

British Polar Exploration and Research: A Historical and Medallic Record with Biographies 1818-1999, by Lieutenant Colonel Neville W. Poulson & Rear Admiral J.A.L. Myres, CB. (London: Savannah Publications, 90 Dartmouth Road, Forest Hill, London SE23 3HZ; 2000) 742 pp., £80. ISBN 1-902366-05-0.

Book review by Glenn M. Stein, FRGS
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As a researcher and collector of polar medals for 17 years, an updated and revised edition of Lieut.-Col. Poulson's 1968 work *The White Ribbon* had been anticipated for several years. The result is a book three times the length of its predecessor, and though it may seem expensive at £80 one should bear in mind that scarce used copies of the original *The White Ribbon* sell for £50-60.

The text of the new work regarding descriptions of the primary medals concerned (Arctic 1818-55, Arctic 1875-76 and 1904 Polar Medals) and related expedition histories, was essentially taken directly from *The White Ribbon*. Additions and corrections were made, most notably much additional information on the Hudson's Bay Company recipients and the mention of the 1898-1900 Southern Cross Expedition member who was awarded a Polar Medal in 1976. This unusual award of the medal to the expedition's last surviving member rang a sad note when the gentleman died a few months before *The London Gazette* announcement.

On an earlier Antarctic note, the introductory paragraph to Franklin's last expedition says that the Erebus and Terror "...had been used by Sir James Clark Ross in his three memorable voyages in the Antarctic in 1839-43 (for which there was subsequently no medallic recognition)." It should be noted that Ross did request an Arctic 1818-55 Medal (First Arctic) for his crews, but it was refused by the Admiralty. As several of these men also participated in Arctic voyages which qualified for the award, it's a pity that a full listing of these "north and south men" was not included in the book.

The heart of this reference work lies in the biographical and medallic information. There is no doubt that there has been a wealth of data added since the publication of *The White Ribbon*, and that this information will benefit collectors and researchers for years to come. I am mystified, however, by the minefield of errors and omissions due to the severe underutilization of published data and original research made available to the authors.

Some 250 pages contain in alphabetical listing of persons eligible for the First Arctic Medal, along with varying amounts of biographical information, whether or not the medal was issued to the individual or next-of-kin, and if a named/attributable medal is known to exist. The award was

issued with a plain edge, though several recipients/family members had it engraved with individual details. Though this section has many biographical details, much of what is in print has been left untouched I will now provide some problematic examples.

Let us take one Henry (Harry) Peglar, Captain of the Foretop, HMS *Terror* (1845-48), to illustrate the circumstantial evidence regarding this man's fate. Poulson writes that "His was one of the bodies identified in 1859 by McClintock on King William Island." This information was gleaned from Richard Cyriax's 1939 book *Sir John Franklin's Last Expedition* (recently reprinted).

In 1859, McClintock found a skeleton a few miles east of Cape Herschel, around which lay tattered pieces of clothing and uniform. Nearby were two coins, a clothes brush, a small comb containing light brown hairs, and a pocketbook with papers inside. Among the papers was a seaman's certificate named to Peglar. Cyriax and A.G.E. Jones wrote an article in 1954 for *The Mariner's Mirror* (journal of The Society of Nautical Research) which closely examined the contents of the recovered papers. In this article, the authors state that "McClintock thought the skeleton was presumably that of Harry Peglar, but the correctness of this assumption can be questioned. The uniform was that of a steward or officer's servant...Peglar joined the *Terror* as a Captain of the Foretop, and when he did so in 1845, had never at any time been a steward in the Royal Navy...". Finally, the article goes on to suggest, through varying degrees of evidence, that the remains may have been that of Thomas Armitage, Gunroom Steward in the *Terror*. Armitage had formerly served with Peglar, and it's possible the latter entrusted his seaman's certificate and other personal papers to the Gunroom Steward. In 1995, I uncovered another possible identity of the skeleton, that of William Gibson, Subordinate Officers' Steward, in the *Terror*. He served with Peglar just prior to their joining the Arctic expedition.

