manner in which our worthy skipper puts his coin down, and the delight beaming on his jolly countenance when he succeeds in winning (Markham, 1874, p. 72).

There is no doubt that Adams was consistently 'lucky' in finding and killing whales. However, the evidence is that his 'good fortune' had nothing to do with rituals and irrational belief and all to do with good character, sensible behaviour and outstanding skills as a whaling master thereby achieving, as the annual records of the Fraternity of Masters and Seamen in Dundee show, remunerative catches that were well above average. Contrary to the rather fearsome reputations of other masters it appears that Adams was well able to command the loyalty of successive crews assisted, no doubt, by his success. Thus, for instance Markham notes:

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> Our captain is a kind, jovial, good-tempered man; and these qualities, added to his daring enterprise and great success during the time he has commanded the Arctic at the seal and whale fisheries, render him deservedly popular with all ranks and clases, and enable him to enlist a good crew, with efficient and experienced officers. (Markham,1874, p. 10)

For whaling masters their voyages to the Arctic fishing grounds were first and foremost commercial ventures with all else coming a poor second save when the rescue of fellow voyagers was required. Exploration was a useful by-product since central to Adams' role as Master was the task of seeking out the more remote, often uncharted, regions where whales could be found. For this purpose he would spend long hours in his crows' nest scanning the waters. Markham noted that the captain:

> […] is possessed of remarkably quick eyesight, rendered doubly acute by constant observation and frequent use of the telescope … (Markham,1874, p. 151).

On the voyage, 'the worthy skipper' appears to have been consistently good humoured except when 'unlucky' in finding whales for slaughter. On those occasions he was

> [...] constantly picturing to himself the other ships in the midst of whales, whilst we are lying idle; and he is, therefore, rather morose and taciturn, so different from his usual jovial and boisterous humour (Markham, 1874, p. 129).

A whaling voyage to the Arctic might last for anything up to six months from May to November. The stress placed on the Master must have been very considerable and it is interesting that Adams seems to have recognised the need to eat well. Markham noted that:

> Another favourite edible of our worthy captain is a sea weed called 'dulse', which is picked up in large quantities on the beach at Broughty Ferry. This is kept in a bucket of salt water on the after-part of the quarter-deck, so as to enable those so disposed to refresh themselves at their pleasure (Markham, 1874, p. 19).

Today, dulse continues to be sold as a snack food, recognised as having a high protein content and being a good source of minerals and vitamins with all the trace elements needed by humans.

As well as taking some care with his diet Adams seems to have recognised the need for adequate rest in periods when the handling of the ship could be safely entrusted to others.

> The captain has certainly a most wonderful constitution for sleep; during the last forty hours he has been over thirty in his bed (Markham, 1874, p. 165).

Early years and career as Master for Alexander Stephen & Sons

The early years

The Dundee Year Book of 1847 records the young William Adams as being an apprentice at the Dundee, Perth and London Shipping Company. (This tends to support the view that, contrary to the date on his gravestone, William was born in 1835 and may have been 13 years old at best when he was first apprenticed.)

During the years 1847–1850 he sailed to India and to the Baltic countries. In 1850, he embarked as Able Seaman on his first trip to the Arctic regions on board the sailing whaler *Princess Charlotte*. Built in South Shields in 1814 she was ship rigged (that is, rigged with three or more masts and square sails) with a standing bowsprit. The well-respected Dundonian, Captain Alexander Deuchars, was her Master between 1850 and 1856; she was owned by the Tay Whale Fishing Company and lost in the Davis Straits in 1859 (Archibald, 2013a, p. 177).

This description is worth recording because in the late 1850s there were significant changes in the whaling industry as a consequence of the introduction of steam power in the vessels built by Alexander Stephen & Sons in Dundee. They had modified Baillie William Clark's ship the *Tay* by fitting an auxiliary screw propeller along with a 75 horsepower steam engine (Archibald, 2013b, p. 194). Such was the success of this initiative that the company went on to build a fleet of custom-built steam whalers. Alexander Stephen was a part owner of the first of these, the *Narwhal*, which was launched in 1859. The vessel was 151.4 feet long and 31.1 feet in beam, ship rigged with three masts and powered by two engines provided by Gourlay Brothers also of Dundee. She was an immediate success and on her maiden voyage the crew slaughtered around 3,000 seals in Labrador in only two days. (Ibid., p. 169).

