

Foreword

Shackleton's *Aurora Australis*, cynosure of polar collectors, expedition magazine *de-luxe*, was written and illustrated by *Nimrod* men during four sunless months preparing to attempt the Pole, in the hut on Ross Island. Astonishingly, the edition was produced in the hut, at that time; there *was* an Albion in Antarctica. Over the ice, from *Nimrod*, they dragged the press, surreal among life-or-death equipment and stores. James Freemantle's 'printer's insight' and tenacious research make us understand properly the frustrations those four hardy explorer-craftsmen overcame, tyros creating *Aurora* in freezing, crowded, 'winter quarters' for fifteen men; their skills shine brighter.

The *printed word* had special importance for Shackleton. His arts and crafts enterprise, something one might have mistaken by its setting for a farce about a displaced Ruskinian guild, was actually extraordinary, imaginative initiative: again and again he upheld the spirits of his men, inspired triumph over adversity, brought out their best.

James Freemantle cites original material from libraries, polar and printing archives, even New Zealand newspapers; his illustrations are telling and unfamiliar. We learn about the press, materials, the context of the project, its technical aspects and special features; some passed-on myths are dispelled. He explains Caslon type, Albion presses, 'algraphy.' His material about Causton's, the printing firm known to Shackleton's family who gave the press and trained the men, is really important. Terse summaries of polar exploration and expedition printing are exemplary.

The first *Aurora Australis* I knew was specially numinous: Shackleton & Frank Wild inscribed it to Kipling two months before leaving on *Endurance*. It belongs to Dulwich College, where I taught and as Keeper of the Archives looked after Shackleton's *James Caird*, the famous *Endurance* life-boat; I liked visitors to handle the book.

In 2000 the College put on the exhibition *Shackleton: the Antarctic and Endurance*; glorious relics were lent by the family and descendants of expedition members. We helped to found the James Caird Society; I edited its Journal, lectured, and wrote articles. This year, asked by the Royal Geographical Society to contribute to their Shackleton's life & legacy exhibition, I also engage with his reading and writing.

For romantic associations *Aurora Australis* is a joy for ever; the scholarly *An Albion in the Antarctic* is a thing of beauty: fashioned by James Freemantle, perfectionist from some past 'heroic age' of book design, his eye chaste as his prose.

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