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# POLAR BYTES

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Loyal readers since 1996



King Penguins, at dusk on South Georgia Island.

## Remembering Sir Ernest Shackleton

Written by Charlotte Connelly



**5 January 2022 marked a century since the death of Sir Ernest Shackleton, aged just 47. At the time of his death, Shackleton was on board Quest, the ship chosen for the Shackleton-Rowett Antarctic Expedition 1921-22.**

Quest had arrived at South Georgia on way to survey previously unvisited stretches of Antarctica after a challenging journey south. The last few entries in Shackleton's diary note the difficulties faced by the crew, his concerns as leader, and,

poignantly, his reflective mood on reaching South Georgia. The final words of his last entry read, "In the darkening twilight I saw a lone star hover, gem-like above the bay." Shackleton was buried in the whalers graveyard on South Georgia following his wife, Emily's, request that he be buried as far south as possible.

At the Institute, we invited staff, students and Institute Associates to remember Ernest Shackleton and his legacy. Bob Headland read the closing passages of Shackleton's diary for attendees, which is now on display in the Polar Museum until the end of March.



Left to right clockwise: Sir Ernest Shackleton; Brass plaque in a wooden frame with excerpts from 'If' by Rudyard Kipling; Current display at The Polar Museum; a page from Shackleton's diary.

Thank you to Argos Froyanes for their generous sponsorship



# Welcome to our Winter Newsletter



**I hope you and your families are all keeping safe and well, and had a wonderful Christmas and New Year, and life is starting to get back to normal for you and your loved ones as the COVID-19 restrictions gradually get lifted around the world.**

Today, I write from self-isolation in my home in the Cambridgeshire fens. I have to stay free of COVID-19 infection in order to join my next Antarctic expedition, Endurance22, which starts in just a few days time! You can follow the expedition here: <https://www.endurance22.org>.

In my first message of 2022, I'd like to start by giving you news of the FoSPRI Committee. We say good bye and a huge thank you to Susan Rose, Richard Ralph and Christine Eckers for their excellent service and contributions to the Committee, and the wider Friends, over the past four years. They all did a great job for the Friends, from helping to run our events, fund raising for the SPRI Centenary Campaign, to keeping the Friends web and social media pages up to date. We wish them the very best of luck for the future. I hope that we might be able to say thank you to them in person at a Friend's event later in the year.

I'm pleased to tell you that we have found three new Committee members to replace Susan, Richard and Christine. They are Mark King, Graham Sadler and Emily Rigby. I expect many of you will know them. Mark is a frequent visitor to SPRI to use the library and archives for his personal research, and has been on several Friends voyages to the polar regions, including to the Ross Sea in 2020. Graham runs his own remote sensing consultancy company and is studying for a part-time PhD student in Polar Studies at SPRI, and was also one of the Ross Sea Voyagers. While Emily was the fund raising and communications assistant at SPRI for several years, and now the Senior Development Officer at Darwin College.

As well as being an excellent Committee member, Susan was also the Vice-Chair of the Friends from 2017. Brad Borkan has kindly agreed to take her place as the Vice-Chair. Thank you Brad!



Just at the moment of going to press we received the sad news of the passing of Bob Burton, a LIFE member of the Friends for 56 years and a founding member of the South Georgia Association. He was a valued Friend who attended many of our events and gave

several interesting and varied lectures over many years to the Friends. Our sincere condolences are extended to his family. You can read an obituary from the South Georgia Association here: <https://southgeorgiaassociation.org/robert-bob-burton-obituary/>

Celene and I had hoped that we might be able to restart FoSPRI events at the start of 2022. We had an excellent meeting with the Interim Director of SPRI, Professor Neil Arnold on 22 November 2021 to discuss how we might be able to do this, and Neil gave us permission to do so. Unfortunately, the emergence and rapid spread

of the new Omicron variant of COVID-19 has delayed our plans once again. We will keep the situation under review, and hope to restart the Friends events at SPRI later in 2022, including a special event to mark Professor Julian Dowdeswell stepping down as the Institute Director after almost 20 years and his official retirement from SPRI and the University at the end of the year. In the meantime, the Friends continue with our activities where we can.

I'm pleased to report that our Artist in Residence 2021, Claudia Myatt, was able to go south to Antarctica onboard HMS Protector, despite all the travel problems caused by COVID-19. We are hugely grateful to Captain Michael Wood and the Crew for being such excellent hosts.

