

# South Georgia Association Newsletter

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The next Annual General Meeting will be on May 29, 2009.



## The Seventh Annual General Meeting, 23 MAY 2008

Held at the Royal Over-Seas League, St James, London.

43 members including the Committee attended. Another 71 members, including Bob Burton, Newsletter Editor, sent their apologies.

The Chairman, Richard Ralph, welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially Charles Swithinbank (SGA President), Alison Neil (CEO, South Georgia Heritage Trust), Elsa Davidson (Curator, South Georgia Museum), David Wilson (Friends of Scott Polar Research Institute), Gustav Ellingsen (Øyas Venner), Alexandra Shackleton (President of James Caird Society), David Tatham (Chairman, Falkland Island Association) and Gerry Adamson (FCO representative).

Richard Ralph reported on the successful visit to HMS *Endurance* and the historic dockyard in Portsmouth, and on the South Georgia historic film evening in Cambridge with SPRI. On South Georgia the Prion Island boardwalk had been erected, and by all accounts was working well. A watching brief is being kept with regard to impact on wildlife. The Association looked forward to the promised GSGSSI environmental impact review in due course. Congratulations were offered to the South Georgia Government on rebuilding the hydro-electric dam. The construction was good and the remediation excellent. The sinking of the cruise ship *Explorer* was a salutary reminder to concentrate minds on relief and rescue plans. Tourism is increasing by leaps and bounds. The SGA is glad that GSGSSI is regulating this closely, especially given invasive species/bio-security implications, and that it would not hesitate to close sensitive areas if necessary. Congratulations were also given to GSGSSI for its exemplary regulated fishery, and their second year of nil seabird bycatch. There remains concern about the declining albatross populations.

The meeting approved Sarah Lurcock's proposal to send midwinter greetings to South Georgia.

The SGA committee had held two meetings with Harriet Hall CEO for South Georgia, GSGSSI. These had proved a very useful and welcome vehicle for maintaining dialogue, and briefing the GSGSSI on SGA concerns. The Government is conducting a legislative review of South Georgia on which SGA would be consulted. SGA welcomed the Government's continued commitment to transparency by publishing its accounts on their website. SGA

was pleased that Harriet Hall is extending her contract by another year, and hoped her eventual replacement would be someone of similar calibre.

Bob Burton was congratulated for the continued high quality of the newsletter, and for the production of post-cards showing Grytviken whaling station. (see page 5.)

SGA had had informal preliminary discussions with the South Georgia Heritage Trust. Although fundamentally different, both organisations have similar objectives, and there was scope for collaboration on projects. SGA continued to value its relationship with Øyas Venner. SGA is a paid-up member of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, and Richard Ralph is an active participant in its South Atlantic Working Group. Joint events continue with the Scott Polar Research Institute and the James Caird Society.

Looking ahead, the Letters Patent Exhibition would be opening on 16 July 2008 at SPRI. The exhibition would then travel to Dundee and Hull, Stanley and South Georgia.

A visit to the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich has been planned for 8 September 2008.

The cruise with Far Frontiers of which the SGA was one of the sponsoring organisations would be taking place in November 2008.

David Tatham's Dictionary of Falklands Biography was due out in a week's time. Peter Pepper, FIA, had produced a booklet *Getting it right: the real history of the Falklands/Malvinas* and had brought copies to the AGM. A review copy of Molly Sheridan's *An Artist in South Georgia* was available for inspection.

Lizzy Hawker thanked the members for their continued support. The SGA currently had 372 paid-up members, with 80 from overseas, and three corporate members. 48 members had not yet renewed this year. Ros Marsden suggested that SGA application forms be made available at the South Georgia Museum.

The audited accounts had been distributed with the AGM notice. John Bawden was thanked for auditing the SGA accounts. Total assets within the current and deposit account amounted to £22,600.

### Initiative Fund

The Initiative Fund has been increased to £500 per project. A current project is the digitisation of photographs taken by David Ferguson in 1912. £600 had been paid this year: £250 to Thomas Binnie for his book of historic South Georgia photographs taken by magistrate E.B. Binnie; £350

to purchase the picture of South Georgia for the Museum. Current projects include the digitisation of photographs taken by David Ferguson in 1912, also supported by the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust, and the digitisation of ciné films taken by Leo Harrison Matthews.

The surplus from the Duncan Carse Bust Fund would be put towards pictures for Alec Trendall's book on the 1950s South Georgia Surveys.

Alison Neil and Elsa Davidson presented a report on SGHT activities. The museum, church and cemetery at Grytviken were taken over from the Museum Trust in 2006. Work include an inventory of library books in the church, a project with Salvesen's ex-whalers on life on the island and a booklet on the history of the museum. A replica of *James Caird* is to be housed at the museum in the Carr marine building. Proposed projects include restoration of the Husvik Villa by the Norwegians and habitat restoration work through rat eradication. £400,000 is currently available for the latter, mostly sourced from the USA. An Environmental Impact Assessment is needed and the method will be trialled on a Falkland island. Future possibilities include a second tourist attraction at KEP/Grytviken, perhaps the Nybrakka; funding research on fur seal enclosures; restoration of the Stromness Villa; and putting South Georgia on the school curriculum. Lyle Craigie-Halkett asked whether it would be possible to get the bell back on to the *Dias* for a photograph. Elsa Davidson replied she was in contact with Robb Robinson about this.

