

<b>Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest, Case 1 (2022-2023) Arctic Expedition 1852, Sledge Flag of Captain Henry Kellett, C.B. Commanding H.M.S. Resolute</b>	
<b>Statement from Expert Adviser</b>	Statement of the Expert Adviser to the Secretary of State that the flag meets Waverley criterion one.  <b>See below</b>
<b>Statement from the Applicant</b>	Statement from the applicant referencing the three Waverley criteria against which the Committee will consider whether an item referred to it is of national importance.  a) <i>Is it so closely connected with our history and national life that its departure would be a misfortune?</i> b) <i>Is it of outstanding aesthetic importance?</i> c) <i>Is it of outstanding significance for the study of some particular branch of art, learning or history?</i>  <b>See below</b>
<b>Note of case hearing</b>	<b>See below</b>
<b>Press release</b>	A press release was issued by the Secretary of State on 2 September 2022: <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/news/120000-flag-from-sledge-of-british-polar-explorer-at-risk-of-leaving-uk">https://www.gov.uk/government/news/120000-flag-from-sledge-of-british-polar-explorer-at-risk-of-leaving-uk</a>
<b>Recommended price</b>	£120,000 (plus VAT of £24,000 which can be reclaimed by an eligible institution)
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Deferral period</b>	1 December 2022
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Deferral period</b>	19 March 2023
<b>Note of outcome</b>	During the initial deferral period, we received a serious expression of interest from the National Museum of the Royal Navy. The owner accepted this offer and granted the National Museum of the Royal Navy an Option Agreement and the decision on the export licence application was deferred for a further three months. The flag was subsequently purchased by the National Museum of the Royal Navy with the assistance of

	grants from The National Lottery Heritage Fund (£98,170) and The Art Fund (£40,000).
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**RCEWA – Arctic Expedition 1852, Sledge Flag of Captain Henry Kellett, C.B.  
Commanding H.M.S. Resolute**

**Statement of the Expert Adviser to the Secretary of State that the flag meets  
Waverley criterion one.**

Please note that images and appendices referenced are not reproduced.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**1. Brief Description of object(s)**

The object is a silk sledging flag belonging to the polar explorer Captain Henry Kellett (1806-1875) made circa late 1851 to early 1852. The flag measures 595 by 885mm, within a frame of 710 by 995mm. The maker is unknown.

I am not a textile conservator, but an inspection of the image attached to the original email indicates the following:

- a) Overall, it looks to be in good if possibly delicate, condition for silk of that age.
- b) Small splits along the four fold lines before it was flattened and framed.
- c) The fly looks to be a little fragile, possibly the result of being used.
- d) A repair with black thread to the right of the centre fold.
- e) Areas of discolouration or surface dirt – note that the contemporary text describes it as green, so this current colour could be degraded dyes or it has been washed.
- f) The Union flag, Crest and Irish Harp additions look to be in good condition.
- g) The hoist with the reinforced holes appears sound.

**2. Context**

**Provenance:** According to the Application for Export Licence, the flag's provenance is by continuous descent through the Kellett family. Further research shows that this is via Henry Kellett's brother John Dalton Kellett. John's g-g-g-g-granddaughter Diana Kellett married Baron Holderness in 1947. (Lady Holderness is the current owner).

**Publications:** It has been referenced in Barbara Tomlinson's article regarding sledging flags: <https://www.flaginstitute.org/pdfs/Barbara%20Tomlinson.pdf> (Barbara was my predecessor responsible for the Polar collections, but with additional oversight of the flag collection at the NMM)

It is specifically mentioned in George F. McDougall (Master of *Resolute*) book, *The eventful voyage of H.M. Discovery ship 'Resolute' to the Arctic Regions in Search of Sir John Franklin* (London, 1857), pp204-5.

### 3. Waverley criteria

#### Waverley 1: Closely connected with our history and national life

The 1845 Northwest Passage Expedition led by Sir John Franklin and subsequent search expeditions for it have continually captured the public imagination in Britain, the USA and Canada. The discoveries of HMS *Erebus* (2014) and *Terror* (2016) and their cultural and political ramifications neatly demonstrates the importance of the search expeditions to British and Canadian history, with a greater focus today on the role of Inuit oral testimony in improving our understanding of how the expedition disintegrated by 1848. Hundreds of books have been written about the Franklin expedition and searches in many languages and it has influenced film, TV and fiction writers, as well as the Antarctic polar explorers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Captain Kellett was involved in two expeditions, one from each end of the Northwest Passage, and this flag is from the Canadian end between 1852 and 1854. A proud Irishman at a time when there was prejudice, his flag represents his identity within a British context. His flag is one of the earliest known to still be in existence, giving it greater significance as an object that tells this story of searching for answers, exploring, mapping and claiming the northern extremes of the North America for Britain (and by extension, Canada).

