

***Terra Nova*: the ship's bell, figure-head, standard compass and binnacle**

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ABSTRACT. This note reports on the three relics of *Terra Nova*, the vessel of R. F. Scott's last expedition, that still exist. These are the ship's bell, which is in the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge, the figurehead held by the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff and the standard compass and binnacle in the Royal Navy's School of Navigation, Portsmouth.

As is well known to those with polar interests, the ship's bell of *Terra Nova*, the vessel of R. F. Scott's last expedition, has occupied for many years pride of place on the staircase of the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge (Fig. 1). The ship, herself, sank in 1943 off Greenland and there appear to be only three relics of the vessel extant; the bell, the figurehead and the standard compass and binnacle.



Fig. 1. Ship's Bell and its original cradle from SS *Terra Nova*.

The acquisition of the bell by the Scott Polar Research Institute is attributed to Surgeon Lieutenant Edward Leicester Atkinson, a prominent member of Scott's expedition who died in 1929 aged 47 years, not long after his retirement from the Royal Navy in the rank of Surgeon Captain. Atkinson had taken over command of the expedition when Scott was on his polar march and in the absence of the second in command E.R.G.R. Evans who had been invalided home. It seems probable that the bell came into the possession of Atkinson at Cardiff in 1913 on return from the Antarctic when the expedition was paid off. The bell was presented to the Institute on Atkinson's behalf on 20 October 1952, by his aunt Catherine, his father's sister who had married Sir Richard Nicholson. They had a residence in Scotland, a house named Eden at Banff on the Moray Firth. The bell had stood in the porch of the house, where Atkinson, who had been born in the West Indies, had lived while in the U.K.

But why did the bell come into Atkinson's possession? In carrying the responsibility of leadership, Atkinson discharged his duties to the admiration of his comrades and it seems likely that this is the reason. The responsibility for handing over the ship and its equipment to the owners would have been that of the ship's captain, Evans, recuperated and now the leader of the expedition. The bell would have been removed from the *Terra Nova* with the permission of the ship's owners. Who more deserving to receive it than Atkinson, presented to him by Evans as a symbolic gesture in recognition of the role which fell upon him and which he discharged so admirably?

But the bell is not the only part of the ship to survive. Following the return from the Antarctic in 1913 the figurehead of the ship was presented to the city of Cardiff, *Terra Nova*'s home port by Frederick Charles Bowring on behalf of the ship's owners, Bowring Brothers Ltd. of St. John's, Newfoundland. It is currently in Cardiff in the possession of the National Museum of Wales (Figs 2, 3). Frederick Bowring also funded a magnificent memorial in the city.

With the figurehead of the ship at Cardiff and the ship's bell at Cambridge, it was long thought that these were the only relics directly part of *Terra Nova* that remained. However, research has also revealed the existence of the standard compass and binnacle. This had been specially fitted on the ice-house of the ship at West India Dock, London when fitting out in 1910, the purpose being to override the readings of the ship's own compasses to assist more accurate navigation.

The binnacle is now, polished and shining, at the Royal Navy Base, Portsmouth (Fig. 4). It has been there since naval records show that it had passed into the Royal Navy's possession in 1920, having been presented by Evans on behalf of the then Lieutenant H.L.L. Pennell, navigating officer and commander of *Terra Nova* when all the officers senior to him were members of shore parties, and Lieutenant H.E.deP. Rennick, watch officer and



Fig. 2. Figurehead of SS *Terra Nova* and

hydrographer, who were both members of the expedition and who were both lost at sea during the First World War. It has stood in the Royal Navy's School of Navigation since its presentation and a brass plate thereon dated 1913 reveals this story. Following representations by the Captain Scott Society and the second son of Evans, the Hon. Edward Broke Evans, the Royal Navy Trophy Trust are retaining the compass and binnacle in readiness for the new City of Cardiff Museum shortly to be established so that it can join the figurehead on display to the public.



Fig. 3. Presentation plate for figurehead. Compliments of the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff.



Fig. 4. Binnacle and standard compass of the SS *Terra Nova* on the Bridge, Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth. Courtesy of the Commodore.

Reference

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