Whether or not the First Arctic Medal was issued to an individual or his next-of-kin is supposedly indicated on the original roll in a column titled "When delivered or sent. Remarks &c.". I write supposedly indicated because medal rolls are known to contain inaccuracies and omissions. When Poulson has "No medal issued." by a man's name, he is assuming the blank in the Remarks column means a medal was never issued for that individual. I asked a long time medal researcher about this, and this person replied: "I agree that the lack of positive information is an insecure basis to decide categorically whether or not a medal has or has not been issued." Perfectly genuine named/attributed medals may forever be frowned upon because there was "No medal issued."

The third point, named/attributed medals known to exist, is of particular concern to collectors, since Poulson rarely gives naming details, the question of provenance rears its head in no small way.

For example, the medals of Lieut. Henry Prescott Bance (HMS *Assistance*/1850-51) are identified in the text as “Medal exists with unnamed Baltic Medal.” He is also entitled to a South Africa 1853 Medal, which was issued officially named to Bance as an Additional Lieutenant aboard HMS *Castor*, but this award was not with the First Arctic and Baltic Medals. In August 1989, a leading London dealer offered unnamed First Arctic and Baltic awards, along with a book, inscribed in ink to Bance, *Memoirs of Rear-Admiral Sir W. Edward Parry, Kt., Late Lieut.-Governor of Greenwich Hospital*, by Rev. Edward Parry, MA, is inscribed: “Henry Bance with best wishes from C.P. Glunise 1 May 1857.” The medals and book were then offered by an auction house in April 1990, but by this time, the First Arctic was engraved in neat, upright, serifed capitals: HENRY.P.BANCE./”ASSISTANCE”. The lot was purchased by another dealer, and offered in his May 1990 list. Since Poulson does not mention whether the First Arctic is named/unnamed, or any reference to the accompanying inscribed book, collectors remain in the dark in the dark as to the unsettling history of this lot. Omission of documents and artifacts accompanying medals is frequent throughout the book, and thus, a golden opportunity to highlight the historical integrity/dubious provenance of such items is lost.

One section of the book that I was particularly keen on seeing covers the Arctic 1875-76 Medal (Second Arctic). The medal was issued named in a distinct style, and a wealth of information exists in published sources alone regarding both officers and other ranks. However, a mere 14 pages are devoted to the 155 recipients of HMS *Alert* and *Discovery*, and the private vessel *Pandora*. Oddly, there is no mention that the *Pandora* was purchased and renamed *Jeannette*, and used in the tragic 1879-1882 American Arctic expedition. Yet, the medal issued for this venture is described in the book. The *Alert* and *Discovery* were engaged in an expedition during 1875-76. The *Pandora* undertook a private North-West Passage expedition in 1875 (which did not qualify for the medal), but qualified under Admiralty instructions in 1876 to communicate with the *Alert* and *Discovery*.

Chapter two’s narrative of the 1875-76 expedition mentions that a Greenland native named Hans Hendrik (Hans Henry on the medal roll, and also spelled Hendrick/Henri/Heindrich in various sources) joined the *Discovery* at Proven, Greenland. His full name was Hans Christian Hendrik, and his prominence during Arctic exploration over 20 years is not even hinted at in the text. He served as a Dog Sledge Driver and Hunter on four expeditions: Kane/1853-54, Hayes/1860-61, Hall/1871-73, and during the 1875-76 venture. Hendrik’s participation in the Kane Expedition qualified him for the First Arctic Medal. His name never made it on the official medal roll, and

therefore, he missed out on being one of possibly only five men entitled to both First and Second Arctic issues, but evidently only four actually received both awards. Poulsom treats the Hans Christian for 1853-54 and the Hans Henry for 1875-76 as two different individuals.

