

Fragile Objects: uncovering networks and tracing material culture from the 'Heroic Age' of Antarctic exploration

PhD

School of Archaeology, Geography and Environmental Science

Henrietta Hammant

February 2025

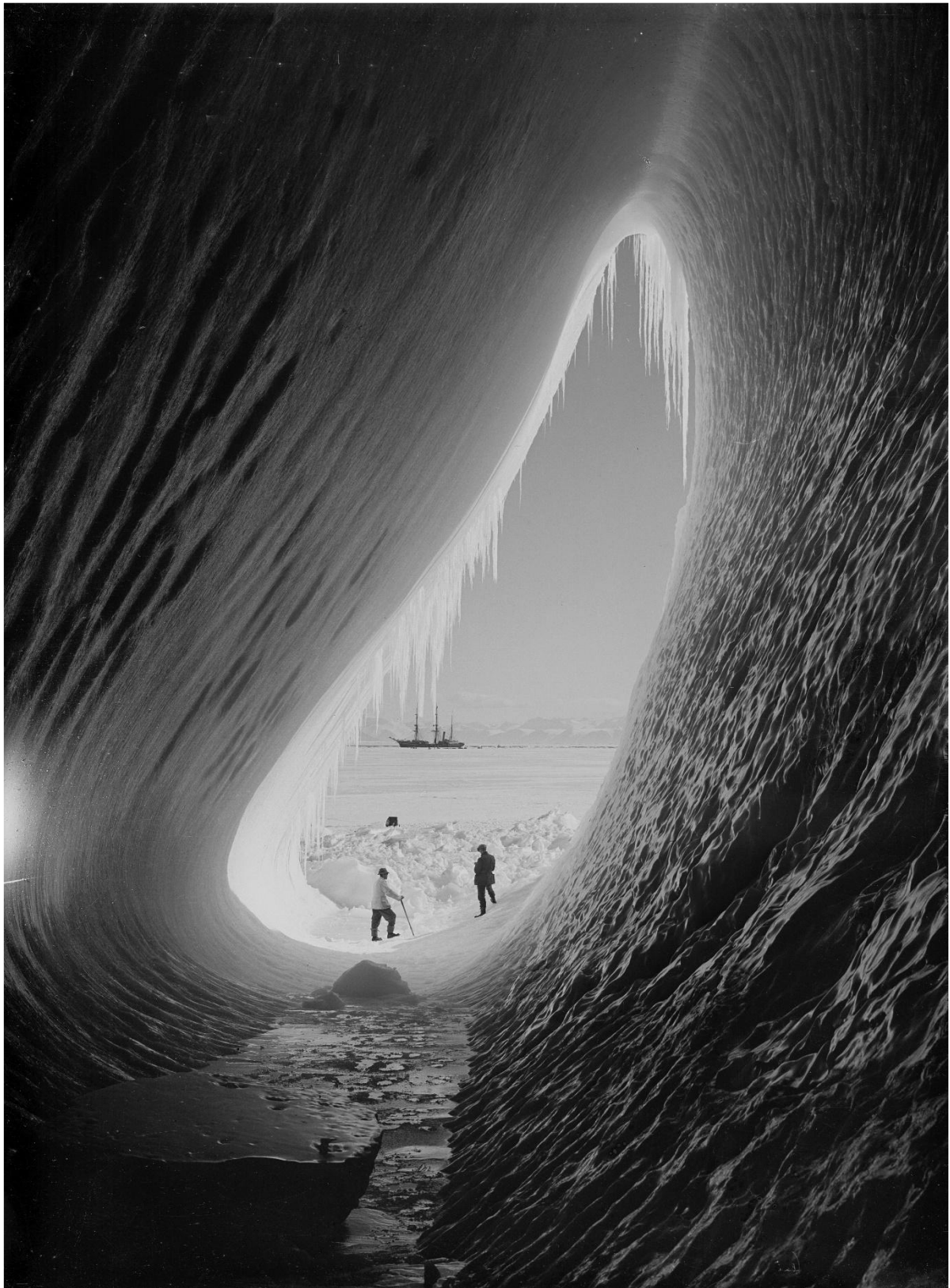


Figure 0.1. P2005_5_1027 - View from inside curved ice grotto. Taylor and Wright stand at the entrance looking up. Ship 'Terra Nova' in background over ice sheet. Image by Ponting © SPRI.

Contents

Abstract	8
Acknowledgements.....	9
Declaration.....	10
1. Introduction: laying the foundations	11
A dusty pair of skis no more.....	11
The aims of this research	12
Why this topic? Why now?.....	12
Scientific Exploration and British Imperialism	15
Heroic masculinity.....	17
Drawn to the poles.....	18
The Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration.....	21
Key figures and events of the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration	23
Captain Robert Falcon Scott	25
Sir Ernest Shackleton.....	29
The changing reputations of Scott and Shackleton	32
Immediately following the expeditions	32
Changing public reception of the expeditions in the context of WWI	33
The decades after death.....	34
The role of museums.....	36
On Heroism	36
2. A multi-sited, patchwork approach.....	39
Research Context	39
Fieldsites	42
Fieldsite 1: The Polar Museum	43
Fieldsite 2: Discovery Point	44
A patchwork ethnographic approach	45
Further ethnographic patches and other methods	46
Museum visitors and exhibitions.....	46
Museum professionals, past and present.....	47
Museum objects.....	48

The work to come	50
3. Fragile objects and mutable networks.....	51
Objects with agency	52
Networks of actors	53
Physical fragility: avoiding the material reversion to ‘thing-ness’	55
Contextual fragility: the contextual reproduction of objecthood	57
Contextual fragility: theories of context	57
Contextualising objects in practice.....	60
Conceptual fragility: networks that create theories (and where to cut them)	64
Authentic objects?	68
4. The History of the Polar Museum: from conceptualisation to the modern day	71
By the Grace of all those involved	74
From the ‘attic period’ to commissioning architects	75
Collection origins and growing pains	79
‘A minor point’	81
A brief note on gender	82
The increasing popularity of the Heroic Age	83
Professionalisation	84
The 2010 redevelopment project.....	85
Reasons for the redevelopment.....	86
A brief note on strategy	88
Key themes for the new Polar Museum	89
Changes to the museum layout and gallery design	90
Written interpretation.....	93
The opening	94
The mission of the Polar Museum today.....	96
Over a hundred years of the Polar Museum	98
5. Museum Voices at the Polar Museum.....	99
The gallery space at the Polar Museum	103
How do the public engage with these spaces?	108
Key takeaways identified by museum visitors	111
Is there anything missing for the visitors?.....	112
What works for the museum professionals at the Polar Museum?	114
What would the museum team like to change – exhibition styles	117

What would the museum team like to change – exhibition themes	117
Future change and modern relationships	119
What next for the Polar Museum?	120
6. The History of Discovery Point: Dundee to Antarctica and back again	121
The history of the <i>RRS Discovery</i> and the creation of Discovery Point	122
Discovery Point from 1993 to the present day	123
The museum mission at Discovery Point	126
7. Museum Voices at Discovery Point	128
The galleries at Discovery Point	130
How do the public engage with these gallery spaces?	136
Key messages identified by museum visitors	138
Is there anything missing for the visitors?	139
What works for the museum professionals at Discovery Point?	140
What would the museum team like to change – exhibition styles	141
What would the museum team like to change – exhibition themes	142
What next for the museum at Discovery Point?	144
The Redevelopment Project	144
Phase I	144
Phase II	145
Key messages, key voices	146
Potential difficulties	147
Impact and a museological ‘echo chamber’	148
8. Authenticity, relics and replicas	150
9. Shackleton’s sledging flag: family connections	155
What is a sledging flag?	158
At home with the family	160
Out on display	162
Bringing colour to a very brown museum	163
A royal ceremony and a not-so quiet life	163
My own influence	165
The power of family, affect and aesthetics	166
10. Boat Bits: research and a mistaken identity	168
The shipwreck of the <i>Charles Shearer</i>	171

Investigations	171
The limelight	172
Obscurity.....	173
Museum positions.....	174
Z Numbers.....	175
Confusion	175
Two objects, one of note.....	176
Research and institutional knowledge	177
11. The Sir Ernest Shackleton lifeboat and the Raymond Plaque: Authentic objects?	180
The Sir Ernest Shackleton boat.....	182
Maiden voyages	182
A gift boat	183
Accession decisions.....	184
Installation and life at SPRI.....	186
Too big and too expensive.....	187
The Raymond Plaque	188
Centenaries and shopping.....	189
Collecting Cultures	190
The boy and the little boat.....	190
On display	191
An Antarctic object that has never been to Antarctica.....	192
Can the <i>Sir Ernest Shackleton</i> boat or the Raymond Plaque be described as authentic?	193
12. Captain Oates' sleeping bag: the power of people	196
Sponsored equipment.....	198
From the Arctic to the Antarctic.....	200
The <i>Terra Nova</i> Expedition	202
Family first.....	203
The only temporary exhibition	205
Early museum life.....	208
A proper place.....	212
Serendipity	215
An icon	216
The display of an 'heroic' death	217
13. Scott's snow goggles	219

The Early Life of Scott’s Snow Goggles	221
Early Display	222
Shifting Priorities	223
Thematic Display	223
Something Special?	224
14. Fragile objects, hero objects, and extending the network	227
In what ways are objects fragile?	228
Physical fragility: the tangible object	228
Contextual fragility: a place to interact with the object	230
Conceptual fragility: a reason for visiting the object.....	234
What makes a ‘hero’ object?	236
How can we see beyond the hero?	238
Past networks.....	239
Present pressures.....	241
Reconstituting networks as decolonial practice	242
15. Conclusion: the persistence of change.....	244
Future Research	248
Conceptually fragile museums	248
16. Epilogue	252
References	254
Unpublished references	276
Appendix 1: Visitor survey.....	281
Appendix 2: List of individual interviewees and professional roles held	282
Appendix 3: An explanation of the numbering system at the Polar Museum	283
Appendix 4: Heat map detailed analysis and spider charts.....	284
Appendix 5: Objects on loan to Athy Heritage Centre – Shackleton Museum from the Polar Museum 2009.....	288
Authorisations, figures and tables	289

Abstract

Captain Robert Falcon Scott and Sir Ernest Shackleton, among others, led multiple expeditions during the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration, which lasted from the late-19th to the mid-20th century. Today, the material culture of their expeditions shapes the legacies of Heroic Age explorers in museum collections across Britain and Ireland. The Polar Museum in Cambridge and Discovery Point in Dundee are both heritage institutions with Heroic Age collections relating to Scott and Shackleton's expeditions. While these collections are generally considered to be fairly inert – unless they are put on public display – and to relate to only a select group of white European explorers, this thesis considers the ongoing production of their status within the museums, and the diverse network of actors with which they are entangled. Through ethnographic data acquired during fieldwork with the museum teams and visitors at the Polar Museum and Discovery Point, as well as visitor observations and archival research, I argue that museum objects are undergoing continuous production within their networks. This thesis makes three key arguments: (1) that museum objects are subject to three modes of fragility – physical, contextual and conceptual, and that these must be stabilised to ensure their 'object' status; (2) that certain museum objects may be seen as more significant than others as a result of their inalienable connection to the body of particular historic figures; and (3) that reconstituting the network of actors within which objects are entangled enables researchers to analytically 'pause' an object's connection to an inalienable individual and uncover other actors who have shaped the object's trajectory. This thesis argues that 'object' status is not a fixed state, but requires a broad network of actors to produce and sustain it over time.



Figure 0.2. P66/18/026 -
The Endurance Return of the sun
after the long winter darkness.

The ship Endurance beset in
consolidated pack ice with large
blocks of ice in the foreground.

Location: Weddell Sea.
Image by Hurley © SPRI.

Acknowledgements

It is quite possible that beginning my doctoral research in 2020 – in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic – could have been the start of a very lonely few years. To my eternal good fortune, that was far from the case and there have been very many people who have made this not only the most intellectually stimulating, but also the busiest time of my life.

My unreserved thanks to the museum teams at the Polar Museum and Discovery Point without whom this research would not have happened. Thank you for your generosity of time and knowledge, your shared interest in my work, and your patience in letting me ask you myriad questions ranging from the fantastically detailed to the impossibly broad. To the Libraries, Archives and Museum teams at the Polar Museum, in particular, who have been with me on a long road from 2017 to the present, your friendship has been a cornerstone of this research.

Thanks go to the Worshipful Company of Arts Scholars who provided me with the funding that enabled me to visit Dundee, I am truly grateful for your ongoing interest in my research and career. I have been fortunate to collaborate with scholars on a range of projects during the course of this thesis. Thank you to Michael Grant, Felix Pedrotti and Jack Pink from the University of Southampton for inviting me to be part of *Tales of Discovery*, and to Daniella McCahey and Maria Ximena Senatore, as well as Camilla Nichol, Alice Oates and Jean de Pomereu, for welcoming me so warmly into the very small world of Antarctic humanities researchers. It has been a true pleasure to work with you all. Thanks, too, to Gabriela Roldan and Pete Carey, whose belief in me eventually meant that I was able to visit Antarctica for myself in 2023-24, a truly life-changing experience (in more ways than one). At Reading, my deep thanks go to Steve Mithen, for his guidance and genuine enthusiasm for my research, even though it is so different from his own.

My PhD supervisors have been, without bias or hyperbole, the very best that anyone could hope for. Thank you so much, Alanna Cant and Duncan Garrow, for your advice, support and very many readings of this thesis. You have pushed me to consider things more deeply, write more accurately and think – frankly – in more interesting ways. It has been an absolute joy (and you are never getting rid of me).

My family and friends have been a true lifeline, their wisdom and kindness know no bounds and I am blessed to have them all. Thank you to the Corpus gang, and the Stamford girls, for being exactly as you are. Thanks to my brother, Alexander, for his jokes and well-needed distraction (all of it good natured, repetitive and well-rehearsed) and to Jenny and Bea for the laughter and the fun. Thank you to my father, Jeremy, for his bish, bash, bosh attitude and his unwavering belief in me. The greatest thanks of all though, must go to my mother, Catherine, without whom none of this would have happened in the first place and, more importantly, none of it would have been possible.

The final heartfelt thanks go to my husband, Doug. He has listened and considered, laughed and comforted, congratulated and cooked (and cooked, and cooked), and makes it all worthwhile.

You are all heroes to me.

Declaration

Declaration: I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

H.L.Hammant



Figure 0.3. P2005_5_1471 - Scott, Shackleton and Wilson stand, in full sledging outfits, in front of laden sledges (British National Antarctic Expedition, 1901-04). Image by Ponting ©SPRI.

1. Introduction: laying the foundations

A dusty pair of skis no more



Figure 1.1. Z: 416a-b - A pair of wooden skis used by Henry Robertson Bowers on the British Antarctic Expedition 1910-13 (Terra Nova).

The Polar Museum team agreed that an important part of preparing for the special behind-the-scenes event was selecting a handful of objects that would give their invited guests a ‘warm, fuzzy’ feeling. The private viewing was part of the centenary celebrations for the Scott Polar Research Institute – of which the museum is a part – and in the weeks leading up to it, the team considered a range of objects. It was a difficult task, as many of the VIPs expected to attend the celebrations would have visited the museum many times before, and likely would have already seen the most famous items in the collection. Nevertheless, the objects chosen needed to be remarkable, as they were to be put on display in the Institute’s historic Old Library and introduced to the guests by members of the team over the course of a very busy afternoon. Eventually, a range of objects was decided upon, including – from the museum’s Antarctic collections – some homemade Christmas tree decorations, a paper party hat, and a charmingly cobbled-together candle holder made out of a biscuit tin, all from Captain Robert Falcon Scott’s final expedition. Alongside these hand-made treasures were more recognisable pieces of expedition equipment including a telescope and a barometer that had been taken to the top of Mt. Erebus. Among this amalgam of riches, there was also a pair of wooden skis (Figure 1.1).

It has to be said that a pair of skis in a museum dedicated to the polar regions is not an uncommon thing. However, these particular skis have led an especially exciting life. Originally used during the

Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration, they have been a part of the Polar Museum's collection since its inception. They were so much a part of the furniture, in fact, that their original provenance had, at one time, become divorced from their materiality. They were a part of the museum's collection, but exactly when they were used and exactly who they had belonged to had become lost in the mists of the Institute's hundred-year history. As a result, for many years, they had been on 'open' display: not behind glass, but resting on top of a bookcase in the Institute's library. Eventually, a volunteer (who would later become the member of staff who told me this story) took them down from the bookcase to clean them. Diligently working her way along the right hand ski, she uncovered a very crudely scratched name – BOWERS. Upon closer inspection, there was also an official-looking 'B' mark stamped into the wood, and the left ski had been inscribed with three letters: HRB. Thanks to these tiny details, missed by staff and visitors to the museum for decades, it became clear that these skis once belonged to Henry Robertson Bowers. Bowers had been a member of Captain Scott's final – and ill-fated – 1910-13 *Terra Nova* Expedition. He had not only accompanied Scott to the South Pole, as part of only the second group ever to achieve this feat, but he had also died next to him in a tent just 11 miles from their next cache of supplies, unable to reach it because of a blizzard. Revealing the skis' connection to this important figure of the Heroic Age transformed their identity from a somewhat grubby, little considered part of the collection, to a pair of objects worthy of special display to the Institute's most important guests.

Through the work of museum professionals, Bowers' skis were collected, displayed, forgotten, found, preserved and – later – heralded as a treasure of the collection, all without ever leaving the Scott Polar Research Institute. So it is that the skis, and this story, provide an indication of the rich lives that museum objects continue to lead even within the confines of a museum context. My research considers not only the lives of museum objects, but how they are shaped by a variety of actors across time and through space. Moreover, it looks for the diversity inherent in the networks these actors form which – like Bowers' connection to his skis – may have been lost from view.

The aims of this research

This thesis is concerned with objects, museums, and people. Taking the Polar Museum in Cambridge and Discovery Point in Dundee as my fieldsites, I seek to uncover the diverse network of actors connected to their 'Heroic Age' Antarctic collections through time. In doing so, I ask how these collections – and the objects within them – are formed, used, and understood. I develop a concept of 'objecthood' that considers the way that museum objects are different to those in circulation outside the context of the museum. I also consider the instances in which this 'objecthood' may be an unstable, or 'fragile', categorisation. I uncover the impact of the museum on the life histories of objects – even when they are seemingly fixed within a collection. Moreover, I interrogate what makes some objects within a museum even more special than others, especially those shaped by their specific connections to certain kinds of historic individuals. Finally, I argue that through careful tracing of the life history of objects – even the most seemingly mundane, or those apparently lacking in diversity – we can reveal a broad network of actors connected to their objecthood.

Why this topic? Why now?

Starting my doctoral research in 2020 meant that I was beginning to consider the themes of my investigation during a period of global uncertainty, at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, when widespread civil unrest was triggered by the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in

Minneapolis. Although it began in 2013, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement launched into the mainstream media and public consciousness that May, with protests around the globe following the murder (Black Lives Matter n.d.). On 6th June, weeks of demonstrations peaked in the US when half a million people turned out to protest on a single day across the country (Buchanan, Bui and Patel 2020). These actions were viewed in the UK against the backdrop of further public calls to address everyday racism, including its manifestations in cultural institutions, like heritage sites and museums. On 7th June, BLM protestors in Bristol showed the power of grassroots activism by toppling the bronze statue of the slave-trader Edward Colston, before throwing it into the city's harbour (BBC News 2020). Then, on 9th June, just three days after the peak of BLM protests in the US, more than 1000 Rhodes Must Fall activists took up residence outside Oriel College in Oxford to demand that a statue of the imperialist and white supremacist Cecil Rhodes be removed from the college's façade (Cvorak 2020).

At the same time as the Black Lives Matter and Rhodes Must Fall movements were reaching their peak, sections of the UK media were decrying what they described as the 'Culture Wars', with particular regard to the national museums sector and heritage institutions more broadly (Hicks 2020a). Inherent within this was the idea that museum institutions were 're-writing history' through new interpretations of objects and stories from the past, a fact which, for many museum professionals who understood the non-neutrality of museum spaces, was rather self-evident (Fleming 2015; Lynch and Alberti 2010; Wajid and Minott 2019). Indeed the #MuseumsAreNotNeutral campaign, which began in 2017 and reached thousands of people worldwide, called for recognition that what is often seen as the 'professional', 'objective', 'impartial' and 'neutral' work of museums too often contributes to a status quo that 'perpetuates oppression, racism, injustice and colonialism' (Autry and Murawski 2019: para 10). Nevertheless, in September 2020, Oliver Dowden, the then Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), sent out a letter to DCMS Arm's Length Bodies¹ outlining the government's position on heritage interpretation (Dowden 2020). In it, he wrote:

...you should not be taking actions motivated by activism or politics. [...] It is imperative that you continue to act impartially, in line with your public funded status, and not in a way that brings this into question. This is especially important as we enter a challenging Comprehensive Spending Review, in which all government spending will be rightly scrutinised.

At the Polar Museum, where I was then employed, this message caused some discussion even though the University of Cambridge Museum's group – of which the museum was a part – was not an Arm's Length Body². How might the act of curating 'impartially' ever be possible when it is so bound up with the context and values of the curator? Would the culture wars disrupt plans – already in place – to include a broader diversity of voices in our interpretation? Did we, as a museum funded

¹ Arm's Length Bodies are public bodies that, 'are primarily accountable to UK government ministers [...] are not financial corporations which primarily operate by selling their goods and services, and are officially classified as such by the Cabinet Office' (Dalton and Gill 2022: para 2). In short, they are not government departments, but nevertheless provide public services, backed by public funding. In the heritage sector, this includes national museums like the British Museum, Royal Museums Greenwich and the Science Museum Group.

² The letter was also sent to Arts Council England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, both of which were contributing funds to the Polar Museum at that time.

primarily by a university, even need to worry about it? It was, in short, a compelling time to work in a museum. Since 2020, the intensity of the culture wars discussion in the UK has died down, but the importance of decolonial practice in museums has only increased. Indeed, in its 2022 Strategic Plan (to cover 2022-2028), the International Council of Museums (ICOM) states that they are committed to addressing decolonisation in the sector (ICOM 2022: 3).

Within this political context, I began my research in September 2020, deciding to look at collections relating to the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration. This may seem an unusual choice, as the Heroic Age is a period notoriously lacking in diversity, with the majority of the men who went south at that time being white Europeans. There were a handful of exceptions including, most notably, Nobu Shirase's Japanese South Polar Expedition (1911-1912), which was in the Antarctic at the same time that Robert Scott and Roald Amundsen were racing to the South Pole (Hamre 1933). Nevertheless, as an academic once relayed to Verity, a member of staff at the Polar Museum, the Heroic Age in Antarctica is often seen as 'the nice face of colonialism', because even though it subscribed to similar processes – of wealthy European exploration in the search of land to claim and possibly exploit – there was nobody in Antarctica to displace and colonise. Lucy³, one of the museum professionals I interviewed at Discovery Point (see Chapter 76), made a similar argument:

Actually, the only reason that we haven't been condemned as hugely problematic yet is because there weren't people. When they got to Antarctica there were just penguins. But you know, if there had been people down there, who's to say it would have been any different to the Pacific, or America or Africa. Like, just because there weren't people doesn't mean that there weren't the same ideologies driving those expeditions.

It is because there is no population indigenous to Antarctica that it is often thought of as having been an untouched wilderness (Senatore 2020) with no geopolitical or social significance. In the UK, this idea is only amplified by the relative lack of diversity in the crews of the European Heroic Age explorers. So, this is the point: if it is possible to discover a wider cast of actors in the production of these expeditions – of European white men voyaging to an uninhabited continent – then it would undoubtedly be possible to identify a wider diversity of voices in *any* museum collection. Regardless of Dowden's views on the 're-writing' of history, there would *always* be an opportunity to think more broadly about the objects in a museum collection and the people they are used to represent.

Ultimately, my research takes the museum objects themselves as a starting point for interrogating the diversity inherent in Heroic Age Antarctic expeditions. Where were these objects made? By whom? Who paid for their production? Once they had been used – often for only a few short months in the Antarctic – who looked after them? Who decided to give them to a museum? Then, once they were accessioned into a collection, who decided to use them? Or not? Display them? Or not? In short: what factors are at play in the ongoing life history of these objects? In attempting to answer these questions, I redraw the networks within which museum objects have become entangled over the course of their social lives, in order to find the diverse voices that have often been missed. Moreover, as in the case of Bowers' skis, these networks include the museum professionals whose actions continue to perpetuate objects' life histories even when they are seemingly stationary within the museum. As a result, the arguments developed in this thesis are relevant to a wide range of ethnographic and social history collections and can spark new ways to uncover the diversity inherent

³ This name has been changed, full details in Appendix 2.

within them through decolonial practice. Moreover, the material culture aspects of what follows will be of interest to anthropologists and museum professionals alike.

Scientific Exploration and British Imperialism

‘Empire is not only about the physical conquest of territories; for the British, it was always about scientifically exploring and systematically exploiting them even as the definition and conception of science itself evolved’ (Larson 2011: xi)

The British Empire expanded rapidly during the nineteenth century, and this imperialism went hand-in-hand with the dogged pursuit of scientific research through exploration (Barczewski 2013; Driver 2001; Harrison 2005; Hodge 2011; McCahey 2023; Stafford 2013). Moreover, this intertwining of empire and exploration spoke to Victorian and Edwardian ideas about masculinity (Duffy 2022; Haines 2024), and individual heroism, relevant to the ‘Heroic Age’ of Antarctic exploration (Jones 2003; Jones *et al.* 2014; Strange 2010). The interconnectedness of these concepts, and the way that they were represented to the public through various writings, from scientific reports to travel and adventure literature, eventually conspired to create a shift in the British public’s ‘planetary consciousness’ (Pratt 1992: 29), shaping how they related to the wider world and their place within it. I argue that this set the scene for a particular view of British Antarctic explorers that continues to shape how they are understood today, but which may be subject to change. I will explore this idea, and how it impacts on the museums that now display collections relating to these explorers, in Chapter 14.

The British Empire directly influenced much of the scientific research undertaken at that time through the provision of funding and logistical support. Driver (2001) notes that explorers who remain household names – including Cook, FitzRoy and Darwin – were dependent upon the British Admiralty for the success of their exploratory voyages and the scientific research undertaken on them. Moreover, the interests of the British Empire also shaped the work carried out on these expeditions so that, ‘imperial concepts, metaphors, data and career opportunities’ all informed the development of the western scientific study of geography, geology and other sciences (Stafford 1989: 223). However, as will be identified below, scientific research itself also impacted Britain and its imperial project. Reflecting on the impact of imperialism on the British public speaks to the ‘New Imperial History’ historiographical approach that seeks to consider the impact of empire on the metropole (Hodge 2011; Thompson 2007; Wilson 2004). I argue that the relationship between scientific research and imperial expansion affected Britain and its public practically, ideologically and culturally.

At a practical level, one way that scientific work directly benefited the imperial project was through the mapping of uncharted areas of the world. This was especially true from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, when the focus of exploration began to shift from mapping coastlines to penetrating continental interiors (Pratt 1992). Put simply, as more was known about the world, more areas were opened up to the potential of colonial rule. Mapping itself, and the understanding of the specificities of new lands – including everything from the direction of flow of their water-sources to the natural migratory routes of indigenous populations – enabled imperial forces to better exploit these areas (Bravo 1996: 347). The mapping of unknown continents also enabled imperial actors to prospect for resources, whether these be animal, mineral or even in the form of human labour. Pratt (1992) notes that as more resources were uncovered, more wealth could be extracted, which would

in turn serve to fund the imperial project. The knowledge gained through the mapping and prospecting of new lands also allowed imperial powers to make territorial claims on the areas that they had 'discovered' (though many of these were already inhabited by indigenous people, who met with imperial powers at what Pratt (1992) terms the 'contact zone' of exploration). The British Empire was able to pursue these claims in the far south, beyond the reach of indigenous populations, because of its power as an 'oceanic empire' (McCahey 2023). The exploration of the distant Antarctic continent by British explorers was an especially expensive endeavour, requiring, 'support on a national scale and therefore involvement with politics' (Fogg 1992: 2). This further connection to empirical power meant that, along with the practical benefits of scientific work, the British Empire also profited from the prestige of successful Antarctic exploration. As well as the practical contributions of mapping, prospecting and territorial claims therefore, scientific research also offered ideological benefits to the imperial project.

Irving suggests that as far back as the seventeenth-century English natural philosophers held, 'a theory of empire as man's original dominion over nature' (2008: 17), and this is echoed in nineteenth and twentieth century approaches to understanding the new lands discovered through imperial exploration. As Riffenburgh writes, 'man's role as conqueror of the world was a persistent theme during the late nineteenth century' (1993: 33). The scientific work associated with imperial expeditions enacted this authority through 'the construction of a positive and comprehensive knowledge of the world' (Richard 1993: 145). Pratt argues that a key event in support of this idea was the publication of Carl Linnaeus' system for classifying plants in 1753. Linnaeus' taxonomic work was then extended by his students to encompass classifications of all living forms, which could be transferred and applied to all plants and animals (even people), including those not yet known to Europeans (Pratt 1992). In this way, the classification and production of knowledge through scientific research performs a kind of 'truth' that is specific to the European explorers who produce it. In their quest to fully understand the world, British subjects create categories of representation which they perceive to be 'universal', but which are in fact predicated upon their own specific cultural contexts, serving to further strengthen empirical power (Haines 2024; Pratt 1992; Driver 2001). As Bell, Butlin and Heffernan put it,

'Modern European science and European imperialism thus marched arm-in-arm: both were supremely ambitious, universalising projects concerned to know all, to understand all and, by implication, to control all.' (1995: 3).

These essentially outward facing ideas about how imperialism shaped the world, also impacted the way that British subjects saw themselves during the colonial period.

Through the conceptualisation of imperialism as an 'enlightened' project (Driver 2001: 21), the British public in the UK could understand the acts of colonisation undertaken by the empire as part of a 'civilising' mission - with the aim of *aiding* the indigenous peoples encountered in the contact zone. Deane describes how the British politician William Gladstone – who was Prime Minister four times between 1868 and 1894 – felt that, 'the reproduction of Englishness throughout the world would morally profit humanity' (2014: 11). Indeed, Thompspon argues that the idea of a 'British world' was itself a popular way to imagine the British Empire in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods (2000: 17). While Mehta (1999) highlights the irony implicit in the idea that the search for 'truth' through colonial expansion and scientific research ultimately led to the reproduction of British

values and norms across the world. Nevertheless, this idea enabled colonialism to be understood as a marker of *progress* in the world beyond Europe. Antarctica is a unique case, as it is the only continent that does not have an indigenous human population, and so the encounter of local peoples and resulting civilising missions that took place in other parts of the world do not apply (Scott 2019). Nevertheless, as Howkins (2024) argues, understanding Antarctic exploration through the lens of colonialism not only allows for the consideration of the powers at play in the relationships between the explorers themselves, but also encourages a renewed view of colonialism itself, questioning where the limits of this idea lie.

The written accounts of these expeditions, whether popular writing, datasets, ships logs or official reports, *produce* the place of the Antarctic in the minds of their readers, directly shaping the way that people relate to and understand this new continent. The importance of writing and written communication for the construction of the places described by explorers is well documented (Driver 2001; Pratt 1992; Richards 1993). As Latour (1987) observes, ‘technologies of inscription’ (which includes both written and visual material, such as maps), are powerful objects when they are mobile, immutable and combinable – that is, if they can be transported, remain constant, and can be translated into other forms of inscription. The circulation of these unchanging and translatable texts therefore ensures that the continent of Antarctica is constantly being evoked and produced for those left at home by the authors of these works, who are most often the scientist-explorers themselves. After all, the Antarctic, perhaps more than any other newly explored territory, was so inaccessible, that the vast majority (even today) are only able to experience it through the writings of explorers.

Heroic masculinity

While the imperial project produced the rest of the world, including Antarctica, for the British public through the written word, these writings may also be said to have produced the explorers who wrote them – moulding them into ‘masculine’ and ‘heroic’ ideals. Of particular interest here is Pratt’s conceptualisation of the British hero of the anti-conquest. Based on the idea of the ‘anti-conquest’ as a ‘Utopian, innocent vision of European global authority’ (1992: 58) this enabled British imperial subjects – like Antarctic explorers – to enact power over the places they encountered, whilst simultaneously framing themselves as innocent actors. Pratt describes a key aspect of this figure of the anti-conquest as, ‘he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess’ (1992: 28). In this way, the scientist-explorers are removed from their imperial actions, free to undertake the politically ‘neutral’ work of science, all the while staking a claim for their nations for the resources and territories that they study.

But these figures were not neutral. Jones (2007) argues that ‘heroes’ in particular should be understood as an amalgam of the cultural, social and political values of past societies. While ‘manliness’ at the beginning of the Victorian era was embodied by family men, missionaries and even entrepreneurs, there was a shift in the late nineteenth century to a very different kind of masculinity (Deane 2014). A key conceptualisation of ideal masculinity during the late Victorian era was that of the ‘soldier hero’ (Dawson 1994; Jones 2003; Meyer 2009), based on intrepid and courageous characteristics that could also be applied to territorial expansion. Brown argues that by the end of the nineteenth century these ideals provide, ‘the exemplary model for middle-class imaginings and performances of manhood’ (2010: 594). In addition to the important traits of the masculine hero – which also included self-sacrifice and patriotism (Robinson 2013) – the Victorian idea of ‘character’

prized self-restraint, perseverance and effort in the face of adversity (Collini 1991). The gendered nature of these characteristics in Victorian and Edwardian society has been widely acknowledged (Brown 2010; Deane 2014; Duffy 2022) and, as Haines writes, ‘the heroic individual, a tough, usually male adventurer, was one of the most enduring figures of the British imperial age’ (2024: 162). In this way, the themes of masculinity (and gendered heroism) and empire became inextricably linked, not least because men who explored unknown parts of the world were provided with the perfect opportunity to display their manly, heroic characteristics. Moreover, how these characteristics came to be represented to the world was also within the power of the explorers, as they wrote the stories of the adventures to be published for public consumption.

That imperial propaganda spanned many different forms, from literature and cinema to theatre and exhibitions, all with the aim of convincing the public of the success and importance of the empire, is well documented (MacKenzie 1985). Moreover, Haines (2024) notes that this propaganda was employed to ‘inculcate the character and values that were thought necessary to expand and sustain empire.’ (2024: 177). It is little wonder, then, that the manly heroes of the late 19th and early 20th century should feature heavily in this agenda. Fortunately for the explorers themselves, there was a well-worn tradition of producing written works about expeditions from exploration narratives to works of fiction (Driver 2001). These accounts described what they had experienced in the field – in such a way as to underscore their heroic manliness and ‘stiff upper lip’ (Haines 2024: 166). This was no different for Antarctic explorers with Scott, Shackleton and the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen all publishing accounts of their expeditions between 1905 and 1919. They were able to present themselves as ideal heroic men in the eyes of their readers. Perhaps the most powerful example of this self-written literature is Scott’s final ‘Message to the Public’, which he wrote just before his death in the Antarctic in 1912, and which Jones describes as, ‘the ultimate expression of self-control in the face of death’ (2003: 10). In this instance, as in all those self-written pieces of imperial heroic propaganda, Scott was able to shape the way his readers think of him and, by extension of his work – including his scientific research.

The publication of written accounts by Heroic Age explorers, alongside the intersection of scientific research and imperial exploration, all served to create an enduring idea of them as ‘innocent’ masculine heroes. This was amplified by the lack of an indigenous population in the Antarctic, which meant that the ‘contact zone’ of colonialism did not involve the subjugation or exploitation of local people. Ultimately, these factors have produced the Antarctic exploration of the Heroic Age in the minds of the British public as something largely *outside of* the imperial project. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the practicalities, ideology and cultural context of this period of exploration were all rooted in the colonial sphere. In the following section, in the light of this historiographical context, I will consider in greater detail the events that led up to the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration and the classification of this period today.

Drawn to the poles

In 1875, the Austro-Hungarian Arctic explorer Karl Weyprecht presented an idea to the 48th meeting of the Association of the German Naturalists and Physicians that would have an unparalleled impact on Antarctic history (Baker 1982). Weyprecht’s idea was that the scientific community should come together, in the spirit of collaboration, to study the polar regions. He proposed an international research initiative, in which a number of research bases would be built around the circumpolar Arctic

and the sub-Antarctic, notably on South Georgia and Cape Horn (Baker 2010). These bases would then conduct research on the same phenomena, at the same time, with their datasets and observations spanning the world. The project would conduct research in meteorology, geomagnetism and even auroral studies (Barr 1983). Weyprecht's idea was developed, and later re-presented, in 1879, to the International Meteorological Congress. The members of the Congress felt that this research project would provide highly important data for the study of meteorology and magnetism in particular, and supported its presentation to the first International Polar Conference, held in Hamburg in 1879. The Polar Conference approved the plans and agreed that the first International Polar Year (IPY) – as Weyprecht's project was to become known – would take place from 1882-1883 (Baker 1982) (there have been three more since in 1932-33, 1957-58 and 2007-08). The first IPY is regarded as a significant step towards international scientific cooperation in the polar regions (which would ultimately lead to that most cooperative of polar agreements, The Antarctic Treaty in 1959) (Barr and Luedecke 2010). It also provided the first ever set of coordinated scientific observations at multiple locations across the Arctic and Antarctic (Elzinga 2010). In its focus on the polar regions – and its inclusion of the Antarctic in these ideas in particular - the IPY formally set the stage for another important international scientific meeting in 1895: the Sixth International Geographical Congress. Here, it was declared that:

‘The Sixth International Geographical Congress, assembled in London, in the year 1895, with reference to the exploration of the Antarctic Regions, expresses the opinion that this is the greatest piece of geographical exploration still to be undertaken; and in view of the additions to knowledge, in almost every branch of science, which would result from such a scientific exploration, the Congress recommends that the various scientific societies throughout the world should urge, in whatever way seems to them most effective, that this work should be undertaken before the close of this century.’ (Sixth International Geographical Congress 1896: 176).

As a result of this declaration, many nations across Europe began work on the preparations for their own, national Antarctic expeditions. These expeditions, as is evident from the discussion of the interconnectedness of scientific research and imperialism above, straddled the line of research and soft claims to colonial power. Together, the International Polar Year and the Sixth International Geographical Congress set the stage for the British Empire's engagement with the Antarctic as a site for potential territorial expansion and resource extraction, through the lens of scientific research and exploration. Perhaps the most important single organisation in Britain's late-Victorian and Edwardian interactions with the Antarctic, however, was the Royal Geographical Society. Topcu and Kartın (2024) argue that the Royal Geographical Society (RGS), through the study of geography and the production of maps in particular, produced data that directly served the imperial expansion of the British Empire. As a result, this organisation holds an important place in the history of British exploration, and by 1870, it was also London's largest scientific society. Its place as an imperial source of knowledge and power, as well as its status as a popular society that opened its doors to non-academic members, meant that its institutional aims were both, ‘to acquire the status of a scientific society and to provide a public forum for the celebration of a new age of exploration.’ (Driver 2001: 24).

Despite a large membership, the RGS's financial resources could not fund the costly multi-year expeditions of the Heroic Age alone (Baughman 1994). As a result, funding for British expeditions

during this period generally came from a mix of public and private benefactors. Governments provided some support, with the British, New Zealand and Australian governments supplying varying amounts to some, but not all, of Scott and Shackleton's expeditions (Beck 1983). Indeed, the Treasury actively cautioned Scott that his *Discovery* Expedition would not be recognised as a government enterprise and as such the government would not be responsible for its organisation in any capacity (*Ibid.*). Titans of industry also contributed to the expeditions, including the Scottish jute baron Sir James Caird (who is remembered particularly, as his name was given to the lifeboat that Shackleton used to travel from South Georgia to Elephant Island on the *Endurance* Expedition) and Sir William Beardmore a Scottish industrialist, after whom Shackleton named the Beardmore Glacier (Bernacchi 1935). There were also donations from men who would go on to play a part themselves in the expeditions, including Apsley Cherry-Garrard and Lawrence Oates, who both ventured south aboard Scott's *Terra Nova* Expedition (Cherry-Garrard 1922).

Despite this very varied roster of funders for Heroic Age expeditions, the RGS nevertheless continued to hold the reins when it came to scientific work on Captain Scott's expeditions. For example, they appointed five scientists to Scott's *Discovery* Expedition, the results which were presented by Scott to the RGS from the stage of the Royal Albert Hall in 1904, and he also produced a written account of the expedition (Jones 2003). However, the RGS's contributions to Shackleton's expeditions during this period were significantly lacking. For his 1914-17 *Endurance* Expedition, they provided only the loan of three chronometers and no money (*Ibid.*). While the RGS was, to a greater or lesser extent, both literally and metaphorically invested in the success of these expeditions, the manner of reporting and analysing research findings was neither formalised nor centralised across the expeditions of the Heroic Age. This led to an environment in which individuals became responsible for the storage and use of their own data – or else were required to hand them over to organisational representatives who had not ventured south (Jones 2003: 70) – an unreliable practice which, as we shall see in Chapter 3, ultimately paved the way for the creation of the Scott Polar Research Institute in 1920.

In addition to their contribution to the scientific work of these expeditions, Duffy writes that RGS fellows 'fostered British myth-making' (2022: 7) through the representation of Antarctic explorers to the public. For example, following the *Endurance* Expedition, which they had so minimally supported before it left for the Antarctic, the RGS nevertheless invited Shackleton to address the public at the Royal Albert Hall, making him only the fourth explorer ever to have done so, following Stanley, Nansen and Scott (Jones 2003). As a result of this kind of exposure, the RGS played a significant role in the formation of the public reputations of Scott and Shackleton. Jones, perhaps, puts it best when he describes how the RGS:

'promoted a vision of exploration as a tripartite process of measurement: explorers measured the world, taking scientific observations; measured manliness, testing their heroic character in the battle against nature, and measured empire, marking the limits of British imperial power.' (2003: 10).

But in the production of Antarctic explorer-heroes, there is one member of the RGS who matters more than most. Sir Clements Markham was the mastermind behind the RGS's move towards polar exploration, particularly at the beginning of what was to become known as the 'Heroic Age' of Antarctic exploration. Markham had ventured to the Arctic as a young man, and brought back with him an enduring love of the polar regions (Baughman 1994). As a result, when he became President

of the Society in 1893, he was able to push a polar agenda, shaping the future expeditions to be funded by the RGS. In particular, following the 6th International Geographical Congress and its call to national societies to prioritise expeditions to the Antarctic, Markham sought to launch a British Antarctic expedition, with the explicit aim of pursuing scientific exploration (Markham 1901). Crucially, it was also Markham who selected and supported Scott as the leader of this expedition, which was to be called the British National Antarctic Expedition. It was as a result of these decisions: to pursue scientific exploration in the Antarctic, and to give Scott the responsibility to lead this first expedition, that Markham shaped the future of British Antarctic history. He created 'a new mould for the explorer hero, a mould from which Scott of the Antarctic, naval officer, scientist, and national martyr, was cast.' (Jones 2003: 31).

The Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration

The Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration is a key term of reference throughout this thesis. It refers to a period that is generally considered to run from the late 19th to the mid-20th century, though there is some disagreement on the specific dates and events it encompasses. Some authors cite the Sixth International Geographical Congress in 1895 as the beginning of this era, when the international scientific community first looked to the Antarctic as a key focus of their future expeditions (Pearson 1992; Clancy, Manning and Brolsma 2014). Other scholars consider early expeditions such as the Belgian Adrien de Gerlache's *Belgica* Expedition in 1898 (Barczewski 2023), or Scott's *Discovery* Expedition in 1901 (Baughman 1994) as the point at which the 'Heroic Age' truly began. Similarly, while some argue that this period came to an end in 1917 following Shackleton's *Endurance* Expedition (Pearson 1992; Summerhayes 2008), others indicate that it officially ended with his death in 1922 (Barczewski 2023; Brazzelli 2017). Whatever the specific dates, the 'Heroic Age' is a well-worn part of the lexicon of Antarctic history, with some authors suggesting that it was first coined by the explorer Duncan Carse in an article written for *The Times* in 1955 (see Fisher and Fisher 1958: 386 for details of this article; Philpott 2012). Today, the Heroic Age features as a term of reference across many different academic works ranging from social history (Barczewski 2007), to the history of science (Larson 2011a), and from economics (Basberg 2017) and literary studies (Legler 2011), to medicine (Guly 2012; 2013) and biography (Butler 2013). Moreover, the Heroic Age is a widely used term among the museum professionals at both the Polar Museum and Discovery Point. Indeed, the Antarctic display at the Polar Museum is called *Antarctic Exploration: The Heroic Age* and at Discovery Point the *Heroes of the Ice* gallery also interprets events solely from this period.

An important distinguishing feature of the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration is the change in the aims of these expeditions from those that preceded them. There had been exploratory expeditions mounted to the Southern Ocean and the outer fringes of the Antarctic before the Heroic Age, including those led by Captain James Cook between 1772-1775 (Bernacchi 1935), John Biscoe from 1830-1833 (Cumpston 1963), and Sir James Clark Ross between 1839-1843 (Savours 1962). There had also been an increasing number of commercial whaling and sealing voyages in the decades preceding the Heroic Age (Basberg 2017; Basberg and Hacquebord 2023; Pearson, Zarankin and Salerno 2020). What distinguished the Heroic Age, however, was an increased interest in the penetration of the interior of the continent (Headland 2009) and scientific discovery (Taylor 1951; Larson 2011a). In this way, the Heroic Age is a clear example of Pratt's (1992) representation of empire as turning away from maritime exploration and towards the continental interior in this period. In the pursuit of these dual aims of scientific research and potential territorial expansion, the

Heroic Age also encompassed the erection of the first manmade structures on mainland Antarctica by Carsten Borchgrevink's 1898-1900 *Southern Cross* Expedition (Pearson 1992), the first overwintering expedition led by Adrien de Gerlache's *Belgica* Expedition from 1897-1899 (De Deckker 2018), and the first expeditions to the South Pole, made by Roald Amundsen and Captain Robert Falcon Scott (Amundsen 1912; Cherry-Garrard 1922; see also the section on Scott below). Moreover, it offered new insights into this little-known place and its unique environment with research spanning a variety of scientific areas including sea-ice, zoology and geology (Edinburgh and Day 2016; Shaughnessy and Pharaoh 2021; Tingey 2009).

The 'Heroic Age' of Antarctic exploration is therefore a well-used phrase to demarcate this period of history, characterised by an increasing number of national European expeditions interested in exploring and scientifically categorising the Antarctic continent. In this way it sits well within the framework of science and imperialism discussed at the beginning of this section. Nevertheless, it is worth noting here that its ongoing use in museums, literature, and even in my own research, continues to construct the perceived heroic nature of the men who went south during this period. The more it continues to be used, the more this phrase cements the men of the era as characterising the heroic ideals first set out in late-nineteenth and twentieth century Britain. In the next section of this chapter, I will outline the specific histories of Captain Robert Falcon Scott and Sir Ernest Shackleton, the two most celebrated British explorers of the Heroic Age. I will trace the stories of their expeditions and the changing nature of their 'heroic' reputations after their deaths.

Key figures and events of the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration

The two key players of Heroic Age in terms of British history are Captain Robert Falcon Scott and Sir Ernest Shackleton (see Figures 1.2 and 1.3 for a map and timeline of their expeditions). Both men play important roles in the museum collections and exhibition displays at my fieldsites – the Polar Museum and Discovery Point. I therefore set out a potted history of these men and the expeditions they led to the Antarctic throughout the Heroic Age as historical context for my research.

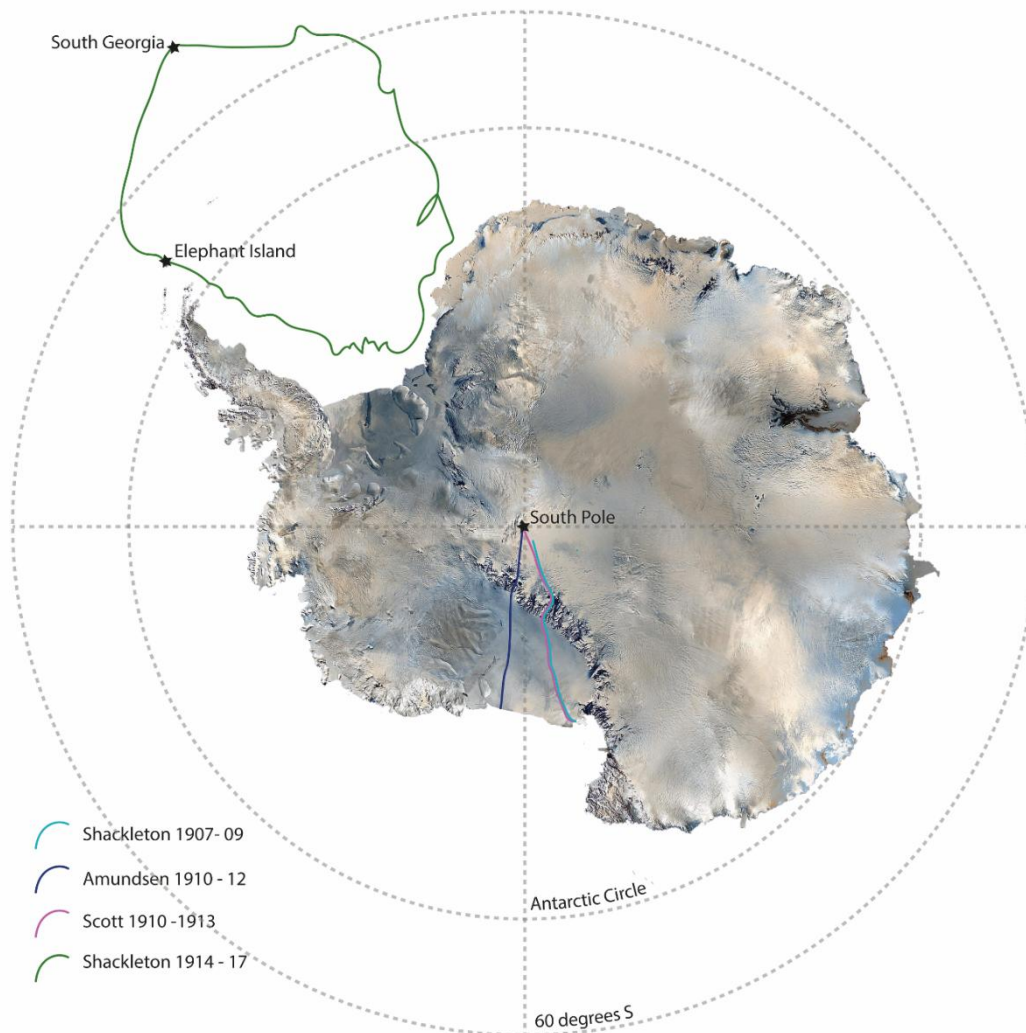


Figure 1.2. Map of Antarctica (satellite image) with key expedition routes from the Heroic Age.

Robert Falcon SCOTT	Year	Ship	Sir Ernest SHACKLETON
Born in Devonport, England.	1868		
	1874		Born in Kilkea, Ireland.
Led the British National Antarctic Expedition (<i>Discovery</i>).	1901	DISCOVERY	Third officer on the <i>Discovery</i> Expedition.
	1903		Unwell and sent home by Scott.
Reached within 410 miles of the South Pole.	1904		
	1907	NIMROD	Led the British Antarctic Expedition (<i>Nimrod</i>), which reached within 97 miles of the pole.
	1909		Upon his return, knighted by King Edward VII for his achievements in Antarctica.
Led the British Antarctic Expedition (<i>Terra Nova</i>).	1910	TERRA NOVA	
Amundsen reaches the South Pole (14.12.1911).	1911		
Reached the South Pole (18.1.1912).	1912		
Died in Antarctica March 1912.			
Expedition completed after Scott's death.	1913		
	1914	ENDURANCE	Led the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition, (<i>Endurance</i>) with the aim to cross the continent via the South Pole.
	1915		The ship was trapped and destroyed by ice in the Weddell Sea.
	1916		Led the open boat journey from Elephant Island to South Georgia, then crossed the island to seek help.
	1917		Expedition completed after rescue.
	1921	QUEST	Led the Shackleton-Rowett Expedition (<i>Quest</i>).
	1922		Died on board and buried in South Georgia.

Figure 1.3. A timeline of the major events relating to Scott and Shackleton's lives & expeditions.

Captain Robert Falcon Scott



Figure 1.4. P2005/5/370 - Captain Scott. Captain Scott wearing sledging outfit stands by a sledge. Image by Ponting © SPRI.

Robert Falcon Scott (Figure 1.4) was born in Devonport, near Plymouth, in 1868 and joined the Royal Navy at the age of 14. His military background shaped the way that he undertook his expeditions to the Antarctic. These ran along the lines of traditional naval voyages, with the same hierarchy of command and expectation of unequivocal top-down leadership that characterised this world. Though these may not fit with modern ideals of leadership, Scott was nevertheless well-respected, particularly by the admirals he served under (Lewis and May 2013: 126-7).

Scott was asked to lead the British National Antarctic Expedition by Sir Clements Markham, at that time the President of the Royal Geographical Society (RGS). As well as support from the RGS, he received £45,000 from the British government for this expedition (Beck 1983) for which the first ever Royal Research Ship – the *RRS Discovery* – was specially built in Dundee⁴. This British National Antarctic Expedition – known colloquially as the *Discovery Expedition* – went south between 1901-04. Accompanying Scott on the *RRS Discovery* was a young officer named Ernest Shackleton. He would go on to lead his own expeditions to this continent, but for now he was under Scott's command. The *Discovery Expedition* accomplished a broad range of scientific work on its journey south and in the Antarctic. This included extensive research on geology, oceanography, zoology, and magnetism. Indeed, some of the samples collected on this expedition are still under investigation today (Rainbow 2005; Jungblut and Hawes 2017). In part, this work can be seen as a kind of prospecting by the British government – providing it with a better sense of the geographical composition of Antarctica which could inform any future efforts to exploit its natural resources. Alongside this academic work, another aim of the expedition was to attempt to send the first men to the South Pole. This would serve the dual purpose of achieving a glorious goal for Britain, and laying the foundations for claiming territory on the continent. In short, an expedition of this type, and at this time, provided an opportunity to 'combine scientific research, heroic endeavour and imperial theatre' (Jones 2003: 63, original emphasis).

The *RRS Discovery* reached the Antarctic in 1902, and would not set sail again until 1904. During this two-year period, as well as scientific research, various journeys were undertaken by the men to explore the continent, including Scott's attempt on the South Pole. Scott selected two men to accompany him on this special mission: his perennial right-hand man Edward Adrian Wilson, a zoologist, surgeon, and talented artist, and Ernest Shackleton, a motivated young man whom he felt would be an asset to the small team. Unfortunately, all three suffered from ill health – Shackleton worst of all – and though the expedition made the furthest inroads into the Antarctic continent yet achieved, they were forced to turn round within 410 miles of the pole. Shackleton became so unwell that he had to be assisted by Scott and Wilson, only truly recovering from the journey once they had returned to base camp and were able to eat a more varied and nutritious diet. As a result, Scott decided that Shackleton would be invalided home in March 1903 aboard the relief ship *Morning*, which had come to replenish the expedition's supplies. Although Shackleton was displeased with the decision, Scott's word was final, and he did return to the UK at this time. However, this provided him with the opportunity to bring the first news of the expedition home, which he capitalised on to great personal effect (more on this below). Scott and the remaining members of the *Discovery Expedition* finally returned to the UK in September 1904.

⁴ The British book editor Sir George Newnes had already funded the *Southern Cross Expedition*, led by Carsten Borchgrevink between 1899-1900, however, because this was a private venture, Scott's was the first official British Antarctic expedition of the 'Heroic Age'.

It took some time for Scott to raise the financial support to return to the Antarctic, and it was 1910 by the time he led his second – and most famous – expedition aboard the ship *Terra Nova*. This was the British Antarctic Expedition, which lasted from 1910-13. The aims of the expedition were also based in science and the desire to lead the first team to the pole (Larson 2011b). However, these plans were disrupted by the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen. Amundsen was a polar explorer with Antarctic experience, but his focus had primarily been on the Arctic. He had lived with the Netsilik Inuit on King William Island (in modern day Nunavut, Canada) for a period of nearly two years (Høvik 2015) and had been the first man to navigate the Northwest Passage from 1903-1906 (Amundsen 1907). Amundsen had originally intended to be the first to reach the North Pole. However, in 1909, there was widespread controversy when the American explorers Frederick Cook and Robert Peary made competing claims that they had achieved this feat. Cook suggested that he had reached the pole in April 1908, while Peary argued that he had been the first man there in April 1909 (Dick 2004)⁵. Following these claims Amundsen's interests shifted. He sailed south – keeping his new goal of reaching the South Pole secret from most of the men onboard until the last possible moment (Sancton 2021). Stopping in Melbourne on his own journey south, Scott received a telegram from Amundsen indicating his change of plans, and so began what was to become known as the 'Race to the Pole'.

Scott worked hard to achieve the scientific aims of his *Terra Nova* Expedition, in spite of the pressure applied by Amundsen's newfound desire to reach the South Pole. In the end, Amundsen did reach the pole first, on 14th December 1911, just five weeks before Scott and his men on 18th January 1912. However, while Amundsen led his team safely back to base camp, Scott's expedition met a different end. Scott had taken four men with him, his old friend Edward Wilson, Edgar Evans, Henry Robertson Bowers and Lawrence Oates (Figure 1.5). The men suffered from bad weather, frostbite, scurvy, exposure and the loss of fuel from their depots, which contributed to a punishing return journey. Edgar Evans died following a fall in which he suffered a brain injury. Next, Captain Lawrence Oates – who had been suffering from scurvy and frostbite, as well as the re-opening of an old war wound due to his malnourished state – sacrificed himself in the hopes that it would save his teammates. Oates walked out into an Antarctic blizzard with the immortal words 'I am just going outside, I may be some time', which were recorded in the diaries of the men he left behind. In spite of Oates' sacrifice, Scott, Wilson and Bowers were not able to make it to the next depot (and the cache of food and fuel that it contained) before a multi-day blizzard confined them to their tent. The final three men of Scott's Polar Party died in March 1912, just 11 miles from the depot. The following spring, a search party of expedition members who had not been chosen to go to the pole discovered the men and their diaries in the tent. They read Scott's final words in his last entry – 'For God's sake look after our people' – as well as the 'last letters' written by the men to their families and friends. Scott had also written a 'Message to the Public' in which he described the difficulties they had faced and the bravery of his men (Scott Polar Research Institute n.d. a).

⁵ To this day, both claims remain highly controversial. In fact, the first men to stand at the North Pole may have been the members of a secret scientific expedition undertaken by the Soviet Union, which flew to the pole in 1948 (Pala 1999), and the first crossing to the North Pole undertaken on foot may not have been until Wally Herbert's expedition in 1969 (Hattersley-Smith 2008).



Figure 1.5. P2005/5/1345 - The Polar Party at the South Pole. Oates, Scott, Evans stand, Bowers and Wilson sit in front. Union Jack flag on a pole behind Location: Antarctica, Ross Dependency. Image by Ponting © SPRI.

Sir Ernest Shackleton



Figure 1.6. P2001/86/186 - Ernest Shackleton: Head and shoulders portrait of Ernest Shackleton © SPRI.

Ernest Shackleton (Figure 1.6) was born in Kilkea in Ireland in 1874 and joined the merchant navy when he was 16. The merchant navy was seen as less prestigious than the Royal Navy at this time (Juzda Smith 2020) but nevertheless Shackleton became a formidable seaman and leader. Because of his merchant navy background, his leadership style diverged from Scott's, and his confident and

outgoing personality generally meant that he was slightly more egalitarian in nature, though he nevertheless had the final say in decision-making.

Following his ill health on the *Discovery* Expedition (see above), Shackleton returned home earlier than planned, having been 'invalided' by Scott following their attempt to reach the South Pole. This meant he was one of the first men to discuss his experiences on the popular speaking circuits, which made him something of a spokesperson for the expedition until Scott's return from the Antarctic in 1904. Shackleton was a charismatic figure who took well to public speaking, and it was not long before he was gathering support for his own expedition (Herbert 2012).

The first expedition Shackleton led to the Antarctic was the British Antarctic Expedition (1907-09) aboard the *Nimrod*, which set sail only a few years after the return of the rest of the *Discovery* Expedition crew in 1904. Scott was concerned that this expedition would hamper his own efforts to return to the Antarctic, and was later unhappy about Shackleton's plans to use his base at McMurdo Sound, built during the *Discovery* Expedition. Scott insisted that Shackleton build his own base elsewhere and though Shackleton agreed – under some pressure from the polar community – upon his arrival in the Antarctic, unfavourable ice conditions meant that he was forced to make his base at McMurdo Sound despite his promise to Scott (Barczewski 2007). During the *Nimrod* Expedition, Shackleton, along with his teammates Frank Wild, Jameson Boyd Adams and Eric Stewart Marshall, made his own attempt on the South Pole. The men managed to reach the furthest south yet attained, stopping within 97 miles of the pole. Though they perhaps could have made it to the South Pole on this journey, Shackleton felt that they would not have been able to make it back to base camp, so he made the decision to return without reaching the pole. This achievement was not bettered until Scott and Amundsen's efforts in 1911/12.

Following his *Nimrod* Expedition, Shackleton spent some years preparing for his next Antarctic journey. During this time, Scott and Amundsen's Race to the Pole took place, and this dramatically shifted Shackleton's plans. Upon realising that he could no longer lead the first expedition to the South Pole – but by now entirely enamoured of the Antarctic – he decided to attempt an even greater feat: to be the first man to traverse the continent, passing through the South Pole on his journey. This expedition, the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition, also became known after its ship, the *Endurance*, and lasted from 1914-17. The *Endurance* Expedition is perhaps one of the best known of the Heroic Age – its recent fame in no small part thanks to the discovery of the *Endurance* shipwreck at the bottom of the Weddell Sea on 5th March 2022, by the members of the Endurance22 Expedition (Endurance22 n.d.).

Shackleton's plan was to begin his trans-Antarctic expedition in the Weddell Sea and walk to the Ross Sea, on the other side of the continent. However, the *Endurance* never made landfall and instead became frozen into the ice of the Weddell Sea in 1915. The ship moved with the current, dragging the expedition crew further from land, until eventually the pressure of the ice was too much, crushing the ship and causing it to sink. The men had been able to save supplies and lifeboats from the ship before it sank and then spent the next five months camping on the sea ice, still at the mercy of the currents. Eventually, they sighted land, and the channels of open water required to access it, rowing their lifeboats for six days to make landfall on Elephant Island. This remote island was so isolated that Shackleton's only option to save his men was to seek help himself – there would be no passing rescuers. He made a plan to convert a lifeboat and set sail for South Georgia, which had a

whaling station and the wherewithal to rescue his men, but was more than 800 nautical miles away (Figure 1.7). Shackleton took Frank Worsley, Tom Crean, John Vincent, Timothy McCarthy and Henry McNeish with him aboard the boat, and, thanks to Worsley's astounding navigational skill, they made landfall on South Georgia 17 days later. However, they had landed on the opposite side of the island to the whaling station. Shackleton, Worsley and Crean trekked for 36 continuous hours over uncharted terrain filled with glaciers and mountains to reach the station. Amazingly, they were successful, and Shackleton was eventually able to arrange the rescue of all the men who had travelled south aboard the *Endurance*.



Figure 1.7. P66/18/66 - The relief boat setting out for South Georgia. A group of men launching the lifeboat James Caird into the sea from the shore of Elephant Island. Image by Hurley © SPRI.

When Shackleton returned from the *Endurance* Expedition in 1917, two years and nine months after he had left Britain, he found a changed world, which had been in turmoil with the events of World War I. The story of his expedition became overshadowed by the everyday heroic acts that had happened much closer to home. However, though he took up a range of other roles in the intervening years, he nevertheless sought to return to the Antarctic. Shackleton's final expedition, the Shackleton-Rowett Expedition aboard the ship *Quest*, lasted only from 1921-22. Having sailed down to South Georgia and landed again at the whaling station where he had found salvation in 1916, Shackleton was preparing to leave for a new adventure when, on 5th January 1922, he died of a suspected heart condition in his bunk onboard the ship (Barczewski 2007). Though Frank Wild, his right-hand man, carried on undertaking scientific research, the expedition ended only a few months later. Shackleton's body was initially sent to Montevideo, so it could be shipped home to be buried, but on hearing what had happened, his widow Emily instructed it to be sent back to the Antarctic. He is buried in the whalers' graveyard at Grytviken on South Georgia.

The changing reputations of Scott and Shackleton

Francis Spufford, in his book *I May be Some Time*, describes the story of Captain Scott's *Terra Nova* Expedition, and notes that, 'like any successful myth, it provides a skeleton ready to be dressed over and over in the different flesh different decades feel to be appropriate' (1996: 4). The stories of the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration – and, indeed, Scott and Shackleton themselves – are subject to significant reinterpretation through time. As societal interests and values change, so too do the way these men are understood. Nevertheless, both Scott and Shackleton remain household names in the UK, even more than 100 years after their deaths. In fact, Jones (2003) notes that in a 2002 BBC poll of 'The Top 100 Great Britons' Shackleton ranked 11th, and Scott 54th (interestingly, that other famous explorer of the late nineteenth century, David Livingstone, only just made it into the poll in 98th place; see BBC 2002). But what did Scott and Shackleton do to ensure that their stories were heard during their lifetimes? How were their reputations spread? And how have these stories and perceptions of the men who wrote them been impacted by the more than 100 years since they were first told? In this section, I will consider the strategies employed by Scott and Shackleton to share information about their expeditions; how the British public's reception of these men was shaped by the events of WWI; and how their reputations have changed in the decades following their deaths. Finally, I will consider the role of museums in maintaining the legacies of these explorers, a theme that I will return to in greater detail in Chapter 14.

Immediately following the expeditions

In the early twentieth century, newspapers and the popular press were crucial not only in telling the world about Scott and Shackleton's achievements in the Antarctic, but also in getting them there in the first place. Due to the varied nature of funding opportunities for Heroic Age Antarctic expeditions, both Scott and Shackleton turned to the press to assist in financing their expeditions (Farley 2005). As Riffenburgh notes, 'not only did members of the press sponsor numerous expeditions, they also encouraged exploration by paying large sums for exclusive accounts from the explorers.' (1993: 3). This had significant consequences for the men of the expeditions, who had to ensure that the appropriate news outlets were the first to hear of their exploits. For example, Barczewski describes how, once the *Terra Nova* reached New Zealand following Scott's death in the Antarctic, three men were sent ashore by dinghy to send word of the outcome of the expedition. Meanwhile, the ship carried on up the coast because, 'the rest of the crew could not be trusted to maintain the secrecy that was vital if Scott's guarantee of exclusivity to the Central News Agency, which had paid £2,500 for the privilege, was to be fulfilled.' (2007: 122). The expense of funding expeditions in exchange for exclusive rights also shaped the way that newspapers reported events in the Antarctic, particularly when other newsworthy things were taking place. For example, the *Daily Chronicle* put the news of Shackleton's survival of the *Endurance* Expedition on its front page on two consecutive days (2nd and 3rd June 1916) because of the money that they had spent in gaining exclusive reporting rights. While two days does not seem like an especially long period, early June 1916 saw news reach Britain of the Battle of Jutland, World War I's largest naval engagement, and Lord Kitchener's death; arguably more immediately significant events that were closer to home. Indeed, the *Daily Chronicle* gave more space to reporting on the *Endurance* Expedition than any other major London paper (Barczewski 2007). The press was therefore an important part of shaping Scott's and Shackleton's reputations, which in turn elevated their chances of future expeditions. As

Riffenburgh writes, 'explorers not only could obtain fame and wealth directly from the newspapers, the exposure gained could increase other sources of income, such as lecture audiences, book sales, and independent contributions' (1993: 56).

Writing books about their expeditions, as I have outlined earlier in this chapter, was also an important part of shaping the reputations of the explorers of the Heroic Age. Like newspapers, books were a way of disseminating the stories of this period to as wide an audience as possible. Biographies of the men on the expeditions, and particularly their leaders, provided not only a way to spread the word of their 'heroic' deeds at the poles, but also to fundraise for future expeditions, or pay back creditors of past voyages. For example, Shackleton signed over the rights for his ghostwritten book *South* directly to his creditors (Farley 2005). Other books served as a way for their writers to have their point of view heard and understood, as with Cherry-Garrard's *The Worst Journey in the World*. This book is often cited as a classic of modern adventure travel writing, but it also allowed Cherry-Garrard to share his perspective on the tragedy of Scott's death (Wheeler 2003).

Another key way for Heroic Age Antarctic explorers to both fund their expeditions and shape their own reputations was by delivering public lectures. While these were inherently more exclusive than the written accounts available in books and the press, they nevertheless catered to large audiences. As Riffenburgh argues, polar explorers in the late nineteenth century were 'widely desired and highly paid as public speakers' (1993: 2). This is certainly true, as has been argued earlier in this section, in the light of Scott's and Shackleton's experiences speaking for the Royal Geographical Society at the Royal Albert Hall in London. Both men also endeavoured to lecture on international circuits, in order to increase their exposure and the potential to attract donors for future expeditions. Following the *Endurance* Expedition, for example, Farley notes that Shackleton lectured, 'in South America, the USA, Australia, New Zealand and Britain' (2005: 234).

Public lectures could also be augmented through the display of photographs and even films that had been produced in the Antarctic. Again, following his *Endurance* Expedition, Shackleton was at one stage providing 'twice-daily live commentary to Frank Hurley's film in the London Philharmonic Hall' (*Ibid.*). Moreover, Herbert Ponting, the photographer on Scott's *Terra Nova* Expedition also toured widely with his photographs for many years following his return from Antarctica (Barczewski 2007: 215-16). The visual representation of this expedition was also greatly enhanced by the release, a century after Scott's death, of Ealing Studio's film *Scott of the Antarctic* which has gone on to introduce, 'millions of people both in Britain and elsewhere to the story' (Barczewski 2007: 213).

Changing public reception of the expeditions in the context of WWI

Farley writes that both Scott and Shackleton, 'embodied a model of manly white explorer integral to British imperialism' (2005: 232). However, as Jones *et al.* (2014) note, the propaganda of imperial heroes was at its height in the years before WWI. Following the First World War, attitudes began to shift and the way the British public responded to Scott and Shackleton was altered as a result. Scott, for one, became a martyr for the British national project – a man who had died in pursuit of imperial (and scientific) goals. His death was interpreted by the British public, millions of whom had suffered the death of a loved one in the war, as an, 'exemplar of heroic sacrifice' and as proof that death itself had meaning at a time of national tragedy (Barczewski 2007: 116). These themes of sacrifice and martyrdom, Barczewski writes, could be as easily used to describe and explain Scott's death in the field as to validate the deaths of soldiers on the battlefields of Europe. As a result, Scott's death was

employed by the British government to inspire young men being sent to fight in the war. The Ministry of Information used Scott as the subject of films meant to portray the British ideals of independence, endurance and morality and the National Book Council put forward Cherry-Garrard's account of the expedition as 'recommended reading' for British troops (Jones 2003: 286). Scott's death was seen as an inspiring death, even a good death, during the course of the First World War and although Britain had not been at war when he had died, his nevertheless became a moral story about the stoicism of the British character and the right way to die.

The fate of Shackleton's reputation during and immediately after the First World War was very different to Scott's because he did not die. In fact he had the 'temerity to come back' (Barczewski 2007: 144). Shackleton and his crew set sail for the Antarctic on the eve of WWI and, although he offered the services of his men and the ship for the war effort, the Admiralty told them to proceed south. At that point in 1914, nobody expected the war to last as long as it did, and by the time Shackleton returned from the Antarctic – having saved his men – the world was a very different place to the one he had left. In fact, in the years following WWI,

'In many people's eyes, Shackleton, for no reason other than his own glorification, had prevented fifty-six able-bodied men from performing their duty to their country, while their own sons, husbands and brothers were dying in droves' (Barczewski 2007: 116).

While Scott had become almost a war hero, in spite of his death a year before the conflict began, Shackleton became a much lesser figure in the public's imagination. The First World War fundamentally changed the public consciousness as Britain became a nation in mourning. The closeness of death in the inter-war years also meant that people were not looking for stories of survival or happy endings, and so Shackleton's achievements in the Antarctic were overlooked (*Ibid.*). The fact that Shackleton had not fought in the war – though some of the men of his expedition who had been saved in the Antarctic would go on to be killed on the battlefield upon their return – would hamper his reputation for many decades to come.

The decades after death

Writing of British and French imperial heroes (and not only those who went to the Antarctic) Jones *et al.* indicate that, 'Imperial heroes were crafted post-mortem by the combined efforts of lobbies, grieving families and friends, unpaid and paid propagandists' (2014: 793). This speaks to the varied cast who have influenced the way Scott and Shackleton have been thought of in the century since their deaths (and which I will go on to describe in much more detail throughout the rest of this thesis). Just as their reputations divided following the First World War, so their fates were equally changeable in the decades that followed. Whilst Scott's star has fallen in recent years, Shackleton's reputation has seen a rapid resurgence.

For Captain Scott, who had received so much attention as an ideal British hero in the context of WWI, his fate changed dramatically in the inter-war and post-war period as British values and ideals shifted. Roberts (2011) notes that even as early as 1928 historians like James Gordon Hayes were beginning to question the planning and leadership of his *Terra Nova* Expedition. While there was still representation of Scott as an heroic individual in books published in the late 1950s and 1960s – in particular the Ladybird book *Captain Scott* in 1963 – critiques of his expedition soon began to emerge. Jones (2011: 195) also argues that Kathleen Scott's death in 1947 was instrumental in

removing a barrier for a more critical response to the *Terra Nova* story in the years that followed. From a socio-cultural perspective, Morgan (1992: 197) argues that after the 1950s, 'Britain embarked on a traumatic process of self-examination, self-doubt, and declining morale, a perception of external weakness and internal decay' as a result of a declining empire, and socio-economic challenges following the Second World War. Because of this altered outlook, the way that the British public responded to Scott's actions, and his reputation as quintessential British explorer and martyr of empire became less favourable. Jones (2011) in particular cites how Scott and even Oates began to be mocked by comedians for their stoicism and 'stiff-upper-lipped' attitude. The playwright Howard Brenton even produced a performance of *Scott of the Antarctic*, 'at Bradford Ice Rink in 1971, with the Norwegians effortlessly navigating the stage on skates, while the British stumbled around on foot.' (Jones 2003: 288). Perhaps the most important nail in the coffin of Scott's reputation, however, was secured by Roland Huntford's biography, published in 1979 which Jones (2011: 148) describes as 'bluntly destructive'. While historians had been critical of Scott in the past, Huntford's work directly blames his leadership, lack of foresight and decision making for the deaths of the Polar Party, and he does not believe that these shortcomings were redeemed by the 'heroic death' that Scott suffered. This book played a vital role in the falling of Scott's reputation that still reverberates through public opinion today. As Jones (2011: 202) notes, 'Scott's resuscitation will never be complete, though, for Huntford's accusations can never be unmade. Once fractured, a reputation cannot be reassembled.' Nevertheless, in more recent years Scott's reputation has begun to be tied, again, to his scientific work. Now – perhaps as the world begins to open its eyes to the impact of climate change and the importance of a solid understanding of our world – there is room for Scott to once again step into the spotlight; as Roberts writes, 'Scott has become a particularly hallowed figure for modern Antarctic scientists' (2011: 149).

So, what of Shackleton's reputation since his death in 1922? Interestingly, Barczewski (2007) writes that following Shackleton's death, there was some acknowledgment within the press that the events of his *Endurance* Expedition had not been well enough appreciated at the time, as a result of their taking place in the midst of the First World War. Although Barczewski suggests that, during this inter-war period, it was his death that the British public were still more interested in, and which spoke to them more profoundly than anything Shackleton had (or could have) done in life. In spite of this, it would still be a period of decades before Shackleton's reputation would rise to the levels that Scott's had attained in 1913. It was not until the 1960s and 70s that Shackleton began to, 'emerge as a romantic hero and great leader.' (Barczewski 2007: 244). This was perhaps as a result of the public's increasing interest in social democracy following Clement Attlee's administration in the late 1940s to 1950s (Jones 2003). The public were no longer as enchanted with the top-down hierarchical leadership imposed by Scott, but were looking for something different, represented in the more gregarious and sociable member of the Merchant Navy: Shackleton. However, it is not until the 1990s that Shackleton really becomes a significant popular figure with the public. The particular trigger claimed for this change varies, ranging from the major Shackleton exhibition at the New York Natural History Museum in 1999 (Jones 2011) to the rise of 'copy-cat' expeditions to the Antarctic in the 1990s and early 2000s, and even Kenneth Branagh's 2002 mini-series *Shackleton* (Farley 2005). However, key to this change is a shift in interest – and an admiration of – Shackleton's leadership style, which is itself now regularly used as a key example in leadership training courses both in the US and UK (Jones 2011). The Shackleton phenomena seems to show few signs of abating and in 2019 he won the 'explorers' category of a new BBC poll on British 'Icons' (BBC 2019).

It is also worth mentioning here that both Scott and Shackleton stepped again into the limelight with the centenary celebrations of their expeditions and deaths. This undoubtedly brought them to the attention of a new generation of people interested in the polar regions. These events also significantly influenced the Polar Museum and Discovery Point, and these are discussed in greater detail in relation to both exhibitions and individual objects throughout the rest of the thesis.

The role of museums

Scott and Shackleton's reputations have certainly been influenced by the creation of national monuments (Jones *et al.* 2014), memorial services (Barczewski 2007), and even the production of material culture like cigarette cards (Spufford 1996). The role of the museum then is to act as an amalgamation of these ideas – a place where people can come to remember, at any time, the men of this era through the objects that they have left behind. Both The Polar Museum and Discovery Point have clear missions to memorialise the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration, and to interpret these figures and their histories to a wide public audience. However, as we have seen, the reputations of these men are far from static, and as Spufford (1996) indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the way that they are understood depends as much on the opinions of the present viewer as they did on the events of the past. Moreover, through their Heroic Age collections, these museums have inherited a legacy of the imperial nationalism that went hand-in-hand with these early expeditions. Like it or not, they are tied to Pratt's (1992) manly British hero of the anti-conquest as he takes the form of the early Antarctic explorer. Therefore, in a world which is beginning to question not only the decisions of its colonial past, but also the impact of museums in the representation of this past, these museums may soon find themselves in a difficult position – their missions tied to men who may increasingly be thought of as anything but 'heroic' imperial figures, and instead the perpetrators of a nationalistic, colonial regime. While the Antarctic has traditionally managed to escape public scrutiny for its early expeditions (largely thanks to the lack of an indigenous human population), this may not be the case forever. I will return to this idea in greater detail in Chapter 14.

On Heroism

Good fieldwork leaves the anthropologist with different questions to the ones they began with (Candea 2013: 255), and certainly this was true of my experiences at the Polar Museum and Discovery Point. At the start of my research, I felt that understanding museum representations of the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration would require a detailed analysis of what 'heroism' itself means to the staff and visitors at these museums. However, over the course of my research it became clear that, although I was talking to people about heroism, it was always my own questions on the topic that sparked the conversation, rather than it being something my participants were talking about – or even especially interested in – when I was not around. This led me to move away from this idea in order to pursue different themes. Nevertheless, there is value in understanding heroism insofar as it frames the broader questions, about the lives of museum objects related to the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration, which became the focus of my work. What follows is therefore a brief discussion of heroism as a concept, as well as perceptions of heroism at both the Polar Museum and Discovery Point.

What it means to be a hero has been debated through time and across disciplines. From the concept's origins in classical literature (Jones *et al.* 2014), to comparative mythological studies (Campbell 1949) and popular culture (Ryder 2019), and from sociology (Frisk 2019) to international

relations (Wegner 2021) and children's literature (Hourihan 1997), the hero is a slippery term hiding behind a seemingly straightforward public image. This is particularly true for the museum staff and visitors I spoke to throughout my fieldwork. Staff and visitors at both museums generally began by describing 'heroes' as brave, capable of sacrificing themselves for others, inspiring, and selfless leaders. These characteristics fit neatly within Segal's (2000) description of a 'Great Man' view of history⁶. However, when asked whether Scott and Shackleton might be described as heroes, many of the museum visitors willingly agreed, but the museum professionals became notably uncomfortable. Their reactions ranged from a sort of begrudging acknowledgement that Scott and Shackleton might possibly be described as heroic, to being wholly unable to square their Antarctic expeditions with the 'heroic' definitions they had just provided. So how is it that these figures can be thought of as both heroic and resoundingly *not* heroic within the context of these two museums that are dedicated to their feats?

The answer lies in the idea that heroism is not a predestined, inherent quality, found in some people from childhood and lacking in others (Hamilton 1980), but that it is in fact socially constructed and contextually dependent. What it means to be heroic can depend on the time, place, social standing and even the personality of the person judging the hero (Frisk 2019). Moreover, this reading enables an individual's heroic status to change over time (Barczewski 2007; 2016; 2023; Farley 2005; Jones 2012; Pedrs 2000), and therefore also allows for a moving of the goalposts when it comes to assessing heroic behaviour. For example, Debbie⁷, one of the staff at Discovery Point, questioned whether Heroic Age explorers were acting heroically, 'Because at that time we didn't really gain much from knowing about Antarctica. Apart from the Magnetic South Pole.' This is an interesting comment, as it goes against the grain of the museum team's usual championing of the scientific work – as an inherently positive activity for the public good – that took place on Scott's expedition. Indeed, Debbie regularly talked about the importance of the expedition's scientific research. Nevertheless, it seems that, for her, the value of this work is more important to present day researchers than to Scott and Shackleton's contemporaries (despite its potential use in the service of colonial endeavours). Today, the data collected during the Heroic Age can be used as a baseline for climate change. As a result, their actions may have been *less* heroic when they were undertaking them and *more* heroic a hundred years on.

Perhaps part of the problem is that museum professionals know these historic figures *too well*. Although they subscribe to a similar definition of what a hero is to the museum visitors, they do not see these men as holding those characteristics because they are able to judge them across a range of their actions over time. By contrast, the museum visitors are reliant upon the interpretative work of the museum in deciding whether to grant Scott and Shackleton heroic status. Many of the people I spoke to – both members of staff and visitors – agreed that heroes require other people (whether contemporaries or not) to tell their stories, in order for their 'heroic' status to be passed on. This telling of heroic stories is encompassed in the museum environment, through the production of exhibitions (Lewis-Jones 2005) and the display of particular objects (Connelly and Warrior 2019). Indeed, some museums even rely on the power of 'heroes' and heroic narratives to draw visitors in the first place (Jordanova 2014). In fact, staff at both museums regularly described feeling that they

⁶ Segal (2000) also describes the 'Great Man' as usually a white, Euro-American, Christian acting alone to overcome an obstacle; a definition which also draws many parallels with Heroic Age Antarctic explorers.

⁷ This name has been changed, full details in Appendix 2.

had a responsibility to include specific stories about Heroic Age explorers, and objects relating to them, *because* of audience expectations about their museums. Furthermore, because neither the Polar Museum nor Discovery Point has been recently renovated, the interpretation available for visitors is more straightforwardly in support of these figures than most members of their teams feel comfortable with today.

Almost every member of museum staff across both sites suggested that, in order to be heroic, people must rely on some kind of network of support – whether that be expedition teammates or effective equipment. Indeed, Glazer and Glazer (1999) suggest that one of the reasons that people may feel courageous or capable of heroic feats in the first place is because they see themselves not as individuals but as active members of a social group. Moreover, this group-based thinking is much more in keeping with current museological and anthropological interests in decolonisation, looking for the people who have traditionally been sidelined by colonial figures and histories (Bourke 2021; Mullard 2021; Plummer Sires 2024; Wajid and Minott 2019). As a result, it is hardly surprising that the museum teams I worked with were not keen to consider Scott and Shackleton as heroic figures, because they are more aware than most of the variety of actors who enabled and supported these ‘Great Men’ and their expeditions. Nevertheless, as Verity, one of the members of staff at the Polar Museum told me, ‘Museums are not particularly good at nuance, that’s not their strength. You kind of have to choose a lens and then run with it.’ This function of museum interpretation, in concert with the fact that – as many of the staff suggested – it is easier to ‘hang’ stories on individual subjects than groups of people, means that the staff were generally dissatisfied with the way that their displays represented the best-known figures of the Heroic Age as heroic individuals, acting alone to overcome difficulties⁸.

Ultimately, across both sites, the museum teams saw heroes as part of a network that made their heroic feats possible and worked to preserve and transmit their stories into the future. Conversely, museum visitors mostly saw heroes in the sense of ‘Great Men’ – courageous people, capable of undertaking extraordinary challenges. Where this was not the case, they almost invariably acknowledged that the change in the way they perceived heroes had come about as a direct result of the interpretation that they had seen on display in the museum. The power museums have to shape our understanding of historic figures like Scott and Shackleton – and also the capacity for ‘heroic’ status to *change over time* – is therefore crucial context to frame what follows in this thesis.

In this chapter, I have described the reasons for my research, and uncovered a variety of background information that will go on to inform the rest of the thesis. An appreciation of the histories of Scott and Shackleton, as well as British imperialism and its connections to scientific research will assist in illuminating much of the work to come.

⁸ Indeed, both museums feature displays that specifically reference heroism in relation to early Antarctic expeditions, *Antarctic Exploration: The Heroic Age* at the Polar Museum and *Heroes of the Ice* at Discovery Point.

