
This view looking up to the Shagtols-Tind, the highest mountain in Norway, reaching the height of 7670 English feet, beneath a bell-shaped snowy valley penetrated into the mountains, and closed by a vast glacier...[the view taken from]... the most splendid fir-forest I have yet met with.
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A significant number of alumni in the University of Aberdeen's long history have found that the compass needle drew them to the north. As explorers, settlers, missionaries, or employees of the Hudson's Bay Company, graduates of the two ancient colleges which make up the modern university have been conspicuous in many circumpolar connections.

Many of them have left us books, papers and material objects reflecting northern travel and Arctic adventure. These form a rich collection of unique diaries, letters and manuscript accounts from explorers, traders, savants and skippers. This is in addition to the rich northern topographical collections, maps and travels, accumulated over the many centuries in which the colleges of Aberdeen formed the northernmost places of learning in the Anglophone world.

**IDEAS OF ‘THE NORTH’**

**Maps**

The University has an exceptional collection of atlases and topographical material from 1492 onwards, part of excellent cartographic holdings which are particularly strong for the Renaissance period. An atlas of the world as it was then understood, Ptolemy's *Cosmographia*, came to King's College as part of the library of its first Principal (its Latin inscription reads 'belonging to the college of Aberdeen, a gift of Master Hector Boece, its principal'). It shows how the idea of 'the north' developed in the Renaissance: one of its maps still shows legendary northern kingdoms such as 'Thule', the mythical northern land conjured by the geographers of the ancient world.

A cartographic pioneer of the sixteenth century, Gerald Mercator, made a single map of *The Lands under the Pole*, complete with an imaginary landmass at the North Pole, while in the seventeenth century, Blaeu's *Regions Beneath the North Pole* tries to accommodate the latest geographical knowledge with classical myth by identifying the Faroe Islands with the 'Fortunate Islands' of the Ancients. Blaeu's atlas, which in its time marked a significant step forward in scientific mapmaking, has a local connection in that the maps of Scotland were revised and supplied with commentary by Robert Gordon of Straloch. One of the copies which we hold is inscribed to Gordon by Blaeu and, in turn, Gordon has written an autograph dedication to the future Charles II, perhaps indicating his intention of presenting the volume to the Prince. Gordon’s careful enumeration of all his royal titles is an affirmation of typically-Aberdonian Stuart loyalism at a time of national crisis.

**Marvels**

Many ideas about the north are reflected in our rare books collection. One of the most engaging of early attempts to portray the wonders of the north is that of Olaus Magnus (1490–1558/9), the exiled Catholic Bishop of Uppsala in Sweden. During his many years in Rome, he recreated on paper the northern
lands which were forever lost to him, stressing the features that, to a Mediterranean reader, were hard to credit:

In the beginning and middle of winter, the ice is so strong and holds so well that with a compactness, or thickness, of two inches it will support a man walking, of three inches an armoured horseman, of one and a half spans military squadrons or detachments, of four spans a whole battalion or thousands of people, as I must record later where I discuss wars fought in winter

The ice is only one of a range of phenomena of the cold that he discusses:

Cold burns the eyes of animals and stiffens their hairs.
Cold makes wild beasts seek out men's dwellings, wanting to relieve their hunger.
Cold makes wolves fiercer than normal to all animals and also to each other...
Cold causes the pelts of all animals to be thicker and handsomer.
Cold allows fish to be kept fresh for five or six months without salt.
Cold causes fish to die of suffocation under the ice if it is not broken.
Cold always stimulates greater voracity in animals...
Cold makes hares, foxes and ermines change colour.
Cold causes copper, glass, and earthenware vessels to break...
Cold allows games and most delightful shows to be held on the ice...
Cold causes dry and leafy tree-trunks to produce a huge noise when they crack.
Cold causes clothes, when slightly damp, to stick to iron, if they touch it...
Cold makes all seed sown in the ground come up in greater abundance ...

The north of Olaus Magnus is a place of wonders and often sinister marvels, inhabited by witches, sorcerers, ghosts and a variety of mythical fauna. The Antwerp edition of Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus of 1558, and that produced in Basle in 1567 (both of which we own) are enlivened by vigorous woodcuts of figures such as the sorcerer king Eric Wind-Hat, Lapland witches, and the Great Sea Serpent, reaching on board a three-master to snatch a struggling mouthful of sailors.

Magicians

Olaus Magnus writes graphically about the north as a place of sorcerors and demons. In particular, the Finns had an extraordinary expertise in controlling the weather. Wizards such as Eric Wind-Hat would sell skippers imprisoned in port by contrary weather 'wind-rope', tied with three magical knots, together with instructions to untie only one at a time (Finns' peculiar powers over the winds were widely credited in seafaring communities until the end of the nineteenth century).

A merchant bargains with a Finn for his wind-rope, while above them a wind observes the transaction. From Olaus Magnus, Historia de gentium septentrionalibus varii conditionibus (History of the Northern Peoples) (Basle: Henric Petri, 1567). Pi 91(48) Mag 3

Another of the liveliest early modern accounts of the far north is Johannes Scheffer's History of Lapland, published in Latin in 1673, and immediately translated into English, German, French and Dutch. In his introduction, Scheffer remarks of Finnmark:

here it is indeed, rather than in America, we have a new World discovered, and those extravagant falsehoods, which have so commonly past in the narratives of these Northern Countries, are not so inescusable for their being lies, as that they were told without temptation, the real truth being equally interesting and incredible.

His account of the nomadic circumpolar peoples now known as the Sami are detailed and uncondescending. One aspect of Sami...
life which was of immense interest to his readers was their paganism. Their worship was based on the sacrifice of reindeer, their principal livelihood, to gods represented by images set in sacred enclosures.

