Large folio (650 by 450mm), large engraved chart on six sheets, half-calf over marbled paper boards, spine in compartments gilt.

NORIE'S RARE CHART OF THE PACIFIC, AND A TALE OF 'MOBY DICK'

A New Chart of the Pacific Ocean, Exhibiting The Western Coast of America, from Cape Horn to Beerings Strait, The Eastern Shores of Asia Including Japan, China and Australia, and all the numerous Islands and known Dangers Situated in Polynesia and Australia, Correctly drawn and Regulated according to the most Approved and Modern Surveys and Astronomical Observations By J.W. Norie, Hydrographer &c., &c. 1825.

Author
NORIE, John William

Publication date
October 1st, 1825. Corrected to 1826.

Publisher
Published as the Act directs, by J.W. Norie & Co. at the Navigation Warehouse and Naval Academy No. 157 Leadenhall Street,

Publication place
London,

Physical description
Large folio (650 by 450mm), large engraved chart on six sheets, half-calf over marbled paper boards, spine in compartments gilt.

Dimensions
1600 by 1860mm (63 by 73.25 inches), if joined

Notes

This particular chart was used aboard the whaler ‘Ann Alexander’, of New Bedford, during its Pacific voyage of 1828-1832. An inscription to the front endpaper gives the name of the ‘Ann Alexander’ together with a set of coordinates (33o 44mins Lat and 88o 30mins Long), and the name of Josiah Howland the master of the ship. The coordinates place her just north of the Galapagos Islands, and indeed the track marked upon the chart bears this out.

The ship ‘Ann Alexander’ had a long and fascinating history. It is first mentioned in 1805, when, during a voyage between New Bedford and Livorno she went to the aid of the victorious though battered British Fleet at Trafalgar. By the mid-1820s the ‘Ann’ was involved in the highly profitable Pacific whaling industry. It was an industry that would prove fatal for her, as in the August of 1851 she was holed under the water line by “a maddened [sperm] whale” just off the Galapagos Islands, and the crew was forced to abandon her. By coincidence, the first edition of Hermann Melville’s ‘Moby Dick’ was published some two months after the incident. Melville, never one for understatement commented on the fate of the ‘Ann Alexander’ in a letter to the famous publisher and biographer, Evert Duychinck:

“For some days past being engaged in the woods with axe, wedge, & beetle, the Whale had almost completely slipped me for the time (& I was the merrier for it) when Crash! comes Moby Dick himself (as you justly say) & reminds me of what I have been about for part of the last year or two. It is really & truly a surprising coincidence — to say the least. I make no doubt it is Moby Dick himself, for there is no account of his capture after the sad fate of the Pequod about fourteen years ago. — Ye Gods! What a commentator is this Ann Alexander whale. What he has to say is short & pithy & very much to the point. I wonder if my evil art has raised this monster”.

John Norie (1772-1843), the most celebrated hydrographer of his day, learned his trade as an apprentice to chartmaker William Heather, eventually taking over the company when Heather retired in 1813. J.W. Norie & Co. operating from the Navigation Warehouse and Naval Academy offered nautical instruments, charts and instructional texts on navigation. The first edition of the present work was published by Norie in 1816 with just 28 maps. Norie understood the vital need for updated charts and the work was constantly revised and expanded: for example, the fifth edition appeared in 1827 with 31 maps, and the eighth edition published in 1838 had 43 maps. This edition was the final produced in Norie’s lifetime and contains many notable additions, including maps devoted to Australia. Norie worked in partnership with Charles Wilson (latterly as J.W. Norie & Wilson), until Wilson took over when Norie retired.

Bibliography

Literature: Tooley, ‘The Mapping of Australia’, 346.

Provenance

Provenance: With the near contemporary manuscript inscription “Ship Ann Alexander… Lat 3-44 Long… 88-30, Josiah Howland”, to front endpaper, and the track of the ‘Ann Alexander’ shown on the second, third, and last sheets, dated 1830.

Price: £45000

Inventory reference: 23182

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