

# South Georgia Association Newsletter

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The Annual General Meeting will be on May 4, 2012



*The Nordenskjöld Glacier.*

## Spring meeting & AGM

The lecture at the Spring Meeting will be by Jamie Watts: **South Georgia - the richest wilderness remaining**'.

Jamie will take a look at South Georgia's marine ecosystem - from the krill, colossal squid and 1000-or-so other species of marine invertebrates to the millions of seabirds, fur seals and penguins. It has been quite an interesting century from the perspective of South Georgia's marine life. From sealers to whalers to climate change, the ecosystem has shown incredible resilience to our impacts. Recently, following the tremendous body of work started during the *Discovery* Investigations, and continuing with work carried out by the fisheries management team on deep sea habitats, as well as by the recent shallow water marine survey, the incredible biodiversity under South Georgia's seas has come once again to light. This talk will be a light overview of the state of our understanding of this remarkable world - with as many pretty pictures as Jamie can muster!

## Sarah's new job

In November 2011 Sarah Lurcock took on the new role of 'SGHT Director, South Georgia' for the South Georgia Heritage Trust. The job, representing the interests of the Trust on the island, includes managing the South Georgia Museum and encompasses part of the work previously done by the Curator, with the assistance from a Curatorial Intern for part of the year.

Sarah brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the job. Husband Pat has been Government Officer at KEP for 20 years and Sarah has, over those years, helped at the museum and has been Registrar and Postmistress. She will now be working as Director full-time during the tourist season and half-time for the rest of the year.

As her first tourist season draws to a close, she says that she has found the new job 'challenging but enjoyable'.

There has been a team of four at the Museum for most of the season and they have been kept busy, despite the number of cruise ship visits being lower because of the state of the world economy. However, visitor numbers

have been a bit higher than expected because the majority of the 50 or so ships that have called at Grytviken this season have been full.

As well as the day-to-day running of the Museum, Sarah has spent a lot of her time fund-raising for the Habitat Restoration Programme. 'It was being able to play a part in helping this important and exciting project that helped me decide to apply for the job!' Sarah said. 'And whilst the job involves a lot of administration, there are moments where the work takes a bizarre turn. This season that has included: helping to dismantle two helicopters and squeeze them into shipping containers; finding the right storage area for a mummified cat; and digging the grave of a polar explorer.'

One of things Sarah helped introduce to the museum this year has been Whaling Station tours. She and the Curatorial Intern, Katie Murray, have been leading 20-30 minute tours to give visitors some insight into the history of whaling in South Georgia, the way the factory worked and the lives of the people who worked there. By the end of the season most of the ships were taking up the offer of tours, so this will now be a regular service offered by the museum.



*The museum team: Sue Edwards (Museum Assistant), Liz Adams (Shop Buyer), Katie Murray (Curatorial Intern), Tom Adams, (Museum Assistant), and Sarah in front.*

## The bizarre world of hydrothermal vents

South Georgia is famous for its wildlife, but perhaps more for the masses of a few species – thronging colonies of seals, penguins and albatrosses – than for its biodiversity (the numbers and variety of species). That idea had to be modified with the results of a recent survey of the continental shelf seabed (see Newsletter 20). This was the first comprehensive study of the bottom-living marine life of South Georgia and it revealed a biodiversity richer than that of the Galapagos Islands. Some 1,445 species have been recorded from the shallow seas, although as with all such surveys the number of species sampled and identified is only a fraction of those present.



*When superheated water issuing from a vent meets cold water, minerals are deposited in the tubular chimneys called 'black smokers'. In this photo large numbers of crabs and molluscs are feeding on rich mats of bacteria on and around the chimneys. Scale bar 1 metre.*

Now the sum of South Georgia's biodiversity has been increased further by a survey of a little-known deep-sea habitat. Hydrothermal vents were discovered only in 1977. They are fissures in the Earth's crust through which very hot water issues; this water can have temperatures as high as 300°C and the water is prevented from boiling by the enormous pressure. Hydrothermal vents are found mostly in deep water in volcanically-active areas and are the equivalents of fumaroles and geysers on land. The interest to biologists is not only that they are colonised by some strange and unique animals but that, unlike most of the planet's life-forms, these organisms are not dependent on the sun. Elsewhere, life depends on plants capturing the sun's energy by photosynthesis and becoming food for animals. In the stygian darkness of the deep sea, life depends on the 'rain' of dead animals and plants sinking from the upper levels.

Hydrothermal vents have been found to be another primary source of energy. The water issuing from them is rich in sulphur and other minerals, which are used by bacteria to provide the energy needed to manufacture organic material. These bacteria grow as extensive mats, which then feed a variety of animals. Many vent animals, however, actually carry the bacteria that provide their food supply, either internally or attached to the body.