Another aspect of Sami life which fascinated outsiders, as it continues to do, was shamanism. Scheffer presented his readers with a society in which difficulties and decisions of all kinds were resolved by recourse to shamans, who solved problems by entering a state of trance in which their spirits would journey through the spiritual worlds until they found the information they sought.

Another service which shamans offered to the Sami was divination by means of this drum, their most important tool. The head was painted with symbols, and to question the gods, a bundle of metal rings (the *arpa*) was laid upon it. As the sorcerer beat the drum, the vibrating drumhead moved the *arpa* until they lay upon one particular symbol, which could then be interpreted. The reindeer, who were the economic basis of the Sami way of life, are also well represented in Scheffer’s illustrations.

Next as to the casting themselves on the ground, there are various relations, something them not really, but only in appearance, dead; others are apt to believe that the soul departs from the body, and after its travell abroad, returns again...Now after the drummer falls down, he laies his drum as nears as possibly on his head, in this posture. (p. 58)

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When he comes near the sacred Stone, he reverently uncovers his head, and bows his body, paying all the ceremonies of respect and honour. Then he anoints the Stone with all the fat and blood, and places the horns behind it ... The horns are found placed one above another, in the fashion of a fence to the God, which is therefore by the Laplanders called Tior Suigardi, that is a Court fenced with horns, which are sometimes above a thousand in number. (p.43)

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The Reindeer is not harnessed like an Horse, but hath a strong cloth about his neck, to which is fastned a rope that goes between his fore and hind feet, to the hole in the prou of the sledge. ... When they thus travel in the Winter, the Reindeers are bravely adorned with needlework of tin-thred upon diverse colour’d cloth, about their necks and back, and a bell, with which they are mightily pleased. (p. 105)
Monsters

The wonders of the north included not only shamans and wind-masters, but also a variety of creatures existing in the shadowed margins of the knowable world. The great whales of the Arctic seas were a significant spur to the exploration and economic exploitation of the circumpolar region. But other, more exotic creatures were thought to lurk at the top of the map. A Norwegian writer whose work follows in the steps of Olaus Magnus, Erik Pontoppidan, professor extraordinary of theology in the University of Copenhagen and Bishop of Bergen in the mid-eighteenth century, is the source of classic stories about wonders and marvels of the northern seas.

Having made exhaustive enquiry on the subject, he was a firm believer in the Great Sea Serpent. He writes in his *Natural History of Norway*:

*The Soe Ormen, the Sea-Snake, Serpens Marinus Maximus ... is a wonderful and terrible sea-monster, which extremely deserves to be taken notice of ... I have questioned its existence myself, till that suspicion was removed by full and sufficient evidence from credible and experienced fishermen.*

An ‘imagined north’

A nineteenth-century visionary with whom the University has a particular connection is George MacDonald. Many of his celebrated works are set in imaginary realms of mountains, forests and castles, transformations of the northern Scotland of his youth. As well as MacDonald’s portrait, the University has part of an autographed draft of his much-loved children’s book, *At the Back of the North Wind*, chapters 26–28, (MS 2231). This is all that remains of MacDonald’s original autograph, which was rescued by his son from ‘a mass of mostly waste papers’, and is greatly augmented and expanded in the printed version, so our draft text allows the reader to see how the author’s thought developed as the work reached its final form.

Our text includes MacDonald’s early version of one of the book’s most memorable moments, the dream-journey of the dying child Diamond, floating over the sleeping countryside in the arms of the North Wind.
ABERDEEN AND THE ARCTIC

Treasures

The University’s collections contain a rich variety of objects brought back from northern voyages, representing the things that took people to the north, such as precious materials, skins and ivory. The importance of amber in the history of northern exploration, and its extraordinary antiquity as a trading commodity, is suggested by prehistoric amber beads from Aberdeenshire, including one from the slopes of Tap o’ Noth beneath the walls of a great vitrified fort that was destroyed in a conflagration some 2,000 years ago.

Another important treasure of the north is walrus ivory, represented in our collections by Inuit carvings of caribou, seal, walrus and, significantly, narwhal.

The talsimanic treasure of the north is the spiral tusk of the narwhal, long identified with the powerful and magical horn of the mythical unicorn. One of the earlier acquisitions by the Marischal College Museum, which is still in the collection, is an example of this northern treasure, a ‘Horn of the Sea Unicorn from Davis Straits, ten feet long’.

Scientists

A variety of library and museum holdings demonstrate Scottish participation in northern scientific investigations, such as J. Rand Campion’s *Aurora and their Spectra* (London, 1879), and James D Forbes’s *Norway and its Glaciers visited in 1851* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1853). This last is a record of a general and scientific tour, but includes an evocative description of a June night at Tromsø:

> It was a glorious evening - the sun shining warm and ruddy across the calm sound. It was more like a sunset at Naples than what I had imagined of midnight in the arctic circle. The town and shores of Tromsø were in comparative shadow; and as we rowed across to our steamer, we heard in the distance the not unmelodious chant of the Russian sailors, who amused themselves in boating and singing most of the night. (p.74)

Among other testimonies to scientific collection in the far north, the museum collections contain that great rarity, an egg of the great auk, and a fine model of a bowhead whale made by the ship’s captain David Gray, who was also a pioneering scholar of the Arctic.

The search for the north-west passage, that most dangerous of Arctic explorations, lies behind one of our more unexpected holdings, a *hortus siccus* (MSU 1332/9); an indexed volume of pressed plant specimens collected by Dr Walker, ship’s surgeon and naturalist on board the yacht *Fox* during one of the many nineteenth-century searches for Sir John Franklin’s lost expedition.

