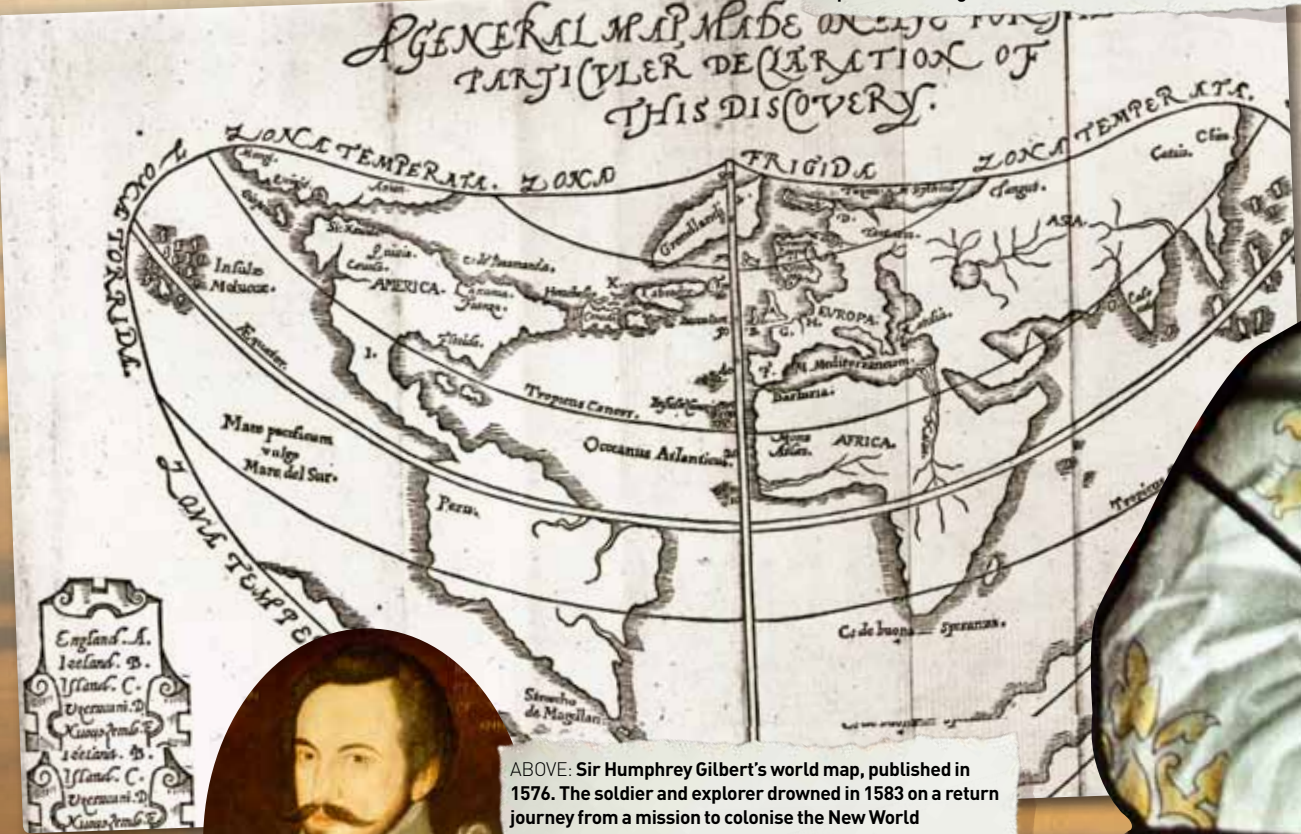


# The Tudor guide to colonising the world

Cannibalism, plunder, starvation and murder... they all appear in an epic Tudor account of English voyages of discovery, compiled by a man who rarely left the country. **Claire Jowitt** hails one of history's greatest travel books



An engraving showing the *Golden Hind* engaging the Spanish ship *Cacafuego*. This episode features prominently in *The Principal Navigations'* account of Sir Francis Drake's epic circumnavigation of the world from 1577-80



ABOVE: Sir Humphrey Gilbert's world map, published in 1576. The soldier and explorer drowned in 1583 on a return journey from a mission to colonise the New World  
LEFT: A portrait of Sir Humphrey Gilbert. Thanks to *The Principal Navigations'* account of his death, Victorians were praising Gilbert's courage some three centuries later

## THE PRINCIPAL NAVIGATIONS, VOIAGES, TRAFFIQUES AND DISCOVERIES of the English Nation, made by Sea or over-land, to the remote and farthest distant quarters of the Earth, at any time within the compasse of these 1500. yeeres: Devided into three severall Volumes, according to the positions of the Regions, whereunto they were directed.

