

Feathers and Flight

Dunbar's coastline and nearby islands are home to many sea-bird colonies. Kittiwakes nest on Dunbar Castle every year, gannets fill the Bass Rock and cormorants, shags and other seabirds can be found around the coast. Scotland as a whole is home to 70% of the UK's seabirds, more than any other European country! Scotland's seas are home to a scotch-broth of algae, invertebrates, fish, and marine mammals for our ravenous seabirds. Sadly, an increase in sea temperatures is disturbing the balance of the food chain and the seabird populations are declining.

There is a superstition that kittiwakes should arrive here in Dunbar by the 16th of March for a 'happy and prosperous summer'. Most seabirds arrive in April and nest in May. Their chicks hatch over the summer, then fledge and become independent around August and September. In autumn, some birds head back to sea while others migrate.



Shags, (White-breesters) also Cormorant, (Scart or Scarf).

There are many shags and cormorants on the islands close to Dunbar's coast. Look for them on our white Scart Rock, drying their outstretched wings. Scart means 'cormorant' in Viking languages. Some migrate north to Norway but others over-winter here.

Gannets, (Solangeese, Bass Goose, youngsters are Guga).

Gannets can live over 30 years. They fly low and fast beyond the Battery, diving vertically for fish. The Bass Rock becomes white in summer with 150,000 gannets. In winter they head for islands off the West African coast. They are the largest seabirds in the North Atlantic, with a wingspan of 2 metres (6.6 ft)! In the 18th century young gannets were sold in Edinburgh "at twenty pence Scots apiece [3p] and served up roasted a little before dinner".



Herring gulls (Mawes, Mews, Gous)

See them everywhere around our harbour walls all year round. Their legs are pink and their bills are yellow with a red spot. Herring gulls are scavengers. Don't feed them - they'll start to depend on human food and forget how to feed themselves in winter!



Puffins (Tammie Norries or Ailsa Parrots)

These small birds live on the Isle of May and Fidra, but you can sometimes find them between Dunbar and Belhaven in the summer months, when they come from out in the North Sea or from as far as the Bay of Biscay, Spain's coasts and Morocco.

Which bird is always out of breath? A puffin!



Oystercatchers (Shalders or Sea Pie)

The oystercatcher is a medium sized wading bird. It looks for mussels and cockles on the coast and forages around our harbour at low tide. We have a population that stays all year but is joined by birds from Norway in winter.

Operation ZZ, 1918

On 11th November 1918 World War One ended. Operation ZZ came 10 days later - the day Germany's mighty naval fleet surrendered. Just visible from Dunbar, off the Isle of May, was the greatest gathering of warships the world had ever witnessed.

As an island nation, Britain had built many huge warships to defend itself. Germany's U-boats had come close to strangling Britain in 1917, but the Royal Navy shut off Germany's overseas trade, causing her major problems later in the war.

Germany had agreed to hand its ships over, before proceeding to Scapa Flow in Orkney. On the 21st November, while it was still dark, the Royal Navy's Grand Fleet set sail along the Firth of Forth, joined by 5 American battleships and 3 French warships. More than 150 cruisers and destroyers joined them for a final rendezvous with their enemy, Kaiser Wilhelm's High Seas Fleet - 9 German battleships, 5 battlecruisers, 7 cruisers and 50 destroyers. Germany would deliver her warships into British hands without a shot being fired.

It was not until the 21st June 1919, that the German fleet scuttled itself in Scapa Flow. Many of the wrecks were salvaged over the next two decades and were towed to the Clyde for scrap metal. Germany is now our close friend and a respected NATO ally. Seven remaining German warships have been protected as scheduled monuments, and nowadays Scapa Flow is a world famous diving destination.



The German fleet, escorted by the British in The Firth of Forth, 1918

The Times newspaper described the scene:

"Between our lines (of ships) came the Germans, guided by HMS Cardiff, and looking for all the world like a school of leviathans led by a minnow. By late morning the meeting was over and the ships steamed north to Scapa Flow."

The SS Bayern is scuttled:
Image: Imperial War Museum



Pirate Radio Scotland



"I grew up listening to pirate radio, transistor radio under the pillow, one more and then 'just one more' until a favourite track came on."

Robert Palmer, singer songwriter.

Radio Scotland (1965-66) was an offshore pirate radio station. It began broadcasting on Hogmanay, 31st December 1965, first using a frequency that legally belonged to France (1241Kz/242 metres), but they were pirates after all!

The DJs included Paul Young, Richard Park, Stuart Henry and Jack McLaughlin. Most of them later joined BBC Radio 1 and BBC Radio Scotland. They were based on the Irish ex-lightship The Comet.

The station had an exciting life, anchored initially off Dunbar, then towed to Troon, Belfast Loch and finally off the Isle of May and Fife Ness, usually outside territorial waters (12 nautical miles). This gave eastern Scotland a strong signal; the 'water run' meant the signal was more 'listenable'. Radio Scotland promised to "tickle the tartan tonsils" and was supplied using boats from Dunbar, skippered by Peter (Boups) Johnstone and Walter Easingwood.