Gustav Ellingsen said a few words about Øyas Venner. The society has about 300 members, mostly whalers or whalers' families. One of its concerns is that there are still some unknown graves in South Georgia.

#### Committee

All members of the committee were willing to stand for re-election, except Jane Tanton who had retired earlier through pressure of work. Dave Fletcher was willing to stand for the committee and had been proposed by David Rootes, seconded by Bob Burton.

The meeting voted in favour of re-electing the committee with the addition of Dave Fletcher.

The Committee now comprises:

President: Charles Swithinbank

Chairman: Richard Ralph

Secretary: Fran Prince

Treasurer: Keith Holmes

Membership Secretary: Elizabeth Hawker

Newsletter editor: Bob Burton

Members: Bob Headland, David Rootes, Alexandra Shackleton, Ron Lewis-Smith, David Tatham, Dave Fletcher

Corresponding Members remain as: Jan Cheek (Stanley), Sarah Lurcock (KEP), Trevor Potts, Dan Weinstein (USA)

George Spenceley, who had been on Duncan Carse's 1955/56 survey expedition paid tribute to Alec Trendall and his great achievement in producing his book on the South Georgia Surveys, which now had a publisher.

Dave Brooks offered thanks to the committee and special thanks to Jane Tanton for organising the visit to HMS *Endurance*. Sarah Lurcock mentioned her plans to use the Letters Patent exhibition material for the next South Georgia stamp issue. Ros Marsden invited members to visit Duncan Carse's memorial at Kings Lynn. Richard Ralph thanked all the committee for their work over the year.

The meeting ended at 8:15 and was followed by an illustrated lecture by Bob Headland on *South Georgia and the International Polar Years*.

## The Letters Patent Exhibition

The objective of this exhibition was to demonstrate "The government of South Georgia - A century of resource management" and was described in detail on page 8 of the last newsletter. Over the course of time it transformed into "South Georgia: A centenary of good government" because it was easier to fit on the display panels!

The exhibition was constructed at the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge, where the opportunity was taken to display some artefacts and historic documents such as Shackleton's death certificate and papers related to the Magistrate's business.

The opening of the exhibition at SPRI on 16 July was a social event attended by a number of SGA members.

The exhibition panels were rolled up and despatched to Dundee where they were exhibited at Discovery Point. On 30th September, the South Georgia Heritage Trust and the Dundee Industrial Heritage were hosts to a fundraising event in the presence of the Patron of the SGHT, The Princess Royal.

*The Princess Royal discusses 100 years of South Georgia's government with Bob Burton.*



The exhibition is now due to go to Stanley and eventually to the Museum at Grytviken.

## Letters Patent centenary stamp issue



*Date of issue is 30 November. Obtainable from the Falkland Islands Philatelic Bureau or contact John Smith of the Poljoy Mint who will send a list of dealers: jcs137@poljoy.com*

*(top left)* H.M.S. *Sappho* arrived at South Georgia on 31 January 1906 to establish British authority on the island.

*(top right)* The Magistrate's Residence was built at King Edward Point in 1912. It initially housed the Magistrate, the Customs Officer and a Police Constable.

*(bottom left)* James Innes Wilson was the first resident Stipendiary Magistrate and held the post from 1909 to 1914. His principal functions were to be a symbol of British occupation and uphold the authority of the Government.

*(bottom right)* S.S. *Coronda*, a cargo ship belonging to Christian Salvesen & Co., brought James Innes Wilson to South Georgia on 30 November 1909.

## Message from the Commissioner

2007 was a significant year for the South Atlantic, being the 25th anniversary of the conflict with Argentina. I was delighted to accompany Keith Mills and Guy Sheridan to South Georgia for a ceremony commemorating the Island's liberation. Later in the year when South Atlantic Medal Association members visited the Falklands, we were pleased to entertain South Georgia veterans at receptions on our Fishery Patrol vessel, *Pharos SG*, and to show them the changes (and we hope improvements) to the Island over the past 25 years. We remain of course happy to meet any of those who served in either the defence of the Island during the initial Argentine invasion or in Operation Paraquat and hope that any who visit the Falklands will contact us.

This year has been the busiest yet in terms of visitor numbers. 8089 individuals visited on 64 cruise ship visits, and 21 yachts, carrying 122 visitors, also spent time in our waters. There is no indication that this is going to decrease and we continue to monitor visitor numbers closely. A new tourism management policy document has been discussed with the industry and is available on our website. New elements are a restriction in the size of vessels allowed to visit to those carrying less than 500 passengers and regulations restricting the access of large private vessels. We continue to hope that as many people as possible will have the opportunity to enjoy the beauty of South Georgia but this must be managed to ensure that the very features which they come to see remain unspoilt.