William Adams moved from the *Princess Charlotte* to be Boatswain on the *Narwhal* where he remained to advance through the various maritime examinations and promotions, gaining his Masters Certificate No. C27185 in 1866. By this time William Stephen, the son and heir of Alexander Stephen, had recognised Adams' exceptional abilities and appointed him First Mate of the company's new flagship the *Arctic*. Launched in February 1867 and owned equally by the Stephens, father and son. Under Captain Wells' brief command it was the first whaler to explore Prince Regent Inlet (Archibald, 2013a, p. 122).

Master for Alexander Stephen & Sons

In 1868, William Adams took over the *Arctic* as his first command, and he went on to become the most successful of the outstanding string of masters working for Alexander Stephen & Sons. The company became firmly established as builders of custom-built whaling vessels and, later, were owner operators of a considerable whaling fleet based in Dundee. As far as Adams was concerned, the catch record between 1868 and 1873 provided him with a substantial income and the basis of his fortune.

The voyages in the *Arctic* were not only fruitful, they were eventful, and each is the basis of exciting stories. For instance, in 1871 Captain Adams assisted, in their distress, the first Leigh-Smith Arctic Expedition to Svalbard and Franz Josef Land. He was warmly applauded for his efforts

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and was invited to a dinner given by the Lord Mayor of London to honour members of that scientific expedition.

In 1872, the *Dundee Advertiser* noted that the *Arctic* returned to Dundee with a catch of 8,000 seals yielding 80 tons of oil;

> The crew commenced to kill them at will and in the course of two or three days what proved to be the cargo of the *Arctic* was taken on board (Watson, 2003, p. 55).

Later in that season, Adams went on to command the *Arctic* on the British whaling and exploration expedition from Dundee.

Adams returned to the Davis Strait region in 1873 on the voyage on which he was joined by Albert Markham. It was a notable success and included the provision of some of the life-saving assistance required by the American exploration party voyaging in the *Polaris* following its ill-fated and controversial failure to be the first expedition to reach the North Pole. Troubled by poor leadership, evident incompetence, and consequential insubordination the *Polaris* had been wrecked near Etah, Greenland, in October 1872. Some of the crew were abandoned on an ice floe; the remaining men were rescued in July of the following summer by the whaler *Ravenscraig* out of Dundee with assistance from Adams and the crew of the *Arctic*.

However, the following year brought disaster in unexpectedly rough weather. In its edition of 11 December 1874 the *Dundee Advertiser* reported '*Arctic* lost in ice Cresswell Bay, Prince Regent Inlet, 07 July 1874'.

Captain Adams returned to Dundee in the early autumn of 1874 with no loss to his reputation as a master as his next appointment confirmed. In the meantime, William Stephen, amongst others, had leased ground to the south of the harbour in St John's, Newfoundland, where he had a yard built for rendering blubber, complete with storage tanks, a blubber crushing machine, boiling coppers, and a coal depot. This facility underpinned the trend for Dundee whalers, by now all equipped with the auxiliary engines pioneered in the 1850s, to make two trips to the fisheries during the season: the first was completed with the discharge of the outcome of the seal slaughter at the depot in Newfoundland; and the second, back to the grounds to catch a cargo of whales which would then be taken to Dundee for rendering and sale (Watson, 2003, p. 88).

With all this in mind, Alexander Stephen & Sons designed and built the *Arctic II* which was launched in 1875. It had a slightly different design from its predecessor with a distinctive funnel and engines situated amidships instead of aft of the mainmast. Her figurehead was an Inuit with a lance and cut out in gold letters around her stern was her motto: 'Do or Die'. At over 200 feet long, nearly 32 feet in beam and powered by a 98 horsepower engine, she was the pride of the Dundee fleet. Captain Adams was appointed her first Master, thus confirming the continuing close and successful relationship with the company that was to last until he retired from its services in 1883 having served for 18 years.

