

# Basic Detail Report

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**00003708**

**Title**

Iron harpoon with toggle spear head

**Date**

c 1850

**Medium**

Iron

**Dimensions**

Overall: 40 x 836 x 61 mm, 1.45 kg

**Name**

Harpoon

**History**

Until the widespread use of harpoon guns from the 1860s, whaling was an extraordinarily dangerous occupation. Whales were hunted from small open boats by men often only armed with hand-held harpoons and killing lances. The hand-thrown harpoon (or iron) was used merely to attach the rope to the whale resulting in an angry, wounded whale. This would more often than not end with the whaleboat and its crew being towed by the whale in an effort to rid itself of the pain inflicted by the harpoon. This was referred to by American whalers as the 'Nantucket Sleighride'. For more than 200 years, whaling was a vital industry around the world. It was the source of many important products which could not be found or produced elsewhere at the time. It also provided tens of thousands of men and their families with a livelihood.