

# Conflict, cooperation and competition: The rise and fall of the Hull whaling trade during the seventeenth century

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*Ce document examine la montée et le déclin du commerce de pêche à la baleine à Hull au dix-septième siècle. Commençant par les voyages de pêche, y compris à la baleine, du port nordique à la fin du seizième et début du dix-septième siècle, il examine aussi bien la rivalité et la concurrence néfaste entre les aventuriers de Hull et la Compagnie de Moscovie de Londres, que le conflit entre les anglais et les hollandais pour l'accès aux baies du Spitzberg. Après un début prometteur, qui a été soutenu pendant les années 1630, le commerce de la pêche à la baleine de Hull a ensuite rencontré des difficultés. En dépit des efforts de le maintenir au cour des décennies tourmentées 1640 et 1650, ce commerce nouveau et potentiellement lucratif a été effectivement abandonné dès la deuxième moitié du dix-septième siècle.*

England played a leading role in the development of Arctic whaling at Spitsbergen during the early seventeenth century. Although the origins of the trade are obscure, the exploitation of these rich northern waters was European in scope. It also formed part of a broader European encounter with the Arctic in which exploration, particularly the search for a northern passage to Asia, was underwritten by commercial and fishing enterprise. At various times during this period the marine resources of the Arctic attracted the interest of maritime communities within and beyond the confines of the North Sea. The international dimensions of the commercial penetration of the north led to the participation of Spanish, French, Dutch, Danish, German and English vessels in whale hunting at Spitsbergen, in circumstances that provoked fierce rivalry between competing venturers and companies. During its early years the English whaling trade was marked by aggressive competition between the Muscovy Company and the Dutch Noordsche Compagnie for control of the best bays and harbours at Spitsbergen.<sup>1</sup> But this

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<sup>1</sup> The early whaling trade at Spitsbergen is discussed in Gordon Jackson, *The British Whaling Trade* (London, 1978); J.T. Jenkins, *A History of the Whale Fisheries* (London, 1921); Sir Martin Conway, *No Man's Land: A History of Spitsbergen from its Discovery in 1596 to the Beginning of the Scientific Exploration of the Country* (Cambridge, 1906); and Richard Vaughan, *The Arctic: A History* (Stroud, 1994). A.G.F. van Holk (ed.), *Early European*

was soon complicated by the activities of independent traders who challenged and effectively undermined corporate attempts to dominate a rapidly developing new business. The peculiar character of the Spitsbergen trade meant that well organized local enterprises could have far-reaching implications for the growth of the northern whaling trade, encouraging commercial de-regulation in circumstances which favoured competition and conflict. In England the most serious and sustained challenge to the Muscovy Company came from the merchants and mariners of Hull, whose interests in the trade occasionally rivalled those of the Londoners. The purpose of this paper is to examine the part played by Hull in the development of English whaling at Spitsbergen, within the context of its prolonged dispute with the Muscovy Company. While the rivalry between the two sides varied in intensity, and was occasionally overlaid by signs of cooperation, the nature of the dispute also raised serious issues concerning maritime rights and jurisdictions that affected the English whaling trade during a difficult period of rapid expansion, contraction and collapse.<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Arctic Whaling

English interest in whaling was slow to germinate. For most of the sixteenth century the trade was dominated by the Basques, who had originally hunted the right whale in the Bay of Biscay using shore-based sites and methods; however, the decline of local supplies encouraged Basque whalers to develop long-distance whaling in the Strait of Belle Isle, off southern Labrador.<sup>3</sup> Their prey were relatively easy to catch with the requisite skills and experience. Right whales are docile and slow moving. They feed on plankton which is filtered from water in a large jaw, lined with baleen or bone plates, as they move slowly along the surface. Their predictable behaviour, when understood by whalers, made them easier to take. As they floated when dead, it was possible for the Basques and others to hunt them at sea in small vessels with harpoons. Before their decline as a result of intensive hunting, large numbers of right whales (*balaena mysticetus*) migrated across rich feeding grounds in the Arctic during the short summer season. The break up of the pack ice led to a short-lived increase in plankton, creating bountiful supplies of food which supported a substantial population of whales. As the ice receded and broke up, they congregated in the bays and harbours of Spitsbergen as well as in the sea to the west.<sup>4</sup> Under the benign protection of this desolate and distant environment they remained free from the dangers of commercial hunting until the early

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*Exploitation of the Northern Atlantic 800-1700* (Groningen, 1981) is a valuable collection of essays.

<sup>2</sup> Bo Johnson Theutenberg, "Mare Clausum et Mare Liberum," *Arctic*, 37 (1984), 481-92; T.W. Fulton, *The Sovereignty of the Sea* (Edinburgh & London, 1911), 527-8.

<sup>3</sup> Selma Huxley Barkham, "The Basque Whaling Establishments in Labrador 1536-1632: A Summary," *Arctic*, 37(1984), 515-19; Jeremy Cherfas, *The Hunting of the Whale* (London, 1988), 59-60; Jackson, *British Whaling Trade*, 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> Cherfas, *Hunting the Whale*, 17-18, 29, 40, 55 (where the hunting of right whales is likened to hunting a herd of bison); Jackson, *British Whaling Trade*, 7-9. During a voyage of 1671 Frederick Martens, of Hamburg, noted great numbers in the west ice. Adam White (ed.), *A Collection of Documents on Spitzbergen & Greenland* (Hakluyt Society, 18, 1855), 33.

seventeenth century.

Because of their number and accessibility, the right whale became the basis of Arctic whaling at Spitsbergen; other species were too difficult or dangerous to take with the available technology. Essentially the economic driving-force behind the emergence of this new trade was the growth of demand for whale oil in many parts of north-western Europe. A single adult whale, weighing up to 55 tons, could produce between 20 and 30 tons of oil and possibly one ton of baleen or whale-bone.<sup>5</sup> In England oil was valued for a variety of purposes, as fuel for lamps, an agent in the manufacture of textiles, and particularly as a raw material in the production of soap. Though initially of much lesser value, whale-bone also had a variety of uses: its flexibility and durability were especially prized in the cutlery and clothing trades. By the mid-seventeenth century it was being used in women's dress. From the outset, however, the demand for whale products was affected by the availability of alternatives; for example, many soap-makers insisted that whale oil produced poor quality soap compared with that made from vegetable oil.<sup>6</sup> Such conditions exerted a powerful influence on market demand and prices, complicating the early development of the whaling trade.

During the early seventeenth century the trade at Spitsbergen was based on bay-whaling which linked sea and shore through a progression of overlapping and discrete activities, though these were always at risk from even a small change in the climate and its impact on the extent of the pack ice. Hunting whales in the more accessible bays and coves of the archipelago was followed by the extraction of oil at temporary sites ashore. In these circumstances whaling vessels tried to get into harbour at Spitsbergen shortly before the arrival of the whales, allowing men to get ashore to erect small huts, in which equipment was stored, as well as to prepare the apparatus needed to boil the blubber. These try-works included furnaces, coppers and coolers; in some cases this material may have been left at Spitsbergen between whaling seasons. The recent excavation of several early seventeenth century sites on Edge Island has revealed a well preserved try-works, made of stone, that may have been constructed by Thomas Marmaduke of Hull, possibly during 1613.<sup>7</sup> Fuel to operate the furnaces was presumably carried out as ballast by whaling ships, though surface deposits of coal were available in some parts of Spitsbergen. Whale hunting was difficult work, calling for skill, hard effort and some degree of luck. The arrival of the whales at Spitsbergen was carefully monitored by their hunters, who were able to observe them spouting water from a distance of two or three leagues. After they entered the sounds the whales were hunted by small shallops, manned with a crew of rowers, steersman and harpooner. When submerged, the crews of the shallops had to try and follow the whale by the wake it left on the surface, while waiting

<sup>5</sup> Vaughan, *The Arctic*, 77.

<sup>6</sup> Jenkins, *History of the Whale Fisheries*, 39-40; G. Jackson, "The Rise and Fall of English Whaling in the Seventeenth Century," in van Holk (ed.), *Early European Exploitation*, 63-5; Adam White (ed.), *A Collection of Documents on Spitzbergen & Greenland* (Hakluyt Society, 18, 1855), 107-9; J.R. Bruijn, "From Minor to Major Concern: Entrepreneurs in 17th Century Dutch Whaling", in van Holk, *Early European Exploitation*, 6-7.

<sup>7</sup> Louwrens Hacquebord, "Three 17th Century Whaling Stations in Southeastern Svalbard: An Archaeological Missing Link," *Polar Record*, 24(1988), 126-8.

for it to rise and spout. When this occurred “they rowe resolutlie towards him, as though they intended to force the shallop upon him. But so soone as they come within stroak of him, the harponier (who stands up readie in the head of the boat,) darts his harping iron at him out of both his hands, wherwith the whale being stricken, he presentlie discends to the bottom of the water, and therfor the men in the shallop doe weire out 40, 50, or 60 fathoms of rope – yea, sometimes 100, or more, according as the depth requireth.”<sup>8</sup> According to the subsequent evidence of Launcelot Anderson, a Hull whaling master who had experience of thirty-three voyages to Spitsbergen, for reasons of safety the harpooner tried to strike the whale in its head or fore-parts.<sup>9</sup>

For inexperienced seamen this close confrontation with an animal that possessed the power to overturn or smash the shallop was probably a terrifying experience. But it was followed by a chase that might last several hours and draw the shallop three or four miles from the place where the whale was first struck. During the course of the pursuit, when the whale emerged above water the crew of the shallop rowed up and struck it with long lances. This was one of the most dangerous parts of the hunt, for it was recognized that a wounded whale might “frisk and strike with his tail very forceable, sometimes hitting the shallop, and splitting hir asunder, sometimes also maihmeing or killing some of the men.”<sup>10</sup> In case of accident, therefore, the killing of a whale was usually attended by two or three shallops. During these closing stages of the chase, whale hunters attempted to lance their prey as low under water as possible, in an attempt to pierce its entrails. After the whale “received his deadlie wound, ... casteth he forth blood where formerlie he spowted water.”<sup>11</sup> As the animal lay stricken and dying, it was tied to the shallops and towed to the side of the ship where it was cut up into pieces of blubber, three or four feet in length. Anderson recounted that when “shee is dead & floates they lett hir alone for 2 or 3 dayes in which tyme shee swells & so a greater part of hir Back appears on the water: then they goe to hir & Cutt off Collops of hir back as deepe as the fatt reaches: & as far as the water permitts which done they turn up one side of the Belly & lastly the other side & so spades hir and then leave the rest of the Body (except the whalebone which they take out of hir mouth) to the mercy of the Sea.”<sup>12</sup> The blubber was carried ashore and chopped into very small pieces of about one and a half inches, which were boiled in large coppers to extract the oil. As it cooled, the oil was poured into butts and hogsheads by means of a long trough or gutter of wood.

As this flensing process proceeded the head of the whale was severed from the body and towed near to the shore. At low water the baleen, or bone, was cut out with hatchets and carried ashore, where it was scraped and rubbed with sand to remove the

<sup>8</sup> Clements R. Markham (ed.), *The Voyages of William Baffin, 1612-1622* (Hakluyt Society, 63, 1881), 74, an account of whale hunting by Fotherby.

<sup>9</sup> British Library, London, Sloane MS. 3986, f. 78v. Sir Martin Conway, “Some Unpublished Spitsbergen MSS,” *Geographical Journal*, 15 (1900), 628-36.

<sup>10</sup> Markham, *Voyages of William Baffin*, 74.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>12</sup> British Library, London, Sloane MS. 3986, f. 79; Markham (ed.), *Voyages of William Baffin*, 75-7.

grease. When clean it was sorted into five different kinds and made up into bundles. Anderson's account indicates that young and old whales were killed indiscriminately, leading to significant variations in the amount of oil and presumably bone that was acquired: "an ordinary whale will yield 12 tun of oyle: some 20 tun, if large and taken at a seasonable time."<sup>13</sup>

For English seamen this was a novel enterprise which brought together a complex of activities that linked fishing and hunting with an industrial and extractive process. To some extent the novelty of whaling, especially in a northern fishing port such as Hull, was qualified by the way in which it was assimilated into long-distance fishing trades and walrus hunting. Although the latter occurred on land, near to the shore, it made use of similar equipment for hunting and processing. Thus it gave the Hull men experience of seafaring in the Arctic, while equipping them with skills that could be adapted to whaling. After being killed with lances, the hide of the walrus was removed and its blubber was "chopped and put into ... coppers, and then it is tryed and reduced to oile."<sup>14</sup> Experience and a knowledge of conditions in the Arctic, including some understanding of the weather and of the behaviour of whales, were of fundamental importance to the development of the whaling trade. Those who undertook such voyages, it was noted in the early seventeenth century, "must not onely bee bold and resolute, but also discreet and wary."<sup>15</sup> The accumulation of locally shared information on Arctic venturing, combined with the publication of accounts of voyages to Spitsbergen, may deserve greater emphasis than they have hitherto received, in assisting the growth of the trade during these years. Nonetheless whaling was laden with risk. As a German observer subsequently reported, whale hunting was like "the chances of gaming ..., (while) some see and catch more than they desire, ... others but at a half mile distance from them see not one, which is very common."<sup>16</sup> For the English, furthermore, the risks were inadvertently complicated by the presence of competing interests in the same sound or bay.

The work-cycle that whalemens developed at Spitsbergen called for a combination of individual initiative with group cooperation, subject to the constraints of a brief, ever-receding Arctic summer. While July evenings might be warmed by constant sunlight, generally Spitsbergen was a cold and comfortless environment; in 1621 the Venetian ambassador in London described it as the "mother of ice" which, apart from whale hunting, was "barren and useless."<sup>17</sup> Whaling ships arriving in Bell Sound towards the end of May could still find snow covering the land, and the bays and sounds littered with straggling ice. Launcelot Anderson reported that vessels "sayld between great masses of Ise of 17 or 20 fathome thick, part of which stood as high ... as their main masts, off

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<sup>13</sup> British Library, London, Sloane MS. 3986, ff. 79-79v.

