

South Georgia Association Newsletter

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Spring Meeting & AGM will be on May 16, 2014



The retired whalecatcher Karrakatta at Husvik. She supplied steam to the adjacent maintenance workshops.

The Spring Meeting Lecture will be by Bruce Pearson

Trailing the Albatross

Bruce Pearson is a world-renowned wildlife artist who started his professional career at Bird Island, South Georgia, 40 years ago, living and working with wandering, black-browed and grey-headed albatrosses. He returned to South Georgia recently by yacht and cruise ship to revitalise his passion for these ocean wanderers and their magnificent surroundings. The talk will be illustrated with images painted in the field.



Endurance at South Georgia.

The draft programme is:

Leadership & management

Shackleton's Leadership Skills

The Shackleton Challenge

Choosing a Team

Science

Antarctic Sea Ice 1914 and 2014

Meteorology of the Weddell Sea

Shackleton's Emperors

Geology

Shackleton's Invertebrates

Expedition techniques

Frank Worsley and the Art of Navigation

Expedition Nutrition

Susan Blow

Kevin Kenny

John Hall

Peter Wadhams

John King

Bernard Stonehouse

David Macdonald

Bill Block

Skip Novak

Steve Jones

Shackleton legacy – one-day meeting

8 December. Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge.

The South Georgia Association and the Friends of the Scott Polar Research Institute are planning a meeting to discuss 'Shackleton's Legacy', a commemoration on the centenary of *Endurance's* visit to South Georgia. Rather than retell the extraordinary rescue of the crew of *Endurance* from the Weddell Sea, the meeting will break new ground by examining some of the achievements of Shackleton and his men and demonstrate the subsequent development of management techniques, Antarctic science and logistics.

Details of booking will be circulated. Numbers are limited to 100, so send expressions of interest to the Secretary, Fran Prince, at secretary@southgeorgiaassociation.org. First come, first served!

Øyas Venner celebrate Whalers' Church centenary

The Whalers' Church at Grytviken was built by Capt. C. A. Larsen and consecrated on 25 December 1913. To mark the centenary, the Norwegian association Øyas Venner (Friends of the Island of South Georgia) organised a voyage to South Georgia in collaboration with the cruise company Hurtigruten. There was a total of 234 passengers on board their ship *MV Fram*. The Øyas Venner group consisting of members, families and friends amounted to approximately 140. There were 14 British on board and overall 15 nationalities were represented.

Our voyage started in Ushuaia on 19 December 2013. During the morning of 21 December we arrived in a sunny and colourful Stanley. Various tour options were available and the undersigned elected to go on a battlefield tour to learn more about the Falklands war that had ended 30 years ago. Around noon Richard Hines held a special ceremony for us in the lovely Christ Church. It did not go unnoticed that one of the stained glass windows bore an image of the Church in Grytviken. Shortly afterwards some of us were invited to Government House for a reception hosted by His Excellency the Commissioner and Mrs. Louise Haywood. Here we were served fresh mince pies and glühwein and had the opportunity to have a look around. The Commissioner welcomed us all and informed us how important Øyas Venner's involvement and interest in the island has been. During the reception Øyas Venner were proud to announce that Nigel Haywood, Martin Collins and Richard Hines had been awarded honorary membership of the association for their work related to South Georgia and their assistance with this expedition. Susan Barr, Senior Advisor of Polar Matters of the Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage, conveyed a message from Hans-Kjell Larsen representing the descendants of Capt. C. A. Larsen, where they hereby handed over any rights they had to the church to the South Georgia government. The message was accompanied by blueprints of the church and a list of individuals who had worked on the construction. The Commissioner handed over a starry night photograph of the church, together with a 'thank-you' message.



Kjell Tokstad presents honorary Øyas Venner memberships at Government House.

We reached Grytviken in the afternoon of 24 December. There was fog and sleet in the air and it looked very Antarctic indeed. However, shortly after dropping anchor, it cleared and it was as if we had entered summer! Going ashore gave us our first of numerous encounters with fur seals, elephant seals and king penguins. One church service was held this day, following the Norwegian tradition of a Christmas Eve church ceremony.

The main centenary service was held on 25 December, exactly 100 years after the first service! The church was completely full and we had three priests officiating: Richard Hines of Stanley and Øyvind Nordin and Stein Unneberg from Tunsberg in Norway (the area where most of the whalers came from). The service was held alternately in Norwegian and English, with psalms of both British and Norwegian origin.



The clergy enter a packed church.

Martin Collins read a message from the South Georgia Government. The Master of *Fram* read a message and so did Susan Barr on behalf of the Larsen family. To top it all, even the His Majesty King Harald of Norway had sent a message of congratulations for the church centenary.

Later that day the staff of the museum and KEP were invited on board *Fram* for a Christmas dinner followed by a celebratory Øyas Venner party. Reindeer from South Georgia added an exotic flavour to the traditional Norwegian Christmas dishes.