The records of the Fraternity of Masters and Seamen in Dundee enable us to build a detailed picture of each 'whaling year'. Added to these, the private papers of Robert Kinnes provide further insights into the place of Captain Adams and the *Arctic II* in the Dundee whaling fleet. Taking 1881 as an example, the Fraternity entry for 13 January 1881 states:

> The Dundee fleet to be engaged at Newfoundland this year will consist of six steamers – the *Arctic*, *Aurora*, *Thetis*, *Resolute*, *Narwhal* and *Esquimaux*. Captain Adams has been advised to stay in this country during the spring for the benefit of his health, and the *Arctic* will be commanded at the seal fishing by a Newfoundland captain. Captain Adams has to go out to St Johns, however, and take his ship to the whale fishing.

(The reference to Adams' health is interesting and will be taken up later.)

On 7 February the *Arctic II*, with Captain Welsh as Master, had sailed for St Johns arriving later that month reportedly having suffered 'slight damage'. On 13 March, following the seal slaughter, it was noted in the Kinnes papers that:

> The *Arctic* arrived St Johns with 600 seals. The small catch of the *Arctic* is accounted for by the vessel being beset amongst the ice in Queen Bay during the best part of the fishing season… 5th May 1881 – *Arctic* arrived St Johns – 1350 old seals. Captain Adams left Dundee about a fortnight ago to take command of the *Arctic* for the whaling voyage. *Arctic* 1st trip – 600 seals, 2nd trip 1350 – total 1950.

The *Arctic II* moved directly to the whaling grounds and on 14 October 1881 it was reported that:

> *Arctic* arrived Dundee with 13 whales calculated to yield 130 tuns oil. Best fished of Dundee fleet.

The Fraternity records dated 16 October provide mention of the ill-fated Franklin expedition:

> Beachy Island was visited, and there Captain Adams saw the monument erected to Sir John Franklin and five of his crew.

Later, in the vicinity of the Fury and Hecla straits Adams was in conversation with an Inuit:

> The native stated that when he was a young man in his father's hut three men came over the land towards Repulse Bay, and that one of them was a great captain. When he died the other two men were in sore distress and cried very much, stating that he was the Aniguk, or great Captain… From all the information furnished by the Esquimaux Captain Adams has no doubt that the vessels referred to were those of the Franklin expedition, and that the great captain mentioned was none other than Lieutenant Crozier.

It is worth noting at this stage that, in common with many of the Dundee whaling masters, Captain Adams developed an intimate knowledge, and empathetic understanding, of the Inuit people with whom he came in regular contact in the Canadian Arctic. It is not out of the question that, like other whalers before and after him, Adams had an

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Inuit family in the Canadian Arctic unacknowledged in Scotland.

Moreover, Captain Adams' obituary, carried in the *Dundee Courier of 7 August 1890*, had a lengthy section headed 'His Love for the Esquimaux', which contained the following observations:

> Captain Adams was a man of large sympathies, and his heart went out to the poor Esquimaux whom he met in the far North. Everyone knows that at considerable expense he brought at different times representatives of the race to Dundee, and by lecturing and otherwise he excited an interest in them.

William Adams: his own master

In 1883, after his last voyage on the *Arctic II*, Adams left Alexander Stephen & Sons and bought the wooden barque the *Maud*. A few examples, drawn from numerous reports in the Dundee Courier are sufficient to substantiate the high regard in which he was held by that time not only at home in Scotland but also further afield in Newfoundland and in post-confederation Canada.

