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A SITE SURVEY OF WHALING STATIONS ON THE SOUTHERN COAST OF THE SOUTH ISLAND

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INTRODUCTION

During October 1990, as part of my Master's thesis work, I carried out a site survey of whaling stations on the Southern Coast of the South Island. For practical reasons this work was restricted to the area between Moeraki to the north and Riverton to the south. Prior to going out into the field the archival record was examined. The most important sources include Dumont d'Urville, who visited Otago Harbour aboard *l'Astrolabe* on his way to the Antarctic in 1840, while the Otakou station was still operating. Edward Shortland came south in 1843 as part of his duties as Sub-Protector of Aborigines. He recorded the statistics of the stations' catches and manning levels up to that time. Similar statistics were recorded in the "New Zealand Spectator and Cooks Strait Guardian" up until 1848. Frederick Tuckett, John Wallis Barnicoat and David Monro came south on the *Deborah* in 1844 as part of the expedition searching for the future site of 'New Edinburgh' (Dunedin). Thomas Wing was Captain of the *Deborah* and made an extensive chart of Foveaux Strait. William Davison was a surveyor on the expedition and his survey books record elements of the stations at Waikouaiti and Otakou. John Turnbull Thompson was Chief Surveyor of Otago at the time of his visit to Riverton in 1858, where whaling was still being carried out.

This primary source material was supplemented with more recent histories, both whaling and local. Generally, however, few archival records of the time were made by eye witnesses or participants of whaling. The whalers themselves were generally illiterate and the station owners were more concerned with recording commerce than history. Of the material examined, very little contains archaeologically useful information. Local informants and 'inspired guesswork' were more important in locating the station than the historical record.

Moeraki J42/136
Grid ref. J42 418 367

The Moeraki station was founded by John Hughes in 1837. It is difficult to know when the Moeraki station ceased operation. As with many stations still operating at the time of Shortland's visit in 1843 the yield was declining considerably. It is likely that many stations continued to chase the odd whale for a number of years while their inhabitants turned more and more to farming.

A site containing historic midden material was recorded in Onekaraka Bay in 1966 by Michael Trotter. In 1978 Karl Gillies reported that the site was in danger from erosion and modern refuse dumping. This site was no longer visible in 1990. Mr. John McLellan (pers. com.) reports that up until the 1936 Moeraki centenary celebrations old whaleboats and whalebone lay where the boats now park in Onekaraka Bay but was tidied away at that time. No surface evidence of the station remains visible. Two pieces of 19th century ceramic, possibly disturbed by gardening, were found beside some newly planted flax bushes nearby. Evidence of the station probably still exists *in situ*, however, the two pieces of ceramic found may come from a time later than the 1840s. Moeraki has been continuously occupied since 1836 and a site survey and surface collection cannot separate whaling period evidence from later material.

Shortland (1974: 129) described a lookout on "the summit of the most projecting point of the cliff..." This lookout probably would have been above Punatoetoe Head, grid reference 425 367. A good all round view can be had from here. No surface evidence was found, however.

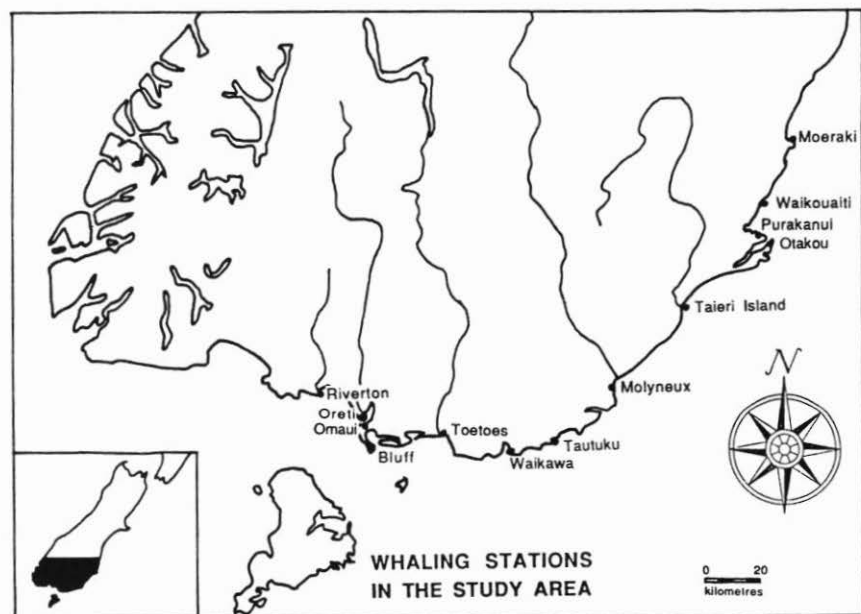


Figure 1. Whaling stations in the study area.

