

# South Georgia Association Newsletter

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The Spring Meeting & AGM will be on April 20, 2018



*A harpoon cannon ready to fire. The gunner or 'skytter' (pronounced 'shooter') takes aim along the sighting rod.*

## Spring meeting and AGM

Members will have had an email with the details and booking form and this is a reminder.

The event is held at The Royal Over-Seas League, Over-Seas House, Park Place (off St James Street), London SW1A 1LR and starts with a pay bar opening from 5:45 pm. The Reception with wine and canapés starts at 6:00 pm. The AGM starts at 7:00 and at 8:00 pm there will be a talk by Dr Mark Brandon, Reader in Polar Oceanography, The Open University, on 'Giant Icebergs and South Georgia'. Mark Brandon did his PhD at the Scott Polar Research Institute before moving to the British Antarctic Survey, and The Open University. He has written more than 40 research articles and three textbooks.

In recent decades several giant icebergs have passed close by South Georgia, the most recent being a remnant of B09 that calved from Ross Ice Shelf in 1987. Oceanographic data shows the impact of the bergs on local melt and how regional waters are affected. During his talk, Mark will use material from the TV series Frozen Planet and Blue Planet 2 for which he was an academic advisor.

## Grand Summer Barbecue on the Thames



*HMS Wellington (U65) was a Grimsby-class sloop launched in 1934. After World War II she was converted to "Head Quarters Ship" HQS Wellington at Chatham Dockyard. Since December 1946 she has been moored at Temple Stairs, Victoria Embankment, where she serves as the floating Livery Hall of the Honourable Company of Master Mariners. She is a superb venue affording wonderful views of the tidal Thames. Click on the link <http://www.thewellingtontrust.com/home>*

The South Georgia Association will visit HQS *Wellington* on 7th June 2018

Report on board at 18:00. Members and their guests will be able to explore this fascinating ship and her collections, and enjoy the sumptuous barbecue and drinks; bars open until late – all included in the ticket price.

Ticket price: £65 per head to include all drinks from two bars and a very special barbecue including meat, fish and vegetarian options, a wide selection from the salad table and a mouth-watering list of desserts. Weather permitting this will be an open-air event but in the event of rain the ship provides shelter in luxury below. Dress code: smart casual - high heels not recommended.

Members: please invite guests and encourage them to join the South Georgia Association.

How to book: either write to SGA secretary, Fran Prince, at

The South Georgia Association, Scott Polar Research Institute, Lensfield Rd, Cambridge CB2 1ER,  
or e-mail to Fran Prince at [secretary@southgeorgiaassociation.org](mailto:secretary@southgeorgiaassociation.org)

Please give names of members and guests, noting special dietary requirements.

How to pay: either by cheque payable to “The South Georgia Association” to Fran Prince at the address above, or by BACS, giving your name and WELLINGTON (or as much as will fit) as a reference, direct to SGA’s bank account, details as follows:

Bank: NatWest. Account number: 23478136 Sort Code: 53 61 47

If paying from overseas you will most likely need two further codes:

BIC/SWIFT: NWBK GB 2L. IBAN: GB63 NWBK 5361 4723 4781 36

Deadline: 4 May at the latest - places are limited so please book early.

### **SGA seeks an auditor**

Keith Holmes has been our auditor for eight years but he now wishes to take a break. Is there someone, not necessarily a member of the SGA, who would like to take over? The SGA is a small society of something under 300 members and its affairs are not complicated. Essentially, honorary treasurer John Owen handles matters throughout the year and prepares the annual summary for members. The auditor makes his check in January.

If you can help, please e-mail SGA secretary Frances Prince, [franprince@icloud.com](mailto:franprince@icloud.com). Or contact Keith Holmes, [kdhox@hotmail.com](mailto:kdhox@hotmail.com), 01865 318914, for a chat about what’s involved.

### **New website for the Dictionary of Falklands Biography (including South Georgia)**

The entire text of the Dictionary of Falklands Biography has been placed on a new website – just click on [www.falklandsbiographies.org](http://www.falklandsbiographies.org) - and is freely available all over the world.