Given his reputation amongst his fellow masters, it was not surprising that it was Adams, home during the winter months at his residence in Broughty Ferry, who led out a group of rescuers in their forlorn search for survivors following the fall of the high girders of the Tay rail bridge on the night of Sunday, 28 December 1879. In 1880 he was called as an expert witness for the prosecution in the trial of four officers charged with being criminally responsible for the loss of the Peterhead whaler *Xanthus* in Melville Bay; and in 1881 he was invited to speculate on the wherabouts of the crew of the American exploration vessel *Jeanette* crushed by ice and the subject of succesive rescue missions. As one further example, following the wreck of the *Chieftain* out of Dundee in Greenland waters in 1884 and the heroics of her gallant Master, Captain Gellatly, it was Adams who called a meeting in the Lamb's Hotel, at the top of Reform Street and reported in the *Dundee Courier* on 1 September, to launch a relief fund for the surviving crew.

During the winter months, when he was at home in Broughty Ferry, Captain Adams was much in demand as a lecturer and raconteur. Thus, for instance, in the final year of his life, the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* advertised that he would lecture on 21 January 1890 on *The Arctic world illustrated by 100 lime light views of Arctic life and scenery* under the auspices of Newport Bowling Club in the Blyth Hall.

An indication of just how widely Adams was respected in post-confederation Canada is provided by the report in the *Dundee Courier* of 19 May 1885 which recorded the invitation to visit in order to advise on the prospects for a new railway to run from Winnipeg to Port Nelson on the Hudson Bay from whence grain would be exported by steamer to the UK. The principal obstacle to be overcome in that venture was the ice belt at the mouth of the Hudson Strait, and Adams was to report on the best course to be followed and the class of vessels to be employed. Unfortunately, the railway proposal came to nothing and the line, when finally built, terminated at Churchill on Hudson Bay well to the north of Port Nelson.

Adams had built up a considerable fortune as a successful business man. His substantial annual incomes generated by the sale of seal and whale blubber and baleen were the basis of his fortune. However, he had added some worthwhile diversifications to his main business. Thus, for instance, the *Dundee Courier* of 12 September 1887 noted on his return from his voyage to the Davis Straits to moor at the Earl Grey Dock that he had a live bear and a walrus on board, the latter of which he offered to the Barnum Circus for £500 (around £30,000 today).

The *Maud*: his own master

Undoubtedly, Captain Adams' grandest business initiative was the purchase of his own whaler. In late 1883, at the age of 48 and by now a very wealthy man, he bought the *Maud* from William McCulloch of Inverkeithing. Built by T. Turnbull and Sons of Whitby, the *Maud* was a 117 feet long, 25 feet beam, three masted, barque rigged sailing ship. Adams brought her to Dundee and had her fitted out for the Arctic (Archibald, 2013a, p. 166). She sailed for the Labrador coast on 6 March 1884 commanded by Captain John Watson and in the company of another barque, the aforementioned *Chieftain*. In a letter from Captain Watson dated 28 April, which was brought back by a homeward bound ship, she was reported to have killed 247 seals and three bottlenosed whales. On the 19 July she was at the entrance to the Cumberland Gulf with a full cargo of old seals and bottlenosed whales, arriving back in Dundee on the 5 September 1884.

On 5 March 1885 the *Maud* sailed for Labrador, once again commanded by Captain Watson, returning to Dundee in early November 1885. Adams then had her converted to an auxiliary steam whaler by installing a small, 35 horsepower engine built by White & Cooper of Dundee. The engine was in place in time for her to sail again for the Arctic on 20 March 1886, this time commanded by Adams himself, and she returned to Dundee on 12 October. In 1886 her catch was 100 seals, 35 tons of oil, six white whales, 220 walrus, 23 bears and 27 narwhal. In 1887, the record was 60 tons of oil and 1.5 tons of baleen (Archibald, 2013a, p. 166). Three further successful voyages are recorded in the *Dundee Year Books* of 1889, 1890 and 1891.