2. A multi-sited, patchwork approach

This chapter sets out the details of my fieldsites at the Polar Museum and Discovery Point, as well as describing the various methods that I used throughout my research. First though, I briefly outline the research context for this thesis, which I argue is shaped by three broad factors. The place of museums as part of the colonial legacy of the British empire; shifting approaches to material culture and museum studies that have seen an increasing importance placed on objects and their varied relationship to people; and recent work on Antarctic heritage.

Research Context

In Chapter 1, I have examined the links between science, exploration and the British Empire, but it seems important at this juncture to also recognise the impact of the legacies of empire on the UK's museum sector. Museums and their collections have historically acted as both tools of empire and as records of the imperial project (MacKenzie 2009; Barringer and Flynn 1998). As Longair and McAleer suggest, 'The acquisition of objects, and their presentation in radically different contexts from their original usage, was one of the results of European exploration and commercial expansion in the early modern period.' (2012: 1). Indeed, for many Victorian curators, the British empire was *obliged* to collect objects to be put on display in the colonial centre, in order to highlight the power of the imperial project (Black 2000). The legacies of these collecting practices remain in many museums today and as a result, museum professionals must decide how best to engage with collections that are directly connected to an imperial past. This question has been considered across a range of contexts from art museums (Jacob 2016), to natural history collections (Das and Lowe 2018), and the ongoing impact of imperialism has been identified across all areas of museum work, from acts of curation (Macdonald 2022) to cataloguing (Turner 2020). While, of course, this imperial heritage most notably applies to museums with ethnographic collections – particularly those removed from communities of origin by agents of empire (see Hicks 2020b) – it is nevertheless also relevant to the collections of the Polar Museum and Discovery Point. Both museums house collections related to the early scientific exploration of the Antarctic from the early 20th century onwards, which, as described in Chapter 1, was closely connected to the British imperial project. While Longair and McAleer (2012: 5) counsel that individual museums should be understood in their specific contexts, in order to 'avoid overarching pronouncements about the role of 'the museum' in buttressing perceived ideologies of empire.' The acknowledgement of this background to the collections at my field sites is nevertheless part of the context of this project.

This thesis has also been influenced by recent developments in the fields of material cultural studies and museum studies that have shaped the way we see museums and their relationships to objects and people. As Morphy writes, at the end of the twentieth century material culture studies saw the beginning of a paradigm shift that involved, 'reconnecting objects to society, developing an awareness of the affective dimension of material objects [and] a growing sense that material culture is closely connected to issues of identity' (2010: 386). Clifford's conceptualisation of the museum as 'contact zone' is also foundational in this discussion of the political and relational nature of museums (1997). These changes are importantly considered in Karp's influential work *Exhibiting Cultures*

(1991) in which museums are understood not as politically neutral spaces, but influenced by the work of their practitioners, who are themselves based in particular social and temporal contexts. Gurian notes that this is a natural progression from the re-examinations of the disciplines of anthropology, history and art history which found that, 'the objectivity of research and the impartiality of the investigator were never realistic' (1991: 177). Alpers (1991) also considers the impact of the museum's socio-political context on objects themselves, arguing that they undergo a transformational process upon entry into collections. This opinion is upheld by Vogel, who indicates that the vast majority of objects in collections were not 'made' to be seen in museums, and as a result *mediation* is key to museum work, so that all material is, 'filtered through the tastes, interests, politics, and state of knowledge of particular presenters at a particular moment in time' (1991: 201). Ultimately, the indication that museums are spaces shaped by the actors within them, and are not neutral preserves of 'truth' or even single interpretations of history, is key to my research.

In *Sensible Objects* (2006), Edwards, Gosden and Phillips continue this interest in the socially constructive nature of museums, while turning their attention onto people's engagement with objects specifically. A key argument of this work is that the value and power of different museum objects can be produced through various *sensorial* connections to them. In fact, Feldman (2006) directly challenges traditional visual ways of engaging with museum collections, arguing that the dominance of these museum displays actively closes down avenues to better engagement with collections. This visual hegemony, Classen and Howes (2006) indicate, is entirely aligned with historical western sensory engagement with heritage collections. Moreover, they note that a traditional classification of the visual as a more 'civilised' way of engaging with the world than the 'lower' senses, can also offer a better understanding of early European collectors' interactions with indigenous material in ethnographic museums. Interestingly, Ouzman (2006) suggests that increasing attempts made by museums to become socially engaged places for personal and societal memory are in tension with their inherent need to formally catalogue, classify and display their collections. Accordingly, he suggests the possibility of 'multi-sensorial' site-specific museums, which can harness a variety of senses to better engage communities of origin and visitors. While both the Polar Museum and Discovery Point mostly engage visitors in traditional visual exhibitions of their collections, nevertheless this turn towards sensory engagements with museums is significant for my research insofar as it marks the beginning of an increasing interest in the *materiality* of museum objects.

Renewed interest in the physical qualities of museum objects increased in the early 21st century, and a key text in this instance is the volume *Museum Materialities* (2010). While she is still interested in the sensory engagement with objects described in earlier material culture and museum studies, Dudley also places emphasis on the materiality of objects themselves. Moreover, she regards objects as both housing information, and as the means of translating this information to museum visitors. Elaborating on this point, for Dudley, is it only through the direct interactions between objects and people that the object is made 'real' at all (2010: 5). The significance of this human *engagement* with objects for their production in museums is key to my research. Some of the other relevant works within Dudley's volume include Stevenson (2010) who considers the materiality of 're-made' objects based on 'original' museum pieces. Additionally, Ting (2010) considers the possibility for different ways of engaging with museum objects that nevertheless are still only available to museum visitors in visual exhibition displays, with a particular focus on the production of meaningful labels and

community interpretation. Finally, Golding (2010) looks at methods of handling and physical interactions with objects that have not traditionally been accessible to the public in museums. I use the emphasis Dudley and the other authors in this work put on the materiality of objects as a jumping off point in my own research for the layered engagement with museum objects that takes place between different people in the museum and over the life histories of the objects that I research.

Finally, and crucially for my work, material culture and museum studies have also fairly recently begun to undergo something of an 'experiential' turn. Bourgeon-Renault *et al.* (2006) describe an experiential approach to museums, which places the value of collections and heritage sites not simply as the objects that they look after, but also in the meaningful experiences that they can provide to visitors. More recently, Hein (2011) has considered objects as experience 'generators' and reflects on how this may impact, amongst other issues, the perceived authenticity of those objects. Ultimately, she explores the importance of discussion amongst visitors about their experiences in the museum environment and how this can shape the objects that they have engaged with. Sterling (2019) has suggested that a focus on experience can even help to expand the kinds of places and sites capable of producing heritage – branching outwards from museums and historic houses to reinvigorate the potential for heritage engagement in different kinds of spaces.

So it is that the very experience of visiting heritage spaces can have a direct impact on visitors, indeed, they may choose to visit museums in order to have an emotional response, or even to find a sense of empathy for others represented in the collections and displays. Building on her earlier work that suggests that heritage itself is a process, rather than a static entity (2006), Smith argues in *Emotional Heritage* (2021) that, through their interactions with museum collections, visitors are an active part of the process of 'heritage making' emphasising the role of emotion in engagement with heritage in museum spaces (2021: 22). This is an extremely important theme throughout my thesis, and the idea of the constant reproduction of museum objects is something I will return to throughout. Additionally, the role of emotion in the experience of visitors at the Polar Museum and Discovery Point is visible in a variety of events that took place during my fieldwork at both sites, from tearful encounters with volunteers to visitors' expressions of awe at the stories they had uncovered. Arguably, the strong emotions felt by some of these people came about as a direct result of the connections that they felt they were able to create with specific figures from the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration.

The study of Antarctic heritage has a broad range of foci. In particular, there has been much work on heritage sites and monuments on the continent of Antarctica itself, including Heroic Age huts and bases. In particular, the provision of ongoing care for these sites has been analysed, including how conservation work in Antarctica is bound-up in international politics that shapes (among other things) what material can be removed from the continent and why (Hingley 2022a; Senatore 2020; Zarankin and Senatore 2005). Additionally, understandings of these historic sites in Antarctic have also been studied in relation to their connection to contemporary national agendas and modern claims to Antarctic territory (even though the enactment of these claims is quashed by the Antarctic Treaty) (Hingley 2022b). Finally, there has also been research on how these sites and monuments intersect with the complexities of Antarctic tourism (Barr 2022). Each of these areas indicates that the Antarctic continent is in fact much more tightly bound to the specifics of international politics than may at first be assumed. Additionally, there has been research on replicas, notably the

reproductions of heritage sites on Antarctica that can then be put on display for the public in more accessible parts of the world (Leane, Winter and Salazar 2016; see also Story Machine n.d.). However, there has been comparatively little work done on how museums represent and display objects from the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration in their collections (Connelly and Warrior 2019; Warrior 2013) and so the research that follows seeks to provide some further analysis of this particular intersection of the Antarctic and the museum context. In what follows, therefore, I outline the specific methods I employed in order to undertake this research at the Polar Museum and Discovery Point.

Fieldsites

To the surprise of many of the museum visitors I encountered during my fieldwork, connections to the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration can be found across Britain and Ireland. From Cardiff in Wales (where Captain Scott's ship *Terra Nova* set sail for the South Pole) to Athy in Ireland (near Kilkea, where Sir Ernest Shackleton was born) to my research sites in England and Scotland, there is more Antarctic heritage than may first be assumed. My work is based on fieldwork across two disarticulated fieldsites: the Polar Museum in Cambridge and Discovery Point in Dundee⁹. I selected these museums because they both contain dedicated permanent displays relating to the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration. At the Polar Museum, these displays are one part of a museum that deals with both Antarctic and Arctic themes, across a number of time periods. At Discovery Point, the Heroic Age displays are part of a broader examination of the ship *RRS Discovery*, which first went south on Scott's British National Antarctic Expedition from 1901-04. The majority of the permanent exhibition at this museum relates to the Heroic Age, with only two of the nine interpretive spaces concerned with subsequent historical periods. Discovery Point is also home to the ship *RRS Discovery* itself.

Though both Cambridge and Dundee are home to universities, and they both have polar connections through their research and ship-building heritage respectively, they offer contrasting contexts for the two museums. Cambridge, with its world-renowned historic university, is a popular visitor destination in England, helped in part by its proximity to London. It is now an established centre for knowledge-based technology and innovation and as a result has grown substantially, with the population rising by a third during the twenty-first century: +33.8% to 145,700 (Thorpe 2022). However, despite great affluence, there are pockets of deprivation as a result of the high cost of living in the city and income inequality. Dundee, with its origins as a major port on the east coast of Scotland, is a post-industrial city with significant inequality, particularly in terms of income, housing, education, and health. Its population of 148,000 (Dundee Partnership 2021) has hardly changed since the turn of the century and the number of those classed as economically inactive is high at 29.3% (Office for National Statistics 2024a), the UK average being 21% and the Cambridge level at 18.5% (Office for National Statistics 2024b). The ongoing £1 billion transformation of Dundee's Waterfront (Scottish Cities Alliance 2023), including the new V&A building next to Discovery Point, is an attempt to reframe the narrative of decline and encourage new visitors to the city.

⁹ This research was approved following an application to the University of Reading's School of Archaeology, Geography and Environmental Science School Research Ethics Committee (SREC). Approved 19.11.21.

Fieldsite 1: The Polar Museum

The Polar Museum is part of the Scott Polar Research Institute (SPRI) in Cambridge, established in 1920. The Institute, itself part of the University's Department of Geography, is home to the museum, a polar library, an archive and photographic library, and a variety of academic staff and students of the polar regions. In my research, I refer to the Scott Polar Research Institute as SPRI and 'the Institute' interchangeably, in accordance with my research participants. Though the museum is part of the Institute, when discussing it directly, I refer to it as the Polar Museum to distinguish it from the larger establishment. It is worth mentioning at this stage that the museum has officially been called the 'Polar Museum' since its redevelopment in 2010. In the chapter on the history of this museum, I therefore refer to it simply as the 'museum at SPRI' in the years preceding this date. The Polar Museum holds five major collections relating to: the Antarctic (encompassing the Heroic Age); Arctic exploration; Arctic material culture; polar art; and flags.

My relationship with SPRI began in 2014 when I wrote my undergraduate dissertation, focusing on the Arctic, using the library there. I returned in early 2017 as a museum volunteer in education and outreach. In 2019, after two years working in museums across Canada, including in the subarctic town of Churchill, Manitoba, I was hired as the Polar Museum's Collections Project Cataloguer because of my Arctic knowledge. As part of this role, however, I was also employed to produce a set of short films on objects relating to Sir Ernest Shackleton, which was my first introduction to the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration.

My role as Collections Project Cataloguer at the Polar Museum was a fixed-term contract and came to an end in 2020 – the year I started my PhD. The Polar Museum inspired my interest in the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration both through my work on the Shackleton films, and via my curation of the Institute's centenary exhibition. In 2022, I held 'visiting scholar' status at the Institute and completed ethnographic fieldwork and archival research over 18 months, until the summer of 2023. In the autumn of 2022, I returned to employment there, becoming the museums' Collections Coordinator on a part-time basis. From 2023, this became a job-share position which I held until I left in September 2024. During this period, I worked two days a week as Collections Coordinator and the rest as a researcher, splitting my time between these two positions.

During my fieldwork at the Polar Museum, the team were 'living with' decisions about the permanent gallery design that had been made during a redevelopment project culminating in the opening of the newly designed museum in 2010. None of the museum team members I worked with had been there at that time, with the longest-serving member having joined soon after the museum was reopened to the public in 2010. Though there was some discussion of possible changes that might be made the next time the museum was updated, the team accepted that this was unlikely to happen for a number of years. Moreover, they generally felt that the areas of the museum dedicated to the Arctic – and European exploration of this region – would be the first to be redeveloped, taking precedence over those relating to the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration. This plan was in keeping with the team's increasing interest in decolonial practice with regards to the indigenous peoples of the Arctic represented in their collections.

Fieldsite 2: Discovery Point

Like the Polar Museum, Discovery Point is part of a broader organisation. The Dundee Heritage Trust (DHT) is a charity that cares for Discovery Point and Verdant Works – a museum dedicated to the history of jute-weaving in Dundee. As such, the trust is concerned with the industrial and maritime heritage of the city, and the museum professionals I got to know through my research worked across both sites. The name ‘Discovery Point’ refers to both the dry dock where the *RRS Discovery* sits, and the museum dedicated to the ship which opened to the public in 1993. In my work, unless otherwise stated, I use the name Discovery Point, to refer specifically to the museum. Though the *RRS Discovery* is arguably the major draw for visitors to the museum (accessed via the museum galleries), I elected not to analyse it, as interpretation available to the public on the ship is less extensive and more inherently transient than in the museum proper. Additionally, the primary display of accessioned objects is in the museum galleries, rather than the ship itself. Moreover, the ship had been used for a variety of purposes since Scott’s 1901-04 expedition (see Chapter 6), with implications for its physical layout and design, that would have made it less recognisable to its Heroic Age crew.

While I initially felt that Discovery Point would provide a strong contrast to the Polar Museum because it was focused primarily on Scott, during my fieldwork I realised that the museum and its staff already tell more stories than just those relating to Scott and the *RRS Discovery*’s first 1901-04 expedition. In fact, Discovery Point is concerned with the whole history of the *RRS Discovery*, the voyages it undertook and the life it lived after its final voyage, before docking permanently in Dundee. I also found that the museum engaged more with Shackleton than I was expecting. This meant that the differences between my fieldsites were related to the specifics of museum display, interpretation and curation, rather than the more thematic variances I was anticipating.

I undertook two weeks of fieldwork at Discovery Point during the summer of 2022. Since then, I have remained in contact with the museum staff, forging professional links between them and the team at the Polar Museum, as well taking part in a joint project there with the University of Southampton: *Tales of Discovery*. One of the aims of this project was to bring together disparate collections relating to Scott’s *Discovery* Expedition held in Dundee, Cambridge and the National Oceanography Centre in Southampton (Grant and Pedrotti n.d.). The project enabled me to revisit Discovery Point in 2024, to share information about the Polar Museum’s collection and further cement my relationships there.

Discovery Point has undergone some, mostly minor, refurbishments in the thirty years since the opening of its dedicated gallery spaces. While some spaces are very similar to their initial construction, others have been shaped by the addition of new exhibition cases and/or the removal of mannequins and ‘set dressing’ materials. There are, however, a handful of exhibition spaces that have been refurbished since the museum’s opening, including the gallery where Captain Scott’s snow goggles are displayed (which I will return to in Chapter 13). However, while I was conducting fieldwork at Discovery Point, the museum team were in the midst of planning a very large-scale redevelopment project that will impact almost every area of the museum. It was an exciting time and provides a key point of comparison to the redevelopment of the gallery spaces at the Polar Museum in 2010.

A patchwork ethnographic approach

For many theorists, ethnographic fieldwork is at the core of anthropology (Eriksen 2010; Howell 2017; McGranahan 2014). Traditionally, and following Malinowski's initial presentation of the method (Malinowski 1984 [1922]), ethnographic work has been characterised by long periods of continuous fieldwork, time spent living with people in the field, and later, even a particular focus on 'suffering' subjects (Robbins 2013). However, increasingly, there are arguments for the validity of different kinds of ethnographic fieldwork (Amit 2000), including those that take place within organisations (Van Duijn 2020) – like museums (MacDonald 2002; Stokes-Rees 2003) – and those that take into account the interplay between researcher, professional (Wulff 2000) and personal interactions (Dyck 2000) within a fieldsite. Recently, these challenges to traditional ethnographic fieldwork have been brought together by Gökçe, Varma, and Watanabe to suggest an alternative approach: that of 'patchwork ethnography' (2020). Patchwork ethnography, they suggest, describes research that retains its academic rigour while accommodating different research conditions and approaches: short-term research visits; new ways of thinking about 'home' and 'field'; and the maintenance of long-term commitments to people in and outside of the field. As such, it speaks to my own research, which was coloured by the complexities of navigating my role as both a museum professional and a researcher, employing a variety of research methods across different field sites.

Despite the differences between Cambridge and Dundee, I consider the Polar Museum and Discovery Point 'disarticulated' fieldsites – distinct, but connected, patches in my ethnographic work. This view borrows from Marcus' (1995) work on 'multi-sited' studies which he suggests are best pursued by 'following' certain ideas, people, objects or even conflicts. In my own research, I can perhaps best be described as following the idea and the objects of the Heroic Age to different heritage organisations. After all, both the Polar Museum and Discovery Point are places where members of the public can go to learn more about this period, with an emphasis on British connections to the Antarctic at this time. Both museums also deal with a number of the same historic actors – including Captain Scott and Sir Ernest Shackleton – and contain comparable historic material in their Heroic Age collections.

A key difference in my interactions with the Polar Museum and Discovery Point was my initial relationship to them. The long and complex association that I held with the Polar Museum, even before my fieldwork there, meant that much in the rather sociological words of Anderson (2006) – I was an 'opportunistic' complete member researcher – I had already been a part of the group of my study before my research had begun. The process of studying communities well known to the researcher before their ethnographic interrogation of a place holds its own potential pitfalls (Denshire 2014; Strathern 1987). However, I found that the intimacy it afforded me with the museum's practices, as well as the immediate connection I had to a variety of people in the Institute itself, were invaluable to my research. This position also helped me to undertake ethnographic research in an organisation where much of what is to be observed regularly takes the form of individual working practices that are hard to connect with (it is difficult to be a participant in someone else's emails). My work at the museum meant that I was privileged in my knowledge of a wide range of professional goings-on with both internal and external stakeholders to the museum that would have been harder to come by were I not part of the team and its network. Additionally, an unexpected positive outcome was the opportunity it afforded me to reflect on my research *and* professional practices. This was particularly notable during my archival research, when I encountered

myself as the author of several documents stored for posterity in the Institute's archive (discussed further in Chapter 5).

As with all research, I encountered some challenges during my fieldwork. At Discovery Point, I had to work hard to convince the team that I was as interested in attending their team meetings and discussing their day-to-day work as I was in visiting the archives and public galleries. At both the Polar Museum and Discovery Point, undertaking the majority of my fieldwork with museum professionals meant that I was often confronted with participants who were extremely reflexive about their own practices. While this regularly led to interesting conversations about the way that museum work was done at these different sites, it also meant that I had to work harder to see past their reflexive dialogues to analyse their practices for myself.

Nevertheless, in spite of the complex multi-sited, patchwork nature of my research, my participation allowed me to engage with people in Cambridge and Dundee in a variety of ways. I had privileged 'behind-the-scenes' access at both sites as a result of my ethnographic research (see Andrews 2009; Hoare 2020; Thorner 2022). I was able to spend time in the offices and attend meetings on a variety of subjects with members of staff both in the museums and the wider organisations of the Scott Polar Research Institute and Dundee Heritage Trust. I had access to digital catalogues and physical archives at both sites, as well as to working computer files and physical copies of 'unofficial' archives of photographs and documents in the offices of these museums. I was also able to move freely between the public and private areas in both museums, observing visitors to the galleries and museum professionals at work. I welcomed visitors from the front desk at the Polar Museum, and took a guided tour of the *RRS Discovery*. I was privy to decision making processes about upcoming interpretation and was able to see and handle objects in storage, particularly at the Polar Museum. I had discussions in museum offices ranging from working practices and object accessions to biscuit preferences and once – memorably – how to display the contents of a whale's stomach. I celebrated the centenary of the Scott Polar Research Institute at a black-tie dinner, went to Christmas celebrations, after work pub trips, tea breaks and leaving dos. In short, I engaged with, and learned from, the people of these museums in myriad ways that informed and shaped my research.

Further ethnographic patches and other methods

The final patches in my patchwork ethnographic fieldwork were a variety of research methods that I employed alongside the more traditional aspects of ethnography and participant observation. These methods can be split into three broad themes allowing me to analyse: the museum visitors and the public-facing side of both sites; the professionals who work at these museums; and the museum objects themselves.

Museum visitors and exhibitions

In order to understand my fieldsites as places where information is interpreted for the public, I conducted visitor surveys, observed how visitors interacted with the museums and analysed the displays they had come to see.

I conducted visitor surveys with members of the public at both museums, completing 17 surveys at the Polar Museum and 10 at Discovery Point. These ranged from discussions with family groups to single visitors and considered the concept of 'heroism' as well as the specifics of the museum exhibitions and objects (see Appendix 1). There is some precedent for studying museum visitors

through the use of exit surveys in the context of museum studies, with some researchers utilising highly specific questions, and others favouring a more open-ended style (Packer 2008; Smith 2021; Squires, Davidson and Piombino-Mascoli 2024). The questions I asked were mostly open-ended, and I also used non-directive probing to encourage visitors to provide further detail where necessary. While all participants were given the choice to write their own answers on the survey, mostly they elected to do the survey in an 'interview style' where I asked the questions verbally and audio-recorded our discussion. These recordings were then transcribed for analysis. At the Polar Museum, I also conducted interviews with three members of the public, taking inspiration from Mouliou and Kalessopoulou's (2012) research on 'emblematic' objects, in front of objects identified by them as particularly interesting in the museum's display. However, I ultimately found this technique to be too unwieldy for comfortable interactions with visitors and elected to focus on visitor surveys instead.

I conducted a 'heat-mapping' exercise five times at the Polar Museum and seven times at Discovery Point (see Figure 5.8 and Figure 6.9). I observed visitor interactions with the museum in order to understand the popularity of different aspects of the galleries, as well as which objects and themes sustained the most interest. Visitors included adults with children through to pensioners and were spread across a variety of nationalities and backgrounds. Journeys around the museum ranged from a very brief 10-minute walk-through, to an hour and 40 minutes of sustained interaction. There is some precedent for using heat-maps to understand visitor engagement with heritage spaces (McMurtrie 2022), though this technique is more commonly used in professional museum evaluation practices (The Audience Agency n.d.). To this end, my method was based on that employed by Harknett (2018) who used heat-maps to analyse visitor behaviour at the Cambridge University Museums between 2013-18. I numbered each case and information board across all the galleries at both museums. Then, when a visitor entered the museum space, I observed them unobtrusively and mapped their journey around the museum, manually noting the number of each case and interpretation board that they engaged with. I also noted the time at the beginning and end of these observations, and recorded areas in which they lingered or moved more quickly. Following these observations, I let the visitors know the work I had been undertaking and showed them the anonymous nature of the information I had recorded.

I analysed the permanent exhibitions on display at both museums, noting any objects highlighted to me in interviews as being particularly interesting to museum professionals or members of the public. In this way, I was later able to study the specifics of museum design, including lighting, exhibition furniture, and written interpretation, that impact the way that museum visitors engage with the themes and objects on display (Forrest 2013; Whitehead 2024).

Museum professionals, past and present

In order to uncover the complex and ongoing decision-making that produces my fieldsites as sites of interpretation, I talked to current and past members of museum staff. I also conducted archival research to understand how the production of these fieldsites has changed over time.

I conducted 12 semi-structured interviews with 11 members of the museum team at the Polar Museum and seven interviews with members of staff at Discovery Point (for a list of the professional roles held by these individuals, see Appendix 2). This method of formally engaging with museum professionals is well-used within the academic literature (Krmopotich and Peers 2013; Macdonald 2002; Medby and Dittmer 2020; Smith 2021; Warrior 2013). Questions were adapted based on the

background, knowledge or professional role of the person I was interviewing, though the broad thematic areas remained consistent. These interviews lasted between 30 and 120 minutes, providing deep insights into the past and present working practices of these organisations. Additionally, at Discovery Point, I conducted a group interview on the subject of the museum's upcoming redevelopment with four members of staff. This interview had been arranged by one of the interviewees and although it was fruitful in understanding the team's 'party line' on various aspects of the redevelopment, I found the individual interviews provided a more nuanced picture of the plans and their thoughts on them.

I have made the decision to anonymise the identities of my research participants by assigning them aliases (see Appendix 2). As the professional role of each person is an important factor in understanding the opinions they hold, I retained each person's job description (though not necessarily official job title). This means that, for those who are well acquainted with these museums, anonymity is not wholly possible. The 'small worlds' of British museums and polar heritage mean that it is likely that readers with an interest in these topics may be able to ascertain who is who. Nevertheless, choosing to anonymise their voices enabled these professionals to speak more openly about their working practices and to share their opinions, particularly as they relate to professional criticisms of their places of work.

I undertook archival research at both museums in order to understand past decisions made at these organisations. This was particularly helpful in relation to the redevelopment of the Polar Museum in 2010 (though I did also interview the curator responsible for this project and three other individuals who had been part of the Institute at that time). This research enabled me to gain a better understanding of the history of both organisations. Again, this was particularly important at the Polar Museum, where the institutional history stretches back more than a century, but continues to shape the museum to this day. It is important here to note that I studied a range of traditional archival documents (McAtackney 2024; Stoler 2010), which included museum catalogues, annual reviews produced by the Scott Polar Research Institute, and minutes recorded at historic meetings (for an account of the varied nature of institutional archives see Withers 2002). This frequently provided insights into the decisions of past curators, who held considerable power and influence in the early years of these institutions (Alberti 2002). However, I also analysed an unofficial archive of documents still in use by these museums (Sterling 2024). This included photographs stored on museum team computers (but not part of archival or photo library collections), accessions documentation, and other day-to-day paperwork used by the museum teams. All this research was also fundamental to the detailed object itineraries I produced.

Museum objects

I traced the life histories of six objects – both on and off display – in order to consider how and why their interpretation and use within the museum had changed over time. While recent criticism of object biography as method has suggested that the 'biography' metaphor lends itself to an approach where the movement or transformation of objects form key milestones in a *linear* timeline (Joy 2009), I nevertheless believe that there is merit in the process of tracing object lives. Yamin's (2019) article on the life history of a gamelan instrument in Bali demonstrates the way that object biography, in combination with a thorough understanding of the cultural context through which it

has been constructed, can produce nuanced and vibrant knowledge about not only a single object but also the myriad social relationships it has forged over the course of its history.

I analysed the museums' catalogues in order to understand the different kinds of objects held in their collections (while cognisant of the influence of historical context on the information recorded in museum catalogues, see Greene 2016; Turner 2016). In particular, following Stevenson, I began this work by looking for, 'discrete 'collection events', be they the moment of field collection, the actions of museum acquisition and cataloguing, through to present display or other collection uses' (2024: 64). This was an especially helpful practice during the moments of my fieldwork when my participants were undertaking necessary tasks with which I could not easily engage (answering emails, making phone calls, completing paperwork). Then I worked outwards from these collection events, searching for connections to other individuals, objects and even organisations. As a result of this research, I selected the objects that would later form the basis of five object chapters.

I decided from the outset that, in order to reveal the actors and influences shaping these museum collections over time, I would need to trace a broad range of objects. At the Polar Museum, I first wanted to study an object that was very popular within the museum, and which would most likely have a well-documented history to follow. For this, I elected to trace the story of Captain Oates' sleeping bag. Then, because the sleeping bag relates specifically to an expedition led by Captain Scott, I chose to include an equivalent object relating to Sir Ernest Shackleton. For this, I selected Shackleton's sledging flag. In order to create a contrast with these popular objects, I then chose an object that had never been put on display in the museum before. As a result, I was drawn into a surprisingly complex story relating to two similar-but-different 'boat bits'. Additionally, I wanted to include a recently accessioned object in my study, and for this, I selected the 'Raymond' plaque – a brass name plaque for a small boat, related to Shackleton's first expedition. This then led to my final object at the Polar Museum, the un-accessioned *Sir Ernest Shackleton* lifeboat. In contrast, at Discovery Point, I chose to follow Captain Scott's snow goggles, selected after a recommendation by the museum team. I felt that choosing an object that they already knew well would provide the best opportunity for in-depth research within the limited time that I was able to spend in Dundee.

At the beginning of each of these object chapters I have included information taken directly from the museum's collections management software (Modes for the Polar Museum, Adlib for Discovery Point) to provide the readily accessible information available to the professionals about these objects. This is significant because much of the work of understanding, stabilising and reproducing objects in museums is done through the production of written texts, be these accession or loan paperwork, or interpretive exhibition labels. In this vein, while I would have liked to include past written interpretation for each of these objects, as these are likely to display the biases and preferences of the people who wrote them (just as historic catalogue entries do, see Turner 2016), unfortunately neither museum retained this information for any of the objects that I studied. I have, however, included the contemporary display labels for Scott's goggles at Discovery Point, Captain Oates' sleeping bag and the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* lifeboat at the Polar Museum in order to illuminate how they are currently being interpreted for the public.

Drazin (2021: 64) writes that, 'An object's biography is mostly descriptive. Description is not intellectually neutral; it is a purposeful act.' Indeed, in the production of the object itineraries in my research I have made a number of selections, not least of which is the selection *not* to include some

objects. The decisions I made on inclusion or exclusion were based on a variety of factors including their popularity in their museums, their use by museum staff and their initial accession. In all cases, I also chose objects for which at least some provenance information was available, which could be used as a jumping off point for my research. For the objects that were selected, however, my research itself has added another chapter to their life histories within the museum collections of which they are a part. Whether this additional attention from me will mean that they receive further use or research once my project is completed, or whether it will bring to the fore their relative *inactivity* (before my encounter with them) in potentially negative ways, remains to be seen. Nevertheless, in tracing their life histories – and showing how these continue to be formed within the environment of the museum – I hope at least to have uncovered new depths to their objecthood.

The work to come

This thesis is split into four sections. The first section considers the contextual and theoretical background for the research and encompasses both this introduction (Chapter 1), Chapter 2 *A multi-sited, patchwork approach* and Chapter 3: *Fragile Objects and Mutable Networks*. The introduction sets out the questions to be explored in the thesis and offers useful background core knowledge. Chapter 2 offers the methodological frame and Chapter 3 provides an overview of my core argument on the three modes of ‘fragility’ experienced by museum objects, anchoring this idea in a range of literature on object agency and materiality, museum collections and networks. The second section of the thesis considers my fieldsites in more detail, beginning with Chapter 4: *The History of the Polar Museum: from conceptualisation to the modern day*. This chapter establishes the history of the Polar Museum in Cambridge, including its complete refurbishment in 2010, and outlines the historical, thematic and relational context which shapes its operations to this day. Chapter 5: *Museum Voices at the Polar Museum* is based on my interactions with the staff and visitors at this museum and uncovers how these different groups engage with and understand the museum and its collections. Chapter 6: *The History of Discovery Point: Dundee to Antarctica and back again* considers the history of Discovery Point, my second field site, while Chapter 7: *Museum Voices at Discovery Point* delves into the museum staff and visitors at this museum and includes an analysis of the team’s plans for a major upcoming redevelopment project. The third section of the thesis zooms in from the context of the museums to consider specific objects in further detail. Chapter 8: *Authenticity, relics and replicas* provides a brief theoretical framework for the object life histories to follow. Chapter 9: *Shackleton’s Sledging Flag: family connections* traces Shackleton’s sledging flag in its course through the Polar Museum and discusses – in the language of my theoretical analysis – a truly fragile physical object. Chapter 10: *Boat Bits: research and mistaken identity* considers how institutional knowledge and research impact object lives. Chapter 11: *The Sir Ernest Shackleton Lifeboat and the Raymond Plaque: Authentic objects?* uncovers the decisions behind the accession (or not) of objects into museum collections. Chapter 12: *Captain Oates’ Sleeping Bag: the power of people* considers the implication of the proximity of objects to certain historical figures in their life history within a museum, and this is continued in Chapter 13 on *Scott’s Snow Goggles* which reflects on similar themes within the collection at Discovery Point. Finally, in section four of this thesis, I present the three core arguments of my research in the discussion in Chapter 14: *Fragile Objects, Hero Objects and Extending the Network*, while Chapter 15: *Conclusion: the persistence of change* brings together my research and makes recommendations for areas of future study. Finally, in Chapter 16 I enfold key ideas in my own experiences.

3. Fragile objects and mutable networks

This thesis builds on Alfred Gell's work on object agency, alongside broader anthropological conceptualisations of networks. Gell's theory of the agency of objects, as laid out in *Art and Agency* (1998) has had far-reaching impact. Its reconceptualization of artworks, artists and viewers – and especially its emphasis on art's *effects*, rather than its meaning – continues to echo through the discipline a quarter of a century later. This is evident in the way it has inspired wide-ranging work by a variety of scholars of material and museum anthropology (e.g. Byrne *et al.* 2011; Cant 2019; Harries 2017; Küchler & Carroll 2021; Layton 2003; Morphy 2009; Domínguez Rubio 2016; Domínguez Rubio & Benzecry 2018). Meanwhile, conceptualisations of networks and their implications for the 'social' have also reverberated through a broad sweep of material culture studies (Antczak & Beaudry 2019; Bryant 2011; Byrne *et al.* 2011; Harman 2018; Harries 2017; Küchler & Carroll 2021; Domínguez Rubio 2016; Domínguez Rubio & Benzecry 2018; Latour 1999; 2005). Additionally, my work also benefits from Strathern's (1996) efforts to 'cut' the ever-expanding implications of these networks. My research works across and between these ideas – with their foundations ranging from the anthropology of art to science and technology studies – in an examination of social history collections. My aim is to uncover the networks of human and non-human actors that shape contemporary interpretation of objects relating to the 'Heroic Age' of Antarctic exploration in British museums. By drawing on literature from anthropology, archaeology, sociology, social geography and history, this chapter situates my research in a truly interdisciplinary discussion of actors and networks, objects and museums.

Key to this project is an understanding of the changing nature of things or, as Domínguez Rubio (2016) explains: the fact that objects are *fragile*. Domínguez Rubio considers 'objects' as distinct from 'things' by virtue of their being imbued with meaning or power. However, rather than this being a stable classification, he suggests that objects are always in danger of reverting back to mere 'thingness'. In particular, Domínguez Rubio describes the fragile *physical* qualities of objects which, if left unchecked, can lead to material deterioration and ultimately a loss of objecthood. I argue that understanding this changeability of objects – via the potential of their return to thingness – allows for an appreciation of the network of human and non-human actors that work to *stabilise* their objecthood.

In this chapter, I expand Domínguez Rubio's theory, to argue that museum objects related to the 'Heroic Age' of Antarctic exploration are at risk of reverting to things not only as a result of their physical fragility, but also their *contextual* and *conceptual* instability. Accordingly, I outline three areas of instability: 1) the fragile physical object, 2) the context of the changing museum and 3) the variable conceptualisation of 'heroism'. These areas are consequently influenced – and stabilised – by a mutable network of human and non-human actors, ultimately responsible for the interpretation of the Heroic Age in British museums. Before I explore these three areas in more detail, I provide a detailed overview of the theoretical foundations of my work.

Objects with agency

Key to my argument that an ever-shifting network of both human and non-human actors shapes the interpretation of museum objects, is the idea that objects themselves have a form of agency. Gell begins *Art and Agency* (1998), by asserting that anthropology is primarily concerned with social relationships. He argues that, to produce a true *anthropology* of art, scholars must therefore treat art objects as any other ‘social agents’ capable of engaging in relationships. This means that human and non-human actors should be placed on a comparable level in the analysis of social connections: Gell argues that objects should be treated as ‘person-like’ by anthropologists. He calls for objects not to be thought of as ‘tools’ which are *used* by people, but rather as, ‘component[s] of a particular type of social identity and agency’ (Gell 1998: 21). Gell argues that this theorisation is made possible by drawing on Peirce’s theory of semiotics (Gell 1998: 14). He views objects as ‘indexes’ that allow for the abduction of an artist’s agency by the ‘recipient’ (who, through my analysis of museum objects, I will now refer to as the ‘viewer’). In semiotics, ‘abduction’ is a type of inference that allows for an explanation of something observed. The abduction of agency, in Gell’s sense, can therefore be understood as a cognitive process within the mind of the viewer. That is, when they perceive an object, the viewer infers the agency of the individual who made it (or caused it to be made) and are subsequently affected by this social agency. As a result, throughout its life, the object can affect any number of viewers through their inferences of this agency.

Gell sees ‘indexes’ (or ‘artworks’) as all physical objects from which agency can be abducted, so he calls the creators of these indexes ‘artists’. The viewers (or in Gell’s terms, ‘recipients’) are the people engaging with the index – as they abduct agency from it, they experience it as the artist’s agency enacted upon them. A simple example of this artist-index-viewer relationship might be traced through Figure 1.7 in Chapter 1, which shows “The relief boat setting out for South Georgia” on Shackleton’s *Endurance* Expedition. Here, the artist is the photographer Frank Hurley, the index is the photograph he produced, and the viewer is us, the people regarding that image. Through this photograph, Gell would argue that we abduct Hurley’s agency – the small boat and Hurley’s decision to photograph it *causing* us to, for example, be impressed by the bravery of the boatmen. In this way, Hurley’s image has a social effect. While Gell’s work on object agency expands to encompass more complex transmissions between different kinds of actors, for the purposes of my work, it is this approach to objects, artists and viewers in particular that is key.

One danger of Gell’s theory is that it could be interpreted as suggesting that objects themselves are capable of acting with *intention* in order to begin the process of the transmission of agency (Morphy 2009). However, Gell attempts to account for this by introducing the idea of primary and secondary agents. He defines primary agents as those capable of initiating chains of action thanks to their will or intention, whereas objects are always categorised as *secondary* agents, ‘entities not endowed with will or intention by themselves but essential to the formation, appearance, or manifestation of intentional actions’ (Gell 1998: 36). In this way, objects only have agency in relation to their place within a series of interconnected social relationships with humans and other human-like actors.

The social history collections with which my research is concerned present some different challenges to Gell’s artworks, particularly borne out of their very complex social lives. For example, I consider expedition kit taken south by early 20th century Antarctic explorers. While technical equipment may first have been made by ‘artists’ with navigation, hard science or survival in mind, these objects

eventually entered into museum collections where they are now employed to demonstrate navigational or scientific *prowess*, bravery or 'heroics'. This is possible thanks to direct connections forged between the objects and distinct individuals – such as Captain Scott and Sir Ernest Shackleton – later on in the object's life. The shift in the agency which can be inferred through abductive reasoning in relation to these objects therefore indicates an issue in Gell's more temporally fixed art-nexus approach, which cannot account for this change through time. Scott and Shackleton were not the original creators of the objects, or even their only users in many cases, but, thanks to their appearance in the objects' life histories, they have imbued them with a different form of significance through their 'inalienable' connection (Weiner 1992). As a result, we might also consider them the objects' 'artists' thanks to their almost total re-framing and re-shaping of the agency abducted through them by the viewers.

To further complicate the above, as museum displays shifted from educating future polar explorers about the practices of their predecessors, to glamorising past expeditions and emphasising heroism, further human actors – museum professionals – also shaped the objects and the stories they were employed to tell. What place do these actors have in Gell's framework? Can an index have three different artists – its original maker, user *and* curator? The viewer of these objects may be able to infer several different types of agency depending on the lens (and historical period) through which they encounter the object. Moreover, if this is the case, might it also be possible to challenge the abductions that viewers make in order to encourage them to see past one particular agent (such as the explorer) in order to consider other kinds of agents (including the people who funded the production of the object, or the family members who considered it worthy of donating to a museum collection)?

Clearly, the social connections with which objects are bound up are capable of dramatic change, but even in Gell's consideration of hunting equipment within the context of the art gallery (Gell 1996) he does not wrestle with the impact of so many changes in an object's biographical life, even before it enters the museum. I believe that Gell's theory alone is not agile enough to deal with the continuous reinterpretation of objects over time. It is here that the idea of *fragile* agents comes into play. When it is understood that objects are by no means fixed in their categorisations – much less their social connections – it is clear that their agency is equally mutable. In order to trace the agency of collections belonging to 'Heroic Age' Antarctic explorers, an understanding of the dynamic social lives of objects is paramount, and this relies upon an appreciation of their ever-shifting social connections.

Networks of actors

As mentioned above, my work brings together Gell's ideas on object agency with anthropological conceptualisations of networks and so I turn now to the work of Bruno Latour. Key to Latour's definition of the social is that it is not limited to human actors (Latour 1994; 1999) and as a result, he is interested in identifying a wide range of actors in the transmission of agency. Like Gell, he is careful to indicate that non-human actors are not themselves capable of intention, and in an explanation similar to Gell's concept of 'secondary agents' he suggests that 'there might exist many metaphysical shades between full causality and sheer inexistence' (Latour 1995: 72). However, unlike Gell's primary and secondary agents, Latour attempts to diminish any hierarchy between these different kinds of social actors via a process that he describes as 'flattening' the social (Latour 1999), which would put humans and objects on a level playing field of impact and importance. Instead of an

overarching entity, Latour considers the social to be a circulating action – a ‘summing up’ of interactions between a variety of actors which constitutes a very small, local context. The social for Latour therefore becomes connected, mediated and translated in a network of both human and non-human actors. Society, he argues, is a local circulation to which we subscribe, rather than, ‘what the world is like’ (Latour 1999: 19). Latour’s idea of the locally circulating social also highlights the ever-present possibility for change. In his 1999 article, he suggests that the term ‘network’ should be used primarily to imply the transmission of information that is *translated or transformed*.

Indeed, an appreciation of change is crucial to understanding the agency transmitted by objects within networks over time, which Gell’s art nexus cannot easily account for. However, Latour’s flattened hierarchies do not allow for an evaluation of the different *types* of agency that can become embedded in objects over their life courses (in our case, from piece of equipment to relic of an Antarctic ‘hero’). I propose that by bringing these two principles of agency and the interconnectedness of diverse agents together, and by reinvigorating them with the idea of constant and pervasive change, we can more thoroughly analyse the multiple forces affecting the practices, interpretations and experiences that are central to museum collections. In the case of my research, this enables a fuller analysis of those forces that are working to produce the interpretation of early Antarctic exploration within the environment of British museums. I argue that this interpretation takes place by way of a mutable network that includes museum objects, museum institutions, and past and contemporary ideas about what it means to be heroic. This network contains a variety of both human and non-human actors that are constantly changing over time.

In this section, I have sought to make clear that objects are capable of acting with agency, even if this is not the same as human agency, led by will or intention. Additionally, the ‘social’ can be understood as a system of ever-expanding and shifting networks made up of agents both human and non-human. The combination of these diverse agents and the mutable network has the ability to produce what might previously have been termed ‘social categorisations’ including whether something is an ‘object’ or a ‘thing’. However, objects are unstable. Without sustained effort from a number of actors in their network, they may revert to being things (which likely would result in a reduced capacity for the transmission of agency). I argue that this idea can be best understood by conceptualising objects as inherently ‘fragile’. That is, things can both *become* objects and *lose* their objecthood, and in order to sustain an ‘object’ state, work must be done to address their fragilities.

I identify three ‘modes’ of fragility, with which objects must contend: physical, contextual and conceptual. I describe an object’s physical fragility as the material qualities that must be cared for in order for them not to degrade or break down over time. Object’s contextual fragility is based on whether it is used, and for museum objects this might range from their display in a museum collection to behind-the-scenes research. Finally, I outline conceptual fragility as an object’s relationship to broader factors that maintain its significance to a society, for the objects in the Antarctic collections at the Polar Museum and Discovery Point, this includes understandings of Antarctic exploration and the figures of the Heroic Age. The rest of this chapter will consider in more detail the ways that the instability of museum objects can be understood as relating to different types of fragility, and some of the work necessary for their networks to sustain them.

In the next section, I discuss the ways in which fragile objects are in danger of losing their objecthood and reverting to ‘thing-ness’ through their changing *physical qualities* over time. The need to create

and replicate the 'object' status of museum collections is important not only for the continuation of their life in the museum, but also for the perpetuation of the narratives to which they, as objects, contribute. The physical stabilisation of fragile objects requires practical work to protect them from deterioration and decay, as well as engagement with objects through touch, which helps to underscore their significance by weaving objects into social networks in the present.

Physical fragility: avoiding the material reversion to 'thing-ness'

In his 2016 article, Domínguez Rubio highlights the extensive work that takes place in order to keep objects in museums from reverting to 'things'. As mentioned above, he sees objects and things not as analogous terms, but as holding two distinct meanings: objects are imbued with a special kind of meaning, power or value, whereas things do not possess these qualities. But Domínguez Rubio suggests that these object/thing categorisations are by no means permanent. Via a condition he terms the 'relentlessness of things', things can be understood as moving in and out of objecthood over the whole course of their lives. Indeed, Domínguez Rubio and Benzecry (2018) argue that, rather than seeing the world as made up of (inherently 'special') objects, we should instead consider the conditions and processes which create objects *from* things, perhaps over and over again (see Figure 3.1 for a 'thing' re-formed into an 'object').



Figure 3.1. Painting of a woman which was damaged by a fire before and after significant art restoration. Mbboston, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via

For example, in his detailed analysis of the treatment of the Mona Lisa by museum conservators and other specialists in object care, Domínguez Rubio (2016) highlights the often 'invisible' work which must take place to stop even this world-famous object veering into thing-ness. These stabilising activities range from specific and detailed restoration work on the canvas and frame itself, to large-scale architectural schemes which effect the humidity, light levels, and temperature of the gallery in

which the painting is displayed. Were this work not done, the Mona Lisa would eventually revert to a 'thing': physically too far removed from the masterpiece status that it holds today to be recognisable as an 'object' and therefore diminished in significance and its ability to transmit da Vinci's agency. As a result, Domínguez Rubio concludes that the distinction between objects and things must be continually made and remade over time; that this process is never fully accomplished but is ongoing; and that understanding this fragility and temporality inherent in objects (and things) is critical to the material culture we study. It can also be argued that the non-human actors employed in the processes of restoration and care are as much a part of this process as the museum professionals. Domínguez Rubio points out the importance of environmental control systems, for example, as well as the work of conservators and their tools in the preservation – and sustained production – of museum objects.

The temporality of an object can also be a contributing factor in the production of its objecthood. Harries (2017) is concerned with the sense of wonderment that arises from touching certain kinds of objects (in his case, a Beothuk stone tool from Newfoundland) and the feeling of a connection to the past – and the past owner of the object – it engenders in the present. Harries' work highlights the importance of temporality in understanding the networks of social connections in which objects are entangled. He asks, 'How is it, then, that in these moments of intimate 'skin-on-skin' contact, the past may come to be felt as present yet also announce itself to be something other than present?' (Harries 2017: 116). The answer is via a process that Harries describes as the 'enfolding' of time into an object. He notes that being able to touch historic objects engenders a 'proximal' relationship with the past for the viewer, as well as adding to the ongoing network of (past and present) relationships inherent within objects themselves. Through a viewer's physical engagement with an object, the network of which the object is a part extends both into the present and back into the past, securing its 'objecthood' through this tactile comprehension of its significance through time.

Building on Gell, Harries argues that the abduction of an object's agency does not just *happen*, but that the viewers of this agency must work for it through our interactions with objects. Furthermore, it is possible that through objects, 'we also sense the being of an absent other' (Harries 2017: 121). As a result, the past is a constituent part of the present world and the network in which objects and actors are connected reveals itself, again, to have multiple iterations through time. In this way, fragile objects have their objecthood reinforced through a viewer's physical engagement with them. This process, and the concurrent act of learning about the object and its absent 'others', delays the object reverting to a thing, by drawing it into networks in the present that understand the power of its connections in the past.

It is worth briefly noting here that the objects my research considers, as well as those discussed by Domínguez Rubio and Harries, behave in similar ways because of the fact that they are objects valued in the present for their past lives. While there are undoubtedly instances in which aspects of material culture are ideally *divisible* from their histories – like pure commodities, for example – I argue that this relates to things, rather than objects. The objects in my research have entered into museum (or in the case of Harries' work, private) collections specifically because of their histories – backed up by their contextual and conceptual characteristics, as I will outline below. The fact of their entering these collections therefore imbues them with meaning or significance that renders them, at least initially, as objects rather than things.

In this section, I have argued that fragile objects require work to ensure their objecthood is replicated physically, thus preventing them from reverting to categorisations of 'thing-ness'. As Appadurai says, 'the very objecthood of art objects requires action in order to resist the historical processes that turn one kind of thing into another kind of thing' (Appadurai 2006: 16). This process relies upon a network of human and non-human actors: from conservators and building specialists; to the electronic humidity monitors and paintbrushes used in the preservation and conservation of the Mona Lisa; or the hands that experience wonderment at holding an object with palpable links to the past. However, it is rare for museum objects to be handled – particularly by members of the public – so how else may the agency of an 'absent other' be abducted in the museum environment, if not through physical touch? The next section of this chapter will describe what I term the 'contextual' fragility of objects which is stabilised through the work of museum professionals. This forms another arm of the varied network of human and non-human actors that stabilise objecthood within the ever-changing environment of the museum.

Contextual fragility: the contextual reproduction of objecthood

Above, I argue that fragile museum objects require ongoing human input to maintain their object status, and that this can take the form of physical acts of conservation, preservation and handling. In this section, I suggest that museum professionals also make things into objects through contextualising practices including accession, research, interpretation and display. I will outline several theories detailing the ability of museum professionals to culturally contextualise objects, before moving on to describe some of the practical ways in which this is achieved within the museum. Just as with the physical perpetuation of objecthood, these processes are dependent upon a stabilising network of both human and non-human actors.

Contextual fragility: theories of context

If we accept Gell's framing of 'agency', which is, broadly speaking, the ability of a person (or object) to cause something to happen – agents are 'the origin of causal events' (1998: 16), an object's agency can therefore be said to influence the mind of the viewer. Van Eck (2010) calls this the 'living presence response' to an object. However, this highlights a limitation of Gell's work: it assumes that both the artist and the viewer have a shared understanding of the meaning or effect of the object (Cant 2019: 35–48). While Gell does account for the idea that viewers may have differing perspectives on the object, he does not consider what might happen if the artist and viewer have entirely different views on what the object actually is. However, this may well be the case when, for example, an artist engendered no particular intention in their creation of an object, or if what they *did* intend was not what actually happened. As a result, Layton (2003) suggests that theorists should pay more attention to the agency of the *viewers* of objects and their particular experience of the abduction of agency. He highlights the importance of 'cultural convention' in shaping the way that art objects are received. This is not to say that objects are simply open to subjective reinterpretation based simply on the viewers' cultural context. Rather, as Cant (2019: 37) argues, art objects should be considered as the relational *mediators* of agency. That is, the object is crucial in order for there to be an encounter with the viewer in the first place, and as such, agency is not only created when an object is formed, but also, 'materializes in a multiplicity of ways as art is encountered and beheld by

viewers' (2019: 37-38). This is particularly prescient in relation to museum visitors, for whom objects are also contextualised through the interpretive work of museum professionals¹⁰.

Morphy's 2009 critique of Gell also highlights the importance of considering the capacity of human actors for object contextualisation. Morphy argues that Gell's theory does not allow for an analysis of the cultural contexts in which artworks in particular are read, arguing that, 'it is the human beings who perceive, respond to and conceptualize the objects and who make the connections' (Morphy 2009: 9). I argue that this is especially true of museum professionals, who categorise and shape the way that visitors understand objects, based on the ways that they present and interpret their collections. Morphy also suggests that, by focusing on the agency of objects, Gell does not engage with the ability of human actors (who are not the 'artists' or creators) to use objects as part of their own agentive actions. In the museum, this might mean employing an object to explain a particular theory or draw out a specific point for analysis. Indeed, Morphy argues that objects,

...are created for use in particular contexts, and in order to understand how a new object is created, one needs to focus on individual agency in the context of systems of knowledge and in relation to historical and contextual factors (Morphy 2009: 21).

I consider that the contextualisation of an object by museum professionals has a direct hand in the ongoing production not only of the object itself, but also of the human actors and other objects with which it can be linked via its network. Objects do not exist in a vacuum, and as a result, a greater understanding of the broader social contexts in which they are encountered and interpreted is required.

The power of past and present cultural contexts to impact museum collections can be further theorised through Clifford's (1997) work on 'contact zones': which sets up museums as nexuses of relationships with ongoing historical, political and moral dimensions. Clifford argues that different groups meet at the 'contact zone' of the museum and defines these groups, very broadly, as collecting and *collected* communities. While Clifford is particularly interested in ethnographic collections, and the ensuing colonial power dynamics, I argue that there is scope to expand his idea to encompass social history collections. This re-analysis of the contact zone would involve considering the museum as a place where a contemporary society can meet a past, different, or even idealised version of *itself* through objects. Clifford acknowledges that the communities who meet at the contact zone need not be geographically diverse, so a difference which is mainly temporal could provide insight into the changing cultural relationships bound up in collections. In terms of my own research, the Polar Museum in Cambridge could, for example, be categorised as a meeting place of past and contemporary societies from Cambridge and the UK. The treatment of collections of Antarctic 'heroic' explorers by museum professionals through time can therefore be studied as a nexus of shifting political, ethical and historical relationships in the past, present and extending into the future.

With a similar interest in linking a variety of agents in the interpretation and contextualisation of objects, Byrne, Clarke, Harrison and Torrence argue that museum collections form shifting and complex assemblages of, 'material and social networks' (2011: 3). They suggest that collections are

¹⁰ Of course, museum visitors also bring their own cultural conventions with them to the museum, which I will consider in my section on 'conceptual' object fragility.

continuously being shaped and re-formed and that their ongoing entanglements not only impact the collections themselves, but also a variety of human actors, both within the museum community and elsewhere. By viewing these material and human assemblages through the lens of 'social collections', the authors understand museums as ongoing *processes* of object construction via complex networks comprised of,

...not only museum curators, collectors, creator communities and the museum-going publics, but also of the collected objects themselves, their technologies of display, the laboratory spaces in which they are stored and the tools which are used for their research, alongside the building in which they reside, the images that represent them and the texts which are written about them (Byrne *et al.* 2011: 10).

It is clear that objects in a variety of circumstances within the museum are connected to ongoing and shifting networks of actors capable of the transmission of agency and the production of social relationships. Expanding on the idea of the museum as process of production, Byrne *et al.* argue for the capacity of objects to embody many different kinds of agency within their life span in the museum. For example, while at times objects may be used for the interpretation of particular ideas to the public, at others those same objects may be researched and employed to hypothesise or prove theories for academics. As a result, the different networks in which objects find themselves at different times impact directly on the work they are asked to do, the agency they come to enact and the value with which they are imbued. This is what I mean by the 'contextualising work' of museum professionals, which produces an object's status in the museum's collection whilst simultaneously operating within an ever-shifting cultural context.

To take this theory of producing objects a step further, Byrne *et al.* also argue that material objects can be used by museum professionals (as well as the institution of the museum more broadly) for 'the construction of various 'social facts'' (Byrne *et al.* 2011: 11). While they are concerned with a broad spread of case-studies, particularly within ethnographic collections, my own research questions the impact that these shifting networks of relations can have on the contemporary perception of historic public figures. As well as forming the nexus of networks of agency between human and non-human actors, museum objects from the 'Heroic Age' of Antarctic exploration are also being worked upon (and are working to) continuously re-shape the way that people conceive of their associated 'heroes' over time.

Gilchrist also explores the potential for the construction of 'social facts' through networks of objects and human actors in her book, *Sacred Heritage* (2020). She categorises 'heritage' as both a label for historic material culture *and* representative of 'the contemporary *use* of this material legacy for social, economic and political agendas' (Gilchrist 2020: 2, emphasis my own). The conceptualisation of museums as essentially political spaces can be a startling idea to members of the public (Oliver Dowden included), who may view them as neutral or direct links to the cultural thoughts of the past (Byrne *et al.* 2011), but as has been discussed above, the agency transmitted by objects and the value they hold is truly mutable. Furthermore, the process of collecting institutions shaping 'heritage' and the cultural understanding of characters from the past is evident in Gilchrist's analysis of saints and relics. Of particular interest to my work is the treatment of objects that can be associated with specific individuals of note – what we may view as the 'heroic objects' of the Christian church.

Gilchrist describes stones and other relics associated with particular saints that held curative properties, which were consequently retained and cared for by Christians hoping to continue to benefit from these qualities. One example, from *Life of Columba*, written by the hagiographer Adomnán at the end of the seventh century, is of certain ‘white stones’ used by Columba to enact miracles. In one story, Columba gives a stone to Broichan, a wizard, who is seriously ill. Columba tells him that, if Broichan sets free a female Irish slave, and then dips the stone in water before drinking it, he will be cured. The curative properties are dependent on him freeing the slave and if he does not, he will die on the spot. After the miracle, the stone was kept by the Pictish king who Broichan served and was used to treat diseases in the area because of its close association with Columba. While museum objects are not generally considered to have quite such active effects amongst visitors, they nevertheless act as a kind of ‘contact relic’ – even in the highly secular case of Antarctic explorers – exposing visitors to objects handled by these named individuals. This is reminiscent of Harries’ (2017) concept of the ‘enfolding’ of time into an object. By framing objects in this way, rather like the holy stones considered by Gilchrist, museums are endeavouring to stabilise objecthood through emphasis on an object’s *association* with particular historical figures.

To take this a step further, as Hoskin notes, Gell’s work encompasses the idea that, ‘the oeuvre of a Western artist can be seen as a form of distributed personhood’ (2006: 78). That people may be considered as ‘dividuals’ – defined not by their individual identities but by their relationships with others over the course of their life histories (Strathern 1998), and that this idea might be expanded to include objects that shape and are shaped by social relationships in the same way (Connelly and Warrior 2019) is nothing new. Weiner’s work on the inalienability of objects is especially helpful here, as it considers some objects as being inextricably bound up with certain past owners, providing their dividual status with long-term significance. In particular, she describes inalienable objects as being, ‘imbued with the intrinsic and ineffable identities of their owners’ (Weiner 1992: 7). Moreover, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2001) suggests that alienability and inalienability may be *stages* in the social life of art objects. These ideas are both evident in my research in relation to museum objects relating to Scott and Shackleton. What is particularly interesting in these instances is that the inalienable relationship between these individuals and their objects is not based on their having *made* them, as Gell’s artists would have, but on their having simply been an important touchstone in the objects’ life history (even if, in some cases, the object played a relatively minor role in the life history of the men themselves).

In this section I have accounted for the different ways that an object’s agency may be abducted by viewers. Accordingly, I have foregrounded the importance of museum practice in further shaping the way that an object may be perceived. So it is that the agency of museum professionals may also be abducted through the display of particular museum objects relating to the ‘Heroic Age’ of Antarctic exploration.

Contextualising objects in practice

As discussed above, it has been well established that museums are particularly important sites for the contextualisation of objects, impacting the agency that is abducted from them by the visiting public. But how can this be traced through museum practice? In the second half of this section on contextual fragility, I demonstrate the methods employed by museum professionals to contextualise objects. These practices produce a sense of stability not only in the categorisation of objects (rather

than things), but also in the narratives objects are employed to tell and the people with whom they are associated.

Antczak and Beaudry discuss the process by which archaeological objects brought up from dig sites are grouped by archaeologists in various ways: things from the same deposition, the same trench, things together on the lab table or brought together with similar material culture from other sites. They argue these groupings, 'are artificially and temporarily severed from the past living individuals and dynamic communities which, through their practices, engaged with vibrant things' (Antczak & Beaudry 2019: 95-6). A kind of break appears in the network of these objects while they are recontextualised by new actors. This process is comparable to the work of museums in bringing together a variety of objects to tell the story of, for example, the expeditions of Captain Robert Falcon Scott or Sir Ernest Shackleton. The people who first interacted with these objects are no longer around to shape the process of categorisation, just as the people who made and used Antczak and Beaudry's archaeological finds are no longer around. However, through describing their actions as 'artificial', Antczak and Beaudry are at risk of painting contemporary (museum) professionals out of the picture. Instead, I suggest that the new connections made in the network via contemporary contextualisation are as important as the historic ones. In this way, the work of museum professionals in the contextualisation of the objects in their care is akin to the 'biographical' objects discussed by Hoskins (1998). While Hoskins is concerned with the telling of an individual's biography through the use of objects, I argue that museum professionals also use objects to, 'reify characteristics of personhood that must then be narratively organized into an identity' (Hoskins 1998: 24) but that they do this to describe historic figures, through the work of museum research, interpretation and display.

Myers (2001) suggests that one of the fundamental tenets of studying objects is an acknowledgement that they are capable of change, describing the instability of the value of objects over their lifetimes. His particular focus is on the mutability of this value through processes of commodification, gift-giving and consumption. He suggests that it is 'the movement of objects through diverse institutions and social fields that classify them that give them their meaning and value' (Myers 2001: 55). Moreover, he argues for 'regimes of value' in order to describe how the value of an object can change form as it crosses different boundaries. In my research, the status of 'objecthood' (whether something is an 'object' or a 'thing') is itself a regime of value. Moreover, this is apparent from the very beginnings of an object's relationship with museum institutions (and the professionals who work in them). For example, to draw on Myers' interest in exchange, a thing can become an object through a specific kind of gift-giving in the form of a donation from a private collection to a museum. Through its accession into a collection – the traversing of this boundary – a thing which may be seen to hold limited import outside of its small private network becomes imbued with greater significance by the simple fact of its being worthy of entry into the museum. For many things, this is the first act of contextualisation from within the museum community that creates its categorisation as an object.

Accession is the first step in the process that will see an object stored, displayed, interpreted and researched within the museum for (what is hoped to be) the rest of its social life. It is accession which officially acknowledges that an object is important enough to have this attention bestowed upon it by present and future museum professionals. Pearce (1992) suggests that museum objects are selected 'twice over' – through the decisions of their collector and the museum which accessions

them. An object must demonstrate its significance to the collector in order to be presented to the museum professional in the first place, before being scrutinised again to ensure that it meets the museum's specific standards for accession (sometimes formalised in the museum's collections management policy). Both these instances of decision making are influenced by prevailing fashions, social values, and the views and political positions of these two initial decision makers, who are themselves sometimes separated in time, culture and space. Accordingly, the whole process is itself bound up in the cultural context of the time(s) of collection and accession as well as the particular lived experiences of the people involved. Thus, these first selections – the very first performances of value by the museum object – are less about the object itself, and far more about the interaction of a host of actors and contexts. They form the basis of its objecthood for the rest of its life, as it enjoys what Stam (2005: 69) describes as the 'museum effect' – an increase in an object's significance thanks to its inclusion in a museum's collection. Nevertheless, entry into a collection is not the end of an object's social life and, as Belcher notes, 'exhibition is also subject to the various vicissitudes inherent in a dynamic, evolving medium which has its roots in the historical, social, economic, education and political structures of society' (1991: 42) the act of exhibition and display is therefore perhaps the most visible area of an object's contextual stabilisation.

Kreps suggests that the process of curation of museum objects is a social practice, 'linked to specific kinds of relationships between people and objects as well as wider social structures and cultural contexts' (2003: 313). This is evident in Medby and Dittmer's (2020) work on the *Death in the Ice* exhibition at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, which also indicates how objecthood may be stabilised contextually through the actions of museum professionals. Through their analysis of this exhibition about the failed 1845 Franklin expedition to the Arctic (which ultimately ended in the loss of two ships and their crews) they indicate the ways in which museums shape objects, the stories they tell and thus the agency they transmit, through practices of interpretation and display. They describe the exhibition space, which led visitors through a series of rooms designed to give them a feeling of entering the world of the expedition. One room gave the impression of the inside of one of the ships as it was when the men set off on the expedition, another brought the visitors into a submerged present with the newly discovered wrecks of the *Erebus and Terror* under the sea in the Canadian Arctic. By shaping the visitor experience in such a sensorially-charged way, the objects on display became imbued with the power of the absent men who used them, who had been made present by the specific all-encompassing design of the gallery space.

Strikingly, Medby and Dittmer also describe a display of photographs depicting the bodies of several men from the expedition which had been uncovered in the high Arctic. The shift in value of these photographic objects as they are recontextualised for the museum in this exhibition is sizeable. The images were originally produced in the 1980s during an exhumation and scientific examination of the bodies, which attempted to identify their quality of life and causes of death (Forst and Brown 2017). The contextual shift performed by curators, exhibition designers and interpretation specialists enabled these images to be reproduced in a public exhibition in order to represent the lives and deaths of an entire failed expedition, and to 're-presence' the men themselves. Ultimately, what the authors' analysis of this exhibition highlights is the capacity of museums to facilitate a particular version of people, places, things, even the past, through their contextual interpretation and presentation of objects. The objects in this exhibition were therefore not statically identified as, 'just what they 'were' on board a ship or in the hands of Inuit, but as continually becoming otherwise

through circulation of use and display' (Medby and Dittmer 2020: 181). Medby and Dittmer go on to acknowledge that it is through the active processes of curation, display and 'technological augmentation' that the 'facts' of the Franklin expedition are produced, emerging from a collection of objects to form a coherent picture of the past, shaped by the present.

While acknowledging the changing role of an object once it has been sold, given or bequeathed to a museum collection, and then later put on display, Myers' special interest in exchange leads him to overlook the capacity for shifting value in what he calls, 'more static moments of definition and secure classification' (Myers 2001: 8). This includes what happens to objects within the museum collection, once they have been accessioned, but have not necessarily been put on public display. I argue that the museum is in fact far from static in its treatment of objects and that circulation, and even display, are not a necessary factor for the stabilisation of museum objects. Moreover, the contextualisation of objects which takes place without any movement at all (physical, economic or otherwise) may be missed in Myers' theories of economic circulation. Sometimes described as being 'resigned' to stores and archives, objects that have not been selected for display seem to have reached a state of stasis in their life histories. However, I counter that their objecthood is still being actively shaped by the decisions of museum professionals, even if they *never* make it into the cases of the gallery. Pearce (1992: 240) describes objects that are often passed over by museum professionals for conservation work, research or display as 'poor stuff'. However, Stevenson suggests that just because material has not been selected for display does not mean that it is insignificant. She argues that objects in store are not simply awaiting display but 'can be accessed for myriad uses from research and learning initiatives, to inspiration and enjoyment' (Stevenson 2017: 234). Moreover, I argue that through decisions to use objects in these 'behind the scenes' roles, museum professionals are still taking an active role in shaping their ongoing objecthood.

In spite of the capacity for the contextual stabilisations of objects in the museum store through the practice of museum professionals, there are instances in which an object may revert to thingness even after accession into a museum.

Disposal (or de-accessioning as some quarters prefer to call it) violates the supposed sanctity of museum collections and forces the curator to be explicit about the conceptual reasons for retaining or shedding particular groups of material (Pearce 1992: 136).

Though rarely discussed outside of museums, it is a fact that not all objects remain in their care for perpetuity. The process of de-accession indicates that objects can *lose* value within the museum context – a fact that is seldom acknowledged at the moment of accession. While some objects may be de-accessioned as a result of their physical deterioration, others simply do not meet (or no longer meet) the mission of the museum, or may be the poorest example of an over-represented type of object. Some objects may also become divorced from the information that made them worthy of accession to begin with, either through human error or loss of institutional knowledge. As a result, the initial decision to accession these objects becomes harder to justify and therefore the object's place in the museum's collection is harder to maintain. At the Polar Museum, this is particularly true of objects that have been given 'Z numbers'. A Z number indicates that the record of their initial accession has been lost (if it ever existed) and as a result, these objects may be more susceptible to deaccession in the future, because they are not proven parts of the collection (for a more detailed explanation of the numbering system at the Polar Museum, see Appendix 3).

It is worth mentioning here that objects that are deaccessioned and revert to ‘things’ may have lost their significance for museum professionals, but it is still possible that they may retain their object-status for other people. For example, deaccessioned things may enter into the auction-circuit, becoming again important ‘objects’ for buyers, perhaps even as a result of their having once been part of a museum collection. Nevertheless, object status is an *active* process requiring, in the museum, constant work by curators, educators and conservators. While Thompson suggests that if ‘people act towards those objects *as if* they were going to last for ever, then the category boundary is unthreatened’ (1994: 273), I argue that this passive expectation of the continuation of an object’s significance is not enough. It is through a lack of sustained effort to stabilise their contextual fragility that objects are eventually de-accessioned from museum collections.

In this section, I have argued that acts of accession, research, interpretation and display within a museum environment help to stabilise an object’s *contextual* stability in practice. These processes are shaped by a diverse set of actors ranging from the curators who first accession objects, through the technologies of exhibition and even include the museum professionals who engage with objects that are not put on display. Moreover, as Senatore (2022) argues, the production of history through objects is based on choices about which objects to save, conserve, or throw away. As a result, the actions of museum professionals in stabilising an object’s *contextual* stability may have ongoing impacts for their *conceptual* fragility. In the final section of this chapter, therefore, I will consider the ways in which these branching networks of humans and objects extend outside of the confines of the museum and into the wider world beyond.

Conceptual fragility: networks that create theories (and where to cut them)

Above, I have highlighted the fragile material status of museum objects and discussed the ways in which their value is maintained through physical acts of care. In the second section, I considered museum professionals’ work to stabilise objects’ contextual fragility via accession, research, interpretation and display. In this final section, I will argue that objects also require the stabilisation of their *conceptual* fragility. That is, networks that include museum objects extend beyond the confines of the museum and in so doing, link objects to various wider conceptual underpinnings which are themselves subject to change. In my research, this encompasses an extended network of human and non-human actors who form the category of the ‘hero’ as it can be applied to Antarctic explorers of the ‘Heroic Age’ (see Chapter 1). I suggest that these broader conceptual definitions reverberate through the network and reflect back on the treatment of objects and collections in the museum, forming what Latour (1999) might term a ‘circulating’ local in which external factors shape internal acts and vice versa. As Latourian networks are made up of a potentially infinite number of connections, it should come as no surprise that museum objects are bound up in networks that extend beyond the (physical and contextual) walls of the museum. However, it is Strathern’s (1996) critique of Latour’s work that enables these networks to be cut down for study. In particular Strathern argues that ‘ownership’ may provide a suitable point at which to cut networks. Ownership is clearly an important consideration in the contextual stabilisation of an object. However, I suggest that it may also feed into the object’s conceptual stability, as will be explored below. Ultimately, this section will argue that museum collections are in danger of losing their objecthood through changing conceptual understandings of the subject matter with which they are associated, which may be

caused by broader changes in society, knowledge, or other features relevant to them. Objects must have some reason to be considered worthy of entry into a museum collection, and for the objects in my study, that is because they are related to the 'Heroic Age' of Antarctic exploration. Their objecthood is therefore dependent upon ongoing public interest in this era – and the individuals involved. As a result, these museum objects require a network of actors which extends beyond the museum to stabilise their *conceptual* fragility.

The branching of social connections out from objects through time and space can be understood in Antczak and Beaudry's (2019) work on the conceptualisation of scalable frameworks of relations in archaeology.¹¹ They understand the entanglements of objects and humans over space and time as taking place at three levels: the knot, the mesh and the meshwork (cf. Ingold 2021). The knot is where the lifelines of humans and objects first come together, and each knot has a frayed end, constantly seeking new connections. The mesh is a conceptualisation of groupings of human-human/object-object/human-object relationships. Antczak and Beaudry cite the crew of a ship and the things they are surrounded by as a mesh, but we might also consider it as the museum and the actors at play within it. Finally, the meshwork is the broader picture of a series of knots and meshes which is only possible over a long period of time and highlights changes and continuities within the whole. In my work, this is the series of interactions and connections reaching out from the object, through the museum and into a broader social context either in the past or present, linking a wide range of actors over space and time in the constitution of these various levels.

The multiple layers of engagement inherent in the reputation of particular historical figures is outlined briefly by Bartlett in his 2013 book, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?*. As well as describing richly researched accounts of religious figures, his comprehensive history of Christian saints and martyrs from their 100BC origins onwards also includes Bartlett's analysis of the environment required for ongoing reverence. Many parallels can be drawn between Christian saints and the secular heroes of Antarctic explorers – particularly with regard to the power of the objects associated with them and the writing of hagiographies – so the dual process Bartlett considers necessary to perpetuate the story of a saint through the ages is especially interesting for my research. He describes the need for two supports: the first being (often local) lay people – who for example, venerate the saint's tomb – with the second support coming from, 'the approval of an ecclesiastical establishment' (Bartlett 2013: 636). We might consider these as comparable to Antczak and Beaudry's knot and mesh, respectively.

Bartlett's description of lay people tending to the tomb of a saint is mirrored in the actions of the peers of Antarctic 'heroic' explorers, who keep and later donate their belongings to museums. Similarly, the approving 'ecclesiastical establishment' of Bartlett's saints can be understood as comparable to the institution of the museum. However, in addition to these two ongoing supports, I would also add a third important body – the meshwork – which in Bartlett's example might be the

¹¹ It is important to mention here that Antczak and Beaudry spend some time at the beginning of their article debating the use of the terms 'object' and 'thing'. Their positionality as archaeologists means that they eventually decide upon the use of the word 'thing' to describe material culture imbued with meaning, power or significance. This is the opposite of my framing of these terms, which has been informed by my own anthropological approach. To avoid confusion, I will continue to use the word 'object' when talking about value-laden items, but the reader is advised that there may be some discrepancies when drawing directly from Antczak and Beaudry.

prevailing role of religion itself. For Antarctic explorers, the equivalence here is the part played by members of the public who, for various personal reasons, become enamoured, or in 'awe', of explorers and thus continue to revere and engage with them: whether by viewing their material culture in museums, making trips to the places they once lived or even the Antarctic itself, or making a special effort to learn more about them. The interest of these actors, in spite of their likely having no personal relationship to the explorers themselves, is nonetheless key to the explorers continuing to be thought of as 'heroic' individuals. That is, institutions and people, both at a local and a wider level, continue to be instrumental in the ongoing constitution of venerated people – whether via thousands of years of Christian worship, or a hundred years of focused interest in Antarctic exploration.

Thomas (1991) is equally concerned with the shaping influence of people, which he describes through the lens of an object's 'entanglements'. Through these entanglements with a variety of actors he considers the continual and complex processes of reformulation that objects undergo over the course of their lives, concluding that, 'objects are not what they were made to be but what they have become' (Thomas 1991: 4), thus highlighting the tangible impact of entanglements upon the conceptual construction of objects. He also suggests that an object's entanglements are difficult to identify because researchers may struggle to 'step outside' of their influence. Senatore's (2020) work on the entanglements between objects and people in Antarctica also considers the influence of objects over people. She describes how people's reliance on man-made things for survival in the Antarctic environment (including research stations) necessitates ongoing commitment to the time and resources required to care for them. This, she argues, eventually leads to the 'entrapment' of people within these object-human relationships. This theory of external influences – well beyond the sphere of the museum – speaks to the ever-broadening network of actors to whom objects are connected. Thomas suggests that analysing entanglements of objects is critical for understanding, 'how we interpret both past and present societies' (Thomas 1991: 6) describing the multi-temporal aspects of the networks in which I argue objects are bound up. Consequently, the status of museum objects is open to reinterpretation – and stabilisation – which can be influenced by historical categorisations and conceptual assumptions.

Having outlined the ways in which networks branch out from objects, through the context of the museum and out into wider connections with human and non-human actors across space and time, I now turn to consider how this branching agency can loop back to the objects themselves, resulting in a level of reflexivity in object interpretation and categorisation. In their 2021 book, and in deep dialogue with Gell's *Art and Agency* (1998), Küchler and Carroll suggest that objects do not simply symbolise relationships, but that relationships are inherent in and constituted by objects themselves. Key to their argument is the idea of 'relational immanence' as a new way of seeing objects not as representative of something, but as *constituted by* their prototypes (using Gell's definition of a prototype as an entity represented in some way by the index). They extend this to consider that, rather than being culturally constructed, objects index prototypes that are themselves culturally constitutive (via the physical index – the object). This perspective – of the culturally-constructive nature of objects – is also apparent in Gosden's (2005) work on archaeological material. Gosden considers the transition from late Iron Age type objects to those with a Roman provenance in Britain in order to understand how, through new forms and styles of objects, the material world imposed new rules and restrictions on the people of Iron Age Britain. Gosden argues that those people who

embraced these new forms, were themselves changed as a result – ultimately becoming the people of *Roman Britain*.

While Küchler and Carroll are concerned with art objects, and Gosden with archaeological material, this idea of the culturally-constitutive object is also relevant to social history collections when understood within the framework of a branching network. The way that objects belonging to, or associated with, heroic explorers are recognised by viewers is inherently bound up in the way that those viewers understand the heroic figures with which the objects are associated. But this understanding can also be informed by those objects and their treatment within the museum. That is, if an object related to an Antarctic explorer can be thought of as emphasising the importance of those explorers in its wider network, then that network will endeavour to imbue further significance upon other objects similarly entangled with explorers. The whole process of network-prototype-index therefore becomes a kind of cycling self-fulfilling prophecy between levels and agents. Furthermore, it is the very ‘immanence’ of this constitutive prototype within the index that makes it inherently relational, ‘related first to the prototype and consequently to its own future becoming.’ (Küchler & Carroll 2021: 81). Küchler and Carroll term these relations ‘interartefactual’. By understanding indexes and prototypes in this way, it is possible to see their direct impact on the production of further objects in the network. As the authors state in the final sentence of their book, ‘Each object, in its own right – and within the sequentialization of its interartefactual relations [through its relational immanence] – foists upon the recipient the prototypical forms held within.’ (2021: 226, brackets my own).

This chapter thus presents a varied network of actors, comprising a circling of agencies and capable of constituting and categorising agents through time and across space. However, without the proper tools to engage with this network, it is in danger of becoming overwhelming and indiscriminate, with no means of analysis. So, I turn to Strathern’s oft-cited 1996 paper, *Cutting the Network*, in order to argue for a greater acknowledgement of the role of the academic (and museum professional) in the construction of categories, and call for a more politically engaged interpretation of these broad networks.

Actor-network theorists, Strathern writes, are concerned with showing what effects are produced by the relationships between human and non-human agents. She highlights the value of Latour’s ideas of networks as essentially democratising interconnectedness – linking disparate actors, be they human or nonhuman, in a way that does not assume any particular hierarchical structure. For Strathern, Latour’s theory is helpful insofar as it accounts for expansive networks that contain a wide range of causes, effects, actors and points of analysis. But there is a problem bound up with this advantage, as in order to make any worthwhile analytical observations, there must be a point at which this ever expanding network is brought to a halt. Strathern considers the idea of ‘cutting’ networks specifically in relation to kinship interactions, including marital exchanges. She argues that by studying *transactions*, theorists can cut expansive networks at particular points, rendering them measurable and therefore open to analysis, ‘They are measured by people’s indebtedness to one another through the flow of objects, human and nonhuman’ (Strathern 1996: 529). Strathern considers ‘ownership’ in particular a powerful concept for cutting networks, identifying its being simultaneously about belonging and property as key strengths for producing network ‘lengths’ which can be analysed.

As has been described in this chapter, 'ownership' of a museum object may well be bound up with a variety of factors, including its biographical history and whether it is an inalienable object that has become tied to a particular person in its life history, as described by Weiner (1992). In fact, we may even consider the inalienability of objects as a kind of ownership that cuts the network at its relationship to a particular individual. In some ways, this may even be comparable to the 'stoppage' of the distributed individual within an agentive object in Gell's work (1998). This ownership/inalienability/stoppage can make it difficult to cut the network in different ways, to reveal different entanglements. But if we were to use the cutting of networks to 'pause' the inalienability of certain objects, acknowledge their significance to the life of an individual, and then expand our inquiries, we may be able to uncover more of the network that stabilises their objecthood. For example, rather than considering the 'heroic' owners of objects taken on Antarctic expeditions, we might ask: who made these objects? Where did they go between returning from the Antarctic and entering into the museum? How have they been used in the years since their accession into a collection? Academics and museum curators are privileged to be able to cut the network in the places they see fit, so how much more could be uncovered about these objects if those networks were cut in different and more inclusive ways. The diverse actors uncovered may not be 'inalienable' from the life of the object, but by including them in museum practice, they are nonetheless made more significant in the object's life history. Perhaps we have been cutting the networks at points that obscure the diversity within them.

In this section, I have argued that museum collections are part of mutable networks that do not end at the boundaries of the museum but extend far beyond it. These networks connect people who may never enter the physical space of the museum, and yet the circling of agency inherent in networks mean that they both stabilise the objecthood of museum objects and are shaped by museum objects in their understanding of the Heroic Age Antarctic explorers that they represent. The work required to stabilise the conceptual fragility that categorises the social significance of this era and its famous figures is therefore a process that must take place both inside and outside of the museum. Furthermore, I have argued that museum professionals and academics themselves play a part in defining which parts of these networks are worthy of consideration. Therefore, if we imbue our practice with a more diverse way of cutting these networks, we will potentially be able to uncover a broader range of players within them. The category of heroism is forged by networks of human and non-human actors, over time and through space; these networks are filled with diverse actors, but so far they have only been cut in limited directions.

Authentic objects?

Across the three modes of fragility of the museum objects in my study – their physical characteristics, the changing context of the museum, and the wider conceptualisation of the 'heroic' figures with which they are associated – runs the idea of 'authenticity'. There is an assumption that the objects in the museum's care are authentic: that is why they are physically looked after, why they enter museum collections in the first place, and why people are interested in their subject matter more broadly. But what is actually meant by the term 'authentic'?

Theodossopoulos (2013) compares 'constructivist' and 'materialist' approaches to authenticity in relation to material culture. Materialist approaches see an object's authenticity as something inherent in its 'material substance'; this, Theodossopoulos argues, can result in a 'static' approach to

the authentic that cannot change or be influenced by other factors. Alternatively, a 'constructivist' view of authenticity is reliant upon 'social signification' and as a result is imbued with constant change as social categorisations of what is authentic shift over time. However, Theodossopoulos argues, this approach does not take into account the materiality of 'authentic' objects. Holtorf (2013) presents a middle way between these approaches which he terms a 'modified constructivist' approach to authenticity that is both mutable and considers the materiality of objects. He does this through a consideration of objects as possessing 'pastness'¹². Being 'of the past' is, for Holtorf, a rather broad net, but crucially it is 'the result of a particular perception or experience' (Holtorf 2013: 431). Though this sounds like another constructivist approach to authenticity, Holtorf's argument is that in order to conceptualise an object as being 'of the past' there must be a material analysis made of it:

...an object on display in a museum may be considered of the past because a label or museum guide convincingly says so. A church may acquire pastness because its architectural style matches what we expect of a Romanesque or Gothic building, irrespective of when it was built. A ruin may possess pastness because its walls are in an obvious state of decay, irrespective of whether or not it possessed the same feature when it was new (Holtorf 2013: 431).

While this combination of materialist and constructivist approaches does help to build nuance into the idea of the authentic object, as Harries (2017) suggests, it does not allow the past to 'impinge' on the present. This is possible through the 'enfolding' of the past into an object which is experienced sensorially by the viewer in Harries' work. In my study of objects at the Polar Museum and Discovery Point, I have also found instances in which the past comes up to meet people through their engagements with objects – particularly those related to well-known 'heroes' of the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration. There have also been moments where the 'authenticity' of objects came into question in ways that took into account their pastness, but still found them lacking in unexpected ways. Perhaps what is needed, then, is a different word – not authenticity at all – that can be used to describe the fluctuations of these ideas and the emotions they engender. Harries (2017) describes the 'wonderment' of engagement with objects and Cant (2019) details an object's 'aura' – as being itself constitutive of its objecthood. That is, 'aura, the alluring and captivating power of desirable or enchanting artworks, is a very large component of their legitimacy' (2019: 48). In my work, therefore, there is something of this 'stickiness' (in Gell's 1998 sense) of objects and how people interact with them as a direct result of their connection to 'heroic' figures. This makes it harder for viewers to extricate themselves from the object's agency. Moreover, this is especially notable in objects that are known to have come into close contact with the body of particular explorers, adding another layer to the sensorial, sympathetic, enfolded enchantment experienced by museum visitors. As a result, certain objects related to the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration are both constructed by modern viewers and based in the specifics of their historical materiality.