This first Volume containing the woorthy Discoveries, &c. of the English toward the North and Northeast by sea, as of Lapland, Serikfinia, Corelia, the Baie of S. Nicolas, the Isles of Colgoine, Vaigatz, and Nona Zembla, toward the great river Ob, with the mighty Empire of Russia, the Caspian Sea, Georgia, Armenia, Media, Persia, Boghar in Baltria, and diuers kingdomes of Tartaria:

Together with many notable monuments and testimonies of the ancient forren trades, and of the warrelike and other shipping of this realme of England in former ages.

Whereunto is annexed also a briefe Commentarie of the true state of Island, and of the Northren Seas and lands situate that way.

And lastly, the memorable defeat of the Spanish Armada, Anno 1588, and the victory of Sir Francis Drake, atchieved by the English, at the mouth of the Bay of Matanzas, in the year 1578.

By Richard Hakluyt, Esquire, Secretary to the Admirall, and one of the Admirall's Counsellors.

Imprinted by I. Iaggard, at the Signe of the Gunne, in the Strand, neere to the Church of St. Dunstons.

The frontispiece of Richard Hakluyt's *The Principal Navigations*, first published in 1589. The Victorian historian JA Froude hailed this massive account of English exploration as "the prose epic of the modern English nation"

**S**IR Humphrey Gilbert was hailed a hero – not so much for the way he lived, but the way he died. In June 1583, the explorer, soldier and half-brother of Sir Walter Raleigh led a fleet of five ships from Plymouth to explore and colonise North America under the terms of a Letters Patent granted by Elizabeth I in 1578. Unfortunately, it was to be his last adventure, for on 9 September 1583 poor Gilbert drowned when his ship, the *Squirrel*, was lost on the return leg from Newfoundland.

According to the eyewitness report of Edward Hayes, captain of the *Golden Hind*, when Gilbert's fleet encountered a violent storm near the Azores, he refused to abandon his small pinnace and transfer to the relative safety of Hayes's ship. Gilbert was last seen on deck reading a book – probably either More's *Utopia* or Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*. His final words, which Hayes claimed to hear, were: "We are as neare to heaven, by sea as by land."

Hayes's account of Gilbert's dramatic demise is a colourful one, and it certainly had a lasting impact back home in England – some 300 years after the event, late 19th and early 20th-century English writers were praising Gilbert for his Christian fortitude and imperial ambitions. Yet the account may have been lost to posterity had it not appeared in one of the most important travel books ever written – *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*... published in 1589 by a man called Richard Hakluyt.

Hakluyt's name may mean little to most people now, but back in the heyday of the British empire, his tales of derring-do – of which Gilbert's death was just one – were greatly admired as

precursors of the Victorian expansionist spirit. In fact, so in thrall to Hakluyt's works were the Victorians that they named a society after him – founded in 1846 by William Desborough Cooley – which has continued his work of editing travel accounts of trade, exploration and adventure ever since.

But perhaps no one summed up the 19th-century acclaim for Hakluyt better than the historian JA Froude, when he wrote in an 1852 article for the *The Westminster Review* that the *The Principal Navigations* was much admired as "the prose epic of the modern English nation".

So who was this man, Richard Hakluyt, who collected and published hundreds of accounts of travels and exploration? Hakluyt the Younger, as he is known to distinguish him from his

cousin, the lawyer Richard Hakluyt – who was also active in the world of trade and exploration – was born in Hertfordshire in 1552 or 1553, the

son of another Richard, a member of the Skinners' Company (one of the livery companies of the City of London), and his wife, Margery.

### Well-connected

Hakluyt the Younger was educated at Westminster School as a Queen's Scholar and, in 1570, went on to Christ Church, Oxford. Ordained as a clergyman, between 1583 and 1588 he was chaplain and secretary to Sir Edward Stafford, English ambassador at the French court. He was then employed in a number of clerical roles, culminating with his appointment as prebendary (a type of canon) of Westminster from 1602 until his death in 1616. He was also well connected, serving as personal chaplain to Sir Robert Cecil, 1st Earl of Salisbury, who was principal secretary of state to both Elizabeth I and James VI and I.