The presence of hydrothermal vents in the East Scotia Sea, close to the South Sandwich Islands and inside the



*A dense mass of the yeti crab, so-called because of its hairy limbs. The hairs are covered with bacteria on which the crabs feed.*

South Georgia Maritime Zone was long suspected but finally confirmed only in 2009 by video cameras in the delightfully named SHRIMP (Seabed High Resolution IMaging Platform) deep-sea vehicle. A return visit in 2011 made a more detailed survey, this time using *Isis*, a deep-water Remotely Operated Vehicle (RoV). *Isis* carries a range of video and still cameras to see the animals, as well as manipulators and suction samplers so that specimens can be brought to the surface for analysis and identification. The preliminary results of this survey have now been published, and they reveal that the South Sandwich vents have a fauna that is unlike that at vents elsewhere, being intermediate between the distinctive assemblages of species found at vents in the Pacific and Atlantic basins.

As so often happens, the discovery of new vents has posed as many questions as it has answered, and BAS scientists together with colleagues from Southampton and many other British universities will be returning with *Isis* to the East Scotia Sea in the 2012/2013 season.

**Andrew Clarke**



*An unknown seven-arm sea star preys on stalked barnacles.*



*An unidentified octopus.*



## Monitoring rats for future reference

A large field study started this summer to provide important information on rat populations, as part of the Government of South Georgia's monitoring associated with the South Georgia Heritage Trust's rodent eradication programme. The main aim of the project is to investigate the genetic structure of rat populations around the island. Genetic analyses of the samples collected from distinct baiting zones (the areas bounded by glaciers) will indicate whether each zone contains an isolated population or whether there is a movement of rats between zones.

This knowledge will help to guide the baiting strategy for Phase 2, the next phase of rat eradication. In the longer term, this information will also be useful in case rats are found after the eradication, because it would show whether they are survivors from the baiting or new interlopers from another zone.



*A charming portrait of a killer.*

Funded by the Overseas Territories Environmental Programme (OTEP), the Government launched the project in November 2011. Three two-person field parties trapped rats at 15 sites over the course of three months around the northern coast of the island, stretching from Gold Harbour in the east to Right Whale Bay in the west. The FPV *Pharos SG* provided logistical support to get teams to each site, where we pitched a field camp and set out on rat trapping forays.

Rats are patchily distributed on South Georgia but prime rat habitat rarely coincided with the location of our camps. As a result, daily checks could require a hike around a peninsula or over a pass to get to the trapping site. Then there would be a circuit to visit 50 to 100 traps, trudging through dense tussock on steep slopes, followed by the hike back. Traps were often set in a number of different sites to maximise rat catches, so the process was generally repeated twice each day. Trap checking in horizontal rain and/or snow is memorable, so the excitement of finding a rat in a trap provided welcome balance.

Besides trapping rats, the pre-eradication monitoring project checked for signs of mice in all the baiting zones. This summer's work yielded no sign of mice in the areas

visited, suggesting that mice remain confined to their historical range on the Nuñez Peninsula and Cape Rosa.

A final aspect of the monitoring work was bird surveys, focusing on species that may be at risk of poisoning though eating the rat bait or which stand to benefit directly from the eradication of rats. The teams censused breeding skuas and giant petrels, documented sheathbill and pintail duck numbers and recorded burrowing petrel colonies.



*The only good rat.*

After a mammoth effort by the field teams, with dedicated support from the *Pharos* crew and the team at King Edward Point (along with great tolerance of shower-deprived fieldworkers), 373 rat tail-tip samples are in transit to the laboratory where the tissues will be subjected to genetic analyses.

We can be more confident that mice are indeed restricted to a small corner of South Georgia, and our picture of the status of bird populations has become more detailed. Depending on results from the genetic analyses, field work will continue next summer to obtain rat samples from the zones not yet visited and to establish sites for long-term post-eradication monitoring.

**Kalinka Rexer-Huber**

## South Georgia reflections

On 9 July 1982, M Company, 42 Commando Royal Marines sailed out of King Edward Cove in South Georgia. The Company had taken part in the operation to recapture the Island from Argentine forces on 25 April and then received orders to remain to defend King Edward Point and Grytviken against any counter-attack.



*Preparing to land from HMS Antrim.*

As their Company Commander, I knew that my thoughts mirrored those of all the other 160 or so Royal Marines: we had no regrets at leaving the island. For all of us, the time on the South Georgia was a test both physically and emotionally. We had coped with the open-ended and uncertain operational commitment, coupled with enduring the harsh, mercurial weather that is unique to South Georgia. Therefore, we left with an over-riding sense of a mission well done and few, if any, backward glances. Our minor part in the South Atlantic conflict was over, so we were on our way to rejoin to our comrades and return to our families in the UK.

Little did I realise then that: while you can leave South Georgia, South Georgia quite never leaves you! Proof of this is that for the intervening 30 years a large framed map of the island has hung on the wall of every office I occupied.

*A Mel Calman cartoon cut out and carried in his wallet to South Georgia by Chris Nunn.*



During a veteran's visit to the Falkland Islands in 2010, I had a chance encounter with Richard McKee, Executive Officer of the Government of South Georgia, and he generously suggested that a return to South Georgia might be possible. Eighteen months later, my wife Siobhan and I embarked on the cruise ship *Sea Spirit* to stay with Pat and Sarah Lurcock at KEP.

As we hove-to near Elschul, seeing the wild majesty of the terrain again was the catalyst that evoked the first tumble of impressions and memories from the past. There were many more to come in the next few days.