<sup>14</sup> Markham, *Voyages of William Baffin*, 79.

<sup>15</sup> Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes*, 20 vols. (Glasgow, 1906), 13: 27.

<sup>16</sup> White, *A Collection of Documents on Spitzbergen*, 33.

<sup>17</sup> *Calendar of State Papers Venetian 1621-23*, 424.

which run spouts of faire fresh water, when the sun shines upon them.”<sup>18</sup> Bad weather, storms and fog, disrupted whale hunting and delayed the departure of vessels for home. By mid-August wintry conditions might have returned with the first snow fall. Robert Fotherby’s account of the trade in the early seventeenth century provides a rare hint of the physical and psychological impact of these conditions among men who were undoubtedly keen to leave the region. Snow in the middle of August was noisome to the crews of whaling vessels, many of whom probably lacked specialized winter clothing, but “so did it also begin to astonish their mindes.”<sup>19</sup> In such circumstances the masters of whaling ships tried to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the northern summer, when night scarcely turned dark. Fotherby noted that men worked around the clock at boiling blubber, with no rest except on Sunday, while later in the century a German observer reported that whale hunting could continue until mid-night during July.<sup>20</sup>

In spite of the potential hazards of Arctic whaling, however, there is little evidence of serious casualties among the Hull men involved in it. Loss of life and other accidents were either unusual or so commonplace as to be barely worth recording; and on balance, the former is more likely.<sup>21</sup> In effect the whaling trade was as safe as most other sectors of English commercial enterprise during this period. In part this reflected the ability of whalers to reduce the level of risk at Spitsbergen through organization and cooperation. Masters also had an important role to play in maintaining the morale and well-being of crew members, particularly in promoting a sense of community among men with varied experiences and from diverse backgrounds. To some extent this may have been articulated through consultation and consensus, customary characteristics of the fishing trade, though the structure and values which underpinned such methods were subject to strain as a result of competition at Spitsbergen between rival interests.

Nevertheless the inherent dangers of the whaling trade were starkly demonstrated in 1630 when eight Englishmen were accidentally left at Spitsbergen by the *Salutation* of London. The men got through the winter by feeding on “Frittars or Graves of the Whale,” the unwanted left-overs from boiling the blubber, while trapped in a “labyrinth of perpetual misery.”<sup>22</sup> Nine months after the departure of the *Salutation*, they were saved by the arrival of two Hull ships in Bell Sound on 25 May 1631. According to a report by Edward Pellham, published under the title of *Gods Power and Providence*, “the Hull men now comming neere our Tent, haled it with the usuall word of the Sea, crying ‘Hey’: he answered againe with ‘Ho.’”<sup>23</sup> The deliverance of these accidental castaways might have

<sup>18</sup> British Library, London, Sloane MS. 3986, f. 78v.

<sup>19</sup> Markham, *Voyages of William Baffin*, 97.

<sup>20</sup> The German observer was Frederick Martens of Hamburg who wrote an interesting account of a voyage to Spitsbergen in 1671. White, *A Collection of Documents on Spitsbergen*, 9-10; Markham (ed.), *Voyages of William Baffin*, 59.

<sup>21</sup> Disasters could occur on northern voyages: during 1585 two Hull vessels lost 15 men during a fishing voyage to Vardø. F.W. Brooks (ed.), *Miscellanea*, vol. V (Yorkshire Archaeological Society, 116, 1951 for 1949), 4.

<sup>22</sup> White (ed.), *A Collection of Documents on Spitzbergen*, 273.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281. Launcelot Anderson was one of the Hull masters involved. His later evidence

been a manifestation of godly power, but it also underlined the endurance, hardihood and community among English whalers.

## 2. The emergence of a new trade

Despite the availability of large numbers of right whales in Arctic waters, the emergence of English whaling was a protracted, uncertain process that ended in failure during the 1660s. Thereafter, until the revival of the trade in the eighteenth century, the domestic market for whale products was effectively taken over by suppliers in Dutch and German ports. During its early phase of development, English whaling was faced with several interlocking problems concerning the acquisition of suitable skills from experienced Basque whalers, and the establishment of an effective infrastructure capable of sustaining the growth of a new and demanding trade. Interest in the whaling trade during the later sixteenth century appears to have been limited to members of the Muscovy Company, and grew out of their efforts to find a north east passage to Cathay. In 1577 the Company was granted a monopoly to hunt whales in northern waters with the assistance of Basque harpooners.<sup>24</sup> A few years later Robert Hitchcock drew attention to the perceived profitability of the trade in a “Pollitique Platt” for the development of fisheries. The “killynge of the Whaile”, he claimed, “is bothe pleasaunt and profitable, and without greate charges: yelding greate plentie of Oyle, the tunne wherof is worth tenne pound. One of the Shippes maie bryng home to his Porte fiftie Tunne, the whiche is worthe five hundreth pounce.”<sup>25</sup> Little came of the Company’s initiative, however, probably because of its greater concern to develop commercial relations with Russia and Persia. Consequently when the Company’s interest in whaling revived during the early seventeenth century, it was in circumstances that quickly led to bitter rivalry with a variety of competing interests.

The opening up of the northern whaling trade was thus accompanied by tangled claims and counter-claims to rights of navigation and territorial possession which were focused on Spitsbergen and other islands in the Arctic. Spitsbergen and Bear Island to the south were discovered by the Dutch captain, Willem Barents, in June 1596 during his third expedition in search of a north east passage. Exploration of the islands was of secondary concern to the purpose of the venture and the limited reconnaissance of Spitsbergen, possibly restricted by ice, had confusing consequences for its identification. While some of the Dutch described it as the New Land, and others Spitsbergen, to convey an image of its sharp, mountainous profile, Barents claimed that it was part of Greenland, a name which the English were to employ alongside the use of “King James’ Newland.”<sup>26</sup> A map of Barents’ route shows part of the coastline of Het Nieuwe Land with several

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adds to the published account of Pellham. British Library, London, Sloane MS. 3986, f. 78.

<sup>24</sup> Vaughan, *The Arctic*, 124; T.S. Willan, *The Early History of the Russia Company 1553-1603* (Manchester, 1956, repr.; New York, 1968), 133-4.

<sup>25</sup> R.H. Tawney and Eileen Power (eds.), *Tudor Economic Documents*, 3 vols. (London, 1924), 3: 246-7.

<sup>26</sup> Marijke Spies, *Arctic Routes to Fabled Lands: Oliver Brunel and the Passage to China and Cathay in the Sixteenth Century* (Amsterdam, 1997), 142-3; Conway, *No Man’s Land*, 11-16.

inlets and bays, and the surrounding sea teeming with whales and walrus. Although the death of Barents during the course of the expedition appears to have dampened interest in exploration, reports of the rich marine life in Arctic waters may have encouraged Dutch fishing activity off the north coast of Norway and Russia.

The Dutch were joined by Hull fishermen and traders. The Hull men had long-standing interests in the fishing trade, within and beyond the North Sea. In addition the overseas trade of the port was growing during the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Hull merchants played a leading role in the development of Anglo-Baltic commercial relations, which laid the basis for the emergence of a specialized trade in timber, and they were also involved in pioneering trading ventures with Russia. Such commercial activity was reflected in the growth of shipping: the average size of vessels from Hull engaged in trading with the Baltic region appears to have doubled during the period from 1580 to 1640. Within this changing commercial environment, enterprising traders and shippers promoted northern voyages that combined fishing with small-scale trade. From 1570 onwards, indeed, vessels from the port appear to have been sailing to Vardø in Finnmark, returning with cargoes of fish and whale oil.<sup>27</sup> Claims that Hull ships were engaged in whaling at Spitsbergen as early as 1596 are unsubstantiated, however, and seem improbable, though William Scoresby subsequently noted that by 1598 they were involved in hunting whales off Iceland and near the North Cape of Norway.<sup>28</sup> In reality much of the interest and activity of the Hull men in northern waters during these years lay in walrus hunting; whale products which were landed in the port were probably acquired through the medium of trade.

The activities of the Dutch appear to have revived the interest of the Muscovy Company in the exploration and exploitation of the Arctic. Bear Island was found by an expedition sent out by Francis Cherry, a prominent member of the Company, in 1603.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Vaughan, *The Arctic*, 79; Edward Gillett and Kenneth A. MacMahon, *A History of Hull* (Oxford, 1980), 144-5. Trinity House records contain evidence of voyages regularly during the 1580s and 1590s, see Brooks, *Miscellanea*, 2, 4-6, 8-9, 11. *Victoria County History, Yorkshire East Riding* (London, 1969), 1: 135-6. (Hereafter cited as *V.C.H.*). Some of these vessels may have carried fairly small cargoes, T.S. Willan, *The Early History of the Russia Company 1553-1603* (Manchester, 1956, repr.; New York, 1968), 138-40. On trade and shipping see also Ralph Davies, *The Trade and Shipping of Hull 1500-1700* (East Yorkshire Local History Series, 17, 1964), 10-12, 22-23. Later evidence, discussed below, indicates the involvement of York merchants in some of this northern enterprise, though their precise role is difficult to determine. Relations between Hull and York were close, but occasionally difficult.

<sup>28</sup> Scoresby has been used by historians as the starting date of Hull whaling, but he provided no evidence to back up his claim. William Scoresby, *An Account of the Arctic Regions with a History and Description of the Northern Whale-Fishery*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh & London, 1820, repr.; Newton Abbot, 1969), 2: 20, 124. Although Henry Elking, *A View of the Greenland Trade and Whale-Fishery* (London, 1722), 41 claimed that the English whaling trade began in 1598, he did not identify the Hull men as being involved in the trade. Ralph Davis, *The Trade and Shipping of Hull*, 6, 11-12.

<sup>29</sup> Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus*, 13: 11; Kenneth R. Andrews, *Trade, Plunder and Settlement:*

Known to the English as Cherry Island, the local walrus fishery was subject to rapid exploitation by Cherry's vessels. The commercial potential of the trade also attracted the interest of Hull merchants and mariners, some of whom were irregularly employed by members of the Company. William Gourden of Hull served as the factor aboard Cherry's expedition of 1603.<sup>30</sup> But the presence of competing interests at Cherry Island was unwelcome to leading figures in the Company. In 1609, after a clash between the two sides, the Company formally asserted its right to the island. After several years of intensive hunting, however, this seems to have been a hollow gesture. By 1609 the scarcity of walruses apparently "made the Companie look out for further Discoveries."<sup>31</sup> Some vessels from Hull continued to visit the island. In 1610, for example, William Gourden was hired by Thomas Swanne, to serve aboard the *Patience*, "as spokesman for Russia or pilot for Cherrie Yland," though he refused to sail, allegedly, because of a subsequent agreement to go on another voyage for Robert Coldcoale.<sup>32</sup>

The Company's search for new discoveries included Spitsbergen which Henry Hudson sighted during the course of an expedition in 1607 to reconnoitre a polar route to the South Sea.<sup>33</sup> Two years later Thomas Marmaduke of Hull may have been at Spitsbergen in search of new walrus hunting grounds. Thomas Anderson, a whaling master from Hull, later claimed that Marmaduke discovered Spitsbergen in 1609, after failing to find any walruses at Bear Island. Marmaduke returned in 1611 "to Kill Sea Horse, but killed no Whale," when he reportedly "went all alonge the Coast".<sup>34</sup> These voyages, based on a combination of fishing and exploration, gave the Hull men a prior claim to the discovery of Spitsbergen which was used thereafter during their dispute with the Muscovy Company. However, Marmaduke's ventures were accompanied by more ambitious expeditions sent out by the Company, including one led by Jonas Poole in 1610 which explored the west coast of Spitsbergen, and led to the naming of Bell Sound and Ice Sound.<sup>35</sup> The following year the Company despatched its first whaling venture to the region, assisted by six Basque harpooners. The venture nearly ended in disaster when the two vessels set out by the Company were shipwrecked off Spitsbergen. The Company's men and possessions were rescued by the *Fortune* of Hull, under the command of Marmaduke, who had "spent all the yeere in Horne Sound, and got little goods."<sup>36</sup> His lack of success was offset partly by the rescue of the Muscovy Company's goods, for

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*Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire, 1480-1630* (Cambridge, 1984), 341-2.

30 Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus*, 13: 291 includes an account by Gourden (or Gorden) of the voyage. *V.C.H.*, 1: 136.

31 Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus*, 13:11; Conway, *No Man's Land*, 31.

32 Brooks (ed.), *Miscellanea*, 25; Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus*, 13: 20-1, 194, 281-4.

33 Sir Martin Conway, "Hudson's Voyage to Spitsbergen in 1607," *Geographical Journal*, 15(1900), 121-30.

34 Anderson appeared as a witness for Great Yarmouth during a dispute with the Greenland Company in April 1643. TNA, State Papers, 16/497/68. (Hereafter cited as S.P.).

35 Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus*, 13:11-12; Sir Clements R. Markham, *The Lands of Silence: A History of Arctic and Antarctic Exploration* (Cambridge, 1921), 123-4.

36 Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus*, 13: 14-15; Conway, *No Man's Land*, 46-8.

which he subsequently claimed compensation at £5 per ton, and by the discovery of Trinity Island to the south west of Spitsbergen; known also as Jan Mayen Island, it was soon being used as a walrus and whale hunting station by vessels from Hull.

