



SUPPORTING POLAR
SCIENCE AND HERITAGE

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POLAR BYTES

ISSUE 097 – SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2020

Loyal readers since 1996



Group of King Penguins on South Georgia Island, Antarctica © Nattapat. J

The Icebreaker Returns

SPRI artist to join HMS Protector on its return to Antarctic mission.

HMS Protector, the UK's sole ice patrol ship, has finally emerged from dry dock following extensive work on her hull since May.

Our newly to be appointed SPRI artist will be on aboard, as the patrol ship heads to the frozen continent for the Antarctic Summer, studying the unique Antarctic environment and conducting hydrographic surveys to chart this pristine and frozen wilderness. The HMS Protector will take vital building materials and fuel to help in the modernisation of the British science station at Rothera, located toward the centre of the 17 million square kilometres of the British Antarctic Territory.

The ship will also conduct scientific and survey work, using a Remotely Operated Vehicle in Antarctica for the first time to

gather data, and a new, British-made aerial drone to scout ahead searching for safe routes among the sea ice.

Captain Michael Wood: "I am proud of this unique ship. Her incredible people, together with the company, worked through lockdown without interruption and despite frequent challenges to restore Protector to the Fleet. For many, our journey to Antarctica and back promises the adventure of a lifetime."

The ship will be on Teesside until late October completing her overhaul – including re-installing her flight deck and crane – before conducting pre-deployment training in home waters.

Read and see more images, visit:

<https://tinyurl.com/yyptsx9c>



HMS Protector leaves dry dock @Royal Navy

Thank you to Argos Froyanes for their generous sponsorship



Argos Froyanes
Partners for sustainability

Welcome to our Autumn Newsletter



Dear Friends,

I hope you and your families and friends are all well, healthy and staying safe.

Back in August I wrote saying that the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions were being eased in the UK, and very slowly life was starting to get back to normal. I spoke too soon. Unfortunately, infections have been increasing rapidly over the past few weeks and restrictions have been put back in place across the country, including the “rule of six”. It is against this background that the Friends, and wider SPRI, continue to work as best we can in very difficult circumstances.

One of the most important events in the Friends calendar is our Annual General Meeting, which was scheduled to take place at SPRI on Saturday 7 November 2020. But as I announced in my August message, it will be impossible for us to meet in person this year because of the COVID-19 restrictions, and instead we are running the AGM remotely by post. You will find enclosed with this issue of Polar Bytes all the AGM papers, including the Minutes from the AGM 2019, the Chairman’s Report, the Treasurer’s Report, News from the Director, and a Nomination Form for new Committee members. Please do fill and return the Nomination Form if you would like to be considered as a member of the Committee. If you have any questions about any of the papers then please contact the Friends by e-mail (friends@spri.cam.ac.uk).

Despite having to cancel our programme of events for the remainder of the year, the Friends continue with our other activities. One of the most important is the selection of the next Friend’s Artist in Residence with the Royal Navy. The deadline for applications is Wednesday 28 October 2020, and we plan to select the winning artist by early November. The Artist will be sailing on the Royal Navy ice patrol vessel HMS Protector to Antarctica, probably in February/March 2021. The ship is just back in the water on Teeside after five months in dry dock undergoing a major refit, and will be departing the UK in the next few weeks.

Work also continues planning for the next FoSPRI polar expedition voyage to Spitsbergen and Northeast Greenland

scheduled between 31 August – 13 September 2021. Steppes Travel tell us that they can now offer COVID-19 travel insurance to Friends wanting to go on the voyage. For further information and details of how you can book one of the last remaining places please see inside the newsletter.

I’m pleased to tell you that the Polar Museum plan to reopen to the public on Saturday 24 October 2020. It will be opening on Saturdays only for the rest of the year, and free tickets must be booked in advance online through the University of Cambridge Museums website <https://tickets.museums.cam.ac.uk/events>. The Museum is unable to welcome visitors who haven’t booked in advance. Tickets will be available to book from mid-October.

We realise that many Friends will be unable to travel to the Museum and visit it before the New Year. So, we have decided to team up with them to offer you the chance to do some online Christmas shopping and buy a range of items from the Museum Shop. Please see the flyer and order form inside this issue of Polar Bytes.