Of some interest, in 1889 the wealthy Walter Livingstone-Learmonth, an Australian of Scottish parents, sailed with Captain Adams aboard the *Maud* to the Davis Strait and Baffin Bay. In the previous season, in 1888, Livingstone-Learmonth had travelled on the whaler *Eclipse*, commanded by Captain Grey, to satisfy his craving for killing for sport. One can only assume that Adams tolerated the man because his money added to the profitability of the voyage. Livingstone-Learmouth wrote a detailed account in the hope of following Albert Markham and others in writing a book on his travels but

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he was unable to find a publisher (Livingstone-Learmouth, 1889). His lasting legacy is a series of photographs taken on the *Eclipse* some of which showed her companion that year, the *Maud*, others depict some of the more gruesome aspects of whaling, while others show him proudly standing over some of his own kills: 26 walruses and seals and four polar bears (Scott Polar Research Institute, http://www.spri.cam.ac.uk/picturelibrary/catalogue/emv1888-89/).

Captain Adam's final voyage and his resting place

In 1890, Captain Adams as Master of the *Maud* set out again from Dundee bound for the Arctic fisheries where he had spent, more or less, the last 40 years of his working life. Voyaging with him was his 21-year-old son, William, who had joined the *Maud* as a boy of 15 and who, on this voyage, acted as Mate. A useful catch of seven whales yielded 100 tons of oil and 110 cwt of bone. However, the return trip was to prove the captain's last. The *Dundee Advertiser* of 7 August 1890 noted that the *Maud* had suffered a severe battering from hurricane force winds and mountainous seas. In the midst of all this Adams took ill, so seriously that William junior took the vessel into Scrabster Roads on the 4 August and landed his father, taking him to a hotel in Thurso, Caithness.

Mrs Elizabeth Adams was telegraphed and arrived in Thurso from Broughty Ferry the following evening. Arrangements were made for the sick man and his wife to catch a train south but at 08h25 on 6 August at Dingwall railway station William Adams died; the cause of death was given as 'obstruction of the bowels', and the duration of the illness recorded as 'uncertain'. It is worth noting that a bowel obstruction happens when either the small or large intestine is partly or completely blocked preventing solids, fluids and gas from moving through the intestines in the normal way thereby causing severe intermittent pain. That description fits well with what is known of Captain Adams' health in the immediately preceding years and in his last few hours. There is no evidence from what is known of the Adams family that it was predisposed to colon cancer, which is a common cause of 'obstruction of the bowels'. However, that form of cancer may be associated with a diet low in fibre and high in fat and calories. Furthermore, smoking and heavy use of alcohol may further increase the risk. It is clear that Captain Adams' diet and lifestyle, despite Markham's observations noted above, rendered him vulnerable to the disease.

Adams' son, William junior, signed the death certificate as the 'informant', and gave his address as 'Disko, Broughty Ferry'. The captain's body was carried to Dundee by the Caledonian Railway, and then to Broughty Ferry by the Joint Railway Company. It was interred in Barnhill Cemetery, Broughty Ferry, on 9 August 1890.

Such was the reputation of Captain Adams that his death was recorded not only in Dundee by way of the *Dundee Courier*, the *Dundee Advertiser* and the *People's Friend*, but also further afield. For example, his passing was noted in the *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, the *South Wales Daily News*, the *Gloucester Journal* and the *Gloucester Citizen*.

Captain Adams left an estate of £16,319.11.03 (which translates to between £1.5 and £1.7 million in 2017 prices). He first registered his will on 5 November 1879 with a codicil added on 15 March 1889. In the codicil, he chose to release his original Trustees, messrs Smith, Hume and Congleton, and replace them with a bank agent, David Scott, and a new solicitor, Robert Steven, while retaining his original accountant, Charles Peter. It may be that he felt that this group were in a position to provide the legal and financial advice appropriate for his improved station in life.

It is worth noting that, although a millionaire in today's terms, Captain Adams did not own any of his homes. The furnishings and related items at Disco were valued conservatively at around £35,000 at current prices; and, on the same basis, his precautionary balances held in local banks amounted to around £64,000. More than 25% of Captain Adams assets were tied up in various stocks and shares in the evolving network of railway lines in North and Central America. His enthusiasm for these ventures can reasonably be traced back to his time in Canada advising on the proposed line from Winnipeg to Port Nelson.

