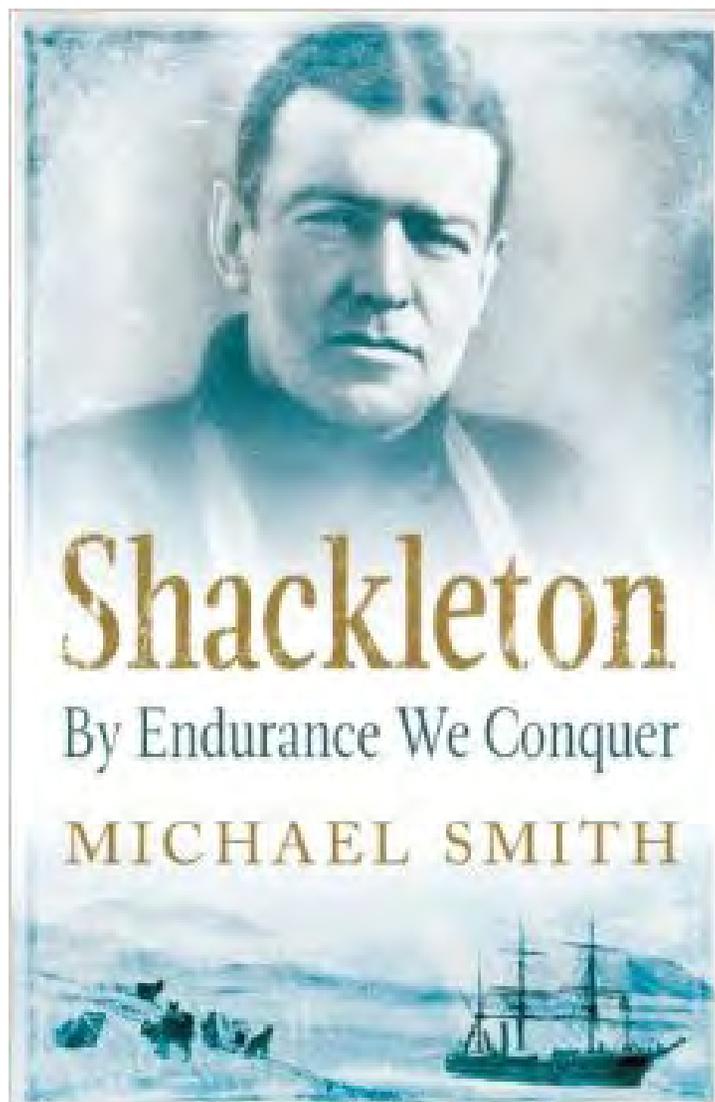


Shackleton By Endurance We Conquer



In 1922, a journalist remarked to General Bruce, leader of the British Everest Expedition, about British tenacity. Bruce replied with a single word: “Shackleton.”

Ernest Shackleton is one of history’s great explorers, an extraordinary character who pioneered the path to the South Pole over one hundred years ago and became a dominant figure in Antarctic discovery. A charismatic personality, his incredible adventures on four expeditions to the Antarctic have captivated generations. He was a restless adventurer from an Irish background who joined the Empire’s last great endeavour of exploration—to conquer the South Pole with Scott on the Discovery expedition. A clash with Scott led to Shackleton being ordered home and began a bitter feud between the two. Shackleton’s riposte was the Nimrod expedition, which uncovered the route to the Pole, and honed his acclaimed leadership skills. These skills would later keep despair at bay and encourage men to overcome unimaginable hardship on the Endurance expedition of 1914.

But Shackleton was a flawed character whose chaotic private life, marked by romantic affairs, unfulfilled ambitions, and failed business ventures, contrasted with celebrity status as the leading explorer. Persistent money problems left his men unpaid and his family with debts.

Drawing on extensive research of original diaries, letters, and many other publications, Michael Smith brings a fresh perspective to the heroic age of Polar exploration with this complex, compelling, and enduringly fascinating story of Ernest Shackleton.

Text is available for excerpt. Michael Smith is available for interview upon request.

Michael Smith is an author and journalist who specializes in the history of polar exploration. His first book, *An Unsung Hero: Tom Crean Antarctic Survivor*, was shortlisted for the Banff Mountain Book Festival and named one of the 100 Best Books of All Time by the Irish Examiner. Smith has written books on polar history for both adult and youth audiences, lectured extensively, and contributed to a wide range of television and radio programs. His excerpts and interviews have appeared in the *Guardian*, *Sunday Times*, and the

Irish Independent, among many other newspapers. He lives in Dublin, Ireland, and can be found online at www.micksmith.co.uk.

