

*The 'Heroic' and 'Post-Heroic' Ages of British Antarctic Exploration: A
Consideration of Differences and Continuity*

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Synopsis

This discussion is based on the following sources:

1. Stephen Haddelsey, *Charles Lever: The Lost Victorian* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe Ltd, 2000)
2. Stephen Haddelsey, *Born Adventurer: The Life of Frank Bickerton, Antarctic Pioneer* (Sutton Publishing, 2005)
3. Stephen Haddelsey, *Ice Captain: The Life of J.R. Stenhouse* (The History Press, 2008)
4. Stephen Haddelsey, *Shackleton's Dream: Fuchs, Hillary & The Crossing of Antarctica* (The History Press, 2012)
5. Stephen Haddelsey with Alan Carroll, *Operation Tabarin: Britain's Secret Wartime Expedition to Antarctica, 1944-46* (The History Press, 2014)

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Approach

Introduction

Hitherto, popular historians of British Antarctic exploration have focused their attention, almost exclusively, on the period known as the ‘Heroic Age,’ a retrospectively applied collective term which is now generally understood to cover the sixteen expeditions – both British and foreign – launched between the Sixth International Geographical Congress of 1895 and the death of Sir Ernest Shackleton on 5 January 1922.¹ Although, as Stephanie Barczewski has demonstrated,² the tone of Antarctic historiography has undergone a number of evolutions over the course of the 92 years that have passed since the end of the Heroic Age (most noticeable in the movement from the hagiographic early biographies of Captain Scott to Roland Huntford’s vitriolic debunking in *Scott and Amundsen*³), these changes have not resulted in either an expansion or contraction of this focus. The parallel careers of Scott and Shackleton, in particular, have spawned a quite extraordinary number of biographies, narrative histories, management studies and deconstructions – and the passage of time has done little to staunch the flow, with major biographies of Scott published in 2003⁴ and 2005⁵ and publication of a comprehensive new biography of Shackleton imminent.⁶ The fact that Barczewski’s shrewd analysis, which is ‘intended for a general, non-specialist audience,’⁷ concentrates on Scott and Shackleton is in itself a further corroboration of this ongoing predilection.

¹ Expeditions of the Heroic Age include those launched by Belgium (1), Germany (2), Britain (7), Japan (1), Sweden (1), France (2), Norway (1) and Australia (1)

² Stephanie Barczewski, *Antarctic Destinies* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007)

³ Roland Huntford, *Scott and Amundsen* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1979)

⁴ Ranulph Fiennes, *Captain Scott* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2003)

⁵ David Crane, *Scott of the Antarctic* (London: HarperCollins, 2005)

⁶ Michael Smith, *Shackleton: By Endurance We Conquer* (Cork: Collins Press, 2014)

⁷ Barczewski, *Antarctic Destinies*, p. xviii

In stark contrast, and with very few exceptions,⁸ books on the most important British Antarctic expeditions of what, for the purposes of differentiation, might be termed the ‘Post-Heroic’⁹ period have been limited to the official accounts published in the immediate aftermath of those ventures.¹⁰ At the time of writing, there is, for instance, no popular narrative history of John Rymill’s British Graham Land Expedition (BGLE) of 1934-37, despite it being widely acknowledged as one of the most important and successful British polar expeditions of the first half of the twentieth century.¹¹ Similarly, prior to the publication of *Shackleton’s Dream: Fuchs, Hillary & The Crossing of Antarctica* (2012) and *Operation Tabarin: Britain’s Secret Wartime Expedition to Antarctica, 1944-46* (2014), there was no popular account of either the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition (CTAE) of 1956-58 – the expedition which completed the first surface crossing of the Antarctic continent – or of Operation Tabarin – the government-sponsored initiative that reaffirmed British interest in the Antarctic and ultimately evolved into the British Antarctic Survey (BAS). The neglect of the CTAE is particularly striking because, under the leadership of Vivian Fuchs, this expedition finally attained the major exploratory objective of many of its Heroic Age predecessors, including Shackleton’s Imperial Trans-Antarctic (ITAE, or *Endurance*) Expedition of 1914-17.

⁸ With the exception of the official accounts, books making reference to the expeditions in question are limited to broader surveys of Antarctic exploration and a small number of personal memoirs by expedition members. Among the latter might be numbered the Operation Tabarin memoirs *That Frozen Land* by David James (1949) and *SS Eagle: The Secret Mission* by Harold Squires (1992); and the CTAE memoir, *Crevasse Roulette* by Jon Stephenson (2009).

⁹ Unlike the ‘Heroic Age’, the ‘Post-Heroic Period’ is not a commonly used term and it lacks an agreed timeframe. For the purposes of this work it is defined as the 40 years between the end of the Heroic Age in 1922 and the establishment of the British Antarctic Survey in 1962.

¹⁰ Expeditions’ scientific reports, which were often voluminous and usually published over a number of years, are excluded from this analysis. As an example, the scientific reports of Douglas Mawson’s Australasian Antarctic Expedition (AAE, 1911-14) were published over 31 years (1916-47), filling 22 volumes with over 4,000 pages of text, plates, charts and maps.

¹¹ For evidence of the general consensus of opinion regarding the significance of the BGLE, see Debenham, *Antarctica*, pp. 107-108; Fuchs, *Of Ice and Men*, p. 20; Kirwan, *The White Road*, pp. 332-3; Croft, *Polar Exploration*, p. 261; Walton, *Two Years in the Antarctic*, p. 14

The disparity in the number of publications on and the concomitant lack of public awareness of, and interest in, these expeditions can be evidenced through a simple analysis of internet search results against the names of each of the expeditions' leaders. Each leader's name was entered into four search tools: ABE books, the world's biggest web-based second-hand and antiquarian book search tool; Amazon.uk (books only); Google; and SPRILIB, the web-based catalogue search tool for the library of the Scott Polar Research Institute (SPRI). Even when allowance is made for substantial levels of duplication within each search, for irrelevant results and for the greater number of years that have passed since the Heroic Age, the numerical imbalance in the number of returns for British Heroic Age leaders when compared with the Post-Heroic leaders is remarkable. The highest scoring Post-Heroic leader, Vivian Fuchs, accounts for just 5.2 per cent of the volume of returns for Captain Scott, the lowest scoring of the Heroic Age leaders (see *Table 1*, below).¹²

Table 1: Comparison of recorded Internet returns for Heroic & Post-Heroic British Antarctic expedition leaders

	ABE	Amazon	Google	SPRI Library ¹³	TOTAL
Captain Scott	2,068	912	792,000	4,269	799,249
Ernest Shackleton	1,940	585	1,040,000	1,397	1,043,922
Vivian Fuchs	504	84	40,700	228	41,516
John Rymill	18	10	4,590	79	4,697
J.W.S. Marr	12	11	3,910	5	3,938

¹² The disparity in coverage is less pronounced in the *Oxford Dictionary of Biography*. In the 2004 edition, Scott receives 7½ columns; Shackleton 9 columns; Fuchs 4 columns; and Marr 2 columns (26.7% of the total for Scott). There is no entry for Rymill, who was an Australian and therefore not eligible for inclusion.

¹³ Statistics from SPRILIB provided by Heather Lane, SPRI Librarian in an email to the author, 25 July 2014

My own work on the history of British Antarctic exploration has been divided equally between the two periods. In writing *Born Adventurer: The Life of Frank Bickerton* (2005) and *Ice Captain: The Life of J.R. Stenhouse* (2008), I sought to present the lives of two Heroic Age British Antarctic explorers and, in the process, to examine the conditions, objectives, challenges and achievements of the expeditions in which they took part. Wishing to move away from biography to a more comprehensive evaluation of the geo-political backgrounds, motivations, successes and failures of specific Post-Heroic expeditions, I then researched and wrote *Shackleton's Dream: Fuchs, Hillary & The Crossing of Antarctica* and *Operation Tabarin: Britain's Secret Wartime Expedition to Antarctica*. When evaluated as a single body of work these four books, which total approximately 440,000 words of text, demonstrate that the different ages of British polar exploration should not be seen as fundamentally distinct but as constituent elements of an historical continuum and that the considerable disparity in levels of public awareness and interest are, at least in part, the result of errors in perception. On a more personal level, my *oeuvre*, which includes a fifth book on a very different subject and in a very different genre, represents an evolution in my own interests and approach to researching and writing history.

Charles Lever: The Lost Victorian (2000) charts the rise and fall in the fortunes of the most successful Anglo-Irish novelist of the nineteenth century and uses a critical analysis of his novels to make a case for a reappraisal of his position in the canon of Irish literature. Although the book was 'applauded' in *Victorian Studies*¹⁴ and described by Professor A. Norman Jeffares, one of the leading authorities on

¹⁴ Elizabeth Tilley, review of *Charles Lever: The Lost Victorian*, in Andrew H. Miller (Ed.), *Victorian Studies*, Volume 44, Number 3 (Spring 2002), p. 533

Anglo-Irish literature, as ‘a good account of Lever, independent and thoughtful’¹⁵ and as ‘timely’ and ‘convincing’ in the *Times Literary Supplement*,¹⁶ Lever’s obscurity; the extremely limited availability of his novels in a modern edition; and the publication of my own study by a small specialist publisher, rendered it highly unlikely that his career would experience any form of renaissance.

Born Adventurer: The Life of Frank Bickerton, Antarctic Pioneer

The selection of a subject for my second book was largely serendipitous, resulting from the chance discovery of references to Frank Bickerton’s career among family papers. Despite the obvious differences in the subjects – Charles Lever being a once-celebrated but subsequently neglected picaresque novelist and Frank Bickerton being an Heroic Age explorer, soldier, fighter pilot and filmmaker – they held certain attributes in common. In particular, both had either commented upon or been directly involved in significant historical events and both, in my view, deserved wider public notice. A crucial difference was that, while Lever’s story was unlikely to attract a mainstream publisher, Bickerton’s role as a protagonist in some of the seminal events of the first half of the twentieth century made it much more probable that a properly researched biography would appeal to a larger publisher and a wider audience.

Of course, an historical biography required the development of research techniques very different from those employed in the preparation of a book of literary and social criticism. In addition, while the salient facts of Lever’s career were well known through early biographies including W.J. Fitzpatrick’s *Life of Charles Lever* (1879), Edmund Downey’s *Charles Lever: His Life in His Letters* (1906) and Lionel Stevenson’s *Dr Quicksilver: The Life of Charles Lever* (1939), the details of

¹⁵ Professor A. Norman Jeffares to publisher Colin Smythe, no date

¹⁶ Professor Declan Kiberd in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 15 December 2000

Bickerton's life were almost entirely hidden. Indeed, the starting point in my research was nothing more substantial than a gossipy reference in the privately printed memoirs of a distant relative: 'my cousin Frank Bickerton... was an ex RAF officer and had been to the South Pole with Amundsen.'¹⁷ Given that there was no possibility of an unsung British hero having accompanied Amundsen, Hanssen, Wisting, Hassel and Bjaaland to the South Pole, who was Bickerton and how had his name become entangled with that of the great Norwegian explorer?

In reality, Bickerton was a member not of Amundsen's expedition but of Douglas Mawson's Australasian Antarctic Expedition (AAE) of 1911-14. Bickerton's presence on the Antarctic continent at the same time as the Norwegian expedition and a phonetic confusion of Mawson's name with Amundsen's had led to the mistake in Walmisley's book. This discovery led to correspondence with Mark Pharaoh, the curator of the Mawson Antarctic Collection at the University of Adelaide, and one of the leading experts on Mawson's expedition. Crucially, Mark Pharaoh agreed to provide me with a copy of the only Bickerton manuscript in the collection: his sledging journal, covering the Western Sledging Expedition of 3 December 1912 to 18 January 1913. At the same time, reference to Walmisley's memoir revealed that Bickerton's wife, Lady Joan, was a sister of the twenty-first Earl of Shrewsbury. By writing to the current Earl, I learned that Bickerton's only child, an unmarried daughter, was alive and that she lived in or around Bournemouth. The Electoral Roll enabled me to find her address, write to her, and to arrange a meeting. In interviewing Rosanna Bickerton (my second cousin, twice removed), I learned that she was aged only eleven when her father died and that her memories of him were vague. In addition, deterioration in her mother's mental health in the years following

¹⁷ Walmisley, *Spacious Days*, p. 195

Bickerton's death meant that she had shared remarkably little information with her daughter regarding her husband's career. Finally, repeated family relocations had resulted in the dispersal of the majority of his possessions and written records. There were, however, some very important exceptions. These included a three-volume diary kept when he travelled by train, automobile and seaplane from Cape Town to Cairo in 1932; a small collection of photographs; and a short record of his military service.

As well as constituting a fascinating record of an early British trans-African journey, made possible by the improvement in off-road motor vehicles during the late nineteen-twenties, the African diary contained tantalisingly brief allusions to an earlier residence in the British Protectorate of Nyasaland (modern Malawi). Given that the 2,000-strong British ex-patriot population in Nyasaland in the period following the First World War was engaged primarily in the cultivation of flue-cured tobacco and that Bickerton's fellow Antarctic veterans, Frank Wild and James McIlroy,¹⁸ were known to have farmed in Nyasaland at this period, it seemed probable that Bickerton was similarly employed and that he may have accompanied them. Unfortunately, at the time of writing *Born Adventurer*, I was unable to locate any definite evidence to support this theory and I was obliged to acknowledge in the book that, in the absence of absolute proof, I could only speculate regarding Bickerton's first period in Africa.¹⁹ It was only after publication that a letter came to light that corroborated my theory. This letter, dated 4 August 1920, was written by Wild to a cousin; in it he confirmed that 'Three of us, all explorers of Antarctica, Bickerton, McIlroy and myself heard wondrous accounts of the possibility of making

¹⁸ Frank Wild took part in more British Heroic Age Antarctic expeditions than any other individual. He served on Scott's *Discovery* Expedition (1901-04); Shackleton's *Nimrod* expedition (1907-09); Mawson's AAE (1911-14); Shackleton's *Endurance* Expedition (1914-17); and Shackleton's *Quest* Expedition (1922). The only British expedition of the period which sailed without him was Scott's *Terra Nova* Expedition (1910-13). Dr James McIlroy was a veteran of the *Endurance* and *Quest* expeditions.

rapid and colossal fortunes in Portuguese East Africa by growing tobacco. We clubbed our little all and went out.²⁰ The letter confirmed that difficulties with the Portuguese authorities obliged the trio to move to Nyasaland and that Bickerton eventually left after contracting malaria.