In this context, I am pleased to say that we have received much positive feedback on the introduction of new biosecurity measures and the construction of a boardwalk on Prion Island. I know that many members of the Association were concerned about the latter but I hope that the end result will reassure you. Unfortunately weather conditions meant that the final piece of the boardwalk extending into a jetty for landing access was not completed and we are reviewing whether there are funds available to do this next season. Sally Poncet visited Prion and Albatross Islands this year to continue her monitoring of the albatross populations and her reports of nest numbers were encouraging, although it is clearly much too early to draw any conclusions.

Our other, larger, construction project was also affected by

the weather and work is still outstanding on the hydro-electric power scheme at Grytviken. Morrisons Construction have done an excellent job so far and completed work on the dam and turbine house. A smaller team will return next season to install and commission the turbine and connect up the electricity supply. From an historical perspective, it was fascinating to see the structures of both the 1910 and 1920s dam uncovered before being concreted over again and to know that work done by the early inhabitants of Grytviken is now playing a part in reducing the Island's carbon footprint. With the price of fuel still rising, it is good to watch a project take shape that should have financial, as well as environmental, benefits for the territory.

We had a successful fishing season and are now entering a period of reassessment of our toothfish fishery to secure a renewal of its certification by the Marine Stewardship Council. I am also delighted that Seaview Ltd has applied for certification of the icefish fishery, which is now being assessed. We recently published an assessment of our fisheries' impact on seabirds which was done by Birdlife International to comply with FAO recommendations. I am pleased to say that the review was very positive, with only a few recommendations for further work. Again, this is available on the website.

Darren Christie has completed his report on the feasibility of rat eradication and this, and the Government's response, is on our website. Although the high costs preclude us from attempting this, we welcome the interest of the SGHT in continuing to explore options for an island-wide rat eradication. In the meantime, we are focussing government efforts on creating the right conditions to enable the work to go ahead by strengthening measures to prevent re-invasion or invasion by other species.

We continue to value the interest in South Georgia taken by your members. 2008 is of course an important centenary for the Island and I welcome your initiative in producing an exhibition to mark the issue of Letters Patent in 1908. I look forward to visiting the exhibition when it arrives in Stanley. In the meantime, I wish you a successful AGM and look forward to our continued co-operation in the coming year.

**Alan Huckle**

## A 50th Anniversary at Bird Island

Towards noon on 24 November 1958, the sealer *Albatros* steamed through the narrow strait of Bird Sound. There was a fair wind and swell from the southwest so Skipper Hauge kept well clear of Bird Island before letting go the anchor. A donkey engine clanked into life, leaking steam as the boom lifted a heavy motor boat and swung it over the side, followed by a slender Norwegian pram, which heaved up and down as we pulled it alongside.

Jordan Cove was not obvious from the ship, but approaching a jagged coast the boats entered a channel between rocky flats swarming with fur seals. They porpoised alongside or watched as we passed, their spiky ears dripping water. Two lagoons appeared and we slowly entered the smaller (east) branch. It was a perfect shelter, calm water rippled by the wind allowed the pram to slide easily up a shingle beach and we quickly unloaded, two of us staying ashore as the others went back to the ship for more.

For about three hours boats shuttled between ship and shore, then *Albatros* sounded a friendly 'toot-toot' and steamed away, trailing a plume of black smoke. Left on the island were: Nigel Bonner the sealing biologist for South

Georgia with his temporary assistant Fergus O'Gorman, a Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey biologist, accompanied by Lance Tickell and Peter Cordall who comprised the South Georgia Biological Expedition 1958-59.

Behind the shore was a flat raised beach no more than two metres above sea level and almost a hectare in extent. Scattered tussocks were thinned by water flowing from three streams that joined to enter the inlet. About 50 metres in from where we had landed there was a pretty meadow of short grass with a brook of clear water. Skuas loudly told us whose property it was and through the mist, above the cries of fur seals, we could hear a chorus of black-browed albatrosses and distant screams of wandering albatrosses.

The previous season, a tent had been flattened here by an elephant seal, so the administration had been persuaded that an expense of about £40 was justified for a safer alternative to camping. We carried up three heavy (25cm x 25cm) cedar beams to the edge of the meadow. They became the solid foundation on which we spent the rest of the day bolting and nailing together prefabricated sections of a small garden shed. By evening there was an unfinished, but serviceable

ble refuge safeguarded by two holding-down ropes. Bonner produced a bottle of whisky and we toasted the first building on Bird Island. That night he and O’Gorman slept inside it.



*The hut at Bird Island shortly after it had been built in November 1958. The two tents belonged to the South Georgia Biological Expedition 1958-59.*

The floor measured 6ft x 8ft, and it was 7ft high, positioned so that the window looked southwest across the inlet to the sea beyond. Two tents were pitched nearby and four weeks later, when one was no longer needed, its wooden platform completed permanent decking in front of the door. Before long, driftwood planks became a short walkway to a washing place on a bridge over the brook.

