

Scott, Oates and Heroism

We were very honoured to be visited last Wednesday by Sir Ranulph Fiennes, the great polar explorer and adventurer. Many of you will have been here in this hall to hear his words. He showed us his modesty and his courage in his words – and I was left reflecting about courage and about the kind of men who go to such extreme and challenging places. Sir Ranulph spoke about Captain Scott, that other great polar explorer, who died 101 years ago in an attempt to lead the first team to the South Pole. I would like to use this assembly to think about heroism, using an example from Scott's expedition to the South Pole. Scott, and one of his team, Captain Oates, give us an insight into the place of heroism in our history and our culture.

Scott set out with his team to be the first to reach the South Pole. He was up against

diffidently, so quietly is what adds to his heroism and greatness. To look around him and say "I'm just going outside now, I may be some time" and have everyone who heard know exactly what he meant makes him live in the collective memory. Was his sacrifice in vain? No one was saved. I think it was not in vain...

Oates was never found. The bodies of Scott and his companions were discovered by a search party on 12 November 1912 and their records retrieved. Their final camp became their tomb; a high cairn of snow was erected over it, topped by a roughly fashioned cross. Oates