In 1982, my first sight of the settlements in King Edward Cove was from the door of a Royal Navy Lynx helicopter as it skimmed at wave height across West Cumberland Bay to land my group of black-faced commandos on Hestesletten, opposite KEP.

Our arrival this time was somewhat more stately! With Siobhan at my side, I stood on the foredeck of the ship, almost pinned to the superstructure by a strong and piercing cold wind under a bright, blue-grey sky. Rounding the point into the cove the first sight of Grytviken was a surprise. The whaling station appeared to be much smaller than I remembered. The change is not actually in the surface area but because most of the old sheds and workshops have been dismantled. At first glance from the sea, KEP seems little changed, however, it is soon evident that Shackleton House has gone. Only the Gaol and Discovery House remain from the settlement I knew.

A discreet reminder of events in 1982 is a small cairn by the flagpole on the pebble beach in front of Larsen House. The small plaque gives the dates of the recapture under which are the simple words 'From the Sea Freedom'. It was most appropriate that my friend and Royal Marines comrade-in-arms Guy Sheridan unveiled the cairn on the 25th anniversary in 2007. Guy was the Land Force Commander for Operation Paraquat. Despite serious interne-cine and politically generated setbacks beyond his control, he ensured victory prevailed in what was always going to be a high-risk operation.

It is customary for four passengers to land by the whalers' cemetery and drink a 'tot' to the memory of 'The Boss', Sir Ernest Shackleton. It was strangely relevant that this was to be where I should step ashore on South Georgia for the first time in 30 years. Only Siobhan knew how poignant this place is to me.

Shackleton's grave itself has a special significance. It was to here that I walked alone through the snow after learning that my brother Richard, a Royal Marines pilot, had been killed during the battle for Goose Green on 28 May 1982. Somehow, it seemed an appropriate place to gather my thoughts and my resolve before returning to KEP. Therefore, when I raised my glass, my thoughts were understandably not just with 'The Boss'.

The cemetery also contains the grave of Chief Petty Officer Felix Artuso, one of the crew of the Argentine submarine *Santa Fé*, which was damaged and captured during the assault. Two days after the landings, one of my men shot and killed Artuso because of a catastrophic misunderstanding that happened while moving the submarine to another mooring. Quite correctly, the subsequent inquiry exonerated the marine. The responsibility for this tragic incident lies with others who were not members of my company; nevertheless, I will always regret Artuso's unnecessary death. Despite the passage of time, standing before his grave, it was easy to recall the cold, grey morning when



he was buried with full military honours in the presence of his comrades. At the time, unbeknown to them, M Company snipers were hidden in positions overlooking the cemetery. They were prepared to forestall any last foolhardy act of Latin bravado. Fortunately, the occasion passed with suitable dignity and the prisoners were soon repatriated safely back to Argentina.

It was a pleasure to present Sarah Lurcock, the museum director, with a 42 Commando RM shield to add to the museum's collection. Among other artefacts I passed into the museum's care were various personal maps, documents and photographs from 1982. Somewhat shamefaced, I also handed Sarah the original Argentine flag we captured on 25 April and which later covered Felix Artuso's coffin. After 30 years of travelling the attics of the world, it has at last returned to where it should be!



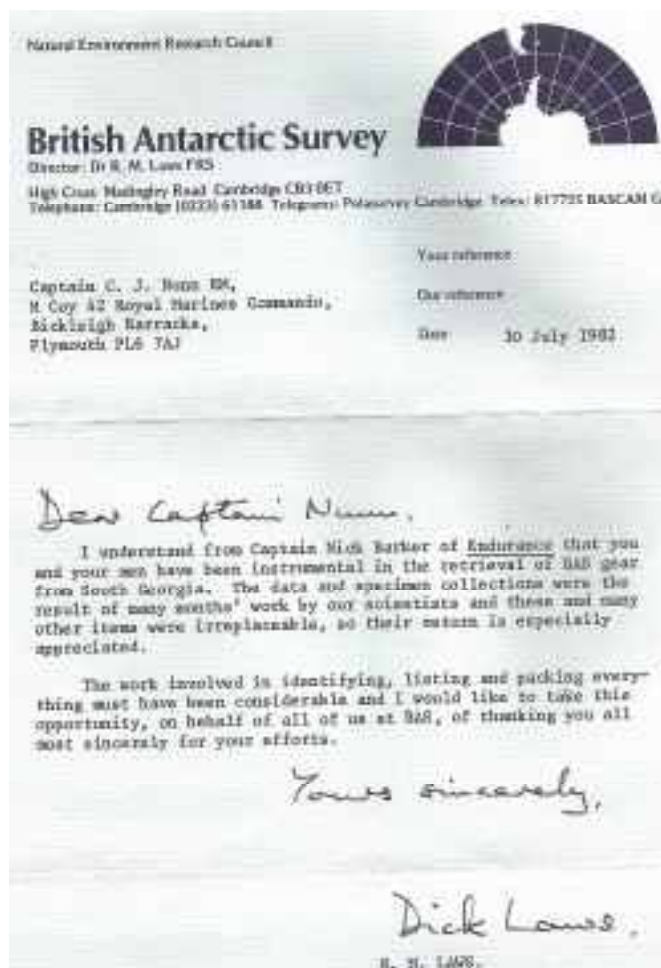
*The Argentine flag returned.*

A test for Katie, the museum's Curatorial Intern, was to find the photograph of M Company taken on our penultimate day in July 1982 and which had hung in Shackleton House. Eventually, the original photograph, still in its frame was located deep in the archive. It will now go back on display.