In addition to the original 476 biographies, six new names have been added and more are to follow. Among the newcomers are Constance Allardyce, the wife of Governor Sir William, who was a respected palaeontologist and expert on Falklands fossils (written by Dr Phil Stone). Several figures from South Georgia are included, among them Dick Laws, a director of BAS and a noted zoologist (written by Professor David Walton). The events on Deception Island in 1953 – little known but significant in countering Argentine expansion in the Antarctic - feature in two biographies by Dr Stephen Palmer – those of Colin Campbell, the Colonial Secretary at the time and of Admiral Sir William Andrewes commander of the Royal Navy’s America and West Indies Squadron whose flagship, HMS *Superb*, spent six weeks in Port Stanley while her marines sailed further south in the guardship HMS *Snipe*.

David Tatham, editor of the printed edition, said:

'I am very grateful to Tom McAdam who volunteered to set up this website and who has produced a very user-friendly resource, with excellent links and very easy to navigate. In addition to the original text and the new names added, we have installed reviews of the book, a guide to Falklands history using the DFB, and an obituary of Jane Cameron whose help and encouragement were vital to completing the Dictionary in 2008. Because the website is more flexible than a printed book we can include more illustrations than we previously did. Plus we have taken the opportunity to update the original text and make corrections to it.

I hope that all Islanders, friends of the Falklands and students of Falklands history will visit the new website, enjoy it and learn from it. And not forgetting South Georgia.'

Further information from the Editor at: [webeditor@falklandsbiographies.org](mailto:webeditor@falklandsbiographies.org); or telephone +44 1531 57 9090.

## Tenacious in South Georgia

The Pelagic fleet has had a busy season with multiple visits to South Georgia. *Pelagic Australis* made two trips to the island including a Shackleton Traverse in September and in October we were ice coring on the Szielsko Ice Cap supporting the University of Maine's Climate Change Institute team. She has just finished three back to back Peninsula trips supporting tourists, skiers and film makers.

Meanwhile, the original tried and tested *Pelagic* has been on the island in December/January with a National Geographic online film team spending some days on Bird Island (with permission!) and has just finished a six week charter with the BBC Wildlife Unit Bristol filming leopards predated penguin chicks which they seem to do annually as new filming technology continually evolves.



I then went 'square rig' with the Jubilee Sailing Trust's barque *Tenacious*, one of their two traditional training vessels that caters for a mix of abled bodied and disabled crew ([www.jst.org.uk](http://www.jst.org.uk)). *Tenacious* is on her way back to the UK after spending two years in Australia making short haul cruises. They rounded Cape Horn at end of February and I signed on in Stanley as Voyage Crew, but on board specifically to facilitate the South Georgia landings as Expedition Leader. As Voyage Crew I stand watches (out in the cold), work the vessel, heaving on old ropes, and wash dishes for 50 by hand . . . a very levelling experience.

The itinerary was Stanley to South Georgia, six days on the island and then on to Tristan da Cunha and from there Simons Town (to round the Cape Of Good Hope) and eventually into Cape Town. Due to rigging problems we were 12 days late leaving Stanley which was frustrating, but at least for the first time in all these years without my two boats to service and worry about, I was able to do all the day tours around Stanley, including taking a group up Mt Tumbledown.

After a hesitant start due to severe weather, we finally left our anchorage in Berkeley Sound on March 9th and made sail for the northwest tip of the island. Six days later, having missed an opportunity to round via the north we went south about the island and at least gave the crew a fine view of the south coast in the clear. We came alongside KEP on March 15th greeted by government officers Steve and Emma who checked all our boots and clothing with a 'fine toothbrush.' As it turned out we had three days 'in town' which was much appreciated by all on board, especially after witnessing a cruise ship having the typical three hours. We had the luxury of Sarah Lurcock's museum tour, plenty of cups of tea and biscuits in the canteen and the usual toast to The Boss at the cemetery. We also enjoyed a vigorous walk to Maiviken but the gentoos were thin on the ground by then.

The high point was a landing at St Andrews (I think if we had missed that one a mutiny would have ensued) on the afternoon of the 18th before setting sail to Cape Town.