This chapter has examined the major concepts that form the theoretical foundations of my research. These hinge upon Gell's (1998) theory of object agency, which states that objects can be agential

¹² Incidentally, this 'middle way' in Holtorf's (2013) work is comparable to Bruman's (2014) argument for 'heritage agnosticism' – which both approaches heritage with a sense of relativism, taking seriously beliefs and performances, whilst simultaneously incorporating more critical responses that acknowledge the socially constructed nature of these heritage practices.

actors with the capacity to forge and shape social relationships. I also draw upon Latour's (1999, 2005) categorisations of networks comprised of both human and non-human actors, and the idea of a circulating local shaped by these variable forces. However, I argue that these theories must be imbued with an understanding of objects as ever-changing entities, constantly ranging in and out of objecthood and 'thing-ness' (Domínguez Rubio 2016) over the course of their life-histories. In order to maintain their objecthood, therefore, museum objects must be stabilised across three fragilities. That is, their physical attributes, the context of the museum in which they are held, and the conceptualisation of the people and events to whom they are related – in my research, this comprises the public understanding of the 'heroes' of the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration. Through an appreciation of this ongoing change, I believe that it is possible to identify not only the fragility of the categorisation of objects, but also the mutability of the network of human and non-human actors that make them so. In terms of heroic Antarctic collections, this means that objects, and the narratives they tell about 'heroic' explorers, are subject to change and reinterpretation over time. Ultimately, the interaction between heroism and museum collections is dependent upon three things: there being a reason for visiting, a place to visit and something to see there, or rather – the concept of a hero, a museum and an object. Having discussed the 'hero' in Chapter 1, the categories of the museum and the object form the broad structure of the rest of this thesis.

4. The History of the Polar Museum: from conceptualisation to the modern day

It is a cold evening in early autumn and the Cambridge college dining hall is abuzz with people and aglow with light. I have joined Verity, Melanie, Mabel¹³ and a few others from the museum team, archive and library at SPRI. We changed into our black-tie eveningwear at the Institute and then ventured across town for this evening's celebrations. Among the hundreds of people packed into the room I notice scientists and diplomats, historians and public figures – there is even a prince in attendance. This is the long-awaited (and Covid-19 delayed) centenary celebration for the Scott Polar Research Institute. There is the usual excitement as the small world of polar researchers, historians, educators and enthusiasts comes together again, then we take our seats for the meal and the first of the evening's speeches begins. A variety of people are called on to say a few words about SPRI and its history, from the Director of the Institute to two current postdoctoral researchers. There is also a descendant of one of the men of the Heroic Age, here to commemorate the achievements of her ancestor. She tells a story – which I have often heard at the Institute – about Frank Debenham and the twinkle in his eye which became SPRI; all it took was a volcano and some writing paper.

Amongst the staff at SPRI, the story goes that the idea of a polar research institute came to Frank Debenham on the side of Mount Erebus, an active volcano in Antarctica (Figure 4.1). Debenham was a geologist on the 1910-13 British Antarctic Expedition (*Terra Nova*), Captain Scott's second expedition to Antarctica (Figure 4.2). During this time, he took part in scientific study and exploration, including leading a team which climbed Mount Erebus in 1912. Accompanying him on this expedition was Raymond Priestley, a fellow geologist who had undertaken similar work in the area on an earlier Antarctic expedition.

We were but amplifying a survey done three years earlier by Professor David Mawson and Priestley himself, and the question arose as to where their original notes and figures would be when we returned. Naturally that led to a debate upon the need for a central repository for field records (Debenham 1945: 223).

Debenham and Priestley realised that earlier research undertaken in Antarctica had not always been published, stored or maintained. As a result, data that had taken years to collect was hard to engage with, inaccessible or had been lost completely. It was thanks to this conversation on the side of the volcano that Debenham first appreciated the need for an institute: to act as a repository for their work and to bring together polar scientists and explorers in the spirit of collaboration. It would be a place where colleagues and students could work on the data they had collected in the field, sharing ideas, advice and even equipment (Figure 4.3).

¹³ These names have been changed, full details in Appendix 2.



Figure 4.1. P2005/5/1365 - Smoke cloud from Erebus. Jan. 15th 1911. Image by Ponting © SPRI.



Figure 4.2. P2005/5/482 - Frank Debenham and plane table. September 9th 1911.

Location: Antarctica, Ross Dependency.

Image by Ponting © SPRI.



Figure 4.3. P48/21 -
Portrait of Frank
Debenham © SPRI.

Debenham's plans crystallised when, later in the expedition, a group of men came across a hut used by Ernest Shackleton's 1907-9 *Nimrod* expedition. Venturing inside during a blizzard, Debenham found what has always been described to me – whenever I have been told the story by Institute staff – as 'a lovely piece of blue lined-foolscap'. The enticing smoothness and weighty thickness of the paper was said to have called out for something interesting to be written upon it.

Accordingly I spent a morning writing down on this noble stationery an outline of the idea, which was afterwards but little altered, except that the original heading of 'A Polar Centre' was at some later time crossed out and replaced by 'A Polar Institute' (*Ibid.*).

Sadly, the lovely blue lined-foolscap of this rather romantic legend has never been found. In spite of this near-perfect origin story, however, the Scott Polar Research Institute may never have made it off the page were it not for the subsequent tragic events of the *Terra Nova* Expedition.

One of the major goals held by Scott's *Terra Nova* Expedition was to be the first to reach the South Pole. In 1912, Scott, Wilson, Bowers, Oates and Evans became the second group to achieve this feat, having been narrowly beaten – by a margin of five weeks – by the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen and his team. Unfortunately, on their return journey, further tragedy befell the men of Scott's 'Polar Party' and not one of them returned to base. The 'Race to the Pole' between Scott and Amundsen had been widely publicised in the media (Ytreberg 2014), and news of the explorers was keenly awaited on the world stage. When it was revealed in 1913 that Scott had not succeeded in

being the first to the pole, and indeed had died trying, there was an outpouring of grief by the British public. The Captain Scott Memorial Mansion House Fund was set up and more than £76,000 was raised in donations.

The monies collected by the Mansion House Fund were spent on a variety of projects both commemorative and tied to the working life of the expedition and its members. Around half of the fund was given to the wives and families of Scott and the men who died on the expedition. £17,000 was spent on analysing and publishing scientific work which had been carried out between 1910-13. £12,000 was paid into a memorial account, which funded the memorial to Captain Scott and the other men in Plymouth (Scott having been born in Devonport), amongst other projects. Finally, the remaining monies – around £10,000 – were set aside as a ‘Polar Research Fund’ (Debenham 1945). It was from this pot that the funding was eventually given to create Debenham’s research institute, named the Scott Polar Research Institute as a memorial to Scott and the Polar Party.

Their legacy is not only in the achievement of the Pole and the subsequent tragedy of their deaths, but in the science that was pursued with such commitment and success during both Scott’s *Discovery* and *Terra Nova* expeditions. The Scott Polar Research Institute is part of their legacy, too, being founded with the residue of the Scott Memorial Fund as a multi-disciplinary polar research centre and as a national memorial to the endeavours of the Polar Party and their memory (Scott Polar Research Institute 2012: 2).

Already, it is clear that the history of SPRI has been shaped by many actors. The history of the museum it houses is no different - from explorers to architects and secretaries to curators, the list of influences on the museum is long and diverse. Moreover, the story of the museum’s collection and how it is displayed, encompasses technological advances in expedition equipment, changing public interests and the whims of funders. Understanding these complex interconnections between the people, objects and physical space of the museum over time serves to reveal the historical, thematic and relational context in which it operates today. Accordingly, this chapter will describe the varied path of the museum at SPRI from 1920 to the present.

By the Grace of all those involved

Scott’s *Terra Nova* Expedition ended in 1913, and in 1914 Debenham and the other scientists were beginning to work up their research. Debenham was based in Cambridge, and the city became something of a hub for the expedition scientists (Debenham 1945). However, not long after their return, the events of the First World War meant that the men were forced to shelve their Antarctic work in favour of the war effort, which scattered them across the world. By the time the men returned to Cambridge after the war, their numbers somewhat reduced, they were finally able to commit to the process of analysing their data. However, they met with considerable frustration while trying to situate their work within the context of their predecessors’ discoveries. As Debenham describes in a 1926 article in *The Geographical Journal*.

...certain of the scientific members of Scott’s last expedition sat down to prepare their reports and found considerable difficulty in obtaining the scientific reports of previous expeditions. It grew to large proportions when, in 1919, the member in charge of the report on the maps and surveys found that without access to the original records he could form no judgment of the value of earlier work. After diligent inquiry he obtained some of the field

note-books of a former expedition, but found that the usual fate of such things in the past had been to be relegated to the lumber room of the original owner or dispersed as souvenirs to friends and relatives. In examining the few original journals which were obtained he and others engaged on the reports made the sobering discovery that observations which they had fondly considered were originated by them were often enough noted in detail many years before, but, not being published, had been unknown and inaccessible (Debenham 1926: 43).

The difficulties the men encountered in accessing earlier research only served to strengthen Debenham's conviction that a polar research centre was a matter of necessity. However, to make his idea a reality, the institute needed funding and a home – both physical and intellectual. Debenham wrote a memorandum, describing his vision for a polar institute, which he took to Sir Arthur Shipley, Master of Christ's College, Cambridge. Shipley passed it on to Sir William Soulsby, the Honorary Secretary of the Captain Scott Memorial Mansion House Fund and it was Soulsby who presented Debenham's idea to the Trustees of the branch of the fund designated to 'Polar Research' (Debenham 1945). A quirk of the financial stipulations of the fund meant that Debenham's idea quickly became entangled with another project. That is, the University of Cambridge was making plans to erect a new building for its Department of Geography, and so the idea was proposed that the polar institute would form a wing of this building (Debenham n.d.). As a result, the institute became inextricably bound up in the workings of Cambridge University.

As well as the Trustees of the Captain Scott Memorial Mansion House Fund and the representatives of the University of Cambridge, Debenham had also sought approval for his idea from the men who had accompanied him on Scott's final expedition and – just as importantly – the widows and families of the men who had died. In particular, Debenham looked to the formidable Kathleen Scott for her approval of his plans, and her support leant an important extra dimension to his proposal (Debenham 1919). He also approached Oriana Wilson – the widow of Scott's right-hand man, Edward Wilson. In a letter to Oriana dated 26th October 1919, Debenham wrote:

The first idea was the raising of a more useful form of Memorial than a statue or series of statues of the Pole Party and took the form of the founding of some kind of Polar Institute where men concerned in polar matters might naturally centre for information or for working up results (Debenham 1919)

Eventually, after much discussion with the University and the board of Trustees, Debenham's idea was accepted and, in November 1920, the formal proposal – known as a Grace¹⁴ – was officially approved.

From the 'attic period' to commissioning architects

Once the idea had been approved by the University, the Trustees of the Captain Scott Memorial Mansion House Fund were to provide £6,000 from the Polar Research Fund to support the building of a dedicated wing to the new Geography building (Debenham n.d.). No provision was made for the daily costs of running the Institute, so to save money, it was initially set up in the attics of the Sedgwick Museum in central Cambridge, which were lent to the Institute by the geologist Professor

¹⁴ Within the University of Cambridge, a 'Grace' refers to a formal proposal presented to the Senate or the Regent House and then announced in the University's *Reporter* publication. (University of Cambridge n.d.).

John Marr (Debenham 1945). Here, Debenham began to amass the collection of equipment and written records that would form the basis of the collections of the museum and archive today. Over time, the momentum behind the creation of a new geography building began to wane, making the future of the Institute less certain. Accordingly, Debenham campaigned for the £6,000 awarded by the Trust to be transferred directly to the University, so that it could be used to build a new dedicated home for the institute and to pay for the daily costs it would incur (Debenham n.d.). At the same time, he requested the remainder of the Captain Scott Memorial Mansion House Fund's 'Polar Research Fund' – a further £7,000 – also be given to the Institute. In 1925, Debenham's suggestion was approved and the University received the money, accompanied by two stipulations: that the building erected for the Scott Polar Research Institute would act as a memorial to the men lost on the *Terra Nova* Expedition, and that it would be built within 10 years (Debenham 1945). To further secure the Institute's links to the University of Cambridge, its Committee of Management was appointed by Grace of the Senate, and is therefore provided with 'general supervision' by the University.

In 1927, the Institute moved out of the attic of the Sedgwick Museum and, temporarily, into Lensfield House. This building – owned by the University – was originally shared with the School of Architecture, but by 1929, it was solely the home of the Institute.

It was homely when a more formal aspect might have been too official, its verandah and green lawns were available for anything from oiling kayaks to small receptions, and its panelling and ornate carvings blended well with our portraits and with the magnificent collection of Dr E. A. Wilson's water colours which came to us at that time from Mrs Wilson (Debenham 1945: 233).

This brief description highlights the many faces of the Institute – from the practical aspect of equipment management, and the social and academic requirements of a space to network and research together, to its place as a site of memorial, the Institute's reputation was growing. At the same time, its expanding collections of books, manuscripts and objects, and its increasing popularity, meant that it would soon require a larger building. Debenham turned to external sources to assist in funding the new building, and again relied upon Kathleen Scott – by this time Lady Hilton Young – to aid him in the procurement of this funding. Kathleen and her husband Sir Edward Hilton Young approached the Trustees of The Pilgrim Trust, who provided £4,000 to the Institute in 1931 (Scott Polar Research Institute 1931).

Finally, in 1934, the Scott Polar Research Institute moved into its own, purpose-built building on Lensfield Road (Figure 4.4). There was space enough for research rooms, storage of the equipment collection, the archive and library, and a purpose-built gallery to display the Antarctic watercolours that had been donated to the Institute by Edward Wilson's widow, Oriana (Figure 4.5). The Institute had hired Sir Herbert Baker, a renowned imperial architect who designed buildings in India, South Africa and Kenya, as well as redesigning the Bank of England (Black 1999). Baker's design featured polar details, including the gilded column tops in what is today called the 'Memorial Hall', with their depictions of penguins on one side of the hall and polar bears on the other. The map maker MacDonald Gill was commissioned to produce two huge maps, painted on domes in the ceiling of the Memorial Hall – one of the Arctic and one of the Antarctic – assisted by Priscilla Johnston, his goddaughter and, according to the staff at SPRI, later his mistress.



Figure 4.4. P99/6/2 - The opening of the Scott Polar Research Institute, 1934 © SPRI.



Figure 4.5. P48/44/16 - Picture Gallery, Scott Polar Research Institute, August 1948.
Image by Ramsey and Muspratt © SPRI.

Perhaps the most notable artist employed to make the Scott Polar Research Institute a beautiful place of memorial was Scott's widow Kathleen. A famous sculptor in her own right – who had studied under Rodin in Paris long before she met and married Scott – Kathleen produced a variety of works for the Institute (Stocker 2015). To the left-hand side of the front door, in the small front garden of the Institute, stands one of the most striking of Kathleen's works. *Youth* is a large – almost life size – nude of a young man with his arms outstretched, looking up into the sky (Figure 4.6). This fairly controversial sculpture is very indicative of Kathleen – who is often described among the museum team as a bold woman who knew herself and her decisions. The story goes that the hedge that surrounds the Institute was grown purposefully high so as to shield the children walking into the Catholic School next door from the view of the statue's nakedness. It is modelled on the younger brother of Lawrence of Arabia, A. W. Lawrence.



Figure 4.6.

Youth

1922

by Kathleen Scott.

Also known as:

These had most to give, or

May Eternal Light Shine upon Them.

The national memorial aspect of the Scott Polar Research Institute – as a place where people can come to learn about and remember Captain Scott and the other men who died on his *Terra Nova* Expedition – is evident in the architectural design and decoration of the 1934 building. But a museum, or at the least a museum *collection*, was also part of the plan for the Institute from the

start (Figure 4.7) (Debenham 1922). So, what, if any, role does the collection hold in the memorial of Scott and his men and how might this have changed over time?

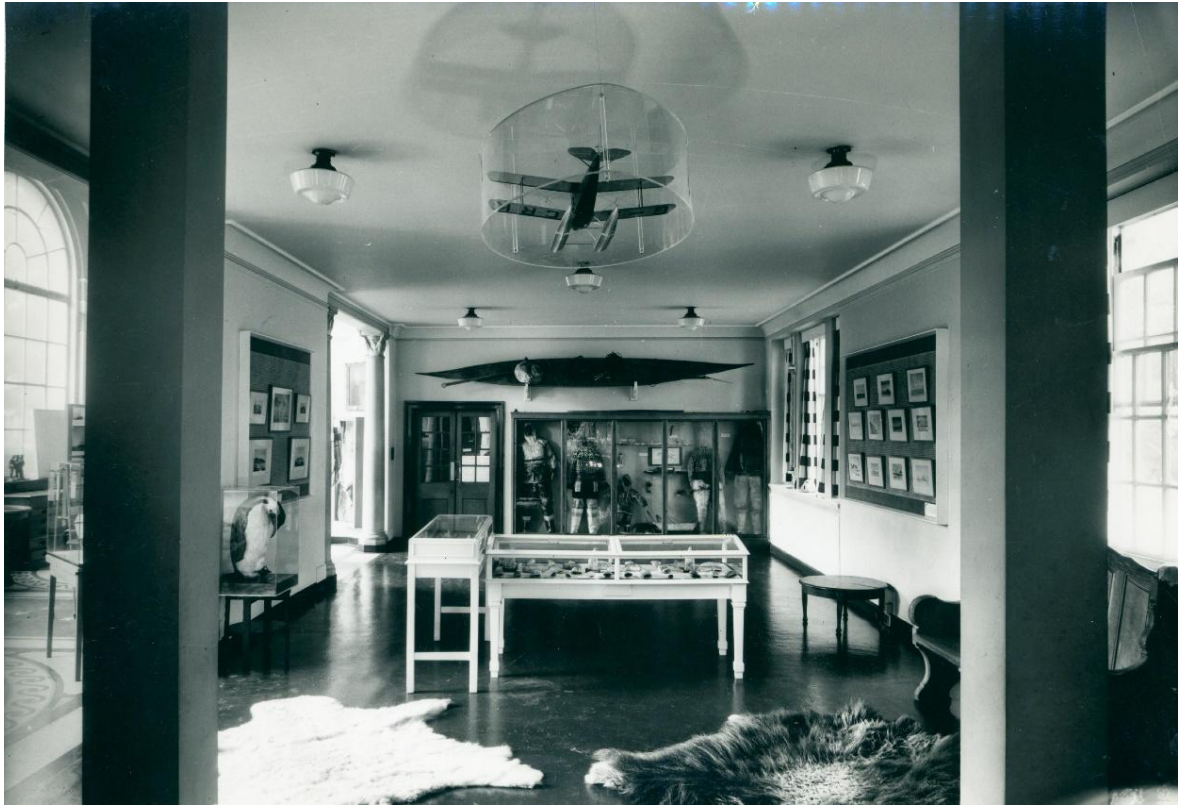


Figure 4.7. P70/33/2 - Transport section in the museum, Scott Polar Research Institute with entrance lobby to the left (likely to be the 1970's) © SPRI.

Collection origins and growing pains

The building would contain these, at least; a practical museum of polar equipment (not the things one sees as relics in the R.G.S. but the things explorers want to see and handle and know the use and cost of, such as camp gear, instruments, clothing etc) (Debenham 1919).

SPRI's founding collection was influenced by two factors, the Institute's remit as a national memorial to the men who died on the *Terra Nova* Expedition, and Debenham's desire to create a 'practical museum'. Because of SPRI's national memorial status, some objects were collected to represent their late owners – including Captain Oates' sleeping bag, the itinerary of which I will trace in Chapter 12 – and as such, did hold something of a 'relic'-like status. However, the majority of the pieces were collected with the specific aim of providing a teaching resource that could be used to train the polar explorers of the future (Debenham 1922). Just as Debenham wanted to create a place where polar researchers could come together to discuss their work, he also wanted to provide a facility where the hard-won lessons of effective expedition equipment could be passed on. He therefore collected a

range of practical objects and equipment that could either be hired for use in future expeditions or act as examples of what *not* to do¹⁵.

One particularly charismatic example is a pair of crampons (N:103a-b) used on Scott's 1901-04 *Discovery* Expedition that are so useless in the snow they were kept for the purpose of making sure their design was never repeated (Figure 4.8). The significance of retaining this type of information is not to be underestimated, as an historic museum label held in the archives of the Institute notes, 'Since the lives of a travelling party may depend entirely on the reliability of their equipment, the details of design and materials used always receive very careful attention.' (Scott Polar Research Institute, 1957). Nevertheless, in the 1952 Annual Report, the name of the collection changed from the 'Museum and Equipment Collection' to the 'Museum and Special Collections' – though this is a subtle shift in terminology, it indicates that the way these objects were perceived in the Institute was beginning to change.



Figure 4.8. N: 103a-b - A pair of crampons made in England for the British National Antarctic Expedition 1901-04 (Discovery). The design was found to be unsuitable as it allowed snow to get between the footwear and the crampon © SPRI.

Over time, the teaching collection at SPRI began to experience a type of decline – even while the number of objects collected continued to grow – as the equipment slowly went out of date. While the first wave of objects donated to SPRI were from men who had just returned from the field, or the relatives of those who had recently died, now they were increasingly coming from researchers at the end of their careers, the objects they provided similarly at the end of their working lives. Debenham's practical collection was itself becoming a relic of a bygone era of polar exploration¹⁶.

¹⁵Nigel, Curator of the collection in the 1980s, mentioned that a panoramic camera used by Herbert Ponting – who took some of the most iconic images of the Antarctic on Scott's *Terra Nova* Expedition – was still being loaned out for use even as late as the 1970s. In a similar vein, in the SPRI Annual Review from 1990, I came across a somewhat chilling report of objects from the *Terra Nova* being loaned as props for a play about the expedition.

¹⁶ Incidentally, Debenham's method of collecting objects from his colleagues had the consequence of producing a library of equipment used largely on British expeditions, in spite of the other national programmes taking place in the polar regions at this time. Thus, a somewhat unanticipated nationalism is inherent in the collection, which is acknowledged today via the museum's modern mission to collect objects specifically from British expeditions to the polar regions.

One of the key original purposes of the collection – to be a teaching resource – simultaneously became less important as the equipment it held was replaced by new technologies. Increasingly, the collection's historical value was more important than the aid that it could provide to contemporary explorers in the field.

The collection began to lose its way. It was increasingly neither wholly practical nor memorial in nature, and because it was never intended to be a 'normal' museum collection, the Institute did not employ a museum professional to look after it. Throughout the 1950s, the museum section in the Institute's Annual Report dwindled, occasionally disappearing altogether. It was not until the early 1970s that the new position 'Assistant Librarian and Curator of Museum' was created (as reported in the Annual Report from 1972). This was one of the very first job titles at SPRI which specifically featured the word 'museum', but as the holder of the position was an archivist by training, the object collection still did not receive a great deal of attention. Indeed, in the annual report the number of objects listed as having been collected each year continued to falter in spite of his employment. It is not until the 1980s that the workings of the museum and its collection reappears as a designated section within the Institute's annual reports.

'A minor point'

The significance of the annual reports in the tracing of the museum's history is inherent in the fact that these documents were the Institute's main way of disseminating its news, acknowledging its accomplishments and asking for support. Though formal documents, these reports indicate what was important to the people at SPRI over the broad sweep of its history. Moreover, because they are invariably written (or at the very least, signed off) by him, they also indicate what was important to the Institute's *Director* – the person with the greatest say over the various moving parts that make up any Institute. To have a period of decades, therefore, where the museum and the object collections of the Institute receive minimal attention in these annual reports, highlights that they are by no means at the forefront of what is considered to be the most important work of the Institute – that of scientific discovery and academia. Then, in the 1980s, Nigel¹⁷ became the Curator of Manuscripts and Curator of the Museum and the information about the museum in the annual report increased rapidly. Nevertheless, when I asked Nigel what he felt the place of the museum was when he first started in this role, he told me that it was a 'minor point' and that other elements – the archives (i.e. the 'Manuscripts' in his job title) and the library – were the 'main parts' of the Institute at this time. However, this is not to say that the museum was not open during this period: in fact, according to museum staff, it has only been closed a handful of times since the founding of the Institute – most notably during the Second World War, a period of redevelopment in 2009-10, and the Covid-19 Pandemic in 2020. Nevertheless, Nigel says,

The museum was fairly static, in some senses, the revenue for it was comparatively little, it was – a reliquary is the wrong way to put it – but the displays, what we had within the building were fairly static.

¹⁷ This name has been changed, full details in Appendix 2.

A brief note on gender

While the story of the museum and its collection at SPRI has, to this point, seemed to be one of declining popularity and interest, this is only partly true. The impact of the collection within the Institute did indeed decline as its role as a teaching collection diminished, but the museum itself was going from strength to strength. In fact, in 1974 – during the period when the museum was hardly mentioned within the Institute’s annual reports – it was open to the public six days a week. That is actually one *more* day of public accessibility each week than today. The question, then, is why this popularity does not seem to have increased the standing of the museum and the collection within the Institute at this time. The fact that SPRI is part of an academic department at the University is one possible explanation for this – while the museum is the public face of the Institute, it is not itself the site of the academic work taking place. The research into the polar regions was deemed to be more valuable, perhaps, to the Department of Geography of the late 20th century, than running a successful visitor attraction¹⁸.

Another reason for the relative insignificance of the museum within the Institute during the 20th century is also, perhaps, due to the people most closely involved with it. Since the earliest days of the Institute, it has been women – and often relatively young, unmarried women – who have been instrumental in the actual functioning of the museum at SPRI. Debenham frequently acknowledges the work of Winifred Drake (the first Assistant to the Director) as instrumental to the cataloguing of, and care for, the early collection for a period of several years from the late 1920s¹⁹ (Debenham 1945). Moreover, the women who followed her into this role also took on aspects of the management of the museum and its collection, including Dorothy Fetherstonhaugh who cleared and re-arranged the exhibits in the museum in 1938 (Scott Polar Research Institute 1938). This was necessary because visitor numbers had increased so much since the museum opened in 1934 that it had to be redecorated in order to keep pace with the demands on the room. While this work is unlikely to have been seen as *insignificant* by the members of the Institute at this time, it was not within the remit of the academic members of staff, which is why it would have been delegated to the women in the first place. As a result, the association of museum work as something perhaps almost akin to ‘women’s work’ within the Institute may well have contributed to its relative insignificance in comparison to other activities.

Women at SPRI have historically not only taken care of the objects and ensured their appropriate display, but have also played a key role in keeping the museum open. From Winifred Drake, who enabled the building to be open to the public for two hours a day in 1931, through to 1949, when it was recorded that, ‘Mrs P. N. Hamilton and Mrs P. J. Pasterfield have assisted the staff in the Museum and Picture Gallery during afternoons when the Institute is open to the public.’ (Scott Polar Research Institute 1949: 1), women have helped to make the museum accessible in the most literal sense. This quiet acknowledgement of the important access work performed by women is visible at SPRI – if you

¹⁸ It is, however, prescient to note that this changed at the beginning of the 21st century, when there was an acknowledgement that the ‘outreach’ and ‘impact’ opportunities produced by a successful museum could provide a positive addition to the department’s Research Excellence Framework submissions (see Footnote 67).

¹⁹ A role that she undertook on a voluntary basis for several years, before being paid in her final year 1930-31 (Debenham 1945).

look hard enough – even up until its most recent iterations, as evidenced by this note in the Annual Review from 2001,

Ruth Flemming has been appointed shop manager/museum attendant and it is planned, with Ruth's arrival, to open the Museum from Tuesday to Saturday. This will bring the Institute Museum in line with other University museums in Cambridge. It is anticipated that a regular Saturday opening, with an attendant on duty in the Museum, will encourage more visitors, particularly those with children (Scott Polar Research Institute 2001: 16).

It seems highly likely, moreover, that this work to make the collection at SPRI more accessible has had an immeasurable impact on the standing of the Institute. A research institute that is well attended, particularly by a diverse audience, inevitably receives more donations – both of objects and of money – bringing it into higher repute, which in turn means that it is well attended. There is, perhaps, a virtuous circle in this gendered work of caring for the museum's collections and making them accessible as the public face of the Institute. Certainly, during this period from the 1920s to the early 2000s, though the record of the museum in the annual reports of the Institute is streamlined, it appears to be moving from strength to strength.

The increasing popularity of the Heroic Age

Thanks to Nigel's appointment to the museum in the 1980s, there was a marked increase in the number and length of references to the museum and its collection in the Institute's annual reports, indicating an increasing value placed on it by the other members of the Institute. This is likely in part due to Nigel's greater interest in the museum's collections than his predecessor, though he, too, was not a museum specialist. Moreover, during this period, there was also increased public interest in the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration, brought about by covey expeditions undertaken in the 1990s, which sought to attempt the same feats that had been achieved a hundred years before, as well as centenary celebrations for the original expeditions from the early 2000s onwards. Happily for the Institute's museum, the gentle neglect that it had seen in terms of exhibition refurbishment (thanks to a relative lack of funding and staffing) – as well as its original remit as a memorial and an early twentieth century teaching collection – meant that its displays were still largely focused on the Heroic Age, rather than subsequent research undertaken by members of the Institute. As Melanie, who works in Education and Outreach at the museum, explained, until 2009 the museum, 'was very small, and it was Heroic Age, and it was piecemeal with very little labelling.' As such, it was in prime position to make the most of this renewed public interest in historic Antarctic exploration.

During the 1990s and into the 2000s the museum hosted a variety of temporary exhibitions and events to celebrate the Heroic Age, and also sought to expand its collection of material from this period. Interestingly, in the Annual Report from 1990, it is recorded that,

A purchase of some of Captain Scott's letters was also made with help from the Friends, unfortunately some other items offered for sale went for such high prices that it was not possible for the Institute to acquire them (Scott Polar Research Institute 1990: 20).

Though these letters form part of the archival collection, rather than that of the museum, this point is an interesting one. Although there had been mention of fundraising to acquire new collections material in the past, this is the first indication that prices of Heroic Age objects were rising so quickly that the Institute was in danger of being out-bid at auction. This signals the increasing public interest

in these themes at this time. By 1999, the Annual Report recorded an ‘exceptional increase’ in public interest in Shackleton in particular, marked by a large outgoing loan of objects for a blockbuster-style exhibition at the American Museum of Natural History in New York called simply, *Shackleton*. By 2000, the Institute was regularly being out-bid in its efforts to buy Heroic Age material at auction.

In the museum itself, temporary and special exhibitions of Heroic Age material were also ramping up at this time. A major temporary exhibition entitled *Shackleton: the Hidden Collections* opened at the Polar Museum in 2004 following the donation of a host of new objects by the Shackleton family (including Shackleton’s sledging flag, the object itinerary of which I trace in Chapter 9). Similarly, in 2007, the museum records a significant increase in visitors for its most recent temporary exhibition.

In the Institute, the private correspondences between Captain Scott and Kathleen Scott, generously gifted by the Scott family, was first exhibited in January. Contained within the bound volume was the last letter written by Captain Scott to his wife, which was found with his body. Huge international press interest in these letters was followed by several months of unprecedented numbers of Museum visitors to view both the letters and also the camera which accompanied Scott and his four companions to the South Pole – again a gift from the Scott family (Scott Polar Research Institute 2007: 2).

As well as being a clear indication of the fervour developing around Heroic Age history, this quote is also notable for its place in the Annual Report: on the first page of the ‘Director’s Introduction’ to the document. The fates of the museum within the Institute had begun to change in earnest.

Professionalisation

The increasing interest in the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration that took place from the 1990s to the early 2000s was an external, positive force that galvanised the museum at SPRI. It was reinvigorated thanks to the increasing popularity of its subject matter (as described in Chapter 3), and this contributed to a new, higher profile for the museum and its collections within the Institute. Moreover, this paved the way for the beginning of the true professionalisation of the museum. In 2001, the Institute launched an ‘Appeal’ for funding,

The international importance of the Library, Archives, and Museum is sustained only by funding obtained from outside the University, which inevitably has to support primarily the teaching and research functions. This ‘soft-money’ funding, which is often only secured on an annual basis, is unreliable and increasingly unstable, and this is hardly a sound basis for maintaining these important aspects of the Institute. Accordingly, we have launched an Appeal to raise £3.5 m to sustain – in a more secure, ‘hard-money’ sense – the important work of these three closely linked aspects of the Institute, by underpinning the costs of employing the excellent staff the Institute relies upon to maintain and develop the Library, Archives, and Museum (Scott Polar Research Institute 2001: 2).

This commitment to securing long-term sustainable funding for the museum staff represents a key marker in its shifting place within the Institute as a whole. Nevertheless, the role of Curator was not secured with permanent funding, Verity told me, until SPRI’s Centenary campaign, ending in 2020 (incidentally, 2017 saw the highest visitor numbers ever to the museum at more than 53,000) (Scott Polar Research Institute 2017).

In 2004, the museum received its full registration – now termed ‘accreditation’ – in a national scheme run by what was then the Museum, Libraries and Archives Council. This scheme, now run by the Arts Council, officially acknowledges a museum’s professional standards – particularly in relation to collections care, access and display. It is worth noting that, though the museum at SPRI achieved this recognition in the early 2000s, this scheme had been active in the UK since 1988 (Arts Council England n.d.). That the museum did not engage with this standard until nearly two decades after it first came into effect is indicative of the fact that, though the museum and collection had existed since 1920, it was not recognised as especially significant within the Institute for some time. Museum professional standards did exist long before they were enacted at SPRI and this is in part because the majority of the museum’s collection was not originally intended as part of a traditional ‘museum’, but rather as a teaching collection. The practical origins of the museum thus reverberated through its practices for decades.

In 2005, Nigel stepped down from his role in the museum. During his time at the helm, he had witnessed the increasing interest of the public in the themes of the museum, and the steps towards professional standards within its practice. Then, following in the tradition of museum curators who were not museum professionals before they started work at the museum, Joy²⁰ became the new, ‘Librarian and Acting Keeper of Collections’. While Joy may not have described herself as a museum professional at the start of her tenure at SPRI, this was certainly a title she had earned by the time she left in 2015. During this time, she led the complete redevelopment of the museum, including its rebranding to the Polar Museum. The curatorial decision making behind this redevelopment will be the subject of the second half of this chapter.

The 2010 redevelopment project

It was an afterthought. It was there and nobody quite knew what to do with it, because it was so dull. Because nobody came into the building to look at it, specifically, and if they did it was like ‘oh, what are you doing here?’. I mean they would see the receptionist at the office who would say oh yes you can go in and have a look around and would go and unlock the door for them. And that was the extent of their interaction with the staff of the Institute. So there was no visitor welcome, there was no volunteer, nothing, it was literally just go and help yourself. And they’d be in and out in twenty minutes because it was just deadily dull – Joy.

The place of the museum within SPRI has not been stable since it was founded in 1920. There have been times when the collection and museum were relatively more, or less, in favour with the staff of the Institute. However, in the years preceding Joy’s recruitment in 2005, it does appear that the museum had achieved some upwards momentum. The public were increasingly interested in the Heroic Age themes it dealt with; the Institute was beginning to recognise the significance of a vibrant public face for its research, and there was a move to secure funding for its future stability. The above comment from Joy, when I asked her what the museum was like when she first joined the Institute, is therefore somewhat surprising. But the narrative of an upwards trajectory for the museum *and* Joy’s criticism of it as a place that was not well looked after or loved can both be true when we consider what Joy’s role at SPRI was to entail.

²⁰ This name has been changed, full details in Appendix 2.

In 2009, four years after Joy was first employed as ‘Librarian and Acting Keeper of Collections’ the museum at SPRI closed for redevelopment. When it re-opened in 2010, it had undergone the biggest change to its design and display that it had experienced since the move to the new building in 1934. Moreover, it had been rebranded, no longer simply the museum at the Institute, it was now the Polar Museum, an important destination in its own right. Presiding over this change, responsible for the selection of objects on display, the re-written interpretation and expensive new storage space, as well as the funding application that made it all possible, was Joy. When she started her post at SPRI, Joy would not have seen the relative lack of interest that the museum had been subject to before the shift in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Moreover, she joined a culture at SPRI which was already interested in a redesign and refurbishment of the museum, this idea having been mentioned first in the Annual Review of 2002. Joy therefore approached the museum as a newcomer with a vested interest in its success and redevelopment, and as a result she was necessarily critical of it. This professional critique of the old museum enabled Joy to drum up support for this project, and to produce a new permanent exhibition that would take the Institute into a new era. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that in her recollections of the less-than-perfect museum that she inherited, she perceives it as a failing place, a place where people were not inclined to go, a place in need of redevelopment.

Reasons for the redevelopment

SPRI’s mission to inform, educate and inspire deserves a museum worthy of its vision. The present museum, last refurbished around forty years ago cannot, by definition, reflect SPRI’s excellence and meet the expectations of twenty-first century visitors. Much has changed since the 1960s (Shackleton 2006).

This quote comes from a letter, written by Alexandra Shackleton – Sir Ernest Shackleton’s granddaughter – in support of SPRI’s application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for the development of a new museum at SPRI. The bid was successful, and in June 2007 the Institute was awarded £50,000 of development funding from the HLF for ‘Stage 1’ of the redevelopment project. The money was used to prepare a variety of plans requested by the HLF, including detailed design specifications for the proposed building work and interpretation strategies for the permanent gallery. Part of this development funding also went towards hiring a Museum Development Manager – one of the first people employed by the Museum to have been a museum specialist *before* their employment there. From this moment on, people with museum-specific backgrounds and experience began to join the team, including documentation assistants, interpretation specialists and even a full-time conservator (Scott Polar Research Institute 2009). By December 2007, the ‘Stage 2’ bid was submitted to the HLF and subsequently awarded. SPRI received £994,000 for the total redevelopment of the museum and the archival and museum collections stores, on the condition that a further £700,000 would be raised by the Institute in matched funding (Scott Polar Research Institute 2008; 2009).

Alexandra Shackleton’s letter to the HLF in support of that very first funding round indicates that, for a period of some decades until the early 2000s, the museum had remained broadly the same - its refurbishment not a top priority for the Institute. This long period of stagnation for the museum was one of the core reasons for the large-scale redesign that was to follow, but it was not the only motivator for change. A major catalyst for the initial HLF application was the upcoming centenary of

Scott's most famous expedition – the *Terra Nova* – in 2010. Joy described a conversation she had with the then Director not long after she started at SPRI,

I went to see [him] and said, 'You do realise that in about 5 years' time you are going to be the focus of national attention because of the Scott centenary and the museum is not fit to show to people'.

Events were to be organised around the UK, from Cardiff docks to St Paul's Cathedral in London, to celebrate 100 years since Scott's final expedition, and this would inevitably draw public attention towards SPRI. This knowledge, coupled with Joy's fresh eye on the museum, gave a sense of urgency to the need to refurbish. The importance of the centenary to the project was further highlighted when the date for the re-opening was set for 1st June, 100 years to the day after the *Terra Nova* set sail from London, bound for the Antarctic²¹.

SPRI would also celebrate a significant milestone during this period, as 2009 was the 75th anniversary of the opening of the 1934 building. This caused a certain amount of self-reflection by the staff of the Institute and gave way to an acknowledgment that the refurbishment of its public facing facilities was indeed in order. As a result, the redevelopment project was dedicated to highlighting the past achievements of British explorers and scientists and the continued relevance of polar research today. In particular, the Institute's role in climate research would be a significant aspect of the new museum. As recorded in a publication created by SPRI for potential funders (who would help to raise the £700,000 required in matched funding required by the HLF) the aim was to,

...develop the Museum as a recognised national repository and international research resource for our polar heritage. We wish to improve public understanding and appreciation of the Arctic and Antarctic and their role in the global climate system (Scott Polar Research Institute n.d. b: 5).

The reasons for the 2010 redevelopment at SPRI therefore spanned a desire to strengthen the Institute's public-facing areas, provide more opportunities for public education on climate change, and maximise the display of its collections. This included *all* collections material – with a commitment to including Arctic objects as much as Antarctic. Indeed, the new museum would ultimately display a much greater proportion of Arctic material than had previously been accessible to the public. Nevertheless, in the work of the redevelopment, the Heroic Age collections are regularly championed, especially in documents created to seek funding support.

The glossy hardback *Our Polar Heritage: A new museum (ibid.)* (Figure 4.9) which was disseminated to possible funders in 2007, for example, features slightly more photographs of museum objects related to the Antarctic than to the Arctic, and all of these relate to the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration, with not a single one representing more recent engagements with the Antarctic. While the Institute is a place for both polar regions therefore, it nevertheless has a special relationship with the Antarctic and with the Heroic Age of exploration in particular. This is likely because of its remit to act as a national memorial to Captain Scott and his men. Ultimately, their tragic demise led both to the founding of the Institute and the modern refurbishment of its museum.

²¹ Though the museum did host its opening party on this date, it ultimately opened to the public just one day later, on 2nd June.



Figure 4.9. Images of *Our polar heritage: a new museum*.

A brief note on strategy

The museum drew up a number of ongoing strategic aims during this period of refurbishment. These acted as guiding principles for the identification of themes, storylines and objects for display in the new museum. They also provided a roadmap for the museum's future. Understanding what the museum team saw as especially important at this juncture therefore shines a light on the curatorial decisions made throughout the project and provides a basis from which to consider the museum work today.

The strategic aims of the SPRI Museum are:

- To improve public understanding and appreciation of the Polar Regions;
- To display and care for collections associated with the historical exploration and the continuing scientific investigation of the Polar Regions;
- To ensure that learning and access provision are core elements of all aspects of the Museum's work;
- To make collections accessible to a non-specialist audience by improving the standards of display and interpretation;
- To safeguard the collections for future generations by improving environmental controls, storage facilities and security; and
- To publish (in conventional form or on the internet) a well-researched but accessible account of the collections (Scott Polar Research Institute n.d. c: 14).

The aims to improve public understanding via interpretation and care for collections, with a view to their scientific contributions, are especially important to my analysis of the redevelopment project. Let us turn, now, to the themes identified for interpretation in the new museum.

Key themes for the new Polar Museum

Joy describes the process of outlining the key themes for the new museum as the real starting point of her redevelopment work:

The first thing I did was actually sit down and write a sort of outline interpretation plan – what were the major things that we wanted to talk about, what were the main themes that were missing from the original museum? So, indigenous peoples for a start, science for something else – where was the polar science? There was nothing. It was very much a museum of the Heroic Age, it was Scott and Shackleton and a little bit of the early Arctic expeditions.

While elements of the old museum would have to remain – including the significance placed on the Heroic Age collections thanks to the museum's connection to the Scott story in particular – three key themes were eventually identified. These ideas would form the major axes around which the museum's interpretation would turn. As a result, they needed to be broad enough that they could be applied to a variety of collections, including archival and photographic material, thereby giving the museum opportunity to use as many of its objects as possible. The themes selected were:

1. Life and work in the polar regions. This would cover topics ranging from transport to food and clothing.
2. Historic exploration at the pole. To discuss the different timeframes in which the poles were explored, similarities and differences in approaches (including interactions with indigenous peoples) and the technologies that made this work possible.
3. Scientific work in the polar regions. Examining the historical basis of polar scientific research, how it is undertaken today, and how it contributes to our understanding of climate change (Scott Polar Research Institute n.d. e.).

As 'higher level' interpretive decisions, everything in the museum's displays and activities would be expected to feed into (at least one) of these themes. From here, they could be divided into sub-categories, which would lend themselves to the specifics of written interpretive text and the objects selected for display. In terms of the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration, several sub-themes were identified by the museum staff, including, in an internal interpretation plan written in 2008: the exploration of a new continent, early scientific work and the first expeditions to the South Pole (Lane 2008).

Interestingly, a later document on interpretive themes in the museum also included the sub-theme of *emotion* related to the death of Scott and the Polar Party. This document suggests that the Heroic Age display would contain information relating to the 'media frenzy' and 'public reactions' following the discovery of Scott's death. The aim would be to give visitors a 'powerful emotional hit' (Scott Polar Research Institute 2009: 1) to draw them into the story of the *Terra Nova* Expedition. Ultimately, the section of the museum described in this plan did not come to fruition, though the deaths of the Polar Party are described elsewhere. It is therefore important to note that not everything agreed in these meetings actually became a reality in the new Polar Museum. While this

may be unsurprising for small sub-themes such as the public's response to Captain Scott's death, it is also relevant to one of the key proposed themes of the new museum: the significance of scientific research. As the minutes from a meeting on display and interpretation from December 2007 describes: 'Science should not be a 'tacked on' section but should be a strand running through the displays.' (Scott Polar Research Institute n.d. d). Nevertheless, the reality of the Polar Museum today is that there is one large section dedicated to scientific research, with very little interweaving of this idea through the other displays. To understand this, let us break free from the intangible themes of the museum, to consider the physical exhibition design and layout of the gallery spaces of the Polar Museum.

Changes to the museum layout and gallery design

The shop was originally going to be in the entrance hall, under the domes, and I kept going in there thinking, no this is too good a space to be just the museum shop and I was standing there and I just looked at the doors and I just thought, well why haven't we opened the front door? We're going to invite people into the building, why not use the old front door as our front door? It's the obvious thing to do! [Laughs] – Joy.

One of the major changes that took place as a result of the redevelopment project was the reopening of the historic front door to the building (Figure 4.10). The door, which opens onto Lensfield Road, had been sealed in the 1960s and the space behind it repurposed into a museum display cabinet. This cabinet was colloquially referred to as 'the shrine' by members of the Institute before the redesign, because it held objects from the museum and archive collections that related to the Heroic Age and specifically to Scott and his men. By reopening this door onto Lensfield Road, two things happened. For the first time, the museum had its own dedicated entrance, separate to that of the wider Institute, creating a distinctive character for the museum as compared to the academic Institute. Secondly, by reopening the original front door, more was made of the vestibule behind it, which was rechristened the 'Memorial Hall'. This new name places more emphasis on the museum's status as a national memorial to Scott and his men in the very first part of the museum encountered by the public. Indeed, the first thing that is visible to visitors entering through the front doors from Lensfield Road is a quote taken from Scott's last 'Message to the Public' about the men of his final expedition. Polly²², who worked in collections care and with the museum's volunteers, described this room to me as, 'an area of contemplation, it's supposed to be *the* memoriam to Scott and his Polar Party as you enter the museum' (her emphasis).

²² This name has been changed, full details in Appendix 2.



Figure 4.10. Front door to the museum today (left), early 2000s (right).

In spite of this production of the Memorial Hall as a designated space for the remembrance of Scott and his men, it is also a place for visitors to orientate themselves in their understanding of both polar regions. It highlights the differences between the Arctic and Antarctic, as confusion between these areas was regularly acknowledged by members of staff in public facing roles and during audience research undertaken in preparation for the redevelopment. This is of particular significance because one of the major goals of the museum redesign was to give a more even hand to the various collections in SPRI's care. A key criticism levelled by members of staff at the old museum was that it was too concerned with the Heroic Age, at the expense of these other collections, and particularly those relating to the indigenous peoples of the Arctic. One of the great successes of this redevelopment could be said to be the far more equitable division of the gallery space. There are four main areas to the museum today, one related to the indigenous peoples of the Arctic, one to European exploration of the Arctic, one to the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration and one to the scientific research taking place in the polar regions.

Once the redevelopment project had been completed, nearly 25% more of the footprint of the Institute was dedicated to the Polar Museum than had been previously. Thanks to this increase in space – largely brought about by reopening the original front door and the removal of internal doors – the redevelopment project also had a fundamental impact on the museum's cases. This was necessary not least because, as reported in 2009, the redesigned museum allowed the team 'to exhibit around 30% of our holdings, as compared with only about 5% in the old museum.' (Scott Polar Research Institute 2010: 2). Whereas before 2010 there had been a mixture of hand-me-down and repurposed cases from across the University, stretching back as far as the 1930s, the HLF project meant that new cases could finally be commissioned (Scott Polar Research Institute 1932; 1940; 1948; 1954; 2010). As a result, a variety of needs were addressed. For one, the museum was able to

showcase more impressive pieces from its Arctic collection – in line with its overall aims – by the production of specialist exhibition furniture. Perhaps the clearest example of this is a case built to house a large kayak, which is one of the first things encountered by members of the public moving from the Memorial Hall into the main room of the museum. Joy told me that the reason for placing this display here was to make it difficult for members of the public to visit the museum without being confronted with the fact that people did – and still do – live in the Arctic. This also indicates that the new exhibition was designed with a certain level of visitor flow in mind – so that visitors should, in theory, follow a fairly logical route through the gallery.

In the Heroic Age section of the museum, cases were made with different audiences in mind (Figure 4.11). The very low cases in this section in particular not only allow for greater access for, for example, wheelchair users, but also allow children to be closer to the objects that they house. One low case, containing a taxidermy penguin, is so popular with children that the museum's collection staff and cleaners to this day describe the necessity of wiping away the 'nose prints' frequently left there at the end of the day. Perhaps the single object which had the most material change on the fabric of the building, however, was Captain Oates' sleeping bag (see Chapter 12). Joy told me that, in order to display this object lying flat (both the safest way, materially, and the method which most brings to mind Oates himself in residence in the bag) one whole external window was blocked up.



Figure 4.11. Antarctic Exploration Gallery today.

In terms of design principles, Joy described the importance of making a museum that felt timeless. She acknowledged the long waiting period that the previous iteration of the museum had had to undergo before it was redeveloped and was realistic about this happening again in the future. The team therefore chose the most modern fixtures they could, including display cases so cutting-edge

that they were still prototypes when they were first installed by the museum fit-out contractors The Workhaus in 2009. In terms of colours, too, the aim was to create a cohesive whole that would not look outdated quickly and could therefore be on display for as long as possible. This decision was made on the basis that it would be decades before the museum would raise the funds required to be refurbished again (this prediction still seems highly likely today). After a brief (and somewhat inexplicable) discussion on whether to use pink and green as the museum's colour palette, the team – and their graphic designers, Blue – settled on the more classic colours visible today. The whites and blues of the display, as Joy told me, reference the light of the polar regions and are a clear choice for the polar themes on display.

With the final fit-out in 2009, the scene was set for the newly modernised museum to reintroduce the public to SPRI's polar collections. So how exactly was the Heroic Age interpreted for visitors?

Written interpretation

Existing visitors show a preference for a traditional approach to interpretation and against the more active and interactive interpretive media (Lane 2008: 9).

The museum at SPRI has always had to navigate the requirements of a mix of exceedingly different audiences. While on the one hand it is a popular space for school visits (and, indeed, the museum team consulted with a primary school during the redevelopment process), it is also a place of pilgrimage for adult visitors with a keen personal interest in the polar regions, as well as a site for specialist academic research and a tourist attraction for visitors to the city of Cambridge. The production of the written interpretation of the museum was therefore always going to be something of a challenge. Moreover, the various stakeholders involved in the creation of the new museum space meant that decisions on themes and storylines needed to be made early on in the process, as much as two years before the new museum was set to open.

The basic tenets of the written interpretation of the new museum were – as with many of the decisions in the development process – initially based on issues identified with the old museum. A clear example of this was the desire to produce text which speaks to broader themes, people and stories. This was because the labels in the old museum had been focused mainly on describing individual objects, with little explanation of their significance to polar history, or to particular historic figures. The layering of information is referred to as an 'interpretive hierarchy' by museum professionals and is described in an internal document on the 'schematic layout of themes and story lines' for the new museum:

For each story line there will be a consistent interpretive structure – a short title, a slightly longer headline summing up the main points in the story line followed by a 200 to 300 word text. Images from the extensive picture library will be used where appropriate (Scott Polar Research Institute n.d. e: 3).

This written interpretation was designed to be as accessible as possible for the museum's diverse visitor base. As a result, it was written in plain language with no assumption of prior knowledge – intended to be understandable to everyone from ten years upwards. As Joy described,

I felt it needed something that we could just take you through, where everything was as clear as it could be – and I still don't think we got that right – but it's essentially evening out the

text so that it was understandable if you were a 10 year old. That was what I was aiming to do. Knowing that we had to really engage the next generation and that they were not engaging with what they were being shown in the old museum. And that there was huge potential there – just to excite them about the science apart from anything else.

Additionally, in the more general discussion of how the museum interpretation would be written, the decision was made not to stick to a strict chronology, whilst still attempting to provide some understanding of time periods within the displays. This is very true to the Heroic Age display which, though it begins with Scott's first, and finishes with Shackleton's final expedition, nevertheless deals with broader themes including food, transport and specific stories from the different expeditions.

While some parts of the written interpretation (including object labels) in the museum would deal with the specifics of the objects on display, other levels of the text – including larger display boards – would deal with broader ideas. This was a move away from the previous iteration of the museum and therefore required some consideration from the museum team. Joy identified two areas in particular that she wanted to be present in all aspects of the museum's written interpretation (not only that of the Heroic Age section). The first was the inclusion of people in the stories on display, and the second was the use of 'familiar' objects to help forge entryways into subject matter that was sometimes complex and often out-of-the-ordinary. As described in the minutes of the meeting on display and interpretation in December 2007, the team: 'Felt strongly that there should be people throughout the displays – the person who owned, used or made use of the object was as important as the object itself.' (Scott Polar Research Institute n.d. d).

Joy told me that she spent some time worrying about the interpretation, not least because she was the person who wrote the majority of the text. She was especially concerned about whether the story she was telling was 'a very white, male, British, post-colonial, colonial story'. However, she also knew that the history of the Heroic Age was an important part of the museum's remit (and its institutional history) and was itself an 'extraordinary story' that needed to be told. The extent to which the written interpretation was a white, male, British story – and how much it was imbued with the key themes identified at the start of the redevelopment process – is a question that I will attempt to answer in Chapter 5. But for the final part of this chapter, let us briefly see what happened to the Polar Museum after all the curatorial decisions had been made, and it opened to the public on 2nd June 2010.

The opening

The last letters of Captain Scott and his companions will return to public display as one of the world's most important collections of polar artefacts reopens to the public on June 2. The Polar Museum at Cambridge University's Scott Polar Research Institute – which also holds the expedition diaries of Sir Ernest Shackleton and the photographic records of Herbert Ponting – has undergone a dramatic 18-month transformation as part of a £1.75m redevelopment made possible by the Heritage Lottery Fund (Scott Polar Research Institute n.d. f).

These words are taken from the first two lines of a press release produced by the Scott Polar Research Institute ahead of the opening of its newly refurbished Polar Museum in 2010. They are striking because, in spite of the time, effort and more than a million pounds that had been spent to produce a museum with a more equitable display of its Arctic and Antarctic collections, all the

objects it references are from the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration. In these two sentences are held the fundamental complexity of the Polar Museum: it is a space attempting to display the variety of its collections and the reach of its work, but it also recognises that, for most people, its draw will come largely from one specific collection.

The museum opening was a success and visitor numbers rocketed from 12,000 a year to 25,000 within the first six months following its reopening (Scott Polar Research Institute 2010). By 2010, there were also more professional museum staff listed in the Institute's Annual Review than ever before in the history of the Institute, along with 40 front of house volunteers waiting to welcome the public to the new museum. The museum's standing within the Institute had been transformed and, to further emphasise this new significance, it was one of four museums shortlisted for the Art Fund's Museum of the Year prize in 2011. It had opened in time to capitalise on the popularity of the Heroic Age centenary years, and this is exactly what it did. Accordingly, in spite of the dedicated move *away* from the Heroic Age in the museum's redevelopment to a more equitable display of its collections, much of the attention that it received in the preceding years was as a result of the centenary celebrations of Heroic Age expeditions.

A short history of the Polar Museum from 2010 to the present day

In 2011, following the success of the museum's re-opening, and to celebrate another milestone in the centenary of Scott's *Terra Nova* Expedition, the Polar Museum exhibited a temporary exhibition entitled *These Rough Notes*.²³ A variety of material from the Institute that had never been on public display before – including diaries, letters and photographs – were exhibited, though the highlight was undoubtedly Scott's own diary. On loan from the British Library, the museum team have told me that its display was only possible because the redevelopment project had overseen the installation of a new case technologically advanced enough to meet the library's lending requirements. It is certain that the hand-me-down cases of the earlier museum would not have been suitable. Earlier in 2011, the museum had also played host to a variety of objects on loan from the Fram Museum in Oslo for an exhibition about the explorer Roald Amundsen. The Institute believed that this was the first time an exhibition in the UK had taken Amundsen – the first man to reach the South Pole – as its focus.

In 2013, to coincide with the final year of the *Terra Nova's* centenary, the museum put on a temporary exhibition entitled *Robert Falcon Scott: A Century On* which, working with a number of guest curators, discussed the ongoing impact of Scott's achievements. 2014 saw the beginning of the centenaries for Shackleton's Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition, 1914-17 (*Endurance*) and the preparations for a major exhibition on this theme. The museum was also awarded a large grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund entitled *By Endurance We Conquer: The Shackleton Project*. This grant was awarded to assist the museum in collecting objects relating to Sir Ernest Shackleton at a time when the prices for material of this type were increasing dramatically, thanks to the attention brought about by the centenaries.

In 2015, Joy left the museum, and was replaced by Verity whose title was, for the first time, Museum Curator – unqualified by the additional care of other collections. The importance of the museum within the Institute had changed significantly since the initial decision to refurbish more than a

²³ The title of this exhibition takes inspiration from a phrase in Scott's 'Message to the Public' about his doomed expedition – 'These rough notes and our dead bodies must tell the tale'.

decade earlier. Nevertheless, the museum's commitment to its Antarctic collections remained and further external funding, this time from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, was awarded. This supported a project to photograph and re-catalogue all the Antarctic-related collections held by the museum – an enormous task that required significant resources and staff time.

Thanks primarily to the efforts of Greta Bertram, our Antarctic Cataloguer, updated information about more than 2,000 Antarctic museum objects can now be viewed online together with a photograph of each object. An impressive 2,364 objects have been studied, measured and condition-assessed by the museum's staff. In addition to the catalogue itself, Greta project-managed the production of five short films about our Antarctic objects and accompanying teacher resource packs (Scott Polar Research Institute 2016: 21).

This ongoing financial and time commitment to the museum and its collections indicates the continued significance of this part of the Institute. Moreover, its continued professionalisation was further cemented by its re-accreditation by the Arts Council in 2017.

2019 marked the end of *By Endurance We Conquer: The Shackleton Project*. Overall, this project had overseen a number of museum acquisitions, as well as the production of an online resource dedicated to Shackleton and his expeditions. Additionally, it supported the production of a number of resources for blind and partially sighted visitors, making the Heroic Age collections related to Shackleton more accessible to a wider audience. The project also funded my first role at SPRI, and in 2019 I produced a variety of long and short-form films about Shackleton and the Polar Museum's collections related to him²⁴.

The period of museum closure for the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 was only the third prolonged period of this type experienced by the Polar Museum (the first being during the Second World War and the second during its period of refurbishment in 2009-10). Following this closure, the momentum of Heroic Era exhibitions, acquisitions and projects in the museum began to ease. This was in part due to a general slowing of visitors to indoor attractions and because the period of Heroic Age centenaries was coming to an end. As a result of these factors and ongoing lock-downs, an exhibition celebrating the Institute's own centenary, which I curated in 2020, was only de-installed in 2022. 2022 was also the year of the final Heroic Age centenary – Shackleton's death onboard the *Quest*. In keeping with the slowing down of exhibitions and events seen over the pandemic, and also the museum's gradual shift away from Heroic Age themes since the completion of the *By Endurance We Conquer* project, this final centenary was marked only minimally by the museum. Unlike the temporary exhibition prepared for the centenary of Scott's death, in the Polar Museum, Shackleton's centenary saw only a small temporary display in a single case in the permanent gallery.

The mission of the Polar Museum today

The mission of the Polar Museum has changed since it was established as part learning collection and part memorial. Today, its work falls within that of the Institute as a whole:

²⁴ While the short-form films were uploaded to the museum's social media channels and so are now difficult to trace, the three longer films are still available to view on the Institute's website: <https://www.spri.cam.ac.uk/museum/shackleton/videos/>

SPRI's mission is to enhance the understanding of the polar regions through scholarly research and publication, educating new generations of polar researchers, caring for and making accessible its collections, and projecting the history and environmental significance of the polar regions to the wider community (Scott Polar Research Institute n.d. g).

But a mission simply to make its collections accessible is not especially surprising for any museum, so I enquired with staff about what they felt the mission of the museum in particular was today. Verity, the curator, told me: 'effectively it's to promote polar science and exploration. British polar science and exploration.' She acknowledges that this 'British' element may have been somewhat retrofitted; the accidental national element probably formalised at some point following the significant role played by British explorers in the creation of the early collection. However, in conversations with the museum team, it became increasingly clear that they felt – following the Heroic Age centenaries – the museum had done 'enough' for these collections, at least for now. Indeed, during the period of my fieldwork, the museum's collecting policy was edited in order to make it more difficult to accession new objects relating to Scott's expeditions, because they are already so well represented.

Current areas of significance for the Polar Museum team are therefore perhaps best summed up by a note on the door of Verity's office (Figure 4.12):

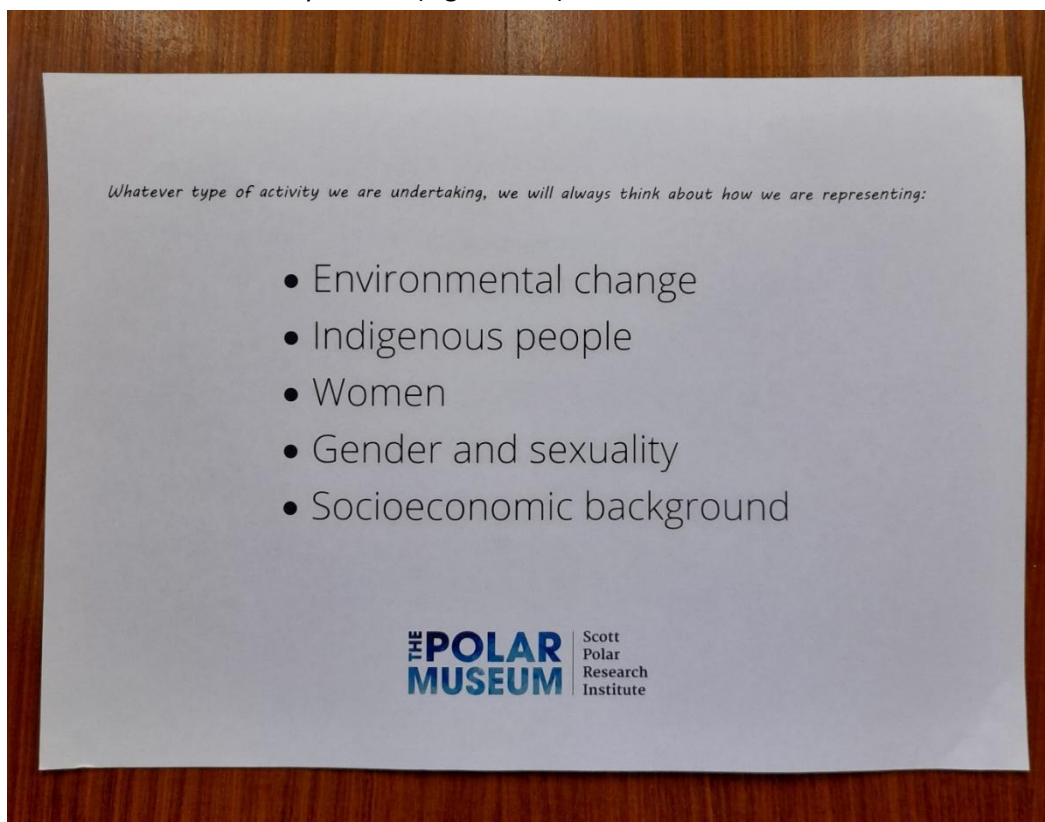


Figure 4.12. Notice pinned to door setting out subjects for representation by the museum team, 2023.

The pendulum of the museum's interests is swinging towards other collections areas – including those relating to the indigenous peoples of the Arctic – which have not received as much attention

since the centenaries began. What this will mean for the Heroic Age, and the way it is understood by the public, only time will tell.

Over a hundred years of the Polar Museum

The Polar Museum at SPRI has a long history. Nevertheless, from its conception on the side of an active Antarctic volcano, to its relatively recent million-pound refurbishment, it has always been connected to the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration. It is a memorial to Scott and the men who died on his *Terra Nova* Expedition, but it is also a repository for collections about both polar regions – collections that span everything from Inuit art to contemporary scientific equipment. The work of the 2010 refurbishment was primarily to bring these other collections into the spotlight, whilst maintaining the museum's important links to the Heroic Age during a period of centenary celebrations. Whether the museum staff were successful in their goal to bring scientific research, exploration and daily life at the poles to the fore, will be the consideration of the next chapter. I will ask what impact their curatorial decisions have on the visitors to the Polar Museum and whether their priorities continue to align with those of the staff who work there today.

5. Museum Voices at the Polar Museum

The centre of Cambridge is full of impressive buildings. Walk down just about any street and you will find some historic architectural wonder to marvel at or, at the very least, a tastefully integrated new-build – all shining glass and honey stone. But turn onto Lensfield Road, a fairly innocuous thoroughfare between the hustle and bustle of Hills Road and the grandeur of the Fitzwilliam Museum on Trumpington Street, and you may miss the Scott Polar Research Institute. In all the time I have spent at SPRI, and all the very many visitors I have spoken to there, I am always surprised by how many people say that they walk past it regularly and yet they have hardly noticed it at all. But once you do stop to look: to take in its symmetry, its parapet and its tall, rounded windows – which have always seemed to me rather like a pair of friendly, owlish, eyes – it quickly becomes a very interesting building indeed (Figure 5.1).



Figure 5.1. The Polar Museum, Lensfield Road, Cambridge.

Pass through the large black gates in the hedge outside SPRI, and you will find yourself in a quiet garden filled with interesting objects and large sculptures. Walk up the stone steps to the large oak front door and you will pass under the second of her artistic contributions to the Institute (Figure 5.2). The bust of Captain Scott has been made, it is clear, by someone who knew him very well. His face is full of emotion, though it is difficult to put your finger on exactly what emotion it is. When it was first installed, there were, according to the Institute staff, grumblings among the founders about whether it was a suitably 'heroic' image for a man who had died in the pursuit of science and national glory. Still, by all accounts, they could not say no to Kathleen – who was not only a talented artist but had a fearsome reputation – so here it is.



Figure 5.2. Bust of Captain Scott by Kathleen Scott. Image by Dowdeswell © Julian Dowdeswell.

Inside, the surprising level of artistic decoration adorning this academic building continues in the 'Memorial Hall'. On the floor, a mosaic depicts the two iconic constellations of the Northern and Southern hemispheres: the Great Bear and the Southern Cross. Everything on the left-hand side of the room is dedicated to the Antarctic. There are carved penguins at the top of decorative stone columns and a long, thin case displaying a variety of objects and information. But the real star of the show is the domed ceiling with its beautiful map of the Antarctic, featuring the names of famous explorers and depictions of their ships all around the continent's coastline (Figure 5.3). There are a

few areas of the map that are not quite geographically correct, because it was painted in the 1930s – before what was ice or land, peninsula or archipelago had been properly straightened out. Even so, I have, in the past, found myself lying on the floor beneath this map, taking in the complexities of its design, and searching for the faint pencil tracings of whales and penguins that swim or slide around its edges. These final flourishes – never fully painted in, for reasons long since forgotten – were first noticed by a small boy on a school trip, taught by Melanie. Presumably he was not especially interested in the topic of discussion at the time; I cannot blame him, with a map like this to gaze at.

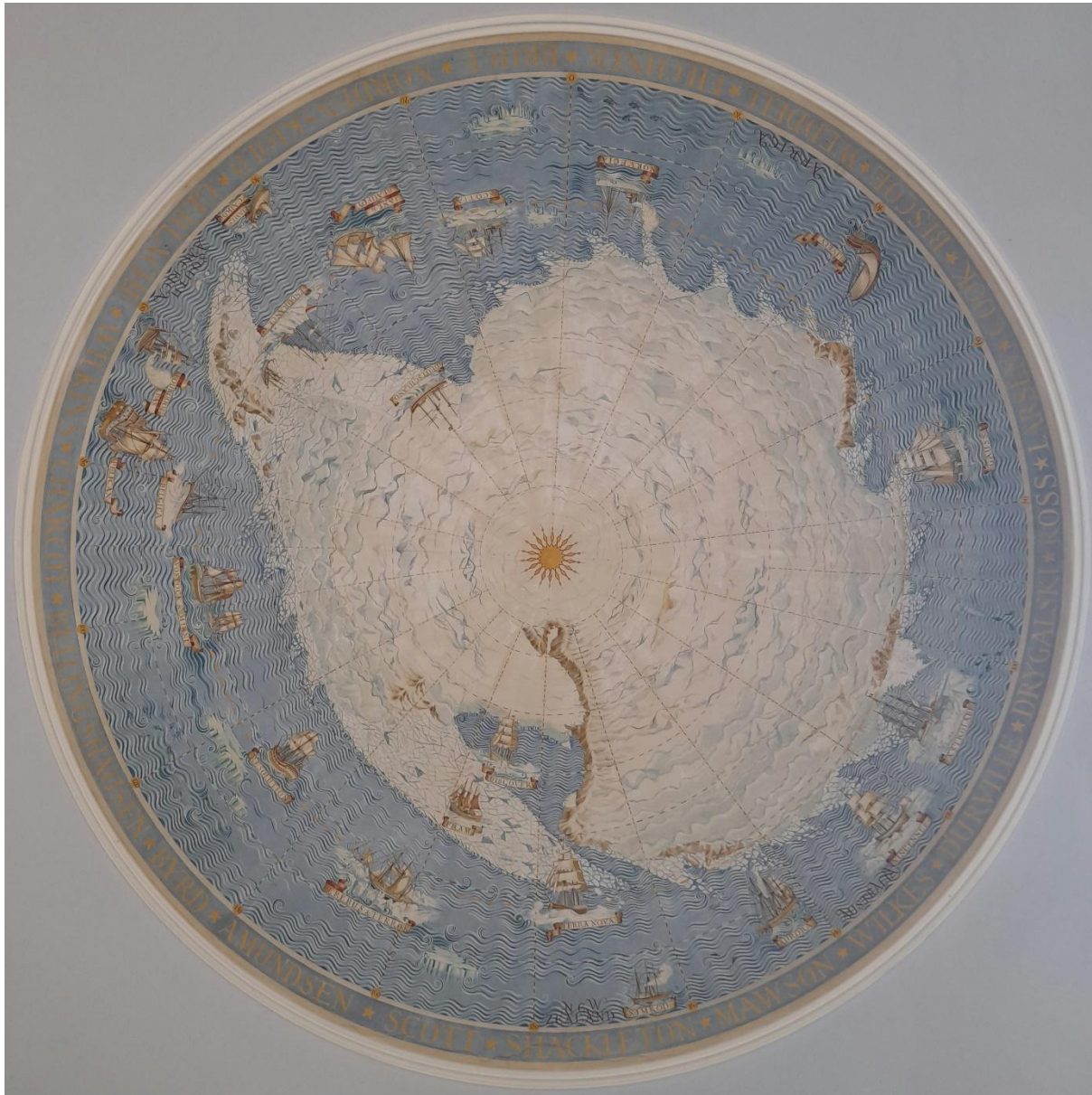


Figure 5.3. The Antarctic Dome in the Memorial Hall of SPRI including the names of explorers encircling the map and named expedition ships sailing the southern seas.

Walking away from this ode to the Antarctic, and under the dome dedicated to the Arctic on the other side of the Memorial Hall, you pass through a glass door and into the main room of the museum. Today, I choose to walk past the front desk and through the permanent gallery of the museum – cutting a straight line between the Arctic history on one side and the Antarctic on the other. I continue through the temporary gallery – which today houses an exhibition on a newly released graphic novel about the Heroic Age adventure ‘The Worst Journey in the World’ – and turn left. I walk down a long corridor filled with pigeonholes and tall shelves stacked high with stationery, polar board games and plastic animal toys, to a large room with a bank of windows at either end. This is part of the 1960s extension to the original 1934 building, a strange sort of box stuck on behind the old part of the building, it is always too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter. Around the room are a number of desks, half hidden amongst a strange collection of polar things (Figure 5.4). There is a three-foot-tall inflatable penguin wearing, inexplicably, a luxurious wig; a mass of maps and books on the polar regions; postcards featuring Inuit art and a small stuffed toy penguin modelled on ‘Ponko’ a sort of mascot of Scott’s *Terra Nova* Expedition. The room is full of chatter and the unmistakable hum of enjoyable work and friendly colleagues, a packet of biscuits is brought out and the volume rises.



Figure 5.4. The Polar Museum office.

This short commute from Lensfield Road to the ‘museum office’ at SPRI reveals a number of important themes for the ethnographer studying the Institute. The history of the building and the specifics of the layout of the Polar Museum are fundamental to how it is perceived by the public today. Moreover, the constant interplay between the Arctic and Antarctic – both in terms of the work of the Institute, and the collections in the museum – shape the actions of the people who work there. Finally, the members of the museum team translate all these things to the public. Having discussed the history of SPRI above, I now turn to the Polar Museum as it is today, its displays, its visitors, and the professionals who work there.

The gallery space at the Polar Museum

Visitors to the Polar Museum (Figure 5.5) enter through the original 1934 front door. The first thing they see, printed in large letters on the opposite wall, is a quote taken from Captain Scott's 'Message to the People', written in his final hours:

Had we lived, I should have had a tale to tell of the hardihood, endurance, and courage of my companions which would have stirred the heart of every Englishman. These rough notes and our dead bodies must tell the tale.

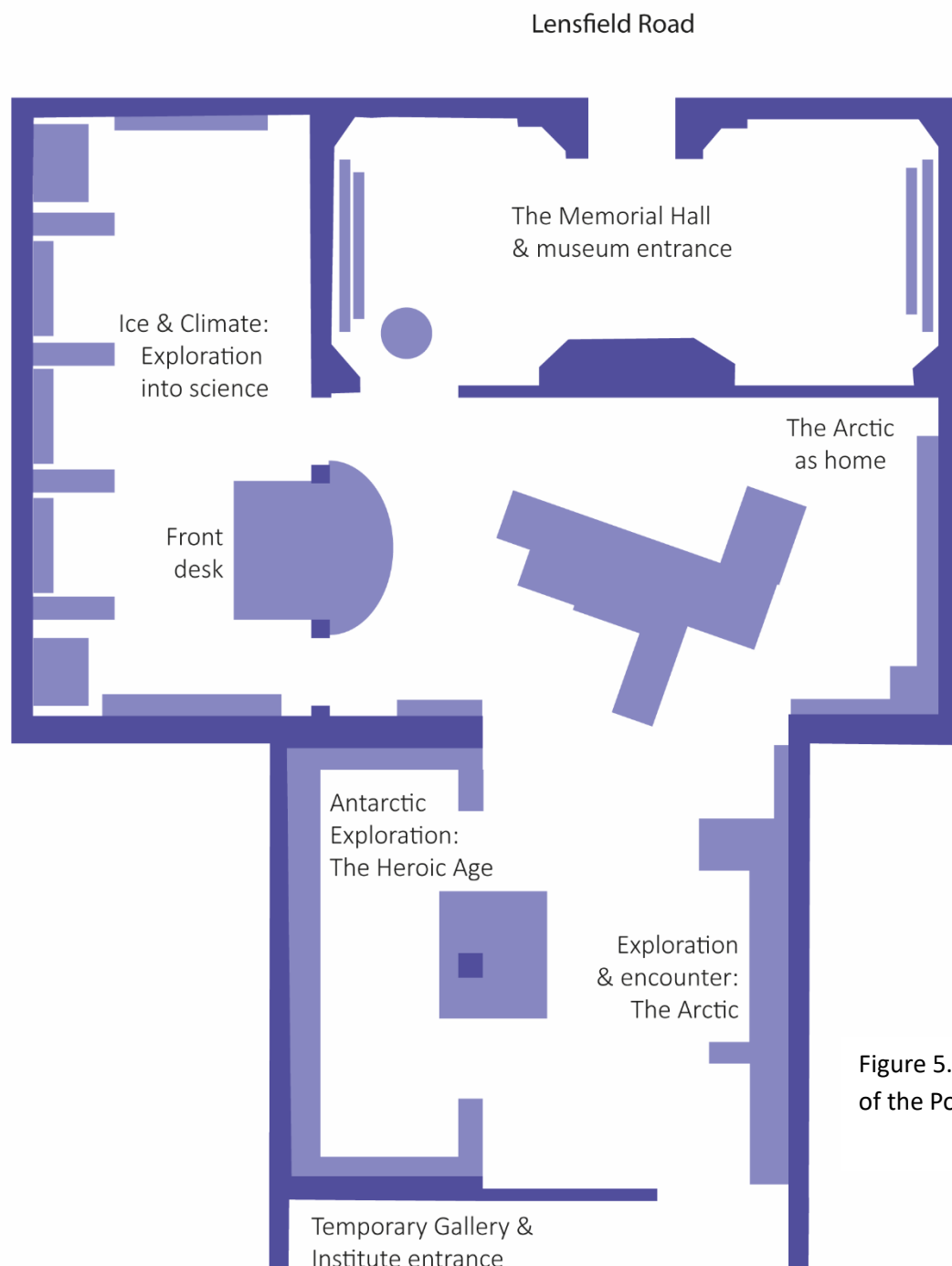


Figure 5.5. Gallery map of the Polar Museum.

This room, the *Memorial Hall*, serves a dual-purpose; it fulfils the Institute's remit to be a memorial to Captain Scott, and it introduces visitors to the polar regions. This first room of the museum aims to outline the key characteristics of the Arctic and Antarctic. There are long, thin cases and written interpretation at either end of the room, with the Antarctic to the left of the front door and the Arctic to the right. Above each section is the historic, domed ceiling map of the region described. The number of objects on display in this room is minimal but impactful. In the case relating to the Arctic for example, there are a handful of pieces of Inuit sculpture. In the Antarctic case, the objects mainly relate to exploration, including a penguin egg collected on Scott's *Terra Nova* Expedition.

Visitors must walk past the Arctic section of the Memorial Hall and through a large sliding glass door to reach the main room of the Polar Museum (Figure 5.6). Directly ahead is the front desk, usually manned by volunteers, or occasionally a member of the museum team. This desk doubles as the counter for the museum's shop, as well as a place for visitors to learn more about the museum. Just behind the desk is an information panel relating to the history of the Institute. This is the only place in the Polar Museum where there is an explicit discussion of the history of SPRI.

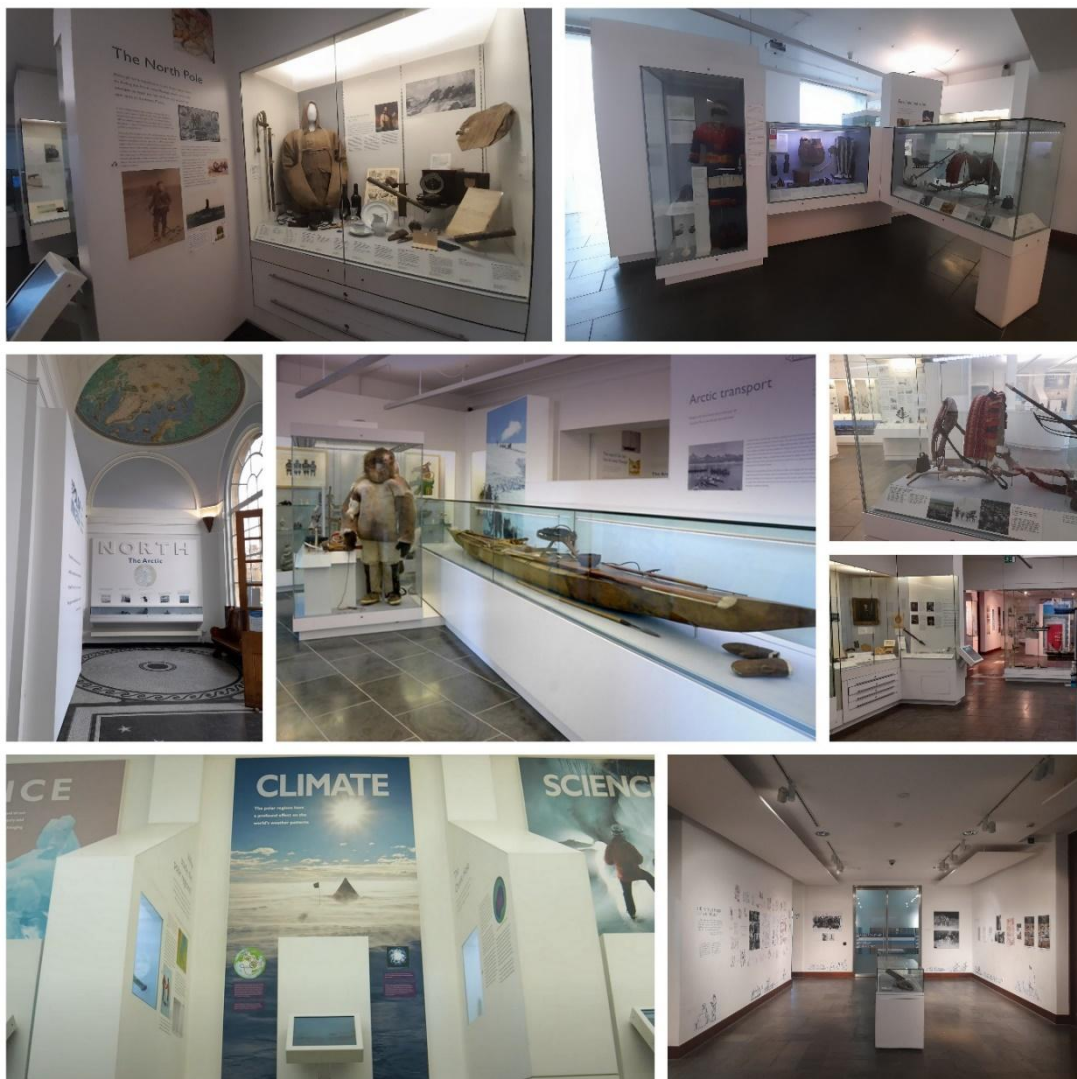


Figure 5.6.
Montage of museum spaces including:
Exploration & encounter: The Arctic; The Arctic as home; the Memorial Hall; Ice & Climate: Exploration into science; and the temporary gallery.

From the front desk, the museum has been designed to encourage visitors to follow a broadly circular route in order to see everything on display. The first section of this route is *The Arctic as Home*, where there are a number of historic ethnographic objects relating to the indigenous peoples of the circumpolar Arctic. The most predominant object on display here is a full-sized kayak, next to which is a case containing objects related to Inuit communities including a seal-gut parka and stone lamps. Following the clockwise route around the space, visitors reach a large case filled with Inuit art. On the other side of the kayak case are displayed objects relating to the indigenous peoples of the European Arctic.

The next section of the museum is called *Exploration and Encounter: The Arctic*. This part of the gallery deals exclusively with historic European exploration of the Arctic. There are objects relating to various expeditions, and some that speak to early encounters with indigenous peoples including art works on paper, though this section is particularly focused on the male, white, European explorers of this era. Some objects relate to the expeditioners' downtime, including a barrel organ, and a large section on the famous Arctic expedition led by Sir John Franklin in 1845. Later on in this section, there is also information surrounding the controversy of the 'first' expeditions to the North Pole²⁵, as well as a case with objects relating to Sir George Strong Nares, a significant Arctic explorer of the 1800s including a surprising example of a very early inflatable pillow used on sledging expeditions.

Next to the section on Nares is a large glass case filled with scrimshaw – a kind of folk art produced by sailors carving images into whale teeth and walrus ivory – and models of historic polar ships. This large case acts as a glass wall, separating the permanent gallery of the Polar Museum from the temporary gallery. The temporary gallery hosts new exhibitions up to three times a year, depending on programming. For the purposes of my research, I focus only on the permanent gallery, as the different styles and displays in this temporary gallery are likely to draw visitor attention away from the main exhibition space in a variable and unpredictable way.

The next part of the museum that visitors come to, following the predetermined clockwise route around the permanent gallery, is *Antarctic Exploration: The Heroic Age* (Figure 5.7). My research, unsurprisingly, is primarily concerned with this area. It comprises a U-shaped run of cases with a large freestanding display case in the centre. This freestanding case is mainly filled with archival documents in drawers, including many examples of the 'last letters' written by Scott and his men once they realised that they were unlikely to survive. The rest of the cases in this Heroic Age section take a broadly chronological approach. The visitor begins with information and objects relating to Scott's first 1901-04 *Discovery* Expedition. Following this, there is a section on Captain Scott and his *Terra Nova* Expedition, including objects related to transport, food and clothing. There are sledges, crampons and a mannequin wearing sledging gear. In addition, a camping stove and sledging rations are on display. This section also includes some 'specialist' objects from this expedition, including the camera that was used by the expedition's photographer Henry Ponting and a box used to collect the men's articles, poems and drawings, later published in the expedition publication, the *South Polar Times*. Finally, there is a section on the death of the Polar Party, featuring Captain Oates' sleeping bag (discussed in Chapter 12) alongside a small piece of black silk, taken from the flag that Roald Amundsen left at the South Pole. Next, the chronology of the cases is lost slightly as they introduce

²⁵ The explorers Frederik Peary and Robert Cook both claimed, in 1909, to have led the first expeditions to the North Pole. Though theories abound, there is still much discussion about which, and even if, either man actually achieved this feat. See Chapter 1 for more information on this.

