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'Heroism displayed': revisiting the Franklin Gallery at the Royal Naval Exhibition, 1891

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ABSTRACT. The Royal Naval Exhibition (RNE) of 1891 offers an important entry point for the study of naval mythmaking. Scrutinising one part of the RNE showcase, 'The Franklin Gallery,' highlights the imaginative potential of the polar regions as a resource for imperial visions. This paper provides a review of the RNE and, more closely, considers the ideology of polar exploration in the context of political debate and naval reforms. The utility of images of the Arctic presented at the RNE is discussed, in particular, its role in displaying the 'heroic martyrdom' of Sir John Franklin (1786–1847). The paper draws upon an extensive study of late nineteenth-century newspapers, illustrated weeklies, periodical reviews, popular adult and juvenile literature, art, poetry, pamphlets, exhibition catalogues and handbooks, and associated ephemera. It argues that the RNE played a central part in the construction and enshrining of narratives of naval and national achievement in the late-Victorian period and in reviving a British commitment to the exploration of the polar regions.

Contents

Introduction

> What a halo of romance encircles those two words *Polar Exploration*. It has always had a strange fascination to the men of this country ever since, and even prior to, the time that England became a great maritime nation. In our childhood we loved to peruse books containing exciting accounts of Arctic travel, and we were never tired of listening to the doughty deeds and perilous adventures of our forefathers in the regions of *thick ribb'd ice*; and in our manhood we were ever ready, when opportunities offered, to enrol ourselves among those specially selected few, who were despatched with the object of exploring those mysterious, because unknown, regions situated in high latitudes. (Naval Shipping and Fisheries Exhibition 1905b: 32)

During the nineteenth century the Arctic was a stage for naval endeavour, sometimes tragic, quite often misguided, yet always compelling. Admiral Sir Albert Hastings Markham (1841–1918), who had secured his fame sledging to a farthest north of 83°20′ while a member of the British Arctic Expedition under George Strong Nares in 1875–76, was an obvious candidate to compose a chapter on 'Arctic heroism' for an exhibition catalogue in 1905. He was quick to reiterate a British commitment to the exploration of the polar regions that had been popular throughout the nineteenth century. His rhetoric drew attention to the intimate and complicated connections between hagiography, the notion of duty, and the justifications of exploration in an age of empire. That Markham's ardently romantic convictions accompanied a polar exhibit at an imperial exhibition provides an entry point into the main focus of this paper: the Royal Naval Exhibition (RNE) of 1891.

Contemporary reviews of the Royal Naval Exhibition were fulsome in praise: 'it affords to the student of naval antiquities opportunities which are not likely to occur again . . . it is scarcely too much to say that its bringing together renders the historian able for the first time to deal adequately with certain aspects of great naval events' (*The Times* 2 May 1891). However, studied as a subject in its own right, the RNE has slipped below the horizon for historians of the nineteenth century. Yet the benefits of revisiting the Royal Naval Exhibition are manifold. It can be examined in the context of political negotiations surrounding the 'new navalism' of the 1890s; equally, it can be viewed as a key event in the 'genealogy' of a national naval museum. Considering recent historiographical approaches to the study of exhibitions and museum collections in this period, it is useful to re-examine the role of the RNE and the dialogue that existed between its organisers and its considerable audience. Scrutinising its aims and achievements can show ways in which 'navalist' sentiments were articulated and propagated, drawing attention to the instrumental use of spectacles in reinvigorating naval reputations (Hamilton 1986; Lewis-Jones 2004). Examined in this way the RNE offers evidence on the manipulation of particular historic narratives.

There were many spectacles during the nineteenth century, feeding a public appetite for the latest thrilling news, whether polar or not. A panorama of Spitsbergen impressed the crowds of Leicester Square in 1819, and grand views of 'Boothia' and the Franklin search expeditions proved sensational in the mid-century; Laplanders and 'Esquimaux' were paraded in show-halls; 'perilous

moving dioramas,' 'superb and fascinating illuminated lectures,' 'sublime scenic spectaculars,' and countless other Arctic entertainments delighted London and provincial audiences alike (David 2000; Potter and Wamsley 1999). But what should make the RNE of especial interest to polar historians is that the relics and images of a whole century of polar exploration were displayed in 1891 with remarkable pageantry. Portraits, cartoons, charts, and equipment — not to mention a tableau on a stage of ice and a 'monster berg' housing an optical show — provided an iconographical spectacular and comprehensive retrospective of exploration achievement that had never before been attempted.

Using materials relating to the polar collections displayed at the RNE, housed in the 'Franklin Gallery,' this paper records the impact the RNE made on late-Victorian maritime hagiography. It addresses the ways that the RNE influenced the re-creation of myths surrounding Sir John Franklin and how the RNE proved to be significant, in the hands of key lobbyists, in the call for a return to polar exploration. It shows that Albert Markham and his elder cousin Sir Clements Markham (1830–1916) — historian, propagandist, and president of the Royal Geographical Society for 12 years from 1893 — were chiefly responsible for reinvigorating, mythologizing, and propagating romantic polar narratives in the late nineteenth century. Both Markhams were central figures on the RNE Arctic organisational committee. The exhibition marked the starting point of a decade of increased interest in Britain's past and future endeavour in the polar regions, which culminated in the 'Heroic Age' of Antarctic exploration in the early twentieth century. This paper demonstrates that the RNE proved significant in helping create the narratives that surrounded the history and mythology of the exploration of the polar regions, and examines the relationships between naval needs, the ways in which histories of exploration were displayed, and the utility of imperial myths. The record of past polar expeditions served as a potent vehicle in propagating heroic visions that could serve the interests both of naval propagandists and of those petitioning for a renewal of exploration in the polar regions.

Arctic exploration and a 'new navalism'

The role of exploration in nineteenth-century institutional, intellectual, and political contexts, particularly its relationship with the mobilisation of the ideological and material features of empire, has attracted popular and scholarly attention (for example, Stafford 1989; Burnett 2000; Driver 2001). Whilst traditional histories of the Arctic regions have tended to be dominated by narrative accounts, biography, and histories of exploration, some aspects of Arctic history have begun to be recovered in the context of recent historiographical scrutiny. The relationships between national political agendas and support for exploration and the role of the press and literature in creating the popular image of the explorer have recently been examined (Fogelson 1992; Riffenburgh 1993; Spufford 1996; David 2000; Dodds 2002).

Tracing the motivations of those who promoted exploration, for example, can be revealing. Whereas exploration has been traditionally translated as an expression of imperialist power, Arctic voyages of discovery in the immediate years after Waterloo took place at a time more commonly associated with severe economic retrenchment. By 1818 the Royal Navy was in the throes of massive disarmament. Whilst exploration and survey can be regarded as the appropriate employment for a peacetime navy and as a suitable outlet for the skills of trained officers, the idea that Arctic expeditions provided *the* answer to the Royal Navy's peacetime employment problems is fallacious. Interest in Arctic exploration can be justified, in part, in the context of service weakness: a naval 'crisis' not only of size, but also one of identity. After the cessation of war with France, domestic interests soon marginalized the Navy, which proved painfully slow to adjust to a different, increasingly commercial, world and to reassess its relevance 'to a post-war society that had fewer pressing martial preoccupations' (Lincoln 2002: 185). In the absence of any major crisis abroad, the Navy was highly vulnerable to spending cutbacks, and demands for retrenchment were insistent: more than 25% of all reports about the Navy appearing in *The Times* between 1815 and 1825 related to calls for greater economy in the service to relieve the huge burden of national tax. The advantages of exploration were obviously appealing at a time when the imminent reduction in manpower threatened the efficiency of the Navy and its, up till now, die-cast reputation (Lewis 1965). The Arctic at once became the new theatre in which the Navy could refashion a role for itself.

Voyages were calculated to renew the image of the Navy, the best kind of opportunity for restoring naval prestige in the eyes of a disgruntled and weary nation. Exploration could be packaged into potent images: in the popular narratives of explorers themselves, the display of artefacts and relics, polar spectacles and panoramas, or a grandiloquent oil on canvas. Immediate naval needs were well-sustained by the romanticised values intrinsic to exploration and discovery — historical and, no doubt, mythologized, enlightened, and heroically pioneering values that were instantly attractive to the post-war public. Some regarded polar exploration as a heroic enterprise, a 'campaign' that approached military combat in the virtues it demanded of its participants, while most applauded Arctic service as a substitute for the experience of combat at sea. Here was a 'form of colonial warfare' that appeared to be about heroic, individual action, which could afford the luxury of chivalric codes, in theory if not in practice, and which lent itself to art and literature (MacKenzie 1992). The Arctic campaign fitted perfectly a number of cultural and literary traditions of the period: the enthusiasm for knightly virtues, the adventure tradition, heightened moral absolutism, and a fascination with individual heroic action in the service of the state. Four ships left British waters in 1818 with the combined prestige of the service and the nation resting on their shoulders. As the century progressed,

naval explorers, meeting the challenges and dangers of the Arctic wilderness in the name of empire, became living (and dying) symbols of national and heroic idealism. The visual iconography of exploration was central to making the real and imagined achievements of the Royal Navy apparent to its audience in Britain. In the light of immediate naval requirements, the ways in which exploration was 'displayed' is telling.

The closing decade of the nineteenth century, and the years preceding the First World War, was an age of imperial naval rivalries, fleet expansion, and far-reaching technological advances. By the 1880s Britain had begun to fear that her supremacy at sea, taken largely for granted in the mid-century, was again being seriously challenged by France, Russia, and, after 1900, Germany. A reaction to this increasing 'fear' was a deliberate and sustained navalist political campaign aimed at raising awareness in, and reforming, the perceived weaknesses of the Royal Navy. The Naval Defence Act of 1889, which expressly formalized the 'two-power' standard — by which the fleet was to be maintained at a strength equal to that of any two powers combined — can be read as the first major legislative reform of this 'new navalism'. It inaugurated a programme of new shipbuilding, strategic debate, and technical development. With £21.5 million providing for 70 new warships in four years, the Act initiated a modern 'race' for armaments in which Britain would set the pace for extravagant naval construction, and which reached a height in 1906 with the launch of the first of Admiral Fisher's revolutionary new battleships, *Dreadnought* (Marder 1964; Kennedy 1976).

