

Book Reviews

ANTARCTICA UNVEILED. David E. Yelverton. 2000. Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado. xxv + 472 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 0-87081-582-2. £25.99.

There can be few accounts of polar travels so often told and evaluated as the two Antarctic expeditions of Captain Robert Falcon Scott. In 1999 Tim Baughman published *Pilgrims on the ice*, a critical review of Scott's *Discovery* expedition, 1901–04. Now David Yelverton has researched the same expedition with a fine-toothed comb, examining a wide range of archival materials, including government records, ships' logs, meteorological reports, personal diaries, and contemporary press reports. His industry and meticulous application is to be applauded, but his return to the research mine has produced few nuggets. Baughman attempted a re-evaluation of the *Discovery* expedition, but for Yelverton, Scott is hero-worshipped. All his successes are praised and his failures minimised. The work becomes a hagiography of Scott rather than a critique of the man and his endeavours. Of recent Antarctic books, the most critical of Scott was *Scott and Amundsen* by Roland Huntford (1979). Yelverton might well have confronted Huntford's accusations about the organisation of *Discovery* head-on in the main body of the text; instead he dismisses Huntford's remarks to a series of footnotes that could be easily overlooked. Similarly he treats Sir Clements Markham, the driving force behind the expedition, with near idolatry, and fails to reveal the almost Machiavellian manipulation exerted by Markham in London as shown in Markham's own words in *Antarctic obsession* (Holland 1986).

The book, with a foreword by the Duke of Edinburgh and an introduction by Robert Swan, is divided into four parts, entitled 'Prelude to achievement: the anguished fulfillment of a dream,' 'Scott's opening campaign,' 'Repulsed but not defeated: prisoners of ice and money,' and 'Frustration richly redeemed.' These are divided into 25 chapters plus an epilogue.

Part one is concerned with the preliminaries in London, the determination of Markham to have a British naval expedition in the Antarctic to rival the German *Gauss* expedition — led by Professor Erich Drygalski — and the recruitment of crew and scientists for both expeditions. The other expeditions at the time — Nordenskiöld's Swedish expedition on *Antarctic*, and the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition led by William Speirs Bruce on *Scotia*, are given short shrift although their scientific achievements were substantial. Because Yelverton is so anxious to recall every detail of the voyage (for example, sea conditions, the changes to the rigging of the sails, the storage of equipment and maintenance of the vessel), the first lifting of the veil of the Antarctic continent is not met until page 117 in part two. The vicissitudes of travelling

across the Barrier and sledge journeys across the ice plateau are similarly dealt with in great and graphic detail, but the pace of the narrative is slowed because of a perceived need to describe everything. The inadequacies of the sledge dogs are considered as derived from the haste of final preparations in London, and the advent of scurvy as a temporary setback dealt with adequately by Edward Wilson and Reginald Koettlitz and the return to a diet of seal meat.

In part three, the problems of a second winter are revealed for both *Discovery* and the relief ship *Morning*, and, for favourable comparison, the difficulties facing Drygalski and the German expedition are detailed. Back in London, Markham was attempting to raise further funds for another season south for *Discovery*, or for another expedition. In part four, Scott's second major journey to the west is detailed and other important magnetic, geological, and zoological surveys made by Wilson, Charles Royds, Hartley Ferrar, Michael Barne, and Albert Armitage are described. The final chapter is devoted to the triumphant return of *Discovery* to the Thames and the subsequent celebrations. The epilogue consists of a series of letters, mainly between Scott and Shackleton, which demonstrate their rivalry over the leadership of a possible second expedition to the same area of Antarctica and a renewal of the search for both the magnetic and the geographical South Pole. They form the prelude to Shackleton's *Nimrod* expedition (1907–09) and Scott's fateful *Terra Nova* expedition (1910–13).

In addition to the main text, there are no fewer than 10 appendices covering topics as diverse as listings of all the members of both the British and German expeditions, and their polar and non-polar medals; the members of all the sledge parties; and the allocation of cabins on *Discovery*. The work is fully referenced and indexed with a selected bibliography. It is surprising that Ann Savours' fine book (1992) on *Discovery* is omitted from this list. Yelverton must be congratulated on the exhaustive nature of his enquiries and for publishing details from some of the less known diaries, particularly that of Michael Barne, as well as travelling again with Scott's own *The voyage of the Discovery* (1905). The work is well illustrated with familiar and not so familiar black-and-white photographs. Maps are located in the end papers and a set of useful charts precedes part one, but they might have been of greater use in the relevant section of the text. One is left wondering if this is the last word on this great expedition; can there be anything more to say? (Peter Speak, Scott Polar Research Institute, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER.)