Sir Ernest Shackleton, and, taking a more thematic approach, discuss his leadership style. The final case in this section is therefore taken up with the three expeditions Shackleton led to the Antarctic: the 1907-09 *Nimrod*, 1914-17 *Endurance*, and 1921-22 *Quest* Expeditions. This case also briefly discusses Shackleton's death onboard the *Quest* in 1922. This case is home to the sextant and chronometer used by Frank Worsley to navigate the lifeboat the *James Caird* from Elephant Island to South Georgia on Shackleton's *Endurance* Expedition. There is also a thin metal tube with a closed end, that would have been used to portion out rations of drinking water for the men while they made this multi-day journey through the worst seas in the world.



Figure 5.7. Montage of *Antarctic Exploration: the Heroic Age* including sections dedicated to Scott and Shackleton.

There is a somewhat abrupt break in the general clockwise thrust of the exhibition at this point. The visitor has now nearly completed a full lap of the main gallery. As a result, they find themselves behind the visitor service desk where, as described earlier, there is a small section of written interpretation about the history of the Institute. This represents a break in the predicted 'flow' of the space, between the section on the Heroic Age of exploration and the last part of the permanent exhibition.

The final section of the Polar Museum is called *Ice and Climate: Exploration into Science*. Concerned with scientific research at both poles, it describes research undertaken at SPRI in particular. This section wraps behind the front desk with a line of very small cases, integrated into the wall, discussing communication and navigation in the extreme environment of the polar regions. Next, there is a mannequin displaying more modern examples of protective clothing. Finally, there are written interpretation sections on ice, climate and science alongside some other small cases. These cases house a small but varied selection of objects including taxidermy penguin chicks and early radio-echo sounding equipment used in the Antarctic in the 1960s. There is also a telescope that had been taken on the 1875-76 British Arctic Expedition aboard the *HMS Discovery*, the 1901-04 British National Antarctic Expedition aboard the *RSS Discovery* and the first mission of the space shuttle *Discovery* in 1984. The final part of this section deals with the political contexts of the polar regions today and is mainly comprised of two large maps of the polar regions featuring geopolitical information. Examining these themes in the final part of the gallery aims to leave visitors with a firm idea of the place of SPRI and the important scientific work it is undertaking in the polar regions today. Abutting this section on polar science is the museum's gift shop.

How do the public engage with these spaces?

My understanding of how the public engage with the permanent gallery at SPRI is based on long-term observations of visitor behaviour, as well as a selection of formally recorded visitor journeys, from which I have produced a heat-map (Figure 5.8). The primary findings of my observations, and the heat-map analysis, is that visitors do not follow a smooth, circular route around the museum (see Appendix 4 for heat-maps overlaid with specific visitor journeys in the Polar Museum, illuminating how often people revisit cases they have already engaged with). Additionally, while it is possible for visitors to take in the whole display in the permanent gallery, this rarely happens. In fact, visitors tend to follow a very complex route, often doubling back on themselves, revisiting displays they have seen before, while missing out other areas entirely. Although no museum professional expects visitors to read every single part of their permanent gallery, most of these spaces are nevertheless designed to facilitate this wherever possible.

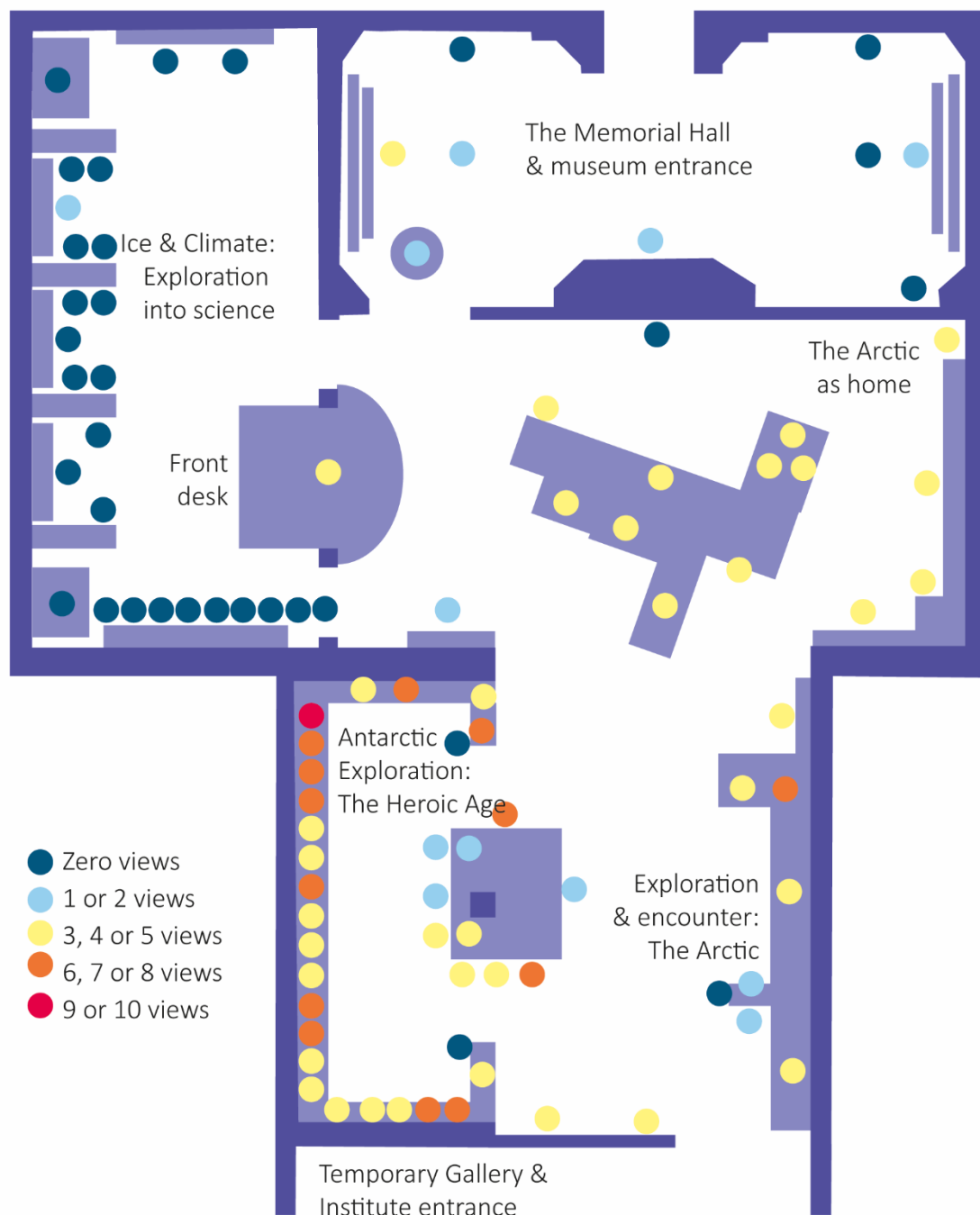


Figure 5.8. Heat map of visitor engagement at the Polar Museum.

Visitors rarely spend much time in the *Memorial Hall*. Occasionally, they stop to look at one or two of the displays, but for the most part they move swiftly through into the main room of the museum. Sometimes, visitors approach the front desk – usually to enquire about whether a ticket is required for entry. At this point, some members of staff and volunteers might ask whether the visitor has seen the painted maps on the domes in the Memorial Hall and encourage them to go back and take a look. This practice means that the Arctic dome is the most visited part of the Memorial Hall, because it is closer to the front desk than the Antarctic map. Generally, when visitors are directed back into the Memorial Hall, they do not engage with the desk again (except for, perhaps, a passing note of

thanks for bringing their attention to the ceiling maps). However, when desk attendants do not ask whether the visitor has seen the painted maps, they often describe the layout of the museum instead. This provides the visitor with a brief understanding of the themes and structure of the museum and often results in them beginning their journey at *The Arctic as Home*. This, as identified by Joy in our discussion of the redevelopment project, is the intended starting point of the displays. When visitors do not interact at all with the attendant on the desk, they might begin their visit by walking straight past *The Arctic as Home*, finding themselves in the centre of the gallery before deciding which area to visit first.

Most visitors tended to interact with *The Arctic as Home* at some point in their visit, and it was the second-most popular part of the museum gallery in my heat-mapping exercise. However, visitors tended to struggle with the shape of this section. The main case juts out into the centre of the gallery, and has a 360° display area, making it quite confusing to navigate. Few visitors walk completely around it, and as a result, often move prematurely on to either *Exploration and Encounter: The Arctic* or *Antarctic Exploration: The Heroic Age*.

Exploration and Encounter: The Arctic perhaps receives the most straightforward engagement from visitors. Often, people start at the 'beginning' of this section (closest to *The Arctic as Home*) and work their way through the cases, even if they do not look in detail at every section on display. Accordingly, the barrel organ case, which is near the start of this display, received the highest number of views during my study of anything outside of *Antarctic Exploration: The Heroic Age*. Issues arise with this section as the end of the main display case juts out into the centre of the museum. Visitors are not aware that there is further information on the other side, and so are funnelled towards *Antarctic Exploration: The Heroic Age*. This is not inherently problematic, but often sets off a kind of 'ping-ponging' backwards and forwards between the two displays. Visitors look at a one or two cases before moving back over to the other side of the museum, perhaps as they realise they have not seen all the cases in the opposite section. One result of this may be that the distinction between what is Antarctic and what is Arctic exploration is not as clear as it was assumed it would be when the museum was first laid out.

If visitors move straight from *The Arctic as Home* to *Antarctic Exploration: The Heroic Age*, bypassing *Exploration and Encounter: The Arctic* completely, a different issue can arise. Part of the planning of the new museum in the early 2000s was that there would be no 'cul-de-sacs' created by the layout of the cases. This is certainly true of *Antarctic Exploration: The Heroic Age*, where visitors can enter from two directions. The display has been designed for visitors coming across from the very final case in *Exploration and Encounter: The Arctic*, past the door to the temporary gallery. These visitors read the introductory information and then work their way around in broadly chronological order through Scott's expeditions to information on Shackleton. However, when visitors start to engage with this section at the other end – as frequently occurs following *The Arctic as Home*, or if they have walked straight past the front desk – they end up going the 'wrong' way. This means that they begin by looking at the objects relating to the death of Scott and his men, particularly Captain Oates' sleeping bag. As this was not the starting point intended by the museum designers, beginning engagement here risks the visitor misinterpreting or missing other aspects of this display.

Visitors tend to engage with *Antarctic Exploration: The Heroic Age* more thoroughly than any other section of the museum. Nevertheless, this does not mean that they read through the display in a

linear manner. People frequently move backwards and forwards between the objects and written interpretation on display, and this is particularly evident in the heat map in Appendix 4, where multiple short lines trace individuals' movements up and down the cases. I was interested to note the frequency with which visitors returned to elements of the display that they had already engaged with. Moreover, the most visited object in this section is Captain Oates' sleeping bag, highlighting its significance within the collection. In the data produced by my heat-mapping exercise, *Antarctic Exploration: The Heroic Age* was engaged with nearly three times as much as any other section of the museum. People read the most and tended to linger longest in this area.

The final part of the museum is *Ice and Climate: Exploration into Science*. I knew from my long-term observations in the museum that this was the least popular part of the permanent display – a fact that is somewhat surprising considering it is part of a museum in a functioning scientific research institute. This was truly brought home, however, by the heat-maps, which showed only one visit to one part of this section by one visitor. The reasons for this are not wholly clear, but I think are dependent on the physical layout of the section and the number of display cases in this area. *Ice and Climate: Exploration into Science* occupies a space somewhat between the front desk and the museum's gift shop. It can feel uncomfortable to go behind the desk (even though it has been designed for this purpose) to reach the display behind it. There is also a narrowing of space between the desk and the beginning of this section, which can be difficult to navigate. Moreover, this section has very small display cases in comparison to the other parts of the museum, and there are considerably larger pieces of written interpretation on the walls than elsewhere. This has frequently been reported to me as being the result of the input of the Director of SPRI in the redevelopment. Despite the Director's understandable interest in this topic, their inexperience with museum displays meant that this area now features a lot of text and relatively few objects. The result is an area that is somewhat daunting for visitors, which is particularly unfortunate due to the importance of scientific research to the Institute. Indeed, this kind of information was initially meant to be 'woven through' all the displays, before the decision was made to produce a dedicated section.

Key takeaways identified by museum visitors

I asked visitors to the Polar Museum what their main 'takeaway' was from *Antarctic Exploration: The Heroic Age*. The most common responses were concerned with how impressive or 'courageous' the men had been. These answers often included a certain level of admiration for the men and what they had achieved, with words like 'hardihood', 'determination' and 'brave' being used to describe them. These characterisations of the men were often also linked to the 'unforgiving' Antarctic environment and the 'primitive' technologies that were available to them at that time:

It shows us how brave they were, because how basic their equipment was. How heavy and cumbersome everything looked. How heavy that sledge would have been to pull. I think that's what stood out here.

Many responses also comprised a kind of wry incredulity about the situation the explorers found themselves in:

...to me what stood out was just the toughness of people back then, really. Nowadays I think you would...well understandably there'd be a huge amount of health and safety concerns if you were going to try and do something like that! Whereas back then they just sort of made

sure they got the supplies, went out and did it and I think that's heroic as it was kind of crazy! But it was the only way they were going to do it, so...a little bit nuts.

The unprompted use of the word heroic in this quote, alongside the assertion that the men were 'a little bit nuts' is very representative of the different ways that the Heroic Age can be quantified, even by the same person.

Alongside these discussions, some visitors also described their key takeaways from the museum as being an appreciation of the driving forces behind these early expeditions. For some, they saw the men as in the pursuit of glory – whether that be for themselves or part of a national agenda: 'these were patriotic times'. As well as these broader political factors, some visitors felt that the men were motivated by personal determination and curiosity for what the Antarctic would be like – an adventurous spirit that perhaps some people have, and others do not. Some visitors also saw competition as an important factor, particularly referencing Scott and Amundsen:

Competitive spirit is a real driver, I mean take Amundsen and Scott, it was just that they needed to beat each other, that was the thing that drove them on. It was discovery, it was just being the first.

Finally, a handful of visitors identified their key takeaway from the museum's display as being related to scientific research. Some recognised that the work done by the men of these early expeditions changed what scientists knew about the Antarctic, thanks to the collection of things like 'rock samples, flora and fauna'. Additionally, one visitor connected this work to events happening today, saying that it is 'more relevant now because of global warming and the melting ice'.

Accordingly, museum visitors were able to identify three key areas that they felt were rendered important by the objects and written interpretation in *Antarctic Exploration: The Heroic Age*. The brave but unusual choices made by the men, the driving forces behind their decision to become polar explorers – whether these be linked to personal or patriotic goals – and the importance and impact of their research.

Is there anything missing for the visitors?

It is complicated to ask visitors whether they think anything is missing from a museum display – as one visitor pointed out: 'Ah now that's a problem logically, because there are things that we don't know!'. Nevertheless, by asking people what they perceive to be missing, or what they would like to know more about, we can gain insight into the sorts of themes that they find particularly interesting and important. When I asked visitors at the Polar Museum this question, two main themes came to the fore. Some wanted more specific information about the lives of the expeditioners: their downtime, how they kept up morale or what kind of food they ate. Others were interested in the details of what it was like to travel across the Antarctic landscape – some even seeking further contextual information about crevasses and the nature of ice. Interestingly, almost all of this information is already discussed in the permanent gallery (though the contextual information about the Antarctic is in the Memorial Hall). While it is possible that some of these visitors were seeking additional information on the topics they were most interested in, it is likely that some simply did not see the displays that would have sated their curiosity.

It was very striking at the Polar Museum how many visitors had a good deal of pre-existing knowledge about the polar regions and the history of polar exploration. Many were able to identify specific individuals – not just Scott and Shackleton, though they were also referenced – who they would have liked to have found out more about during their visit:

I think a bit more of the post-war – Hillary driving his tractor across the Antarctic. A bit more of that and into the modern scientific side. And I would love to see some of the Wilsons and Ponting's pictures. Ponting's photographs and Wilson's paintings. I know there's quite a few. I have a – his descendants have done a book with some of his pictures in and I've got the book. Some of the animals and penguins and things, others are landscapes. And again, I know some of Ponting's photographs can be got from the V&A. I would love to see more of them.

As in this quote, visitors often referenced books they had read in relation to particular people and expeditions that they would like to know more about. Cherry-Garrard's (1922) *The Worst Journey in the World* was cited in this way, as was *South* the 1919 book written by Shackleton about his 1914-17 *Endurance* Expedition. Interestingly, the visitor who had read *South* also expressed an interest in seeing more objects in the museum.

I've read *South* by Shackleton and so when I look at what's there, it is quite condensed and obviously you've got quite limited space, you can't tell the whole story. But I think personally I would have liked to have seen greater depth, but really the important thing for me is the artefacts. So I know the story but seeing the artefacts that connect to it, that's the most important thing. So, yeah, more artefacts, if anything.

This is perhaps least surprising for a visitor who is interested in Shackleton, as the section related to him is significantly smaller than that on Scott. This is a result of the origins of the museum as a memorial to Captain Scott and, according to the museum team, because Shackleton would frequently give away objects from his expeditions, meaning that there are fewer things belonging to him in national collections. The collection at SPRI is therefore comprised of relatively more objects relating to Scott and his expeditions than Shackleton.

Though I had asked members of the public whether they would like to learn more about anything in the Antarctic display, many also responded with comments about the layout and design of the whole museum. The inclusion of more interactive exhibits, and less written interpretation, were highlighted as particular areas for improvement. This may have been partly due to the two touchscreen exhibits in this part of the exhibition being broken, meaning that there was no digital interpretation available. These touchscreens are visible (both in *Antarctic Exploration: The Heroic Age* and *Exploration and Encounter: The Arctic*) on the heat-map as the only parts of these displays not engaged with at all by visitors²⁶. Mentioning these, one visitor also asked:

I saw computers or something, screens there on the side, was that to give information about climate change or something on the poles?

²⁶ Though there were also some broken touchscreens in *Ice and climate: Exploration into Science* these are less significant as the heat-map data shows only one interaction with one exhibit in this area by one member of the public.

This suggestion that more information on climate change would be gratefully received by visitors came up in several other interviews. Many visitors also wanted to know more about the scientific work taking place at the polar regions today.

There wasn't really much about climate change, which would be very powerful. Any sense of urgency that things are changing so quickly and we've got to do something about it before it's impossible.

This is particularly interesting in the light of the heat-map data, that indicate that the dedicated section on climate change and scientific research was only visited by a single visitor during my observations. It is possible that the reason for the lack of engagement with this dedicated section – even though many visitors purported to be interested in it – was down to the specifics of its display, which is very text-heavy and contains relatively few objects. As one visitor succinctly put it: 'reading is boring!'.

Finally, throughout these interviews there was again some confusion between the Arctic and Antarctic histories on display in the Polar Museum. One visitor described the Arctic explorer Sir John Franklin's wife Lady Jane Franklin when she mentioned wanting to know more about the families and wives of the explorers. Another visitor indicated that they would have liked to see more information on the 15th century explorer John Cabot who explored the area around Newfoundland. Though it is possible that these visitors thought I was interested in *all* the displays of the museum and how they could be improved, this blurring of the polar regions is not unexpected. It was noted throughout the redevelopment process that the public struggled to distinguish between these two areas. Nevertheless, I suggest that the 'ping-ponging' between the displays on historic Antarctic and Arctic exploration because of the physical layout of these museum sections only serves to amplify this issue.

So it is that visitors to the Polar Museum are able to identify several themes that they feel are missing from *Antarctic Exploration: The Heroic Age*. They are interested in the lives of the men of Heroic Age expeditions – from leisure time to their work – as well as the specifics of the lives of a range of named polar explorers. Additionally, they would like to see this information displayed in a more interactive way, with links to climate change and the scientific work taking place at the poles today. Finally, though the visitors themselves may not realise it, there is a need to put further work into delineating the differences between the histories and geographical regions of the Arctic and Antarctic. Despite all of this, the museum team may take heart from the words of one visitor who, when asked whether there was anything else that they would have liked to know about the Heroic Age of exploration said: 'No. I think I've learned more today than I expected to learn.'

What works for the museum professionals at the Polar Museum?

I asked the museum professionals at the Polar Museum which – if any – of the aspects of *Antarctic Exploration: The Heroic Age* in its current format they felt were particularly effective. Many of the professionals could think of at least one point that they felt positively about, and, perhaps unsurprisingly, these often aligned with their role within the museum team. Melanie, for example, who works in Education and Outreach, was particularly appreciative of those cases in the display that were at 'child height'. She specifically mentions the case that houses the stuffed emperor penguin as

being very well-loved among younger visitors (Figure 5.9). Zara²⁷, who works in collections care, thinks that one of the greatest strengths of the museum is the sheer number of objects on display. This, she says, means that even the casual visitor can learn a lot just by looking at the collection, without needing to read much, if any, of the written interpretation that accompanies it.



Figure 5.9. Some of the professionals' favourite objects: Stuffed Emperor Penguin; Everyday items; Letter drawer.

Some of the opinions held by the museum professionals were somewhat conflicting, such as those held by Simon, who works in collections care, and Diana²⁸, who once worked in the museum in conservation and collections care. Simon felt that one of the key strengths of the display was that it enabled visitors to connect with the tragic stories it represents on a human level. He cites the particular objects belonging to the Polar Party on Scott's expedition, for example, as being a tangible connection to these men and their stories. Moreover, he describes the drawers that contain the 'last letters' written by Scott and his men. These, he says, are important insofar as they keep the letters in darkness most of the time – which they require for their material conservation – but they also provide an 'intimate' interaction for visitors. He says opening one of the draws makes it feel like you have 'discovered' something, helping to forge a more personal relationship to it, and thereby with the man who wrote it. Diana, on the other hand, felt that one of the major strengths of the museum

²⁷ This name has been changed, full details in Appendix 2.

²⁸ These names have been changed, full details in Appendix 2.

display was specifically that it focused on other areas of these expeditions, and not simply the men's deaths:

It doesn't make it all about the tragedy – obviously the tragedy's in there – but it's not all about that and it's not all about those 5 men, actually other people are mentioned and that is important. And clearly there aren't any non-white males involved, but it does something to try and talk about the lives of non-officers, so the ratings [junior sailors] and people like that, I think it attempts that.

While Diana thinks the display 'attempts' to include a variety of voices in its interpretation, Verity – the curator – highlights the sheer number of people included as a particular strength. Especially in comparison to the display on historic European exploration in the Arctic, she feels that the Antarctic display 'does a pretty good job actually of not being so centred on the individuals'. Moreover, the sense that *Antarctic Exploration: The Heroic Age* tells a diversity of stories is reflected in the team's discussion of the objects on display. Verity, for example, goes on to say that:

That corner, the *Discovery* bit where we've got all of the ditty bags and the cooking gear and then the naval uniforms and the outdoor uniforms. I think that section does a really good, in a nutshell, job of showing how many different sides there were to an expedition. That it was partly about actually you have to feed yourself and house yourself and keep yourself warm. But they're doing science, but they're trying new things, and they're part of the Navy, but they're also going out and doing new things. I think just that little area, if you only came and looked at that you'd get a pretty good understanding of what early 20th century polar exploration was about.

The objects relating to the varied daily life of the expeditions therefore provide visitors with a better understanding of *all* the men involved. Moreover, this human aspect is something that Polly, who works in collections care and with the volunteers, identifies as a particular strength. Unsurprisingly, given her role, she is interested in the museum's accessibility for a variety of visitors, and she thinks the way the displays are laid out 'like a day in the life' with all the – often familiar – things the expeditioners would need, like food, clothes and transport, is particularly effective in this regard.

Finally, Sam²⁹, who also works in collections care and with the volunteers, suggests that whether the display is effective is dependent on what it is trying to achieve. As one example of this he cites the last letters display as successfully enabling an emotional connection between the visitors and the expeditioners. However, for him, the particular strength of the museum is somewhat differently quantified:

In terms of effective for what I think a museum should be doing – which is using objects to educate and tell a story – I actually think the middle of the *Discovery* section where it talks about the South Polar Times and has a few bits, you know the cameras and things like that, I think it shows what a well-rounded expedition these expeditions were. That a lot of things happened, that it wasn't just you arrived in Antarctica and immediately you set out to try to conquer the South Pole.

²⁹ This name has been changed, full details in Appendix 2.

Though many members of the museum team said that they had either never considered – or never been invited to consider – the effective parts of this display before, they were nevertheless able to identify a number of strengths. They cited emotional connection, human stories, and the ability of the display to represent a variety of voices as especially important. With these positives in mind, let us now turn to the aspects of *Antarctic Exploration: The Heroic Age* that the team felt were less successful.

What would the museum team like to change – exhibition styles

When discussing the aspects of the display that they would like to change, very few of the museum professionals at the Polar Museum suggested changes to the exhibition style. However, where these points were made, they largely echoed the feedback provided in my visitor interviews. Tania³⁰, for example, who works in education and outreach, suggested that interactive exhibits are very important in museums and that these could be much improved. When we had this conversation, one of the two touchscreens in *Antarctic Exploration: The Heroic Age* was working while the other had broken. As well as fixing this technology, Tania felt that what was currently available – largely a selection of historic photographs from SPRI's collection – could also be adapted to a more modern audience.

Both Verity, the curator, and Zara, from her perspective in collections care, felt that the exhibition would benefit from having less written interpretation. Zara, in particular, thinks that because the display is 'text-heavy' it makes the information difficult to absorb. Verity suggests that if she were redesigning this section of the museum today she would 'halve' the text while simultaneously integrating the scientific information across all the areas of the museum, rather than focusing it in a single display. She also indicated that she would try to interweave more people more prominently into the narrative of the exhibition. These suggestions were not the only ones made by the museum team about the themes included in the exhibition.

What would the museum team like to change – exhibition themes

The importance of the written interpretation in the Polar Museum was summed up by Melanie, who works in education and outreach, when she said: 'If you walked in without any interpretation, knowing nothing, it's like a load of old equipment, isn't it? But it's the stories that make it.' Interestingly, this is at odds with Zara's assertion that one of the museum's current strengths is that it can provide a level of insight through consideration of its objects alone. This can perhaps be explained by their different roles within the team – Melanie in education and outreach and Zara collections care. Nevertheless, the significance of the themes included in a museum's written interpretation is not to be underestimated, as it shapes the way that visitors interact with the objects on display. At the Polar Museum, the team identified three key themes that they would like to include or adapt in the written interpretation of *Antarctic Exploration: The Heroic Age*.

Firstly, several members of the team discussed the potential for including more information about the wider socio-political context of these expeditions. What was the world like when the men started

³⁰ This name has been changed, full details in Appendix 2.

their journeys south and what impact did that have on what they were doing, and why they were drawn to do it in the first place? Zara sums up these ideas by saying:

I suppose I would want a bit more to do with the context of expeditions. I think there's an expectation that you go to a museum to see some old stuff. But the good exhibition is the one that you walk in and you walk out of placing it properly in the history (for ones that are looking back in time). I think it kind of lacks that.

Polly concurs with this suggestion of a more global lens for the Heroic Age section and while Sam also agrees, he wonders whether there is really space in such a small museum for this level of detail. However, one impact of a more contextual discussion of these expeditions would be the opportunity to project this forward, indicating the ways modern policy in the Antarctic is much more concerned with international cooperation than was the case during the Heroic Age. As Verity says:

I think the big thing that we really, really, *really* should be doing is – specifically in that Heroic Age bit – is talking about how it laid the foundations and how it *didn't* lay the foundations for what went on to become the Antarctic Treaty³¹. Which *surely* is the thing we ought to be really banging on about in our museum. But instead, it's tucked away in a very sad corner with a touchscreen that occasionally works.

The positive international relations associated with the Antarctic Treaty today could not be said to spring directly from the nationalism of the Heroic Age. However, there is another area of modern life which can treat these early expeditions as a baseline of information. Many of the museum staff suggest that, if they were able to redevelop the museum, they would be at lengths to integrate science into this display. Specifically, the scientific work that takes place in the Antarctic today and how it has developed from historic expeditions. Taking this a step further, Verity suggests that there should be cross-cutting themes integrated throughout the museum, in order to give visitors a better appreciation of how the different collections interconnect. However, she accepts that breaking out of these thematic siloes can be complex without the right objects to hang ideas on.

The third theme that the museum team would change about *Antarctic Exploration: The Heroic Age* is how it deals with diversity. Both in terms of the men involved in these expeditions and the broader contextual world in which they operate. Simon suggests that there's 'space for a lot more nuance and diversity in the displays'. This is emphasised by Verity, although she acknowledges that 'diversity' for Antarctic travel – particularly in the Heroic Age – is a fairly limited concept. Polly agrees that more consideration of the expedition crews would be beneficial for the exhibition, alongside a discussion of the wives, families and others left behind when they went south. Interestingly, Verity says:

It's remarkable that nowhere in the museum do we say 'And in X year women were finally allowed to go [to the Antarctic], it was weird that they couldn't before then and here are some of the ways that we prevented that from happening' or people of colour, or name your non-elite, marginalised group of choice, essentially.

She goes on to describe how this information may be lacking in the Polar Museum because it is more likely to be found in the archives of the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) – also based in Cambridge but

³¹ The Antarctic Treaty, signed by twelve countries in 1959 (now with 52 signatory nations) officially designates the continent as a place for international peace and science and pauses all current Antarctic territorial claims (Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty n.d.).

separate from SPRI. A discussion on these topics in the museum may therefore cause visitor confusion of the different institutes or, in terms of SPRI's relationship to BAS, may be seen as 'treading on toes'.

One final note in this section on the themes that could be edited or adapted in the current Antarctic display, comes from Sam. He suggests that the way the Antarctic and Arctic historic expeditions are treated in the museum is different because of the ways that they expect to elicit emotion from visitors.

I think that entire thing where you've got the items like the matchbox and Bowers' bible sort of representing the men who've died and then you've got these really heart-wrenching last letters that they wrote I think that is telling someone how to feel about it in the way that the rest of the museum doesn't do that at all. We don't tell people how to feel about indigenous art or Arctic exploration, even. You know, Franklin getting lost with 120 men is objectively sadder than 5 men dying, but we use that as a jumping off point to talk about Arctic exploration, rather than 'isn't it absolutely devastating that Lady Jane Franklin was left?' You know, you could tell a *completely* different story about Jane Franklin's search for her husband that she loved so deeply – all that kind of stuff. But we don't do that because that would be manipulative and unfair, whereas we do do it on Antarctic, which is quite odd.

Sam was the only person to raise this idea – or anything like it – as for the most part the team treated emotional connection as a positive thing. This feeling that emotion can sometimes spill over into visitor *manipulation* is an unusual one in a museum context, particularly one relating to European subjects. However, it provides an insight into a very specific challenge that the Polar Museum must face in any future attempt to redevelop *Antarctic Exploration: The Heroic Age*.

Future change and modern relationships

Simon suggested that one change he would like to make would be to have a detailed discussion of Scott and Shackleton. He describes the current display as an 'even-handed' interpretation of both men, but would be interested in including information about the different ways that they have been understood over time:

Their reputations have waxed and waned over the years and probably will continue to do so as society's priorities and interests shift and that that's just as interesting. To look at these objects and think how would you see this in ten years' time? You know, it's a good question to ask.

This is a very interesting point, and touches on my own ideas about shifting heroics (see Chapter 1). Nevertheless, it is, by Simon's own admission, quite far removed from what can happen in reality, because of the museum's sense of responsibility to Scott and, thereby, to his descendants.

SPRI was founded by a member of Scott's *Terra Nova* Expedition, with a remit to act as a national memorial to him and the men who died with him (see Chapter 4). SPRI – and by extension the Polar Museum – has therefore always had close relationships with the descendants of Heroic Age explorers. As a result, any future developments made to the museum must be cognisant of any potential impact they may have on these relationships with important stakeholders. Verity describes what this means for the museum:

As time goes on, we get further away from the original events, so I think at each step it becomes easier and easier to be critical. And I mean critical in the academic sense – to critique the way we’ve described the past. Yeah, it just is a challenge, and it’s that dichotomy I talked about right at the start. It would be very weird and quite hurtful to a lot of people if I, in my present role, started saying ‘Yeah, but Shackleton he just did it all wrong, didn’t he? I mean, you know, he just didn’t know what he was doing!’ Which, isn’t a line I would take, particularly – it’s not very scholarly for one thing, but it’s the sort of rhetoric that I’ve heard about Scott on lots of occasions is people saying that kind of thing, and of course I don’t repeat that, because it’s not – in my view – accurate. But also because it would be incredibly hurtful to a lot of people. So, yeah, there’s a lot of feelings to manage with this particular topic and given that most of the descendants are members of our Friends of SPRI organisation, which is explicitly to raise funds for us, so they’re stakeholders in a very real way. Not only as people we know and like and get on with, but also as in they’re actively advocating for us, and they play a not-quite formalised role, but there is a kind of role for them as ‘friends’ in inverted commas.

There is an expectation of the museum to maintain a certain narrative, and express things in a certain way. This is not something that is likely to change soon, and while the museum team may recognise the importance of keeping their friends on side, it does seem that they are able to keep a certain professional distance in their own work on the Heroic Age. However, this additional consideration is an usual one for a museum, and in SPRI’s case is borne out entirely as a result of its institutional history.

What next for the Polar Museum?

So, I think the museum will probably rumble along more or less in its current form, maybe with an upgrade to the science section, certainly with an upgrade to the Inuit art section, for another 10 years would be my prediction. Before people start seriously thinking about ‘Ooh it is actually quite out of date’ and then it’ll probably have another 5 or 10 years of individual panels being refreshed, before it really looks old and tatty enough to properly redo. 30 to 40 years is a normal lifespan, I’d say! – Verity.

The Polar Museum’s redevelopment project, completed in 2010, is still recent enough, in the world of UK museums, to ensure that it is unlikely to undergo many considerable changes in the near future. Though certain parts of the permanent gallery may be edited, single cases adjusted, individual labels adapted, the likelihood of a complete overhaul in the next decade or so is very slim. As a result, the staff of the Polar Museum must learn to live, and work, with what they have. However, following the increased attention enjoyed by these collections thanks to the recent centenaries of Scott and Shackleton’s expeditions, there is a feeling that they are due a rest. Other topics must now step into the limelight. The sections of the museum that deal with the Arctic – and in particular indigenous voices – are receiving more attention than they have done for many years. This is something that the museum team are keen to continue, with plans to renew the *Arctic as Home* a top priority. It is unlikely, therefore, that the Heroic Age displays will be significantly adapted until the whole museum is eventually completely overhauled. The life cycle of the museum is turning, and this particular theme is fading, though it will undoubtedly remain a key draw, and a major interest, for visitors to the Polar Museum.

6. The History of Discovery Point: Dundee to Antarctica and back again



Figure 6.1. *Royal Research Ship (RRS) Discovery* with the museum behind on the waterfront at Dundee.

Discovery Point (Figure 6.1) is the name for both the dry dock in which the *Royal Research Ship (RRS) Discovery* sits, by the bank of the River Tay in the city centre of Dundee, and the museum that interprets it for the public. It is also, providing the weather is on your side, an exceptionally good place for a sandwich. So it was that a few days into my fieldwork I found myself sitting, somewhat miraculously, outside in the Scottish summertime, taking in the view. One table along was a family with three young children also enjoying the rare glimpse of sun, and after a few minutes there was a very loud, very excited exclamation: 'Wait! So it went to the North Pole?!'. Although a not insignificant amount of the time I have spent working in polar museums has involved the careful explanation of the difference between the Arctic and the Antarctic, the North and the South Pole, it was not until later in my fieldwork that I realised that this statement was not entirely incorrect. Over the course of its more than hundred-year history, the *RRS Discovery* has, in fact, not only been to the Antarctic, but to the Arctic as well (though not as far as the North Pole, it has to be said). In fact, it ventured north in between several different expeditions to the south, before eventually returning to the city in which it was built: Dundee. So it is that this ship – and the museum that interprets it – can trace a complex story that spans not only more than a century, but also the length of the globe.

The history of the *RRS Discovery* and the creation of Discovery Point

The museum team at Discovery Point assured me that the commission to build the *RRS Discovery* – the first vessel designed primarily for scientific research in the polar regions – was given to a Dundonian shipyard as a direct result of their specialist knowledge of building whaling ships for environmental exploitation in the colonized Arctic. Arctic whalers were built to withstand the pressure of the sea ice, and this specialist expertise was important for the *Discovery* which would be required to overwinter during Captain Scott's Antarctic expedition (Figure 6.2). Her whaling pedigree also meant that, after Scott's 1901-04 expedition, the *RRS Discovery* was perfectly suited to its use by the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) as a cargo vessel in the Arctic.



Figure 6.2. P83_6_1_1_072.1 - The ship *Discovery* held fast in the pack ice © SPRI.

The *Discovery* returned to the Antarctic from 1925-1927 as part of an expedition to understand the impact of hunting on whale stocks in the Southern Ocean, the origins of an enquiry that ultimately drew attention to the unsustainable nature of Antarctic whaling (Hofman 2017). She returned to Antarctica yet again as part of the British, Australian and New Zealand Antarctic Research Expedition (BANZARE) for two seasons between 1929 and 1931. Then, after this final Antarctic work, the *Discovery* was sent to London, where she was docked at Embankment in 1936, and became a base for the Sea Scouts (Savours 2013). Here, she had her first experience as a heritage attraction, holding a small museum dedicated to Antarctic exploration. During WWII, she became a base for training and the headquarters of the River Emergency Service. The *Discovery* was later briefly returned to the Sea Scouts before being taken over by the Admiralty who used her as a training vessel for the Royal Naval Auxiliary Reserve and the Westminster Sea Cadet Corps (Savours 2013). Eventually, the Ministry of Defence no longer required the facilities provided by the *Discovery* and proposed that she be used

for target practice. Following public outcry at this suggestion, she was eventually sold to the Maritime Trust, who took over care of the ship in 1979 (*Ibid.*).

The Maritime Trust (now the Maritime Heritage Trust following a merger with Heritage Afloat in 2011 [Cleary 2024]) aims to preserve, and engage the public with, the maritime heritage of the UK. However, the financial burden shouldered by the Maritime Trust in caring for the *Discovery* – along with several other historic ships including the Cutty Sark in London – eventually became too much. As a result, in 1986, the charity struck a deal for the *Discovery* to travel back to where she was made, to be cared for by the Dundee Heritage Trust. In 1995, The Maritime Trust sold the *Discovery* to the Dundee Heritage Trust, as the museum team delighted in telling me, for the nominal fee of £1.

Though the Dundee Heritage Trust existed before the handover of the ship, it was primarily concerned with the city's industrial past, particularly jute production (see Chapter 1). Its polar collection therefore initially consisted solely of those objects donated by the Maritime Trust when it transferred ownership of the *Discovery*. Helen³², who worked in heritage and exhibitions at this time, told me that the staff of Dundee Heritage Trust were not fully aware that any collection was being donated along with the ship. She describes receiving a phone call from the Maritime Trust asking when they would be coming to pick up the *Discovery* collection, and the subsequent drive to the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, which had been storing the objects for the Maritime Trust. She tells me that she and a colleague had hired a van to drive down to London which they filled with 'box after box after box' of objects – mostly without any provenance information – to take back to Dundee. Helen believes that most of these objects had become part of an informal collection, tied to the ship, even before the Maritime Trust's ownership of the *Discovery*.

The influx of objects meant that Dundee Heritage Trust's collection went from what Helen describes as 'a handful to hundreds of things'. Since then, the polar collections of the Trust have grown – and they continue to actively collect – benefiting from the increasing fame of the museum and the propensity of collections to draw in objects via gifts and bequests. They have also bought objects at auction and, as Helen notes, lost out at auction because of the value of objects relating to the Heroic Age of exploration to the private collector's market. Nevertheless, she cites the purchase of the ship, and the associated objects which came with it, as the biggest single influx of collections into the Trust. In spite of this, the collection at Discovery Point remains fairly small for a museum of its size.

Even in this brief history, it is clear that a variety of people have been involved in the *RRS Discovery*'s creation, Antarctic expeditions, and production as a heritage space. But this is only part of the story, because since 1993, Discovery Point has also been home to a dedicated museum, which complements the interpretation available on the ship, and these galleries have also undergone some change in the thirty years since they first opened to the public.

Discovery Point from 1993 to the present day

From 1986, when the *RRS Discovery* first docked in Dundee, until 1993 when the museum opened, any objects on display were located exclusively on the ship itself (Figure 6.3). Early photographs of this time show a few exhibition cases with a variety of objects presented somewhat haphazardly. By 1993, however, and with the creation of dedicated gallery spaces in the adjacent building, the stage

³² This name has been changed, full details in Appendix 2.

was set for a museum that has not seen any complete renovations until today (Figure 6.4). The movement through the gallery spaces – arranged in a circular formation – followed a broadly chronological trajectory that still persists, and some elements of the exhibition also remain the same. The limited change in this thirty-year period is not unusual in a museum environment; the funding and staff time required for renovations often meaning that museums must go many years between updates.

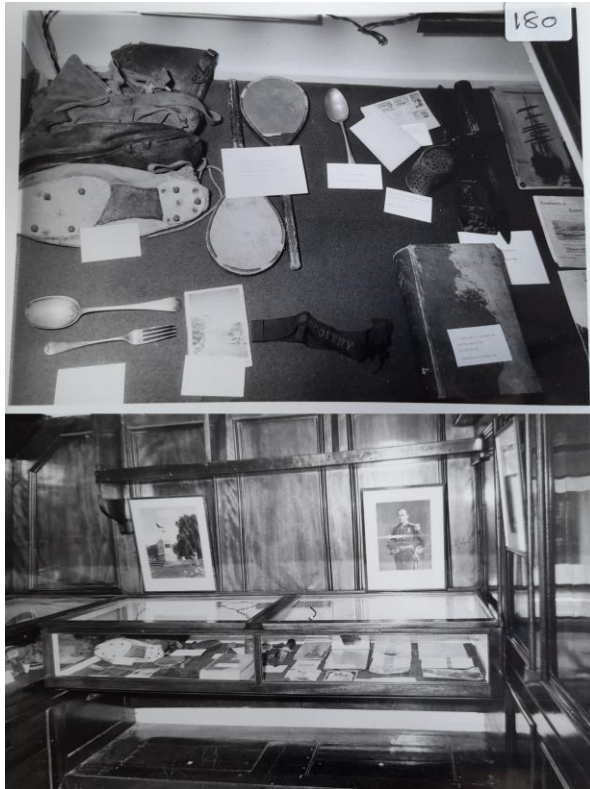


Figure 6.3. Images 180, 184 - Early display on the ship. Courtesy of Dundee Heritage Trust.



Figure 6.4. Images 173, 178 - Original museum displays at Discovery Point. Courtesy of Dundee Heritage Trust.

At Discovery Point, some changes were made to the original museum in a two phased project between 1999-2000 and 2000-2001. It is unusual that this work was done so soon after the museum was first opened; however funding was secured from the National Lottery Fund and some minor sources, which allowed the team to redevelop aspects of the galleries. Helen notes that the funding they had received was not enough for them to 'rip everything out and start again' but instead they did the work in stages to keep costs down and because they could not afford to close the museum while the redevelopment was taking place. She describes these early changes as an attempt to 'museum-ify' the centre, 'because it was more a visitor attraction. Very little – virtually no objects – and very little in the way of interpretation.' She describes how some walls were simply graphics, with no interpretation or information and that there were a lot of theatre-style set dressings. The museum team worked hard to retain certain aspects of the gallery, whilst simultaneously adapting them to include more text and more interpretation. As she says of one of the galleries,

For example, in the gallery that's all about the provisioning of the ship, there's some wall panels at the very back, along the back of the walls – they were the graphic panels that were there, but there's no text on them, they're just diagrams of a ship [...] we did things like we vinyl wrapped them, and then we put graphic panels on top, graphic panels that actually had text and images and information!

Because there were relatively few objects in the collection, the team relied more on different kinds of interpretation, from written text to multi-media pieces including films and interactive exhibits.

Following their adaptations, Helen and the team began to notice a difference in the way that their audiences engaged with the galleries.

The science gallery when I arrived was just basically a scenic room. So we cut away whole sections of icebergs and added in showcases and AVs and graphics, you know, that told you about the scientists and what the disciplines were. It was like working with what was there, but trying to improve the visitor experience. Gradually the dwell time for visitors increased from something like 20 minutes to 30 minutes in the museum to more like an hour and a half or something because you just keep adding more content.

As well as adding information, the team had to negotiate the preferences of their predecessors, and one example of this particularly stood out. The very first gallery in the museum, *The Adventure Begins*, now displays a film and a selection of personal objects relating to Captain Scott. When the museum first opened, it also had a film, providing contextual background to Scott's expedition, and a number of animatronic mannequins which discussed the film and its themes. Strangely, although these mannequins were depictions of real figures – including Sir Clements Markham, the president of the Royal Geographical Society at the time of Scott's expedition – none of them had represented Scott. Debbie, who works in interpretation and exhibitions at the museum, told me that this was because the original designers of the museum 'didn't like him'.

So it is that museums are something of a palimpsest (cf. Colwell 2022), with individual curatorial decisions often stacked on top of each other, and only rare opportunities to take everything down and rebuild from scratch. As Helen says,

They've always been slightly compromised because you think, you know 'I would have preferred a blank canvas', and sometimes you think 'oh that theme deserves a lot more

space, but we have to put it in this space because if we put it over there it's out of context, or it's out of the logical flow of information' / so you're always sort of trying to fight against them when you're working in an existing space or an existing set up.

Occasionally though, there are opportunities to completely renovate a whole gallery, as in 2017 when the first part of the museum became *The Adventure Begins*. Still, the decision to make this space an introduction to Scott's expedition – and a place to venerate him via his personal objects – may already be contrary to the current museum team's preferences. This is something I will explore later in Chapter 7. For now, it is important to note that, these small interventions aside, the museum at Discovery Point has not changed drastically since the early 2000s. The current redevelopment project is therefore the first opportunity for large scale renovation. How the team will go about making the decisions necessary to enact this redevelopment is the subject of Chapter 7, but it is likely that they will first engage with the official mission of the museum.

The museum mission at Discovery Point

As in any organisation, a clear mission enables team members to work towards a common goal, though this mission is likely to change over time. The Dundee Heritage Trust was set up to preserve and recognise the textile and industrial heritage of the city of Dundee. It started life with a collection of textiles and textile machinery and was initially intended to focus on the jute industry. But when the Maritime Trust suggested that the *RRS Discovery* return to Dundee on loan, Helen told me that:

Ultimately out of that grew the idea that this could be the focus of a new museum and economic regeneration for the city. So that was the whole idea of setting up Discovery Point and bringing the ship back was to develop Dundee as a tourist destination and to be the focus for economic waterfront regeneration. So way before the V&A was touted as that's what they were doing, that's what was done for here. And our organisation was asked would we run the museum when it was built. So we then became an organisation with two museums.

Helen suggests that asking the Dundee Heritage Trust to run the museum at Discovery Point made sense because:

It's connected to the industrial history because the ship was built here, and it all connects to the city's shipbuilding heritage and whaling heritage. So there was a synergy, it did mix with that, in terms of representing the city's industrial heritage and the story there.

However, this meant that the mission of the trust was bound to change, from one focussed solely on the textile and industrial heritage of the city, to something which could encompass the polar history inherent in the *RRS Discovery*. Initially, Helen says that they dealt with this by considering themselves as an attraction that had to compete with others in the city, as they do not receive government funding:

As well as hopefully having good core collections and a good core story that you want to tell people, you have also got to think about the commerciality of what you're doing as well.

She suggests that this idea of commerciality – coupled with the social context of the early 1990s, meant that Discovery Point was conceptualised more as a visitor attraction than a traditional museum. This, she suggested, meant that it ended up lacking in substance:

It was quite impressive, the visitor experience, in terms of lots of set pieces and dioramas and lots of things to gawp at and go ‘Wow!’ you know, but actually very little to involve you. And obviously over the years we’ve tried to improve that and change that.

Today, the Trust’s mission statement echoes the need to be a dynamic and competitive experience for visitors, whilst also emphasising new areas of interest:

We are Dundee Heritage Trust. The proud guardian of two of Scotland’s best-loved museums: Discovery Point and Verdant Works. Together, we spark curiosity in heritage. Our museums have inspired millions of people across the globe since the RRS *Discovery* returned to Dundee. Built in our city, she belongs to the world. An anchor for generations of scientists. A beacon for explorers, young and old. A compass for the curious. Now, we’re on an urgent mission to conserve the RRS *Discovery* and transform Discovery Point for the next 100 years. Will you join our mission for *Discovery*? (Dundee Heritage Trust n.d.).

As well as the emphasis on the restoration of the *Discovery*, and its historical place within the global stage, this mission also foregrounds science and the ship’s important links to Dundee. Interestingly, it features very little information about Verdant Works. This is surprising, considering the importance of the jute trade in Dundee’s history, and the usual association of the town with this product. The mission’s emphasis on the ship therefore indicates the significance the new redevelopment project holds for the staff of Dundee Heritage Trust. It is clear that, for the time being at least, it is this which is at the forefront of the Trust’s work and aspirations. With this guiding statement in mind, therefore, I turn to consider the site, people, collections and visitors to Discovery Point.

7. Museum Voices at Discovery Point

Walking through Dundee on a grey morning in late August, the *RRS Discovery* slowly comes into view. Her masts peek out from behind the corners of buildings – not quite stretching above the rooftops – beckoning me towards the River Tay. Sandwiched between the railway station and the modern geometric concrete of the V&A Dundee lies Discovery Point. This is the name given to the purpose-built dock in which the *RRS Discovery* sits and the adjacent museum tracing the ship's history from construction to the present day (Figure 7.1).



Figure 7.1. Discovery Point museum entrance with the Royal Research Ship (RRS) *Discovery* and V&A behind.

This was the first day of my fieldwork in Dundee, so I waited outside the main entrance for my contact Debbie, who works in interpretation and exhibitions, to arrive and let me in an hour before the official opening time. It was clear as we signed into the building that the main reception area was undergoing a major transformation. Part of the first phase of a redevelopment project at Discovery Point, this space is, I am told, just a week away from opening (though Debbie informs me that its opening has been ‘just around the corner’ since February). It has been designed so that a spiral staircase at the back of the space forms a large ‘ice core’ plunging down from the central dome of the building to the reception desk below. For now, because this space is not yet ready for the public, we must walk – somewhat confusingly – in reverse order around the octagonal building.

We trace a path that begins at the visitors' normal end point, weaving through a variety of galleries including one titled 'Men of Discovery' which Debbie swiftly points out is, 'problematic', until we disappear through a side door marked 'staff only'. The distinction between the front of house and behind-the-scenes is clear. From a somewhat dated but nonetheless well cared for gallery space, we are now standing in a small vestibule, alongside such seemingly universal museum clutter as boxes of foam shapes, coloured paper and cardboard, a roller banner depicting the lay-out of the museum and several broken sign holders with the words 'wobbly needs fixing' scrawled across them on pieces of scrap paper (Figure 7.2). Heading out of the vestibule we are met with a somewhat tired looking staircase, at the top of which is the museum team's office. Although not for much longer. Debbie tells me that the team are in the process of moving their office to Verdant Works, their sister site. This move is happening soon and the office, she says, is looking somewhat worse for wear as a result of the transition. Certainly, it is not so full of *things* as the museum offices I am used to, but there is still plenty to interest the ethnographer here. An array of old (and some newer, though nothing that could accurately be described as 'new') books about Robert Scott and Ernest Shackleton jostle alongside jars full of exciting looking plastic animals belonging to the education team. There seem to be files everywhere and yet there are only four rather empty desks, clearly in the process of being vacated. Rubbing shoulders with these is a hand drawn note from a child that mysteriously reads, 'Dear Discovery staff I am sorry that I stole something' taking up a whole side of A4 in its giant lettering. There is also a printed out version of an internet 'meme' showing two men in a car, one dressed in plain black, the other wearing a huge pink feathered ensemble reminiscent of a carnival costume. Over the man in plain clothes is written 'Curator' and above the man in the pink outfit 'Education officer'.



Figure 7.2. Discovery Point behind the scenes.

In the office, I meet Paula³³, whose role encompasses collections and exhibitions. She excitedly tells me that she's recently been to the new office at Verdant Works and is delighted with the space. The move will change the members of the trust who work in close proximity – at Verdant Works, the curatorial, education and outreach, and admin (including finance) offices will all be together for the first time. The aim, Debbie tells me, is for everyone to be able to function as one big team.

After getting my bearings in the office, Debbie and I make our way back downstairs and to the very first gallery that visitors are supposed to encounter on entering the museum. *The Adventure Begins* is a fairly small room with a large cinema-style screen. Here, a short film introduces some of the men who first sailed aboard the *RRS Discovery*, on Scott's 1901-04 expedition. Framing this screen are four small cases, arranged in such a way that it is impossible to watch the film without seeing them too. These special cases – sometimes called 'hero' or 'jewel' cases by museum professionals, because of the implied importance that being displayed in this way bestows upon an object – look like shining glass cubes on the top of white plinths. Each one houses a single object that once belonged to Captain Scott. Displayed like treasures in this most prominent part of the gallery are: a pipe, a knife, a cigarette lighter and a pair of wooden snow goggles used to protect the wearer from developing snow blindness in icy regions.

This brief introduction to the museum touched on many of the main themes that subsequently emerged during my fieldwork. The significance of the physical redevelopment of Discovery Point (and the time that this is expected to take) was evident from my first impressions of the reception area, through to Paula's unbridled excitement at the new office space. There is a clue here, too, of the less-tangible impacts that this project will bring with it. Debbie's off-hand comment about the 'problematic' gallery speaks to the changing views of the museum staff, sparked by the long decision-making process of the redesign. It hints, too, at the way that the staff were reconsidering the 'heroic' narrative of the past as they moved towards a new phase in the museum's life. In this chapter, I will contend with how the museum team and visitors engage with Discovery Point in its current form. I also describe the team's plans for the biggest renovation in the museum's history. Ultimately, I will highlight the particular culture of the museum staff here, which encompasses professional critique of the museum in which they work.

The galleries at Discovery Point

In order to reach the *RRS Discovery*, in its custom-built dry dock alongside the River Tay, visitors to Discovery Point must first pass through the museum. The building's architecture channels the visitor in an anticlockwise flow through the galleries, which are arranged in a large semi-circle with each one leading on from the next (Figure 7.3). This design means that, unless they turn back to revisit a particular gallery or object, most visitor's journeys will follow the same sequence of galleries. The original museum developers utilised this design to present a – broadly – chronological exhibition, following the ship's story from its construction in a Dundee shipyard, through to its purchase by the Dundee Heritage Trust.

³³ This name has been changed, full details in Appendix 2.

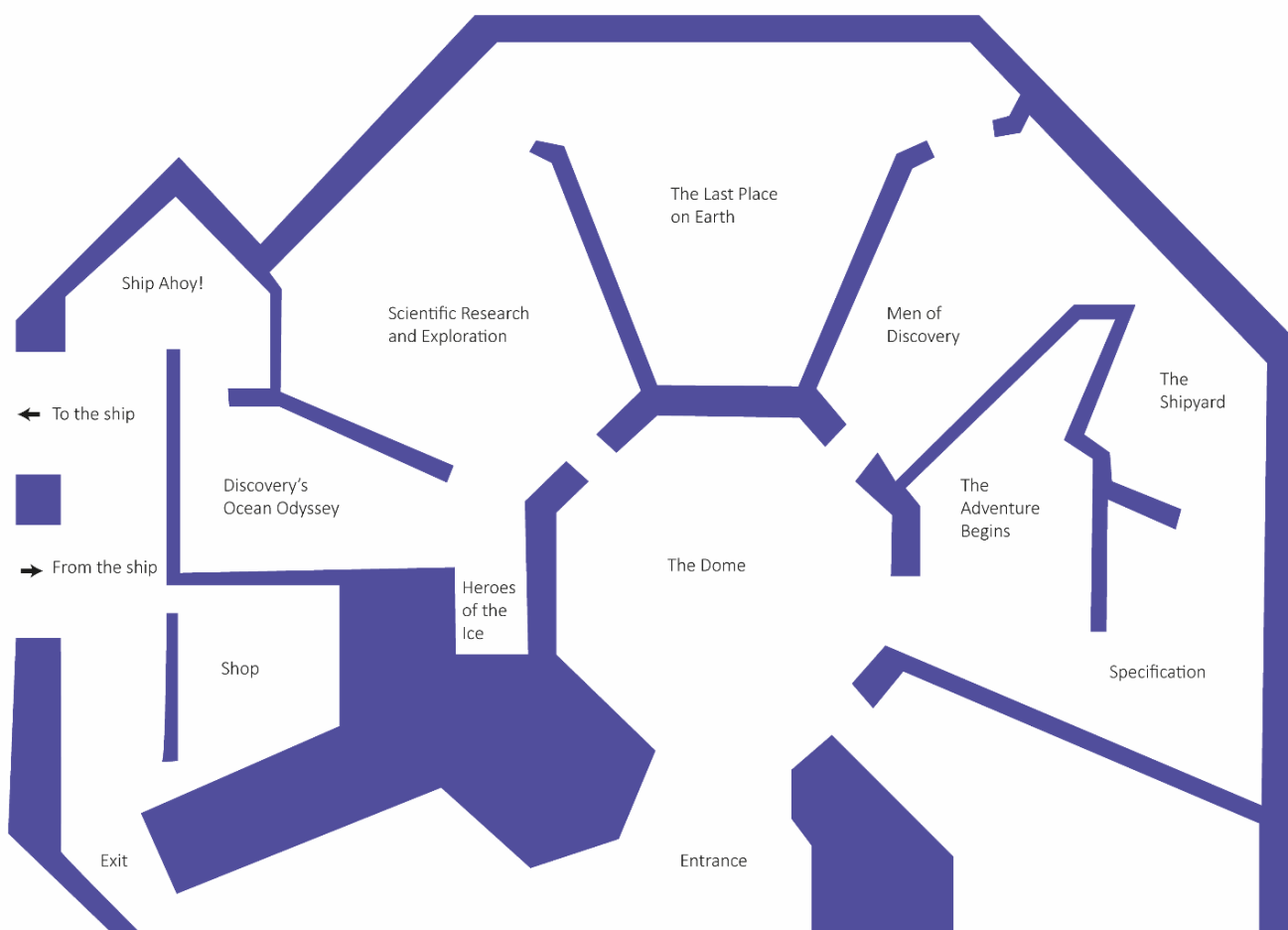


Figure 7.3. Gallery map of Discovery Point.

The first gallery, *The Adventure Begins*, (Figure 7.4) is one of the smallest in the museum and has been refurbished most recently. A short film introduces Scott's 1901-04 expedition and some of the men aboard, including Scott's right-hand-man, Edward Wilson. The film is projected onto a large, curved wall, above a slightly raised area, like a shallow stage. On the stage are arranged: a large depiction of Scott, a stuffed emperor penguin, and four 'jewel' cases – large glass cubes containing a single object each. The four objects in these cases all belonged to Scott: his knife, pipe, cigarette case and snow goggles. As Debbie, who works in interpretation and exhibitions put it, 'People are here for Scott, so therefore we give them Scott.' It is an atmospheric space, with water effect floor, low-lighting and spotlights highlighting the few objects on display.

The next gallery is *Specification*, (Figure 7.4) which deals with the physical specifications of the ship, and the equipment and reserves taken south on Scott's 1901-04 expedition. This gallery is amongst those that have gone the longest without major redevelopment. It features some contextual information about Dundee as a city and its shipbuilding industry, and discusses the provisions taken south by Scott and his men. There are relatively few objects in this gallery – even though it is one of the museum's largest – with six display cases, four of which contain only one object. This is

symptomatic of Discovery Point's comparatively small collection. Nevertheless, there are 12 written display boards and a number of interactive displays in the gallery, including one designed by the Junior Board of Dundee Heritage Trust, which invites visitors to load provisions onto a wobbling boat using a model crane.



Figure 7.4. Top: *The Adventure Begins*.

Below: *Specification*.

Specification leads onto *The Shipyard* (Figure 7.5). This small room has more objects than any gallery so far – with two dedicated cases and a variety of shipbuilding tools on open display. However, it is dominated by a large diorama of a ship under construction. Complete with a theatre-style lighting bar and ambient ‘sawing’ noises, this space has the feel of stage dressing, in spite of the collections on display.

Following on from *The Shipyard* is the *Men of Discovery* gallery (Figure 7.5). Here, there is another short film about Scott's expedition aboard the *RRS Discovery*, and a series of display boards that provide further details about the lives of some of the men of the expedition. While there are a handful of crew represented in this display, there is nonetheless more space dedicated to the officers Scott, Wilson and Shackleton. This gallery has a few larger cases, featuring objects related to leisure activities on board the ship, from skis and musical instruments to a copy of the *South Polar Times* (a monthly magazine actually printed by the men in Antarctica), alongside examples of the men's cold-weather clothing.



Figure 7.5. Top: *The Shipyard*.

Below: *Men of Discovery*.

The next room is a large cinema that plays a ten-minute film entitled *The Last Place on Earth* on a regular loop (Figure 7.6). This film is the longest in the museum and discusses the history of exploration in Antarctica including early sightings of the continent, the work of whalers and sealers, early exploration and the Heroic Age. The only other areas of interpretation in this room are a board with written acknowledgements for the production of the film and a model diorama of the *RRS Discovery* trapped in the ice in McMurdo Sound on Scott's 1901-04 expedition.

After the film, visitors reach *Scientific Research and Exploration* (Figure 7.6). The most striking part of this gallery are the mannequins representing Scott's scientific team at work in the field. There is more stage dressing, in the form of large blocks of imitation ice, around the edges and in the centre of the room, among which the mannequins and display boards are placed. There are also a number of interactives, some of which have been produced by the British Antarctic Survey, as well as an area dedicated to dressing up in clothes which would have been worn in the Antarctic in different periods. As in previous galleries, there are a small number of objects on display and only one display case, which contains scientific equipment including a microscope, telescope and a variety of birds' eggs.



Figure 7.6. Top: film theatre showing *The Last Place on Earth*.
Below: *Scientific Research and Exploration*.

The smallest gallery at Discovery Point is *Heroes of the Ice* (Figure 7.7). It deals with the return of the men from Scott's 1901-04 expedition, and his 1911-13 *Terra Nova* Expedition. This gallery has perhaps the largest proportion of objects – in comparison to its size – of the whole museum, with two dedicated display cases here containing a variety of photographs, memorabilia and objects.



Figure 7.7.
Heroes of the Ice.

The penultimate gallery before the *RRS Discovery* itself is *Discovery's Ocean Odyssey* (Figure 7.8). Here a variety of text panels, multi-media displays, and interactive pieces tell the story of the *RRS Discovery* after Scott's association with it. A large map features heavily in this section and the whole gallery acts as a large timeline spanning the period 1905-1931. There is one small wall-mounted case with a historic model of the *RRS Discovery*, and a small display featuring specimens collected on one of the ship's later scientific expeditions. There is also a dedicated case with objects from the 1929-1931 British Australian and New Zealand Antarctic Research Expedition (BANZARE). In spite of its large size, these are the only objects on display in this gallery.

Finally, *Ship Ahoy!* contains information about the *RRS Discovery's* life between 1931-1986 and its subsequent move to Dundee when Dundee Heritage Trust took over responsibility for its care (Figure 7.8). Nevertheless, the last case in the museum contains clothing and equipment from the Heroic Age: a final return to Scott, before visitors leave the building to explore the ship itself.



Figure 7.8. Top: *Discovery's Ocean Odyssey*.

Below: *Ship Ahoy!*

The *RRS Discovery* contains interpretive material including exhibition panels, mannequins and interactive displays. However, my research considers the display, interpretation and design of the dedicated gallery spaces in the museum building only. This is where the vast majority of the museum's accessioned collection is stored and it provides more scope for reinterpretation by museum professionals, who are free to adapt and change the building in a way that is not possible to the same degree on the historic ship.

How do the public engage with these gallery spaces?

From my observations in the galleries, and the subsequent 'heat-map' I have produced (Figure 7.9), it is clear that visitors view the most information in the first three galleries: *The Adventure Begins*, *Specification*, and *The Shipyard*. As visitors move through the museum, they tend to visit fewer displays, until the final two galleries: *Discovery's Ocean Odyssey* and *Ship Ahoy!* in which visitors view the lowest total number of exhibits. I also noticed that visitors tended to linger longer in earlier galleries, and to move through the final galleries more quickly. It is worth noting that films were the most universally engaged-with parts of the museum.

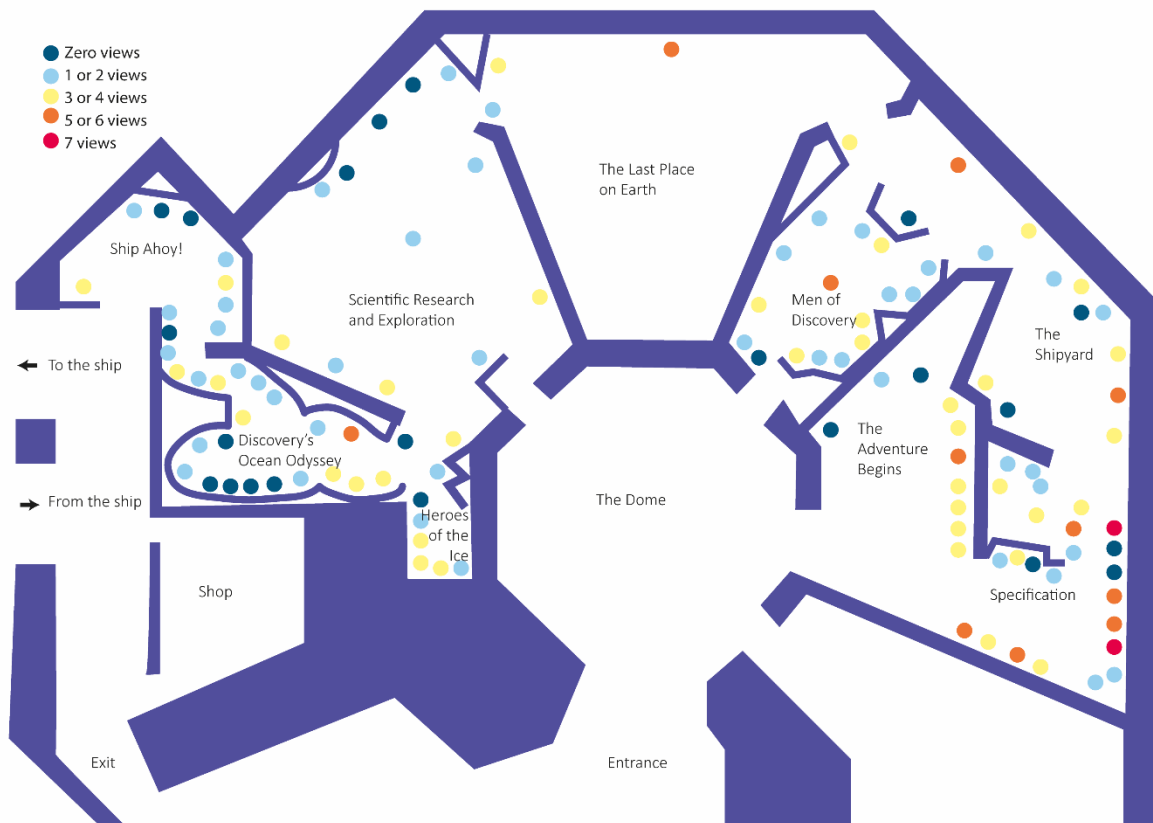


Figure 7.9. Heat map of visitor engagement at Discovery Point.

In *The Adventure Begins*, the film is the most engaged-with part of the display, playing on a large screen in a relatively small room. While many visitors do tend to engage with the objects belonging to Scott in the 'jewel' cases, they do not often spend long at these cases or view them all. I believe that the layout of the room holds the reason for this. As the small jewel cases are set on the low stage in front of the film, it is impossible to examine them without blocking the screen. This makes viewing these cases uncomfortable if there are any other visitors in the room. A countdown timer indicates when the film will start to play, but this can be accelerated by the push of a button. More than once, visitors would look at one or two of the cases before the film started to play again – either at the end of the countdown or because the start button had been pressed by another visitor – and would then quickly leave the room. Of course, these visitors may simply not have wished to hear the film playing through again. Nevertheless, I believe that the design of this room – while attempting to emphasise the significance of Scott's personal belongings by displaying them on their own – still

counter-intuitively moves visitors on before they may naturally be ready to leave. As Debbie told me: 'You can't really stand and look at things whilst everyone is sat down. So I think we force that a bit.'

In *Specification* and *The Shipyard*, the most popular displays are about shipbuilding, including: information on the 'Special Features' of the *RRS Discovery*, designed to aid her scientific work; a large cross-section of the materials used to construct the ship's hull; information on the Dundee Shipbuilders Company; and a small tools case. Another popular feature was the temporary exhibition of a photograph album depicting the construction of the *RRS Discovery* in the shipyard in Dundee. There was clear interest, therefore, not only in the construction of the ship, but also in the role of Dundee and Dundonians in this process.

The next most popular gallery was *Men of Discovery*, with another short film on Scott's first journey south and a case containing a harmonium drawing the most visitors. This gallery provides the most information on the personal lives of the expedition crew – from leisure activities to their clothing – and as a result allows the public to better understand the men as individuals.

Following these galleries, visitor engagement begins to dip. In *Scientific Research and Exploration*, the most popular section was on the biological research undertaken by Thomas Vere Hodgson, but in spite of being the most visited display in this gallery, it only drew four engagements. In *Heroes of the Ice*, the information board on the 'Rescue and Return' of Scott's 1901-04 expedition also drew four visits – more than anything else in that gallery. By the time the visitors reached *Discovery's Ocean Odyssey*, the map of the world indicating where *RRS Discovery* had travelled was visited five times, which was more than any other object or display in any of the final four galleries of the exhibition. Nevertheless, this gallery also had the highest number of exhibits which were not engaged with by a single visitor during my research. In *Ship Ahoy!*, with the *RRS Discovery* itself now clearly visible through the window, a display on the Sea Scouts and a case filled with equipment used on Scott's first expedition drew only three visits each.

Visitors' shift from more engagement with objects and displays in the earlier galleries, to shorter interactions and fewer engagements in the final rooms, may be explained in terms of personal interest, and the anticipated themes of the museum. The initial rooms highlight Scott, the ship's local links to Dundee, and the 'human' aspect of food and provisioning. Conversely, the rooms that visitors tend to spend the least amount of time in are concerned with the life of the *RRS Discovery* following its most famous expedition with Scott. Perhaps, as the exhibition moves away from the best-known years of the ship's history, public interest begins to wane. Another possible reason for this decrease in engagement may be that visitors sense they are coming to the end of the displays, nearing their opportunity to board the ship, as daylight filters into the museum in the final two galleries (the only galleries with any natural light). Additionally, visitors may experience a loss of energy as they make their way through the museum (particularly after watching the film *The Last Place on Earth* in a darkened cinema room, which may well interrupt the rhythm of their visit). Davey (2005) has outlined the ways that 'museum fatigue', which sees visitors interact less with museum exhibits over the course of their visit, can be made up of factors associated with the visitors themselves (including physical or cognitive fatigue) and environmental factors in the museum (like lighting and even the direction of an open door). It seems very likely, therefore, that both of these factors are at play, to some extent, for visitors to Discovery Point.

Key messages identified by museum visitors

To complement my work heat-mapping the exhibition displays, I asked visitors what they felt had been the key messages in the galleries at Discovery Point – their main ‘takeaways’ from the museum. By far the most common theme identified was the idea that Scott and his men had overcome real hardship during their Antarctic expedition.

...the hardships that they had to endure without the mod cons that we know that the current scientists down there have. It doesn't take away from the hardship of the environment, but also there was very limited experience to draw on.

While some participants couched this idea in admiration – even describing the ‘heroism’ of the men who overcame these difficulties – others found it harder to relate to the men. Some visitors cited concerns about the cold weather, the kit, and even the purpose of the expedition:

I think it is – some humans have the desire to go and explore. There are people who will go above – you know they'll go to far off places and they'll travel there, however hard the conditions, and that's the bit that you go...why would you do it twice? [Laughs]. Every time I go here and I read about Shackleton and I read about Scott I think, but you did it once and the second time you went, Scott, you got so depressed you died! That's my take on it, which is not the same as everybody's, but it's certainly mine. There is something, it's like climbing mountains or exploring, there must be a gene for it... I haven't got it!

Nevertheless, the idea that Scott and his men were involved in a difficult undertaking, that they were among the first to venture south in this way, and that they had limited kit and expertise to draw on, were key to many of the visitors I spoke to (see Figure 7.10 for Scott wearing some unconvincing cold-weather kit). Linked to this idea of hardship was the acknowledgement that the men of the 1901-04 expedition had achieved something significant and worthy of respect.

I mean we just take all this for granted and they were doing this over 100 years ago where no one had ever done it before, it's kind of like going to the moon – just like the exhibition paralleled it. So I respect that.

For the most part, the themes the public identified as significant relate to the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration. This is perhaps unsurprising, as it is the most well-known period of the ship's history. However, this focus on the Heroic Age was somewhat at odds with the gallery heat map, which indicates that visitors also regularly engaged with displays on the shipbuilding history of Dundee, and the construction of the *RRS Discovery* itself. In spite of the popularity of the displays in the *Specification* and *Shipyard* galleries, these themes were not mentioned by visitors as part of their main takeaways from the museum.



Figure 7.10. P83/6/1/4/170 - Captain Scott and Dr Koettlitz on ski in Pack ice © SPRI.

Only one answer explored something other than Heroic Age. One visitor described their key takeaway from the museum as a recognition of the importance of heritage spaces in the memorialisation of history:

Mine would be just how much we need to preserve things like this because if you don't the story gets lost to some degree. The story's still there but you don't touch it, you don't feel it until you're here, so we need to keep restoring and retaining.

This comment is particularly interesting as it acknowledges that heritage sites and specific histories are only maintained and made available to the public via active decision making. Indeed, when museum professionals consider what to include, and what to omit, from their interpretation, these choices have a direct impact on the way that the public understands the past and historical figures (see Chapter 3).

Is there anything missing for the visitors?

In the spirit of highlighting the importance of curatorial decision-making in shaping the views of the public, I asked visitors whether there was anything else they wanted to know about Heroic Age explorers and exploration. Had anything been omitted from the displays that would have added to their understanding of these historic figures? For the most part, the visitors felt that the exhibition had been comprehensive, or reasoned – as at the Polar Museum - that they didn't know what they didn't know: 'I had really no expectations so I'm just happy with everything I learned. I did not think

about what I did not learn here!’ However, visitors who did identify areas for expansion focussed specifically on the personhood, and personal lives, of the explorers.

Some visitors expressed an interest in the specific histories of individuals – including how many men died on Scott’s first expedition (though this information was available in the *Men of Discovery* gallery) and what happened in subsequent ‘more well-known’ expeditions like Scott’s *Terra Nova* (a brief display on this is held in the *Heroes of the Ice* gallery). They also cited Captain Oates as someone they would be interested to learn more about. Oates’ story is outside the mission of this museum, as he did not travel south aboard the *RRS Discovery*, though the interest in further information about him indicates the conflation of figures and events from this period³⁴.

Visitors also sought to know more about the influences and mentors that sparked the Antarctic interests of Scott and his men – ‘what led them to be fascinated?’ with the Antarctic. Others wanted to learn more about the families left at home and how they coped with being apart from their loved ones for long periods. Both of these themes demonstrate an interest in the variety of people who informed and supported Heroic Age explorers, thereby making their exploration and achievements possible. In this way, the visitors revealed their understanding that the men were not individuals acting alone, but required broader networks for emotional support, as well as professional inspiration. Nevertheless, the fact that only a few visitors identified these themes as possible sources of further interpretation, while the vast majority felt content with the material already available, suggests that not enough is yet being done to encourage visitors to think beyond the famous names.

What works for the museum professionals at Discovery Point?

Alongside asking visitors about the themes of the exhibition, and the aspects of Heroic Age exploration that they would like to know more about, I also wanted to uncover what the museum professionals at Discovery Point thought of the museum in its current state. First, I asked about the aspects of the display which they found to be particularly effective, and for the most part, they found this question surprisingly challenging to answer. Rebecca³⁵, who works in heritage and exhibitions, initially struggled to think of anything at all in any of the gallery spaces, because she had such a long list in her mind of things that she wanted to change. She was quick to acknowledge that this didn’t necessarily mean that nothing was effective, but that she had spent so long thinking about changes to be made that she was struggling to think of the positives. Ultimately, she concluded that if there was something that she *didn’t* want to change, it would be the ship itself (even though she felt that there were things missing from it), because, ‘it’s the most authentic thing that we have.’

This underlying professional critique of the gallery spaces was a common theme in most of the interactions I had with the team at Discovery Point. Nevertheless, *The Adventure Begins* was identified by more than one member of staff as a strong part of the museum’s interpretative offering. Debbie, whose role is in exhibitions and interpretation, and Lucy, who works in education and outreach, both identified interactive displays and multimedia as particularly important parts of the galleries’ outputs, citing the film in *The Adventure Begins* as especially good. Debbie suggested that the film’s main strength lies in the histories that it includes of some of the men of the exhibition.

³⁴ This confusion is also attested to by the museum professionals, who told me that visitors regularly confused the *RRS Discovery* with Shackleton’s ship the *Endurance*, in spite of the fact that the latter currently rests at the bottom of the Weddell Sea.

³⁵ This name has been changed, full details in Appendix 2.

Many members of the museum team were quick to acknowledge that much of the written interpretation in the museum was focussed on the officer classes, and so any areas that mentioned working class crew members by name were seen in a positive light.

Sarah³⁶, who works in education and outreach, suggested that *Scientific Research and Exploration* was an effective part of the museum today. As well as describing it as a visually impactful space, she suggests that it is a good starting point for discussing the scientific work which took place on the expedition. She suggested that the displays in this room cover the scientific work in just the right amount of detail for their audiences, and could provide them with a jumping off point for their own research on this topic. Though Sarah was the only member of staff who selected this gallery as effective, many other members of the museum team expressed their interest in displaying more information about the scientific work undertaken on Scott's expedition.

Finally, Paula, who works in collections and exhibitions, felt that *Specification* and *The Shipyard* were the most effective galleries in the museum. She considered the information on shipbuilding to be well developed, suggesting that it would not require much editing to bring it 'up to date'. She also felt that the diorama in *The Shipyard* gave a good sense of scale when describing the boat building process in Dundee. She did, however, feel that more could be done to hammer home the impact of Dundonian boatbuilders on the production of the *RRS Discovery*, and to discuss the shipbuilding history of Dundee. This interest in providing more information on the ship's specific links to Dundee was another key aspect identified by many members of the museum team throughout the course of my fieldwork.

The professionals at Discovery Point therefore provided four main answers to this question on the effectiveness of the galleries today. Firstly, most of the people I interviewed suggested that they could think of a lot to edit, but that there were not many parts of the galleries that they thought were effective. However, three positive areas identified were: the discussion of working class members of the expedition (particularly via multimedia); the information on the scientific work undertaken by the crew; and the acknowledgement of the *RRS Discovery*'s particular links to Dundee. These three areas were particularly interesting, if not wholly surprising, as they represent three important points of expansion for the museum's redevelopment project, which was in its planning stage during my fieldwork. The members of the team were therefore most alert to where the displays did and did not interpret these themes, because they had already identified them as significant markers for the future. Moreover, they were particularly critical of the museum as it currently stood, because they were at the beginning of the process of redevelopment, considering the areas that they wanted to change and shape, and prioritising the galleries in terms of renovation.

What would the museum team like to change – exhibition styles

The museum professionals found it much easier to identify aspects of the museum's current displays that they would like to change. Sometimes, they expressed these views very strongly, as Rebecca did when she said,

Every single one of them [the galleries] has things that need to be changed. Not necessarily the story, that's probably not fair, but certainly how we do it, how we tell that story.

³⁶ This name has been changed, full details in Appendix 2.

As Rebecca's answer suggests, the professionals' thoughts can broadly be divided into two areas: changes to the style of the displays and changes to the themes explored.

In terms of proposed changes to the style of display, several members of the team considered the exhibition to be 'of its time'. As Lucy put it, when I asked her whether the galleries communicated what she would like them to:

No. They tell *a* story, in a very specific way and I think that it is a product of the era that it was created in. And that's not to say that there's anything inherently wrong with that, except that people now are different to people 20/30 years ago.

A specific example of what the museum professionals considered to be this older style of interpretation was the amount of information available to read in each gallery. Rebecca commented that, 'There's a huge amount of information and it's exhausting'. She suggested that layering interpretation – to allow some individuals to read the key points and 'move on', while simultaneously providing interested individuals with additional facts – would be the best way to address this issue.

What would the museum team like to change – exhibition themes

The museum team also wanted to address some of the key themes on display and, just like the visitors I interviewed, they wanted to include more personal stories of the ordinary men who spent time aboard the *RRS Discovery*. This ranged from providing information on how men would have worked in different areas of the ship; explaining their socio-economical backgrounds and how they got their roles onboard; to discussing in greater detail what they did in their downtime in Antarctica. Though this information is available in part in the *Men of Discovery* gallery, some of the professionals indicated that they wanted to expand this to include more than simply Scott's 1901-04 expedition. Sarah and Paula also both expressed a desire to build on the idea of leisure time to include information on the men's mental health in Antarctica. This might include how they dealt with isolation and the effects of the polar night, as well as separation from loved ones.

It is worth noting that, although a greater emphasis on leisure and mental health was mentioned by many of the museum professionals I interviewed in Dundee, these themes do not have a specific home in the museum's current redevelopment plan. I believe these discussions therefore stem from a tendency within the team, brought about by the redevelopment project, to think critically about the entirety of the museum. Though the financial and practical plans for the redevelopment do not include the *Men of Discovery* gallery, and there are no immediate plans to renovate it, the team have nonetheless entered a professionally critical phase. As a result, they cannot stop themselves from casting a critical eye over the whole of the exhibition as it currently stands. One of the major impacts of this project so far is therefore a shift in the institutional culture of the team at Discovery Point.

For the most part, however, the museum professionals' critiques of the current exhibition do tally with the areas slated for renewal as part of the redevelopment project. One important part of this project, as outlined in the next part of this chapter, is a reconsideration of the way that the museum deals with science and scientific research aboard the *RRS Discovery*. Rebecca suggested that the science that was currently on display needed to be brought up to date, and several members of staff also indicated that there was room to discuss the background of the research undertaken onboard

and how it feeds into modern environmental thinking. Debbie agrees that the interpretation as it currently stands has 'lost the importance of the scientific data', which acts as a historic baseline, and was also used to define environmental policy in its own right. This is particularly true of the oceanographic expeditions, which took place after Scott's expedition, researching the impact of commercial whaling on the Antarctic environment. Rebecca indicated that exploring this scientific legacy in more detail would provide new opportunities to discuss climate change, and the interpretation of climate change itself will form a major part of the redevelopment project.

Many of the museum professionals noted that the discussion of historic science could be employed to talk about the empirical aspects of early Antarctic exploration. In particular, the 'soft' colonialism inherent in western scientific research in the Antarctic at this time. Lucy tells me that the exhibition currently explains how Scott's expedition collected 'loads' of specimens, but that it does not say why this happened. She also describes a part of the exhibition which indicates that the men were told to 'stick a flag wherever', but does not address this in the detailed text. Underlying this conversation was the idea that scientific exploration was a foil for empirical expansion and that gathering data on these early expeditions was as much about staking a claim to parts of the Antarctic as about furthering scientific knowledge. Ultimately, Lucy says (as cited on page 15):

Actually, the only reason that we haven't been condemned as hugely problematic yet is because there weren't people. When they got to Antarctica there were just penguins. But you know, if there had been people down there, who's to say it would have been any different to the Pacific, or America or Africa. Like, just because there weren't people doesn't mean that there weren't the same ideologies driving those expeditions.

This view of the public conceptualisation of exploration in Antarctica as largely positive – because there was no indigenous human population – was described multiple times throughout my fieldwork. It was clear that the museum team had discussed this together in their preparation for the redevelopment project. Relatedly, there was also much examination of how the museum's interpretation would benefit from more contextual information surrounding the early 20th century. Rebecca says, 'We do need to talk about the motivations, and what the world was like when these men went off and how society is different today.'

When the museum team discuss the importance of contextualising Scott's 1901-04 expedition, they also frequently suggest that the best way to do this would be to broaden out the list of characters mentioned in the museum's interpretation. Sarah says that she would like to focus on the men as part of a collective, with support received from various other countries on the way down, as well as through the production of clothes and kit by indigenous people in the Arctic. Debbie takes this even further when she explains that she would like to: 'tell the story of the people, as much as possible, the whole community that was involved in *Discovery*, and that includes Dundee as well as people's families and fundraisers and everyone.' In this sense, the museum team are conceptualising the men of these expeditions as part of wide-ranging networks, encompassing a variety of individuals, who make their work possible. This is reflected in the way they were beginning to think about the proposed 'Race to the Pole' gallery in the museum's redevelopment. What was once going to be a straight exploration of Scott and Amundsen's journeys to the Pole, increasingly – even over the course of my fieldwork – began to be considered as a possible arena for exploring not only the many nations aiming to reach the pole at that time, but also the many people who assisted them.

What next for the museum at Discovery Point?

Professional reflexivity is a crucial part of museum practice. It provides the opportunity to consider what a museum already offers and find areas for improvement. More often than not, museums are limited in the ways they are able to respond to this analysis, perhaps producing temporary exhibitions, events or outreach activities to fill the gaps in their written interpretation. But sometimes, they have an opportunity to redevelop their permanent galleries. Discovery Point will soon undertake this work, producing major galleries concerned with science and climate change and the 'Race to the Pole'. It is therefore hardly surprising that the museum professionals identified themes related to these areas as inherently lacking in their current display.