In the spring of 1889 *The Pall Mall Gazette* carried a series of articles entitled 'What should be done about the Navy,' written by W.T. Stead, which alerted readers to the prospect of an 'Imperial calamity' if naval strength be allowed to fall. Then, as now, the potentiality of a challenge provided an ideal catalyst for naval reformers to increase their spending, despite considerable political disquiet over the mounting costs of maintaining, not least expanding, the fleet. Another illustration of the revival in interest in the Royal Navy was the founding of a number of societies to educate the public in naval affairs. In 1893 the Naval Records Society was established to 'promote a more serious and scientific study of naval history.' Whilst its primary aim was the publication of critical editions of rare works, its wider, although unwritten, objectives 'were based on the belief that naval policy had to be guided by the scientific study of the past and that the society could provide the historical material for those involved in policy-making' (Littlewood and Butler 1998: 17). It rapidly became a social and political organ for advocates of naval expansion and reform. The foundation of the Navy League in December 1894 likewise created an influential non-governmental focus of information and propaganda, crucially among the middle and professional classes. Its express purpose was to publicize a 'Big Navy' policy and to raise public awareness and support for this programme at home and in the Empire. The League 'deployed history' in its meetings, lectures, and school visits to construct a populist and patriotic version of the past, and to justify policies that included vigorous support for increased naval expenditure and enlistment. League doctrine, tirelessly propagated, was a natural product of the combination of economic nationalism and increasingly articulated national imperialisms. Although the new navalism was promulgated and contested by many people, and at many levels, the League continued to be its most important public forum until the First World War. In 1896 mass meetings of the League were held in Trafalgar Square; the climax of half a century of naval supremacy was best illustrated at the Diamond Jubilee Review in 1897. More than 165 British warships, including 21 first-class battleships and 54 cruisers, steamed past the Royal Yacht off Spithead to anchor in five lines, each more than five miles long, with not a single ship needed to be recalled from foreign service to join the impressive demonstration. Few were inclined to dispute the boast of *The Times* (25 June 1897) that 'it is at once the most powerful and far-reaching weapon which the world has ever seen.'

But at the start of the decade the naval image was not so assured. In 1891 *Review of Reviews* contained an alarming notice of increases in the tonnage and horsepower of armoured additions made to continental fleets during the previous decade. An article appeared in Alfred Austin's staunchly conservative *National Review* in 1891 calling for the immediate cultivation of patriotism among Englishmen. Juvenile education, public celebrations, historical presentations, and 'new national ballads' would be the vital ingredients of this plan. The nation had for too long been on its knees before the practical idols of 'opportunity' and 'commercial prosperity'; it concluded: 'It is time that we turned our minds to the cultivation, for the most practical uses, of sentiment, enthusiasm, and devotion' (Trotter 1891: 570). Whilst it would be nothing but conjecture to suggest that this article had any effect on the RNE, it does point to a small, but not insignificant, body of opinion for which a public exhibition, promising to be instructive and patriotic, would be a useful tool.

The naval celebrations of this era were a central medium in the active promotion of peacetime service reputations. Like the Naval League, the RNE served an explicit navalist purpose. British nineteenth-century exploration in the Arctic was, in many ways, a publicity exercise, wedded to the construction and restatement of potent naval images, and there can be no clearer realisation of this intimacy during the late-nineteenth century than at the RNE of 1891. Salvos of the most compelling Arctic visions were put to the service of peacetime naval propaganda.

The Royal Naval Exhibition, 1891

Held in the grounds of the Chelsea Royal Hospital from 2 May to 24 October 1891, the RNE was an extravagant and immensely successful event. First Lord of the Admiralty George Hamilton delivered the address as RNE Chairman on the opening day, in which he reinforced its aims 'to present a complete chronological series of exhibitions

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THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS

SATURDAY, MAY 9, 1891.

Fig. 1. The opening ceremony of the Royal Naval Exhibition as it appeared in *The Illustrated London News* (9 May 1891: 614).

which shall enable the public to follow the development of the Navy from its earliest existence as an organised service . . . and to bring home to a great mass of people the glorious history of the Navy.' The Prince of Wales, Patron and President of the RNE Council, prophesised that the public would take 'the keenest interest' in an exhibition that had 'assumed a national character.' Indeed, it had been decided from the outset that the RNE should be restricted to purely national objects; foreign exhibits were not permitted. The sheer magnitude and variety of the 'national' collections on display at the RNE, the mass of shipbuilding material, war munitions, engines and machinery, relics of Arctic exploration, and portraits of officers past and present, the Prince confidently predicted, 'could not fail to be a source of the highest interest' (*The Times* 2 May 1891) (Fig. 1).

The press agreed: *The Times* claimed it to be 'by far the most complete naval exhibition that has ever been seen,' as well as being the 'fullest and most comprehensive technical exhibition of any kind that has hitherto been attempted in England.' *The Daily Telegraph* (4 May 1891) called it 'delightful' and 'the finest exhibition London has seen for 40 years,' while *The Daily Chronicle* (8 May 1891) maintained it was 'the finest and most interesting English exhibition since that of 1851.' Superlative praise, certainly matched by the numbers of visitors to the RNE published each week as a running total in *The Times*. In all some 2,352,683 people attended. Foremost among the high-profile visitors was Queen Victoria, who paid a visit on 7 May, and on several other occasions the RNE was attended by minor members of the British royal family, by the German Kaiser and Kaiserin, and by members of most of the other royal families of Europe. But it was in every sense a national demonstration of naval achievements.

The *Official catalogue and guide* to this maritime imperial exposition — part historical celebration and part modern armaments and shipping industry fair — ran to 570 pages and 5354 numbered entries (Royal Naval Exhibition 1891). Within the technology of the age it was equal to any such modern show in size and sophistication, with historical galleries of marine art and modern displays of engineering and weaponry to impress the eager crowds. The visitor was bombarded with 'navalist publications,' too. 70,298 *Official catalogues* were sold at the price of one shilling, in addition to 305,730 *Daily programmes* and 7,036 *Illustrated souvenirs*. The variety of attractions that the RNE promised was 'exhaustive':

> ROYAL NAVAL EXHIBITION, Chelsea, S.W.– Close to Grosvenor-road Station on the L.B. and S.C. and L.C. and D. lines. Unrivalled Attractions — The Exhibition buildings and grounds cover an area of over 15 acres, and the following are some of the principal features: – Arctic Relics, Arts Gallery containing one of the finest collections ever got together – Historical Collections of Models of Ships of War and Mercantile Marine – Full-size Models of HMS VICTORY and Eddystone Lighthouse, on which will be burning the most powerful light in the world – MONSTER Ordnance (guns of 57 and 110 tons) – Machine Gun Firing – Torpedoes – Exhibition of Diving, &c – Lake 250 ft. long by 150 ft. wide on which Mimic Combats between Models of two Modern Battle Ships will take place, and illustrations of Submarine Mining, &c, will be given – Nautical displays in the arena – Performances by the Sons of Neptune Opera Company – Aquatic FIREWORKS – Balloon Ascents – Monster Iceberg, containing realistic ARCTIC Scenery, and Panorama of TRAFALGAR – Grounds Magnificently Illuminated (thousands of coloured lights), Decoratic Lighting by James Pain and Son. (*The Times* 6 May 1891)

The official guides were vital in providing the 'correct' interpretations of the naval visions at the RNE amid competing readings. Whilst *Punch* took the opportunity to mock the intended austerity of the 'official mind of patriotism' at the RNE, criticisms were quickly muted by a mass array of navalist literature keenly designed to reinforce the RNE mission statement. *Review of Reviews* published its guide, a two-penny handbook entitled 'How to *see* the Royal Naval Exhibition,' and in offering a conservative translation of the exhibits, 'calculated to interest even the most casual sight-seer in the naval glories of our

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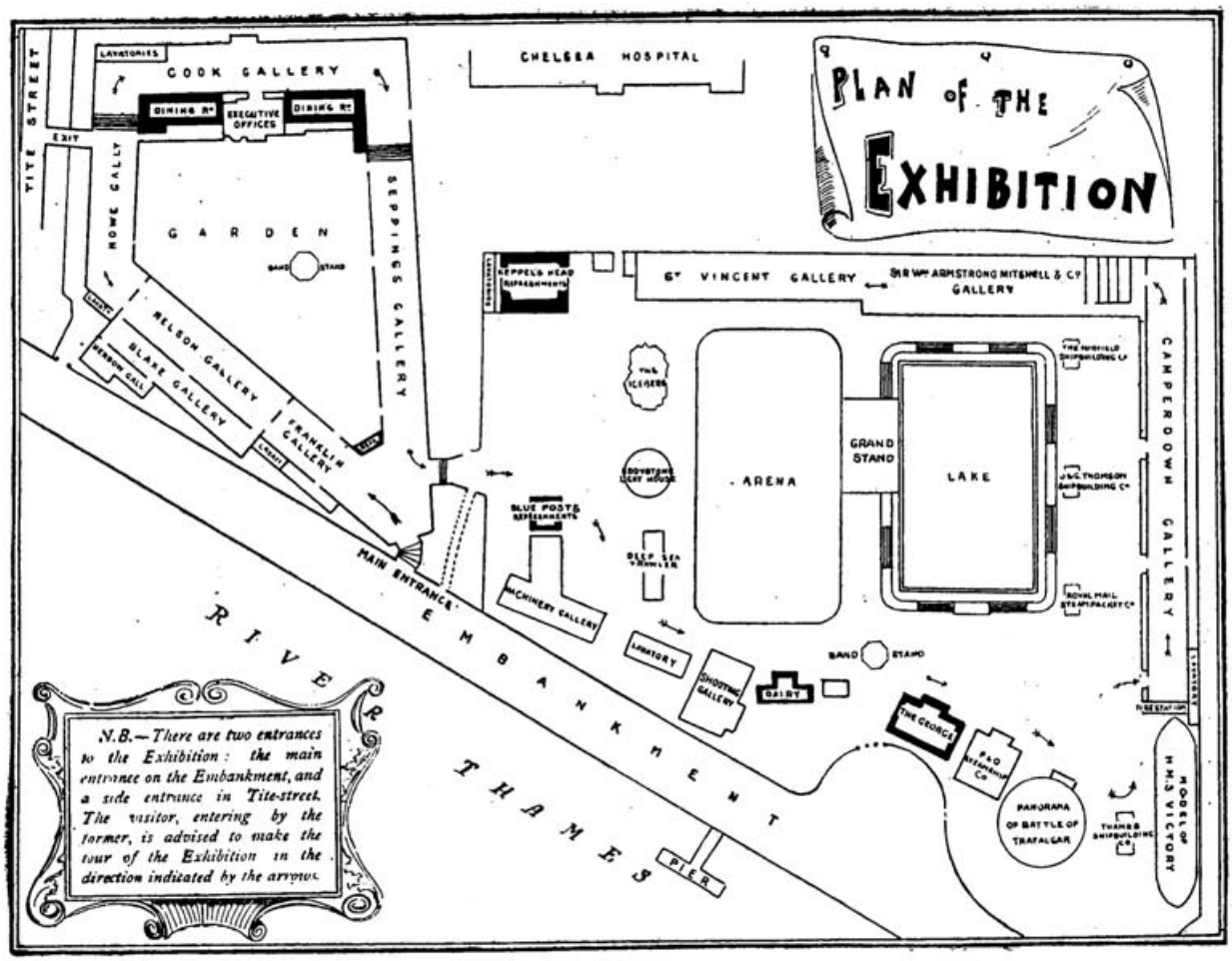

Fig. 2. Plan of the Royal Naval Exhibition, 1891 (*The Pall Mall Gazette* 1891).