Explorers

One of the most resonant names in the history of northern exploration is that of John Franklin, tragic hero of the Arctic. We hold a copy of his *Narrative of a Second expedition to the Shores of the Polar sea in the years 1825, 1826, and 1827* (London: Murray, 1828), which begins in Canada, at the Great Bear Lake. There follows a strange litany of improvised and invented names including Barter Island and Foggy Island. ‘Return Reef’ is the name of the point which marks the limit of the outward voyage, making a passing moment a permanent fixture on the map. The appendix, containing Franklin’s minute observations of the aurora borealis, anticipates the observations of celestial phenomena recorded in delicate pastels by Nansen in his book *Farthest North*, an account of later and more fortunate Arctic explorations.

Franklin disappeared in 1845, on a doomed quest for the fabled north-west passage, a
search which claimed many lives before the great Norwegian adventurer Roald Amundsen finally demonstrated that it did exist - but that in order to use it, a captain must expect his vessel to be frozen into the ice and to take three years over the trip. Lady Franklin refused to believe that her husband was not still alive, lost somewhere in the Arctic. His disappearance, and her resolution, captured the public imagination, and expedition after expedition was mounted to search for him.

Elisha Kane MD USN, in *Arctic Explorations* (Philadelphia, 1856), reports on 'The second Grinnell expedition in search of Sir John Franklin', with a splendid engraving of Fiskaernes in South Greenland, the first Arctic port of call for the expedition. Another engraving, 'The lookout from Cape George', is evocative of the conditions of expedition life: sledges, dogs and pack ice, seen in low sun.

Other relics of exploration are now conserved in our museum, collected from abandoned camps of the 1875 Arctic expedition. A china tea-cup from HMS Alert, and a tin opener from HMS Discovery, symbolise the attempt by explorers to maintain civilised standards of eating and drinking in the face of the Arctic. By contrast, a pair of snow goggles made from driftwood and animal sinew exemplifies the use of available Arctic resources by the Inuit. Without the protection of items such as these goggles, hunting - and thus life - in the Arctic would have been impossible. One of the major lessons of Arctic exploration is that explorers from the Orcadian John Rae to the Norwegian Amundsen, who were prepared to learn from the Inuit, survived; those such as Franklin and Scott who refused to adapt were less likely to return.

**Drama in the Arctic**

One of the oddities of exploration literature is a record of the entertainments of one such expedition. Edward Sabine (ed.), *The North Georgia Gazette and Winter Chronicle* (London: Murray, 1821), prints extracts from the ships’ newspapers of the Fury and Hecla, employed in the discovery of a north-west passage in 1819–20, written to "relieve the taedium of our hundred days of darkness and cold":

The design of this paper is solely to promote good humour and amusement – original contributions on any subject will be acceptable … A box will be kept on the capstan of the Hecla to receive them the key of which will be kept by the Editor.

From 'Winter Harbour, Oct 20th 1819', a correspondent jokes:

> After the frost shall have exhausted all its usual effects of freezing the brandy-bottle to the lips, freezing the water in the tea-kettle on the fire, congealing sounds, converting sighs into showers of snow and turning tears into icicles, is it not probable that it may reduce the temperature of the human body so low, as to interfere with the internal economy, compelling the blood to roll through the veins and arteries in the form of peas, dropping one by one into the proper cavities of the heart, and being discharged again from thence like small shot?

The Theatre Royal, North Georgia opened on Friday 5 Nov 1918, with Garrick's farce, Miss in her Teens, a curious choice. Even if there was a round-faced midshipman to play Miss Betty, this group of bearded heroes in their thick clothes must have revelled at the incongruity. Poor Mr Fribble will certainly have raised a laugh with his response to being pushed into a store-room with an earthen floor at the approach of Betty's aunt; 'I shall certainly catch my Death! Where's my Cambrick Handkerchief, and my Salts'?

The play was evidently a success, since in December The Theatre Royal offered a new musical entertainment, *The North-West Passage*, or *The Voyage Finish'd*:

> The day that's appointed is next Wednesday week
> Should it not be too cold for the actors to speak.

**Commerce and adventure**

The sheer breadth and diversity of the Aberdeen collection is well demonstrated by the richness of our holdings of nineteenth-century voyages and travels to the Arctic.
The sense of wonder and romance which attended northern voyages is conveyed by John Laing’s A Voyage to Spitzbergen containing an account of that country (Edinburgh, for the author, 1822) which begins exactly like a tale of adventure:

In the year 1806, being at the University of Edinburgh, an advertisement was put on the College Gate, by Messrs. Rand C. Wood, merchants, Leith, intimating that a surgeon was wanted for the ship Resolution of Whitby, Yorkshire, engaged in the North Sea whale-fishery. Impelled by curiosity and by a still more powerful motive, to visit the snow-clad coast of Spitzbergen …

The intrepid Laing signed up for the Resolution, and embarked on a voyage of wonders and adventures among vast shoals of herring as thick and glittering as ‘a spacious field of variegated gems’ and in the floating ice and tempestuous seas off Bear or Cherry Island, ‘Lat 74, degrees 30 north’, hearing the polar bears roaring from the shore. He also reports that the captain had commissioned for himself a wonderful bed, made, like the ancient throne of the kings of Denmark, from narwhal horns: ‘It is reckoned a great curiosity and is extremely handsome.’

Another Scottish traveller who crossed the Atlantic to explore the cold waters between Greenland and Canada, as a skipper rather than ship’s surgeon, was David Duncan, who subsequently wrote Arctic Regions, voyage to Davis’s Strait by David Duncan, master of the ship Dundee (London, sold by the author at 9 Baltic Place, Lower Road Deptford, 1827).