It is difficult to understand why two well known books about the 1875-76 voyage were not consulted (at least, they are not listed in the bibliography), as they contain much useful biographical information. These are Capt. Sir G.S. Nares' *Narrative of a Voyage to the Polar Sea* (two volumes/1878) and Rear Admiral A.H. Markham's *The Great Frozen Sea* (1894). These works would have at least allowed for a far fuller picture of sledging activities. In addition, Nares' book identifies each sailor's rating, allowing several men to escape the bland rank descriptions of Petty Officer 1st or 2nd Class found in Poulsom and Myres.

Two glaring errors regarding the Northern Sledge Party need to be addressed. In describing this group's situation on the ice it is stated that "By 5 June [1876] the returning party was only some 30 miles from Alert, but they were so weakened by scurvy that one fit man, Lieutenant Alfred Parr, was sent on alone to seek help from the ship and they were all recovered." (my emphasis). Yet, under Marine Gunner George Porter is written, "Died of scurvy on June 8, 1876 at 27 years of age whilst returning with the Northern Sledge Party with HM Sledge *Victoria*. Was buried on an ice floe in latitude 82 degrees 41' N." Equally inexplicable is the following information under Royal Army Captain Henry W. Feilden – "...he was in the Northern Sledge Party towards the North Pole." Feilden was one of two Naturalists with the expedition, but never served with the Northern Sledge Party.

Poulsom indicates a survival rate of over 45% for Second Arctic Medals, yet several additional medals have survived. I can add the following "survivors," along with notable details regarding known medals listed in the text.

HMS Alert

Pte. William Ellard, RM – Honeyman Collection, Natural History Museum, Los Angeles, California, USA/1995

William J. Gore, Stoker – Glendining's/Oct. 26, 1906

Robert Joiner, Ldg. Stoker – Glendining's/Jan. 27, 1910

David Mitchell, AB – Original medal in a private collection/2001. Poulsom notes the existence of a possible replacement medal, but it has no milled edge and its naming is highly suspect.

John Pearson, AB – Poulson lists the existence of his Second Arctic, paired with a South Africa 1877-79, but makes no mention of the “1879” clasp or its impressed naming (in a style not unlike the QSA). Douglas-Morris’ roll does not indicate a duplicate issue, so this may serve as an example of what was noted earlier in the review regarding medal rolls’ reliability. In October 1972, the single Arctic Medal was offered in *Hayward’s Gazette*.

James Self, AB – Willouby Coins & Medals/February 1982

George Winstone, AB – Poulson notes this man’s medal, but incorrectly writes that he served on the historic *Challenger* Expedition from 1872-73. In fact, Winstone was on the *Challenger* until December 1874, when he left the ship at Hong Kong to return home and join *Alert*. The *Alert* reached Greenland on July 6, 1875, just two days shy of Winstone’s 20th birthday; he was the expedition’s youngest member, and was certainly the youngest in the Northern Sledge Party.

HMS *Discovery*

Engineer Daniel Cartmel – Cartmel’s descendants retain his medal/2000. In addition, they also have original photographs from the expedition.

William Jenkins, Carpenter’s Mate – Toad Hall Medals/September 1981 Traces of brooch marks on reverse.

Charles William Paul, AB – The British Museum/1995

Pte. Henry Petty, RM – Sotheby’s/June 29, 1904

James Phillips, Domestic 2nd Class (Wardroom Cook) – Private collection/1994; medal lacks suspension

John Langston Saggars, AB – Poulson lists this medal, but does not note that the middle initial is engraved on the medal as an “S”. This is likely an engraver’s error, since the letters “L” and “S” are quite similar when written in script; engravers may have worked from a handwritten list of recipients.

Henry Windser/Winser/Winsor, Carpenter’s Crew – Medal known on the market in the early 20th century.

Pandora

William Ricketts, AB – Glendining's/Sept. 25, 1919

Turning to the 1904 Polar Medal, which covers expeditions for both the Arctic and Antarctic and is still issued today, it is pleasing to see many details under the recipients' biographies.