For a few heady months back in 1982, I was both the Magistrate and the Postmaster of South Georgia. I suspect that a retrospective claim for substitution pay would fall on deaf ears in today's FCO! In 1982, the Post Office was part of KEP but the building, which became my company office, has been demolished. When the Argentines invaded, a diligent member of the BAS team flung the special South Georgia franking stamps into the water off the end of the jetty before being taken prisoner. Despite extensive searches by our divers at the time, they were never found, or, if they were, I was never told.

I was concerned that, during my time at KEP we should do all we could to preserve the BAS work and presence at KEP. To that end we gathered together all the BAS gear that we could identify, including personal effects, from buildings that had been ransacked. All personal kit - cameras and cassette players and the like - were collected and inventoried by my C/Sgt Quartermaster. We also boxed up scientific records and samples for shipping to Cambridge.\*

I was particularly concerned about the artefacts that were scattered around Shackleton House and which together represented the history of BAS presence for many years. They included photographs, watercolours, an ice pick, brass diving helmets.....even a Wasp tail rotor! Before we left, we replaced as much as possible where it should be and I made the Captain of the Scots Guards who relieved us sign for all these and other key pieces of history.



Walks to the sites of erstwhile defensive positions at Grytviken, Brown Mountain, higher Gull Lake and Maiviken all seem to be further from KEP than I recall. As the geography is unchanged, I reluctantly have to put this down to my knees, which are now double the age they were when they last trekked these routes!

After our most memorable nine-day visit, we set sail for Stanley aboard the fishery patrol vessel *Pharos SG*. This time, as we turned out of the shelter of King Edward Cove, I did take a lingering backward glance to cement the lasting impressions of what was then, and what is now. The most over-riding impression is of Grytviken, a testimony to a bygone age of Man, caught in a time capsule and surrounded by a savage landscape.

**Chris Nunn OBE**

**\* The boxes were transferred to HMS *Antelope* and never reached Cambridge.**

## Dirk Geelen and the mystery blonde

Dirk Geelen will be a name that practically no readers will recognise. However he contributed greatly to the clear-up of the whaling stations in 1990-91 by the team operating from RMAS *Throsk*. This resulted in the removal of several thousand tons of fuel oil and other oils from Grytviken, Husvik, Stromness and Leith Harbour.



*Throsk at Grytviken.*

I recently received the sad news that Dirk had passed away at his home in Swansea aged 74 years. So taken was Dirk with South Georgia, that he actually named his house in Swansea 'Husvik'.

Dirk was a Dutch National. He had served at sea as chief engineer for many years in the merchant navies of both Great Britain and the Netherlands. He joined RMAS *Throsk* in Southampton along with the rest of the crew and sailed on 26 November 1990 for South Georgia.

Dirk was tasked with looking after the transfer of oil from the shore installations to the Uruguayan tanker *Cope-mar I* that would carry the oil away. On arrival at Grytviken we made some trials on the old steam sealer/whaler *Petrel*, even though she was not included in the remit. We had discovered her bunker tanks were near full so Dirk and his small team removed most of the 90 tons of furnace fuel oil



*Mopping up oil spills by hand.*

into a shore tank. Eventually all the reclaimed oil from the station was stored in this tank awaiting the arrival of the tanker.

Dirk soon perfected a means of moving the heavy oil that resembled tarmac in consistency to the holding tanks at all the stations. We in turn tried all kinds of unorthodox means of warming the oil to help it through the pumps. The most effective method was to surround the tank with wood debris and have controlled fires (or at least almost controlled).

In several instances Dirk was able to make use of the existing steam-powered fuel oil pumps that had lain exposed to the elements for over 30 years, by using compressed air as a substitute for steam. This really helped us keep to the tight schedule allowed for the project. Meanwhile other team members were cleaning old oil spills, stowing asbestos in pressure vessels, removing toxic substances to *Throsk* and often finding very unwelcome items, such as 50 tons of nitric acid.



*Removing a crate of asbestos.*

The work went well and to schedule, so we were able to enjoy brief 'make and mend' periods most weekends. If oil was being pumped at this time it was not stopped, and the team would work in shifts.

Dirk, like most of the team, really enjoyed these breaks to catch up with clothes-washing and explore the neighbourhood, along with the tradition of taking millions of photographs of penguins, cheeky fur seals and the more obnoxious elephant seals. Saturday evenings were usually spent having a few beers in the messroom and swapping stories, usually about the work done so far and tales of runs ashore in faraway places.

Dirk had a single cabin next door to a salvage diver who was a great fan of Pavarotti and loved to listen to his music. Unfortunately, he tended to forget he had a volume control, especially after the Saturday night get-together. Dirk, who was a light sleeper anyway, did not share his taste for music.

