

**Royal
Geographical
Society**

with IBG

Advancing geography
and geographical learning



ENDURING EYE

THE ANTARCTIC LEGACY OF SIR ERNEST SHACKLETON AND FRANK HURLEY

• **Exhibition Text in Summary**

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) holds one of the finest collections of original glass plate and celluloid negatives created by Frank Hurley, the official photographer and cinematographer on Sir Ernest Shackleton's Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition, 1914-17. To mark the centenary of the expedition, the Society has digitized its entire collection – including lantern slides used to promote public awareness of the expedition – direct from Hurley's fragile negatives, for the very first time.

In doing so, the latest contemporary technology has 'unlocked' much new visual content, expertly processed by Hurley, since hidden, but now seen at the highest resolution possible. These images also survived the extraordinary journey undertaken by Shackleton, Hurley and the other members of the party.

This exhibition, curated by Polar historian and writer Meredith Hooper, celebrates the Antarctic legacy of Sir Ernest Shackleton and Frank Hurley, reproducing some of the finest examples from the Society's Hurley Collection using these new digital files, providing new levels of detail to the viewer.

Ernest Henry Shackleton, born County Kildare Ireland
15 February 1874.

Antarctic Expeditions: Third Lieutenant, The British National Antarctic Expedition 1901-03. Expedition Leader, The British Antarctic Expedition 1907-09.

Asked to name the basic qualities necessary to become a successful Polar explorer Shackleton listed:

'First, optimism;
second, patience;
third, physical endurance;
fourth, idealism;
fifth, and last, courage.'

Pearsons Magazine, 'The Making of an Explorer', August 1914

James Francis (Frank) Hurley, born Sydney Australia,
15 October 1885.

Antarctic Expeditions: photographer to Douglas Mawson's Australasian Antarctic Expedition 1911-13, 1913-14. Hurley is hired by Shackleton as official photographer to his Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition.

Exploitation of Hurley's moving film, glass plate and celluloid negatives will be vital to paying off expedition debts.

THE IMPERIAL TRANS – ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION

OBJECTS:

'To cross the Antarctic from sea to sea, securing for the British flag the honour of being the first carried across the South Polar Continent'.

THE SHIPS OF THE EXPEDITION

The *Endurance* ... will take the Trans-continental party to the Weddell Sea.

The *Aurora* will land ... men at the Ross Sea base.

They will lay down depots on the route of the Trans-continental party

28 men live on board the *Endurance*. *Endurance* is their home and their transport: the means of entering - and escaping – the Antarctic ice.

1 August 1914:

Endurance leaves West India Docks

Germany declares war on Russia

5 August:

Shackleton in a telegram to his wife Emily

'... King sent for me this morning spent 20 minutes then wished the expedition god speed and gave me silk union jack'

As *Endurance* moves down the English Channel Worsley

'signalled to H.M.S. *Diamond* "Is War declared" - answer "Yes, at midnight." '

Departing Buenos Aires 26 October 1914 Shackleton heads south.

Endurance carries everything needed to survive - boots, windproof clothing, fuel, food, matches, chronometers, knives, medicines

The Antarctic pack ice is reaching further north than anyone can remember.

Shackleton waits in South Georgia until early December 1914. Then, summer well underway, *Endurance* leaves for the Weddell Sea.

During the month's wait in South Georgia, Hurley photographs and films the austere beauty of the island's mountains, glaciers and fjords. Shackleton gets extra food, winter clothing and coal from the whaling stations in South Georgia. The unusually severe conditions rule out any possibility of crossing the continent this season.

'Left South Georgia on December 5th ... the last link with civilization. On the third day we came into pack ice ...'
Reginald James

'10 January 1915. A notable day! First glimpse of ... Land.'
Hurley

But Shackleton, 'The Boss', wants to get even further south to set up his base, before finding a place to bring his sledging party, scientists and dog teams ashore.

'... here we are with the land in sight ... absolutely helpless.'
Hurley

14 February. At midnight Shackleton calls a halt to a tremendous effort to cut the ship free from thick ice. The 15th, Shackleton's 41st birthday, *Endurance* – so close to where they hoped to land - is acknowledged to be trapped.

'... all hope is not yet given up of breaking free...' Hurley

'14 February ... a decisive effort ... made to free the ship ... 15 February ... All hands again attack the ice ... till ... it is reluctantly determined ... the ... ice is unworkable...' Hurley

'Life of the Expedition on the Drifting Sea Ice' Hurley

Imprisoned in the pack ice, *Endurance* drifts. All hands are formally 'put off' ship's routine. The sailors in their quarters in the foc'sle have little to do. For Worsley, his ship becomes in effect a shore station. For those keyed up to leave the ship and start their work ashore - keen disappointment.