The next day took us to Fortuna Bay where the particularly adventurous could complete the Shackleton Walk, retracing the last leg of the explorer's famous journey. We thereafter had an opportunity to visit Stromness Harbour and some were able to spend some time outside Leith Harbour, either to visit the graves or as terminus for a walk from Stromness Harbour. The following day we went ashore at Husvik Harbour. Our last South Georgia stop was St. Andrews Bay. Due to lack of time we did not go ashore, but rather raced along the beach by boat to see the vast number of king penguins.

Gustav Ellingsen



Kjell Tokstad addresses the congregation.



Ex-whaler, Odd Aspaas, plays the trombone in the church, as he did when a young man working as a warehouse clerk.



The marriage of Olav Orheim and Grethe Sofie Bratlie was conducted after the service by registrar Sarah Lurcock and blessed by Stein Unneberg.

An historic letter from Grytviken's first priest



Extract from a letter from Kristen Löken, Priest and Lecturer, to Hans Wold, secretary to the manager of Compãnia Argentina de Pesca:

'We have started to collect money for a church down here. Almost half of the necessary 14 to 15 000 kr. is already promised. Of this, the manager has promised 5000. If one could build a church here, it would certainly be a greater guarantee of continuing Christian work, among whalers and in future whaling seasons. In connection with the church, I had thought of providing a reading and writing room, where newspapers could be kept, letters written and where also the library could be transferred. Such a room is certainly lacking down here. And the whalers should take pride in managing this themselves without calling on the Seamen's Mission for help. It has probably enough to do, and besides is quite hard up.

'It is my hope to get to see the church built before I leave my work down here. But when it is finished, and with it the spur to a vigorous Christianity, and when the feelings of responsibility and interest have been aroused, and when one has got at the same time some guarantee for the continuance of the Christian work - then I shall consider the groundlaying work complete down here. Then I could also hand it over to other, and maybe more capable hands than mine.'

The letter is dated 1 May 1913. Only eight months later, on 25 December, the church was consecrated. The whalers had erected the prefabricated building in just 28 days. It is amazing what can be achieved when there is no 'red tape'.

The envelope and letter are a treasured possession of Stephen Palmer who bought it at auction in Norway. Apart from its great philatelic interest, it is the only known letter in which Löken, the first priest at South Georgia, writes about the Whalers' Church.

Another 'Just So' Story Or How Mount Fagan Got Its Name

Sometime in early 1964 I was enjoying the heat and sunshine in Aden when I learned that my nomination for a Joint Services Expedition to South Georgia had been successful, and that I would be participating in this; it was truly a case of jumping out of the frying pan and into the fridge.

Every two or three years the MOD sponsors a Joint Services expedition to some remote area to foster a spirit of adventure, leadership, etc — those qualities which so many organisations have subsequently been set up to encourage. This particular one was led by Lt Cdr Burley RN and consisted of 10 members from all three services. It was to go to this island and had three main aims:

(1) To retrace Shackleton's route across the island and to assess the achievement in the light of modern mountaineering knowledge.

(2) To climb Mount Paget, the highest mountain in the island at 9,625 ft, and as many others of the major peaks as possible.

(3) To participate in a 'scientific' programme, which consisted of various tasks, but principally to perform a survey of the Royal Bay area.

The retracing of Shackleton's route and climbing of Mount Paget were completed successfully but delays reduced the time available for the survey.

In 1881-2 the German 'Transit of Venus' expedition based at Royal Bay had produced a large scale planetable survey of a small area on the north shore. This survey however did not fit tidily into the smaller scale survey of the whole of the island by Duncan Carse's South Georgia Surveys and subsequently published as DOS 610. One reason for our survey of this area was to resolve the differences.



Our survey involved the use of a homemade theodolite by screwing a small 35 mm camera on to the top of the theodolite telescope, and a means of correlating the two axes was devised. Plenty of photographs were taken at recorded horizontal and vertical angles from stations subsequently triangulated, and these films carefully developed in the field as a guard against failure.

Fortunately the mountains in this area, and indeed over almost all South Georgia, have sharply defined summits, and it was relatively easy to establish and observe a triangulation scheme over the desired area without the need for prior reconnaissance on the ground. This saved much time and the two observing parties, myself and a civil engineering graduate, were able to advance through the area independently, and with good coordination.

So much for the actual survey but, of course, there was still the question of names to be decided. The authority for this is the Antarctic Place-names Committee (APC) which establishes certain policies for naming, and also guards against duplication in neighbouring areas. Its policy is to name only those features which are necessary to aid a traveller, i.e. the density of names in Antarctica would, as one might expect, be far less than a similar area of British rural landscape. Another principle is for names to be as descriptive as possible, e.g. one of our mountains had twin summits and the name Ibex Peak, was selected for this as a good descriptive name for such a feature which had not previously been used within the Antarctic region. Where descriptive names are not practicable, the names of people associated with a particular feature may be used and of these - as luck would have it - surveyors and navigators are most preferred. Leaders of expeditions come next and very significant patrons etc follow. It so happened that the highest mountain in the Royal Bay area, invisible from the German 1881-2 base camp, remained unnamed and the Secretary of the APNC kindly suggested that my name might be associated with it, partly because I had led the survey, and partly because there was no previously recorded ascent of this mountain before I climbed it for the survey - albeit on hands on knees on the day because of the storm force winds. A little afterwards this proposal was ratified by the Committee.