**Skip Novak** (in the South Atlantic at the Polar Front)

## A night at the cinema – 65 years ago



*The Kino at Leith long after closing down.*

The four principal whaling stations (Grytviken, Leith, Stromness and Husvik) each had a Welfare (Velferden) Committee which organised various entertainment and sports activities. Inter-station winter sports competitions were also popular. Each station committee was also responsible for managing a well-stocked library. In addition, the four stations had a cinema or Kino in which films were regularly shown, most probably on Saturday nights; they also doubled as theatres, sports and meeting halls.

When I visited Leith, on a hike from Husvik, in 1991 (before the days of GSGSSI access restrictions), I entered the library, or what was left of it, and found various files of correspondence and related artefacts strewn over the floor, most with boot imprints, and many damaged beyond recognition. When I had visited the same offices ten years earlier there was no such damage and everything remained intact and almost pristine since it had been abandoned in 1965. I salvaged some of the papers out of interest. Of particular interest was a typed letter headed 'Films received season 1951/52 Leith Harbour', and ending 'Leith Harbour, 26.1.52. DR'. Other correspondence revealed 'DR' to be David Rarity, the Chairman of the Welfare Committee. By a quirk of coincidence, while I was in Aberdeen exactly 50 years ago, I

had bought two envelopes with South Georgia stamps cancelled at Grytviken but with a cachet applied at 'Leith Harbour', and self-addressed to this same gentleman at Leith! Another well-trodden item was a receipt from Oslo, dated 31 August 1950, for an unspecified number of films sent to Husvik Harbour Kino, Syd Georgia for season 1950/51, cost 4,725 Kroner [ca. £235].

So, what was showing at the Leith cinema in the first six months of 1952 (then repeated at the Husvik Kino six months later)? The letter listed 25 blockbusters of the day, the titles, actors and actresses most now only vaguely remembered by a small minority of a certain age. As listed, they were:

*Tall in the Saddle* (Wild West): John Wayne, Ella Raines  
*The Spoilers* (Wild West): Marlene Dietrich, John Wayne  
*It's a Wonderful Life* (Comedy): Donna Reid, James Stewart  
*Spring Time* (Musical): Deanna Durbin, Robert Cummings  
*All this and Heaven too* (Drama): Bette Davis, Charles Boyer  
*Nora Prentiss* (Drama): Ann Sheridan, Kent Smith  
*Gentleman Jim* (Boxing): Errol Flynn  
*Stallion Road* (Drama): Ronald Reagan, Alexis Smith  
*Guest Wife* (Comedy): Claudette Colbert, Don Ameche  
*Watch on the Rhine* (Drama): Bette Davis, Paul Lukas  
*Yankee Doodle Dandy* (Musical): James Cagney  
*Lady of Burlesque* (Musical): Barbara Stanwyck, Michael Shea  
*Stage Door Canteen* (Musical): Cheryl Walker, William Terry

*Chip off the Old Block* (Musical): Donald O'Connor, Peggy Ryan  
*Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (Drama): Edward G. Robinson  
*The Outsider* (Drama): George Saunders, Mary Maguire  
*Lendeman* (Drama): Edwige Feuillère  
*Flesh and Fantasy* (Drama): Charles Boyer, Barbara Stanwyck  
*Heartbeat* (Comedy): Ginger Rogers, Adolph Menjou  
*They Drive by Night* (Drama): Ann Sheridan, Humphrey Bogart  
*The Egg and I* (Comedy): Fred McMurray, Claudette Colbert  
*Dumbo* (Full length Cartoon): Walt Disney  
*The Climax* (Thriller): Boris Karloff, Susanna Foster  
*Pursued* (Western Thriller): Robert Mitchum, Teresa Wright  
*The Hard Way* (Thriller): Ida Lupino, Joan Leslie

Where are they now, those films of yesteryear? They just don't make them like that any more! When I first visited South Georgia in the late 1960s the cinemas still stood intact, sentinels of a bygone era of innocent entertainment. However, within a few years, the shelves and floors of the projector rooms and halls presented a forlorn sight. They were strewn with hundreds of film reels in metal cases, many opened and the film torn out. Most appeared to be newsreels, probably up to the time of the respective station closures. A truly depressing scene of wanton vandalism by visiting foreign ships' crews. The Grytviken Kino, next to the church, was maintained by BAS until the Argentine invasion and used for badminton matches, but sadly collapsed in a gale about 30 years ago. Husvik Kino, near the hospital, had a fine upright piano, somewhat out of tune, when I visited in 1980, but ten years later the roof had collapsed and the piano crushed. Stromness cinema, with its lovely wood-panelled interior with intricate locally made iron light fittings, had collapsed by 1991. The Leith cinema was a large corrugated iron Nissen hut on a concrete base, a little out of town towards the reservoir; it too collapsed sometime between 1980 and 1991.