## DETAILED CASE

### 1. Detailed description of object(s) if more than in Executive summary, and any comments.

What does it depict?

- Silk embroidered sledging flag with three sets of iconography specific to Captain Kellett, revealing what he felt was important to publicly say about himself:
  - o **National Identity** – Kellett was born in Ireland, represented by the Irish harp. The Irish connection was significant for Kellett, as George McDougal records that one of HMS *Resolute's* sledges was launched on St. Patrick's Day in 1852. He wrote '...the sledge itself was decorated with a boat's ensign, and a green flag of the captain's crest embroidered thereon.' The green reinforces this obvious connection to Ireland (even if now the silk is a different colour).
  - o **Personal Identity** – elements of the Kellett coat of arms features prominently in the centre with an armoured arm holding a baton aloft above a cross. Within a blue belt is the motto 'Auxilium ab alto' (help from on high).
  - o **Supra-National identity** – In the canton is the Union flag, although it has been sewn the wrong way around. The expedition was a British one and Ireland was part of the British Empire, so this makes a good counterbalance to the Irish harp.

What does it tell us about that period?

- **Peculiarly British phenomenon** – sledge flags were a British polar obsession that stretched to the Antarctic in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Promoted by Captain Austin in 1850 on the second expedition to search for Franklin to '...retain *esprit de corps*, and a naval atmosphere...' They forged an identity among officers and crew for each sledge sent from the ship to search for Franklin's expedition – effectively a form of command and control in an unfamiliar landscape.
- **Reinventing history** – As later formalised by Sir Clements Markham (President of the Royal Geographical Society), these flags harked back to an age of chivalry blended with Victorian (mis-)understandings of Mediaeval society, characterising the officers as knights on an Arctic quest. Their embedded presence in polar exploration was such that they featured in private publications and the official Parliamentary *Arctic Blue Books*, which recorded the correspondence and interviews after the expeditions returned.
- **Class & Identity** – sledge flags also reflected Victorian social standing. A gentleman officer would have a family coat of arms and/or motto, whereas the crew of these ships would not. The process of inventing a crest and motto for officers who had risen from the 'lower deck' would have emphasised the different social standing between gentlemen and non-gentlemen officers. It reminds us that the Royal Navy in this period was becoming socially more rigid in its office corps, in contrast to the more fluid 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Who made it/painted it/wrote it?

- **Female makers** - Sledge flags makers are rarely known. However, from the little research and evidence we have, they tend to be made by women. For instance, Lady Franklin embroidered a Union Flag for Sir John's 1845 expedition, and the sisters of Captain Collinson (a polar explorer) created McClintock's sledging flag for his 1857-59 Franklin search expedition. Emile de Bray records in his diary that women embroidered flags and submitted them to the ship's captain for distribution among the officers. This is an area of much needed research, as the female voice is rare in Polar exploration histories.
- **Unknown maker** – Kellett was unmarried and had no sisters. Therefore, candidates would be his mother, Mary (nee Foott) or his sister-in-law Charity (nee Knowlles).

No. of comparable objects by the same artist already in the UK, in both public and private collections? - Not applicable, as maker is unknown.

## 2. Detailed explanation of the outstanding significance of the object(s).

Significance of figures associated with the object(s): maker/client/owners?

**Henry Kellett (1806-1875)** – Captain in the Royal Navy who took part in two polar expeditions to search for Sir John Franklin and his crew (1848-9 and 1852-4). Earlier, he fought in the First Opium War with China, where he was promoted twice (1839-42). He ended his career as a Vice Admiral, having served as Commander in Chief of the China Station in 1869. His varied career is a good example of an officer who gains promotion in war but makes his name as a surveyor – numerous places are named after him around Hong Kong and the Arctic.

**Sir John Franklin (1786-1847)** – Franklin fought at Copenhagen (1801) in Nelson's squadron, he served with Matthew Flinders during the survey of Australia (1802), was present at Trafalgar (1805), and ultimately became famous for leading three expeditions to the Arctic, the last of which never returned (1845-48). This 'loss' triggered over 30 search expeditions by land and sea from both ends of the Northwest Passage. His wife Lady Franklin's persistence, supported by friends, raised the public profile of these expeditions like no other: from clairvoyants to royalty.

Significance of subject-matter?

**Politics of Polar Exploration** – Britain's imperial drive is represented in the numerous expeditions sent to the Arctic between 1818 and 1876. Mapping the landscape and undertaking scientific research stamped Britain's claims to what is now Canada and the Canadian Arctic Archipelago.

**Contemporary relevance** – the retreat of the Arctic sea ice is opening up the Northwest Passage, over which Canada (by inheritance from Britain's exploration and mapping) claims sovereignty. The USA is inclined to claim it is an international seaway.