Thus it was that Mount Pagan came to be named but, unfortunately, I had no photographs of it - other than distant views through the phototheodolite - since I had not known of this future association when I was there on the ground. Although there have been quite a number of visitors to South Georgia since then, both before and after the war of 1982, I had been unable to receive any good photographs of this mountain until the Exercise Trig South, managed to take several photographs from a helicopter on a fortuitous fine day, and two of these now adorn my office wall.

Patrick Fagan



Mount Fagan in the foreground.

David Ferguson's mineral prospecting expedition

Recent discoveries in academic archives have shed light on an early examination of South Georgia for economic mineral deposits. When the Christian Salvesen Company established their shore whaling station in Stromness Bay in 1909, naming it Leith Harbour after the company's home port in Scotland, the mineral rights to South Georgia were also acquired. To carry out prospecting work, the Salvesen Company employed David Ferguson, a Scottish geologist and mine surveyor.

Ferguson sailed south on the Salvesen supply ship *North Sands* and arrived at Leith Harbour on 7 January 1912. From there he was transported around the island by the whalecatcher *Matilda*, landing wherever possible to make observations and collect rock specimens. Many of his photographs and the reports arising from his investigations are preserved in the Salvesen Archive, now held by the University of Edinburgh Library's Centre for Research Collections who have given permission for two to be reproduced here. Amongst the photographs is a splendid one showing Ferguson surrounded by the crew of the *Matilda*. It is the only picture of Ferguson known to exist and, along with his other surviving glass-plate photographic negatives, has been digitized with financial support from the South Georgia Association and the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust.

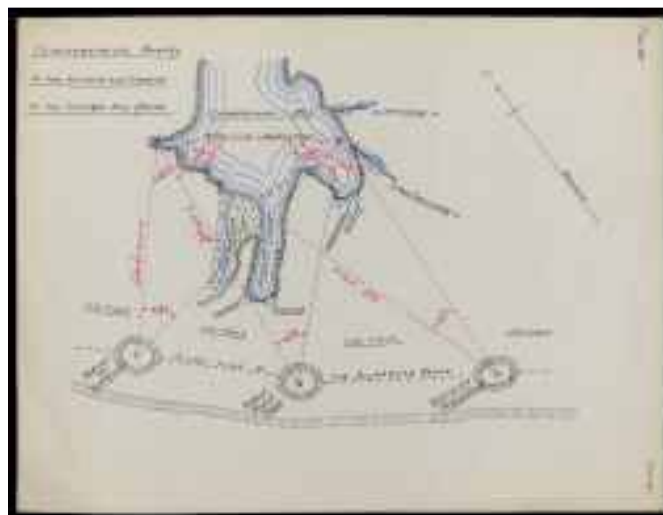


David Ferguson (seated, centre) with the crew of the Matilda.

Ferguson's collection of rock specimens was presented by the Salvesen Company to the University of Glasgow in 1915 (Ferguson had studied geology there, 1905-1908) and that university's Hunterian Museum now holds about 200 'Ferguson' specimens from South Georgia. Complementing the specimen collection, Ferguson's field notebooks are held by the University of Glasgow Archive Services. They are fragile, faded and water-damaged in places, but the writing and diagrams are mostly clear and comprehensible. The notebooks only came to light in 2003, when they were passed to the university from the Bank of Scotland archive where they had been held since

Ferguson's death in 1936; presumably the Bank had acted as executor of his estate. The notebooks provide a fascinating insight into the development of his geological interpretations and add considerable value to the specimen and photograph collections. Also relevant to the 'Ferguson in South Georgia' story is a series of letters that he wrote to William Speirs Bruce, leader of the 1902-1904 Scottish National Antarctic Expedition, that are now held by the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge.

Although many of Ferguson's geological interpretations subsequently proved erroneous, his work served as a valuable introduction for subsequent investigators. His negative conclusions as to the economic potential of the rocks have, however, proved well-founded. As controls on the thickness of the sedimentary succession that he could see in the mountain crags, Ferguson attempted to measure the heights of mountain peaks and the distances between them and several manuscript maps are preserved in the Salvesen Archive as supplements to his geological report. The example from Cumberland Bay shown here may be the first attempt to survey the height of Mount Paget, for which Ferguson calculated 8383 feet; modern measurements give 9629 ft (2934 m).



A sketch map of the East Cumberland Bay area drawn by Ferguson and included in his confidential report to the Salvesen Company.

