

<b>Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest, case 13 (2023-24): Sir Ernest Shackleton's Polar Medal</b>	
<b>Statement from Expert Adviser</b>	Statement of the Expert Adviser to the Secretary of State that the medal meets Waverley criterion one  <b>See below</b>
<b>Statement from the Applicant</b>	Statement from the applicant referencing the three Waverley criteria. The Reviewing Committee will designate an object as a 'national treasure' if it considers that its departure from the UK would be a misfortune on one or more of the following three grounds:  a) Is it closely connected with our history and national life? b) Is it of outstanding aesthetic importance? c) Is it of outstanding significance for the study of some particular branch of art, learning or history?  <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 February 2024: <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/news/sir-ernest-shackletons-polar-medal-at-risk-of-leaving-the-uk">https://www.gov.uk/government/news/sir-ernest-shackletons-polar-medal-at-risk-of-leaving-the-uk</a>
<b>Recommended price</b>	£1,760,000 (plus VAT of £44,000)
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Deferral period</b>	1 May 2024
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Deferral period</b>	
<b>Note of outcome</b>	

## **RCEWA – Sir Ernest Shackleton’s Polar Medal**

### **Statement of the Expert Adviser to the Secretary of State that the medal meets Waverley criterion one**

Please note that images and appendices referenced are not reproduced.

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

- What is it?

Sir Ernest Shackleton's Polar Medal, 1904, with three clasps: 'ANTARCTIC 1902-04', 'ANTARCTIC 1907-09' and 'ANTARCTIC 1914-16'.

- What is it made of?

Silver and ribbon

- What are its measurements?

Diameter: 33mm

Length (inc ribbon): c.100mm

- Who is the artist/maker and what are their dates?

Made by the Royal Mint

Obverse portrait by George William de Saulles (1862–1903)

Reverse design by Ernest George Gillick (1874–1951)

- What date is the object?

1904 with clasp additions 1909 and 1916.

- What condition is it in?

As issued. Some discolouration to the ribbon and minor tarnish to the metal due to its age.

#### **2. Context**

- Provenance

By descent from the recipient

- Key literary and exhibition references

<https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/building/cultural-collections/medals/collection/polar-medal/history/>

- No. of comparable objects by the same artist already in the UK, in both public and private collections?

There are unissued specimens of the first (pre-1910) polar award bearing Edward VII's portrait in UK public collections, and one issued specimen:

Ernest E.M. Joyce's Polar Medal (issued 1904), in the Scott Polar Research Institute.

[Captain Scott's Polar Medal is in Canterbury Museum, Christchurch New Zealand (acquired by donation in 1948).]

### **3. Waverley criteria**

- Which of the Waverley criteria does the object meet?

**Waverley 1** - Is it closely connected with our history and national life?

**Yes**

If yes, please explain why?

The Polar Medal was instituted in September 1904, at first to reward the participants in Captain Robert F. Scott's successful first expedition to the Antarctic region, and then to reward future expedition members and leaders. Besides Captain Scott, its other most distinguished recipient was Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton (1874–1922). This is the original, full-sized version of the medal awarded to Shackleton. It is also the only award to reference all three of the polar expeditions in which he was involved (two of which as leader). Its retention by his descendants until the present while others have been dispersed, demonstrates its sentimental and personal value as a relic of the great explorer.

Shackleton, who accompanied Scott during the 1902–04 expedition and who subsequently led expeditions in 1907–09 and 1914–16, is the most decorated explorer of the so-called Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration, and possibly of all time. Born in County Kildare, Ireland he was raised in London and schooled at Dulwich College before joining the merchant navy aged sixteen. His polar expeditions broke numerous records, notably achieving a farthest South in 1909, 97 miles short of the South Pole. This achievement made his name and earned him a knighthood. The leadership and courage he demonstrated during the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition 1914–16, is now legendary. The loss of his ship *Endurance*, crushed by sea ice, and his heroic rescue of all his men after two years marooned in Antarctica, provides an epic account of triumph through adversity.

Shackleton received thirteen official decorations from various countries. He was also awarded around forty civilian and academic awards. Examples of most official decorations exist as miniatures. These were purchased by the recipient as and when their ribbon bar expanded through additions, and were worn at banquets and

other state occasions. These, including all known miniatures of the Polar Medal, are now all held abroad; there are none in any UK museum. To not have any original full-sized medals or miniatures from the most decorated polar explorer we have known available in any UK institution, represents a major omission from the public record.

Shackleton's reputation as an explorer, leader and national figure remains strong and public interest, if anything, has grown in the hundred years since his death. He remains a popular figure in historic polls (a finalist in the BBC Icons: Greatest Person of the 20th Century), museum permanent displays (Polar Worlds at the National Maritime Museum; The Polar Museum in Cambridge), special exhibitions (The Enduring Eye exhibition at the Royal Geographical Society and national tour; The Heart of the Great Alone: Scott, Shackleton and Antarctic Photography, Queens Gallery) and in popular culture (notably the Channel 4 drama *Endurance* starring Sir Kenneth Branagh). A statue is placed in a niche at the Royal Geographic Institute on Exhibition Road while his books, *South* and *Heart of the Antarctic*, remain non-fiction bestsellers.