References

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WAR, ICE & PIRACY: THE REMARKABLE CAREER OF A VICTORIAN SAILOR. Dominick Harrod (Editor). 2000. London: Chatham Publishing. 192 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 1-86176-138-4. £16. 99.

With so many recent books regurgitating old familiar stories of polar exploration, it is refreshing to see something new and different, something that adds to our knowledge of events and participants. This collection of letters illuminates the career of an officer involved in the Franklin search, Samuel Gurney Cresswell. The letters provide a perspective quite different from the often self-serving published narratives and official despatches. Addressed mainly to his parents, they comprise a more personal, and perhaps more honest, view, one in which there are some frank criticisms of senior officers.

The letters span the two decades in which Cresswell served in the Royal Navy. He entered as a volunteer apprentice in 1842, took up his first command in 1856, and retired in 1863. It is sobering to realize that he began his career as a youth of 14, quit the service at the age of 35, and died before his fortieth birthday. This was not the usual experience; in fact, many senior officers were remarkably long of tooth, as editor Dominick Harrod points out in his introduction, and this may have produced a harmful conservatism in naval operations. But, sadly, Cresswell was struck down by an undisclosed illness well before his time.

Reading history often gives a skewed impression of the careers of the intrepid naval officers who played such a prominent role in the exploration of polar regions. We may tend to think of the 'Arctic worthies' such as Edward Parry, George Back, John and James Ross, and many others whose names now decorate the map, as Arctic specialists, men whose experience was confined to the Arctic. While there is no denying that many of them served in several northern expeditions and became very proficient in what they did, it is also true that these men usually served in many other theatres of operation as well, sent by the Admiralty to various far-flung parts of the world to fight wars, blockade ports, quell uprisings, subdue pirates, support native rulers, defend colonies, protect trading interests, and show the flag. They knew how to cope not only with ice floes, icebergs, severe cold, and frostbite, but also with coral reefs, hurricanes, debilitating heat, and sunstroke.

Cresswell's career, notwithstanding its brevity, illustrates this. He served with naval forces in southeast Asia during the signing of the Treaty of Nanking (1842),

which gave Britain control of Hong Kong and access to trading ports on mainland China. During more than three years in the region he participated in military actions against pirates in Brunei, operations carried out in conjunction with Sir James Brooke, the famous English Rajah of Sarawak (readers of Fraser's Flashman novels will know all about him). From the humid tropical rainforests of southeast Asia he was sent next to the treeless Arctic tundra zone of North America, serving on HMS *Investigator* in Sir James Clark Ross' search expedition of 1848–49. When the ship returned to England, Cresswell remained on board to undertake another search, under Robert McClure. This required a voyage round the Horn and north through the Pacific to enter the Arctic islands by way of Bering Strait, after which he experienced three winters frozen into the ice before another expedition rescued the crew and got them back to England. Cresswell's next appointment was on HMS *Archer*, blockading Russian ports on the Baltic Sea during the Crimean War. Then in 1856 he commanded HMS *Sparrowhawk*, a despatch vessel in the Channel Fleet. When more troubles in China led to another British show of force, Cresswell sailed for Hong Kong in command of HMS *Surprise* and participated in the bombardment and capture of Canton, which led to the Treaty of Tientsin in 1858. All this in 16 years!

Published collections of letters require some editorial input to transcribe and organize the letters, bridge the gaps between them, explain references to obscure events, identify unfamiliar persons, and provide biographical information about the author. This has been done conscientiously by Harrod, a great-great-great nephew of Cresswell, who has happily accomplished these tasks in what has clearly been a labour of love. Harrod was formerly a journalist and BBC correspondent.

Approximately a quarter of Cresswell's naval career was spent on the two Arctic voyages in search of Sir John Franklin. But unfortunately for readers of *Polar Record*, the longest breaks in his letter-writing occur during these expeditions, when there was no opportunity to send letters out. In the first there is a blank period of more than a year after the ships left Greenland, and in the second there is a gap of more than three years after the ship advanced beyond the mouth of the Mackenzie River. For the first of these gaps Harrod summarizes the expedition of James Clark Ross, but only in one short paragraph (page 60), which tells disappointingly little about its achievements or about Cresswell's role. For the second gap Harrod fills in with his own text and with excerpts from the writings of McClure, Johann Miertsching, and Sherard Osborn, and from an unpublished journal by Cresswell himself. One wonders where Cresswell's journal (presumably unpublished) exists, and why it was not reproduced in its entirety to cover this period of his career. One also wonders which specific publications or manuscripts by Miertsching and McClure provided the quotations. In any case there is a serious imbalance here; James Clark Ross' expedition is dismissed in a dozen lines but McClure's receives 27 pages.