Fund raising for the SPRI Centenary campaign continues. The latest financial summary, dated 20 January, shows that we have now raised the grand total of £200,020.93! A fantastic achievement to break the £200,000 mark, despite having to try and fund raise in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. A big thank you to Bill Newton for his donation of £500 to the campaign. We still have more to do to reach our target of £250,000, but if we keep up the hard work, and manage to run a couple of fund raising events in 2022, then I'm confident we will finally get there!

Planning for the FoSPRI expedition voyage to Spitsbergen and Greenland continues and has now been rescheduled and confirmed for 27 August - 9 September 2022 onboard the M/V Ortelius. Celene has been working closely with our partners at Steppes Travel and Oceanwide Expedition to organise the cruise. She tells me that some spaces are still available. We will be joined on the voyage by Professor Julian Dowdeswell and wife Evelyn as our polar experts. For more details visit: <https://bit.ly/3u8Wb1c>

Once I return to UK sometime in March, I will be back in contact to arrange the next Committee meeting, once we have permission from Neil to meet at the Institute. Please don't hesitate to give me a call Tel: 01487 741060 or e-mail [john\\_shears@btinternet.com](mailto:john_shears@btinternet.com) if you want to ask me anything regarding the Friends activities in 2022.

John Shears  
Chairman of the Friends of SPRI

## Spitsbergen & Northeast Greenland Cruise

Don't miss out! There are still remaining places for our trip of a lifetime fund-raising voyage for the Friends. **BOOK TODAY!**

[friendsofspri@steppestravel.com](mailto:friendsofspri@steppestravel.com)  
01285 880980 | [STEPPESTRAVEL.COM](http://STEPPESTRAVEL.COM)

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# Sketching on Ice



**Claudia Myatt, this year's Friends of SPRI Artist in Residence, is back from an inspirational time in Antarctica**

'I hope you don't mind me asking,' said the young marine commando, 'but what are you doing here?'

The three marines from HMS Protector were sharing their tot of whisky with me at the Shackleton memorial in South Georgia. At the foot of the memorial a fur seal snored gently and the cold wind whipped the pages of my sketchbook so that the wet colours blended into a puddle.

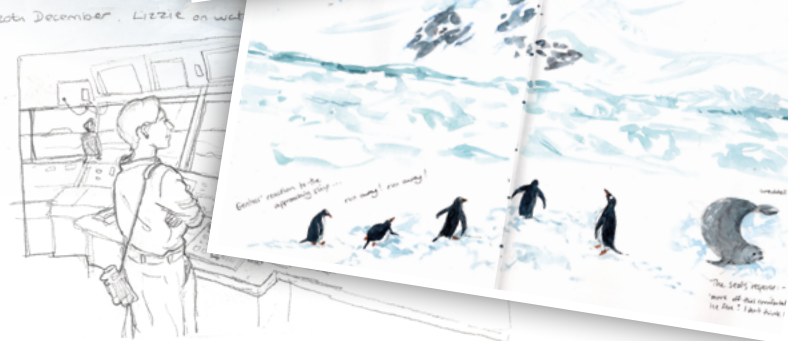
It was a good question – what on earth was a woman old enough to be their grandmother doing on a working Navy ship with her sketchbook and paints? I told them the easy answer first, that I was this year's Artist in Residence appointed by Friends of Scott Polar Research Institute (I still get a thrill telling people that!). Their question, though, deserved more of an answer. What they were really asking is, why have an artist at all? What's the point?

It's about communication, I said. Finding ways of using art, drawings and stories to engage ordinary people who will never have the chance to come here, who may have no idea what goes on down here, why it matters, and why places like South Georgia, the Southern Ocean and Antarctica are important as well as beautiful. Sketches can be more engaging, more personal, than photographs. Art, whether through films, paintings or stories, can bring faraway places closer. It can nourish the imagination, reflect the past as well as the present and make the world a bigger and more interesting place.

See Claudia onboard the HMS Protector,  
visit: <https://youtu.be/sCQWJ0op9nk>

5.30am Saturday 4th December 2021 First impressions of South Georgia  
By 6am the mist had increased & the island disappeared.

FORTUNA GLACIER on the north coast of the island as we steamed eastwards to King Edward Cove



Maybe – hopefully - my sketchbooks and what I do with them will inspire a few others to start drawing too, enriching their own lives because of it. After an extraordinary trip I am home with three full sketchbooks, each page a swirl of lines and colours evoking memories of ice, glaciers, mountains, wildlife, people, history, life on board ship, sea, sky and birds. I tried to draw not just what I was seeing but what I was feeling, and what it is about the Antarctic air and landscape that makes you feel more intensely alive.