The inventory of his estate reveals that the greatest part of Captain Adams' fortune was invested in the *Maud*. His ownership, and the monies accruing from his last voyage, amounted to around £1 million at our current prices. It seems that shortly after purchasing the vessel Adams sold off 11 shares. He held the other 53 until his death at which point Robert Steven handled them as executor. The 53 were sold to Captain Andrew Scott who became the effective owner of the *Maud* until, in 1892, she was wrecked at Coutts' Inlet in the Davis Strait with Scott himself as Master.

A promissory note dated 23 April 1888 to George Boathe and Thomas Beattie for £500 does not fit well with the rest of Adams' portfolio of assets. Adams second wife's maiden name was Beattie and her birth certificate reveals that she was born in Roxburghshire. It is likely that Thomas Beattie of Dykes Farm, Jedburgh, was Eliza's brother and Adams had made the loan of £500 (almost £60k) to his brother-in-law at terms better than those offered by the banks of the day.

A few final matters provide closure for Captain Adams life and his distinguished career. A public notice appeared in the *Dundee Courier* of 15 August 1890 inviting all persons having claims against the late Captain Adams, of Disco, to lodge the same with Rollo and Steven at 41 Reform Street, Dundee. Later, *The Arbroath Herald* of 6 August 1891 carried a lengthy piece telling that a monument to Captain Adams had been erected in Barnhill Cemetery: 'the monument is thoroughly emblematic of the deceased's calling'. As far as those family members who were present at his death are concerned, it was reported in the *Dundee Courier* that Mrs Adams died

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having suffered 'an apoplectic fit' (probably a stroke) on 16 August 1893. William Adams junior went on to be a whaling captain achieving well-earned distinction as an explorer and expert master in his own right.

Acknowledgements

In respect of the life and times of William Adams senior we have relied heavily on successive editions of the *Dundee Year Book* and the *Dundee Directory*. Captain Watson has unrivalled access to the archives of the Fraternity of Masters and Seamen in Dundee, and we have made good use of the British Newspaper Archive including contemporary references in the *Dundee Courier*, *Dundee Advertiser* and *Dundee Evening Telegraph.* There is a particularly useful extensive obituary contained in the *Dundee Advertiser* of 7 August 1890.

We have benefited from a plundering of the authoritative work already undertaken by Norman Watson who, when archivist at the DC Thomson Press, published *The Dundee Whalers* in 2003. We have also benefited from the journal of Albert Hastings Markham, who sailed with Adams on the *Arctic* in 1873, which was published in 1874 as *A whaling cruise to Baffin's Bay and the Gulf of Boothia and an account of the rescue of the crew of the* Polaris.

We are grateful to Professor and Mrs Michael Lea who provided us with a copy of Walter Livingstone-Learmoth's unpublished manuscript which provides an account of "Whaling on the SS Maud in Davis'Straits and Baffin's Bay in 1889". We are likewise grateful for the privileged access to the private papers held by Kinnes Shipping Limited, the successor company to Robert Kinnes & Sons founded in 1883. Furthermore, we acknowledge with gratitude the note from Matthew Ylitalo of St Andrews University setting out the Dundee shipping register for the Maud in the period 1883–1892, which enabled us to trace the details of her ownership.

We have welcomed comments and assistance from Helen Kerfoot and Dr Peter Usher. Helen has recently retired as Chair of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names and is Emeritus Scientist at Natural Resources, Canada. Peter has lived and worked in the Canadian Arctic as a consultant and was, amongst many other appointments, Director of Research at Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, in Ottawa, and Chair of the Joint Review Panel for the Mackenzie Gas Project.

Finally, an earlier and much extended note prepared by us on Captain William Adams, his life and times, can be found at (http://www.fdca.org.uk/Captain_William_Adams_Sen.html). We take this opportunity to thank those at Polar Record who have assisted us in preparing this much edited paper for publication.

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