Unfortunately, mention is not always made of polar services for which no medal/clasp was awarded to the individuals. In addition, it is worthy to note that some recipients were awarded military campaign medals for scientific work in vastly different climes. Dr. Stanley Wells Kemp, FRS, is a good example. A recipient of the Royal Geographical Society's Victoria Medal, Kemp received the Indian General Service Medal in Silver, with bar for Abor 1911-12, while the Zoologist attached to the Survey of India party accompanying the expedition in north eastern India.

The particularly frustrating thing about the biographies concerns the listing and handling of recipients' medals and artifacts, which in several cases are not mentioned at all. A case in point is Lieut. H.R. Bowers, RIM, who died with Captain Scott on the way back from the South Pole. On June 28, 1984, Sotheby's auctioned Bowers' medals, to include his Polar Medal, Royal Geographical Society (RGS) Silver Medal (unnamed as issued, in case of issue), and an Italian Royal Geographical Society Silver Medal (named and dated, in case of issue). The lot made £13,000; as of 1995, it was still in a private collection in Canada. At the same sale Capt. Oates similar group of medals made £50,000, but this too is omitted from the text.

Turning to the medals of Petty Officer Frank V. Browning, of the 1910-13 Antarctic Expedition's Northern Party, Poulson simply states: "He held the following medals:- 1914-15 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal, Polar Medal". In fact, in March 1970, Browning's group was offered in Spink's Numismatic Circular at £350, but the British War Medal was noted as missing, and there was a RGS Special Medal in Bronze with the lot; the latter was not noted as being named. By February 1978, the lot was offered by a dealer at £750, but this time, a BWM was included with engraved naming; again, the RGS Medal was not noted as being named. At the 1992 OMSA convention, Browning's group was offered on consignment by a leading medal firm, without the Polar Medal, for, £750, on this occasion, the RGS medal was named (in tall, thin, serified capitals). The lot did not sell and was eventually auctioned in May 1993 for £630. As of 1996, the Polar Medal was held by a Briton living in South Africa.

The Boatswain of the 1902-04 Antarctic Expedition was a Petty Officer 1st Cl. named Thomas A.F. Feather, and the entry regarding his awards is typically bland: "Awarded the following medals: 1914-15 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal, Polar Medal, Naval Long Service &

Good Conduct Medal (EVIIR)". The group, in private hands in Britain, also includes several artifacts: silver bosun's pipe and chain, one gilt Discovery uniform button, silver monogrammed cigarette case, brass and enamel pocket matchbox (an official memento of the Channel Fleet's visit to Blackpool during 9-11 August 1907), and silver monogrammed napkin ring. Over the years, another gilt button and three spoons were separated from the lot, the latter going to Feather's daughter. On a final note, Feather was specially Mentioned in Despatches (MID) by Scott, and this fact is not indicated in the writings.

Oddly, the style of noting individuals' awards changed from the First and Second Arctic Medals to the Polar Medal. In the former, the existence of medals is stated in the text, but in the latter, individuals' entitlements are simply noted in the vast majority of cases. Again, as with the Arctic Medals, it would have been so much more meaningful, from a collector's and researcher's point of view, to include various artifacts and documents accompanying the Polar Medals. The omission of this information also damaged the provenance of the items, as does the lack of naming details and styles. There have been excellent published articles on the latter. Finally, the medal rolls do not differentiate bar only awards (except in one instance) to men who already had a Polar Medal.

I have written much about omitted information throughout this review, and in fact, there is wasted space in the book's design, thus allowing for more information if more thought had been put into this area. For example, in a large number of cases, the information of name, rank/rate, ship, years served and whether or not the First Arctic Medal was issued can be put on one line and not three lines. Surely Quartermaster, Able Seaman, Private, etc., could have been abbreviated QM, AB and Pte., in the medal roll. Similar arguments can be made for the Polar Medal biographies regarding the bar entitlements and whether a Silver or Bronze Medal was issued. Also, it was repetitious to print the various *Gazette* entries, and other authorities, three times - in the section's introduction, the Polar Medal rolls and the biographical listings, thus needlessly taking up space. Much is made in the book about the different years of service on the Discovery Investigations' Bronze awards (1925-39), and this could have been condensed down to a couple of pages with years of service included in brackets after the men's names.