Among the more notable adventures described by Duncan was ‘The perilous situation of the Dundee and the loss of the Harlingen’. The Dundee was, up to that time, the only fishing ship which had ever passed a whole winter in the Arctic with her crew aboard, and lived to tell the tale. Captain Duncan rescued the crew of the wrecked Harlingen, and the two companies shared their meagre provisions until the Dutch set off overland across the ice toward the remotest Danish settlement, far to the south. There are similarly evocative illustrations of ships frozen into ice in Thomas McKeevor’s A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay (London: Richard Phillips, 1819). One of the physical artefacts we hold which is powerfully evocative of these adventurers is a long coat with bone or ivory toggles made for Sir William MacGregor (governor of Newfoundland from 1904–09) by the half-Inuit Mrs Lane at Port Burwell, Labrador. (Read more about Sir William MacGregor in the section on The American Arctic.)

Sir William MacGregor’s fur coat ABDUA 5720, Marischal College Museum.

Also in our collections is a manuscript notebook of a northbound passenger, Patrick Buchan, recording a voyage from Peterhead to Greenland in the brig Union in 1832 (MS 2303/7). Its contents include verses about travel, exile and longing for home, workaday as poetry, but with thrilling datelines: ‘Off Amsterdam Island, West Spitzbergen, 18 June, 1832’ or ‘off the West Ice, Greenland, June 1832’.

Lithographed frontispiece of Dutch and Scottish ship frozen into ice, from David Duncan, Arctic Regions, Voyage to Davis’s Strait, (London: the author, 1827). Lib R 91(98) Dun
Ferdinand von Wrangel’s, *Narrative of an Expedition to the Polar Sea* (London: James Madden, 1840) is another unusually strange and atmospheric journey along the north coast of the polar sea. It tells of ice-journeys, shamans, reindeer, early snow, ‘conjunctions, drummings and jumpings’, and a description of a Sami fair: ‘Men and women clothed with furs and covered with rime, were moving about as gaily as if it were summer, in a cold of -41 degrees.’

**TRAVEL AND TOPOGRAPHY**

**Orkney and Shetland**

In geography, culture and history, the Northern Isles are the pivot between Scotland and Scandinavia. Gordon of Straloch’s contribution to the great Amsterdam atlas of the 1640s gives the Orkneys and Shetland a section apart from Scotland, in the course of which he describes fierce winters, treeless slopes, and the absence of venomous reptiles. He follows also a general Renaissance trend in identifying Shetland with Thule, the distant northern land of ancient legend.

His account is amplified in James Wallace’s *A Description of the Isles of Orkney*, published at Edinburgh in 1693, which contains a consideration of the summer midnight, concluding that:

…it cannot be the true body of the Sun that is seen, but only the Image of it refracted though the Sea, or some watery cloud about the Horizon

Otherwise, his account does not lack descriptions of the wonders of these northern islands: stones generated spontaneously in the air and falling into the sea, mysterious fires burning at Evie and St. Nicholas’s church lit up ‘as if torches or candles were burning all night’. He also reports contacts with occasional Inuit visitors to the Orkneys, such as the ‘Finnman’ of Greenland, seen in 1682 rowing ‘in his little boat at the south end of the Isle of Eda’.

A *Voyage to Shetland and the Orkneys*, published in the mid-eighteenth century, calmly records recollections of the legendary north of the monsters and the enchanters. Not only are there ‘uncommon fish resembling the shape of human creatures’, but the inhabitants of Orkney…

…deal much in Charms, with great Success, particularly for excessive bleeding, which is stopped by sending the name of the afflicted person to the Charmer who repeats certain words, and never fails of curing.

A *True and Exact description of the Island of Shetland*, published at London in 1753, is concerned mostly with the economic potential of the islands lying forty leagues north of ‘Johnny Groat’s house, commonly called the World’s End’, but the anonymous author finds room to record that the world’s finest hawks are bred in Shetland. and that the otters in Shetland are so tame that…

…in cold winter nights they will come into People’s Houses, and lie down by the fire like a dog.

The eighteenth century also saw the first scholarly publication of the most ancient written account of the early-mediaeval history of the Orkneys, the *Orkneyinga Saga*. This was published in Copenhagen with a commentary and parallel Latin translation by the Icelandic scholar Jon Jonsson. Thus he made the histories of the Earls in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, including St. Magnus, internationally available in the international scholarly language. His volume includes also the saga which preserves the legends of Magnus, his battles with his kinsmen, his death at their hands, and the posthumous manifestations of his sanctity in supernatural lights about his tomb and the ‘bare stones’ where his blood had fallen flourishing as green as any garden.

Orkney is also the setting for Walter Scott’s late novel *The Pirate*, of which the University holds a pristine copy of the three-volume first edition, a part of the magnificent Bernard Lloyd Scott collection, which also contains a rare chapbook version of the novel. This little shilling edition of *The Pirates, a tale founded on facts* ‘from a celebrated novel of that name by a Favourite author’, with its brightly-coloured…
naïve frontispiece, is in itself a considerable rarity, a surviving example of an ephemeral publication.

Russia and Siberia

A variety of explorers with more or less ethnographic concerns visited the countries of the far north. At the turn of the seventeenth century, the intrepid Dutch traveller Cornelius de Bruyn set forth on a gigantic journey with his sketch-book, the results of which were published in 1737 as *Travels into Muscovy, Persia, and part of the East-Indies*. His travels took him up to the territories of the Samoyed nomads of northern Siberia.