Waikouaiti I43/66
Grid Ref I43 281 051

The station at Waikouaiti was established in 1837 by Messrs. Long, Wright and Richards, and purchased at auction a year later by Johnny Jones for £225. In 1840 settlers other than whalers arrived at Waikouaiti and Jones himself came over from Sydney in 1843. He continued to farm until his death in 1869.

Shortland described the lookout on the "projecting headland [from whose] lofty summit a good view may be had of the offing, and of any whale which may chance to spout there" (Shortland 1974: 106). A year later Monro wrote of entering the harbour and passing "the shears by which the whales are hoisted up in the operation of stripping them of their blubber. Further on was a large shed, in which the oil is tried out, greasy in the extreme, and smelling like a thousand filthy lamps."

The first four pages of William Davison's survey field-book 1 from 1844, held at the Department of Survey and Land Information, Dunedin, contain a survey of Waikouaiti showing the signal staff of the lookout and the shears. Shortland and Barnicoat also left sketch maps of the peninsula showing the shears, signal staff, 'Pah' and whalers village. Shortland's and Barnicoat's maps show the whalers' village to have been on the isthmus of the peninsula. This area is now built on. The 'Pah' was probably located on the present reserve, but no surface evidence is visible. The try-works site is located on a terrace on the cliff top above a sloping sandy beach at the north-east end of the breakwater. The slope above the site has slumped onto it and the cliff below the site has eroded considerably. The terrace is approx 50m long by 15m wide and is shown in a photo dating to 1899. A few of the rocks outlining the try-works may be seen at the north-east end of the terrace. A flat raised area 3 x 1.5m represents the rest of the try-works. Two possible building terraces are visible at the south-west end of the main terrace. A number of pits, depressions and ditches may be evidence of whaling activities. No stratigraphy was visible in the eroding clifftop below the site and any evidence of the lookout has probably been disturbed by the installation of a trig.

The try-works shown in the 1899 photograph are probably the 1870s try-works rather than Johnny Jones' try-works of the 1840s. However there is no reason to believe that the try-pots and try-works would have been moved in the intervening 30 years. In comparing the photograph with what is currently visible it is evident that the edge of the terrace has been subject to erosion. Subsequent visits to the site in 1992 showed that further erosion of the cliff had occurred.

Purakanui I44/216

Grid Ref. I44/J44 254 929

The Weller brothers operated a station at Purakanui in 1837 and 1838. Shortland (1974: 301) does not list it as a separate enterprise but includes it with Otakou in his statistics, with which it seems to have been associated.

The site is inferred to have been along the spit on the true left bank of the channel at Purakanui Bay. This area has blown over with sand which is now eroding back again, however, the present pine plantation will prevent further erosion occurring for the foreseeable future. Some 19th century glass of uncertain date was found where the sand has eroded. No other evidence of the station was visible.

Otakou J44/5

Grid Ref. I44/J44 324 875

In October 1831 Edward and Joseph Weller came ashore at Wellers Rock (or Te Umukuri) to found one of the most successful and, briefly, profitable shore whaling enterprises in the country. During its nine years of operation Otakou shipped about 1500 tons of oil, peaking in 1838 with 310 tons (Shortland 1974: 301). The newly established station was destroyed by fire in about March of 1832. Around 80 houses were destroyed, indicating that the population of the station would have been considerable.

M. Roquerma, d'Urville's first mate, described "two or three fishing depots" set up in the harbour. D'Urville's chart of the harbour calls Harrington Point "Pte. de la Pecherie" (Fishery Point), and Harwood, the local storekeeper, writes in his journal of the Upper and Middle Fisheries. These Fisheries were probably Roquerma's "depots" at Harrington Point and Te Rauone Beach. In 1844 J.W. Barnicoat made sketches of the Wellers Rock try-works and Harwood's store. Monro (1898: 243) at the same time described "immense sand-banks like drifts of snow, without a blade of vegetation upon them, and shifting with every wind, so that you may see cottages half buried, and garden fences completely overtopped". This sandblow now covers the whole of the whaling station site to a considerable depth with the exception of the try-works at Wellers Rock.