The museum professionals have the luxury of sustained consideration of, and conversation around, the museum's key themes and how they are interpreted. It is important to remember this and that none of these behind-the-scenes conversations are available to the public (unless they are put on display). Additionally, *how* things are displayed, and even where they are displayed, also has an impact. As we have seen, visitors to Discovery Point began to think about heroes in a more community-minded way thanks to the museum's discussion of Scott's scientific work. But not many visitors spent time in this gallery, because it was in the second half of the museum, after a long film. The museum team are keen to represent Scott and Shackleton as part of much larger collaborative networks, but in order to achieve this in practice, they will have to thoroughly reconsider how and where they present this information to their visitors. The next section of this chapter will therefore deal specifically with the plans for the redevelopment project and what the museum team are aiming to achieve.

The Redevelopment Project

Throughout my fieldwork at Discovery Point, one frequent topic of conversation was the substantial redevelopment project taking place at the museum. It was to be split across two phases and when I arrived in the late summer of 2022 the first phase was drawing to completion, with an expectation that the second phase would begin in early 2024. The plans for the project were formed at least five years before my fieldwork, in part thanks to money coming into Dundee as a result of a wider redevelopment of the city's riverside area, including the opening of the V&A Dundee in September 2018. The project has so far been funded primarily by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Tay Cities Culture and Tourism Investment Programme, alongside a variety of smaller fundraising efforts made by Dundee Heritage Trust. However, there were some concerns within the museum team about fundraising in the current economic climate, which may delay the second phase – or perhaps mean that it will be split in two – so that an initial suggested end date of 2025 was not certain. Nevertheless, it was agreed that the redevelopment provided an opportunity to do something 'transformational' for the museum at Discovery Point.

Phase I

The first phase of the project centred around the development of the 'dome' in the museum building, and the creation of a new reception area. The dome is a large lantern-like structure on the top floor of the building, which was not previously open to members of the public but is now accessible via a spiral staircase and a lift from the newly refurbished reception. It houses an installation about Dundee's past, projected onto screens which eventually rise to reveal panoramic

views over the city of Dundee, the River Tay and the *RRS Discovery*. Alongside the projections about the history of Dundee, the dome has been fitted with an installation of the British artist Luke Jerram's work 'Gaia' (see Figure 7.11). This large 3D globe, projected with images supplied by NASA, will, it is hoped, give visitors a better understanding of the distances travelled by Antarctic explorers during their expeditions.

The new reception area's focus is more clearly geared towards the Antarctic themes of the museum. It is designed so that the staircase leading towards the dome forms a large 'ice core' plunging down from the roof of the building to the floor (see Figure 7.11). Ice cores are employed by scientists working in the polar regions to establish, amongst other things, the state of the atmosphere at different points throughout history, and are used extensively in climate science. This shift towards more scientific themes will be further elaborated in the second phase of the redevelopment. The new reception area did open to the public in the middle of my fieldwork. However, while the dome was also scheduled for an official opening during this period, unfortunately this did not happen, so I was unable to see the information to be projected about Dundee on the screens. I was, however, able to see the Gaia installation. Members of the public were first able to book tickets to visit the dome on 10th October 2022.



Figure 7.11. Internal views of Discovery Point, entrance and central 'ice core'.

Phase II

The second phase of the redevelopment project will involve the creation of three new galleries. A temporary exhibition gallery will be created in what is currently the museum's café. At the moment, the museum is only able to host temporary exhibitions of 2D objects on the café walls, which limits what they are able to put on display, and consequently, the themes they are able to explore. It is hoped that a dedicated temporary exhibition space will enable the museum team to host a wider variety of loans from other institutions, including the Scott Polar Research Institute.

The second key aspect of this phase will be the creation of a dedicated 'Climate Change' gallery. The museum team felt that this would likely be a 'destination' space – not part of the broader flow of galleries which currently leads visitors around the museum. The current plan for the climate change gallery is that it will be somewhere members of the public will visit after having been aboard the ship

(though this is not confirmed, and the site of the gallery may yet change). The reasoning behind making this gallery one that people visit separately to the rest of the exhibition is that it may help to put some of the historic scientific research covered in the displays on the ship itself into a broader context than simply the Heroic Age itself. This was one of the key points made by the museum team when they discussed the redevelopment project – that it would focus more clearly on the scientific history of the RRS Discovery, and that this would link to climate change.

The final gallery to be added to the museum as part of phase two of the redevelopment project will be called 'Race to the Pole'. This was sometimes referred to as the 'Scott/Shackleton' gallery by members of the broader Dundee Heritage Trust, but interestingly, in one of my meetings with the museum team, it was noted that 'we refer to it as the Race to the Pole gallery'. Debbie told me that the original plan for this gallery was to talk about the 'contrast' between Scott and Shackleton, but as the museum team researched this topic, it became apparent that this was a 'bit of a myth'. Instead, they have chosen to change the name of the gallery in order to broaden the discussion. Today, they plan to focus on Heroic Age expeditions from around the world, including Norway, Japan, Germany, France and Scotland. Part of this plan is also to uncover the lives and experiences of individual explorers, rather than focussing exclusively on household names. Debbie told me:

I think when they put in the bid for the project to get the funding, they just sort of thought 'oh what's a quick thing that we can say, let's go Scott and Shackleton'. But actually, the more interesting stories are the whole story.

The redevelopment project also has some aims less relevant to the specifics of my study. For example, the ship itself is likely to undergo conservation work during the second phase of the project. However, I do not believe that this will have either as significant or as immediate an impact on the public's understanding of the men of the Heroic Age as the interpretation in the new galleries. Additionally, it is possible that at least some of the existing galleries will be refreshed or refurbished as part of the project, but this is not the main focus, and as a result, the museum team were more concerned with the creation of the three new galleries during my fieldwork visit. Finally, some structural changes will take place to the building itself, including the installation of insulation, curtain walling and new windows, as well as the creation of a new café.

Key messages, key voices

The Race to the Pole is something that a lot of visitors comment on - that there isn't more about that. And I think the climate change thing [...] I suppose it was a desire to try and make [...] the science of Discovery more relevant to people – Rebecca.

For the rest of this section, my focus will be on the preparations for the Race to the Pole and Climate Change galleries by the curatorial, and education and outreach teams. These galleries are major aspects of the redevelopment project and require by far the most interpretation work by the museum team. They also bring to the fore some common themes about the museum and team at Discovery Point.

When asked to describe the key message or messages that would be communicated by these two new galleries, the museum team suggested first that the most important message they would like to get across was the relevance of the science undertaken on board the Discovery in the past to modern scientific knowledge and research. In terms of the voices needed to communicate this key message,

the team expressed an interest in enabling more partnership work with institutions such as the British Antarctic Survey and the Scott Polar Research Institute. The team frequently described their concern that the *RRS Discovery* is only known for Captain Scott's first 1901-04 Antarctica expedition, but the ship went on many further voyages over the course of its life including oceanographic excursions in the mid-1920s and the British, Australian and New Zealand Antarctic Research Expedition BANZARE expeditions between 1929-1931. These expeditions produced scientific data and knowledge that informs modern day science and it is hoped that they will also enable the team to expand the voices included in the stories about the ship. As Paula noted, 'I'm quite excited to tell those other stories of the other things that Discovery did which are equally as cool, equally as important and in some ways brings it back to Dundee as well'. This link to ordinary people – and the city of Dundee – is echoed in the team's plans for the Race to the Pole gallery.

The key aim of the Race to the Pole gallery will be to show that the Heroic Age was not just about Scott and Shackleton, but that there were many other explorers trying to reach the pole at the same time. The voices that the team intend to bring to this new gallery are equally diverse. Shipbuilders, crew, families and scientists – even those in Antarctica today – were all cited as candidates for inclusion. Most tellingly, in a discussion about this gallery, Paula tells me, 'we're not a Scott museum, I think that's the key thing for me.'

This was echoed by Lucy, who is involved in the development of new education and outreach material to accompany these new galleries. Though she acknowledged that, until the curatorial team were able to identify the specific objects for display in these galleries, outlining the specifics of the education and outreach offer would be challenging. This was in part because this side of museum practice can be employed to discuss the gaps in narratives which cannot be filled by curators either due to lack of suitable objects or lack of space: 'that's where programming and education can really pick up stuff, is those gaps'. While the general themes of the education and outreach plan are to include a broader variety of people in the stories which are told to museum visitors – including men and women not included in traditional Heroic Age narratives – they will also include specifics which are not clear until the curatorial work has been done, and this may be subject to some difficulties before it can be completed.

Potential difficulties

When I asked about the curatorial team's strategy for selecting objects for the new galleries, I was told that they were not quite at the stage of identifying individual objects, but that they were considering what stories they wanted to tell in these new spaces and would choose the objects from there. However, there are some influencing factors on these decisions, not least of which are past funding applications. As Paula put it,

There's no point in doing object selection if we don't have the money, but to fundraise we have to say we're going to do X, Y and Z, so the fundraising team were kind of the ones that were doing object selection. Because they had to tell people 'oh, we're going to have this fabulous thing' in order to get money out of them.

This situation highlights one of the many ways curatorial decision making in museums can be influenced by outside factors which may not only dictate the stories to be told, but also the voices to

be included in exhibition spaces. Even though it is a necessary part of the process – as Paula says, ‘there’s no point in picking objects for a gallery that we can’t fund.’

A further potential difficulty for the curators is the nature of inter-institutional loans, and this is particularly true for Discovery Point, which is a relatively new museum. Many of the objects in the Polar Museum’s collections, for example, were first donated more than half a century before Discovery Point was founded. There are objects in other museums in the UK that speak to the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration, but these are mostly unavailable to Discovery Point for a time period long enough to design the new galleries around them. Discovery Point is also limited insofar as other institutions with material of the right kind may already be telling stories with those objects in their exhibition spaces. As Debbie says, ‘there’s items that I would love to have, but also everyone else that’s telling the same story wants those items.’ However, one way that the museum is able to collect items is through donations, often from the descendants of individuals involved with these expeditions. While these donations help to bolster the museum’s collections, they may also be the source of potential difficulties for the museum.

As museums receive donations from the families of historic individuals, they may begin to feel a sense of responsibility to tell particular kinds of stories, or to tell them in a certain way. This is a phenomenon that I have recorded with regards to the Polar Museum and their collections (and was the focus of an excellent study by Claire Warrior (2017) at the National Maritime Museum). Moreover, the museum is also dependent upon these families to both identify potential objects of significance, and to donate them to the museum. This means that many objects may have gone through some element of ‘vetting’ before being considered for a new gallery or display. This process shapes the stories that can be told. It is impossible to tell how many objects of this kind never make it to museums because of the decisions of family members, but it is certainly clear that what is significant to a curator may be very different to what is important for a descendant. For example, Debbie mentioned a donation of notebooks belonging to a Dundonian glaciologist who had worked in Antarctica. She described how the family thought that these books were, ‘just scribbles and notes’, but for the museum, they were an invaluable insight not only into polar science, but also the life of a scientist working in the field.

Impact and a museological ‘echo chamber’

When I asked what impact the museum team hoped the redevelopment project would have on their visitors, Debbie told me,

It isn’t just a closed moment in history, the impact from 1901 is still here, very much, today in everything – like climate change, the politics of Antarctica, the movement of science, everything.

There was a discussion about how it was ‘ok to be proud’ of certain people and achievements, but also an acknowledgment that questioning ‘heroes’ and the events of the Heroic Age is an important aspect of the constant re-evaluation that is a part of museum practice. Nevertheless, it was broadly acknowledged that the new messages and voices identified for inclusion by the museum team may be somewhat challenging, both to visitors and to other museum professionals. The team expressed their understanding that they were a group of likeminded individuals and even described themselves, in their own words, as an ‘echo chamber’ on more than one occasion. The team is

predominantly comprised of women and a large proportion are recent graduates from museum-specialist higher education programmes. This means they have specific ideas about museum work, based in contemporary museology and calls to decolonise and democratise practice. As Rebecca put it, in relation to the politics of the Antarctic in particular, 'we do need to challenge people, because until I came to work here, I hadn't really thought about it.'

Ultimately, the museum team at Discovery Point have, through shared communication and discussion, shaped their professional culture. They have forged a set of narratives surrounding what they consider to be the important aspects of Scott's 1901-04 expedition, namely: the significance of science in Heroic Age expeditions, and the place of expedition leaders as one among many. Perhaps most importantly though, the team has forged a sense of professional critique – especially as a result of their place on the cusp of a major museum redevelopment – which permeates their work and the way that they relate to the museum in its current form. This project has already shaped the way the museum staff interact with each other, the discussions they have and the questions they are each pondering on a professional level. It acts as an invitation to critique – a prompt for a more robust consideration of the work that they are currently doing and how it could be different. While the team at the Polar Museum were happy to engage with professional critiques of their interpretation, this was not at the forefront of their minds in quite the same way that it was at Discovery Point.

8. Authenticity, relics and replicas

Objects hold a privileged place within museums. Indeed, for many it is the museum's inextricable relationship with objects that is at the heart of its cultural position (Dudley 2012, cf. Gurian 1999). It follows that any thorough investigation of the impact of museums on the way that Antarctic explorers are understood must engage with objects in detail. My own research is particularly concerned with revealing the entwined network of relationships encapsulated by these museum objects, and understanding how this may change over time. As a result, in the following chapters I will trace the stories of six objects – held at the Polar Museum and Discovery Point – in order to trace their connections to a variety of actors across time and space. These object itineraries (Bauer 2019) will touch on themes including: family networks, affect and aesthetics; research and institutional memory; and the inalienable body-proximity of certain objects to historical figures. However, there are also two broader themes present across these object itineraries: the concept of authenticity (including how this relates to replica objects) and the idea of secular 'relics' in museums. What follows in this chapter, therefore, is a brief discussion of these two cross-cutting themes, in order to provide the reader with the tools to better understand the specifics of the object itineraries to come.

Authenticity and replicas

In order to understand the significance of authenticity in this thesis, it may be helpful to briefly lay out the place of authenticity in anthropology more broadly. What do anthropologists mean when they talk about authenticity? Theodossopoulos suggests that authenticity, 'encompasses diverse sets of meaning that range from genuineness and originality to accuracy and truthfulness' (2013: 339). However, authenticity is a deceptively complex subject. The origins of this idea may be said to lie in historic European conceptualisations of social order – as Lindholm (2008) and Handler (1986), following (Trilling 1971) describe – ideas about authenticity can be connected to the transformation from a medieval to 'modern' world order. That is, following a historical shift from understandings of 'reality' as an encompassing cosmic world order defined by God, to something much more internal and individual, authenticity came to be a way of describing reality as something found deep within the self (Handler 1986). This shift also places religious emphasis on the inner conviction of the individual (and what might be described as their 'sincerity' Handler 1986; Trilling 1971) over external religious ritual. This shift acted as a kind of foundation to the idea of authenticity as a value in the West, and in this way, it became linked to 'modernity' and the individual, speaking to ideas of the original, the genuine and the truthful. Anthropologists have therefore noted that – when understood in this way – authenticity may be perceived as a kind of absolute value held within a particular person, object, production process or even cultural group (Cant 2019; Lindholm 2002; Terrio 1999).

Over time, the concept of authenticity has been increasingly studied across a variety of different academic contexts, from tourism (MacCannell 1976), to folklore (Bendix 1997) and religion (Lindholm 2002). With this expansion in authenticity studies, there has also been a shift away from the idea that there is one inherent (cross-cultural) 'authenticity', towards an appreciation of 'plural, multi-dimensional authenticities' (Theodossopoulos 2013: 340). That is, authenticity may be understood anthropologically as a process, meaning or context which is itself culturally specific. Building on this

idea, in Chapter 1, I set out the major arguments surrounding the ‘constructivist’ and ‘materialist’ responses to authenticity (Theodossopoulos 2013; Holtorf 2013). However, there are a variety of other, more specific ways in which this idea has been conceptualised, for example, as something which is publicly negotiated within a particular social context (Cant 2019; Lindholm 2008) or, in the case of objects in particular, as something linked to physical production processes, the identities of makers and users, or even brand names (Cant 2019; Field 2009). Ultimately, for the purposes of my work, authenticity might best be described as a value that *appears* to be tangible, or somehow essential to a given (museum) object, even though this is not truly the case.

The question of authenticity is particularly important to the study of museum objects and collections because, as Foster and Jones argue in relation to the heritage objects of their research, ‘as a rule, people do not value things that in their eyes are not authentic’ (2020: 31). As a result, museum objects may be treated differently if their authenticity is called into question, whether through provenance research or if the object is a replica of another (more) authentic object. A range of authors have also considered how authenticity relates to heritage work and museum collections more specifically (Chapagain 2017; Wood 2020), and one example of this is ‘experiential’ authenticity, which foregrounds the *relational* quality of what it means for an object to be authentic. That is, authenticity is produced through the direct interaction of visitors with objects that they consider to be ‘real’ in the museum environment (Rickly-Boyd 2012; Penrose 2017). This idea of authenticity as neither constructed nor inherent in objects, but as formed through relationships between objects and people is also evident in Jones and Yarrow’s (2013) study of stonemasons working at Glasgow Cathedral. Here, they describe how authenticity can be ‘crafted’ through the skill and expert practice of different kinds of conservation and heritage professionals, working to conserve the cathedral itself. Relational ways of defining the authentic such as these speak to the research outlined in Chapter 10, in which I unravel a story of mistaken identity surrounding different boat fragments in the collections of the Polar Museum. Though in many ways both objects are comparably ‘authentic’ in terms of their age and historic uses, it is nevertheless the connection – or not – of each to the historic figure of Sir Ernest Shackleton which shapes their place within the museum. That is, what makes one of these objects more significant – more authentic – than the other, is its *relationship* to a specific person in its life history.

Building on the work of Chapter 10, the object itineraries traced in Chapter 11 require both an understanding of authenticity and an appreciation of replicas. The question of replica objects is perhaps most famously taken up by Benjamin (2008 [1936]), who considers whether the mass production of objects through copies, including photographs, ultimately impacts the authenticity of the original. He is interested in whether modernity – that is, a world in which the production of replicas is not only possible but relatively easy – shapes our experiences of original objects as a result of the possibility of their reproduction. While scholars have since shown that the value of original objects is not inherently diminished by the production of replicas or copies (Pinney 2002; Steiner 1999), of particular relevance for my discussion of replicas is Benjamin’s conceptualisation of the ‘aura’ of (original) objects, created through the interaction between an object and a viewer. This idea of aura, or the ‘stickiness’ of objects is something that I will return to again in my discussion of hero objects in Chapter 14.

Though conceptually distinct from ‘originals’, replica objects have been employed by heritage and museum professionals to enable and enrich a variety of practices including research, sensory visitor

engagement and display (Amico *et al.* 2018; Foster and Curtis 2016; James 2016; Wilson *et al.* 2018). Moreover, museum visitors have been shown to be accepting of the display of replicas in museum galleries, particularly if the 'original' object no longer exists, its parts are too easily damaged, or it is not available for, but necessary to complete the story of, an exhibition (Schwan and Dutz 2020). Accordingly, some theorists have begun to call for replicas to be understood as important objects in their own right (Foster, Blackwell and Goldberg 2014). Through their work on the replica crosses of Iona, Foster and Jones argue that, 'the replica might be said to have its own life, albeit constrained and to some extent dependent on the original' (2020: 163). This is certainly true of the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* lifeboat discussed in Chapter 11, which is inextricably bound up with the *James Caird* lifeboat, of which it is a copy. In fact, the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* was produced not only as a physical replica, but also to undertake a replica journey that was first achieved by the *James Caird* during Shackleton's *Endurance* Expedition. In this way, the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* follows in a tradition of replicas made with the specific aim of reproducing historic feats (Lakey 1992). Nevertheless, while Foster and Jones (2020) suggest that replicas acquire their own 'authenticity' when understood as objects within their own context, this has not been the case for the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* lifeboat. In fact, this object is not part of the Polar Museum's collection *specifically because* of its replica status. As such, in this chapter, I have chosen to contrast it with a second object, the 'Raymond Plaque'. This rather unassuming object is treated entirely differently within the Polar Museum because of its perceived authenticity, nevertheless the somewhat tenuous nature of its claim to authenticity will be traced in this chapter.

Sacred objects and secular relics

Building on the idea of object authenticity, the analysis of sacred objects, relics and reliquaries also provides a helpful lens through which to explore the remaining object itineraries in this section. In Chapter 1, I identify that the hagiographies of the 'heroes' of the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration are akin to those produced for Christian saints (see Bartlett 2013 on histories of Christian saints and martyrs). However, another way in which these explorers can be compared to religious figures is through the transformation of their objects into 'relics', indeed, relics themselves are traditionally associated with religion (Knight 2010).

Morgan (2021) argues that religious objects, including relics, have agency: they have the power to act on both people and other objects. He identifies six different ways that religious objects can acquire such agency, several of which are relevant to my own research. In one instance, Morgan describes how objects can come to act on people as a result of their 'sensuous' characteristics, which he describes as 'aesthetic' agency, for example, he cites the power of gems (including gold, silver and 'jewels') in the medieval church. He notes the capacity of these beautiful objects to 'move' people as a result of their aesthetic presence, thereby causing them to contemplate a higher religious state than the earthly realm (2021: 18-19). This connects to my discussion in Chapter 9 of *Sir Ernest Shackleton's* sleeping bag, one of only a handful of notably aesthetically striking objects in the Heroic Age collection at the Polar Museum. Also evident in this object itinerary though, and relevant across *all* the objects of my research, is Morgan's suggestion that religious objects, 'possess power intrinsically because of their relation to a sacred person or place' (2021:10). He argues that this agency is inherent in the object and that relics are a particularly important example of this type of agency. A key example of this type of sacred object are relics created from the body parts of Christian saints, including their teeth, bones and hair (Morgan 2021: 13). While objects like these do not exist

in relation to Antarctic explorers in the collections of either the Polar Museum or Discovery Point, nevertheless Morgan's identification of the kind of agency bestowed on relics through their connection to the physical bodies of religious figures does come to bear on my research. In Chapters 12 and 13 in particular, I consider equipment employed by explorers in the Antarctic that would have come into direct contact with the men's bodies: a sleeping bag and a pair of goggles. In this way, these objects act as 'contact relics' for the Antarctic explorers who used them (Browett 2017; Bynum 2004). Finally, in the study of these pieces of equipment, my work draws parallels with a third kind of agency identified by Morgan (2021: 15-16): 'instrumental' agency, which describes how some objects work alongside the human body, in order to augment what is possible by the body alone. Here, again, the sleeping bag and snow goggles both allow the body to survive in the otherwise hostile environmental extremes of the Antarctic, and they have become important museum objects as a result of this connection to the bodies of particular explorers.

Crucially for my research, Morgan suggests that objects act as part of larger networks of actors that also (often) include people, though they can also be part of networks that contain other kinds of things. Moreover, he outlines three key themes in his work: networks, agency and what he terms 'focal objects' – within the context of religion, these might be altars, holy images of saints or gods, or relics/reliquaries. Ultimately, he describes these as 'nodes within a network, places where a number of strands fuse, enabled access to the broader network' (221: 184). This parallels what I will later describe as 'hero objects' in museum collections – key objects that also hold a certain level of 'aura' or 'stickiness', they are the place at which people, objects, institutions across a variety of timelines, meet and interact.

Though relics are frequently associated with religion, Osterholtz (2025) describes relics as objects imbued with a particular kind of 'charismatic' power, which derives from their connection to people. The concept of the relic can thus be broadened out to encompass what are often termed 'secular' relics, associated with different kinds of significant individuals, whether they be ancestors, royalty, heroes or celebrities (Hooper 2014; Lutz 2015). Hahn (2016) for example, describes Napoleon as one of the earliest celebrities, as well as a source of many relics. Secular relics may also be formed as a result of an object's relationship to 'martyrs' who have died not for religion, but for some other cause. In the case of the men of early Antarctic exploration, this cause may be the service of empire, science, masculinity, or even ego (see Chapter 1). This is perhaps unsurprising when we consider that death – and particularly the death of a martyr – was historically a significant factor in becoming a Christian saint, and therefore the originator of the traditional form of religious relics (Geary 1986). Moreover, as Hahn (2016) notes, relics are not only *indexical* of particular people, but they can also transcend boundaries – even those between the living and the dead – meaning that the viewer can form a kind of attachment or relationship with historical figures through engagement with their relics. So it is that relics are, as Morgan (2021) argues, actors in networks that include people – they have agency, and the capacity to act on viewers. As Hahn writes, relics 'adeptly seize their audience's imagination and propel it on a trajectory that leads to distant destinations, from here and now to *there* and *then*' (2016: 6).

It is widely held that things do not immediately become relics simply as a result of their connection to a specific celebrity, hero, or religious leader, but that they must first undergo some kind of *process* (Geary 1986; Hahn 2016; Hutchings and MacKenzie 2016; Morgan 2021; Osterholtz 2025). Paine suggests that when things enter into a museum collection, this is akin to the 'sacralization' of

religious objects as they transform into relics – he even argues that museums are traditionally architecturally designed in order to appear like ‘modern secular temples’ (2020: 77). In both instances, the object is removed from one context and receives a new, different kind of value in its new context. As a result, while the museum may act as a reliquary for secular objects, it might also be considered as akin to a cenotaph, memorial or even a shrine (Paine 2020). This is particularly the case for memorial museums (Paine 2020; Williams 2011) and while traditionally, these are connected memorialising people lost to war and atrocities, the Polar Museum itself was also originally founded to act as a memorial to Scott and the men who died with him in the Antarctic. So it is that certain museum objects, as with relics in reliquaries, stand in for the missing dead. Through their objecthood, they provide a physical link to the past, and even the past body of a historic individual.

While the act of being kept in a reliquary continues to reproduce a relics’ significance (Geary 1986; Hahn 2016), the same is certainly also true of museum objects. Therefore, understanding secular relics within the museum context, and how this may shape their relic-status is an important part of understanding their ongoing life histories. I therefore trace the impact of museum usage on an object’s life history. In particular, in Chapter 9, I consider Sir Ernest Shackleton’s sledging flag, whose status as a relic is perhaps most clearly evident in its use to memorialise Shackleton in a service of remembrance at Westminster Abbey. In addition to this single act of memorialisation, I also ask how the influence of family, and aesthetics and affect, shape the life history of this object, which has come – literally – to stand in for its previous owner.

The contextual understanding of secular relics and museums-as-reliquaries – or even cenotaphs – as described above does not, however, explain why *some* museum objects become relics while others do not. This, I argue, is not only where their connections to particular individuals come into play, but also the specificities of their object life histories. I term objects that are held in especially high regard within their museum contexts as ‘hero objects’, a phrase that I will consider in greater detail in Chapter 14. But, in part, this idea can be understood through Hahn’s (2016) suggestion that clothing may be particularly important in the production of relics because it was worn close to the skin. While Hahn describes the hat worn at Waterloo by Napoleon, I trace the life histories of Captain Oates’ sleeping bag and Captain Scott’s goggles in Chapters 12 and 13 – the final two chapters in this section. Taken together, these are perhaps the two most significant ‘relics’ in the collections at the Polar Museum and Discovery Point respectively, and this, I argue, is as a result not only of their connections to two significant figures from the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration, but also because of what I term their ‘inalienable body-proximity’ to these figures. Through their intimate links to the bodies of these Antarctic explorers, they might even provide secular examples of the corporeal objects that are so well associated with traditional religious relics (Geary 1986; Hahn 2016; Knight 2010; Morgan 2021).

Like the hub of a wheel, objects – whether ‘authentic’, replica or relic – link the people who made them with the people who used them *and* the people who see them on display; the tools that forged them become linked to tools they were used alongside *and* those of the museum conservator. Objects embody a line to multiple pasts, stretching into a network of human and non-human agents, all connected. By working outwards from specific objects and uncovering the relationships in which they are entangled, we can begin to form a picture of the individuals, but also the *power* that shapes them.

9. Shackleton's sledging flag: family connections



Figure 9.1. Y: 2002/2/4 - Shackleton's sledging flag.

Table 1: MODES record on Shackleton's Sledging Flag

Object no.	Y:2002/2/4
Brief description	A red and gold sledging flag with goldwork embroidery. Used by Ernest Shackleton on the British Antarctic Expedition 1097-09 (Nimrod). Ross Dependency. Antarctic regions
Note	Flag should be flown with cross top left corner
Description	A sledging flag made of red and gold fabric and cord goldwork embroidery; the design of which is the same on both the front and back. The flag appears to have been made in three strips – a top gold strip, a central red strip, and a bottom gold strip which have been sewn together and the outer edges of which are edged in cord of the same colour. The central red strip has a diamond-shaped motif in goldwork embroidery repeated three times. A red square of fabric, edged with red cord, and with a goldwork embroidery square cross has been sewn afterwards into the top left-hand corner. Two wide loops in a plain fabric have been sewn to the top and bottom of the flag along the left-hand edge, and an eyelet has been sewn into the bottom left-hand corner, through which is a string tassel.
Material	fabric
Keyword	flags
Measurement	Height 750mm Width 705mm Depth 70mm
Period	1900s
Acquisition	Bequest 2000 from Mrs Rena Dodds, distant cousin, friend and companion of Shackleton's daughter Cecily who died in 1957.
Association	Used by Ernest Henry Shackleton, 1907-09 on the British Antarctic Expedition (Nimrod)
Exhibition/ access information	• Internal exhibition: Hidden Shackleton 2004-05 • External exhibition: The 9th Annual Shackleton Autumn School 23 to 26.10.2009 Athy Heritage Centre- Museum • Off site for specialist conservation 20.11.2009 - 5.3.2010 • Photography for Antarctic Cataloguing Project 2014-16 21.10.2015, 17.11.2015 • Temporary display: A Centenary Service of Thanksgiving for the Courage and Endurance of Sir Earnest Shackleton CVO and his men 20.5.2016 Westminster Abbey -To be supervised by SPRI staff at all times • Moved as part of emergency planning – Museum store A, Plan Chest B, Drawer 2 25.5.2016 • Research visits: Shackleton Design and Manufacturing Co Ltd. Removed to Lecture Theatre for use in talk to company founders and staff. Sledge flag used as part of demonstration illustrating connections between Shackleton legacy and SPRI as part of preliminary discussions for a commercial relationship between Shackleton clothing company and Fitzwilliam Museum Enterprises 11.8.2021 Further visits by the company to research for the development of trim details of future Shackleton garments 23.2.2023 & 6.12.2021

In early 1915, Shackleton's ship *Endurance* became stuck fast in sea ice in the Weddell Sea. Trapped for several months, she was eventually crushed by the pressure of the ice and sunk in November 1915. Stranded miles off the coast of Antarctica, Shackleton and his men camped on the ice for several months. Then, taking advantage of a brief gap in the weather, all 28 men made a daring voyage in open-topped lifeboats to the remote Elephant Island. From there, Shackleton and five others: Worsley, Crean, McNeish, McCarthy and Vincent again took to a lifeboat, sailing 800 nautical miles in some of the roughest seas in the world, to the Island of South Georgia. A storm and damage to their boat forced the six men to land on the opposite side of the island to the whaling station they were hoping to reach. Leaving their three weaker companions behind, and promising to return, Shackleton, Worsley and Crean walked continuously for 36 hours over uncharted terrain filled with glaciers and mountains to the other side of the island. Here, at the whaling station at Stromness, the men were finally able to sound the alarm that the crew of the *Endurance* were stranded on Elephant Island. Sea ice and bad weather meant that it took Shackleton four attempts to rescue his crew, but he was eventually successful, and every man who had travelled south aboard the *Endurance* survived³⁷.

In 2016, a memorial service took place 100 years to the day after Shackleton, Frank Worsley and Tom Crean made the first recorded crossing of the island of South Georgia – completing the final leg of what would become one of the most famous feats of survival in Antarctic history. The service at Westminster Abbey in London was a celebration of Shackleton's achievements as the expedition's commander and a memorial to both Shackleton and his men. It was attended by Princess Anne, senior members of the Church of England, and important figures from across British polar heritage, research and exploration. Also present at this celebration was Shackleton's sledging flag (Figure 9.1).

His sledging flag, held in our museum collection, was presented to the Dean of Westminster at the High Altar during the Canterbury Service of Thanksgiving for Sir Ernest Shackleton and his Men, held at Westminster Abbey in May 2016 (Connelly 2016: 21).

Diana, who worked in conservation and collections care at the Polar Museum at that time, was at this service in Westminster Abbey, tasked with safeguarding the flag and transporting it to the altar in a highly choreographed procession at the very beginning of the service. The flag had been chosen to 'stand in' for Shackleton and had been specially framed for the event. It was left on a large easel by the altar for the duration of the service, and its physical presence called to mind the man to whom it had once belonged. Nevertheless, while this flag had been used on Scott's first two journeys to the Antarctic, it had not been taken on the *Endurance* Expedition at all. How it came to be at this service, standing in for Shackleton, is therefore a testament to the interaction between polar families' interest in the representation of their ancestors, the way that museums engage with family objects, and aesthetics.

³⁷ It is sometimes said that every member of the *Endurance* Expedition survived. However, the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition 1914-17 (*Endurance*) was actually made up of two crews, one aboard the *Endurance*, and another aboard the ship *Aurora*. The *Aurora* and her men were stationed on the other side of the continent, in the Ross Sea, laying food and fuel depots for what they thought would be the second half of Shackleton's trek across Antarctica. They had no contact with the crew of the *Endurance* and did not know that the ship had sunk, meaning that the expedition could no longer go ahead as planned. Tragically, three members of the 'Ross Sea Party' lost their lives during the expedition.

What is a sledging flag?

Sledging flags are both peculiarly British and rather rare, having only been in use for a relatively brief period from the 1850s to the early 20th century (Carr 1941). Initially, British naval men – who were well used to flags as part of their daily paraphernalia – affixed ensigns to lifeboats which were sometimes used on land to man-haul equipment and provisions across icy Arctic landscapes. As Arctic exploration and travel became more practiced, naval officers began to substitute the heavy and unwieldy lifeboats for sledges. Replacing boats with sledges made man-hauling easier, extended the seasonal period in which men could travel, and meant that they could explore further afield when their ships were frozen into the ice³⁸. The traditional naval practice of flying flags persisted, and the sledges were adorned with flags, just as the lifeboats had been.

In 1845, Sir John Franklin led a two-boat expedition to the Arctic in the hope of being the first man to find and navigate the fabled Northwest Passage: a path through the complex waterways of the Canadian archipelago from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast of North America (Byard 2021). Franklin and his men were never heard from again, but around 36 parties ventured north to try and save, supply or relieve them (Ross 2002). As more men went to the Arctic on these expeditions, more sledges were used and sledging flags became increasingly popular (Tomlinson 2001). Initially, each man-hauling party would work under a different sledging flag, giving the men a spirit of camaraderie and friendly rivalry between teams. Slowly, these flags came to be associated more with individual officers than teams of men, until, by the time of Scott's *Discovery* Expedition, many of the officers had a flag of their own. Shackleton's sledging flag, displayed during the 2016 memorial service for his Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition 1914-17 (*Endurance*), was in fact made for him for his first trip to the Antarctic in 1901, aboard Scott's *Discovery*.

Traditionally, sledging flags were sewn for officers by wives, mothers, or other female family members. Although it is not certain who produced Shackleton's sledging flag, at the time of the *Discovery* Expedition, he had not yet married Emily Dorman (Figure 9.2) and so it is most likely that it was produced by one of his relations. As well as his mother, Henrietta, Shackleton had eight sisters (Fiennes 2021), so there were many candidates to create the flag for him. The sewing of these sledging flags by loved ones meant that they represented an important connection to home. Moreover, they are a physical expression of care, enacted by women for their explorer husbands, brothers and family members. This is particularly poignant at this time, when women would have been left at home, cut off from contact with the explorers for months and even years at a time. This was, in many ways, as close to the Antarctic as any of these women were ever likely to get, no women being permitted to travel to Antarctica at this time³⁹.

³⁸ Man-hauling was the act of pulling sledges through man-power alone, rather than utilising dogs or motorised sledges.

³⁹ In fact, the British Antarctic Survey (part of the Natural Environment Research Council) would not send women to Antarctica until 1983 (Seag 2017).



Figure 9.2. Emily Dorman
Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.

The emotional power of sledging flags was highlighted in a conversation I had with Diana about Edward Wilson – surgeon and zoologist on the *Discovery* Expedition and Captain Scott's right-hand man – about his sledging flag on Scott's ill-fated *Terra Nova* Expedition:

...there was an argument between him and Scott about the sledging flag because he wanted to bring it with him and Scott said, 'I don't want to bring this, it's just too much weight' and Wilson writes in his diary, 'I'm going to sew it into my underwear if I'm not allowed to bring it!'

While Wilson's wife, Oriana, had sewed him a different sledging flag for both of his Antarctic expeditions, Shackleton took the same flag on his first two journeys south: Scott's *Discovery*, and his own *Nimrod* Expedition. Shackleton's sledging flag, along with those of Scott and Wilson, is visible in a photograph of the men at the furthest south recorded on the *Discovery* Expedition (Figure 9.3). As Nigel, the curator, once wryly told me:

Shackleton had that rather large one, if you've seen in the photographs when Scott, Wilson and Shackleton went to the far south on the *Discovery* Expedition in 1902 you'll see he's got the big one...



Figure 9.3. Shackleton, Scott and Wilson, starting for the Great South Journey during the British National Antarctic Expedition. 2 November 1902. Photograph taken by an unidentified photographer. National Library of New Zealand wikimedia commons.

As well as being unusually large, it is an entirely different shape to other British sledging flags of this time, which were usually much thinner and pennant shaped. It is visually striking, measuring 705 mm wide by 750 mm high, and also rather beautiful. Made from three panels of alternating gold and scarlet silk, it is decorated with three 'buckles' of gold cord embroidery, and in the top left hand corner is a smaller scarlet silk square, with a gold embroidered cross. It is both unmissable and unmistakable to those interested in the history of British Antarctic exploration. So how did it come to be at the Polar Museum and, later, part of the memorial service at Westminster Abbey?

At home with the family

Shackleton's reputation among the professionals at the Polar Museum is of a man who regularly gave away his belongings, especially kit and equipment, to friends and acquaintances. Sometimes, this idea is employed to explain why Shackleton material is less abundant in the museum's collections than, for example, objects pertaining to Scott (see Chapter 5). Informally, there is even a sense that there may be Shackleton objects scattered in private households across the world, residing with the ancestors of the people he met and gave things to during his voyages. This in part explains the need for the HLF funded project *Collecting Cultures: The Shackleton Project: By Endurance We Conquer* which was designed to allow the museum to collect Shackleton material from private sources (I discuss this in more detail in Chapter 11, in relation to the 'Raymond Plaque'). In spite of his reputation as a prolific gift-giver, however, Shackleton did retain some objects – including his sledging flag – which were passed down to his family following his death aboard the ship *Quest* on 5th January 1922. In the following years, a small amount of Shackleton material came to the Scott Polar Research Institute; a move to which Shackleton himself had been amenable, during a discussion at the Royal Geographical Society in 1921 (Brown et. al. 1921). However, the sledging flag and certain other objects remained in the family, eventually becoming the property of his daughter, Cecily (Figure 9.4).



Figure 9.4. Cecily Shackleton
Courtesy of the National Portrait
Gallery.

Cecily Shackleton dedicated her life to supporting the polar and political career of her elder brother, Raymond. This, according to Hanrahan (2019) was a gift of emotional labour and practical support which ultimately allowed her brother to continue the family name as a polar explorer, but permitted Cecily little time for a private life. Cecily never married but, in later life, moved in with distant cousins, bringing with her the family collection of objects relating to Ernest Shackleton and his expeditions, of which she had been the custodian. Following Cecily's death in 1957, these objects were passed to Mrs Rena Dodds, the cousin with whom Cecily had been living. The collection, including the sledging flag, remained with Mrs Dodds until her death in 1999. At this time, 'Shackletonmania' was taking hold in Britain and North America (Farley 2005), raising questions about the next appropriate resting place for what remained of Shackleton's material legacy.

Eventually, the sway of Shackleton's rising star led to calls for a sale of what was now being termed the 'Shackletoniana' that Mrs Dodds had previously inherited from Cecily Shackleton. Mixed opinions within the family meant that a plan was formed:

Mrs Dodds' executors and beneficiaries, in consultation with members of Shackleton's family, have developed a plan whereby the diaries, with other major items, should be passed to the Institute for safe-keeping, preservation, and where they will become available to scholars. The Institute already has copies of some of the items (*Aurora Australis*, the first book published in Antarctica, is one example). These, with other selected items, are to be sold for Mrs Dodds' estate. Some of the 'Shackletoniana' has recently been shown in special exhibitions arranged at the Scott Polar Research Institute and Dulwich College (Headland 2001).

So it was that almost all of the Shackleton material that had belonged to Mrs Dodds, passed to her by Cecily, was brought to SPRI. It was then sorted through by Nigel, the curator of the museum at that time, working alongside another member of the family, the Hon. Alexandra Shackleton, Sir Ernest Shackleton's granddaughter. The collection was divided into three groups. Firstly, things considered important enough to be accessioned into the Institute's collections: the sledging flag was part of this first and most important group. The second group contained things which would also, if possible, be acquired by the Institute, and in the third group were things which would be sold by Christie's Auction House. In the end, everything in the third category was sold, raising enough money for SPRI to be able to keep all the objects in both the first and second groups.

As is often the case when objects are brought into a museum from a family collection, one of the first tasks Nigel had to complete after identifying the objects for accession was repacking them in order to minimise damage. When the flag was first brought to the museum to be sorted, ahead of the Christie's sale, it was folded up in a brown envelope with a small note attached outlining its significance. When its importance to the collections at SPRI had been confirmed, Nigel removed it from this envelope and mounted it on polycarbonate sheeting to keep it flat and supported. Folding textile objects like the sledging flag can be very harmful, weakening the material at the site of the folds and causing damage over time which can be costly to repair. Eventually, the flag was framed and stored in the archive at SPRI. This was somewhat unusual, as the flag had been accessioned into the museum's collection, but owing to its unusual size it required a lot of space to be stored flat in its frame, and so the archive was deemed most suitable at this time. It remained either in the archive store or on display, either internally or as part of an external loan, until late 2009 when it was moved to the museum store for the first time.

Out on display

The sledging flag was first displayed at SPRI in the temporary exhibition *Hidden Shackleton* from May 2004 – March 2005. This drew on both the newly acquired material, which had come into the museum following the period of ‘Shackletonmania’ in the 1990s, and the donation from Shackleton’s family at the turn of the millennium. In the official description of the exhibition on the museum’s website it states:

The exhibition is a rare chance to see Shackleton's Antarctic sledging diaries from the *Discovery*, *Nimrod*, *Endurance* and *Quest* expeditions. Original letters and charts are on display as well as the beautiful red and gold sledging flag, flown at the farthest south, during the *Discovery* and *Nimrod* expeditions (Scott Polar Research Institute 2004).

The fact that the sledging flag was singled out as one of the key items on display in this exhibition shows the regard with which it was held by the curator of the exhibition, and the assumption that it was something the public would be particularly interested in coming to see.

Following the *Hidden Shackleton* exhibition, the sledging flag remained in the archive store at the Institute for three years before being put on display in an exhibition to commemorate the centenary of Shackleton’s 1907-09 *Nimrod* Expedition. This temporary exhibition, held in a part of the Institute’s Museum now fittingly referred to as the ‘Memorial Hall’⁴⁰, ran from 21st October 2008 to 4th April 2009, with the flag installed in the exhibition space for several days before and after these official dates. This was the last temporary exhibition before the museum was closed for refurbishment, opening again in 2010. The decision to dedicate this final exhibition to one of Shackleton’s lesser known expeditions speaks volumes to the assumed draw of the Shackleton name, and the Institute’s perceived sense of responsibility to record the centenaries of ‘Heroic Age’ expeditions. It is instructive that the web page for this exhibition, rather than describing the content of the exhibition as on the *Hidden Collections* webpage, mainly tells the story of the *Nimrod* Expedition (Scott Polar Research Institute 2008).

In late 2009, the sledging flag was sent out on loan to the Athy Heritage Centre and Shackleton Museum in County Kildare, Ireland. This museum, close to Shackleton’s birthplace in Kilkea, hosts a regular ‘Autumn School’ – a conference for people with a special interest in Shackleton and his expeditions to come together to discuss his life’s work. The loan of the sledging flag to the museum in Athy for this purpose again highlights its status as an important object, worth the not inconsiderable provision of staff time, museum finances and resources to send it to County Kildare for this relatively short event. In total, twelve items from the museum’s collection went to Athy on this loan, with the vast majority of those objects being related to the *Nimrod* Expedition. The sledging flag was by far the largest and most difficult to transport of these items, again emphasising its significance as an object for the memorial of Shackleton and this expedition⁴¹.

⁴⁰ This name came into popular use within the Institute following the 2010 redesign of the museum space. Previously, and at the time of this *Nimrod* exhibition, the space was referred to as the ‘Museum domes’ referring to its highly decorated ceiling paintings depicting the Arctic and Antarctic, which are original to the 1934 building.

⁴¹ For a full list of the objects in this loan, please see Appendix 5.

Bringing colour to a very brown museum

In 2010, after its return from the museum in Athy, the sledging flag was sent for professional conservation by textile conservators external to the museum. This was in preparedness for the flag's display in the new permanent gallery, following the Polar Museum's period of refurbishment. Curating the new galleries in the museum required a thorough consideration of the objects to be displayed and the stories that they would be employed to tell. But this process also included more practical considerations, including the size and shape of objects, whether they were in a stable enough condition to be put on display and as the curator, Joy, described, their visual impact:

The sledging flags I think, I mean apart from anything else, they bring colour to what is otherwise a very brown museum, if you're not careful.

It is rare for objects at the Polar Museum to be valued in terms of their aesthetics, and interesting to note that this is one of the only places that this idea came up during my fieldwork. In a collection largely dedicated to historic expedition kit and equipment, few objects can be said to be genuinely visually striking, in spite of the fact that they represent a variety of engaging and unusual stories. However, the qualities which give the flag its aesthetic power may also be the reason why it was removed from display just four years later in 2014. As Diana said:

...to be honest I think it shouldn't be on display all the time like that because it is, well it's a silk textile and it's red and it's not good for things to be out indefinitely. I don't know whether it's going out again, but it's been off display for quite a long time, but available to visit if people want to see it.

It is exactly this kind of concern for the 'fragile physical object' (as outlined in Chapter 3) – made in a delicate material, dyed a very light-sensitive colour – which typifies museums' collections care principles. Putting the physical care of the object first will enable the sledging flag to be preserved in perpetuity, as is the responsibility of the staff of the Polar Museum. But while the sledging flag is no longer on permanent display to the public, its story has not ended.

A royal ceremony and a not-so quiet life

In 2016, as mentioned above, the sledging flag was present at the memorial service to commemorate the life and bravery of Sir Ernest Shackleton and the men of his *Endurance* Expedition 100 years before (Figure 9.5). It was selected for the task as an important object with direct links to Shackleton. Accordingly, its condition was checked before it was packed by conservation staff at the Polar Museum and carefully driven from Cambridge to London by Diana, with another member of staff in attendance too. It was transported directly to Edward the Confessor's chapel at Westminster Abbey where it was continually supervised by conservation staff, despite this chapel being separated from the rest of the Abbey by an iron gate, until it was time for it to be processed. The flag was carried – flat, in the interests of object safety – down the aisle during the service, by two of Shackleton's great-nephews. When the men had brought their ancestor's flag to the altar, Diana, and another member of conservation and collections staff, were there to meet them. Performing a move which had been carefully rehearsed, the four placed it on the altar and Diana remained standing close by for the duration of the service. As she says:

So that sort of stood in for Shackleton at this event, so there you go, that's a relic, that object, if ever there was one.

In spite, or perhaps because, of its 'relic'-like status, upon its return from Westminster Abbey, the flag was not put back on display in the Polar Museum.



Figure 9.5. Shackleton sledging flag at the 2016 service
© 2025 Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey.

Though it may seem contradictory for an object to be kept off display *because* of its significance, as noted by Diana earlier in this chapter, sometimes the physical demands of display are too much for particularly delicate or frangible objects. In these instances, the importance of stabilising their 'physical fragility' (as outlined in Chapter 3) is brought to the fore. Nevertheless, the significance of these objects can be reflected in their ongoing treatment in the stores themselves. Indeed, perhaps the most significant change that has happened to the sledging flag since it has been held in store at the Polar Museum, is that in 2018 it was designated an 'emergency salvage object'. This is an important status only granted to a handful of objects in the museum's stores. These objects are specially marked and labelled so that emergency services personnel would be able to recognise – and hopefully salvage – them in the case of an emergency situation. While all the objects in the stores are important within the context of the museum, those designated as 'emergency salvage' are, in Diana's words:

...essentially your list of the things that are the most iconic/important or significant or whatever it is – that you think are the most important things in your collection, that you would want to rescue if you haven't got very long and you've got to make a difficult decision, then those are the things you get out first.

This category is open to change, and some objects may be designated as part of the emergency salvage collection at certain points and replaced by others over time. However, the current designation of the sledging flag is certainly of significance to its life history, even though it took place without the flag leaving the store.

Finally, one of the most recent additions to the sledging flag's object itinerary has come in the form of a series of research visits from representatives of the luxury expedition-wear brand *Shackleton*, run by the Shackleton Design and Manufacturing Co. Ltd. The company's remit straddles high-end expedition clothing and adventure tourism, and they take their namesake very seriously, describing him as the 'Inspirer-in-Chief' on their website (Shackleton n.d. a). *Shackleton* also launched the 'Shackleton Medal' in 2022, to celebrate individuals working for the protection of the polar regions and Shackleton's ideals (Shackleton n.d. b). Members of the company have visited the museum and toured the collection store on several occasions, to research and review clothing and equipment taken to the Antarctic during the Heroic Age of exploration, with the aim of informing their contemporary designs. Shackleton's flag was shown to several professionals from the company by members of collections care staff in 2021, and 2023. The buckle motif on the sledging flag was later adapted (and copyrighted) by Shackleton Design and Manufacturing Co. Ltd. to form the logo of their 'Challenger' clothing line, described on their website as a range of 'elite technical apparel' (Steele 2023: para 1). After his session with the company representatives, Sam who works in collections care and with the volunteers at the museum, told me that the flag had caused quite a stir when one of the visitors from the clothing company asked how much they would need to pay to buy it for themselves. Sam suggested that he thought they might be hoping to hang the flag on the wall of the company's offices. The rules of museum accessioning and de-accessioning were explained to the would-be buyer, who was disappointed not to be able to own a piece of Shackleton for themselves.

My own influence

At this juncture, it is important to note the impact of my work in the museum on the life history of the sledging flag. In 2019, I worked with the flag in the museum store, as part of my role as Collections Cataloguer at the Polar Museum. I was hired with the specific aim of producing a series of films to showcase the Shackleton collections held by the museum. This was to round up the work on *Collecting Cultures: The Shackleton Project: By Endurance We Conquer* – a National Heritage Lottery Funded grant that provided the Polar Museum with money to acquire new objects relating to Sir Ernest Shackleton. The sledging flag film proved popular, being viewed more than 14,000 times in the first three years after it was put on the museum's website in 2019⁴². So it is that the sledging flag continues to commemorate Shackleton and educate the public about his Antarctic expeditions, even though it has not moved from the museum store in nearly a decade.

⁴² The sledging flag film was part of a set of three films that were collectively viewed more than 50,000 times over this three year period. These films can be accessed here: <https://www.spri.cam.ac.uk/museum/shackleton/videos/>

I chose the flag for the film project because it had been owned by Shackleton, and because of the stories that it could be used to tell. In particular, this flag can highlight women's shift, over the past 100 years, from being simply the makers of sledging flags, to Antarctic explorers and researchers in their own right. However, I also chose it for its aesthetic appeal, which I knew would be popular online. As a result, I have directly contributed to the flag being seen by a much wider audience – a group who have not had to venture to the museum or arrange a private viewing in order to engage with it. Indeed, the museum's own webpage about the flag hosts the film that I researched, wrote and delivered, so that anyone interested in this object is likely to hear about it through my own words (Scott Polar Research Institute 2019a). In my academic work, the fact of my choosing the sledging flag as one of the five objects for discussion in this thesis adds another layer of interpretation and significance to the object. The ongoing impact of my decision-making on these objects, as a result of my research (which I discuss in Chapter 1) should not be overlooked in the history of this object.

The power of family, affect and aesthetics

More than any other feature of its life story, this sledging flag was selected to 'stand-in' for Shackleton at the 2016 memorial service in Westminster Abbey because it had accompanied him to the Antarctic. But Shackleton had been to the Antarctic many times over the course of his life, taking many different objects with him, as well as taking a variety of objects on his 'furthest south' journeys. Moreover, while the service celebrated the centenary of Shackleton's *Endurance* Expedition, as we have seen, the sledging flag was made significant through its use on the *Discovery* and *Nimrod* expeditions, not the *Endurance* at all. So why was it that this object specifically was chosen, when others with these polar credentials were also available? I believe that it is the overlapping strands of the Shackleton family, affect and aesthetics – as well as the flag's own semiotic power as an icon representing Shackleton – at play within the life history of this object, that imbue it with a kind of significance not present to the same extent in other items in the Polar Museum's Shackleton collection.

The sledging flag is inherently bound up with family: having been made (almost certainly) by a female family member for Shackleton to take with him to the Antarctic. While there, it would have offered him a sense of connection to home in a way that would not have been possible with the generic equipment used during these expeditions. Afterwards, in order to make it to the 2016 service at Westminster Abbey, the sledging flag first had to survive the intervening century from its last use to the present day. It managed this because it was cared for. Initially this care was the responsibility of Shackleton himself, looking after his possessions in the field. Then, upon his return home and after his death in the Antarctic, this responsibility was passed down to the Shackleton family, who ensured its preservation for over 80 years. Perhaps this care stemmed from a shift in the way that British people today regard themselves in relation to their ancestors – seeing themselves as 'dividuals' with links to larger family networks that include deceased relatives (Cannell 2011). Warrior (2017) argues that this relational responsibility may also encompass an associated duty of care for ancestral objects. While the specific way in which this flag was looked after by Cecily Shackleton, and later Rena Dodds, is unknown, we do know it was considered important enough to be kept and passed on. Crucially, it was also recognised as worthy of being offered to the Polar Museum. Once assessed, the Hon. Alexandra Shackleton – another family member – and Nigel, the museum curator, even categorised it as being of such significance as to be in the most important group of objects offered

for accession. As such, there was never any doubt that it should remain in the museum in perpetuity. Since then, the status of the sledging flag has only been strengthened as it was chosen for display, stood in for Shackleton in memorial events, and was later designated as an 'emergency salvage' object within the museum's collection.

It is important also to note that the flag is – unusually for items accessioned from Heroic Age expeditions and collections – an object that is especially visually striking. This combination of the flag's affective significance (having likely been made by, and then passed down through his family) and its aesthetic impact is especially powerful because, 'affect and aesthetics can be seen as two sides of the same coin, as both are concerned with embodied responses to experience' (Cant 2019: 33). These dual influences of affect and aesthetics mean that the flag has often been selected for use since it was accessioned into the museum's collection. Whether through display, selection for important events and outreach activities, or through private requests, the flag has been engaged with regularly since the early 2000s. Many other objects belonging to Shackleton or used on his expeditions have not received this level of attention over the same period. All of this combines to ensure that the sledging flag represents the obvious choice – why would it *not* stand in for Shackleton? It is both emotionally rich in its history, indicative of the achievements of its owner by virtue of having been there, *and* visually impressive enough to be able to take centre stage in a formal act of remembrance, without fading to the background or feeling unbecoming of the solemnity – and celebration – of the occasion.

The sledging flag is shaped by familial connections, affect and aesthetics, and the combination of these factors can have a snowballing effect. Use can inspire use: when an object is an 'obvious choice' it receives ongoing levels of research and attention. In my next chapter, I will uncover what happens when this chain of use and attention breaks down, and what it means for the object at the centre.

10. Boat Bits: research and a mistaken identity



Figure 10.1. Y: 2011/57 - Fragments of the remains of the 1877 wreck of the American sealing vessel *Charles Shearer*, found in 1998 at Stinker Point.



Figure 10.2. Z: 425 - Salvaged ships timber. Four pieces of salvaged ships timber, given by Captain T.J. Barton, Commanding Officer of HMS *Endurance*.

Table 2: MODES record on Boat bits

Object no.	Y:2011/57
Brief description	Fragments of the remains of the 1877 wreck of the American sealing vessel Charles Shearer, found in 1998 at Stinker Point on the south eastern side of Elephant Island, and originally incorrectly identified as flotsam from the endurance. Includes fragments of wood and a broken chain pull. South Shetland Islands, Elephant Island
Description	A solid and very heavy piece of metal with a flat back and a square hole at the top and bottom. There are three pairs of holes in the sides, two of which contain metal bars, and two pairs of grooves
Material	Metal
Keyword	Ship wreckage Hunting and fishing
Measurement	Length 850mm Width 220mm Depth 170mm
Association	United States Sealing Voyage 1877 (Charles Shearer)
Exhibition/access information	• 4.7.2011 temporary storage during refit • 27.6.2011 cold room – precaution against pest infection • 24.8.2016 Object photographed as part of the Antarctic Cataloguing project 2014-16

Table 3: MODES record on Boat bits

Object no.	Z: 425
Brief description	Four pieces of salvaged ships timber, given by Captain T.J. Barton, Commanding Officer of HMS Endurance.
Description	Four pieces of disintegrating pieces of wood: a length of flat wood which tapers at one end (605 x 110 x 50 mm); a small block of wood which tapers at one end (190 x 95 x 48 mm); a shaped length of wood which tapers at one end (520 x 160 x 90 mm); and a length of wood with a corroded iron rod running at right angles through it (440 x 460 x 80 mm).
Material	Wood; Metal
Key word	Memorabilia and souvenirs
Measurement	See description
Acquisition	Captain T.J. Barton
Association	Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition 1914-16 (Endurance)
Exhibition/access information	• 28.6.2011 cold room – precaution against pest infection • 27.10.2016 - Object photographed as part of the Antarctic Cataloguing project 2014-16 • 25.9.2018 – UKAHT training session

When I was first hired by the Polar Museum in 2019, as part of my induction, I was shown the museum stores by a member of the museum team. We looked around together and they pointed out some objects of interest. Eventually, we came to a large white box, on a shelf slightly higher than eye-level, near the back of one of the rooms. Rather tentatively, this box was brought down, and the lid gently opened to reveal a mass of bulky wooden shapes. It was not clear just from looking in the box exactly what the object was, or why it had been accessioned into the museum and lovingly preserved in its store. The box contained, I was told, some of only a few known pieces of Shackleton's ship *Endurance*, though this provenance was not reported with total confidence. There are other fragments of the *Endurance* in the collections at the Polar Museum, but they are generally much more lightweight⁴³. While it is easy enough to imagine putting an oversized splinter of wood in your pocket to save it for posterity, the big pieces made less sense⁴⁴ and this was the reason for the reticence in believing their provenance. This encounter stuck with me, so when I went back to the Polar Museum to begin my fieldwork, I enquired about this box of 'boat bits' as I had come to think of it. Very few members of the museum team knew what object I meant, but a few thought they did. This line of enquiry would send me down an unexpected path, ultimately causing me to consider the impact of academic research and institutional memory on the life of objects inside the museum.

Eventually, it became clear that the Polar Museum is home to two objects thought – at one time or other – to have come from the wreckage of the *Endurance*. The box I had looked at in the stores in my first week in a new job does indeed have a mysterious provenance, but is nonetheless recorded in the museum's catalogue as being from the *Endurance*. However, when I began my fieldwork enquiries, unbeknownst to me, I was actually steered towards an entirely different 'boat bit' which had undergone far more detailed research. At one time, this second object was thought to come from the *Endurance* too. In fact, it is a piece of a different shipwreck – most likely the American whaling ship the *Charles Shearer*, which sunk near Elephant Island in 1877. All this information was also present in the digital catalogue record for this object. Nevertheless, it was this object which came to mind for my participants when I asked after the box of pieces of the *Endurance*. In outlining the itineraries of these objects, I will consider the interactions between institutional memory and object research, which meant that the *Charles Shearer* could become the *Endurance*, and the *Endurance* could be forgotten entirely.

The first half of this section will focus on a large fragment of the *Charles Shearer*, recorded in the Polar Museum's catalogue under the accession number Y: 2011/57 (Figure 10.1). The second part will outline how this case of mistaken identity with the second object – accession number Z: 425

⁴³ One example of this is Y: 2015/19/1, described in the museum's catalogue as a, 'Small piece of timber from the *Endurance*, brought back by Huberht Hudson from the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition 1914–17 (*Endurance*).' It measures approximately 88 x 49 mm.

⁴⁴ As it happens, the Polar Museum is also home to the largest known piece of the *Endurance* still above water. The *Endurance* spar (Y: 98/4) was salvaged by the crew of the *Endurance* and used on Elephant Island as a makeshift flag pole for sending distress signals across the island while the men were stranded there. James Mann Wordie brought it back from Elephant Island when the men were rescued. Wordie went on to become the master of St. John's College, Cambridge in 1952, and brought the spar with him to the city. Among the staff of the Polar Museum, the story goes – in another instance of mistaken identity – the spar was stored in a shed in the grounds of the college for some time and was very nearly disposed of, until someone remembered its provenance and donated it to the Institute.

(Figure 10.2), which truly (as far as we know) is a number of pieces of the *Endurance* – came to be uncovered, and the implications of this for the interpretation of different objects.

The shipwreck of the *Charles Shearer*

Decades before Scott, Shackleton and other explorers of the Heroic Age had ventured south to the Antarctic, a flotilla of whaling and sealing ships had already begun regular trips to harvest the natural resources of the Southern Ocean (Basberg and Headland 2008). Based on cold-weather experience gained in the Arctic, whaling and sealing was so common and so voracious that it often left significant and lasting damage on marine mammal populations around the Antarctic coastline (Tulloch *et. al.* 2017). However, the waters of the Southern Ocean are some of the most treacherous in the world, and even seasoned whaling and sealing vessels were at risk from damage or shipwreck.

The American whaling ship the *Charles Shearer* was likely built in the mid-1860s and is first recorded as reaching the South Shetland Islands – in the South Atlantic, about 150 km north of the Antarctic peninsula – in the mid-1870s (Headland 2000). She ventured south again a few years later but was seriously damaged in Tierra del Fuego, which may have weakened her ahead of her final southern voyage in 1877 (*ibid*). It was during this voyage that the ship was lost, presumed wrecked, and never seen again. This event took place in the waters around the South Shetland Islands, close to Elephant Island – the site of the camp subsequently made by the stranded men on Shackleton’s *Endurance* Expedition. Shackleton and his men navigated these Antarctic waters more than 35 years after the loss of the *Charles Shearer*.

Investigations

The ‘Director’s Report’ for 24th April 1998, in the *Committee of Management for the Scott Polar Research Institute Minute Book 1998*, contains the first mention of Y: 2011/57 in relation to the Institute:

The Director noted that [...] considerable interest had been aroused by the discovery of remains of a ship on Elephant Island that were being investigated to discover if they could be from Shackleton’s *Endurance* (Committee of Management for the Scott Polar Research Institute 1998).

Specifically, these remains had been collected by Cdr Malcom Burley R. N., who had been on a Joint Services Expedition to Elephant Island in 1970-71 and had discovered the wreckage on a beach (Headland 2000). It was Burley’s opinion that, having been found on Elephant Island, it was possible that the debris could be part of the *Endurance*, washed ashore by the wind and currents. In order to verify this theory, he elicited the help of the Scott Polar Research Institute, giving specimens he had collected to SPRI for investigation in March 1998 (*ibid.*). The resulting detective work brought in external expertise, according to Nigel, the then curator:

The Anglian Polytechnic University⁴⁵ had a very good dendrochronology lot, so [we] got the dendrochronology done and found a couple of odd things.

Most notably, the dendrochronology data suggested that different fragments of the timber appeared to be quite different ages. One piece dated to 1847, making the theory that it was from the *Charles*

⁴⁵ Now Anglia Ruskin University.

Shearer more likely. However, other pieces seemed to be from the mid-18th century. It was hypothesised that these may have come from furniture onboard the ship⁴⁶ (Headland 2000). Additionally, the dendrochronology indicated that the timber had not come from Scandinavia – where the *Endurance* (once the Norwegian ship, *Polaris*) was built (Kjær 2005).

Ultimately, the dendrochronology proved convincing in establishing that the remains of the ship had not come from the *Endurance*, and this was reported in the Annual Review for the Institute in 1998:

Cdr Malcolm Burley gave a collection of relics from a wreck he investigated from Elephant Island in the South Shetland Islands, the provenance of this was a mystery and several hypotheses were proposed. Dendrochronological and other investigation has ruled out some possibilities and the most likely one is that the wreck is of a United States sealing vessel, *Charles Shearer*, lost in 1877 (Scott Polar Research Institute 1998: 17).

In spite of these objects not coming from arguably the most famous ship in Antarctic history, the site from which they had been taken was nevertheless put forward by the United Kingdom as an Historic Site under the Antarctic Treaty System (the Working Paper was submitted by the United Kingdom in 2000). Furthermore, while the fragments were not proven, categorically, to have come from the *Charles Shearer*, the circumstantial evidence of the shipwreck in 1877, alongside the dates and origins of the wood itself, provided some convincing clues. Either way, the work was deemed significant enough to record the pieces in the catalogue of the Polar Museum as:

Fragments of the remains of the 1877 wreck of the American sealing vessel *Charles Shearer*, found in 1998 at Stinker Point on the south western side of Elephant Island, and originally incorrectly identified as flotsam from the *Endurance*.

Nevertheless, when I eventually tracked down Y: 2011/57 in the museum store to take a look at these fragments, I found only a single part of the *Charles Shearer*, a large metal object stored separately from any wooden pieces that had once accompanied it. It is likely, then, that the splitting up of these objects in the store, also contributed to the resulting confusion between Y: 2011/57 and Z: 425 that I experienced during my fieldwork.

The limelight

While there is no record of either the wooden or the large metal portion of Y: 2011/57 ever having been put on long-term display at the Polar Museum, it has not spent the entirety of its life in the store. In 1999, the year after the SPRI Annual Review reports on the dendrochronology work to identify the *Charles Shearer*, a special event took place in the Institute. Prince Phillip, who was Chancellor of the University of Cambridge at that time, had been in Cambridge and decided to make a special visit to SPRI (this was not the only time he would visit the Polar Museum, as evidenced by Figure 10.3)⁴⁷. On the morning of 28th June 1999, Prince Phillip spent time touring the Institute, and during the visit:

⁴⁶ Headland (2000) also notes that, during this period, sometimes pieces of timber from older vessels were utilised in the construction of new ships.

⁴⁷ Incidentally, in the background of this photograph of Prince Phillip's visit to SPRI, is evidence of Shackleton's sledging flag on display in the Polar Museum before it was removed for conservation reasons.

There was also an opportunity to discuss the interesting project in which the Institute has attempted to resolve the question of the origins of a scattering of wooden ship's timbers on a beach on Elephant Island. Measurements of the lengths of spars on Hurley's photographs of Shackleton's *Endurance* after the break-up suggested that the spars on the beach were too long for it to be likely that they were remains of this famous ship. Dendroclimatology also seemed to rule out the timber being Scandinavian (which is where *Endurance* was built), but an increasing possibility to emerge from Bob Headland's records was *Charles Shearer*, a whaler built in New England around 1855, which disappeared without trace in 1877. This project provided a fitting demonstration of the way in which the Institute's archives can be combined with its scientific expertise to investigate an unusual and interdisciplinary problem in polar history... (Scott Polar Research Institute 1999: 2).

The fact that this work was considered important enough to be made known during the royal visit suggests a level of pride in this interdisciplinary research. Moreover, that it was reported twice in the Annual Review of the Institute indicates that it was, between 1998-1999 at least, a major project. So why is it that, in the intervening quarter of a century, this information – though recorded – seems not to have been retained in the working memories of the staff of the Polar Museum?



Figure 10.3. Prince Philip at the Scott Polar Research Institute, following its redesign in 2010.

Obscurity

Y: 2011/57 underwent a considerable level of research in the late 1990s. It was the subject of an interdisciplinary investigation, helped SPRI to forge a link with another local university, and was presented to a member of the royal family. There was even an academic article written about it and the process of disproving its *Endurance* links (Headland 2000). All this work was achieved between

1998 and 2000. Nevertheless, this object was not officially accessioned into the museum's collections until 2011, as indicated by its accession number, Y: 2011/57. There is no record that it was removed from the museum between 1999 and 2011, so it is likely that it remained in the building, but was not accessioned, for twelve years. In spite of the time and resources that had been put into the research of this object, it was left in a kind of museum limbo for more than a decade (Figure 10.4). This meant that the information which had been uncovered about it was neither officially recorded nor elaborated upon once it was proven that it was part of the whaling vessel the *Charles Shearer*. At first glance, it appears that, because this object was proven not to have played a part in the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration, it was no longer of significant interest to the museum. But the fact that it was eventually accessioned suggests otherwise. Perhaps the issue is therefore less about the object itself, than about the functioning of the museum in the years from 1999 to 2011.



Figure 10.4. Y: 2011/57 (part) - in the museum's store.

Museum positions

As discussed in Chapter 4, it is only in recent years that the Polar Museum has had its own dedicated members of staff, without other responsibilities to the Institute. Though there was discussion of an 'Equipment Officer' who would look after the founding collection of objects and equipment in the early 1950s (Scott Polar Research Institute 1951: 3); it was not until 1972 that a role was created with the word 'Museum' specifically in its title – that of 'Assistant Librarian and Curator of Museum' (Scott Polar Research Institute 1972: 7). During my fieldwork, Joy, a former curator of the museum, indicated that the person who first held this position was an archivist first and foremost, and as a

result was less concerned with the objects in the museum collection. Indeed, their title was later changed to ‘Assistant Librarian and Curator of the Museum and Manuscripts’ (Scott Polar Research Institute 1977: 6) presumably to reflect this preferred interest. Joy also told me that the museum and its collections were actually largely considered to be secondary to the library and archive for some years within the Institute. Though things began to change in 1985 with the appointment of a new ‘Archivist and Museum Curator’, it was still many years before the true professionalisation of the museum. This may be said to begin with the hiring of people who had worked in museums elsewhere before they worked at the Polar Museum, alongside the first registration (now accreditation) of the museum in 2004. This led to a significant inventory project in the museum’s stores, which saw the rationalisation and cataloguing of ‘decontextualised’ objects (including ‘Z’ numbered objects) in 2009 (Arts Council England 2016). It seems likely that our box of ‘boat bits’ was ultimately accessioned – in the years that followed the museum achieving accredited status and running its inventory project – specifically because it was always considered important enough to form part of the collection, but had not been properly processed until that point.

This is where Y: 2011/57 becomes entangled with Z: 425 – they are similar objects, with similar stories, but while one is ‘truly’ accessioned into the museum’s collection, the other is not.

Z Numbers

It’s claimed that it’s from the Endurance. [...] But there’s no real evidence to that yet [...] I don’t know when it was accepted but – I think it’s Z numbered actually isn’t it? – Sam.

This small question about Z numbers was the key to complicating what was, at one point, quite a simple story about a fragment of a boat that was thought to be from the *Endurance* and then was proven not to be. Because the object from the first half of this chapter, Y: 2011/57, is *not* a Z numbered object, as Sam suggests.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, and described in detail in Appendix 3, Z numbers are used at the Polar Museum to indicate that an object is presumed to be part of the collection, but there is no formal paperwork or provenance information to prove that they have actually been accessioned. As such, they are treated as ‘accessioned until proven otherwise’ meaning that they are cared for with all other accessioned objects, but their true status is open to reinterpretation should new information about them arise. Conversely, objects with Y numbers have been officially accessioned into the museum and as such would be subject to a variety of complex checks and guidelines should they be posited for removal from the collection. Accredited museums in the UK – such as the Polar Museum – are required to care for their accessioned objects in perpetuity. While it is possible for an accessioned museum object to shift to a simple ‘thing’, via the process of deaccession, it is not accidental, but rather is dependent upon considered effort and targeted work by museum professionals.

Confusion

So why was Y: 2011/57 mistaken for a Z numbered object? Because of the existence of Z: 425 (Figure 10.5). This is an object which has a very similar story to Y: 2011/57. They are both part of the wreckage of historic ships. But the difference is that Z: 425 has not had the intensive research at one time afforded to Y: 2011/57. Instead, all the information there is relating to this Z-numbered object is

what can be found in the museum's catalogue: 'Four pieces of salvaged ships timber, given by Captain T.J. Barton, Commanding Officer of HMS Endurance.'



Figure 10.5. Z: 425 - in the museum's store.

It is also recorded that this object was 'found' in the museum in 2010. This does not necessarily mean that it was dropped off on the doorstep, but rather that paperwork or institutional knowledge about this object did not exist when it was discovered, most likely in the stores or offices of the museum. This, we can assume, is why it was given a Z number. This way, it could be managed – and its current whereabouts recorded – by museum staff, without necessarily being a formal part of the collection. I have been unable to find any further information anywhere about this object, and indeed have had no further conversations with any members of staff who knew about it other than the one which alerted me to all this confusion. This came about in a discussion with Sam, a member of collections care staff who had recently run an audit of the museum's collections. As a result of this audit, Sam was particularly well-versed in the objects in the museum's store, arguably more so than any other member of staff in the team at that time, including the curator whose role did not allow for this level of detailed collections work on a regular basis. This confusion revealed a truth that is not often admitted outside the confines of a museum – that museum professionals do not have encyclopaedic, all-encompassing knowledge of their collections. That this knowledge is hard won via personal interactions with objects – through their research and study. This also means that there is an inherent ambiguity of objects in the minds of museum professionals, who may be thinking of one object, as I was, while researching another.

Two objects, one of note

Research can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Where work done on a single object means that it is more predominant in the minds of museum professionals, that same object can be offered for inclusion in new projects more frequently than other parts of the collection⁴⁸. But sometimes

⁴⁸ I discuss this, specifically in relation to Captain Scott's goggles in the collections of Discovery Point in Dundee, in Chapter 13.

research can also halt further enquiry – when findings do not fit the right narrative or strengthen the story that we were hoping to tell, these objects can be pushed to the back of an organisation’s mind, to the back of institutional memory. So it was that when Y: 2011/57 was proven not to be part of the *Endurance*, it was briefly acknowledged as the subject of an interesting project, and then never engaged with again. But this also meant that Z: 425 became tarnished by association – it was similar to Y: 2011/57 but had no further information of its own – so it went either completely unheard of, or it was assumed to *be* Y: 2011/57. This is particularly surprising in the case of Z: 425 which as far as we know actually *is* a box of fragments from the Heroic Age ship the *Endurance* (Figure 10.6), and yet continues to be treated as if it is not – right down to its precarious place within the collection due to its Z number. Furthermore, because Y: 2011/57 had already been proven not to tell a Heroic Age story, it was never brought forward for further research and the confusion was never uncovered.



Figure 10.6. P66/18/55 - Frank Wild examining the wreckage of the *Endurance* © SPRI.

Research and institutional knowledge

This chapter presents two discrete but intersecting questions: how do we approach research within the context of the museum, and what is the impact of institutional knowledge on a museum collection?

Sigfúsdóttir (2019) indicates that, while research can be seen as one of the core practices of museums, it has rarely been interrogated academically. She argues that, within the limited literature relating to research in museums, there are two broad themes. The first theme presents museums as

sites of knowledge production, without specifically discussing research itself. The second often takes the form of descriptions of specific projects, without delving deeply into theoretical considerations of the research behind them. But what I call for in this chapter is a more reflexive approach to what research *does* to objects and what it means for collections. The act of undertaking sustained academic research on Y: 2011/57 shaped not only its life history, but impacted the life history of other similar objects within the museum as well. What's more, this research was undertaken not in pursuit of an exhibition – or indeed, any significant interpretative work – but for the sake of the research itself, to better understand the collections at the Polar Museum and to record this knowledge for future use. Nigel, and the other members of the Institute involved in the research, had firsthand knowledge of Y: 2011/57, which they recorded, but which nevertheless became diluted over time. This brings us to the second question posed by this chapter.

Institutional knowledge is perhaps even less well represented within museological literature than that of research. Writing from a library background, Byrne (2015) discusses institutional memory in 'memory institutions' (which he categorises as galleries, libraries, archives and museums). He describes institutional memory as, 'as changeable as human memory, evolving over time in response to professional imperatives, community expectations and opportunity' (Byrne 2015: 260). This is not an unconscious process, institutional knowledge is formed as much by the active decisions of curators and professionals as it is by serendipity. Equally, while institutional knowledge is (sometimes) recorded in catalogues and other technologies of remembrance, it is also present in the way that staff interact and remember each other and even in their working habits. As Yarrow (2016) argues, institutional memory and culture is constantly shaped on the ground by meetings, themselves dependent on, 'a series of situated relationships between people, places, tools, and documents' (Yarrow 2016: 96). This also means that this knowledge is not always permanent. When people move on from the museum – as Nigel did – information which may once have seemed self-evident can be eroded, obfuscated or even lost. In the case of Y: 2011/57, this knowledge was forgotten even though it had been recorded in the museum's digital catalogue, because the object was rarely engaged with again.

So it is that the interaction between research and institutional memory (and even individual memory) can hold a key to understanding the way that museum objects and collections shift and develop over time. In understanding who did the work of research, why and when, we can pick up threads which may otherwise have been lost or forgotten. But we can also create new threads. As museum professionals come to be better acquainted with certain aspects of a collection, their knowledge in these areas grows. This means that, when future research, exhibition or engagement events are posited, objects from that part of the collection come to mind and can be put forward for use. This is a wholly personal interaction based on individual knowledge and memory, but which can be magnified over the life history of an object. In the case of this chapter, Z: 425 was of personal interest to me, because I recalled it being pointed out to me in the early days of my work at the Polar Museum. This meant that, when I came to write my thesis, I was curious about, and chose to study, it. I brought it up in discussions – both formally and informally – with other members of staff within the Institute, both members of the museum team and other academics and professionals. As a result, more people have come to know of its existence, and I have uncovered the confusion between it and Y: 2011/57. I have also told the museum team this story. As a result, both of these objects have been brought to the forefront of their minds, when they research or see or think of one,

it is now more likely that they will also think of the other. All this increases the likelihood of their describing these objects, or their story, to others. Perhaps one day Y: 2011/57 or Z: 425 will even be selected for further research, display, or some other form of engagement work. Before, neither Y: 2011/57 nor Z: 425 would have been described as especially interesting objects, but now, with the background of this knowledge, for the people who have heard the story at least, it is possible that they will receive new attention. The fates of objects and collections are, as ever, tied to the people who care for them.

11. The Sir Ernest Shackleton lifeboat and the Raymond Plaque: Authentic objects?



Figure 11.1. *Sir Ernest Shackleton* lifeboat in situ.



Figure 11.2. Y: 2016/5 - The Raymond Plaque.

Table 4: MODES record on *Sir Ernest Shackleton* lifeboat

The Polar Museum does not hold comparable information relating to the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* lifeboat because it is not part of the collection.

Table 5: MODES record on Raymond plaque

Object no.	Y: 2016/5
Brief description	Brass name plate for Ernest Shackleton's portable boat 'Raymond' that was meant to be taken onboard The Nimrod for The British Antarctic Expedition 1907-09. The boat was never sent however.
Note	The boat was never sent, so was not taken on this expedition
Material	Metal, brass
Key word	Memorabilia and souvenirs transportation
Measurement	Height 77mm Width 458mm Depth 2mm
Acquisition	Private purchase as part of the Heritage Lottery Fund Collecting Cultures programme 2014-1912.10.2016
Association	Ernest Henry Shackleton 1907-1909 Made to be used on the British Antarctic Expedition 1907-09 (Nimrod)
Archival items which formed part of this accession	A letter from Ernest Shackleton to Emily in which he states that the small boat was not sent out to the Antarctic (he is in the middle of the Nimrod expedition at this point) – the inference is that the small boat was RAYMOND. MS 1637
Exhibition/ access information	• Temporary display as part of a gala dinner celebrations 5.11.2022 • Display – Showcase, Friends Room, Library 24.8.2022 • Virtual Shackleton object filming 23.5.2019 • Shackleton HLF display in Friends Room 18.1.2019 • Photography for Antarctic Cataloguing Project 2014-16 27.10.2016

This chapter considers two objects: the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* lifeboat, a replica of the *James Caird*, used by Shackleton during his famous *Endurance* Expedition, and the Raymond Plaque (Y: 2016/5), a small rectangle of brass, which played a minor role in Shackleton's lesser known *Nimrod* Expedition. Only one of these objects has actually been to Antarctica. Only one would have been known to Shackleton. One of the objects is merely an 'asset' of SPRI, not owned by the museum at all, while the other is a fully accessioned part of the museum collection. As a result of their unique life histories, and certain factors at play within the workings of the Polar Museum, these objects occupy

very different spaces at SPRI. Taken together, I argue that they have much to say about the impact of funding, physical characteristics and ‘authenticity’ on an object’s life history within the museum.

The Sir Ernest Shackleton boat

In the space between the car park at the Scott Polar Research Institute and the side door which leads visitors into the reception area, there is a smallish wooden lifeboat - about seven and a half metres long and slightly more than two metres across at its widest point (Figure 11.1). It is named the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* and it sits beneath a tree, quietly collecting leaves and berries (and more than a little guano from the birds of Cambridge). It is unusual for museum objects to be left outside, particularly wooden objects, and even more so wooden boats, which start to decay, bow and deteriorate almost the moment they are taken out of the water. To put an object like this under a tree only adds insult to a conservator’s misery. But then, this isn’t really a ‘museum object’. When I asked, Simon, a member of the museum team who worked in collections care, about which object he thought would stand out to the public above all others, he said:

I think probably the boat – even though it’s a replica outside and isn’t technically part of the museum collection.

Clearly, this boat is capable of captivating the public and has a significant physical presence outside the Polar Museum. So why does it not qualify as a ‘museum object’? And if it is not a museum object, why is it sitting outside the Polar Museum, quietly decaying under a tree?

Maiden voyages

The Gino Watkins Memorial Fund is a charity that supports expeditions to the polar regions. The fund draws its trustees from the University of Cambridge and the Royal Geographical Society (Scott Polar Research Institute n.d. h) and was first chaired by the founder of SPRI, Frank Debenham, in the early 1930s (Gino Watkins Memorial Fund 1933). In 1993, some 60 years after it was founded, the trustees of the fund were approached by a would-be expedition crew hoping to venture south. *In the Wake of Shackleton* was an expedition planning to replicate the voyage Shackleton and five of his men had made from Elephant Island to South Georgia during the 1914-17 *Endurance* Expedition. *In the Wake of Shackleton*, led by Trevor Potts, would recreate this voyage, and the subsequent trek made by Shackleton, Worsley and Crean over Elephant Island to the safety of the whaling station at Grytviken. The modern expedition would have a camera crew in tow, documenting their efforts and bringing Shackleton’s story to a wider audience, while pitting themselves against the same forces of nature that Shackleton had encountered. The modern day boat built for this copy-cat expedition was christened the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* and was broadly a replica of Shackleton’s lifeboat the *James Caird*, with a few modern safety features.

The expedition crew contacted the Gino Watkins Memorial Fund to request some funding to help them achieve their goals. In a letter to his Trustees, Bob Schroter, the then Chairman of the fund, asked for the committee members’ opinions, and recommended that the fund provide a special £1,000 donation to the expedition (Schroter 1993). Many committee members responded positively, and the money was awarded. After some hiccups and delays, the voyage ultimately went ahead on Christmas Eve 1993 and by 16th January their mission had been achieved. Through their own challenging voyage, Potts’ expedition drew attention to the skill and knowledge of Shackleton and his small crew who had been the first to accomplish this feat of navigation and seamanship nearly 80

years before. Trevor Potts and his team returned happy having completed the mission, with another string to their bows and a rather sizeable lifeboat now in need of a home.

A gift boat

After the *In the Wake of Shackleton* Expedition, the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* lifeboat, modern replica of the *James Caird* – itself on display in Dulwich College (Figure 11.3)⁴⁹ – eventually made it back to the UK. It was made available for hire and had its first engagement at the ‘Wooden Boat Show’ in Greenwich (Potts 2010). Once requests for hire began to slow, the boat came to be stored at Potts’ ‘Croft Campsite’ on the Ardnamurchan Peninsula, in the West Highlands of Scotland (*ibid.*). Here, adaptations were made so that she could be used locally, though eventually she was stored out of the water, where her condition began to deteriorate. Potts began to liaise again with staff at SPRI, this time no longer seeking expedition funding, but a potential long-term home for the boat which had carried him through the roughest seas in the world.



Figure 11.3. The *James Caird* at Dulwich College © creative commons.

Though it has been extended several times over the years, SPRI is a relatively small building, and it was eventually decided that the only feasible option for accepting the gift of the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* boat would be to store it, on display, outside. In 2014, an internal document was circulated within SPRI relating to what was now being called ‘The Shackleton Boat Project’, stating that the Institute was now at the point of:

⁴⁹ Sam, who worked in collections care and with volunteers, once told me a particularly surprising story about the *James Caird*. A visitor to the Polar Museum had described going to see the boat in Dulwich College and informed Sam with pride that he had been so moved by it that he had hopped over the barrier and given it a kiss. Just another instance of the capacity for emotional impact that museum objects can hold!