Radio Scotland's closure was caused by the Marine Offences Act in 1967. The station that "swings to you on 242" entertained millions in Scotland, Ireland and northern England. On closure they hurled their last discs into the sea; maybe the discs are still on the seabed.



Brilliant Symbols

The earliest mention of a lighthouse in Scotland is in 1635. Charles I granted a patent to James Maxwell of Innerwick and John Cunninghame of Barnes - to erect a lighthouse on the Isle of May, at the mouth of the Firth of Forth. The light was a coal fire.

The Stevenson family of Edinburgh built most of Scotland's lighthouses. Shown here are some of the lighthouses you can see from Dunbar.

Lighthouses are maintained by the Northern Lighthouse Board. In 2015 they had responsibility for,



Dunbar once had its own lighthouse on the pierhead at Cromwell Harbour. However, an inspection by the 'Lighthouse Stevensons' in 1876, twelve years after it was built, stated that it had *"been shaken to such an extent it has knocked the lighthouse off the perpendicular and has a considerable incline. Its removal is essential as it is off the plumb and may fall at any moment."*



Isle of May
Year Established: 1816
Engineer: Robert Stevenson
Flashes: 2 White every 15 Sec
Nominal Range: 22 nautical miles
Structure: Square tower on Gothic dwelling - 24 metres
Automated: 1989



Fife Ness (Ness is Norse for nose)
Year Established: 1975
Engineer: P. H. Hyslop
Flashes: Red/white every 10 Sec
Nominal Range: 21 nautical miles
Structure: White building 5 metres



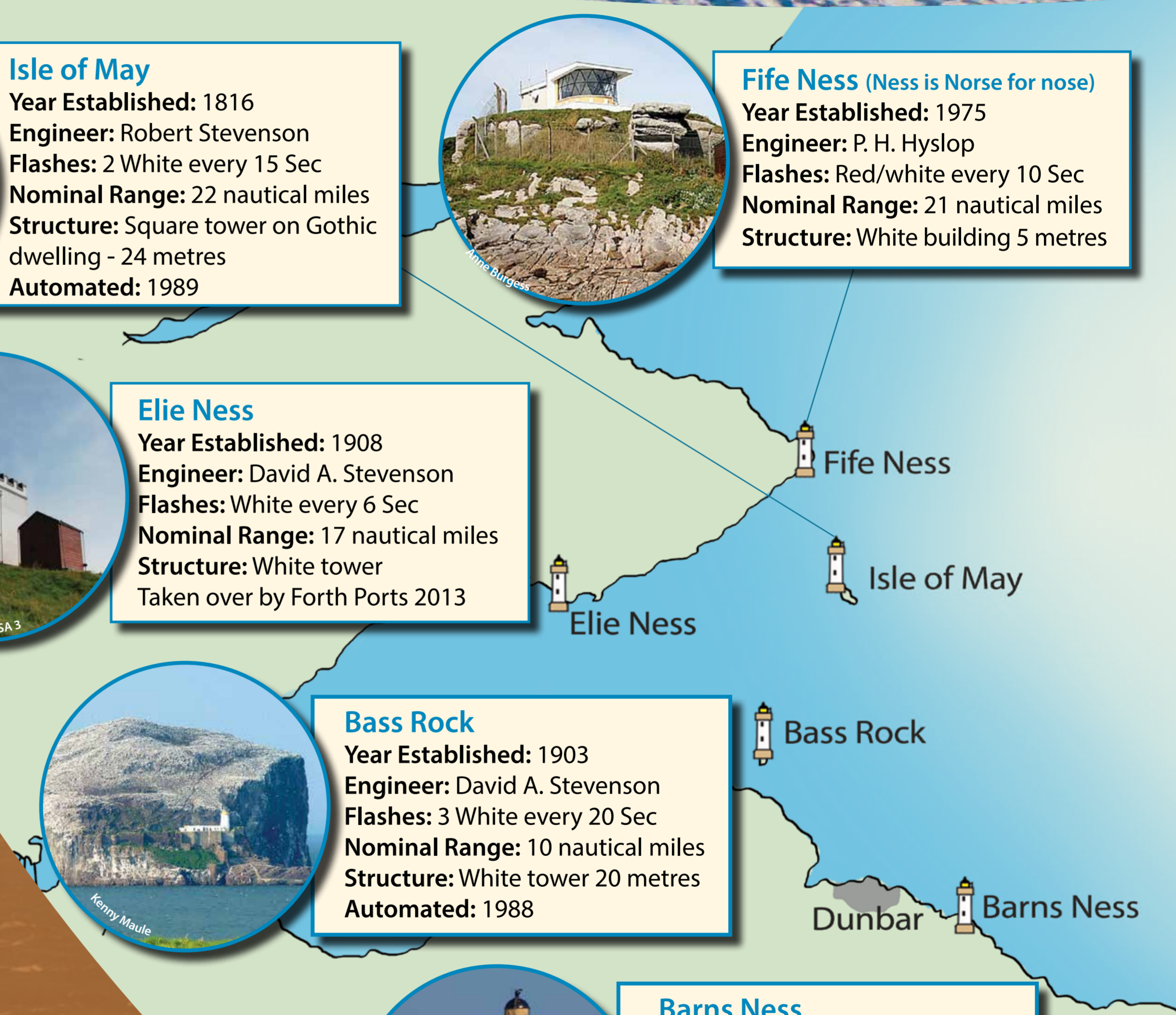
Elie Ness
Year Established: 1908
Engineer: David A. Stevenson
Flashes: White every 6 Sec
Nominal Range: 17 nautical miles
Structure: White tower
 Taken over by Forth Ports 2013