**Ron Lewis-Smith**



*Badminton in the Grytviken Kino, 1976.*



*The Grytviken Kino before its final collapse.*



*Cumberland West Bay by Paul Rodhouse.*



## Has South Georgia been cleared of rats? Keen-nosed dogs find out!



*Miriam Ritchie and Jane Tansell with Abu, Will and Wai at KEP.*

centre of this final and critical phase of the operation. They have come from New Zealand and are specially trained to detect rodents but special permission was needed for them to be taken to South Georgia because the dog is an alien species.

Dog handler Miriam Ritchie explains the dogs' work: 'They stay close to us, but of course they can detect smells from many metres away, so they help increase the range of what is actually covered on foot. They can also get to areas that are inaccessible to humans, such as nooks and crannies in the landscape, or within the former whaling stations.' To date, Wai, Will and Abu have covered a total of 2124 km, outpacing their handlers, who have walked 1415 km – already more than the distance from Land's End to John O'Groats.

Miriam continues: 'All three of the dogs have a lovely, calm temperament and are very quiet around birds. Their training is as much about ignoring other smells, as it is about recognising rodent odour. South Georgia is famous for its vast penguin colonies and thousands of seals, and the dogs' noses are filled with the intense smells of these animals the whole time. They have to ignore all this and simply focus on, and react to, the one extremely weak smell of rodents.'

In line with international best practice, the monitoring team has been using a combination of detection methods. In addition to the dogs, chewsticks and camera traps have also been used. Over a thousand such devices have been deployed as part of the survey.

Dickie Hall, SGHT Project Director, says: 'This survey has been the culmination of 10 years of planning and months of challenging field work over four sub-Antarctic seasons by an international team, led by SGHT. We are all on tenterhooks, waiting for the results as the survey nears completion. There is no room for error - we have to have eliminated every single last rodent if we are to save many vulnerable bird species like the South Georgia pipit from extinction.'

The outcome of the monitoring survey will be announced in early May, but it is looking good so far.

(Based on a Press Release. Photos: SGHT.)



*Will, with Miriam, checks out the King Penguin colony in St. Andrews Bay. Showing single-minded diligence, he is ignoring thousands of interesting penguins and concentrating on finding the elusive odour of rats.*

## Geology at Gold Harbour ... Thanks from Phil Stone

I would like to thank the SGA members who responded to my appeal in the last newsletter and sent me a range of splendid images of the newly deglaciated cliffs at Gold Harbour: Bob Burton, Mike Norman, Tom Sharpe and Jim Wilson. The different angles of view that they provide combine to reveal the three-dimensional structure of the folded Cumberland Bay Formation strata. They also confirmed that the axes of the folding ran about NW-SE, more-or-less along the line of the cliff beneath the remains of the Bertrab Glacier. This agrees pretty well with the fold orientation data which I had previously noted from the Cumberland Bay Formation to the south of Royal Bay when I was studying the geology of the area in the early 1970s. This was when the cliff face at Gold Harbour was covered by the glacier and these folds were hidden.

The newly exposed folding at Gold Harbour is unusually squashed and overturned. The most obvious fold (below the remaining ice and to the left of the waterfall) is very well preserved but there is another one, slightly higher in the cliff and closing in the opposite direction, that is much more disrupted and quite hard to make out (see arrows). These various features most probably all arose from proximity to the major thrust fault that carried the Cumberland Bay Formation over the more intricately folded Sandebugten Formation. These are the two principal sedimentary rock formations of South Georgia and are everywhere separated by the thrust fault. It now cuts across the northern side of Gold Harbour, where it is inclined at about 20° towards the SW; the folds are only a few hundred metres above it.

