

**NORTHWARD HO! A VOYAGE TOWARDS THE NORTH POLE 1773.** A catalogue to the exhibition at the Captain Cook Memorial Museum. 2010. Contributions from Ann Savours, Sophie Forgan, and Glyn Williams. Whitby: Captain Cook Memorial Museum. 65 p, illustrated, soft cover. No ISBN number. UK: £9.50; Europe: £11.50; rest of the world: £14.50 (including post and packing).

The Captain Cook Memorial Museum, located in the 17th century house on Whitby's harbour in which the young Cook lived as an apprentice and began his career as a seaman, has presented a series of exhibitions in recent years exploring Cook's voyages and those associated with him, such as Sir Joseph Banks. In 2010, the museum expanded this scope to include one of Cook's exploring contemporaries: Constantine John Phipps and his polar expedition of 1773. This excellent exhibit catalogue seeks to rescue the Phipps expedition from its relative obscurity both in polar history and in the awesome shadow cast by Phipps' fellow Yorkshireman, Cook. As the introductory chapter by Ann Savours puts it, the failed attempt at the pole deserves to be known for more than 'the expedition on which young Nelson tried to shoot the polar bear' (page 1). Just how much more is open to some debate.

Phipps was a well-connected British naval commander and member of parliament who in 1773 was selected to lead the first British attempt to reach the North Pole since 1615. He was a friend from their Eton days of Banks. They visited Newfoundland and Labrador together, and they shared a hunger for the practical scientific exploration and rational philosophical enquiry that characterised the age of enlightenment in England. A member of the Royal Society and of the Society of Antiquaries, Phipps served his country in the Seven Years War and had been at the capture of Havana. And, as the fascinating second chapter of this catalogue written by Sophie Forgan, describes it, he possessed and indisputably made great use of one of the best libraries on nautical and polar exploration in England. Like many British naval officers whose careers spanned the Seven Years War, the American Revolution, and the Napoleonic Wars, Phipps was preoccupied with French theoretical studies of ship design, French vessels being routinely believed to be sturdier and faster than British. This combination of practical seamanship, a mind open to new ideas and theories, and friendships with influential men like Banks, led to Phipps' selection to lead the polar expedition of 1773.

The genesis of the expedition lay in the theories of the Swiss geographer Samuel Engel, who believed that sea ice was only formed by fresh water emanating from northern rivers, and the irrepressible lawyer and vice president of the Royal Society, Daines Barrington, the uber-champion of the theory of the open polar sea. When it came to navigating a ship to the North Pole, Barrington, as Savours writes, was never 'daunted by apparent proof of its impracticality' (page 2). The catalogue also delves into the potential influence on the expedition of explorer Louis-Antoine de Bougainville. Bougainville's own

proposal for an expedition to the pole over two years using two specially-strengthened vessels had been rejected in September 1772 (and in just ten days at that, showing the remarkable speed of the government grants process two and a half centuries ago). Barrington took up his position at the Royal Society in December, and within a month was talking to Lord Sandwich about an expedition to the East Indies over the pole. Sandwich presented the idea to George III a few weeks later and, by mid-April, 1773, Phipps had been named to command an expedition of two ships to the pole via northwest Spitsbergen.

The expedition consisted of specially strengthened shore bombardment vessels, *Carcass*, commanded by future Admiral of the Red Skeffington Lutwidge, and *Racehorse*, to be commanded by Phipps. Both vessels were further stiffened for the anticipated work in the ice as well as among the expected rocks and shoals of the north coast of Svalbard. Either vessel could evacuate the entire expedition in the event of the loss of the other. *Carcass* carried a compliment of eighty officers and men; *Racehorse* ninety, with four veterans of the Greenland whaling grounds as ice pilots, and the catalogue contains excellent descriptions of Phipps' commendable care in selecting victuals that were thought to maximise the effectiveness of his men in Arctic conditions, including 'one hundred butts of porter to be brewed with the best malt and hops, that they [the men] might have proper drink to fortify themselves against the rigour of the climate they were about to pass' (page 3).

