

# Sledge and flag from Shackleton's Nimrod expedition at risk of being lost abroad

- Expedition was the first in history to travel within 100 miles of the South Pole□
- Sledge carried supplies for the four men who undertook the famous failed march to the Pole in 1909□

Arts Minister Helen Whately has stopped the export of a sledge and flag that was taken on Ernest Shackleton's 1907 – 1909 British Antarctic Expedition following their sale to an overseas buyer.

The items are valued at £227,500 plus £8,750 VAT and are at risk of export unless a UK buyer can be found to add the items to the national collection so they can be enjoyed by the public.

The expedition, known as Nimrod, was the first led by famous explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton (1874 – 1922). He led three expeditions to the Antarctic in the early twentieth century, this one with the intention of being the first to the South Pole.

During Nimrod, Shackleton, chose three other men from the group – Frank Wild, Eric Marshall and Jameson Adams – to make the attempt on the Pole. The sledge and the flag were hauled, first by pony and then by the men, to within 97.5 miles of their objective, the South Pole before famously turning back to Discovery Point in 1909.

This sledge was one of four used to carry the supplies and equipment the team needed to survive in the extreme conditions. This expedition was the greatest advance to the Pole in history until Amundsen and Scott reached the South Pole separately three years later in 1912.

## **Arts Minister Helen Whately said:**

Shackleton's expeditions to the South Pole are legendary. The sledge and the flag were part of his ground-breaking Nimrod expedition. Together, they help to tell the story of one of the most daring moments in the twentieth century.

The UK has a proud history of discovery, and it would be a terrible loss for the nation if these unique items did not stay in the country.

The items at risk of export belonged to Dr Eric Marshall (1879 – 1963), a

surgeon and polar explorer, who was one of the group chosen to accompany Shackleton on the march to the South Pole during the Nimrod expedition. Marshall was an indispensable member of Shackleton's team, acting as surgeon, surveyor, cartographer and principal photographer.

The items were brought back to the UK by Marshall and in the 1950s he donated them to his alma mater, Monkton Combe School in Bath. The flag itself is unique, having been handmade and designed for the expedition and is a prominent feature in many of the famous photographs of the journey.

### **The Chairman of the RCEWA, Sir Hayden Phillips said:**

This sledge and flag, belonging to Eric Marshall, are evocative objects. In themselves, the sledge is beautifully crafted; and the square flag unusual, in that the other sledging flags on the 1906 Nimrod expedition were pennants. It appears in photographs, distinct from the others, but it was more often wrapped around Marshall to help him keep warm when sledging with ponies.

It is the story around these objects which gives dramatic and historic resonance to them. Marshall was the expedition's surgeon, cartographer, principal photographer and the keeper of the record of the expedition. It was fairly chaotically organised. Unlike Scott and Amundsen later, Shackleton received no public funds. When their ship arrived in Antarctica (it had to be towed, so laden was it) it could not moor, so everything they needed (which could not walk or swim itself), had to be thrown overboard.

Relations between Marshall and Shackleton were strained, and that may be an understatement, as they were very different in character. Returning from the most southerly point ever reached, Marshall fell into a crevasse. When he emerged, he told Shackleton that he had dropped the notebook recording their journey, as he fell. Shackleton ordered him to go back down and find it. He did.

It may be said that this expedition was a heroic failure but it went further south towards the pole than ever before and blazed the trail which Scott and Amundsen were to follow. The story behind these objects is a riveting saga. Generations to come will be prompted to discover it if the sledge and the flag can be on public display in this country. We need to keep them."

The Minister's decision follows the advice of the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest (RCEWA). The committee noted that very few objects from the expedition have survived, and

that Nimrod was of outstanding significance for the history of Polar exploration. They also noted that the items provided the public with a tangible connection to a significant chapter in the history of the United Kingdom.

The RCEWA made its recommendation on the grounds of the items outstanding significance for the study of Polar exploration and Ernest Shackleton's Nimrod expedition.

The decision on the export licence application for the items will be deferred until 6 May 2020. This may be extended until 6 August 2020 if a serious intention to raise funds to purchase it is made at the recommended price of £227,500 plus £8,750 VAT .

## Notes to editors

1. Organisations or individuals interested in purchasing the items should contact the RCEWA on 0845 300 6200.
2. Details of the items are as follows: □ An Antarctic sledge and framed plaque, used on the British Antarctic Expedition ('Nimrod Expedition'), 1907-09, retained by Eric Marshall. Eric Marshall's sledge flag used on the British Antarctic Expedition ('Nimrod Expedition'), 1907-09.  
Materials: Ash and hickory with fibre and rawhide bindings  
Dimensions: 3360mm x 600mm x 200mm  
Manufacturer: LH Hagen and Co, Oslo, Norway, 1907  
Date: 1907-1909
3. Provenance: Both items belonged to Dr Eric Marshall, surgeon and polar explorer. Dr Eric Marshall was a member of the British Antarctic Expedition 1907-09 (Nimrod) led by Sir Ernest Shackleton, which aimed to reach the South Pole. Marshall was one of the four men picked to join the Southern Party to undertake the sledge march to the pole, which was famously abandoned less than 100 miles from their intended destination, which was the record for a farthest south until Amundsen and Scott conquered the pole in three years later. These items were returned to the UK on the Nimrod and retained by Marshall until the 1950s, when he donated them to his alma mater Monkton Combe School in Bath. They have been kept at the school and displayed until sold by it at Bonham's as lots [195](#) and [196](#) in its 6th February 2019 Travel and Exploration sale.
4. The Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest is an independent body, serviced by The Arts Council, which advises the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on whether a cultural object, intended for export, is of national importance under specified criteria.
5. The Arts Council champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives. It supports a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to digital art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. [www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk). □