So, during a particularly pleasant week end at Leith Harbour, Dirk asked if he could possibly spend the night alone at Stromness. Not only to get away from Pavarotti, but

also for the peace and tranquillity of being able to observe the wildlife without disturbance. Reluctantly I agreed, but insisted he had a fixed VHF schedule with us just to make sure all was well.

Kitted out with all kinds of arctic equipment, including the very latest military survival sleeping bag and, of course, food, a Primus, and I suspected something other than just a bottle of 'mouthwash', Dirk was ferried to Stromness by launch. I spoke with him a couple of times by radio, and learned that he had settled down in the old accommodation block (and actually had the benefit of a whole pane of glass in the window) which overlooked the stream. When everything was very quiet, the reindeer would graze on the vegetation outside.

At about 0800 on the Sunday morning the VHF crackled into life an hour earlier than was scheduled and Dirk requested that I should come to pick him up as quickly as possible. He did not elaborate but I sensed he was upset, or perhaps ill. He was waiting by the jetty when we arrived in Stromness, but said nothing until I had a coffee with him back in his cabin.

Apparently he had woken early feeling quite disorientated, and jumped out of his sleeping bag perhaps before he was fully awake. He looked out of the window and there, in the stream, was a totally naked blonde girl - not the reindeer he had expected. He later admitted to a feeling of panic, because at that time there were no females at Grytviken, never mind the derelict station at Stromness. He did not venture for a closer look but hurriedly packed his gear and made his way to the jetty after calling me.

Thankfully, it quickly became evident that he had not been hallucinating or gone crazy. The Greenpeace clapped-out ex-supply boat *Gondwana* had previously hove into sight with her attendant oil slick from a leaky stern gland. Obviously some of the crew had gone ashore in Stromness very early in the morning and one of them had decided to bathe in the stream. Dirk confided in me later by remarking that 'she was not really all that pretty'.

It was some time before most of the *Throsk* crew were aware of Dirk's disturbed weekend at Stromness, and it was never really discussed, except by a few of us who would tease Dirk about not taking photographs of the Blonde Reindeer of Stromness.

**Lyle Craigie-Halkett**



*Not a blonde.*



## Prince Philip at South Georgia

A new element topped the usual surge of excitement associated with the arrival of the first supply ships of the season, at the end of the 1956 winter. Apart from long-awaited mail, fresh provisions and the return of old friends, the over-wintering personnel at the whaling stations, and those at the 'Point', were agog to know the outcome of the 'buzz' that H.R.H. Prince Philip would visit in the Royal Yacht *Britannia*, on his way home from Melbourne at the conclusion of the 1956 Olympic Games

The thrill of receiving a royal visit was soon dampened by the realisation that something must be done to improve the general appearance of Her Majesty's most southern major outpost, and home to booming tax-payer commercial interests.

The sorriest sight by far was the Met Office. Its charred, singed and smoke-blackened façade was a stark reminder of a night of excitement and mayhem, when fire broke out in the dead of night (cause unknown). The fire damage was compounded by havoc wrought by ardent amateur fire-fighters, who left smashed windows and loosened roofing iron in their wake.

The exterior of all the other buildings and sheds on the 'Point' were noticeably weathered, with faded and blistered paintwork. The high tussock grass concealed a multitude of sins but failed to conceal old oil drums, packing cases and discarded, obsolete machinery. The shore-line around the cove was polluted with fuel oil and littered with tin cans, bottles, oil drums and masses of driftwood.

There is nothing to compare with a Royal Visit to get things moving and within six weeks the 'Point' was transformed. The Government, at huge expense, called upon the Pesca whaling company to repair the Met Office and apply a lick of paint elsewhere. Gangs of Pesca employees scoured the beaches, burning what could be burned and dumping other rubbish in deep water. Little could be done about the oil, other than to reduce carelessness and indifference aboard the catchers when refueling.

Time played its part, the constant action of the waves washed up new shingle and the occasional storm provided seaweed and kelp to create a more natural, unspoiled look.

Pesca also took on a new look; Prince Philip would be given a guided tour by the manager. The accommodation blocks, hitherto painted brown and black and reduced to further dinginess by the grime and oily smoke of thousands of whales, emerged in sparkling white with yellow trim; one could almost imagine it to be a dairy complex! The station manager, Mr. Ken Butler, who had previously been the Administrative Officer at King Edward Point, seized the opportunity to install a bar in the manager's villa; a distinction previously claimed by the Husvik manager, who until then had the only bar on the island.

Nochart Nilsen, the gunner of the Salvesen catcher *Southern Jester*, called round to the 'Point' to invite Nan and me to spend a few days at sea with him.

'You must come,' he said. 'It's my last season, I retire in April.'

Later, over dinner in the saloon, he proudly announced that he had been asked to take Prince Philip from Leith Harbour to Grytviken; the only 'catcher' trip H.R.H.'s schedule permitted.

I jokingly said to him, 'You'll miss a few days whaling.'