Bass Rock
Year Established: 1903
Engineer: David A. Stevenson
Flashes: 3 White every 20 Sec
Nominal Range: 10 nautical miles
Structure: White tower 20 metres
Automated: 1988



Barns Ness
Year Established: 1901
Engineer: David A. Stevenson
Flashes: Light is decommissioned, was white every 4 sec.
Nominal Range: 10 nautical miles
Structure: White tower 37 metres



Name that Rock!

The rocks stretching along the coast at Dunbar have each been given names whose origins lie in local folklore. Some names can be interpreted with reasonable certainty; but others we have to guess at.

Long Craigs. From the Gaelic, *Creighan*, meaning rocks - long rocks.

Doo Rock. Scots for *dove* or *pigeon* and/or *dhu* is Gaelic for black

Half-Ebb Rock. This covers at half-tide.

Scart Rock. The old Viking name for cormorants and shags that roost here.

Castlefoot Rock. Named for its location below Dunbar Castle.

The Grips or Gripes. Old Scots: to seize, to catch (fish).

Long Steeple and Round Steeple. Perhaps old Scots '*steeple-backit*' - hunch-backed.

The Yetts. From the Old English and Scots languages, meaning gate.

Little Spiker. Scots: *spieker* - A large nail or spike.

Meikle Spiker. Mickle: from Old Norse '*mikell*' much or great, confusingly in Scots a small amount (*many a mickle maks a muckle*).

Broadhaven, once Lammerhaven. From the Gaelic *Lomair*, meaning lambs.

Oliver's Ship. Perhaps linked with Oliver Cromwell who had strong Dunbar connections?

Wallace's Head. Perhaps a connection with William Wallace?

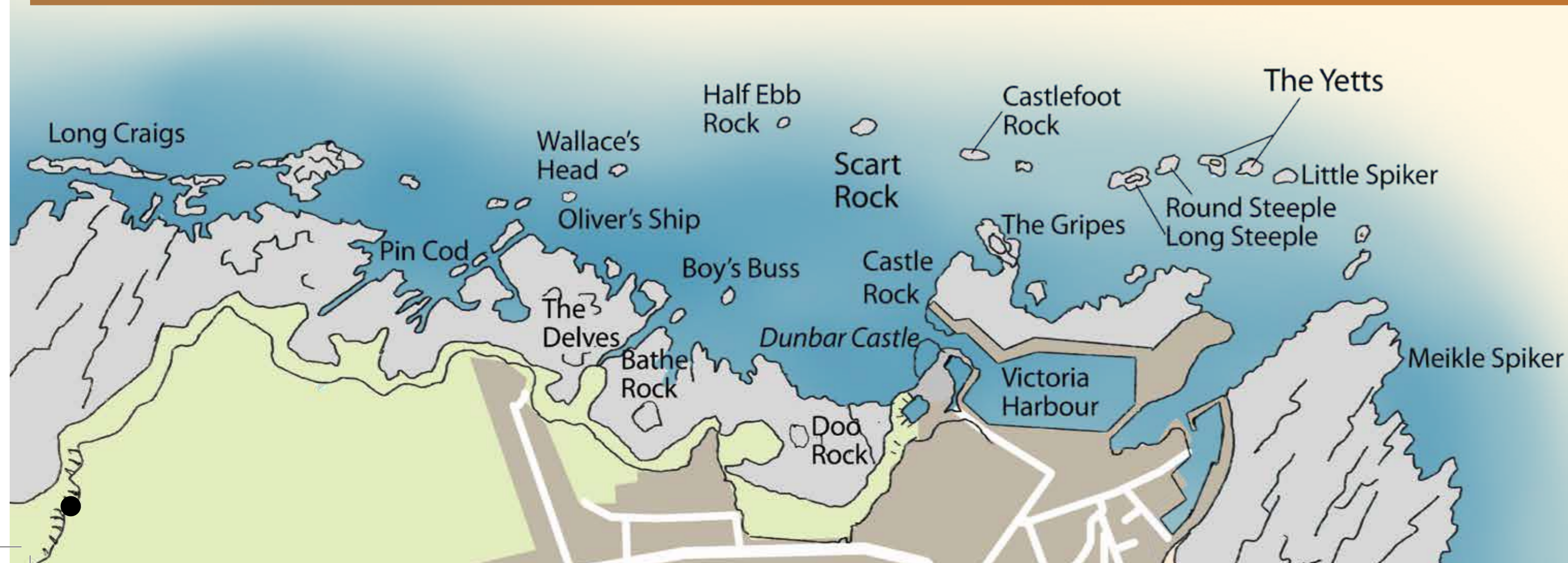
Doo rock is aptly named!