Looking back from the vantage point of the early 1630s, Sir William Monson claimed that English whaling at Spitsbergen, under the instruction of the Biscayners, “hath been discovered and prosecuted with little charge and great profit to the merchant.”<sup>37</sup> Indeed the arrival of competing English interests at Spitsbergen inaugurated a boom in the trade which had far-reaching consequences. When Marmaduke returned to Spitsbergen in 1612, possibly sailing as far as 82° north in a reconnaissance of the region, there were at least five other vessels engaged in hunting whales, including one from Holland, another from the Spanish port of San Sebastian, and two from London set out by the Company.<sup>38</sup> In these circumstances Marmaduke’s men attempted to secure a stake in the new trade by symbolically setting up a cross, with the royal standard attached to it, on part of the shore known as Red Beach. Evidence of fires made by the Hull men on the beach was found by a Muscovy Company expedition in 1614. Robert Fotherby, the author of an account of this voyage, also described how a party of Hull mariners restored a cross “which... they found there fallen downe, and had been formerly set up, in the time of Master Marmadukes first discovery, by one Lawrence Prestwood, ... with two or three names more, and it had the date of the seventeenth of August 1612. Upon this crosse they nailed the Kings armes.”<sup>39</sup> No evidence survives of the Hull men’s returns for 1612, though the Company seems to have experienced a profitable whaling season. It sent out two vessels, with crews of 100 men including Biscayners, at a charge of between £3,000 and £4,000. This was a substantial investment in a new venture, but it was reported later in the year that the expedition “prospered strangely, got within nine degrees of the pole, saw 700 whales, and brought home 17.”<sup>40</sup>

In 1613 at least seven Dutch vessels, and eight from San Sebastián, were engaged in whaling at Spitsbergen. The Company, which received a new charter during the year giving it exclusive rights to fishing in the region, set out a fleet of seven vessels, including a well-armed ship of 260 tons with 21 ordnance. This armament enabled the Company’s ships to expel the Dutch, Spanish and French, while claiming the land, which was ceremoniously named “King James his New Land.”<sup>41</sup> The vice-admiral of the expedition was Marmaduke, who was emerging as one of the most experienced ship-masters involved in Arctic venturing. William Baffin, who served as chief pilot during the voyage, later recounted that Marmaduke was reprimanded for his eagerness to explore

<sup>37</sup> M. Oppenheim (ed.), *The Naval Tracts of Sir William Monson*, 5 vols. (Navy Records Society, 1902-14), 3: 236.

<sup>38</sup> Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus*, 13: 15; Markham, *Lands of Silence*, 124; Sir W. Martin Conway (ed.), *Early Dutch and English Voyages to Spitsbergen in the Seventeenth Century* (Hakluyt Society, 2nd Series, 11, 1904), 4-5; Hugh Calvert, *A History of Kingston upon Hull* (Chichester, 1978), 145.

<sup>39</sup> Fotherby may have come from Grimsby. Markham, *Voyages of William Baffin*, 80, 93.

<sup>40</sup> *Calendar of State Papers Domestic 1611-18*, 140. (Hereafter cited as *C.S.P.D.*).

<sup>41</sup> Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus*, 13: 15.

the area, allegedly to the hindrance of its primary purpose. Nonetheless the Company's vessels killed 38 whales, and Marmaduke's ship returned with an impressive lading of 184 tons of oil and 5,000 pounds of whale-bone.<sup>42</sup> While the English reported an abundance of whales and walrus at Spitsbergen, they were unable to kill too many of the latter. The Company's returns for 1613 reinforced a growing appreciation of the economic potential of the trade, despite the danger of a dispute with the Dutch: "The profit is very rich," Sir John Throckmorton reported in October 1613, "and 2 or 3 of our London ships lately come from thence approve the same."<sup>43</sup>

The Muscovy Company sought to strengthen its claim to the Spitsbergen trade through politics and diplomacy. Thus the Dutch claim to prior discovery, based on Barents' voyage of 1596, was challenged on the grounds that Sir Hugh Willoughby had discovered Spitsbergen in 1553. The Dutch, according to this view, were merely following in the footsteps of the Company. Moreover the Company insisted that it began the whaling trade at Spitsbergen during 1611: "This trade of whale fishing being thus discovered, begunne, & Continued by the Merchants, they houlde it proper, & peculiar to themselves, aswell bye naturall rights & intereste as by President, & Example of other Nations."<sup>44</sup> In 1614 the Dutch ambassador in London and the governor of the Company debated the issue before the Privy Council. According to the English record, it was "evidently proved, and in a manner without contradiction, that ... (they) were first discoverers of that navigation and that trade of fishing: that privately they were possessed of that island, and there had planted and erected ... (the royal) standard, thereby to signify and notify to the world the property."<sup>45</sup> In practice the Company's claim was theoretical and unenforceable. But the parties to this dispute were more concerned with access and utility than with actual possession; essentially this involved control over the bays and harbours at Spitsbergen, and the unrestricted use of the shore as a base for the processing of whale blubber. Despite the prospect of conflict between the English and Dutch at Spitsbergen, a concern to "conserve mutual correspondence" favoured compromise in London.<sup>46</sup> Anglo-Dutch rivalry over the whaling trade persisted, occasionally flaring into open conflict, but it was gradually defused by a demarcation of separate spheres of interest at Spitsbergen. Faced with the prospect of English hostility in the bays and harbours of the south-west, the Dutch turned their attention to the northern coasts of the archipelago. Although this unwritten agreement failed to protect the Company from the damaging impact of Dutch competition, as late as 1654 several Dutch vessels were reportedly reluctant to sail into Duck's Cove at Spitsbergen because it was

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<sup>42</sup> Markham, *Voyages of William Baffin*, 49-50, 63.

<sup>43</sup> *Historical Manuscripts Commission, Downshire*, 4: 214.

<sup>44</sup> "A Briefe Narration of the discoveries of the Northern seas: to approve his Majesties right to Greenland written in anno 1613," in *The New World: A Catalogue of an Exhibition of Books, Maps, Manuscripts and Documents* (London, 1957), 87; Vaughan, *The Arctic*, 81-2.

<sup>45</sup> *Letters From and To Sir Dudley Carleton, Knt. During His Embassy in Holland, From January 1615/16 to December 1620* (London, 1775), 6-7.

<sup>46</sup> *Letters From and To Sir Dudley Carleton*, 7; British Library, London, Yelverton MS. 48155, ff. 40-41v.

recognized as an English harbour.<sup>47</sup>

After a prolonged and uneasy gestation, the English whaling trade was born during the early seventeenth century. It depended on the opening up of rich hunting grounds off Spitsbergen, encouraged by the competition between the Muscovy Company and the Hull men which cut across the international rivalry between the English, Dutch, Spanish and French. It was also subject to the acquisition of new skills, and the development of carefully timed patterns of voyaging, aimed at exploiting the narrow opportunity of the short Arctic summer, when the ice about Spitsbergen melted. Although the employment of experienced Basque whalers, who served as harpooners aboard ships sent out by the Muscovy Company, was an essential part of this learning process, the situation in provincial ports, like Hull, appears to have been different.<sup>48</sup> There is, indeed, scant evidence for the presence of the Basques aboard Hull vessels. Local masters and mariners who were engaged in the whaling trade may have acquired some of their skills through the agency of men, such as Marmaduke, who were occasionally employed by the Company; others may have been forced to proceed with the uncertainties of improvisation. Even for the Basques, the Spitsbergen trade in the early seventeenth century was new, the development of which rested to some extent on trial and error. Under these conditions the rapid growth of English whaling may have been imperceptibly aided by a common perception that it was a form of fishing. The Muscovy Company captured the essence of this view in its comment on “The nature of this Fishing being rather a hunting by armed Men above water, then a fishing under water”.<sup>49</sup> In the later 1620s, when the Hull men defended their right to participate in the whaling trade at Spitsbergen, against the exclusive claims of the Company, they did so on the grounds “that they live at sea and are fishers.”<sup>50</sup> In effect English whaling started life as a fishing trade, with finely-balanced opportunities for its future development.

It was within this context that Hull merchants and mariners sought to develop the trade of Arctic whaling. Although the evidence is often confusing and contentious, reflecting the controversies that surrounded the emergence of the English trade, it is clear that Hull ships were among some of the earliest vessels to visit Spitsbergen and Trinity Island for a commercial purpose. A memorandum drawn up in 1617, defending the right of the Hull men to hunt whales in the northern seas, linked this with difficulties in the fishing trade at Vardø. Thus “Maryners of Hull with their Shippes (to their great chardge) did first discover manie profitable Ilandes about Greneland when they were expulsed frome their fishing at Wardehowse, where before they had good employment for viii or x shippes yearlie.”<sup>51</sup> This appears to refer to the arrest of five Hull vessels fishing off

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<sup>47</sup> Markham, *Lands of Silence*, 127; Conway, *No Man's Land*, 135.

<sup>48</sup> Markham, *Voyages of William Baffin*, 59 where the Basques are described as “our whale strikers.”

<sup>49</sup> S.P. 18/65/62.

<sup>50</sup> Robert C. Johnson et al. (eds.), *Commons Debates 1628*, 6 vols. (New Haven & London, 1977-83), 3: 343-4.

<sup>51</sup> S.P. 14/94/71&72.

Vardø during 1599, at the order of the King of Denmark.<sup>52</sup> In response the Hull men began to search for alternative fishing grounds and suitable sites for walrus hunting. Evidently much of this maritime probing, which paved the way for Hull's entry into the whaling trade, was obscure and unrecorded. Furthermore the customs records for the port during the first two decades of the seventeenth century only survive for 1602/3, 1608/9, 1613/14 and 1618/19. These accounts provide no evidence of whaling activity prior to 1613, though the judgements of Hull Trinity House indicate that at least one vessel, the *Phoenix*, was involved in a whaling voyage to Spitsbergen during the year.<sup>53</sup> Thereafter the customs evidence indicates the landing of whale-bone from the "northe parts" in 1614, and of whale oil from Trinity Island during 1619.<sup>54</sup> In association with other evidence, therefore, it can be argued that the Hull men turned to Arctic whaling sometime between 1612 and 1619; that this development grew out of their interests in fishing and walrus hunting; and that it was focused on Trinity Island, Spitsbergen and Edge Island to the east.<sup>55</sup>

### 3. Competition and conflict with the Muscovy Company

The rapid growth of the English whaling trade during the early seventeenth century placed the merchants and mariners of Hull on a collision course with their rivals in the Muscovy Company. At the outset this appears to have been an unbalanced struggle between a powerful London company, the governor of which, Sir Thomas Smith, was one of the most prominent and well-connected merchants in the city, and a small group of little known, almost anonymous, provincial traders. But the Hull men pursued their case with great tenacity, earning a reputation as the most troublesome of the Company's opponents.<sup>56</sup> After years of unresolved competition and occasional conflict their right to participate in the whaling trade at Spitsbergen, as well as their claim to Trinity Island, was officially recognized by the Privy Council. This did little, however, to deal with the underlying issue concerning access to the bays and harbours of Spitsbergen, which remained a source of tension between the Company and provincial traders through to the 1640s and 1650s.

During the early decades of the seventeenth century the Company aggressively defended its charter, in an effort to protect its monopoly over English enterprise in Arctic

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<sup>52</sup> *V.C.H.*, 1: 136.

<sup>53</sup> Brooks, *Miscellanea*, 30.

<sup>54</sup> The *Phoenix* and the *Seabright* returned with 7 and 5 tons of train oil during September 1614; the *Grace* and the *Heartsease* returned from Trinity Island with loadings of whale oil, walrus bone and hides. TNA, Port Books E.190/313/8 and 190/314/14.

<sup>55</sup> Conway, *No Man's Land*, 102-3, 126, 129, 364-5 argues that the Hull men frequented the eastern region, seldom coming into contact with the Company's men, during these early years. Duck's (or Duke's) Cove on Edge Island may have been named after Marmaduke. However the evidence from Purchas indicates that some Hull vessels were visiting the bays of western Spitsbergen; and Bottle Cove, in Bell Sound, was soon to become their main whaling station.

<sup>56</sup> Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus*, 13: 19-20, 33-4, 284.

regions. In March 1613 these rights were confirmed by the crown: Spitsbergen, Bear Island and other islands in the north were explicitly identified as coming within its jurisdiction. They appeared to be reinforced by proclamations of 1614 and 1619, restricting the import of whale-bone to the Company, and of 1636 which included oil.<sup>57</sup> Determined to assert its authority over the new trade, during the whaling season of 1613 an expedition sent out by the Company forced other vessels, including four English ships, to leave Spitsbergen. Diplomatic complaints by the Dutch were met with the claim of prior discovery by the English. Claiming a right of *jure domini*, which was intended to support the jurisdiction of the Company, the Privy Council insisted that “it is not lawfull for any other of his Majestie’s subjectes, much lesse for strangers, to fishe or abide there.”<sup>58</sup> But the Company’s action invited retaliation. In 1614 the House of Commons was informed that the Dutch “have sent an army to force a trade in Greenland in despite of the English”.<sup>59</sup> At the same time the Hull men seem to have been in the process of bringing their complaints against the Company before the Commons. The sudden dissolution of parliament meant that the “Hull business” was not heard, but the possibility of using it as a forum for provincial grievances was soon to be revived.<sup>60</sup>

Although the Company continued its ambitious attempts to develop the whaling trade at Spitsbergen, it was forced to send out large expeditions, accompanied by at least one well-armed vessel, in order to protect its interests. Little evidence survives of the activities of the Hull men during this difficult period. According to Thomas Edge, an agent for the Company who wrote an account of English whaling at Spitsbergen, they “still followed the steps of the Londoners, and in a yeere or two called it their Discovery”.<sup>61</sup> In 1617 it was reported that “the Hull men set a small ship or two to the East-wards of Greenland,” possibly in search of new whaling grounds.<sup>62</sup> At the end of September the Privy Council issued warrants for the arrest of Nicholas Gattonby, master of the *Patience* of Hull, and Robert Coldcoale, merchant, to answer allegations that they had infringed the Company’s jurisdiction at Spitsbergen. Both men appeared before the Council on 10 October, when a committee was established to examine the issues in dispute between the two sides.<sup>63</sup>

The case for Hull was laid out in a carefully worded paper that was probably submitted to the committee in November 1617. It drew on a variety of arguments which tried to distinguish between the interests of the northern port and those of the Company,

<sup>57</sup> C.S.P.D. 1611-18, 178; James F. Larkin and Paul L. Hughes (eds.), *Stuart Royal Proclamations. Volume 1: Royal Proclamations of King James I 1603-1625* (Oxford, 1973), 315-6, 432-3.