Perhaps the single greatest challenge in researching Bickerton's extraordinarily varied career related to his time hunting for pirate gold on Cocos Island, the model for Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. Rosanna Bickerton had advised me that her father had been a pupil at Marlborough College. The school's archive contained a brief career résumé provided by Bickerton probably during the 1930s. In it he referred to a treasure hunting expedition to Cocos Island, but he provided no details and no date. My research revealed that its reputation as a hiding place for multiple hoards of stolen treasure had made Cocos Island a favourite destination for treasure hunters. Initially I believed that Bickerton's expedition had probably taken place during the late 1920s or early 1930s and I concentrated my attention on identifying expeditions undertaken during this period. These included an expedition led by Sir Malcolm Campbell and another in which the Heroic Age veterans J.R. Stenhouse and Frank Worsley had participated.²¹ Through reading Campbell's book about his venture²² and through conversations with his daughter, Jean Wales, I was at last able to discount Campbell's expedition. Following detailed research at the National Archives in Kew, I also confirmed that Bickerton did not accompany Stenhouse and Worsley.²³ The mystery was eventually solved following

¹⁹ See Haddelsey, *Born Adventurer*, pp. 165-167

²⁰ Frank Wild to his cousin, Margaret, 4 August 1920

²¹ See Haddelsey, *Ice Captain*, pp. 175-188

²² Malcolm Campbell, *My Greatest Adventure: Searching for Pirate Treasure in Cocos Island* (1931)

²³ The National Archives holds a substantial file on the rather farcical Treasure Recovery Limited expedition to Cocos Island. See TNA, FO288/205 and Haddelsey, *Ice Captain*, pp. 175-188

correspondence with the polar historian, Kelly Tyler-Lewis.²⁴ She believed that Aeneas Mackintosh, leader of the Ross Sea Party during the *Endurance* Expedition, had once hunted for treasure on Cocos Island. This correspondence led me to contact the daughter of Mackintosh, Elisabeth Dowler, who immediately confirmed not only that Bickerton had accompanied Mackintosh on this expedition, which had taken place in 1911, but that the men were close friends and that Mackintosh had kept a diary of the expedition. Mrs Dowler made this diary available to me and it formed the basis of my account of the Cocos Island expedition in the first chapter of *Born Adventurer*.²⁵

As well as furnishing details of the Treasury Recovery Limited expedition to Cocos Island (material which formed the basis for two chapters in my third book, *Ice Captain*) the National Archives provided essential information on Bickerton's military exploits. My account of his service as a trenches officer with the 7th (Service) Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment was based on a number of sources, including Bickerton's service record, the battalion records and correspondence held in the West Sussex Record Office, the official history of the battalion by Owen Rutter²⁶ and the school magazine of Marlborough College, among others. However, my account of his time with the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Air Force (May 1916 to August 1919) was informed by his casualty records in the archives of the RAF Museum at Hendon and his Combat Reports held at Kew. These short official documents, completed as soon as a pilot returned from a sortie, provided an extremely vivid, immediate and firsthand source for my description of aerial combat over the Western Front, with the immediacy reinforced by the fact that Bickerton's last report was

²⁴ Author of *The Lost Men: The Harrowing Story of Shackleton's Ross Sea Party* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006)

²⁵ See Haddelsey, *Born Adventurer*, pp. 7-10

completed by proxy due to the wounds that he had sustained during his final engagement.²⁷ During my research I also contacted Ralph Barker,²⁸ one of the best modern historians of the Royal Flying Corps, and through his good offices corresponded with Patrick Garland, the theatre director, whose father had served with Bickerton until the latter was wounded and invalided home.²⁹ Mr Garland made his father's diaries available to me and they, too, formed an important firsthand source.³⁰

The fact that Bickerton died in 1954 meant that, in the majority of cases, I could conduct interviews only with individuals who were children or adolescents when they knew him. An important exception was Bryan Langley, a cameraman who worked with Bickerton when they were both employed by the Associated British Picture Company during the 1930s. The British Film Institute facilitated contact with the 95-year-old Langley, who proved very willing to share his experiences of working with Bickerton on such low budget films as *Happy Days Are Here Again* (1935) and *The Mutiny of the Elsinore* (1937).³¹ Despite the restricted nature of the interviews that I was able to conduct, some led to crucial breakthroughs in my research into his life. Perhaps the most significant was a reference made by William Cavendish, son of Rosanna Bickerton's godmother, to a relationship that Bickerton was reputed to have had with Irene Lawley,³² heiress to the Escrick Park estate in Yorkshire. This remark led me to research Irene Lawley and in the process I located her correspondence and other private papers in the archives of the University of Hull. These papers included some of the most intimate and personal of Bickerton's writings in the form of some seventy letters sent to Irene over the course of more than two decades. They cast light

²⁶ Owen Rutter, *The History of the Seventh (Service) Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment* (London: The Times publishing Co., 1934)

²⁷ See Haddelsey, *Born Adventurer*, pp. 142-162

²⁸ Author of *The Royal Flying Corps in World War I* (London: Robinson, 2002)

²⁹ At this stage in his RFC career (1916), Bickerton was an observer and Garland was his pilot.

³⁰ IWM, MS P359, Ewart Garland, diary

on a side of Bickerton very different from the battle-scarred man of action and adventure. In particular, they reveal an individual riddled with self-doubt after the catastrophic breakdown of his engagement to the American heiress Hope Hollins in May 1931: a man driven into the arms of prostitutes and morbidly sensitive to the portrayal of doomed love and psychological abuse in films like Sternberg's *The Blue Angel* (1930).

Given the significant levels of interest in the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration, it is perhaps not surprising that, to some degree, the period of Bickerton's life most easy to research was his time with Mawson's expedition. The gathering of much of the available material in just two archives, namely the Mawson Antarctic Collection and the Scott Polar Research Institute, and the publication of items like the diaries of Mawson and the ship's master, John King Davis, made access to these sources relatively simple. However, while the majority of this material made explicit reference to Bickerton, there was little in his own hand.³³ In writing *Born Adventurer*, and in giving such prominence to the AAE within its pages,³⁴ I considered it essential that Bickerton's own words should be used as much as possible. His original sledging journal and his narrative of the Western Sledging Journey written for the expedition's official account, *The Home of the Blizzard* (1915), were both available to me and the latter provided a good deal of material that was not limited to the journey itself.³⁵ Moreover, such substantial alterations had been made to Bickerton's narrative by Mawson and his collaborator Archibald Lang McLean that in many ways the original could be considered an entirely fresh source. I also unearthed two major new accounts

³¹ See Haddelsey, *Born Adventurer*, pp. 214-219

³² She became Irene Forbes-Adam on her marriage

³³ These items were mostly limited to correspondence with Mawson.

³⁴ Almost exactly half of the eleven chapters in *Born Adventurer* focus upon the AAE.

written by Bickerton: the first, a letter written during the course of the expedition to his sister, Dorothea;³⁶ the second, a lengthy typescript prepared by Bickerton for a talk he gave for the BBC on 17 March 1927.³⁷ During the years immediately following the end of the Heroic Age a number of the explorers involved gave broadcasts on their experiences for the recently established BBC. Bickerton was the fifth, following in the footsteps of Frank Wild, Louis Bernacchi, Herbert Ponting and Leonard Hussey. Contact with the BBC confirmed that the limited technology of the period and the passage of time since the broadcasts were made meant that the surviving recordings were completely unusable, being reduced to a static hiss. When I asked whether there might be a typescript of the broadcast, the BBC archivist advised me that this was highly improbable; nonetheless a search was made and, to her obvious surprise, a typescript located. The archivist's view was that its survival was remarkable and that it would have rested undisturbed since the broadcast in 1927. It is therefore possible that other Heroic Age transcripts might also have survived, forming an invaluable resource for future historians of the subject. A further untapped source was the diary of the novelist Stella Benson, in which she recorded her conversations with Bickerton regarding his time with the AAE.³⁸ None of these documents had previously been accessed by researchers into the AAE and all can be considered as entirely new sources. Of the many photographs published for the first time in the book by far the most important in historical terms is what is now believed to be the only surviving photograph of the Vickers REP monoplane which Mawson intended to use

³⁵ Both items now reside in the archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute, having been donated by Rosanna Bickerton (archive reference: SPRI MS1509). A copy is located in the Mawson Antarctic Collection.

³⁶ Found among family papers held by Karen Bussell, Bickerton's great-great-niece-by-marriage.

³⁷ BBC, 2LO-5XX-S.B., Bickerton, 'Australian [sic] Antarctic Expedition,' 17 March 1927

³⁸ Cambridge University Library (CUL), MSS6762-6803, Stella Benson, diary

for aerial reconnaissance in the Antarctic.³⁹ I found this photograph among the small collection in Rosanna Bickerton's possession and a copy is now held by the Mawson Antarctic Collection.

By tracing these multiple sources and by drawing them together in one narrative, I shone fresh light on the circumstances and events of the AAE from the perspective of one of the key participants. The book was the subject of a number of reviews in both academic and specialist journals which confirmed the value of this contribution. The *Polar Record* (Cambridge University Press) opined that 'The author, distantly related to his subject, has done a fine job of piecing together Bickerton's story and providing an insight into this engaging character.... the sort of man without whom the expeditions could not have succeeded.'⁴⁰ *Geographical Magazine* (Royal Geographical Society) observed that 'Haddelsey is good on the minutiae of life in an Antarctic camp – the crowding and horseplay... the comic opera staged for entertainment... and the grief over stricken comrades... What's here represents enough for several ordinary lives.'⁴¹ And the reviewer for *International Polar Year* wrote that 'A biographer's challenge is to rekindle the spirit of a person, and this has been accomplished by Stephen Haddelsey.'⁴² The chapters on Bickerton's service with the RFC resulted in a review in the *Cross & Cockade International Journal*, which stated 'The story and the way it's told are brilliant.'⁴³ The book also attracted some attention in the more mainstream press, proving the existence of a wider interest in accounts of this nature. The *Tamworth Journal* found that 'Born Adventurer takes the reader into the world of a real life adventurer who puts Hollywood action heroes into the shade, and whose energy and charisma leap out of

³⁹ Now in the possession of the author.

⁴⁰ *Polar Record*, Volume 42, No. 223. October 2006, p. 370

⁴¹ *Geographical Magazine*, February 2006, p. 86

⁴² *International Polar Year*, September 2006

every page and photograph,⁴⁴ and the *Oxford Times* called it ‘insightful and skilled.’⁴⁵

Sometimes the best analogy for writing historical biography is that it resembles the rebuilding of a dismembered jigsaw. Some pieces lie ready to hand; others have been destroyed, either accidentally or deliberately; and more still have been strewn far and wide, to reside in attics, to be filed away in archives, perhaps, or to be locked in the memories of friends, contemporaries or descendants. Wherever the pieces have landed the process of finding them and putting them back together to form a coherent picture is meticulous and time consuming. For the researcher the process usually gives a very real and lasting satisfaction – but at times it can be incredibly frustrating or even dull, particularly when weeks of work finally result in a dead end. The art of the narrative historian is to render these dull and frustrating moments invisible to his readers, to bridge the gaps credibly and to present them with a vibrant, compelling and seamless portrait. To a large degree, the research that resulted in *Born Adventurer* epitomised all of these trials, tribulations and minor victories.

Ice Captain: The Life of J.R. Stenhouse

A key element in the research for my biography of Bickerton was examination of the careers and archives relating to his friends and colleagues. These included, among others, Irene Lawley, Stella Benson,⁴⁶ Cuthbert Orde,⁴⁷ Belgrave Ninnis,⁴⁸ Joan

⁴³ *Cross & Cockade International Journal*, Volume 37, No. 3, 2006

⁴⁴ *Tamworth Journal*, February 2006

⁴⁵ *Oxford Times*, 13 January 2006

⁴⁶ Benson’s papers are held in Cambridge University Library, CUL MSS6762-6803

⁴⁷ Captain Cuthbert Julian Orde (1888-1968), fellow RFC pilot, war artist and a close friend of Bickerton’s. As well as drawing and painting Bickerton at least five times, Orde took many photographs, some of which are reproduced in the book. Orde’s papers are held by his granddaughter, Sophia Crawford.

Bickerton, Hope Hollins, Ewart Garland, Aeneas Mackintosh – and Joseph Russell Stenhouse, whom Bickerton met at the house of Aeneas Mackintosh. In seeking to obtain material relevant to my work, it became clear that Stenhouse, too, had enjoyed an extraordinary varied career, including service as an officer in the merchant navy during the last days of the age of sail; command of the SY *Aurora* on the *Endurance* Expedition; U-boat hunting as a Q-ship officer; campaigning in North Russia, against the Germans during the First World War and against Bolshevik forces thereafter; participation in the National Oceanographic Expedition of 1925-27; treasure hunting on Cocos Island; work in the British film industry; and an active, and ultimately fatal, role during the Second World War. It also became apparent that a huge archive of documents relating to all elements of his life was held by his descendants, including diaries, letters, photographs, official reports and ships' logs. Like Bickerton, Stenhouse's important work in the Antarctic had been referenced in various published narratives but no author had attempted to research or to tell his full story. His family were anxious that his biography should be written and, on the basis of just one meeting, they granted me full access to their archive, much of which had never previously been viewed by an historian. This marked the beginning of my next research project on the history of Antarctic exploration.

Without doubt, the jewel in the crown of Stenhouse's private archive was the huge collection of documents relating to the *Endurance* Expedition, including the original handwritten diaries of Stenhouse and Aeneas Mackintosh. Though some of these diaries had been photocopied and the copies lodged at SPRI, a study of the originals resulted in some important revelations. Most significant of all was the fact that when he submitted his diary to Shackleton in order to assist with the preparation

⁴⁸ Lieutenant Belgrave Ninnis became one of Bickerton's closest friends during the AAE. Ninnis was killed when he fell into a crevasse, becoming one of the expedition's two casualties. His excellent

of *South* (1919), Stenhouse had hidden a number of his original entries by pasting slips of paper over them. Suffering from recurrent bouts of depression and under enormous strain following his enforced assumption of command of the *Aurora* in May 1915, it seemed perfectly natural that he should give vent to his anxieties and frustrations in his diary; natural, too, that he should wish to conceal some of these outbursts from Shackleton. To anyone consulting the copies in SPRI these entries would be completely invisible, appearing as days when no entry was made, and it was only by adopting the painstaking process of holding the original diaries to a light to read through the crossings-out and paper inserts that it became possible to fully understand and describe Stenhouse's state of mind during this critical period and to reveal, for the first time, the occasional ambivalence of his feelings towards the men he had been forced to abandon when the *Aurora* was blown out to sea. Never has it been more true that the experiences of an explorer in the field were 'at variance with the ways they portrayed those experiences for public consumption.'⁴⁹

The fragility of Stenhouse's mental state was again demonstrated through my research into his command of the RRS *Discovery*, during the National Oceanographic Expedition. This expedition, which formed the basis of the long-running *Discovery* Investigations into the lifecycle of the whales of the Southern Ocean and into the impacts of whaling, has been very little researched or written about, though it forms a fascinating study in its own right.⁵⁰ Running from 1925 to 1951, the investigations generated 37 volumes of reports published between 1929 and 1980, and thousands of pages of unpublished reports, correspondence and meeting minutes, much of it now

diaries are held by SPRI (MS1618) and are due for publication by the Erskine Press.

⁴⁹ Dane Kennedy, 'Introduction: Reinterpreting Exploration', in *Reinterpreting Exploration: The West in the World* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), p. 3

⁵⁰The excellent *Voyages of the Discovery* (London: Virgin Books, 1992) by Anne Savours includes some important material on the early stages of the Investigations. The best accounts by participants are Alister Hardy's *Great Waters* (London: Collins, 1967) and E.R. Gunther's *Notes & Sketches: Made*

held at SPRI in Cambridge and at the National Oceanography Centre in Southampton. Indeed, although my period of interest was limited to 1923 to 1928, the range and quality of the material is so great that my coverage of the expedition eventually increased from one chapter to three. Without doubt, the single most striking item in this mass of records was a minute of a special meeting of the *Discovery* Committee held on 2 December 1927.⁵¹ It revealed that during his command of the *Discovery* Stenhouse's mental health had declined to such a degree that the ship's medical officer described his behaviour as pathological, resulting in his being relieved of his command. Just as Bickerton's correspondence with Irene Lawley had exposed a very different side to his character, these minutes and Stenhouse's own writings in his *Endurance* Expedition diaries showed a character very much at odds with the persona that he routinely presented to the world.

If anything, Stenhouse's career was even more varied than Bickerton's and the unparalleled quantity and quality of the materials relating to his life and work made writing his biography an enormous pleasure. Moreover, the sequence of extraordinary incidents in which he played an active part made it not only possible but absolutely essential to undertake examination of a number of otherwise disparate and often little-researched historical events. Again, the book received good reviews in both academic journals and the mainstream press. *International Polar Year* opined that 'Readers pulled by Antarctica's magnetism will likewise be drawn by Haddelsey's deft portrayal';⁵² a reviewer in the *Polar Record* commented that 'The Antarctic community owes a debt of gratitude to Stephen Haddelsey for bringing Stenhouse

During two years on the Discovery Expedition (Oxford: Holywell, 1928). John Coleman-Cooke's *Discovery II in the Antarctic* (London: Odhams, 1963) describes the period from 1928 to 1951.

⁵¹ SPRI, MS 1284/4/8, Minutes of a Special Meeting of the *Discovery* Committee, 2 December 1927

⁵² *International Polar Year*

back to life, and doing it in such a thoroughly enjoyable manner,'⁵³ and the *Geographical Magazine* wrote that 'Tracking down interesting people from the Heroic Age of polar exploration who haven't yet merited a full biography is a challenge these days... But Stephen Haddelsey has managed the feat with some style.'⁵⁴ For its part, *The Times* focused on Stenhouse's complex personality, calling him 'A colourful, temperamental character who fell little short of greatness.'⁵⁵

Shackleton's Dream: Fuchs, Hillary & The Crossing of Antarctica

Alistair Thomson has remarked that, in the eyes of many historians, 'personal narratives illuminate the lived experience and meanings of historical events.'⁵⁶ This is particularly true when the events described are far removed from the experience of the reader. Just as the military historian Samuel Hynes has argued that 'if we would understand what war is like, and how it feels, we must... seek the reality in the personal witness of the men who were there,'⁵⁷ personal accounts of polar exploration during the Heroic Age cast valuable additional light on a world which is so different from our own spatially, culturally and experientially. As Ranulph Fiennes wrote in the introduction to his 2003 biography of Scott, 'To write about Hell, it helps if you have been there.'⁵⁸ This conviction is the cornerstone of narrative history – and it forms the basis of my own work. Moreover, since so many of the accounts of early polar exploration are by the leaders, the more first-hand accounts that we can find by other members of the expeditions, the more nuanced will become our understanding and

⁵³ *Polar Record*, Volume 45, Number 233, April 2009, p. 189

⁵⁴ *Geographical Magazine*, October 2008

⁵⁵ *The Times*, 26 July 2008

⁵⁶ Alistair Thomson, 'Life Stories and Historical Analysis,' in Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire (Eds.), *Research Methods for History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 101

⁵⁷ Samuel Hynes, quoted in Alistair Thomson, 'Life Stories and Historical Analysis,' in Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire (Eds.), *Research Methods for History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 101

⁵⁸ Ranulph Fiennes, *Captain Scott* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2003), p. xiii

appreciation of those ventures. However, while the introduction of new contemporary voices should add depth to our understanding of historical events, the biographer who brings forward those voices is also subject to pressures that can bias his own contribution. Harry Liebersohn has commented that when ‘scholars develop their own versions of earlier travels, in particular the kind of travel we call exploration, they have to make choices about which narrative perspective to adopt and which to subordinate or ignore.’⁵⁹ The biographer also faces this dilemma and, thoroughly enjoyable though it was to piece together the careers and characters of Bickerton and Stenhouse, I had felt a growing frustration with the need constantly to draw my narratives back to these single individuals and to sublimate the voices and experiences of other participants in the events I described. Therefore, I chose for the subject of my fourth book not an individual but an entire expedition. This decision meant that I could research a single historical event from the perspectives of multiple participants, with the experiences of each carrying equal weight within my narrative.

The Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition (CTAE) first came to my attention through the work of Anthea Arnold. In 2007, Arnold published *Eight Men in a Crate*,⁶⁰ an account of the experiences of the CTAE’s Advance Party which, in the most gruelling conditions, spent a year establishing the expedition’s main base on the Filchner Ice Shelf. She based her account, almost exclusively, on the diaries of Rainer Goldsmith, the party’s medical officer and physiologist, and was concerned purely with the first year of the expedition. This reliance upon just one contemporary source meant that the book displayed an unmistakable bias; in addition, Goldsmith’s participation in only the first twelve months of an expedition that lasted for more than two years meant that only a fraction of the story had been told. Thomson has asserted

⁵⁹ Harry Liebersohn, ‘A Half Century of Shifting Narrative Perspectives on Encounters,’ in *Reinterpreting Exploration: The West in the World* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), p. 38

that historians ‘have no excuse for uncritical usage of autobiographical sources. Conventional methodological skills – background research to situate an account in its historical context, triangulation with other evidence, checking for internal and external consistency – are readily applied to personal testimony.’⁶¹ My conviction on reading *Eight Men in a Crate* was that Arnold had failed to exercise these essential checks and balances and that her account was therefore deeply flawed.

In trying to learn more of the expedition as a whole, I discovered that four books, including two official accounts, had been published in the years immediately following its conclusion, and that three further books, including Arnold’s, had been published between 2007 and 2010. Despite the fact that three new accounts had been published in a 3-year period, all were released by small publishers, all were tightly focused on particular elements of the expedition and none claimed to be a comprehensive history.

In addition to moving from biography, the decision to write an account of the CTAE marked a second important evolution in my work as an historian because it meant researching an expedition that had taken place within living memory. Hitherto I had interviewed individuals who had themselves known the main protagonists in historical events; now I would be interviewing the protagonists themselves – or as many as had survived. Thrilling as this prospect might be, it also brought with it certain dangers. In the parlance of modern memory theorists, ‘within a short space of time we necessarily forget most of what happens... a minority of personal experience is preserved in long-term memory through a process of cognitive articulation that creates meaningful neural connections within the brain. Every time we revisit or *re-member* events – and create a new life story – we reconnect to the recorded memory

⁶⁰ Anthea Arnold, *Eight Men in a Crate* (Norwich: The Erskine Press, 2007)

in new ways and make new sense of the past.⁶² Apsley Cherry-Garrard put it more simply: ‘So much of the trouble of this world is caused by memories, for we only remember half.’⁶³ While Cherry-Garrard had been referring to events that had taken place just a few years earlier, I would be asking veterans of the CTAE to speak of events that had occurred more than half a century ago. Therefore, from the outset, it was essential to achieve balance by comparing as many accounts as possible, and to compare recollections with contemporary diaries, letters and other records; in other words to situate their accounts in their historical context and to triangulate with other evidence. This approach was strongly advocated by Derek Williams, the BP cameraman who sailed for Antarctica with the expedition on the MV *Theron* on 14 November 1955. In a letter of 14 July 2009, he urged me to ‘corroborate everything and to use personal opinions with great care. Not to do so is mere journalism, with its usual inaccuracy and hazy relationship with truth.’⁶⁴

During the course of my research, I interviewed veterans from the Advance Party; from the main Crossing Party; and from the New Zealand depot-laying party. All interviews were recorded and accurate transcriptions made; I then shared these transcriptions with the interviewees for them to correct and comment upon.⁶⁵ Interviews were followed by further meetings, telephone conversations and correspondence to obtain clarification and additional information, as required. The generosity of these octogenarian and nonagenarian veterans redoubled my commitment to telling the story of the CTAE as accurately and as comprehensively as possible and caused me to further intensify my search for contemporary

⁶¹ Alistair Thomson, ‘Life Stories and Historical Analysis,’ in Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire (Eds.), *Research Methods for History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 102

⁶² Alistair Thomson, ‘Life Stories and Historical Analysis,’ in Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire (Eds.), *Research Methods for History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 103

⁶³ Cherry-Garrard, *The Worst Journey in the World* (London: Pimlico, 2003), p. 232

⁶⁴ Derek Williams to the author, 14 July 2009

documentation. In this regard, an unexpected disadvantage of researching an expedition that took place a little over 50 years ago was the discovery that remarkably few private records, such as diaries and letters, had found their way into public archives.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, I succeeded in tracing and negotiating the use of seven full expedition diaries, including those of Vivian Fuchs⁶⁷ and Edmund Hillary, none of which had ever been used previously. Moreover, as I had hoped when choosing to write a full expedition narrative, each of these sources could be used extensively within the book in order to provide a fully rounded picture. In total the completed book contains 1,026 endnotes, the vast majority of which are detailed source references.

Inevitably, sources conflicted with each other and since an historian's duty is to achieve a synthesis by comparing as many as possible, my conclusions in *Shackleton's Dream* sometimes required that I ask the veterans to reconsider certain of their long held opinions. My research for *Born Adventurer* had made it necessary for me to acquaint Bickerton's daughter with her father's pre-marital affairs and with accusations of homosexuality made against him.⁶⁸ Prior to *Ice Captain*, Stenhouse's family had also been ignorant of his severe bouts of depression and his occasionally pathological behaviour towards the men under his command. Fortunately, the families of both explorers recognised that my conclusions were based on detailed research and that none were made in order to increase the sensationalism of my accounts. The same proved true, in particular, of Ken Blaiklock OBE, senior surveyor of the CTAE, when I was obliged to reveal to him the often highly critical allegations made against him by his close friend, Hal Lister, when both were based for seven months at the

⁶⁵ These transcriptions have since been lodged at SPRI for the use of future researchers.

⁶⁶ Only two CTAE diaries are held in public archives; these are Edmund Hillary's (Auckland Museum, MS 2010-1) and J.H. Miller's (Alexander Turnbull Library, MS 90-304-2)

⁶⁷ In the possession of VEF's son, Peter Fuchs

expedition's forward base, 'South Ice.' Up to that point, Blaiklock's memory of the time at South Ice was that it had been very harmonious and that he, Lister and the geologist Jon Stephenson had thoroughly enjoyed their experiences. Lister's diary from the time painted a very different picture – and one that clearly shocked Blaiklock.⁶⁹

Another major challenge in writing *Shackleton's Dream* concerned the selection of those episodes that should be treated in detail and those that should be summarised. At the core of the story is the infamous 'Race to the Pole' between Fuchs and Hillary. This event received considerable attention in the newspapers of the period⁷⁰ and generated a significant degree of bad feeling that continues among the veterans to this day. That this highly dramatic incident should form one of the key elements of my account was obvious and the discovery of entirely new contemporary material, including correspondence between Fuchs and the secretary who took the minutes of the relevant Executive Committee meetings, made it even more so. The appalling experiences of the Advance Party, which became the first party to over-winter under canvas at such high latitudes, must also be covered in detail, as must the establishment of the bases and the stories of the main crossing and Hillary's often controversial depot-laying activity. This being the case, it appeared that the only sections of the story that could be summarised were the various subsidiary survey expeditions undertaken by members of the main Crossing Party and by the New Zealand party based on Ross Island. Though interesting in themselves, these minor expeditions were peripheral to the objectives of the main expedition and might distract the reader. Despite these decisions, the word count of the finished book exceeded 140,000 words (excluding notes) and I felt extremely fortunate that my long

⁶⁸ See Haddelsey, *Born Adventurer*, p. 185

⁶⁹ See Haddelsey, *Shackleton's Dream*, pp. 132-36

and successful relationship with The History Press persuaded them to allow me very considerable latitude in terms of the size of the finished book. Indeed, my commissioning editor has stated that my ‘choice of subject matter is always astute and we feel no compulsion to limit the word count.’⁷¹

Jill Lepore has written that ‘In terms of the narrative style, as a reporter and as a writer, your job is to immerse yourself in this world and then immerse your reader in it through your narrative in this almost transparent way.... when you immerse yourself in the past [it] is less familiar to you and less familiar to your readers. Your job, in immersing yourself in that culture, is a more challenging one, and your job in immersing your reader is therefore a more challenging one. But it is the same job.’⁷²

The CTAE was a large and highly complex expedition with planning and preparation taking place in England and in New Zealand and with the expedition itself establishing bases on both sides of the Antarctic continent under different leaders.

This being the case, it was a challenge to develop a coherent, immersive and comprehensive account. Given these difficulties and the consideration devoted to overcoming them, I felt particularly pleased by the critical reaction. A review in the *Polar Record* stated that ‘It is a credit to Stephen Haddelsey that he ably leads us through the complex labyrinth of events and has given us a stimulating, solidly-researched perspective on a fascinating piece of Antarctic history. *Shackleton’s Dream* fills a significant gap in the record of polar exploration and should be included in every geographer’s library.’⁷³ The Journal of the James Caird Society, the leading Shackleton society, described it as ‘a thoroughly researched appraisal of the TAE [which] covers its historical context, its actuality and, above all, its legacy.... This

⁷⁰ See Haddelsey, *Shackleton’s Dream*, pp. 204-22

⁷¹ Publisher’s statement, 5 August 2014

⁷² Jill Lepore, ‘The Immersion Experience in Historical Narrative,’ see www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem

magnum opus will go a long way to exploding the myth that only Heroic Age expeditions are noteworthy and exciting.... Haddelsey's *Shackleton's Dream* is a timely and compelling study of the TAE.... Unless new material comes to light in future years, this fine book will surely remain a definitive work.⁷⁴ In the more popular press, *Wanderlust* called the book 'a thoroughly researched, well-referenced look at "the last great journey on earth" ... Haddelsey's account of the battle of wills between Vivian Fuchs and Everest-hero Edmund Hillary is so lovingly crafted as to deserve its place on the heaving Antarctic bookshelf.... This is a gem.'⁷⁵

More important to me even than the published reviews was the response from the veterans of the expedition. These men played conspicuous parts in the events I described in the book and they know better than anyone what it means to live and work in such high latitudes. Professor Rainer Goldsmith called the book 'a remarkable tour-de-force describing for the first time what an expedition of this sort is all about.... I believe it is a unique account by an author who has been able to stand back, has no axe to grind but who triumphantly takes the reader behind the scenes to illuminate what it was really like.'⁷⁶ Ken Blaiklock opined that '*Shackleton's Dream* will remain the definitive account of the Trans-Antarctic Expedition, for its completeness and accuracy,'⁷⁷ and David Pratt, the expedition's senior engineer, called it 'a great read.'⁷⁸

⁷³ *Polar Record*, Volume 48, Number 4, May 2012

⁷⁴ Journal of the James Caird Society, March 2012, pp. 71-2

⁷⁵ *Wanderlust*, April 2012, p. 125

⁷⁶ Professor Rainer Goldsmith, Amazon review of *Shackleton's Dream*, 19 March 2012

⁷⁷ Ken Blaiklock OBE, in an email to the author, 17 July 2014

⁷⁸ David Pratt to the author, 15 February 2013

Operation Tabarin: Britain's Secret Wartime Expedition to Antarctica, 1944-46

Satisfied that there was a genuine demand for books on the Post-Heroic Period of Antarctic exploration, I chose as the subject for my fifth book the secret British wartime expedition to Antarctica, Operation Tabarin. While this expedition is referenced in various general surveys of polar exploration, no book had been devoted to it. In addition, the facts that Operation Tabarin was the only Antarctic expedition launched by any combatant nation during the Second World War and that it was the progenitor of the British Antarctic Survey made it appear very worthy of further research. The expedition was not entirely virgin territory. In October 2011 the *Polar Record* had published a highly informative analysis of the origins of the expedition written by John Dudeney and David Walton.⁷⁹ In addition, Alan Carroll, Historic Advisor to the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust, had undertaken a great deal of research into the history of the British base at Port Lockroy, including its establishment by the personnel of Operation Tabarin. As neither work attempted to describe the entire course of the expedition, from its origins to its return to England in 1946, *Operation Tabarin: Britain's Secret Wartime Expedition to Antarctica, 1944-46* constitutes its first comprehensive narrative history. Following Alan Carroll's generous decision to allow me full access to his research into the operation, particularly into its work at Port Lockroy, I decided that the book should be co-authored. However, given that Carroll's work had never been intended for general publication and that its focus was fairly narrow, significant additional research was required in order to tell the expedition's full story, covering its genesis and the activity at each of its three bases. I estimated that the finished book was probably 70 per cent my work and 30 per cent

⁷⁹ Dudeney, J.R., and Walton D.W.H., 'From "Scotia" to "Operation Tabarin" – Developing British Policy for Antarctica', *Polar Record*, DOI: 10.1017/S0032247411000520, printed as 2012, No 4, 48, pp. 342-360

Carroll's and for this reason the book was described as being by 'Stephen Haddelsey with Alan Carroll.'

When I began my research, only one member of the personnel of the expedition's land parties survived: Gordon Howkins MBE, meteorologist on Deception Island from 1944 to 1945. However, in earlier decades, interviews with some of the veterans had been conducted by the archives staff of the British Antarctic Survey as part of their Oral History Project and these interviews (and transcripts of the same) were made available to me. In addition, I located substantial archival holdings at BAS, the National Archives, SPRI and the University of Manitoba. Together, these sources meant that well in excess of half of the personnel of the land parties of Operation Tabarin were quoted directly within the book.⁸⁰

Operation Tabarin did not boast a single high profile geographical objective such as the attainment of the South Pole or the crossing of Antarctica. Instead, as Dudeney and Walton have demonstrated, it was an expedition designed to reassert British interests in the region in the face of expanding Argentine claims. In addition, in an attempt to mitigate the risks of a diplomatic incident and the resulting potential for an interruption in the substantial wartime imports of Argentine beef, the War Cabinet decided to disguise the expedition as a campaign to prevent German U-boats and surface raiders from using Antarctic and sub-Antarctic harbours for refuelling and re-provisioning. In the words of one participant, 'the original idea was to send just a party of soldiers down there, a sergeant and corporals, just to sit somewhere in the Antarctic to occupy the place and that was that.'⁸¹ Despite these apparently limited objectives, the expedition undertook significant scientific and survey work and the

⁸⁰ Between 1944 and early 1946, a total of 22 men served in the land parties of Operation Tabarin. Fourteen are directly quoted within the book.