Scart Rock with roosting Shags



Half Ebb Rock with perch, for navigation



Seals and Selkies

Selkies Legends:

Selkies are mythological creatures found in Scottish folklore. They are said to live as seals in the sea but can become human on land when they shed their skin. Many tales revolve around humans stealing their skin to make a selkie stay with them.

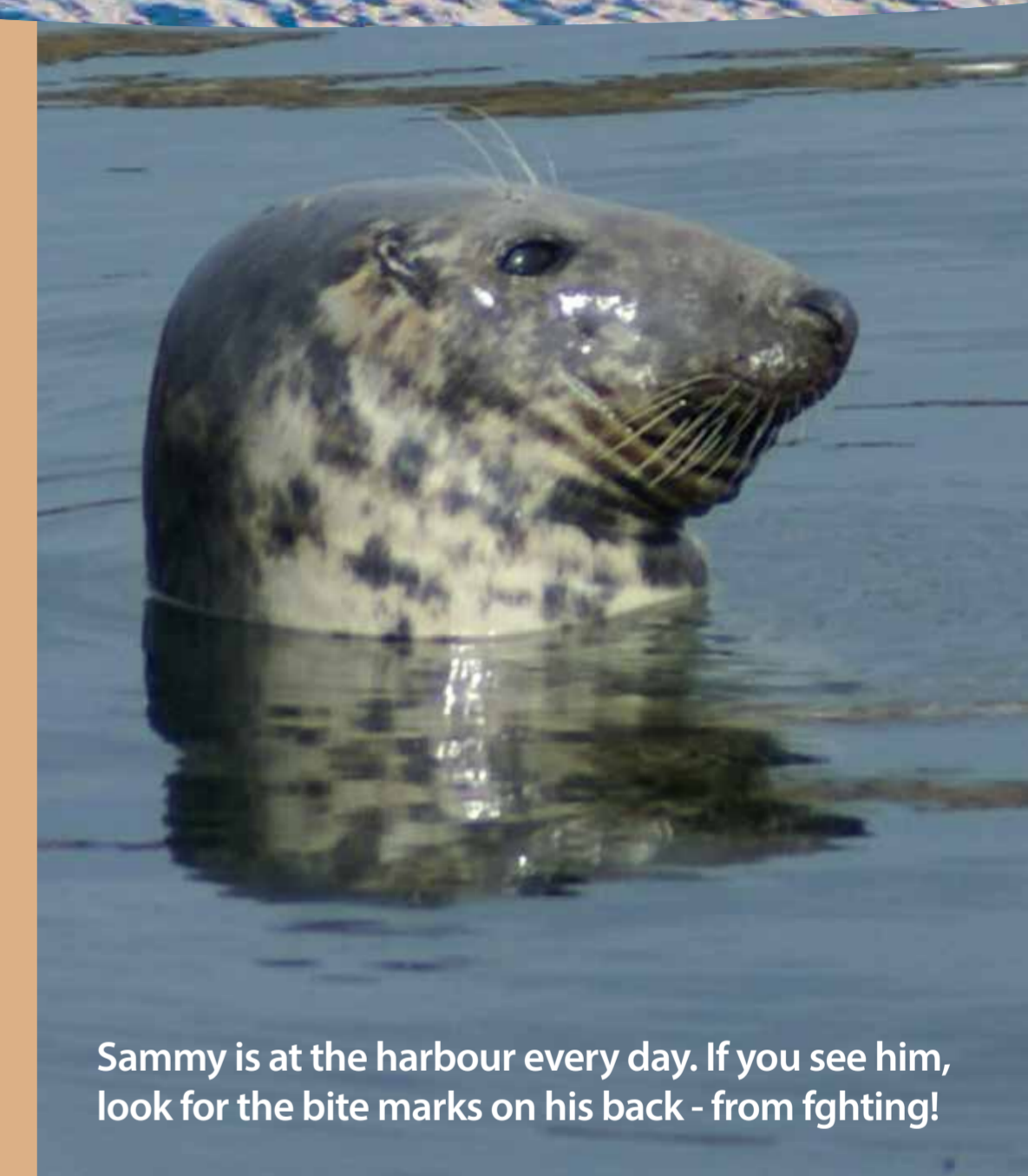
Often the selkie finds its skin many years later and leaves its human family to go back to the sea.