This unique artefact is therefore of outstanding significance, both as the most important and original of the UK medals to have been awarded to Shackleton, as well as the last remaining of any award to remain here in the UK. It should go to a UK public institution where it can remind visitors of Shackleton's extraordinary achievements, and to inspire future generations of leaders.

## **RCEWA – Sir Ernest Shackleton’s Polar Medal**

### **Applicant’s statement**

Please note that images and appendices referenced are not reproduced.

### **Is the item closely connected with our history and national life?**

No – it is a relic of the now distant age of our imperial expansionism, awarded to an Anglo-Irish explorer, and so probably less ‘*closely* connected’ now, over a century after its recipient’s exploits, than it was in its own time, and in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century in the wake of Roland Huntford’s great revisionist biography (*Shackleton*, 1985).

### **Is it of outstanding aesthetic importance?**

No

### **Is it of outstanding significance for the study of some particular branch of art, learning or history?**

No – the medal itself is of symbolic value but not ‘*outstanding* significance’ for the study of art, learning or history. The Shackleton Collection at SPRI, Department of Geography, University of Cambridge, is the repository of material of ‘*outstanding* significance’ for the study of the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration.

<b>Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest, note of case hearing</b>	
<b>Meeting date</b>	Wednesday 6 December 2023
<b>Object</b>	Sir Ernest Shackleton's Polar Medal
<b>Expert Adviser's objection</b>	The Keeper, Department of Coins and Medals, British Museum, had objected to the export of the medal under the first Waverley criterion on the grounds that its departure from the UK would be a misfortune because it was so closely connected with our history and national life.
<b>Committee Members &amp; Independent Assessors</b>	Seven of the regular eight Committee members were present and able to inspect the medal. They were joined in person by three independent assessors, acting as temporary members of the Committee. One Committee member joined remotely, but as they had not viewed the object, they did not participate in the Committee's discussion or vote.
<b>Value on the licence</b>	The value shown on the export licence application was £1,760,000, which represented an agreed sale price.
	<p>The applicant was informed that there was currently an interim process in place for Committee hearings. The Committee was still holding hybrid meetings but any Committee members, including the independent assessors, were required to inspect the object under consideration prior to discussing the case and voting. Any permanent Committee members or independent assessors who were not able to view the object were not able to vote.</p> <p>The applicant confirmed that the owner understood the circumstances under which an export licence might be refused.</p>
<b>VAT</b>	The applicant confirmed that the value did not include VAT and that VAT of £44,000 on the buyer's premium would be payable in the event of a UK sale.
<b>Expert Adviser's comments</b>	The expert adviser made an additional statement in response to the applicant's comment that the medal was representative of our imperial expansion. They wished to add that, in their view, this period of Polar exploration should be viewed separately to

	colonialism and be seen in the context of the advancement of natural science research.
<b>Applicant's comments</b>	The applicant stated that they wished to add to their submission that public interest in Shackleton had peaked around the millennium but had been receding over the past 20 years.
<b>Committee's discussion</b>	<p>The expert adviser and applicant retired and the Committee discussed the case.</p> <p>They agreed that the medal was a highly significant symbol of the extraordinary achievements of Shackleton, a national hero who himself could be considered the epitome of the period of Polar Exploration in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They noted that, although previously Shackleton had not been as well represented in UK museums as Captain Robert F. Scott, there had been a recent shift and growth in public interest towards Shackleton.</p> <p>The Committee noted that the object itself was extraordinary and beautiful, and the fact that the medal was, unusually, named and had three bars was rare. Overall, however, they agreed that its outstanding significance was because it had been owned and worn by Shackleton.</p>
<b>Waverley Criteria</b>	The Committee voted on whether the medal met the Waverley criteria. Of the 10 voting members, 10 members voted that it met the first Waverley criterion. No members voted that it met the second Waverley criterion. Three members voted that it met the third Waverley criterion. The medal was therefore found to meet the first Waverley criterion.
<b>Matching Offer</b>	The Committee recommended the sum of £1,760,000 (plus VAT of £44,000) as a fair matching price.
<b>Deferral periods</b>	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 medal, the owner will have a consideration period of 15 Business Days to consider such offer(s) and enter into the Option Agreement. The Committee recommended that there

	<p>should be a further deferral period of five months that would commence following the signing of an Option Agreement.</p>
<b>Communication of findings</b>	<p>The expert adviser and the applicant returned. The Chairman notified them of the Committee's decision on its recommendations to the Secretary of State.</p> <p>The expert adviser agreed to act as champion if a decision on the licence was deferred by the Secretary of State.</p>