He made careful drawings and observations of a Samoyed couple:

They are drest in skins of the rein-deer, adorn’d with streaks of white, grey, and black. This woman was dress’d out as a bride, and was very neat from head to foot, according to their fashion. [her husband’s] winter dress was what I thought most proper for me to draw, and I therefore desired him to appear in that. His upper garment was one piece of skin, to which the cap he wore on his head was joined. He put it on and off like a shirt, so that nothing appeared of him but his face, his gloves being also of-a-piece with the rest of his habit: and indeed, he had looked more like a bear than a man, had it not been for the sight of his face. His boots were fastned below the knee: but this dress was so hot, as well as the stove in my room, that he was obliged to put it off several times, and to go out and refresh himself with a little air. (p. 8).

In our way, we landed at a wood, where we saw some of the people called Samoëds, which in the Russian tongue, signifies man eaters, or people that devour one another. They are almost all wild, and stretch along the coast quite to Siberia. (p. 6)

Another northern traveller of the same period, Robert Ker Porter, ventured eastward to Russia and recorded his impressions in *Travelling Sketches in Russia and Sweden* (London, 1813). His notes indicate his ambivalence; while he is a fascinated and observant witness of the Russian scene, he is also eager for news. He records the intense emotion with which he heard of Trafalgar and the death of Nelson, brought to him in the remote wilderness of the Russian steppes. To Ker Porter, the arrival of winter in St Petersburg was the authentic experience for which he had been waiting: (p. 107)
His lively sketches include a view of a post-house, the way-stations for all travellers in the interior, which he describes as follows:

One room is the habitation of all the inmates. Here they eat, sleep, and perform all the functions of life. One quarter of it is occupied by a large stove or peech, flat at the top; on which many of them take their nocturnal rest; and during the day loll over its baking warmth for hours, by threes and fours together in a huddle, not more decent than disgusting. Beneath, is an excavation like an oven, used for the double duty of cooking their victuals and heating the dwelling to the desired temperature ... when we entered, the top of the stove was occupied by the three women and child, almost all in a state of nature ... in one spot was placed a lamp, which during certain holy-days is kept continually burning.

Another Russian travel-book of outstanding quality from the same period is *A Picture of St. Peterburgh* (London, 1815), which gives views of each month of the year, and also illustrations of different sledges. Its author, unlike Ker Porter, is interested in the summer face of Russia:

Snow ... does not disappear until the month of April, but then two or three days are sufficient to eradicate the melancholy prospect. At this period everything assumes a new face; the men lay aside their fur clothing which envelops and conceals their fine forms: and the women appear more beautiful and amiable. The winter nevertheless has its pleasures, which are even preferred by the natives of the country to those of the finer seasons. In winter coaches are laid aside and are agreeably succeeded by sledges: and the inside of the palaces of the great cause one to forget the rigours of the season.

**Iceland**

A considerable impetus was given to northern tourism when the Napoleonic wars closed western continental Europe to travellers. William Jackson Hooker's *Journal of a Tour in Iceland in the summer of 1809* (London, 1811) was a naturalist's expedition undertaken with the help of the great botanist Sir Joseph Banks of Kew. The tour illustrates some of the oddities of contemporary politics. Denmark and Britain were at that time at war, actively so, since the British navy had shelled
Copenhagen in 1801. However, for all that, British ships in harbour in Reykjavik were happy to help to suppress an Icelandic rising against the Danes, and to take the leader to Britain as a prisoner. The only one of his drawings to survive the rising is the depiction of an Icelandic bride, reproduced as the frontispiece.

An urbane Scottish visitor to Iceland in the Napoleonic era was Sir George Steuart Mackenzie. In Travels in the Island of Iceland during the summer of the year 1810 (Edinburgh, 1811), he, like Hooker, shows himself to be on surprisingly good terms with the Danish authorities. It is interesting to note that language was not a problem for him, because he found that official functionaries, clergy and schoolmasters were all able to converse with him in Latin.

The literary and political heritage of the Viking age in Iceland attracted a stream of informed visitors as the nineteenth century progressed. Iceland was originally settled by sturdily independent Norwegians who were determined to resist the encroachments of King Harald Fairhair, and thus evolved the first parliamentary democracy.

The liberal and educated tradition of pilgrimage to the site of this first democracy is revealed by William Morris's saga translations and record of his travels in Iceland. We hold an excellent late Victorian photograph album of travels in his footsteps. These photographs are equally concerned to portray scenes of dramatic episodes from the sagas, and Thingvellir, site of the world's first parliament.

Scandinavia

Another Scandinavian traveller of the nineteenth century went to the north of Finland, where he was astonished by a local custom then totally unfamiliar – the sauna. Joseph (Giuseppe) Acerbi in his Travels Through Sweden, Finland and Lapland (London, 1802), reports:

Almost all the Finlandish peasants have a small house built on purpose for a bath. It consists of only one small chamber, in the innermost part of which are placed a number of stones, which are heated by fire till they become red. On these stones, thus heated, water is thrown, until the company within be involved in a thick cloud of vapour … men and women use the bath promiscuously, without any concealment of dress, or being in the least influenced by any emotion of attachment. … The Finlanders, all the while they are in this hot bath, continue to rub themselves, and lash every part of their bodies with switches formed of twigs of the birch tree … in the winter season, they frequently go out of the bath, naked as they are, to roll themselves in the snow.
Adventurous tourists continued to visit, and report on, the various countries of the north throughout the nineteenth century. Two gentlemen went on a summer walking holiday in Norway, Mr Forrester and Lieut. Biddulph, which Forrester subsequently wrote up as a book, *Norway in 1848 and 1849* containing rambles among the fields and fjords (London, 1850). The friends were interested in the remoteness of Norway, its lack of previous visitors, and, rather unusually for tourists, by the peculiarities of the nation’s political life. 1848 was a year of revolutions, and they felt that the manner in which Norway was apparently completely untouched by this was a fact requiring explanation. The answer they come up with is a simple one: they ascribe the apparent Norwegian absence of oppression or the formation of an oppressive class to the absence of easily-worked building-stone to build castles.