Grey Seals are the most-common mammal here at Dunbar Harbour. Its latin name, *Halichoerus grypus*, means 'hooked-nosed sea pig'. Males are generally darker than females, with lighter patches and often scarring on neck and back. Females are smaller, silver-grey to brown with dark patches.

Sammy patrols Dunbar harbour, cadging fish from the boats. He is sometimes joined by two other seals: a female, Samantha and a younger male, Samuel. You can call all of them 'Sammy'.

They eat a wide variety of fish and sand eels. Outside Dunbar harbour there are dozens of seals, fishing or lying on the rocks for a quiet snooze. Many more come down from the Isle of May. Sometimes you can hear their breathing or their wailing song.

The pups are born from October to December and lie on rocks waiting to shed their dense, soft, silky, white fur. At this point, they can't swim! Within a month they grow dense waterproof adult fur, and enter the sea to fish for themselves.



Sammy is at the harbour every day. If you see him, look for the bite marks on his back - from fighting!



A seal pup in the harbour

A Barometer for Boats

The Fishermen's Monument was erected in 1856 by local benefactor, William Brodie. It is dedicated to the fishermen of Dunbar and houses a useful barometer - they were not common at the time. The monument is a Grade B listed structure. It was restored in 1998 by the Dunbar Initiative Project. The white carving is Carrera marble and was completely recarved. In 2012 the Dunbar Shore & Harbour Neighbourhood Group raised funds to restore the damaged stonework however the sandstone will continue to deteriorate in our salt-laden atmosphere. The existing barometer is not the original and no longer works.

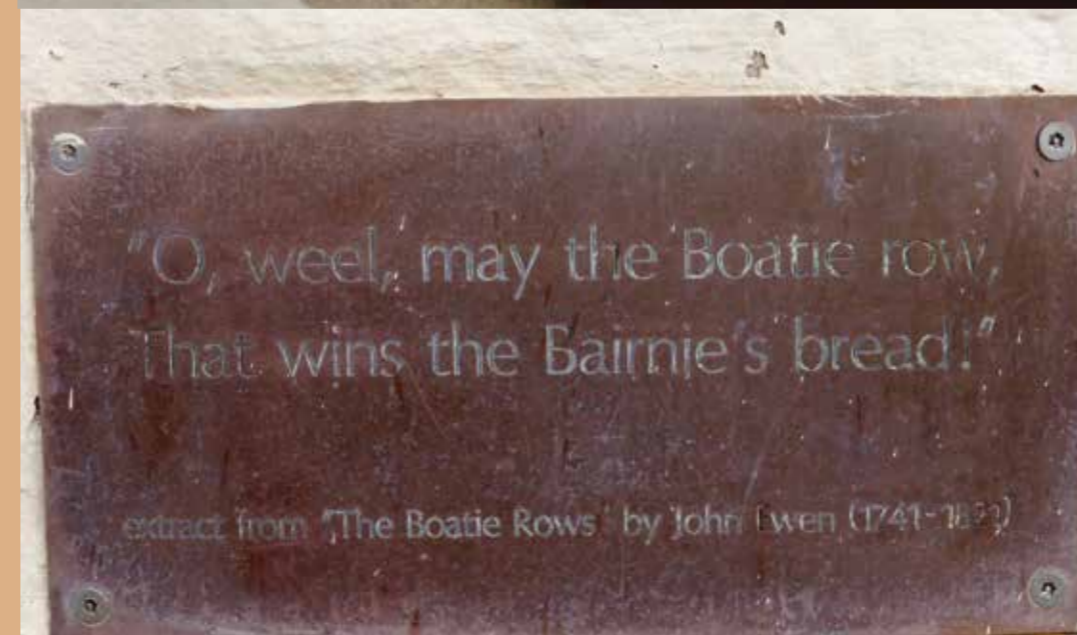


How does the barometer work?

The barometer measures air pressure by using the weight of mercury acting against changing air pressure.

Dropping pressure means the weather is deteriorating. Rising pressure means the weather is improving.

People who say they can feel rain coming in their joints may be right! When the barometric pressure drops, the pressure against your body drops as well, so joints and injured areas begin to swell - causing increased inflammation and pain.



The relief image on the barometer tells a story. A fisherman is in his boat, while his wife points to the barometer below and begs him not to sail. In the boat an old woman points to the dark, cloudy sky, while two boys prepare to cast off. Above the relief is an inscription: 'Presented to the Fishermen of Dunbar, To Whose Perilous Industry The Burgh Owes So Much Of Its Prosperity.'



Whence came that fair ship?

A huge variety of ships pass the Dunbar coast, or anchor at the mouth of the Forth. If you have ever wanted to know more about them, perhaps we can help.

Q *Many ships moor off Dunbar, sometimes for weeks. Why?*

A It's a safe place to anchor and wait.

