

## The Bonnie Ship The Diamond

1. The Diamond is a ship, my lads  
For the Davis Strait she's bound;  
The quay it is all garnishéd  
With bonnie lasses 'round.  
Cap'n Thompson gives the order  
To sail the ocean wide -  
Where the sun it never sets, my lads  
Nor darkness dims the sky.

**And it's cheer up my lads  
Let your hearts never fail,  
For the Bonnie Ship the Diamond  
Goes a-fishin' for the whale.**

2. Along the quay at Peterhead  
The lasses stand aroun'  
Wi' their shawls all pulled around them  
And the salt tears runnin' down.  
Now don't you weep, my bonnie wee lass  
Though ye be left behind,  
For the rose will bloom on Greenland's ice  
Before we change our mind.

**For it's cheer up my lads  
Let your hearts never fail,  
For the Bonnie Ship the Diamond  
Goes a-fishin' for the whale.**

3. Here's a health to the Resolution  
Likewise the Eliza Swan,  
Here's a health for the Battler o' Montrose  
And the Diamond, ship of fame.  
We wear the trousers o' the white,  
The jackets o' the blue.  
When we return to Peterhead  
We'll have sweethearts anew.



**For it's cheer up my lads  
Let your hearts never fail,  
For the Bonnie Ship the Diamond  
Goes a-fishin' for the whale.**

4. So it will be bright both day and night  
When the whalin' lads come home,  
With ship full up with oil, boys  
And money to our name.  
We'll make the cradles all to rock, And the  
blankets all to tear,  
And every lass in Peterhead sing  
"Hushabye, my dear".

**For it's cheer up my lads  
Let your hearts never fail,  
For the Bonnie Ship the Diamond  
Goes a-fishin' for the whale.**

5. The Diamond is a ship, my lads,  
For the Davis Strait she's bound  
The quay it is all garnishéd  
With bonnie lasses round.  
Captain Thompson gives the order  
To sail the ocean wide -  
Where the sun it never sets, my lads,  
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**For it's cheer up my lads  
Let your hearts never fail,  
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*A bottle of unrefined whale oil*, by [Kurzon](#) and a *Whale oil lamp in brown-glazed earthenware with candle bowl for the wick and base drip pan* by [Claus Ableiter](#), Lyse parish, Bohuslän - now in Nordiska Museet, Stockholm, both from a [Wikipedia article](#).

### Notes:

**Alternative Titles:** The Bonnie ship the Diamond, The Diamond

This is a traditional Scottish song; versions were collected by Grieg and Duncan in 1905 and AL (Bert) Lloyd in 1937.

The **Davis Strait** lies between Greenland and Canada's Baffin Island.

**A.L. Lloyd**, in *Leviathan!* sleeve notes:

Sad events lie behind this most spirited of whaling songs. By the 1820s the relatively milder northern waters were fished clean, and whalersmen were having to search in more distant corners of the Arctic, notably round the mighty and bitter Melville Bay in Northwest Greenland.

In **1830**, a fleet of fifty British whaleships reached the grounds in early June, a month before they expected. But the same winds that had helped them also crowded the Bay with ice floes and locked most of the fleet in, including the Diamond, the Resolution, the Rattler (not Battler) of Leigh (not Montrose), and the Eliza Swan. Twenty fine ships were crushed to splinters and many bold whalersmen froze or drowned.

The Eliza Swan was among those that got free and brought the sad news home. Our song must have been made only a season or two before that tragedy for the Diamond's maiden voyage was only in 1825. One wonders if the man who made the song was up in Melville Bay, the year of the disaster, and whether he was lost with his ship.

A different version of the story is told, for example by the **Scots Language Centre**, Perth - [www.scotslanguage.com/articles/node/id/383](http://www.scotslanguage.com/articles/node/id/383).

This version is about a ship The Diamond from 1819 of the same name but from Aberdeen not Peterhead. For a discussion on which date / ship is the one in this song, see [mudcat.org thread 45251](http://mudcat.org/thread/45251).

The article gives additional information about the life of Scottish whalersmen as well as demonstrating how common was destruction by ice:

"The Diamond sailed to the Davis Strait every year from 1812 to 1819 ... from Aberdeen, as sung in other versions [of the song].

"The whalers would be away for several months, so their womenfolk dressed in their best shawls to see them off. The sailors boasted that when they came back they would be so rich they would burn the whale oil lamps during the day as well as at night.

"In 1819 the ships named in this song were waiting in April at a great wall of ice for the pack ice to melt, but the wind changed and they were all caught and frozen in. The sailors knew this might happen and they had put tree trunks inside across the hulls to make the ships stronger. One by one the ships were squeezed flat, but the sailors knew by the sounds that this was going to happen and they could escape onto the ice. They lived in tents made from the sails and burnt their ships' timbers for warmth.

"They suffered greatly, but after many months they were rescued and came home. They left the Bonnie Ship the Diamond and the other ships behind, crushed flat by the Greenland ice.

"The whale that the whalers went to catch was called the 'Right Whale', because it was the right whale to hunt.

"The sailors got into rowing boats, chased after the whales and threw iron harpoons with long ropes attached. A whale might pull the boat along for hours, or might even hit the boat with its tail and fling the sailors into the icy water.

"When the whale was caught and slaughtered, its fat was cut into chunks and boiled down into oil. The oil was used for lamps, for heat and to oil machinery. The whalebones were very strong and supple, and were used for many things."

**Map indicating Davis Strait, lying between Greenland and Nunavut, Canada,** by [David Kernow](#), from [Wikimedia Commons](#).