race,' it toed the official line perfectly. An alternative, for some an additional, way to 'see' the RNE was in a lantern reading. This form of media proved incredibly popular in the late century, promising a bewildering variety of subjects including popular science, episodes in history, religious parables, descriptions of famous landmarks, and literary fantasies. For a mere six pence one could 'Explore with Stanley,' experience the 'Arctic Regions,' or join the 'Franklin Search Expeditions.' The sanctioned 'Royal Naval Exhibition, London, 1891' lantern show contained much of the boundless optimism that permeated RNE guides and publicity pamphlets. It consisted of a set of 50 slides with an accompanying lecture and came with strict instructions on delivery to ensure the 'brilliance of the whole entertainment.' The lantern shows were a dynamic advertisement for the RNE and a means by which naval organisers could reach a wider public to drive home RNE narratives: 'we hope this summary of the several sections will serve to *imprint* the more important items on the memory' (Anonymous 1891: 7). What RNE organisers regarded as important, and what would prove visually entertaining, is immediately obvious when looking at the slide inventory. The slides displayed a view of the Navy that was modern, efficient, and vital to the nation's security and continued prosperity, reproducing images that were vigorously promoted throughout the duration of the RNE. At least half of the chosen views were of armaments and munitions — field-gun and torpedo drills, 'monster ordnance,' the battery of an ironclad — the trappings of a modern fighting force. There were four slides devoted to the '110-Ton Gun,' 'fifty times more powerful than any gun that Nelson ever saw.' Reaching a crescendo, and 'having said and seen so much of our deeds of valour, and our determination to maintain our position as Sovereign of the seas' the RNE lantern display finished with a fanfare flourish, with the words of 'Rule, Britannia!' thrown upon the screen. It becomes clear that whilst the RNE could be viewed in a number of ways — through visits, special gala evenings, in literature, pamphlets, guidebooks, or in this case, in one's own home — organisers were at pains to ensure that it was seen in the way intended. As a 'catalyst of naval propaganda' without reservation, image was everything (Fig. 2).

The RNE was to be 'viewed' and 'understood' in the theoretical sequence of four main sections: arts, navigation, models, and ordnance, with three gallery ranges encircling a man-made lake, parade square, and extensive grounds containing a host of supporting exhibits and amusements. Arrows mark the recommended path on the exhibition map; signposts and uniformed guides

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ushered visitors along the predetermined route for the duration of the event. The RNE was to be understood in a strict historical sequence. On first entering, attention was drawn to diagrams on the wall of the main entrance lobby. Prepared by the MP Captain Sir John Colomb, the two diagrams graphically illustrated British sea commerce and naval expenditure from Trafalgar to 1891 and compared British naval expenditure with that of her major 'foreign competitors.' Presenting these charts, diagrammatic justification for past and future spending, the message was clear: the spiralling costs of the British fleet were essential in order to maintain Britain's supremacy and protect the interests of her growing empire. A trophy depicting Britannia accompanied by a lion and standing on a dais of modern and ancient weaponry faced the visitor, and scrolling around her, inscribed in gold, were the words of the RNE motto: 'IT IS ON THE NAVY, UNDER THE GOOD PROVIDENCE OF GOD, THAT OUR WEALTH, PROSPERITY, AND PEACE DEPEND.' 'It would be difficult to frame anything more appropriate to the Exhibition itself, or more in accordance with the glorious traditions and history of that great Service which has called the Exhibition into existence' the *Official catalogue* chimed. The Admiralty was the principal and underlying force in the promotion of this naval spectacle, and the impression registered upon the general public was, as a result, a major and calculated consideration. The *United Service Magazine* carried a full description of the RNE by Admiral Sir George Elliot, KCB, in May that, not unsurprisingly, was brimming with naval patriotism. 'By enlightening the public as to the enormously increased cost of naval armaments,' he asserted, the RNE would become the means of 'restoring naval supremacy' and 'averting the ruin which at present awaits us by neglecting the naval condition' (Elliot 1891: 182–192). The RNE offered a material articulation of British technological supremacy precisely to avert this gloomy reflection. Only by the 'most vigorous and constant efforts' to ensure naval supremacy — the RNE, clearly the crucial component of these efforts in 1891 — Elliot asserted, could 'the inheritance' of peace and prosperity, secured by Nelson at Trafalgar, be sustained. The impressive buildings, the mass of armaments, and the 'resounding optimism' of the RNE was certain, Elliot concluded, to 'bring such pressure to bear on the governing powers as will rouse them to a true sense of their responsibilities.'

And the collections *were* impressive: the Cook Gallery related to the several branches of the science of navigation; models of marine engines and a complete history of naval architecture could be found in the Seppings Gallery; and the Blake and Nelson galleries were filled to the rafters with portraiture and grand canvases of famous naval actions. Large oils of the celebrated 'Nelson engagements' featured prominently: at St Vincent, the Nile, Copenhagen, and Trafalgar, by Westall, George Jones, Turner, and countless more. There were scores of Nelson portraits, idealised profiles in crayon, engravings, sketches, watercolours, embroidery, medallions, busts in black Wedgwood, and figures cast in gunmetal. In all, it was an unprecedented and remarkable visual cornucopia (Lewis-Jones 2004).

The St Vincent and Camperdown galleries were devoted to naval ordnance, torpedoes, electrical machinery, and diving apparatus to illustrate the history of 'Naval War materiel' and, more importantly, impress upon the public the vision of future of naval engagements. The Armstrong gallery, for example, 230 feet long and occupied entirely by the exhibits of the great Elswick firm of Sir William Armstrong, was home to 'tremendous engines of war' and prodigious artillery. The RNE was explicitly designed to provide a stage for the display of industrial achievement; from the outset it was intended to be a technological exposition brimming with nationalist overtones.

Nor were the attractions of the RNE limited to these 'edifying arcades.' In the spirit of other contemporary exhibitions the RNE was to be both instructive and entertaining. 'We live in a progressive age, and one more or less of advertisement,' observed the Honorary Secretary of the RNE, 'and must not cling too closely to tradition if by departing from it we can add to the security of the kingdom by popularising, in no matter how small a degree, the Service on which in time of war so much will depend' (Jephson 1892: 554). Indeed, the secret of the success of all of the imperial exhibitions of this era was that they combined entertainment, education, and industrial showcase on a spectacular scale. On the lake there were 128 engagements between model battleships; within it, some 169 mining and torpedo operations, daily aquatic performances, and water polo fixtures; 152 cutlass and field-gun drills; 58 displays of fireworks; 57 balloon ascents (which 'desirous Gentlemen' could book in advance at a price of £5); gymnastic displays by the Greenwich Boys, and drills by recruits of the Royal Marine. Some heralded the RNE as 'the perfect exemplar of rational recreation,' combining pleasure and instruction; for others, the unabashed mixture of quasi-historical display, commercial trade fair, and popular spectacle fell a little short of these lofty aspirations. For example, the concrete lake, just 4 feet deep, provided for the display of electrically controlled torpedo boats, sham fights between two miniature battleships (*Vernon* and *Colossus*), and, less ingenious, the evolutions of 16 smaller models, each of which were moved by a man who walked 'unsuspected' in the water beneath it and who fired the guns and caused the vessel to heave over or pitch in accordance to the programme. Though it was 'impossible to derive any scientific instruction from these battles on the lake,' *The Times* decided (21 August 1891), the demonstrations proved 'enormously popular' for they 'supplied the public with plenty of noise and smoke and with very pretty spectacles' (Fig. 3).

Other exhibits were more immediately impressive. Standing on the shores of the exhibition lake was Mr Webster's life-size model of the Eddystone lighthouse. One hundred and seventy feet tall with a passenger lift built into its interior, it was illuminated at night by

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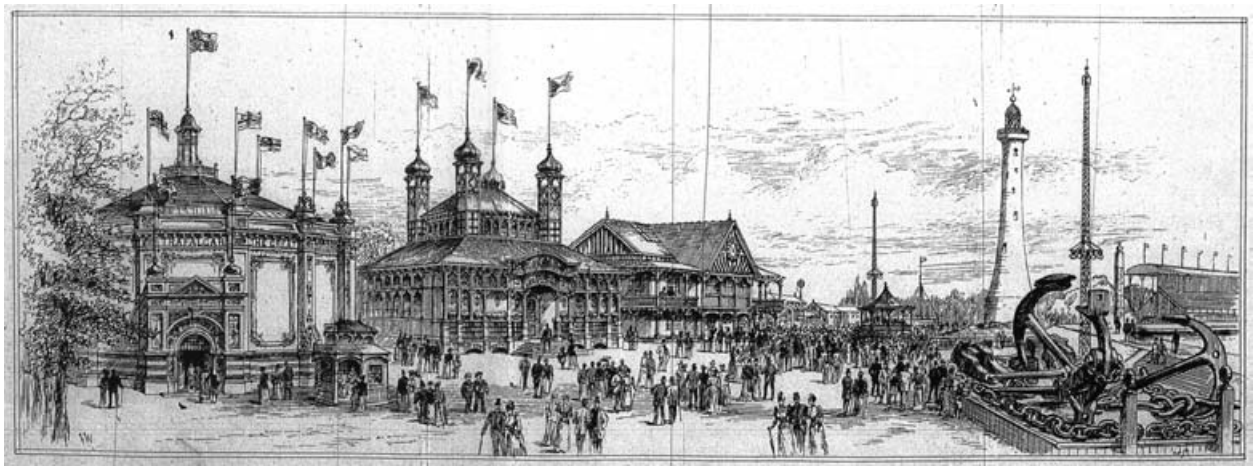

Fig. 3. Buildings in the grounds of the Royal Naval Exhibition. Showing from left to right: The Trafalgar panorama, the pavilion of the P&O Company, the 'George' refreshment pavilion, model of the Eddystone lighthouse, and 'Monster anchors and chains.' The grounds also included 'delightful' formal and enclosed gardens, illuminated with thousands of coloured gas lamps, arranged around bandstands (*The Illustrated London News* 9 May 1891: 615).

a five million 'candle-power' electric lamp, reputedly the most powerful in the world. There was a 310-foot-long panorama of the Battle of Trafalgar by Chevalier Fleischer, whilst the undisputed star attraction of the RNE was a full-sized model of HMS *Victory*. Despite having papier-mâché 32-pounders and lacking masts or rigging, the replica contained a wax-figure tableau of the 'Death of Nelson' by Tussaud, which 'couldn't fail to be the talk of the town.'