Q *But why Dunbar?*

A Dunbar is just outside the Firth of Forth, so ships can avoid mooring fees. There is a Forth Ports Authority line from Fife Ness to Great Carr (near the Bass Rock). If your ship crosses - you pay!

Q *What are they waiting for?*

A Their owners will decide what their ship will do next - this will be for commercial reasons.

Q *Why do they point east and then later west?*

A They are moved by tides, currents and winds.

Q *What do the crew do while they are out there?*

A Maintenance, fitness, watch videos, telephone home. Often they cannot come ashore because they have no UK entry visa.

Q *Where will they go next?*

A Anywhere in the whole, wide world.



What kind of boats pass us?
Bulk Carriers, Tugs, Cruise Liners, Fishery Protection Vessels, Oil Rigs, Research Ships, Survey Ships, Military Ships, Aircraft Carriers, Sail Training Yachts - and more!



Looking at the Big Sky

So much goes on as we look out to sea, but remember to look up too!

The harbour boasts big, ever-changing skies. Throughout the year you can see a variety of atmospheric or optical phenomena both day and night. These happen because of the interaction of light from the sun or moon with the atmosphere, clouds, water, dust, and other particles. From here, everything from aurora borealis (northern lights) to eclipses have been viewed. What's happening right now?



Gavin Douglas

At Dunbar's latitudes, **noctilucent clouds** can be seen during the summer months, only when the Sun is below the horizon. Noctilucent roughly means 'night-shining' in Latin.

Alan Dyer

In spring and autumn the sun sets exactly in the harbour entrance. Red light waves are least affected by particles in the atmosphere, so a low sun creates a beautiful sunset.

Fata Morgana mirages are images that are stacked on top of one another. Layers of warm and cool air act like a refracting lens, distorting the view behind.

In a **double rainbow**, a second arc is seen outside the primary arc. The order of its colours is reversed, with red on the inner side of the arc.



When the sun is just over the horizon, these very unusual **nacreous clouds**, high in the stratosphere, are illuminated from below. They are usually seen in the polar regions, but this image was taken in Dunbar. The small size of the water droplets means the light is reflected in this distinctive way. It's easy to see why they are known as 'mother of pearl' clouds.



Storms and Surges

Dunbar's harbours have withstood many storms over hundreds of years, sheltering boats from the worst the sea has to offer. But there have been some significant storms which have impacted our coast.



THE DISASTERS OF A NIGHT. 1847, December 6.
The weather, which had been uncommonly mild for the season, changed on Sunday, when the neighbourhood of Dunbar was visited by a storm of snow and hail from the southwards, and towards the evening of Monday the wind became high, amounting to a perfect hurricane from the south-east, accompanied with rain and sleet.
The sea set in with tremendous fury, and, melancholy to relate, with great loss of life and property on the coast and on the morning of Tuesday the shore betwixt Berwick and Dunbar was literally strewed with wrecks. At the Catcraig, between Dunbar and Skateraw, the Belgian sloop Le Rodeur of Bruges, with a cargo of apples for Glasgow, was cast on shore, high on the beach, and the crew saved. Two of them were washed off the deck, but regained it by the next wave, and got on shore much exhausted. This vessel sustained very little damage. Her cargo was sold by auction on the spot.
-- James Miller, author and poet.

On the morning of 14 October, 1881, the vast majority of the skippers from Eyemouth, Burnmouth, Cove, and St Abbs ignored warnings and sailed at dawn, just before a severe storm. They headed back for shelter but many boats either overturned or were dashed on the rocky coast. The close-knit fishing communities along our coast lost 189 men at sea and 19 boats. Family members watched as their husbands, brothers and fathers drowned before their eyes. 73 widows lost their husband and 263 children lost their father.



Sculptor Jill Watson, originally from Cove, was commissioned to produce four statues for Eyemouth, Burnmouth, Cove and St Abbs, each one depicting the exact number of widows and fatherless children affected by the disaster.