⁸¹ British Antarctic Survey, AD6/16/1986/2.1, Recording of an Interview with Gwion Davies, 13 September 1986

bulk of my narrative focuses on these activities – often conducted in adverse conditions – and on a portrayal of the life of an expedition during the nineteen-forties. Mark Pharaoh wrote of *Born Adventurer* that it was ‘one of the most detailed and realistic published accounts on such aspects as sledging in the heroic era,’⁸² and in all my books I have sought to provide my readers with an accurate and detailed impression of the anxieties, the challenges and the dangers of exploration. Operation Tabarin was no exception. But the expedition was also highly unusual in that all the normal pressures of exploration in a hostile environment were exacerbated by the secrecy surrounding it, by the resulting uncertainty among the participants regarding their objectives and, finally, by their complete ignorance of the timeframe for their relief. I was therefore very pleased to learn from John Dudeney, erstwhile Deputy Director of BAS and one of the experts on Operation Tabarin, that he thought it ‘very enjoyable and informative, and for me personally strikes a strong chord with my own experiences of 2 years in the 1960s as scientist and base commander.’⁸³

As *Operation Tabarin* was published only in April 2014, reviews to date have been limited in number. The British Antarctic Survey Club Magazine has described it as ‘a good story, which reads well, is nicely structured, and will interest not only the Fids⁸⁴ who have been to the Antarctic Peninsula, but also a wider community interested generally in Antarctica and its exploration history.... I hope that this book gives as much pleasure, interest, and stimulus to other readers as it has to me.’⁸⁵ The review for the *Polar Record* states ‘This well-crafted narrative history makes fascinating reading, whilst providing an invaluable record of the start of the permanent British presence in Antarctica. It is a long overdue tribute to the men who

⁸² Mark Pharaoh, advance notice for *Born Adventurer*

⁸³ John Dudeney to the author, 5 August 2014

⁸⁴ ‘Fids’ is a term applied to all personnel who served with the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey, which succeeded Operation Tabarin.

took part.... Haddelsey has made wide use of his access to personal accounts and diaries, plus interviews with the few members of the expedition still alive, to weave a historical narrative that brings alive the trials and tribulations, and also the wonder and excitement, of wintering in Antarctica.... As a result this is a book that will be influential as an historical reference as well as being an absorbing read.... this is a valuable and timely addition to the history of Antarctica, and one that will further help to give the lie to the myths that have surrounded Tabarin.⁸⁶ *The History of War Magazine* called it a 'staggering tale.... Full of historical insight, this is a hugely entertaining read that captures a lost world of frozen wastes, endless nights and frostbitten heroes. 5 Stars.'⁸⁷ Interest in the book and the expedition has also been signified by the publication of articles in both the *Sunday Telegraph*⁸⁸ and the *Daily Mail*⁸⁹ and an additional review is anticipated in the *Geographical Magazine*. Leading experts on polar history generously provided advance notices of the book, with Heather Lane, librarian of SPRI, stating that 'Haddelsey brings the little known story of Operation Tabarin to life with his usual blend of narrative drive and thorough attention to detail. Based on extensive research, this volume is a valuable addition to our understanding of Britain's involvement in the Antarctic during this critical period.' Sir Ranulph Fiennes called it 'A truly remarkable story,' and Rachel Morgan, Director of the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust, thought it 'A timely and very welcome account of an expedition that is vital to our understanding of British Antarctic exploration.' The surviving veterans have also been highly complimentary: Gordon Howkins found the book a 'perspicuous and absorbing history;' the late George

⁸⁵ BAS Club Magazine

⁸⁶ John Dudeney, review of *Operation Tabarin* for *Polar Record*, October 2014. DOI: 10.1017/S0032247414000679

⁸⁷ *The History of War Magazine*, Issue 6, August 2014

⁸⁸ *Sunday Telegraph*, 13 April 2014

⁸⁹ *Daily Mail*, 6 May 2014

James, who served as wireless officer on the expedition ship, wrote that ‘Mr Haddelsey deserves praise for bringing it all back so vividly;’ and the late Ian Graham, navigating officer, considered it a ‘well written book about a little known but important expedition – very nostalgic.’⁹⁰

Throughout the majority of my writing career, which now spans five books totalling over 500,000 words and a small collection of reviews and articles for publications including the *Polar Record*, *The Times Higher Educational Supplement* and the Journal of the James Caird Society, my primary objective has been to examine and to bring to wider public notice some key expeditions of the Heroic and Post-Heroic eras of British polar exploration and the careers of a number of men who took part in these expeditions. My medium has been the historical narrative, intended to appeal to an intelligent general readership – but the desire to attract as wide an audience as possible has never been allowed to undermine my scholarly approach to sources, or to prevent me from collecting as many references as possible in order to build up a composite picture of the individuals and expeditions involved. My insistence on this approach has been fully supported by the publisher of my last four books, The History Press,⁹¹ which has affirmed its ‘faith in [Haddelsey’s] research and ability to present complex narratives to a popular audience.... He has a scholarly approach to endnotes, sources, acknowledgements and interviews with living witnesses to the events described.’⁹² I believe that the complimentary reviews of my books, as published in both the academic journals and the mainstream press, have also served to underpin the validity of this approach, though it is the opinions of the

⁹⁰ Quotations from Gordon Howkins, George James and Ian Graham are extracted from their advance notices of *Operation Tabarin*

⁹¹ The History Press is the UK’s largest local and specialist history publisher. It publishes around 500 books each year on a wide range of subjects including military history, ancient, medieval and modern history, archaeology and heritage. Founded in 1978 as Sutton Publishing, the company now includes Spellmount, Pitkin and Phillimore among its imprints.

participants themselves that have most encouraged me. My work received further and very welcome recognition in December 2013 when I was elected to Fellowship of the Royal Geographical Society on the basis that my books are ‘publications of merit that disseminate advances in geographical knowledge and understanding, that increase access to geographical knowledge in education, [and] that raise knowledgeable enthusiasm and awareness of geographical issues and the world among the wider public.’⁹³ This was an honour that I felt deeply, not least because many of the explorers whose lives and work I had researched were themselves officers of the Society. Finally, *Shackleton’s Dream* was one of seventeen books nominated for the 2014 William Mills Prize of the Polar Libraries Colloquy; this is the only prize dedicated to non-fiction books dealing with polar subject matter. Although my book was not shortlisted, the judges did praise it for making ‘a significant contribution to polar literature.’⁹⁴

⁹² Publisher’s statement, 5 August 2014

⁹³ Royal Geographical Society, Guidance on Eligibility for Fellowship

⁹⁴ Polar Libraries Colloquy’s 2014 William Mills Prize for Non-Fiction Books, email to all nominees and nominators, 29 August 2014. Based upon the judges’ feedback for the 2014 award, The History Press will be nominating *Operation Tabarin* for the 2016 William Mills Prize.

The ‘Heroic’ and ‘Post-Heroic’ Ages of British Antarctic Exploration: A Consideration of Differences and Continuity

Origins and definition of the term ‘Heroic Age’

The term ‘the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration’ was first used by the British polar historian J. Gordon Hayes in 1932. In his book, *The Conquest of the South Pole*,⁹⁵ Hayes wrote of the explorers of this epoch that ‘As a small tribute to these gallant men it is suggested that this period should be known as the Heroic Era of Antarctic Exploration.’⁹⁶ He was also quite clear regarding the fact that this ‘era may be said to have begun when Captain Scott embarked in the *Discovery*’⁹⁷ and that Shackleton’s ‘*Endurance* Expedition... ended the heroic age of Antarctic exploration.’⁹⁸ Despite the specificity of Hayes’s definition, the phrase is now commonly applied to a slightly wider period, beginning with the Sixth International Geographical Congress of 1895 and terminating with one of two events: either the end of the ITAE or Shackleton’s death on South Georgia on 5 January 1922.⁹⁹

Hayes was also very definite regarding the most notable characteristics of Heroic Age exploration. First, its work was accomplished ‘for the most part under difficult conditions.’¹⁰⁰ Second, its prosecution was acutely dangerous, particularly for the British explorers whose footsteps ‘were continually dogged by disaster.’¹⁰¹ Third, ‘Most of the earlier explorers achieved success with means that now appear to have

⁹⁵ J. Gordon Hayes, *The Conquest of the South Pole* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1932)

⁹⁶ Hayes, *The Conquest of the South Pole*, pp. 29-30

⁹⁷ Hayes, *The Conquest of the South Pole*, p. 30

⁹⁸ Hayes, *The Conquest of the South Pole*, p. 295

⁹⁹ Bruce Davis has suggested that the term should be used to describe an even longer period, from 1890 to 1945 but this is not the accepted norm. See Bruce Davis, ‘The Australian Antarctic Research Program in Focus’ in Aant Elzinga (Ed.), *Changing Trends in Antarctic Research*, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993), p. 118

¹⁰⁰ Hayes, *The Conquest of the South Pole*, p. 29

¹⁰¹ Hayes, *The Conquest of the South Pole*, p. 29

been imperfect; the man was greater than the machine.¹⁰² Finally, the story of these expeditions forms a ‘record of how, for the last time in human history, large parts of an unknown continent have been unveiled.’¹⁰³ Together, these attributes – or shortcomings – appear to render the exploits of the explorers of the first quarter of the twentieth century more perilous, more romantic and therefore more appealing: ‘These men depended mainly upon themselves, as men have done for thousands of years.

They were heroes, and their labours heroic, in the classical sense.¹⁰⁴

There is no doubt that in the years immediately after his death, the British establishment and the British people considered Robert Falcon Scott to be the embodiment of the qualities of heroism and self-sacrifice so beloved of Empire.¹⁰⁵ Critically, there is also evidence to suggest that this is very much how at least some of the explorers thought, if not of themselves, then of their fallen comrades. As the *Terra Nova* prepared to sail from McMurdo Sound in January 1913, a party made up of Edward Atkinson, Apsley Cherry-Garrard, Tom Crean, Charles Wright, Frank Debenham, Patrick Keohane, Davies (the ship’s carpenter), and William Lashly carried a heavy wooden cross to the top of Observation Hill. Its purpose was to commemorate the sacrifice of Scott, Edward Wilson, ‘Birdie’ Bowers, ‘Taff’ Evans and ‘Titus’ Oates and upon it were carved their names and a carefully chosen epitaph. ‘There was some discussion as to the inscription,’ wrote Cherry-Garrard, ‘it being urged that there should be some quotation from the Bible because “the women think a lot of these things.”’¹⁰⁶ The quotation eventually chosen, however, was not biblical but a line from Tennyson’s poem ‘Ulysses’: ‘To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.’ Unlike the equally emotive ‘Their Name Liveth for Evermore,’ carved on the

¹⁰² Hayes, *The Conquest of the South Pole*, p. 31

¹⁰³ Hayes, *The Conquest of the South Pole*, p. 33

¹⁰⁴ Hayes, *The Conquest of the South Pole*, p. 31

¹⁰⁵ See Barczewski, *Antarctic Destinies*, particularly pp. 115-137

Commonwealth war memorials after the First World War, this inscription was not selected retrospectively by a committee in London; instead, it was the choice of the men on the spot, made in the immediate aftermath of the events it commemorates and, in the absence of any wireless link with the outside world, without any direct external influences. Surely, therefore, the selection must be considered to have been the most telling and apposite quotation to reflect the feelings and opinions of those wishing to memorialise their friends and to summarise their qualities.

Although the taxonomy of Heroic Age exploration has experienced some minor changes in the 80 years since Hayes's first attempts at classification, the British explorers of the period, in particular, are still seen as ordinary men who struggled courageously against extraordinary circumstances, rather than suitably-equipped professionals who undertook work for which they were well qualified and well prepared. Of course, historians vary in their assessments of the applicability of these traits to specific expeditions and leaders – and vary, indeed, as to whether the traits themselves made the explorers more heroic or foolhardy. For instance, rightly or wrongly, Shackleton is now often presented as the supremely human face of 'muscular' exploration while Douglas Mawson, leader of the Australasian Antarctic Expedition of 1911-14, inhabits the role of austere man of science.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, as Barczewski has revealed, popular perception of an expedition leader can change, often as a result of wider social, economic or other factors and with the pace of change dictated, in part at least, by the reach of the revisionist historians whose work reflects these wider influences. In this regard, the triadic dialectic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis can be applied directly to the changing perceptions of Scott: early

¹⁰⁶ Cherry-Garrard, *The Worst Journey in the World* (London: Pimlico, 2003), p. 585

¹⁰⁷ See, for instance, Philip Ayres, *Mawson: A Life* (Victoria: The Miegunyah Press, 1999)

hagiography (thesis), as represented in biographies by Harold Avery,¹⁰⁸ Stephen Gwynn¹⁰⁹ and others; revisionist criticism of character and methods (antithesis), as articulated by David Thomson¹¹⁰ and Roland Huntford; and balanced reappraisal (synthesis) by writers including David Crane and Susan Solomon.¹¹¹ Of itself, the evolutionary process of historical reinterpretation can serve to further reinforce interest in an explorer, whatever the estimation of his character and achievements might be. When an historian's view is questioned – or, even better, vehemently challenged – the resulting debate can add a fresh dimension to a subject's appeal: a reality cannily exploited by Ranulph Fiennes, who used his disagreement with the revisionist conclusions of Roland Huntford as a highly effective marketing tool during his talks to publicise his biography of Scott.

Recognising the enduring nature of Hayes's original definition; the fact that his definition was itself an articulation of how many of the Heroic Age explorers conceptualised their own activity; and that the interplay of varying interpretations within subsequent historiography has done little to diminish their appeal, in considering the disparity in the levels of interest in the Heroic and Post-Heroic eras it is necessary to establish which of the defining characteristics of the earlier period are unique; to determine which characteristics are common to both periods; to evaluate any differences in the historiographical treatment of those shared traits; to identify other social and cultural factors that might explain the variance in popular awareness and perception; and to examine the risks inherent in the differentiation of the two periods.

¹⁰⁸ Harold Avery, *No Surrender: The Story of Captain Scott's Journey to the South Pole* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1933)

¹⁰⁹ Stephen Gwynn, *Captain Scott* (London: John Lane, 1929)

¹¹⁰ David Thomson, *Scott's Men* (London: Allen Lane, 1977)

¹¹¹ Susan Solomon, *The Coldest March: Scott's Fatal Antarctic Expedition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001)

The polar environment

In terms of the difficulty of the natural conditions, of course these are essentially the same for all Antarctic expeditions and to understand the enduring appeal of polar exploration, whether of the Heroic Age or later, one must first recognise the uniqueness and the challenges of the environment in which that exploration was, and is, prosecuted. A continent of more than 5 million square miles, Antarctica is the coldest, driest, highest and windiest landmass on the face of the globe, with 98 per cent of its surface area permanently covered in ice and snow to a depth of up to 2 miles. Mean temperatures range between -40°C and -70°C during the long, dark winter months, while winds which gust at well over 200 miles per hour not only reduce visibility by hurling clouds of drift snow into the air but also, through the phenomenon known as the ‘wind chill factor,’¹¹² remove heat from a body so that it quickly cools to the current air temperature. In these conditions, exposed flesh will freeze almost immediately and even teeth will split.¹¹³ On clear days, the power of the sun, the lack of water vapour in the air and the reflective glare of the ice, will cause severe sunburn to unprotected skin. On cloudy days, even during the summer months, perception can be massively distorted as a result of the loss of the visual clues usually provided by colour and contrast; as a result, objects lying only a foot away can appear to be far distant, and vice versa. Frank Bickerton, the subject of *Born Adventurer*,

¹¹² The term ‘wind chill factor’ was coined by the American scientist Paul Siple to describe the accelerating effect of the wind on the process of heat loss (a result of the removal of the surface layer of warm air and its replacement with cold air). See Ashcroft, *Life at the Extremes*, p. 152

¹¹³ The phenomenon of teeth splitting was experienced most famously by Apsley Cherry-Garrard, Birdie Bowers and Edward Wilson during their winter sledge journey to Cape Crozier during the *Terra Nova* Expedition of 1910-13

memorably compared this phenomenon of ‘whiteout’ to ‘living in a spherical tent made of sheets, except for the wind.’¹¹⁴

In such conditions travel, whether on foot or in vehicles, becomes impossible or, at best, extremely perilous – particularly where crevasses are present. These fissures are formed as the ice sheets flowing down from the polar plateau buckle and split as they collide with underlying surface inequalities, with mountains and with each other. Over time, the mouths of the crevasses are plugged by drift snow which renders them largely invisible and therefore doubly dangerous. The strength of the snow bridges formed in this fashion is dependent upon a number of factors including depth, width and air temperature¹¹⁵ and, in the event of a collapse, the larger crevasses are quite capable of swallowing a man, a dog team or even a tracked motor vehicle. A combination of whiteout, high winds, tidal changes and fluctuations in temperature also significantly increases the risk of travelling on sea or bay ice, as the members of the Norwegian British Swedish Antarctic Expedition (NBSAE, 1949-52) discovered to their cost on 23 February 1951 when three men drowned after their tracked vehicle plunged over a newly-formed and invisible ice edge.¹¹⁶

In other areas, the action of the katabatic winds sculpts the surface ice into ‘sastrugi’, wave-like crests which can be up to 4 or 5 feet tall and as hard as iron. It is these sastrugi which have caused so many explorers to describe the Antarctic landscape as resembling a frozen sea and they constitute a major barrier to all forms of surface travel.¹¹⁷ Where the scouring action of the wind is absent, soft snow collects in layers so deep that a man will sink to his groin, making every step a

¹¹⁴ BBC, 2LO-5XX-S.B., Bickerton, ‘Australian [sic] Antarctic Expedition,’ 17 March 1927

¹¹⁵ The effect of the increasing power of the sun on previously robust snow bridges was particularly apparent during the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition; see Haddelsey, *Shackleton’s Dream*, p. 189

¹¹⁶ See John Giaevers, *The White Desert* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1954), p. 177

struggle. If this accumulation occurs on floating ice, its weight can be sufficient to push the underlying ice beneath the surface of the water, so that anyone attempting to cross it is likely to suffer from wet as well as cold feet, significantly increasing the risk of frostbite.¹¹⁸ To further exacerbate the difficulties of those navigating without the benefit of the Global Positioning System (GPS), the close proximity of the Magnetic South Pole renders magnetic compasses erratic and unreliable while, on overcast days, the alternative sun compass becomes equally useless. Finally, and of particular relevance to those seeking to reach the South Pole – the primary objective of many, though not all, Heroic Age expeditions – the lifeless interior of the continent rises to around 14,000 feet above sea level. At this altitude the atmosphere becomes so rarefied that the performance of men, dogs, motor vehicles and aircraft is seriously inhibited.