That a heady mix of historical collections, commerce, and popular amusements was necessary suggests two things: first, that these were the ingredients that would prove appealing to visitors; and second, that the RNE was not necessarily assured of its success, but had to remain competitive. This is obvious when one realises that there were numerous other 'days out' to be had in London during the summer of 1891. Besides mechanical trade demonstrations, travelling fairs, garden shows, and the usual museum and gallery collections open during the season, the main competing attraction for RNE visitors was a 'German extravaganza' held at Earl's Court, the brainchild of exhibition-veteran John Robinson Whitley. 'The German' of 1891, as it was commonly known, was an impressive affair. It was predictably strong on industrial manufactures and, responding to the RNE that had opened the previous week, it stressed German military heritage. A switchback railway took its passengers along the banks of the Rhine; the 'Kaiser panorama' transported its viewers to the 'heart of the German Empire.' The new show *Germania*, an 'historical performance in four parts,' was reportedly a 'vivid illustration of the leading history of German militarism.' In a blaze of weaponry and massed ranks the audience were carried from the 'Barbaric age of the ancient Teutons' to 'Modern Germany rejoicing in its nationalist vigour' (Lowe 1892: 385). The celebrations were equally vigorous in the beer and sausage halls of 'Potsdam,' which for *Punch* were always more popular than any nationalist pageant.

Whilst the RNE was not without its fashionable amusements or spectacles — a shooting gallery, a panorama, restaurants, bars, parades, and battles on the lake — the prevailing tone was certainly more sober than that suggested by the boozy satirists of *Punch*. Whilst it was undeniably part of the exhibition tradition, the RNE differed in many respects: it was not outright commercial, but a venture for which the public had initially donated, with any profit forming a charitable fund; it had backing from members of the government and the priceless validation of Royal patronage; it had a naval mandate which in some ways ensured that standards were upheld throughout its operations; and perhaps most important of all, its collections represented a significant part of the national history. For this reason its scale and confidence could be atypically grand, and it could rightly call itself 'The Exhibition' of 1891. Whilst it was only open for 151 days the imaginative reach of the RNE would prove more durable than any other contemporary imperial showcase.

But what can one actually draw from the more immediate imaginative impacts of the RNE? For some visitors, entering Nelson's ship and admiring the mass of relics were not merely a visit in the simple sense but virtual participation in an act of pilgrimage. *Review of Reviews* (June 1891: 612), for example, exhorted its readers to see the RNE with religious reverence: 'the Exhibition is indeed a great temple reared to the memory of the heroes of our Imperial domain.' By capitalising on the interest in Nelson, and further propagating a particular historical representation of his achievements, the RNE could assure its immediate popularity (Lewis-Jones 2004).

But did British polar heroes have a comparable 'pulling power'? Well, along the suggested route of the RNE, and perhaps at first sight incongruous with its techno-centric naval mandate, was the Franklin Gallery. It did not promise armour plate, or 'monster machinery,' certainly no 110-ton gun, nor impressive canvases of

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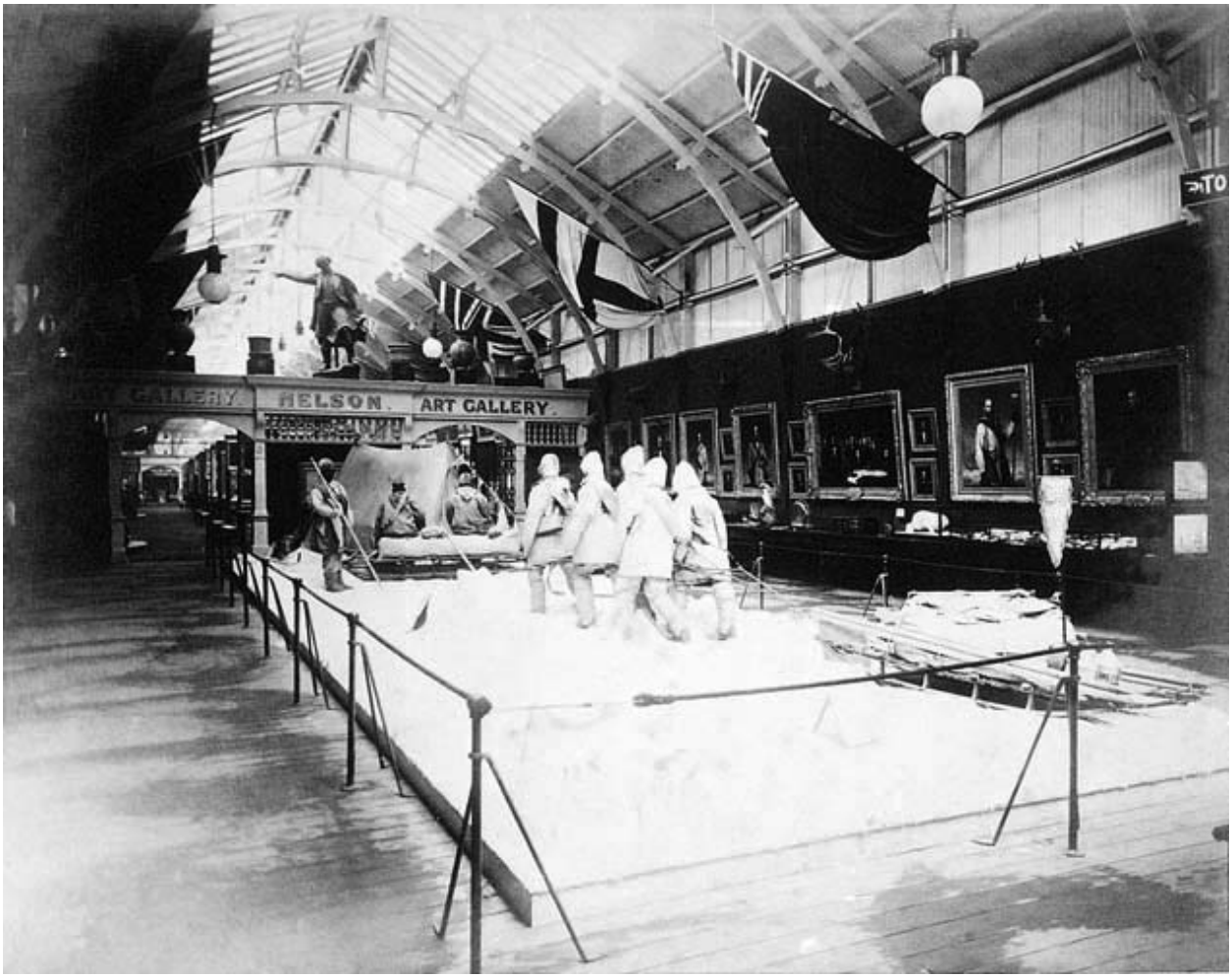

Fig. 4. View of the Franklin Gallery – a recently discovered promotional photograph of 1891 (National Maritime Museum, P47513).

notorious sea fights. But it did offer something to RNE organisers. And to understand the RNE as a sequence of these powerful images, one needs to look more closely at how they were constructed, showing that displaying the naval record in the Arctic regions was a calculated consideration on the part of the RNE organisers, and a display that was expertly manipulated.

Displaying the Arctic

The Franklin Gallery opened immediately to the left of the principal entrance and, being the first attraction on the recommended route through the RNE, could not 'possibly be missed' (*The Pall Mall Gazette* 1891: 6). In the 'Arctic Sub-Division,' as the gallery was officially titled, a comprehensive history of Arctic research appeared (Royal Naval Exhibition 1892: 44–45). Whilst the section was organised by a mixed service and civilian committee that included many officers famous for their Arctic exploits — Rear Admiral Albert Markham, Admiral Sir Francis Leopold McClintock, Rear Admiral Sir George Nares — and others, like Sir Allen Young and Clements Markham, who had experience in the polar regions, their shared interests ensured a visual message that was uniformly powerful. The long tradition of Arctic exploration and the role of the heroic individual operating in a challenging environment took centre stage. The first object met with was a full-size representation of the Franklin cairn, 'erected by the ill-fated survivors of that expedition' on Victory Point, the spot at which the remaining members of the Franklin party had landed on 25 April 1848 after abandoning their frozen ships. Immediately beyond the cairn, a trove of relics recovered from the Franklin expedition were arranged upon a large table, in the centre of which stood 14 flags, all banners carried by sledges employed in the Franklin search (Ross 2002). The central space of the gallery was occupied by a representation of the surface of an ice field. On this 'appropriate platform' — a stage of ice for an eager audience — was exhibited in realistic form 'the model' of sledge-travelling adopted by many of the mid-century Arctic expeditions and continued by Nares in 1875–76 (Fig. 4). Whilst at once 'illustrating the means by which British Seamen have discovered and explored many thousands of miles of frozen shores, otherwise inaccessible,' the technique itself was destined to become the archetype, the model *modus operandi* for

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subsequent British polar explorations, especially those orchestrated under Sir Clements Markham at the Royal Geographical Society and directed toward the south. *The Pall Mall Gazette* (1891: 6) was less lyrical, but more descriptive: 'foremost among the exhibits [. . .] is a realistic representation of a hummocky ice-pack, along which four wax-work men laboriously drag a sledge, while a mariner awaits them at the door of the tent which they are about to occupy. The men are all rigged out with snow-goggles, cavernous mittens, and other articles of apparel essential to a locality where the thermometer is often 45 degrees below zero.' *Punch* was undecided about the virtues of the Arctic section with its 'dummies drawing a sledge through the canvas snow of a corded-off North Pole,' preferring instead to sample the virtues of iced-tipples in the grounds (9 May 1891: 217).

Along each side of the gallery were hung portraits in large numbers of Arctic explorers, beginning with Sir Hugh Willoughby and continuing through James Cook and Constantine Phipps to William Edward Parry and John Franklin. The portrait of Admiral Sir Edward Inglefield, chairman of the RNE Arts Section, took its place among the naval heroes. There were large three-quarter length paintings of Robert McClure, William Penny, McClintock, and Nares against a distinctive Arctic background. There were small formal half-lengths of almost all the key exploration figures, both naval and civilian: James Clark Ross, John Richardson, James Weddell, Edward Sabine, John Rae, and Young. In the middle of this sea of portraits Stephen Pearce's celebrated canvas *The Arctic Council*, completed in 1851, was exhibited depicting the 'foremost Arcticists of the day planning a search for their fallen comrade.' It presented a noble vision of a community of actors united toward this common cause. The instrumental significance of the image lay in its patriotic and rhetorical power. The painting was shown extensively in the middle of the century, reproductions from engravings were widely distributed, and it was successfully used as a prop to stir up sentiment and support for the Franklin search parties. It became a means in itself to apply pressure on the government, assisting in efforts to secure funding and mobilise a collective resolve to further the search. In the hands of RNE organisers keen to resurrect this 'resolve' and create an historic show of unity, Pearce's *The Arctic Council* regained much of its mid-century instrumentality. As recent polar historians have often had recourse to Pearce's canvases as means to illustrate their writings, it is of especial interest that nearly all of Pearce's major works of a polar theme were exhibited at the RNE alongside each other, for the first, and possibly the only, time (Stone 1988: Ross 2004). The Admiralty and the Royal Geographical Society also lent items to complete the record of portraits, in addition to equipment, model ships, and fine illustrative works of art, including *HMS Terror in the ice* by George Back and a series of watercolours by Captain May.

