

Book Reviews

AS AFFECTING THE FATE OF MY ABSENT HUSBAND: SELECTED LETTERS OF LADY FRANKLIN CONCERNING THE SEARCH FOR THE LOST FRANKLIN EXPEDITION 1846–1860.

Edited, with an introduction and notes, by Erika Behrisch Elce. 2009. 222p, illustrated, hard cover. Montreal and Kingston: McGill–Queen’s University Press (Native and Northern series). ISBN 978-0-7735-3479-7. C\$39.95, US\$39.95.

doi:10.1017/S0032247410000446

This book is a welcome addition to the literature of the ‘Franklin search’ for H.M.S. *Erebus* and *Terror*, under the command of Sir John Franklin, which were abandoned in 1848, during the last exploring and scientific expedition to be despatched by the Admiralty in search of the northwest passage. The editor here provides a transcription of 29 documents, all in the public sector, but not necessarily easy to find. She therefore performs a service to historians and to the reader and traveller interested in Arctic North America.

Her introduction, introductory notes, end notes and bibliography, as well as her very personal and informal acknowledgements demonstrate the ground she has trodden in bringing the book to publication. A good start is evident right at the beginning with the four clear and useful maps by Michael Pacey, so often considered unnecessary in similar works. The editor outlines the importance of the collection.

In contrast to explorers’ reports, Admiralty Blue Books, and Victorian press editorials on the subject, Lady Franklin’s letters offer us the opportunity to read of the tragedy as it unfolded. Her hopes and fears, her devastating acknowledgement of her husband’s death, and her efforts to restore Franklin’s honour and shine a light on his heroism are revealed in her forceful and elegant prose. As an advocate

for all of the missing sailors, Lady Franklin became an enduring symbol of faith and fidelity. Through her letters, she transformed a tragedy – one that many Britons believed was best left forgotten – into a celebration of British fortitude, faith and heroism (page 5).

Furthermore, she maintains that Jane Franklin’s letters inspired her contemporaries

....to persevere with the searches when the Admiralty would willingly have abandoned them, they kept her husband’s memory and honour alive in the public imagination; and they provided a heroic template of Sir John Franklin that influenced both the explorers who went in search of him and the writers who later celebrated his adventures. Lady Franklin herself never went north to search for her husband, and all her opinions were based on other people’s accounts and reports. But what Victorians learned about the lost Franklin expedition – and thus what we largely know about it today – they learned as a result of her fervour to locate her husband and, if he could not be found alive, to locate his honour in his discovery of the Northwest Passage (page 4).

One cannot help marvelling at Lady Franklin’s eloquent pleas to the Admiralty, to Prime Ministers Disraeli and Palmerston. One also wonders not only at her command of English and her knowledge of the geography of the north, often through her friendship with Richards, Richardson and Collinson, but also at her restraint when complaining to the Admiralty about the loss of navigating seasons through their prevarication. Similarly, she witnesses the return of H.M.S. *Resolute*, restored by the Americans, after her amazing drift from the Arctic, abandoned by Belcher, with a gallant captain ready to continue the search, not accepted by the British authorities. In many ways, Lady Franklin’s letters, plus the editor’s notes and comments, are more appealing than a biography. Well recommended! (Ann Savours (Dr Shirley), Little Bridge Place, Bridge, Canterbury, Kent CT4 5LG.)

WHALES’ BONES OF THE NETHERLANDS AND BELGIUM.

Nicholas Redman. 2010. Teddington: Redman publishing. xix + 161p. Hard cover, illustrated. ISBN 978-095458003-8. Available only from the author. Enquiries to nick.redman@hotmail.com. £30 plus postage and packing.

doi:10.1017/S0032247410000689

This is the third volume of a series projected to cover the whole of Europe and beyond, including the Americas and Australasia. The Netherlands can boast a large numbers of whale remains, many still surviving others known only through historical documents. This is not surprising considering the huge fleets of whale ships which sailed from ‘Holland’ to

the Arctic in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as well as the numerous cetacean strandings that have occurred on the North Sea coast over the generations. The tradition of whale ships bringing home jawbones and other portions of the whale was revived in modern times and there are bones from the south Atlantic at locations across the country (Ameland, Amsterdam, Groningen, Terschelling etc), that were carried home aboard the Dutch whale factory ship *Willem Barendsz* in the post war period. Three vertebrae from a Greenland Right whale were found in 1927 at Maasover on the site of a try works and detailed investigation of some of these early processing sites might yield important information on the old industrial methods. There is a particular tradition in the Netherlands of displaying a jawbone or whale rib on, or in, a public building, though the reason for this is unclear. Possibly it is a reminder of