In a similar way, the catalogue details Phipps' efforts at Arctic clothing. Since none of this specialised clothing survives, the museum brilliantly entered into partnership with the Polish Maritime Museum to display items of cold weather clothing recovered from a recent underwater archaeology expedition to the site of a contemporary Whitby-built vessel wrecked off Poland in 1785. This excavation revealed a trove of cold weather gear, woolen mittens, stockings, and hats, among other items, preserved for 210 years in the mud of the Baltic, and offers a glimpse into the kinds of clothing with which Phipps would have outfitted his men.

Phipps' instructions were to follow open water near northwest Svalbard as far north as possible. The track of the voyage, reproduced here, shows an overlapping series of geometric tacks north of Fair Haven in Northwest Spitsbergen. For decades, the logbooks of whalers operating in these waters had recorded the changing nature of the polar ice. The line of ice would shift in different summers, at some years crushing down upon the islands of northwest Spitsbergen, in others moving offshore and leaving an ice-free passage trending northeast from the whaling stations of Amsterdam and Danes islands all the way to the Seven Islands. It was these seasonal variations that Barrington had used to argue that one only need push a little further north before an ice-free corridor was located that would allow ships to sail directly to the Pole.

Despite such occasional open waters, Phipps would (re)discover that pack ice near 81° north always remained as an impassable barrier to the North Pole. The expedition left England in May 1773, and by the end of June had raised Prins

Karls Forland. The vessels navigated an ice-free corridor along the north coast of Svalbard, but found no ice free passage to the pole itself. The two vessels reached the Dutch roadstead at Fair Haven in mid July and anchored in eleven fathoms. Wherever he looked, Phipps saw a uniform field of ice extending to the north. He turned east along Reindeerflya, then north again when he encountered loose ice north of Woodfjorden. On 27 July, the expedition attained a new furthest north of 80° 48'N, where the vessels were blocked by a line of ice extending nearly east to west. This record held for more than three decades, until Scoresby increased it in 1806.

Phipps continued to force his vessels east, and occasionally entered openings in the ice wall that extended a few miles north. But each time, the leads closed, and forced Phipps to retreat. The ships continued eastward, and on 3 August reached Sjuøyane (the Seven Islands), the northernmost islands in the Svalbard archipelago, where the ships were beset. The pressure of the ice forced Phipps to contemplate abandoning the vessels and for four days he led crews onto the ice to man haul the small boats westwards in search of open water. Foreshadowing the Franklin debacle, Phipps at one point man hauls with his men for six hours, then orders a halt while he called for a meal on his personal dinner service. These plans spoil when the portly cook dropped the Captain's silver into an ice fissure that he was trying to leap; the Phipps silver is no doubt lying on the bottom still, somewhere south of the island in the Sjuøyane that was later named for him.

With northward progress halted, Phipps nevertheless continued a programme of scientific research, using such in-

struments as a thermometer designed by Lord Cavendish for measuring water temperature, and an apparatus invented by Dr. Irving for distilling fresh water from salt water. The catalogue describes these and other scientific researches, and goes to some length to verify whether or not the famous incident between a large polar bear and fourteen-year-old Horatio Nelson, a midshipman on board the *Carcass*, actually took place.

On the larger import of the expedition, especially in relation to the revolutionary voyages of Cook, the catalogue is less certain. Phipps quit the waters around Svalbard on 22 August. On 7 September, the expedition reached Shetland, and then fought through a succession of gales until they regained the Thames on 24 September. Phipps had demonstrated conclusively that no direct open sea route to the North Pole could be had from the waters between Svalbard and Greenland, nor from the waters directly north of Svalbard. These were waters, he wrote, 'without the smallest appearance of any opening' to the north (page 18). But these direct observations were repeatedly ignored for a century or more as the power of the idea of the open polar sea continued to defy even the most direct assaults from rational, practical data collected by some of the best expedition leaders in the history of exploration. It is the cultural absorption and integration, or lack thereof, of the results produced by these leaders that would make for a worthy subject of a future effort by this small yet highly productive regional museum. (P.J. Capelotti, Division of Social Sciences, Penn State Abington College, Abington, PA 19001, USA.)