Hakluyt's interest in exploration dated back to his youth. In the preface ➤

In the heyday of the British empire, his tales of derring-do were greatly admired

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## By dint of prior discovery, *The Principal Navigations* claimed the New World for the English

to *The Principal Navigations* he recalls a visit to the chambers of his cousin Richard, where “I found lying open upon his board certain books of cosmography, with an universal Mappe”. His cousin “began to instruct my ignorance” by showing him recent geographical discoveries on the map, and describing the commodities and valuable trade resulting from them.

The two Richard Hakluys then discussed the relationship between the new geography and Christian belief, studying Psalm 107 from the Bible, “where I read, that they which go downe to the sea in ships, and occupy by the great waters, they see the works of the Lord, and his woonders in the deepe”. It “formed so deep an impression,” Hakluyt tells us that “I constantly resolved [...] I would by God’s assistance prosecute that knowledge and kinde of literature.”

In this encounter the seeds were sown for Hakluyt’s life work, the circulation of practical information

about global geography and trading opportunities, within the framework of the reformed Protestant religion.

Apart from a visit to Paris as part of Stafford’s household, Hakluyt never travelled himself – though in a letter of 1584 to Sir Francis Walsingham, then Queen Elizabeth’s principal secretary of state, he writes of his readiness to “goe myself in the action” under Gilbert’s patent for American exploration. Then, over 20 years later, in 1606, he was granted a licence to serve as chaplain for the Jamestown colony, but sent a substitute in his place.

So, instead of drawing on his own experiences, Hakluyt gathered the

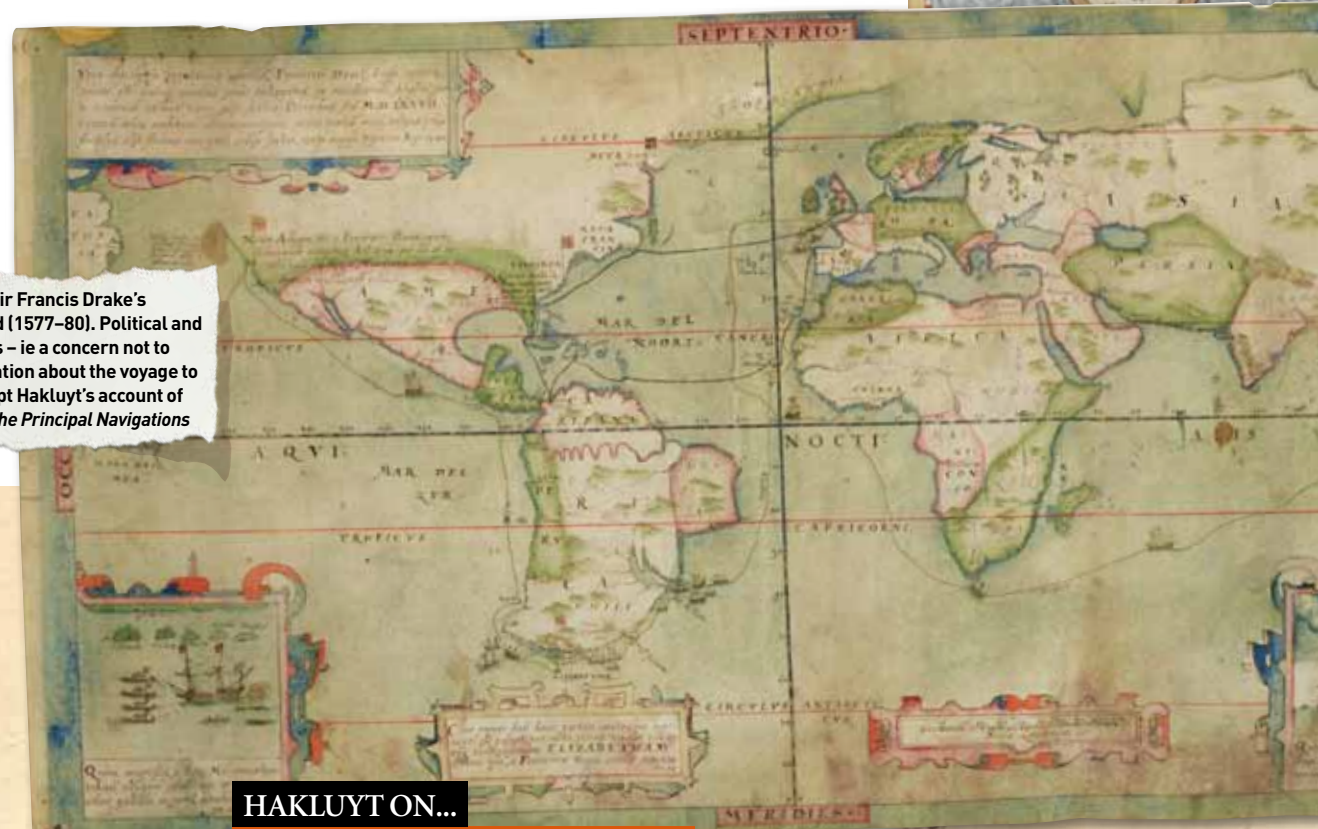
information that was to grace his works from a multitude of different eyewitnesses – not to mention a host of manuscripts and printed sources. It was then that he put his own individual mark on them, editing, translating and shaping them into a published text.

