



TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

The Great White Silence

The race to the South Pole in 1910 is one of those great national stories – we all know how Captain Robert Falcon Scott and his companions met their tragic end after being beaten to the Pole by the Norwegian Roald Amundsen. The subject has spawned a vast literature and acquired considerable baggage, so it comes as some relief to be able to return to the primary sources: the words of the men themselves, the real objects – and best of all the actual film footage taken on the expedition.

The centenary of the British Antarctic (Terra Nova) Expedition to the South Pole in 1910-13 has triggered a range of activities centred on just such authentic material. The Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge, which celebrates and builds on the expedition's scientific legacy, has just opened the Polar Museum to display original artefacts from the expedition. These include a letter written by Scott that was retrieved from his tent by the rescue party. It also offers an embarrassment of online riches, including all of the expeditions photographs and Scott's diaries.

But the centrepiece of this centenary reappraisal is the National Film Archive's restoration of *The Great White Silence* (1924), Herbert Ponting's film record of the expedition, which he edited into a documentary feature film. Scott's decision to include a cameraman in his expedition team was a remarkable one for its time, and it's thanks to his vision – and to Ponting's superb eye – that we have this astonishing visual account of his tragic quest.

The film captures the journey to Antarctica aboard the *Terra Nova* life in camp, the indigenous wildlife – seals, killer whales and (of course) penguins – the landscapes and ice formations. Most remarkably, though, it records the men themselves happily preparing for the journey to the Pole, demonstrating how they will cook and eat and sleep in their tent on their three-month walk through the frozen wastes. Scott, Wilson, Bowers and Evans sit around showing off their reindeer-hide sleeping bags, smiling and chatting over pemmican hoosh (a stew made of dried meat and melted snow). These are the very men who would die on the journey, in the very tent that would become their tomb.

Ponting left the expedition, taking his precious films with him, just after the men started their long trek to the Pole. It was a remarkable achievement for the veteran photographer, considering the newness of cinematography and the sub-zero conditions in which he was working. The news of the death of Scott and his party two years later, and the huge outpouring of national grief that followed, elevated Ponting's work from reportage into the documentation of a legend. It's no exaggeration to call it a national treasure. The film was sent to the BFI National Film Archive for preservation in the 1940s, after having been edited into different forms over the years: first into newsreel, then, after Scott's death, into an illustrated lecture. Ponting himself re-edited the footage in 1924 as a narrative, introducing intertitles as well as incorporating his own stills, maps, portraits, paintings and animated models.

The primary aim of the archive's team was to restore the beautiful tints and tones of the original footage, while using the latest technology to render the

most detailed, highest-resolution picture possible. The results are exceptional. Lending a vitality to the polar landscape, the original tints were not intended to reproduce natural colours, but rather to suggest lighting effects – time of day, bright sunlight on snow, the purple and pink of the midnight sun, even the texture of a seal's skin. Details in the image – barely visible before – are now clear and sharp. The individual members of the expedition are recognisable, and you can even catch something of their character which for polar enthusiasts will prove a revelation.

Bryony Dixon, *Sight & Sound*, November 2010

Music for Silence

Simon Fisher Turner's new score for *The Great White Silence* answers a fascinating challenge to create a soundscape which complements this stirring documentary record of the British Antarctic Expedition. Fisher Turner's approach is partly influenced by the traditions of Indian and Japanese silent cinema accompaniment which offer a counterpoint to the images on screen.

The part-improvised score includes some pre-recorded elements and Fisher Turner has gone to great lengths to include relevant 'found sounds'. The first was a gift from a friend, Chris Watson, who made a recording of the ambient silence in Scott's cabin in the Antarctic. Fisher Turner has also recorded the striking of the *Terra Nova* ship's bell at the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge. He has even managed to track down the expedition's original gramophone to play some of the records which were played by members of the expedition.

This collage of musical archaeology aims to create a sense of the place, the people and the poetry of the film, a precious record of this tragic expedition. The participating musicians are also singers and the score will include some sung elements including some for counter-tenor. Some verses from Tennyson's 'Ulysses' which were read at Captain Scott's memorial service in St. Paul's Cathedral will also be used.

Simon Fisher Turner said, 'This is a project which is very close to my heart. I went to school near Plymouth and have a great love of the sea. I still have a vivid memory of watching the film *Scott of the Antarctic* as a child and I particularly loved the stirring melodies of Vaughan Williams' dramatic score. We're doing something different for *The Great White Silence*, but something that I hope will be just as memorable.'

THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

Director: Herbert Ponting

UK 1924

108 mins

Restoration supported by the Eric Anker-Petersen Charity

BFI National Archive

Curator: Bryony Dixon

Restoration Supervised by: Kieron Webb, David Gurney, Angelo Lucatello, Peter Marshall

Film Lab and Optical Effects: Richard Cory, Ian Lawman, Rick Pearce, Phil Sheward, Chris Stenner

Deluxe Digital

Colourist: Steve Bearman

Restoration: Matt Watson, Neil Stenhouse, Tom Wiltshire, Clayton Baker, David Burt

Film Scanning and Recording: Paul Doogan, Bob Roach

Technical Production: Jonathan Dixon, John Pegg, Richard Fish

Thanks to: Elif Rongen, Catherine Cormon, Mark-Paul Meyer (EYE Film Institute, Netherlands) Michael Harvey (National Media Museum), Dr Elizabeth Watkins (Victoria University of Wellington), Brian Prichard

With special thanks to the Eric Anker-Peterson Charity and the Scott Polar Research Institute

Music by: Simon Fisher Turner

Strings: The Elysian Quartet

Musical Saw, Bones: David Coulter

Sound Recordist. Scott's 'Terra Nova' Hut Recording: Chris Watson

Bass Clarinet: Sarah Scutt

Vocals: Alexander L'Estrange

Mac, Forester, all Pianos, Fender Rhodes, Standing Treatments and Ediol Life Recordings: SFT

The score also includes a remix of NETWORK by SFT.

This remix is by Rupert Lally and features The Elysian Quartet

Produced by: SFT

Recorded and Mixed by: James Aparicio

TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

Scott of the Antarctic

Sun 2 Jan 12:30, Mon 24 Jan 18:00

The Conquest of Everest

Mon 3 Jan 16:10, Wed 12 Jan 20:40 (+ intro by explorer Mark Wood)

The Great White Silence

Mon 3 Jan 18:20, Sun 23 Jan 12:10

Touching the Void

Wed 5 Jan 20:30, Sun 23 Jan 18:30

The Fight for the Matterhorn

(Der Kampf ums Matterhorn)

Thu 6 Jan 18:00 (+ intro by BFI curator Bryony Dixon), Sun 23 Jan 15:20

The Red Tent (Krasnaya Palatka)

Tue 11 Jan 18:00 (+ intro by BFI curator Simon McCallum),

Sun 30 Jan 18:00

YES & NO Salon: Exploration Now

Wed 12 Jan 18:30

Encounters at the End of the World

Sat 15 Jan 15:00, Tue 25 Jan 20:30

Talk: Silent Cinema: Intrepid Women

Sun 16 Jan 15:30

To the Ends of the Earth: The Transglobe Expedition

+ Q&A with Ranulph Fiennes

Tue 18 Jan 17:45

Antarctic Crossings: Postwar shorts + intro by

BFI curator Patrick Russell

Tue 25 Jan 18:00

The Epic of Everest + live score by Simon Fisher Turner

Sat 29 Jan 19:00

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