You can also keep up with what is happening at the Museum by reading their news blog on the SPRI website. I’ve just finished reading a recent post by Henrietta Hammant, who was the Collections Project Cataloguer at the Polar Museum, about “The Women who made SPRI”. She writes about the various vital roles women have played in the founding, development and research carried out at SPRI over the past 100 years. It is a fascinating article. Click on: <https://www.spri.cam.ac.uk/museum/news/uncategorized/2020/09/10/the-women-who-made-spri/>

Finally, I’d like to tell you that we continue to make good progress fundraising for the SPRI Centenary Campaign, and are moving ever closer to our target of £250,000 to fund a studentship at SPRI. We have now reached a total of nearly £150,000, almost £10,000 more than when I last wrote to you in August! We are very grateful to the late Simon Ommanney for his donation of £5,875, to Peter and Edna Golder for a further donation of £250, and the late Ronald Hart for his donation of £100. Also, thank you again to all of you who have

bought SPRI Centenary First Day Covers. The covers have attracted interest from across the world, and I’ve been kept busy over the summer sending post to countries far and wide, including Germany, USA, Australia, Canada, and Singapore. I still have a couple of covers left! Details of how you can order one of the last covers are included in the Museum Shop flyer.

Let us hope for much better times ahead. I would like to thank you all for your fantastic support of the Friends in such challenging times, and look forward to that special day when we might be able to meet together once again at SPRI.

Please do take care and stay safe this autumn.

My best wishes,

John Shears

Chairman of the Friends of SPRI

THANK YOU TO THE POLAR POSTAL HISTORY SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN

Many thanks to the Polar Postal History Society of Great Britain for their help in advertising the SPRI 100 First Day Covers for sale to their members.

The Society promotes the study of postal history from the polar regions and acts as a meeting place where members can exchange information and learn more about their areas of interest. The SPRI 100 First Day covers were featured on the Society’s website and in their Polar Post newsletter, and as a result several covers were sold. If you would like to know more about the Society, and polar postal history, please visit their website:

www.polarpostalhistory.org.uk

The Founding of SPRI



**This year marks
100 years since the
opening of the Scott
Polar Research
Institute (SPRI).
Museum Curator**

**Charlotte Connelly tells
us about the history of SPRI.**

"The building would contain these at least; a practical museum of Polar equipment... the things explorers want to see and handle and know the use and cost of, such as camp gear, instruments, clothing etc.); a comprehensive library of Polar literature and maps, not only narratives... but all the scientific reports; thirdly a set of rooms for the use of people undertaking research, these people might be returned scientists, budding explorers or people working up papers on Polar subjects who require the facilities."¹

Frank Debenham was the driving force behind the founding of the Scott Polar Research Institute. His vision, as outlined above, was for a place that brought together polar researchers and resources for the betterment of polar expeditions and scientific investigation. As Debenham and several of the other veterans of the British Antarctic Expedition 1910-13 (Terra Nova) had found themselves in Cambridge writing up results, and, as Debenham argued, because Cambridge had 'furnished more polar scientists than all the other English universities put together', Cambridge University seemed the obvious fit.²

In his letter to Oriana Wilson (the widow of Edward Wilson, who died with Scott), one of the many persuasive letters he wrote to encourage support for the proposed institute,

Debenham clearly articulated the challenges the new venture faced:

"The proposed Polar Research Department, even though attached to the University of Cambridge, is still a national memorial (the research rooms become available to all students of whatever qualification or origin besides polar leanings), but a Scott School of Geography becomes a local memorial, and in fact as much a possession of Cambridge as the Sedgwick Museum or Cavendish Laboratory. The two things must therefore be kept distinct."³

In March 1920, the trustees of the Scott Memorial Fund wrote to the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge stating that the trustees were 'prepared to grant £6,000 toward the provision of a suitable Wing, or Annexe, forming part of a larger building devoted to Geography'⁴. However, when the SPRI's home did eventually open in 1934, it was in its own dedicated building, 'with two floors and an attic, and the accommodation includes a museum and a Director's room on the ground floor; a library and research rooms on the first floor. The attic will be used for exhibition of pictures, and for museum storage.'⁵

The new building could not be erected soon enough. Between the geological specimens that Debenham and others were working with, and the accumulation of expedition gear, books and other items for the new institute's collection, by 1925 the University Council noted that 'some accommodation [for the SPRI] will be required at once, as material, weighing about 2½ tons, has already arrived.'⁶

The memorialization elements of the building are still evident today. A niche above the entrance on Lensfield Road houses a bust of Scott, cast from a sculpture by Scott's widow, Kathleen, then Lady Young. Inside the entrance, the ceiling of the Memorial Hall features two impressive painted maps of the Arctic and Antarctic, complete with the names of explorers and their ships (image above).

The SPRI as a whole continues to serve two purposes. It is a multi-disciplinary centre of excellence in the study of the Arctic and Antarctic, and part of the University of Cambridge. It is also a national memorial to Captain R. F. Scott and those who died with him in Antarctica: descendants of explorers come to remember their ancestors and spend time with the collections of material left behind by them; visitors can spend time reading the final accounts of Scott and his men; and new deposits are made to the collections enabling public access.