<sup>58</sup> *Acts of the Privy Council 1613-14*, 322. (Hereafter cited as *A.P.C.*).

<sup>59</sup> Maija Jansson (ed.), *Proceedings in Parliament 1614 (House of Commons)* (Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society, Vol. 172)(Philadelphia, 1988), 430.

<sup>60</sup> Jansson, *Proceedings in Parliament 1614*, 382, 401.

<sup>61</sup> Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus*, 13: 19-20. Though it is possible that under Marmaduke’s leadership some of the Hull men were exploring farther east. Conway, *No Man’s Land*, 31-2.

<sup>62</sup> Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus*, 13: 19-20.

<sup>63</sup> *A.P.C. 1616-17*, 329-30, 341-2, 344.

while drawing attention to the importance of the whaling trade for the local and regional economy. Not only were mariners from Hull the first to discover many islands about Spitsbergen, but also “the places where Hull shippes take the whale was never in the actual possession of ... (the) Companie, but 80 or 90 Myles distant from anie contynent or Island granted by Charter” to it.<sup>64</sup> In addition it was claimed that the Hull men had been involved in the trade for as long as the Company. Moreover, while the latter attempted to restrict English whaling, the Dutch and others continued to visit Spitsbergen without hindrance. In an attempt to forestall concern at the impact of competition on the domestic market for whale products, it was pointed out that the Hull men disposed of their oil in the north; any surplus was usually exported without prejudice to the Company’s interests. Finally the paper drew attention to the growing significance of the whaling trade, and its widespread economic and social ramifications. Between 200 and 300 householders were investors in a planned whaling venture, at a charge of about £3,000. If the voyage was restrained, at the request of the Company, they would be utterly undone; and the damage might be even wider. By the “meanes of this voiage onelie, ... most of the Artificers are employed of the whole towne, as Bearebrewers, Coopers, Smythes, Bakers, Butchers, Taylors, Shewmakers, Ropemakers &c. As are also besyde a great number of seamen and maryners, above 100 landmen who being cast out of their rurall service in respect of the great povertie latelie falne upon the Countree might sterve if they should want this employment.”<sup>65</sup> This was a skilful presentation which may have been intended to serve several purposes. While it provided a justification for Hull’s right to participate in the whaling trade, by not directly challenging the Company’s claim to Spitsbergen it seemed to leave the door open for negotiation and compromise.

The Company, however, was unwilling to give ground. By the terms of its charter the Hull men, and any others who were involved in the Spitsbergen trade without the Company’s approval, were interlopers whose activities threatened the development of English whaling. In January 1618 the Company warned that if the problem was not dealt with, the trade would be overthrown. The merchants and mariners of Hull were also identified as the “most troublesome, and the greatest hinderers of the Companie”.<sup>66</sup> While it was forced to despatch large expeditions to Spitsbergen, their northern rivals were able to set out “smale vessells att little Charge ... and under sell” the Company in the domestic market.<sup>67</sup> The Privy Council attempted to resolve the dispute through negotiation. Although the Company offered to “admit the Hull men ... into the joynt stocke ... for the fishing of the whale without clogging them with any charge or inconvenience incident to the trade of Russia, ... on the other side those of Hull ... doe rather desire the ... Company may come into joynt stocke with them of the coast townes, wherein they soe persist that neither partie will by any reason or perswasion be drawne to

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<sup>64</sup> S.P. 14/94/71.

<sup>65</sup> S.P. 14/94/71.

<sup>66</sup> British Library, London, Lansdowne MS. 142, f.390; *A.P.C. 1618-19*, 2, 40-41.

<sup>67</sup> British Library, London, Lansdowne MS. 142, f.389v.

other conformitie.”<sup>68</sup>

With the prospect of a mutually acceptable agreement receding, and a new whaling season approaching, the Council resorted to the expediency of a short term solution. In doing so, it acknowledged that Trinity Island “was first possessed and frequented” by the Hull men, and “consequently the fishing of the whale at that island and all other comodities of that place doth by ... right of discovery appertaine unto them”.<sup>69</sup> The council’s intervention enabled the merchants of Hull and King’s Lynn, who evidently represented the interests of the coast towns, to set out up to 300 tons of shipping to hunt whales at Trinity Island, on condition that any whale-bone brought back to England would be exported.<sup>70</sup>

Even this temporary agreement failed to work effectively. Although the Hull men seem to have stayed away from Spitsbergen in 1618, the Company alleged that Thomas Marmaduke, who was fishing off Cherry Island, persuaded several Dutch vessels to attack its ships in Bell Sound. In reality the Dutch needed little incentive or justification for hostile action against the English. They also appear to have clashed with the Hull men at Trinity Island, which they named and claimed as Jan Mayen Island on the grounds of prior discovery. The following year the Company was faced with the prospect of renewed competition along the west coast of Spitsbergen with some of the Hull men, who seem to have been in the process of abandoning whale hunting at Edge Island and Trinity Island. In 1619 Marmaduke was whaling in Horn Sound, though he lost two shallops and six men, while his own vessel was seriously damaged by the ice.<sup>71</sup> Thereafter Hull ships began to use Bottle Cove, on the northern shore of Bell Sound, as a regular whaling station, in a region that was coveted by the Company.

Faced with such mounting difficulties, the Company began to lose interest in the whaling trade. In 1618 it claimed losses of more than £66,000 against the Dutch.<sup>72</sup> By 1620 it is likely that less than a handful of members of the Company remained involved in the trade. During the early 1620s it farmed out the whaling trade to a small group of members, led by Ralph Freeman, a leading London merchant who had wide ranging commercial and shipping interests.<sup>73</sup> The new organization, known as the Greenland Company, inherited the dispute with the Hull men. Seeking to take advantage of the Company’s difficulties, the latter were prepared to resort to more overt means of political

<sup>68</sup> *A.P.C. 1618-19*, 46.

<sup>69</sup> *A.P.C. 1618-19*, 2, 40-41, 46. The discovery of Jan Mayen Island was bitterly contested between the English and Dutch. Günter Schilder, “Development and Achievements of Dutch Northern and Arctic Cartography in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries”, *Arctic*, 37(1984), 509-10.

<sup>70</sup> *A.P.C. 1618-19*, 46.

<sup>71</sup> Conway, *No Man’s Land*, 32, 126.

<sup>72</sup> *C.S.P.D. 1611-18*, 572-3.

<sup>73</sup> Maurice Ashley, *Financial and Commercial Policy under the Cromwellian Protectorate* (2nd edition; London, 1962), 119; William Robert Scott, *The Constitution and Finance of English, Scottish and Irish Joint-Stock Companies to 1720*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1910-12), 2: 69-70; Andrews, *Trade, Plunder and Settlement*, 334-5.

lobbying to advance their case. During the parliament of 1621, when a bill for the freedom of fishing on the coasts of North America was being discussed, John Lister, M.P. for Hull, with the support of Sir Thomas Wentworth, the member for Yorkshire, urged that Spitsbergen be included.<sup>74</sup>

Although these tactics bore little immediate fruit, evidently some of the Hull men were preparing for a confrontation with the Londoners. Early in 1623 the Privy Council was informed that Nicholas Gatonby, Thomas Anderson and Richard Warner, with others of Hull, “have given out that they are resolved and doe intend to make a voyage this yeare from thence to Greenland with diverse shippes, purposing to encroach and enter upon the ... companie’s discoveries and privileges and thereof make great boast in London.”<sup>75</sup> On 4 April 1623 the council ordered the mayor of Hull to take bonds of £1,000 from several masters, in an effort to prevent them from sailing to Spitsbergen or the islands to the east. The council’s instructions provoked an unyielding response from the mayor and customs officials in the port. Claiming to speak for “the bodye of this whole towne, and manie of the countrie adjoyning,” these local office-holders warned the council that “the Restrainte of their tradinge thither conserneth no lesse then the utter ruyne not onelie of them, their wives, and children, but of a number of people more interested in that voiedge, for that they now have to their great chardges prepared & Addressed themselves with three or foure small shippes of purpose to have traded this yeare (as for manie other yeares they formerlie have done) into those partes, whereof (as they affirme) they can well prove themselves to have beene the first discoverers.”<sup>76</sup>

Prompted by local concerns the council again resorted to compromise, presenting various propositions to the members of the Greenland Company for the conduct of the forthcoming whaling season. No details of these proposals survive, but later evidence suggests that the Company agreed to allow a specified volume of Hull ships to participate in the trade, possibly at a carefully selected location at Spitsbergen. The following year the Company allowed the Hull men to hunt for whales in Duck’s Cove. In 1625, however, they were excluded from Spitsbergen by a fleet sent out by the Company. Boats and other equipment left in Duck’s Cove in 1624 were also seized.<sup>77</sup>

The Hull men responded by sending out a large expedition to Spitsbergen during 1626, possibly with the intention of provoking a conflict with the Company’s vessels. Early in June the Company’s fleet, under the command of captain William Goodlad, arrived at Spitsbergen. Unaware of the presence of their rivals from Hull the vessels separated, sailing to their appointed harbours along the coast. Goodlad, aboard the admiral of the expedition, the *Hercules*, a well-armed man-of-war, carrying 22 ordnance, stayed close to the ice in Bell Sound, probably to provide protection for the other vessels

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<sup>74</sup> Wallace Notestein, Frances Helen Relf, Hartley Simpson (eds.), *Commons Debates 1621*, 7 vols. (New Haven, 1935), 2: 386, 297-8. L.M. Stanewell (ed.), *Calendar of the Ancient Deeds, Letters, Miscellaneous Old Documents, &c. in the Archives of the Corporation* (Kingston-upon-Hull, 1951), 177.

<sup>75</sup> *A.P.C. 1621-23*, 459; Stanewell, *Calendar*, 180-1.

<sup>76</sup> S.P. 14/143/10.

<sup>77</sup> Conway, *Early Dutch and English Voyages to Spitsbergen*, 175.

in nearby bays. Towards the end of June he sailed to Whale Head harbour, where he met several Hull ships which “had killed some whales there and boyled them,” in defiance of the Company’s claim over the region.<sup>78</sup> Goodlad also alleged that some of the Hull men seized and spoiled provisions left ashore by a previous expedition. These included eleven or twelve shallops and several oil coolers.<sup>79</sup> In Duck’s Cove houses and “the forte and platforme of a fortificacion or Castle,” which had been transported to Spitsbergen by the Company’s vessels during 1624 and 1625, were “razed and spoiled.”<sup>80</sup> In a neighbouring bay Goodlad encountered a fleet of nine ships from Hull and York; when he demanded satisfaction for the damage to the Company’s property, they prepared to attack his vessel.

According to Goodlad’s account of the ensuing clash, based partly on information received from several of the Hull men, when they sighted the *Hercules* the masters of the northern ships “called a Councell toucheinge the ... choice of their Admirall and Rear Admirall, and not agreeing caste the dice for the same, and soe it fell to (Richard) Prestwood to bee Admirall and (Richard) Perkins Rear Admirall.”<sup>81</sup> A confusing and hotly disputed exchange of shots led to a skirmish between the two sides that lasted for about two hours, after which the Hull ships yielded. Although Thomas Anderson and Jeremy Gascoigne, two of the Hull masters, informed Goodlad “that all the Masters ... had bounde themselves, one to the other to fighte againste” the Londoners, Prestwood “had threatened to sue the bonds of them ... because they would not fighte”.<sup>82</sup> After yielding, the Hull ships were forced to leave Spitsbergen, mid-way through the whaling season. They returned home with about 162 tons of oil and 200 tons of blubber. The oil was estimated to be worth £15 a ton, the blubber was worth £8 a ton. Goodlad noted that this was about “a thirde parte of their ladeinge, wheras there were whales enoughe there to have laded both the Hull and Yorke shippes and Londoners, had they not disagreed”.<sup>83</sup> He also claimed that the Company suffered losses of between £7,000 and £10,000 as a result of the hostility of the Hull men.

On their return Perkins and Prestwood were ordered to appear before the Privy Council; they were discharged on 15 November, following the establishment of a committee to examine and settle the dispute. Later in the year representatives of both sides appeared before the committee to debate the future of the trade. The Company restated its exclusive rights over whaling at Spitsbergen and Cherry Island, as well as over islands yet to be discovered in the region. But this was disputed by the northern merchants on the grounds that “in point of lawe the King had not devested himselfe unto them of the sole fishing of those parts, to the exclusion of himselfe and all his other

<sup>78</sup> *C.S.P.D. 1625-26*, 475. TNA, High Court of Admiralty, Examinations, William Goodlad, 19 April 1627, H.C.A. 13/46, ff.78v-82. Joan Thirsk and J.P. Cooper (eds.), *Seventeenth-Century Economic Documents* (Oxford, 1972), 479-80.

<sup>79</sup> TNA, High Court of Admiralty, Examinations, H.C.A. 13/46, ff.79-81; S.P. 16/39/67.

