



# Dickens and Antarctica

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Talk presented online to the  
Melbourne Dickens Fellowship

Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2020

# Heroic-Era Expeditions

- ◇ Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century
- ◇ Marooned over Winter
- ◇ Writing and reading
- ◇ Inexpressible Island 1912
- ◇ Elephant Island 1916



What do  
Melbourne,  
David Copperfield,  
Dombey and Son  
and Antarctica  
have in common?



<b>THE HERALD. MONDAY EVENING. JUNE 6. 1910.</b>		
<b>AMUSEMENTS.</b>  <b>NOSS'S THEATRE.</b>  Sole Lessee and Manager, <b>HUGH E. WARD.</b>	<b>AMUSEMENTS.</b>  <b>OPERA HOUSE.</b> Sole Prop. and Manager: Mr Harry Rickards. <b>Mr HARRY RICKARDS'</b> <b>NEW TIVOLI VAUDEVILLE COMPANY.</b> MATINEE MATINEE MATINEE	<b>MEETINGS AND LECTURES.</b>  <b>DICKENS' FELLOWSHIP,</b> <b>AUSTRAL SALON, TO-NIGHT.</b>  Papers by Miss Fraser, Mervyn Burgess, M'Cartney, and Newman. Reading, Miss Scott, Recitation, Mrs Smith.

Recitations in 1910 related to DC:

- David Copperfield's courtship
- Copperfield and the waiter

# Dickens' Fellowship Meeting

## Austral Salon, Melbourne



# *Terra Nova* in Melbourne Oct 1910

The Australasian (Melbourne, Vic.)

Sat 15 Feb 1913 Page 67

CAPTAIN SCOTT'S ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/142958925?searchTerm=terra%20nova%201910>

Australasian (Melbourne, Vic. : 1864 - 1946), Saturday 15 February 1913, page 67



- ◆ The expedition left London on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1910 on the *Terra Nova*
- ◆ Arrived in **Melbourne**, Australia, 12<sup>th</sup> October 1910
- ◆ They carried out geological work near **Mt. Melbourne**
- ◆ *Terra Nova* was due to collect them; stuck in ice floes
- ◆ They waited through the Winter until November
- ◆ <https://www.spri.cam.ac.uk/picturelibrary/catalogue/bae1910-13/>

# Melbourne – Port and Mt

# Weekly Times

(Melbourne, Vic.)

Sat 15 Oct 1910

Page 26

News in Brief.

[https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/  
221806059/23508315](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/221806059/23508315)

The exploration vessel, **Terra Nova**, with most of Captain Scott's exploring expedition on board, arrived in Melbourne on the night of October 12, and was subsequently berthed at Port Melbourne. The **Terra Nova** will proceed to New Zealand forthwith, and from thence will convey the party with all equipment to the Antarctic regions, where they will remain for two years, and make every endeavor to reach the South Pole.



# No man is an island

Act as an analogy for visiting explorers

- state of mind...characterized by isolation and remoteness

They could find over-crowding when they expected isolation

- too close to each other

Social distancing

- physical obstacles: the noise of the wind
- emotional: personal hostility; overly close to others

# Claustrophobia

Daily life in expedition bases

Sledging expeditions

Frank Wild – completed 4 Heroic-Era expeditions in 1937 – stated

- “men’s [sic] tempers must naturally become grated when needed together in close quarters under the trying conditions of a Polar winter”
- Leane, Elizabeth. Isolation, Connectedness and the Uses of Text in Heroic-Era Antarctica: The Cases of Inexpressible and Elephant Islands in *Island Studies Journal*, 2(1) May 2007: 67-76

Richard Byrd  
1934

Worse than being  
alone is not being  
entirely alone

“In a polar camp, little things ... have the power to drive even disciplined men to the edge of insanity ... for there is no escape anywhere. You are hemmed in on every side by your own inadequacies and the crowding measures of your associates”