Today on South Georgia, David Ferguson is celebrated in Ferguson Peak (561 m), a locality in the south-east of the island overlooking Cooper Bay, which was so-named following Duncan Carse's topographical survey expeditions of the 1950s.

Phil Stone

For a detailed assessment of Ferguson's geological work see: Stone, P & Faithfull, J. 2013. 'The mineral prospecting expeditions to the South Atlantic islands and Antarctic Peninsula region made by the Scottish geologist David Ferguson, 1912-1914.' *Scottish Journal of Geology*, Vol. 49, 59-77.

Gulbrandsen Lake – drained by climate change

This ice-dammed lake has been described as 'one of South Georgia's most unusual glaciated landscapes'. It has been recorded since the 1920s and has featured on maps, in scientific journals and tourist brochures. Gulbrandsen Lake, originally some 1.5km long by 1km wide, was formed by the Neumayer Glacier damming the end of a valley. As the lake filled and emptied, at least 30 relict beaches, shaped by waves or the grinding action of floating ice, formed parallel terraces on the valley sides. The lake has disappeared but it is possible to chart its demise.



The 1:200 000 topographic map of South Georgia shows the status of Gulbrandsen Lake (GL) and the ice front position of the Neumayer Glacier in 2009. It also shows moraine-dammed Montia Lake (ML) and the Lyell Glacier Lake (LGL) preserved today.

The lake had been diminishing slowly by the 1960s, as a result of increasing temperatures due to climate change, but drainage accelerated between 1974 and 1993 as the Neumayer Glacier continued to thin and retreat. It contained only stranded icebergs between 1993 and 1999, yet partial refilling must have occurred thereafter as Gulbrandsen Lake was visible on satellite images from 2003 (incorporated in the 1:200 000 map above) with the snout of a thinner Neumayer Glacier located to the east in Cumberland West Bay.

However, the lake had emptied completely by 2009 when four of us on the *Pelagic Australis* 2009 expedition to South Georgia skied up to it, verified its demise and the extreme retreat and ablation of the Neumayer Glacier. The snout was now almost adjacent to the former Gulbrandsen Lake position. Climate change is real and very apparent in the glaciers of north-east South Georgia!

Gulbrandsen Lake was called 'The White City' by the Shackleton-Rowett Antarctic Expedition 1921-22 and documented on a map by their geologist George Vibert Douglas. It is presumed that the perfectly flat, frozen lake and the snow-covered terraces on the slopes around it reminded him of the white marble-clad exhibition buildings and sports arena built for the 1908 London Olympic Games and known as 'The White City'.

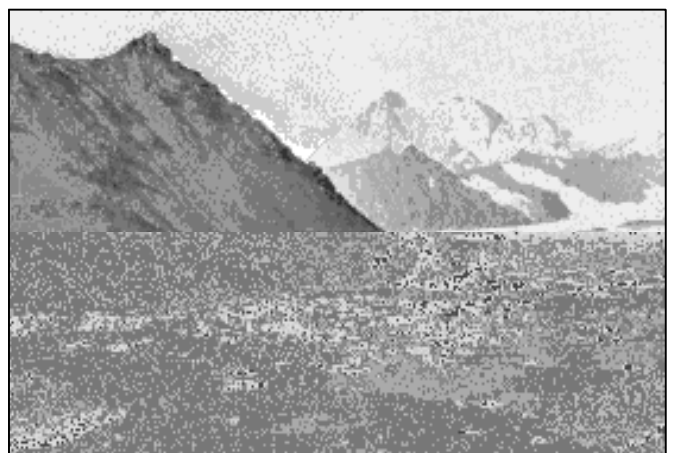


The map of Stromness Bay drawn by Douglas and showing 'The White City' bottom right.

The name 'White City' was not used by the whalers but Duncan Carse's South Georgia Surveys used it in the 1950s and it features in the book *Putting South Georgia on the map* by geologist Alec Trendall. The survey teams camped beside it and Trendall mentions 'a traverse across steep scree above green ice-littered waters of the lake, easy going along scree terraces formed by alterations in the lake's shoreline'. So by 1958 Gulbrandsen Lake was already in decline as the Neumayer Glacier retreated slowly from its maximum advance in or around 1925.

The first scientific description of Gulbrandsen Lake was written by BAS geologist David Brook after fieldwork in November and December 1965. He identified three lakes on the northern edge of the Neumayer Glacier and the two larger ones, Gulbrandsen Lake and the newly-named Montia Lake, were accurately surveyed.

The drainage of the lakes was ascribed to sub-glacial tunnels and by elevation of the Neumayer glacier from the lake bottom by its buoyancy when the lake levels rose. The drainage and refilling were thought to be seasonal and subject to change as dictated by the advance or recession of the Neumayer Glacier. Brook concluded that the shorelines were formed within the last 100 years.



Gulbrandsen Lake in 1968.