<sup>80</sup> TNA, Kew, High Court of Admiralty, Examinations, H.C.A. 13/46, ff. 79-80.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 79v-80.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 79v-80.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 80v-82.

subjects for ever.”<sup>84</sup> Following further discussion with the attorney-general a temporary agreement was reached in January 1627 which was to last for one year. Drawing on previous arrangements, it was agreed that the merchants of Hull and York would be allowed to send out 600 tons of shipping to Spitsbergen, out of a total of 3,000 tons, on condition that they paid a fifth part of the Greenland Company’s farm of the trade. Though temporary, the Privy Council hoped that it would lead to a long term settlement by encouraging “the parties to adventure in a joint stock according to their proportions, it being ... the readiest way to bring the businesse to a full accommodation”.<sup>85</sup> With this aim in view, the Council attempted to enforce the agreement during 1627. In April it issued instructions to prevent any vessels leaving Great Yarmouth for Spitsbergen. The following month it ordered the mayor of Hull to stop the *Primrose* from departing on a whaling voyage, because it exceeded the port’s allocation of shipping.<sup>86</sup> The mayor’s failure to prevent the *Primrose* from sailing underlines the fragility of the agreement. Adam Marmaduke, the ship’s master, refused to allow the mayor’s agent aboard, leaving behind a new shallop, without which the mayor had assumed that the ship “could not well goe to sea, or at least make any voyage.”<sup>87</sup>

During 1628 the dispute concerning the privileges of the Greenland Company was investigated by parliament. Despite an English claim to Spitsbergen which allegedly reached back to King Arthur, and the availability of bays and harbours that were large enough for the English to exploit peacefully, competition between rival interests was threatening the ruin of the whaling trade: “while we have differed thus”, members of the House of Commons were informed, “the Hollanders have beat us all out.”<sup>88</sup> In May 1628 the complaints of the Hull men, which linked local grievances with wider economic concerns, were heard by the Committee of Grievances. The clash with the Company’s vessels in 1626 was presented as an unprovoked attack, during which two members of the Hull fleet lost their arms.<sup>89</sup> At the same time, while the Company was trying to exclude the Hull men from whaling at Spitsbergen, Dutch and Scottish vessels hunted there without restraint. The Company’s privileged position, moreover, was damaging to trade and the domestic market. According to the Hull men, the Company’s control of the trade enabled it to “let ... (oil) go at what price they please.”<sup>90</sup> Consequently the price of oil had increased from £12 to £24 a ton in recent years.

The Greenland Company’s attempt to defend its privileges was weakened by an acknowledgement of the Committee of Grievances that Trinity Island was discovered by the Hull men in 1609. It was also confused by Sir Thomas Wentworth’s claim that

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<sup>84</sup> *A.P.C. 1626*, 305-351, 367-8, 395.

<sup>85</sup> *A.P.C. 1627*, 14; *C.S.P.D. 1627-28*, 10, 113.

<sup>86</sup> *A.P.C. 1627*, 199-200, 273-4.

<sup>87</sup> S.P. 16/64/58.

<sup>88</sup> Robert C. Johnson et al. (eds.), *Commons Debates 1628*, 6 vols. (New Haven & London, 1977-83), 3: 433-5.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 343-4.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 343-4, 433.

Spitsbergen had been found by them “as soon as the Muscovy Company.”<sup>91</sup> While speaking as one of the members for Yorkshire, who was representing local interests, Wentworth’s growing authority in the Commons meant that his statement, though contentious, could not be lightly dismissed. Indeed it appeared to set the tone for the Committee’s discussion of the Company’s case. Sir Edward Coke, a former attorney-general and lord chancellor, asserted that parts of its patent were void.<sup>92</sup> Sir Nathaniel Rich, a prominent London merchant with wide ranging interests in transatlantic trade and colonization, urged the Company “to let the shipping (be) open,” warning that if its “patents proved bad,” then it would have to pay compensation to the Hull men.<sup>93</sup> In this unfavourable atmosphere it was reported that the Muscovy Company was willing to transfer the whaling trade into the hands of the latter, on the condition that they “would undertake to defend and maintain that fishing against strangers ...; but those of Hull refused to undertake the same.”<sup>94</sup> After further discussion the Committee resorted to a short term compromise, based on previous agreements, which would allow “those of Hull ... to send this year 500 ton of shipping to that fishing.”<sup>95</sup> However this did not prevent it from reporting, later in the year, that the Company’s monopoly over the whaling trade at Spitsbergen was a grievance. In June it was agreed that a petition to this effect should be drawn up by a group of MPs, and presented to the king.<sup>96</sup>

The Company survived this attack on its privileges, but by the later 1620s it was evident that the dispute with Hull was only serving to benefit overseas competitors, particularly the Dutch. In such circumstances both sides appear to have reached an agreement that enabled the Hull men to participate in the whaling trade in association with, or under the auspices of, the Company. No direct evidence survives for this arrangement, but the surviving customs records for Hull during the period from 1629 to 1640 indicate that ships returning from Spitsbergen, with ladings of oil and bone, were entered for the Greenland Company.<sup>97</sup> It seems likely therefore that the Hull men were either leasing or sharing a proportion of the trade with their former rivals in London. While the Company continued to complain to the Privy Council during the 1630s about the activities of interlopers from Great Yarmouth, its competition with Hull appeared to be over.

#### **4. The consolidation and character of a new trade**

During the 1620s and 1630s the whaling trade became a regular part of Hull’s

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 616, 619.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 610, 616.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 616, 619.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 619-20.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 611, 620.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 467-8, 474, 476.

<sup>97</sup> TNA, Port Books, E. 190/316/12; 190/317/6; 190/318/1A. In March 1635 the Privy Council instructed that Nathaniel Edwards be admitted to the trade of the Greenland Company “upon lyke condicions as the Marchants of the Citie of York, and the Towne of Kingston upon Hull are.” TNA, Privy Council Registers, P.C. 2/44, ff. 503-4.

commercial and maritime enterprise, attracting as many as nine vessels in some years. Local interest in whaling grew out of the northern fishing trade at Vardø and the surrounding region; in particular, it represented an extension of walrus hunting which attracted the Hull men to island locations. But commercial whaling in the Arctic developed within a highly competitive environment that was international and national in scope. Although a provincial English port, such as Hull, may not have been in a strong position to cope with European rivalry, it was better placed to deal with domestic competition from London whaling interests. Compared with their rivals in London, the Hull men had a head start for the voyage to Spitsbergen. Departing early in May, the Hull ships could be at Spitsbergen by the end of the month or early June, giving them an important advantage in the selection of bays for whale hunting. The surviving evidence, indeed, indicates that the Londoners sometimes arrived to find the Hull men on location and engaged in whaling, in areas that the Company struggled to protect from competing interests.<sup>98</sup>

Although geographical advantage facilitated the growth of the whaling trade in Hull, the driving force behind its development lay in the demand for whale products across an extensive and accessible hinterland. The merchants of Hull enjoyed unrestricted access to a widespread market for oil in northern England, through a far-reaching river network, that ranged from the soap manufacturers of York to the clothiers of West Yorkshire towns, such as Leeds and Wakefield.<sup>99</sup> The expansion of the textile industry, which was reflected in an impressive increase in cloth exports from Hull to the Low Countries during the 1620s and 1630s, was probably vital to the maintenance of the whaling trade, especially given the threat to the local manufacture of soap following the establishment of the Society of Soapers of Westminster in 1632: not only did the new Society close down the soapworks in York, it also sought to end the use of whale oil in the manufacture of soap.<sup>100</sup> Although local and regional markets for whale-bone were smaller and more scattered, the growth of the cutlery trade in Sheffield created another outlet for whale products which was within reach of Hull by relatively cheap river transport.

The surviving customs records for Hull, supplemented by other material, provide invaluable evidence for the development of the trade during the 1620s and 1630s. Table 1 contains details of the number of vessels landing cargoes of whale oil and bone in Hull, with annual totals for both of the latter, based on these records. It also includes estimates, that must be viewed as notional, for the average volume of oil returned by each vessel, and for the number of whales killed at Spitsbergen or Trinity Island.

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<sup>98</sup> Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus*, 13: 14-15, 281-2; TNA, High Court of Admiralty, Examinations, H.C.A. 13/46, ff. 78v-82.

<sup>99</sup> On internal trade, see T.S. Willan, *The Inland Trade: Studies in English Internal Trade in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Manchester, 1976), 15-17.

<sup>100</sup> Jackson, *British Whaling Trade*, 20-1.

Table 1: Hull whaling vessels and cargoes, 1618-1640

	1618/9	1622/3	1629/30	1630/1	1632/3	1633/4	1636/7	1639/40
Number of vessels	2	4	4	4	4	4	2	3
Amount of oil <sup>1</sup>	65	264	275	327	315	163 <sup>+</sup>	131	187
Amount of bone <sup>2</sup>	-	-	3,900	5,000	3,700	-	-	6,800
Estimated whales <sup>3</sup>	3-6	13-22	14-23	16-27	16-26	8-14	6-11	9-16
Average oil per vessel	32.50	66.00	68.75	81.75	78.75	40.75	65.50	62.50

<sup>1</sup> Tons <sup>+</sup> And 8 hogsheads.

<sup>2</sup> Pounds

<sup>3</sup> Maximum/Minimum

Source: The National Archives Public Record Office, Kew (hereafter cited as TNA), Port Books E.190/314/14; 190/315/3; 190/316/10 & 12; 190/317/6 & 7; 190/318/1A & 7.

Although Hull was one of the leading centres for the English whaling trade during the first half of the seventeenth century, the scale of enterprise in the port was modest. However interest in the trade was sustained during a difficult period, when the English struggled to meet the challenges of a new way of seafaring. To a considerable degree this was a speculative phase in the development of the whaling trade, during which competing interests attempted to secure rapid profit from the exploitation of the marine life of the Arctic, at the risk of endangering the resource base on which it depended. Thus the customs records for Hull strongly suggest that by the early 1620s its main interest in the Arctic was concentrated on whaling at Spitsbergen rather than Trinity Island. According to William Scoresby the latter was abandoned during this period because of the prodigious destruction of its whale and walrus populations due to over-hunting.<sup>101</sup> William Goodlad, one of the Greenland Company's captains, indicated that prior to 1624 the Hull men used Bottle Cove as their base at Spitsbergen.<sup>102</sup> Thereafter they extended their activities, visiting other bays and harbours usually within the confines of Bell Sound, which tended to be the resort of most English whaling vessels during these years. Within these surroundings the Hull men were involved in bay-whaling, which was distinct from the open-sea hunting that the Dutch developed during the 1640s and 1650s in response to the declining number of whales at Spitsbergen.<sup>103</sup>

English whaling remained a specialized trade, restricted to a small number of ports, throughout the seventeenth century. In Hull, as the data in Table 1 suggest, at least four vessels were regularly engaged in the trade during the 1620s and 1630s. In some years the total was much greater; during 1626 there were nine vessels from Hull and York at Spitsbergen, forming a substantial complement to the other English ships.<sup>104</sup> Little

<sup>101</sup> Scoresby, *An Account of the Arctic Regions*, 2: 54-5.

<sup>102</sup> TNA, High Court of Admiralty, Examinations, William Goodlad, 19 April 1627, H.C.A. 13/46, ff. 78v-82; Conway, *No Man's Land*, 142; Calvert, *History of Kingston upon Hull*, 147.

<sup>103</sup> Jenkins, *History of the Whale Fisheries*, 25-6 argues that the bay fishery at Spitsbergen was exhausted as early as 1623.

<sup>104</sup> Conway, *No Man's Land*, 142; S.P. 16/39/67.

evidence survives for the type of shipping used in the whaling trade at this time, or of its tonnage, armament and manning. Many of the vessels were probably in the region of between 100 and 150 tons, sufficient to carry three or more shallops for use in whale hunting.<sup>105</sup> Some were armed to a greater or lesser degree, but few were as well-equipped as vessels sent out by the Muscovy or Greenland Company. Among the Company's fleet of 1626, one vessel carried 22 pieces of ordnance which were apparently more than sufficient to compel the ships of Hull to yield.<sup>106</sup> During this early phase of development most of the shipping involved in whaling was made up of unspecialized trading vessels, though a number may have been strengthened or modified in various ways as a defence against ice. Consequently the use of vessels for the whaling trade in Hull appears to have varied from year to year. During the seven years, from 1622 to 1640, for which customs records survive, between 16 and 19 vessels were entered from Spitsbergen; out of these totals about one quarter was recorded more than once. Ships such as the *Friendship* made annual voyages to Spitsbergen from 1629 to 1634, while others, like the *Advice*, *Adventure* or *Bonadventure*, seem to have undertaken only one voyage during the same period.<sup>107</sup>

Unfortunately the men who served aboard these vessels, who formed part of the first generation of English whalers, are almost invisible. Little evidence survives for the manning of, or recruitment to, Hull whaling ships; nor is much known about conditions of work, discipline and pay. It seems likely, in the light of Dutch and French manning levels, that whaling vessels sent out from Hull each carried a company of between 30 and 55 men.<sup>108</sup> In some years, such as 1626 when nine ships were at Spitsbergen, the trade may have made significant demands on the local labour force. To some extent the demand for labour was met partly by employing experienced mariners alongside inexperienced landsmen, or "green hands," who may have included butchers and rural labourers from the hinterland of the port.<sup>109</sup> This pattern of employment allowed the supporters and promoters of the whaling trade to argue that it contributed to the maintenance of the poor. In 1617 the Hull men claimed to be providing work for 100 landsmen, cast out of rural service as a result of a recent dearth.<sup>110</sup>

Within Hull recruitment may have been encouraged by methods of payment that gave the company of whaling vessels a share in part of the returns from the voyage. Aboard Hull ships it became customary for members of the crew to receive "oar and fin money" in addition to a wage.<sup>111</sup> John Drew received £6 15s, including oar and fin

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<sup>105</sup> Surveys from this period suggest that many vessels in Hull were about 100 tons. Brooks, *Miscellanea*, xxiii-xxiv. *V.C.H.*, 1: 138.

