

News

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Millbay marks centenary of Shackleton's departure from Plymouth

A re-enactment of Sir Ernest Shackleton's departure from Plymouth on his quest to cross Antarctica a century ago is taking place in Millbay this week as part of a series of celebrations.

Millbay's lead developer, English Cities Fund (ECf) – a joint venture between Muse Developments, Legal & General and the Homes and Communities Agency - has made Clyde Quay available for the re-enactment and it is hoped a plaque being unveiled there will become a permanent feature in the final regeneration of the area.

Shackleton and his crew boarded the ship Endurance at Millbay Docks on August 8th, 1914, setting out to become the first team to cross the continent via the South Pole.

But rather than becoming a celebration of exploration, the expedition was ultimately one of the greatest rescue operations in history, as the crew were unable to land, the ship was crushed by the ice and sank and had to launch an audacious and protracted two-year bid to save their lives.

A century later, the Duke of Cornwall Hotel in Plymouth – where Shackleton stayed the night before the expedition – is hosting a series of events from August 6th-8th to commemorate the occasion, alongside the re-enactment of the departure itself.

The Shackleton 100 Plymouth events are being coordinated by the Devon and Cornwall Polar Society. Its chairman Paul Davies said: "This event in Plymouth will be the first of a series of Shackleton 100 events over the next two years to commemorate this expedition, culminating in a national service of thanksgiving in 2016 at Westminster Abbey.

"When the men were marooned and completely isolated from the rest of the world for two years, they suffered terrible hardships. The story of their rescue under Shackleton's leadership is truly inspirational. Several of the men had strong links to Plymouth and it is right that the city is commemorating its part in this famous expedition."

After leaving Plymouth and sailing the Atlantic early in 1915, Endurance became trapped in the Antarctic ice and ten months later sank. Shackleton's crew had already abandoned the ship to live on the floating ice and in April 1916, they set off in three small boats, eventually reaching Elephant Island.

Taking five crew members, Shackleton then went to find help and the six men spent 16 days crossing 1,300 km of ocean to reach South Georgia, then trekked across the mountainous island of South Georgia to a whaling station to get help. The remaining men from the Endurance were rescued in August 1916, and not one member of the expedition died.

Starting on Wednesday, August 6th, the story of the Endurance will be celebrated with two days of talks and discussions led by renowned polar experts. These will focus on the expedition and its members, but also on how their sense of enterprise and discovery can inspire present and future generations.

Sir Ernest's granddaughter, the Hon Alexandra Shackleton, will unveil two plaques to commemorate the occasion, the first at the Duke of Cornwall Hotel, and the second at Clyde Quay

in Millbay.

The departure from Plymouth will be recreated at noon on Friday 8th August with an historic sailing ship, supplied by Cornish company Square Sail, leaving Millbay and heading out into Plymouth Sound.

Shackleton 100 Plymouth is being organised by the Devon and Cornwall Polar Society in partnership with Plymouth University, Plymouth City Council, the Duke of Cornwall Hotel, Sutton Harbour Holdings, English Cities Fund, Muse Developments and Associated British Ports.

The event is also sponsored by Arcturus Expeditions, the James Caird Society, South Georgia Association, the Antarctic Heritage Trust and the Heritage Lottery Fund.