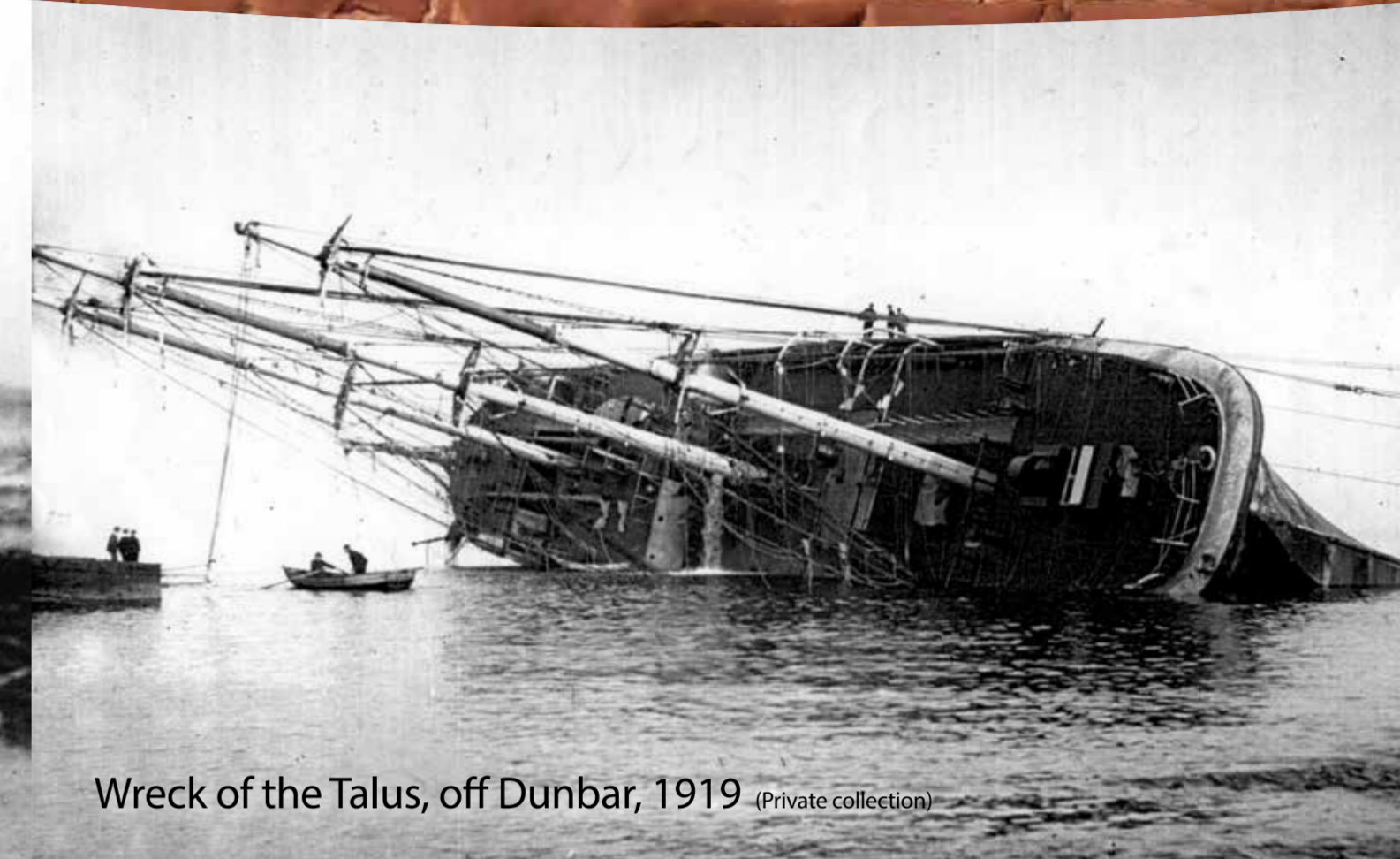
Wrecks and Rocks

Within 10 miles of Dunbar, four hundred wrecks have been recorded since 1729. Before lighthouses, navigation errors were easily made.

There are tragic stories attached to many of the wrecks. HMS Fox was one of the ships that escorted Sir John Cope's army into Dunbar prior to the Battle of Prestonpans. She was destroyed by storms off Dunbar on the 14th November 1745. She ran aground and broke apart and although the crew may have numbered 200, only nine were saved.



A Norwegian steamer, the Prosum, 1908, ashore at Dunbar in two halves. A well-known local diver benefited from this wreck!



