



Press release

8th September 2010

The 54th BFI London Film Festival presents
WORLD PREMIERE
ARCHIVE GALA SCREENING:
THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE



CAPTAIN SCOTT'S POLAR EXPEDITION ON FILM
NEWLY RESTORED BY BFI
GALA SPONSORED BY DISCOVERY CHANNEL

A highlight of The 54th BFI London Film Festival in partnership with American Express (13 – 28 October 2010) will be the world premiere of a new restoration by the BFI National Archive of one of the greatest records of British polar exploration, **The Great White Silence** on 20th October 2010. With thanks for their collaboration and support to the Scott Polar Research Institute, the Eric Anker-Petersen Charity and Discovery Channel.

This Archive gala presentation at the Odeon West End will feature a partly improvised, live musical accompaniment based on a newly commissioned score by leading contemporary composer Simon Fisher Turner, playing with the Elysian Quartet, David Coulter and Alexander L'Estrange. Simon's previous film scores include **Caravaggio**, **The Croupier** and **The End of the Affair**.

The Great White Silence is presented as part of the Treasures of the Archive section of The 54th London Film Festival.

The BFI has the world rights to **The Great White Silence** with cinema and DVD releases in 2012 to commemorate the centenaries of Scott's arrival at the South Pole, and his death.

In early 2011, Discovery Channel will air the global television premiere of Ponting's masterpiece in a specially commissioned 90-minute documentary, *The Great White Silence with James Cracknell*. Cracknell, who endured his own Antarctic expedition last year, will compare his modern day experience of the trek to the Pole – the equipment, diet, mental challenges and physical preparations – with Scott's ultimately tragic journey, bringing a new perspective to this historic voyage.

The Great White Silence was filmed by Herbert Ponting, the official photographer and cameraman on Captain Scott's legendary, and ultimately ill-fated, British Antarctic Expedition 1910 – 1913. In addition to hundreds of still images Ponting filmed the voyage south and life at their camp on Ross Island including the extensive preparations for the assault on the South Pole. This new restoration features the exquisite tinting and toning which gives these remarkable images such depth and lustre.

Ponting's eye for composition reveals the great and often unexpected beauty of the polar icescapes in a way which belies the often difficult conditions in which he was forced to work. Ponting risked frostbite repeatedly in his attempt to film and photograph in extremely cold temperatures.

The footage begins in 1910 with the departure of the ship *Terra Nova* from Lyttleton, on New Zealand's south island, for the Antarctic – a perilous journey during which animals and stores were lost overboard in a gale and the ship had to break through unusual amounts of pack ice for 400 miles to reach the Great Ice Barrier. Ponting took some of his most impressive footage, showing the ship breaking through the ice from a makeshift platform over the side of the ship. Once arrived on Ross Island he filmed every aspect of the work of the expedition, the scientific work, life in camp and the local wildlife – killer whales, seals, Antarctic skuas and Adélie penguins. Most importantly he filmed the preparations for the assault on the Pole – trials of dogs, ponies and caterpillar track sledges, sledges and skis, clothing, cooking equipment and tents.

Bryony Dixon, Curator, Silent Film, BFI National Archive said: "Not only does this film give us a real sense of the challenges and hardships of the expedition, it also helps to resolve controversies that arose in the 1970s concerning Scott's reputation as leader."

Among the most poignant parts of the film is the footage Ponting took of Scott, Wilson, Evans and Bowers manhauling the sledge and cooking and sleeping in their tent. He could not have predicted the tragic denouement - the discovery by the polar team that Amundsen had beaten them to the Pole, and their terrible end in unseasonably cold weather just 11 miles short of the depot of food and fuel.

THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE Great Britain 1924
d/ph. Herbert Ponting, 35mm silent 7000ft , tinted and toned 106 mins.

Various parts of Ponting's film were distributed commercially during the course of the expedition under different names. When news of the tragic end of the expedition reached England in February 1913 a respectful gap of a year was left before a new compilation was re-released by Gaumont under the title **The Undying Story of Captain Scott**. There was a huge appetite for first-hand accounts of the Scott story. In his lifetime Ponting gave more than 2,000 illustrated lectures during the First World War and beyond, even once delivering it at Buckingham Palace. He eventually bought back the rights to his film footage and released **The Great White Silence** in 1924 using extra footage of stop-motion animation with maps and models to show Scott's journey that he had been unable to film. This was then re-released in a sound version as *90 Degrees South* (1933) by New Era for the Antarctic Film Trust and Herbert Ponting with music, his own commentary and an introduction by 'Teddy' Evans, Scott's second in command on the expedition.