SPRI continues with both purposes. It is a public-facing museum, library and memorial, welcoming visitors to learn and reflect on polar exploration. It is also a centre for research into polar subjects ranging from the physical understanding of glaciology through to the anthropology of Arctic peoples. The public-facing aspect of the SPRI was reinforced in 2010 with the reopening of the newly refurbished Polar Museum, which professionalized the museum and reinterpreted the collections.

Images left to right: The Antarctic ceiling mural in the memorial hall of the Scott Polar Research Institute. The bust of Captain Scott in the entablature by Lady Scott. All images © SPRI.

Footnotes:

1. F. Debenham, letter to 'Mrs Bill' (Oriana Wilson, widow of Edward A. Wilson, who perished with Robert F. Scott), Cambridge, 26 October 1919, Scott Polar Research Institute, MSS in 'Working files, SPRI history, inception'.
2. *ibid*

3. Debenham, *op. cit.* (note 1), emphasis in original.
4. Speak, Deb: geographer, scientist, Antarctic explorer (Polar Publishing, Guildford, 2008), p. 73.
5. Cambridge University Reporter, 21 February 1933, p. 716.
6. Cambridge University Reporter, 3 November 1925, p. 253.



From the Institute

A few words from Director Julian Dowdeswell
email: director@spri.cam.ac.uk

The start of the new academic year has arrived, but in the strange environment of Covid the Institute is open with only limited numbers of staff present on any given day.

The Polar Museum, Library and Archive remain closed to external visitors.

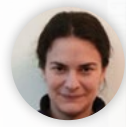
In this context, we are endeavouring to welcome our new cohort of Polar Studies MPhil students into the Institute and to give them as much face-to-face academic

contact as the current situation allows – indeed, we hope to deliver our lectures in the main Lecture Theatre with appropriate social distancing. All of our senior academic staff also teach in the Geography undergraduate degree scheme and these lectures are being delivered virtually at least until Christmas and possibly throughout the academic year.

Our field programmes in the Arctic and Antarctic are, of course, on hold. The nearest I have been to a glacier over the summer is a visit to NW Scotland. Some of you will know the beautiful glacially carved mountain scenery around Ullapool. Here, successive glaciations have eroded much of the bedrock to leave scattered lochans with a few wonderful remnant mountains such as Stac Pollaidh and Suilven rising above the scoured plain. While it is unlikely that any research in Antarctica will take place in the next austral summer, we are hoping that by the summer of 2021 we may be able to get back into the Arctic. Like our plans for reopening the Museum, Library and Archive in due course, we must at this stage simply wait and see.



Stac Pollaidh with glacially scoured bedrock and lochans in NW Scotland from Cul Beag (JAD).



From the Research Collections

Naomi Boneham SPRI Archives
contact archives@spri.cam.ac.uk



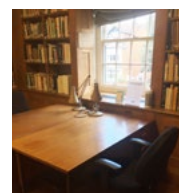
When the Institute closed in March the Polar Library moved online, focusing on the provision of e-resources to support our students completing their degrees.

Working from home the team were able to recommend databases and e-books for purchase, and direct students to these resources through the creation of online reading lists. These resources included a list of digital material on Eurasia, (<https://tinyurl.com/y3vteakt>) produced in collaboration with the MMLL library.

Archive staff continued to answer enquiries and work on the catalogues while work on SPRI's oral history recording project has also been completed. A variety of polar people with connections to the Institute were interviewed between 1992-2004. The majority of those interviews have now been summarised and we hope to make them available for research in the near future.

The Library team staged a Thursday Twitter take over from June to August which brought engagement to the wider community as did participating in a virtual Open Cambridge and Cambridge Alumni Festival this September. You can access the videos <https://tinyurl.com/vyjh3y>. Staff kept up with their colleagues across the city, country and world through regular on line meetings, sharing ideas and attending virtual conferences and training events.

We now move in to our next phase with limited access to the building. The library is supporting the University Library's scan and deliver service and offers researchers and students in the Institute zero contact book borrowing and the opportunity to book one of two socially distanced study desks in the Old Library, we are exploring how we will manage archive access while providing digital copies of documents where possible.



These services are operating within the Institute's limited building occupancy. Look out for us on Twitter again from October #PolarLibrary while our Polar Studies guide <https://libguides.cam.ac.uk/polar-studies/induction> includes a 2020/21 welcome page with a video library tour to welcome and inform our new students and researchers as they engage with SPRI for what will be an unusual academic year.



A Note from the Executive Secretary

Dear Friends,

As we are approaching Christmas why not gift a Friends Membership to your friends and family. A unique and completely different surprise, in a year when we hope to hold many of our original events held over from our Centenary year. Please email the Friends for a gift package.

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

PASSING FRIENDS - We are saddened to hear of the passing of Kenneth Blaiklock (Life member since 1953), Simon Ommanney and Ronald Hart. Our sincere condolences are extended to their families.

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