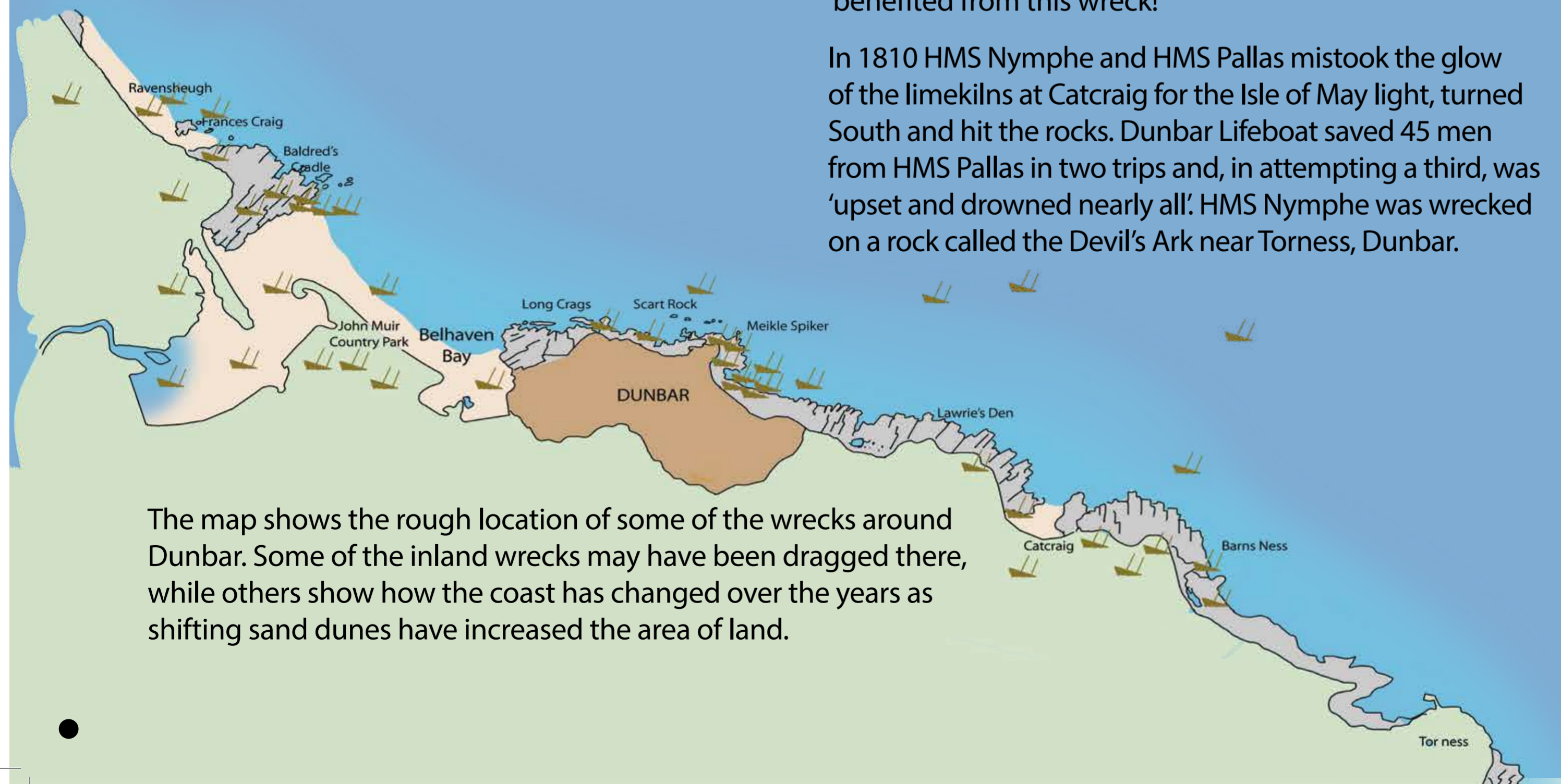
Wreck of the Talus, off Dunbar, 1919 (Private collection)

In 1810 HMS Nympe and HMS Pallas mistook the glow of the limekilns at Catcraig for the Isle of May light, turned South and hit the rocks. Dunbar Lifeboat saved 45 men from HMS Pallas in two trips and, in attempting a third, was 'upset and drowned nearly all'. HMS Nympe was wrecked on a rock called the Devil's Ark near Torness, Dunbar.



Dunbar lifeboat, Sir Ronald Pechell BT, Trent Class

The map shows the rough location of some of the wrecks around Dunbar. Some of the inland wrecks may have been dragged there, while others show how the coast has changed over the years as shifting sand dunes have increased the area of land.



In March 2008 disaster struck the Dunbar lifeboat. It was moored at Torness Harbour where it should have been relatively safe. During the night there were force 8 gales and very high seas. The lifeboat suffered catastrophic damage and was beyond repair. It was stripped of everything that could be salvaged, then tragically decommissioned and broken up.

Baleen and Blubber

Did you know there was once a whaling industry here?

Whaling ships had been sailing from Scottish harbours for over 200 years when the East Lothian and Merse Whale Fishing Company was founded in Dunbar in 1752 and ended in 1804.

Five whaling boats employed 238 men. Voyages to Greenland set out in March, returning in July. The cargoes of whale blubber were examined and certified by the local customs officers. As with much of the industry around the shore, the company was largely controlled by the local Fall family.

Whaling continued from British seaports into the 1970s. Roland Craig and James Burgoyne, working in South Georgia, were two of the last Dunbar men to work on a whaler in the 1960s.



The Eeland (island) End pier, washed away in the 1930s

“The town of Dunbar is considerably engaged in the Greenland Fishery; and we found the smell of the whale-blubber extremely offensive.” Journal of a tour to the Northern Parts of Great Britain, August 1796



Ingram Gordon & Co., Haddington

There are many remnants of older times at the harbour. Look for Roman numerals and a recess in the harbour wall for 17 numbered 'booms' - craned into place to reduce the dangerous surge in the harbour. The left hand image shows the booms ready to be placed.

Take a walk by the Battery. Can you see old tar on the ground?



Ancient wooden bollard (pawl). There are many pawls around the harbour. Most are wood, which has become very hard over the years, but some are disused cannon upended in cement. How many can you find?