I plan to write a proper scientific note about all this but, in the meantime, all the background is in Stone, P. 1980. *The Geology of South Georgia: IV. Barff Peninsula and Royal Bay areas. British Antarctic Survey Scientific Reports, No. 96.* Available online at [nora.nerc.ac.uk/509189/](http://nora.nerc.ac.uk/509189/). And strictly for geology buffs ... the axial planes of the tight, overturned fold pair at Gold Harbour are almost parallel to the overall bedding attitude, but the upper fold hinge is partially sheared out by movement along that plane. The asymmetry implies top-to-the-NE tectonic movement consistent with the thrust-emplacement direction of the Cumberland Bay Formation as defined by evidence seen elsewhere in South Georgia.



*One of Tom Sharpe's images showing the principal fold structure (marked by arrows) beneath the remains of the Bertrab Glacier.*

*The hundreds of white dots along the shoreline – king penguins – give a magnificent sense of scale.*

## A new bird for South Georgia

On the morning of 22 December 2017, the *Akademik Sergei Vavilov* was travelling north-east from Elephant Island, and had reached 55° 57' S, 39° 45' W, 140 nautical miles south-east of the southern tip of South Georgia, in clear, calm conditions. A few passengers were with me on the bridge, when I was amazed to see a small passerine flying round the bows.

Originally we assumed it to be a South Georgia pipit, the only songbird breeding on South Georgia, but it revealed its true identity by flying through the open door into the bar-lounge during lunch! It was a white-crested elaenia, a small tyrant-flycatcher normally found in woodland in places like Ushuaia on the Argentine mainland. (I have frequently seen the species in that area). As it flew round the room, it sought refuge several times in



*A unique photo of a white-crested elaenia. (Steve Rose)*



the branches of the Christmas tree. It was also attracted to the shelf of spirits behind the bar.

The elania was still on the ship four hours later, but disappeared after that. I assume it was blown south-east by a severe depression in the Cape Horn and Drake Passage area a few days earlier. There is a previous record from farther south (in the Drake Passage), but perhaps this one will be accepted as the first record for South Georgia, since it must surely have made landfall on the island before continuing southwards.

**Simon Boyes** Staff ornithologist aboard *Akademik Sergei Vavilov*

### **Alien hunters claim a crash landed spaceship on remote island off Antarctica is pictured on Google Earth**

This is one of the headlines that popped up on the internet in the early days of March. The News Nation reported 'Alien hunters have been looking for extra-terrestrial lives for over a decade now. While earlier studies have sparked several debates over the existence of aliens, the latest finding by a group of UFO scientists in Antarctica is doing rounds on social networking sites.' The story started on 3 March with an organisation called SecureTeam10 finding something strange near Mount Paget. SecureTeam10 are alien and UFO chasers and they found the South Georgia 'spaceship' on Google Earth. You can see their video report on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbzr13UeAZA&feature=youtu.be>.



The video has been viewed nearly 2 million times and has attracted over 7,000 remarks on websites. Some viewers accept the alien spaceship theory; others suggest it could be an aircraft, a missile, perhaps from North Korea, or even a seriously-misplaced submarine.

More sober comments, some from geologists, point out that it is a lump of ice that fell off the glacier and slid down the slope, leaving a very distinct trail in the snow. It is not an unusual phenomenon.

*Is it spaceship? Is it a submarine?  
No. It's a lump of ice.*

### **Early "Discovery" days at South Georgia**



*Newly-built Discovery House from one of the wireless masts.*

By 20 January 1925 the roof [of Discovery House] was on and the living quarters good enough for us to move in, but it was not until 20 February that we could throw a house warming party and it was early April before we had the laboratory complete and furnished. Hunter was afflicted with any number of frustrations and set-backs with his target dates for getting the buildings finished and sometimes got into a mood of deep depression which led someone to propound the 'Principle of the Futility of Endeavour - the more you try the less you succeed'. He was not amused.

In the meantime Mackintosh and Wheeler started their work at the whaling station, crossing the cove every morning in the motor launch, to measure the day's batch of whales as each was hauled onto the flensing plan and to record all the standard observations. Clowes made a daily trip to Shackleton's Point to take sea temperatures and collect water samples for analysis. I had the job of collecting plankton in Cumberland Bay and investigating the bottom

fauna with dredge and small trawl to make a preliminary survey until the *Discovery* should arrive. I borrowed the spare whaling station all-purposes boat and fitted it with a small winch, bow roller and so on for working the gear. Although she was a heavy decked carvel-built boat that had been brought out in 1904, and was powered with a huge single cylinder engine of antique design, she served the purpose well enough.