Full polar clothing intended for the landing party is shared out amongst the whole ship's company. Carpenter Harry McNish uses the timber intended for the shore hut to build cubicles in the 'tween decks for winter quarters. The dogs transferred to specially built 'dogloos' on the ice begin training in sledge teams.

The scientists create work programmes. Hurley fits up the ship's refrigerator in the hold as a dark room. Routine for the men is essential, as is keeping busy. 'Told off if late for meals by 2 mins' Worsley

For Shackleton, visible optimism is key. At the same time he exercises strict control over all movement away from the ship. Winter and darkness close in. Crammed inside a wooden shell trapped in a vast ocean of ice, the 28 men are utterly alone.

Out of all contact. No-one will ever know they are here.

22 June 1915 – the day the sun begins to return – 'treated as Christmas Day ... the special feast of duck and green peas, fresh - out of the tin.' Rickinson.

Inside the ship is security.

Outside - the ice. Unpredictable. Dangerous.

In winter's dark, *Endurance* drifts north. Signs of distant trouble come nearer – ice heaving up, slow masses rolling over each other. The wind howls in the rigging. *Endurance* experiences her first attack. Things quieten. But pressure increases, menacing in the darkness and cold of winter.

Hurley's images capture specific moments in time, yet distill the inherent isolation of the beset ship.

The Returning Sun

The returning sun brings clear August days.

Hurley ranges away from the ship with his dog sledge, capturing the clarity of light, the tones and textures of white, the chaos of ice in frozen motion. Superb evocations of the beset ship on her maiden voyage, ice-glittering; a 'Bride of the Sea' chance-placed in vast, careless spaces.

Endurance travels steadily north. In late spring or early summer perhaps she might break free of the pack. The ice might open allowing them to escape. But always the sounds of the ice creaking, groaning, squealing, roaring: reminders of threat.

Cracks in the Ice

Endurance is squeezed but recovers. Bursts of pressure are followed by quiet. The floe is holding *Endurance* intact, but becoming increasingly unstable. The last day of September the floe cracks open.

Wordie: 'At lunch we could do nothing but talk about the ... chances of the ship being free ...'. Then, with no warning – Worsley: 'the worst nip we have had ... the decks shudder & jump ... every moment it seems as tho the floe must crush her like a nutshell'. 'As suddenly, the pressure stops. '... at tea we were once more ... back to the chance of the ship being crushed.' Wordie.

Early October everyone moves back to their summer cabins.

The *Endurance* keels over

17 October, pressure starts. 'In the engine room - the weakest part of the ship - loud noises - crashes & hammerings ... the iron plates on the floor buckle up & over ride ...' 18 October. 'at 4.45 p.m. the floes come together ... forcing her out of the ice ... heeling the ship over ... with a list of 30 degrees' Hurley

23 October 1915. Pressure begins, again focusing on the vulnerable engine room. *Endurance* springs a leak. Fighting to the end to save their ship, they are forced, late on Wednesday 27 October to abandon the irretrievably damaged *Endurance*.

'Awful calamity overtaking the ship' Hurley

'The ice drove the engine through the galley. The galley through the wardroom. A sickening sensation to feel the decks breaking up, the great beams bending & then snapping with a noise like heavy gunfire. The cabins splintered ... Relentless destruction ...' Shackleton

Ejected on to the ice, a night of tension and anxiety follows. Bitterly cold, the floes cracking, forced three times to move their tents.

'morning came in chill & cheerless ... Hurley rigged his kinematograph getting pictures of *Endurance* in her death throes.' Shackleton

Ocean Camp

'We are homeless & adrift on the sea ice' Hurley

Stripping to bare essentials Shackleton attempts to lead his men over the pack ice to the nearest land 200 miles west. His declared aim: to get everyone safely home.

On 1 November, defeated, they scavenge what they can from the dangerous wreck and set up 'Ocean Camp' on a thick old floe.

2 November. '... try & save negatives & bared from head to waist probed ... the mushy ice. The cases ... containing the negatives in soldered tins I located ... & practically all were intact.'

9 November. '... selected the pick of my negatives about 150 & owing to the necessary drastic reduction in weight had to break & dump about 400.' Hurley

21 November 1915, 5 pm, *Endurance* finally sinks below the ice.

Hurley's images of Ocean Camp drifting slowly north, a small dark smudge in a colossal world of floating ice, evoke isolation, distance, the smallness and vulnerability of men held in the grip of forces over which they can have no control.