- ◇ Robert Scott's Northern Party
- ◇ 6 men led by Victor Campbell
- ◇ Forced to spend dark freezing winter 11.2x0.8km (7x½ mile)
- ◇ Survived by building a snow cave 3x4m (9x12feet)
- ◇ Couldn't stand up straight; crawl through low entrance
- ◇ Ate seal and penguin meat
- ◇ Walls stained black by blubber smoke from stove and lamps
- ◇ Plaque on site of cave (next slide)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historic\\_Sites\\_and\\_Monuments\\_in\\_Antarctica#/media/File:InexpressibleIsland5.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historic_Sites_and_Monuments_in_Antarctica#/media/File:InexpressibleIsland5.JPG)

# Inexpressible Island 1912



IN THE WINTER OF 1912,  
CAMPBELL, MURSTLEY, LEVICK,  
ABBOTT, BROWNING & DIGGAS  
WERE FORCED TO SNOW-CAVE  
ON THIS SITE, WHEN THE  
H.M.S. TERRA NOVA FAILED  
TO PICK THEM UP



# Looking out over Inexpressible Island

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/  
Inexpressible\\_Island#/media/  
File:InexpressibleIsland3.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inexpressible_Island#/media/File:InexpressibleIsland3.JPG)





- ◆ Ease social isolation by following familiar practices from home
- ◆ Naval hierarchies
- ◆ Imaginary line dividing cave – what was spoken on one side could not be heard on the other
  - ◆ 3 crew members
  - ◆ 2 officers
  - ◆ 1 scientist