The site was first recorded in 1961 by Peter Gathercole, who did not recognise the burnt area on Wellers Rock as the site of the try-works. In the road cutting on the other side of the road from the rock, historic midden material was recorded, but was soon destroyed by roadworks. Wellers Rock is a basalt outcrop jutting out into the harbour. Most of the rock is bare and regularly scoured by wave action, but an area of approximately 8 x 5m, representing the site of the try-works, remains covered in soil and straggly grass. Two areas of surface deposits were visible. One, on the south knoll,

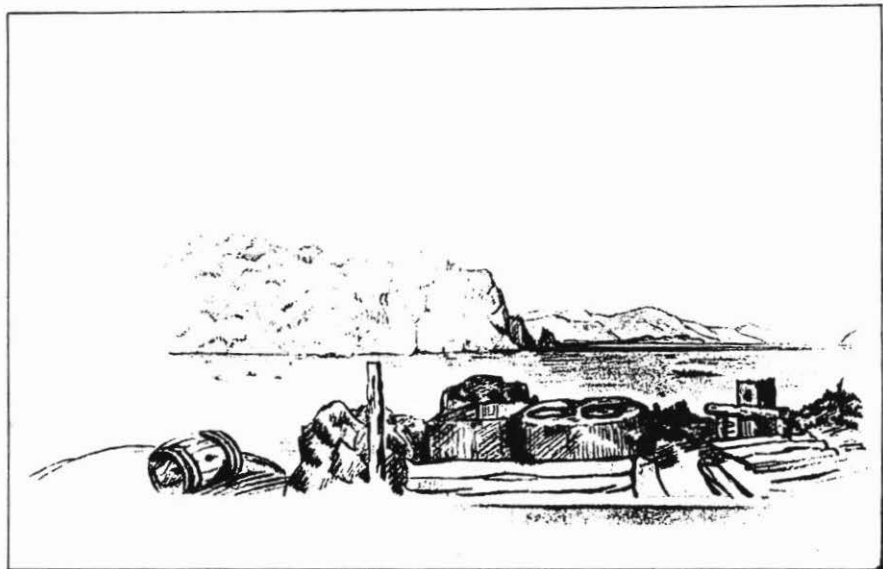


Fig. 2. Barnicoat's sketch of the Wellers Rock try-works.

consisted of a small scatter of red brick. The other, on the main area of the rock, consisted of similar brick as well as areas of hard black soil. Ongoing erosion was evident in this area and had exposed a section up to 700mm deep.

The stratigraphy was confusing, although a burnt layer up to 250mm deep was visible. The black soil visible on the surface and in section was thought to be consolidated try-works ash. A layer of sand up to 200mm deep covered much of this area. This was assumed to be from the sandblow that Monro described in 1844.

No surface evidence was found of the Upper and Middle Fisheries, at Harrington Point or along Te Rauone Beach.

While most of the Otakou site is not visible on the surface it is probably well preserved since it was sealed beneath a layer of sand soon after it ceased operation. A reconstruction of William Davison's 1844 survey of the harbour together with two later photographs showing Harwood's derelict store indicate that the flagstaff, behind the store, would have been at 10m grid reference 3221 8721. The try-works at Wellers Rock is the only visible remains but was under threat from erosion. It was the subject of an excavation in March 1991 (Campbell 1992: 134).

Taieri Island (Moturata) I45/62
Grid ref. I45 945 574

The station at Taieri Island was established in 1839 on behalf of the Weller Brothers. It procured only 8 tons of oil in 1840 and was subsequently closed. At the time of Tuckett and Monro's visit in 1844 the station was being run by Tommy Chaseland on his own behalf. According to statistics in the "New Zealand Spectator and Cook Straits Guardian" he too only whaled at Taieri for two years.