The book includes an atmospheric plate of resting in the forest under the peaks and glaciers (see front cover illustration).

Northern Japan

Inevitably, Aberdeen’s connections with the circumpolar world reflect our own geographical position. A rich and various collection of books, manuscripts and artefacts attest to interest in, and connections with, Arctic Canada and Greenland. Other travellers recorded journeys in Scandinavia, Finnmark, and Russia. But one of the most tantalisingly enigmatic treasures at the University’s Marischal Museum, recently rediscovered and as yet unstudied, closes the circle by suggesting the interest of an Aberdeen alumnus in a northern people from completely the other side of the world, the Ainu of Hokkaido.

This is a lavishly and beautifully illustrated Japanese ethnographic account of Ainu life and folkways, in the form of a scroll called ‘New Year’s Ceremonies of the Ezo people [observed] at Matsumae Castle’, produced probably some time in the 1850s. Matsumae is a region in the southern tip of the island of Hokkaido. In 1807, late into the rule of the Tokugawa Shogunate, the regional administration for Hokkaido and Sakhalin was moved there from Hakodate. Since it was moved back to Hakodate in 1856, the scroll was made before that date, and after 1807. The term ‘Ezo’ was generally applied to the peoples living in the north-eastern part of the island of Honshu, as well as on Hokkaido, who did not submit to the central Japanese government (at the time, the imperial court), but the term came gradually to be applied solely to the indigenous peoples of Hokkaido. ‘Ezo’ thus included the Ainu, who are undoubtedly depicted here, identifiable because of their peculiar hairiness, and even more peculiar customs.

We know of only one other such scroll in Britain, which is now in the British Library. In words and pictures, it shows Ainu fishing techniques, an Ainu hut, commercial trade in dried fish with merchants from mainland Japan, and above all, details of the Ainu bear cult: a cub, lovingly hand-reared, which is treated as the god of the tribe, and sacrificed when it reaches maturity. This scroll is a unique witness to Aberdonian interest in the furthest reaches of the northern world.
The American Arctic

Though our material on the social history of southern Canada is rich, throughout the University’s history a very important area of our interaction with North America has been contact with its Arctic north. Northern Canada was the home of the beaver, which was for long Canada’s most economically significant resource (beaver hats were virtually mandatory for anyone with pretensions to gentility from the late sixteenth century until the early nineteenth.)

However, the mirage which glittered before investor’s eyes was the fabled sea-route, the north-west passage. One of the earliest travellers represented in our collections is Samuel Hearne. Hearne’s *Journey from Prince of Wales’s Fort in Hudson Bay to the Northern Ocean* (1795) records a journey made in the company of a group of native Americans to map and survey the interior. The neat engraving of the Prince of Wales’s Fort, with its Union Jack, and a British officer gesturing with his cane to impress a native American woman, suggests an obtuse attempt to impose European perspectives on a profoundly alien environment, and gives a completely inaccurate impression of this man.

Unlike many later explorers, Hearne made no attempt to maintain European standards, but lived as his guides did, which required a strong stomach:

*The most remarkable dish among them ... is blood mixed with the half digested food which is found in the deer’s stomach or paunch, and boiled up with a sufficient quantity of water, to make it of the consistency of pease pottage ... [I] always thought it exceedingly good.*

Observant and nonjudgmental, his account brings the country and its people to life. While he is sometimes sickened by his guides’ conduct (as when they massacre an inoffensive group of Inuit), he perceives them as fully adult and human, never as children or ‘noble savages’.

The work-life of Northern Canada, and in particular its exploitation of the endless forests, is reflected by Joseph Bouchette’s, *The British Dominions in North America or a topographical description of Lower and Upper Canada* (London, 1832). On page 137 there is a description of the life of ‘the lumberer’, cutting and dragging timber all through the winter snows and then at the melt when the rivers swell or, according to the lumberer’s phrase, ‘the freshets come down’, then the timber is floated down and made into rafts when it reaches the deeper water.

The solitudes of Arctic Canada dominate the illustrations of an account of an 1831 whaling expedition, MS 673, which includes vignettes of icebergs and seabirds, Arctic animals seen against the wastes of ice. The text is a richly factual diary of a voyage (March-October 1831) from Aberdeen via Lerwick in Shetland to the Davis Straits, and back to Hoy and Bressay in the Orkney islands. It is full of fascinating and detailed descriptions of marine and bird life, weather conditions, whaling procedures, shipboard customs and superstitions, hunting expeditions and encounters with the Inuit. (We also have another account, dating from 1853, of the Arctic voyage of a Peterhead vessel in MS 2719.)
Men from northern Scotland, already inured to a difficult climate, were attracted to the Hudson’s Bay Company. One of Hearne’s distinguished successors as an explorer financed by the Company was John Rae, from Orphir in Orkney, who surveyed the as-yet-unexplored northern coastline of Canada in the 1840s. Rae’s outstanding success was also grounded on attending carefully to what the Inuit had to tell him about Arctic survival and living off the land, in stark contrast to most British explorers of the period. The links between Aberdeen and Rae are evoked by a tag attached to a small comb donated to the Marischal Museum in 1929: ‘Esquimaux comb from Dr. Rae, Hudson’s Bay Co’.