'I don't care if I miss a blue whale,' replied Nochart. 'He, too, is a seaman, and it will be a great honour to have him on board my ship. I only wish he could come out whaling as well.'

Saturday, January 6 1957, is a historic day in the annals of South Georgia. It opened with the arrival of the Royal Yacht *Britannia*, bringing Prince Philip to Leith Harbour. After an inspection of the shore establishment he boarded the *Southern Jester*, captained by a very proud Nochart Nilsen, (who was dressed rather incongruously in a lounge suit), for the short trip to Grytviken. On the way Nochart demonstrated the harpoon gun by 'harpooning' a drifting packing case - scoring a direct hit, much to his relief.

The 'Royal Whale-catcher' steamed at speed up King Edward Cove at midday, under a lowering sky, with Prince Philip's huge personal flag billowing out at the masthead and proclaiming a most unusual role for so humble a vessel.

The *Britannia* had preceded the *Southern Jester* into the anchorage. After the Royal Party had transferred to the yacht, Nochart came alongside our jetty to have lunch with us. He was delighted with his royal passenger, who evinced an intense interest in every aspect of whaling, his only regret being that his itinerary did not permit a 'business' trip with Nochart.

Conditions could not have been worse for photography after lunch, when the Royal Barge put off from *Britannia* bringing Prince Philip ashore for his official visit to the Government settlement. Heavy black clouds extended as far as the eye could see, so low that they seemed to be supported by the mountain peaks, and a fine drizzle hung in the air like a mist.

As the Royal Party stepped on to the landing stage, to the sound of a salute fired from the harpoon guns of a quartet of pensioned-off Pesca whale catchers dressed overall with pennants and flags for the occasion. I had great difficulty identifying our Royal visitor as he was surrounded by similarly duffel-coated aides, all sporting scruffy beards, cultivated over the previous few weeks. If the beards were an attempt to blend in with the locals it misfired, as the residents of the 'Point', and management staff at Pesca, were clean-shaven; not for the occasion - it is how they always were.

Following introductions all adjourned to the Administrative Officer's house for an excellent afternoon tea, combined with drinks and protracted socialising which cut into

*21 harpoon cannon salute.*







*HRH with Basil Biggs, the policeman at the Point.*

the official timetable. Prince Philip mingled freely, speaking with everyone and ignoring the veiled hints of aides.

Finally, with the Royal group embarked on one of the *Britannia's* barges, and off to visit Pesca, an investiture took place. Hans Christoffersen, captain of the Leith Harbour message boat, received an MBE from the Governor of the Falkland Islands and Dependencies. The ceremony was performed on the front step of the Administrator's house, from which His Excellency O. R. Arthur CMG, CVO, emerged in full Governor's regalia. An impressive build of a man at any time, he presented a striking figure in his frock coat, red-piped trousers, boots, spurs and sword. An abundance of gold braid, coupled with gleaming orders and decorations further enhanced his splendour, which was topped off by his tall plumed hat. In all, seven feet of uniformed excellence. He was assisted by an equerry, in Captain's military attire

In spite of the formal appearance the atmosphere was delightfully informal, he too having had a noggin or two by this time. His jovial mood was only surpassed by that of 'Happy Hans' - as he was universally known - whose shining face never looked happier than when the medal was pinned to his suit coat after the Aide-de-Camp had read the citation: 'For Services to the Whaling Industry.'

Salvesen's management had been advised of the proposed award and had been requested to name a recipient, and Hans' nomination was acclaimed throughout the Company; though not without a little tongue-in-cheek humour. Apart from spending a considerable part of his life in whaling activities, Hans also was something of an entrepreneur. He had been a bootlegger during a prohibition

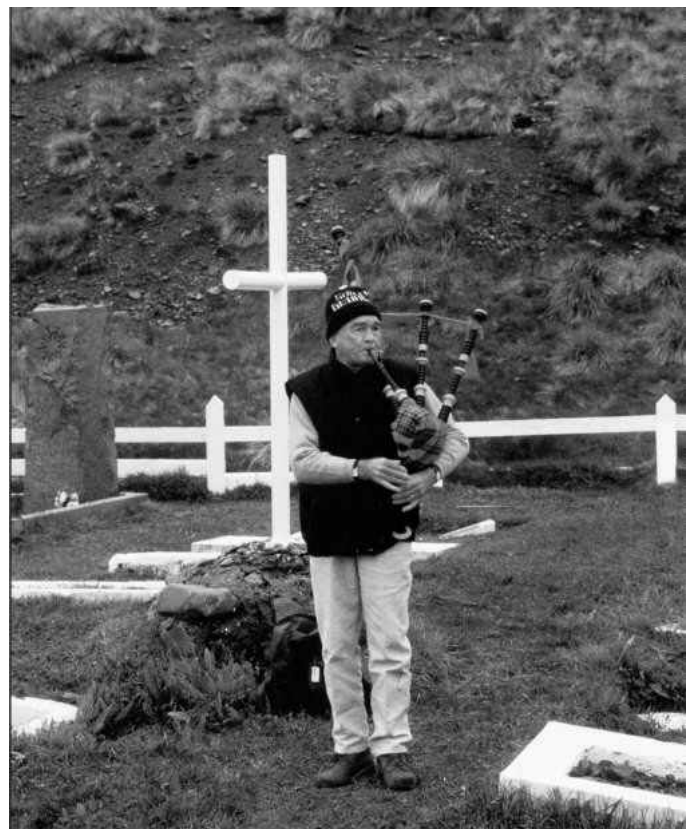
period in Norway's history, when he smuggled liquor supplies in for the home-coming whalers. Reputedly too he had a coterie of female acquaintances who cared for physical needs of deprived men returning from Antarctica. 'Yes, indeed,' they said, as heads were shaken in admiration, 'Hans did a lot for the whaling industry.'

