

= Tay Whale =

The Tay Whale , known locally as The Monster , was a humpback whale that swam into the Firth of Tay of eastern Scotland in 1883 . It was harpooned in a hunt , but escaped , and was found floating dead off Stonehaven a week later . It was towed into Dundee by a showman , John Woods , and exhibited on a train tour of Scotland and England .

The Regius Professor of Anatomy at Aberdeen University , John Struthers dissected the whale , much of the time in public with a military band playing in the background , organised by Woods . The decomposing whale made Woods a great deal of money , and Struthers famous .

William McGonagall wrote an infamously bad poem about the events .

= = History = =

In December 1883 , a humpback whale appeared in the Firth of Tay off the shore of Dundee , at that time the country 's major whaling port , and attracted much local interest . The whalers normally hunted in the Arctic , but as the whaling boats were in harbour for the winter , some of the whalers decided to hunt this animal in their own waters .

After several failed attempts , they harpooned the humpback on 31 December 1883 . It was a strong male , and it towed two rowing boats and two steamboats as far as Montrose and then to the Firth of Forth . After a struggle that lasted all night , the harpoon lines broke and the whale escaped .

A week later the whale was found dead , floating out at sea . It was towed to Stonehaven and dragged onto the beach . John Struthers , the Regius professor of Anatomy at Aberdeen , quickly visited the carcass , recording it as 40 feet long with flukes measuring 11 feet 4 inches . A local entrepreneur , John Woods , bought the whale and had it transported to his yard in Dundee . On the first Sunday that it was there , 12 @, @ 000 people paid to see it .

The local newspaper , the Dundee Courier , published at least 21 stories on the Tay Whale between 12 November 1883 and 11 January 1884 . The headlines included :

Appearance of a Whale in the River - 12 November

Whale Hunting in the Tay - 16 November

Return of the Whale to the Tay - 21 November

On the Trail of the Whale - 7 December

Christmas Greeting from the Whale - 25 December

The Whale Interviewed by his Mother on his Exploits in the River Tay (poem) - 27 December

The Whale Hunt in the Tay . Exciting Chase - 1 January

The Whale Hunt in the Tay . Escape of the Whale - 2 January

The Runaway Whale - 4 January

The Tay Whale Found Dead - 8 January

The Whale 's Corpus - 9 January

The Recovered Whale at Stonehaven . Sale of the Monster to a Dundee Man - 11 January

Finally on 25 January 1884 , when the whale was too badly decomposed for further public exhibition , Struthers was allowed to come and dissect the famous specimen . He was well used to working on stinking carcasses : his dissecting room was reputed to stink " like the deck of a Greenland whaler " . He had two assistants ; but the dissection was disturbed by John Woods , who admitted the public , for a fee , to watch the dissection in progress , while a military band played in the background .

There were snow showers , but Struthers was able to remove much of the skeleton before Woods had the flesh embalmed ; the carcass was then stuffed and sewn up to be taken on a profitable tour as far as Edinburgh and London . Finally on 7 August 1884 Struthers was able to remove the skull and the rest of the skeleton . Struthers eventually wrote seven anatomy articles over the next decade on the whale , and ultimately published a complete monograph on it in 1889 , entitled *Memoir on the Anatomy of the Humpback Whale , Megaptera Longimana* .

In 2011 , the whale 's skeleton was displayed in the McManus Galleries in Dundee .

= = Fame for anatomist = =

Struthers became popularly famous for his dissection of the Tay Whale , his largest specimen . It was one of a wide range of specimens of many species that he energetically collected to form a museum of zoology , to illustrate Darwin 's theories .

= = Fame in doggerel = =

The whale became so famous that the doggerel poet William Topaz McGonagall (1825 ? 1902) wrote a notably bad poem , " The Famous Tay Whale " , about it . Two of the verses run :

And my opinion is that God sent the whale in time of need ,
No matter what other people may think or what is their creed ;
I know fishermen in general are often very poor
And God in His goodness sent it to drive poverty from their door .

So Mr. John Wood has bought it for two hundred and twenty @-@ six pound ,
And has brought it to Dundee all safe and all sound ;
Which measures forty feet in length from the snout to the tail ,
So I advise the people far and near to see it without fail .

This was not the only piece of doggerel verse about the whale , as a poet signing himself " Spectator " published " The Whale Interviewed by his Mother on his Exploits in the River Tay " in the Dundee Courier , with verses such as :

Oh ! why went you there , my son , my son ,
Within the range of their banging gun ?
" Fear not , mother , ? twas only a lark ,
I reckoned they would shoot wide of the mark . "

= = Anatomical drawings of the Tay Whale by John Struthers = =