The display of art throughout the RNE, and in the Franklin gallery particularly, had a power and utility beyond the aesthetic. As indicated, Pearce's *The Arctic Council* brought to the RNE an iconography of historic naval resolve in the polar regions that keenly fitted Markham's intention to encourage public and governmental support for new explorations. Similarly, Richard Westall's *Nelson's adventure with a Bear* provided RNE organisers with a useful link between the Arctic regions and well-established naval heroes. Nelson, as a plucky member of Phipps' expedition to the Arctic in 1773, was displayed in a formative engagement in the ice. The episode, in fact, was one mythologized by Nelson's biographers, part Herculean labour and, more generally, a shining example of naval courage (Savours 1984; Lewis-Jones in press). In the context of RNE narratives it set Nelson, however tenuously, within a constructed tradition of maritime discovery in the polar regions, of which Halley and Cook were the celebrated progenitors and Nares the most recent major participant. In their consistent lobbying for a renewal of Arctic exploration, both Markhams were quick to point to the benefits of Arctic service: the demands of the Arctic, real and imagined, could continue to provide a school for 'future Nelsons.' 'No service, during peace time,' Albert Markham would rejoice, 'conduces more to the development of the energies of our seamen, their resourcefulness, skill, and all those other great qualities [. . .] than service in the Polar Regions. It is a service that necessitates constant watchfulness, courage of no common order, dash combined with prudence, and, above all, that trust and confidence in the power and help of the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, who alone can guide our footsteps in safety, and crown our efforts with success' (The Naval Shipping and Fisheries Exhibition 1905a: 56) (Fig. 5).

Polar charts, cartoons, and large canvases of Arctic and Antarctic scenery 'in the tradition of the sublime' covered the left wall; in a large glass case, on the right of the gallery, were shown the sledge banners used by the British Arctic Expedition of 1875–76, including the Union Jack carried by Albert Markham to a farthest north then attained. On either side of the gallery were counters upon which Arctic birds and animals, Esquimaux implements, kayaks and curiosities, Greenland woodcuts, Arctic and Antarctic sketches, geological specimens, and meteorological instruments jostled for space. Meanwhile, from the roof was suspended a balloon, similar to those used in the Franklin search for the distribution of printed coloured papers 'in the hope that some survivor of Franklin's ships might find them.' High above the portraits the heads and horns of Arctic animals provided a 'crown of natural trophies'; and throughout 'The Polar Spirit was omnipresent,' or rather a 'somewhat dishevelled lady reclining on the back of a white bear', the spirit of Arctic research personified in plaster-cast, her arms outstretched cradling a compass (Elliot 1891: 186).

The display of the Arctic regions provided popular images that were recycled in a number of juvenile picture books, pamphlets, and cheap ephemera, and featured

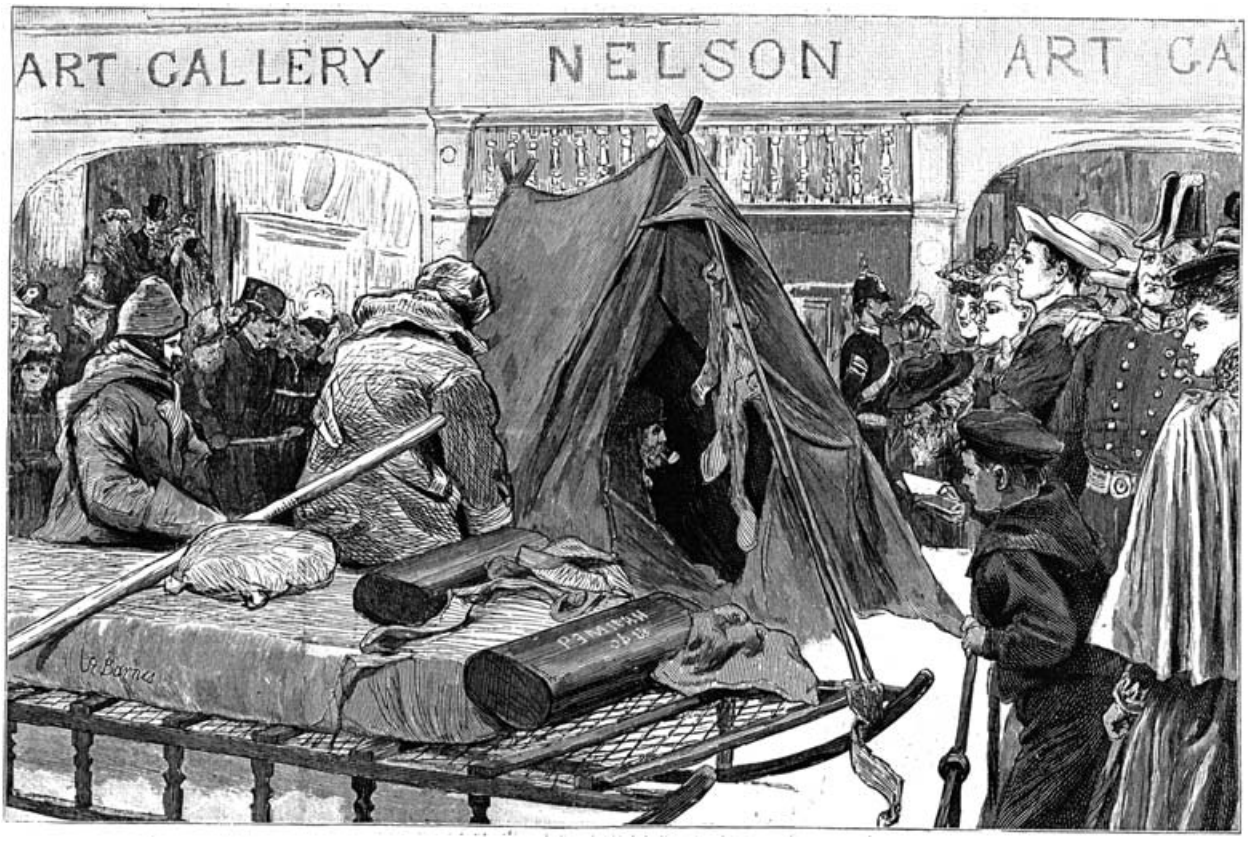

Fig. 5. 'Articles used for the equipment of the Arctic expedition, 1875–6, shown in the Franklin Gallery.'

prominently in the item *A day at the Royal Naval Exhibition*. The cover presented a young midshipman and the *Victory* resplendent against the Union Jack, and other images amongst its seven double-page plates included the crow's nest, an Esquimaux kayak, 'the death of Nelson,' the Eddystone lighthouse, and a grand firework display.

Continuing the 'Franklin journey' in the RNE grounds, visitors could voyage inside the 'Iceberg Exhibit' and gaze upon a model construction of HMS *Investigator*, abandoned by McClure during his Franklin search expedition of 1850–54. The Queen and Prince of Wales, the placard claimed, marvelled at the realism of the 'internal display of the Arctic Region' during their visits (7 and 21 May). The internal tableau showed 'An Illustration of the Voyage of HMS *Investigator* . . . during the discovery of the North-West Passage,' with a model ship 'nipped' in the ice, sledging parties preparing to leave her, and an 'elaborate arrangement' of electric lights simulating a 'facsimile' of the Aurora Borealis.

The interior was 'ingeniously fitted with electric light' by the aid of which the visitor could get some idea of 'the fitful flashes of the Aurora Borealis which illuminate the long Arctic night, and of the welcome dawn' (*The Pall Mall Gazette* 1891: 7; Royal Naval Exhibition 1891: 535). 'There is an Arctic Pavilion' noted *The Times* wryly, 'the exterior of which conveys a good idea of an ice hummock' (2 May 1891). *The Daily Telegraph* called it 'the stranded iceberg of Mr Lyons' and praised the 'vivid scenic arrangement of the Polar seas with mock moon, aurora borealis and midnight sun' (1 May 1891). While *The Pall Mall Gazette* heralded it 'an interesting appendix to the Franklin relics' and a useful companion in helping 'the visitor to realise the great Arctic tragedy associated with that explorer's honoured name,' others were less impressed by the 'Monster Berg' (Fig. 6). In their 'First Visit to the Naveries' the journalists of *Punch* enjoyed a champagne-fuelled 'cruise' at the RNE. Entering a 'shed, declared to be an Arctic scene,' the writers for *Punch* were amused by the model ship that reminded them of 'those happy boyhood days spent in the toy-shops of Lowther Arcade' (9 May 1891: 217). The following month *Punch* paid another fanciful review visit to the RNE. In a piece entitled, 'Horatio Larkins visits the Naval Exhibition,' an attractive cartoon illustrated a day trip in which a 'merry time' was had: frolicking in the shooting gallery and the Sons of Neptune Theatre; marvelling at the Trafalgar Panorama; scaling the Lighthouse by a rope to avoid the queues and admission charges; hitching a ride upon the sledge of a team of Nares' Arctic heroes; and to close the day, relaxing upon the Iceberg, at once a glorious refrigerator for the ubiquitous bottles of Exhibition 'grog' (27 June 1891: 310).

But when the RNE closed late in October, and hangovers cleared, what was remembered? One risks overemphasising the importance of the Franklin Gallery and its 'Arctic spectacular' unless it is possible to gauge its

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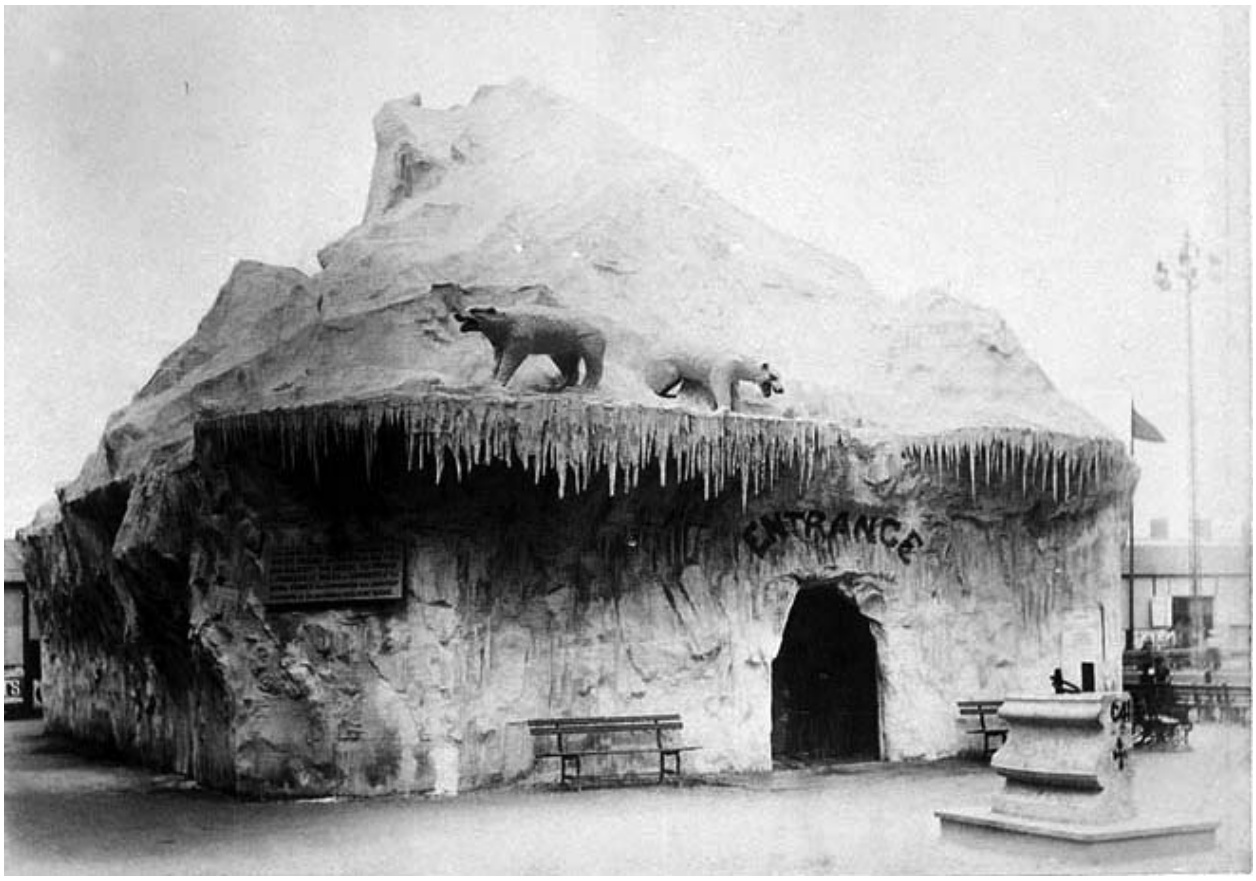