Just inside the door on the left, there was a low shelf with two Primus stoves where we cooked, usually with the door open. At other times, with the door closed, a ‘Tilly’ pressure lamp provided ample warmth and we made two ventilators with caps from empty food cans. There were two-tier bunks on the right, a bench under the window on the left and standing room between. At the opposite end from the door, a box served as a seat for one next to the radio and two or three others could sit on the lower bunk.

On 6 March 1959, when *Petrel* arrived to take us back to Grytviken, John Lawrence, the handyman from King Edward Point, came ashore with a roll of roofing felt, a can of mastic, some flat sheet iron and an axe, all he needed to clad the walls and cover the roof, making the hut weather-proof for the winter.



*In 1959 the walls were clad with roofing felt and the roof with sheet metal. It is clean-out day and the hut is surrounded by the contents of the hut stacked on decking.*

For five seasons field workers lived in the hut. The sealing biologists rarely stayed away from KEP for more than a week or two, but visiting albatross researchers lived in the hut for 2-3 months at a time. They had radio communication, but Bonner did not, and the administration insisted that he had company for his visits to Bird Island. In December 1959, when there was no-one available at KEP, his wife, Jennifer and baby Martin (18 months) accompanied him for 10 days. The following year he was given a radio and spent nine days alone on the island.

During its early years, the Bird Island field hut had no name, but in November 1962, when the United States Antarctic Research Program (USARP) put up three more huts, it became ‘No 1’. After February 1963, when Lönberg House was completed, no-one lived in it again. A list of radio frequencies pinned on the wall and crib scores pencilled on the window frame were all that remained of former residents. It was used as an emergency store and in October 1963 Tickell painted the door and window frame for the first time, naming it ‘Bonner’s Bothy’.

No-one lived on Bird Island between 1964 and 1971. Most of the huts deteriorated and when BAS took over, the door of Bonner’s Bothy was falling apart. Bob Burton repaired it, re-painted the red and white stripes and touched up the name. The hut resumed its role as emergency store, but in the late 1980s, Callan Duck remembers seal biologists using it for dissecting specimens. By the time Burton suggested that should be preserved as an historic monument, it had gone. In November 1987 it had been dismantled by Dewi Edwards, a BAS carpenter, to make way for a larger hut. From among the re-cycled timber he made a memorial plaque in the shape of Bird Island for Bonner, who was about to visit the island for the last time, the rest was burnt.



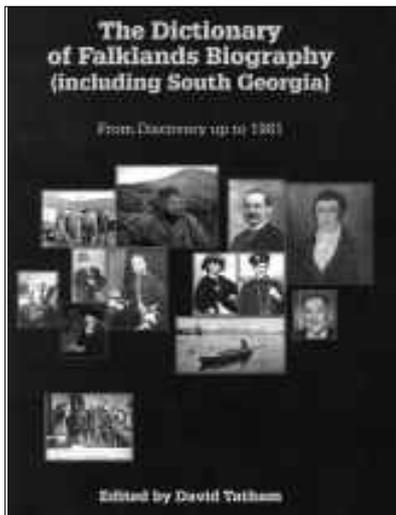
*Bonner’s Bothy in October 1963 when it had become an emergency store. Its door had recently been painted for the first time and name boards attached.*

*This was the hut’s condition when Bird Island was evacuated in April 1964.*

Bonner’s Bothy survived for 29 years, but it was the first four seasons, 1958-1962, when it stood alone at Bird Island and before it was named, that it made a contribution to science beyond anything that might have been imagined when Bonner looked for an alternative to a wet tent. Those who lived in it, cherish the memory of its basic comforts, one remove from the elements.

**Lance Tickell**

**The Dictionary of Falklands Biography (including South Georgia)** Edited and Published by David Tatham 2008. Hardcover. 576 pages, illustrated, £33.00.



I have had to be very patient wait-ing for my copy of David Tatham's *Dictionary of Falkland Biography*. I ordered it months ago, before it was released, planning to get it in the U.K. before I returned to South Georgia, but in the end it had to follow me down by sea mail. I waited so long I began to wonder if it had gone to Iceland, as quite a bit of our parcel mail does. I should know - I am the Post

Mistress here. At last it arrived a few days ago.

Now let me be honest with you. I am only a few pages into the book, but already I disagree with those who say it is for dipping into. This is a book I am going to read from cover to cover, but then it is right up my street, combining two of my favourite types of reading material: biography and anything to do with South Georgia.

The 'D of FB', as it known for short, covers people through the history of the Falklands and South Georgia from their discovery until 1981, neatly avoiding the many new players that entered the scene during the Falklands (and South Georgia) War.

The 470 plus people who are included make for a weighty book full of gems. The editor David Tatham appealed for people to suggest who should be included and to write them up. Then he filled many of the gaps himself. Every single Falklands Governor is included, sundry royals who visited, farm managers, great explorers, the plain eccentric. There are many more with South Georgia connections than I was expecting from reading earlier publicity.