The mechanisation of polar travel

Accepting the commonality of the *natural* conditions faced by all Antarctic expeditions, the differences in their experience must lie in the *manmade* conditions, which are a product of the knowledge, the equipment and the tactics of the explorers themselves. Writing at the end of the first decade of the Post-Heroic Age, Hayes asserted that ‘the most striking feature of the period from 1906 to 1931 as a whole is the contrast between the *heroism* with which it opened and the *mechanism* with which it closed.’¹¹⁹ However, it would be quite wrong to assume that the Heroic Age explorers eschewed the very best that was available to them in terms of ‘*mechanism*’; on the contrary, innovative technology formed a part of every British foray into

¹¹⁷ The presence of sastrugi also increases the risks of air travel in the Antarctic as they are often invisible from the air, making landings extremely risky. See Haddelsey, *Shackleton’s Dream*, pp. 110-11

¹¹⁸ See Haddelsey, *Operation Tabarin*, p. 187

Antarctica during the Heroic Age. Indeed, the use of state-of-the-art equipment was a feature of some ‘Pre-Heroic’ expeditions, most notably Cook’s second voyage of discovery, during which he made full use of a copy of John Harrison’s revolutionary fourth chronometer to establish his longitude.¹²⁰ For its part, Scott’s National Antarctic (or *Discovery*) Expedition carried a hot air balloon. Quaintly named *Eva*, the balloon was very far from being a gimmick: it cost £1,300 and was intended primarily to enable observation of leads, or channels, in the pack ice in order to facilitate the southern progress of the expedition ship. On 4 February 1902 it made two ascents from the edge of the Great Barrier (later renamed the Ross Ice Shelf) and reached a maximum altitude of 800 feet before being abandoned because of a leak from the fabric. Two months later, during his *Gauss* Expedition, the German explorer, Erich von Drygalski, repeated the experiment with his own balloon, reaching a more impressive 1,600 feet.

The English-born Australian explorer, Douglas Mawson, also attempted to experiment with aerial reconnaissance in the Antarctic. In 1911, during a fundraising trip to England, he purchased an REP monoplane from the Vickers Company for £955 4s 8d. Unlike a hot air balloon, the aeroplane could not be launched from an unprepared surface so there was little chance of it being used for spotting leads in the sea ice during the voyage south; instead it was intended for inland reconnaissance from the expedition’s main base. Given that powered flight was still in its infancy and that no one had ever taken off from snow or ice, the experiment would have been an astonishingly daring one and it was perhaps just as well that it came to nothing. On 5 October 1911 during a test flight in Adelaide the aeroplane was badly damaged in a crash landing and with spare parts and time both in short supply an irate Mawson had

¹¹⁹ Hayes, *The Conquest of the South Pole*, p. 31. Emphasis is Hayes’s.

¹²⁰ The copy was manufactured by Larcum Kendall

no option but to instruct that it should be stripped of its wings and converted for use as an ‘air tractor sledge’ for ground hauling.¹²¹ In this capacity, the machine succeeded in towing a 700lb sledge up the 1 in 15 snow slope behind the expedition’s winter quarters at Commonwealth Bay and covered a mile in just three minutes, making it by far the fastest vehicle test in the Antarctic up to that date. But its career came to an ignominious end on 3 December 1912 when the already damaged engine seized during the early days of the Western Sledging Journey, ‘pulling up with such a jerk that the propeller was smashed.’¹²²

The first attempt at mechanised surface, rather than aerial, transportation had been made by Shackleton. During his British Antarctic (or *Nimrod*) Expedition of 1907-09, he unloaded an Arrol-Johnston motor car from his ship directly on to the sea ice. It was the very first motor vehicle in Antarctica and his initial plan was that it would be used to haul supplies from the expedition ship to Hut Point. The car, a 4-cylinder 15hp model, boasted a number of modifications intended to render it suitable for polar work. In particular, no fan had been fitted to the air-cooled engine and the heat of the exhaust was deliberately diverted to the inlet manifold and to a snow melting device intended to provide the car’s occupants with an immediately available source of hot water. In addition, the engineers’ confidence in their vehicle could be gauged by the fact that they had fitted a second fuel tank, increasing its range to 300 miles. Unfortunately, less ingenuity had been devoted to the far more pressing problem of traction and it very quickly became apparent that the wheel was far from being ideally suited to the work that the car was now expected to undertake. On each of its three outings, the wheels lost grip as soon as hard, smooth, wind-packed snow gave way to a softer surface, and the expedition’s personnel quickly abandoned it and

¹²¹ See Haddelsey, *Born Adventurer*, pp. 18-19

took up their sledging harnesses. Judged overall, the first trial of motorised vehicles in the Antarctic had been a pitiful failure, the car's performance woefully short of the 150 miles in twenty-four hours that Shackleton had claimed might be possible before the expedition left England.

Despite his ill-deserved reputation for being a traditionalist, disastrously wedded to the romance of man-hauled sledging, Scott proved to be a champion of motor vehicles in the Antarctic. After watching the tentative progress of his own experimental tractors, he wrote 'I find myself immensely eager that these tractors should succeed... a small measure of success will be enough to show their possibilities and ability to revolutionise polar transport... it is impossible not to be convinced of their value.'¹²³ The vehicles he described were the three Wolseley motor sledges taken on his ill-fated *Terra Nova* Expedition of 1910-13. These sledges possessed no steering and no brakes and were powered by four-cylinder, air-cooled engines with a top speed of just 3½mph, compared with the Arrol-Johnston's 16mph. Unlike the Arrol-Johnston, however, the Wolseley tractors were designed specifically for snow work, rather than being lightly modified road vehicles. Of the three sledges, one was lost even before it was tried, breaking through the rotten sea ice during the unloading of the *Terra Nova* to then drop 120 fathoms to the seabed. Its fellows proved highly temperamental with both eventually failing due to big-end problems and overheating. Nonetheless, despite being overloaded and under-powered they had managed to complete journeys totalling 50 miles with payloads of 3,000lb, albeit in very short hops. More importantly, although traction had continued to be an issue, the three Wolseleys signalled the arrival of the first tracked vehicles in the Antarctic.

¹²² SPRI MS1509, Bickerton, *Western Sledging Journey*, p. 9. Quoted in Haddelsey, *Born Adventurer*, p. 78

¹²³ Quoted by David Pratt, 'Performance of Vehicles Under Trans-Antarctic Conditions', Institution of Mechanical Engineers, 'Proceedings of the Automobile Division', 1958-59, No.6, p. 196

Finally, in 1914 Shackleton decided to equip his *Endurance* Expedition with a propeller-driven sledge similar, in principle at least, to Mawson's Heath Robinson air-tractor sledge. In addition, he took a 'motor-crawler' equipped with Swedish-designed paddle-wheels and powered by a 9hp Coventry Simplex engine and two heavy static tractors which would be man- or dog-hauled and then used to wind-in heavily loaded sledges. Much like the Arrol-Johnston motor car, the Simplex engines were equipped with small water cisterns, each with a drainage tap. When in use, the cisterns could be packed with snow which would then be melted by the heat of the engine, providing a constant supply of hot drinking water and thereby negating the need to pitch a tent and light a stove whenever a brew was required. The same gadget could be used as a hot plate and as a drier for damp clothes or sleeping bags. Of course, the loss of the *Endurance* in the Weddell Sea in November 1915 meant that Shackleton never enjoyed a proper opportunity to test the effectiveness of his propeller sledge.¹²⁴ As for the 'motor-crawler,' which accompanied Aeneas Mackintosh's Ross Sea Party, it proved a pitiful failure, hardly able to pull its own weight let alone a train of heavily laden sledges. It was finally abandoned as useless close to Hut Point in February 1915.¹²⁵

Although he argued that the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration was a distinct period, with its expeditions – and its protagonists – closely bound by a set of common characteristics, Hayes did not believe that the absence of some or all of these characteristics necessarily made the expeditions of the Post-Heroic (or in his phrase, 'Mechanical age') any less interesting or impressive. Indeed, he emphasised that the increased reliance upon mechanical innovation in the later period 'by no means denies

¹²⁴ The machine was tested on the snowfield under the Harbangerjokul mountain near Finse, Norway, in May 1914. Its performance left a great deal to be desired. See Haddelsey, *Born Adventurer*, pp. 130-132

¹²⁵ See Haddelsey, *Ice Captain*, p. 42

the title of hero to the more recent explorers,’¹²⁶ and recognised that while ‘Mechanical means of exploration may appear devoid of romance.... romance, of a different kind, is associated with machines.’¹²⁷ Romantic or not, Scott’s enthusiasm for motor vehicles was shared by many of his successors and significant strides forward were made in the use of mechanised transport during the Post-Heroic Age, most noticeably by the celebrated American polar explorer, Admiral Richard E. Byrd.¹²⁸ However, despite Byrd’s pioneering work, one expedition stands head and shoulders above all others in terms of its successful utilisation of motor vehicles in the Antarctic. That expedition is Fuchs’s CTAE, subject of *Shackleton’s Dream*, which, between 24 November 1957 and 2 March 1958, used four American-built Tucker Sno-cats and three support vehicles¹²⁹ to complete the first-ever surface crossing of the continent. In addition, three converted Ferguson farm tractors and four light aircraft were used to lay depots. The expedition attained all of its goals; indeed, in some ways it is not unreasonable to describe it as the most successful British polar expedition ever launched, since it achieved a major geographical first – the crossing – and completed a complex scientific programme which, through the delivery of the first full seismic survey of the continent, finally proved it to be a single landmass and not an archipelago of two or more islands. It also achieved these feats without the loss of a single man.

¹²⁶ Hayes, *The Conquest of the South Pole*, p. 31

¹²⁷ Hayes, *The Conquest of the South Pole*, p. 31

¹²⁸ In 1928, Byrd took a Ford ‘Snowmobile’ on his first American Antarctic expedition. The Snowmobile, which was virtually a car on skis and tracks, proved much more useful than its predecessors, contributing to the unloading and transportation of stores and completing a journey of 75 miles before being abandoned. Even more impressive were the vehicles of his second expedition of 1933-35. They included two Snowmobiles, three Citroën cars and one ‘Cletrack’ crawler tractor. The latter was capable of hauling 5 tons and, with the vehicle itself weighing 6 tons, represented the first move away from the light vehicles previously favoured. By the end of 1935, the motor convoy had logged more than 11,500 miles – though the majority of this was made up of load carrying from the Bay of Whales to Little America II, rather than inland exploratory journeys.

¹²⁹ As the weight of fuel to be carried reduced, the support vehicles, two American-built Weasels and one Canadian Muskeg, were abandoned at various stages en route.

In contrast with the Heroic Age expeditions, the use of motor vehicles was absolutely central to Fuchs's plans and to the ultimate success of his expedition. This being the case, and given that so much of the debate over the merits and demerits of the Heroic Age leaders revolves around their decisions concerning motive power – in particular, the different choices made by Amundsen, Scott and Shackleton relating to dog-, pony- and man-hauling – in researching and writing the first full and objective account of the CTAE a key line of inquiry was to determine which of the many challenges it faced were common to all Antarctic exploration; which were ameliorated by the use of motorised transport; and, contrariwise, which either resulted from or were exacerbated by mechanisation.

Whatever their view of the period's leaders, all historians of the Heroic Age have emphasised the physical suffering inseparable from man-hauling and the sheer grit and determination essential for the completion of even a handful of miles each day. No matter whether they are seen as heroic and noble or futile and ill-judged, this suffering and these character traits sit at the core of our perception of the Heroic Age: they form the very foundation of its drama and its enduring appeal. In this regard, a comparison might be drawn with the most commonly used motifs of First World War literature: the mud, the trenches and the massed formations of men walking into a hail of machinegun fire. Recognising the universality of these images, in the afterword to his seminal *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell acknowledges that he quite deliberately 'chose to stay with the foot troops in the trenches: that is the setting that comes to mind instantly when the war is mentioned. These places have become clichéd, which is why they are indispensable to the Great War essayist.... in a book addressed to the general reader, I invoked the most familiar actions and settings made

permanent by the arts and film, no matter how intellectually unrepresentative.¹³⁰ Similarly, readers familiar with the triumphs and tragedies of early British Antarctic exploration anticipate stories of frostbitten heroes slogging across impenetrable landscapes, hauling unbearably heavy sledges towards valueless goals. All of the vast body of literature on the Heroic Age, underpinned by films such as Michael Balcon's *Scott of the Antarctic* (Ealing Studios, 1948) and Charles Sturridge's *Shackleton* (Channel 4, 2002), have served to permanently implant such images in the popular imagination. Unlike Fussell, however, in writing *Shackleton's Dream*, I would be abandoning at least some of these 'indispensable' clichés. This abandonment – which was, of course, an inescapable consequence of describing a predominantly mechanised expedition – risked losing the natural sympathy which Fussell deliberately and openly exploited in his own work. In other words, in the absence of at least some of the common motifs of Heroic Age exploration, would readers find the story of the first successful Antarctic crossing as compelling as the narratives of the failed attempts of the earlier period?

In his afterword, Fussell goes on to cite the work of war historian Martin Gilbert, 'whose accounts of both the First and Second World Wars are always illuminated by emotion.'¹³¹ In describing the apocalyptic slaughter of both conflicts, Gilbert is always at pains to emphasise the human scale of the suffering: 'Delivering the raw data of various military and naval encounters, he often concludes by reminding readers of the butcher's bill and implicitly inviting them to mourn along with him.'¹³² Any reference to the 'butcher's bill' of polar exploration inevitably conjures images of Scott's fatal polar journey and recalls the spare, elegiac and compelling language of his final 'Message to the Public'. Therefore, in writing an

¹³⁰ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 337-38

¹³¹ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 338

account of the CTAE – addressed, like Fussell’s work, to ‘the general reader’ – I must establish not only whether the expedition’s reliance upon motorised transport in any way diminished the dramatic appeal essential to a popular narrative history, but also whether the available contemporary documentation in the form of diaries, letters, telegrams and reports would illuminate my account with the humanity that plays such an important part in both the war narratives of historians like Martin Gilbert and in the accounts of man-hauled sledging.

In many ways, the motor vehicles purchased by Fuchs proved as temperamental and unreliable as their forbears and throughout the expedition the two engineers, David Pratt and Roy Homard, made necessary modifications and essential repairs in appalling conditions, with no shelter and with very little sleep. Spare parts, too, were in very short supply and by the end of the 2,000-mile trans-continental journey the surviving vehicles were, quite literally, held together with balks of timber and lengths of rope. Factors including cost and lack of availability in the post-war period meant that, from the very beginning of the expedition, the vehicles were a compromise: many of them being second-hand and so decrepit after years of service in the Arctic that they broke down with tortuous regularity. But the engineers knew that, even if the vehicles had been factory-fresh, remarkably little confidence could be placed in them. Weasels had been used by the Norwegians in Finnmark during the war, in Greenland by the French and British,¹³² and by the Norwegian-British-Swedish Antarctic Expedition – but this repeated use had been driven more by a lack of alternatives than by proof of their reliability. As for the Tucker Sno-Cats, which formed the mainstay of the CTAE, Pratt later told me that ‘I had [only] ever seen one beforehand and... had not been able to drive one as they were all unserviceable.... On

¹³² Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 338

¹³³ The British North Greenland Expedition (1953-54) and the French Greenland Expedition (1949-51)

inspecting the defunct Sno-Cats I could see the design principles were ideal and the fabrication was very poor. The rest is history and a lot of sweat.¹³⁴ The story of the engineers, in particular, is therefore one of extraordinary resilience, endurance and ingenuity and Rainer Goldsmith spoke for many when he stated that ‘the individuals who stand out are the engineers who kept the frail vehicles going.¹³⁵

At the same time, while Hayes acknowledged the romance of mechanical transport, this romance was less apparent to many of the men involved and the non-engineering staff of both the Heroic and Post-Heroic expeditions regarded their vehicles with much the same uncertainty and even antipathy. After watching the trials of Shackleton’s propeller sledge in Norway in May 1914, expedition artist George Marston remarked glumly that ‘Perhaps it will go for twenty min[utes].’¹³⁶ For his part, when asked about the potential for the development of emotional ties with the machines used a little over forty years later, Ken Blaiklock recalled that ‘I suspect most people just regarded them as a lump of metal to get from A to B. Certainly the weasels I don’t think had any [admirers].... They were damn awkward things to drive; they were cold because you had to have the window open. No, I don’t think there was any attachment in that way.’¹³⁷ In many ways, then, the only difference between the machines of the Heroic Age and their Post-Heroic successors was that the latter succeeded, albeit only with the expenditure of huge amounts of labour and patience on the part of the engineers, drivers and passengers.