Fig. 6. Exterior view of the 'Monster Berg' (National Maritime Museum, P47515).

durable relevance. While this paper has suggested that the RNE assured its immediate popularity by capitalising on the interest in Nelson and propagating a vision of his achievements, what of the long-term influence of the RNE in the business of making other heroes? This is examined by studying another of the RNE's naval icons: Sir John Franklin.

Propagating heroic myths

If there is to be a history of naval hagiography, and in particular a history of the making and maintenance of the legend surrounding Sir John Franklin, the RNE must stand as an important part of the story. While re-affirming the domestic and international reputation of the Royal Navy, the RNE also re-engaged public interest in the polar regions. In presenting a potent iconographical display of a century's worth of polar exploration, the exhibition introduced a new generation to the achievements and imagery of Britain's naval heroes, of which Sir John Franklin, despite his failures, provided a glowing example.

While much has been written about the actual meaning of the term 'hero,' and the type of men that the public, at various points in the nineteenth century, accepted as such, scrutiny of Victorian myths of the sea and naval heroism has attracted only intermittent academic attention (Behrman 1977; Hamilton 1980). In his highly regarded analysis of the particular ingredients of late-Victorian 'heroism,' John MacKenzie drew the analogy between military hagiography and the Roman Catholic Church, which 'sees the canonisation of new saints in each generation as a vital way of maintaining the energy of the Church, solidifying the loyalty of old adherents and inspiring the faith of the new' (MacKenzie 1992: 15). One can suggest that heroic myths of empire operated in a similar way, true both of the army and the navy. Certainly the formation of iconic myths, that of Nelson the most obvious, was crucial in sustaining public interest and reinforcing the unquestioning duty of naval servicemen (Lincoln 2002). A.T. Mahan, whose *Influence of sea power upon history* had proved so instrumental in girding British resolve to continue expanding her Navy in 1890, decided that naval heroes were a central part in maintaining naval greatness. In his analysis *The life of Nelson*, the hero became the 'embodiment' of British sea power (Mahan 1899). Whilst analysis of the RNE can shed light on the continuing profit, both ideological and commercial, of preserving the cult of Nelson, it is also illuminating in re-evaluating the durability of other naval heroic myths. Arctic exploration and the canonisation of its officers provided the Navy, like the Church, with much rejuvenative potential. The RNE enabled mid-century Arctic visions to be revisited, solidified, even recreated, and took particular care to ensure its visitors left reinvigorated, morally, religiously, and patriotically.

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Beau Riffenburgh's analysis of heroic myths of the late nineteenth century clearly highlighted their instrumental power: 'because they justified and promoted the expansion of the state in geographical and economic terms, embodied the collective will and hopes of the governing elite, and offered guidelines for personal and national ascendancy to a new generation (Riffenburgh 1993: 6–7). The subjects of the major imperial myths were much more than 'heroes of an hour,' rather being enduring figures. In death, the hero's image could be inflated and manipulated and the full range of media available in the nineteenth-century — books, displays, the press, verse, and art — combined to draw out as much as could be taken from the hero's status. The cult surrounding each hero required mediators to develop, interpret, manipulate, and articulate the myths, and the means of mediation. Carefully edited journals, diaries, and letters, poetry and art, and other 'mediums of iconography' enabled the dissemination of the particular message that the mediator (through the hero) wished to promulgate. The 'muscular Christian' novelist Charles Kingsley suggested that the longevity of heroic myths rested on their distribution by the key mediators of these myths, and, equally, the willingness of individuals to accommodate the moral and instructive lessons that such stories articulated: 'still the race of hero spirits pass the lamp from hand to hand.'

Exhibitions, as MacKenzie has shown, were particularly compelling iconographical mediums that achieved this distribution and inculcation (MacKenzie 1984; Behrman 1977: 157). Explorers and their adventures were featured in both theatres and music halls, venues that maintained such popularity that by 1892 an estimated 14 million seats were sold annually in the 35 music halls of London alone (Bailey 1986). The images created of exploration and explorers were specifically designed for the consumption of its audiences — geographical societies, scientific societies, financial supporters, or the general public — and for these different audiences, a different sentiment: sometimes enlightened, disinterested, scientifically praiseworthy; sometimes triumphalist or mindlessly jingoistic; and, often, a thick narrative mix of all. Even as images created for the exhibition-going public could be equally disparate, they remained universally persuasive, often durable illusions (Brain 1993; Driver 2001). Such exhibitions and their 'imaginative geographies' were one of the prime propaganda tools of the era, and they displayed explorers to their audience in supremely heroic terms. They belong to a broader tradition of spectacular display through which the achievements of the crown, the nation, and the empire were consumed at home in a wide range of plays, pageants, and panoramas (for example, Allwood 1977; Altick 1978; Greenhalgh 1988; Rydell 1992). The RNE was an exhibition born in shared times and its resounding optimism was clearly a vehicle for imperial propaganda and naval myth.

The visual references that were frequently repeated during the myth creation of Sir John Franklin clearly demonstrate the iconography of the explorer-hero, as constructed by recent theoretical perspectives (Riffenburgh 1993: 7). In the hand of his biographers, Franklin's career neatly fitted the heroic-cycle paradigm: born in Lincolnshire in 1786, Franklin had entered the Royal Navy as a boy in 1800, immediately seeing active service onboard *Polyphemus* at the hard-fought battle of Copenhagen (the call to duty); joining *Investigator* under Matthew Flinders on its voyage of discovery to New Holland (Australia) in 1801–04 (exploration apprenticeship); the return to naval duty showing 'very conspicuous zeal and activity' as signal-midshipman on *Bellerophon* at Trafalgar, in *Bedford* off New Orleans in 1814, and as diplomat in the Mediterranean in 1830 for which he was awarded the Golden Cross of Greece (continued adventure and duty); his first engagement with the Arctic under David Buchan's *Dorothea* in the *Trent* in 1818 (the threshold); two overland expeditions to explore the Arctic coast of British North America in 1819–22 and 1825–27, enduring severe privation yet returning rich geographical discoveries (the trials); the exacting Lieutenant-Governorship of Van Diemen's Land between 1836 and 1843 (limbo); the celebrated return to the Arctic in 1845 commanding the Admiralty expedition in renewed search of the Northwest Passage (the fateful journey); the death of the entire party (the martyrdom); and the piecemeal discovery of relics (the return). During the years 1847–59, some 36 expeditions were sent out in search for the missing Franklin party. McClintock's 1857–59 search expedition aboard *Fox*, financed largely by Lady Jane Franklin — who was the undisputed and incredibly active mediator of the Franklin myth during the mid-century period — found relics and written records, and finally confirmed the fate of the Franklin party. A gestation of 15 years of continued interest and agonising over the whereabouts of the missing seamen ensured an emotional investment in the expedition. Death in the Arctic, the noble sacrifice so necessary to imperial hagiography, elevated Franklin to iconic status as a mid-Victorian national hero. Few nineteenth-century heroes actually reached this final mythic stage, the apotheosis, as Franklin did. Men such as Livingstone, Gordon, Havelock, and Nelson were canonised in this way, while the example of lesser heroes could still be pressed into personifying the perceived national greatness and as useful symbols for those interested in 'justifying nation, imperial, or scientific progress' (Johnson 1982; Helly 1987).

However deeply felt the mid-century fascination with Franklin's tale, interest in this heroic episode was soon supplanted by new images of heroism and new forms of colonial warfare elsewhere, in effect closing the chapter on British Arctic exploration until the Nares expedition of 1875. In 1865 Sherard Osborn read a paper at the RGS calling for a renewal of Arctic exploration. Echoing the arguments of the late Second Secretary of the Admiralty, Sir John Barrow, he stated: 'The Navy needs some action to wake it up from the sloth of routine, and save it from the canker of prolonged peace. Arctic exploration is more wholesome for it, in a moral as well as a sanitary

point of view, than any more Ashantee or Japanese wars' (Osborn 1865). Whilst the vivifying promise of a return to the Arctic was met with approval, most notably among members of the RGS, the project was soon forestalled. The Arctic was no longer the best place for the formation of an empire's heroes. War in the Crimea, exploration in central Africa, naval engagement in southeast Asia, and the suppression of a mutinous Indian sub-continent all provided a new crop of dutiful champions ready to die in the name of empire. 'At last the mystery of Franklin's fate is solved,' reported *The Times*, 'and we know the very day of his death . . . Alas! There can be no longer those sad wailings from an imaginary Tintagel to persuade the credulous that an Arthur still lives . . . The dauntless soul dies out amid frost and snow; the spirit is never quenched though the body may perish. We retire now from the contest with honour, if with grief, and we leave the name of Franklin engraved on the furthest pillars which the energy of mankind had dared to erect as the landmark of its research in the dull and lifeless regions that guards the axis of the world' (23 September 1859).