My husband is having to put up with me regularly reading him snippets as I come across them. I laughed out loud when David Tatham wrote that the death at the age of 28 of Prince Eddy Albert Victor, 'who showed little mental ability or interest', was a 'release' for England and for his betrothed (who went on to marry his younger brother George and become Queen Mary).

Some entries are only a few sentences long, others are longer, like that of Sir William Lamond Allardyce as described by Stephen Palmer. I am now a huge fan of Allardyce, who was Governor of the Falkland Islands and Dependencies from 1904 to 1915, a period that saw the establishment of the whaling industry in South Georgia. It seems he was a man of great foresight. His attempts to rein in the worst excesses of a sometimes wasteful industry, and to reduce the numbers of whales caught by restricting the number of catcher boats per station, were the forerunners of the good practices that South Georgia is now so rightly praised for managing the modern fishery. It seems right that the spine of the Island, the Allardyce mountain range, should be named for such a man.

Others in the book with strong South Georgia connections include: the Swedish geologist and polar explorer Johan Gunnar Andersson; several Magistrates including William Barlas (killed by an avalanche and buried at

Grytviken) and Fredrick Black Alison who it would seem was brought in to oversee the Memorial service for Shackleton in 1928 but whose tenure was cut short as he was 'addicted to excessive drinking'; Søren Berntsen, Norwegian gunner and founding Manager at Husvik whaling station; Betty Biggs, philatelist and wife of Policeman Basil; Anthony (Tony) Bomford, summed up in the first line of his entry as 'surveyor, mathematician and eccentric'; Nigel Bonner, Government Biologist and Sealing Inspector; meteorologist Daniel (Danny) Borland who spent 15 years on the Island; sealer Matthew Brisbane; Malcolm Keith Burley, naval officer and leader of the Combined Services Expedition in the 60s. Have you noticed we are not even out of the Bs yet? If you think that, because of its title, this book is not so much about South Georgia, think again.

It cannot all be praise though. The D of FB lacks a separate index of the biographies, so you cannot run your finger down a list to see who you want to read about. There are also many South Georgia folk missing: no Worsley or Crean, no Harrison Matthews or Barrett-Hamilton, nor Tilman, Marr, Coleman or Thorsen. It is a big enough book as it is, however, and there is not room for them all. But that just gives me hope that David Tatham may soon launch into the next volume.

And was it worth the long wait for my copy? Oh Yes! Perfect reading material for weeks ahead.

**Sarah Lurcock**

Obtainable by post from: Editor DFB, South Parade, Ledbury, Hereford, UK: HR8 2HA. Please send cheque for £42 made out to D E Tatham (DFB) to cover book, post and packing. Also available from shops in Stanley, Falkland Islands for £39.

### South Georgia Association postcard

A postcard showing the painting of Grytviken that was donated to the South Georgia Museum is available from The Secretary, South Georgia Association, SPRI, Lensfield Rd, Cambridge CB2 1ER  
Email: [secretary@southgeorgiaassociation.org](mailto:secretary@southgeorgiaassociation.org)  
Price: £2.00 for 10 including postage.



*William Allardyce, Governor: 'pioneer Antarctic conservationist'.*

## Betty Biggs, a legend in her lifetime

Betty was born in Stanley on 29 August 1929 and she died there on 17 September 2008. She married Basil Biggs in 1947. They moved to King Edward Point with their three children, Janet, Coleen and Peter, when Basil was appointed policeman/handyman in 1954.



As one of a handful of women on the Island, Betty had to sew and knit clothing for the growing children. Teaching was a problem; it was difficult to obtain books and materials and even more difficult for her to pin down three lively children for lessons. However, none appears to have suffered from their irregular and unconventional early education. Betty's quiet kindness is remembered by many who passed time in South Georgia during the 16 years she spent there. For a while there was an explorer in the attic; Duncan Carse had to lodge in the Biggs household for a time. The only space available was in the loft.

In 1967 Betty, now expecting a fourth child, was sent to Stanley on the midwinter trip of RMS *Darwin*. The doctor on board became anxious and asked if there was anything faster. Fortuitously, and fortunately, HMS *Lynx* was on passage from South Africa so came to the rescue. After a dramatic rendezvous at night when Betty was tied onto a stretcher and winched into and out of a small boat for the transfer, HMS *Lynx* set off at speed for the Falklands. The Captain famously announced to the ship's company that Mrs Biggs was no more likely to give birth on board than he was. Pauline Lynx Biggs was born as they sailed into Stanley harbour.

Betty Biggs had been a stamp enthusiast since childhood and on South Georgia she had an opportunity to do some work for London stamp dealers. She spent many nights tearing and sticking stamps to catch the rare outward mails. Back in the Falklands, Betty was able to put her stamp expertise to good use in the early 1970s when she dealt with the many specialist stamp orders received by the post office. Demand grew and eventually the philatelic bureau was set up. One of the tasks that Betty undertook for the bureau after the Falklands war in 1982 was to travel to South Georgia to release new stamp issues.