Another Hudson’s Bay book, Thomas McKeevor’s *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay during the summer of 1817* (London, 1819) is the work of a man with a gift for description, who evokes the real strangeness of the Arctic world:

> The first thing that engages the attention of the passing mariner is the majestic, as well as singular form which the ice assumes in these chilling regions. I have seen many of these immense masses bear a very close resemblance to an ancient abbey with arched doors and windows …while others assume the appearance of a Grecian temple, supported by massive columns of an azure hue, which at a distance looked like the purest mountain granite (p.9).

He is above all, interested in ice phenomena, and the engraving made from one of his drawings of three ships frozen into the ice is haunting and evocative.

The story of Aberdeen and the Hudson’s Bay Company is a long and complex one, and we have benefited from our connections with the Company in a variety of ways. One remarkable northern Scot who became one of its most distinguished servants was Donald Alexander Smith, later Baron Strathcona and Mount Royal (1820-1914), who was born in Morayshire, and joined the service of the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1838. By 1869, he was head of the Company’s Montreal department. His diplomatic success in achieving a peaceful solution to the Red River uprising (1869-70) seems to have whetted an appetite for politics, a career which culminated in becoming High Commissioner in London. However, the most significant thing about him is that by the time of his death, he had become easily the wealthiest Canadian of his time and a noted philanthropist, particularly generous to McGill and Aberdeen Universities.

The world of early twentieth-century scientific investigation of Arctic Canada is vividly evoked in a set of stereoscopic images of an expedition of 1902. These pictures show scenes of whaling – ‘On the lookout for whales, Baffin Bay’ is an image of ship’s boats momentarily at rest amid the reflections of granite rocks in motionless water. There are also evocative records of ‘Fort Magnesia, the winter quarters of the Stein Arctic expedition to Cape Sabine, Ellesmere Land, 79 degrees north’. The substantial wooden hut is shown in winter completely buried in snow, with a shaft cut at chimney level to the open air. There is also an interior of the hut, ‘Dr Leopold Kahn, the Arctic Explorer, in his winter quarters.’ Interestingly these arctic images come from the collection of William Clark Souter (1880–1959), better known for his record in manuscript and photographs of the Antarctic voyage of the *Terra Nova* in 1903–1904, our MS 3755/2.

In 2000, the University hosted a major conference on Inuit Studies. Though this was primarily focused on the increasingly complex and problematic relationship between peoples, resources, environment, and global processes in the Arctic today, it also had a significant historical dimension, since some of the Inuit who attended the conference had personal ties with the north-east of Scotland, and consequently the additional motive of tracing their heritage or ancestry. Many Inuit worked on Scottish whaling vessels, visiting and living in towns such as Aberdeen and Peterhead.
One of the most remarkable pieces of evidence for Aberdeen’s interaction with the circumpolar world dates from around 1700, and, astonishingly, represents an epic voyage from the Americas to Europe – perhaps exploration, perhaps misadventure. The University preserves an ‘Eskimaux canoe in which a native of that country was driven ashore near Belhelvie, about the beginning of the eighteenth century, and died soon after landing’. The first record of this kayak is in a diary written by the Rev. Francis Gastrell of Stratford-upon-Avon who visited Aberdeen in 1760. He says that,

_In the Church . . . was a Canoo about seven yards long by two feet wide which about thirty two years since was driven into the Don with a man in it who was all over hairy and spoke a language which no person there could interpret. He lived but three days, tho’ all possible care was taken to recover him._

At the time of Gastrell’s visit, the University Chapel was used as the library, and also as the museum, hence the ‘Canoo’ being ‘in the Church’. This enigmatic visitor has since been identified as a Greenlander, on the grounds of the style of his kayak. His arrival in Aberdeen seems almost miraculous, but he may have had an experience resembling that of another Inuit visitor to Scotland, who turned up in 1818 (the story is told in another of the books in our library, Thomas McKeevor’s _A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay_ (London, 1819), p. 31):

_This poor fellow had been drifted out to sea in his canoe near a hundred miles, when he fortunately met with one of the homeward-bound Greenland ships, which took him up …_

This second story ended more happily, with the unnamed adventurer returning home laden with possessions which he shared with his family.

One remarkable Aberdeen skipper who made a significant impact on North Canada was Captain William Penny. In 1839, Penny encountered a young Inuk man, Inuluapik, who told him he knew where to find a huge, sheltered fjord on the east of Baffin Island. Whalers had long been searching for this, since it was known to exist (provisionally named Cumberland Sound) and was the favoured territory of the bowhead whales which were their preferred target. Penny invited the young man to accompany him to Aberdeen for the winter, which he was happy to do, and the _Neptune_ reached Aberdeen on November 8, where Inuluapik’s arrival created a sensation. He gave a demonstration of his kayaking ability on the River Dee. Rashly, he wore full Arctic dress, far too warm for the climate, which sadly put him in bed with a lung infection from which he never entirely recovered. The kayak he used is probably the one now housed in the University’s Medical School. Inuluapik and Penny left Aberdeen aboard another ship, the _Bon Accord_, on 1 April 1840, and on 27 July, guided by Inuluapik, Penny triumphantly entered Cumberland Sound. In the following years Cumberland Sound became the most important whaling ground in the Canadian Arctic. Penny’s own reputation is suggested by the fact that he was selected to lead a British Admiralty expedition in search of Sir John Franklin, an exceptional honour for a whaling master. Concerned about the growing number of American whalers wintering in Cumberland Sound, Penny applied for a Royal Charter in 1853 to establish a permanent commercial colony. Although his initiative was rejected by the British government, an Aberdeen Arctic Company was formed to purchase the _Lady Franklin_ and the _Sophia_ (the two ships he had commanded on the Admiralty Expedition), allowing him to maintain a land base in the Sound which became the chief British station on Baffin Island. In 1857-8, he returned to Baffin Island, accompanied, unusually, by his wife Margaret, and mapped the Cumberland Sound region.