Whenever the weather allowed and I could get one or more of the others to crew her we worked all around East Cumberland Bay. We even managed vertical plankton hauls from as much as 90 fathoms, closing the net with a messenger at fifty or sixty. As no closing gadget had been sent out I devised and made a simple one that worked so well that it was later adopted as the standard mechanism used in the *Discovery*.



*Civilized life in Discovery House.*

find that, try as I might, I could identify only one species. No-one had suspected that the krill in South Georgia waters was an almost pure culture of *Euphausia superba*.

In September the barque *Tijuca* arrived with stores from Buenos Aires, soon followed by the *Harpon*. Mac and Bill resumed their work on whales as soon as the catchers began hunting. Dr Kemp had told me that the seals and birds deserved attention if opportunity offered, so I turned to them. I went out with the sealers, at first in the *Granat* until we lost her on an unknown rock in North Bay of Ice Fjord, and then in the *Don Ernesto*. Both were old catchers and had their after rails boxed in with corrugated sheets to let them carry a deck cargo of sea elephant blubber. These trips, which lasted about a week if not delayed by bad weather, took us into all the bays and fjords and little coves known only to the sealers, and I picked up much lore about the island from my very congenial Norwegian hosts.

These trips were a wonderful opportunity for getting to know something of the elephant and other seals, and the penguins, albatrosses and mollymawks in their huge rookeries. Between trips I pickled my specimens, prepared bird skins, and developed and printed photographs and films. I spent so much time with the sealers that towards the end of the season Esbensen, who was short-handed owing to sickness, asked me if I would go as mate on the *Don Ernesto*, and I had to explain that I was employed by the *Discovery* Investigations and could not work for two masters.

The *William Scoresby* and the *Discovery* returned on 5 December, meeting at Grytviken - Pot Cove, where in those days a dozen or so of the old sealers' try pots lay among the tussac, some bearing the maker's name 'Johnson & Co, Wapping Dock, London'. I hear that by the order of some ignorant vandal all that remained were smashed up a few years ago and the pots thrown into the sea 'to make the place tidy'. Shame on the Philistines.

Dr Kemp received a signal that the British Museum (Natural History) wanted skeletons of all the southern whales and that Salvens had promised to give them from Leith station. Leganger Hansen, the Leith manager, had asked for help in preparing them so I was sent to do it. I lived at Leith for some weeks and made a set of plaster-of-Paris moulds of the head and shoulders of a big blue whale for the Museum to take a cast, and prepared the skeletons of a right whale, killer, bottlenose, blue and sperm whales. They were stored in the ruins of the old whaling station that had been wrecked by an avalanche several years before. Would you believe it - another avalanche came down that winter and destroyed the lot; the Futility of Endeavour.

On 24 May the *Harpon*, the transport ship of the Cia. Argentina de Pesca, sailed for Norway with much siren-blowing and flag-dipping, taking most of the station's workforce and the crews of the catchers, leaving only a care-and-maintenance gang for the winter. Mac and Bill no longer had their daily journey to the whaling plan, and settled down to analysing the enormous mass of measurements that they had gathered and to dissecting the whale ovaries that filled our formalin tanks. One day Wheeler emptied the contents of a fresh ripe follicle into a large petri dish and after much searching with the binocular microscope claimed to be the first man to see a living whale's egg.

Examination and analysis of the accumulated plankton samples gave me many days work in the lab, for the winter blizzards often kept us indoors. I examined some hundreds of krill samples from whale stomachs and was astonished to



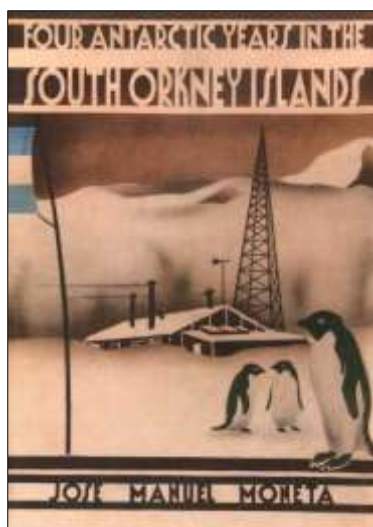
*A sealer with a palisade of corrugated iron sheets to hold the deck cargo of blubber.*

Abridged from an article by **Leo Harrison Matthews**



## Review: Four Antarctic Years in the South Orkney Islands

By José Manuel Moneta. Edited by Robert K. Headland. Bernard Quaritch. 2017. Price £50. Available from SPRI.



