

Sir Clements R. Markham 1830-1916

'BLUE PLAQUES' adorn the houses of south polar explorers James Clark Ross, Robert Falcon Scott, Edward Adrian Wilson, Sir Ernest H. Shackleton, and, at one time, Captain Laurence Oates (his house was demolished and the plaque stored away). If Sir Clements Markham had not lived, it's not unreasonable to think that of these only the one for Ross would exist today. Markham was the Britain's great champion of polar exploration, particularly Antarctic exploration. Markham presided over the Sixth International Geographical Congress in 1895, meeting in London, and inserted the declaration that "the exploration of the Antarctic Regions is the greatest piece of geographical exploration still to be undertaken." The world took notice and eyes were soon directed South.

Markham's great achievement was the National Antarctic Expedition (*Discovery* 1901-04) for which he chose Robert Falcon Scott as leader. He would have passed on both Wilson and Shackleton, too. When Scott contemplated heading South again, it was Markham who lent his expertise at planning, fundraising and 'gentle arm-twisting.' Without him, the British Antarctic Expedition (*Terra Nova* 1910-13) might not have been.

As a young man Markham was in the Royal Navy on the Pacific station and went to the Arctic on Austin's Franklin Search expedition of 1850-51. He served for many years in the India Office. In 1860 he was charged with collecting cinchona trees and seeds in the Andes for planting in India thus assuring a dependable supply of quinine. He accompanied Napier on the Abyssinian campaign and was present at the capture of Magdala. (It was he who discovered the body of Emperor Theodore.) He received the C.B. in 1871 and two years later was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society. He was an Honorary Secretary of the Royal Geographical Society for 25 years and President for 12 years from 1893. He served as Secretary of the Hakluyt Society from 1858 to 1886 and President from 1889 to 1909. He edited for the Society 20 volumes. In all he wrote or edited over 50 volumes including biographies, historical or ethnological works, records of polar discoveries and three historical romances. In 1896 he was knighted (KCB) in recognition of his geographical work.

Markham, along with his wife, Minna, and their only daughter, Mary Louise, lived at 21 ECCLESTON SQUARE from 1859 to 1916, a period spanning his most productive years. Important gatherings took place in the house, and back from the Antarctic, Scott "...found a welcome retreat at Markham's house...in which to write his narrative of the expedition," *The Voyage of the Discovery*. Markham was godfather to Scott's son, Peter, whose middle name was Markham. The last entry in Markham's diary, days before his death, reads: "Sturdy little Peter Scott came and walked with us in the Square garden."

No 21 is a large handsome stuccoed terrace on the northwest side of Eccleston Square. It was built in 1835, about 25 years before the Markhams took residence there. Winston Churchill lived nearby at No 33 between 1908 and 1911, so quite possibly Markham and Churchill knew one another as neighbors. 🐾 🐾 🐾



Taken in large part from Markham's entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.
For more information on Markham go to

<http://www.antarctic-circle.org/markham.htm>

For information relating to the effort for a Blue Plaque for 21 Eccleston Square, go to
<http://www.antarctic-circle.org/markhamplaque.htm>