He would have been a familiar sight at the quays and the inns of London and Bristol’s docks, talking to travellers returning from long journeys. But he had other sources of information too, not least a network of correspondents from all over Europe. These included the geographer Emanuel van Meteren, the cartographer Gerard Mercator, the French royal cosmographer André ➤



When editing his travel books, Hakluyt employed a network of correspondents and acquaintances from across Europe. Among them was the renowned cartographer and mathematician Gerard Mercator, who produced this map of South America

This c1587 map shows Sir Francis Drake’s voyage around the world (1577–80). Political and commercial sensitivities – ie a concern not to reveal too much information about the voyage to the Spanish – almost kept Hakluyt’s account of Drake’s exploits out of *The Principal Navigations*



### HAKLUYT ON...

#### ENGLISH CANNIBALS

In 1536 Richard Hore embarked with two ships, the *Trinity* and the *Minion*, on a voyage to Newfoundland, possibly hoping to explore the Gulf of St Lawrence in the wake of recent French voyages to the region.

In the second edition of *The Principal Navigations*, Hakluyt described Hore as “a man of goodly stature and of great courage and given to the studie of Cosmographie” who had brought together a group of gentleman “desirous to see the strange things of the world”. However, the ships became separated near the Strait of Belle Isle. Hore’s ship, the *Trinity*, managed to return safely to England. The men on the other ship were not so fortunate; it became stranded on the coast of Labrador, resulting in starvation, murder and

cannibalism. According to Hakluyt’s informant, Oliver Dawbeny, who was on the *Minion*, one of the group “killed his mate while he stooped to take up a roote for his relief, and cutting out pieces of his bodie whom he had murdered, broiled the same on the coles and greedily devoured them”.

Further cannibalism was prevented only by the arrival of a French ship, which the English seized and used to return to England, finally arriving, much emaciated, in late October 1536.

Hakluyt’s account was the first published version of the story. He describes how he rode 200 miles to interview William Butts, the last remaining survivor, because he particularly wanted to include his eyewitness account of the voyage.

### HAKLUYT ON...

#### THE GREATEST EVER ENGLISH VOYAGE

Francis Drake’s celebrated circumnavigation of the world (1577–80) possessed all the elements required to capture the English popular imagination. Travelling west to go east, and sailing for much of the time in Spanish-controlled waters, he pulled off the feat of navigating the Strait of Magellan, landing on the west coast of North America at ‘Nova Albion’, and heading back to England via the Moluccas (modern

Indonesia), returning with a king’s ransom in (Spanish) treasure.

According to Hakluyt’s account, when Drake captured the Spanish ship *Nuestra Señora de la Concepción*, colloquially called *Cacafuego* or ‘Shitfire’, the ship contained “great riches, as jewels and precious stones, 13 chests full of royals of plate, foure score pound weight of gold, and sixe and twentie tunne of silver.”

Drake’s story was nearly left out of the first edition of *The Principal Navigations* due to its politically sensitive nature – it described unmerciful and highly profitable plundering.