...drawing up a business plan and arranging for the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* to be brought to Cambridge, most probably in 2014, to coincide with the beginning of the Shackleton Centenary. It is intended for the boat to be on permanent display outside the west entrance to the Institute main building (Scott-Fawcett 2014).

The first task was for Potts to reverse the adjustments he had made to the boat while in the Highlands – reverting it back to the state in which it most closely resembled Shackleton’s *James Caird*. Then, the Institute and Polar Museum staff were left to discuss the details of what would happen to the boat once it reached Cambridge, including its status within the museum.

Accession decisions

At the Polar Museum, all proposed new accessions must be brought before a central committee at the bi-monthly Libraries, Archives and Museum (LAM) committee meeting. Having a centralised board for these decisions helps the museum to employ its Collections Management Policy, so only objects deemed suitable for the collection are given the privilege of being accessioned. In order for any object to officially shift from a ‘thing’ to an ‘object’ (for a full discussion of this distinction in my work, see Chapter 3) in a museum collection, it must be accessioned. During this process, the object is catalogued and photographed, its information is collected and recorded and its status within the museum is formalised. It is only then that the museum commits to its ongoing care. This process is not undertaken lightly by museum professionals, because most accessioned objects will stay in a museum’s collection forever. Though it is possible to ‘de-accession’ objects, this is very rare in museums, and for those which have been accredited – like the Polar Museum – there are strict procedures to follow for deaccessioning to take place. The object must, for example, be offered to other accredited museums before other disposal methods can be attempted, and selling the object is usually seen as a last resort (Museums Association n.d.). As a result, museum professionals do not tend to consider de-accession as a possibility when they are adding new objects to their collections⁵⁰.

Formal processes for the proposal of new accessions, like the LAM meetings at SPRI, safeguard museums by ensuring that decisions about accessions are made by teams, not individuals. This means that no single person is responsible for deciding an object’s fate and, arguably, ensures a more rounded response to potential acquisitions. However, the professionalisation of the team at the Polar Museum was in its early days at the time of Pott’s offer of the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* lifeboat and individual decisions about objects were sometimes made. In this instance, personal and professional relationships between members of the Institute and the *In the Wake of Shackleton* Expedition meant that the gift of the boat was accepted. A member of staff outside of the museum team agreed to the bringing of the lifeboat to the Institute. However, what happened to the boat once it reached Cambridge – and the place that it would occupy within the Institute – was to be decided by the museum team.

Joy, the curator at the time the boat was brought to SPRI, described some of the complex decision-making process required to weigh up whether or not to accession the boat into the museum’s collection once it arrived:

⁵⁰ The Polar Museum has only rarely de-accessioned objects in its care and this has become even less frequent since it has been accredited.

...as soon as we had this thing, we were going to have to look after it well and the only place it could possibly go was where it is: right underneath a tree which sheds lots and lots and lots of stuff on it all summer long, you know lots of honeydew type stuff that comes off it, as well as the leaves in the wintertime. We'd had an incident where somebody took a cobble and threw it through the window of the Memorial Hall, so we were quite conscious that it's a completely uninvigilated space there. [...] Then there's the whole business about public liability, what if someone climbs on it and falls off and brains themselves on the cobbles? So, in other words, we didn't quite know what we were getting into and if we accessioned this object then once you've got it, you've got it and that's it. And if it turned into a nightmare for whatever reason – for any of these public liability/insurance risks, but actually also the fact that when you take a boat out of the water, the way a boat is built it needs the balance of pressure from the water and its own weight to help maintain the structure of it and as soon as you take the water away you have this problem called hogging where boats start to sag down and they lose their... I'm not sure you'd necessarily want to go sailing in that anymore. It would have somehow lost some of its original boat properties because of having it out of the water for such a long time. And again, dealing with that and then dealing with just regular painting and if you've accessioned it then you have to think a bit about, what kind of painting are we going to do? Is it going to be conservation painting and do any of us have the skills for that? No we don't. In which case, you're going to sign yourself up for quite regular expense.

Clearly, accessioning the object would lead to persistent and uncontrolled financial, health and safety, and professional commitments.

Whereas if you just have it here and it's a facility, you can paint it with whatever you want as often or as infrequently as you like, if it starts to sag down you can just go, 'Hey Trevor, would you like to have your boat back because it's not doing very well?' and the whole thing is very straightforward.

So it was that three members of the museum team put their names to an options appraisal. This was presented to the Director, in order to fully explain the commitments which would arise as a result of accessioning the boat. It also outlined the possible advantages of treating the boat as a 'facility'. This meant that the boat would be based at SPRI (though not necessarily *owned* by the Institute) and would be cared for, but not to the same standard as accessioned museum objects. This option – of taking but not accessioning the boat – would have a number of advantages for the Institute. Any maintenance required would not have to be done to 'conservation standards' which would be complex, time-consuming and expensive, but could be performed in house by members of Institute staff. If, for any reason, the Institute decided that it no longer wanted the boat, or could no longer care for it, 'rehoming' it would be considerably simpler to arrange and would not have to involve the complexities inherent in de-accessioning a museum object. The boat could be used for a range of activities, which would not preclude it from being touched, as accessioned objects are strictly handled by museum professionals. It would also not necessarily require the protection of an expensive custom-built shelter or cover, which would be a necessity for accessioned objects. Ultimately, for all of these reasons, as well as its relationship to 'authenticity' (discussed further below) the decision was made not to accession the boat into the museum collection. Joy explained that, once this decision has been made, staff in the museum team were not allowed to undertake even basic maintenance of the boat, because the money spent on their salaries was designated for

the care of the objects in the museum's collection. As a result, it could only be cared for by non-museum staff within the Institute.

Installation and life at SPRI

The *Sir Ernest Shackleton* was installed at SPRI on 14th October 2014 in the only space large enough for it – outside the side entrance to the Institute. Unfortunately, this particular area is under a large tree which is protected by a Tree Preservation Order from Cambridge City Council. This means that the tree cannot be felled or worked on in any way without the express permission of the council beforehand (Cambridge City Council n.d.). As a result, the tree thrives in its spot next to the museum, at the expense of the boat, which becomes covered in debris at regular periods throughout the year (Figure 11.4). When the boat was first brought to the Institute, there was some discussion around a kind of awning to protect it from the worst of the tree damage. This did not take place because of the expense involved and the decision to display the boat with her mast raised, making her too tall to cover without interfering with the branches of the tree.



Figure 11.4. *Sir Ernest Shackleton* lifeboat underneath the tree, seen across the car park.

In 2019 and 2020, two grant applications were made internally from the museum to the BB Roberts Fund, which is available only to internal SPRI applicants (Scott Polar Research Institute 2022), to seek funding for repairs to the rapidly deteriorating boat. These requests were granted, and while expensive repairs have been necessary as a result of the boat's location, these have been performed by a boat specialist, not an expensive conservation specialist. The fact that this treatment was

necessary only around five years after the boat first came to SPRI indicates the forward thinking of the museum professionals who recommended the boat not be accessioned.

Too big and too expensive

Ultimately, the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* was not accessioned into the collections of the Polar Museums for two key, and intersecting, reasons. It was too big and would cost too much to care for. The limited space in the museum's gallery and store meant that there was no suitable indoor home for the boat, and as a result, the only place that it could be stored was outside the building. While there are some accessioned objects in the grounds of the museum, they are made from materials designed to withstand the weather⁵¹. A wooden boat is simply not designed to last on dry land. This meant that the financial commitment that the museum would have had to make to care for it in a manner befitting an accessioned object was simply too great. From the perspective of the museum, the decision not to accession the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* also has implications for its value within SPRI. It cannot (and, indeed, should not) occupy the same level of importance as the accessioned items in the museum's care.

After the boat was installed outside SPRI, an information board was produced and displayed next to it, informing visitors about its life history and the expedition it had recreated (Figure 11.5). The first line of this interpretation reads: 'The *Sir Ernest Shackleton* is a replica of *James Caird*, the lifeboat which Sir Ernest Shackleton sailed 800 nautical miles to South Georgia to seek rescue for his men trapped on Elephant Island.' It then goes on to outline the 'In the Wake of Shackleton' expedition which replicated this famous voyage. This is an important point because written interpretation like this information board provides a direct line between museum professionals and the public, shaping the way that they engage with heritage objects. However, in spite of this written interpretation, since 2014 the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* has been mistaken countless times by members of the public for Shackleton's 'real' boat, the *James Caird*. This is, perhaps, hardly surprising given it looks so similar and is on display at the Polar Museum, which is known to house objects from the Heroic Age of exploration. Moreover, although the boat does differ from the *James Caird* in ways which made it safer for the members of Pott's expedition, this would not be immediately obvious to a lay person without some knowledge of historic boats. But when members of the public do find out that the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* is a replica of the *James Caird*, and that it completed a replica journey, they are almost always disappointed. The *Sir Ernest Shackleton*'s crossing from Elephant Island to South Georgia was an impressive accomplishment by boat and crew, but it was not the 'right' crossing at the 'right' time with the 'right' crew. Even though it has achieved a feat of its own, this boat is not seen as 'authentic' in the same way as other objects in the Polar Museum which were used during the Heroic Age. From this, we may surmise that authenticity does not arise simply from what an object has *done* but from something else. And it is with this in mind that I turn now to the second object in this chapter, the Raymond Plaque.

⁵¹ Bronze statues, an iron try-pot (cauldron) used in Antarctica, a granite inuksuk (an Inuit stone structure in the rough shape of a man from Nunavut, northern Canada).

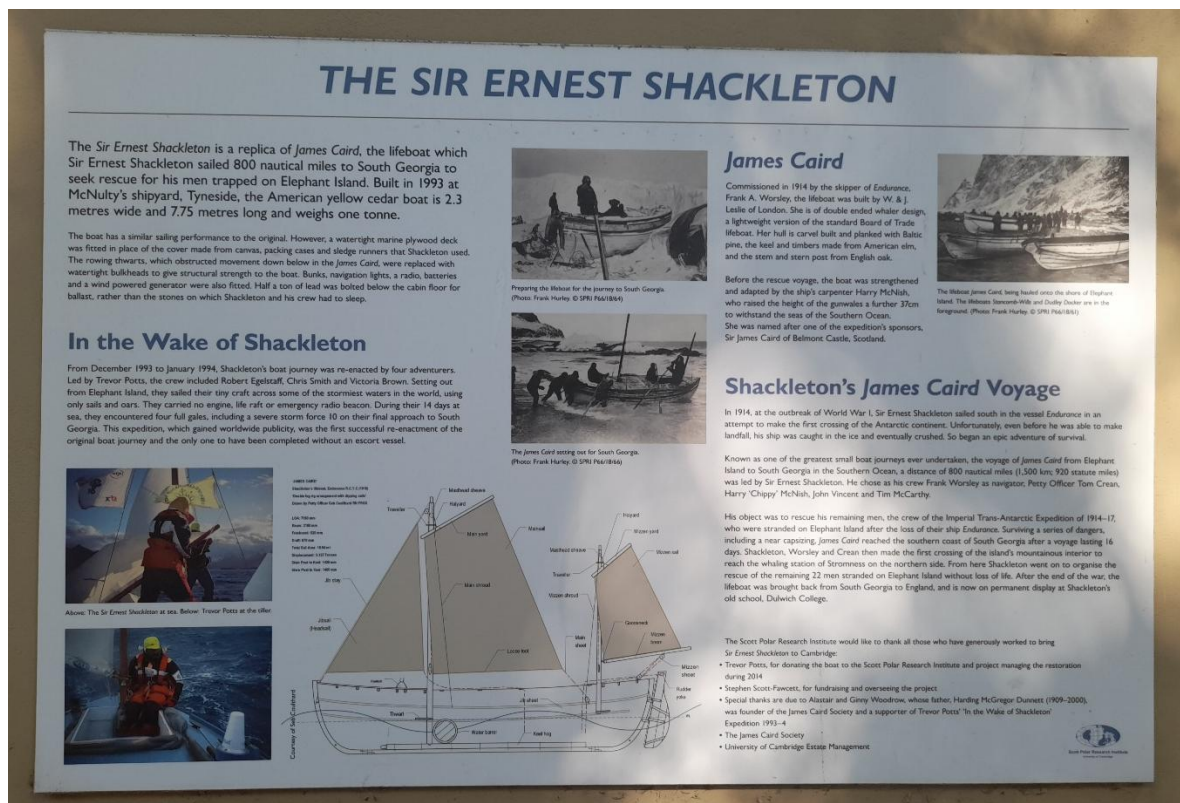


Figure 11.5. Display board for the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* lifeboat.

The Raymond Plaque

In 2019, funded by the NHLF⁵² grant *Collecting Cultures: The Shackleton Project: By Endurance we Conquer* (mentioned in Chapter 5) I was tasked with producing some short films about objects relating to Ernest Shackleton in the museum's collections. In order to engage with the museum's wider community in the shaping of the project, I produced a series of ten one-minute-long films covering a variety of objects associated with Shackleton. This 'long list' was then posted on the museum's social media for the public to vote for three objects to be the subject of longer (5 minute) professional videos. Upon investigating the collection for these films, I was surprised by how limited the Shackleton material in the museum was – I expected there to be far more objects directly related to him than there were. Of the approximately 4900 objects in the museum's collections (not including artworks, which are treated as a separate collection) less than 250 hold even a passing connection to Shackleton. Moreover, this low number includes modern objects such as memorabilia and even costumes from the 2002 film *Shackleton* starring Kenneth Branagh. As a result of this limited number of suitable objects, one of the ten I chose for the first round of films (which we called #MuseumSpeedDating) was a rather unassuming brass plaque. A little less than half a metre long, it has the word Raymond emblazoned across it in painted red infilled letters (Figure 11.6). Perhaps unsurprisingly, this object did not capture the public's imagination and was never discussed in a longer film, but it did leave me with some questions about exactly what it was, and exactly why it had been accessioned into the collection.

⁵² At that time called the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

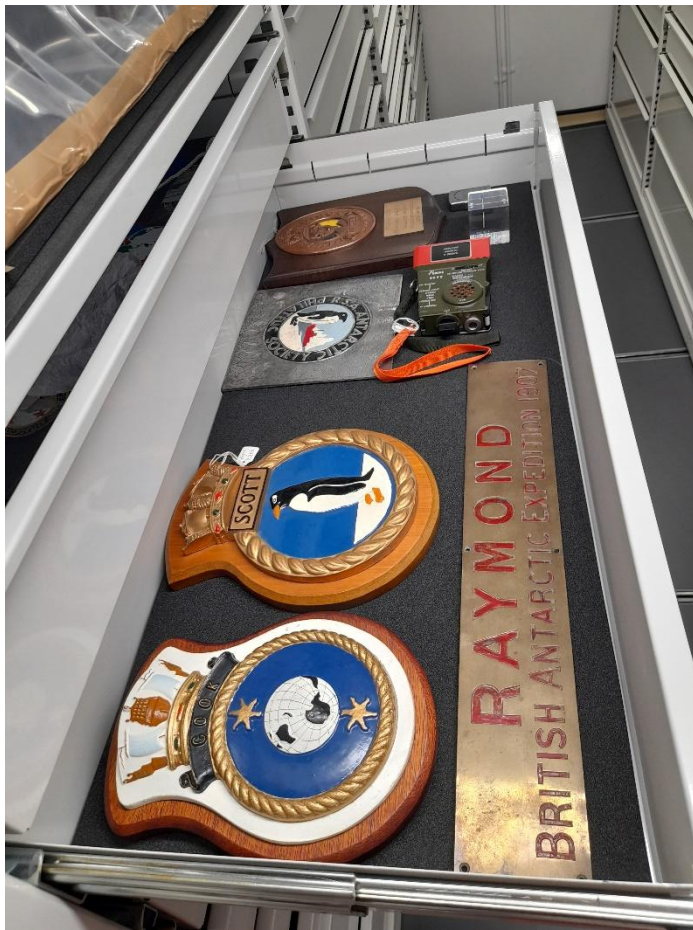


Figure 11.6. The Raymond Plaque in the museum's store.

Centenaries and shopping

The relative lack of Shackleton material at the museum was particularly keenly felt during the Heroic Age centenary period. Following the 'Shackletonmania' of the 1990s (Farley 2005), commemorative events captured the public imagination and brought a lot of attention to polar objects in museum – and personal – collections. At SPRI, celebrations commemorating Shackleton's 1914-17 *Endurance* Expedition began in 2014, included the arrival of the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* boat, and were scheduled to last some years. They included an event to celebrate the departure of the expedition – which featured a speech made by Shackleton's granddaughter the Hon. Alexandra Shackleton, as well as a plan for a temporary exhibition to be called *By Endurance We Conquer* – the Shackleton family motto. There were also plans to collect as much Shackleton material as possible, as press from the centenary brought these objects out of private collections and into the limelight. But this caused its own issues. As Joy, the curator at that time, noted:

...we knew, because we'd had lots of conversations with the families, that there was a lot of material out there. And we also knew that as soon as you're given a lump sum to start buying, prices go up. And it was a problem with the Scott material during the centenary period anyway, and even prior to the centenary, because Bonham's took over all of those polar sales, I used to go to every one. We never had any money to bid on anything, very occasionally I would get a little pot of money together, possibly, if it was something we were

desperate for [...]. But the prices were going up and up and up. I mean if you'd done it 10 years earlier they were rock-bottom, and all of a sudden the prices just started to sky-rocket.

This meant that the museum, which had hoped to use this centenary period to bolster its collection of objects relating to Shackleton and his expeditions, was in danger of being unable to afford to add to its collections at all. As a result, an application was made to the NHLF.

Collecting Cultures

The NHLF as a funding body had realised that museums and galleries were being increasingly 'priced out' of auction sales because they were unable to raise funds quickly enough, or because objects – like those related to Shackleton – were gaining in popularity and drawing in more attention from private collectors⁵³. In order to help tackle this problem, the NHLF set up 'Collecting Cultures' an award specifically designed to help museums buy objects for their collections at auction. The Polar Museum had already received a Collecting Cultures award, to bolster its collection of Inuit art, and this project had been very productive⁵⁴. Following its success, and in the knowledge that they, in Joy's words, 'desperately need to get the Shackleton stuff ready for the Shackleton centenary' the museum team made a new application to the NHLF.

The grant application was successful and in 2014 the Institute was awarded £500,000⁵⁵ to be spent between 2014 and 2018⁵⁶. Now, thanks to this funding, the team had to plan for the material they wanted to collect, in the knowledge of the types of objects likely to become available over the centenary period. Joy described their strategy:

...so we're sort of looking for filling in [...] rather than expecting that we just get loads more stuff, because it was unlikely that we would get loads more stuff because there isn't as much stuff out there now. So it's just like that, finding a different sort of story, a different bit to commemorate round and what we could fill in and say something on.

This focus on 'filling in' the collection and telling unusual – or lesser known – stories, eventually brought the team to the Raymond plaque.

The boy and the little boat

The Raymond plaque is made of a brass and measures 77mm in width by 458mm in length. On the plaque, in large capital letters infilled with red paint, are the words RAYMOND BRITISH ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION 1907. It is a name plaque for a small boat and it tells a story of what might have been.

⁵³ There is an ethical decision to be made when collecting objects at auction. Museums do not want to be seen to drive up prices, particularly when they are spending public funds. Nevertheless, a museum bidding on a particular object can highlight its worth to other potential buyers, leading to an increase in bidding and higher prices as a result. Still, if museums do not acquire objects at auction, they may be lost to private collections, becoming inaccessible to the public for years or even decades at a time.

⁵⁴ SPRI holds the largest public collection of Inuit art from Arctic Canada in the UK. (Saywell n.d.).

⁵⁵ Heritage Lottery Fund, Collecting Cultures – By Endurance We Conquer: the Shackleton Project. Grant CC-13-21559. £500,000. 2014-2018.

⁵⁶ As evidenced in the Institute's Annual Review, this grant was later extended for a year, enabling the partial funding of my position at the museum in 2019 (Scott Polar Research Institute 2019b).

Raymond was Shackleton's eldest child (Herbert 2012) (Figure 11.7). At first glance, it seems that perhaps the plaque was made for him as a toy or memento of the first Antarctic expedition led by his father – the British Antarctic Expedition 1907-09 (*Nimrod*). However, a document in the archives at SPRI suggests that this plaque may have been intended for a very different purpose. In a letter from Ernest Shackleton to his wife Emily in January 1908, written aboard the *Nimrod*, Shackleton states:

Where we are going to land now it is a straight road to the south and no crevasses you may be certain that I will take no risks in any way and I am not going to try and and [sic] cross the Continent: especially as I have not got the little boat, through some carelessness it was left behind at least I mean the people in London never sent it out but it is just as well. Let us get through this job and we will be all right (Shackleton 1908).

This letter indicated to the team at the Polar Museum that the Raymond plaque may have been a nameplate for the 'little boat', which did not arrive in time to be taken to the Antarctic. This is the only known document to reference the idea that Shackleton was planning to trek across the continent of Antarctica *before* his Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition 1914-17 (*Endurance*). This tantalising possibility presented an interesting enough story to justify acquiring the plaque. It is largely assumed that Shackleton's *Endurance* Expedition was designed to traverse the continent because he had missed the opportunity to lead the first expedition to the South Pole, and so wanted a bigger challenge. But the existence of this plaque, along with the letter to Emily, suggests that crossing the Antarctic continent had been on Shackleton's mind years before the *Endurance* Expedition set sail.



Figure 11.7. Raymond Shackleton
Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.

On display

Since its acquisition from a private collection in 2016, made possible by funds from the NHLF Collecting Cultures award, the Raymond plaque has been exhibited only once. This was in the semi-private setting of the 'Friends Room', rather than in the Polar Museum. This small room in the Institute's library has a large display case, but is not as accessible to the public as the temporary gallery in the museum, being both seldom advertised, and accessed only through a door requiring a University key card. The 2019 temporary exhibition in the Friends Room was part of the Shackleton centenary celebrations, and featured objects that were already in the collection and new acquisitions made by the museum team (and the Institute's archive) over the centenary period. In spite of the

NHLF funding, these acquisitions were not as numerous as had initially been hoped. Nevertheless, alongside the Raymond plaque was displayed the letter which, when taken with this rather unassuming object, hints at the possibility of what could have been an entirely different history of Antarctic exploration.

Following its exhibition in the library, the Raymond plaque has been displayed just once more: for the centenary celebrations of the Scott Polar Research Institute on 5.11.2022⁵⁷. It was made available to invited guests ahead of an invitation-only private dinner. There was some discussion between the staff of the library, archives and museum at SPRI as to which objects would be put on display for this event, and it was suggested that objects which spoke to the 'history of SPRI' and would give guests 'warm fuzzy' feelings would be the best fit. Ideally, they would be highly historically significant and/or so precious as to be rarely on display. The air of mystery surrounding the history of the Raymond plaque, coupled with its recent acquisition, meant that it was selected over many other objects for the day. It was also singled out because it was unlikely to have already been seen by the centenary guests – who were mostly very familiar with SPRI and its collections – thereby contributing to the 'behind the scenes' feel of the event. It is worth noting here that this behind-the-scenes engagement with the Raymond Plaque may also increase its perceived value. As Van Broekhoven (2013) suggests – drawing on MacCannell's (1973) work in tourism studies – back of house areas 'generate feelings of awe, amazement and wonder to almost all who visit them' (Van Broekhoven 2013: 158) and as a result, a certain 'aura' builds up around the objects in these areas. The fact that, since the centenary event, the plaque has remained in the stores of the museum, only serves to increase this aura.

An Antarctic object that has never been to Antarctica

Unusually for a museum object, the Raymond plaque's accession was predicated upon external funding, provided without knowing what it would be used to acquire. Furthermore, while it is linked to an archival document in SPRI's collections, the plaque's proposed history could be said to be largely based on conjecture. Nevertheless, prior to its acquisition, it had been preserved in a private collection since it was made in 1907. It has not been melted down or lost, and it was offered for sale at the time of Shackleton's centenary celebrations, which were an important aspect of the ongoing history of the Heroic Age. 100 years previously, this plaque must have been deemed valuable enough by somebody to think it was worth preserving. Since then, it has passed between other interested parties – or at least, parties whose interest in it at least stretched to not throwing it away – until it was eventually collected by the Polar Museum. In spite of all of this, it has never been to the Antarctic, it has never been used by Shackleton, and it may not even have been *seen* by him. As a result, it raises similar, but contrasting, questions of authenticity to those raised by the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* boat. Where the boat was a newly built replica used to reproduce a 'heroic' expedition, this plaque was a contemporary of Shackleton's but never used by him. As Diana, who worked in conservation and collections care at the museum, described:

It's never gone anywhere at all! Yes, but it's interesting because the *Ernest Shackleton* is not contemporary, it is a replica – it was always a replica, and although it has replicated the journey, its authenticity is that it's been in Antarctica replicating a journey, but it's a sort of

⁵⁷ Though SPRI's actual centenary year was 2020, the celebrations were pushed back due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

second-generation authenticity. Because the Raymond plaque has the authenticity of being made for something even though it never did it, it is at least contemporary with the events that it somehow memorialised, whereas the other one is like a homage really, isn't it? So it's curious because if you were to say, well which one is more important/authentic/significant than the other, that's quite a difficult call, because they're both a bit hollow in different ways, aren't they? [Laughs].

But the Raymond plaque is an accessioned part of the museum collection, and the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* boat is a specifically non-accessioned 'facility'. Did this plaque become part of the collection, when the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* did not, simply because of the material available during the finite timescale of the Collecting Cultures grant and the fact that it was conveniently small? This interaction between funding provision, what it is to be 'authentic' and the physical space available for an object is therefore one which requires careful probing in the production of museum collections.

Can the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* boat or the Raymond Plaque be described as authentic?

From tourism studies (Rickly-Boyd 2012) to archaeology (Joyce 2013) and museum studies (Van Broekhoven 2013) a variety of definitions of authenticity have been described. Two major starting points are the opposing ideas of authenticity as inherent within a given object, or contextually produced by the people viewing it. Jones (2010) describes these two ideas as 'materialist' and 'constructivist' respectively, and while the constructivist viewpoint is increasingly popular within material culture studies, she suggests that it does not do enough to engage with the materiality of the object itself. Her argument is that, 'Having situated authenticity as a cultural construct, it is as if layers of authenticity can be simply wrapped around *any* object irrespective of its unique history and materiality' (Jones 2010: 183). Instead, she considers authenticity to be constituted by networks of relationships that connect people, places and things. This is a particularly fruitful starting point for the consideration of the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* lifeboat and the Raymond Plaque. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, I also look to Holtorf's (2013) 'middle way' in his argument for a 'modified constructivist' approach to authenticity that also brings to the fore an object's 'pastness' in our perception of its authenticity.

The *Sir Ernest Shackleton* boat could be seen to be authentic in terms of its relationship to a particular place. It has made the fabled journey from Elephant Island to South Georgia famously first accomplished by Shackleton 80 years before. The value placed on the boat as a result of this interaction with place was enough for it to be housed at SPRI, but not enough, in the end, for it to be accessioned into the museum's collection. Meanwhile, the Raymond Plaque is not authentic in relation to place – it never did make it to the Antarctic with Shackleton. Nevertheless, even though he may never even have seen it, it is linked to Shackleton through its life history, and this was sufficient for it to have been accessioned into the museum's collection.

Arguably, the fact that the plaque was accessioned suggests that its person-centred authenticity, linked to Shackleton (Figure 11.8), is more valuable than the boat's place-based authenticity, born from its ties to Antarctica. But there are also practical and material factors at play. The plaque was small enough to be housed in the museum's store, meaning that the financial demands of its future

care are lesser than the boat's, in spite of the initial expenditure in acquiring it. It is also possible, as Van Broekhoven 2013 suggests, that the privileged 'back of house' position of the plaque creates an aura around it which is not held by the boat on display outside the building. This aura leads to the amplification of the plaque as the more 'special' of the two objects, and the continuation of its status as an authentic object worthy of care. So it is that, while authenticity is certainly tied to place and people, as Jones (2010) suggests, in the instance of these objects, it also draws physicality, funding and the practicalities of museum space and conservation into the network for the researcher to consider.

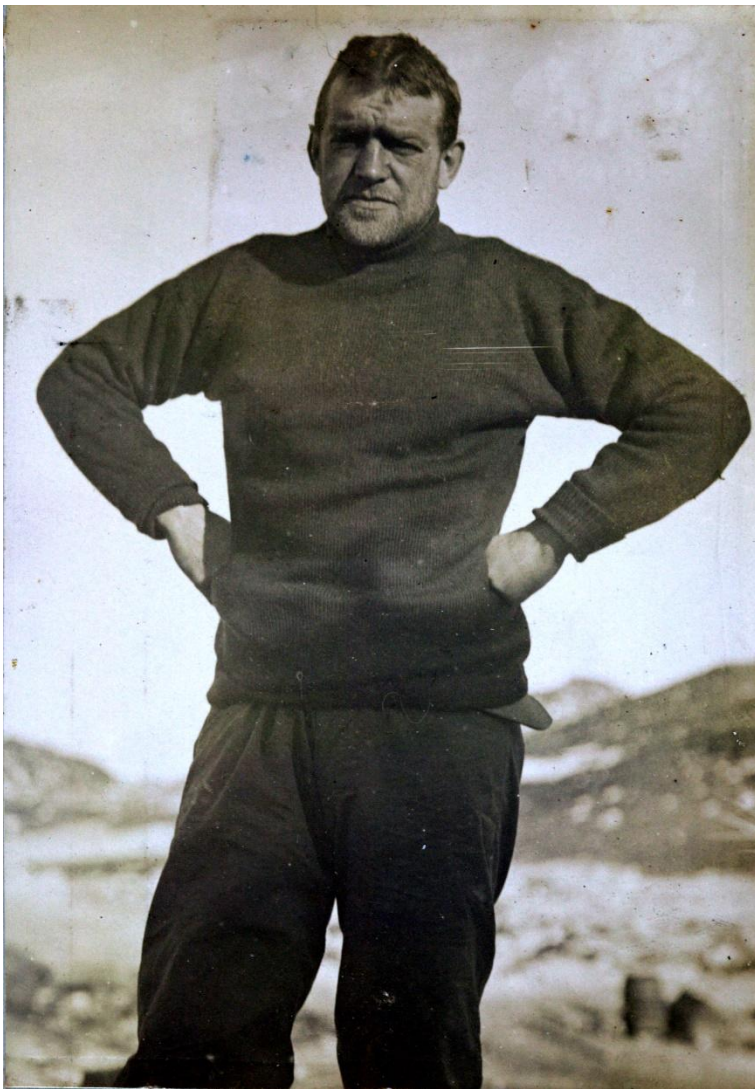


Figure 11.8. P68/76/87 - Ernest Shackleton stands with hands on hips. Location: Ross Dependency © SPRI.

Authenticity, in the case of the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* lifeboat and the Raymond plaque is a combination of physical attributes and constructed networks, but there is also a further element at work. As Holtorf (2013) suggests, 'pastness' can be helpful to think through the additional interactions at play within an authentic object. However, I argue that these objects possess an 'aura' (Cant 2019) or 'stickiness' (Gell 1998) that makes them difficult for viewers to extricate themselves from and this is their relatively stronger and weaker connection to an inalienable (Weiner 1992) figure of the Heroic Age of exploration. This means that, although the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* has followed in Shackleton's footsteps, it will never be the 'real' thing to Shackleton fans, moreover, even

if the Raymond plaque was never actually seen by the man himself, its intangible connection to him nevertheless raises its status within the museum collection.

In some ways, these objects began with similarly vague connections to the 'authentic' Shackleton story, but the influencing factor of person over place, and the more mundane impact of physical properties and funding, as well as the complexities of their 'aura', ultimately meant that the Raymond Plaque has taken up a more privileged position within the Polar Museum's collections. Moreover, the decision to accession the plaque and not the boat will have ongoing implications in the future treatment of these objects for as long as they are housed at the Polar Museum.

12. Captain Oates' sleeping bag: the power of people



Figure 12.1. N: 857 - Captain Oates' sleeping bag.

Table 6: MODES record on Sleeping bag	
Object no.	N: 857
Brief description	A reindeer skin sleeping bag used by L.E.G. Oates during the journey to the South pole on the British Antarctic Expedition 1910-13 (terra Nova). The bag was found on 12 November 1912 by the search party looking for the polar party. It has been cut along the length to ease the entry of Oates' badly frostbitten leg. Ross Dependency
Note	1. See object file for loose hairs collected in 2010 during sample taking. 2. Typed entry in original accession register reads: 'Reindeer skin sleeping bag which belonged to Lieut. L. Oates on Terra Nova Expedition, 1910-12, and was used by him on the Pole Journey. The opening was slit up to make it easier for his frost-bitten leg. The bag was left at No. 14 Pony Camp wand was later recovered and brought back by Atkinson. The bag was originally presented to the Expedition by Trafalgar House School, Winchester.

Description	Label text Captain Oates' sleeping Bg. On the way back from the Pole, suffering from severe frostbite and in extreme pain, Oates realised that if he sacrificed himself his companions might stand a chance of survival. On 17 March 1912, Scott wrote in his journal: 'We knew that poor Oates was walking to his death, but though we tried to dissuade him, we knew it was the act of a brave man and an English gentleman.' It was Lawrence Oates' 32nd birthday. The following spring the Relief Expedition found the tent with the bodies of Scott, Wilson and Bowers. Further south they discovered the sleeping bag but were unable to find Oates' body. Lieut. Atkinson recalled: 'The kindly snow had covered his body, giving him a fitting burial. Here again, or as near to the site of death as we could judge, we built another cairn to his memory, and placed thereon a small cross...' The sleeping bag is slit along its length so that it was easier for Oates to get in and out of it with his badly frostbitten feet and hands. Given by B.W.G. Oates, 1939.
Material	Skin, reindeer leather A reindeer skin sleeping bag (fur-side in) which narrows towards the feet. It is made of large strips of skin which have been stitched together, with an extra flap of skin which overlaps across the opening. The opening has been reinforced in the centre at the top and bottom with a square of leather, and there is an extra slit in the side to make the opening bigger.
Key word	Sleeping bag
Measurement	Length 1950mm Width 820mm Depth 100mm
Acquisition	B.W.G. Oates 11.1938 Field collection: Edward Leicester Atkinson 12.11.1912
Association	Lawrence Edward Grace Oates 1910-1913
References	1. Cherry's account of finding the sleeping bag Cherry-Garrard, Apsley. (1979). <i>The Worst Journey in the World</i>. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, pp. 544-547: 2. Description of using three-man reindeer sleeping bags; Conversion of reindeer skin sleep suits to sleeping bags Scott, Robert Falcon. (1905). <i>The Voyage of the 'Discovery'</i>. London: Smith, Elder, pp. 352-359; 318-321 3. Sleeping bags presented by Schools etc.; Sleeping bags used on the winter journey to Cape Crozier; Sleeping bags used on the spring journey Scott, R F with biographical introduction by Barrie, JM (1933). <i>Scott's Last Expedition: The Personal Journals of Captain R.F. Scott, R.N., C.V.O., On His Journey to the South Pole</i>, pp. 492-493; 288-289; 324-325
Exhibition/ access information	• 2.10.2009 Frozen as a precaution against vodka beetle • 6 to 10.4.2009 Photography for American Museum of Natural History • The State Coach Britannia, Evolution and Ecology Research Centre, School of Biological Earth and Environmental Sciences 1.11.2010 • Antarctic Cataloguing Project 2014-16 21.3.2016; 20.6.2016

There is a story that an elderly member of the public once came into the Polar Museum and asked to see a sleeping bag which she recalled from a childhood visit. After some consideration by the museum staff, the most likely candidate was thought to be Captain Oates' sleeping bag, which had been in the museum's collection since the late 1930s. The elderly visitor was therefore directed towards this object, which was on display in the permanent gallery. Upon seeing the sleeping bag, she expressed some sadness that it was now locked in a display case, because when she was a child, she had been allowed not only to touch it, but to actually climb inside it. At this point in the story, the museum professionals I spoke to at the Polar Museum often relate their great surprise at this possibility. Reactions ranged from, 'feeling quite queasy' to the more disbelieving, 'my first thought was oh that's *terrible*! And then as I was thinking about it, I thought, no, she *must* be mistaken...'.

The objects at the Polar Museum were originally a teaching resource, and much of its founding collection was used not only for hands-on teaching, but as working equipment taken into the field by university students. However, there are now many measures in place to ensure that accessioned museum objects (such as Oates' sleeping bag) are only handled by trained professionals. Today, inviting a child to climb inside the sleeping bag in the way described in this story is inconceivable. The only possible scenario is therefore that the elderly visitor had her sleeping bag encounter before modern object handling procedures had been put in place. This in itself is not especially surprising, and museum staff are aware of the collections' early life as a teaching resource. Moreover, the professionalisation of the museum following its accreditation by the Arts Council in 2004 means that there is an official acknowledgement that times have changed since the museum's early 20th century beginnings. So why were the museum professionals who told me this story quite so disturbed by the idea of somebody touching Captain Oates' sleeping bag, especially when they knew that handling practices were more lenient in the past? Why do they believe that the visitor must *have* to have been mistaken in her recollection? The answer, I suggest, lies in the sleeping bag's proximity to a 'hero' of Antarctic exploration, the story it is used to tell, and its subsequent status as an 'iconic' object in the museum's collection.

Sponsored equipment

Captain Oates' sleeping bag was purpose-made for Captain Scott's British Antarctic Expedition 1910-13 (*Terra Nova*). To support this expedition, Scott sought a wide range of private and public funders, investors and sponsors. Perhaps the best-known contribution came in the form of provisions, with a number of brands providing the expedition with products (both food and equipment) in exchange for advertising opportunities. The images (Figures 12.2 and 12.3) below of Heinz and Lyle's products in situ in Antarctica are especially striking examples of this. Advertising encouraged buyers to feel a sense of connection with Scott and his men, and that – through buying these products – they could own a small part of the expedition. But there were other ways for members of the public to achieve this sense of connection with the expedition and its members before they had even set sail for Antarctica. A variety of expedition equipment was purchased with funds raised by members of the public, and the expedition's sleeping bags in particular were 'sponsored' kit, paid for with money collected by school groups. In the case of Oates' sleeping bag, the money came from Trafalgar House School in Winchester. It is possible to trace the funding for this particular sleeping bag back to this school because there was a name-giving tradition amongst equipment donors. Everything from ponies to tents and dogs to sledges received a name, and the children of Trafalgar House school, rather unimaginatively, chose to call their sleeping bag 'Trafalgar' (Scott *et al.* 1913). As a result, we

now know that their contribution became part of Captain Oates' life story. The practice of naming not only tied particular objects back to the people who had raised the money to acquire them but also provided donors with a real sense of connection to, and ownership of, a small part of the expedition. Accordingly, in receiving these donated objects, Scott was not simply inviting a financial investment from the public, but an emotional investment in his expedition's success. These advertising and sponsorship practices were specifically designed to draw the public into the story of the *Terra Nova*, providing them with a level of personal investment that would only be further amplified by the tragic story to come.



Figure 12.2.
P2005/5/1065 -
Expedition member sits
on two boxes marked
'Heinz Baked Beans', on
the snow.

Image by Ponting
© SPRI.



Figure 12.3.
P2005/5/1046 -
Penguin stands on
a gravel nest. Next
to it lie two tins of
Lyle's syrup.

Image by Ponting
© SPRI.

From the Arctic to the Antarctic

Once the funds had been raised for its manufacture, the technological knowledge required to produce Oates' sleeping bag was dependent upon an entirely different group of people. It was not unusual for Heroic Age Antarctic explorers to look to the Arctic for inspiration in how to deal with the extreme environment that they would find in the south. Carsten Borchgrevink had brought Persen Savio and Ole Must, two Sámi men from Northern Norway, with him on the British Antarctic Expedition 1898–1900 (*Southern Cross*) (Maddison 2019) (Figure 12.4). The Sámi are an indigenous and historically nomadic cultural group whose traditional lands stretch across northern Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula in Russia (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs n.d.); Savio and Must were employed by Borchgrevink to assist him in navigating the demands of the Antarctic climate. A little over a decade later, Nobu Shirase's Japanese Antarctic Expedition (1910–12) took Yasanosuke Yamabe and Shinkichi Hanamori – two Ainu men from Northern Japan – to help with dog driving (Maddison 2019). The Ainu are a distinct cultural group from the northern part of the Japanese archipelago, who would have been very familiar with life in an especially cold environment, as parts of this area have a sub-Arctic climate⁵⁸. Little wonder then, that Shirase sought the knowledge of men from this ecologically and culturally defined region to assist his expedition into the unknown continent of Antarctica. While Scott himself did not take any people indigenous to the Arctic with him on any of his expeditions, he nevertheless sought out traditional technologies from the Arctic to assist his work in the southern hemisphere.

⁵⁸ The way of life of people from this region of northern Japan has been a subject of interest in the country since the formation of the Yamato Imperial Court in the 4th Century (Takashi 2004).



Figure 12.4. Ole Must and Per Savio.

Image by Ellisif Wessel, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

Edward Atkinson, the expedition's surgeon, provides a detailed record covering the period from before the *Terra Nova* Expedition left Britain until its return some years later in the *British Antarctic Expedition Papers*. Atkinson notes that the reindeer-fur sleeping bags and finnesko boots used on the expedition were best made by a community of Sámi 'on the coast of Russia a days [sic] cross from Vardöe in Norway' (Atkinson 1882-1929). Finnesko are a type of shoe usually made from reindeer fur. Amongst a variety of cold-weather features, they can be packed with sennegrass – a type of sedge from Northern Europe – to provide extra insulation, and were often constructed so that the hairs on the soles ran in opposite directions, giving the wearer greater grip on ice or snow. Though the sleeping bags and finnesko for this expedition were bought through Hagen & Co. of Christiania⁵⁹, Atkinson recommends to readers (who he is likely envisaging as his peers and colleagues) that, should they be planning future polar expeditions, they visit the village across from Vardöe. Once there, they should 'fraternise' with the indigenous people to, 'obtain from them the finnesko and sleeping bags necessary for another expedition.' (*Ibid.*) The recording of this information – from the supplier in what is now Oslo, through to the details of the village where the equipment was made, indicates Atkinson's appreciation of the quality of this kit. He also records, in the section of his papers dedicated to sleeping bags, that the best fur to be used in their production is the 'thick fur of the winter coat of the animal', noting that the summer fur of a reindeer is prone to 'come out in clumps' (*Ibid.*). The traditional ecological knowledge of the best time of year for the hunt in order to

⁵⁹ The city of Christiania changed its name to Oslo in 1925 (Bunkholdt 1925).

provide the warmest, most hardwearing fur is a testament to the Sámi's relationship with their environment, honed through hundreds of years of reindeer husbandry (Sara 2009). So it is that these reindeer skin sleeping bags and Sámi-style finnesko boots made polar exploration more comfortable and more achievable during this period. Heggie notes that technologies like these, originating with indigenous communities and later put to use by Western explorers and scientists, were generally subject to, 'erasure, reinvention, or being 'proved right' by Western science' in the historical record (Heggie 2019: 100). Nevertheless, without the intimate understanding of polar environments held by indigenous groups from the circumpolar north, technologies like these would have been far less effective for European polar explorers. Less effective kit may have meant less successful expeditions, with the men unable to push the boundaries of exploration that they could when backed up by proper equipment derived from real expertise.

Thanks to these indigenous people – and the members of the public and school children who provided the funds – the British Antarctic Expedition was able to provide its men with good quality equipment, enabling them to live and work in the harshest environment on earth.

The *Terra Nova* Expedition

Once all the expedition's equipment – including the sleeping bags – had been bought and loaded onto the ship *Terra Nova*, the British Antarctic Expedition could begin, setting sail from Cardiff on 15th June 1910. One of the sleeping bags eventually came to be the personal possession of Captain Lawrence Oates. During the Heroic Age, reindeer-fur sleeping bags were largely employed for camping and excursions away from the expedition's base (Shackleton 1909). So it was that Oates took his sleeping bag with him to the South Pole when he was selected by Captain Scott to be a member of the Polar Party in 1911. The men eventually reached the Pole on 18th January 1912 (Cherry-Garrard 1922). It is likely to have been sometime between this date and 17th March 1912 that Oates cut the long slit in his sleeping bag to accommodate his frost-bitten foot. Cherry-Garrard reports that Oates only made his frost bite known to his companions three days before his death on 17th March (*ibid.*). The slit he cut in his sleeping bag is the only physical indication of Oates' relationship with it. Perhaps because he cut this slit himself, it now bears witness to Oates' interaction with this sleeping bag, adding to its 'aura' and the feeling of connection to him that it engenders. This slit also represents the incredibly poor physical state that Oates was in during his final days. As Nigel, a former curator at the Polar Museum, informed me,

You can continue walking, marching, trekking on frostbitten feet, you can't do anything like that if they're thawed until they're fully recovered. So, on the way back with frostbitten feet, if he was going to continue coming north – the only way to go – then his feet had to remain frostbitten. If they were thawed out, then he would have been unable to walk and they were unable to carry him. So, the long slit down Oates' bag is so that his feet could remain outside and remain frozen at night.

Oates' connection to this piece of kit is perhaps best understood in the context of 17th March 1912 – when he stepped out of it for the last time. The men of the Polar Party had been struggling on their return from the South Pole, and Oates in particular had been suffering both from frostbite and

scurvy, which was causing an old war wound, sustained in the Boer War, to re-open⁶⁰. Captain Scott records the following passage about Oates in his diary:

He has borne intense suffering for weeks without complaint, and to the very last was able and willing to discuss outside subjects. He did not – would not – give up hope till the very end. He was a brave soul. This was the end. He slept through the night before last, hoping not to wake; but he woke in the morning – yesterday. It was blowing a blizzard. He said, ‘I am just going outside and may be some time.’ He went out into the blizzard and we have not seen him since (Scott 1912: 410).

It is this story that is most often told in connection to the sleeping bag. Oates’ self-sacrifice is mentioned on the sleeping bag’s label in the Polar Museum to this day. When members of the public talk about the sleeping bag, or about Oates, this is one of the key points they make, one of the key stories they remember. It is also one of the few stories that many people know about Antarctic exploration *before* they enter the museum. The enduring power of this story has slowly become inextricably linked with this object, even though the sleeping bag’s role was as something *left behind* by Oates. As one of the museum visitors I spoke to at the Polar Museum said,

...we knew – is it Oates who said ‘I’ll just be some time’? And I just thought, they just let him go but when you read that you realise that it was quite a hard decision for them to let him go and that’s what stood out to me about, although they’re these big, butch explorers, how sensitive they were to each others’ needs if you like, and how they tried to help each other.

The British Antarctic Expedition crew members who had not been part of the Polar Party eventually realised that their crewmates had been lost and, in the spring of 1912, they sent out a search party to try to recover as much information as possible about what had happened (Cherry-Garrard 1922). The members of this search party eventually found the final camp and resting place of Captain Scott, Edward Wilson and Henry Bowers. Here they uncovered diaries and letters, and through these documents, the search party learned the fate of Captain Oates. The search party went out to try to find his remains, and though he was never found, they did uncover the sleeping bag, rolled up and propped against a cairn by an old snow wall that had been built to shelter the men’s ponies on their outward journey (Cherry-Garrard 1922). Apsley Cherry-Garrard brought the sleeping bag back to camp and from there it began its journey back to Britain, and into the public’s imagination.

Without the decisions of these men – that the large and bulky sleeping bag was worth collecting, safeguarding and bringing home again – this object may never have come to stand for Oates, or occupy the important place in the museum’s collection that it has done for decades.

Family first

Once the members of the *Terra Nova* Expedition had returned home, bringing with them any equipment and kit that had survived their journey to the Antarctic, their belongings came to be stored in a number of places. While some came almost immediately to the Polar Museum, after it

⁶⁰ Scurvy occurs from a vitamin C deficiency and one of the roles of vitamin C within the body is to knit together scar tissue. When suffering from scurvy, the body is unable to produce collagen (which requires vitamin C) and therefore scar tissue, which depends on collagen, deteriorates (Hujoel and Hujoel 2022).

was founded in 1920, others remained in personal and family collections. This is true of the sleeping bag.

Letters between Frank Debenham – the first Director of the Scott Polar Research Institute and the Geologist on the *Terra Nova* Expedition – and Captain Oates' mother Caroline, make evident that, as well as a teaching collection, Debenham had plans for the museum at SPRI to act as a memorial to his crewmates. Debenham wrote in a letter to Mrs Oates in February 1932, 'I would particularly like to have something belonging to Soldier [Oates] in the special case we shall have in the Museum vestibule.' (Debenham, 1932a). Then, in November of the same year, he sends another letter, telling her that he is 'anxious' that each member of the Polar Party should have a personal memorial at the Institute. He notes that Lady Maxwell (Bowers' mother) and Mrs Wilson (Wilson's wife) are already onboard with this plan (Debenham 1932b). Surprisingly, Mrs Oates writes to tell him that, 'To be perfectly honest with you, I have never been in sympathy with this Scheme [the building of a polar institute]. It has not appealed to me.' (Oates, C. 1932). In fact, in 1934, Mrs Oates reveals in a telegram to Debenham that she had, 'Never approved method memorial fund administration' (Oates, C. 1934). As the Captain Scott Memorial Mansion House Fund (described in Chapter 4) ultimately provided for the founding of SPRI, Mrs Oates was not interested in sending Debenham anything belonging to her son for display in the Institute. It is possible that Mrs Oates did not approve of the way that the memorial fund (collected from public donations following the news of the death of Scott and his companions) was administered because she did not approve of Scott himself. Barczewski (2007: 63) reports that Lawrence Oates' letters to his mother were full of 'complaints' about Scott, even writing in one, 'I dislike Scott intensely'. Though some amount of ill-will towards the officers in charge on this physically and mentally demanding expedition is surely to be expected, it is clear that Mrs Oates' opinion of Scott – and the institute founded in his memory – may have been coloured by her son's correspondence.

Nevertheless, other members of the Polar Party were honoured via the collection of their possessions to act as memorials in the Institute, and it began to seem that Oates would be left out, until his brother intervened. In 1938, Debenham corresponded with Bryan William Grace Oates, and in a letter dated 3rd November, Debenham wrote:

I write to thank you most heartily for giving us your brother's sleeping bag. We have always wanted some personal souvenir of him for this Institute, since, as you can imagine, we get many enquiries about him in a place established to the memory of the Polar Party itself almost as much as to Scott (Debenham 1938).

In Bryan's reply to Debenham, he explains that it gives him pleasure to think of the sleeping bag in the Institute. He is evidently satisfied with the sleeping bag acting as a memorial to his brother in a nationally recognised institution. The inclusion of an object belonging to him in the collection implies the national importance of Lawrence Oates' experience and sacrifice in the Antarctic. This is an instance of the inherent value bestowed upon an object when it enters a museum collection – even if that museum is relatively newly formed, as the Polar Museum was at that time. This is further amplified by Debenham's following letter of 1st March 1939:

I was so sorry to miss you when you brought your brother's sleeping-bag, but I now write to tell you of our plans with regard to it. You can imagine, of course, that it will be one of the

most important exhibits we have, and we propose to have a special case made for it to be put in the Memorial vestibule, up against the wall (Debenham 1939a).

Only a few such objects were collected to act simply as a memorial so early on in the Institute's life. As a result, Oates' sleeping bag was somewhat removed from many other objects in the collection, because it was specifically accessioned to hold the memory of a particular individual who had met a tragic fate. The role of the Oates family in securing this place for Lawrence within the museum is due entirely to their donation of an object which could so effectively stand in his place. Nevertheless, it was the decision of Oates' family to donate the sleeping bag to the museum at SPRI, rather than to retain it in their personal family collection, which ultimately led to it becoming an important part of this national collection.

It is worth noting here that Gilbert White's House and Gardens in Hampshire now houses much of the Oates family collection. Robert Washington Oates (Lawrence's cousin), responded to a public appeal for funds to save the British naturalist, Gilbert White's house for the nation, and in so doing requested that it also become the home for his family collection (Gilbert White's House and Gardens n.d.). As a result, the Oates collection was donated in 1954 (Atkinson 2024). I did not find any connections to this museum in my tracing of the object history of Oates' sleeping bag, and so it is unlikely that this donation, 15 years later, had previously contributed to Caroline Oates' reluctance to support the museum at SPRI.

The only temporary exhibition

As can sometimes be the way with family donations, the acquisition of Oates' sleeping bag was not entirely straightforward. Not long after Debenham had taken delivery of this object – and written to Bryan Oates to explain his plans to display it in the Memorial vestibule – he received a letter from an old crew mate, George Murray Levick. Levick had been the surgeon and zoologist aboard the *Terra Nova* and was in the midst of helping to organise an exhibition in London.

The Exhibition of Royal and Historic Treasures opened in Piccadilly in 1939 and as part of the event, Levick had been working on Debenham to send a variety of objects for display. Then, on 17th June 1939 he asked Debenham to include Oates' sleeping bag along with the other objects he was sending for the exhibition, enclosing a letter from Violet Oates – Lawrence and Bryan's sister. This letter, from Violet to Levick, dated 14th June 1939, reads:

My dear Dr. Levick,

Since writing you about Laurie's sleeping bag I find that Bryan has already sent this to the Polar Research Institute at Cambridge without my knowledge. I hear that it is on view at Cambridge so I suggest that you approach Professor Debenham to loan it to you (Oates, V. 1939).

While it is unusual for family members to continue to make requests regarding objects which have been donated to the museum, the poor communication of this situation, and a sense of obligation to Oates' family, left Debenham inclined to lend the sleeping bag to the exhibition as requested. However, this did not come without its own difficulties. As Debenham writes in his letter to Violet Oates on 20th June 1939:

We have sent off to the Exhibition your brother's sleeping-bag in accordance with your instructions through Dr. Levick. It will be a most notable exhibit in the collection they are getting together [...] Our only regret is that the request for its loan did not come a week earlier because we had just got it in its permanent case pinned to the wall of the vestibule and hermetically sealed for ever. This occasion seemed to be an appropriate one for undoing that work, but I think once we have it again it must be sealed up for good. We are very grateful to your brother for giving it to us and it has become a centre-piece exhibit in the Memorial Vestibule (Debenham 1939b).

Debenham's frustration in this correspondence is clear, though he remains grateful to the family for donating the sleeping bag to the museum. Especially interesting is the description of the sleeping bag as being 'hermetically sealed' into its case in the Memorial vestibule (Figure 12.5). Debenham had been concerned with the material condition of the sleeping bag since the beginning – asking Bryan in one of his first letters how he had managed to keep it in such good repair. This interest is unsurprising as reindeer fur sheds continuously even when it has not been infested with insect life or left to become damp – two problems which may easily have occurred while it was in transit from the Antarctic or in storage with Oates' family. Debenham later describes the 'hermetically sealed' case in another letter to Levick, saying:

...your last request for Titus' [Oates] sleeping-bag cut us to the heart as we had just collected funds and got a special case made and pinned to the wall, in which the bag had been hermetically sealed for ever. [...] when it does return, I think we must lock it up for good. It is in wonderful preservation but we want it to last for centuries and to do that means extraordinary precautions of one kind or another (Debenham 1939c).

The fact that Debenham is thinking about the sleeping bag in terms of its long-term preservation shows the reverence he holds for it. While the museum at this time was certainly putting objects in cases, these were mostly donated second hand by other museums in Cambridge⁶¹. To have gone to the effort of commissioning and funding an entirely custom-built case for this comparatively large object is a tangible measure of its standing within the collection.

⁶¹ As evidenced by many notes of thanks in the Annual Reports of the Institute. These notes are evident from the very first annual report in 1939, which notes a case donated by the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography, all the way through until 1990 when the Fitzwilliam Museum provided some cases on long term loan. (Scott Polar Research Institute 1939; 1990).



Figure 12.5. P48/44/8 - Vestibule of the Scott Polar Research Institute building with the sleeping bag at the far end on the right hand side (no date, likely to be 1948). Image by Ramsey and Muspratt © SPRI.

The sleeping bag was reportedly a popular exhibit at Levick's exhibition, and Debenham received an official letter informing him that HRH Princess Alice had been particularly impressed by it on her visit. However, not everyone was so pleased to see it there. Further complicating the family politics of the situation, Debenham received a letter from Bryan Oates asking whether the Institute had given away the sleeping bag (Oates, B. 1939). He had seen in the catalogue of the exhibition that there was no indication that it had been leant – as there was for other objects leant from the museum at SPRI – and wanted reassurance that, 'it is loaned from the Institute to which I presented it, and will be returned there.' The Assistant to the Director at the Institute, Miss Fetherstonaugh, replied immediately to put his mind at ease, saying:

I know that [Debenham] would like me to assure you that the Institute would never part with the sleeping bag for any reason whatever, as it is one of our most treasured possessions. We lent it to the exhibition on the request of Miss Oates and we presumed that it was your wish also. I must say that we were very loath to do it as we had had a wall case specially made for it, and it had been very carefully treated against moth and sealed up. Professor Debenham in writing to Miss Oates said that he hoped that we should not have to lend it again as he was afraid that it would not do the bag any good (Fetherstonaugh 1939).

On 6th September 1939, the exhibition was ordered to close early by Princess Alice, following the official start of the Second World War five days earlier. By this time, there had already been official correspondence from the exhibition organisers advising SPRI that 'it is impossible to insure against war risks' (Committee for the Exhibition of Royal and Historic Treasures 1939). As a result, the sleeping bag was sent back to the Polar Museum the day after the exhibition's closure and was received the following day. Even though it was cut short, during the period from 29th June – 31st August 1939, in which it was open to the public, the exhibition welcomed 100,000 visitors.

After these events, Debenham made good on his promise never to loan out the sleeping bag again. Nevertheless, this rather confused episode – and the way that it was dealt with – highlights the importance of the museum's obligations to the families of the people to whom their objects once belonged. This is as true today as it was during the early years of the museum. The need to treat donor families with respect – and the tightrope that this sometimes entails professionally – also impacts on the treatment of objects themselves.

Early museum life

Since its return from the Exhibition of Royal and Historic Treasures in September 1939, the sleeping bag has remained in the building at SPRI. While other accessioned objects that once belonged to Oates have been leant out over the years, that the sleeping bag has not been reveals its important place in the collections at the Polar Museum. Nevertheless, it has at times been requested, including for an exhibition at the Royal Geographical Society in 1946, as well as for *South: Race to the Pole* at the National Maritime Museum in 2000. Despite museums becoming increasingly professionalised, and therefore the safety of the sleeping bag being assured, neither request was granted (in 1946 it

was substituted by another sleeping bag and in 2000 the loan simply refused)⁶². By this time, the sleeping bag was simply too important to the collection to be sent out for exhibition elsewhere.

The sleeping bag remained on display, hanging in the hermetically sealed case which had been specially made for it, in what is now known as the Memorial Hall, for decades. Indeed, it is clearly visible behind the then Director of the Institute, Gordon Robin, in a 1961 film for Anglia Television, made about the Institute and now accessible via the East Anglian Film Archive (East Anglian Film Archive n.d.). In this film, Robin stands in front of the sleeping bag, still sealed into its special case in the vestibule, and it is highlighted as a star of the collection. I have found no suggestion that it was moved from this case in the 20 years prior to that, following its return from the Exhibition of Royal and Historic Treasures.

In 1972, the sleeping bag was finally moved, though it remained on display in the museum. New glass cases were fitted, and it was felt that it could now safely be moved without being at risk from pests. In its new case, the sleeping bag shared the limelight with other objects from Scott's final expedition as well as a reproduction of a large painting from 1913, *A very gallant gentleman* by the British painter and illustrator Charles C. Dollman. The painting depicts the imagined final moments of Oates' life as he walks out into a blizzard, bent double with the strain of the weather and his weakening body. This painting, in combination with the fact that the sleeping bag now shared a case with other personal objects from the men who had died on the expedition, meant that the air of sombre memorialisation inherent in its exhibition remained. Nevertheless, Joy, a former curator of the museum, described the display in the sleeping bag's new case as being unlit and having minimal interpretation about the bag itself. The sleeping bag was hung from a wire coat-hanger, and was too long to hang fully, so that half of it was folded along the base of the case (Figure 12.6). A small label indicated that it was Captain Oates' sleeping bag. There is a photograph of the sleeping bag in this position from an event in the museum which took place on 17th July 2008 (Figure 12.7). At this time, the museum was mainly a display of Antarctic – particularly 'Heroic Age' – collections.

⁶² Object safety was a particular concern for early requests as some objects that had been loaned out in the very early years of the museum had been returned damaged. This left a lasting impression on the staff, who became generally more reticent to send objects out on loan.



Figure 12.6. Sleeping bag in the new case in the early 2000s.



Figure 12.7. Sleeping bag in the case (left) in the context of the museum in 2008.

It was at this point in tracing the object's itinerary that it became clear to me that the sleeping bag remembered by the elderly museum visitor at the beginning of this chapter was highly unlikely to have been the one that once belonged to Oates. Having traced Oates' sleeping bag through its exhibition in various glass cases, it has evidently always been deemed too important to be put on 'open display'. This method of exhibiting objects puts no barriers between them and members of the public and as a result, may have made it easier for a child to be invited to climb inside the sleeping bag. Far more likely then, is that another reindeer-fur sleeping bag, accessioned at a similar time but with a different – less emotionally powerful – provenance, was at one time put on open display, and that it is this the visitor remembered climbing inside as a child. This realisation was met with a sense of relief by the staff of the museum.

In 2009, an entry in the museum's digital catalogue indicates that the sleeping bag was photographed for the American Museum of Natural History in New York, and a large loan of 24 objects was organised to be sent there for exhibition in 2010. This was a very significant loan, both in terms of scale and the distance required to transport the objects, many of which had been taken on the *Terra Nova* Expedition, or used by important historical figures including Scott, Shackleton and Frank Debenham. The sleeping bag, however, remained at the Polar Museum. Later in 2009, it was moved to the 'plant room' in the museum's basement – ahead of the complete refurbishment of the

museum and stores, as a result of a Heritage Lottery Fund grant⁶³ (see Chapter 4). During this roughly year-long period off display, from the spring of 2009 until May 2010, the sleeping bag underwent a freezing treatment as a precaution against vodka beetle, its care being a top priority even when out of the public eye.

Although the sleeping bag has moved very little since its original display in the museum, this section of its life history highlights the importance of professional curatorial decision making. Whether that be the decision not to lend out the object, or to transfer it to a different case, or treat it for pests, these decisions were always made with the longevity of the sleeping bag in mind. Though what we understand to be careful practice may change over time, the fact of the sleeping bag's importance to the collection was never in doubt.

A proper place

The redevelopment of the museum in 2010 saw a number of large adaptations to the ground floor of the Institute, not least of which was the reopening of the original 1930s front door. The door had previously been blocked off and made into a built-in display case, fondly referred to as 'the shrine', and used to display mainly Antarctic objects from the Heroic Age (see Chapter 4). Also in 2010, the temporary gallery was re-shaped and many more Arctic collections went on display in the museum. However, amongst all this one thing was certain – Oates' sleeping bag would be put out on display again as soon as possible.

From the very beginning of the tendering process to find exhibition designers for the permanent gallery redesign, the sleeping bag was a clear 'star' object. One tender included a 'hero wall' and tribute to Captain Oates as a major part of its design (Figure 12.8). It centred around the sleeping bag, and even directly criticised its previous display, 'Oates' sleeping bag is tucked away in a corner of a cabinet (suspended from a wire coat-hanger)' (Logistik n.d.).

⁶³ Since 1994, the National Lottery Fund has distributed National Lottery funding (Heritage Fund n.d.). In 2019, the fund was rebranded the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF).



Figure 12.8. Extract from the museum brand development, design and build document proposal showing the importance of Oates' story and the sleeping bag.

Though this tender was unsuccessful in its bid, its emphasis on the sleeping bag was not unusual, and the design which ultimately won the contract also included a photograph of the sleeping bag in one of its case mock-ups. It was one of only a few objects from the museum included in these tender designs by external designers. Though this appears to be a minor point, the fact that the sleeping bag was identified by these outsider professionals as an impactful object, and specifically placed in their plans, highlights the power it holds. Its significance was clear, as was the necessity to include it in the newly redesigned gallery. While other objects within the museum's collections may or may not be chosen to be on display after the redevelopment project, the display of the sleeping bag was never questioned.

Ultimately, the redesign worked on the basis that the sleeping bag would not only be an important object but would lead a storyline in the newly conceptualised 'Heroic Age' section. In the document 'An Interpretation Plan for the Polar Museum Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge' (Lane 2008) which was produced following the successful funding bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund, the planned storyline for the *Terra Nova* Expedition specifically included a reference to Oates' words 'I am just going outside and may be some time'. This sense of the sleeping bag as a key building block around which the museum was formed continued in my discussions with former curator, Joy:

You come in now at the right-hand side of that space, and basically I decided that we were going to have to completely alter it because we couldn't fit the very long sledges and the

sleeping bag in. So I basically recast that side of the building entirely. We took out two *huge* panes of glass windows...

The decision to entirely redevelop one external wall of the building in order to display the sleeping bag more effectively was surely not taken lightly. Part of the consideration was that it is a long object, but its age meant that it needed to be displayed lying flat, rather than hung (either completely or partially) as it had been before. Its place within the museum's collection meant that big decisions like this could be made for the sleeping bag, in a way which might not have been possible for other objects with less well-known histories. The museum staff's appreciation of the stories conveyed by, and importance of, the sleeping bag ultimately shaped not only its permanent display, but also the very fabric of the building which houses it.

Today, the sleeping bag is displayed at the far end of the part of the permanent gallery dedicated to the *Terra Nova* Expedition. Visitors follow the story of this expedition through its early preparations, to specific sections on food, clothing, photography and transport. They read about Roald Amundsen's achievement as the first man to reach the South Pole and Captain Scott's subsequent realisation that he had been beaten. Then, the tragic loss of life at the end of Scott's final expedition is explained. This story is accompanied, poignantly, by the black flag left at the pole by Amundsen and collected by Scott as proof of both men's achievements. Beneath the flag lies Oates' sleeping bag. Joy, the curator who selected the objects and themes of this display, described the decision to display the sleeping bag here as representing a 'full stop' to Scott's story. In the corner of the gallery, it provides visitors with the opportunity to briefly pause, and take in the impact of the story, before moving on (for the accompanying label see Figure 12.9). From the sleeping bag, visitors may choose to double back on themselves and read the emotionally charged last letters written by the Polar Party, or move on to a section of the gallery dedicated to Shackleton. The positioning of the sleeping bag therefore invites contemplation and provides the visitor with a choice of how much further to engage with this emotional story. However, should the visitor stop to read the text of the sleeping bag's label, they will be presented with interpretation that leans heavily on the emotive nature of Oates' sacrifice (and, briefly, on the pain that he would have suffered in the days leading up to his death). This label does not engage with any other aspects of the sleeping bag's social life, or even provide any real information about its material specificities. Instead, it focuses on the tragedy of Oates' death, cementing the sleeping bag as a material representation of this single historic event.

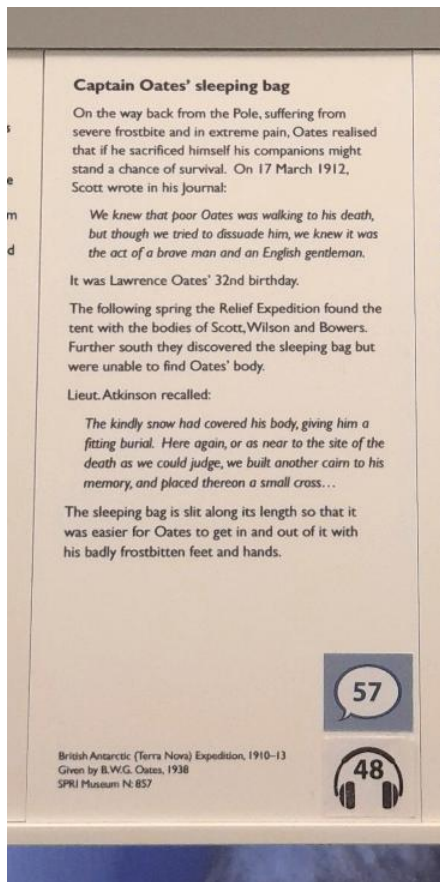


Figure 12.9. Captain Oates' sleeping bag label – transcript.

'On the way back from the Pole, suffering from severe frostbite and in extreme pain, Oates realised that if he sacrificed himself his companions might stand a chance of survival. On 17 March 1912, Scott wrote in his Journal: *We knew that poor Oates was walking to his death, but though we tried to dissuade him, we knew it was the act of a brave man and an English gentleman.*

It was Lawrence Oates' 32nd birthday.

The following spring the Relief Expedition found the tent with the bodies of Scott, Wilson and Bowers. Further south they discovered the sleeping bag but were unable to find Oates' body.

Lieut. Atkinson recalled:

The kindly snow had covered his body, giving him a fitting burial. Here again, or as near to the site of the death as we could judge, we built another cairn to his memory, and placed thereon a small cross...

The sleeping bag is slit along its length so that it was easier for Oates to get in and out of it with his badly frostbitten feet and hands.'

Serendipity

It is possible, in tracing the itinerary of the sleeping bag to this point, to imagine that every decision that has been made about it has been both purposeful and clearly thought through. However, there is also space for serendipity in the movement of objects through time. Nowhere is this more evident than in the sleeping bag's connection to Jim Frecklington.

Following the museum's 2010 redesign, the sleeping bag was included in ongoing condition checking and pest-trapping measures. During this process, a diligent conservator collected a small envelope of reindeer hairs which had shed from the sleeping bag. As they had come from an accessioned object, these hairs were placed in an envelope and filed in a cabinet kept by the Curator of the museum. This practice of keeping 'loose' pieces of museum objects is not unusual, and often results in the ability to run – for example – destructive tests without damaging the objects themselves. In the case of the sleeping bag though, these hairs were soon called upon for a very different purpose.

Jim Frecklington is an Australian man and lover of the British Royal Family. He built the State Coach Britannia – a carriage created to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012 – by hand (Figure 12.10). As part of this labour of love, Jim included a variety of materials representing historic people and events from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. He approached the Polar Museum to enquire if there was any material he could include in this endeavour, and as it happened, not long before, during routine conservation work, the envelope of loose hairs had been filled from Oates' sleeping bag. Diana, who had saved the hairs, and Joy, the curator at the time, agreed that they would be a suitable thing to give Jim for his project. Now those hairs, harvested by Sámi reindeer herders, funded by school boys, saved by Antarctic explorers, donated by family members, revered

by polar academics and collected by museum staff were part of a Royal coach. So it is that the importance of unexpected outsiders, and of serendipity, should not be overlooked in the production of an object's life history, and its subsequent perceived importance by the public. Furthermore, the sleeping bag became part of an entirely new object, produced for an entirely different purpose, without (for the most part) leaving the walls of the museum.



Figure 12.10. State Coach Britannia
Jordiferrer, CC BY-SA 4.0

<<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia

An icon

Part of the reason for choosing the sleeping bag as one of the key object itineraries of my thesis was because of its popularity. It is the only object which came up in every single interview I undertook with members of museum staff, both past and present, and part of this prevalence seems to be down to its mutability. As Melanie says:

...it's fascinating because you can go down so many different lines with it. You can link to the Herbert Ponting poem, 'The Sleeping Bag' and do the old tongue-twister⁶⁴ and that leads into a variety of performances, entertainment, literature, writing. You can go down the insulation, keeping warm route. You can go down the manufacture route. You can go down the sponsorship route from the schools [...] you can go down the Queen's carriage and the three hairs in the door.

However, I argue that its longevity in the museum has been more closely linked to its relationship with Oates and his categorisation as an Antarctic hero, which has itself benefited from the ongoing interpretation of museum professionals for almost 85 years. When Simon, a member of collections staff, described giving a tour of the museum he said:

I like to point out the sleeping bag a lot of the time, because people – a lot of people – also know the Captain Oates story. Will have heard of Captain Oates and will have heard the

⁶⁴ For this tongue Twister, published in the third volume of the *South Polar Times* (a publication produced in Antarctica during both of Captain Scott's expeditions) see Epilogue.

expression 'I'm going out for some time' or 'I may be some time' you know. I knew that without really knowing who Oates was or his connection to Scott before coming here.

It is easy to hang stories on individuals – particularly when those stories are complex or multi-faceted. Here, Oates has come to stand for the bravery of the men of the Polar Party, the disappointment of losing the Race to the Pole, *and* the heroics of his own actions in walking out into the Antarctic in an attempt to save his friends. By allowing a single person to become the face of a story, they can also become the hero, and as a result the objects that belong to them can become something like hero-objects. Eventually, this system becomes so self-fulfilling that the objects themselves are described as 'iconic', and then the very idea that they could be taken off display becomes impossible to countenance. As Verity, curator of the Polar Museum describes, whatever happens:

We would still have to have the last letters that Captain Scott ever wrote on display, and we would still have to explain what the *Terra Nova* Expedition was, and we would still have to have Captain Oates' sleeping bag on display. Because they take on relic status – people come and pay homage to them, and if they can't pay homage to them here then they can't anywhere really.

The display of an 'heroic' death

Captain Oates' sleeping bag has captured the imagination of museum staff and the public alike for nearly 90 years. So what is it about this particular object that renders it so captivating? The importance of curatorial decision making is not to be underestimated, not least because, as Cojocaru notes, biographical objects, 'become valuable as cult objects through exhibition' (Cojocaru 2022: 474). This is a result of the capacity of museums to provide places for contemplation of objects which would otherwise not enter the public eye. Indeed, Cojocaru argues that, 'Exhibiting gives things the opportunity to become heroic objects, as the viewer is now advised not to find practical utility in a snow shovel or a urinal, but rather to contemplate them, as they have something to 'tell us'' (Cojocaru 2022: 482). For this sleeping bag, the only one of the objects in my research that has been displayed nearly continuously since its accession, the opportunity to be contemplated and judged as heroic is longstanding. However, the implication of Cojocaru's assertion is that *any* object on display has the capacity for contemplation which will – arguably – eventually lead to them being considered 'heroic' objects. So why do some objects come to be more revered than others? What distinguishes Oates' sleeping bag from other Heroic Age objects on display at the Polar Museum? The answer, I suggest, is twofold: firstly, our understanding of objects is heavily influenced by the *style* of their display and, secondly, because of the sleeping bag's proximity to Oates' 'heroic' death.

Since it entered the Polar Museum's collection, Oates' sleeping bag has always been displayed in such a way as to emphasise the emotional story to which it is connected. Indeed, Debenham first accessioned it specifically because he wanted an object to represent Oates in the Institute's 'Memorial vestibule'. It was meant to act as a site of emotional connection to the *Terra Nova* Expedition, the specific actions of Oates and the other men, and their deaths. To add to this, when the sleeping bag was first displayed in its own purpose-built case, its physical separation from the rest of the objects on display amplified the opportunity to contemplate it separately and consider the story which brought it there. Later, when it was moved to a shared case with other objects relating to the expedition, it was nevertheless displayed alongside a striking artist's impression of

Oates walking out of the tent into a blizzard and his inevitable death. To show such a dramatic image alongside the sleeping bag only served to underline its place as a significant object with a direct line to Oates and these events. Perhaps most significant of all was the impact that the sleeping bag itself had on the 2010 redesign of the Polar Museum, literally shaping the physical architecture of the new gallery space so that it could be displayed lying flat, as if Oates had just left. Today, its display forms an emotional full-stop to the tragic story of the *Terra Nova* Expedition. Through tracing its life history at the Polar Museum, it is evident that the sleeping bag has always been displayed in order to maximise visitors' emotional connection with it. As a result, its place as a 'heroic' object seems to be sealed, but this is also dependent upon the sleeping bag's inherent connection to a specific event with ample capacity for emotional contemplation.

Albano (2007) suggests that personal objects can become 'cultural icons' when they are considered within a biographical narrative. Specifically, she notes that – while some objects may hold a passing biographical link to an individual of historic note, those with *special* significance are distinct because of, 'their links to the identity of the biographical subject, their act on a personal level to authenticate the subject.' (Albano 2007: 18). This is certainly true of Oates' sleeping bag, which is both linked to the identifying factors of Oates' story (his sacrifice and heroic death) and enables the authentication of the subject because it was this very sleeping bag which he left behind when he walked out into the polar landscape. What makes this sleeping bag particularly notable, therefore, is its proximity to Oates' death. Moreover, Albano identifies clothes as especially easily fetishised because of the closeness with the individual that they symbolise, they, 'tell us, through their physicality – shape, condition, texture, colour, and smell – about another absent physicality, that of the person who wore them.' (Albano 2007: 20). It follows that sleeping bags, linked as they are to the intimate act of sleep, should occupy a similar category. Arguably, this intimate interaction with the body itself further amplifies the sleeping bag's heroic status because of the impression it gives of the *absent* body. From the way it is displayed lying flat, to the roughly-cut slit that bears witness to Oates' frostbite, the sleeping bag makes Oates' body conspicuous by its absence. Albano writes, 'biographical objects become relics. They act as cultural fetishes, as the tangible surrogate of the absent subject' (Albano 2007: 20). At the same time, she argues – like Cojocar (2022) – that the original 'functionality' of the biographical object is overcome by its new role as a biographically significant object. This goes some way to explaining the horror of the museum professionals when they heard the elderly visitor's story about getting into – supposedly – Oates' sleeping bag. The sleeping bag was no longer *for* that, it had become a site of remembrance and reverence for a body which was no longer there.

13. Scott's snow goggles



Figure 13.1. Scott's goggles on display at Discovery Point.

Table 7: ADLIB record on Scott's Snow Goggles

Object no.	W 79.133.51
Brief description	Wooden snow goggles belonging to Captain Scott
Note	Goggles like these were essential when trekking through hostile Antarctic terrains to prevent the intense glare of sunlight reflecting off the snow and burning the explorers' eyes. Used by Scott during the Discovery expedition 1901-1904, his initials "RFS" are carved into the top side. The goggles could be tied on with leather straps and the cut cross provides some degree of visibility. Scott preferred these to the glass lenses which would often frost over.
Description	Snow goggles, wooden, with a cross cut across each eye to provide some degree of visibility, small holes were pierced at each side so that they could be tied on with leather straps. This pair belonged to Captain Robert Falcon Scott, his initials 'R.F.S.' are carved into them on the top side. He used them during the National Antarctic Expedition 1901-1904. Goggles like these were essential when trekking through such hostile terrains as the Antarctic with explorers often exposed to conditions such as 'snow blindness'. This was caused by the intense glare of sunlight reflecting off the snow, burning either the corneas or any exposed skin; leaving the men with blistered faces and often unable to see.
Material	Wood with leather straps

Keyword	Goggles
Measurement	Length 135mm, width 45mm, depth 40mm
Period	1901 – 1904
Acquisition	purchased
Association	Used by Captain Scott on the British National Antarctic Expedition 1901-1904
Exhibition/ access information	• On display in Adventure Begins (redisplayed 2018) • filmed for the Antiques Roadshow on the 23rd of June 2019. • conservation/restoration 25.4.2019 to 19.6.2019 • 3D scan (https://skfb.ly/6LS09) created by the Scottish Maritime Museum May 2019 • 3D Scan and 3D printing of goggles 2024 by Southampton University

It's got his initials on, which for some people would be like 'wow!'. The fact that it was worn on his head! – Debbie.

Just like Captain Oates' sleeping bag at the Polar Museum, it is the connection of these snow goggles in the collection at Discovery Point (Figure 13.1) to the physical presence of an inalienable individual – their proximity to the *body of Captain Scott* – which renders them significant. The goggles are displayed alongside a few other personal items belonging to Scott, in *The Adventure Begins* gallery at Discovery Point. I asked Sarah, who works in education and outreach at the museum, why she thought they were more impressive than, for example, his cigarette lighter or his knife. She suggested that the goggles' links to the harsh physical conditions that Scott would have experienced in Antarctica, and the fact that they protected his body from these conditions, makes them especially compelling. They give context to the physically demanding situations he would have experienced. The goggles, like Oates' sleeping bag, bring the visitor closer to the *person* that Scott was, and the physical way that he interacted with an environment few will ever visit themselves.

In this chapter, I follow Scott's goggles through time from their early display in the museum, to their place in *The Adventure Begins* today. I chose these goggles to be the subject of this object itinerary for two reasons. Firstly, because they are part of the most recently refurbished gallery in the museum and, secondly, at the suggestion of Debbie and Paula whose responsibilities lie across interpretation, collections and exhibitions. When I told them that I wanted to trace the journey of one object through the museum, they immediately offered the goggles as a likely candidate. One of the reasons for this was because they had already received a lot of attention from researchers and members of staff at the museum, and another was their personal connection to Scott. As Paula says:

They're used a lot because they're easy – really easy – items to tell stories. Like, 'could you do a talk on Friday?' 'Ok, yes I'll do a talk'. I'll do a talk on one of those items because I have four days to prepare a talk and I wasn't expecting to and all the information's just sitting there for me to do a talk. And then they're quite cool little things [...] You know, these are items where you can just go into the case and pick it up and if you need to take it to show somebody then it's really easy to do that. So they can be, you know, if somebody's coming for a television show or whatever it's easy – it's not a 'well you're going to have to come to the object', we can take the object to them. So there's that, there's the information that's available for them, and then there's that storytelling, that human connection. With Scott the goggles are shaped to his face, this is *his* pipe that he smoked, you know he put it in his mouth! This is his lighter which he flicked – we know he used it for his pipe but you can also

imagine you know, giving it a wee play or whatever, it's in his hand, it's something that he can hold. And the same for his knife, that is something that he held, he used this physical thing. So it's a connection with that time. And it's that object acting as the storyteller, you know that connection between you and a piece of history. And because they're small they can go in nice small cases which means people can get up close and personal with them.

As well as being portable, well-researched, 'easy' and striking in their intimate connection to Scott ('shaped to his face'), at the time of my fieldwork, Scott's snow goggles were also one of only two objects in the museum's collection that had been 3D scanned⁶⁵. That these goggles were the only small object that had been specifically chosen, at that time, to undergo 3D scanning, indicates both their significance to the museum staff, and their perceived potential for further interpretation through this new digital form.

Through this object itinerary, I will explore how the shifting display of these goggles influences the way they are interpreted. The original proponents of the idea that objects have social lives were focused on how these develop as they move through space and across different regimes of value (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986). In contrast, I argue that important chapters in an object's life history are also written from within the museum, when the object might seem to stand still.

The Early Life of Scott's Snow Goggles

I think people always really like Scott's goggles, the wooden ones. Those are always really popular, and I really like telling the kids to keep an eye out for them when they go through the museum, and they always get a big kick out of them because they're actually his goggles
– Sarah.

Snow goggles were an important part of Heroic Age Antarctic expeditions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the wooden goggles held at Discovery Point are no exception. These goggles were used by Captain Scott during his first Antarctic expedition to protect his eyes from snow-blindness. This is a serious and painful affliction resulting from light bouncing off ice and snow, causing damage to the eyes through exposure to excessive amounts of ultraviolet radiation (McIntosh et al. 2011). There are accounts of polar explorers not taking adequate precautions against snow blindness and having to be guided by teammates or travel blindfolded to allow their eyes to heal and their vision to return (Wilson 1905).

While experiments were being made into the use of tinted glass lenses, Scott preferred these wooden goggles which are sometimes referred to as 'Inuit-style'. As Inuit have lived in the Arctic for thousands of years, it is hardly surprising that this technology had already been developed by the time of Scott's excursion to the Antarctic. This is just one example of a variety of technologies created by indigenous peoples living in the Arctic that were used by Antarctic explorers during the Heroic Age (see Chapters 12 and 13). Without the intimate understanding of polar environments held by the Inuit and other indigenous groups from the circumpolar north, technologies like these goggles would have been far less effective for European polar explorers.

⁶⁵ At this time, the only other object which has been 3D scanned was the ship itself. Since my fieldwork, *Tales of Discovery*, a project that I was involved in with the University of Southampton, has scanned a variety of other objects in the collection at Discovery Point, related to Scott's 1901-04 expedition.

Early Display

Scott had these goggles with him in the Antarctic throughout his 1901-04 expedition. Unfortunately, there is no provenance information to explain what happened to them in the intervening years, but they were eventually officially catalogued as part of the Maritime Heritage Trust's collection in 1979. They were later moved to Dundee when the *RRS Discovery* was loaned to the Dundee Heritage Trust in 1986. Shortly after this, the dedicated museum at Discovery Point opened in 1993.

A photograph from Dundee Heritage Trust's archives, part of a collection of photographs taken in April and May 1979, shows the goggles on display when the *RRS Discovery* first became a heritage space cared for by the Maritime Trust (Figure 13.2). In this image, a tabletop case displays a variety of objects from Scott's 1901 to 1904 Antarctic expedition, including some pony snowshoes, made from bamboo, prototype crampons and a man-hauling harness. At the top of the case rests an unmistakable pair of snow goggles. This image is our first glimpse into the life of the goggles at the Trust and shows that, in their early days on display, they were very much illustrative of the working life of the expedition. The goggles here are resting upside down, cramped into a case with a variety of other material and little interpretation, particularly poorly displayed by contemporary museum standards. This first display case does not seem to connect the goggles directly with Scott himself. However, this case was actually placed in Scott's own cabin aboard the *RRS Discovery*. Because the ship was the only place available for the exhibition of objects until the dedicated museum building opened in 1993, it is likely that this is where the goggles remained from 1979 to 1993.



Figure 13.2. Image 177 - The 1979 display of objects including Scott's goggles (top, left of centre, behind white card). Courtesy of Dundee Heritage Trust.

