

Excerpts from Ann Savours' 'Clements Markham; The Longest Serving Officer, Most Prolific Editor' within *Compassing the Vaste Globe of the Earth* (Studies in the History of the Hakluyt Society 1846-1996), edited by R.C. Bridges and P.E.H. Hair (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1996, Series II, Volume 183). Pages 181-83; 187-88.

Markham never returned to the Arctic but in the last decades of the century he reflected on the need for further exploration of the Polar regions. According to the tribute he wrote after Robert Falcon Scott's death in 1912, Markham first met the future Antarctic explorer in the West Indies in 1887, when the young midshipman won a cutter race and Markham immediately marked him out for later deployment.⁷ In 1896 Markham was present in Christiania (Oslo) to welcome home the Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen and his vessel, the 'Fram'. Nansen had made the first crossing of the Greenland ice cap before organising the North Pole expedition of 1893-96. Markham's thoughts were, however, turning to the South. At this date the south polar regions were scarcely better known than they had been in the 1840s. Owing to the unexpected resignation of his predecessor, Markham was elected President of the Royal Geographical Society in 1893 and was thus in an admirable position to campaign for the despatch of an expedition to the Antarctic. At his first Council meeting an Antarctic steering committee was appointed.¹ Thereafter Markham campaigned ceaselessly to gain the interest in his proposals of Government, geographers, scientists and the general public. There was much disagreement among the experts, and some plotting behind the scenes,² but funds were eventually raised and a special ship, the 'Discovery', was built.³ The Government would not sanction a naval expedition, but was willing to help with the secondment of naval officers and ratings, so that the practical organisation of the National Antarctic ('Discovery') Expedition fell into the hands of Captain Scott.

The achievements of the 1901-1904 expedition in the Antarctic and the value of the published scientific results were very considerable. As stated earlier, Scott named a mountain, 'a monster of unsurpassed eminence and dignity', Mount Markham.⁴ Markham's responsibilities were by no means over when the 'Discovery' left the British Isles. His principal task was to raise funds for the purchase and despatch of a relief ship, the 'Morning'. Markham became the 'Managing Owner' of the 'Morning' as he was of the 'Discovery', while the vessels actually belonged to the Royal Geographical Society. Markham met the 'Discovery' on her return to England in September 1904 and sailed from Spithead up the Thames to her berth in the East India Dock. Markham, Scott, and Ernest Shackleton (who had been invalided home at the end of the first year), dined together and had 'a very jolly evening'.⁵ Markham later received the silver sledge, mentioned earlier in this essay, from the officers and men of the 'Discovery'. Scott found a welcome retreat at the Markhams' house, 21 Eccleston Square, in which to write his narrative of the expedition.¹ There can be no doubt that the 1901-1904 Antarctic expedition was a triumph for Markham, a proof of his organising ability in combining practical, geographical and scientific considerations, and the most notable achievement of his long life.²

The early years of the twentieth century have been called the 'heroic age of Antarctic exploration', when, by their inland journeys, men pitted themselves against the unforgiving climate, terrain and isolation of the frozen continent. Markham's call in the 1890s for the renewal of Antarctic exploration, which was supported by the International Geographical Congress of 1895 held in London which he chaired, resulted not only in the British expedition of 1901-1904, but also in expeditions from Germany, Scotland, France, Belgium and Sweden.³ Further British expeditions followed, but Markham's part in these was limited. Although

he had earlier spoken highly of Shackleton, the latter's independent resolve to lead an expedition to the Ross Sea in 1907-1909 earned Markham's bitter disapproval, despite the South Magnetic Pole being reached and a party sledging to within 97 miles of the South Pole itself. Markham did, however, help in an advisory capacity with the planning of what became known as 'Scott's last expedition'. Before Scott left in June 1910 Markham had stood as godfather to Scott's baby son, Peter Markham Scott. The last entry in Markham's last diary, made on 18 January 1916, reads as follows: 'Sturdy little Peter Scott came and walked with us in the square garden. I often think of his dear father and the men he has trained to fight his country's battles.',⁴

1 John Murray, 'The renewal of Antarctic exploration', *Geographical Journal*, 3, 1894, pp. 1-42, map p. 80.

2 The Royal Society was involved - Markham had become a Fellow in the 1870s - but his views prevailed over those of the Royal Society's representatives. For varying interpretations of these events, from different viewpoints, see H. R. Mill, *The Record of the Royal Geographical Society*, London, 1930, pp. 133-68; Cameron, *History of the RGS*, pp. 137-8; Clive Holland, ed., *Clements Markham: Antarctic Obsession*, Aldburgh, 1986, pp. 6-7; and Ann Savours, *The Voyages of the 'Discovery'*, London, 1992, 2nd. ed., 1994, pp. 1-102, which discusses the expedition, its origins and previous interpretations.

3 Built and now berthed at Dundee, she was launched by Markham's wife, Minna.

4 For details of the expedition, see Savours, *The Voyages of the 'Discovery'*, pp. 22- 92.

5 RGSA, CRM 1/15.

1 R. F. Scott, *The Voyage of the 'Discovery'*, 2 vols, London, 1905.

2 Cameron, *History of the RGS*, pp. 137-41. However, Markham's involvement with Antarctic exploration has been denigrated in Roland Huntford, *Scott and Amundsen*, London, 1979, and *Shackleton*, London, 1985, in the present writer's view unfairly.

3 Markham however did not approve of foreigners 'poaching in our preserves ...

Foreigners, anyhow, never get much beyond the Antarctic Circle' (Cameron, *History of the RGS*, p. 143). Nevertheless, the 1901-1904 expedition worked in scientific concert with the Germans, in the 'Gauss', between 1901 and 1903.

4 A. H. Markham, *Sir Clements Markham*, p. 361.

Even in his later years, Markham was not always desk-bound, however. By invitation of his cousin, who was its Commodore, he several times sailed

with the Naval Training Squadron in the West Indies, delighting in the company of the officers and midshipmen. He and his wife spent holidays in Norway and southern Europe, especially Portugal.⁵ The outbreak of war in Europe did not persuade the Markhams to abandon their seaborne visits to Portugal and they even went as far as Madeira, despite the menace of submarines. In January 1916 they were back in London. On 29 January Markham was in bed suffering from one of his recurrent attacks of gout and reading an early Portuguese printed book. Under an electric light bulb not switched on, he read by candle-light – as he had done as a midshipman in his hammock. Perhaps he nodded off for a moment and the flame caught his bedclothes. Although his calls for assistance were instantly met and the fire extinguished, the shock caused him to lose consciousness and he died peacefully after some twenty hours. t

Eighty years after his death, many of Markham's books are still in use and several have been recently reprinted. But above all, two British learned societies - both with an international membership - now approach the twenty-first century in full intellectual vigour, and with considerable achievements during the present century, thanks in no small part to the career and devoted attentions of Clements Markham.

⁵ Hence Clements R. Markham, *The Story of Majorca and Minorca*, London, 1908.

Estoril, on the coast of Portugal, became a favourite winter resort for the elderly couple, hence, *List of Plants collected round Estoril during Three Seasons by Lady Markham and her Friends, with an Introduction by Sir Clements Markham, K.C.B., etc.*, Lisbon, 1910.

¹ A. H. Markham, *Sir Clements Markham*, p. 361; Mill, *Record of the RGS*, p. 168.