

Great Britain's Greatest Irish Polar Expeditioner

Synopsis

PURPOSE: Special study of Ireland's County Kildare's Sir Ernest H. Shackleton's five (1901-22) polar expeditionary exposures, using a concise presentation of the most significant material postally documenting them.

INTRODUCTION: Sir Ernest H. Shackleton, (affectionately known as "Boss"), was a beloved (by his men, not to mention his swooning female admirers) polar expeditionary member and leader on five expeditions (one military) at the close of the Heroic Age of polar activity (1901-22). A native of County Kildare, Ireland, he was believed to have suffered discrimination in the British polar community, because of his heritage and the fact that he was a former merchant mariner among Royal Navy officers.

Despite these barriers, he became renowned for his leadership and expeditionary successes, to include a particularly catastrophic Antarctic expedition (1914-17 *Endurance*). Even this disaster became a triumph as he miraculously saved all stranded men after navigating almost 1,000-miles in a whaleboat, eventually to save all with an international rescue.

Ironically, he would die at the onset of his fifth expeditionary experience, being buried in the Antarctic. Before this, he had significantly explored and discovered (land and science) and is credited with landmark achievements (e.g., a farthest south attainment, participant in 1st Antarctic "flight," 1st Antarctic expedition post office, 1st military expedition with professional polar logistical orientation, etc.).

BACKGROUND: There are existing single-frame exhibits of material from the first two polar expeditions on which Ernest Shackleton served (the first [before being invalidated out] as one of its officers); 1901-04 *British Antarctic Expedition* or "Scott I" and his first-led polar expedition (1907-09 *British Antarctic Expedition* or "Nimrod Expedition." There also are multi-frame exhibits of Allied Intervention of Russia mail that include some from the polar (NREF) *North Russia Expeditionary Force* (1918-19).

Occasionally polar expedition Heroic Age (pre-1924) exhibits even might have a piece or two from his 1914-17 disastrous "*Endurance Expedition*" (*Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition*) and maybe (in rare instances) also from *Shackleton-Rowett (Antarctic) Expedition* (1921-22). Sometimes there are entire exhibits rightfully idolizing Shackleton, though only with modern postage stamps that picture him and commemorate his polar activities.

However, no previous exhibitor has attempted to record ALL of his five polar exposures with sufficient contemporaneous items to adequately document them in a cohesive, philatelically-worthy presentation with adequate balance that would convey a significant understanding and appreciation of his polar (scientific and military) "expeditionary" experiences and achievements. Though certainly a well known and popular subject in polar philately, an all-inclusive "Shackleton" exhibit of this type probably has not occurred before because much of the required material represents quite an acquisition challenge.

Even that from the more accessible events (*Scott I* and *Nimrod*) still embody procurement difficulties. Anything from the following two Antarctic expeditions is extraordinarily elusive. Additionally, his penultimate "expeditionary" experience (1918-19 *North Russia Expeditionary Force*) only can be postally documented by just one known piece (in this exhibit).

WHY A SINGLE-FRAME EXHIBIT? *Scott I* (1901-04) can fill a single frame, though much of that material would appear similar, only demonstrating postings from different personalities. However, if focusing solely on Shackleton, one needs only one page for his introduction to polar expeditions. He did not lead this Antarctic expedition (1901-04 *Scott I*) and was not even with it

during its entire life (being invalidated home midway through it). Hardly any mail *from* Shackleton on *Scott I* exists, so just one of those scarce pieces would be sufficient.

The next Shackleton polar adventure (his first led expedition, 1907-09 *Nimrod* Antarctic Expedition) can fill a few more pages than what is here. However, those additional items would not be necessary to explain its key events, including its postal "first," beyond what I have presented.

It would be impossible to attain even a single-frame for the (1914-17) *Endurance* Expedition and Shackleton-Rowett (1921-22). Both were calamitous for Shackleton.

For the former, it would be senseless to expect many examples from dozens of stranded men almost immediately struggling to survive as they begin their proposed Antarctic venture. This rationale would include material from their supporting ("Ross Sea") party that suffered a similar fate on the other side of the Antarctic continent. Of course, his last expedition (Shackleton-Rowett [S-R]) truly was his last, as he died one day after arriving in the southern polar region.

That still would not be a reason not to have exist more Shackleton-Rowett items. However, it seems that without Sir Ernest's presence, it produced a paltry amount of postal artifacts from a little used expedition post office that he personally had inspired and ensured be established. Even external post office mail is virtually unknown (though one is shown in this exhibit).

Thus there is a title page followed by one page for the introductory expedition (1901-04 *Scott I*). His first led (and arguably most successful) is accorded the most space (five pages). Four pages *each* are devoted to 1914-17 *Endurance* and 1921-22 *Shackleton-Rowett*. A solo page is reserved for *North Russia Expeditionary Force's* only known "Shackleton" piece. The entire presentation thoroughly tells the whole "Shackleton" expeditionary story in just sixteen compact pages.

IMPORTANCE: Shackleton is the best known and most highly respected polar expeditionary leader of the Heroic Age. His expeditionary experiences (including two he served only as "member") produced some of the most iconic, elusive and desirable material of polar philately from the end of the Heroic Age.

HIGHLIGHTS: **Only** NREF mail known from Shackleton. **One** of few pieces from him on *Scott I* and **only** example on its "Wrench cards." **Two** of the few examples of mail from South Georgia during *Endurance* Expedition. **One** of few incoming *Endurance* mails to South Georgia. **Only** known European lecture tour mail from post-*Endurance* (sent from Germany to his daughter). **Proof** impression of 1st Antarctic expedition postmark. **One** of just a few pieces of *Aurora* (sub-*Endurance* Expedition) mail. **One** of only a few examples of S-R expedition's ship cachet on mail. **One** from the only known pair of S-R Gough Island post office usages. The **only** other known S-R postal markings' proof sheet. **Only** known S-R dispatch to the USA.

CONDITION: Though pristine pieces always are nice to see, the scarcity and commercial nature of most this material make such aspirations illusionary for this exhibit.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Vogel, Hal & Serge Kahn, *Ahead of the Pack* (2016), pp. 202-5, 258-9, 274-6. Available from APRL.

Vogel, Hal, "The Five Polar 'Expeditions' of Great Britain's Greatest Irish Polar Expeditioner," *The Revealer* (journal of the Éire Philatelic Association), Spring (pp. 14-22) & Summer (pp. 20-29), 2019.

History: LG March Party'19 + Grand.