Always patriotic, Betty, just before the war in 1982, felt so strongly about the assumption being made that 'lease-back' would be good for the Falklands that she took action. One of the councillors claimed most people were in favour. Betty and a friend, convinced that this was not true, visited the majority of households in Stanley with a simple questionnaire asking whether or not people favoured leaseback. The result was an almost unanimous 'no'.

Betty continued to live as she wished: under the union flag which was painted on her roof in Stanley. She enjoyed regular visits from her family, especially the younger grandchildren and great grandchildren, and old friends passing to and from more southerly latitudes - and the occasional folk-night in the pubs.



### Jan Cheek, née Biggs

Modified, with permission, from *The Dictionary of Falklands Biography*, edited by David Tatham.

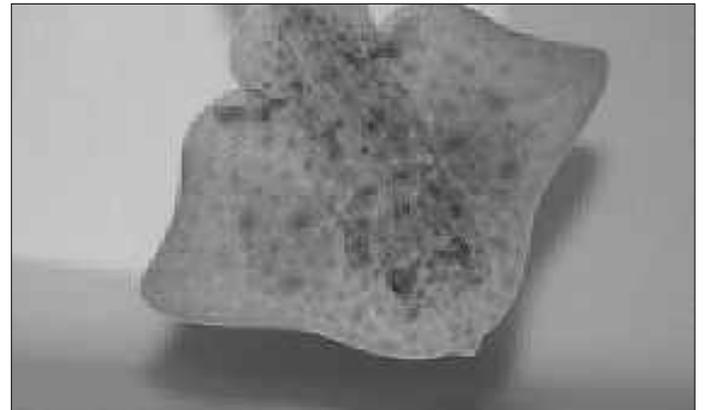
On 24 September, the day of Betty's funeral, the flag at King Edward Point was flown at half-mast and the church bells at Grytviken were rung as a mark of respect.

## A happy (fishy) event at KEP

2009 is the Year of the Skate. Not exactly attention-grabbing news, but at King Edward Point it is significant! The designation comes from CCAMLR, the international body that manages the living resources of the Southern Ocean.

Longlining and trawling result in a significant by-catch of skate (amongst other species). There is not a huge amount known about these skate, so from a sustainable fisheries perspective it is important to determine the impact of the by-catch. To do this we need to know several things, including the proportion of skate in the by-catch, whether they survive being caught and released, and the stage of maturity. This information is recorded by the observer on board every vessel in the South Georgia fishery.

To increase the survival rate of skate caught on toothfish longlines, the lines are simply cut rather than the skate being dragged aboard and the hook pulled out. This decreases mortality but does not always allow the observers time to determine the species and age of the skate. Some mature skate are tagged and released, and there is a reward for tags spotted on skate unlucky enough to be caught a second time.



Among all this routine (essential but dull) work, we have had two excitements in the last year. On the September 2007 survey, seven skate egg cases (popularly called mermaids purses) were caught in trawls and brought back to our aquarium. Eventually, in March 2008, a baby skate hatched. She was duly christened Skatie and her progress has been closely watched. She is weighed every three months and has nearly doubled in weight to a mighty 60 grams on a diet of amphipods (small shrimpy crustaceans). Skatie was joined in September by another hatchling, when little Ray appeared.

Although still very young, Skatie has been tentatively identified as a soft-nose skate and Ray as a starry skate. They are of great scientific (and popular!) interest. As the regular weigh-ins started at birth, their growth rate will add a bit of information on how quickly little skates become big skates.

Vessels working in South Georgia waters are trying to reduce the skate by-catch and mortality. As well as line-cutting, vessels move their fishing operations 5 nautical miles if the proportion of skate caught is too high. These measures, together with research, monitoring and improved forecasting should secure the future of skate species in Antarctic seas.

Mairi Macleod

## An American invasion of South Georgia

On 18 January 1973, four American geologists arrived at Grytviken to be immediately enthralled with the stunning scenery and the tightly folded strata clearly visible on the face of Mount Hodges. We were Ian Dalziel and Ronald Bruhn from Columbia University and Robert Winn and me from the University of Wisconsin. We soon settled into life at Shackleton House, our 'home away from home' where Base Commander Ricky Chinn and the 25 or 30 Fids welcomed us warmly.

Why had we come? During the previous decade, Dalziel and I had conducted research in southern South America and West Antarctica. In 1973 the new theory of plate tectonics provided a promising paradigm for finally understanding the former connection between the two continents. We had recognized from the pioneering studies by A.F. Trendall in the 1950s that South Georgia was an important link for unraveling the puzzle. We had come to test our hypothesis that the island had been a part of Tierra del Fuego which had been carried east 1,000 miles during the opening of the Drake Passage, approximately 25 million years ago.