The lake was revisited in 1968 by Chalmers Clapperton, an Aberdeen University geomorphologist, who was intending to work on Deception Island until it erupted in December 1967. In March 1968 Clapperton recorded Gulbrandsen Lake as 5.5km back from the snout of the Neumayer Glacier, approximately 1000m x 700m in extent and with its surface at about 200m a.s.l. There were at least 30 relict beaches present, the highest 50m above the current lake surface. This reduction in area and surface height compared to Brook's survey may be evidence that the lake was continuing to drain, but could also be due to inaccurate measurement.



Gulbrandsen Lake in 1974.

Gulbrandsen Lake appeared little changed in March 1974 when BAS geologist Geoff Tanner visited it. The Neumayer Glacier still dammed the lake and calved into it but the interaction between the lake depth, ice thickness and ice character was changing as the glacier front thinned and open seracs (blocks or columns of glacial ice, often formed by intersecting crevasses) became more abundant and permanent across the seasons. A dramatic image taken in 1993 of the stranded icebergs in Tim and Pauline Carr's book *Antarctic Oasis* (page 100) shows that lake had emptied. In January 1999 when ornithologist John Croxall visited the location there were now only a few stranded icebergs remaining and a stream cut into the former lake bottom indicated that fluvial activity was well established.

The likelihood of seasonal 'drain/refill' seemed impossible and yet just four years later the 2003 satellite image (Landsat ETM+ Path: 206 Row: 098, 7 February 2003) as incorporated in the 1:200 000 BAS topographical map shows Gulbrandsen Lake partially full again.



In 2009, the relict beaches are clearly visible on the more gentle slopes but they become indistinct and absent at lower levels presumably because the drainage/refill cycles since 1993 were shortened and allowed little time for beach formation.

In October 2009, when we visited from *Pelagic Australis*, we found that the lake previously visible on the 2003 Landsat image had disappeared completely, as thinning and retreat of the Neumayer Glacier had gone beyond a critical point. The snout of the glacier now lies below Gulbrandsen Valley itself, and the sea within Cumberland West Bay is visible from the col behind it.

My 2009 image shows the more gentle eastern slopes where the relict beaches are best preserved. Compare it with Clapperton's 1968 photograph when the Neumayer Glacier reached the break of slope on the ridge at the south-eastern side of the valley. Gulbrandsen Lake was a significant ice-dammed glacial feature but has been in gradual (and occasionally sporadic) decline since its maximum fill prior to the 1920s, as rising average temperatures have resulted in increasing glacial retreat. The Antarctic Place-names Committee has now transferred the name from Gulbrandsen Lake to Gulbrandsen Valley!

Former ice-dammed lakes are not uncommon in glacial and previously glaciated regions of the world, and many were much longer lived and larger than Gulbrandsen Lake. They are also much closer to home than South Georgia! The 'Parallel Roads of Glen Roy' in the Lochaber district of Scotland formed during a cold period 12,500 to 11,500 years ago are worth a visit. Yes, climate change (be it warming or cooling) is part of our natural world (but man has accelerated it in the recent past) and if we wait long enough Gulbrandsen Lake could reappear in the future.

Bruce Mair

Discovery House renovation

Discovery House, also known as the Marine Station, was built in 1925 as a laboratory with accommodation for the *Discovery* Investigations. At the time, the magistrate complained to the Governor that the scientists in Discovery House enjoyed central heating, hot & cold bath water and a flush lavatory: 'Mod. Cons.' denied to everyone else on King Edward Point.



'Mod. Cons.' 2014.



Part of the new boiler room. There is an electric boiler using power from the hydro-generator below Gull Lake and a diesel boiler as standby. The room also houses pumps for sewage and the fire sprinkler system.

During the 1970s the British Antarctic Survey used Discovery House for workshops. In recent years the interior was stripped to remove asbestos and the building was used for storage. Over the last two summers the building has been extensively renovated to become high-class accommodation and offices for visiting scientists.

Whilst retaining much of its outward appearance, the interior has been reshaped to provide four twin bunkrooms with en-suite shower rooms, an office and conference room, a well-equipped kitchen and dining room/lounge and even a laundry. Although the extensive reshaping of the interior and removal of the distinctive

red chimneys detracts from the historical value of the building, giving old buildings a new use is the practical way of preserving them in a place where maintenance costs are very high.

Encouraging news about pipits



The recolonisation of parts of South Georgia by the South Georgia pipit will be an indicator of the success of the rat eradication programme because it does not nest where rats are present and has therefore been absent from vast areas of the main island.

The South Georgia Pipit is endemic to the island. It is often described as the most southerly songbird but house sparrows are plentiful in Ushuaia 57 km father north! It would be better to call it the only songbird south of the Antarctic Convergence. This still makes it unique and worthy of special attention.

