

The Introduction by John Millard to  
Ernest Shackleton's  
**Aurora Australis**  
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*[Note: The illustrations have been omitted.]*

## INTRODUCTION

Printing a book is a complex business, normally undertaken only by men with a range of skills acquired during a long apprenticeship. How unlikely then to imagine that unskilled men, trapped by the long winter inside a crowded hut, would even attempt the daunting task of writing, illustrating, printing and binding multiple copies of a book for their own entertainment. Yet this was Ernest Shackleton's plan when he set off for the Antarctic and its brilliant realization resulted in the production of *Aurora Australis*. It was the first book printed in the Antarctic but, as we shall see, was based on an earlier tradition developed by Arctic explorers.

Explorations in the Arctic began in Elizabethan times and were carried out mostly by commercial interests in fishing and whaling. Although some voyages were short, whaling voyages and exploring expeditions might take two or three years. In the nineteenth century the Royal Navy became involved. The British Government, ruling over an expanding empire, needed a faster route to the Pacific Ocean than the regular one around Cape Horn. Accordingly explorations began to find a North West Passage around the top of North America. Advantage was to be taken of this both to map and explore a new area of the Arctic, claiming lands for the Crown when necessary, and to pursue scientific investigations (especially in magnetism) whenever possible.

One of the earliest of these naval expeditions was that led by Sir Edward Parry in the ships HMS *Hecla* and *Griper*. By September of 1819 they had reached a latitude of 74° 44'N. and were iced in for the winter. A strict routine was laid down for the men so that there would be no idle moments. There was much in the way of entertainments provided to overcome the Arctic gloom and monotony; singing and dancing, card games and theatrical

performances. Captain Edward Sabine of the Royal Artillery, the Expedition's Natural History and Magnetic Observer, announced a weekly newspaper in October called *The North Georgia Gazette and Winter Chronicle*.

Twenty-one issues were produced by the end of March 1820. It contained mainly humorous poetry, letters and articles by the officers together with announcements concerning productions at the 'Theatre Royal, North Georgia'. On return to Britain Sabine produced a public printed edition of the issues.

In 1845 the ill-fated Sir John Franklin Expedition left Britain in HMS *Erebus* and *Terror*, to search for the North West Passage. When no word had been received of their fate after several years, the public set up such a clamour for a search expedition that the Admiralty was forced into action. Over the next twelve to fifteen years numerous expeditions went out to search for any trace of Franklin and his men. One of the naval expeditions, a large one with four ships, was led by Captain Horatio T. Austin in 1850-51. This expedition wintered in the strait between Griffith and Cornwallis Islands. The usual winter programme was started to keep the men occupied and in good spirits. Five monthly issues of *The Illustrated Arctic News*, co-edited by Lieutenant Sherard Osborn and George F. McDougall, were produced on board HMS *Resolute*. McDougall was a very able artist, and his illustrations made it an outstanding Arctic publication. When the Expedition returned, a facsimile edition of *The Arctic Illustrated News* was published in 1852. Less well known is the monthly newspaper produced on board HMS *Assistance* during the same expedition, since this was not published in a later public edition.

The Sixth International Geographical Congress of 1895 was held in London. Clements Markham, President of the Congress, and of the Royal Geographical Society, used this occasion to press the case for an international revival of Antarctic exploration. Markham's activities finally resulted in the organization of the British National Antarctic Expedition, led by Captain Robert F. Scott, R.N. Although both Markham and Scott would have preferred to have taken only Royal Navy men, in the end five civilians were appointed to scientific posts. Two Merchant Navy officers were also accepted—Albert B. Armitage, of the Peninsula and Orient Line, as 2nd in command, for his knowledge of Arctic ice conditions and sledging, and Ernest H. Shackleton, of the Union-Castle Line, as Third Officer, for his experience in the handling of sails.

After months of organization in Britain, and the long voyage to Antarctica via New Zealand, their ship the *Discovery* finally landed the

Expedition in McMurdo Sound early in 1902. *Discovery* was secured for the winter, and some local exploring trips were made to get acquainted with the area. A typical winter programme was instituted to keep all hands busy and in good heart. True to Naval and Polar tradition Scott decided to produce a winter magazine. Ernest Shackleton was selected by general consensus as the Editor of *The South Polar Times*, the title being chosen during an evening discussion amongst the officers on 21 March 1902. Scott, in his book on the Expedition *The Voyage of the Discovery*, does not say how or why Shackleton was selected, but Shackleton's literary bent and interest in poetry seem likely to have been of some significance. All members of the Expedition were encouraged to contribute to the publication, and most did. Each of the four monthly issues produced during the winter months of 1902 included an editorial, summary of events, weather conditions, articles about the work being done, about the surroundings, poetry, stories, caricatures, acrostics, puzzles, and other interesting features. Only one copy of each issue was produced, typed by Shackleton and illustrated mainly by Dr Edward A. Wilson, whose artistic abilities were outstanding. Each copy was handed from one member to another, to be read and enjoyed.