# British social class

# Winter reading

Important occupation



Unstructured unoccupied time

is known to be one  
of the greatest  
producers of stress

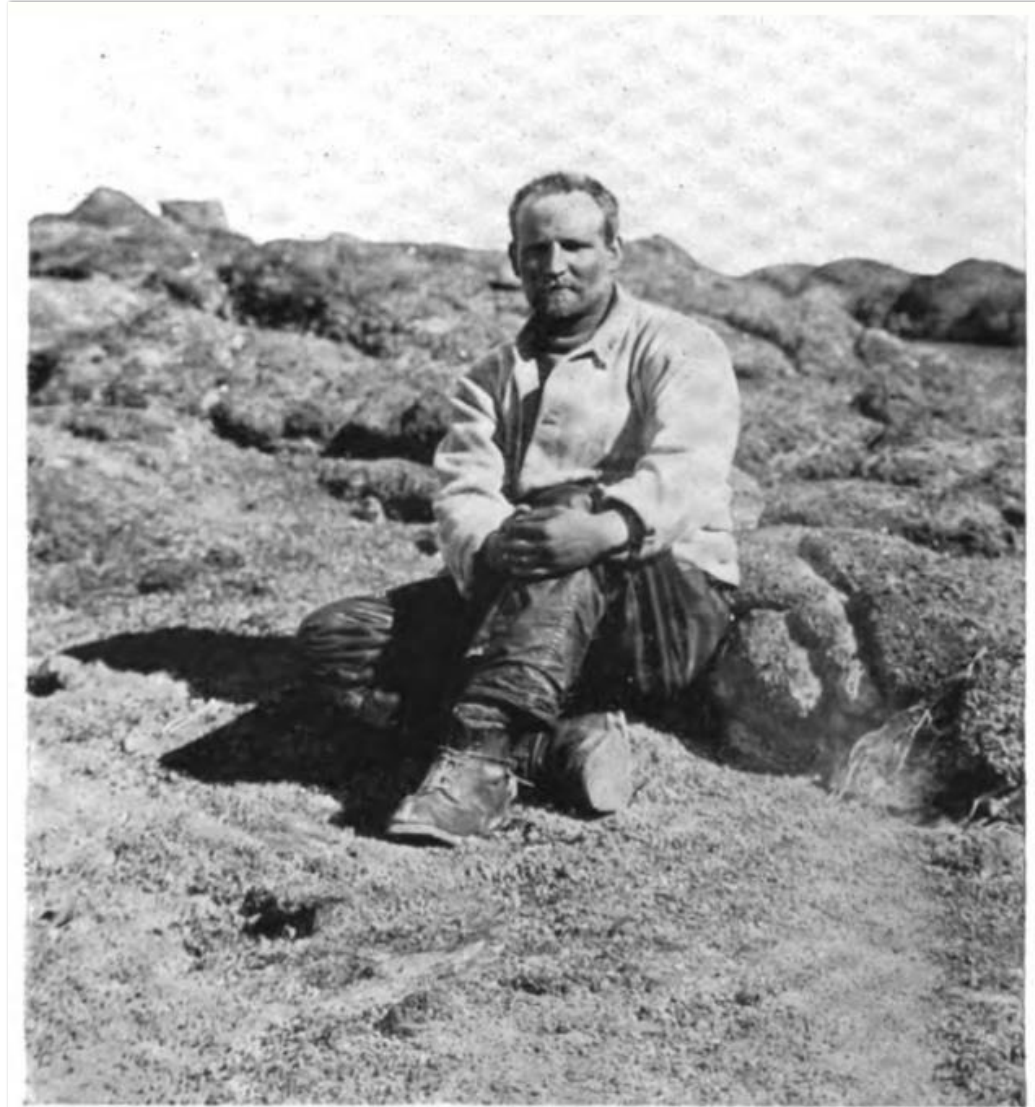
was abundant

reading was pivotal

# Raymond Priestley

Christmas 1912

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433000635692&view=1up&seq=445>



THE AUTHOR. CHRISTMAS 1912.



# Raymond Priestley's diary 1910-1913

- ◆ Scientist, anticipating return of ship 1912
- ◆ “the worst of waiting like this is that we have only one book between the three of us – *David Copperfield* by Dickens – but we are making the most of this and I have read it so thoroughly that I could easily pass a stiff examination on it”
- ◆ The men kept themselves sane by reading a chapter each night
- ◆ “never...had Dickens a more dirty and enthusiastic audience”
- ◆ He even wrote of dreaming about it

- ◆ The beginning of June saw us all settled down under the new routine with the night watch, and the only difference the latter made was an increasing desire on my part to stay in bed and make up the lost hour or two's sleep in the morning instead of rising for breakfast. The time passed quite quickly, and all through the winter there was no lack of work to keep our mornings and afternoons occupied, and a variety of amusements wiled away the time after tea.
- ◆ We had a good library with us, as usual, and it is at such times as this that one finds time to read classical books. For my part I find it quite difficult to make time to read and enjoy such authors as Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray, at home, but in the course of two winters in the Antarctic I read through the complete works of all three and many more standard books which are far heavier reading than these.
- ◆ Antarctic adventure: Scott's Northern party (1915) by Raymond E. Priestley. New York, E. P. Dutton & Co; Ch 7, p101;  
<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433000635692>

## Priestley's diary

## CHAPTER VII

### MIDWINTER AND PREPARATIONS FOR SLEDGING

Books—Chess and bezique—Boxing in below zero temperature—Browning's illness—Loss of instruments through wind—Potatoes in our washing and biscuits in our beds—Midwinter dinner—Frozen champagne—Sledging preparations—Harnesses—Food-bags and food—Individual ideas encouraged—Reading Antarctic literature—Our sledge rations—The cooks—A packed sledge.

THE beginning of June saw us all settled down under the new routine with the night watch, and the only difference the latter made was an increasing desire on my part to stay in bed and make up the lost hour or two's sleep in the morning instead of rising for breakfast. The time passed quite quickly, and all through the winter there was no lack of work to keep our mornings and afternoons occupied, and a variety of amusements wiled away the time after tea. We had a good library with us, as usual, and it is at such times as this that one finds time to read classical books. For my part I find it quite difficult to make time to read and enjoy such authors as Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray, at home, but in the course of two winters in the Antarctic I read through the complete works of all three and many more standard books which are far heavier reading than these. One book which proved a great favourite with the men was Marcus Clark's "For the Term of his Natural Life," and their com-

