

not forcing ice. However, it is a fact that any icebreaker navigator will always prefer to stay out of ice if at all possible, even if the open-water route may be longer, as there is less effort required and lower potential for damage to the vessel.

All of these factors add up to prove that nothing startlingly new has taken place at the North Pole in the space of one year. It has already been established by scientific observation — such as Operation Sheba, when the Canadian Coast Guard icebreaker *des Groseilliers*

wintered (1997–98) in the ice of the Beaufort and Chukchi seas — that the overall cover and thickness of drift ice in the Arctic Ocean is decreasing. However, the process is gradual, and the openings in the ice at the North Pole in the summer of 2000 are part of a perfectly natural phenomenon that has always occurred at irregular intervals, and may be repeated at any time or may not occur again for many years. As always, this will depend on the interaction between wind and ice — and will have nothing to do with sudden melting.

Shackleton's *Nimrod*...of Riga?

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Readers of *Polar Record* will be aware of the superb exhibition at the National Maritime Museum entitled 'South: the race to the Pole,' which will continue until 30 September 2001. The exhibition is devoted to the main expeditions of the 'Heroic Age': those of Scott, Shackleton, and Amundsen. The Museum has assembled a magnificent collection of exhibits, and these are well-mounted with clear captions. Not the least valuable aspect of the exhibition is a small (and free!) illustrative guide that is concise, well-written, and calculated to stimulate the interest of the non-specialist visitor to read further in the subject and even to pay a personal visit to Antarctica.

There is a minor puzzle in the exhibition. This relates to the ship's bell of *Nimrod*, which is on display and is the property of the Royal Geographical Society (RGS). I was astonished to note that the inscription on the bell reads 'Nimrod...Riga.' The letters on the bell are rather more angular than those that usually appear on the bells of British ships, and they have a somewhat Teutonic appearance. Unaware of a Baltic registration for Shackleton's vessel, which had been, according to Roland Huntford's book (1985: 175), built in Dundee, I raised the matter with Liza Verity of the Museum's Centre for Maritime Research. She very swiftly solved the mystery by consulting the Lloyds' records. The bell on display is not that of the Antarctic *Nimrod*, but is that of a 421-ton, three-masted schooner built in 1890 by the firm of P. Krause of Widrisch (now Vidrizi) in Latvia. Hence the Riga registration. It was owned by a P. Anderson. Latvia

was in the Russian Empire at the time, but most of the trade of the Baltic provinces was in the hands of Baltic German merchants resident in those countries. This may be the reason why the script on the bell is not Cyrillic.

I also approached Dr A. Tatham, keeper at the Royal Geographical Society, and he was kind enough to conduct a speedy search of the Society's records. The bell had been presented to the RGS by a Mrs H.A. Moore, who believed, in the best of faith, that it was that of Shackleton's *Nimrod*. Doubt concerning this identification came from no less an authority than John King Davis, who had served on the 1907–09 expedition. The RGS checked, and published a clarification in 1960 that the newly acquired bell was not that of Shackleton's *Nimrod*. During the course of research, the RGS was able to establish that the *Nimrod* of its bell had been broken up at a south coast port in the 1920s, and that Shackleton's *Nimrod* had been a total wreck off East Anglia during World War I (*Geographical Journal* 1960).

No doubt, and perfectly reasonably, persons seeing the bell in the premises of the RGS associated it with Shackleton's *Nimrod*, and hence the misidentification in the exhibition.

Bells, however, are fairly indestructable and one wonders if there is any chance of Shackleton's bell ever being found!

I am indebted to Liza Verity of the National Maritime Museum and to Dr A. Tatham of the Royal Geographical Society for their contributions towards unravelling this matter. Also to Mr Juris Mors of Riga for the identification of Widrisch.

References

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