Wilson's diary contains many comments on the production of the magazine. Scott always saw each number in advance of the rest of the party although there is no evidence that he censored any of it. Wilson recorded, after the circulation of the first number:

And it certainly is a considerable factor in keeping up interests and giving occupation and amusement to everyone on board, so that I cannot think it is a waste of time spent. Moreover we are keeping it so strictly polar that I think many interesting things will be preserved in it which would otherwise be lost—little incidents and pass-times of a somewhat frivolous and fleeting character, which people will like to read later on. In fact, the paper brings out the more human side of the expedition...

Later on in the first winter Wilson remarked on Shackleton's job as editor:

Shackleton has all the drudgery of its production, and everyone else has helped. He has also had the unpleasant task of returning things that were not approved, and there have been a few from the mess deck and a few more from the wardroom. But he has stuck to his original idea that it should not be made use of for personal spite or as a perpetuator of any feelings that are not up to its high standard as a pioneer paper in the far

south.

Shackleton clearly had the right touch, both for encouraging contributors and for editing the material to a high standard. He even found time to produce a single issue of *The Blizzard*, a ten-page paper for contributions unsuitable for the *South Polar Times*. One copy was produced for each expedition member and then this supplementary production died a natural death.

After the difficulties of the southern sledge journey, during which Shackleton collapsed, Scott decided to send him home on the *Morning*, ostensibly on medical grounds and despite Shackleton's protests. This decision was to have great repercussions in the future.

After the departure of the *Morning*, it was clear that *Discovery* was not going to be released from the ice, so a winter programme was set in motion. Four more issues of the *South Polar Times* were produced, under the editorship of Louis Bernacchi, the Expedition's physicist, with art work and illustrations by Wilson. When the Expedition finally returned to Britain in 1904, Scott's publisher, Smith, Elder & Co., published facsimile editions of 250 copies of each winter volume, to be sold to the general public. Volume three was added some years later after the return of Scott's Last Expedition in 1914. This volume, edited by Apsley Cherry-Garrard and again illustrated by Wilson, was published in 350 copies. Their sale helped both to publicise the expeditions and to raise funds to pay off the debts.

By the time Shackleton arrived back in London in the summer of 1903 he had completely recovered. Despite his disappointment Shackleton turned to with a will to promote Scott's Expedition. He gave lectures and wrote articles for the press. In the following year, when the Admiralty took over the relief of the expedition, Shackleton was put in charge of acquiring provisions and supplies for the relief ship *Terra Nova*. He needed to find more permanent employment as he now wanted to get married. Eventually he became the secretary of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, a good position from which to begin planning his own Antarctic expedition. He needed a major benefactor to get his idea off the ground and in 1906 he found such a man, Mr William Beardmore, the Scottish industrialist.

The Shackleton Antarctic Expedition, 1907-09, was rather modest compared to the earlier British National Antarctic Expedition. Given Shackleton's Merchant Navy background and the fact that the Expedition was his own personal endeavour, he was able to be both flexible and innovative in its organization. One of his first new ideas was the introduction of Manchurian ponies for hauling the sledges, following in the

footsteps of the Jackson Harmsworth Arctic Expedition of 1894-97. With a limited budget only a small ship could be afforded, and as there was a very large amount of provisions and equipment to be taken South, every nook and cranny had to be utilized. To help in stowing and unloading the ship Shackleton decided to use strong light weight packing cases made of Venesta board, a forerunner of modern plywood, usually made of three layers of oak or chestnut glued together with waterproof cement. These cases were 24 x 15 x 15 inches, with a saving of 4 lbs in weight per case over the standard packing cases of the day. The 2500 cases ordered were used for almost everything, from food-stuffs to scientific equipment. They were easily handled by one person, and fitted very neatly onto the sledges. Even the empty cases were used, both for making furniture and other fittings for the base hut and later as covers for the Expedition's publication. For both psychological and nutritional reasons Shackleton acquired a far wider variety of foodstuffs than was normally expected on a polar expedition. Members of later expeditions blessed this innovation when they raided his old food caches!

In keeping with Polar Expedition traditions and no doubt remembering his efforts as editor of the *South Polar Times*, Shackleton decided that his Expedition would also produce a publication with him as editor. Here again he innovated, by deciding to go one better than Scott and produce a printed and illustrated book in Antarctica. It was intended to be an anthology rather than a topical magazine like its predecessor. Its first title, *Antarctic Ice-Flowers*, was rapidly abandoned in favour of *Aurora Australis*, for some reason a much more satisfactory name.

