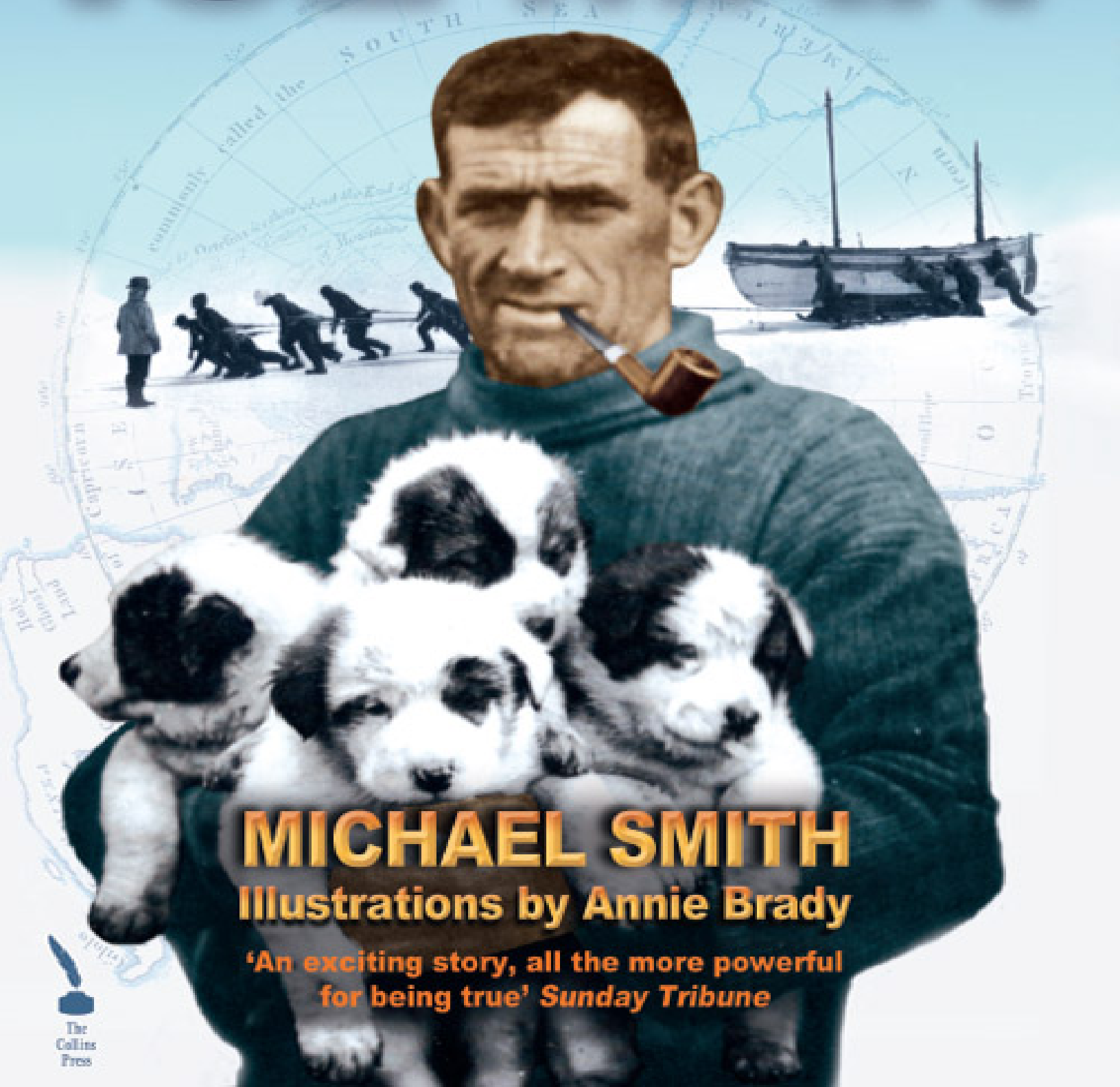


TOM CREAN

THE ADVENTURES OF AN IRISH ANTARCTIC HERO

ICE MAN



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*'An exciting story, all the more powerful
for being true' Sunday Tribune*

INTRODUCTION

Far away at the very bottom of the world in the harsh ice-covered continent of Antarctica stands a dark mountain. It towers above the endless plains of snow and ice.