Monro (1898: 247) describes being "rushed up a species of wooden railway by a following sea ... We then ascended a sort of staircase along the edge of a steep cliff, with a rude balustrade to hold on by; and, on a little platform at the top, found a number of grass huts, the habitations of the whalers". There are two parts of this station visible. One is the whalers' village, partially excavated by Coutts in 1972, uncovering a hut site ca. 6.5 x 3m with nineteenth century artefacts (Coutts 1976). The other is the try-works area which is situated in a rocky cove on the western shore of the island. Below it is a sloping sandy beach. Both Coutts (1976: 293) and Martin Palmer (pers. comm.) identified this as the station site. It also fits Monro's description from 1844. Any visible evidence of the whaling station is ambiguous. Three fire-pits (measuring 1 x 1m, 1 x 1m, and 2 x 1.5m), visible about half way up the cove, could represent the try-works. Mr Palmer reports that three try-pots are thought to have come from the island, one of which is on his property at Taieri Mouth. These try-pots could coincide with the three pits. Burnt bone was visible in one pit, while the soil showed dark sand containing charcoal.

About 15m above the cove is a cleared area amongst the flax, about 6 x 6m. This is Coutts' 1972 excavation site. The outlines of the north and west walls remain. Surface finds here include 19th century glass, iron and numerous pieces of sawn bone. Another hut site was visible 30m to the north where the outline of a chimney could be seen as well as some possible walls. Charcoal was visible within the chimney while clay was visible in the sand matrix outside it, presumably used as mortar for the chimney. 20m north a further hut was visible, though not as clearly outlined as the other two. Along the whole slope rocks have been exposed by erosion and it is not certain if these rocks were part of the whalers' houses. Monro had described the whalers' houses as grass huts. Due to ongoing erosion the hut sites can be expected to disappear in the near future. On the slope below the huts clay pipe stems, glass, ceramics, metal and sawn bone were found and collected for analysis. Presumably these have eroded out of the house sites and rolled down the slope.

While this is one of the most visible stations surveyed this is unfortunately due to the ongoing erosion of the site. The huts and the material downhill from them are all clearly whaling period artefacts. One ceramic makers mark was identified as Copeland and Garrett New Fayence ware, manufactured between 1833 and 1847, dates that coincide with the station's operation.

Molyneux (Matau) H46/53 S176/46
Grid ref. H46 627 179

The Molyneux station was founded by William Palmer in 1838 and ran for one season before Palmer moved to Tautuku.

A 1940s description claims that "the old whaling station was situated at the southern end of Willsher Bay, the try-pots being on the beach just about where the big bluegums now stand" (Waite 1940: 8). Mrs L. Dunn (pers. comm.), a 5th generation descendant of William Palmer, was told by her great grandmother that whaling was carried on south of the Karoro Creek and at Nugget Burn mouth. No surface evidence of the whaling station remains visible anywhere along the sandy beach at Willsher Bay, neither has Mrs Dunn ever seen any evidence. The situation is very exposed and any evidence has probably been destroyed.

Tautuku S184/82
Grid ref. G47 366 949

The Tautuku station was established in 1839 by William Palmer, who the year before had whaled at the Molyneux station. Monro (1898: 249) described "a small river [running] into the sea here forming a boat harbour, which is further protected by a projecting ledge of rock". The station ran until at least 1846. Catches do not seem to have been high, as up to the time of Shortland's visit in 1843 the station had obtained only 44 tons of oil in 5 years, representing 8 or 9 whales.

The Tautuku site was first recorded by Jane Teal and Jill Hamel in 1977. Here they found a midden of cockle, pipi and mussel but no direct evidence of the station. Prehistoric middens are also evident on the peninsula and isthmus and there is no evidence that those found by Teal and Hamel are connected with the whalers.

The station was situated in the sheltered main bay on the peninsula. Cribbs have been built on the slope above it. Les Lockerbie (pers. comm.) reports that in the 1920s clay pipe stems could be found in abundance below the turf on the slope above the "fish shed" which still stands. Allan Dew (pers. comm.), who owns the last crib on the peninsula above the fish shed, reports having found occasional shell midden below the surface but no European material. The whalers' village is believed to have been situated just south of the sand dune on the isthmus, just below where the first crib now stands. A flax mill was later built on the site and has obscured any evidence of the settlement. Building terraces are still visible, as are the piles of the flax mill's wharf on the beach.