'Attempt to escape' Shackleton

Just before Christmas Shackleton tries again to get his men west. They drag two boats leaving the third behind at Ocean Camp along with much equipment, food and clothing.

The surface is atrocious, the ice treacherous in summer's warmth. Exhausted and disappointed, on 30 December they look for a solid floe to establish a new camp. In the distance the scattered remains of Ocean Camp can still be seen.

Patience Camp

Parties of men negotiate the decaying floes back to Ocean Camp, returning with food, small comforts, books and the all-important third boat. But Patience Camp tries more than their patience.

The boats are packed ready to launch the moment a lead through the ice opens: yet still the ever shifting pack allows no release. The weather is wretched, dense wet fogs, snow, gales. There's nothing to do. Their floe shrinks. Seals, essential for fuel and food, are becoming scarce. The dogs are hungry. Companions, workers, but no longer of use, they are shot. The prospect of another winter on the pack ice appals.

'The ice breaks up and Party take to the Boats' Hurley

Approaching the open ocean the pack heaves and jostles, opens and shuts.

9 April 1916, mid-morning, their floe splits diagonally ... a hurried lunch, boats were got into the water and loaded ... 2.30 we were in very open pack ... whales blowing all around.' James

At last they are free. Heading for whichever land they can reach.

'Most could row no more ... never do I wish to endure such a night ... Dawn ... a glimpse of land!' Hurley

Elephant Island, uninhabited, ice-hung.

‘Elephant Island reached’ Hurley

‘April 15th 1916. The first land ... since December the 5th, 1914.’
Shackleton

Half-delirious, men stagger, laugh and cry. Then sleep, dead, dreamless sleep. But their beach is insecure. Getting back in the boats they row in a blinding gale to a new camping place. Rough, bleak, inhospitable.

‘Atrociously cold ... blizzard fury hurled gravel & ice splinters, ripping tents to shreds ... not a square inch of shelter.’ Hurley

‘A bad time ... a boat journey in search of relief ... necessary ... no chance at all of any search being made for us on Elephant Island.’ Shackleton

24 April 1916, Easter Monday, the *James Caird* with Shackleton, Worsley and a crew of four depart. The aim – to sail 750 miles across the wildest ocean to South Georgia to get help. Frank Wild is left in command of the marooned men.

‘In the event of my not surviving the boat journey ... you will do your best for the rescue of the party.’ Shackleton

‘Shackleton sets off for our relief’ Hurley

The two remaining boats are overturned, rested on rock walls either end and the sides closed with the canvas remains of their tents. ‘Awful squalor’. Food, watchfully shared out from expedition supplies, is boosted with whatever they catch; penguins, seals, small birds. Fuel to cook meals, melt ice for drinking water and provide minimal light comes from seal blubber and penguin skins.

12 May 1916. 'Daily hope of the Relief ship ... What kind of ship will come for us?' Alexander Macklin

'Life on the island under two boats' Hurley

Optimistic predictions that Shackleton will arrive any day to rescue them mix with uncertainty and fears. Winter comes 'hard upon us' with darkness, little to do, nowhere to go. Days of heavy snow confine all to their bags. Gales sweep down the glacier threatening the hut.

'Bored to distraction' they go through the old rounds of songs, jokes, celebrate another Midwinter's day with a concert and toasts. But proximity oppresses, repetitive habits, personal noises.

Ice covers the sea, clears, moves back in, clears again. Still - no ship.

If the *James Caird* has not survived this most risky of journeys no-one will know they are here, in this desolate place.

15 June 1916. The doctors Macklin and McIlroy amputate the frostbitten toes of Blackboro's left foot. Banished from the hut during the risky operation, the men shelter in the cave, passing the time cutting each other's hair.

***James Caird* and South Georgia**

In their small 22 foot boat battling with winds, weather, the relentless swells, meals gulped as they crouched beneath the decking, sleep snatched lying on the hard ballast boulders, constantly wet, thirsty – uncertainty rules their every hour. Achieving South Georgia is one of the great acts of navigation, and endurance.

But having rested, fed off albatross chicks, another journey must be made across the mountains and glaciers to the whaling station on the other side of the island. Leaving McNish, McCarthy and Vincent under the overturned Caird, Shackleton with Worsley and Tom Crean do it, in 36 hours.

No-one has crossed the island before.

News reaches London

Shackleton carries Hurley's image of the listing *Endurance*, wrapped tightly against sea water, through the desperate days and nights on the *James Caird*, the crossing of South Georgia, and the first, failed, attempt to reach Elephant Island in a rescue ship. On 31 May he arrives in the Falkland Islands.