Shifting Priorities

In a photograph taken in 1993, the year the museum opened, the goggles can be seen at the front of a case that looks very different to the one they occupied in Scott's cabin, and they are displayed the right way up (Figure 13.3). More modern lighting, mounting, and design are evident as the collections are cared for in a more specialist and professionalised way; more formalised labels are also visible. Alongside the goggles are a commemorative cup, a sledging flag, and a boot, among other objects. What this case appears to have in common with the first is that the goggles are still part of a large display amidst a variety of objects, rather than being specifically indicative of their relationship to Scott himself. However, it differs from the first display insofar as it is more selective in the objects that the goggles are placed alongside. There is a move away from the 'everything we have' approach of the first case to something more thoughtfully curated.



Figure 13.3. The 1993 display of objects including Scott's goggles. Courtesy of Dundee Heritage Trust.

Thematic Display

The next time the goggles appear in the museum's photographic archives is in another relatively large case, alongside a variety of polar clothing, in *The Men of Discovery* gallery in 2010 (Figure 13.4). This gallery was identified as 'problematic' by several members of staff during my visit due to its treatment of the men onboard the ship (particularly the officer class) as the only people involved in the expedition. The positioning of the goggles in this case rather underlines this critique. They form part of a display about expedition clothing which does not mention how different technologies – such as the snow goggles – were created or which other people might have been involved in the

invention, or even production, of this expedition kit. It is interesting to note that in some ways this grouping of the goggles alongside other pieces of expedition kit specifically, speaks more to their initial display aboard the *RRS Discovery* than the previous case, which included memorabilia and personal items alongside the goggles.



Figure 13.4. The 2010 display of objects including Scott's goggles.
Digital image of *The Men of Discovery* gallery.
Courtesy of Dundee Heritage Trust.

Something Special?

I felt that, throughout the museum, because we were constrained with space, there were a lot of amazing objects buried in cases with lots of things in them, and Scott's goggles were one of those. They were in a case and there were probably three other pairs of snow goggles on the same shelf...I thought there were a few objects that really warranted bringing out and making more of and really sort of shouting about the fact that our museum had these, and how important they were. So that's why we took the decision to take them out and have a little showcase of their own – Helen.

In 2017 the goggles were moved from *Men of Discovery* to the very first gallery visitors now encounter in the museum: *The Adventure Begins*, where their display in a specially designed 'jewel' case marks them out as especially worth coming to see, looking at in detail, and forging a connection with (Figure 13.5). In the object label relating to these goggles, their role in assisting the explorer in the physically demanding environmental conditions of the Antarctic serves to emphasise Scott's hardihood to museum visitors. Moreover, much is made of their particular connection to Scott himself, with no further information about their life history, including that snow goggles themselves

are a traditional Inuit technology. As such, this label serves to underline the connection of these goggles to this one (inalienable) person.

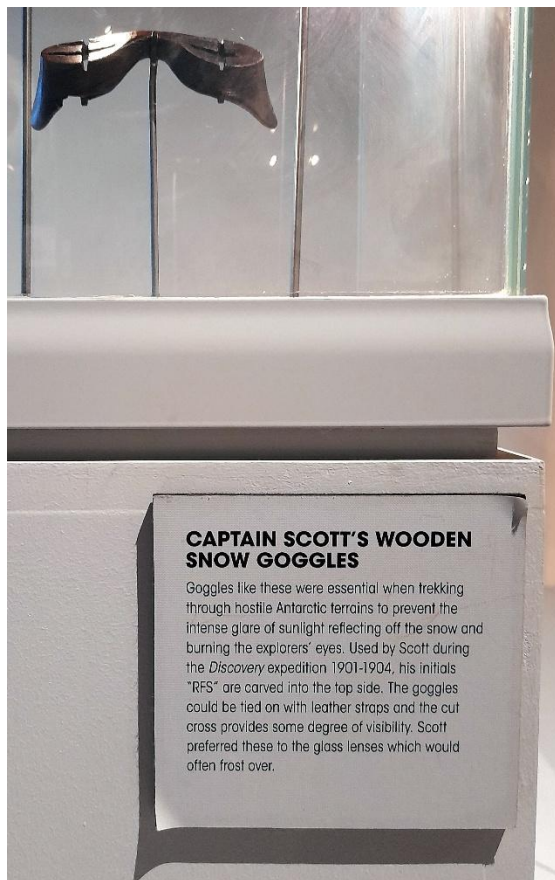


Figure 13.5. Captain Scott's wooden snow goggles – transcript.

Goggles like these were essential when trekking through hostile Antarctic terrains to prevent the intense glare of sunlight reflecting off the snow and burning the explorers' eyes. Used by Scott during the *Discovery* expedition 1901-1904 his initials "RFS" are carved into the top side. The goggles could be tied on with leather straps and the cut cross provides some degree of visibility. Scott preferred these to the glass lenses which would often frost over.

Most of the items on display in this gallery were selected because of their personal connection to Captain Scott. They make the gallery, despite its democratising video featuring different crew members, into a space which memorialises Scott above all others. As Paula says:

They are hold-it-in-his-hands size objects – you know a pipe was really connected, the goggles are shaped to his face, his cigarette lighter and then his knife, they are really things that he used – really connecting objects – that are also, you know, 'it's Captain Scott's!'.

Since the goggles were moved into this case in 2017, they have, from time to time, been taken out for special occasions or research. Paula recalls that she chose to highlight these goggles when Antiques Roadshow came to Dundee, handing them to Fiona Bruce to discuss on television:

They're that type of object that people always want a photograph of for a magazine article or a this or a that so, yeah, they're trotted out quite a lot, basically!

This self-fulfilling cycle of popular and well-researched objects being the obvious choice for future interpretation and research is a theme which I also explore in relation to the collections at the Polar Museum in Chapter 10. To see this happen once more at Discovery Point serves to highlight the significance of this phenomenon in the interpretation of museum objects for the public.



Figure 13.6. The current display in *The Adventure Begins*, including Scott's goggles.

This object itinerary draws attention to the power of Heroic Age stories, the influence of the decision-making of museum professionals, and the personal connections inherent in museum objects. Crucially, these goggles can be brought into conversation with Captain Scott's sleeping bag at the Polar Museum because of the feeling of connection they engender within the museum visitor. That is, the goggles provide a direct line from the viewer to not simply the *idea* of Captain Scott (the inalienable individual with whom this object is associated) but to his own *physical body*. The significance of this – which I term inalienable body proximity, will be outlined in the following chapter, alongside the other original contributions of my research.

14. Fragile objects, hero objects, and extending the network

Sam, who works in collections care and with the volunteers at the Polar Museum, once told me a story about a clock. The clock in question had been presented to Sir Ernest Shackleton, by the men of his *Quest* Expedition (1920-22), and was engraved 'To the Boss from the Boys'. Later, it had been in Shackleton's cabin when, on 5th January 1922, he took his final breath. Today, it is part of the collection at the Polar Museum and, unusually for a museum object, it is still actually in use for its original purpose. High up on a shelf in the public part of SPRI's archive and photo library office, it displays the time to polar researchers and is still regularly wound by the photo librarian. Recently though, the clock had stopped chiming, so Sam sent it off to be conserved by a specialist. When it was returned, Sam took delivery, and before taking it back to the office, he decided to show it to the volunteer on the museum's front desk who he knew was a 'massive Shackleton fan'. Carefully unwrapping the clock, Sam lifted it out of its box with gloved hands and placed it in front of the volunteer, who promptly burst into tears. She was so overcome, in fact, that Sam had to take over the desk for a few minutes while she took a quiet moment to compose herself. All the while, sitting behind the front desk in the Polar Museum, Sam and the volunteer had been surrounded by hundreds of objects relating to the Heroic Age of exploration and Shackleton himself.

This story speaks to many of the key themes I have encountered during my work on Heroic Age Antarctic collections held in British museums. The clock is cared for physically through the actions of the conservator and Sam's gloved hands. Its significance in the context of the museum is maintained through its use and display – even in a 'behind the scenes' office only semi-accessible to the public. Additionally, the continuing importance of the historic period and explorer with whom it is conceptually linked is beyond doubt, as evidenced by the volunteer giving her time freely to tend to a museum dedicated, in part, to this period. So it is that I argue the clock's physical, contextual and conceptual fragilities are all stabilised in this story – securing its objecthood and reducing its risk of reverting to a mere thing. Furthermore, in her reaction to the clock, even though she did not touch it herself, the volunteer experienced a sense of 'wonderment' (Harries 2017). The enfolding of time and identity in this object allowed her a feeling of closeness to Shackleton which gave rise to her unexpected and emotional response. This clock's inalienable connection to Shackleton himself therefore provides this object with an extra level of stickiness, in Gell's (1998) sense, making it difficult for the volunteer to disentangle herself from its agency. Nevertheless, I suggest that, even in this one short story, new ways of cutting the network within which the clock is entangled would also bring us into conversation with the crew of the *Quest* who presented it to Shackleton, modern day conservators, museum professionals, researchers and volunteers who all play a part in its care and life history, all shaping its continued objecthood.

In this chapter, I outline the key contributions to knowledge supplied by my research. Firstly, I set out my theorisation of three different types of object fragility, inherent in the idea that objects are not static within the museum environment, even when they are kept in a store. Moreover, I describe what it is that makes certain 'hero' objects stickier than others within the environment of the

museum. I theorise that some hero objects cast an additional level of ‘wonderment’ over their viewers thanks to their inalienable proximity to the bodies of certain historical figures. Finally, I argue that by reconstituting the branching network within which an object is entangled, we can choose to ‘cut’ the network (Strathern 1996) in different ways that allow for a greater diversity of narratives in our understanding of museum objects. First though, I present my argument for the understanding of museum objects as comprising three modes of fragility.

In what ways are objects fragile?

The central tenet of my theorisation of fragile objects is the distinction between an ‘object’ and a ‘thing’. I suggest that museum objects have been imbued – through their accession into collections – with a special kind of significance that separates them from mere things. Nevertheless, I am in agreement with Domínguez Rubio’s (2016) argument that objecthood is not a fixed entity, and as a result, at any point during its life history an object is vulnerable to ‘reverting’ to thingness. Of course, the idea that objects are subject to changes in status is nothing new (Appadurai 1986), nor is the idea that changes in an object’s life history may come about for a number of reasons, ranging from commodification (Kopytoff 1986; Myers 2001), to their entanglements with people (Thomas 1991), or even as a result of museum display (Medby and Dittmer 2020). However, my conceptualisation of object fragilities invigorates objects with the possibility for constant change, even when they do not cross physical or social boundaries, and even if they are not frequently engaged with by people. In the museum context, this means that objects can still change after they have been accessioned into collections, even if they are not selected for display. Furthermore, I argue that objecthood itself requires an active process of continual production that sets a museum object apart from a thing, and that this takes place across three modes of fragility: the ‘physical’, ‘contextual’ and ‘conceptual’. In the following sections, I will break down my findings based on these three fragilities, in order to explore the implications, and evaluate the significance, of each.

Physical fragility: the tangible object

The physical fragility of an object relates directly to its materiality. If an object is allowed to deteriorate, break down into its constituent parts, or even decay, because it has not been physically cared for, it is at risk – as Domínguez Rubio (2016) describes – of losing its objecthood. In this case, the materials that made up an object once again become a thing (or a collection of things) divorced from the significance they previously held. The deterioration of the physical object also impacts its ability to abduct agency for the viewer. The museum volunteer in the story above – even if she had still felt some connection to Shackleton’s clock – would not have had the same reaction to it had it been reduced to a piece of rotting wood and some tarnished cogs. Ensuring the ongoing physical stability of an object is therefore a key constituent part of maintaining its objecthood.

For museum objects, the stabilisation of their physical fragility is a major advantage of their accession into collections. Where historic objects held in private collections may be treated with care by the people who own them, they do not benefit from the expertise and resources that are employed to preserve objects held in the museum. Indeed, guaranteeing and sustaining the physical care of their collections is one of the core functions of the museum. One of the requirements of formal museum accreditation in the United Kingdom is a museum’s commitment to the physical care of its collections. The 2019 *Accreditation Guidance* document, produced as part of a joint initiative by Arts Council England, Museum Galleries Scotland, Northern Ireland Museums Council and the Welsh

Government, specifically identifies that, in order to become accredited institutions, all museums must provide evidence of their abilities to, 'care for and conserve collections' (Arts Council England *et al.* 2019: 42).

My research indicates that the expectation of physical care brought about by the accreditation standards can impact museum decision making. That is, when the accession of a thing into a collection is first proposed, whether the museum will be able to guarantee its physical care long-term can be a major consideration. For example, if a potential object is deemed too large, too materially complex, or if its physical stabilisation would place undue financial or professional pressure on the museum, then it may not be accessioned at all, as was the case for the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* lifeboat at the Polar Museum (Chapter 11). While this boat has been imbued with a certain status thanks to its display outside the museum, it is not – as Diana the conservator and Joy the curator at the time were keen to point out – a *museum object*. This distinction between an object-at-a-museum and a museum object may seem like a minor point, but it has a major impact on the way that an object is treated by museum professionals. Ultimately the potential burden of stabilising the boat's physical fragility in perpetuity – ensuring that it did not decay and revert back to a thing – weighed against its historical significance (as a boat that had been to the Antarctic but, as a 'replica', not during the Heroic Age), was simply too great for the museum team to allow it to be accessioned at all.

When objects *are* accessioned into museum collections, they are cared for via a number of means. The environmental factors of the store where they are kept will be recorded and analysed, from the average temperature to the relative humidity. Detailed documents, including reports on their physical condition and records of their location in the museum, will be produced, updated and regularly reviewed. Moreover, the standards and requirements of these practices are also subject to change over time. Captain Oates' sleeping bag, for example, was first put into its 'hermetically sealed' case in the 1940s, hanging from one end. When it was moved to its next display case in 1972, it was hung on a wire coat hanger and folded along the length of the case, reducing the tension in the bag but creasing the main body of the object. Then, in 2010, it was moved to a custom-built case designed to keep it flat. Throughout its lifetime in the museum, it has also been regularly and diligently observed for signs of insect activity. The purpose of this constant review of the sleeping bag's physical state is not simply to ensure that this object remains part of the museum's collection for a further 85 years, but also that it can continue to tell the story of Captain Oates, enable his agency to be abducted by viewers, and create instances of 'wonderment' for visitors.

Sometimes the physical care required by museum objects is beyond the expertise of the museum team, so external specialists are employed to assist in their physical stabilisation. Shackleton's sledging flag is a clear example of this, it having been sent away for conservation by a textile specialist. Often, conservation work takes place in order for an object to be put on display, however, sometimes the physical care of an object trumps the importance of making it accessible through display. This is currently the case for the sledging flag which, as Diana the conservator noted, is too physically delicate for long-term display, despite the conservation work it has undergone. This object is now housed in the store of the Polar Museum precisely *because* it is an important object. Indeed, it is part of the museum's 'emergency salvage' list of objects that should take priority in the case of a major emergency in the building. Nevertheless, in spite of its significance to the narratives of Heroic Age exploration told at the Polar Museum (as evidenced by its 'standing in' for Shackleton at his 2016

memorial service, see Chapter 9) it is not on display to the public, and there are no plans for this to change, because displaying it would likely cause some level of material deterioration.

Understanding the physical fragility of museum objects therefore highlights a fundamental tension in museum practice: the perfect conditions to maintain an object's physical stability – typically a dark, cold room where the object is never moved but left forever, physically safe – are at odds with museums as sites of public display and interpretation. This tension speaks to the interplay between an object's *physical* fragility, and the *contextual* fragility I describe in the next section. That is, remaining in perfect physical condition alone is not, I argue, enough to ensure objecthood over time. If this were the case, everything in every accredited museum would stay there forever – there would only be movement *into* collections, and no object would ever leave. But this is not the case. Though it is rarely expected at the time of their entry into the museum, some things are eventually de-accessioned – losing their objecthood (as I have defined it) and leaving the museum collection. What is the process that makes this possible? How is it that objects which have not been allowed to physically deteriorate can nevertheless be deaccessioned? I argue that this happens as a direct result of an object's *contextual* fragility being left unchecked.

In the next two sections, I build on Domínguez Rubio's (2016) work on the physical acts of care that prevent objects from reverting to things. I argue that, in addition to their physical fragility – as I have termed it – objects in museums also have two further modes of fragility which must be constantly stabilised in order to assure their objecthood: contextual and conceptual fragility.

Contextual fragility: a place to interact with the object

I conceive of contextual fragility as relating directly to the use of, or engagement with, an object within its particular context. That is, contextual fragility is concerned with the ways that objects are used (or not used), as well as with the actors who engage with them and how often this engagement occurs. When the expedition equipment of the Heroic Age was first made, its contextual fragility may have sprung from how often it was selected for use in the field, or how critical it was to sustaining life in the Antarctic. Within its museum environment today however, I suggest that if an object is not engaged with either by members of the public or by museum professionals, eventually its contextual fragility will be so weakened that it will revert back to being a thing. A museum object's contextual fragility therefore refers to both its specific context within the museum itself and the contextualising work of museum professionals. There are a variety of processes at play within the museum that can stabilise an object's contextual fragility, including acts of display, research and interpretation.

Through revealing and unpacking the ongoing work required to stabilise an object's contextual fragility, I argue that museum objects are constantly being acted upon throughout their lives in the museum. Their life histories and meanings shift and are constantly being added to as a result of a variety of museum practices, including accession, exhibition, research, interpretation and conservation. Gaining an understanding of an object's contextual fragility also highlights an issue in the way that Domínguez Rubio (2016) and Gell (1998) understand the abduction of an artist's agency through objects to a viewer. Building on Gell, Domínguez Rubio suggests that:

...the bond between author's intention and material form is considered to be inviolable: it cannot be substituted, altered or defaced. What this means is that in order for some-thing to be considered an art object it has to be *and* remain legible as the original, unique and

authentic representation of the artist's intention. In other words, it must always be *true to its author* (2016: 68-9)

However, my research shows that this framework does not leave room for the other actors whose agency may be abducted through the same object over time. For example, the inalienable connection (Weiner 1992) between some objects and the people with whom they become associated later in their life histories, impacts on the agency that is inferred by the people who engage with these objects in the museum environment. Museum interpretation creates a new 'public nexus' (Gell 1995: 27) between the inalienable Heroic Age actor and the viewer, producing these as art objects, so that the wonderment Sam's museum volunteer felt at interacting with the clock comes as a result of *Shackleton's* place in its life history, not the clockmaker who first created it. Moreover, to add another layer of complexity to this process, the work of museum professionals shapes the way that objects are understood by members of the public as a direct result of how they interact with and interpret them. Sam's gloved hands and the care with which he handled the clock inevitably contributed to the awe felt by the volunteer when she was presented with it.

Understanding the different actors who may become entangled with a museum object also has implications for its 'authenticity', which we may see as the interplay between materiality and contextual fragility. Holtorf (2013) suggests something similar in his categorisation of authenticity as being both inherent in the physicality of objects and reliant on those objects having what he describes as 'pastness'. His is a kind of constructivist approach to authenticity with an appreciation of the specifics of materiality. My work takes Holtorf's as a starting point, whilst acknowledging that there is a further element – or 'aura' (Cant 2019) – surrounding some objects in the museum collection that is harder to account for. My approach allows for an understanding of objects that possess an emotional 'aura' in spite of a less convincingly 'authentic' materiality. Similarly, it speaks to certain objects encountered in my research whose 'pastness' is undeniable, but which were still perceived as lacking in authenticity. Moreover, these categorisations may shift and develop dependent on the context of the object itself.

The brass plaque emblazoned with the word 'Raymond' which I studied in Chapter 11 was never used in the Antarctic. Nor is there any evidence that it has ever crossed paths with Shackleton himself. Nevertheless, because it was (likely) commissioned by him, and because it is in the collections of a museum related to Shackleton and his Heroic Age expeditions, this object can be said to have a certain 'aura' related to its life history. Conversely, the *Sir Ernest Shackleton* boat, which navigated the same journey as Shackleton and his men from Elephant Island to South Georgia, on the 'copycat' *In the Wake of Shackleton* Expedition (1993-94) could, in some respects, be considered an 'authentic' object. It has overcome the same physical challenges as the boat used by Shackleton and his men. However, because this expedition took place decades later – even though it was inspired by Shackleton's actions – it is not considered 'authentic' by staff or visitors at the Polar Museum. Its pastness does not align to the right expedition. Nevertheless, if this object were to be put on display in a museum on the history of copycat expeditions, it would certainly be an 'authentic' example of a replica boat. Therefore, this object's materiality and its contextual fragility combine to produce or diminish its 'aura'.

Putting a museum object on display is perhaps the simplest way to stabilise its contextual fragility and ensure the ongoing categorisation of it as an object, rather than a thing. For the whole period

that an object is on display, its significance is not only made visible, but literally interpreted for the visiting public, through the decisions of museum professionals. Alongside their written interpretation, curators and exhibition designers shape objecthood through the specificities of display. That is, where decisions have been made to single an object out – as in the small ‘jewel’ case which holds Scott’s goggles at Discovery Point – museum professionals attempt to infer that this object is worth particularly careful consideration. The technology of display therefore communicates that the goggles have been selected for contemplation because of some special story, inalienable connection, or ‘aura’ that they hold.

As well as the mode of display, another indication of the stabilisation of an object’s contextual fragility is the length of the period during which it is on display. For example, Captain Oates’ sleeping bag has been continuously accessible in the permanent galleries of the Polar Museum since 1939, with only brief gaps in this history during periods of extraordinary closure for the museum. Moreover, throughout this period of display it has been used to tell the story of Captain Oates and his act of self-sacrifice in the Antarctic. The sleeping bag is culturally significant within the collection and, as my research shows, also the most visited object on display. As such, it is hardly surprising that it has enjoyed such a long period in which it has been accessible to the public in this way. However, very few objects in the Polar Museum or Discovery Point remain on display for such long periods and the vast majority – if they are displayed at all – will only spend a short time in the galleries as part of temporary exhibitions or to mark special occasions. One such object is the piece of the *Charles Shearer* boat (Y: 2011/57) that was confused with fragments of the *Endurance* during my fieldwork at the Polar Museum (see Chapter 10). This object, Y: 2011/57, was on display to the public at the museum only once, as part of a special event to welcome Prince Phillip to the Scott Polar Research Institute in 1999. At that time, it was used to illustrate the scientific and historical research that had been done in order to identify which ship it had come from. As such, its contextual fragility was stabilised – in front of a very notable visitor – through just one instance of display. While this display to Prince Phillip undoubtedly worked to shore up Y:2011/57’s objecthood (for at least as long as the special event was remembered by members of museum staff) it may not be enough to continue to sustain it into the future, particularly if it is never put on display again. Nevertheless, the fact of Y: 2011/57 having been the subject of research is another way in which I argue its objecthood may be stabilised, its social life progressing from within the confines of the museum.

It is a very common state in museums in the UK, and globally, that not all objects can be put on display. Indeed, at the Polar Museum, less than 30% of the total collection is represented in the permanent gallery. Moreover, in the selection of one object for display over another, it is imbued with meaning or power which objects left in the store must work harder to achieve. Nevertheless, I suggest that in every interaction with an object, museum professionals endow them with a level of significance that stabilises their objecthood and continues to justify their place within the museum. This may take place behind-the-scenes when objects are selected for research or investigation. Sometimes this research is undertaken, as in the case of Y: 2011/57, by museum professionals themselves in order to enrich the information that they have about their own collections. Sometimes it is done by academic researchers with specific questions about the objects held by the museum. Research on the collections by external companies and interested individuals also contributes to the stabilisation of an object’s contextual fragility. For example, the interaction between Shackleton’s sledging flag, Sam, and the members of the Shackleton Design and Manufacturing Co. Ltd has further

reinforced the significance of this object in the museum's collection *and* in public understanding of Shackleton himself (thanks to the company's decision to copyright the image of the buckles on the flag). Moreover, this story has been told by Sam to various members of staff at the museum, thereby continuing to reinforce the sledging flag's significance and stabilise its objecthood.

My own research – and the conversations that I have engendered about the objects whose itineraries I have traced – will also have implications for the contextual fragility of these same objects. My interest in them will have reminded them to the museum professionals at the Polar Museum and Discovery Point, and as a result they may go on to be selected for further research, interpretation or even display. Indeed, in unpicking the stories of the *Endurance* and *Charles Shearer* 'boat bits' at the Polar Museum, I have made clear the possibility of their confusion to the museum professionals who care for them, and actively introduced some of these individuals to Y: 2011/57, which they had not encountered previously.

Though it may seem counterintuitive, it is also possible that research may occasionally contribute to the *de*-stabilisation of an object's contextual fragility. Let us look again at the piece of the *Charles Shearer*, Y: 2011/57. This object was researched, as described above, in order to trace its life history. In the process of this research, it was determined that it was *not* in fact part of the *Endurance*, but a piece of an entirely different (and substantially less famous) ship, the *Charles Shearer*. Now that this knowledge has been uncovered, it is entirely possible that no further work will be done on this object. It does not relate to an important Heroic Age expedition as previously thought, but a ship far less relevant to the specific mission of the Polar Museum. Therefore, unless a specific reason for investigating it further comes along (perhaps in the form of another PhD student, interested in Antarctic material culture) it may well be ignored, passed over in favour of other objects. The very fact of the investigation into this object may be the reason that it is no longer engaged with in the collection, and as I outline below, this may ultimately have disastrous consequences for its objecthood.

As well as research, the contextual fragility of objects can be stabilised via the interpretation of objects by museum professionals outside museum galleries. An extreme example of this – and an instance in which an object is used to 'stand in' for a particular, inalienable, person – is the use of the hairs from Oates' sleeping bag in the building of the State Coach Britannia (see Chapter 12). In allowing these hairs to be used to commemorate Oates in this memorial, Joy, the curator at that time, acknowledged the importance of the man's history, but also the object which is inalienable from him. Objects may also be interpreted outside the galleries of a museum through digital interpretation. The films that I made in my professional capacity at the Polar Museum bestowed significance upon the objects that I chose to feature. Moreover, Shackleton's sledging flag – which became the subject of a longer professional film as part of that project – is reinvested with significance every time this film is viewed. When museums make their objects available to the public through interpretation in ways such as these, they acknowledge the objects as holding special meaning or power and as a result, their objecthood is maintained.

Not all objects in museum collections are on permanent display or in regular use by museum professionals or other interested parties. There are many hundreds of objects at the Polar Museum alone that are rarely engaged with. I argue that nonetheless, the decision *not* to choose or engage with these objects is also an active decision made by museum professionals. These *negative*

decisions continue to shape the lives of these objects, not least because of museums' reliance on institutional memory in the understanding of their collections. At the Polar Museum, only Sam and Diana suggested that they might have seen everything in the collection, and this was thanks to their both having undertaken collections audits – a specific and unusual project to record every object, which is rarely repeated within institutional memory (indeed, Diana's audit was several years and members of staff before Sam's). This means that, particularly those objects about which little is known, may well be forgotten. Forgotten objects are passed over for research, interpretation or display and as a result, their contextual fragility is put under pressure.

Of course, museum documentation provides professionals with opportunities to record information about their collections, and these records support the stabilisation of objecthood over time and with staff turnover. However, as evidenced by the museum audits, collections are often so large that it is difficult for individuals to have a sense of *all* the objects in their care. At this point, while they are able to search object records to discover more, individual preferences and specialisations mean that – in spite of information being recorded on documentation systems – objects can nevertheless be forgotten or mis-remembered. This is how objects whose *physical* fragility may have been stabilised when they entered a museum, can nevertheless go on to be de-accessioned. Because a weakening of their *contextual* fragility means that they have not been used, displayed, researched, interpreted – and as a result, the space that they take up in the stores of a museum may no longer be justified. Perhaps they are the poorest example of an object of which a museum holds many variations, perhaps their story is too specific or awkward to interpret, perhaps there is no information available about them in the museum's database and no opportunity to find out more. All of these factors may chip away at an object's contextual fragility, until the decision is made – usually following a collections audit – to remove it from the collection entirely and acknowledge that the object has once again become a thing.

Through theorisation of an object's contextual fragility, I make the case for an object's requirement to be made stable within the environment of the museum via consistent use by, and interaction with, people. Objects are made important – their objecthood maintained – through this use in the context of the museum. Moreover, the work of museum professionals, visitors, researchers, interested parties, private companies and any other people who engage with objects in or via the museum consequently contributes to this stabilisation. Contextual fragility sums up the necessity for there to be a place that people know they can come to in order to engage with historic objects, and the way that the objects are treated within that place indicates the significance placed on them. However, as I have outlined above, not everything can be regularly 'used' by the museum. The question then, is why every object that is not in 'use' in the museum's collection at any given time is not at risk of deaccession. I argue that the answer to this question lies in the *conceptual* fragility of these objects.

Conceptual fragility: a reason for visiting the object

So far in this discussion, I have identified two modes of object fragilities that I suggest require stabilisation in order to ensure that museum objects – imbued with special significance, meaning or power – do not revert to things. The physical fragility of an object relates to its materiality, while its contextual fragility speaks to the way that it is used and engaged with within the environment of the museum. The final fragility that I argue museum objects are subject to is *conceptual* fragility. This idea takes into account theorisations of objects as part of larger networks that encompass various

people, objects and institutions (Latour 1999; 2005; Strathern 1996). I argue that the networks within which museum objects are entangled extend outside of the museum and shape – and are shaped by – conceptualisations of the broader topics, historical periods, and individual figures to which they relate.

For my research, the key conceptual framework with which the museum objects at both the Polar Museum and Discovery Point are associated is the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration. More specifically, the British expeditions of this period, particularly those relating to Captain Scott and Sir Ernest Shackleton. Though it has been well documented that the public view of these heroes has been subject to change over time (Barczewski 2007; Farley 2005; Jones 2012) there has nevertheless been ongoing public interest strong enough to support these two museums for a period of 105 and 32 years respectively. From my own research, this sustained public interest in the Heroic Age was visible across a number of the working practices in the museums.

Particularly striking throughout my research was the evident popularity of museum events related to memorials and the celebration of Heroic Age centenaries. At the Polar Museum, for example, temporary exhibitions were held to celebrate the centenary of Shackleton's *Nimrod* (2009) and Scott's *Terra Nova* Expedition (2011). The Polar Museum also contributed to external celebrations, with a significant number of objects on loan to a 'blockbuster' exhibition – titled *Shackleton* – at the American Museum of Natural History in New York in 1999 on the subject of Shackleton's *Endurance* Expedition (American Museum of Natural History n.d.). Additionally, Shackleton's sledging flag was employed to 'stand in' for Shackleton at the memorial service to him held at Westminster Abbey in 2016. It may not be especially surprising that a museum dedicated in part to the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration should be involved in events with these themes. However, the fact that the two temporary exhibitions were held in such relatively quick succession – and bookended the redevelopment of the Polar Museum in 2010 – suggests a demand for this kind of programming and a confidence that this historical period, and the people associated with it, would remain popular with visitors.

In addition to exhibitions, public interest in the broader themes associated with these museum collections is again made clear in funding and collecting practices at the Polar Museum at the time of the Heroic Age centenaries. Indeed, the museum team sought external funding to support the increase of their collection of objects relating to Sir Ernest Shackleton specifically because increasing public interest in his expeditions, his life, and the life of his men, meant that auction prices had risen so rapidly that the museum was increasingly unable to bid. The funding supplied by the Heritage Lottery Fund bolstered the museum's ability to take advantage of the increasing public interest in Shackleton which meant that more objects relating to him were coming up for auction, but also that the price of these objects was increasing in kind. The fact that this competitive funding was awarded to the museum for this purpose – and in 2013, only three years after the completion of another Heritage Lottery Funded project to redevelop the museum – speaks to the importance of this era within the cultural landscape of that time. Similarly, while the Polar Museum was looking for funding to support the acquisition of new objects at auction, it also benefited from the donation of objects relating to Sir Ernest Shackleton directly from the Shackleton family. While the families of Heroic Age explorers may donate objects relating to their ancestors to museums at any time, the fact that a large collection – including Shackleton's sledging flag – was offered to the Polar Museum at this point suggests an acknowledgement by the family themselves that the Polar Museum was an appropriate

home for these important family objects, perhaps brought on by the increased interest in their ancestor during this period⁶⁶.

As well as the events, funding awards and donations that typify the public's interest in the Heroic Age of exploration, I also noticed this interest first-hand in my fieldwork at both the Polar Museum and Discovery Point. At Discovery Point, my heat map (Figure 6.9) indicates that the areas of display dedicated to Scott's first Antarctic expedition are the most popular and most regularly accessed in the whole museum. Moreover, it is clear that the galleries associated with later expeditions receive less engagement from the public. At the Polar Museum, visitors return time and again to the section of the permanent gallery dedicated to the Heroic Age, and while other areas also prove popular, this part of the museum receives the most visits. My research also makes clear people's interest in this period, through the volunteers who work at both museums, providing their time and labour for free often as a result of their love of the stories, expeditions and people of this era. So it is that the ongoing public interest in the historic background of these museums and their collections serves to stabilise the conceptual fragility of the objects related to them.

In the first part of this chapter, I have outlined my argument that museum objects are subject to three different fragilities: physical, contextual and conceptual. More prosaically, this can be understood as the object, the place to see it and the reasons for visiting. Analysing objects through this framework allows for a reinvigoration of Gell's (1996) perspectives on the agency of objects, by accounting for persistent, if subtle, changes through time. My research also demonstrates the ways in which object itineraries continue to shift and change within the context of the museum – even when they are not on display. In the next section, I will identify the features of what I term 'hero' objects and outline how these are produced through an inalienable proximity to the bodies of specific historic figures.

What makes a 'hero' object?

I have argued above that museum objects are distinct from things (and other, different kinds of objects) because they have crossed the barrier into a museum collection. Indeed, as Pearce (1992) indicates, all museum objects have had their significance confirmed, both by the person who recognised that they were worthy of a museum collection in the first place, and by the collecting institution itself. As a result, all objects in the care of museums have been imbued with a special significance or meaning that springs directly from their accession – this is Stam's (2005) 'museum effect'. Moreover, I argue that this significance is not a fixed quality, but must be maintained through the active work of stabilising the object's physical, contextual and conceptual fragilities. If this is the case, and all these fragilities are indeed made secure by the actions of actors both inside and outside of the museum, then it follows that the most stable objects – those equally secure in their physical, contextual and conceptual modes of fragility – should occupy the same important place within a museum collection without any further hierarchy of significance. However, in any collection, there are objects that museum professionals or visitors will see as particularly special or important, which occupy a higher plain even than the other most stable objects. I call these pieces 'hero' objects, and while there may be a variety of reasons for their occupying this privileged position within a

⁶⁶ Indeed, these funding decisions, and the collection of the Shackleton objects, might also be considered to contribute to the stabilisation of the *museum's* own conceptual fragility, particularly during the difficult financial climate for heritage institutions at this time.

collection, an important factor to the objects in my discussion is Weiner's (1992) conceptualisation of inalienability. I extend her work in order to suggest that some 'hero' objects in museums are imbued with particular significance not only as a result of their direct connection to an inalienable historic figure, but because of their connection to the *body* of that individual. I call this an object's inalienable body-proximity.

When I was planning my fieldwork at Discovery Point, I asked the museum professionals there if there was one object in their collection that they thought was particularly interesting, and which they would suggest as my subject of study. They immediately responded that Scott's goggles would be the perfect object for the task. These snow goggles are entirely assured in their objecthood in the museum. They are physically cared for in a custom made 'jewel' case. Moreover, at the time of my fieldwork, they were the only object in the museum that had been 3D scanned in order to make them even more accessible for the public (whilst nevertheless ensuring their physical safety). Their contextual fragility is stabilised via their display alone in the case, in the very first gallery of the museum which introduces Scott and his expedition to the public – factors that emphasise the goggles' status to the museum visitor. Moreover, they are regularly used for external events to promote the museum and its collections, including recently being selected by the museum team to appear on an episode of *Antique's Roadshow*. Additionally, they regularly undergo further research – including in my own work at the museum. Conceptually, the stability of these goggles is assured not only because of their direct link to the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration, but also because of their inalienable connection to Captain Scott. However, I suggest that there is an extra factor at play in these goggles that heightens their significance, making them not simply a museum object, but a 'heroic' museum object: their historic proximity to the *body* of Captain Scott.

Discovery Point has a number of different pieces of equipment in its collections, including a variety of snow goggles. However, Scott's goggles are the only ones displayed on their own and regularly engaged with outside of display, as a direct result of the fact that they are inextricably bound up with Scott himself. Harries (2017) argues that 'wonderment' arises when a person touches an object and experiences the enfolding of time within it, bringing them closer to the hands of the past which have also engaged with it. Touching an object therefore engenders a feeling of a connection to the past in the present. I expand upon Harries' concept to suggest that this enfolding of time might also be possible even in the context of the museum – where objects can rarely be physically engaged with by visitors – when the touch of the inalienable person can be clearly imagined by the visitor. I suggest that it is easier to imagine this past touch when it relates to an object that is inherently bound up with a person's bodily experience of the world. Scott's goggles would have been worn regularly, shielding his eyes from the Antarctic environment. Moreover, the understanding of the intimacy of this connection – the inalienable proximity of Scott's body to these goggles – channels this wonderment to the museum visitor, creating a 'hero' object.

Another example of the power of the inalienable body-proximity of certain museum object is Captain Oates' sleeping bag at the Polar Museum. In a museum in part dedicated to the memorial of Oates and the other men who died on Scott's *Terra Nova* Expedition, the stability of its objecthood must surely be secure. Conceptually, it is part of a key display relating to the figures of the Heroic Age, which at the height of its visitor numbers before the Covid-19 pandemic, attracted 50,000 visitors a year. Contextually, it is stable not least because it has been on continuous display for nearly a century, while physically it is cared for through the environmental and physical standards upheld by

the museum team in the permanent gallery where it is stored. Additionally, Oates' sleeping bag is visited more than any other object in the museum. I argue that it engenders a sense of wonderment in visitors by enabling them to imagine the intimate bodily proximity of Oates – the person inalienably associated with this object. Oates' body is evident even in the specifics of the materiality of the sleeping bag, which was slit to account for his frostbitten leg in the final days of his life. Moreover, the conceptually strong story of Oates leaving this sleeping bag whilst uttering the immortal words: 'I am just going outside, and may be some time' further reinforces its significance when museum visitors realise that this is the *very* sleeping bag which he left behind. His broken and exhausted body leaving this object at the most well-known moment of Oates' life, in order to meet a tragic end. The poignancy inherent in the body proximity that is inalienable in this object imbues it with significance and engenders wonderment in the viewer.

An object's inalienable body-proximity therefore speaks to its connection to the body of a specific person, and the resulting additional level of connection to that person this provides for the viewer. Moreover, it suggests that the agency of the inalienable person may be abducted from this object – in spite of the fact that the inalienable individual may not have been the original producer of the object. Indeed, my conceptualisation of 'hero' objects as imbued with the inalienable qualities of the body of an important individual, which makes them more difficult for visitors to extricate themselves from, is comparable to understandings of objects' 'wonderment' (Harries 2017), 'aura' (Cant 2019) or 'stickiness' (Gell 1998). Even objects in a museum that are thoroughly stabilised across their physical, contextual and conceptual spheres may nevertheless never achieve the status held by those objects that also speak to this inalienable body-proximity. With this in mind, then, in the final part of this chapter, I suggest that – while inalienable individuals are an important part of museum collections relating to the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration – it may be possible to analytically 'pause' their impact in order to discover a wider reaching network of individuals at work in the life history of museum objects.

How can we see beyond the hero?

So far in this chapter I have outlined my argument for three different modes of object fragility: physical, contextual and conceptual. I have also considered the implications of the inalienable connection between an object and a particular person in its life history (Weiner 1992) and have proposed that this idea may be expanded to consider the inalienable body-proximity of certain kinds of objects. I term these 'hero' objects and argue that they are especially capable of producing 'wonderment' for the museum visitors who view them. While I have found this inalienability of objects very helpful to think with – in light of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (2001) indication that alienability and inalienability may form phases in an object's life history – in this section I suggest that it might be possible to pause an object's inalienability in order to look beyond it, analytically. The function of this, I argue, is to reveal the many other actors at work in an object's life history who enable its movement through time to the present. I view this process as the reconstitution of networks that have been cut (Strathern 1996) in order to highlight a more diverse set of characters in an object's life history. That is, some objects in the Polar Museum and Discovery Point have an inalienable connection to an historic individual from the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration, including, for example, Captain Scott, Sir Ernest Shackleton and Captain Oates. As a result, these objects are exclusively used to represent these individual figures within the museum environments, cutting the network of the objects' entanglements at the point of their interaction with their

inalienable person. Seeing past this inalienable actor may allow for different types of agency, from different figures, to be inferred through these particular objects. However, in order to do this, the networks in which museum objects are entangled must be reconstituted. In my research, I have traced networks connecting museum objects from the Heroic Age to indigenous communities in the Arctic and wives and female family members of explorers, to school children. Moreover, I have brought these networks forward to a time after the death of the inalienable person, connecting conservators and modern day clothing businesses, modern day expeditioners, national funding organisations and even Queen Elizabeth II.

In my research, I reconfigure the diverse networks in which objects are entangled (Thomas 1991) in part by tracing their life history before they enter the museum collection. However, I also draw on Clifford's (1997) conceptualisation of museums as 'contact zones' to understand an object's movement through the museum. Clifford's work focuses on the interaction – in the museum – between a colonising and a colonised society. However, I argue that this understanding of the museum as a meeting place between societies might also be fruitfully employed, in terms of the Polar Museum and Discovery Point, to describe the point at which a society meets with a past, idealised or otherwise different version of *itself*. That is, in these museums, 'British society' comes face-to-face with a past version of itself via the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration. Moreover, this meeting is mediated by the work of museum professionals through their interpretation of the museum's collections to the public. Accordingly, in order to properly reconfigure the network related to an object, as well as tracing its life history outside of the museum environment, we must also follow its movement throughout its life in the museum. This will illuminate the historic factors which have shaped the way the object has been represented. Additionally, these networks must be extended into the present, to ascertain the pressures currently shaping the way that objects are employed in museum collections. As a result of this process, I argue that it is possible to 'pause' the inalienability of certain objects, retrace the actors who have influenced their life histories *and* understand the impact of the museum in shaping their place in the present.

Past networks

Understanding the history of specific museums can highlight the shifting influences that shape their practice through time, and the resulting ways that objects' networks are cut for interpretation. One such influence is the organisations to which a museum is connected. Discovery Point is, for example, inextricably bound to the Dundee Heritage Trust and its sister museum, Verdant Works. As a result, the way that it approaches its collections and the objects within them is always shaped by an interest in the city of Dundee, its traditional industries, and the way that these may be connected to Scott and the story of his first expedition. Indeed, it was the *RRS Discovery's* links to the city of Dundee as the place where it was constructed, that ultimately caused the museum at Discovery Point to be built there in the first place. Moreover, because the museum team at Dundee Heritage Trust are responsible for interpretation across both Discovery Point and Verdant Works, it is unsurprising that the overarching context of the city of Dundee will have a part to play in the way that they interpret their objects for the public. In fact, during my fieldwork, members of the museum team regularly suggested that they were seeking to make more of the *Discovery's* connections to Dundee in their future development of the museum, which would not be a significant priority were it not for the Trust's mission.

The influence of larger organisations on museum practice is also visible at the Polar Museum, which is a part of the Scott Polar Research Institute, itself part of the Geography Department at the University of Cambridge. The Polar Museum's direct links to an academic department shape the way that it approaches its collections, particularly with regard to current scientific research taking place within the Institute and how objects might be used to interpret this for the public. However, the Polar Museum has also undergone certain challenges as a result of its place within a university department. My research shows that the museum was seen as a 'minor point' within the broader Institute until the early 2000s, when recognition of its potential as a site for public interpretation of the polar regions was first truly appreciated only in relation to the impact that it might have within the context of the academic Research Excellence Framework⁶⁷. Moreover, the less important status held by the museum within the Institute meant that, for many decades of its early history, the work done in this space was enacted by women. I hypothesise that an association, however informal, by academic staff at the Institute of the museum as 'women's work' in its early years, may have led to the underappreciation of its capabilities for interpreting its collections to visitors in the intervening decades. Furthermore, this disinterest in the work of the museum meant that opportunities for expansion, redevelopment and the evolution of practice may have been under-resourced or missed entirely until relatively recently. Once the status of the museum began to rise during its redevelopment from 2009-10, its place within the Institute – which continues to undertake scientific research on the polar regions – had a direct impact on the information interpreted to the public. What's more, the work of academic actors also directly influenced the way that certain areas of the museum – notably the section *Ice and climate: Exploration into Science* – were designed during its redevelopment.

Related to the idea of the shaping influence of organisations on museums' practice through time is the impact that associated individuals can enact on the museums' approach to its collections. While both Discovery Point and the Polar Museum have been inextricably linked to the life of Captain Scott since their inception, the connection between Scott and the Polar Museum in particular means that there is an assumption of the kind of information that will be available to visitors in its displays. This shapes what many of the museum professionals feel is appropriate to include or omit in their interpretation of him for the public. This was perhaps most clearly set out when Joy, in discussing her work to curate the permanent gallery displays for the 2010 redevelopment of the museum, said that what she produced had to

...tell all the stories that *needed* to be told at a particular juncture. And I had a lot of time agonising about whether this was telling a very white, male, British, post-colonial, colonial story (My emphasis).

This sense of responsibility to the traditional stories of Scott's expedition shaped the way that Joy approached interpretation in the gallery space, even in the light of her own considerations of the new ways that this story might be told. These ideas are tied up particularly, in the Polar Museum, with its status as a sight of a national memorial for Captain Scott and the men who died with him on the *Terra Nova* Expedition. Museum professionals feel a sense of responsibility to the history of Captain Scott – because of the museum's own history – that shapes their practice. Verity also

⁶⁷ The Research Excellence Framework is a review process used to assess research undertaken in higher education institutions in the UK. (Research England *et al.* n.d.).

mentioned this in a discussion of the decisions made during the 2010 redevelopment, when she suggested that many of these decisions may have been the result of a feeling that the museum needed to 'rehabilitate' Scott's reputation. This is particularly in reference to the publication of Roland Huntford's very popular book *Scott and Amundsen* in 1979, which was extremely critical of Scott's actions during the *Terra Nova* Expedition, and which had sustained influence on the way that he was perceived as a historical figure in the UK.

The original *purpose* of the museum collection also influences the way that the museum approaches its collections over time. At the Polar Museum, the original dual use of its collection as both a teaching resource for polar explorers preparing to go into the field (in both polar regions), and as a memorial for Scott and the other men who died on the *Terra Nova* Expedition, led to unusual object histories within the museum. Some objects – particularly those which were inalienably connected to Scott – were employed to interpret and memorialise Scott from the museum's conception. However, other objects that had been used on Scott's expeditions – but not necessarily by Scott himself – were taken back out for reuse in the field, where they became entangled with additional networks of individuals outside the bounds of the museum. Moreover, because museum collections tend to attract objects similar to those they already hold (Pearce 1992), the founding collection at the Polar Museum, comprising of largely British polar equipment, shaped the modern remit of the museum as *primarily* relating to British expeditions. A further consequence of the teaching collection at the Polar Museum, was that, because it was not seen as a traditional museum collection, it was not cared for by a trained curator until very late in the museum's history. This had implications for the ways that objects were interpreted and used in the environment of the museum, with very little made of research or public engagement with objects until more recently. Moreover, objects were primarily employed to tell stories relating to inalienable individuals, with little work being done to expand this interpretation into different areas.

Present pressures

Today the museum teams at Discovery Point and the Polar Museum are subject to new external pressures, through the forms of shifting public interest and funding pressures on the larger sector, which shape their work and the way they approach their collections. In particular, both museums are being increasingly encouraged to connect their interpretations with discussions of climate change, and the inclusion of indigenous peoples, working class individuals and women in the history of Heroic Age Antarctic expeditions. The interests of the museums' contemporary audiences therefore shape the kind of work they are called on to do with the objects in their collections. Additionally, audience interest can impact the external funding made available to museums, as funders seek to support projects that speak to the contemporary world. At the moment, this might look like increased financial support for museum work that directly engages with contemporary calls to decolonise museum practice or highlight underrepresented voices within collections. Nevertheless, the impact that these calls for change might actually have on museum practice is dependent, I argue, on where the museum is in its interpretative life cycle.

Throughout my research, the interpretative spaces at Discovery Point were on the cusp of real change. The museum team's plans to redevelop the museum included creating three new dedicated galleries, and one of these in particular was to cater to increasing public interest in climate change. The gallery had been designed specifically to outline the links Scott's *Discovery* Expedition had to

climate science and its contributions to baseline climate data (as well as the scientific work undertaken on the *RRS Discovery* after Scott's expedition). The team's ability to dedicate a new gallery space to this shift in public interest came as a direct result of their being in the formative stage of their planning for the redevelopment project. I argue that during this phase they were in the midst of analysing the themes and ideas that they wanted to include in their new gallery spaces, and accordingly, they were casting an especially critical eye over the interpretation currently on display in the museum, with the explicit aim of shaping something new. During this phase, new thoughts and ideas are presented and critiqued by the team, until such decisions have been made as to properly commit to specific themes and objects over others – beginning the more formal 'planning' stage of the redevelopment process. Planning will include the drawing up of object lists, designing new displays and writing new interpretative materials. This is followed by the delivery of the project in which the new galleries are built, objects are exhibited, and interpretation is delivered for the first time. At this point in the life cycle of Discovery Point's redevelopment, therefore, the museum team were most open to new ideas, inclusion of public interest and critique of their current exhibitions. As a result, they were able to combine this external influence into strategic decisions that will shape their museum for years to come – even perhaps long after those ideas have themselves faded from relevance.

The Polar Museum, on the other hand, though it had been exposed to similar calls to include climate science in its work and present a broader variety of voices in its interpretation of the Heroic Age, is at an entirely different point in its life cycle. After the museum reopened to the public following its redevelopment in 2010, the team entered a phase of their life cycle characterised by the management of their new displays and a decreased capacity to affect significant change over their interpretation. At this point, the museum team must accept the outcomes of their previous critical strategising, while attempting to remain alive to the demands of their ever changing socio-political context. The team must therefore work with the crystallisation of the decisions they made in the planning phase, until they eventually have the time and funding to redevelop their permanent galleries again - perhaps, if they are lucky, in 15-20 years' time. Their agility in terms of responding to present pressures in the production of their written interpretation in their gallery spaces is thereby reduced. In order to engage with these new ideas, the team at the Polar Museum must look to other ways to interpret their collections – including digital interpretation, or outreach programmes.

The changing interests of the society of which museums are a part therefore has a variable impact on the way that they are able to interpret their collections for the public, particularly in their permanent galleries. Nevertheless, an understanding of these external influences is an important part of reconstituting the networks within which museum objects are entangled.

Reconstituting networks as decolonial practice

In doing the work of reconstituting the broad networks in which museum objects are entangled, I argue that the inalienability of certain objects may be 'paused' in order to look beyond the heroes with whom they are associated and take stock of the broad influences which have shaped their object itineraries. As described above, these networks can include the work of museum professionals and external organisations, as well as individuals within and outside museums. This method of approaching object life histories engenders an understanding of why decisions have been made to display or interpret museum objects, as well as why they may have been selected for research or

passed over entirely in favour of other parts of the collection. Moreover, it indicates how object's life histories may be constantly being written and reconsidered within the environment of the museum. Through the tracing of object itineraries, I also argue that museum objects are shaped by the people with whom they interacted before their entry into the museum, both before and after their relationship with the person to which they became inalienable. This, I suggest, creates the opportunity for decolonial approaches to museum collections.

Captain Oates' sleeping bag is a key example of the variety of actors capable of shaping the life history of an object which goes on to become inalienable from a single individual. It was paid for through the donations of the children of Trafalgar House School, and the raw materials used in its production were harvested thanks to the traditional ecological knowledge (Berkes 1993) of the Sámi. After its use in the Antarctic by Oates, it was brought back to the UK through the care of his crewmates and transported to his family, where it remained until it was presented to the Polar Museum. In the museum, it has been cared for by an Assistant to the Director of the Polar Institute, curators and conservators, and part of it has been incorporated into a carriage made for the British Royal Family. As a museum object, it has also shaped the experiences of thousands of visitors to the museum over the course of 85 years of display. Nevertheless, it acts as a material memorial to Captain Oates, a man whose engagement with it lasted a matter of mere months over the course of more than a century of its life span.

The potential for the reconstitution of object life histories as decolonial practice has implications for all museum collections. However, I argue that this work is particularly significant in collections related to the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration because the Antarctic is widely regarded as 'timeless' and 'apolitical' space. Moreover, the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration is a period that is often quantified as inherently 'lacking in diversity'. Nevertheless, through the detailed study of museum objects, and by pausing to look beyond the current primary cutting points of the network, it is possible to uncover a far more diverse network of actors, reaching back thousands of years to the ancestors of the Sámi reindeer herders and extending all the way to the museum professionals of today. Reconstituting networks in this way allows access to different aspects of the object, making way for a decolonial approach to interpretation that is not possible when we focus only on its inalienable relationship.

In this discussion, I have brought together the findings of my research and presented the original contributions of my work. Through the conceptualisation of three different modes of object fragility; the outline of 'hero' objects, in particular inalienable body proximal objects; and the argument for looking beyond the hero in order to reconstitute and re-examine the networks in which they are entangled, I outline the key contributions of this research. In the final chapter, I draw these ideas together to make the final case for this research as imbued with the significance of ongoing and wide-reaching change.

15. Conclusion: the persistence of change

In the final months of this research, five years after the controversy of the 'Culture Wars' in the UK (outlined in Chapter 1), two articles appeared in the British press, considering significant changes to two major UK museums. The first discussed Nicholas Cullinan, who was recently appointed director of the British Museum (Thomson 2025a), and the second was an interview with Tristram Hunt, the director of the V&A, in light of the opening of the museum's new publicly accessible store in Stratford (Thomson 2025b). Both mentioned the 'Culture Wars', and the ongoing complexities of navigating new public demands on museums as sites of heritage construction. They acknowledged that the heritage landscape was changing and that leaders would need to make difficult, and often politically-charged, decisions about the future of their institutions. They also highlighted moves towards increasing the accessibility of the UK's collections both to the British public and to communities of origin around the world.

As I have noted in this thesis, museums have long been considered as tools of empire, with the task of bringing back objects for exhibition at the colonial centre (Black 2000; Longair and McAleer 2012). While collections relating to the Antarctic may not at first glance appear to relate to this imperial project, the early exploration of this continent was nevertheless rooted in colonial ideas. Moreover, the objects in Heroic Age Antarctic collections can connect us to a far greater group of actors than we may first have thought possible, their life histories spanning the globe and still being written today. In this way, I question where the limits of colonialism lie in museums, expanding them to consider collections that have traditionally been understood as un-diverse and apolitical.

My research is concerned with change. It seeks to trace the changing histories of museum objects relating to the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration and how these continue even once they have been accessioned into museum collections. Moreover, it is concerned with objects, which I understand as distinct from mere things. In the case of my research, this transition can be said to take place once they have been accessioned into a museum collection. However, the instability of their objecthood is ever present and as a result, sustained work must be undertaken in order to ensure that they do not revert back to thingness. I argue that this work can be accounted for through three modes of fragility displayed by museum objects: the physical, contextual and conceptual. In this way, objects must be stabilised through intentional and unintentional practices that affect their materiality, their use in the museum, and their connections to broader historical periods and individuals that extend their networks beyond the museum. In addition, I suggest that certain objects may have their significance further assured by their inalienable connection to particular historic figures of the Heroic Age. This inalienable connection is enhanced for those objects that have had some kind of intimate proximity to the body of specific men of the Heroic Age. The wonderment produced by these 'hero' objects, makes it hard for the viewer to disentangle themselves. Nevertheless, by acknowledging and then 'pausing' an object's inalienable connection to its charismatic former owner, the more extended networks of human and non-human actors with which they are entangled may be reconstituted. Furthermore, by analytically re-forming these extended networks in this way, new possibilities for

decolonial understandings of museum objects that may, at first glance, be entirely lacking in diversity, are revealed.

The potential for re-forming these networks was brought home to me one Thursday afternoon at the very end of my fieldwork at the Polar Museum. The team was planning a temporary exhibition focused on the 'Hidden Histories' inherent within the museum's collections, seeking to recontextualise the objects on display. To ensure these histories would stand out to all visitors, the team decided to use stick-on labels, printed with bright orange borders and applied directly onto the glass of the display cases, to highlight people and ideas that had not previously been mentioned in the permanent gallery. It was an exciting project, making the discussions about diverse perspectives and decolonial thought that took place behind-the-scenes in the museum visible to visitors. The team, somewhat anarchically, had even begun to talk about it amongst themselves not as a temporary exhibition, but as a 'label intervention'.

That Thursday afternoon, the weekly museum team meeting had been dedicated to a 'walk-through' of the galleries, scrutinising every object and every label. The team were hoping to identify decolonial or democratising themes and ideas that could be included in the label intervention, to provide a new level of interpretation to the objects already on display. Most of the critique levelled by the team was, expectedly, in those sections dedicated to European exploration of the Arctic and climate science – there having been the greatest shifts in thinking in these areas since the museum's 2010 redevelopment. But when the team began to discuss what they could possibly do to diversify the display of the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration – particularly because of its associations with white European and male explorers – Tania excitedly recalled, 'That's the whole topic of Henrietta's PhD!'. What followed was a discussion about a wide variety of people and things, from the traditional ecological knowledge inherent in Oates' sleeping bag, to the school children who funded expedition equipment, and the women – our predecessors – who had catalogued and cared for, curated and displayed these objects for over 100 years.

This conversation with the Polar Museum team came about as a result of a number of factors including recent societal shifts – made visible by, for example, the Black Lives Matter and Rhodes Must Fall movements – towards recognising diverse perspectives and histories; the team's growing attention to decolonial practice and existing plans for the label intervention; and my own interest in these themes as they relate to the Heroic Age. In short, it was a conversation of a specific place, but also a specific *time*. The 'Culture Wars' in the UK, happened in part because of a myth that museums and the objects in their collections are impervious to change – that their work is concerned with static, apolitical, 'objective' facts. But this brief example indicates that museums are influenced not only by the broader societies in which they sit, but also by the individuals who work within and alongside them. This conversation represented – in the words of one-time Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Oliver Dowden – a moment of 're-writing' history, where a diverse group of people, places and things that contributed to the heroic narratives of this historic period could be revealed. Because they had been there all along.

Nevertheless, the label captured but a fraction of this conversation (Figure 15.1).

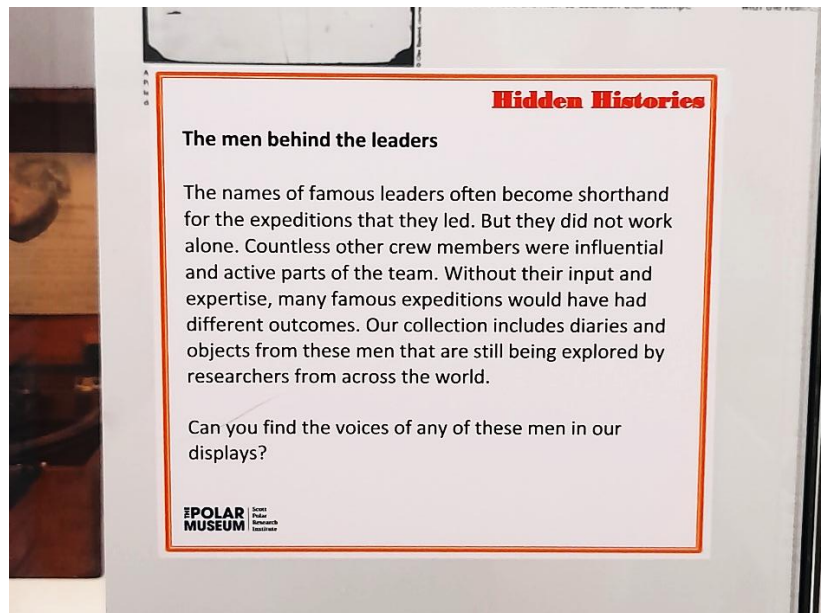


Figure 15.1. Additional interpretation for the *Antarctic Exploration: The Heroic Age* display as a result of the *Hidden Histories* project.

Museums, as Verity, the curator at the Polar Museum said, are bad at nuance. By necessity, they must find the story that works – not everything can be expanded upon and not every conversation can be reproduced in a label. Museum interpretation, in fact, is not only influenced by people, but also by a variety of other non-human actors including the practicalities of exhibition display, the funding provided for projects and the objects available with which to tell stories. But the more work is done to look beyond the accepted narratives, the more lines of research pursued, and object histories interrogated, the more opportunities there will be to include diverse voices in interpretation. Because the people who work in museums are always making choices about what to include and what to exclude from their collections, their research, their interpretation and their displays. Moreover, these decisions are based on the individual, their sociopolitical context, and the history of the institution. Museums preserve, research, interpret and educate, but they can also hide, ignore, get things wrong and forget. As a result, museum objects themselves are not fixed entities – either physically, contextually or conceptually – rather, they are things that have been made significant through the ongoing actions and decisions of a wide range of actors.

My research offers new methodological and analytical perspectives to scholars working across a variety of themes and academic areas. The interdisciplinary contributions of my work include: museological ideas related to the environment and practices of museums; conceptualisations, based in material culture studies and anthropology, of objects, things, and inalienable personhood; and broader anthropological discussions of networks of diverse actors.

That objects have social lives, and that these social lives are influenced by factors such as commoditisation and exchange, has been a subject of interest and debate in anthropology since these ideas were posited by Appadurai (1986) and Kopytoff in the same volume (1986). Since then, a variety of authors working across a broad spectrum of contexts have argued that new chapters of these object social lives can be written not only through exchange and commoditisation, but also via entanglements with people (Thomas 1991), including inalienable connection to an individual

(Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2001), or even classification and display in museums (Alberti 2005; Medby and Dittmer 2020). With particular reference to the museum environment, I argue that objects' life histories do not end at the door, when their ownership transfers to the museum, nor are they added to only when they are selected for display to the public. In fact, I suggest that objects' social lives are shaped by myriad decisions to both use and *not* use them within the museum context. Following accession, conservation, documentation, interpretation, exhibition and research can *all* contribute to their life histories.

Just as Appadurai and Kopytoff have been instrumental to the anthropological discussion of object histories, Gell (1998) is a fundamental theorist in the conceptualisation of object agency. I have found his work on the abduction of agency and objects' capacity to effect their viewers extremely helpful to think with throughout my research. Moreover, I have also benefited from Domínguez Rubio's (2016) argument for the physical fragility of museum objects and the distinction between an 'object' and a 'thing'. Through bridging and building on these ideas, I have argued that objecthood is an active process dependent on a variety of actors (which, in the case of museum objects, may exist both inside and extend beyond the museum environment). I also suggest that the influence of these actors may be both intentional or unintentional, whilst still impacting objecthood. Indeed, a key argument within my research is that, even when museum objects appear at their most static, unused and forgotten at the back of a museum store, they might in fact be sliding most quickly towards thing-ness. Moreover, I have made the case for three different modes of fragility that impact objects over time, encompassing the physical, contextual and conceptual.

Gell's (1986) work on object agency also informed my research into objects that become particularly closely associated with certain individuals. In particular in this area, I have approached this through the lens of Weiner's (1992) work on inalienability. I have developed this idea to consider how certain objects may possess a kind of 'aura' (Cant 2019), engendering 'wonderment' (Harries 2017) in their viewer not simply because of their relationship to a named historic figure, but specifically due to their connection to the physical body of this person. I have termed this combination of factors an object's inalienable body-proximity and I argue that this imbues some objects within museum collections with a heightened level of significance. Moreover, I conceptualise 'hero' objects as holding a special place within collections and suggest that objects with inalienable body-proximity can be understood within this 'hero' category.

Finally, my work contributes to contemporary anthropological discussions on networks and actors that were sparked in particular through the work of Latour (1999; 2005) and Strathern (1996). I have found Latour's approach to a broadening network of actors, and Strathern's views on how these networks may be 'cut', to be especially fruitful when brought into conversation with an object itinerary approach to research. By considering objects as part of a broad network of actors who shape their objecthood, I have been able to consider a broader cast of individuals. Moreover, by taking Strathern's idea of 'ownership' as one way to cut these networks, and applying it to Weiner's (1992) work on inalienability (as a kind of ownership within the life history of an object), I have identified a method for analytically 'pausing' the network of actors associated with an inalienable object. Accordingly, I propose that it may then be possible to look past the inalienable individual in the object's social life in order to reveal the impact and contributions of a much wider diversity of actors.

Future Research

Taking these contributions into account, I outline three possible areas for future study. One area for the expansion of the work outlined in this thesis would include a discussion of its ethnographic methods. This work has benefited from the richness provided by a patchwork-style ethnographic approach (Gökçe, Varma and Watanabe2020). This new way of engaging in anthropological fieldwork is in its earliest stages, and I have found it to be a valid and revealing response to a changing academic environment, as well as fruitful in its incorporation of mixed methods to enhance the core ethnographic approach. Particularly, the combination of ethnographic research with archival work, visitor and staff interviews and the analysis of visitor behaviour in museums through the production of heat-maps produced a nuanced picture of these museums in both their internal and public-facing capacities. Moreover, these mixed-methods could be used for future research in other museums to outline the impact of professional decision-making on visitor engagement. However, there is certainly more that could be drawn out on the advantages and challenges of this method in further reflection which was beyond the scope of this project.

My model of viewing objects as inherently ‘fragile’ can enable new ethnographic research into questions of materiality not previously explored in the field. For example, we might ask what impact the increasingly digital nature of museum interpretation will have on object fragilities? I have begun to consider this through discussion of the film related to Shackleton’s sledging flag – which was watched more than 14,000 times in its first three years, part of a set of three films collectively viewed more than 50,000 times over the same period. Clearly the production of these digital resources had impact. However, could these films be described as digital ‘objects’ themselves – and if so, would the idea of fragility work in the same way in this case? Moreover, will the increasing digitisation of museum collections – and the ability to access them remotely – decrease the number of objects that are deaccessioned from museum collections, by making their use a more democratic experience? Do these types of digital tools have the reach to significantly alter an object’s life history, or do they attract only the same kinds of visitors who would come to the museum in person anyway?

Additionally, the concept of fragility would be very useful for research to be conducted into objects’ ‘contextual’ fragility *outside* the museum context: how are objects impacted by their environs in private collections or other instances where they are used and engaged with, outside of heritage and museum spaces? For example, on a small-scale, anthropologists might consider what an understanding of contextual fragility can tell us about the way that people use objects relating to specific historical figures, or even ancestors, in the home. Expanding into the public domain, this way of approaching objects may also provide insight into the ways that contested heritage sites (including statues such as that of Colston and Rhodes described in Chapter 1) are used and engaged with by different social groups. It could even provide an opportunity to strengthen the conceptualisation of heritage that has been (physically) lost, through the acknowledgment of different kinds of continued ‘use’ practices, including storytelling and other intangible approaches.

Conceptually fragile museums

Research into lost or contested heritage might also feed into another line of further enquiry: a detailed consideration of external factors – including the decisions of family members (who choose to donate to collections) and funding bodies – on the ongoing ‘conceptual’ fragility of museums themselves. That is, heritage institutions in the UK are increasingly finding themselves at the centre

of a fraught financial and social climates, as evidenced by the ongoing 'Culture Wars' (Kendall Adams 2024; compare also Hicks 2020a; Hicks 2020b; and Kuper 2023 for differing views on this issue). Museums as sites for memorial and research, as well as cultural construction and identity production, are at risk from these ongoing challenges. As a result, the way that British society thinks about its relationship (both historic and contemporary) to the wider world and – in my rethinking of Clifford (1997) – the way that it understands *itself* is increasingly threatened. Considering these challenges through the lens of museums' own conceptual fragility therefore gives a way to represent the ongoing impacts of these events on the heritage sector.

Jones (2011) writes that, 'The adventures of Scott and Shackleton continue to appeal in part because the Antarctic appears as a fantasy space for heroic endeavour, unencumbered by the troubling legacy of imperial exploitation which surrounds explorers in Africa and elsewhere.' (2011: 204). That is, historically, the Antarctic has been seen as a place populated only by 'innocent' explorers (in Pratt's 1992 sense). Though they were men of empire, as Jones suggests, the lack of an indigenous human population meant that their imperial expansion could be approached differently to that of explorers like Cook and Livingstone who met directly with local peoples in the contact zone. But it is possible, indeed, even increasingly likely, that this will not be the case for much longer. The 'Culture Wars' in the UK – sparked by events such as the proliferation of the Black Lives Matter and Rhodes Must Fall movements – are encouraging a reconsideration of what is meant by empire and imperialism. In the light of these societal changes, Captain Scott and Sir Ernest Shackleton, as white male explorers from the early-twentieth century, may find themselves under increasing scrutiny for the part they played in the imperial project. Indeed, this debate has already begun in some quarters, with the *Daily Mail* recently publishing an article that (albeit incredulously, under the headline 'Exploring Antarctic was colonialism, claims Cambridge University (even though only penguins live there)') discusses the Polar Museum's recent acknowledgment of the colonial nature of early Antarctic exploration (Tozer 2025). These figures are therefore increasingly vulnerable to shifting views on Britain's historic interactions with the rest of the world. As has been shown throughout this thesis, Scott and Shackleton's reputations have been subject to change for decades, but if they were both to fall foul of changing opinions on imperialism and exploration, then what might become, for example of the Polar Museum? Or Discovery Point?

At the time of writing, both the museums in this thesis are unabashed in their direct connection to the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration. This is, after all, in many ways their unique selling point. Representing this era, and the heroic explorers who were involved in it, forms an important part of the mission of both sites. Moreover, both museums are bound to these men through historic and modern connections to their family members and descendants. Both museums also take pride in their collections, which include the personal possessions the men took south to the Antarctic, to assist in the work of empire. But if the conceptual fragility of Scott and Shackleton were not to be stabilised, if their role within the historical sphere of Britain were to change, then these museums might find themselves, too, in a vulnerable position – because they are also fragile. The Polar Museum and Discovery Point, as much as the curators may wish they were otherwise, are for the public largely personality-based museums. People come to visit them in the understanding that they will learn about the famous names of this period of polar exploration. As a result, if the individual explorers with whom they are intimately connected are called into question in the public sphere, then so too will be the museums themselves.

In Chapter 1, I outlined the ways in which scientific exploration and British imperialism went hand-in-hand during the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration. Moreover, the masculine, 'heroic' narratives that sprang up around these men are also drawn from this historical context. So it is that the comingling of science, imperialism and heroism is inherent in the history of the Heroic Age. Today, the Polar Museum and Discovery Point increasingly focus their attentions on the scientific contributions of these men, and their heroic deeds in the field, but neither of these themes is wholly divisible from the imperial project which sent them south in the first place. This leaves a problematic legacy for the museums to deal with and some complex questions to resolve. They may choose in future to continue to highlight the scientific contributions of these expeditions. However, this may not necessarily be enough to sustain public interest, nor to sufficiently distract them from the other aspects of their historical context. As I have seen at the Polar Museum, visitors are not especially interested in the section on polar science, to the extent that during my period of observation they did not engage with it at all (despite often suggesting that they would like to know more about it in my interviews).

Another option available to these conceptually fragile museums would be to continue to reproduce the ideas of Scott and Shackleton as 'heroic' explorer-ideals, but my research raises the question of whether it is even possible to do this without centring them within a kind of nostalgia for the imperial project. When this era is described as the 'safe', 'soft' face of colonialism, even within these institutions themselves, will an emphasis on 'heroic' qualities truly be enough should public opinion on these men change dramatically? The museums may also choose to diversify their missions – to speak to other aspects of Britain's polar past, but these stories too may come under scrutiny, particularly as they relate to the present governance of the Antarctic and the Antarctic Treaty system (see Dodds 2010; Dodds and Hemmings 2013).

From a practical perspective, it is entirely possible that the future funding and external support of these museums will also be tied to the ways in which they negotiate the ongoing changes to the reputations of Scott and Shackleton. Their very survival as heritage organisations is therefore based in the conceptual fragility of the people with whom they are most closely associated. In this thesis, I have identified the ways in which museums and the conceptual fragility of their subject matter interact through their collections, but this larger-scale issue of the museums themselves can also be understood through the ideas of fragility and stabilisation. Because the future of these museums, as with the future of their key characters, may be uncertain. Nevertheless, with the language of conceptual fragility, we can open the door to a new way of discussing these changes and how museums respond to them. Moreover, this point is as relevant to Britain's national heritage institutions, like those directed by Cullinan and Hunt, navigating societal change and seeking to foster worldwide collaboration, as it is to small personality-based museums like the Polar Museum and Discovery Point.

The aim of this study was to understand the potential ways in which objects are capable of change, particularly when they are already part of a museum collection, and to uncover the unexpectedly broad network of human and non-human actors who shape them. Throughout this research I have uncovered networks, and I have created my own. I have got to know people, objects and collections, I have come to understand galleries, past decisions and future priorities, and I have seen how these all contribute to the narratives about the Heroic Age of exploration that were made available for museum visitors. Verity, the curator at the Polar Museum, once told me that she felt the end of the

Heroic Age centenary celebrations would be met with a sense of 'relief' by the team. They were looking forward to new challenges, researching new topics, and exploring entirely new parts of their collections, for a while at least. Nevertheless, these networks will remain, and they will continue to grow, as the Polar Museum interprets the stories that its visitors expect to see, including those objects from the Heroic Age of Antarctic history which have delighted and informed, provoked wonderment and even tears, for more than one hundred years.

16. Epilogue

It is a sunny day in June and I am at the University of Reading's Whiteknights campus along with a lecture theatre full of other research students. It is the annual Doctoral Research Conference and we have congregated to marvel at the many other research projects, worlds away from our own, taking place within the University. Students have been encouraged to express their research in different ways and there are people here who have made films and posters, taken photographs and even diligently rehearsed presentations that will be exactly two minutes and 59 seconds long for the Three Minute Thesis category. I, being naturally interested in objects, was delighted to see that this year there was also a 'My Research in an Object' competition, and so I have decided to enter.

The trouble is, I really feel that the object that best expresses my research is Captain Oates' sleeping bag, currently safely housed some 100 miles away in the Polar Museum in Cambridge. Moreover, I am absolutely certain (having recently read in the archives of the Institute that the sleeping bag had only once left the museum on loan, and that was in 1939) that, even if I were to ask very nicely indeed, they would not let me borrow it for the day. So it is that I have taken drastic action. I have decided to sew my own. It bears mentioning here that I am not a gifted seamstress (my preference, if you will excuse the terrible pun, always being for weaving words, over threads). Nevertheless, the sleeping bag really does feel like the best material representation of my research, and so I am left with little choice.

I decided to give myself a fighting chance and so scaled down the bag, usually big enough to fit a full-grown man, to approximately the size of a pencil case. The construction was very, very difficult, given that I only had photographs from the museum to work with and could not go and poke and prod at the real thing to see where all the seams lined up. There were, I am happy to admit, a few prototypes (including one in bright red and orange felt that I would rather not talk about) before I eventually struck upon the right shape, and the right material. I am sure that Oates would have been surprised to see a tiny chamois leather version of his sleeping bag, made more than a hundred years after he had slept in it. I imagine, having spent many months in the Antarctic covered in the moulting hairs coming from his own sleeping bag, he might also have asked me why I did not make it out of reindeer fur (Figure 16.1).

Still, I hope that Oates would have approved, and I am sure that he would have been amused, either way, that a homemade representation of his sleeping bag has been entered into a university competition. But the idea of the competition itself probably would not have been so surprising. Heroic Age expeditions, filled as they were with difficulty and endurance, also had moments of lightness. Music was played and shows were arranged, diverting lectures were given and decorations and curios were hand-made and enjoyed. Both of Scott's expeditions to the Antarctic even produced their own magazine, *The South Polar Times*, which was full of articles and illustrations and even poems. Including one poem about a subject very close to my heart. For written in Volume III of the *South Polar Times*, produced on the *Terra Nova* Expedition, the photographer Herbert Ponting wrote a poem about a reindeer fur sleeping bag, and I can think of no better of way of bringing this thesis to a close.



Figure 16.1. Model (not to scale) and photo of Oates' sleeping bag.

THE SLEEPING BAG.

There seems to be a difference of opinion amongst us as to which is the correct way to use a sleeping bag. There may almost be said to be sides on the subject, hence the following:-

ON the outside grows the furside, on the inside grows the skinside;
 So the furside is the outside, and the skinside is the inside.
 As the furside is the outside, and the skinside is the inside,
 One side likes the skinside inside, and the furside on the outside.
 Others like the skinside outside, and the furside on the inside;
 As the skinside is the hard side, and the furside is the soft side.
 If you turn the skinside outside, thinking you will side with that side;
 Then the soft side, furside's inside, which some argue is the wrong side.
 If you turn the furside outside, as you say it grows on that side;
 Then the hard side's next your own side, which for comfort's not the right side;
 As the hard side is the cold side, and your skinside's not your warm side;
 And two cold sides coming side by side, are not right sides, one side decides,
 If you decide to side with this side, turn the outside furside inside;
 Then the hard side, cold side, skinside, beyond all question's inside outside....
 AND it does not matter a particle what you do with the
 bally thing, someone's sure to tell you it's outside inside.

Herbert Ponting. The South Polar Times Vol. III

References

- Alberti, S., J., M., M. (2002). Placing nature: Natural history collections and their owners in nineteenth-century provincial England. *British Journal for the History of Science*, 35: 291–311.
- Alberti, S. (2005). Objects and the Museum. *Isis*, 96(4): 559-71.
- Alpers, S. (1991). 'The Museum as a Way of Seeing'. In Karp, I. (ed). *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- American Museum of Natural History (n.d.). *Shackleton: January 1, 1999 – October 11, 1999*. Available at: <https://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/shackleton#:~:text=About%20the%20Exhibition&text=The%20Shackleton%20exhibition%20featured%20more,mounted%20on%20this%20dramatic%20journey>. [Accessed 16.01.25].
- Amico, N., Ronzino, P., Vassallo, V., Miltiadous, N., Hermon, S. and Niccolucci, F. (2018). 'Theorizing authenticity, practising reality: The 3D replica of the Kazaphani boat.' In Di Giuseppantonio Di Franco, P., Galeazzi, F., and Vassallo, V. *Authenticity and cultural heritage in the age of 3D digital reproductions*. Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research.
- Amit, V. (2000). 'Introduction' in Amit, V. (ed.) *Constructing the Field: Ethnographic Fieldwork in the Contemporary World*. London: Routledge.
- Amundsen, R. (1907). To the North Magnetic Pole and Through the North-West Passage. *The Geographical Journal*, 29(5): 485-513.
- Amundsen, R. (1912). *The South Pole: An Account of the Norwegian Antarctic Expedition in the 'Fram', 1910-1912*. Translated by Chater, A., G. London: John Murray.
- Anderson, L. (2006). Analytic Autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35(4): 373-395.
- Andrews, C. (2009). 'Heritage Ethnography as a Specialised Craft: Grasping maritime heritage in Bermuda'. In Sørensen, M., L., S. and Carman, J. *Heritage Studies: Methods and Approaches*. London: Routledge.
- Antczak, K. and Beaudry, M. (2019). Assemblages of practice. A conceptual framework for exploring human-thing relations in archaeology. *Archaeological Dialogues*, 26: 87-110.
- Appadurai, A. (ed.) (1986). *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Appadurai, A. (2006). The Thing Itself. *Public Culture*, 18(1): 15-22.
- Arts Council England. (n.d.). *History of the Scheme*. Available at: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/supporting-arts-museums-and-libraries/uk-museum-accreditation-scheme/about-accreditation#t-in-page-nav-2> [Accessed: 15.11.2024].
- Arts Council England (2016). *Good Practice Case Studies: Review and Rationalisation of Collections at The Polar Museum*. Available at: <https://collectionstrust.org.uk/wp->

[content/uploads/2016/11/Collections_Review_and_Rationalisation_at_The_Polar_Museum.pdf](#)
[Accessed 29.03.2024].

Arts Council England, Welsh Government, Museums Galleries Scotland and Northern Ireland Museums Council (2019). *Accreditation Guidance: Supporting Guidance for Accreditation Standard November 2018, March 2019*. Available at:

https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Accreditation_Guidance_Mar_2019_0.pdf [Accessed 05.04.202].

Atkinson, R. (2024). 'Q&A 'We hope to inspire the next generation of naturalist' Available at: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/people/2024/05/qa-we-hope-to-inspire-the-next-generation-of-naturalists/> [Accessed 15.07.25].

Autry, L., T., S. and Murawski, M. (2019). 'Museums Are Not Neutral: We Are Stronger Together,' Bully Pulpit. *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art*, 5(2).

Baker, F., W., G. (1982). The First International Polar Year, 1882-83. *Polar Record*, 21(132): 275-285.

Baker, F., W., G. (2010). Some reflections on the Antarctic Treaty. *Polar Record*, 46(1): 2-4.

Barczewski, S. (2007). *Antarctic Destinies: Scott, Shackleton and the Changing Face of Heroism*. London: Continuum UK.

Barczewski, S. (2013). 'The Historiography of Antarctic Exploration.' In Kennedy, D. (ed). *Reinterpreting Exploration: The West in the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Barczewski, S. (2016). *Heroic Failure and the British*. London: Yale University Press.

Barczewski, S. (2023). 'The Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration, 1890 to the Present,' in Howkins, A. and Roberts, P. (eds.) *The Cambridge History of the Polar Regions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Barr, S. and Luedecke, C. (2010). *The History of the International Polar Years (IPYs)*. London: Springer.

Barr, S. (2022). How we talk about Antarctic cultural heritage. *Antarctic Affairs*, 8: 33-52.

Barr, W. (1983). Geographical Aspects of the First International Polar Year, 1882-1883. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 73(4): 463-484

Barringer, T. and Flynn, T. (eds.) (1998). *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum*. London: Routledge. Black, B. (2000). *On Exhibit: Victorians and their Museums*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.

Bartlett, R. (2013). *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation*. Woodstock: Princeton University Press.

Basberg, B., L. (2017). Commercial and economic aspects of Antarctic exploration – from the earliest discoveries into the 'Heroic Age'. *The Polar Journal*, 7(1): 205-226.

Basberg, B., L. and Hacquebord, L. (2023). 'Industrial Whaling in the Arctic and Antarctic,' in Howkins, A. and Roberts, P. (eds.) *The Cambridge History of the Polar Regions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Basberg, B. and Headland, R. (2008). The 19th century Antarctic sealing industry: Sources, data and economic significance, *NHH Department of Economics Discussion Paper*, 21: 1-24.
- Bauer, A., A. (2019). Itinerant Objects. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 48: 335-52.
- Baughman, T., H. (1994). *Before the Heroes Came: Antarctica in the 1890s*. London: University of Nebraska Press.
- BBC (2002). *The Top 100 Great Britons*. Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20021204214727/http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/programmes/greatbritons/list.shtml/> [Accessed 30.06.25].
- BBC (2019). *Icons. The Finalists*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/3Tk2LpLg755Js0LQF7t3TQ2/the-finalists> [Accessed 30.06.25].
- BBC News (2020). *Edward Colston statue: Protesters tear down slave trader monument*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-52954305> [Accessed 06.01.24].
- Beck, P., J. (1983). British Antarctic Policy in the Early 20th Century. *Polar Record*, 21(134): 475-483.
- Belcher, M. (1991). *Exhibitions in Museums*. Leicester: Leicester University Press.
- Bell, M., Butlin, R., A., and Heffernan, M., J. (1995). *Geography and Imperialism, 1820-1940*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Bendix, R. (1997). *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Benjamin, W. (2008 [1936]). *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Translated by Underwood, J., A. London: Penguin.
- Berkes, F. (1993). 'Traditional Ecological Knowledge in Perspective', in Inglis, J., T. (ed.) *Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Concepts and Cases*. Ottawa: International Program on Traditional Ecological Knowledge. International Development Research Centre. Canadian Museum of Nature.
- Bernacchi, L., C. (1935). Antarctic Exploration Past and Present. *Geography*, 20(3): 176-190.
- Black, B. (2000). *On Exhibit: Victorians and their Museums*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.
- Black, I., S. (1999). Rebuilding 'The Heart of the Empire': bank headquarters in the City of London, 1919-1939. *Art History*, 22(4): 593-618.
- Black Lives Matter (n.d.). *Our History*. Available at: <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/#our-history> [Accessed 06.01.24].
- Bourgeon-Renault, D., Urbain, C., Petr, C., Le Gall-Ely, M., and Gombault, A. (2006). An Experiential Approach to the Consumption Value of Arts and Culture: The Case of Museums and Monuments. *International Journal of Arts Management*, 9(1): 35-47.
- Bourke, S. (2021). Enacting an Indigenist Anthropology: Diversity and Decolonising the Discipline. *Teaching Anthropology*, 10(1): 30-36.