¹³⁴ David Pratt in an email to the author, 15 February 2013

¹³⁵ Rainer Goldsmith, Amazon review of *Shackleton’s Dream*, 19 March 2012

¹³⁶ Hampshire Record Office, George Marston to Hazel Marston, May 1914. Quoted in Haddelsey, *Born Adventurer*, p. 131

The introduction of wireless telegraphy

One of the most interesting aspects of exploration as a whole is the psychology, and the influence of the processes of exploration upon that psychology, of the men involved. In comparing and contrasting the Heroic and Post-Heroic Ages, it would appear that the technological development likely to produce the most profound and beneficial impact upon the mental well-being of the explorers would be the introduction of wireless telegraphy – but the evidence reveals that, from the outset, its effects were mixed. Scott had considered taking a transmitter and generator on his *Terra Nova* expedition but he was dissuaded by the equipment's size and weight. Instead Mawson made the pioneering experiment, taking two complete sets of Telefunken apparatus on his AAE.¹³⁸ If the expedition succeeded in sending and receiving messages via a relay station on Macquarie Island some of the doubt and uncertainty inherent in Antarctic exploration would be effectively removed and for the first time an expedition would be able to announce both its achievements and, perhaps more importantly, its precise whereabouts.

During the AAE's first year success was extremely limited with the operator on Macquarie Island able to pick up only disjointed words and phrases but, after the erection of a new aerial mast, communication improved during the second year and an important precedent was set.¹³⁹ Surprising, given that the second year party of seven men had never intended to remain in the Antarctic for longer than twelve months, the wireless seemed to make very little difference to their lives. Archie McLean, the expedition's medical officer, observed that 'we... scarcely think about the fact that it is the first time any Polar expedition wintering has been in wireless communication

¹³⁷ Author's interview with Ken Blaiklock, 1 June 2009

¹³⁸ This same equipment was purchased by Aeneas Mackintosh for use by the Ross Sea Party during the *Endurance* Expedition.

with the outside world.¹⁴⁰ Mawson's insistence that his men should pay for sending personal messages – a decision forced on him by the parlous condition of the AAE's finances – further discouraged use and, finally, the senior operator's descent into madness turned the wireless into a liability when he began to send garbled and paranoid transmissions to the outside world and to hide or deliberately mistranslate incoming messages.

The double-edged nature of wireless communication continued to be apparent in the Post-Heroic Age. In its first year, Operation Tabarin included two professional operators in its personnel, increasing to three in its second year. They established an effective link with Port Stanley almost immediately and the wireless became an essential tool for the transmission of meteorological data for inclusion in the naval synoptic weather reports for the South Atlantic as well as for conveying routine expedition updates. The personnel of the expedition also listened to live BBC broadcasts from London and, in a curious and probably unique inversion, they found themselves comparatively safe in the Antarctic while listening to the sound of bombs falling on their homes in England.¹⁴¹ In an unexpected twist, many explorers also discovered that wireless, instead of reducing homesickness, increased their feelings of isolation with some finding that their day-to-day lives had become so divorced from the routine experiences of those at home that they had little or nothing to say to one another.¹⁴² The fact that wireless also changed the explorers' expectations regarding the frequency and content of communications was also lost upon officials at home and in a paper he later wrote entitled 'Cold Weather Hazards,' Eric Back, the medical

¹³⁹ In order to receive time signals to aid navigation, a mobile set was also used on a short range sledging expedition.

¹⁴⁰ Mitchell Library, MSS382/2, A.L. McLean, diary, 28 February 1913. Quoted in Haddelsey, *Born Adventurer*, p. 114

¹⁴¹ See Haddelsey, *Operation Tabarin*, p. 86

¹⁴² See Haddelsey, *Shackleton's Dream*, p. 72 and p. 146

officer to Operation Tabarin, stated that ‘In order to keep up the morale of isolated parties they should be kept informed of the work in hand.... The sense of frustration experienced by men completely isolated in the cold and given no information about future plans can be extremely galling and is often not appreciated by those at home.’¹⁴³ But, as Fuchs learned during the CTAE, the reverse could also be true when, as leader in the field, he found himself bombarded by the BBC and by his expedition committee, for daily updates and press releases, all of which diverted him from far more pressing matters.¹⁴⁴

The impacts of technological innovation

Evidence of the many and varied attempts during the Heroic Age to take advantage of the very latest in technological advances, make it futile to argue that Scott, Shackleton and their peers were temperamentally or philosophically wedded to a bygone age. On the contrary, all believed that technology could ease their labours and make their objectives more attainable. So far as vehicles were concerned, Scott was ‘convinced of their value,’ while Shackleton put up a fierce defence when the utility of his own models was challenged by a sceptical committee of the Royal Geographical Society in March 1914. ‘I am right to think it is worthwhile to try the machines,’ he declared, ‘because if I can do 200 miles on 500lb weight of petrol... it will be a tremendous asset to me.’¹⁴⁵ Therefore, a key characteristic of the Heroic Age leaders is not that they turned their faces against the latest products of the industrial age but that those products failed and forced them to revert to more primitive, but tried and tested methods.

¹⁴³ Eric Back, ‘Cold Weather Hazards’, in *The Medical Press*, 9 November 1955

¹⁴⁴ See Haddelsey, *Shackleton’s Dream*, p. 187

¹⁴⁵ SPRI, MS 1456/38, Fisher papers: ‘Report of a Conference of the RGS with Sir Ernest Shackleton,’ 4 March 1914

In this regard, it is possible to draw a comparison with the introduction of mechanised transport, more particularly the tank, to the battlefields of the First World War. The first deployment of the British Mark I tank took place at Flers-Courcelette, during the Battle of the Somme, on 15 September 1916. Of the forty-nine tanks deployed, only thirty-two were able to begin the attack and just nine made it across No-man's Land. A combination of mechanical failure, vulnerability to heavy artillery fire and insufficient numbers reduced the British tanks' effectiveness in their first engagement and it was not until the following year that they achieved real success, most notably at the Battle of Cambrai in November 1917. In the meantime, the British generals had little option but to rely upon a continuation of artillery bombardment and massed infantry assault. In the words of Hayes, 'the man was greater than the machine.' However, just as Scott and Shackleton felt convinced of the potential benefits of motor vehicles in the Antarctic, the British Commander-in-Chief, Field Marshal Douglas Haig, could see that tanks might one day help to change the course of the war and, with his full support, British production was accelerated. At the time Hayes wrote *The Conquest of the South Pole*, the real potential of motor vehicles in the Antarctic had become apparent through Byrd's use of the Snowmobile during his first Antarctic expedition of 1928 but, just like the tanks at Flers-Courcelette, much still needed to be done in terms of design and strategy. Though he made no direct comparison with the advances in motorised technology on the battlefield, at this stage Hayes could see quite clearly that the ongoing development of more reliable forms of technology would bring new frustrations and dangers that would be, in their way, as great as those experienced by the explorers of the earlier period.

Analysis of Heroic and Post-Heroic Age casualty statistics

In considering the comparative dangers of Antarctic exploration in the Heroic and Post-Heroic ages, it is interesting to note that, of the 664 men estimated to have taken part in the sixteen earlier expeditions,¹⁴⁶ only nineteen died – approximately 2.9 per cent of the total.¹⁴⁷ Expressed another way, this means that each man who took part in an Antarctic expedition between 1895 and 1922 had a one in thirty-five chance of death when participating in polar exploration. Although the risks would vary significantly depending upon the exact duties of the individuals involved, with a base cook less likely to die than a long-distance sledger, statistically speaking these odds do not appear to be too unfavourable given the harshness of the environment, the pioneering nature of the work, the limitations of the equipment and knowledge then available, and the distance of the expeditions from external aid. As Hayes acknowledged, a higher proportion of British explorers ‘purchased their discoveries with their lives,’¹⁴⁸ and of the 155 men involved in the shore-based operations of the six British expeditions launched between 1901 and 1921, ten died – 6.5 per cent of the total, equivalent to a one in sixteen chance of death. As might be expected, the year that generated the highest number of casualties was 1912, the *annus mirabilis* of Heroic Age exploration, when five expeditions were in the field. In total, eight men died between 17 February and 14 December, of whom seven were British.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ The author is indebted to Joan N. Boothe, author of *The Storied Ice* (Berkeley: Regent Press, 2011), for sharing her detailed analysis of the numbers involved in the Heroic Age expeditions. Boothe to the author, 10 August 2014

¹⁴⁷ Of these deaths, four might be considered to have been the result of ailments not directly attributable to Antarctic conditions: Émile Danco (Belgian Antarctic Expedition, 1897-99), Allan Ramsey (Scottish National Antarctic Expedition, 1902-04) and Shackleton (*Quest* Expedition, 1921-22) all died of heart disease; Richard Vahsel (Second German Antarctic Expedition, 1911-13) died of syphilis.

¹⁴⁸ Hayes, *The Conquest of the South Pole*, p. 29

¹⁴⁹ The eight included the five men of Scott’s polar party (British); Belgrave Ninnis of the AAE (British); Robert Brissenden, also of the *Terra Nova* expedition (British); and Richard Vahsel of Filchner’s Second German Antarctic Expedition (German). Of these, six were included in shore parties and two were on board ship.

Although it is not possible to calculate accurately the total number of fatalities for all nations during the Post-Heroic period, statistics are available for British and US operations. Between 1922 and 1962, the United States lost thirty-one men and the British lost eleven,¹⁵⁰ with all these casualties sustained between 1946 and 1962. At first glance, the loss of forty-two lives in just sixteen years may seem excessive, especially when compared with the nineteen lost during the twenty-seven years of the Heroic Age, but this perception does not take account of the huge increase in activity in the same period. For instance, during the austral summer of 1946-47, the United States sent 4,700 men south as part of their colossal Cold War exercise, Operation High Jump. Of these, just four died (a casualty rate of 0.09 per cent). Although numbers reduced after the operation, with just 179 men divided between twenty stations operated by eleven different nations during 1955, they again increased exponentially during the International Geophysical Year (IGY) of 1957-58, with a winter population of 912 men rising in the summer months to approximately 5,000.¹⁵¹ In that period, Britain sustained three casualties (2.4 per cent of the total British personnel of 127, or a one in forty-two chance of death) and the United States sustained nine (2.7 per cent of 339 personnel, or one in thirty-eight).

Given the popular perception of the dangers of Heroic Age exploration – a perception reinforced by Hayes's statements – it is surprising to see that the difference in the levels of risk between the Heroic and Post-Heroic eras was not as great as might be anticipated. Writing of the casualties sustained during the IGY, Walter Sullivan, science correspondent for the *New York Times*, opined that 'Such mishaps were due, essentially, to the novelty of the environment in which men and equipment had been called upon to operate. Had the nature of the hazards been fully understood, they

¹⁵⁰ See British Antarctic Monument Trust, www.antarctic-monument.org, 'Those Who Died'

would not have been much greater than those confronting the man who tries to dash across Fifth Avenue against the lights. The difference was that the jaywalker, however foolhardy, has usually lived with city traffic all his life.¹⁵² Of course men continued to die as a result of exposure and accidents in crevasses and on sea ice; what differentiated the two periods in terms of the causes of death was the advent of air power. Although Sir Hubert Wilkins, Richard E. Byrd, John Rymill and Lincoln Ellsworth had all successfully used aeroplanes in the Antarctic during the 1920s and 1930s, their operations were on a tiny scale when compared with the post-war era. The extent of air operations during the IGY, for instance, can be gauged by the fact that, between 20 November 1956 and 21 February 1957, the United States Navy airlifted 760 tons of cargo to the South Pole in 65 separate sorties. Such a colossal expansion of air activity in polar conditions must of itself increase the likelihood of accidents; add to this the fact that much of the flying was completed in large aircraft, such as the Douglas C-124 Globemaster and the Lockheed P2V Neptune, the probability of multiple casualties being sustained in just one accident also increased. This reality was tragically demonstrated on 18 October 1956 when a Neptune crashed at McMurdo, killing four, and again on 16 October 1958, when six men died in a Globemaster crash in the Admiralty Mountains.¹⁵³

These statistics demonstrate that casualty rates during Heroic Age exploration were not as high as might be assumed and, at the same time, that Post-Heroic exploration could be almost equally dangerous. However, it is not possible to determine to what degree the perception of risk has influenced the ongoing focus on

¹⁵¹ IGY population statistics drawn from Walter Sullivan, *Assault on the Unknown* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), p. 306

¹⁵² Walter Sullivan, *Assault on the Unknown* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), p. 298

¹⁵³ The potential for air activity to skew the figures was again demonstrated on 28 November 1979 when an Air New Zealand McDonnell Douglas DC-10 crashed into Mount Erebus, killing all 257 passengers and crew.

the earlier expeditions. Indeed, in recent years the *Endurance* Expedition, which suffered no fatalities among its better known Weddell Sea Party,¹⁵⁴ has attracted at least as much attention as the *Terra Nova* Expedition which suffered more deaths than any other Heroic Age expedition. As Barczewski has demonstrated, survival has become more appealing than ‘heroic’ death. Despite the well-documented ability of the British to eulogise ‘heroic’ defeat as ardently as victory – the *Terra Nova* Expedition and the evacuation from Dunkirk in 1940 being the most oft-quoted examples – it would also be erroneous to assume that disasters or costly victories are more likely to remain in the public consciousness. The 1953 ascent of Mount Everest, for instance, was both successful and devoid of casualties and yet the celebratory photograph of Hillary and Tenzing after they completed their climb remains one of the iconic and most immediately recognisable of all twentieth century images.

New worlds – and the public’s appetite

The final distinguishing characteristic of the Heroic Age expeditions, as defined by Hayes, was that their stories form ‘the record of how, for the last time in human history, large parts of an unknown continent have been unveiled.’¹⁵⁵ Of course, the expeditions launched during the Post-Heroic period made numerous major discoveries in a continent of some 5 million square miles, the vast majority of which had been left unexplored by the expeditions of the Heroic Age. During the CTAE alone, Fuchs’s

¹⁵⁴ Three men of the Ross Sea Party commanded by Aeneas Mackintosh died, including Mackintosh and Victor Hayward, both of drowned when sea ice broke up, and Arnold Spencer-Smith, who died of scurvy. The claim that Shackleton never lost a man is true, therefore, only if one considers the parties which he commanded in the field rather than his expeditions as a whole. In a recent (as yet unpublished) paper for the *Polar Record*, John Dudeney, John Sheail and David Walton have also demonstrated that Shackleton wilfully increased the danger to his men marooned on Elephant Island by refusing the assistance of the Norwegian, Carl Anton Larsen, who possessed both the ships and the experience to reach them sooner than Shackleton could. J.R. Dudeney, J. Sheail & D.W.H. Walton, ‘The British Government, Shackleton, and the rescue of the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition.’

¹⁵⁵ Hayes, *The Conquest of the South Pole*, p. 33

Advance and Crossing parties discovered two new mountain ranges and traversed for the first time the vast wilderness that lies between Vahsel Bay and the South Pole. For their part, George Marsh and Bob Miller of the Ross Sea Party discovered another two new mountain ranges; proved that the Queen Alexandra Range was made up of five distinct chains; and located four new glacier systems. Meanwhile, Richard Brooke and his Northern Party sledged well over 1,000 miles and climbed an astonishing thirty-one mountains, most of which had never previously been scaled. Ken Blaiklock is one of the most experienced veterans of the Post-Heroic era, and he has admitted that the opportunity to explore completely virgin territory remained ‘one of the big attractions: you’ve got a range the size of the Alps and you’re the first ones to start plotting – making a map of it, or doing the geology. It’s unique almost – well it’s impossible now of course, [the opportunity] doesn’t exist any longer.’¹⁵⁶ The explorers of the Post-Heroic Age also achieved a number of important ‘firsts’: the first flight to the South Pole (Byrd, 1929); the first trans-continental flight (Ellsworth and Hollick-Kenyon, 1935); the first motorised journey to the Pole (Hillary, 1957-58);¹⁵⁷ and the first surface crossing of the continent (Fuchs, 1957-58). Nor should it be thought that these achievements constituted the ‘dregs’ left by the explorers of the Heroic Age. Completion of a surface crossing, in particular, was an ambition of Bruce, Scott, Shackleton and Filchner and held to be at least equally desirable as conquest of the Pole.¹⁵⁸

Though significant, these achievements could not duplicate the excitement of the ‘discovery’ of the continent by the Heroic Age explorers who became the first to experience, to photograph and to describe its grandeur, its beauty and its harshness.

¹⁵⁶ Author’s interview with Ken Blaiklock, 1 June 2009

¹⁵⁷ Hillary’s party also became only the third to reach the Pole over land, following those of Amundsen and Scott in 1912.

