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RELICS FROM CAPTAIN SCOTT'S FATAL LAST EXPEDITION TO BE OFFERED AT CHRISTIE'S IN SEPTEMBER

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Sir Charles Seymour ("Silas") Wright

London – Christie's announce that they will offer at auction the Charles Seymour Wright collection of relics from Scott's British Antarctic Expedition of 1910-1913. Sir Charles Seymour Wright (1887-1975) was the last surviving member of Scott's Polar Party and the man who made the harrowing discovery of Captain Scott's tent out on the Ice Barrier in November 1912. The collection is the centre-piece of the Polar section of the *Exploration and Travel* sale on 22 September 2010, celebrating the centenary of the departure of Scott's *Terra Nova* for the South in 1910. The collection has been consigned by Wright's grandson in British Columbia and includes his skis, sledging tables, cartoons, manuscripts, scientific instruments and sledging kit, as well as a little-known collection of photographs of the fatal southern journey. It is expected to realise a total of £150,000 to £250,000.

"Although modest about his accomplishments, and reluctant to speak publicly about his time in the Antarctic, his family was privy to many personal stories from that expedition; his constant gnawing hunger from their meagre rations, boots that literally fell apart as they marched across the Ice Barrier, the struggle to get into frozen sleeping bags... Silas passed away in 1975, making him the last surviving member of Scott's Polar Party. He left behind extensive archival material that collectively forms an amazing historical record of the last great Polar expedition."

(Adrian Raeside, Wright's grandson Whistler, BC)

Nicholas Lambourn, Director of Exploration and Travel: *“This extraordinary collection, consigned to Christie’s by Wright’s grandson in Canada, with its relics from skis and scientific instruments, to manuscripts and photographs, takes us right back onto the frozen Antarctic continent with Wright and his fellow sledgers, supporting Scott on his historic and ultimately fatal sledging journey to the South Pole in 1911-12. The collection is a poignant souvenir of one of the most famous and tragic journeys in the annals of exploration. This is one of the last great collections of relics from Scott’s Terra Nova expedition to be dispersed, and follows a tradition of sales of relics from the ‘Heroic Age’ of Antarctic exploration at Christie’s, notably those of The Scott Relics for Scott’s heirs in 1999 and The Shackleton Collection for Shackleton’s heirs in 2001.”*

A physicist, glaciologist and talented sledger and navigator, Wright played a key role in all parts of the expedition, though his first postal application to join the expedition had been rejected by Scott. In an effort to persuade him to reconsider, the determined young Wright, who was at that time studying physics up at Cambridge in 1910, walked all the way from Cambridge (with just a few boiled eggs for sustenance) to Scott’s office in London, where he successfully persuaded Scott to include him as the physicist on the expedition’s scientific staff.

Wright was in Scott’s *First Supporting Party*, which turned back to Cape Evans at the top of the Beardmore Glacier just before Christmas 1911, leaving Scott and his companions to continue on to the South Pole.



From the southern journey, evocative relics include Wright’s pair of skis, *illustrated left* (estimate: £6,000-8,000), still with the small copper nails banged in to help him navigate across the vast Ice Barrier, his Altitude Scale in its sledging bag (estimate: £2,500-3,500), Sledging Tables (estimate: £4,000-6,000), and chart with his route annotated in pencil (estimate: £20,000-30,000). His large archive of photographs taken on the expedition (estimate: £30,000-50,000) includes little-known and unpublished images of the journey, with photographs taken by Wright of their difficult progress across the Barrier, and their sledging camps amongst the crevasses and mountain ranges of the awesome Beardmore Glacier. The collection also includes a rare group of vintage prints of Scott and Bowers’s photographs taken on the journey (estimate £4,000-6,000), rare survivals as the negatives of these photographs have been long lost.

On 29 October 1912, some 10 months after the Polar Party had set off on their final push towards the South Pole, Wright navigated for the Search Party that set out from Hut Point to discover the fate of the Polar Party, knowing that they must surely have perished. It was Wright, the young Canadian, who made the remarkable sighting of the very tip of a tent, a tiny distant speck of green on the vast blank expanse of the Ice Barrier, some half a mile off:

"I had been plugging away along my chosen course when I saw a small object projecting above the surface on the starboard bow ... it was the 6 inches or so tip of a tent and was a great shock ... I tried to signal my party to stop and come up to me but my alphabetical signals could not be read by the Navy and I considered it would be a sort of sacrilege to make a noise. I felt much as if I were in a cathedral and found myself with my hat on ... We cleared away the snow and opened the tent to find there were only three occupants: Scott, Wilson and Bowers"

It was solely due to this extraordinary sighting by Wright, just a few miles south of One Ton Depot, that the fate of the Polar Party was discovered, their journals, negatives and other pathetic relics retrieved and recovered to tell their awful story, one whose telling would both traumatise and inspire the British Nation on the eve of the Great War.

The collection includes Wright's expedition negatives (estimate £4,000-6,000), amongst which images from the Search Party, notably of the massive snow cairn built by Wright, Cherry-Garrard and Atkinson, surmounted by a cross made of sledge runners, marking the grave of their perished comrades.

Wright led a distinguished career after the expedition returned home, becoming Director of Scientific Research at the Admiralty and later first chief of the Royal Navy Scientific Service. Following his retirement to Canada, he was flown up the Beardmore Glacier and on to the South Pole by the US Navy in the 1960s, finally completing a journey he had been so disappointed not to complete with Scott in 1912.

Sale: Exploration and Travel with the Polar Sale

Date: 22 September 2010

Location: Christie's King Street, 8 King Street, St. James's, London, SW1Y 6QT

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Images and interviews available on request
Visit Christie's Web site at www.christies.com