- Bravo, M., T. (1996). 'Ethnological Encounters.' In Jardine, N., Secord, J., A., and Spary, E., C. (eds). *Cultures of Natural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brazzelli, N. (2017). 'Heroic and post-colonial Antarctic narratives,' in Dodds, K., Hemmings, A., D. and Roberts, P. (eds.) *Handbook on the Politics of Antarctica*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Browett, R. (2017). Touching the Holy: The Rise of Contact Relics in Medieval England. *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 68(3): 493-509.
- Brown, M. (2010). "Like a Devoted Army": Medicine, Heroic Masculinity, and the Military Paradigm in Victorian Britain. *Journal of British Studies*, 49(3): 592-622.
- Brown, R., H., E., Shackleton, E., Simpson, G., C., and Atkinson, E., L. (1921). The Future of Polar Exploration: Discussion. *The Geographical Journal*, 57(3): 200–204.
- Brumann, C. (2014). Heritage agnosticism: a third path for the study of cultural heritage. *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*, 22(2): 173-188.
- Bryant, L., R. (2011). *The Democracy of Objects*. Michigan: Open Humanities Press.
- Buchanan, L., Bui, Q. and Patel, J., K. (2020). *Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in U.S. History*. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/03/us/george-floyd-protests-crowd-size.html> [Accessed 06.01.24].
- Bunkholdt, B. (1925). Oslo - Norway's rebaptized capital. *Current History (New York)*, 22(1): 65-79.
- Butler, A. (2013). *The Quest for Frank Wild: Including his Original Memoirs*. Warwick: Jackleberry Press.
- Byard, R., W. (2021). Death in the Arctic – the tragic fate of members of the Franklin expedition (1845). *Forensic Sci Med Pathol*, 17: 161–166.
- Bynum, C., W. (2004). Bleeding Hosts and their Contact Relics in Late Medieval Northern Germany. *The Medieval History Journal*, 7(2): 227-241.
- Byrne, A. (2015). Institutional memory and memory institutions. *The Australian Library Journal*, 64(4): 259-269.
- Byrne, S., Clarke, A., Harrison, R. and Torrence, R. (2011). 'Networks, Agents and Objects: Frameworks for Unpacking Museum Collections', in: Byrne, S., Clarke, A., Harrison, R. and Torrence, R., (eds.) *Unpacking the Collection: Networks of Material and Social Agency in the Museum*. London: Springer.
- Cambridge City Council (n.d.). *Protected trees*. Available at: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/protected-trees> [Accessed 15.05.24].
- Campbell, J. (1949 [1968]). *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Candea, M. (2013). The Fieldsite as Device. *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 6(3): 241-258.
- Cannell, F. (2011). English Ancestors: The Moral Possibilities of Popular Genealogy. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 17(3): 462–80.

- Cant, A. (2019). *The Value of Aesthetics: Oaxacan Woodcarvers in Global Economies of Culture*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Carr, H., G. (1914). SLEDGE-FLAGS: THEIR ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT. *The Mariner's Mirror*, 27(1): 5-13.
- Chapagain, N., K. (2017). Contextual Approach to the Question of Authenticity in Heritage Management and Tourism. *Journal of Heritage Management*, 1(2): 160-169.
- Cherry-Garrad, A. (1922 [2003]). *The Worst Journey in the World: Antarctica 1910-13*. Pimlico: London.
- Clancy, R., Manning, J. and Brolsma, H. (2014). *Mapping Antarctica: A Five Hundred Year Record of Discovery*. Chichester: Springer.
- Classen, C., and Howes, D. (2006). 'The Museum as Sensescape: Western Sensibilities and Indigenous Artefacts'. In Edwards, E., Gosden, C., and Phillips, R. (eds). *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Cleary, H. (2024). Pioneers of Difficult Preservation: Maritime. Part Three. *Vintage Spirit* 259.
- Clifford, J. (1997). *Routes: Travel and translation in the late twentieth century*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Cojocar, M. (2022). The Creative Solution: Privileged Things as Heroic Objects. *Philosophia*, 50: 473-486.
- Collini, S. (1991). *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Colwell, C. (2022). A Palimpsest Theory of Objects. *Current Anthropology*, 63(2): 129-238.
- Connelly, C. and Warrior, C. (2019). Survey stories in the history of British polar exploration: museums, objects and people. *Notes Rec.*, 73: 259-274.
- Cumpston, J. (1963). The Antarctic Landfalls of John Biscoe, 1831. *The Geographical Journal*, 129(2): 175-184.
- Cvorak, M. (2020). *Rhodes must fall: Oxford protesters call for removal of statue – video report*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/video/2020/jun/09/rhodes-must-fall-oxford-protesters-call-for-removal-of-statue-video-report> [Accessed 06.01.24].
- Dalton, G. and Gill, M. (2022). *Public bodies*. Available at: <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainer/public-bodies> [Accessed 12.01.25].
- Das, S. and Lowe, M. (2018). Nature Read in Black and White: decolonial approaches to interpreting natural history collections. *Journal of Natural Science Collections*, 6: 4-14.
- Davey G. (2005). What is Museum Fatigue? *Visitor Studies Today*, 8(3): 17-21.
- Dawson, G. (1994). *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*. London: Routledge.

- De Dekker, P. (2018). On the long-ignored scientific achievements of the *Belgica* expedition 1897-1899. *Polar Research*, 37(1).
- Deane, B. (2014). *Masculinity and the New Imperialism: Rewriting Manhood in British Popular Literature, 1870-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Debenham, F. (1926). The Captain Scott Polar Research Institute. *The Geographical Journal*, 68(1): 43-48.
- Debenham, F. (1945). Retrospect: The Scott Polar Research Institute, 1920-45. *Polar Record*, 4(29): 223-235.
- Denshire, S. (2014). On auto-ethnography. *Current Sociology*, 62(6): 831-850.
- Dick, L. (2004). Robert Peary's North Polar Narratives and the Making of an American Idol. *American Studies*, 45(2): 5-34.
- Dodds, K. (2010). 'Governing Antarctica: Contemporary Challenges and the Enduring Legacy of the 1959 Antarctic Treaty'. *Global Policy*, 1(1): 108-115.
- Dodds, K. and Hemmings, A., D. (2013). Britain and the British Antarctic Territory in the wider geopolitics of the Antarctic and the Southern Ocean. *International Affairs*, 89(6): 1429-1444.
- Domínguez Rubio, F. (2016). On the discrepancy between objects and things: An ecological approach. *Journal of Material Culture*, 21(1): 59-86.
- Domínguez Rubio, F. and Benzecry, C. (2018). 'The cultural life of objects', in Grindstaff, L., Lo, M-C. and Hall, J., (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of Cultural Sociology*. London: Routledge.
- Dowden, O. (2020). *Letter from Culture Secretary to DCMS Arm's Length Bodies on contested heritage*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/letter-from-culture-secretary-on-hm-government-position-on-contested-heritage> [Accessed 06.01.24].
- Drazin, A. (2021). 'The object biography', in Carroll, T., Walford, A., and Walton, S. (eds.), *Lineages and Advancements in Material Culture Studies: Perspectives from UCL Anthropology*. London: Routledge: 61-74.
- Driver, F. (2001). *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Dudley, S., H. (ed). (2010). *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations*. London: Routledge.
- Dudley, S. (2012). 'Introduction: Museums and things', in Dudley, S. et. al. (eds.) *The Thing About Museums: Objects and Experience, Representation and Contestation*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Duffy, A. (2022). The Margins of Empire: Gender, Nationalism, and Space in British Exploration. *Environment, Space, Place*, 14(2): 1-27.
- Dundee Heritage Trust (n.d.). *Our Mission*. Available at: <https://www.dundeeheritagetrust.co.uk/about-us/our-mission/> [Accessed: 12.09.24].
- Dundee Partnership (2021). *About Dundee: Statistics, Demographics, General Reference Material*. Available at:

https://www.dundee.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/about_dundee_2021pdf.pdf
[Accessed 30.12.24].

Dyck, N. (2000). 'Home field advantage?' in Amit, V. (ed.) *Constructing the Field: Ethnographic Fieldwork in the Contemporary World*. London: Routledge.

East Anglian Film Archive. (n.d.). *Scott Polar Research Institute 1961, Cambridge (Cambridgeshire)*. (Cat no. 128899). Available at: <https://eafa.org.uk/work/?id=792671> [Accessed 09/11/23].

Edinburgh, T. and Day, J., J. (2016). Estimating the extent of Antarctic summer sea ice during the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration. *The Cryosphere*, 10: 2721-2730.

Edwards, E., Gosden, C., and Phillips, R. (eds). (2006). *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Elzinga, A. (2010) 'An Evaluation of the Achievements of the First International Polar Year.' In Barr, S. and Luedecke, C. (eds). *The History of the International Polar Years (IPYs)*. London: Springer.

Endurance22 (n.d.). *Endurance22: Finding Shackleton's lost ice ship*. Available at: <https://endurance22.org/#:~:text=On%205th%20March%202022%20the,the%20Weddell%20Sea%20in%201915>. [Accessed 07.01.24].

Eriksen, T., H. (2010). The challenges of anthropology. *International Journal of Pluralism and Economics Educations*, 1(3): 194-202.

Farley, R. (2005). 'By endurance we conquer' Ernest Shackleton and performances of white male hegemony. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 8(2): 231-254.

Feldman, J., D. (2006). 'Contact Points: Museums and the Lost Body Problem'. In Edwards, E., Gosden, C., and Phillips, R. (eds). *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Field, L. (2009). Four kinds of authenticity? Regarding Nicaraguan pottery in Scandinavian museums, 2006-08. *American Ethnologist*, 36(3): 441-613.

Fiennes, R. (2021). *Shackleton: A Biography*. Penguin Random House: London.

Fisher, M., T. and Fisher, J. (1958). *Shackleton and the Antarctic*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Fleming, D. (2015). Museums, Human Rights, Contested Histories and Excluded Communities. *Case Studies and Field Reports*, 67(1-4): 116-124.

Forrest, R. (2013). Museum Atmospherics: The Role of the Exhibition Environment in the Visitor Experience. *Visitor Studies*, 16(2): 201-216.

Forst, J. and Brown, T. (2017). A Case Study: Was Private William Braine of the 1845 Franklin Expedition a Victim of Tuberculosis? *Arctic*, 70(4): 381-388.

Foster, S., M., Blackwell, A. and Goldberg, M. (2014). The Legacy of Nineteenth-century Replicas for Object Cultural Biographies: Lessons in Duplication from 1830s Fife. *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 19(2): 137-160.

- Foster, S., M. and Curtis, N., G., W. (2016). The thing about replicas: why historic replicas matter. *European Journal of Archaeology*, 19(1): 122–48.
- Foster, S., M. and Jones, S. (2020). *My Life as a Replica: St John's Cross, Iona*. Havertown: Oxbow Books.
- Frisk, K. (2019). What makes a Hero? Theorising the Social Structuring of Heroism. *Sociology*, 53(1): 87-103.
- Geary, P. (1986). 'Sacred commodities: The circulation of medieval relics.' In A. Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gell, A. (1995). On Coote's "Marvels of Everyday Vision". *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Anthropology*, 38: 18-31.
- Gell, A. (1996). Vogel's Net: Traps as artworks and artworks as traps. *Journal of Material Culture*, 1(1): 15-38.
- Gell, A. (1998). *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gilbert White's House and Gardens (n.d.). 'The Oates Collections'. Available at: <https://gilbertwhiteshouse.org.uk/the-oates-collections/> [Accessed 15.07.25].
- Gilchrist, R. (2020). *Sacred Heritage: Monastic Archaeology, Identities, Beliefs*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gino Watkins Memorial Fund (1933). The Gino Watkins Memorial Fund. *Polar Record*, 1(6): 70.
- Glazer, M. P. and Glazer, P. M. (1999). On the Trail of Courageous Behaviour. *Sociological Inquiry*, 69(2): 276-295.
- Gökçe, G., Varma, S., and Watanabe, C. (2020). 'A Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography.' Member Voices, *Fieldsights*. Available at: <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/a-manifesto-for-patchwork-ethnography> [Accessed 23.01.25].
- Golding, V. (2010). 'Dreams and wishes: the multi-sensory museum space'. In Dudley, S., H. (ed). *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations*. London: Routledge.
- Gosden, C. (2005). What Do Objects Want? *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*, 12(3): 193-211.
- Grant, M. and Pedrotti, F. (n.d.). *Tales of Discovery*. Available at: <https://www.southampton.ac.uk/research/projects/tales-of-discovery> [Accessed 31.01.25].
- Greene, C., S. (2016). Material Connections: 'The Smithsonian Effect' in Anthropological Cataloguing. *Museum Anthropology*, 39(2): 147-162.
- Guly, H., R. (2012) 'Polar anaemia': cardiac failure during the heroic age of Antarctic exploration. *Polar Record*, 48(245): 157-245.
- Guly, H., R. (2013). Use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs during the heroic age of Antarctic exploration. *History of Psychiatry*, 24(1): 94-105.

- Gurian, E., H. (1991). 'Noodling Around with Exhibition Opportunities'. In Karp, I. (ed). *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Gurian, E. (1999). What Is the Object of This Exercise? A Meandering Exploration of the Many Meanings of Objects in Museums. *Daedalus*, 128(3): 163-183.
- Hahn, C. (2016). *The Reliquary Effect: Enshrining the Sacred Object*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Haines, D. (2024). Heroic Fear: Emotions, Masculinity, and Dangerous Nature in British Colonial Adventure Narratives. *Environmental Humanities*, 16(1): 162-182.
- Hamilton, C., I. (1980). Naval Hagiography and the Victorian Hero. *The Historical Journal*, 23(2): 381-98.
- Hamre, I. (1993). The Japanese South Polar Expedition of 1911-12: A Little-Known Episode in Antarctic Exploration. *The Geographical Journal*, 82(5): 411-423.
- Handler, R. (1986). Authenticity. *Anthropology Today*, 2(1): 2-4.
- Hanrahan, M. (2019). 'Not to Worry': Cecily Shackleton's Polar Gift Giving and the Oxford University Ellesmere Land Expedition of 1934-35. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 34(1-2): 114-122.
- Harknett, S-J. (2018). How we located the most visited object in our museums. Online: <https://www.museums.cam.ac.uk/blog/2018/04/13/how-we-located-the-most-visited-object-in-our-museums/> [Accessed 11.07.25].
- Harman, G. (2018). *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*. London: Penguin Random House.
- Harries, J. (2017). A stone that feels right in the hand: Tactile memory, the abduction of agency and presence of the past. *Journal of Material Culture*, 22(1): 110-130.
- Harrison, M. (2005). Science and the British Empire. *Isis*, 96(1): 56-63.
- Hattersley-Smith, G. (2008). Obituaries: Sir Wally Herbert. *Polar Record*, 44(228): 93-95.
- Headland, R., K. (2000). Wreckage on Elephant Island, South Shetland Islands. *Falkland Islands Journal*, 7(4): 49-55.
- Headland, R., K. (2001). 'Shackletoniana', in Christie's *The Polar Sale: Tuesday 25 September 2001*. Christie's: London.
- Headland, B. (2009). *A Chronology of Antarctic Exploration: A Synopsis of Events and Activities from the Earliest Times Until the International Polar Years, 2007-09*. London: Bernard Quaritch Limited.
- Heggie, V. (2019). *Higher and Colder: A History of Extreme Physiology and Exploration*. London: Chicago University Press.
- Hein, H. (2011). The Matter of Museums. *The Journal of Museum Education*, 36(2): 179-187.
- Herbert, K. (2012). *Polar Wives: The Remarkable Women behind the World's Most Daring Explorers*. Vancouver: Greystone Books.

Heritage Fund. (n.d.). *About*. Available at: <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/about> [Accessed 21.06.24].

Hicks, D. (2020a). *The UK government is trying to draw museums into a fake culture war*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/oct/15/the-uk-government-is-trying-to-draw-museums-into-a-fake-culture-war> [Accessed 06.01.24].

Hicks, D. (2020b). *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution*. London: Pluto Press.

Hingley, R. (2022a). Ice-locked huts, snow-buried cairns, and sunken ships: the prevailing discourse on heritage in antarctica. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 28(8):0 940–954.

Hingley, R. (2022b). Territorializing polar heritage: cultural heritage as a means to exercise symbolic sovereignty in Antarctica. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 12(7): 989-1005.

Hoare, J. (2020). The practice and potential of heritage emotion research: an experimental mixed-methods approach to investigating affect and emotion in a historic house. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 26(10): 955-974.

Hodge, J. M. (2011). 'Science and Empire: An Overview of the Historical Scholarship.' In Bennett, B. M. and Hodge, J. M. (eds). *Science and Empire: Knowledge and Networks of Science across the British Empire, 1800-1970*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hofman, R., J. (2017). Sealing, whaling and krill fishing in the Southern Ocean: past and possible future effects on catch regulations. *Polar Record*, 53(268): 88-99.

Holtorf, C. (2013). On Pastness: A Reconsideration of Materiality in Archaeological Object Authenticity. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 86(2): 427-443.

Hooper, S. (2014). A cross-cultural theory of relics: on understanding religion, bodies, artefacts, images and art. *World Art*, 4(2): 175-207.

Hoskins, J. (1998). *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of People's Lives*. New York: Routledge.

Hoskins, J. (2006). 'Agency, Biography and Objects' in Tilley, C., Keane, W., Küchler, S., Rowlands, M., and Spyer, P. (eds.) *Handbook of Material Culture*. London: Sage Publications.

Houriham, M. (1997). *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children's Literature*. London: Routledge.

Høvik, I. (2015). Framing the Arctic: Reconsidering Roald Amundsen's Gjøa Expedition Imagery. *Nordlit*, 35: 137-160.

Howell, S. (2017). Two or three things I love about ethnography. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 7(1): 15-20.

Hujoel, P., P. and Hujoel, M., L., A. (2022). Vitamin C and scar strength: analysis of a historical trial and implications for collagen-related pathologies. *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 115(1): 8-17.

Huntford, R. (1979). *Scott and Amundsen*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Hutchings, T. and McKenzie, J. (eds.). (2016). *Materiality and the Study of Religion: The Stuff of the Sacred*. London: Routledge.

ICOM (2022). *Strategic Plan 2022-2028*. ICOM: international council of museums. Available at: https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/EN_OGA2022_StrategicPlan_Final_.pdf [Accessed 06.01.24].

Ingold, T. (2021). *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. London: Routledge.

International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs. (n.d.). *Indigenous Peoples in Sápmi*. Available at: <https://www.iwgia.org/en/sapmi.html> [Accessed 09.11.2023].

Irving, S. (2008). *Natural Science and the Origins of the British Empire*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Jacob, P. (2016). Spectres in storage: the colonial legacy of art museums. *Journal of Art Historiography*, 15.

James, N. (2016). Replication for Chauvet Cave. *Antiquity*, 90(350): 519–24.

Jones, M. (2003). *The Last Great Quest: Captain Scott's Antarctic Sacrifice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jones, M. (2007). What Should Historians do with Heroes? Reflections on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Britain. *History Compass*, 5(2): 439-454.

Jones, M. (2011). From “Noble Example” to “Potty Pioneer”: rethinking Scott of the Antarctic, c. 1945-2011. *The Polar Journal*, 1(2): 191-206.

Jones, M. (2012). Scott of the Antarctic: From hero to villain? *Geographical Magazine*, 38-42.

Jones, M., Sèbe, B., Strachan, J., Taithe, B. and Yeandle, P. (2014). Decolonising Imperial Heroes: Britain and France. *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 42(5): 787-825.

Jones, S. (2010). Negotiating Authentic Objects and Authentic Selves: Beyond the Deconstruction of Authenticity. *Journal of Material Culture*, 15(2): 181-203.

Jones, S. and Yarrow, T. (2013). Crafting authenticity: An ethnography of conservation practice. *Journal of Material Culture*, 18(1): 3-26.

Jordanova, L. (2014). On heroism. *Science Museum Group Journal*, Spring (01).

Joy, J. (2009). Reinvigorating object biography: reproducing the drama of object lives. *World Archaeology*, 41(4): 540-556.

Joyce, R. (2013). ‘When is Authentic? Situating Authenticity in the Itineraries of Objects’, in Geurds, A. and Van Broekhoven, L., N., K. (eds.) *Creating Authenticity: Authentication Processes in Ethnographic Museums*. Leiden: Sidestone Press.

Jungblut, A., D. and Hawes, I. (2017). Using Captain Scott’s Discovery specimens to unlock the past: has Antarctic cyanobacterial diversity changed over the last 100 years? *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 284(1857).

- Juzda Smith, E. (2020). Raising Boys for the Navy: Health, Welfare, and the British Sea Services, 1870-1905. *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 76(1): 53-77.
- Karp, I. (ed). (1991). *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Kendall Adams, G. (2024). *Capital museum projects face uncertainty as government mulls £100m cut*. Available at: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2024/11/capital-museum-projects-face-uncertainty-as-government-mulls-100m-cut/> [Accessed 20.01.25].
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (2001). 'Reflections', in Myers, F. (ed.) *The Empire of Things: Regimes of Value and Material Culture*. Sante Fe: School of American Research Press.
- Kjær, K-G. (2005). Belgica in the Arctic. *Polar Record*, 41(3): 205-214.
- Knight, A. (2010). The Several Legs of Santa Anna: A Saga of Secular Relics. *Past & Present*, 206(5): 227-255.
- Kopytoff, I. (1986). 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process', in Appadurai, A (ed.) *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kreps, C. (2003). Curatorship as Social Practice. *Curator*, 46(3): 311-323.
- Krmpotich, C. and Peers, L. (2013). *This is our life: Haida material heritage and changing museum practice*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Küchler, S. and Carroll, T. (2021). *The Object: Alfred Gell, Art, and Social Theory*. London: Routledge.
- Kuper, A. (2023). *The Museum of Other People: From Colonial Acquisitions to Cosmopolitan Exhibitions*. London: Profile Books.
- Lahey, D., C. (1992). Replicating a Voyage of Discovery. *Historical Archaeology*, 26(4): 27-33.
- Larson, E., J. (2011a). *An Empire of Ice: Scott, Shackleton, and the Heroic Age of Antarctic Science*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Larson, E., J. (2011b). Poles apart: Scott, Amundsen and science. *Endeavour*, 35(4): 129-136.
- Latour, B. (1987). *Science in Action: How to follow scientists and engineers through society*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Latour, B. (1994). Pragmatogonies: A Mythical Account of How Humans and Nonhumans Swap Properties. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 37(6): 791-808.
- Latour, B. (1999). On recalling ANT. *The Sociological Review*, 47 (S1): 15-25.
- Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Layton, R. (2003). Art and Agency: A Reassessment. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 9(3): 447-464.

- Leane, E., Winter, T., and Salazar, J., F. (2016). Caught between nationalism and internationalism: replicating histories of Antarctica in Hobart. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 22(3): 214–227.
- Legler, G. (2011). The end of the heroic illusion: how three generations of women writers have changed the literature of Antarctica. *The Polar Journal*, 1(2): 207-224.
- Lewis, G. and May, K. (2014). 'Will made a good Admiral': a reassessment of Captain Scott's naval career. *Polar Record*, 51(2): 111-129.
- Lewis-Jones, H. (2005). 'Heroism Displayed': revisiting the Franklin Gallery at the Royal Naval Exhibition, 1891. *Polar Record*, 41(218): 185-203.
- Lindholm, C. (2002). Authenticity, Anthropology, and the Sacred. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 75(2): 331-338.
- Lindholm, C. (2008). *Culture and Authenticity*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Longair, S. and McAleer, J. (2012). 'Introduction: Curating empire museums and the British imperial experience'. In Longair, S. and McAleer, J. (eds). *Curating empire: Museums and the British imperial experience* Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Lutz, D. (2015). *Relics of Death in Victorian Literature and Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lynch, B., T. and Alberti, S., J., M., M. (2010). Legacies of prejudice: racism, co-production and radical trust in the museum. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 25: 13-35.
- MacCannell, D. (1973). Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings. *American Journal of Sociology*, 79(3): 589-603.
- MacCannell, D. (1976). *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. London: Macmillan.
- Macdonald, B. (2022). Pausing, Reflection, and Action: Decolonizing Museum Practices. *Journal of Museum Education*. 47(1): 8-17.
- Macdonald, S. (2002). *Behind the Scenes at the Science Museum*. Oxford: Berg.
- MacKenzie, J., M. (1985). *Propaganda and Empire: The manipulation of British public opinion 1880-1960*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- MacKenzie, J., M. (2009). *Museums and Empire: Natural History, Human Cultures and Colonial Identities*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Maddison, B. (2019). 'Indigenising the heroic era of Antarctic exploration', in Leane, E. and McGee, J. (eds.) *Anthropocene Antarctica: Perspectives from the Humanities, Law and Social Sciences*. London: Routledge.
- Malinowski, B. (1922 [1984]). *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc.
- Marcus, G., E. (1995). Ethnography In/Of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24: 95-117.

- Markham, C., E. (1901). Address to the Royal Geographical Society. *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 17(7): 337-347.
- McAtackney, L. (2024). 'Archives and historiography'. In King, R. and Rico, T. (eds). *Methods and Methodologies in Heritage Studies*. London: UCL Press.
- McCahey, D. (2023). 'Britain's Polar Empire, 1769-1982.' In Howkins, A. and Roberts, P. *The Cambridge History of the Polar Regions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McGranahan, C. (2014). What is Ethnography? Teaching Ethnographic Sensibilities without Fieldwork. *Teaching Anthropology*, 4: 23-36.
- McIntosh, S., E., Guercio, B., Tabin, G., C., Leemon, D. and Schimelpfenig, T. (2011). Ultraviolet Keratitis Among Mountaineers and Outdoor Recreationalists. *Wilderness & Environmental Medicine*, 22(2): 144-147.
- McMurtrie, R., J. (2022). Observing, recording, visualising and interpreting visitors' movement patterns in art museums: A mixed method approach. *Multimodality & Society*, 2(2): 93-113.
- Medby, I. and Dittmer, J. (2020). From *Death in the Ice* to life in the museum: Absence, affect and mystery in the Arctic. *Society and Space*, 39(1): 176-193.
- Mehta, U., S. (1999). *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Meyer, J. (2009). *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mímisson, K. (2012). Twisted Lives: On the Temporality and Materiality of Biographical Presences. *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 16(3): 455-471.
- Morgan, D. (2021). *The Thing About Religion: An Introduction to the Material Study of Religions*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Morgan, K., O. (1992). *The People's Peace. British History, 1945–1990*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Morphy, H. (2009). Art as a Mode of Action: Some Problems with Gell's *Art and Agency*. *Journal of Material Culture*, 14(1): 5-27.
- Morphy, H. (2010). 'Afterword'. In Dudley, S., H. (ed). *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations*. London: Routledge.
- Mouliou, M. and Kalessopoulou, D. (2012). 'Emblematic museum objects of national significance: In search of their multiple meanings and values', in Dudley, S., Barnes, A., J., Binnie, J., Petrov, J. and Walklate, J. (eds.) *The Thing About Museums: Objects and Experience, Representation and Contestation*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Mullard, J. (2021). Decolonising the discipline: a genealogy of thought, power and exploitation. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. Available at: [https://rai.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/toc/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1467-9655.decolonising](https://rai.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/toc/10.1111/(ISSN)1467-9655.decolonising) [Accessed 23.01.25].

Museums Association (n.d.) *Off the Shelf: A Toolkit for Ethical Transfer, Reuse and Disposal*. Available at: https://media.museumsassociation.org/app/uploads/2011/02/31130538/HS377-%E2%80%93-MA-New-Disposal-Toolkit_08-FINAL.pdf [Accessed 11.05.24].

Myers, F. (2001). 'Introduction', in Myers, F. (ed.) *The Empire of Things: Regimes of Value and Material Culture*. Sante Fe: School of American Research Press.

Office for National Statistics (2024a). *Employment, unemployment and economic inactivity in Dundee City*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/labourmarketlocal/S12000042/#inactivity> [Accessed 30.12.24].

Office for National Statistics (2024b). *DatasetLI01 Regional labour market: local indicators for counties, local and unitary authorities. October 2024 dataset*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/li01regionallabourmarketlocalindicatorsforcountieslocalandunitaryauthorities> [Accessed 07.01.24].

Osterholtz, A. (2025). 'Relics and Reliquaries.' In *The Bodies Poetic. Bioarchaeology and Social Theory*. Cham: Springer.

Ouzman, S. (2006). 'The Beauty of Letting Go: Fragmentary Museums and Archaeologies of Archives'. In Edwards, E., Gosden, C., and Phillips, R. (eds). *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Packer, J. (2008). Beyond learning: Exploring Visitors' Perceptions of the Value and Benefits of Museum Experiences. *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 51(1): 33-54.

Paine, C. (2020). *Religious Objects in Museums: Private Lives and Public Duties*. Oxford: Routledge.

Pala, C. (1999). Unlikely heroes: the story of the first men who stood at the North Pole. *Polar Record*, 35(195): 337-342.

Pearce, M. (1992). *Museums Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study*. Leicester: Leicester University Press.

Pearson, M. (1992). Expedition huts in Antarctica: 1899-1917. *Polar Record*, 28(167): 261-276.

Pearson, M., Zarankin, A. and Salerno, M, A. (2020). 'Exploring and exploiting Antarctica: The early human interactions' in Oliva, M. and Ruiz-Fernández, J. (eds). *Past Antarctica: Paleoclimatology and Climate Change*. Oxford: Academic Press.

Pedrs, I. (2000). 'The Gentleman and the Hero', in Segal, R. (ed.). *Hero Myths*. Oxford: Blackwell Publisher.

Penrose, J. (2018). Authenticity, authentication and experiential authenticity: telling stories in museums. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 21(9): 1245–1267.

Philpott, C. (2012). Notes from the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration: Gerald S. Doorly's *Songs of the 'Morning'*. *Context*, 37: 3-35.

Pinney, C. (2002). 'The Indian Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Or, What Happens When Peasants 'Get Hold' of Images.' In Ginsburg, F. and Abu-Lughod, L. (eds.) *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Plummer Sires, J. (2024). A global call for informed action on decolonisation. *Museums Journal*, Opinion. <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/opinion/2024/07/a-global-call-for-informed-action-on-decolonisation/#> [Accessed: 06.01.24].

Potts, T. (2010). 'In The Wake of Shackleton Expedition. Log of "Sir Ernest Shackleton" Elephant Island to South Georgia 24 December 1993 – 16 January 1994'. *The James Caird Society Journal* (2014)7: 33-41.

Pratt, S. (1992). *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. 2nd Edition. London: Routledge.

Rainbow, P., S. (2005). From natural history to biodiversity: collections of discovery. *Archives of Natural History*, 32(2):221-230.

Research England, Scottish Funding Council, Medr Commission for Tertiary Education and Research and Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland (n.d.). *What is the REF?* Available at: <https://2029.ref.ac.uk/about/what-is-the-ref/> [Accessed 16.01.25].

Richards, T. (1993). *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire*. London: Verso.

Rickly-Boyd, J., M. (2012). Authenticity & aura: A Benjaminian Approach to Tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 39(1): 269-289.

Riffenburgh, B. (1993). *The Myth of the Explorer: The Press, Sensationalism, and Geographical Discovery*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Robbins, J. (2013). Beyond the suffering subject: toward an anthropology of the good. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 19: 447-462.

Roberts, P. (2011). Heroes for the past and present: a century of remembering Amundsen and Scott. *Endeavour*, 35(4): 142-150.

Robinson, M, F. (2013). 'Science and Exploration.' In Kennedy, D. (ed). *Reinterpreting Exploration: The West in the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ross, W., G. (2002). The Type and Number of Expeditions in the Franklin Search 1847-1859. *Arctic*, 55(1): 57-69.

Ryder, M. (2019). *How mythologist Joseph Campbell made Luke Skywalker a hero*. Available at: https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/how-mythologist-joseph-campbell-made-luke-skywalker-a-hero-1.5262649?fbclid=IwAR36Jxf1a1IAKPb0DKk0YP5-I_vci0aRaDHZ6jq7dsdgQar94JMRw9IE_48 [Accessed 29.07.21].

Sancton, J. (2021). *Madhouse at the End of the Earth: The Belgica's journey into the Dark Antarctic Night*. London: W. H. Allen.

Sara, M., N. (2009). Siida and traditional Sami reindeer herding knowledge. *Northern Review*, 30 (Spring): 153-178.

- Savours, A. (1962). Sir James Clark Ross, 1800-1862. *The Geographical Journal*, 128(3): 325-327.
- Savours, A. (2013). *The Voyages of the Discovery: The Illustrated History of Scott's Ship*. Barnsley: Seaforth Publishing.
- Saywell, D. (n.d.). *Artists and places: Artworks by the indigenous peoples of northern Canada, Greenland and Alaska in the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge*. Available at: <https://artuk.org/discover/curations/artists-and-places-artworks-by-the-indigenous-peoples-of-northern-canada-greenland-and-alaska-in-the-scott-polar-research-institute-cambridge/template/album> [Accessed: 05.05.24].
- Schwan, S. and Dutz, S. (2020). How do Visitors Perceive the Role of Authentic Objects in Museums? *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 63: 217-237.
- Scott Polar Research Institute (n.d. a). *Message to the Public*. Available at: <https://www.spri.cam.ac.uk/museum/diaries/scottslastexpedition/1912/03/29/message-to-the-public/> [Accessed 07.01.24].
- Scott Polar Research Institute. (n.d. g). *Home*. Available at: <https://www.spri.cam.ac.uk/> [Accessed: 23.11.24].
- Scott Polar Research Institute (n.d. h). *The Gino Watkins Memorial Fund*. Available at: <https://www.spri.cam.ac.uk/about/funding/ginowatkins/> [Accessed 07.05.24].
- Scott Polar Research Institute. (2004). *Shackleton: The Hidden Collections – Exhibition*. Available at: <https://www.spri.cam.ac.uk/museum/exhibitions/shackleton/> [Accessed 10.11.23].
- Scott Polar Research Institute. (2008). *Nimrod*. Available at: <https://www.spri.cam.ac.uk/museum/exhibitions/nimrod/> [Accessed 26.03.24].
- Scott Polar Research Institute. (2019a). *Sledging flag*. Available at: <https://www.spri.cam.ac.uk/museum/shackleton/articles/y2002.2.4/> [Accessed 10.11.23].
- Scott Polar Research Institute (2022). *Polar Charities*. Available at: <https://www.spri.cam.ac.uk/links/charities.html> [Accessed 11.05.24].
- Scott, R., F. (1912 [2005]). *Robert Falcon Scott Journals. Captain Scott's Last Expedition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Scott, R., F. et al. (1913). *Scott's last expedition: Vol. I. Being the journals of Captain R.F. Scott, R.N., C.V.O. Vol. II. Being the reports of the journeys and the scientific work undertaken by Dr E.A. Wilson and the surviving members of the expedition*. London: Smith, Elder.
- Scott, S., V. (2019). 'Imperialism in Antarctica' In Ness, I. and Cope, Z. (eds). *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Scottish Cities Alliance (2023). *Dundee*. Available at: <https://scottishcities.org.uk/dundee/> [Accessed: 30.12.24].
- Seag, M. (2017). Women need not apply: gendered institutional change in Antarctica and Outer Space. *The Polar Journal*, 7(2): 319-335.

- Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty (n.d.). *The Antarctic Treaty*. Available at: <https://www.ats.aq/e/antarctic treaty.html> [Accessed 15.01.25].
- Segal, R. (2000). 'Introduction', in Segal, R. (ed.). *Hero Myths*. Oxford: Blackwell Publisher.
- Senatore, M., X. (2020). Things in Antarctica. An archaeological perspective. *The Polar Journal*, 10(2): 397-419.
- Senatore, M., X. (2022). Antarctic conservation policies and practices: Towards a more inclusive and sustainable future. *The Geographical Journal*, 189: 49-62.
- Shackleton (n.d. a). *Homepage*. Available at: <https://shackleton.com/> [Accessed 19.01.25].
- Shackleton (n.d. b). *The Shackleton Medal*. Available at: <https://shackleton.com/pages/shackleton-medal> [Accessed 19.01.24].
- Shackleton, E. (1909 [2000]). *The Heart of the Antarctic: The Farthest South Expedition 1907-1909*. London: Penguin Books.
- Shackleton, E. (1919). *South: The Last Antarctic Expedition of Shackleton and the Endurance*. London: The Lyons Press.
- Shaughnessy, P., D. and Pharaoh, M. (2021). Mawson's views on use of natural resources in the Antarctic and sub-Antarctic. *Polar Record*, 57: 1-11.
- Sigfúsdóttir, Ó., G. (2019). Blind spots: museology on museum research. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 35(2): 196-209.
- Sixth International Geographical Congress (1896). *Report of the Sixth International Geographical Congress held in London, 1895*. London: John Murray.
- Smith, L. (2006). *Uses of Heritage*. London: Routledge.
- Smith, L. (2021). *Emotional Heritage: Visitor Engagement at Museum and Heritage Sites*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Spufford, F. (1996). *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Squires, K., Davidson, A., and Piombino-Mascali, D. (2024). Public attitudes towards the display of non-adult mummies in the Capuchin Catacombs of Palermo, Sicily. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 30(8): 888-904.
- Stafford, R., A., (1989). *Scientist of Empire: Sir Roderick Murchison, Scientific Exploration and Victorian Imperialism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stafford, R., A. (2013). 'Scientific Exploration and Empire.' In Dubow, S. (ed). *The Rise and Fall of Modern Empires, Volume II*. London: Routledge.
- Stam, D. (2005). 'The Informed Muse: The Implications of 'The New Museology' for Museum Practice', in Corsane G. (ed.) *Heritage, Museums and Galleries: An Introductory Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Steele, A. (2023). *The symbolism behind the Shackleton iconography*. Available at: <https://shackleton.com/blogs/articles/the-symbolism-behind-shackleton> [Accessed 19.01.25].

- Steiner, C. (1999). 'Authenticity, Repetition, and the Aesthetics of Seriality: The Work of Tourist Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.' In Phillips, R. and Steiner, C. (eds.) *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sterling, C. (2019). Designing 'Critical' Heritage Experiences: Immersion, Enchantment and Autonomy. *Archaeology International*, 22(1): 100-113.
- Sterling, C. (2024). 'Documents and records'. In King, R. and Rico, T. (eds). *Methods and Methodologies in Heritage Studies*. London: UCL Press.
- Stevenson, A. (2010). 'Experiencing materiality in the museum: artefacts re-made'. In Dudley, S., H. (ed). *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations*. London: Routledge.
- Stevenson, A. (2017). 'Lying in wait: Inertia and latency in the collection,' in Brusius, M. and Singh, K. (eds.) *Museum Storage and Meaning: Tales from the Crypt*. London: Routledge.
- Stevenson, A. (2024). 'Collections and collecting'. In King, R. and Rico, T. (eds). *Methods and Methodologies in Heritage Studies*. London: UCL Press.
- Stocker, M. (2015). 'These had most to give': Kathleen Scott's sculpture at the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge. *Polar Record*, 51(256): 49-57.
- Stokes-Rees, E. (2003). Methods for a Multi-Sited Study of New National Museums: A Fieldworker's Experience. *Museological Review*, Special Issue 10: 67-73.
- Stoler, A., L. (2010). *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic anxieties and colonial common sense*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Story Machine. (n.d.). 'Deception Island'. Available online: <https://storymachines.co.uk/portfolio/deception-island/> [Accessed 13.07.25].
- Strange, C. (2010). Griffith Taylor's Antarctica: science, sentiment and politics. *Polar Record*, 46(1): 65-74.
- Strathern, M. (1987). 'The limits of auto-ethnography', in Jackson, A. (ed.) *Anthropology at home*. London: Tavistock.
- Strathern, M. (1996). Cutting the Network. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 2(3): 517-535.
- Strathern, M. (1998). *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia*. London: University of California Press.
- Summerhayes, C., P. (2008). International collaboration in Antarctica: the International Polar Years, the International Geophysical Year, and the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research. *Polar Record*, 44(231): 321-334.
- Takashi, I. (2004). Northern Studies in Japan. *Japanese Review of Cultural Anthropology*, 5: 55-89.
- Taylor, G. (1951). 'Exploration of Antarctica', in Taylor, G. (ed.) *Geography in the Twentieth Century: A study of Growth, Fields, Techniques, Aims and Trends*. London: Routledge.

- Terrior, S., J. (1999). Performing Craft for Heritage Tourists in Southwest France. *City & Society*, 11(1-2): 125-144.
- The Audience Agency (n.d.). The V&A Museum Visitor Journey Mapping. Online: <https://theaudienceagency.org/en/project/va-museum-visitor-journey-mapping> [Accessed 11.07.25].
- Theodossopoulos, D. (2013). Laying Claim to Authenticity: Five Anthropological Dilemmas. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 86(2): 337-360.
- Thomas, N. (1991). *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Thompson, A., S. (2000). *Imperial Britain: The Empire in British Politics c. 1880-1932*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Thompson, J. (2007). Modern Britain and the New Imperial History. *History Compass*, 5(2): 455-462.
- Thompson, M. (1994). 'The filth in the way', in Pearce, S. (ed). *Interpreting Objects and Collections*. London: Routledge.
- Thomson, A. (2025a). 'Leaking roof, treasures flogged on ebay, a £1billion revamp and those marbles...' *The Times Magazine*, 10th May 2025: 18-22.
- Thomson, A. (2025b). 'The man who opened the V&A's Aladdin's cave' *Times2*, 2nd June 2025: 4-5.
- Thorner, S., G. (2022). Being called to action: Contemporary museum ethnographies. *Museum Anthropology*, 45(1): 3-14.
- Thorp, D. (2022). *The 2011-21 census data for the Cambridge City region is astonishing – what lessons should we take from it?* Available at: <https://www.cambridgeahead.co.uk/news-insights/2022/the-2011-21-census-data-for-the-cambridge-city-region-is-astonishing-what-lessons-should-we-take-from-it> [Accessed 30.12.24].
- Ting, W., Y., V. (2010). 'Dancing pot and pregnant jar? On ceramics, metaphors and creative labels'. In Dudley, S., H. (ed). *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations*. London: Routledge.
- Tingey, R., J. (2009). Heroic age geology in Victoria Land, Antarctica. *Polar Record*, 21(134): 451-457.
- Tomlinson, B. (2001). Chivalry at the Poles: British Sledge Flags. *Proceedings of the XIX International Congress of Vexillology York 23-27. July*: 215-222.
- Topcu, E. and Kartın, C. (2024). An Overview of the Royal Geographical Society and its Activities. *Vakanuvis*, 9: Dr. Selma Pehlivan'a Armağan: 1959-1997.
- Tozer, J. (2025). 'Exploring Antarctic was colonialism, claims Cambridge University (even though only penguins live there). *Mail Online*. Available at: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14653891/Exploring-Antarctic-colonialism-claims-Cambridge-University-penguins-live-there.html> [Accessed 15.07.25].
- Trilling, L. (1971). *Sincerity and Authenticity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- Tulloch, V., J., D., Plagányi, E., E., Matear, R., Brown, C., J., and Richardson, A., J. (2017). Ecosystem modelling to quantify the impact of historical whaling on Southern Hemisphere baleen whales. *Fish and Fisheries*, 19(1): 117-137
- Turner, H. (2016). Critical histories of museum catalogues. *Museum Anthropology*, 29(2): 102-10.
- Turner, H. (2020). *Cataloguing culture: Legacies of colonialism in museum documentation*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- University of Cambridge (n.d.). *Governance explained: Graces*. Available at: <https://www.governance.cam.ac.uk/governance/decision-making/Notices-Reports-Graces/Pages/Graces.aspx> [Accessed 14.01.25].
- Van Broekhoven, L., N., K. (2013). 'Authenticity and Curatorial Practice', in Geurds, A. and Van Broekhoven, L., N., K. (eds.) *Creating Authenticity: Authentication Processes in Ethnographic Museums*. Leiden: Sidestone Press.
- Van Duijn, S. (2020). Everywhere and nowhere at once: the challenges of following in multi-sited ethnography. *Journal of Organizational Ethnography*, 9(3): 281-294.
- Van Eck, C. (2010). Living Statues: Alfred Gell's *Art and Agency*, Living Presence Response and the Sublime. *Art History*, 33(4): 564-734.
- Vogel, S. (1991). 'Always True to the Object, in Our Fashion'. In Karp, I. (ed). *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Wajid, S. and Minott, R. (2019). 'Detoxing and Decolonising Museums', in Janes, R., R. and Sandell, R. (eds.) *Museum Activism*. London: Routledge.
- Warrior, C. (2013). 'On Thin Ice': The Polar Displays at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. *Museum History Journal*, 6(1): 56-71.
- Warrior, C. (2017). 'Home from home: Memory and history, families and museums', in: Brusius, M. and Singh, K. (eds.) *Museum Storage and Meaning: Tales from the Crypt*. London: Routledge.
- Wegner, N. (2021). Helpful heroes and the political utility of militarized masculinities. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 23(1): 5-26.
- Weiner, A. (1992). *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving*. Oxford: University of California Press.
- Wheeler, S. (2003). 'Preface' In Cherry-Garrard, A. (1922 [2003]). *The Worst Journey in the World: Antarctica 1910-13*. Pimlico: London.
- Whitehead, C. (2024). *Analysing Museum Display: Theory and Method*. London: Routledge.
- Williams, P. (2011). 'Memorial Museums and the Objectification of Suffering'. In Marstine, J. *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics: Redefining Ethics for the Twenty-First Century Museum*. London: Routledge.
- Wilson, E., A. (1905). The Medical Aspect of the *Discovery's* Voyage to the Antarctic. *Br Med J*. 2(2323): 77-80.

- Wilson, K. (ed). (2004). *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wilson, P., F., Stott, J., Warnett, J., M., Attridge, A. Smith, M., P., and Williams, M., A. (2018). Museum visitor preference for the physical properties of 3D printed replicas. *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, 32: 176-185.
- Withers, C., W., J. (2002). Constructing 'the geographical archive'. *Area*, 34(3): 303-311.
- Wood, B. (2020). A Review of the Concept of Authenticity in Heritage, with Particular Reference to Historic Houses. *Collections*, 16(1): 8-33.
- Working Paper submitted by the United Kingdom (2000) *Historic Sites and Monuments: Sailing Vessel Wreckage, South-West Coast of Elephant Island, South Shetland Islands*. Available at: https://documents.ats.aq/satcm12/wp/satcm12_wp004_e.pdf [Accessed 29.03.24].
- Wulff, H. (2000). 'Access to a closed world' in Amit, V. (ed.) (2000). *Constructing the Field: Ethnographic Fieldwork in the Contemporary World*. London: Routledge.
- Yamin, T. (2019). One or Several Gamelan? Perpetual (Re)construction in the Life of a Balinese Gamelan Semara Pagulingan. *Ethnomusicology*, 63(3): 357-392.
- Yarrow, T. (2016). Where knowledge meets: heritage expertise at the intersection of people, perspective, and place. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 23(1): 95-109.
- Ytreberg, E. (2014). The 1911 South Pole Conquest as Historical Media Event and Media Ensemble. *Media History*, 20(2): 167-181.
- Zarankin, A. and Senatore, M., X. (2005). Archaeology in Antarctica: Nineteenth-Century Capitalism Expansion Strategies. *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 9(1): 43-56.

Unpublished references

Atkinson, E., L. (1882-1929). 'G. Description of Various Gear Used: XII Gear', in *British Antarctic Expedition Papers Vol 2*. [Manuscript volume]. Edward Leicester Atkinson collection, MS 280/28/2. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Committee for the Exhibition of Royal and Historic Treasures. (1939). *Letter from the Committee for the Exhibition of Royal and Historic Treasures to The Scott Polar Research Institute 26.08.39*. [Letter]. SPRI Working Files: (Temporary exhibitions NOT at SPRI. "Correspondence -1965."). Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Committee of Management for the Scott Polar Research Institute. (1998). Minutes 24th April 1998. [manuscript volume]. SPRI Working Files: Committee of Management for the Scott Polar Research Institute Minute Book 1998. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Connelly, C. (2016). 'The Polar Museum', in *90th Annual Report of the Scott Polar research Institute University of Cambridge, UK*. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 2011- . Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Debenham, F. (n.d.). 'Draft General Notice asking for bequests. Date 1920 (?)' SPRI Working Files. SPRI History 1920-36. 'Deb's Stuff' – Correspondence etc. MSS. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Debenham, F. (1919). Letter to 'Mrs Bill', October 26th 1919. [letter]. SPRI Working Files: SPRI History 1920-36. 'Deb's Stuff' – Correspondence etc. MSS. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Debenham, F. (1922). 'The Scott Polar Research Institute'. SPRI Working Files, SPRI History 1920-36. 'Deb's Stuff' – Correspondence etc., 'Rough Plans for SPRI by Frank Debenham (1922)'. MSS. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Debenham, F. (1932a). *Letter from Frank Debenham to Caroline Oates 06.02.32*. [letter]. SPRI Working Files: (SPRI History 1920-36. "'Deb's Stuff' – Correspondence etc.>"). MSS. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Debenham, F. (1932b). *Letter from Frank Debenham to Caroline Oates 06.11.32*. [letter]. SPRI Working Files: (SPRI History 1920-36. "'Deb's Stuff' – Correspondence etc.>"). MSS. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Debenham, F. (1938). *Letter from Frank Debenham to Bryan William Grace Oates 03.11.38*. 069-49. [letter]. SPRI Working Files: (TEMP files. "Oates – sleeping bag.>"). MSS. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Debenham, F. (1939a). *Letter from Frank Debenham to Bryan William Grace Oates 01.03.39*. 069-49. [letter]. SPRI Working Files: (TEMP files. "Oates – sleeping bag.>"). MSS. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Debenham, F. (1939b). *Letter from Frank Debenham to Violet Oates 20.06.39*. 069-49. [letter]. SPRI Working Files: (TEMP files. "Oates – sleeping bag.>"). MSS. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Debenham, F. (1939c). *Letter from Frank Debenham to George Murray Levick 20.06.39*. [letter]. SPRI Working Files: (Temporary exhibitions NOT at SPRI. "Correspondence -1965."). MSS. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Fetherstonough, A. (1939). *Letter from Miss Fetherstonough to Bryan Oates 20.07.39*. 069-49. [letter]. SPRI Working Files: (TEMP files. "Oates – sleeping bag."). MSS. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Lane, H. (2008). *An Interpretation Plan for the Polar Museum, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge*. [internal document]. SPRI Working Files: (SPRI History. "Building Redevelopment 2010." Interpretation.). Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Logistik. (n.d.). *SPRI Museum: Proposal for Museum Brand Development, Design and Build*. [tender]. Scott Polar Research Institute, SPRI Working Files: ("Refurbishment 2010. Museum Archive. Tenders."). Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Oates, B. (1939). *Letter from Bryan Oates to Frank Debenham 19.07.39*. 069-49. [letter]. SPRI Working Files: (TEMP files. "Oates – sleeping bag."). MSS. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Oates, C. (1932). *Letter from Caroline Oates to Frank Debenham 12.11.32*. [letter]. SPRI Working Files: (SPRI History 1920-36. "'Deb's Stuff' – Correspondence etc."). MSS. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Oates, C. (1934). *Telegram from Caroline Oates to Frank Debenham 15.02.34*. [letter]. SPRI Working Files: (SPRI History 1920-36. "'Deb's Stuff' – Correspondence etc."). MSS. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Oates, V. (1939). *Letter from Violet Oates to George Murray Levick 14.06.39*. [letter]. SPRI Working Files: (Temporary exhibitions NOT at SPRI. "Correspondence -1965."). MSS. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Schroter, R., C. (1993). *Letter from R. C. Schroter to the Committee Members of The Gino Watkins Memorial Fund 26.07.1993*. [letter]. 1993 In the Wake of Shackleton, *7 (91(08). Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (n.d. b). *Our Polar Heritage: A New Museum*. [brochure]. SPRI Working Files: Refurbishment 2010. Box A. HLF site reports, publicity. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (n.d. c). 'Annex 1 Aims and objectives of the Museum' in *The Museum of the Scott Polar Research Institute University of Cambridge. Education Strategy. ANNEXES*. [internal document]. SPRI History: Building Redevelopment 2010. ("Education/Outreach"). Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (n.d. d). *Display and interpretation meeting 11 December 2007*. [internal document]. SPRI History: Building Redevelopment 2010. ("Education/Outreach"). Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (n.d. e). *The Museum of the Scott Polar Research Institute University of Cambridge. Schematic layout of themes and story lines. Interpretation and Designs for the Exhibits.* [internal document]. SPRI History: Building Redevelopment 2010. "Interpretation". Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (n.d. f). *Scott Polar Research Institute Media release. Date tbc 2010: For immediate use. Launch of the new Polar Museum. DRAFT.* [internal document]. SPRI History: Building Redevelopment 2010. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (1931). Annual Report of the Committee of Management of the Scott Polar Research Institute. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 1-30. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (1932). Annual Report of the Committee of Management of the Scott Polar Research Institute. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 1-30. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (1938). Annual Report of the Committee of Management of the Scott Polar Research Institute. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 1-30. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (1939). Annual Report of the Committee of Management of the Scott Polar Research Institute. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 1-30. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (1940). Annual Report of the Committee of Management of the Scott Polar Research Institute. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 1-30. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (1948). Twenty-second Annual Report of the Committee of Management of the Scott Polar Research Institute. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 1-30. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (1949). Twenty-third Annual Report of the Committee of Management of the Scott Polar Research Institute. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 1-30. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (1951). Twenty-fifth Annual Report of the Committee of Management of the Scott Polar Research Institute. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 1-30. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (1952). Twenty-sixth Annual Report of the Committee of Management of the Scott Polar Research Institute. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 1-30. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (1954). Twenty-eighth Annual Report of the Committee of Management of the Scott Polar Research Institute. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 1-30. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (1957). 'Scott Polar Research Institute Exhibition, 1957'. [internal document]. SPRI Working Files: SPRI History – exhibitions at SPRI. Temp. exhibitions SPRI. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (1959). Thirty-third Annual Report on the work of the Scott Polar Research Institute. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 1956-74. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (1964). Thirty-eighth Annual Report on the work of the Scott Polar Research Institute. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 1956-74. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (1965). Scott Polar Research Institute Thirty-Ninth Annual Report. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 1956-74. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (1968). Scott Polar Research Institute Forty-Second Annual Report. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 1956-74. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (1972). Scott Polar Research Institute Forty-sixth Annual Report. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 1956-74. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (1977). Fiftieth Annual Report on the work of the Scott Polar Research Institute. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 1977-85. Annual Review Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (1990). SPRI Review – 1990. 64th Annual Report of the Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, England. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 1985 – 2010. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (1998). SPRI Review – 1998. 72nd Annual Report of the Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, England. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 1985 – 2010. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (1999). SPRI Review – 1999. 73rd Annual Report of the Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, England. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 1985 – 2010. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (2001). SPRI Review – 2001. 75th Annual Report of the Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, England. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 1985 – 2010. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (2002). Annual Review. SPRI Review – 2002. 76th Annual Report of the Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, England. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 1985 – 2010. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (2007). SPRI Review – 2007. 81st Annual Report of the Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, England. [report]. SPRI Working Files:

History Annual Reports 1985 – 2010. Annual Review. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (2008). SPRI Review – 2008. 82nd Annual Report of the Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, England. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 1985 – 2010. Annual Review. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (2009). *Scott exhibition – developed themes for each exhibition area*. [internal document]. SPRI History: Building Redevelopment 2010. “Interpretation”. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (2010). SPRI Review – 2010. 84th Annual Report of the Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, England. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 1985 – 2010. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (2012). SPRI Review – 2012. 86th Annual Report of the Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, England. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 2011-16. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (2016). SPRI Review – 2016. 90th Annual Report of the Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, England. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 2011-16. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (2017). SPRI Review – 2019. 91st Annual Report of the Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, England. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 2011- . Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott Polar Research Institute. (2019b). SPRI Review – 2019. 93rd Annual Report of the Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, England. [report]. SPRI Working Files: History Annual Reports 2011- . Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Scott-Fawcett, S. (2010). *The Shackleton Boat Project (2014)*. [internal document]. Museum Files: Sir Ernest Shackleton BOAT. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Shackleton, A. (2006). Letter in support of HLF funding bid to redevelop the Polar Museum. [letter]. SPRI Working Files: 2010 refurb. “HLF letters of support”. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Shackleton, E., H. (1908). Letter from Ernest Shackleton to Emily Shackleton 14th January 1908. [letter]. MS 1456/25/1-21. Cambridge: Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

Appendix 1: Visitor survey

How do museum objects help to create and replicate ideas of heroism with regards to British Antarctic explorers of the late 19th and early 20th century?

Have you visited this museum before? (Please circle).

Yes No

If yes, approximately how many times have you visited?

1-2 visits 3-5 visits 6-10 visits 10+ visits

Approximately when was your last visit?

Earlier this year 1-2 years ago 3-5 years ago 6-10 years ago 10+ years ago

What is a hero?

Would you say Scott/Shackleton were heroes? Why?

Did you know about any of the objects on display in the museum before your visit today?

Was there a particular object in the 'Antarctic explorers' section which stood out to you?

Why did this object stand out?

If you could choose only one object to represent the whole 'Antarctic explorers' section, which would you choose? Why?

What do you think the 'Antarctic explorers' display tells us about these explorers?

Would you like to know anything about historic Antarctic exploration and explorers which is not covered in the museum?

Appendix 2: List of individual interviewees and professional roles held

Participants and aliases

My research draws heavily on interviews and participant observation. Often, I have found it helpful to outline the professional roles held by my participants, as these have a direct impact on their perspectives and opinions. This need to identify their professional responsibilities, alongside the fact that both the Polar Museum and Discovery Point are relatively small museums, means that it is very challenging to fully anonymise my participants. While colleagues and others in the relatively small field of polar museums may recognise some individuals, I have done my best to ensure that my participants are anonymous for most readers.

I have provided all my participants with aliases and a list of these aliases, alongside the real job descriptions these people held, is provided below.

Polar Museum, at the Scott Polar Research Institute:

Melanie – Worked in education and outreach
Tania – Worked in education and outreach
Simon – Worked in collections care
Zara – Worked in collections care
Polly – Worked in collections care and with volunteers
Sam – Worked in collections care and with volunteers
Diana – Worked in conservation and collections care
Mabel – Worked in the archives
Verity – Was the curator
Nigel – Was the curator
Joy – Was the curator

Discovery Point:

Lucy – Worked in education and outreach
Sarah – Worked in education and outreach
Helen – Worked in heritage and exhibitions
Rebecca – Worked in heritage and exhibitions
Debbie – Worked in interpretation and exhibitions
Paula – Worked in collections and exhibitions

Appendix 3: An explanation of the numbering system at the Polar Museum

The numbering system used to identify the collections at the Polar Museum has implications for the ways that different objects are engaged with by museum staff. When accessioned into a museum collection, objects are given a reference number which distinguishes them from the rest of the collection. Each museum has a different way of formulating this number, though it is usually some combination of the date of its accession and the number of objects that entered into the museum's collection that year. At the Polar Museum, these numbers are preceded by a letter, which provides another layer of information about the object and its place within the collection. Those objects with the letter N: at the beginning of their accession number were part of the museum's founding collection, or from very early on in its collecting history. This is true of N: 857, Captain Oates' sleeping bag, which is one of the key object itineraries I will trace at the museum (the 857 in this case tells us that it was the 857th object accessioned into the collection). From 1949 onwards, this convention becomes too complex, as the museum reaches a very large number of items in its overall collection, and so objects begin to be accessioned as Y: followed by the last two numbers of the year, and then a number to indicate where it ranks in terms of the objects accessioned that year (i.e. 1st, 2nd, 857th etc). This is true of Y: 2016/5 the 'Raymond plaque', and Y: 2002/2/4 – Shackleton's sledging flag, which was the 4th object to be accessioned in the 2nd collection of objects accessioned in the year 2002.

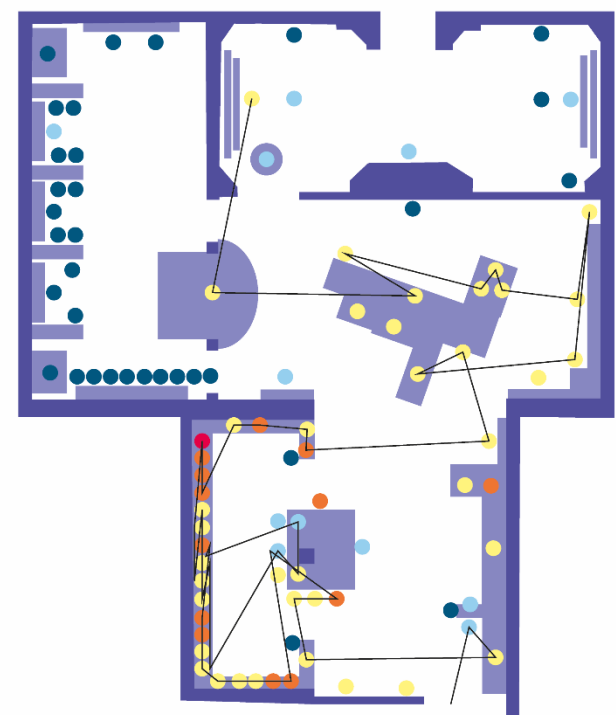
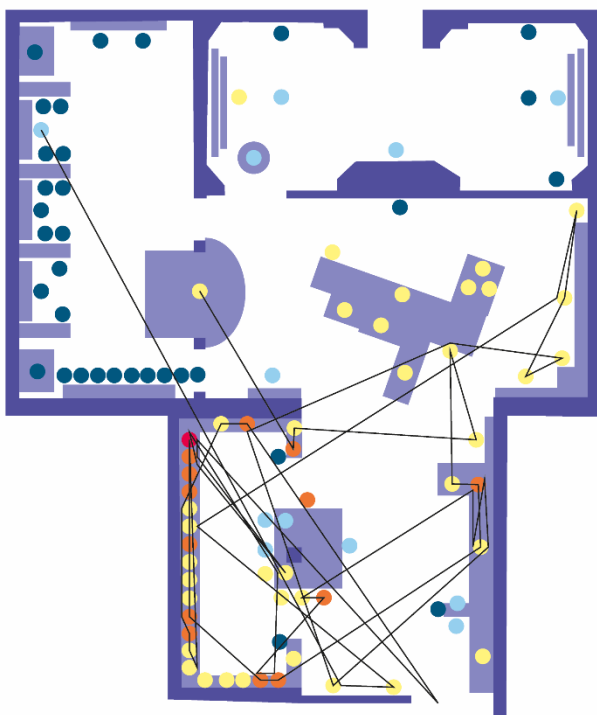
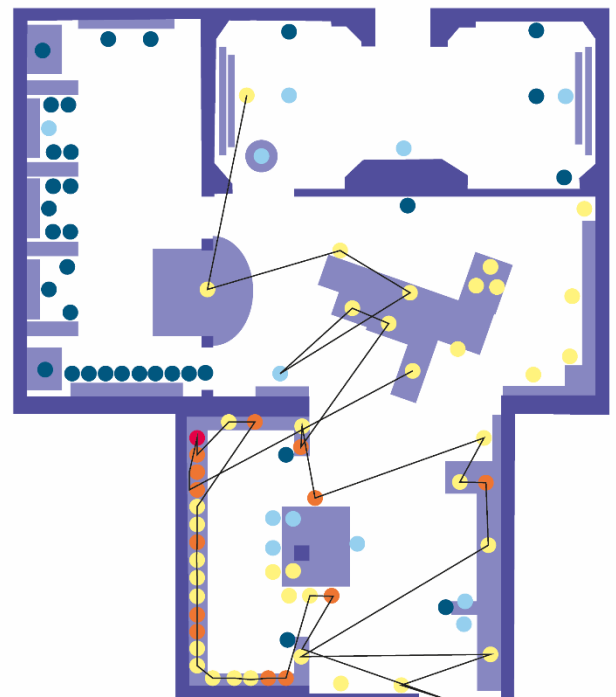
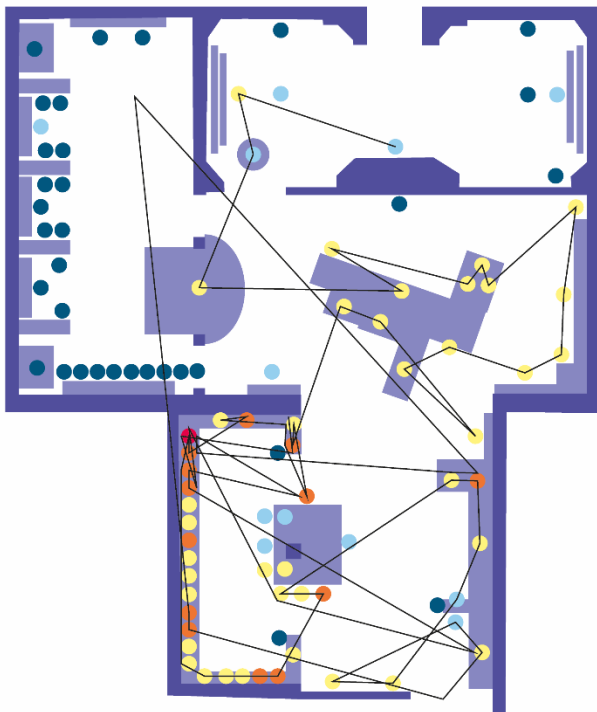
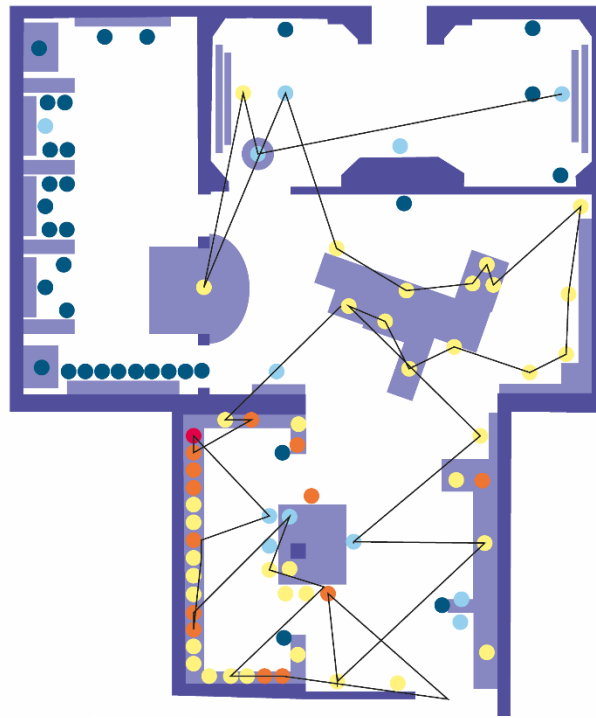
There are a handful of further categories, including L: objects, which are on loan, and M: objects, which refer to memorabilia. Another important category which I will return to in this research is that of the Z: object. This is an unusual category as it was used in the museum's past for objects that had become separated from their original accession numbers due to error, confusion or accident. However, the museum professionals at the Polar Museum realised during my research that these objects may never have been accessioned at all. This has implications for the objects today as it means that, should the team deem them no longer significant to the mission and role of the museum, they may be removed from the collection. Usually, this process of removal is called 'deaccession' and requires a comprehensive series of processes and actions by the museum team. However, if the objects have, in fact, never been accessioned, then they can be removed from the collection very easily indeed. This directly impacts Z: 425 – fragments of Shackleton's ship *Endurance*.

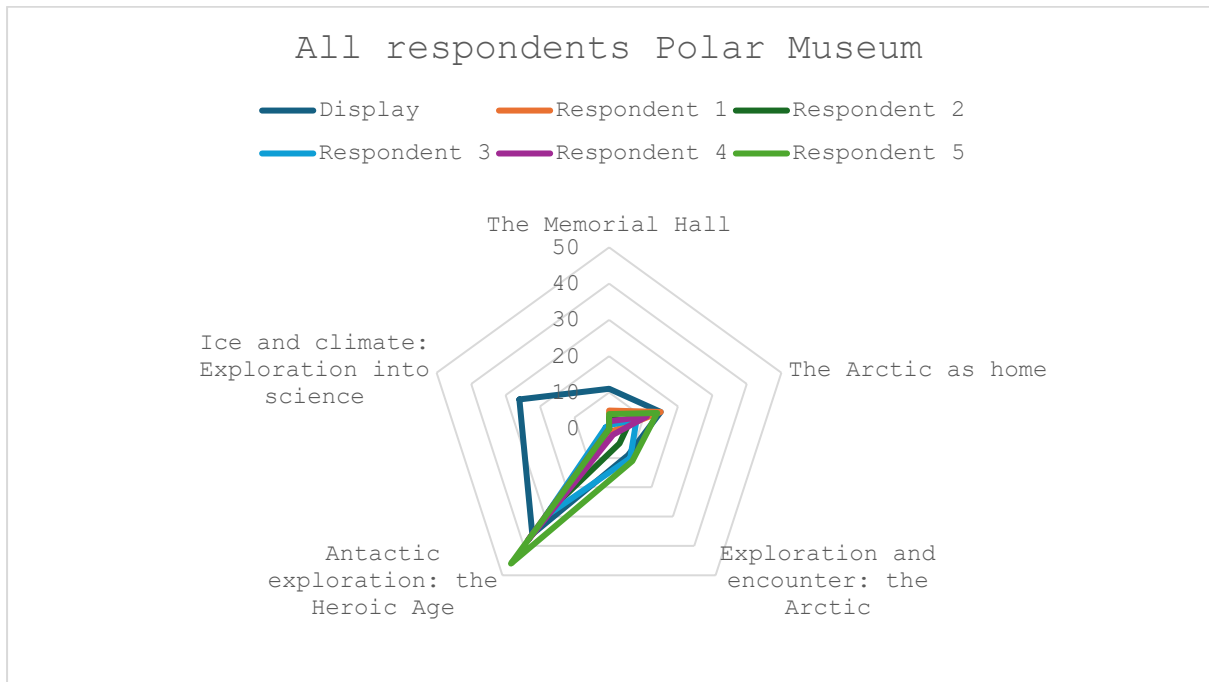
Appendix 4: Heat map detailed analysis and spider charts

The Polar Museum

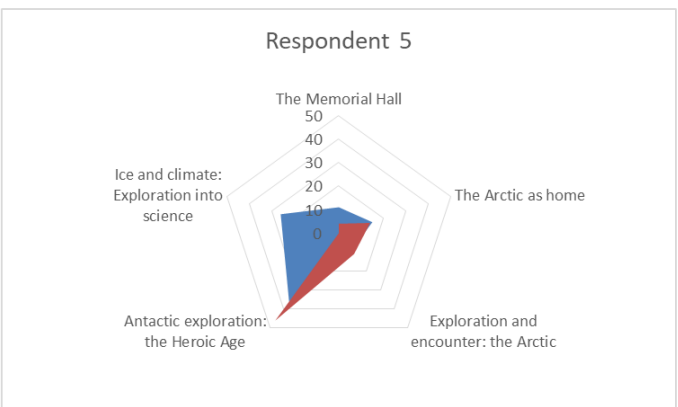
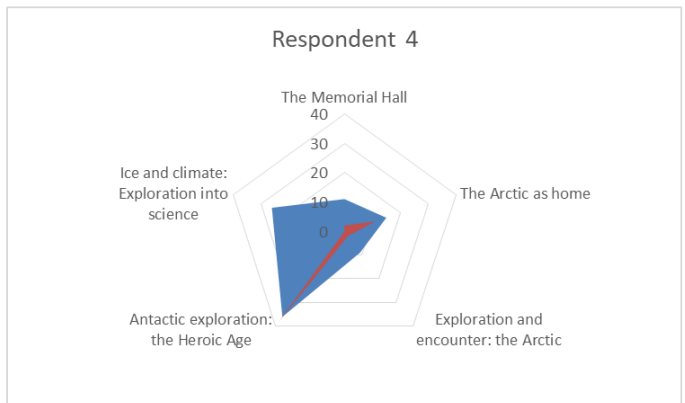
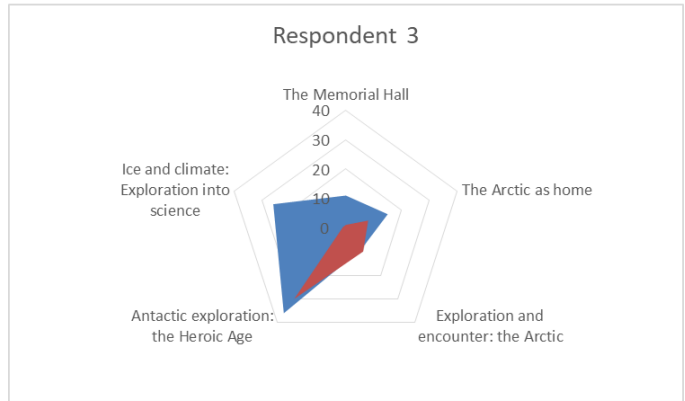
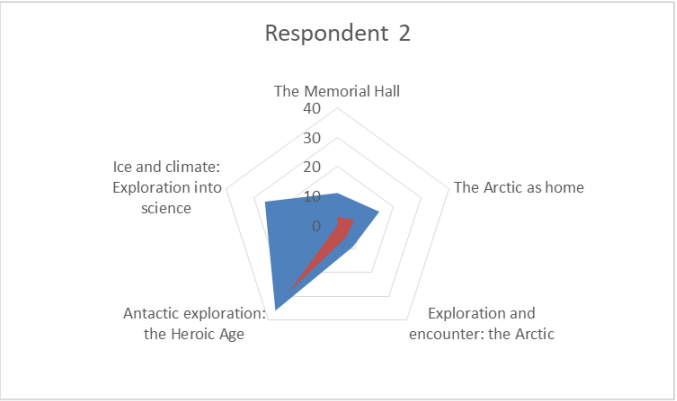
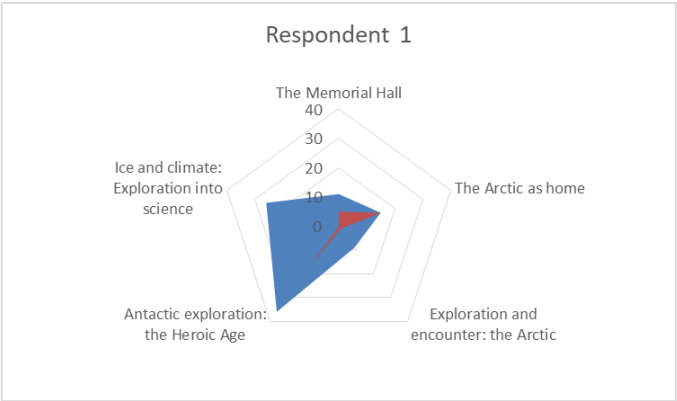
Individual visitor journeys

- Zero views
- 1 or 2 views
- 3, 4 or 5 views
- 6, 7 or 8 views
- 9 or 10 views
- Visitor journey





Spider chart showing the displays visited for all individuals and the total number of displays across the museum.



Spider charts showing the displays visited by each individual (red area) against the total number of displays across the museum (blue area).

Appendix 5:

Objects on loan to Athy Heritage Centre – Shackleton Museum from the Polar Museum 2009

Accession Number	Brief Description
N: 69a	Goggles used on the <i>Nimrod</i> Expedition
N: 69b	'Unsatisfactory' goggles used on the <i>Nimrod</i> Expedition
N: 749	Unopened tin of concentrated beef essence from the <i>Nimrod</i> Expedition
Y: 57/4	Wet bulb thermometer from the <i>Nimrod</i> Expedition
Y: 74/1	Joyce's RGS special award (medallion) awarded for the <i>Nimrod</i> Expedition
Y: 74/10/1	<i>Nimrod</i> cap band
Y: 2002/2/4	Shackleton's sledging flag
Y: 2002/2/5	Brass plate with excerpts from Rudyard Kipling's 'If'
Y: 2008/31/1	Unopened tin of nut pemmican from the <i>Nimrod</i> Expedition
Y: 2008/31/2	Unopened tin of pemmican from the <i>Nimrod</i> Expedition
Y: 2008/31/3	Unopened tin of pea soup from the <i>Nimrod</i> Expedition
Y: 2010/24	Canvas helmet worn on the <i>Nimrod</i> Expedition

Authorisations, figures and tables

The photographs in this thesis, unless author's own, are reproduced with thanks to:

Dean and Chapter Westminster Abbey, Julian Dowdeswell, Dundee Heritage Trust, The National Portrait Gallery and The Scott Polar Research Institute.

List of figures and tables

Item	Title	Page
0.1	P2005_5_1027 - View from inside curved ice grotto. Taylor and Wright stand at the entrance looking up. Ship 'Terra Nova' in background over ice sheet. Image by Ponting © SPRI.	2
0.2	P66/18/026 - The Endurance Return of the sun after the long winter darkness. The ship Endurance beset in consolidated pack ice with large blocks of ice in the foreground. Location: Weddell Sea. Image by Hurley © SPRI.	8
0.3	P2005_5_1471 - Scott, Shackleton and Wilson stand, in full sledging outfits, in front of laden sledges (British National Antarctic Expedition, 1901-04). Image by Ponting ©SPRI.	10
1.1	Z: 416a-b - A pair of wooden skis used by Henry Robertson Bowers on the British Antarctic Expedition 1910-13 (Terra Nova).	11
1.2	Map of Antarctica (satellite image) with key expedition routes from the Heroic Age.	15
1.3	A timeline of the major events relating to Scott and Shackleton's lives and expeditions.	16
1.4	P2005/5/370 - Captain Scott. Captain Scott wearing sledging outfit stands by a sledge. Image by Ponting © SPRI.	17
1.5	P2005/5/1345 - The Polar Party at the South Pole. Oates, Scott, Evans stand, Bowers and Wilson sit in front. Union Jack flag on a pole behind Location: Antarctica, Ross Dependency. Image by Ponting © SPRI.	20
1.6	P2001/86/186 - Ernest Shackleton: Head and shoulders portrait of Ernest Shackleton © SPRI.	21
1.7	P66/18/66 - The relief boat setting out for South Georgia. A group of men launching the lifeboat James Caird into the sea from the shore of Elephant Island. Image by Hurley © SPRI.	23
3.1	Painting of a woman which was damaged by a fire before and after significant art restoration. Mbboston, CC BY-SA 3.0 < https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/ >, via Wikimedia Commons.	38
4.1	P2005/5/1365 - Smoke cloud from Erebus. Jan. 15th 1911. Image by Ponting © SPRI.	55
4.2	P2005/5/482 - Frank Debenham and plane table. September 9th 1911. Location: Antarctica, Ross Dependency. Image by Ponting © SPRI.	55
4.3	P48/21 - Portrait of Frank Debenham © SPRI.	56

4.4	P99/6/2 - The opening of the Scott Polar Research Institute, 1934 © SPRI.	60
4.5	P48/44/16 - Picture Gallery, Scott Polar Research Institute, August 1948. Image by Ramsey and Muspratt © SPRI.	60
4.6	<i>Youth 1922</i> by Kathleen Scott. Also known as: <i>These had most to give, or May Eternal Light Shine upon Them</i> .	61
4.7	P70/33/2 - Transport section in the museum, Scott Polar Research Institute with entrance lobby to the left (likely to be the 1970's) © SPRI.	62
4.8	N: 103a-b - A pair of crampons made in England for the British National Antarctic Expedition 1901-04 (Discovery). The design was found to be unsuitable as it allowed snow to get between the footwear and the crampon © SPRI.	63
4.9	Images of <i>Our polar heritage: a new museum</i> .	71
4.10	Front door to the museum today (left), early 2000s (right).	74
4.11	Antarctic Exploration Gallery today.	75
4.12	Notice pinned to door setting out subjects for representation by the museum team, 2023.	80
5.1	The Polar Museum, Lensfield Road, Cambridge.	82
5.2	Bust of Captain Scott by Kathleen Scott. Image by Dowdeswell © Julian Dowdeswell.	83
5.3	The Antarctic Dome in the Memorial Hall of SPRI including the names of explorers encircling the map and named expedition ships sailing the southern seas.	84
5.4	The Polar Museum office.	85
5.5	Gallery map of the Polar Museum.	86
5.6	Montage of museum spaces including: <i>Exploration & encounter: The Arctic; The Arctic as home</i> ; the <i>Memorial Hall</i> ; <i>Ice & Climate: Exploration into science</i> ; and the temporary gallery.	87
5.7	Montage of <i>Antarctic Exploration: the Heroic Age</i> including sections dedicated to Scott and Shackleton.	89
5.8	Heat map of visitor engagement at the Polar Museum.	91
5.9	Some of the professionals' favourite objects: Stuffed Emperor Penguin; Everyday items; Letter drawer.	97
6.1	<i>Royal Research Ship (RRS) Discovery</i> with the museum behind on the waterfront at Dundee.	103
6.2	P83_6_1_1_072.1 - The ship <i>Discovery</i> held fast in the pack ice © SPRI.	104
6.3	Images 180, 184 - Early display on the ship. Courtesy of Dundee Heritage Trust.	106
6.4	Images 173, 178 - Original museum displays at Discovery Point. Courtesy of Dundee Heritage Trust.	106

7.1	Discovery Point museum entrance with the Royal Research Ship (RRS) <i>Discovery</i> and V&A behind.	110
7.2	Discovery Point behind the scenes.	111
7.3	Gallery map of Discovery Point.	113
7.4	Top: <i>The Adventure Begins</i> . Below: <i>Specification</i> .	114
7.5	Top: <i>The Shipyard</i> . Below: <i>Men of Discovery</i> .	115
7.6	Top: film theatre showing <i>The Last Place on Earth</i> . Below: <i>Scientific Research and Exploration</i> .	116
7.7	<i>Heroes of the Ice</i> .	116
7.8	Top: <i>Discovery's Ocean Odyssey</i> . Below: <i>Ship Ahoy!</i>	117
7.9	Heat map of visitor engagement at Discovery Point.	118
7.10	P83/6/1/4/170 - Captain Scott and Dr Koettlitz on ski in Pack ice © SPRI.	121
7.11	Internal views of Discovery Point, entrance and central 'ice core'.	127
9.1	Y: 2002/2/4 - Shackleton's sledging flag.	134
Table 1	MODES record on Shackleton's sledging flag	142
9.2	Emily Dorman Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.	136
9.3	Shackleton, Scott and Wilson, starting for the Great South Journey during the British National Antarctic Expedition. 2 November 1902. Photograph taken by an unidentified photographer. National Library of New Zealand wikimedia commons.	137
9.4	Cecily Shackleton Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.	138
9.5	Shackleton sledging flag at the 2016 service © 2025 Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey.	142
10.1	Y: 2011/57 - Fragments of the remains of the 1877 wreck of the American sealing vessel <i>Charles Shearer</i> , found in 1998 at Stinker Point.	146
10.2	Z: 425 - Salvaged ships timber. Four pieces of salvaged ships timber, given by Captain T.J. Barton, Commanding Officer of HMS <i>Endurance</i> .	146
Table 2	MODES record on Boat bits	156
Table 3	MODES record on Boat bits	156
10.3	Prince Philip at the Scott Polar Research Institute, following its redesign in 2010.	150
10.4	Y: 2011/57 (part) - in the museum's store.	151
10.5	Z: 425 - in the museum's store.	153

10.6	P66/18/55 - Frank Wild examining the wreckage of the <i>Endurance</i> © SPRI.	154
11.1	<i>Sir Ernest Shackleton</i> lifeboat in situ.	158
11.2	Y: 2016/5 - The Raymond Plaque.	165
Table 4	MODES record on <i>Sir Ernest Shackleton</i>	168
Table 5	MODES record on The Raymond Plaque	168
11.3	The <i>James Caird</i> at Dulwich College © creative commons.	159
11.4	<i>Sir Ernest Shackleton</i> lifeboat underneath the tree, seen across the car park.	162
11.5	Display board for the <i>Sir Ernest Shackleton</i> lifeboat.	164
11.6	The Raymond Plaque in the museum's store.	165
11.7	Raymond Shackleton Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.	167
11.8	P68/76/87 - Ernest Shackleton stands with hands on hips. Location: Ross Dependency © SPRI.	170
12.1	N: 857 - Captain Oates' sleeping bag.	172
Table 6	MODES record on Sleeping bag	183
12.2	P2005/5/1065 - Expedition member sits on two boxes marked 'Heinz Baked Beans', on the snow. He holds a can in one. Image by Ponting © SPRI.	174
12.3	P2005/5/1046 - Penguin stands on a gravel nest. Next to it lie two tins of Lyle's syrup. Image by Ponting © SPRI.	174
12.4	Ole Must and Per Savio. Image by Ellisif Wessel, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.	175
12.5	P48/44/8 - Vestibule of the Scott Polar Research Institute building with the sleeping bag at the far end on the right hand side (no date, likely to be 1948). Image by Ramsey and Muspratt © SPRI.	181
12.6	Sleeping bag in the new case in the early 2000s.	184
12.7	Sleeping bag in the case (left) in the context of the museum in 2008.	185
12.8	Extract from the museum brand development, design and build document proposal showing the importance of Oates' story and the sleeping bag.	187
12.9	Captain Oates' sleeping bag label and transcript.	188
12.10	State Coach Britannia Jordiferrer, CC BY-SA 4.0 < https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/ >, via Wikimedia Commons.	189
12.1	Scott's goggles on display at Discovery Point.	193

Table 7	ADLB records on Scott's Snow Goggles	206
12.2	Image 177 - The 1979 display of objects including Scott's goggles (top, left of centre, behind white card). Courtesy of Dundee Heritage Trust.	195
12.3	The 1993 display of objects including Scott's goggles. Courtesy of Dundee Heritage Trust.	197
12.4	The 2010 display of objects including Scott's goggles. Digital image of <i>The Men of Discovery</i> gallery. Courtesy of Dundee Heritage Trust.	198
12.5	Captain Scott's wooden snow goggles – transcript.	199
13.6	The current display in <i>The Adventure Begins</i> , including Scott's goggles.	
15.1	Additional interpretation for the <i>Antarctic Exploration: The Heroic Age</i> display as a result of the <i>Hidden Histories</i> project.	218
16.1	Model (not to scale) and photo of Oates' sleeping bag.	223