¹⁵⁸ See Haddelsey, *Shackleton’s Dream*, pp. 11-12

Certainly there can be no doubt regarding the public's appetite for the early explorers' accounts of exploration and adventure in an unknown land. Commenting on the publication of Scott's *The Voyages of the Discovery*,¹⁵⁹ David Crane has noted that 'reviewers, "Arctics", shipmates, colleagues, friends.... queued up to heap on the praise.... The book sold, too, with a first edition of three thousand going immediately, followed the next month by a second run of 1,500. By the end of the year Scott had made over £1,500 from the sales and if that was not a fortune it was almost four times his half-pay as a captain.'¹⁶⁰ Four years later, Shackleton's *The Heart of the Antarctic*¹⁶¹ also attracted rave reviews, generated huge sales and was produced in nine simultaneous translations. According to Roland Huntford, 'Since Nansen returned from the North, there had not been such interest in a book of polar exploration.'¹⁶² Inevitably, the outbreak of war and the ever-growing casualty figures stifled demand for exploration narratives and Mawson's *The Home of the Blizzard*¹⁶³ proved an expensive flop, with only 2,200 of a print-run of 3,500 having sold by the end of 1918.¹⁶⁴ Although the narratives of the Post-Heroic explorers could only add to those of their predecessors, and build upon the 'most familiar actions and settings' alluded to by Fussell, the events of those expeditions, and the language in which the explorers described their experiences – whether in private diaries or published accounts – lack nothing in terms of the drama so appealing to a popular audience. Not surprisingly given its secret status, no official account of Operation Tabarin was ever

¹⁵⁹ London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1905

¹⁶⁰ David Crane, *Scott of the Antarctic* (London: HarperCollins, 2005), pp. 321-322

¹⁶¹ London: Heinemann, 1909

¹⁶² Roland Huntford, *Shackleton* (London: Abacus, 2011), p. 317

¹⁶³ London: Heinemann, 1915

¹⁶⁴ See Philip Ayres, *Mawson: A Life* (Victoria: The Miegunyah Press, 1999), p. 101. In considering the print runs and sales figures of these expedition accounts, it should be noted that all were produced in expensive, lavishly illustrated two-volume editions. Only Shackleton's *South* (1919) broke the mould, being released in one volume.

published;¹⁶⁵ but the popularity of Fuchs's *The Crossing of Antarctica*¹⁶⁶ compares favourably with the success of the earlier accounts. Jon Stephenson, the expedition's geologist, thought the finished book only 'a modestly gripping account',¹⁶⁷ but it quickly became a best seller and was translated into no fewer than fourteen languages, including Hebrew and Japanese, and was subsequently abbreviated for children as *Antarctic Adventure*.¹⁶⁸

More broadly, the reception given to Fuchs lacked none of the warmth of those accorded to Scott and Shackleton. As soon as he stepped down from his Sno-cat at Scott Base on 2 March 1958, he was surrounded by reporters, flown by the US Navy to McMurdo Sound specifically to witness the event. Instantly, he became the most celebrated explorer of his day, feted by governments, geographic and scientific institutions and by the general public. Even before he left the Antarctic, he was notified that the Queen had bestowed a knighthood upon him and over the coming weeks and months British, Commonwealth and foreign institutions showered him with honours and medals. He toured Britain, Europe and North America, met national leaders including General de Gaulle and President Eisenhower and gave lectures to packed theatres. Inevitably comparisons were made with the explorers of the earlier age and the New Zealand *Weekly News* set the tone when it proclaimed that 'the name of Fuchs will go down to history among those of other famous explorers like Scott and Shackleton'.¹⁶⁹

Crucially – just as the bearers of the memorial cross to Scott and his four companions saw their fallen comrades as heroes – the explorers of the CTAE saw

¹⁶⁵ The expedition also resulted in the publication of only a small number of scientific papers, which were published at a much later date. See Haddelsey, *Operation Tabarin*, p. 217

¹⁶⁶ Fuchs & Hillary, *The Crossing of Antarctica* (London: Cassell, 1958)

¹⁶⁷ Stephenson, *Crevasse Roulette* (New South Wales: Rosenberg, 2009), p. 123

¹⁶⁸ London: Cassell, 1959

¹⁶⁹ New Zealand *Weekly News*, 18 December 1957

themselves, if not as heroes, then as inheritors of the heroic tradition. In most practical matters, including rations, equipment and the use of dogs, the CTAE owed less to the Heroic Age than to the British Arctic Air Route Expedition of 1930-31 and to the BGLE but, in the immediate aftermath of the expedition, George Lowe¹⁷⁰ looked back to the expeditions of Scott and Amundsen rather than to those of Gino Watkins and John Rymill. ‘Although we used vehicles we still clung to camping and eating rules of the past...’ he wrote in *The Mountain World*. ‘Then, Amundsen with his dogs or Scott on foot walked the 1,800 desperate miles. Amundsen averaged 17 miles a day with his dog teams and returned according to plan; Scott averaged a dozen miles a day and died tragically within a hundred miles of his base.... in the future there will be no place for the lightly-equipped hardy dash which was the spirit in which our expedition was conceived’.¹⁷¹ More recently, Rainer Goldsmith described the CTAE as ‘the last of the heroic expeditions – full stop!’¹⁷²

Discussion

If, as has been demonstrated, Post-Heroic Age expeditions such as Operation Tabarin and the CTAE retained many of the characteristics of the Heroic Age, as defined by Hayes, and that the periods should, therefore, be considered not as separate and distinct but as elements of an historical and exploratory continuum, to what degree does the current disparity in popular awareness and perception of the two periods risk skewing our broader historical understanding of British polar exploration?

¹⁷⁰ New Zealand cameraman and photographer with the Crossing Party

¹⁷¹ George Lowe, ‘The Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition 1955-58’, in *The Mountain World 1960-61* (Ed. Malcolm Barnes), p.243

¹⁷² Author’s interview with Rainer Goldsmith, 3 May 2009

A key factor that unifies all Antarctic exploration is that it is, in the words of Michael F. Robinson, an ‘investigation of the uninhabited.’¹⁷³ In the opinion of Stephen J. Pyne, this characteristic places it in the same category as those other uniquely twentieth century forms of exploration, of the deep sea and of space, and differentiates it from all other terrestrial exploration. Throughout its course there has been no ‘first contact’ with native populations and therefore it has generated none of the tension, danger, excitement or detrimental impacts commonly resulting from such encounters. In fact, only once in the history of the continent have guns been fired in anger.¹⁷⁴ Nor, with the significant exceptions of sealing, whaling and fishing, has the exploration of the Antarctic resulted in the commercial exploitation of its natural resources: there has been no slavery, no deforestation, no damming and no mineshafts have been sunk. The British government benefited to a very considerable degree from granting whaling licences, particularly to Norwegian whalers like Carl Anton Larsen, but its attempts to preserve the industry and the whale stocks upon which it depended led to one of the most comprehensive, longest-lived and most benign research programmes of all time: the *Discovery* Investigations. Of course Antarctic exploration has generated cultural and ethical dilemmas, relating particularly to the potential for future exploitation but, uniquely, these have been largely addressed through the adoption of the International Antarctic Treaty (signed in 1959 and ratified in 1961) and by the later Protocol on Environmental Protection (ratified in January 1998). As a result, Antarctic expeditions when taken as a whole have given no cause for the kind

¹⁷³ Michael F. Robinson, ‘Science and Exploration,’ in Dane Kennedy (Ed.), *Reinterpreting Exploration: The West in the World* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), p. 29

¹⁷⁴ At Hope Bay on 1 February 1952, when a landing by members of FIDS was opposed by the Argentine military. No one was injured and the situation was ‘resolved’ by the arrival of HMS Burghead Bay, dispatched by the Governor of the Falkland Islands, Sir Miles Clifford.

of ‘coruscating ethical dilemmas’¹⁷⁵ that so pained scholars of the post-imperial period that, for a time, they abandoned exploration as a fit topic for scrutiny.

Of course, Antarctic exploration’s avoidance of the most negative impacts of imperialism and the difficulty that modern historians find in identifying ‘a single and direct line of causation between exploration and empire’¹⁷⁶ do not mean that it was not, at least in part, an imperial activity. Much of the historiography of the Heroic Age has demonstrated that, while the Antarctic was not ‘an imperial frontier, its exploration nevertheless exhibited all of the features of national competitiveness associated with zones of direct imperial rivalry,’¹⁷⁷ and that this is nowhere more evident than in the acceleration of activity that culminated in the race to the South Pole. *Shackleton’s Dream* and *Operation Tabarin* have also shown that both Operation Tabarin and the CTAE, just like their predecessors, were driven by ‘a combination of scientific and technological achievement, state power, and national prestige.’¹⁷⁸ Indeed, Argentina continues to argue that the British presence on the Falkland Islands and, by implication, the rest of the British Antarctic Territory is a result of an outrageous imperial seizure by Great Britain in 1834 and there is very clear evidence that the United States’ activity in the region in the middle of the century was motivated, at least in part, by the desire to stamp its authority on the Antarctic as a whole.¹⁷⁹ The difference between the earlier and later British expeditions was that the latter, instead of being assertions of imperial confidence,

¹⁷⁵ Stephen J. Pyne, quoted in Michael F. Robinson, ‘Science and Exploration,’ in Dane Kennedy (Ed.), *Reinterpreting Exploration: The West in the World* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), p. 29

¹⁷⁶ Dane Kennedy, ‘Introduction: Reinterpreting Exploration’, in *Reinterpreting Exploration: The West in the World* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), p. 9

¹⁷⁷ Robert A. Stafford, ‘Exploration and Empire,’ in Robin W. Winks (Ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume V: Historiography* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), p. 292

¹⁷⁸ Dane Kennedy, ‘Introduction: Reinterpreting Exploration’, in *Reinterpreting Exploration: The West in the World* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), p. 2

¹⁷⁹ See Haddelsey, *Operation Tabarin*, p. 215

were responses to challenges both to this prestige and to Britain's previously unassailable hegemony in the region.

As has been shown by Haddelsey (with Carroll)¹⁸⁰ and by Dudeney and Walton,¹⁸¹ the primary purpose of Operation Tabarin was to reply to Argentine encroachments within the Falkland Islands Dependencies. In sending its navy into British territory in 1943, the Buenos Aires administration believed that Britain would have neither the will nor the resources to oppose its actions. But, for their part, British officials realised that failure to resist would send an unmistakable and dangerous message to other parts of an already weakened and embattled Empire. The previously accepted suggestion that the expedition was intended to deny Antarctic and sub-Antarctic harbours to German surface raiders and U-boats was merely a convenient cover story disseminated in an attempt to minimise the risks of a diplomatic rift with Argentina, which might in turn threaten British foreign investments and imports of beef.¹⁸² Operation Tabarin was, therefore, more closely connected with national power and prestige than had been thought; indeed, its very *raison d'être* was the bolstering of British imperial interests and it had little or nothing to do with 'hemispheric defence.'¹⁸³ Of course, the operation did not succeed in permanently quashing Argentine and Chilean claims in the region, which had been growing in stridency since the early years of the twentieth century, but it is unlikely that this was ever the expected outcome. Rather, the expedition was intended to bolster a

¹⁸⁰ See Haddelsey, *Operation Tabarin*, pp. 21-29

¹⁸¹ Dudeney, J.R. and Walton D.W.H., 'From "Scotia" to "Operation Tabarin" – Developing British Policy for Antarctica', *Polar Record*, DOI: 10.1017/S0032247411000520, printed as 2012, No 4, 48, pp. 342-360

¹⁸² Acceptance of this cover story was still widespread until very recently; see, for example, Nigel Bonner, 'The Science / Politics Interface in Development,' in Aant Elzinga (Ed.) *Changing Trends in Antarctic Research* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993), p. 104

¹⁸³ TNA, ADM 116/4670, Mossop to Trafford Smith at the Colonial Office, 26 November 1942. Quoted in Dudeney, J.R. and Walton D.W.H., 'From "Scotia" to "Operation Tabarin" – Developing British Policy for Antarctica', *Polar Record*, DOI: 10.1017/S0032247411000520, printed as 2012, No 4, 48, pp. 342-360, and Haddelsey, *Operation Tabarin*, p. 27

sovereignty that had been weakened by decades of apathy and indecision by successive British administrations – and the fact that the Argentine and Chilean governments continue to proclaim what they perceive to be their rights over the region does not mean that the expedition should be counted a failure. On the contrary, the ongoing commitment of successive British governments to the funding of Operation Tabarin's successor, the British Antarctic Survey, might be cited as a perhaps unique example of decades-long, pan-administration policy continuity.¹⁸⁴

As for the CTAE, having served as overall field commander for FIDS between 1948 and 1950 and as the first director of the FIDS Scientific Bureau, Fuchs was very familiar with the nature and extent of Argentine and Chilean claims in the Antarctic. Given that his expedition was also, to a significant extent, a privately funded operation, like Scott, Shackleton and Mawson before him he was also very well aware of the need to use every possible means to raise essential funds. Within this context, his suggestion that his expedition might have 'considerable prestige and political value for this country, particularly in regard to the dispute with Argentina and Chile,'¹⁸⁵ could have real financial value. His hint did not go unnoticed: Anthony Eden agreed to launch the expedition's public appeal for funds in 1955, at the same time taking the opportunity to emphasise that Britain would 'maintain the right to our wide areas [of the Antarctic] and to explore them.'¹⁸⁶

In the absence of the dilemmas usually associated with imperial expansion, the historiography of Heroic Age exploration, expressed mostly through biography and expedition studies, has experienced no noticeable hiatus. Of course, it has not been

¹⁸⁴ Just as Operation Tabarin was Britain's response to Argentine incursions during 1943, Margaret Thatcher's administration substantially increased BAS's funding in the years following the Falklands War. See Klaus Dodds, *Pink Ice: Britain and the South Atlantic Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), p. 194

¹⁸⁵ BAS, MS 2006-72-6, Fuchs, 'A Consideration of Political Factors Affecting the Proposed Trans-Antarctic Expedition, 1955-57. Quoted in Haddelsey, *Shackleton's Dream*, p. 23

immune to revisionism but, as noted above, if anything this has resulted in a growth rather than a reduction in interest. However, in the opinion of Barczewski, while ‘the forms of Antarctic history, dominated by biography and chronological narrative, have remained relatively static, the manner in which they reflect the contemporary geopolitical context has been anything but.’¹⁸⁷ In her analysis, the sudden surge in Antarctic expeditions at the end of the nineteenth century generated an unprecedented literary output focusing on the region, with the tone being predominantly imperialistic and competitive in nature. Scott’s defeat in the race to the South Pole and his death during the return journey caused a major revision in attitude and from being ‘a chronicle of adventure and derring-do, it became a story of explaining and justifying personal and national defeat, starring Scott as its tragic hero.’¹⁸⁸ ‘Here,’ writes Robert Stafford, ‘were duty and heroism wasted in an endeavour not worth the sacrifice (as if, in a prelude to the Great War, they had become dangerously outworn forms).’¹⁸⁹ Apparently, the growing dominance of the United States in the inter-war years was not resented in Britain; instead, British praise of Richard E. Byrd’s achievements ‘marked the first indications of a shift in the strategic contours of global power’ and a British ‘concession to this new reality.’¹⁹⁰ A resurgence of British triumphalism followed Fuchs’s trans-Antarctic success – but it was a triumphalism tempered both by the fact that the expedition was intended to celebrate the benefits of Commonwealth co-operation and by the ‘colonial’ Ed Hillary’s obvious unwillingness to play second fiddle to the English Fuchs. The rapid and increasingly

¹⁸⁶ Speech by Sir Anthony Eden, 4 November 1955. Quoted in Haddelsey, *Shackleton’s Dream*, p. 28

¹⁸⁷ Stephanie Barczewski, ‘The Historiography of Antarctic Exploration,’ in Kennedy (Ed.), *Reinterpreting Exploration: The West in the World*, p. 216

¹⁸⁸ Stephanie Barczewski, ‘The Historiography of Antarctic Exploration,’ in Kennedy (Ed.), *Reinterpreting Exploration: The West in the World*, pp. 218-219

¹⁸⁹ Robert A. Stafford, ‘Exploration and Empire,’ in Robin W. Winks (Ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume V: Historiography* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), pp. 293-294

¹⁹⁰ Stephanie Barczewski, ‘The Historiography of Antarctic Exploration,’ in Kennedy (Ed.), *Reinterpreting Exploration: The West in the World*, p. 221

obvious decline of British power and influence in the 1960s and 1970s saw Scott lambasted by Huntford and others as ‘a suitable hero for a nation in decline,’¹⁹¹ but the vacuum left by the discredited Scott was filled, from the mid-1980s onwards, by a suddenly resurgent Shackleton: ‘By this time, the cultural climate in both Britain and the United States had created an atmosphere that was more favourable to heroes. Emerging from the era of post-Vietnam, post-imperial malaise that had so tarnished Scott, an Anglo-American culture suffused with disillusionment suddenly regained some of the confidence it had lost. Shackleton fit this era perfectly.’¹⁹² In this context, Shackleton, who as an Anglo-Irish merchant navy officer was less obviously an establishment figure, might even be seen as the Antarctic counterpart of Sir Richard Burton who, as ‘the most complex and rebellious’ of the nineteenth century British explorers of Africa and Asia, ‘fared the best in transition to the age of counter culture.’¹⁹³

According to Dane Kennedy, the psychological motive force behind all forms of exploration finds its most enduring expression in ‘the epic quest, the long and arduous journey that leads to self-discovery. This theme figures prominently in the traditions of many cultures. Its appeal derives in part from its promise that the individual who endures this prolonged physical and psychological ordeal is transformed by it.’¹⁹⁴ In *The Conquest of the South Pole*, Hayes recognises the heroism of the explorers of both the Heroic and Post-Heroic ages – but, crucially, he draws a distinction between the classical heroism of the former and the non-classical heroism of the latter (though he does not attempt to define the non-classical form,

¹⁹¹ Roland Huntford, quoted in Stephanie Barczewski, ‘The Historiography of Antarctic Exploration,’ in Kennedy (Ed.), *Reinterpreting Exploration: The West in the World*, p. 224

¹⁹² Stephanie Barczewski, ‘The Historiography of Antarctic Exploration,’ in Kennedy (Ed.), *Reinterpreting Exploration: The West in the World*, p. 225

¹⁹³ Robert A. Stafford, ‘Exploration and Empire,’ in Robin W. Winks (Ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume V: Historiography* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), p. 298

beyond emphasising its reliance upon mechanisation). In this regard, Hayes was adopting what the cultural historian Jay Winter has described as the ‘complex traditional vocabulary of mourning, derived from classical, romantic or religious forms’ that became prevalent in the years after the Great War, ‘largely because it helped mediate bereavement.’¹⁹⁵ Indeed, Hayes is quite explicit regarding the fact that it is because of the early explorers’ sacrifices that he has ‘suggested that this period should be known as the Heroic Age,’ that ‘the heroic age has gone beyond recall’ and that ‘this change, from the historical standpoint, enhances its importance.’¹⁹⁶ However, in the post-imperial epoch, when a bankrupt, war-ravaged but militarily victorious Britain sought (and continues to seek) to establish a new position and status in the world, the paradigm of classical heroism, drawn upon by Hayes, could even be applied to the nation as a whole instead of to an individual or small group of individuals. In this interpretation, a self-confident and assertive Britain commenced an imperial quest; was vanquished and supplanted by youthful challengers (Norway followed by the United States); but survived to rise phoenix-like, chastened and more self-aware, to lead (through the British Antarctic Survey) the scientific analysis and interpretation of the continent. Viewed in this way, the entire story of British Antarctic exploration returns to the mould of the classical epics alluded to by Hayes in 1932, with Britain, through its explorers and, more lately its polar scientists, undertaking an epic quest towards self-discovery and the mature assumption of responsibility.