Waikawa S183/19
Grid ref. G47 144 887

Although this station is among the best preserved in the study area its history is among the least known. Shortland (1974: 300) records that it was originally established for "Groce of Sydney" in 1838 and subsequently owned by Johnny Jones. In 1840 it procured only three and a half tons of oil and was subsequently abandoned. Monro described Waikawa in 1844 as "totally uninhabited, but the traces of its former occupation by a whaling party are to be seen in old try-pots and oil-casks and bones of whales" (Monro 1898: 250).

At the same time Tuckett observed that "the exterior headlands are grassy, most probably cleared by whalers for the purpose of keeping a lookout on them" (Tuckett 1898: 220).

This site was first recorded by Jane Teal and Jill Hamel in 1976 and again by Warren Gumbley in 1989. The midden of shellfish, glass and charcoal exposed in a bank and described by Teal and Hamel is no longer visible.

The site is in the first bay inside the north head of Waikawa Harbour. In an exposed section at the northwest end of the bay at the end of the cliff, barrel bands, brick, heat fractured stone and charcoal may be seen below a lens of shell midden, which may be historical or have been redeposited by slumping.

The iron is very corroded. In the bed of the creek, 40m from the cliff, some small ceramic sherds were found. In the exposed bank to the true right of the stream mouth ceramic sherds, barrel bands, charcoal and heat-fractured stone were visible in section and the ceramics and some barrel bands were collected. The sherds are pieces of approximately half a willow pattern plate with the mark "GENUINE STONE CHINA J." in a laurel wreath on the back. This mark has not been identified.

No lookout could be observed on the heads above the station but an area of boulders just below the trig point affords the best view, at grid reference 141 887.

Tokanui S183/103
Grid ref. F47 905 912

James Wybrow's son, speaking of his father, is quoted in Beattie (1909: 75) as saying that Wybrow and Johnny Davis "started 'bay whaling' at Tokanui Mouth". Wing's chart shows a whaling station at Tokanui but there is no evidence that the station was actually operating in 1844 at the time the *Deborah* was in the area.

No visible surface evidence of the whaling station remains. The river mouth appears to be unstable, and any evidence has presumably been swept away.

Toe-toes (Fortrose or Mataura) S181-2/177
Grid ref. F47 878 947

In 1835 a station was established at the Mataura mouth by Tommy Chaseland and James Brown. Shortland relates that "in 1835, a party of whalers established themselves, and shortly after their arrival killed eleven whales in seventeen days. This is recorded as the greatest feat of the kind ever performed in the country. By the strangest neglect, no casks had been sent to the station; so that the whole of the oil was lost. Afterwards, when they had casks, no more fish were caught; and the place has ever since been abandoned" (Shortland 1974: 145). The station would probably have been situated in the first bay inside the south head of the estuary, below the golf course. The site is a small sheltered bay with a sandy beach with an ideal lookout on the cliffs above it, grid ref. 879 943 but no visible surface evidence of the whaling station remains.

Bluff (Stirling Point) S181-2/174
Grid ref. E47, D47 543 896

In 1836 Johnny Jones established a whaling station at Bluff Harbour with William Stirling as manager. Wing's chart shows a "whaling station" at Stirling Point and another "station", not so well placed, at Spencers Bay. Stirling's station would have been the main station, with Spencer perhaps assisting when the catch was bought in. Between 1838 and 1843 Shortland records annual returns of between 63 and 90 tons of oil. The Bluff station was the most consistent in this respect long after many of the other stations had begun to decline. In 1844 Tuckett recorded that "Mr.[Stirling] and Mr.[Howell], of Jacob's River, are whaling this season in concert, on their own account. Each has a schooner and a shore party" (Tuckett 1898: 221). Stirling continued to whale until his death in 1851.

The site was probably situated where the old pilot station is visible today. A large try-pot visible in the background of an 1870 photo indicates that this was also the site of the whaling station. Artefacts have eroded out of the bank above the beach to the east of the pilot station but the area above has been levelled. Any evidence of the whaling station is either overlain by the pilot station or sealed beneath the levelled turf above it. Surface finds include 19th century glass and ceramics in two discrete find sites. About halfway between the old slipway and the signal house 19th century glass and ceramics and waterworn brick lie on the surface above the tidal zone. Artefacts collected include a "pig snout" and three conical collar case gin tops. A pig snout is an irregular, crudely applied lip that indicates an early date, whereas the more neatly applied conical collars came to supplant them between the 1850s and 70s. Further pig snouts and other 19th century glass were visible wedged in the rocks in the inter-tidal zone. Above the slipway some brick, iron and 19th century ceramic was visible in the bank.