The South Orkney Islands have received little literary attention despite having the longest continuous human occupation of any region of Antarctica. The first residents were the Scottish National Antarctic (*Scotia*) Expedition (1902-04) who built Omond House on Laurie Island. In its second year the expedition leader, William Speirs Bruce, with the full agreement of the British Government, enrolled three Argentine scientific assistants. Thus the legacy of the SNAE was to give Argentina its sovereignty claim to this sector of the Antarctic. The base was renamed 'OrCADAS' and operated ever since by the Argentine Meteorological Service.

*Four Antarctic Years in the South Orkney Islands* (*Cuatro Años en las Orcadas del Sur*) is the personal account of José Moneta who spent a total of 4¾ years as a meteorologist at 'OrCADAS' between 1923 and 1930, including two years as Leader. It was first published in 1939 and this is the first edition in English. The editor, Robert Headland, has had it meticulously translated from Spanish by SGA member Kenn Back, and Kathleen Skilton, and he provides an introduction and copiously informative footnotes and maps.

Moneta's Prologue is followed by 115 short chapters, mostly of individual events, all highly descriptive and often in considerable detail. More than half the book concerns his first year (1923-24); only the more memorable events of later seasons are related in the remaining chapters. Much of his text is written as first person narrative, recalled from memory 10-15 years after the events, so may be subject to a degree of embellishment. Nonetheless, his accounts of incidents, hardship, scenery, wildlife, local treks, and, most significantly, of human interaction among the five or six members of the expedition team, are fascinating and often deeply philosophical.

Living in cramped quarters was not easy. The work was tediously 'clockwork routine ..... a world of numbers and calculations'. During Moneta's first year they had no electricity or radio communication, and had no idea of when they would go home until the relief ship appeared. It was on Moneta's insistence that a radio and operator were provided for the 1925-26 season. The effect of having almost daily contact with a mainland station and even directly with family was an immense boost to morale. Interestingly, at no time does Moneta discuss the political situation regarding the sovereignty of the South Orkneys, merely observing that it was administered by the British who received tax from the whaling in the region.

The annual expeditions to the South Orkneys sailed from Buenos Aires via South Georgia. The voyages to and from Grytviken lasted 15-20 days. From there to 'OrCADAS' took another five days on a small whaler. Moneta describes hair-raising voyages in severe storms and with malfunctioning engines, encountering massive waves and icebergs up to 100 kilometres long. Sometimes a few weeks were spent at Grytviken and several chapters are devoted to Moneta's observations and impressions of the station's infrastructure, the role of the British Magistrate and lone policeman at nearby King Edward Point, and the *Discovery* Investigations' (not *Discovery Expeditions* as given on page 64!) oceanographic laboratory. The Argentine meteorological observatory at KEP was run by a former observer from 'OrCADAS'. On his first expedition Moneta had the opportunity to experience a chase on a whaler, vividly describing the hunt and the subsequent processing of the carcass. Although the hive of industrious activity at Grytviken, with its backdrop of stunning scenery, had an memorable impact on Moneta, he adds: 'All this, so unspoiled and idyllic, is offset by the stench of blubber, blood and other detritus of putrefied whale entrails floating in the otherwise tranquil waters of the cove'. An apt description!

Moneta's tale is well-written and the alternation between descriptive and conversational text makes it all the more fascinating and readable. Here and there a word has been omitted or mistranslated, and, in a few cases, the editor has made a slight technical error in his annotations. Occasionally, a memory from a later expedition anachronistically creeps into an account of an earlier one, perhaps intentionally. More critically, perhaps, is when Moneta, during an exceptionally rough crossing to South Georgia, states "... while I clung to the bulkhead with one hand, I put my other one in my pocket and felt for my automatic pistol .... 'If the end has to be now', I told myself, 'at least I won't suffer' ". [!]