The next area of concern is the chapter titled "Other Medals and Medallions". The RGS medallic information is enhanced by a list of recipients of Royal Medals, but remarkably, descriptions of the RGS Special Medals lack any mention of naming. In the case of medals issued by the United States government, some were issued officially named, but this is only mentioned in one case. In describing the reverse of the *Jeannette* Arctic Expedition Medal, 1879-1882, the following misleading words appear: "...towards the top, is a space for the recipient's name to be engraved.", which leads one to believe the awards were issued unnamed. The latter is not the case, and I have

noted at least two styles of naming for the medal. As a footnote to this sad venture, Seaman Herbert W. Leach was the last survivor, passing away in 1933. I have seen a photograph of him admiring a model of a memorial to honor the *Jeannette's* people, and he is wearing his medal.

Two notable medals which are mentioned among the First Arctic medal roll biographies are strangely missing from this chapter. They are the Sea Gallantry Medal (Foreign Services) and The Grinnell Medal. Poulson incorrectly describes the former, under Jefferson Temple Baker's heading, simply as a Sea Gallantry Medal (SGM, which is still issued today, is a British Government award for lifesaving, as opposed to the SGM (Foreign Services), which is given to foreigners for humanity and lifesaving involving British subjects). A special Foreign Services Medal was given to members of the 1853-55 American Kane Arctic Expedition in Gold and Silver (without suspensions) for efforts related to the search for the lost Franklin Expedition. Each medal had naming details inscribed on the edge.

The Grinnell Medal was also awarded as a result of the search for the lost Franklin Expedition. From 1850-51, two whale ships, privately purchased by American businessman Henry Grinnell and renamed *Advance* and *Rescue* were crewed by U.S. Navy officers and men and sent to the Arctic. After the expedition's return, silver medals were presented to the officers and crew of both vessels. The 38 mm. medal's obverse features the ships' names and depictions of the vessels trapped in pack ice, while the reverse has the following: PRESENTED BY THE BRITISH RESIDENTS OF NEW YORK, TO (recipient's rank and name) IN COMMEMORATION OF HIS SERVICES, IN THE AMERICAN ARCTIC EXPEDITION, SENT BY HENRY GRINNELL ESQ. IN SEARCH OF SIR JOHN FRANKLIN. 1851.

A final note addresses the images of recipients. Only officers' pictures are published for the First and Second Arctic Medals, and the quality of these images varies. It seems odd that the engraving of George Strong Nares wearing only his First Arctic Medal was used, since a fine portrait photograph exists showing him as a Vice Admiral, wearing both Arctic Medals mounted together and the insignia of the Knight Commander of the Bath (Civil). This photograph is even mentioned in the text.

It would have been nice to see varied images, such as Danish Eskimo Dog Sledge Driver and interpreter Johann Carl Christian Petersen, whose account of the voyage of the *Fox* (1857-59) was published in 1860, and is mentioned by Poulson. This work features an engraving of Petersen and he is wearing the Order of Dannebrog (Knight) and the First Arctic Medal. Not listed in the book is Petersen's role as Guide during the 1861 Swedish Torel Expedition. A photograph of French Navy Ensign Emil De Bray shows him wearing the Legion of Honour and the First Arctic award. De Bray had served during the 1852-54 Franklin search expedition on

board the Resolute. The photograph appears in his translated journal (published 1992) and Poulson mentions the journal. American Thomas Hickey, a crew member during the 1853-54 Kane Expedition, is pictured in his narrative of the voyage, wearing the First Arctic and possibly the SGM (Foreign Services) Medal. There are also several available images of the Greenlander Hans Christian Hendrik, and at least one of Johan Frederik Wille, who was a Dog Sledge Driver and Hunter in the *Alert* (1875-76), and Robert Peary's Interpreter and Pilot in 1886.

