Welcome and Introduction

David Drewry, Chair of the South Georgia Association

Welcome everybody to this joint meeting of the SGA and the Friends of SPRI. Whilst I am opening the meeting, my opposite number as Chair of the Friends, Admiral Nick Lambert, will be handling the closing session.

Today we are here to celebrate the Life, Labours and in particular the Legacy of an extraordinary person, Ernest Shackleton and of his Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition which departed from the shores of Britain in the ship *Endurance*, one hundred years ago.

For all of us, and many millions of others around the world, the exploits of Shackleton, in particular his iconic expedition to the Weddell Sea, stand as a triumph of leadership, determination and courage. The story has been told and re-told in its various component parts - the voyage south, *Endurance* trapped and crushed in the ice, the camps on the ice, the journey to Elephant Island, the encampment on its bleak and forbidding shore, preparations for and then the heroic boat journey to South Georgia and finally, as if any one of the former would not have constituted an epic experience in its own right, the treacherous crossing of the mountains and glaciers of the island to Stromness.

We experience the vividness of Shackleton's expedition time and time again as we read his account, enjoy the perspectives of other writers and biographers, through film and video and via the re-creation of stages of his venture by contemporary expeditioners.

This November is also a time around our shrinking globe when we are commemorating the beginning of the horrors The Great War. But so many times we fail to connect the two and forget that Shackleton's exploits were undertaken at the same time as death and carnage stalked the countryside of France and Belgium. It is almost as if the two events, albeit of greatly different magnitudes, were somehow part of completely separate storylines. Yet both the Great War and the Expedition surfaced the most exceptional acts of human courage, gallantry and fortitude against appalling odds. It may be said that in contrast to the Legacy of the War which was a bleak and
impoverished landscape across Europe from which rose the phoenix of fascism, the feat of Shackleton and his men was the cornerstone for the future exploration of Antarctica and an enduring example to future generations of men and women.

We know that Shackleton, realising the imminence of war, offered his ship to the service of the country. I quote from the Preface of South: "...I took the ship to Margate ... and on Monday morning I went ashore, and in the morning paper I read the order for general mobilisation.

I immediately returned to the ship, and, having mustered all hands, I told them that I proposed to send a telegram to the Admiralty offering the ship, stores and, if they agreed, our own services in the event of war. Within an hour I received a laconic wire from the Admiralty saying "Proceed". A little later Mr. Winston Churchill, wired thanking us for our offer, and saying that the authorities desired that the Expedition should go on."

Shackleton continued, "Following these definite instructions, the Endurance sailed to Plymouth, and on Tuesday the King sent for me and handed me the Union Jack to carry on the Expedition. On that night, at midnight, war was declared."

Shackleton was sensitive to possible criticism that he was deserting his fellow countrymen at time of national crisis for some personal adventure......It is worth reflecting that upon their return practically all the members of the expedition enlisted in the services and a significant number of them lost their lives in the latter days of the Great War. It is also telling that Shackleton wrote the dedication in his book South as follows: "To My Comrades who fell in the white warfare of the south and on the red fields of France and Flanders".

But let us move away swiftly from the awfulness of war to the enjoyment of our Conference today. This has been put together to reflect the Legacy of the Endurance Expedition and its association with South Georgia in particular. And its timing to coincide with the arrival of *Endurance* in South Georgia - on 5th November 1914 - where Shackleton made final preparations over the next month. The 8th was a day off and at leisure around Grytviken.
Our planning has been led by Bob Burton along with colleagues from the SGA and Friends - to whom we are extremely grateful. The event has been sponsored by Ice Tracks Expeditions, to whom also our considerable thanks are extended. I should also take the opportunity to thank the administrative staff at SPRI for their assistance, of course, the support of the Director, Professor Julian Dowdeswell.