At last he can send cables to the outside world. Contracted to give all Expedition news to the London *Daily Chronicle*, Shackleton's exclusive reports of his 'wonderful adventures' appear from 2 June.

Hurley's photograph of the embattled *Endurance* arrives in London by post to be published 10 July, establishing a dramatic symbol of raw adventure and immediate need.

A second attempt to rescue the marooned men departing 10 June fails, the third - departing 12 July - struggles with impossible conditions.

'The Rescue' Hurley

August comes, light returning, some warmth. But food and fuel are running short.

26 August 1916: dense pack ice fills the bays either side of the spit then briefly clears. Watching for a relief ship alternates with speculation about what to do if no ship appears.

30 August: lunch of boiled seal carcass is interrupted by Marston calling the magic words - 'A ship.'

Shackleton desperately anxious to get away without a moment's wait, loads men and baggage for the Chilean rescue ship. 'we had to take our chance and jump ... came alongside the *Yelcho* ... an ocean going tug ... clamber aboard ... and started off.'
Macklin

Marooned men: now, suddenly they are back. The war news appals. On board, they find the London newspapers, supplied by Shackleton. There on the front page of *The Daily Mirror* is the photograph of *Endurance* listing. In just over seven weeks this newspaper has travelled from London to the tip of Chile to Elephant Island, where they have been totally cut off from everything happening everywhere else in the world.

'It was Nature against us the whole time' Shackleton

Believing they must establish depots for Shackleton's Transcontinental Party in the first season, Ross Sea Party members struggle heroically to start getting supplies south. But in May 1915 their ship *Aurora* breaks from her moorings to drift locked in the ice, leaving men ashore to face the winter and a second summer of effort to lay supplies. *Aurora* manages to reach New Zealand on 3 April 1916. Having rescued his men from Elephant Island Shackleton must focus on this second set of marooned men: not knowing what he will find. Shackleton's cable of 6 February 1917 reported the disaster to the Ross Sea Party. Seven survivors have been picked up. But three of the Expedition are dead.

Artefact Display – ‘Survivors’ of the Expedition

These precious survivors travelled the succession of journeys that started as the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition and ended in a Chilean rescue ship.

Each avoided sinking to the sea floor caught in the tangled ruins of Endurance, dropping from a disintegrating ice floe or being left abandoned on Elephant Island.

Union Flag, fine silk slightly frayed by the Antarctic winds. Presented to Sir Ernest Shackleton by King George V, 5 August 1914, and returned to the King by Shackleton, 30 May 1917. Lent by Her Majesty The Queen

All the improvements and useful things, made by carpenter Harry McNish on Endurance, went down with the ship. But this paper knife carved from a tent peg was given to fellow Glaswegian, James Wordie, as McNish left Elephant Island on the James Caird. The plaid shirt was made from Wordie’s tartan rug, perhaps at Patience Camp.

Both have been loaned to the exhibition by Sir James Wordie’s descendants

Three loose pages of sketches and notes made at Elephant Island by Reginald James showing the Ground Plan, Upper Storey and Exterior view of the Hut; and a diagram showing the working of the stove that ‘does all the cooking for 22 men every day.’

Discovered in July 2015, hidden in the back of James’ photograph album by his son John James

The Bible presented by Queen Alexandra on visiting Endurance 16 July 1914 with her sister the Dowager Empress of Russia, and inscribed by her.

Forced to abandon their crushed ship, facing an attempt to walk across the pack to safety, Shackleton set an example by throwing possessions on to the ice. He tore out and kept the fly-leaf inscribed by Queen Alexandra, and pp. 551-6 (Job 34 v. 35 to 41 v. 10) and pp. 569-70 (Psalms 22 v. 1 to 25 v. 6). But the Bible itself was picked up by able seaman Thomas McLeod, to become a possession that survived. In 1971 it was presented to the Royal Geographical Society by Commander Malcolm Burley of the 1970-71 Joint Services expedition to Elephant Island.

The Holy Bible. The Revised Version without the marginal notes of the revisers. Cambridge University Press, 1903 rgs303487

‘Mr Hurley’s ... photographs ... tell better than any word-picture ... the experiences which befell the expedition ...’ Buenos Aires Herald

Arriving in London, 11 November 1916, Hurley hands over his film to the Expedition’s agent Ernest Perris at the *Daily Chronicle* offices. The film needs animal life before it can be marketed. Fully alert to the power of moving images in the commercial exploitation of expeditions, Hurley agrees to return early in 1917 to South Georgia. Newspaper exclusives, books, photographs, lantern slides, the lecture circuit, the film of the Expedition - all will provide crucial funds to cover debts.