At the last minute Francis Walsingham relented and allowed Hakluyt to include ‘The Famous Voyage of Sir Francis Drake into the South Sea, and There Henceabout the Whole Globe of the Earth, Begun in the Yeere of our Lord, 1577’. The piece was printed on six unpaginated leaves and inserted between pages 643 and 644.



A copperplate from 1603 shows the Strait of Magellan at the southern tip of South America, which was defended by a fort built to repel English attacks led by Sir Francis Drake





This engraving shows 'England's Famous Discoverers', including Sir Walter Raleigh, navigator Sir Hugh Willoughby, Captain John Smith, who was rescued by Pocahontas, and Arctic explorer John Davis

Thevet, and the merchant and explorer Étienne Bellenger.

Hakluyt also gained access to the extensive London library of Lord Lumley, as well as becoming adept at locating antiquarian manuscripts and gaining permission to copy them. As van Meteren put it: "He [Hakluyt] is the most skilled man in research that I have ever known."

### Colonial expansion

Prior to publishing *The Principal Navigations*, Hakluyt contributed two other significant, though more modest, additions to the history of English overseas exploration. The first, *Divers Voyages Touching the Discoverie of America* (1582), was a collection of travel accounts that aimed to promote the legitimacy of plans for English colonial expansion in North America.

The second, a 1584 manuscript

entitled 'A Particuler Discourse Concerning the Greate Necessitie and Manifold Commodities That are Like to Growe to this Realme of England by the Western Discoveries Lately Attempted' (widely known as 'Discourse of Western Planting'), forcefully makes the case for developing English New World settlements, despite Spanish claims to the region based on papal bulls conferring ownership rights.

Hakluyt presented a copy of this manuscript to Elizabeth I in the autumn of 1584. No record survives of the queen's reaction though, with Anglo-Spanish relations at a low point, it is perhaps unsurprising that she did not immediately follow Hakluyt's recommendation that England directly confront Spain in the New World.

*The Principal Navigations* is a publication of fundamental importance

to the emergence of England as a colonial power. Not only did it span every area of English activity and aspiration – from Muscovy to America, from Africa to the near east, and India to China and Japan – it also offered the most up-to-date information available, designed to stimulate ambitious plans for future trade and settlement.

By any standards, it is a massive book. The 1589 edition, which is one large volume of approximately 700,000 words, was divided into three sections. An expanded 1598–1600 edition, which comprised a total of more than 1.75m words, was divided into three too.

In the 1589 edition the text is split into English travels to the east and to the north, with the final section focusing on "all the corners of the vaste and new world of America". Hakluyt

## Hakluyt's book is of fundamental importance to the emergence of England as a colonial power

also included an account of Francis Drake's 1577–80 circumnavigation of the globe, and a report about Thomas Cavendish's newly returned voyage of circumnavigation of 1586–88.

The first volume of the second edition includes 39 voyages to the north; the second volume

contains 64 documents about travels to the south and south-east. The final, largest, volume included nearly 200 reports of travel and their supporting documents.

The large number of surviving copies of each edition, the range and scope of contemporary references to the text, and the frequent use of the information it contained suggest that *The Principal Navigations* circulated widely. Hakluyt's most recent biographer, Peter Mancall, writes that "[c]opies of it became a fixture on board ships bound for distant parts," suggesting that its utility as a practical guide for exploration was fully recognised.

### Future trade

*The Principal Navigations* is also an important political and ideological statement, establishing an apparent tradition of 'English' activities that stretched as far back as Hakluyt could go in his recovery of antiquarian records.

Hakluyt began the third 'American' section of the first edition with the story of the ocean voyages of the Welsh prince Madoc to the New World. Madoc's voyages placed the English, via their Welsh ancestors, in America more than three centuries before Columbus's first footfall on the islands

off the coast of the continent in 1492.

So, by dint of prior discovery, *The Principal Navigations* claimed the New World for the English, at a sweep negating Iberian claims for exclusive territorial rights in the region.

At the turn of the 16th century, England was not a global power. When Elizabeth I inherited the kingdom in 1558, it possessed no foreign territory. Even Calais, the last remaining continental outpost, had been humiliatingly lost during the reign of Elizabeth's sister, Mary.