<sup>106</sup> TNA, High Court of Admiralty, Examinations, H.C.A. 13/46, ff. 78v-82.

<sup>107</sup> Based on customs records. TNA, Port Books E.190/316/10&12; 190/317/6&7.

<sup>108</sup> Bruijn, "From Minor to Major Concern," 46; J. Thierry du Pasquier, "The Whalers of Honfleur in the Seventeenth Century," *Arctic*, 37 (1984), 535.

<sup>109</sup> Also known as "Greenmen". Jackson, *British Whaling Trade*, 72.

<sup>110</sup> S.P. 14/94/71.

<sup>111</sup> F.W. Brooks (ed.), *The First Order Book of the Hull Trinity House 1632-1665* (Yorkshire Archaeological Society, 105, 1942 for 1941), xv.

money, in 1638, after serving on a voyage to Spitsbergen, despite allegations that he was an unsatisfactory cook. In 1635 a mariner who served on a whaling voyage received £6 19s 6d, including whale money.<sup>112</sup> In some cases wages were supplemented by other perquisites. According to the customs accounts, in September 1633 James Lupton, master of the *Increase*, was allowed one hogshead of oil and 500 pounds of bone for portage. About the same time Richard Perkins, master of the *Mayflower*, and the rest of his company, received 600 pounds of “wreck whaile Fynns.”<sup>113</sup> As in other branches of overseas trade, however, issues of pay and service were also a source of tension between merchants, masters and mariners, occasionally provoking contentious cases which were adjudicated by Trinity House.<sup>114</sup>

Conditions of work and pay were probably inherited from the fishing trade, and adapted to meet the needs of whaling. A similar process of adaptation may have influenced the management and financial organization of the new trade, though this is difficult to substantiate in detail given the paucity of the surviving evidence. During the early seventeenth century a small group of masters played a leading role in the development and organization of the trade, bearing risks and responsibilities, as well as undertaking a variety of managerial functions. Masters such as Thomas Marmaduke were instrumental in opening up the Arctic to commercial exploitation, contributing to the much disputed discovery of Trinity Island and to the exploration of the Spitsbergen archipelago. Thomas Anderson, who appears to have been regularly in charge of whaling voyages during the 1620s and early 1630s, was also interested in the search for the north east passage.<sup>115</sup> Little of this venturing was written down, though it formed part of a maritime oral culture in the port which served to vindicate local rights and claims against the Muscovy Company.

The surviving customs records indicate that there was a solid core of masters in Hull who acquired substantial experience of the whaling trade during the 1620s and 1630s. At least three or four masters, including Thomas and Launcelot Anderson, Richard Perkins and John Fowldes, appear to have been regularly engaged in voyages to Spitsbergen, while another ten or eleven were intermittently involved in the trade. Although details of the working careers of such men are scant, most masters possessed varied experiences of whaling, serving as mates and harpooners on previous voyages. Indeed it was not uncommon for some masters to continue to play a direct role in whale hunting as one of the harpooners. For example, John Pybus, aged 44, of Greenwich, who was employed as master aboard the *Adventure* of Hull in 1656, had served under other masters on five previous voyages to Spitsbergen, and as “Master & harponeere” on another eleven.<sup>116</sup>

Little is known about the merchants who sent these vessels out, or of their

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 18, 32; Jenkins, *History of the Whale Fisheries*, 150-1.

<sup>113</sup> TNA, Port Books, E.190/317/6.

<sup>114</sup> Brooks, *Miscellanea*, 30, 43-4.

<sup>115</sup> *C.S.P.D. 1619-23*, 328.

<sup>116</sup> TNA, High Court of Admiralty, Examinations, H.C.A. 13/71, ff. 587-588v.

relationship with the masters they appointed to look after their interests. Merchants of Hull and York promoted the new trade, but their identities and commercial activities remain elusive. Unfortunately the customs records for Hull are of limited value in trying to fill in these gaps. While the accounts for 1619 indicate the arrival of two ladings of whale oil, walrus tusks and decaying walrus hides for Samuel Dalton and company, those for the late 1620s and early 1630s, as well as for 1640, record the entry of goods in the name of the Greenland Company.<sup>117</sup> In 1633 Richard Perkins and an associate were described as “agents of the Greenland merchants of York and Hull,” who had shipped men for a voyage in Richard Prestwood’s ship, but no more specific details of their employers were provided.<sup>118</sup> Earlier accounts for 1623 also list the landing of oil and bone under the names of ships’ masters. The remaining records for 1634 show the entry of whale products for Percival Levitt and company, and Robert Coldcoale and company. Levitt was involved in the trade at least until 1643 when he sent out the *Whale*, under the command of Launcelot Anderson, to Spitsbergen.<sup>119</sup> While this material demonstrates that Arctic whaling attracted the attention of prominent traders in Hull, such as Samuel Dalton, it is singularly uninformative regarding the extent of their interests in the trade.

To a considerable degree the organization of the whaling trade in Hull during these years appears to have encouraged an overlap in function between merchants and masters, which was strengthened by a shared interest in shipowning. This was not uncommon, of course, either in other trades or ports, but it was reinforced by the peculiar characteristics and development of the whaling trade in Hull. On the one hand successful masters acquired extensive economic interests in the trade, while on the other hand the members of merchant families were employed as ship-masters on voyages to Spitsbergen. Richard Perkins and Richard Prestwood, who were selected by dice to lead the Hull men against the ships of the Greenland Company in 1626, owned and set out, in partnership with others, at least four of the nine local vessels.<sup>120</sup> Perkins appears to have been regularly involved in the trade, becoming one of the most successful whaling-masters in Hull during the 1620s and 1630s. He returned from Spitsbergen in 1623 with a lading of 92 tons of oil, 72 tons in 1630, 107 tons in 1631, 122 tons in 1632, and 121 tons in 1637. The figures in Table 2 strongly suggest that there were few masters who were able to match the consistency of this record. Representatives of merchant families who became involved in the whaling trade as masters included the Raikes brothers, who acquired a powerful hold over the timber trade with Norway during the 1630s. William Raikes served as master of the *Consent* in 1634, returning with a lading of 45 tons of oil for Percival Levitt and company; Robert Raikes was master of the *Neptune* which brought back a lading of 74 tons of oil for the Greenland Company during 1640.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> TNA, Port Books, E.190/316/10; 190/318/7.

<sup>118</sup> Brooks, *The First Order Book*, 3.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-4.

<sup>120</sup> TNA, High Court of Admiralty, Examinations, H.C.A. 13/46, ff. 78v-82.

<sup>121</sup> TNA, Port Books, E.190/315/3; 190/316/10&12; 190/317/6&7; *V.C.H.*, 1:142-3.

Table 2: Returns of whale oil for selected Hull masters, 1622 to 1637

	1622/23	1629/30	1630/31	1632/33	1633/34	1636/37
(Tons of oil)						
Thomas Anderson	76	45½	110	26	-	-
John Fowldes	-	85½	37	54	60	-
James Lupton	-	-	-	113	39	-
Richard Perkins	92	72	107	122½	-	121

Source: TNA, Port Books E.190/315/3; 190/316/10&12; 190/317/6&7; 190/318/1A.

These men formed part of the wider commercial and shipping community in Hull, whose interests were represented by the nomination and election of officials to Trinity House. In 1641 William Raikes, master and ship-owner, was nominated to succeed Sir John Lister as an elder brother, though he failed to secure election. The following year he was elected to the post. Thereafter he was elected to serve as a warden in 1643, 1652 and 1658.<sup>122</sup> Robert Coldcoale, a ship-master who was also interested in the whaling trade, was elected to serve as steward in 1651. Richard Perkins also served as an elder brother; however one year after the outbreak of the civil war, in August 1643, he was discharged from office on the grounds that he “had been absent for two years, residing in the enemy’s quarters.” He was re-admitted in 1648.<sup>123</sup>

The data in Table 1 indicate that the 1620s and early 1630s were the high point of the whaling trade in Hull during the seventeenth century. Evidently the volume of oil landed in Hull increased rapidly during the early 1620s, though this was from a low base, and grew steadily, despite occasional interruption, until about 1632, after which it appears to have experienced a severe decline. From a peak of 327 tons for 1631, the volume of oil fell by half in 1634. Despite a slight recovery during 1640, the amount of oil landed in Hull still represented less than 60 percent of the total for 1631. Although the figures for whale-bone in Table 1 appear to follow a similar chronological pattern, with the exception of the total for 1640, they need to be interpreted cautiously, particularly given the likelihood that bone might have been collected by scavenging dead carcasses floating at sea or along the shore at Spitsbergen. At this stage, moreover, bone was of much less value and importance than oil. In 1624 the Muscovy Company complained that its price in London had recently fallen from two shillings to two pence a pound.<sup>124</sup> Prices recovered with the growing use of whale-bone in female clothing, but throughout the seventeenth century it remained essentially a by-product of the trade in oil.

During the 1620s and 1630s the surviving evidence indicates that annual average loadings of oil *per* vessel ranged from 40 to 88 tons; apart from 1634, Table 1 demonstrates that the annual average lading did not fall below 60 tons. From the 1770s to the 1830s, when the whaling trade was of greater significance in Hull, average loadings of oil for individual vessels apparently amounted to 88 tons *per annum*.<sup>125</sup> Of course these

<sup>122</sup> Brooks, *The First Order Book*, 50, 55, 62, 110, 144.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 53, 56-8. 87, 106.

<sup>124</sup> *C.S.P.D. 1623-25*, 342.

<sup>125</sup> James Joseph Sheahan, *History of the Town and Port of Kingston-upon-Hull* (2nd edition;

average figures mask wider variations in the annual loadings of Hull whaling vessels, as is indicated by the data in Table 2. In most years, for which customs records survive, the differences between loadings for individual vessels were often two- or three-fold. Occasionally they were even greater. In an extreme case Richard Perkins entered a cargo of 122½ tons of oil, aboard the *Mayflower*, on 5 September 1633; five weeks later Thomas Anderson entered a lading of 26 tons aboard the *Adventure*.<sup>126</sup>

Crude estimates for the number of whales killed at Spitsbergen, based on annual loadings of oil, are presented in Table 1. According to modern calculations, between 20 and 30 tons of oil could be acquired from an adult right whale; however, Launcelot Anderson who had more than thirty years of experience in the whaling trade during the first half of the seventeenth century, claimed that the amount of oil ranged from 12 to 20 tons for each whale.<sup>127</sup> As the actual amount was obviously subject to variation, depending on differences in weight and the efficiency of the extractive process, the estimates in Table 1 err on the side of caution, in order to take account of possible defects and difficulties in the boiling of the blubber. On the assumption that each whale produced either a minimum of 12 or a maximum of 20 tons of oil, therefore, it seems highly likely that the Hull ships rarely killed more than 25 or 26 whales annually at Spitsbergen during the 1620s and 1630s, and in some years the number was much less. Collectively the data point to a striking consistency in the average annual catch, which usually ranged between three and five whales for each vessel, though in practice the variation may have been between one and seven or more. By comparison modern estimates suggest that during the second half of the seventeenth century, Dutch and German vessels killed an average of four or five whales *per annum*.<sup>128</sup>

During the course of the 1620s and 1630s the Hull men secured a stake in the whaling trade which they sustained with varying degrees of success. Although their participation in the trade was modest, it was locally recognized and valued not least for its contribution to the wider commercial and shipping economy. Local merchants and mariners fought long and hard to protect these interests. They continued to do so despite increasingly unfavourable conditions during the 1630s and beyond. Such persistence suggests that profit was to be made from the new trade, though insufficient evidence survives to calculate with precision the rate of return for Hull whaling vessels. Moreover there were considerable differences in cargoes of oil brought back to Hull, ranging from just under 20 to more than 120 tons *per vessel*. As the price of one ton of oil varied between £12 and £20 during these years, gross earnings for individual ships could fluctuate from £220 to £2,500, excluding the value of bone.<sup>129</sup> While it is clear that the

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Beverley, 1866), 362.

<sup>126</sup> TNA, Port Books, E.190/317/6; Jenkins, *History of the Whale Fisheries*, 317.

<sup>127</sup> British Library, London, Sloane MS. 3986, f. 79.

<sup>128</sup> Richard Vaughan, "Historical Survey of the European Whaling Industry", in H.C.s' Jacob, K. Snoeiijing, R. Vaughan (eds.), *Arctic Whaling* (Groningen, 1984), 126 (this is average catch per ship). Jenkins, *History of the Whale Fisheries*, 155 records an average of 7 to 11 whales per ship for Hamburg vessels from 1669 to 1698.

<sup>129</sup> In the early eighteenth century it was argued (by Henry Elking, *A View of the Greenland Trade and Whale-Fishery* (London, 1722), 59) that the cost of setting out a whaling vessel

Hull men experienced some poor years, such as 1634 when returns were low, as late as 1640 some vessels were entering valuable cargoes of oil from Spitsbergen: Launcelot Anderson's lading of 87 tons, for example, might have been worth between £1,040 and £1,740. How much of this was profit depended not only on the costs of the venture, about which little is known, but also on the prevailing price of oil in the domestic market. To a considerable degree this was linked with the demand for oil from the manufacture of soap, which became increasingly uncertain during the 1630s as a result of attempts by the Westminster soap-makers to use alternative raw materials in the manufacturing process. In April 1639 when Charles I visited York, to try and rally support against the Scots invasion, local traders and the merchants of Hull seized the opportunity to accuse the Westminster company of exploiting its monopoly to import soap, creating "a want of vent for oils brought ... from Greenland."<sup>130</sup> The merchants successfully petitioned for the re-establishment of a soap house in York, which the Hull men agreed to supply with oil at a lower price than that charged by the Greenland Company. But the implementation of these arrangements, which incidentally suggested that the agreement between the Hull men and the Company was breaking down, was thrown into disarray by the rapidly developing political crisis and the outbreak of the civil war during 1642.