There have been some hopeful signs. At the end of December passengers and staff from the cruise ship *Ortelius* spotted pipits at both Salisbury Plain and Hercules Bay. These two places are 50km apart but wae both within the Phase Two baiting area of the SGHT Habitat Restoration Project which was completed at the end of last summer. Sightings have also been made at several other places on the north coast. Significantly, pipits were heard singing at Salisbury Plain and Maiviken, which is recognised to be territorial behaviour and an indication that at least some of these birds are trying to breed.

Only the finding of a pipit nest or seeing parents carrying food intended for the nestlings will be proof that the birds are breeding.

The SGHT is keeping a record of sightings. Report them to the museum during the summer season; otherwise to the SGHT's Dundee office: info@sght.org.

Visitors and residents should remember that the SGA is offering a bottle of champagne to the first person to provide proof of nesting on the Thatcher Peninsula.

We hope that the prize will be claimed very soon!

The British Antarctic Oral History Project – Volunteers needed

During the last few years, with the support of the SGA, we have been recording people's experiences of their work in the Antarctic. The current collection phase is now complete and we have a team of volunteers transcribing the recordings. So far we have done about one quarter of the total and we are looking to recruit more volunteers!

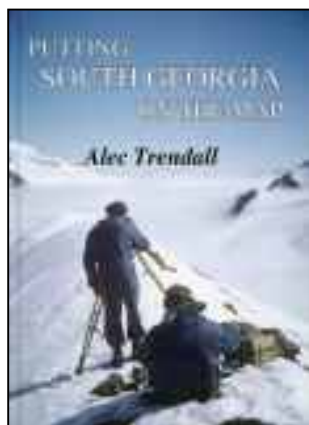
All that is needed is access to a computer and TIME because it can be a very time-consuming process! As an example, it takes about 30 minutes to transcribe 5 minutes of recording, perhaps longer to start with. But it is a unique opportunity to hear some fascinating stories about Antarctic life and work, and to help make these more widely accessible. You can work to your own time-scale, though a commitment to complete one recording in 12 months is requested.

If interested, please get in touch with Andy Smith at andy@smitha.demon.co.uk or for general information Allan Wearden 01254 247541 allan.wearden@btinternet.com.

Initiative funding

Members are reminded that the SGA has money available to initiate or support projects that will stimulate awareness of, and interest in, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. We have given financial assistance to the South Georgia Surveys for fieldwork recording historic sites, a donation to Thomas Binnie for help in preparing Ian Hart's book *Antarctic Magistrate* and £1,500 has been spent on digitising and making various historic photographic and film records more widely available. A substantial sum was raised to create the bust of Duncan Carse on display in the South Georgia Museum. A small amount remains and the SGA particularly invites applications for projects that have a connection to Duncan Carse or the South Georgia Survey expeditions.

Members interested should contact the Secretary (secretary@southgeorgiaassociation.org), who will provide further details of how to apply.



The high-quality printing of Alec Trendall's self-published book was supported by the SGA and copies of the book were donated to various institutes and national libraries.

Honour for Martin Collins

We congratulate Martin Collins, Chief Executive Officer for GSGSSI, for the award of an OBE in the New Year's Honours list. The award is for 'services to science and conservation in South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands.'

Martin has worked in the South Atlantic since graduating in Zoology from Reading University in 1989. He first served as a Fishery Observer in the Falkland Islands, before gaining a PhD on squid ecology at University College, Cork. He then continued research on cephalopod ecology and deep-sea fish behaviour and ecology at Aberdeen University and joined BAS in 2002 to work on the Scotia Sea ecosystem. In 2009 he became Director of Fisheries and Chief Executive Officer for South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. In this role he is responsible for managing the Territory, including the valuable fisheries.

Reindeer eradication very nearly complete



Reindeer and king penguin. The last photo?

Last summer was the second season of the project to eradicate the introduced reindeer from South Georgia. Six Norwegian marksmen returned to South Georgia to eradicate the Barff Peninsula herd. The rugged terrain and lack of suitable anchorages on the Barff Peninsula meant that herding was not a viable option as had been possible in the Busen area the previous year. Ground shooting was used as a stand-alone method. The marksmen were based in tented field camps and supported by the GSGSSI fisheries patrol vessel *Pharos SG*. Despite the difficult terrain and some of the worst summer weather in recent years, the marksmen completed systematic searches of all areas with reindeer and shot 3,140 animals in a six-week period. Together with 1,555 shot on the Barff Peninsula last year, this makes 4,695 deer in the Barff herd. Combined with 1,900 killed in the Busen area, the grand total of reindeer on South Georgia was around 6,500, considerably more than the estimate.

It ended as a race against time and weather to remove all the reindeer before the *Pharos SG* had to return to Stanley. The marksmen had to utilise all daylight hours for stalking deer and it is not surprising that eight deer were spotted after they had left. They will return next summer to give a final sweep of the area and shoot the remaining animals.

The eradication programme cost around £900,000, funded from GSGSSI reserves, although some costs were offset by the sale of meat products harvested during the first year of the operation.

