UNCHARTERED Exhibition statement written by Julia McKenzie.

At times of great upheaval and anxiety we look for things to help give us meaning, signs to help us navigate events we cannot control. In 2014 as my father was entering the final leg of his long journey with Alzheimer’s disease, his final days were spent at the family home.

As time went on and looking for things to occupy myself and my mother, I finally sat and looked through my great grandfather’s sea diaries from the 1890s. These had been in a bookcase in my father’s study for decades. Only my father, John, had read his name sakes handwritten account of his voyages from over 120 years ago.

In one diary I read about John Henry’s perilous predicament, trapped in sea ice off Patagonia. High in the crow’s nest he guided his crew and his ship to safety. Passing and negotiating massive icebergs for over 300 miles, away from certain death, coming home.

Mortality, fate, luck – an uncharted route opened before me at a time of loss. Without an unbroken thread of family narrative, I would not be here to tell the tale, my father would never have existed. As I look back, I also see an uncharted future, as do we all. It should be celebrated and explored.

This work features maps, words, images, hope and echoes of the sea. The coast, trade winds and currents- they have all have all helped create this exhibition. It’s a culmination of trying to chart the uncharted, noting glimpses and fragments of the past to help me reflect upon now and tomorrow.