## 5. Crisis and competition: the failure of a new trade

The civil war sowed dissension and division, inflicted widespread economic and social damage, and severely disrupted overseas commercial enterprise. Although the whaling trade survived the conflict, by the later 1640s it was in a battered and beleaguered condition. English vessels continued to sail to Spitsbergen during these years, but the trade became increasingly intermittent and ineffective, and possibly limited to less than a handful of ships. During the 1640s and 1650s English whaling collapsed under the burden of mutual hostility between competing and contentious interests.<sup>131</sup> The later 1640s witnessed a revival of the conflict between the Hull men and their long-standing rivals in London. Within the context of an unprecedented and radical political environment, the provincial merchants resurrected old grievances against the Greenland Company, which they sought to portray as a monopolizing and oppressive body that was damaging the trading interests of the commonwealth. Following the abolition of the monarchy, these grievances created a common platform for various groups in London and other provincial ports to use against the Company. As in the past, however, such divisions and distractions only served to benefit overseas competitors. While the English squabbled

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amounted to £600. If this applied to the 1620s and 1630s it would suggest that Hull vessels would need to return with loadings of at least 50 tons of oil, assuming a price of £12 per ton, to break even. During these years 16 out of 26 loadings were of 54 tons or above. Critically, however, this notional calculation depends on the price of oil in the domestic market which may have fallen below £12 for some of this period, for reasons noted above.

<sup>130</sup> The Greenland Company warned that the jobs of 1,000 mariners were at risk if the Soap-makers banned the use of whale oil. *C.S.P.D. 1634-35*, 392-4 (which includes a reference to Thomas Washer, soap-boiler, who was imprisoned for making soap with oil); *C.S.P.D. 1639*, 45, 363-4, 474.

<sup>131</sup> Jenkins, *History of the Whale Fisheries*, 142-5.

amongst themselves for access to sounds and bays at Spitsbergen, the Dutch turned to open-sea whaling, inaugurating a new stage in the Arctic trade, which was no longer tied to shore bases. Under these conditions the whaling trade was abandoned in Hull: by the 1650s and 1660s its market was being supplied with oil and bone by Dutch and German shippers.

The confirmation of the Company's monopoly by the Navy Committee in 1645 failed to deflect the campaign of its rivals in favour of opening up the whaling trade.<sup>132</sup> This loose alliance of potentially competing interests presented itself as an amalgam of independent traders, who were defending the interests of the freemen of England against the unjust pretensions of a privileged city institution. The Hull men played a leading part in launching the attack against the Company. In December 1649 Thomas Anderson and Nicholas Gatonby, two experienced whaling masters, who described themselves as "poor men," sought compensation from the Company for damage to their property at Spitsbergen, which they probably sustained during the 1620s.<sup>133</sup> In January 1650 Richard Perkins was ordered to attend the powerful Admiralty Committee to give evidence in the dispute. After reviewing the details of the case, the committee decreed that the Company's actions against the Hull men were "oppressive and fit to be relieved by the justice of Parliament."<sup>134</sup> Despite efforts by the Council of State to persuade both sides to compromise, the dispute dragged on for several years, acting as a focal point for wider grievances concerning the organization and regulation of the whaling trade.

By the early 1650s a group of whaling masters and merchants, including representatives from Hull, London and Great Yarmouth, were publicly seeking support for their case within and beyond parliament. In January 1654 they presented a petition to parliament, published as *The Case of many Freemen of England that have adventured, and desire to adventure, to fish in Greenland*.<sup>135</sup> Although it drew on long-standing claims by the Hull men, the petition was tailored to the new political environment of republican government. Under such conditions corporate ventures established during the rule of monarchy were vulnerable to a variety of charges, particularly as, in the eyes of their enemies, they appeared to rest on a discredited and defunct royal prerogative. Thus the Muscovy Company stood accused of unjustly assuming the sole right of the whaling trade, against the prior claims of the Hull men: "The fishing of *Greenland*," it was robustly asserted, was "discovered above 40 years since, by some Merchants of *Hull*."<sup>136</sup> Furthermore the Company used force and imprisonment, including the seizure of property, allegedly with the connivance of the Privy Council, in order to prevent its rivals from whaling at Spitsbergen. Consequently for many years it effectively monopolized the trade, arbitrarily raising the prices of oil and bone, "to the great oppression of the people, the discouragement of Mariners, and preventing the increase of Shipping and Seamen,

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<sup>132</sup> Jackson, "The Rise and Fall of English Whaling," 55-67.

<sup>133</sup> *C.S.P.D. 1649-50*, 431, 479, 482, 486, 509.

<sup>134</sup> *C.S.P.D. 1649-50*, pp. 492, 514. *C.S.P.D. 1650*, 84.

<sup>135</sup> S.P. 18/65/60.

<sup>136</sup> S.P. 18/65/60.

and (the) decay of trading in this Nation.”<sup>137</sup> These circumstances also enabled the Dutch to increase their role as suppliers of oil and bone to the English market. Although Anglo-Dutch commerce was disrupted by war during the early 1650s, it did little to reduce their growing importance in the trade. Shortly after the end of the conflict twelve Dutch vessels apparently entered Hull with cargoes of oil; during October 1654, indeed, “in regard of the late disappointment of the Greenland fleet, and the great want of oil to carry on the trades of cloth and soap,” it was proposed in parliament that “licence be given to fetch it out of Holland.”<sup>138</sup> The Company’s control of the whaling trade thus led to high prices, the oppression of independent traders, and an alarming dependence on overseas markets.

These general complaints provided a necessary context for the more pressing concerns of the petitioners regarding access to Horn Sound and Bell Sound at Spitsbergen. Since the inception of the whaling trade, the English had used the bays and harbours in both Sounds as their main hunting grounds. By the early 1650s, however, the Company was insisting on its sole right to hunt for whales in these waters, while offering to leave other parts of Spitsbergen “free for all other English men to adventure unto.”<sup>139</sup> According to the independent traders this was a self-interested and empty gesture, intended to allow the Company to retain control over the best whaling grounds at Spitsbergen, which were “the only certain places for fishing, most of the other Harbours being many times inaccessible by reason of the Ice”.<sup>140</sup> The Company’s warning of the danger of conflict and bloodshed, if other vessels were allowed to hunt in Horn Sound and Bell Sound, was bluntly dismissed by the petitioners. Both regions, they insisted, “have commonly fish enough for more fishers then ever have adventured thither: The Harbour of *Bell-sound* being 15 miles in breadth, and 30 miles in length or more; so that several Companies may fish in the aforesaid Harbour, and make their Oyl, and yet never molest each other.”<sup>141</sup>

In denying the Company’s claims, the petitioners went on to question whether its proposals were for the good of the commonwealth. Given its recent record, the independent traders warned that the Company would be unable to meet domestic demand for oil and bone, leading to shortages and higher prices. In response to the Company’s claim that the whaling trade would collapse without its continued participation, which was dependent on the retention of its rights, the petitioners asserted that “several persons of good estates” were prepared “to set out Shipping for *Greenland*, ... of double the Burden that the said Company have ... set out, ... if the trade might be declared to be wholly free for every English man.”<sup>142</sup> Apparently an expedition of several vessels, amounting to about 1,100 tons, was under preparation for Spitsbergen. Some ships had

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137 S.P. 18/65/60.

138 John Towill Rutt (ed.), *Diary of Thomas Burton, Esq.*, 4 vols. (London, 1828), 1: xlix.

139 S.P. 18/65/61.

140 S.P. 18/65/60.

141 S.P. 18/65/60.

142 S.P. 18/65/60.

already departed. But the petitioners warned that these voyages would be overthrown if the Company's proposals regarding Bell Sound and Horn Sound were accepted.

In the eyes of these self-appointed representatives for the freemen of England, the opening up of the whaling trade at Spitsbergen was linked with the economic improvement of the commonwealth. The debate over different forms of commercial organization had been heard before, and the argument that the economy was "cheaper served by many men, then by a particular Company," was well rehearsed; nonetheless, the appeal for free whaling at Spitsbergen, on the grounds that it was "the proper right of every free born English man," had far-reaching and radical implications that ranged well beyond the issues in dispute.<sup>143</sup> The attack on an oppressive monopoly which was seen to discourage trade and shipping, combined with an emphasis on rights and freedom, suggests that the authors of *The Case of many Freemen* were influenced by the campaign of the Levellers in London during the later 1640s. Among other demands for reform, that appealed to the industrious "middling sort," the Levellers called for overseas trade to be free from "all monopolizing and engrossing by companies or otherwise."<sup>144</sup> In representing, if not directly articulating, the anxieties and ambitions of independent traders and ship-masters, this hostility to commercial privilege possessed considerable relevance for whaling merchants and masters. It was a common thread that linked potentially competing interest in London, Hull and Great Yarmouth. Among such men, who were struggling to make ends meet, the reliance on birthright and liberty was intended to strengthen the case against the Company's continued control of the trade, though in Hull the influence of a garrison of soldiers from the New Model Army, who were themselves influenced by the Levellers, should not be discounted.<sup>145</sup>

The public presentation of these issues deepened the dispute over the whaling trade, encouraging the rival parties to adopt an entrenched position which narrowed the opportunity for compromise. Early in 1654 a committee of the Council of Trade was appointed to hear and determine the matter. Representatives for the Muscovy Company continued to claim that "severall Interests cannot with any convenyence fish for Whales in one Harbour without prejudice one to another."<sup>146</sup> Consequently their solution was for a clear demarcation of interests, among the English, between different bays and harbours. Given the Company's experience at Spitsbergen this was the only way to avoid conflict and controversy between whaling vessels. Francis Ashe, the governor of the Company, drew attention to an incident that occurred during 1653 which encapsulated these difficulties. Thus

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<sup>143</sup> S.P. 18/65/60.

<sup>144</sup> A.S.P. Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty* (2nd edition; London, 1974), 319, 339, 425; F.D. Dow, *Radicalism in the English Revolution 1640-1660* (London, 1985), pp. 47-48; C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford, 1962), 120-1, 143, 156.

<sup>145</sup> H.N. Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution* (London, 1961), 123, 151, 532-3; Joseph Hemingway, *The Declaration of the Officers of the Garrison of Hull* (London, 1649); *The Humble Remonstrance and Resolves of Col. Overtons Regiment* (London, 1649).

<sup>146</sup> S.P. 18/65/61.

a Whale being struck by those employed by the Company, divers of the Contrary Parties struck in their Irons into the same whale, & occasion'd a controversye – which rise to a very great height, & neere unto bloodshed, had it not been prevented by a third Party; yet nevertheless the Contest continued soe long, that the losse of the whale was much endangered being neere driven into the Sea, which occasioned 30 houres labour to our people to save her, & hath now occasioned a suit in Lawe ... And it is further observed, that the whales coming into the Sound to Gender, Feed & rubb themselves doe stay there for a long tyme together, soe that when one Interest is onely there, They can take or pursue such as are most likely to goe first out, & to follow the rest at leizure, whereas if there be divers Interests, each Party disturbs the Fish wheresoever it appeares, having onely respect to their owne profitt, & soe suddainly scares or drives away the whales, & being they cannot attaine to it themselves, are not wanting to use meanes to hinder one another, & put by others when they cannot gett the Whales themselves, as the last yeare divers whales were lost & went out of the Harbour by the eager pursuit of the severall Parties. And whereas it is also objected by the contrary Party, (though most untruely), That the whales come in one day & goe out the next, To that we answere, That it hath been by long experience knowne, & wilbe made good by Oath, if required, That the whales not being disturbed doe usually lye in the Harbours for many dayes together, and soe consequently much better for the fishing.<sup>147</sup>

According to Ashe, conflicts over the possession of stricken whales were regular occurrences which could only be prevented by the establishment of separate whaling grounds at Spitsbergen. Another solution might have been to follow the Dutch into open-sea whaling, to the west of Spitsbergen, but this appears to have been beyond the capability of the English during the 1650s.

The Company's case was reinforced by a claim that Bell Sound was too small to support the whaling activities of different interests. Covering a region of about seven miles in breadth, and ten in length, between 30 and 40 well-manned shallops were "sufficient to fish that Harbour if not disturbed by others, and may kill as many whales as if there were doble the Number of boates."<sup>148</sup> Contrary to the assertions of the Company's rivals, Ashe warned that an increase in the number of whaling vessels in the Sound would not lead to an increase in the production of oil. Three vessels of the Company reportedly returned from Spitsbergen with more oil than twice as many ships sent out by independent traders. Paradoxically, according to the Company's perspective, competition led to a decline in shipments of oil, which had fallen by more than half in recent years. As a result, in the domestic market the price of oil had increased from £18 to £30 a ton; that for bone had risen from £1 to £8 a hundredweight.<sup>149</sup>

The Company's proposal to restrict access to Bell Sound to its own vessels came with a warning that the congregation of English whaling ships in one harbour would leave other sounds and bays in the hands of the Dutch and the French. The demarcation

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<sup>147</sup> S.P. 18/65/61.

<sup>148</sup> S.P. 18/65/61.

<sup>149</sup> S.P. 18/65/61.

of interests which the Company called for would thus maintain “the English propriety in that Country,” while helping to deal with the increasing threat from the Dutch who were accused of selling “the worst & foulest of their Commodities in this Commonwealth.”<sup>150</sup> In response to the claims of the independent traders, concerning their ability to manage the trade more economically, Ashe pointed out that the “same Men who make these pretences were trayned up to that Fishing by the Company, and have of late yeares deserted them for their owne ... which bringeth a greater charge upon the voyage & ... makes the Comodity dearer.”<sup>151</sup> In concluding, Ashe reminded the committee that the Company’s right to the whaling trade was based on its discovery of Spitsbergen, as demonstrated in the confirmation and renewal of its privileges.