The mountain is called Mount Crean¹ and it stands as a lasting monument to a remarkable man whose name will forever be linked with the first exploration to the unknown Antarctic continent. His name was Tom Crean.

Tom Crean was among the small band of outstanding men who conquered the unexplored Antarctic wilderness about 100 years ago. His astonishing adventures helped lift the veil from Antarctica and no history of the frozen land can be written without saluting the massive role he played.

Tom Crean sailed on three great expeditions to the region when it was largely unknown and he spent longer on the ice than more famous explorers like Captain Robert Scott or Sir Ernest Shackleton.

But his incredible exploits were half-forgotten and overlooked for almost 100 years. He was the unknown hero of Antarctic exploration.

This is a stirring tale of an ordinary man who rose from humble beginnings on an Irish farm to become a legendary figure of Antarctic exploration.

People are eager for heroes and Tom Crean is a hero for every age.

Note: In Tom Crean's time, a different system of measuring distance and weights was used. In this book modern measures are used with the older conversions shown in brackets. Temperatures are given in Celsius with the Fahrenheit comparison shown in brackets. See '[Useful Information](#)' for comparisons.



Footnotes

1. Tom Crean's name will live forever in the Antarctic, where two landmarks have been named after him. Mount Crean is located in Victoria Land, map reference: 77.90° S - 159.47° W and stands 2.5km (1.5 miles or 8,360ft high). The Crean Glacier is on the island of South Georgia, map reference: 54.17° S - 28.13° W.

Chapter 1

A FARMER'S LAD

Half a world away from the frozen Antarctic's ice and snow are the lush, green fields of Ireland. The contrast between the two different landscapes is stark - one is always cold, hostile and alien to humans, while the other is mild, grassy and welcoming.

However, it was a man from Ireland's soft rolling hills who tamed the world's most wild and violent place, Antarctica. The man was Tom Crean.

Tom's story began over 100 years ago. He was born in 1877 near the village of Anascaul in County Kerry on Ireland's western shores.

Tom had a humble start in life. His parents were very poor farmers who struggled to work the land and feed their ten children.

Life on the farm was extremely hard. There were no luxuries like electricity or telephones, people were often hungry and when crops failed many thousands died. Only the toughest survived.

Children like Tom had little chance to escape the poverty. Schools were poor and children learned little more than how to read and write. They often left school by the age of twelve, too early to develop skills or knowledge and find a good job.



But Tom was a determined lad. He wanted more than a life of struggle and dreamt of better times. The chance came in the summer of 1893, when he was just fifteen years old.

One day, Tom's father asked him to work in a potato field. Potatoes were the basic diet for Irish people at the time and looking after the crop was a matter of life and death for farmers and their families.

But Tom was daydreaming. Without thinking, he left the gate to the field wide open and, in a moment, some cows wandered into the field and started eating the precious potatoes.

Tom's father was furious and shouted at his dozy son. Father and son had a blazing row and an angry Tom swore that he would run away from home.

A few days later Tom was strolling along by the seashore near his home when he came across a man in a uniform chatting to some local people. The man was a recruiting officer for the British navy and Tom listened to what the officer had to say.

Britain's navy in Victorian times was the most powerful in the world and it needed an endless supply of young men to crew the vast fleet of ships which cruised the oceans.

Ireland was one of the places where recruiting officers came to find new sailors and for many young Irish lads, a job in the navy was their best chance of getting away from the struggle on the land.

The Atlantic coastline of Kerry is the most westerly point in Europe and the local people have long connections with the sea. Going to sea was a normal step.

Tom was brought up in Kerry with tales of seafaring exploits, including those of the legendary St Brendan the Navigator who in the sixth century sailed into the Atlantic from Brandon Creek - only a few miles from where Tom grew up many centuries later.

Tom's lucky meeting with the naval recruiting officer was his chance to follow in the footsteps of St Brendan and the Kerry tradition.

