

BLOOD ON THE ICE (SOUTH OF SOUTH GEORGIA)

(Ron Baxter/anon)

(based on a fragment heard on the M.T. Hector Hawk)

Now our business is bloody,
The truth for to tell.
We're just a slaughterhouse,
Out on the swell.
There's no romance
As in times long gone by -
It's "Fire the harpoon!"
And another whale dies.

Then it's "Tow him alongside!"
And winch him on board.
Then the flensers get cutting
And the blood around us pours.
With the aid of the winches
His blubber it is torn,
Then he's stripped of his flesh
Right down to the bone.

Now the blood of the whale
And the white of the ice
Are there on our funnel,
As our fleet's device.
Though our business is bloody,
When all is done and said -
We all have our families
At home to keep fed.

Here on the Balaena,
We are stuck for eight months;
It's work, work and more work,
Then collapse into your bunks;
We're cruising around
In the snow, hail and sleet,
South of South Georgia,
On Hectors' whaling fleet.

Blood on the Ice: Notes (RB) :-

I heard an incomplete version of this on the M.T. (Motor Tanker) Hector Hawk, from an Ulsterman 2nd Engineer who had sailed many years before with the vessel's original owners, Hector Whaling. The company had been formed in 1938 when the Norwegian firm "Hektor" relocated to London. The

tankers would sail to the South Atlantic laden with fuel oil for the start of the whaling season. While the catchers and the factory ship were working, the crew would clean tanks and return to London at the end of the season with a cargo of whale oil. When the company abandoned the whaling trade in the late fifties, its tankers were bought by Cayzer Irvine.

The Balaena - was the factory ship where the captured whales were brought for processing.

"---our fleet's device" - the Hector's house flag, painted on the funnel, was a rectangle divided diagonally, and coloured red on the top left, white on the bottom right.

Due to the fragmentary form in which I collected the song, I felt I should write some lines so that it made sense. Verses in italics* were definitely the ones I collected; some of the other lines may be too, but after this time I can't remember which were original and which were mine. Sorry! The original fragment was sung to the hymn tune "Slane" (Be Thou My Vision).

I believe (though with no evidence) that this is the last song "made up" on the British Whaling Fleet. I would guess it was made in the early fifties.

"Blood on the Ice" has been recorded by Hughie Jones on his latest CD "Seascape". The same track features on a compilation CD (titled "Blood on the Ice") of Ron Baxter's songs by various artists, both CDs available from The Chantey Cabin (<http://www.chanteycabin.co.uk/>).

Hughie used the "Slane" tune on his recording. For Red Duster's CD "Farewell to the Clan Line", Ross Campbell reset the song to his own tune.

Note (RJC):- John Bailey of Fleetwood continued working in the Merchant Navy until a couple of years ago. He relates the story of a young apprentice being left with the maintenance crew to over-winter at the whaling-station in South Georgia (cf Harry Robertson's "Wee Pot Stove" for the sort of conditions to be found there). The relief crew turned up in the spring as expected. However, somebody decided it would be a good joke to tell the apprentice that his trip home would have to wait till the next year. Before anyone realized what was happening, the boy took a shotgun, went round the back of the hut and killed himself.

RJC

italics* - pasting in lost my Word formatting - don't know the html for that - collected lines as recalled by Ron were:-

Verse 3, lines 1-4, verse 4, lines 1&2, 6-8