

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.

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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.

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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

the valuable whaling trade or maybe they were just curiosities to excite public interest. A jaw bone which hangs from the ceiling of the Stadhuis, Haarlem, was taken by Jan Huyghen van Linschoten at Novaya Zemlya in 1595. Another jaw bone was given by him and shown in the Doelen at Enkhuizen, but no longer survives. A rib of the same date, from Linschoten's second attempt to discover the northeast passage, is now in the Zuider Zee museum, Enkhuizen, his home town. These are the oldest actual remains but a stone plaque in the wall of a farmhouse in Friesland depicts a whalebone arch with the date 1574 and the name of the sixteenth century farmer and his wife. There are few cetacean bones displayed in Dutch churches and an impressive sperm whale skull is in the Oude Kerk, Scheveningen, taken from a nearby stranding in 1617.

There were once many hundreds of jaw bones erected as rubbing posts for cattle in the fields. Sometimes these were painted with black and white bands, though it is not known when this practice was adopted. There are more drawings and paintings depicting bones than from most countries, including Pieter Saenredam's painting from 1657, of the Amsterdam, Stadhuis, showing a single jawbone hanging in chains, lost when the building burned down. There is a painting of 1652 by Rembrandt's pupil Paulus Potter, and two, *circa* 1780, at Groningen, all of which show rubbing posts. In a country of canals and waterways it is not remarkable that jaw bones were used as tethering or towing posts around which the tow rope of boat was passed when being hauled by a horse. None survive but a drawing of one from Zaanstreek, Noord Holland, is illustrated.

In Friesland, for example at Ameland (Nes) there were fences made from scores of cut down jaw bones placed side by side, to form a field or boundary division. These structures have largely decayed though portions have been preserved and some constituent bones brought into museum collections. Again in Friesland jawbone grave markers were common, inscribed and dated like any headstone. They have mostly decayed but a few have been brought indoors inside the local churches and dates have been recorded from 1755–1827.

Across Europe whale shoulder blades were used as inn or shop signs and a few of these survive. Other scapulas have been used as a step down outside the front door of a house,

as at Ameland (Nes). In the Museon (Den Haag), is a large vertebra the centrum of which has been hollowed out to create an umbrella stand.

At Doorn (Utrecht) a dovecote built *circa* 1840 was supported on eight jawbones but, being in a state of decay, they were replaced by timbers at the beginning of the twentieth century. The most amazing confection of whale remains was that erected in 1913 Katendrecht (Rotterdam) for the centenary celebration of independence from French rule. A triumphal arch was made up of four columns of vertebrae each topped with a shoulder blade and the columns linked by ribs and the whole structure decorated with plates of baleen.

The Netherlands riches are enhanced still further by finds of cetacean sub fossils from the Miocene and Pliocene eras many of which have surfaced when digging drainage ditches.

Belgium claims the earliest recorded use in the low countries of the display of whales' bones in a public building. A shoulder blade and rib, which still survive, at the Stadhuis in Antwerp, were seen by the renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer in 1520. The greater part of the description for Belgium gives a detailed history of the remarkable Oostende whale. This fin whale, some 98 feet long, was stranded at Oostende in 1827 and after dissection and mounting travelled all over Europe, including across the channel to Britain, and subsequently to the USA. After changing hands several times the skeleton was acquired by Balabin, a rich Russian, who gave it to the Russian Academy of Sciences in 1856 and it is still preserved in St. Petersburg.

This record of bones for decorative and practical use is a rich resource for anthropologists, folklorists, social historians, museologists and cetacean zoologists. Like the preceding volume this maintains the practice of listing the skeletal remains preserved in major museums and institutions and also those in private hands which otherwise might not reach the attention of researchers. As before there is a wealth of illustrations, location maps, a bibliography, indices of categories, museums and institutions, newspapers, magazines and journals, people and places. Also available (from the author, as above) is *Whales' bones of the British Isles; supplement 2004–10* added to the first volume, amended and corrected as appropriate. (Arthur G. Credland, 10 The Greenway, Anlaby Park, Hull HU4 6XH).