In 1873 Clements Markham published his record of the century's polar pageant, *The threshold of the unknown region*, which ran to four editions. It certainly signalled that Markham, then honorary secretary of the RGS, intended playing a central role in celebrating British polar achievement and in mediating the myth of Sir John Franklin, as had John Barrow and Lady Franklin before him. It also contributed to consolidating a collective resolve to materialise the Arctic proposals of the RGS. By 1875, following a prolonged and often fruitless period of lobbying — largely through the vigorous advocacy of Osborn and Markham — the government finally acquiesced to calls for a renewal of Arctic exploration and dispatched the British Arctic Expedition under George Strong Nares. Nares' lumbering man-hauled sledges failed ignominiously to reach the North Pole, and although Albert Markham, in command of the sledge *Marco Polo*, secured his fame by attaining a farthest north of 83°20′, scurvy broke out and the expedition was forced to return home the following year. Clements Markham had sailed to Greenland on the first leg of the expedition, and he too returned home ingloriously: exceeding his allowance of leave by one month he was promptly dismissed from his post at the India Office.

Nevertheless, some 15 years later, the material legacy of the Nares expedition dominated the RNE Arctic spectacle: in its flags, trophies, and the sledging tableau. Both Markhams were well aware that displaying the 'relics' of the 1875 expedition prominently in 1891 was a strong indictment on the lack of any British expedition in the intervening period. So despite failure, the record of the Nares expedition by 1891 had become a useful and emotive tool for a new programme of exploration lobbying. 'Failure' was manipulated into a new narrative of historical, romanticised achievement that had immediate coercive instrumentality. In the last decade of the nineteenth century Markham engineered a position

Fig. 7. Sir Clements R. Markham.

for himself as the presiding guardian of the historical legacy of British polar exploration and as the authoritative promoter of future endeavour, particularly for a re-entry into the Antarctic (Markham 1898, 1986). Sir Roderick Murchison's sponsorship of African exploration through the RGS, whilst a vehicle for his own intellectual and institutional ambitions, can be read in close comparison to Markham's own promotion and mediation of exploration: as a manipulator of information Murchison constantly helped promote public interest and vitalise the heroic stature of explorers, whilst continually reinforcing his own exploration ideology (Secord 1982). With a conviction, like Murchison's, that proved unassailable, Markham was instrumental in perpetuating a notion of the infallibility of man-hauling, a sledging technique central to the romantic and ennobling spirit of naval exploration in the past. The Nares tableau at the RNE can be regarded as a clear articulation of this commitment. The most enduring image of Markham himself is the grand oil portrait by George Henry that still hangs above the fireplace in the Royal Geographical Society. The portrait beautifully combines Markham's ruling passions: high on the facing wall is a framed picture of the cinchona plant, which he collected in Peru for the relief of malaria in India; close by his right hand, on a stand of oak from Robert Falcon Scott's *Discovery*, is a silver model of a man-hauled sledge (Savours 1996) (Fig. 7).

Ironically, Markham's inflexible and proprietary commitment to past traditions and techniques, heroic myths in themselves, and British hubris more generally in this field, can be seen as one of many factors that contributed to Scott's eventual failure. But this is the benefit of

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historical hindsight and one must not be too quick to censure Markham in this regard (Huntford 1979). Markham can certainly be credited for, almost single-handedly, revitalising the institutional interest in polar exploration in Britain; for capturing, perhaps even re-creating, a public polar fascination through the RGS; for creating a particular culture of polar imperialism; and for incubating a grand scheme of exploration, first realised with Scott's *Discovery* expedition 1901–04 and that reached its apogee with the failure and apotheosis of his party in 1912.

Looking closely at the RNE raises interesting questions about the power of relics themselves as inscriptions: piecemeal but crucial building blocks in the formation of heroic myths. As relics filtered their way back to England during the course of the Franklin-search expeditions, they provided tantalising clues to the fate of the lost explorers. The endless shelves and cases of relics might seem ridiculous to the modern observer: broken bottles, fragments of leather and wood, a dip circle and sextant, a medicine chest, a pair of steel spectacles, buttons and bunting, silver spoons, a small prayer book, an empty tea canister — some important, but most individually pathetic. Yet collectively, and to a public eager for any information relating to the fate of the expedition, they became sacred artefacts in their own right, the sole remains of Franklin and his companions: the 'departure,' 'initiation,' and 'return' of a century's worth of polar exploration revealed in its images and artefacts. 'Franklin sowed himself like treasure amid the polar ice,' *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* mused, 'and it was the ceaseless endeavour to discover him that made our knowledge of the Arctic what it is' (Guillemard 1897). *The Cornhill Magazine* eulogised on the 'heroism displayed' in the 'relics of the Franklin Expedition exhibited in the Naval Exhibition at Chelsea' (Drew 1893), while *Review of Reviews*, in 1891, suggested they provided 'a tangible object lesson set forth in material shape.' A small two-penny juvenile book sold at the Exhibition, entitled *The story of the Franklin search illustrative of the Franklin relics* and authored by Lady McClintock, proved immensely popular in guiding visitors through the material manifestations of this 'heroism.' Through the relics, a story was pieced together: 'a story of courage, discipline, and devotion to duty, and a story of woman's faithful love inspiring strong men to perform acts of daring, which will live for ever.' Decoding the relics offered morally uplifting lessons, for 'inspired by such facts as we have here to tell, we are sure that whenever an Englishman falls in the discharge of his duty, his countrymen will never rest, until they have verified his fate, and brought light to his achievements' (McClintock 1891: 12). Continuing, 'the story is a tragedy complete enough in itself; but illuminated by such high qualities as may well make us proud of our race and our country; for, as General Charles Gordon told us, "England was *made* by her adventurers." And England will never decay as long as Courage, Discipline, and Endurance survive among us, such as kept Franklin's party a united band, even in their doomed and hopeless march.'

Beyond the RNE, popular histories and juvenile works provided further vehicles for the circulation of images of exploration, and sustained the growing vogue of naval exploration successes in the Arctic (Richards 1989). Albert H. Markham's *Life of Sir John Franklin*, published in 1891, enjoyed a number of reissues through to 1906. Markham's biography closely echoed the prevailing vision presented at the RNE: we know he was member of the Arctic committee that had organised the Franklin Gallery exhibits; Colonel Barrow had offered access to his vast Arctic collections and his Arctic portraits by Stephen Pearce, all of which found their way to the RNE and many of which were reproduced as plates in Markham's volume; he 'directly enlisted' the help of Sophia Cracroft who placed at his disposal a wealth of information, as she too had done for the Franklin Gallery; and McClintock, also a central member of the RNE committee, offered his hand by editing the whole (Markham 1891: viii). A 'condensed account' of Markham's biography appeared in James T. Knowles' *Nineteenth Century* and asserted that its popularity was assured such was the strength of Franklin's religious and moral character and the attraction of his example to a 'naval nation' (Elliot 1892). Echoing this praise, the *Dublin Review* declared, 'without such spirits England would never have attained her place in the world's history, and she does well to cherish their memories' (Clerke 1891).

That the RNE had been central in displaying and enshrining these memories is now beyond doubt. Cochrane's *English explorers*, which had previously met with huge success in detailing the 'famous travels of Mandeville, Bruce, Park and Livingstone,' was republished in 1891. An entire chapter on 'Arctic explorations' was spliced to the front of the book precisely 'at a time when public attention was being interested to this field,' capitalising on the excitement aroused by the RNE. In perhaps the clearest indication of Franklin's ascension to the pantheon of exploring heroes, he supplanted the crusading Sir John Mandeville on the volume's frontispiece, taking his place alongside Livingstone by an ice-clad ship and wreathed in gold. Likewise, in Frank Mundell's *Stories of North Pole adventure*, a 'narration of the most thrilling incidents,' Franklin was romantically presented as the 'knight errant of the northern seas,' immediately the modern Mandeville, and evidently 'among the most truly noble that ever left the shores of England' (Mundell 1893: 68).

G. Barnett Smith's *Sir John Franklin and the romance of the North-West Passage* painted Franklin's history in typically bold and heroic colours: 'for there is no name which exercises such a strange fascination over Englishman,' and whose 'romantic fate invested him with a halo of immortality' (Barnett Smith 1896). *The realm of the ice king*, an equally popular work published by the Religious Tract Society, appeared in 1891 in a new edition offering a distilled narrative chronology of the century's

foremost explorations and, predictably, was quick to rehearse naval achievements. Pointing to the moral and instructive benefits of the Arctic record of a 'gallant band of heroes,' its preface opined: 'As might have been expected from the naval supremacy of Great Britain, it is our own countrymen who hold the foremost place amongst those who have risked their lives in the endeavour to force a passage through these frozen seas . . . the perils encountered and the hardships endured have brought out into striking prominence some of the noblest qualities' (Frost 1891: 5). It made particular reference to the 'relics of Franklin' (by then 'carefully preserved in the Painted Hall in Greenwich') as reassuring material evidence of Franklin's 'steadfast faith.' The narrative sentiment of this small book, typical among many of its type of 'juvenile religious instruction,' could not be clearer. Polar exploration was enabled by naval supremacy and ensured through the devout heroism of its officers: 'We dwell on the fact with much satisfaction that the command of the crews engaged in the perilous voyages to the north was instructed to those who united great nautical skill and physical courage with earnest piety and a great sense of religious responsibility' (Frost 1891: 371). These were precisely the qualities that enabled Franklin's posthumous status to reach mythic proportions, and be sustained. The RNE would be a formative polar experience for a generation who would in time see Britain re-enter the field of Antarctic exploration. More generally, these were exactly the sentiments that ensured that the RNE was well attended, as a means for juvenile instruction and moral improvement, not unlike the recently consolidated museums and national collections in London, and that its stated intention of re-affirming and then maintaining the reputation of the Navy would be long-lasting.

The fiftieth anniversary of the departure of the Franklin expedition in 1895 presented further opportunity to continue the celebration of British polar achievement. The RGS organised a meeting to view the Franklin relics and the monument at the Royal Naval Museum at Greenwich; the Scottish Geographical Society commemorated the event with a symposium and exhibition in Edinburgh (David 2000: 163). Lithograph images of Franklin were featured in juvenile literature, and other Arctic heroes enjoyed a brief revisit; a beautiful coloured frontispiece of Thomas Collier's 'The last voyage of Henry Hudson' appeared prominently in the *Boy's Own Paper*, and engravings of Sir John Millais' symbolic 'The North West Passage', which was painted in 1874 with the subtitle 'It might be done, and England should do it,' appeared in the illustrated press. Thomas Smith's harrowing canvas 'They forged the last link with their lives,' painted in 1895, was a constructed fiction of the Franklin narrative that reinforced the dark, yet idealised, elements of the disaster to a receptive audience. As a counter point to the 'new imperialism' with its aggressive triumphalism, of which Stanley proved a controversial symbol, many returned to the Franklin story and the more understated, yet shining, qualities it had become to embody.