He strode up to the officer and asked how he could enlist in the navy. To his dismay the officer said recruits had to be sixteen years of age.

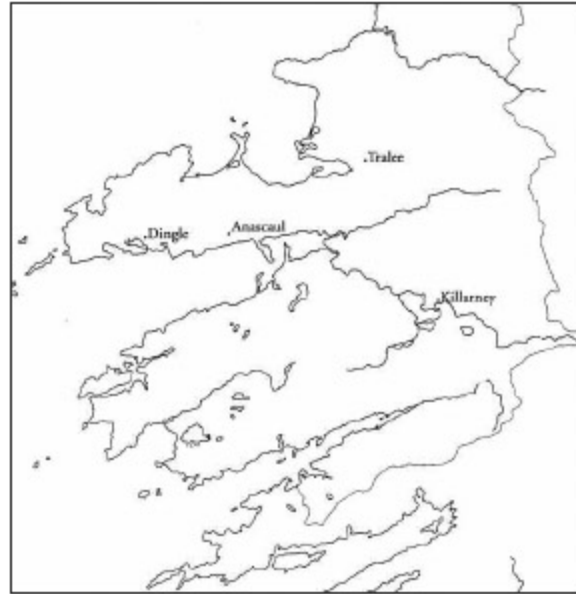
Tom was only fifteen but he was determined to run away. So he lied. In an instant, he told the British officer he was sixteen. No more questions were asked and Tom was promptly enrolled as a junior seaman in Queen Victoria's mighty Royal Navy.

Tom raced back home to break the news to his parents. In some circumstances, his parents might have stopped him going, especially since he was so young. But it was one mouth less left to feed on the farm and Tom's parents allowed him to go.

Tom had other problems. First his clothes were scruffy rags he wore to work on the farm. Second, he did not have any money saved to pay his train fare to the naval port at Cobh, near Cork city.

Luckily a kind soul lent him a small sum for the train ticket and he borrowed a shirt, jacket and trousers from someone else. The fresh-faced fifteen-year-old stepped down the hill to a new life at sea, never to return to his life on the farm.

It was the first time the young Kerryman stepped into the unknown. But it was not the last.



Anascaul, Co. Kerry

Chapter 2

A STEP INTO THE UNKNOWN

Tom Crean was a scrawny teenager when he joined the navy and he found that life was hard for ordinary sailors. He started his new career at the lowest rank, known as Boy 2nd Class and was sent to a training ship to learn the ropes.

Work was demanding, the discipline was very strict and 700 or 800 men were crammed together below decks on big naval battleships. Although the food was not good, it was probably better than Tom had at home.

Below decks a heavy cloud of tobacco smoke hung over the men's living quarters, since most sailors puffed a pipe all day long. At night hundreds of sailors slept in hammocks strung out like rows of clothes' lines.

But eight years later in 1901, Tom's life in the navy changed forever.

Tom's battleship, the *HMS Ringarooma*, was on duty patrolling in the Pacific Ocean. By chance the vessel happened to be moored in New Zealand just before Christmas. Over the horizon came another vessel, the British exploration ship, *Discovery*, which moored alongside the *Ringarooma* in the harbour.

Discovery was Captain Robert Scott's special ice ship en route to explore the unknown continent of Antarctic. Tom and his fellow sailors eagerly rushed on deck to catch a

sight of the famous craft before it disappeared into unexplored waters.



Discovery was in New Zealand to pick up last-minute supplies of food and equipment before starting the long journey south. But plans were disrupted when one of Captain Scott's sailors got drunk and attacked an officer. To avoid punishment, the sailor fled.

Captain Scott urgently needed a replacement for the deserter and asked the *Ringarooma's* captain if he could spare one of his sailors. On board the *Ringarooma*, Tom heard the news and bravely offered to replace the runaway sailor.

By this stage, the skinny teenager who ran away from home in 1893 had developed into a fine, strapping seaman, standing close to 1.8m (6ft). Captain Scott was impressed by the big Irishman and was happy to welcome Tom on board *Discovery*.

Once again, Tom was stepping into the unknown - this time as an Antarctic explorer.