His Excellency obligingly submitted to the demands of the small group of camera-equipped spectators, who later escorted him to the jetty to see him safely aboard one of the royal barges. With a final handshake all round, and a pat on the back for Hans, he boarded the craft, took up a prominent position and waved gaily as the barge sped away. He presented a flamboyant figure and we enjoyed every minute of his performance, as I am sure he did too. I guess H.E. upstaged H.R.H., but the latter was well out of the picture by then.

With official activities concluded, a champagne party at the Admin. Officer's house in Hans' honour capped a day that will live long in the memory of those who shared his day of glory.

### **George Brown**

George Brown submitted this article shortly before flying to Australia for the winter. He was taken ill on the way and, most sadly, died in hospital not long afterwards. In the last issue, it was reported that George hoped to raise £5,000 for ovarian cancer research by bagpipe-busking on Edinburgh's Royal Mile. He achieved this ambition before he left for Australia.



*George Brown in the Whalers' Cemetery.*

## The first reindeer hunt

When the British Antarctic Survey took over the government settlement at King Edward Point in November 1969, they inherited an array of buildings and their contents, vehicles, boats, chickens, cats and a dog. Included in this legacy was a large quantity of foodstuffs, some dating back a decade or more and of dubious provenance, and a huge walk-in freezer (empty).

To rectify the state of the latter, we could obtain our own fresh meat in the form of reindeer venison. Now, hunting was not one of the qualifications for selecting BAS personnel. But, once the new base was up and running, it was decided that it was time to stock the larder.

It was gloriously sunny, warm and calm when the expedition set off for Barff Peninsula. Our armoury comprised a couple of Lee Enfield .303 rifles and the marksmen were selected after target practice on the rifle range at the back



*Left: Crossing Cumberland Bay.*

*Right: Bringing the quarry off the hill.*

of Shackleton House. Those who hit the (large) target (anywhere) were promoted to the front line.

The expedition started with a 45 minute voyage in two boats across Cumberland Bay to the Barff Peninsula. As we approached the shore, a small herd of reindeer was spotted amongst tussock grass close to the boulder beach, but by the time we struggled ashore they were nowhere to be seen. However, excitement rose, cigarettes and pipes were doused, voices dropped to whispers and binoculars scanned the hillsides for further signs of anything bearing antlers. But it was like chasing a rainbow – as we approached a herd it just kept moving out of range. Eventually, the snipers got within reasonable range and a barrage was let loose in the general direction of the animals. After a quick glance around, the deer recommenced grazing. A second fusillade served only to move them on to higher pastures. After this futile gesture we returned to the beach to discuss where we had gone wrong and to plan a more coordinated strategy.

We tried a landing in the next bay where a larger herd was grazing. They disappeared over the horizon before we had finished splashing through the kelp. However, this foray did yield one stag close to the beach. Not downhearted and rapidly gaining experience, a third landing was made at Sandebugten, a favourite grazing area for reindeer herds. Here, a long slog uphill brought us to the crest of a

ridge overlooking a herd. With improved accuracy our artillery brought down two more stags.

The problem with shooting the animals so far inland was that the carcasses had to be carried to the shore. First the animals had to be gralloched (disembowelled), which reduced their weight, but they were still very heavy, particularly as we kept the offal. Transporting the carcasses overland involved tying their front and rear ankles together in pairs and sliding a long bamboo pole through the strapped-up legs so the animal could be carried, upside-down, with the pole resting on the shoulders of two porters. This was no easy task over the rough terrain and it became immediately clear why shooting the deer on or very close to the shore would be a great advantage.

We sailed on to Sörling Valley for one last attempt. A herd could be seen scattered over the lower part of the valley and the stalkers went ashore with the intention of



positioning themselves downwind of the animals and driving them towards the beach. This was highly successful and the targets were brought to within 50 m of the guns. A few rounds brought down five stags, and the carriers had a much easier task this time. We returned home, sunburned, weary but exhilarated and with a good return. But, of course, that was not the end of the day's activities.



*Butchery on the jetty.*

at the bottom of the Weddell Sea). All we were left with was a haunch and the offal (but the liver is a delicacy).

One month later, nine of us made another foray into the Barff hinterland and returned with 16 stags. After the requisite period of hanging they were disjointed and stored in the freezer. From then on venison became a regular and welcome constituent of our diet.