It was a pleasure to see a photograph of one of the very few women to receive the Polar Medal, Mrs. Margaret Ann Bradshaw. She is a New Zealand scientist who "...made a major contribution to the New Zealand Antarctic Programme over a period of 17 years." The bar reads ANTARCTIC TO 1992, and she is pictured wearing her award.

Lieut.-Col. Poulson and Rear Admiral Myres respond:

As Glenn Stein has observed in the above critique, the principal difference between the new book and Neville Poulson's *The White Ribbon*, upon which it is based, is that nearly two-thirds of it is taken up with "mini-biographies" of the 4000 or so individuals to whom the two 19th Century Arctic Medals and the 20th Century Polar Medal was awarded. The object of publishing this account was both to bring up-to-date and correct the original volume but also to add some flesh to the bones of the many men (and a few women) behind the medals.

In attempting this, there have inevitably had to be a lot of compromises. Amongst these were the ever-present problems of what to leave out in order to keep the book to manageable proportions and cost – and the latter has, I'm afraid, been inevitably rather higher than we would have wished because of its very specialist nature and short printing run.

Stein's criticisms are fairly widely-drawn, and some are certainly justified, but whilst it would have been very nice to include details of all the polar ephemera noted in auction catalogues against every group or medal that was on the market in the 20th Century, I fear that this was not a practical task.

It is quite true that inaccuracies and omissions appear in the First Arctic Medal rolls in the Public Record Office, but this is the first attempt to publish in one volume such details about these medals that are so recorded. Certainly there may be some instances when a very late claim for a medal has not been recorded in the original roll, and there are certainly cases where First Arctic medals have been subsequently named by persons, and to persons, for whom there is no recorded entitlement. If later issue and entitlement can be proved, we will be happy to record this in any later edition. In the meanwhile our record remains "the best available information".

We are delighted to read of the Second Arctic medals of which Stein is aware and we were not. Those in private collections or still ‘in the family’ would not necessarily have been known to us, and those recorded in the first two decades of the century may well no longer exist, but they are all grist to this particular mill and add to the remarkably high survival rate for this rare medal; with only 155 awarded with 12 known duplicates and including some, at least, of Stein’s, the survival rate is just over 50%. We wonder how it compares with other survival rates for a “campaign” medal.

Turning to the extant Polar Medal, Stein is disappointed at the lack of information on polar service for which no medal or additional clasp was awarded. Short of requesting curricula vitae from all living recipients – even supposing that their whereabouts were known – this would have been an impossible task and would, in any case, have made for a far weightier tome. As it was, although the skeleton of each “mini-bio” was obtained from *The London Gazette* and other published sources as well as correspondence, much additional information was gleaned from sources which are not yet in the public domain.

Similarly information on campaign and other medals to which recipients were entitled could usually be obtained from auction catalogues, from obituaries and from personal correspondence – and a great deal was. The extra information provided by Stein has been recorded for any new edition.

Any book with a scope of some 4000 individuals and covering nearly two centuries is likely to have gaps in it. But, as Dr. Laws says in his Foreword “. . . this book is an invaluable source of information and, especially, is a firm basis for further research into the “the men behind the medals”. If we had done till the research, there would be no fun for anyone else!

Glenn Stein's last word regarding his review:

I appreciate the authors taking the time and effort to respond to my review. It's refreshing to see them accepting my criticisms with grace. There are always difficulties in producing such a work. Given that it's been 30 years since the publication of *The White Ribbon*, I fear cost, the very specialist nature and a short printing run, makes another edition to the recent volume far beyond the horizon. Consequently, I hope the book and my review will encourage further research, discussion and debate on this topic.