By the end of Elizabeth's reign, in 1603, the nation was not significantly more successful. It had established, and lost, a colony on Roanoke Island in present-day North Carolina in the 1580s – this was later refounded at Jamestown in 1607 – and had made various efforts to exert control over Ireland through military campaigns and the establishment of plantations. However, what *did* change during the Elizabethan period, in no small part due to Hakluyt's work, was that propagandist colonial discourses began to appear, justifying, defending and proving England's Protestant right to empire.

After the publication of the second edition of *The Principal Navigations*, Hakluyt continued to be active in English overseas endeavours, translating *Mare liberum*, the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius's argument about the freedom of the seas, into English. He also worked on an English-language translation of Gothard Arthus's series of dialogues in Latin and Malay, a text that aimed to enable the English to challenge Portuguese and Dutch trading interests in the East Indies.

Hakluyt is also listed in April 1606 as one of the recipients of a patent granted by King James VI and I to North American lands in Virginia, a foundational document in the history of the Virginia Colony.

But perhaps his most important contribution to Jacobean exploration was through the advice and experience he could offer to new generations of explorers



Jodocus Hondius's c1590–92 engraving of Thomas Cavendish, explorer and privateer. Cavendish was one of a distinguished band of adventurers – including the legendary medieval Welsh prince Madoc – to be celebrated in *The Principal Navigations*

and merchants, and to his literary successors. He wrote reports about commodities, potential for trade, and local inhabitants – all relating to a variety of geographical regions. He also assessed the possibility of finding new navigable routes, particularly a North-West Passage, for the English East India Company and the Virginia Company.

He encouraged others to translate into English, and hence make important texts about particular regions

accessible to a wide readership – all with the aim of stimulating trade. John Pory, for example, acknowledged Hakluyt's influence in his decision to translate Leo Africanus's history of Africa. Samuel Purchas, Hakluyt's closest literary successor as the 17th-century editor of various compendious collections of travel and exploration, also hailed Hakluyt's impact in the field of travel writing. He had been "as Admirall, holding out the light unto me in these Seas, & as diligent a guide by land".

When Hakluyt died he was buried in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey. No marker survives there to him, but even at the time of his death in 1616 his true monument was already apparent. That was placing the 'English' in the forefront and centre of international exploration and trade – both in deeds and in texts. **II**

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### JOURNEYS

#### Books

- **The Origins of Empire: British Overseas Enterprise to the Close of the Seventeenth Century** ed by Nicholas Canny (OUP, 1998)
- **Richard Hakluyt and Travel Writing in Early Modern Europe** ed by Daniel Carey and Claire Jowitt (Ashgate, 2012)
- **Hakluyt's Promise: An Elizabethan's Obsession for an English America** by Peter C Mancall (Yale University Press, 2007)



An illustration showing members of Sir Hugh Willoughby's doomed voyage of 1553, in the Norwegian Sea. Hakluyt's understated reference to the crew's demise served to encourage readers to imagine the agony of their final days

### HAKLUYT ON...

## THE FROZEN NORTH

In both editions of *The Principal Navigations*, Hakluyt included accounts of a 1553 voyage in search of the North-East Passage, on which Sir Hugh Willoughby and his men on the *Bona Speranza* and *Bona Confidentia* all died. However, his pilot, Richard Chancellor, and his men in the *Edward Bonaventure* survived and established direct, and highly lucrative, trade with Muscovy for the first time.

In the first edition, Hakluyt included an account of a young scholar, Clement Adams; in the second he added an account by Chancellor, as well as Willoughby's log. The

voyage was delayed by bad weather, and by mid-September the fleet had become separated. Willoughby's journal recounts that, as the storms worsened, on 18 September he decided to winter in a bay near Varzina on the Kola Peninsula. Willoughby's last entry was about unsuccessful searches made in three directions for help. It was not until the following spring that the two ships with the bodies of the crews, including Willoughby and his journal, were found by Russian fishermen.

Hakluyt's framing of Willoughby's death is an

example of the power of understatement. After telling his readers about the notes written on the outside of the journal stating its purpose and the ship's location, Hakluyt's text ends on a telling, and chilling, note: "It appeareth by a Will found in the ship that Sir Hugh Willoughbie and most of the company were alive in January 1554."

Willoughby and his men had clearly survived many weeks frozen in the ship before they died. Hakluyt's matter-of-fact tone and the brevity of his comments force his readers to imagine the agonies of their final days.