

The Scott Polar Research Institute

THE new building of the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge, was opened on November 16 by the Chancellor of the University, Mr. Stanley Baldwin, in the presence of a distinguished company. In a pamphlet distributed at the opening, the history and aims of the Institute are outlined. The Chancellor also made it clear in his speech on Friday that the building has the twofold object of doing honour to the name of a great polar explorer, and being also a centre of information for those yet to come. The building was therefore designed by Sir Herbert Baker with these two objects in view, and has succeeded in attaining both of them.

The history of the Institute is, briefly, as follows. A balance of £12,000 remained after the War from the Mansion House Fund subscribed in 1913 in answer to Capt. Scott's last message. A first grant of £6,000 was made from this fund in 1920 to establish a polar research institute at Cambridge, and in 1925 the whole trust fund was handed over to the University. £6,000 was set aside as a building fund, and the Institute began its work on an income of £300 a year. In 1931, the Pilgrim Trust made a grant of £4,000 to the building fund and later the trustees of the British Museum gave £2,000 for a publication fund. The whole scheme owes its inception and completion to the unremitting labours of Prof. F. Debenham, director of the Institute, who was a member of Scott's last expedition to the Antarctic.

The present building is of three stories, the uppermost an attic floor with dormer windows behind a balustrade. The front door is flanked by two very large windows to the vestibule and is surmounted by a bronze bust of Capt. Scott, executed by Lady Hilton Young. On a frieze which forms part of the upper stone balustrade are the words *QUÆSIVIT ARCANA POLI VIDET DEI*, an epitaph which is singularly apt for one who sought so diligently the scientific, as well as the geographical, secrets of the Antarctic, and in doing so found a glorious death; an end, which, as Mr. Baldwin pointed out in his speech, was like the failure of Sir Richard Grenville in his last fight, in that it was more lasting than a success.

In the forecourt there is a symbolic statue given by the same artist, to the memory of the five men of the Pole party. It is in the form of a youth standing with head thrown back, and is one of the best of Lady Young's symbolic designs. On the pediment are the words *LUX PERPETUA LUCEAT EIS*, and indeed a light everlasting will shine on the memory of Dr. Edward Adrian Wilson, Capt. L. E. G. Oates, Lieut. H. R. Bowers, and Petty Officer Edgar Evans, as on that of their leader.

On the keystones over the large windows are symbolic representations of a polar bear and an Emperor penguin feeding its chick, by Mr. Charles Wheeler. For this carving the late Sir Louis Baron gave £100.

The vestibule consists of a chamber with two high domes painted by Mr. MacDonald Gill with maps of the polar regions. These paintings were the gift of an anonymous donor, and attracted a great deal of interest from those who inspected the building at the time of the opening. They are not only topographically correct in a general sense, but also contain a great deal of historical detail in the form of pictures of famous ships, in their proper localities. Below each map is a ring of names of explorers famous for the great discoveries they made and the

extent of their additions to the maps encircled by their names.

The ground floor is taken up by a museum of polar equipment, which includes exhibits of both practical and historical interest. Thus sledges, dog-harness, polar clothing, and Eskimo kayaks are in close proximity to relics from the time of Sir Martin Frobisher, including some from the Parry, Franklin and more recent expeditions. The director and his assistant have each a small room on this floor.

On the first floor there are two research rooms and a library, designed with special care by the architect, with oak parquet flooring and oak furnishings. Adjacent to the library is the map room, also carried out in oak; these two rooms will be spacious enough for their purpose for a very long time to come.

The second, or attic, floor has been most ingeniously designed to give a long gallery for the pictorial side of the collections. The walls are panelled with three-ply African mahogany and are hung with water-colours by Dr. E. A. Wilson. Display cupboards, after a design borrowed from Sir Sydney Cockerell of the Fitzwilliam Museum, further increase the space available for hanging sketches and pictures. In cabinets and lockers on this floor are kept the already very large collection of photographs and other illustrations of past expeditions.

The Polar Research Institute would not justify its name were it nothing more than a depository of things polar, and its real activities are possibly not evident to the passing visitor. The first duty of the Institute is to keep in touch with all investigations made in, or concerning, the polar regions. It does this by maintaining a large correspondence with people interested in polar matters in Great Britain and other countries. It is satisfactory to record that an increasing number of the visitors are more or less directly concerned with expeditions going or returning.

A second duty is to provide facilities for those wishing either to organise an expedition or to work out the results of one which has returned. In the past eight years there has been a constant use of these facilities, beginning with the temporary residence of Mr. V. Douglas to work out the geological results of Sir Ernest Shackleton's *Quest* Expedition. The Institute does not organise expeditions itself, nor is it concerned only with those from Great Britain; many of the requests for information come from overseas.

A third activity of growing importance is the publication of the *Polar Record* in January and July of each year. By means of the large correspondence referred to above, by reference to press-cutting volumes which are kept up to date, and with the assistance of many well-wishers, it has become a publication unique in character. Each number consists briefly of a review of all major events in the polar regions for the previous six months, and in addition to this it usually contains an authoritative article on some subject of topical interest. Its circulation is growing rapidly and it has proved a very useful means of spreading interest in the work of the Institute. Nevertheless it is still, owing to scarcity of funds, unable to illustrate its pages with plates and maps in the style the subject merits, nor is the size to which the journal is limited sufficient to include long articles or reviews of books.