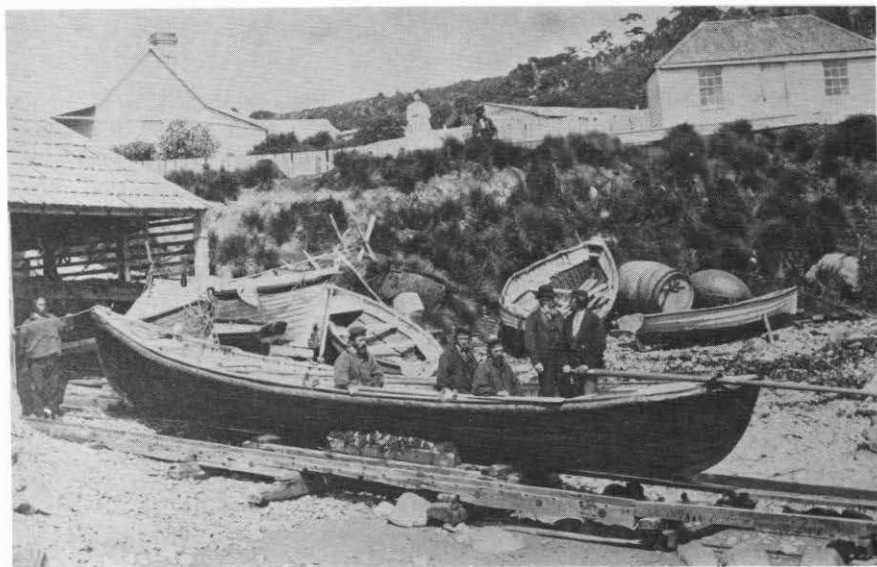


Fig. 3. The pilot station at Bluff in the 1870s, showing the try-pots in the background.

Oue (New River) S181-2/172
Grid ref. E47, D47 490 038

Owen McShane set up a whaling station for Johnny Jones at Oue in 1836. Local historian Les Ryan (pers. comm.) believes the site of the whaling station to have been at Coopers Creek. Along the south bank, extending from the mouth of the creek to 50m inland, any evidence of whaling is obscured by cribs and rapid soil accumulation due to humus deposition and sand blows. However, this is almost certainly the site of the whalers' village since the creek is named for the station's cooper, Owen McShane, and it is the only local source of fresh water. This may not have been the site of the try-works or lookout. These would have been closer to Sandy Point at the estuary mouth or perhaps at Whalers Bay.

Omaui (New River)
Grid ref. E47, D47 487 007

This station, of which no surface evidence remains, was established in conjunction with the Oue station in 1836 and was managed for Johnny Jones by John Williams. W.J.W. Hamilton's map of 1849 shows "Tryworks Point" on

the north-east point of the Mokomoko Inlet channel. Here there is a sloping sandy beach suitable for use by the whalers.

Riverton (Aparima or Jacob's River) S176/111
Grid ref. D46 266 162

The station was established in 1837 on behalf of Johnny Jones by Capt. John Howell. Howell continued to whale for Jones for a number of years but in 1844 Tuckett recorded Howell working with William Stirling of Bluff (Tuckett 1898: 221). Wing's chart shows the location of the station. In 1858 Thompson reported that Howell still whaled by ship on the West Coast, though it seems likely that the shore station would no longer have been in use.

The site of the whaling station is presumed to have been in the vicinity of Howell's monument, on the south shore of Jacobs River Estuary approximately 700m east of the bridge on State Highway 99. The area around the monument has been levelled and no surface evidence of the whaling station was visible although artefacts were found eroding from the bank below. While much of this was 20th century in origin and modern dumping has continued at the site, some of the material was clearly of 19th century origin. Artefacts found and collected for analysis included 19th century glass, ceramics, bone, and clay pipe stems. The only datable artefact found was the piece of pipe-stem marked "W. WHITE" on one side and "GLASGOW" on the other. William White made pipes in Glasgow between 1805 and 1837, indicating a provenance coinciding with the whaling era. Most of the assemblage, with a few late and obvious exceptions, could have come from this period.

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