¹⁹⁴ Dane Kennedy, ‘Introduction: Reinterpreting Exploration,’ in *Reinterpreting Exploration: The West in the World*, p. 6

¹⁹⁵ Jay Winter, *Sites of memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), p. 223. Quoted by Stephanie Barczewski, *Antarctic Destinies* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), p. 140

¹⁹⁶ Hayes, *The Conquest of the South Pole*, pp. 30-31

In considering the historiography of Antarctic exploration and, more specifically, the resurgence of Shackleton's reputation from the 1980s onwards, Stephanie Barczewski has expressed the hope that 'Shackleton's moment of glory will appear as the last gasp of an outmoded way of writing about Antarctic history by focusing on the feats or failures of individual explorers and the Heroic Age.'¹⁹⁷ Having expressed this hope, however, she goes on to assert that any move towards a wider cultural interpretation of Antarctic history is, at best, nascent, with only a handful of books moving away from the more traditional modes of interpretation. She even admits that her own work, *Antarctic Destinies: Scott, Shackleton and the Changing Face of Heroism* and Max Jones's *The Last Great Quest: Captain Scott's Antarctic Sacrifice*¹⁹⁸ 'in some ways... represent less of a departure from the conventional concerns of Antarctic historiography than they might appear.'¹⁹⁹ In particular, she recognises that, while both studies break new ground in their examination of the wider cultural context of exploration and the forces that have shaped popular perception of the men involved, they still focus on the expedition leaders.²⁰⁰

Despite Barczewski's concern that recent Antarctic historiography has been dominated by 'a succession of works along conventional lines,'²⁰¹ there is very real evidence not only that new and rich veins of research are being identified and enthusiastically mined, but also that students and scholars are demonstrating a growing willingness to cross both geographic and disciplinary boundaries in order to

¹⁹⁷ Stephanie Barczewski, 'The Historiography of Antarctic Exploration,' in Kennedy (Ed.), *Reinterpreting Exploration: The West in the World*, p. 226

¹⁹⁸ Max Jones, *The Last Great Quest: Captain Scott's Antarctic Sacrifice* (Oxford: OUP, 2002)

¹⁹⁹ Stephanie Barczewski, 'The Historiography of Antarctic Exploration,' in Kennedy (Ed.), *Reinterpreting Exploration: The West in the World*, p. 226

²⁰⁰ See Barczewski, 'The Historiography of Antarctic Exploration,' in Kennedy (Ed.), *Reinterpreting Exploration: The West in the World*, pp. 226-227

²⁰¹ Barczewski, 'The Historiography of Antarctic Exploration,' in Kennedy (Ed.), *Reinterpreting Exploration: The West in the World*, p. 227

produce more rounded and comprehensive interpretations. In addition to her own work and that of Max Jones, Barczewski cites studies by Francis Spufford²⁰² and Susan Solomon²⁰³ as important departures. In *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination*, Spufford moves away from a purely ‘hero-centric’ interpretation of polar exploration to undertake a much wider cultural examination of ‘the poles as they have been perceived, dreamed, even desired.’²⁰⁴ In doing so, he creates a fascinating account of a polar history that is ‘largely uncharted; an intangible history of assumptions, responses to landscape, cultural fascinations, [and] aesthetic attraction to the cold regions.’²⁰⁵ For her part, Solomon meticulously analyses the voluminous data gathered by the meteorologists of the *Terra Nova* Expedition in order to describe the unusual climatic conditions of early 1912, and to attribute to those conditions the deaths of Scott and his polar party. In the process, she establishes the polar environment itself as a fit subject for further scrutiny. Though not cited by Barczewski – and despite the fact that they are not exclusively Antarctic, or even polar, in their focus – new treatments can also be found in Beau Riffenburgh’s *The Myth of the Explorer: The Press, Sensationalism, and Geographical Discovery*,²⁰⁶ which charts the relationship between exploration and the popular press; Geoff Powter’s *We Cannot Fail: The Fine Line Between Adventure and Madness*,²⁰⁷ which examines the psychology, and the potential psychosis, of those compelled to explore;

²⁰² Francis Spufford, *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997)

²⁰³ Susan Solomon, *The Coldest March: Scott’s Fatal Antarctic Expedition* (London: Yale University Press, 2001)

²⁰⁴ Francis Spufford, *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), cover blurb

²⁰⁵ Francis Spufford, *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), p. 6

²⁰⁶ Beau Riffenburgh, *The Myth of the Explorer: The Press, Sensationalism, and Geographical Discovery* (Oxford: OUP, 1994)

²⁰⁷ Geoff Powter, *We Cannot Fail: The Fine Line Between Adventure and Madness* (London: Robinson, 2007)

and *Life at the Extremes: The Science of Survival*,²⁰⁸ by Frances Ashcroft, which considers the physiological impacts of exploration.

Although these broader studies remain the exception rather than the rule in terms of books intended for ‘a general, non-specialist audience’,²⁰⁹ even a cursory survey of more specialist academic journals will reveal the extraordinary breadth of research now being undertaken and published, with subjects including the ‘imaging’ of the polar environment through photography and painting; gender, masculinity and feminism in exploration; sovereignty, diplomacy and the geopolitics of the polar regions; class and colonialism; polar science and medicine; the built environment and perceptions of civilisation – to name but a few.²¹⁰ Taken *en masse*, the range of this research serves to underpin Dane Kennedy’s assertion that ‘new lines of inquiry have resulted in a widespread reassessment of the historical significance of exploration, shifting away from its longstanding triumphalist associations and towards a more nuanced appreciation of the multiple forces that propelled it and the unintended outcomes it produced.’²¹¹ In addition, while the Heroic Age remains at the core of most Antarctic historiography, historians including Barczewski, Klaus Dodds²¹² and

²⁰⁸ Frances Ashcroft, *Life at the Extremes: The Science of Survival* (London: Flamingo, 2001)

²⁰⁹ Barczewski, *Antarctic Destinies*, p. xviii

²¹⁰ The following is a representative sample of relevant essays published in the last five years: Shirley V. Scott, “Ingenious and Innocuous? Article IV of the Antarctic Treaty as Imperialism” (*Polar Journal*, Volume I, Issue 1, 2011, pp.51-62); Adrian Howkins, “Political Meteorology: Weather, Climate and the Contest for Antarctic Sovereignty, 1939-1959” (*History of Meteorology* 4, 2008, pp. 27-40); Kerry McCarthy, Jacky Bowring & Bryan Storey, “A Working Man in Wonderland: Ernest Joyce, Photographs and Antarctic Exploration” (*Polar Journal*, Volume I, Issue 2, 2011, pp. 155-175); Victoria Rosner, “Gender and Polar Studies: Mapping the Terrain” (*Signs*, Volume 34, No. 3, 2009, pp. 489-494); H.R. Guly, “Psychiatric Illness and Suicide in the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration” (*History of Psychiatry*, Volume 23, No. 2, 2012, pp. 206-215); E. Leane, “Isolation, Connectedness and the Uses of Text in Heroic Era Antarctica: the Cases of Inexpressible and Elephant Islands” (*Island Studies Journal*, 2(1), pp. 67-76); Carolyn Strange, “Reconsidering the ‘Tragic’ Scott Expedition: Cheerful Masculine Home-making in Antarctica, 1910-13” (*Journal of Social History*, 46(1), 2012, pp. 66-88)

²¹¹ Dane Kennedy, ‘Introduction: Reinterpreting Exploration’, in *Reinterpreting Exploration: The West in the World* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), p. 3

²¹² Klaus Dodds, *Pink Ice: Britain and the South Atlantic Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002)

Peter H. Hansen²¹³ have demonstrated that consideration of later expeditions can be highly beneficial in the development of wider cultural interpretations not only of Antarctic exploration, but of exploration as a whole. In particular, all have used the CTAE as an important case study in their analyses of the evolution of British and Commonwealth exploration.

Given these trends, there can be no doubt that consideration of later expeditions – particularly when they are placed within a broader context – will generate further opportunities for valuable inter-disciplinary research. My own work, which has spanned both the ‘Heroic’ and ‘Post-Heroic’ periods of Antarctic exploration, has included consideration of the psychological impacts of technological advancements on the men involved and I now find the prospect of further research into this field particularly appealing. One possible focus is on the impact of the mechanisation that Hayes identifies as the defining feature of the expeditions launched after 1917. Technological improvements meant that, from the 1950s onwards, revolutionary vehicles like the Sno-cat and the Skidoo rapidly replaced dogs as the main motive power of polar exploration – but what effects did this evolution have not only on the psychology and self-perception of the men and women directly involved but also on the attitudes of their ‘audience’, those who from a distance assessed the value of their endeavours? In the same vein, many polar explorers have emphasised the importance of sledge dogs not simply as a means by which to cover ground swiftly and safely but also as objects of affection and as a ‘safety valve’ at times when the inevitable frustrations of confinement within a small expedition hut became almost unendurable. Speaking of the decision to ban the use of dogs in the Antarctic, Ken Blaiklock, an experienced dog-driver with FIDS, later stated that ‘I

²¹³ Peter H. Hansen, ‘Coronation Everest: the Empire and Commonwealth in the “second Elizabethan age”’, in Stuart Ward (Ed.), *British Culture and the end of Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University

don't think they realised the psychological advantage of having an animal which welcomes you all the time.²¹⁴ The move from man- and dog-hauled sledging to motor vehicles therefore not only revolutionised polar travel in terms of the distances covered, it also generated significant changes in the explorer's interaction with the natural environment, with his companions and with those who observed and commented upon his work.

Similarly, while Riffenburgh, Barczewski and others have done much to trace the factors which have both influenced and mediated the relationship between explorers and their audience, much more can be done to examine and understand the effects of *direct* and *immediate* communication between explorers in the field and those at home – communication which only became possible with the advent of wireless telegraphy and the radio telephone. That this improvement in communication proved to be a mixed blessing has already been shown.²¹⁵ Reference has also been made to the independent manner in which Scott's men chose the epitaph for their dead friends.²¹⁶ With the advent of near-instantaneous communication between explorers and their management committees at home, it became almost impossible for men in the field to operate with such independence. At the same time there is clear evidence that the explorers on the ground sought to maintain their autonomy. Vivian Fuchs found the constant demands of his committee and the press a major distraction during his attempt to cross the Antarctic continent²¹⁷ and he did his best to dodge the constant stream of questions and demands. During the same expedition, Ed Hillary went even further and used atmospheric interference as a cover for his deliberate

Press, 2001), pp. 57-72

²¹⁴ Author's interview with K.V. Blaiklock, 1 June 2009

²¹⁵ See pp. 51-53

²¹⁶ See pp. 36-37

²¹⁷ See pp. 52-53

manipulation of wireless communication.²¹⁸ The impacts of wireless and, more recently, satellite communications on the prosecution of exploratory activity and on the actions and psychology of explorers therefore merits further study; moreover, the pursuit of these studies will complement the valuable work that has already been done on the various media used by the earlier explorers to communicate with those at home – and by those at home to influence and interpret *them*.

These examples constitute but a fraction of the potential avenues for further study. In the words of Robert Stafford, ‘Population growth and environmental degradation can only increase interest in what were once blank spots on the map and the process by which they were incorporated into Europe’s economy and consciousness.... Exploration has always been a complex cultural activity; its history remains so, influenced by changing trends, but continuously deepening our understanding of the motivations and consequences of those most unusual men and women compelled to go where others had not.’²¹⁹ In this context, we can see that the demonstrable continuity in so many elements of British Antarctic exploration makes such arbitrary classification as ‘Heroic’ and ‘Post Heroic’ nonsensical. Moreover, by allowing our analysis to be prescribed by classifications that we know to be decades-old historiographical constructs, we wilfully limit our ability to develop a cultural interpretation of exploration that is both inclusive and properly grounded in the realities of the expeditions themselves and in an understanding of the complex combination of forces that gave rise to them.

²¹⁸ See Haddelsey, *Shackleton’s Dream: Fuchs, Hillary & The Crossing of Antarctica*, p. 209

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²¹⁹ Robert A. Stafford, 'Exploration and Empire,' in Robin W. Winks (Ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume V: Historiography* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), p. 301

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Note:

My research has included the identification and use of primary sources (e.g. diaries, correspondence, official reports, telegrams, ships' logs and sound recordings) as well as published accounts of mostly British and Commonwealth polar exploration and interviews with nearly all of the surviving members of the two later expeditions. These sources have formed an essential part of my accounts of the Australasian Antarctic Expedition (1911-14), the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition (1914-17), Operation Tabarin (1944-46) and the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition (1956-58), with multiple primary sources being used wherever possible. In almost all cases, interviews with veterans were recorded and transcribed with transcriptions lodged in the archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge for the use of future researchers.

Interviews Conducted With:

Expedition Veterans

Ken Blaiklock OBE, Lieutenant-Commander Richard Brooke, Wing Commander John Claydon, Professor Rainer Goldsmith, Lieutenant Ian Graham, Major Roy Homard, Gordon Howkins MBE, George James, Dr Jon Stephenson, Derek Williams.

Others (including explorers' family, friends, colleagues etc)

Pat Bamford, Sheila Bates, Bob Beck, Rosanna Bickerton, Eileen Blaiklock, Karen Bussell, Allan Carroll, Didi Cavendish, William Cavendish, Sophia Crawford, Elisabeth Dowler, Gerry Farrington, Nigel Forbes-Adam, Anne Fright, Peter Fuchs,

Patrick Garland, Eliane George, Enid Homard, John Hooke, Bryan Langley, Margaret Lister, Martin Lockley, Mary Lowe, Angus Macindoe, Patricia Mantell, Sarah Mantell, Janet Marr, Sheila Marsh, Stephen Marsh, Justin Marshall, Margaret Marshall, Charles & Vera Martin, Sally McNally, Pippa McNickle, Jean Messervey, Andrew Morritt, Angela Nall, Nigel Nicolson, Elizabeth Pearce, Anne Phillips, Ted Pollard, Colin Rogers, Paul Rogers, Madeline Russell, Jane Seligman, the Earl of Shrewsbury, David Stewart.

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John Dymond

Vivian Fuchs

Rainer Goldsmith

D.E.L. Homard

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Hal Lister

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David Madigan

George Marsh

E.H. Marshall

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RAF Museum, Hendon

F.H. Bickerton Casualty Reports

Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge University, Cambridge

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Vivian Fuchs Collection

Walter Hannam Collection

H.F.P. Herdman Collection
Leonard Hussey Collection
Alfred Larkman Collection
Aeneas Mackintosh Collection
Douglas Mawson Collection
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