## Antarctic adventure; Scott's Northern party

- ◇ Raymond E.  
Priestley. New York, E. P.  
Dutton & Co, 1915
- ◇ Ch 7, p101  
[https://hdl.handle.net/2027/ny  
p.33433000635692](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/ny.p.33433000635692)



◆ First of all we waited until the messmen for the day had finished their work, and then when they had turned in and all diaries were written up Levick would read us a chapter from *David Copperfield*. This one chapter a night became a regular institution with us from now until we had finished all three of the books we had with us. *David Copperfield* lasted us for some sixty nights, and at the end of that time we were sorry to part with him.

◆ Antarctic adventure: Scott's Northern party by Raymond E. Priestley. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1915.

◆ <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433000635692&view=1up&seq=415&q1=David%20Copperfield>

## Dr Murray Levick's reading





<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/10765907?searchTerm=terra%20nova%201910%20Melbourne>

Article Illustrated - The Argus (Melbourne, Vic.) Thursday 13 February 1913 - Page 11

- ❖ Officers of the Scott Expedition taken on board the *Terra Nova* 14<sup>th</sup> Oct 1910
- ❖ Dr Murray Levick, top row, far right

# Connecting with home

- ◆ Regular reading by all six men
- ◆ Provided an imaginary connection with home
- ◆ Characters formed a web of connectivity which also enclosed the readers
- ◆ Serial form gave a sense of event and climax in a very static situation
- ◆ Finished final chapter with great regret

- ◊ Not only for leisure
- ◊ Reading was medicinal
- ◊ Doctor Murray Levick worried about a “falling off of spirits” in midwinter
- ◊ Increased to 2 chapters a day which “bucked things up a good deal”
- ◊ By July increased to 3 chapters a day; Priestley worried whether their library (6 books) would last the winter
- ◊ From Priestley’s note, we believe only DC was available when they were marooned in the cave

Reading is  
therapeutic



# Elephant Island 1916



SHACKLETON'S ENDURANCE  
EXPEDITION



KEPT ABOUT 15 BOOKS  
INCLUDING DICKENS'S  
*DOMBEY AND SON*



READ INDIVIDUALLY  
INSTEAD OF READING  
ALoud

# Reading & Writing



Intensely personal activity

Connecting with home  
Escaping present privations through imaginative involvement



Drew isolated group together

Communal involvement



Writing a diary was similarly dual purpose

Important chronicle  
Outlet for feelings of frustration or despair



# ICE

- ◆ Text acted like ice in Heroic-Era expeditions
- ◆ Insulating expedition members
- ◆ Calving off imaginary islands on which they could maroon themselves
- ◆ Solidifying gap between the island and home – reminiscing via their diaries







(c) Scott Polar Research Institute  
www.spri.cam.ac.uk

<https://www.spri.cam.ac.uk/picturelibrary/catalogue/article/p54.16.367/>

◆ Priestley with a bag,  
sleeping bag and box

# Global Dickens Exhibition

- ◇ Dickens Museum, London, May-Nov 2019
- ◇ 1910 copy of *David Copperfield*
- ◇ Dickens saw himself as a truly global writer
- ◇ shaping the lives of people around the planet
- ◇ <https://dickensmuseum.com/blogs/exhibitions/global-dickens-for-every-nation-upon-earth>

Displayed May-  
Nov 2019





David Copperfield.  
Personal History of  
David Copperfield the Younger.

CHAPTER I.  
I am Born.

I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life. I shall station myself in the world by my own efforts. To begin my life with the knowledge of what I am, and what I am to be, is a great advantage. I am born.



What do  
Melbourne,  
David Copperfield,  
Dombey and Son  
and Antarctica  
have in common?

# Charles Dickens

The answer is the  
inimitable...



# Journey

- ◊ Isolation
- ◊ Preservation of mind and body
- ◊ Connectedness
- ◊ Global reach of Dickens