During this year I look forward to sharing my experiences through both real and online events. There will be a book and a series of youtube videos as well as talks, exhibitions and workshops. I hope to meet as many polar enthusiasts as possible and hopefully inspire some new ones!

Do get in touch – I may be home from the ice now but my polar adventure is really just beginning. [www.claudiamyatt.co.uk/blog](http://www.claudiamyatt.co.uk/blog) (also on facebook, instagram and youtube).







## From the Institute

A few words from Interim Director  
Neil Arnold email: [nsa12@cam.ac.uk](mailto:nsa12@cam.ac.uk)

As we start the new academic term in the University, and the new year, the Institute is in the process of re-opening following the relaxation of the restrictions brought in just before Christmas. It very much feels like a case of déjà vu. I'm pleased to say, however, that the Polar Library will soon be open for booking by members of the public (including the Friends, of course) and students, as are the Archives.

School visits to the Polar Museum are running, with a mix of in-person and online visits as schools in particular struggle with short-staffing. The feedback we are getting is that the schools are very grateful to come, and that the online events are excellent and really enjoyed, so a huge thank you to the Museum and Outreach team for all their work. Staffing the museum, however, is still very difficult, meaning that we are not yet able to extend opening the Polar Museum beyond Thursdays to Saturdays. We are still offering pre-booked tickets for those who wish to ensure entry, but we are also now allowing 'walk-up' tickets, subject to capacity on the day.

As I have said before, getting to this stage has taken a great deal of work by colleagues throughout the Institute, and I thank them all for the flexibility and adaptability they have shown. As we move into spring, I hope that the Institute can open more fully, and we are certainly hoping that the next Friends Committee meeting will be able to take place in the Institute, rather than online.

## Crossing a continent

How do you cross a continent made of ice? You can still join the Institutes archivist for a chat about the planning, provisions and progress of the 1955-58 Commonwealth Trans Antarctic expedition. This 10 minute video was first released for Open Cambridge, watch online: <https://t.co/1DEWjvKcql>



## From the Research Collections

Naomi Boneham SPRI Archives  
contact [archives@spri.cam.ac.uk](mailto:archives@spri.cam.ac.uk)



## What's on the library shelves

In July, the library team embarked upon a stock check of material on the open shelves. This is an important task for all custodians of heritage collections but had not been done in the Polar Library for several years. It was a labor-intensive but worthwhile project; every book on the shelf is taken off and checked. We have now audited over 7,000 items from our Antarctic and physical sciences collections. The books we have checked all now have unique identifiers which helps us to keep track of and care for every book in our collection for the long term future.



## New collaborations

Exciting collaborations are developing between the SPRI and the National Museum of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug (NAO) in Arctic Russia. Charlotte Connelly, Alex Partridge and Eleanor Peers are working with colleagues from the Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM) in Oxford and the National Museum of the NAO to create an online exhibition of Nenets artefacts from SPRI and the PRM, scheduled for November 2022.



The indigenous Siberian Nenets community have a rich and ancient cultural tradition, which is under threat. Museum artefacts are a crucial resource for the historians and cultural workers who seek to revitalise this tradition. Elena Menshakova and Larisa Latysheva, respectively Director and Research Fellow at the NAO museum, were excited to discover that SPRI and the PRM hold Nenets artefacts. The online exhibition will raise awareness of these UK collections among the Nenets community.

## A note from the Executive Secretary

Friends Secretary Celene Pickard  
email: [friends@spri.cam.ac.uk](mailto:friends@spri.cam.ac.uk)



Dear Friends

The last 18 months have been very challenging for us all, which is why we remain eternally grateful to each and every one of you for supporting us, through both the good times and the bad. I wish you all a healthy and happy 2022 with the opportunity of being able to meet up again very soon.

**NEW FRIENDS** - A very warm welcome is extended to all new members.

**PASSING FRIENDS** - We are so sorry to hear of the passing of Bob Burton who was one of our longest serving members. We shall miss him greatly in SPRI as he always came with interesting stories and great knowledge that he so happily shared with us all, especially via the many lectures he gave to the Friends.

In December we sadly lost Donald Kerr, a Friend and fellow passenger on the 'Shackleton Centenary Voyage' in 2014. Don was the grandson of Alexander J.H. Kerr, the second engineer on 'Endurance' and the chief engineer on 'Quest'.

Our sincere condolences are extended to their families.

## HOW TO CONTACT US:

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