The British printing firm of Joseph Causton & Sons very generously lent the printing press and a small etching press as well as donating all the necessary high quality paper, ink and type. They arranged for three weeks of instruction in printing and typesetting for Ernest Joyce and Frank Wild, and in lithography and plate etching for George Marston. A special penguin stamp was made for use on the binding. The fourth member of the publishing team was Bernard Day who, without any kind of instruction, made up the covers for the book, using Venesta boards from the packing cases. Many of the boards bore stencilled letters denoting the nature of the contents of the original packing case and these have served to identify many individual copies as the printers neglected to number them. The two cover boards were joined by a strip of leather, which formed the spine, and stamps were used to apply the title and the trade mark of the two penguins to the spine. Leather hinges were glued on the inside edges of the cover boards and the contents of the book were held in by a green silk cord threaded through

holes punched in the pages.

Murray and Marston described the conditions in the hut during the printing in graphic detail:

It was winter, and dark, and cold. The work had to be done, in the intervals of more serious occupations, in a small room occupied by fifteen men, all of them following their own avocations, with whatever of noise, vibration and dirt might be incidental to them.

The inevitable state of such a hut, after doing all possible for cleanliness, can be imagined. Fifteen men shut up together, say during a blizzard which lasts a week. Nobody goes out unless on business; everybody who goes out brings in snow on his feet and clothes. Seal-blubber is burned, mixed with coal, for economy. The blubber melts and runs out on the floor; the ordinary unsweepable soil of the place is a rich compost of all filth, cemented with blubber, more nearly resembling the soil of a whaling-station than anything else I know.

Dust from the stove fills the air and settles on the paper as it is being printed. If anything falls on the floor it is done for; if someone jogs the compositor's elbow as he is setting up matter, and upsets the type into the mire, I can only leave the reader to imagine the result.

The temperature varies; it is too cold to keep the printer's ink fluid; it gets sticky and freezes. To cope with this a candle was set burning underneath the plate on which the ink was. This was alright but it made the ink too fluid, and the temperature had to be regulated by moving the candle about.

Once the printers were called away while the candle was burning, and nobody happened to notice it. When they returned they found that the plate had overheated and had melted the inking roller of gelatinous substance. I believe it was the only one on the Continent and had to be re-cast somehow.

So much for the ordinary printing. The lithography was still worse. All the evils numerated above persecuted the lithographer, and he had others all to himself. The more delicate part of his work could not be done when the hut was in full activity, with vibration, noise and settling smuts, so Marston used to do most of his printing in the early hours of the morning, when the hut was as nearly quiet and free from vibration as it ever became, and there was a minimum of dust (at least in suspension in the air)...

I do not pretend to know the nature of the special difficulties that the climate introduced into lithography, but I know this, that I've

frequently seen Marston do everything right—clean, ink, and press—but for some obscure reason the prints did not come right. And I've seen him during a whole night pull off half a dozen wrong ones for one good print, and he did not use so much language over it as might have been expected.

Thus was this Magazine produced.

Shackleton encouraged all the members of the expedition to contribute something to *Aurora Australis*, listing their articles on a contents page. Although David, Murray and Marston were all content with their real names the rest used pseudonyms. Priestly was 'A Messman', Marston was 'Putty', Marshall was 'Lapsus Linguae', Mackay was 'A.F.M.', whilst Wild and Shackleton used their pseudonyms from *Discovery* days, 'Shellback' and 'Nemo'.

In his book *Heart of the Antarctic* Shackleton makes no mention of how he arranged for the printing firm to make such a generous contribution to the Expedition. Unfortunately, the firm has no records of this contribution, nor a copy of the *Aurora Australis*, having moved several times since the early 20th century and having suffered a serious fire in the 1930s which destroyed many records. Indeed the present management only became aware of the company's role in the expedition when they were approached by Mary Goodwin whilst researching her article 'The First Book Printed in the Antarctic'.

I became especially interested in the book after reading Mrs Goodwin's article and in December 1981 I began a world wide survey of copies of the *Aurora Australis*. I wanted to locate all existing copies and trace the history of ownership for each copy. To add to the useful information of the survey I also sought any information about inscriptions, signatures or other annotations of interest to historians, bibliophiles, book collectors and book sellers. To date (Spring 1985) with the help of many correspondents, I have located 56 copies. There is also some evidence for a further number of copies as yet untraced.

Some interesting differences between the copies have come to light as a result of the survey. A major difference appears in the article 'An Ancient Manuscript' by Shellback (Frank Wild) which was printed in two versions. An American owner, comparing his copy with several others, discovered that in most copies this article has an illustration on the verso of one of the leaves, part way into the article. The illustration—entitled 'Many Shekels were required for the ship to go forth'—is a line drawing of a three masted sailing ship, with all sails furled, tied up at a wharf. The illustration did not

appear in his copy, and its place was taken by additional text. For identification purposes the version with the illustration is designated Format 'A' and appears in nearly all of the copies located in the survey. The version without the illustration, Format 'B', appears to be very rare. So far there is no information on why this particular article was printed in two versions. This is the only major variant so far discovered.

