

EENOO THE INUIT'S VISIT TO ABERDEEN 1839

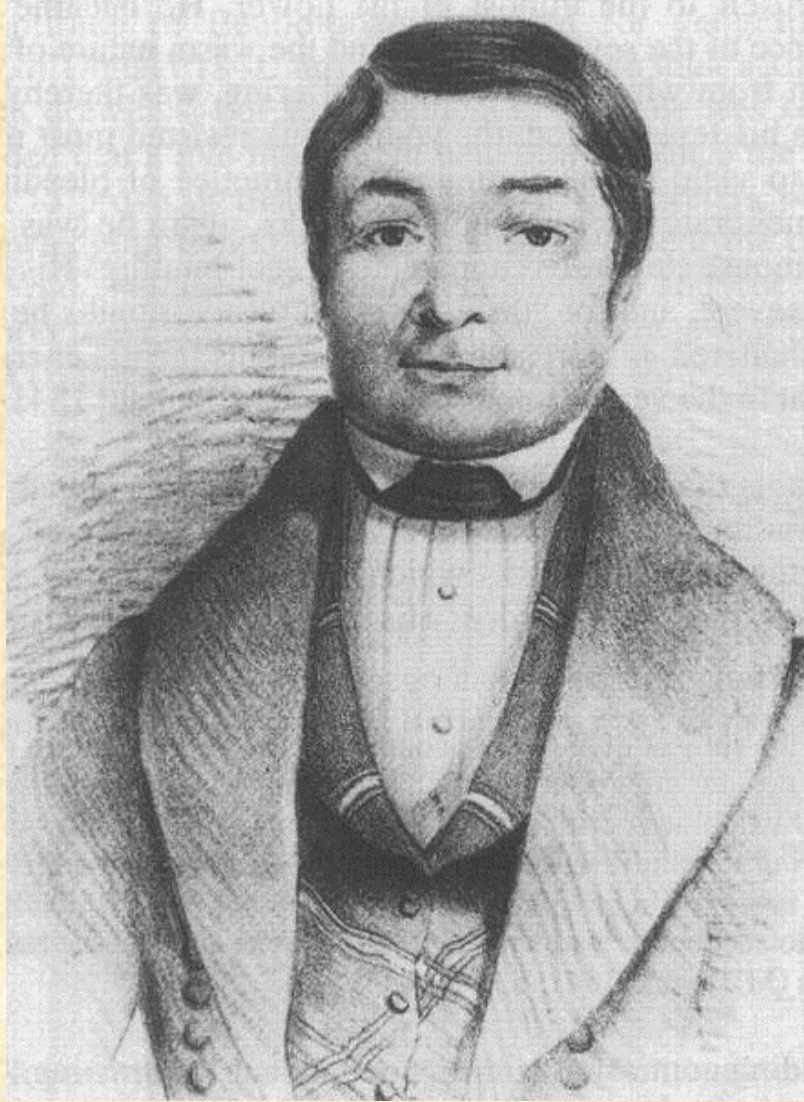
The visit of Inuit guide, Eenooloopik to Aberdeen in 1839 was something of a cause célèbre in the Granite City. His experiences were recorded by Laurencekirk medical doctor, Alexander MacDonald, who would later die as a member of Sir John Franklin's ill-fated expedition to find the Northwest Passage.

Eenoo, or "Bobbie" was a guest of Peterhead whaler, Captain William Penny, who had been in Baffin Island, Eenoo's home. Though ten years Penny's junior, Eenoo made an excellent guide for the Scots whaler, having an intimate knowledge of the area from his youth. Eenoo jumped at the opportunity to visit Scotland and accompanied Penny on the Neptune.

The Neptune first dropped anchor in Scotland at Thurso, Caithness. Eenoo was disappointed to be prevented from seeing inside the Castle of Mey which had greatly intrigued him. Dr MacDonald records the Inuit's puzzlement at seeing local sheep and ponies, imagining they were wild and able to be hunted. MacDonald and Penny did their utmost to ensure Eenoo was versed in the niceties of Georgian society, teaching him to read and write, and of course, gain more English vocabulary.

On arrival in Aberdeen some days later, Eenoo was overwhelmed by visitors wanting to see this curiosity. As a result, he was stricken with a severe chest infection, and moved to lodgings in the city. It would appear that the Scottish climate did not agree with the young man, as every time he tried to get up, his health would fail again.

After about three weeks, Eenoo was finally able to leave his sickbed and promptly gave an exhibition of his kayaking skills on the Dee. He wore his native furs, but by this time had become so enamoured of western clothing, that he did not want to be seen in his rustic garb. By this time, Eenoo could write his own language, and had some grasp of English. MacDonald described him as having had a 'revolution' in his habits, being fastidious to a fault in his dress, eating and cleanliness. Eenoo had a great facility for mimicry, allowing him to fit in easily with British society.



Eenooloopik the Inuit

Eenoo continued to be plagued by chest complaints and Penny realised that the visit would have to be curtailed as Eenoo's continued presence in Aberdeen was proving a danger to his health. Penny also remembered the piteous wails of the Inuit's mother as he had left Baffin Island, thus by the Spring of 1840, Eenoo was heading home on Penny's other ship, the *Bon Accord*.

Eenoo continued to help the whalers find suitable fishing grounds and berths, but never again did he leave his native land. He married a fellow Inuit, Coonook, whose father was so impressed by Eenoo's knowledge gained from his visit to Scotland, that he was quite willing to break her betrothal to another.

Eenoo's story so inspired Deeside gin-distiller, Lost Loch Spirits, that they named their first product after him. Thus, one young man's story was bound up with some of the North-East's most fascinating characters.