The high density of reindeer on South Georgia has had a very detrimental effect of the vegetation and hence on the invertebrate animals and burrowing seabirds. The deer graze the tussac and also eliminate plants such as greater burnet and lichens.

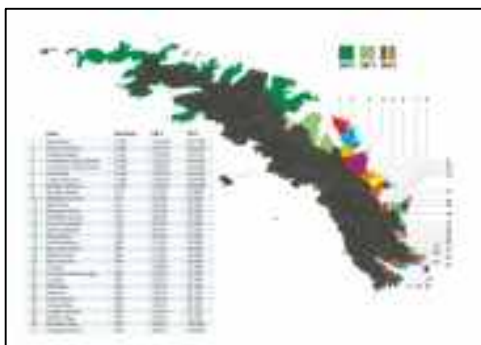
Monitoring of vegetation and bird communities has started to track their recovery. It will take a number of years for the full benefits of the eradication to be realised, but there are early signs of vegetation recovery, especially in the Busen area, which has now been free from reindeer for almost a year. Here, there are signs that the vegetation is starting to recover. Grasses are flowering and setting seed and small burnet plants are starting to grow.

Rat eradication – the final phase

If all goes well, rats will be removed from the South Georgia species list in the late summer of 2014-15. The methodical monitoring programme will hopefully report negative findings a couple of years later but, realistically, there may have to be some follow-up baiting where rats are lingering. As has been pointed out before, destruction of rats on South Georgia has to be 100 per cent complete, otherwise they will spread over the island again and the huge effort will have been wasted.

The more immediate concern is financial. The cost of operating three helicopters, chartering a ship and employing a support team in a remote place is enormous. A very large sum of money is still needed to enable next summer's operation to go ahead.

There is 300 sq. km. of the approximately 1,000 sq. km. infested area of the island left to clear in the south-east of the island. The map below shows (in shades of green) the area already treated and the multi-coloured areas that are planned to be covered in 2015.



Coupled with the removal of the reindeer and progress being made on eradicating some of the introduced plants, the eradication of the similarly alien rats, the wildlife of South Georgia will have a more assured future. The island will never be 'pristine' but it will be immeasurably improved.

So a final fund-raising effort is needed. By this time next year South Georgia could be rat free, but only if people get behind us one more time and sponsor a hectare now. There have been some amazingly generous donations by individuals but more are needed. So if you think, in the words of Frank Todd, that if God took a holiday She would go to South Georgia, help preserve this divine holiday resort by sponsoring the clearance of a hectare (or more).

It's very easy. Simply type 'www.sght.org/Sponsor-a-hectare' into your browser.

Unusual maternal instinct

Jess Walkup, the albatross assistant at Bird Island, was surprised in January to find a wandering albatross brooding a chick more than a month before wanderer eggs usually hatch. After some puzzled checking of dates, a closer inspection revealed that the chick was a southern giant petrel!



The wanderer and her stinker chick.

The scenario seems to have been that the female wanderer had lost her own egg and moved to the giant petrel nest, a few metres away, where she 'adopted' the chick. This was of an age when GP chicks are big enough to be left alone while the parents go foraging. What happened to the 'birth parents' is not known. Adoption between species is very rare in wild birds. A male albatross had been observed on the original wanderer nest but it has not been seen since the egg was lost. Normally the female would disappear as well but this one seems to have an overdeveloped maternal instinct. She was very protective of her 'foster child' but the story did not have a happy ending. About two weeks later, Jess found the chick dead, apparently from starvation although the wanderer was continuing to brood it.

The wanderers return?

There is some good news about South Georgia's wandering albatrosses. Sally Poncet and Ken Passfield of South Georgia Surveys carried out the annual census of wanderer nests in January on Prion and Albatross Islands and found higher numbers than for several years. Thirty seven birds on eggs were counted on Prion Island, the highest number in ten years. On Albatross Island 140 nests were counted, also a substantial increase and the highest number since the 151 counted in 2008. There is also encouraging news of an increase in wanderer nests at Bird Island.

Sally and Ken think that the trend in recent years shows the population is stabilising after years of decline. However, they point out the possibility of the increase being due to birds from other islands moving to Prion and Albatross Islands. Hopefully, this will be assessed by a wider survey next year.

That this is not simply a short-lived fluctuation is supported by news that wanderer numbers on other sub-Antarctic islands stopped the alarming downward trend some years ago. This may be linked to improvements in fishery practices to reduce the by-catch on long-lines or increased food supplies due to a change in ocean currents.

Let us hope that this heartening trend continues!



A more common sight in future?

South Georgia polar library – some found

The loss of the polar library at King Edward Point described in Newsletter 25 has resulted in some correspondence. The BAS librarian, Andrew Gray, has very helpfully looked through the holdings there and found several books from South Georgia in its collections. These were identified by the plastic laminate film, distinctive rubber stamp and catalogue number, described in the article, which all the books had. Andrew has found six of the total of about 120 (numbers 45, 46, 58, 79, 92, 103) and there may be others. This suggests that a small part of the collection has been absorbed by BAS at some time. Unfortunately further details are not readily available from the library records, although one had a slip indicating it had been borrowed in 1997.