**1845 Northwest Passage Expedition & the British psyche** – polar exploration and the disappearance of Franklin's expedition continue to capture the public imagination. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Landseer's 1864 painting *Man Proposes, God Disposes* were inspired by the expedition or the sublime and wild landscape of the

Arctic. Finding HMS *Erebus* (2014) and *Terror* (2016) reignited public interest, underpinning the numerous books written about the expedition. The recent TV adaptation of Dan Simmons' book *The Terror*, further raised its profile in the public consciousness.

**The Relics** – material brought back from the search expeditions was deemed of national significance and exhibited in the Royal Naval Museum Greenwich. These were transferred to the NMM in 1936, where they have continued to be displayed and researched.

Significance of materials/process/usage?

There is no significance of materials or process. However, the use of these early sledging flags in the Arctic were important to Captain Scott and Sir Ernest Shackleton (and others) when exploring the Antarctic in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Examples are in SPRI and NMM collections.

Is/are the object(s) of local/regional/national importance?

The object is of national significance, reflecting the British obsession with, and state-sponsorship of, 19<sup>th</sup> century Arctic exploration and specifically the Franklin search expeditions. It is not just a story about one region, but a national effort that opened up northern Canada and began to piece together the story of a catastrophic polar tragedy.

Summary of related objects in public/private ownership in the UK

**Public institutions for Franklin-related Arctic sledge flags**

- National Maritime Museum – AAA0947: Woollen Union flag from 1850 search expedition (not technically a sledge flag); AAA0834: Lt. Pim's sledge flag given by Lady Franklin, (1852-54).

**Private ownership**

- Lady Holderness - Kellett flag (1852-54)
- McClintock Family – McClintock flag 'Be thou our guide' (1852-54).

**Sold but owner not known**

- Captain Richard's sledge flag – sold 2017 by Bearnes, Hampton & Littlewood

**Owned abroad**

- McClintock's 'Lady Franklin' flag (1857-59) – Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, Yellowknife, Canada
- Lt. Hobson flag (1857-59) – St. David's Cathedral, Hobart

## **RCEWA – Arctic Expedition 1852, Sledge Flag of Captain Henry Kellett, C.B. Commanding H.M.S. Resolute**

### **Applicant's statement**

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Though a superb example of a polar sledging flag from the 1852 Arctic Squadron expedition in search of Sir John Franklin, this flag is not the sole example of its type. The National Maritime Museum holds the sledging flag of Lieutenant Bedford Pim, crew member of *Resolute*, for his sledge *John Barrow*. This flag, with its iconic motto "Hope on Hope Ever" was made for him by Lady Jane Franklin herself. Visually, Kellett's flag does not match this in aesthetic importance.

*Resolute's* fate resulted in an interesting legacy of international exchange between Great Britain and America. At the behest of Squadron commander Sir Edmund Belcher, and to the consternation of Captain Kellett, she was abandoned in the ice along with four other Admiralty ships. Over a year after Kellett's men had closed the hatches, *Resolute* was sighted adrift near Baffin Island, and was recovered by an American whaling captain. She was then purchased by the US government and fully refitted at a cost of over \$40,000, and presented back to Queen Victoria as a gesture of goodwill. When she was eventually decommissioned from the Royal Navy, the queen requested an ornate desk be crafted from *Resolute's* oak timbers, which was presented in turn to President Rutherford B. Hayes. Many US Presidents since have used this desk in the Oval Office. These gestures have led to a series of further diplomatic gifts presented between the two nations pertaining to the *Resolute*. A sterling example of such a relic, the value of this flag is significantly bolstered by its presidential connection, and the inextricable link of the *Resolute* to the "special relationship" between the United States and Great Britain.

As such, the flag holds little in the way of research value. It is, however, of great value to a collector of Arctic or presidential material, especially within the North American and Canadian market.

Kellett's flag has some condition issues, including the loss of its original green colour. As outlined in the independent conservator's report, it requires work to clean and stabilise it.



**Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest, note of case hearing on 13 July 2022: Arctic Expedition 1852, Sledge Flag of Captain Henry Kellett, C.B. Commanding H.M.S. Resolute (Case 1, 2022-23)**

**Application**

1. The Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest (RCEWA) met on 13 July 2022 to consider an application to export an Arctic Expedition 1852, Sledge Flag of Captain Henry Kellett, C.B. Commanding H.M.S. Resolute. The value shown on the export licence application was £120,000 which represented the agreed sale price (including dealer's commission) at which the overseas buyer had agreed to buy the item, conditional on the issue of an export licence. The expert adviser had objected to the export of the flag under the first Waverley criterion on the grounds that its departure from the UK would be a misfortune because (i) it was so closely connected with our history and national life.
2. Six of the regular eight RCEWA members were present in person and able to inspect the flag. One member attended virtually. They were joined by three independent assessors, acting as temporary members of the Reviewing Committee, all of whom were present in person. The Chairman explained that the binding offers mechanism was applicable for this case.
3. The applicant was consulted about the hybrid digital/in person process and confirmed they were content to proceed in this manner and were content for the RCEWA member who was attending remotely to vote. The applicant confirmed that the value did not include VAT and that VAT of £24,000 would be payable in the event of a UK sale and that this could be reclaimed by an eligible institution. The applicant also confirmed that the owner understood the circumstances under which an export licence might be refused.