The revival of this damaging dispute, which drew on contested claims concerning prior discovery in the Arctic, was both cause and consequence of the disintegration of the English whaling trade during the 1650s. But the underlying competition for access to the southern sounds and bays at Spitsbergen, an inherent characteristic of the trade since its earliest days, appears to have been intensified by the declining number of whales due to sustained commercial hunting, which was compounded with climatic change, particularly the onset of colder weather during the 1640s and beyond. Not only did this leave bays and harbours enveloped with ice for longer, cutting into the hunting season, but also it may have contributed to increasing mortality among whales.<sup>152</sup> Implicitly these problems were acknowledged in the evidence that was produced during the dispute between the Company and its opponents during the early 1650s: too many vessels, it seemed, were chasing too few whales. According to the Company, even “the best Harbors make more loosing voyages then gayning, but once in 3, 4, or 5 yeares the Whales Coming in plentifully by scoales.”<sup>153</sup>

In an attempt to deal with these unfavourable conditions the Company proposed the establishment of a general joint stock to manage and maintain the whaling trade at Spitsbergen. To a considerable degree the plan built on existing arguments in favour of commercial control and regulation. Thus it was claimed that competition disrupted whale hunting in Bell Sound; it reduced profits; and it threatened to undermine English claims to the rest of the archipelago. If a “generall liberty” prevailed, so that “every one may freely enjoy everything, and every place in Greenland, that hee can first arrive unto & possesse,” the Company warned, it “will beget an endeavour to prevent others, which must necessarily occasion them to sett out a month or some tyme before the season, which as it augmentes the Charge, soe it destroyes the profitt which is the wheele of all

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<sup>150</sup> S.P. 18/65/61. The description of this as “the most part blubber” indicates that the Dutch were moving away from boiling it on the shore at Spitsbergen. Some Dutch vessels were already beginning to carry try-works between decks. *C.S.P.D. 1655*, p. 325.

<sup>151</sup> S.P. 18/65/61.

<sup>152</sup> L. Hacquebord, “Smeerenburg: The Rise and Fall of a Dutch Whaling-Settlement on the West Coast of Spitsbergen,” in van Holk (ed.), *Early European Exploitation*, 89-95, 125-8; L. Hacquebord, “The History of Early Dutch Whaling: A Study from the Ecological Angle,” in Jacob, Snoeijs, Vaughan, *Arctic Whaling*, 135-48.

<sup>153</sup> S.P. 18/65/62.

designes.”<sup>154</sup> The failure of the proposal, according to this view, would spell the end for the whaling trade. For while a declining number of English vessels clashed over the capture of one or two whales in the bays of Bell Sound, the “Dutch and French, who fish in numerous Fleets at Sea, and by plying neere the mouth of the Harbours, breake & beat the scoales of Whales,” leaving less available for others.<sup>155</sup> In effect the Company threatened to withdraw from the trade if its plan was rejected.

While portraying itself as the defender of English interests at Spitsbergen, whose rivals were identified as opportunistic, self-interested and insolvent adventurers, the Company’s concern to have the first choice of bays and harbours, which would then be barred to others, betrayed its essential purpose. The proposal for a general joint stock thus met with a hostile rejoinder from the rivals of the Company. Their response, including a list of propositions for the regulation and encouragement of the whaling trade, was published during 1654 as *The Heads of the Answer of several Adventurers to Greenland, To the claim of the Muscovia Company, of the two Harbors of Bel-Sound and Hornsound*.<sup>156</sup> Unpublished versions of this material, which may have circulated among the merchant community, indicate that much of it was compiled by Edward Whittwell, who was representing the interests of independent traders in London.<sup>157</sup> It vigorously reasserted the case for an open trade at Spitsbergen, free from the controlling influence of the Company. Although little of this was new, the attack on the Company was more direct and designed to draw attention to its failure to serve the needs of the commonwealth. While it had “no right in Law or Equity to the said Harbors, more then any other English men that will adventure thither,” it also “used in the late Kings time all unjust, illegal, and arbitrary means possible to suppress all but themselves.”<sup>158</sup> At the same time it was accused of discouraging native whalers; of undervaluing their labour; and of employing Basque harpooners who were paid double their wages. Against this *The Heads of the Answer* insisted that the only way to meet the threat of Dutch competition was by encouraging more vessels to sail to Spitsbergen, whereby “industry and ingenuity will be more advanced, and Marriners and Navigation increased.”<sup>159</sup> In order to deal with the continued risk of violent rivalry between competing English interests, parliament was urged to introduce legislation for the regulation of the trade.

In a separate submission to the committee of the Council of Trade, at the end of January 1654, the Hull men presented their reasons why the trade “ought to be free, and not restrained to any one particular Company.”<sup>160</sup> Though influenced by the circumstances of their protracted dispute with the Muscovy Company, they laid aside the issue of prior discovery, concentrating more on commercial rights and public benefits, in a way which reflected, and tried to take advantage of, the new political environment. In

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<sup>154</sup> S.P. 18/65/62 & 63.

<sup>155</sup> S.P. 18/65/63 & 64.

<sup>156</sup> S.P. 18/65/67.

<sup>157</sup> *C.S.P.D. 1653-54*, 379-80, 392-3; *C.S.P.D. 1654*, 16.

<sup>158</sup> S.P. 18/65/67.

<sup>159</sup> S.P. 18/65/67.

<sup>160</sup> S.P. 18/65/69. It was delivered to the Council by Richard Eccleston.

these conditions it was possible to portray a repressive corporation as an agent of unrestrained royal power. According to the Hull men, the whaling trade should be free because it was a native right of those who lived under the same government, "bearing ... (a) share of the common-charge," to enjoy the same liberties and privileges as others.<sup>161</sup> Thus the Company's attempt to engross the trade was "rounded upon a monopolizing patten: which came from prerogative power, and is not consistent with the freedom of a Common-wealth, and the members thereof."<sup>162</sup> This appeal to native right was reinforced by the wider economic and social gains from an open trade which included the employment of large numbers of labouring men, as well as an increase in shipping and seamen. In addition the growth of the trade would safeguard the provision of supplies of oil and bone for the domestic market.

An effective resolution of this dispute continued to be delayed by the determination of independent traders in Hull, Great Yarmouth and London to defend their interests in the whaling trade, in the face of resolute resistance from the Muscovy Company. Accumulated grievances, soured by mutual mistrust and resentment, stretching back over several decades, appeared to rule out the possibility of a short term compromise, providing an unfavourable environment for a longer term agreement that took account of the proposals put forward by the Company and its rivals. Although representatives from these metropolitan and provincial groups were nominated to a committee during 1654 to draw up regulations for the forthcoming whaling season, they were unable to reach a suitable settlement. The representatives for the new adventurers of Hull, as they were now described, included Roger Drayton, John Jolliffe, George Poyner, Francis Pargiter and Robert Cumminge.<sup>163</sup> After several meetings, the committee admitted that "a fitt Regulation cannot be speedily settled."<sup>164</sup> In its place the Hull men and the Company agreed to send out seven vessels to Spitsbergen, three of which were to go to Bell Sound, while the remainder were to be distributed between Bottle Cove, Green Harbour and Horn Sound. Evidently this arrangement threatened to divide the provincial rivals of the Company. A proposal by Thomas Horth, one of the leading whaling merchants in Great Yarmouth, for the distribution of English vessels at Spitsbergen, apparently failed to get the support of the Hull men, as a result of which "some harbours will be unfished and insecure."<sup>165</sup>

These unresolved issues point to deep-seated weaknesses in the organization of the early English whaling trade. Despite a warning from the Council of State in 1652 that "the whale fishing is of consequence, and should not by dissensions be allowed to fall into the hands of strangers," the English were unable to mount an effective response to overseas competition, either from the Dutch or the French, during these years.<sup>166</sup> The first Anglo-Dutch war from 1652 to 1654 added to these problems by severely disrupting

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<sup>161</sup> S.P. 18/65/69.

<sup>162</sup> S.P. 18/65/69.

<sup>163</sup> *C.S.P.D. 1654*, 30.

<sup>164</sup> S.P. 18/68/66.

<sup>165</sup> *C.S.P.D. 1654*, 41.

<sup>166</sup> *C.S.P.D. 1651-52*, 177-8.

overseas trade and shipping, particularly for east coast ports which were vulnerable to the activities of enemy men-of-war. In practice the war probably had a greater impact indirectly, as the costs of trade increased due to the threat of privateering in the North Sea. To some extent state support may have helped to maintain the trade, at least in providing protections for experienced harpooners against the risk of impressment for naval service. However, the evidence strongly suggests that the English struggled to send out more than a handful of vessels annually to Spitsbergen. By contrast, 70 Dutch ships were reportedly convoyed to Spitsbergen by three men-of-war during 1654.<sup>167</sup> The following year between 24 and 50 French vessels apparently “made great voyages” to the northern whaling grounds.<sup>168</sup> In 1656 there seem to have been seven English ships at Spitsbergen, only one of which was from Hull. By 1657 the London Company was complaining about the import of large amounts of oil and bone by the Dutch, in defiance of the Navigation Acts, which left it with large stocks that it could not sell. Although the Company’s rights to the whaling trade were confirmed in January 1658, when it was granted the sole right of access to Bell Sound and Horn Sound, it was a hollow victory. By then the domestic market in England had been effectively captured by its overseas competitors.<sup>169</sup>

The Hull men played a prominent role in this early, though unsuccessful, phase of English whaling in the Arctic. From the second decade of the seventeenth century through to the 1650s they were among the most persistent promoters of the new trade in England. But, the development of these interests was heavily influenced by an unstable compound of competition, conflict and occasional cooperation. The prolonged and complex dispute between the Hull men and their rivals in London may have inadvertently placed limits on the scale of local and national enterprise. It also raised wider issues, concerning maritime rights and commercial organization, which were never effectively resolved during this period. The revival of the dispute during the 1640s and 1650s had a radicalizing effect on the position of the independent traders, whose hostility to commercial monopoly was reinforced by an appeal for an open and free whaling trade as a means of guaranteeing the rights of free-born English subjects living under commonwealth rule. This appeal met with little success during the 1650s, and when the trade was subsequently opened up, in 1672, it was too late for the English to recover lost ground to their competitors.<sup>170</sup>

In effect the scale and character of the whaling trade in Hull, London and elsewhere left it deeply vulnerable to overseas competition, especially from the Dutch.

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<sup>167</sup> *C.S.P.D.* 1654, 176, 434 (protections from impressment).

<sup>168</sup> *C.S.P.D.* 1655, 509, 523.

<sup>169</sup> *C.S.P.D.* 1657-58, 140-1, 161, 280, 343; Ashley, *Financial and Commercial Policy*, 120; John C. Appleby, “‘A Voyage to Greenland for the Catching of Whales’: English Whaling Enterprise in the Seventeenth Century,” *International Journal of Maritime History*, 9 (1997), 36-7.

<sup>170</sup> Scott, *Constitution and Finance of English, Scottish and Irish Joint-Stock Companies*, 2: 74-5, 379.

The English were ill-equipped to respond to the growth of Dutch whaling, which was on such a scale as to encourage adaptability and innovation. By contrast the modest nature of the English trade appears to have promoted conservatism and inflexibility. While English vessels persisted with bay-whaling during the 1640s and 1650s, despite warning signs of a decline in the number of whales at Spitsbergen, the Dutch turned to open-sea whaling with considerable success. In these circumstances by the later 1650s the Hull men had abandoned whaling as an economic enterprise; they were soon followed by the London Company. By 1669, it was reported that there was only one English vessel at Spitsbergen, compared with between 300 and 400 Dutch ships.<sup>171</sup> Consequently it became commonplace during the later seventeenth century to lament that England had lost the whaling trade to the Dutch. As the author of *Britannia Languens* noted in 1680, “the Dutch had far beaten us out of these Trades.”<sup>172</sup> Although this was politically appealing, it was an incomplete explanation for the disappearance of the Hull whaling trade during the second half of the seventeenth century. Despite the apparent opportunities presented to overseas suppliers by the decline of local enterprise, the volume of whale oil imported into Hull during the 1660s and 1670s remained small, and was often barely noticeable. In effect the northern market for oil, the mainstay of the trade, appears to have collapsed; the combined pressures on demand and supply thus created insuperable difficulties which were intensified by domestic competition and rivalries. It may not have been until the 1750s and 1760s, with the spread of street lighting based on the use of whale oil, that the market recovered.<sup>173</sup> When Daniel Defoe visited Hull in the early eighteenth century, its involvement in the trade was already a distant memory. While expressing admiration for the commerce and business of the port, particularly with the Netherlands, Defoe recounted how “They had once set up a Greenland fishery, and it went on with success for a time; but it decayed in the time when the Dutch wars were so frequent, and the house built by the Greenland merchants is now turned into granaries for corn, and warehouses for other goods.”<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Thirsk and Cooper (eds.), *Seventeenth-Century Economic Documents*, 70; Scoresby, *An Account of the Arctic Regions*, 2: 56.

<sup>172</sup> *Britannia Languens, or A Discourse of Trade* (London, 1680), in John Ramsay MacCulloch (ed.), *Early English Tracts on Commerce* (London, 1856), p. 409.

<sup>173</sup> Customs records show no significant import of whale oil. TNA, Port Books E.190/320/10; 190/321/4; 190/324/9; 190/325/3; 190/331/15. This was probably linked with changes to the soap manufacturing industry in York, though the subject deserves further investigation. On street-lighting see Jackson, *British Whaling Trade*, 56.

<sup>174</sup> Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, 2 vols. (London, 1928), 2: 243, 245.

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