Some of the illustrations in the book have a cover/title sheet, not unlike the tissue guards in older illustrated books, to protect the illustration from the printed page opposite. There is an illustration in the article 'Trials of a Messman' by A Messman (Raymond Priestley) with a cover sheet entitled STRUGGLE? FOR THE BROOM. The title is printed near the top of the sheet, and the two penguins trade mark in the centre near the bottom in reddish-brown ink. This appears to be the version that is used in the collating of all the copies. However, there is another which was printed, but does not appear to have been used. In this version the two penguins trade mark is in the centre, at the top of the sheet, and the title, slightly different, THE STRUGGLE FOR THE BROOM? is at the bottom. I first became aware of this version when I received a copy of it in 1948 from Professor Griffith Taylor. Taylor and Charles Wright were the first of Scott's party to visit Shackleton's base hut at Cape Royds, a half day journey north over the sea ice of McMurdo Sound. In the hut Taylor found copies of this second cover sheet. How many copies Professor Taylor originally acquired, and how he disposed of them all is not known.

There are some other minor differences between the various copies. All of the illustrations in the book are in black ink, except for the illustration of an Aurora on the title page, between the two columns, which is overprinted in blue. In some copies one or two other illustrations appear to be tipped in, but this was not the original intention. The margins of these illustrations may have become marked or soiled, and as the marks probably could not be removed the margin was trimmed off and the illustration mounted on a clean sheet of paper. Other differences have to do with placement of the various items like the cover sheets, some are upside down, or sideways, or placed behind the illustration, rather than in front, and many copies seem to have missing leaves. The most curious missing feature is the illustration entitled 'A Giant Tick was Investigating the Carcase' for which nothing except the title page exists, and this, in only a few copies. *Aurora Australis* thus finishes on an unfinished note!

Collation of all copies is difficult as no pages were ever numbered. When the printers began to assemble the book in the Antarctic, they probably did a fair number at once and it is likely that these are the most complete copies.



After the return of the Expedition to Britain other copies were made up only when Shackleton needed a copy to present to a friend or benefactor. With only a limited supply of printed pages it seems probable that these copies are the main defective ones.

To the best of present knowledge there are very few original sources for information about the *Aurora Australis*. An important one is Shackleton's book on the Expedition *Heart of the Antarctic*, first published by William Heinemann in 1909. The de luxe edition bound in vellum was in a limited edition of 300 copies. This edition comprised three volumes, the third being *The Antarctic Book* which contained the signatures of all the party as well as 'Erebus' and 'Bathylbia' and five of Marston's illustrations from *Aurora Australis*. The second source *Antarctic Days* by James Murray and George Marston, was published by Andrew Melrose in 1913 in two editions. The deluxe edition has the signatures of Shackleton, Murray and Marston, and contains four reproductions of water colour sketches by Bernard Day. Besides the above there is, of course, the *Aurora Australis* itself.

Reliable information on the number of copies printed is scarce. Some sources say 100 copies of the book, another only 90 copies, and a third says 90 copies but all in the hands of the members of the party. This information has been repeated so often in auction and book sellers catalogues that it has become accepted, with little definite fact as proof. It seems possible that up to 100 copies of any individual section may have been printed but the incidence of missing leaves in many copies suggests that there was never enough printed material to make up even 90 copies. My survey may well have traced nearly all the extant copies.

It seems that one original intention was to sell copies of the *Aurora Australis* to the general public for the benefit of the Expedition funds. This would have been a logical idea after the success of the facsimile editions of the *South Polar Times*. Margery and James Fisher, in their biography of Shackleton, suggested that this was not done because difficulties arose over the compensation to be given to Joyce, Wild, Marston & Day. A more likely reason would seem to be insufficient paper, ink and available time to produce a sufficient quantity to make this a viable proposition. It seems likely that each member of the overwintering party received at least one copy of the book and other copies were given to friends and benefactors of the Expedition. Certainly a fair number of the copies located are inscribed by Shackleton to benefactors.

Not all of the 56 copies to date have been collated and compared. This is desirable and would be most helpful in determining what other differences might exist between the various copies. Hopefully, eventually, this can be

done.

The *Aurora Australis* is now 77 years old. It was produced in an era when the pace of life was a great deal slower than it is today, an era before rapid global communication. It reflects the lighter side, the human side of polar exploration. Its traditions continue even today, with the production of similar journals by modern Antarctic men overwintering in that frozen Continent.

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