**Expert's submission**

4. The expert adviser had provided a written submission stating that the silk sledging flag belonged to the polar explorer Captain Henry Kellett (1806-1875), was made circa late 1851 to early 1852 and featured three sets of iconography specific to Captain Kellett. Captain Kellett was involved in two expeditions, one from each end of the Northwest Passage, and this flag is from the Canadian end between 1852 and 1854. A proud Irishman at a time when there was prejudice, his flag represents his identity within a British context. His flag is one of the earliest known still to be in existence, giving it greater significance as an object that tells this story of searching for answers, exploring, mapping and claiming the northern extremes of the North America for Britain (and by extension, Canada).

5. Sledge flags were a peculiarly British polar accoutrement that continued in use to the Antarctic in the early 20th century. Promoted by Captain Austin in 1850 on the second expedition to search for Franklin to ‘...retain *esprit de corps*, and a naval atmosphere...’ They forged an identity among officers and crew for each sledge sent from the ship to search for Franklin’s expedition – effectively a form of command and control in an unfamiliar landscape. The object is of national significance, reflecting the British obsession with, and state-sponsorship of, 19th century Arctic exploration and specifically the Franklin search expeditions. It is not just a story about one region, but a national effort that opened up northern Canada and began to piece together the story of a catastrophic polar tragedy.

### **Applicant’s submission**

6. The applicant had stated in a written submission that they did not consider that the flag met any of the three Waverley criteria. They stated that though a superb example of a polar sledging flag from the 1852 Arctic Squadron expedition in search of Sir John Franklin, this flag is not the sole example of its type. The National Maritime Museum holds the sledging flag of Lieutenant Bedford Pim, crew member of *Resolute*, for his sledge *John Barrow*. This flag, with its iconic motto “Hope on Hope Ever” was made for him by Lady (Jane) Franklin herself. Visually, Kellett’s flag does not match this in aesthetic importance.

7. *Resolute*’s fate resulted in an interesting legacy of international exchange between Great Britain and America. Over a year after Kellett’s men had abandoned the ship, *Resolute* was recovered by an American whaling captain. She was then purchased by the US government and fully refitted and presented back to Queen Victoria as a gesture of goodwill. When she was eventually decommissioned from the Royal Navy, the queen requested an ornate desk be crafted from *Resolute*’s oak timbers, which was presented in turn to President Rutherford B. Hayes. A sterling example of such a relic, the value of this flag is significantly bolstered by its presidential connection, and the inextricable link of the *Resolute* to the “special relationship” between the United States and Great Britain. As such, the flag holds little in the way of research value. It is, however, of great value to a collector of Arctic or presidential material, especially within the North American and Canadian market.

8. Kellett’s flag has some condition issues, including the loss of its original green colour. As outlined in the independent conservator’s report, it requires work to clean and stabilise it.

### **Discussion by the Committee**

9. The expert adviser and applicant retired and the Committee discussed the case. They agreed this was a fascinating early example of a sledge flag, and an early prototype for future design of such flags. They found the symbolism of the heraldic elements remarkable and noted these flags were unique to Britain.

Further to this, the flag was notable for its context within the exploration of the northwest passage, which was potentially the single most important goal within British maritime history. They concluded that the unique design of this flag, along with its importance within the context of British history was of outstanding significance.

### **Waverley Criteria**

10. The Committee voted on whether the flag met the Waverley criteria. Of the 10 members, all voted that it met the first Waverley criterion. The flag was therefore found to meet the first Waverley criterion.

### **Matching offer**

11. The Committee recommended the sum of £120,000 (plus VAT of £24,000 which can be reclaimed by an eligible institution) as a fair matching price.

### **Deferral period**

12. The Committee agreed to recommend to the Secretary of State that the decision on the export licence should be deferred for an initial period of three months. At the end of the first deferral period, if the Arts Council received notification of a serious intention to raise funds with a view to making an offer to purchase the flag, the owner will have a consideration period of 15 Business Days to consider such offer(s). The Committee recommended that there should be a further deferral period of three months that would commence following the signing of an Option Agreement.

### **Communication of findings**

13. The expert adviser and the applicant returned. The Chairman notified them of the Committee's decision on its recommendations to the Secretary of State.

14. The expert adviser agreed to act as champion if a decision on the licence was deferred by the Secretary of State.