Probably the most significant of the University’s legacies from our Hudson’s Bay connection is held in the Marischal Museum. The Museum contains the third-largest ethnographic collection in Scotland, with a particular strength in Arctic America (almost 2,000 items). At the core of this collection is a donation by Sir William MacGregor (1846–1919), which includes archaeological material from Labrador of ancient date, as well as nineteenth-century ethnographic items. MacGregor, who studied medicine at the University of Glasgow and the University of Aberdeen, joined the colonial service in 1872 and gradually made his way up the ranks, becoming governor of Newfoundland in 1904. He was one of the few governors who took an
active interest in native peoples, visiting both Inuit and Mi'kmaq settlements, and drew on his medical training to help stop the spread of tuberculosis on the island. His term ended in 1909, and after a period in Queensland, Australia, he retired home to Aberdeen, where he died. Most of his collection consisted of quotidian artefacts such as scrapers, a soapstone kettle, and other tools of the Inuit way of life. His fur coat is mentioned in this booklet in the section on Explorers. But his donations to Marischal also include an object particularly rich in associations with the great enterprises of the nineteenth century - an Inuit knife. This knife was found by Captain Bartlett during Peary's attempt on the North Pole in 1906, on the site of the English camp at North Grant Land (82° 30' N), and had belonged to a member of the crew of the Discovery during the Arctic expedition of 1875.

One of our most important donors in this field was Captain William Mitchell (1802–76), an Aberdonian master mariner employed by the Hudson's Bay Company. Like many Hudson's Bay employees, 'Willie' Mitchell was both sailor and trader. He was responsible for four vessels, Cadboro, Una, Recovery and Beaver, and later for the Company's base, Fort Rupert (Mitchell Bay in the Queen Charlotte Islands bears his name). From the many beautiful objects which Mitchell bequeathed to Marischal Museum, one has particular interest. Among a collection of decoratively-carved panel pipes, mostly of argillite, is a charmingly humorous representation of Mitchell's own side-paddlewheel steamer, the Beaver (note the beaver figurehead), carved by a native of the Queen Charlotte Islands in British Columbia.

The Beaver was the first steamship on the west coast of the American continent, and understandably an object of interest. These panel pipes, which combine European and Haida motifs, are a particularly evocative reminder of the complex relationships between native people and European traders and settlers.

Panel pipe showing model boat, ABDUA 5559. Marischal College Museum.

Other highlights of Mitchell’s collection include a remarkable pair of wooden figures, sombre, thoughtful and dignified, also from the Queen Charlotte Islands and an exquisite Chilkat blanket in the Tsimshian style. These blankets were worn by Tlingit people of rank, both men and women, and were placed as funerary robes on the graves of dead chiefs. Mitchell also collected five unusually beautiful masks, one of which conveys such a strong sense of individuality that it may be a portrait.

Inuit knife, ABDUA 5819, Marischal College Museum

Figure carving, Queen Charlotte Islands, ABDUA 9503, Marischal College Museum
We also have a variety of Inuit representational art, including a small group of gaming pieces shaped like waterfowl, which may be of considerable age. They were excavated in 1866 from a house on the south entrance to Jones Sound, Banks Island, in the North-West Territories. Though diminutive, the pieces are exquisitely carved, and two are clearly identifiable as crested grebes.

A particularly fine statuette of a walking caribou from Baffin Island similarly shows shrewdly affectionate observation of the animal’s physique and movement, this miniscule work of art constituting in itself a treasure of the north.

CONCLUSION

This is a long, rich history of the relations of the northernmost university in Britain with the whole northern world lying below the pole. From the collecting of Renaissance maps, to explorations in both directions across the cold seas, Aberdeen’s relations with the Arctic and with northernmost Europe have been complex and fruitful. From 1800, there was an ever more serious and significant movement of peoples, goods, artefacts, art and ideas to and fro across the Atlantic. In this process, the colleges of the University of Aberdeen had a significant part to play. Alumni and professors alike have travelled to Arctic America as well as to Iceland and Scandinavia, and our librarians have constantly collected the records of travels to the north and of northern explorations, to the infinite enrichment of our collections as well as of our intellectual life.
HOLDINGS AS INDICATED IN THE TEXT


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Ainu boy cuddling a bear cub, from *New Year’s Ceremonies of the Ezo People at Matsumae Castle*. Scroll, 1850s, Marischal College Museum.

Samuel Hearne, *Journey from Prince of Wales’s Fort in Hudson’s Bay to the Northern Ocean* (London, 1795), SB 91 (98) Hea


Anon, Journal of a whaling expedition from Aberdeen to the Davis Straits, 1831 (MS 673)

Anon, Journal of a voyage from Peterhead to the Arctic, 1853, MS 2719

Comb, once the property of John Rae, ABDUA, Marischal College Museum

Kayak, navigated from Greenland to Aberdeen c. 1700, ABDUA 6013, Marischal College Museum

Inuit knife, ABDUA 5819, Marischal College Museum

Panel pipe showing model boat, ABDUA 5559. Marischal College Museum.

Figure carving, Queen Charlotte Islands, ABDUA 9503, Marischal College Museum

Chilkat blanket, ABDUA 9503, Marischal College Museum

Mask, ABDUA 9497, Marischal College Museum

Gaming pieces, ABDUA 6199, Marischal College Museum,

Walking caribou in walrus ivory, ABDUA 5735. Marischal College Museum.