Eager to expand his career as adventure cameraman and presenter, Hurley works closely with Perris. He orders albums of selected glass plate negatives, dictates a typed version of his diary, arranges a successful exhibition of his Paget colour plate Antarctic images, some sized at 25 feet. This splendid epic of extraordinary adventures and hardships requires the dramatic powerful images that Hurley has created; but also dramatic text. Perris’ instincts are for additions and adjustments.

Hurley's image of the whole party farewelling the *James Caird* becomes the moment of rescue, celebratory compared with the three quick exposures captured at the time. His original diary account of saving his negatives from the drowning *Endurance*, choosing some and destroying the majority, becomes a more dramatic rescue, with selection assistance from Shackleton.

In August 1917, back from South Georgia, Hurley goes to France as official photographer to the Australian Imperial Forces. Appalled by the brutality and waste, this 'frightful prolonged massacre', Hurley creates searing immediate images. His vision of the suffering *Endurance* - its mangled death - seemingly a precursor of the war he had no knowledge of. In turn, Hurley's war scenes seem to reference the desolation, isolation, destruction, of the Weddell Sea; and the comradeship of men under extreme pressure.

In November 1918, Hurley returns home to Australia.

Frank Hurley, 'official photographer to the Shackleton *Endurance Expedition*'

Hurley takes the latest, best equipment south. As an adventurer-photographer and cinema photographer he selects for reliability and durability, choosing cine cameras, Graflex cameras, a Paget colour outfit, and light-weight Folding Pocket Kodaks for mobility. Everything required to develop and process his material in the most difficult conditions has to be remembered and ordered – developing tanks, spools, chemicals, printing paper, thermometer, scales and weights, a dark room lamp and clock. Mechanically highly competent, professionally meticulous in caring for all details of his equipment, Hurley is obsessive in his commitment to his art.

Considerable weight, and bulk, are part of the game. Hurley's strength, agility, and daring have already been tested on his first Antarctic expedition. Now, with Shackleton, he not only is the image taker but also along with the other 'staff' does ship duties.

Hurley is one of Shackleton's chosen team to undertake the trans-continental journey. On *Endurance* he uses all opportunities to capture images of life on board, and in the pack ice of the Weddell Sea.

**Exhibition written and curated by Meredith Hooper, FRGS
Designed by Sarnier International Limited**

‘The Enduring Eye: the Antarctic Legacy of Sir Ernest Shackleton and Frank Hurley’ Royal Geographical Society (with IBG), 21 November 2015 – 28 February 2016.

Credits and Acknowledgements:

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) would like to thank the following organizations for their support:

The United Kingdom Antarctic Heritage Trust
Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851
British Antarctic Territory
Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands
Picturae
Rolex (For its support for the Society's Picture Library and contribution towards conservation of its Collections)
British Antarctic Survey
British Film Institute
Walter Scott and Partners Limited
Heritage Lottery Fund

Text © Meredith Hooper, 2015

All images in the exhibition © Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) unless otherwise stated.

Full picture captions and complete text can be downloaded from the Society's website. No photography is allowed in the exhibition.

For more information on events and educational resources linked to the exhibition please visit the Society's website for details:

www.rgs.org



Limited Edition Platinum Prints

To mark the centenary of the Imperial Trans-Antarctic 'Endurance' Expedition 1914-17, the Society has collaborated with master printmaker Mr Georges Charlier and his team – based at Salto Ulbeek's studio in Belgium – to create the first ever limited edition series of platinum prints from the original photographic glass negatives captured by Mr Frank Hurley during the expedition. Handmade on the finest cotton paper, the prints will be available in three sizes with full supporting provenance documentation.

For all enquiries please contact: hurleyprints@rgs.org or telephone: +44 (0)20 7591 3060

The Society's Picture Library

Within its Picture Library the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) holds a collection of over ½ million pieces of photography and artwork including, lantern slides, original negatives and photograph albums dating from around 1830 to present. It is considered to be one of the world's preeminent collections relating to travel, geographical exploration and discovery. The Picture Library collection sits within the Society's wider Collections which have been awarded Designated Status in their entirety by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA).

www.rgs.org/images

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG).

We are the learned society and professional body for geography and geographers. Founded in 1830, we are a world centre for geography; supporting research, education, expeditions and fieldwork, and promoting public engagement and informed enjoyment for our world.

Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

1 Kensington Gore

London SW7 2AR

020 7591 3000

www.rgs.org