The restoration of *The Great White Silence*

Work on this complex restoration began in 1993 under a European funding scheme known as the Lumière Project for collaborative film restorations between members of FIAF. Recent developments in digital film restoration technique have made it possible to complete the restoration more flexibly.

The available original elements for the restoration are:

- The unedited camera negatives of expedition footage 9811 feet
- The tinted Dutch original release print held by the Netherlands Filmmuseum
- A British 1925 nitrate release print (the 'soft print') of *Great White Silence*
- Material from *90 Degrees South* and *The Story of Captain Scott*

The archive master, which comprises the best of these original elements, was scanned digitally and conformed using, as a guide, the 'soft print' (i.e. low contrast positive), which is the most authentic edit for *Great White Silence*. Digital restoration has enabled the team to clean up dirt and damage. Grading has been carried out for digital outputs and also for rendering it back out to 35mm film. The tinting and toning was recreated digitally using the original instructions from the negative and the titles were remade as replicas of the original design and lengthened where necessary.

The restoration team is led by Kieron Webb with Angelo Lucatello, Peter Marshall and Dave Gurney and with Bryony Dixon as lead curator. Our commercial partner is Deluxe Digital London with John Pegg, Jonathan Dixon, Stephen Bearman and Matt Watson – they are working on the digital aspects of the restoration.

Key dates

15th June 2010 centenary of *Terra Nova* leaving Cardiff for Antarctica – the start of the British Antarctic Expedition 1910-1913

Dec 14th 2011 Centenary of Amundsen reaching South Pole

Jan 17th 2012 centenary of Scott's Polar team arriving at South Pole

Mar 29th 2012 Proposed memorial service St Paul's Cathedral for the centenary of Scott's death

Feb 11th 2013 centenary of the news of Scott's death reaching England

Press release prepared from original research notes by Bryony Dixon, Silent Film Curator, BFI National Archive.

Bryony Dixon is available for interview.

Simon Fisher Turner

Simon Fisher Turner is a prolific composer and a major figure on the contemporary British music scene. He has had a longstanding relationship to film. He is known for his haunting scores for directors such as Derek Jarman (**Caravaggio, The Garden, The Last of England**), Mike Hodges (**The Croupier**), Neil Jordan (**The End of the Affair**) and many more. He was also an actor/teen star in the 1970s.

His work has appeared on a variety of different labels in various guises including Mute Records (UK), El Records, Cherry Red Records (UK), Beggars Banquet, Papier Mache, Sulfur Records UK (Scanner, Robin Rimbaud), Humbug Records, Creation Records UK, and others.

www.simonfisherturner.com

About the BFI

The BFI is the nation's cultural organisation for film, keeping the breadth of voices in moving image culture alive and known. Through its venues, festivals, film releases and online, the BFI inspires people to understand and enjoy film culture, ensuring that everyone in the UK can see the broadest range and choice of films, otherwise not provided by commercial cinema. The BFI reaches an audience of over 7.5 million in the UK every year.

The BFI London Film Festival champions creativity, originality, vision and imagination by annually showcasing the best of contemporary world cinema, documentaries, shorts, animation and experimental film. The Festival is a highly regarded and anticipated event in Europe's cultural calendar, attracting leading international filmmakers, industry professionals and the media together with large public audiences to London for a two week celebration of cinema.

Last year's Festival hosted 193 feature films and 113 short films from 46 countries including 15 world premieres. There were 515 screenings and 553 filmmakers in attendance, drawing the highest ever audience attendance of over 130,000 filmgoers. The Festival opened with the World Premiere of FANTASTIC MR. FOX and closed with the World Premiere of NOWHERE BOY. This year's Festival is in the second of a three-year Lottery funding partnership with the UK Film Council and in its first with new principal partner American Express.

The BFI is a public body part funded by DCMS through the UK Film Council. For every £1 it receives in grant-in-aid, the BFI raises a further £1.50 through self-generated means.

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About Discovery Communications

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Since 2008, Discovery Channel and the BFI have worked together to bring the BFI's unique archive to UK television audiences in a series of specially commissioned programmes.

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