Living in a British, male-only community was quite an education and being the oldest man at Shackleton House (43), as well as married, a father of five and American, gave me a unique perspective. I quickly learned such new words as *gash*, *scrage*, *jolly*, *splode* and *mankey*, which reminded me of Oscar Wilde's observation that 'The English and Americans have really everything in common - except, of course, for language'. We were promptly introduced to the Saturday tradition of a dress-up dinner followed by a rousing *piss-up*. Never in my life, either before or since, have I been so wasted as one Saturday when I was goaded into mixing extra-dry, American-style martinis for the group and then sampled too many of my creations. I never touched another martini.

The cuisine was interesting, as any BAS veteran can attest. When a ship came in, welcome fresh fruit and vegetables graced the table for a week or two. I became addicted to the English Digestive Biscuit, which had not yet reached the U.S.A. We enjoyed delicious roasted reindeer one night and wished it were served more often.

We accomplished our research work by camping at outlying places for several days at a time. Much of our work was near sea level, where the rocks are best exposed. So we had the company of wildlife at most of our camps. Countless elephant seals commanded the beaches and near some of our camps were penguin, petrel or cormorant rookeries. All of these neighbors provided a vigorous 24-hour chorus. Often I was awakened from a deep sleep by outraged roars from a nearby ellie wallow.

A flat, grassy area at Sandebugten on the Barff Peninsula seemed a perfect place for one camp. Although several discarded antlers might have warned us, we did not tumble to

*An odiferous camp at Sandebugten.*



the fact that this had been a winter yarding area for reindeer until, after two or three days, we finally guessed that the slightly odiferous brown stuff we were tracking into our tents must be something else the deer had left behind.

South Georgia's sudden, dramatic changes of weather offered some challenges. One day Dalziel and Winn got lost in a fog when trying to cross from Cumberland East Bay to Hound Bay through Sörling Valley. When they thought they should be reaching their destination, it slowly dawned on them that the body of water just ahead was not Hound Bay, but the same lake at the head of Sorling Valley, which they had passed an hour or so earlier. On the night before we were to leave South Georgia, Winn showed extraordinary ingenuity. He was returning late to Shackleton House on a moonless night from a farewell party on the Bransfield moored at Grytviken. The revelry had rendered him a bit disoriented until his right boot suddenly filled with cold water. 'Aha', he thought, 'If I keep that foot in the water, I shall be safely headed east to Shack House'.

Our most adventuresome outing took us by Zodiac around Sappho Point into Cumberland West Bay. We then back-packed over the Jason Peninsula to Stromness Bay. At the suggestion of the Fids, we would 'camp' in the old whaling stations. The first night we stayed in the clubhouse of abandoned Husvik Station. Snow fell overnight, so the next day we had to slog through several inches of wet snow to our ultimate goal, Leith Harbor.



*Lunch at Stromness.*

On reaching Leith Harbor with boots and trousers soaked we proceeded to dry out and make ourselves at home. A room in the hospital building provided sleeping space and we created a fine makeshift kitchen, dining area and lounge in the old smithy. The huge forge served as a fireplace for warming, drying and cooking. Thus we had a comfy 'home away from home, away from home' as Winn declared.

As we hiked back from Leith to Stromness and on to Husvik, we speculated about the possibility of future tourism coming to South Georgia. We even composed a jingle as we traveled, which imagined 'Breakfast at Husvik, lunch at Stromness, and dinner at Leith.' Little did we realize that in a couple of decades tourism would, indeed, come to this remote and beautiful place for better or worse. In 2002 my wife and I numbered among the 5,000 or so annual visitors to South Georgia, when I was a lecturer together with Bob Burton on one of the cruise ships. It was the chance to return to the island with my wife that induced me to risk sea-sickness. Return to South Georgia proved to be just as thrilling as my first arrival. It was a special treat for the group to repeat the last leg of Shackleton's march on a beautiful, warm, sunny morning by hiking the four miles from Fortuna Bay across the peninsula to re-visit Stromness.

By the way, our findings on South Georgia did provide definitive proof of our hypothesis about the origin of South Georgia in Tierra del Fuego.

**Robert H. Dott, Jr.**

Robert Dott's spelling has been retained to reinforce Oscar Wilde's perceptive observation. Ed.

## Managing the environment: a powerful new tool

The environment of South Georgia is fragile and under pressure from introduced species, from human activities and from climate change. Its Government has the task of managing the many influences on the environment to minimise their impact on iconic species such as the wandering albatross. This work requires access to as much information as possible, so that the best decisions can be made to protect these and other endangered birds and to protect the environment that they require in order to thrive.