Whilst new national heroes would in the future emerge in the Antarctic rather than in the north, this did not greatly erode the Arctic's appeal, which recent historians suggest to have been on the wane. It was precisely because of renewed polar interest and the threat of new nations taking part in the 'race for the south' that the historical achievements of the Navy in the Arctic burned more brightly. The RNE and the Markhams in particular were responsible for that: the longevity of the Franklin story, as naval myth and part of polar folklore, had been assured. 'Happily those memories can never really die which are brightened with the fair lustre of noble qualities,' mused the novelist Felicia Skene on the subject of Franklin's celebrity (Skene 1895). Campaigning for a return to the field of Antarctic exploration, also in 1895, Clements Markham was quick to point to past naval achievements, and recycled a great deal of RNE rhetoric: polar exploration and the Navy made ideal partners, encouraging 'that spirit of maritime enterprise which has ever distinguished the English people' (Markham 1895).

Back in April 1891, prior to the RNE opening, the influential *Edinburgh Review* had carried a review of Antarctic exploration written by the naturalist Thomas Roscoe Stebbing. Like Markham, his call for a new Antarctic expedition was couched in a celebration of the long tradition of naval discovery — the efforts of Halley, Cook, Weddell, and Ross stressed among many others — and an overview of the benefits to science that exploration promised. 'The full resources of the present and the fertile experiences of the past,' Stebbing asserted, would ensure that Britain 'garner honour' and win a 'prize not to be relinquished to any other name or nation.' Further, the 'time is certainly ripe for another Antarctic expedition,' he declared, 'and one on a great scale, prepared to attack the frigid zone summer after summer' (Stebbing 1891). Whilst the record shows there was to be no expedition launched in the summer of 1891, the RNE did however provide for the public a vicarious exploration of the polar regions on an impressive scale, and one that ensured the Navy immediate praise.

Exactly what could be gained in 1891 by invoking the mid-century? Amid the pomp of guns and iron-clad armaments, the Franklin Gallery took visitors back to a non-technological era, to the non-confrontational and disinterested record of peacetime, a period when British power was less problematic and British naval and economic supremacy still unchallenged. And like the new technology, but in a different way, it could be a huge source of confidence. As a vehicle of spectacle, nostalgia allowed visitors to look with distance: the horror of the Franklin tragedy could be comforting. While the celebration of heroic figures more conventionally fits the tenor of expansion and of empire, Carlyle (1895) turned to heroes for comfort in the face of the anonymous social forces he saw threatening mid-century Europe, and, although the parallel is a little tenuous, by the end of the century, heroes acted for some as romantic figures that promised comforting alternatives in the world. Displaying

heroism that was individual, chivalric, and dutiful — a particular set of appeals to another era, yet Victorian values at their most solid — a narrative was spun that promised to allay possible anxieties about the morality of an increasingly industrialised state and the anonymity of being a cog in the imperial machine. By placing the RNE in the sequence of events that led to the return to polar exploration at the beginning of the twentieth century, it can be seen as an introduction to the 'Heroic Age.' The Arctic display at the RNE surely tapped a rising public interest in individual action and the heroic, and Clements Markham, as Hakluyt historian and arch-imperial myth-maker, is where this all met.

Whilst the Arctic helped reinforce the historical aspect of naval achievement, and as a tool for recruitment, it can be interpreted as a reflection of the determination of its organisers, most obviously the Markhams, in re-affirming British ideological and imaginative connections to exploration in the polar regions. The RNE provided an opportunity to revisit traditional heroes — Cook, Nelson, and Franklin among many others — and to celebrate a vision of their lives, achievements, and deaths. The blood-soaked shore of a Pacific island, the deck of *Victory* at the height of battle, the 'thick ribb'd ice' of a frozen wasteland, all of these sites were visualised in the process of affirming the mythic legacy of heroes central to narratives of naval hagiography. And crucially all three died, as other seamen had and continued to do so, doing their duty. Rallying to the suggestion that 'nothing remained' of Franklin's expedition, *The Pall Mall Gazette* declared, 'yes, there is something — something which, perhaps, after all is worth more than the glory of scientific discovery, more even than the winning of battles. There remains the imperishable record of the heroism and endurance of men who, were English in heart and in limb and strong with the strength of the race to command, to obey, to endure' (*The Pall Mall Gazette* 1891: 6).

Conclusions

In 1905 Earl's Court hosted a new naval exhibition, 'to arouse patriotic sentiments and to re-tell the tales of nautical derring-do,' immediately exploiting the commercial possibilities of the exhibition format, both as sober showcase and funfair (The Naval Shipping and Fisheries Exhibition 1905a: 54). The sprawling complex was home to Burton's Canadian Indian Village, a submarine, a shooting gallery, a 'gigantic wheel,' Fleischer's Trafalgar Panorama, 'Distorting Mirrors,' Burn's 'Ants and Bees,' and a 'Lager Beer Hall.' Amid this unusual mix, exhibits of naval history and of the exploration of the polar regions were celebrated. Clements Markham was centrally involved again as a member on the Sub-Committee for the Polar Section. Though smaller in conception, this display contained much of what was on show in 1891. The RGS, the Royal Naval College at Greenwich, and Admiral Markham were the largest contributors of items: there were new pieces relating to Antarctica; photographic enlargements of polar scenes; large displays of equipment used by Scott in his *Discovery* expedition of 1901–04; a tableaux celebrating Markham's farthest north, with figures clad in fur suits and Jaeger caps; the Union Jack 'hoisted at the Magnetic North Pole in 1831' by James Clark Ross; and a number of works of art, including portraits of Franklin, offered for sale (The Naval Shipping and Fisheries Exhibition 1905b: 126–131).

'The history of Polar Research is, and always has been, of absorbing interest in this country,' noted Albert Markham writing for the *Official guide*. 'It is therefore very right and proper that it should receive special recognition in an Exhibition which has for its object, not only to recall to our minds the heroic deeds performed on the high seas by those who have done so much to build up this great Empire, but also to remind our countrymen of those who have endured great hardships and privations, in their endeavours to advance and promote geographical knowledge, by the Exploration of every accessible part of the globe.' In a typically rousing style, he continued, 'there are, even in this twentieth century, many thousands of square miles situated at the north and south extremes of our terrestrial sphere, still wrapped in the veil of obscurity, illustrated on our charts and on our globes by unseemly blank spaces.' Celebrating the recent Antarctic success of Scott, and lamenting that 'Norway and Italy have succeeded in wresting Northern honour from our grasp,' Markham deliberately sought to rally the 'munificence of patriotic Englishmen,' who shared his desire 'in seeing their country maintain its lead in the race for geographical discovery in the Polar Regions.' The fundamental benefit and virtue of polar exploration, he concluded, was its ability to 'animate the heart and mind' of the nation (The Naval Shipping and Fisheries Exhibition 1905a: 55–56).

Naval exhibitions, the RNE particularly, provide clear examples of when narratives such as these find a material form. Displaying collections of naval history had dual utility. The 1905 showcase, albeit an unashamedly commercial venture, took the opportunity offered by the centenary of the Battle of Trafalgar to celebrate the maritime heritage of the British Isles. The Royal Naval Exhibition of 1891 likewise sought to profit from the political and domestic potential of celebrating Britain's long history of naval achievement.

Before, during, and after the RNE, Clements Markham was centrally involved. He delivered a lecture, 'On the advantage of forming collections at Greenwich,' early in 1891 at the Royal United Service Institution. Illustrated by notable episodes of naval history, including Arctic explorations, his paper was couched in the form of a proposal to bring together a collection of historic navigational instruments, maps, and charts in order to provide instructive resources for the officers at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich (Markham 1891). For Markham — then President of the Hakluyt Society, a post he would hold for 20 years, and the undisputed historian in charge of exploration hagiography — the collections also promised to provide essential imaginative resources. The display of heroism was crucial to capturing a naval

history that had a modern usefulness, and for maintaining naval narratives of progress. Encouraging the faculty of imagination 'in the education of a naval officer' was 'serviceable.' 'It not only arouses feelings of emulation, and of love for a noble profession,' Markham suggested, but 'also excites a thirst for knowledge [. . .] which can never be quenched.' 'The study of history,' he concluded, 'tends to increase efficiency, to combine progress with knowledge, and to foster intelligent pride in, and love for, a noble profession.' In the audience that evening was Admiral Sir Erasmus Ommanney, commanding officer of HMS *Assistance* during her search for Franklin in 1850–51 (on which Markham, as midshipman, had enjoyed his formative but limited Arctic experience), and he offered vocal approval (Markham 1891: 299).

This paper shows that these themes were undoubtedly carried over into the planning and execution of the RNE. The record of exploration in the Arctic provided the Navy with a rich instructive and imaginative resource. The conduct of individual officers in the 'regions of *thick ribb'd ice*' offered a display of naval heroism that would have enduring popular appeal. These acts were extended to the public through published journals, were reported widely in the periodical press, and were recycled in popular histories and juvenile literature of the period. The RNE can be clearly seen as another medium that propagated this particular naval history of the Arctic — nostalgic, patriotic, and ennobling — and Markham was quick to realise the potential of an exhibition for this didactic purpose. The RNE must be seen as a key episode in the history and promotion of British exploration ideologies and as the first step, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, toward a new programme of naval polar discovery, the 'Heroic Age' of Antarctic exploration, at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Studying exhibitions can provide valuable insights. One has the rare opportunity to prise underneath the 'official mind' of patriotism, and to gauge public reaction through press reports and periodical articles. They have left behind a deposit of cheap publications, pamphlets, and ephemera which illustrate — some more skilfully than others — a variety of narratives, imperial, racial, or in this instance naval, that were disseminated for public consumption, some soon discarded while others became quickly entrenched. Despite the patriotic and moral didacticism that provides the body to most of the surviving sources, the RNE celebration of exploration — gilt in flags, charts, portraiture, and relics, the visible trophies of such an enterprise — had an instrumental currency that was real as well as rhetorical. The RNE must have been central to propagating heroic myths, and whilst one cannot detail its precise role in culturing an exact part of late-century public consciousness, one can claim for it the achievement, at least, of putting a vision of Arctic exploration firmly back in the public domain.

The surge of interest in the nautical hero suggests some of the significant functions of heroic myth in the national self-consciousness, particularly in the late-Victorian period. Britain at the time was facing unprecedented political, economic, and diplomatic competition from other nations. Her supremacy on the seas was beginning to be challenged. British 'navalism' was a direct manifestation of the alarm felt regarding Britain's Great Power status and the RNE was to be an explicit exercise in advancing navalist propaganda. Re-examining and re-appreciating those qualities that led to her historical greatness enabled Britain to reinforce confidence in herself and her dominions. Examination of the displays at the RNE gives insight into the ways the myths and realities of British sea power were marshalled for this purpose.

It was inevitable that many would turn to Nelson, for example, as a personification of the national virtue and to the Navy as the symbol of national greatness. With the bicentenary of Trafalgar now fast approaching, it will be interesting to observe the ways in which the Nelson myth is re-visited, perhaps reinvented, for a modern audience. The polar regions will play no part in this particular naval celebration, but their imaginative reach continues in new configurations. Nevertheless, examining the way in which the Royal Naval Exhibition of 1891 served as a foundation for nostalgic visions of the polar past, immediately utilised by Markham in advancing his Antarctic aspirations, sheds some light on the material and imaginative relations that sustain exploration.

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