Several other correspondents have written that they remember the library and a few recall its reception in BAS headquarters for storage, with the announced intention of return to the island when this became practicable.

Nobody has, however, seen any trace of the remaining books, which are about 95% of the collection. None of the few specialist polar book dealers has reported any appearing on sale and none of the far more numerous owners of polar books (including several with very extensive collections) have reported seeing any of them. Thus the mystery remains. They were a mixture of many from the Falkland Islands Dependencies government days, a lot from BAS and a substantial number privately presented.

Where have the rest gone? The distinctive markings make the books obvious if any appear on the second-hand book market. It is barely conceivable that they have been discarded and no longer exist. It would be excellent for South Georgia to get them back. Any news and information will be appreciated now the members of the South Georgia Association are interested in their fate. Please keep the mystery in mind and continue the detective work.

Bob Headland

A KEP childhood



In the shadow of Shackleton's Cross is Beverley McLeod's account of her life at KEP, where her father was senior wireless operator, when she was aged five to ten years old in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Published by OTC Editions in early April, for around £15.00.

My Muse – the albatross

I had always thought that albatrosses are some of the most graceful and spectacular of all birds, but it was not until I saw them in the flesh that I truly fell in love with them. I knew then that I had to sculpt them.

I saw my first wandering albatross on the 3rd of February 2010, two days sail west of the International Date Line. The giant bird was following our sailing ship westward across the South Pacific, gliding up and down on invisible waves of wind with tiny tilts its preposterously proportioned wings. It seemed more like a light aircraft than a bird as it stalked the ship hour after hour, effortlessly sweeping back and forth above our



wake. This moment provided the principal inspiration for my sculpture 'Wandering Albatross', which depicts the bird in its element, gliding gracefully over the ocean with wing-tips grazing the surface of the waves.

Two years later, I had my first opportunity to observe albatrosses up close, at the large black-browed albatross nesting colony on West Point Island in the Falklands. Sitting on the edge of the colony, I was startled when one of the circling albatrosses suddenly flopped down onto the ground beside me. It folded its giant wings and waddled slowly up to the soles of my shoes. Then, with delicate precision, it carefully plucked a blade of tussock grass and proffered it to me with its outstretched beak. I hesitated for a moment, not quite sure what to do, but finally I put out my hand and took the blade of grass. The albatross stared at me for a few moments longer and then turned and plodded off between the high tufts of tussock.

I have just completed a two-month stint as Artist in Residence at the South Georgia Museum where I worked on various art projects as well as assisting in the museum. I have been fascinated by the history and wildlife of South Georgia for many years, so I was very excited at being able to assist with the fund-raising campaign for the rat eradication project. I donated a bronze cast of an albatross to the SGHT and, in a sealed auction, it has raised the magnificent sum of £2650.

Now I am back at home, I have started work on a series of sculptures based on my observations of Antarctic wildlife. Images of these will be added to my website once they are complete (www.anthonysmithart.co.uk). To be kept informed about new works and forthcoming exhibitions, email me at anthonysmithart@gmail.com.

Anthony Smith

The role of the SGA

The SGA acts as a 'constituency' for South Georgia, raising issues and commenting on legislative developments with the Government of South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands. This is a valuable role and enables the experience, expertise and knowledge of SGA members to be put to good effect. In recent times we have been able to provide important comment and advice on a range of prospective environmental legislation.

Your Committee seeks your assistance in identifying matters which you feel are important for the future of South Georgia for discussion with the Commissioner and his staff. Please send these to me via the Hon. Secretary, Fran Prince (secretary@southgeorgiaassociation.org or South Georgia Association, Scott Polar Research Institute, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER). Thank you.

David Drewry (Chairman)

Friends of the Scott Polar Research Institute

The Friends of SPRI would be delighted for SGA members to join them at their summer weekend fund-raising event at Chatham Historic Dockyard, Kent, on Saturday &/or Sunday, 7 - 8 June.

The varied programme includes a full weekend pass to the entire Dockyard and all its exhibits, guided tours, an inspirational lecture by Tim Jarvis and his team about their recent successful Shackleton re-enactment voyage, along with displays and their *James Caird* replica, named the *Alexandra Shackleton*. Evening drinks will be served in the Ropery followed by an evening buffet in the 'Steam, Steel & Submarines Gallery' and talks.

Ticket price for the entire event, and inclusive of all food and drink in the evening, is £100 per head.

Please note that this is a weekend package but that all the events listed above occur on the Saturday, with further access to the dockyard and tours taking place on the Sunday.

Special discounted rates have been agreed at the on-site hotel.

For tickets, and all further information please contact: Celene Pickard, Executive Secretary of the Friends of SPRI on friendsofspri@gmail.com.

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:

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