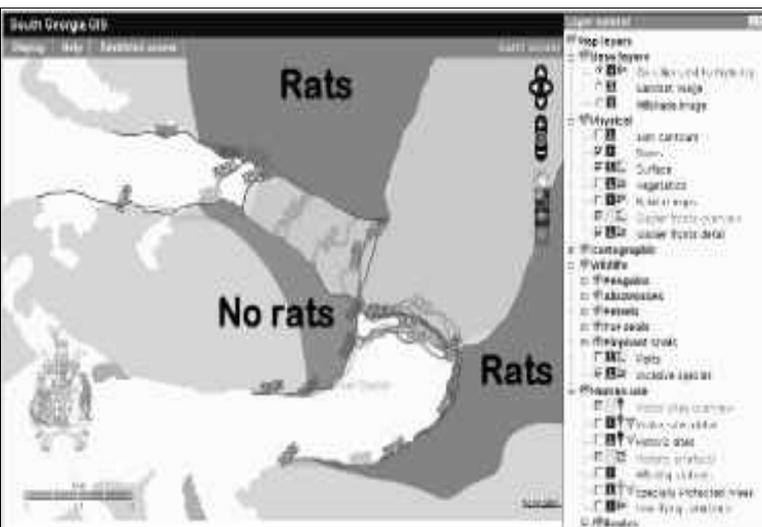
In order to provide access to this information, in 2007 the Mapping and Geographic Information Centre (MAGIC) at the British Antarctic Survey was asked to create a system that would enable administrators, scientists and the public to see environmental information in a geographic framework. The system, known as the South Georgia Geographic Information System (or SGGIS for short), is already in use in the offices of the Government of South Georgia, and has now been released to a wider audience.

The SGGIS website ([www.sggis.gov.gs](http://www.sggis.gov.gs)) presents a map of South Georgia which users can manipulate to zoom in on the area of interest. Using a simple menu system, they can select the information to be displayed, and see how (for example) changing glaciers may allow rats to move from one part of the island to previously unaffected areas.

The information in the SGGIS covers many themes, including topography, vegetation, glacier change, seabirds, seals, historic sites and artefacts, visitor sites, protected areas and historic and tourist routes (including the most recent interpretation by Alec Trendall of Shackleton's epic crossing).

The screen-shot below shows how an area that is currently free of predatory rats is threatened by the rapid retreat of glaciers which could allow rats to spread from infested areas. Information such as this will be used to plan eradication programmes, so that ground-nesting birds can recolonise areas from which they have been driven by rats.

**Paul Cooper**



## The Initiative Fund: Historic Sites Database

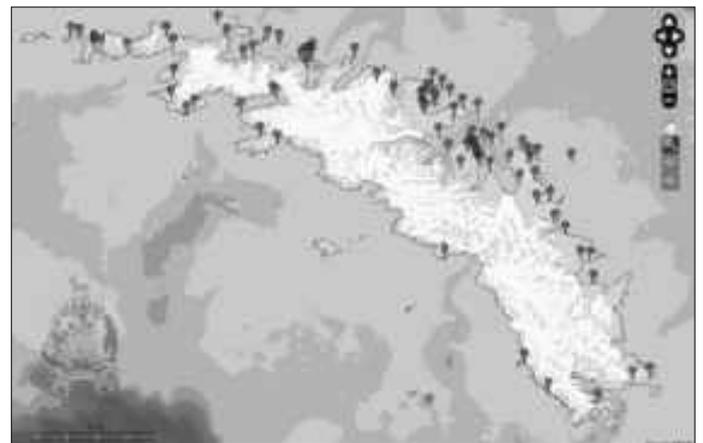
Earlier this year, SGA member Sally Poncet of South Georgia Surveys (SGS) applied to the SGA and the South Georgia Heritage Trust for further contributions towards

the cost of upgrading the South Georgia Historic Sites Database. Readers will recall that our Association made significant contributions in 2006 and 2007 towards the cost of gathering the original field data. The current proposal is to process that information (there are more than 1,000 photographs, for example) and to make it more accessible. We have supported the project with another £500 from the Initiative Fund.

In thanking us, Sally commented that 'without the support, both financial and moral, from the SGA and SGHT, the South Georgia historic sites database would have run the risk of becoming an historic artefact in itself, and for that, I really do appreciate the interest and support shown for the project.'

**Keith Holmes, Hon. Treasurer**

Some results of Sally's work can already be seen on the South Georgia Geographic Information System (SGGIS) website, shown below.



The SGS database for historic sites and artefacts was created in 2007 following fieldwork at South Georgia in 2006/07 and formed the starting point for the historic sites 'layer' of the SGGIS database. When data from the 2007/08 field surveys of Ocean Harbour, Prince Olav Harbour, Grytviken area and Stromness Harbour are added the total number of documented sites will be 86.

## South Georgia government website

Don't forget to check [www.sgisland.gs](http://www.sgisland.gs)! The two webcams mounted at King Edward Point will refresh your memories of mountain scenery (on nice days!), seals and penguins. Sometimes there is a ship passing. In early October there was excitement as the elephant seals gave birth 'on camera'.



The South Georgia Association newsletter is produced twice a year, in April and November. Contributions should be submitted, at least one month before publication, to the editor: Robert Burton, 63 Common Lane, Hemingford Abbots, Huntingdon PE28 9AW. e-mail: [robert@burton41.co.uk](mailto:robert@burton41.co.uk)