Q: Ernest Shackleton is certainly a name many of us recognize—a brave polar explorer whose doomed Endurance expedition saw no loss of life, a celebrated leader of lovable rogues—and there have been plenty of books on the Endurance and Shackleton’s legacy. Yet “Shackleton: By Endurance We Conquer” is the first biography of Ernest Shackleton in thirty years. What compelled you to write this book now? What fresh perspectives do you offer the history of Shackleton?

A: A whole generation has passed since the last full biography of Shackleton was published in 1985. I felt that since 2014 is the centenary of the epic Endurance expedition, it was timely to re-examine one of history’s most compelling figures. New books, diaries and correspondence regarding Shackleton and his close companions have emerged in the past 30 years, and my book brings a fresh, 21st-century perspective to his series of incredible adventures. I also untangle the myths from the reality of this complex character’s packed life.

Q: Academics at Harvard Business School and other top-tier MBA programs often use Shackleton as a role model for leaders in difficult situations. Yet in your new book, you note, “Shackleton’s expeditions were built on credit and airy promises.” Is Shackleton not the polar exploration equivalent of Bill Gates, as he has been called? What problems or ironies do you find in his legacy as it stands today?

A: Shackleton would be astonished to learn that he is a model for business schools. Someone recently said that if he were alive today, Shackleton would be another Bill Gates—this is laughable. Shackleton was a spectacular failure at every business deal he touched and died up to his neck in debt. Shackleton’s greatest strength was his inspirational leadership in a crisis. He could lead men back from the brink when all hope was lost. He had an uncanny knack of choosing dependable and resourceful companions like Tom Crean and Frank Wild. But he could not spot a charlatan in a suit, and all his business deals were catastrophic failures. The paradox is that Shackleton on dry land was different to the man at sea or the ice.

Q: Throughout your new biography, it’s clear Shackleton was remarkably media-savvy, and well ahead of his time. Can you give us a few examples of how he used the press to his advantage?

A: Shackleton was ahead of his time in selling the exclusive rights to books, photographs, even moving films about his expedition. The late Victorian-Edwardian era was a boom time for newspapers and magazines because people were better educated, and Shackleton helped pay for his expeditions by selling the rights in advance. He may have got the idea from the 19th century American explorer, Charles Francis Hall, who was among the first explorers to be sponsored by the press. As a child, Shackleton was mesmerized by Hall’s accounts of exploring the Arctic in the 1860-70s and this encouraged him to become a polar explorer. Shackleton’s men also had to sign over the rights to publish their own accounts of expeditions to Shackleton.

Q: In what ways was Shackleton a product of the British Victorian and Edwardian eras in which he lived?

A: Shackleton was born into an age when Britain ruled the biggest the empire the world had ever seen, with 25% of the world’s population living under the British flag. It was an age of imperial expansion and explorers were the poster boys whose stories captivated millions. Most boys were brought up to serve the British Empire as soldiers, sailors, administrators, and merchants. Explorers to the Antarctic wilderness were driven by a strong desire to plant the flag before foreign nations like America, Germany, and France succeeded first. Shackleton rallied support for his Endurance expedition by declaring that he represented the Empire’s 400 million people.

Q: One of the most surprising and striking characteristics of your new book is your use of poetry to understand and frame Shackleton’s life. You often use verse (much of it written by Shackleton’s favorite poets) to offer insights and context. What compelled you to take this poetic reading of Shackleton’s life? What can his relationship with poetry teach us that we didn’t know before?

A: Shackleton loved poetry. His father read to him as a child and it was said that he could quote poetry “by the yard.” He loved the classic Victorian poets like Tennyson but his favorite was Robert Browning.

Shackleton used poetry to express himself and filled his letters with poetic references. Poetry gave words to Shackleton’s feelings for his women and his expeditions. To understand Shackleton, we need to understand his fondness for poetry.

Q: Given Shackleton’s maiden voyage (which you call a “ferocious baptism”) on a North Western Shipping clipper around Cape Horn, his first frost-bitten Antarctic journey with Robert Scott, his own infamous two-year failed Endurance expedition, one might read him as a profoundly lucky man. Shackleton seems to have skirted death in almost every chapter of your new book! Would you call him lucky?

A: Shackleton was a man who created his own luck. He was certainly fortunate at times of great crisis, such as when a blizzard or a storm might have killed all hands. But he was blessed with extraordinary judgement at time when others might have buckled under strain. Although he may be regarded as a swashbuckling character, Shackleton was cautious and never took unnecessary risks. Above everything he was a survivor, unlike his rival Scott.

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