**Ron Lewis-Smith**



## A couple of anniversaries in 2012

The centenary of Captain RF Scott's attainment of the South Pole in 1912 has overshadowed the prior claim of Roald Amundsen—as well as the 90th anniversary of the death of Sir Ernest Shackleton at Grytviken and two anniversaries of notable visits to South Georgia.

### 1882 International Polar Year Expedition

One hundred and thirty years ago, Germany operated two stations in the International Polar Year. South Georgia was chosen for one because its longitude was diametrically opposed to that of a geomagnetic station at Melbourne, Australia.

The expedition landed from the corvette *Moltke* in Royal Bay on 20 August, having been prevented by storms from landing in Cumberland Bay. It was mid-winter and over 1 metre of snow had to be cleared from the site, a chore made easier with the help of 100 sailors.



*SMS Moltke was the first steamship to visit South Georgia.*

Twice a month geomagnetic observations were made synchronously with the worldwide network of International Polar Year stations. Many other branches of science were studied in detail but the climax was the observing of the Transit of Venus with a telescope mounted in a revolving cupola. Accurate timing of the passage of Venus across the sun's disc allows calculation of various astronomical distances. Given South Georgia's fickle weather, the clear sky on 6 December was very fortunate.



*The station in Moltke Harbour with the cupola on the left.*

### 1912 The Voyage of the *Daisy*

One hundred years ago, the brig *Daisy* arrived at South Georgia on 23 November, being towed into Grytviken by *Fortuna*, the first of the modern whalecatchers. *Daisy* was the last of the old-time Yankee whalers and sealers. She sailed from New York and The captain, Benjamin Cleveland, was aware of the Seal Fisheries Conservation Ordinance established by the Government of the Falkland Islands and Dependencies but he later denied this and certainly he ignored it.



*The brig Daisy in King Edward Cove.*

The voyage is better known for the presence of the naturalist Robert Cushman Murphy. As well as observing and recording the natural history of South Georgia, Murphy made extensive collections of bird skins and other specimens. He kept a journal for his wife which was later published as a charming book *The Logbook for Grace*.



*The site of Murphy's camp on the edge of Salisbury Plain.*



## Troubled Waters

### Trailing the Albatross - an Artist's Journey

The Southern Ocean is home to most of the world's albatrosses and petrels and the sub-Antarctic islands are vital in their life cycle, none more so than Bird Island and South Georgia with over 100 million birds making it their home each year. But seabirds, most notably albatrosses, have become increasingly threatened over the past 20 years at a faster rate globally than any other species of birds.

When the artist Bruce Pearson was first on Bird Island and mainland South Georgia in the mid-1970s there were over 4,200 breeding pairs of wandering albatross; now there are only 1,500 pairs. The biggest threat has been long-line fisheries where birds are caught on hooks and drown.

Following a recent return to South Georgia, Bruce was so shocked to realise that the wandering albatross could become extinct within his lifetime. So he has set up the Troubled Waters project to generate a powerful visual appreciation of seabirds, particularly albatrosses. Part of the project has been to sail on a long-liner and witness, at firsthand, the collision of birds and fisheries.

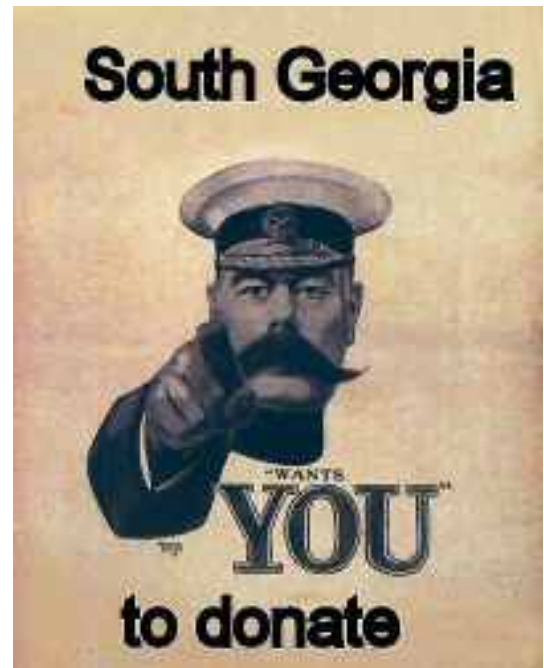
Working with BirdLife International, Troubled Waters will produce a book and exhibition to offer insights into our understanding of the oceans and engage with an urgent conservation crisis.

The Exhibition will be at the **ArtSpace Galleries**, 18 Maddox Street, London W1S 1PL, from 26 November - 1 December, 2012 (Opening hours: Monday to Friday 10.30 to 7pm. Saturday: 10.30 to 5pm).

### A date for your diary: Thursday 29 November 2012

The SGA will host an evening reception and fund-raising event at the gallery and Bruce Pearson will give a short presentation about the **Troubled Waters** project and its focus on Bird Island and South Georgia. 7.30 – 9.00pm.

**Booking details will be in the November Newsletter.**



Enlist at [www.sght.org/sponsor-a-hectare](http://www.sght.org/sponsor-a-hectare) to save South Georgia's birds from Rodent Invaders.

**£90/USD 140** frees 1 hectare of rats for birds to return to breed without their nestlings facing a grisly death.



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