Moneta had an eminent career with the Argentine Meteorological Service until 1946 when he was appointed to the newly established post of Secretary General of the Comisión Nacional del Antártico. He was the principal Argentine delegate to the meeting which established the International Whaling Commission in 1946. In the following year he was the Argentine substitute delegate to the United Nations in New York. Between 1949 and 1953 he held several ambassadorial posts.

José Moneta's account will appeal to everyone with an interest in Antarctic expeditions and, more specifically in the South Georgia-South Orkneys region. It is one of very few austropolar narratives of the inter-war years. Bob Headland has done a great service in acquiring permission from Moneta's daughters to have their father's book translated and re-published. My only quibble is the editor's addition of the word 'Antarctic' in the English title. Headland's explanation for this (page 19) was 'to avoid any confusion for a Northern Hemisphere reader who might be more familiar with the [North] Orkney Islands'. As one such reader, I cannot imagine anyone making this mistake (especially when there are penguins on the cover)!

**Ron Lewis-Smith**

## Autumn meeting: New and future science at South Georgia and related regions



*The Aurora Innovation Centre conference room.*

Our autumn event at the British Antarctic Survey's HQ in Cambridge was a resounding success thanks to Paul Rodhouse's organisation and the willing co-operation of BAS. It took place in the recently-opened BAS Aurora Innovation Centre and was attended by about 100 SGA members and BAS staff.

The programme started with a keynote address by Martin Collins, former Chief Executive of GSGSSI, titled 'Science supporting management & policy in South Georgia'. He set the scene by leading us through the history of biological science from James Cook's landing in 1775, the *Discovery* Investigations, applied fisheries science at KEP to the recent eradication of alien reindeer and rodents. Research on ensuring sustainability of fisheries through the Marine Protected Area and monitoring fish predators such as fur seals and albatrosses was highlighted.

From the titles in the programme, it looked as if the subjects might be too technical for some SGA members but the speakers are to be congratulated on the clarity of their presentations. For instance, Katrin Linse was able to demonstrate that methane seepage from the sea bed is an interesting subject. Claire Waluda showed how the topical problem of plastic pollution extends to worries about the Southern Ocean even though this has been little studied as yet. (Have a look at what is happening to our albatrosses: <https://www.facebook.com/bbcearth/videos/1909004295799784/?t=0>) Jennifer Jackson described how her team will be cruising South Georgia waters in a yacht to investigate the health of the local population of right whales. (We hope to present the results in due course.) Melody Clark disclosed how the 20,000 species in South Georgia waters could become commercially attractive by yielding compounds for use in anything from face cream to cancer drugs, and Mike Pinnock showed how observations at South Georgia will provide information to help understand climate change. A sobering thought is that it could be calamitous for the thousands of species which are near their northern limit at South Georgia if climate change pushes the Polar Front southwards.



*The plastic horror story.*



*The importance of South Georgia in climate change studies.*

The full programme was:

Bioprospecting: Melody Clark and Lloyd Peck

Gas seepage from shelf troughs off South Georgia: results from RV *Meteor*'s recent cruise: Katrin Linse

South Georgia whales - recovery from whaling: Jennifer Jackson

Assessing fishery impacts at South Georgia using underwater cameras: Mark Belchier and David Barnes

Atmospheric Waves and science in South Georgia and Antarctica: Alan Gadian, Barbara Brooks and Ralph Burton  
Tectonic history of the Scotia Sea and South Georgia: Teal Riley  
Marine plastics pollution: Claire Waluda  
History of Antarctic Lakes: Dom Hodgson  
South Georgia: a sentinel for the impact of climate change in the sub-Antarctic: Mike Pinnock



After the presentations there was a drinks and snacks reception in the exhibition area with a chance to inspect the display of paintings, photographs and maps. This was followed by a convivial sit-down supper in the Icebreaker canteen to round off a very enjoyable day.

The Association would like to thank all the speakers, Sonia Sargent and John Hall for their organisation, as well as Russ Beuken and his staff in the Icebreaker for making the day a great success.

### **The Stakeholders' cruise**

The Reverend Nicholas Mercer reports: I was very privileged to have taken part in a recent visit to South Georgia. The visit was arranged by the Commissioner for South Georgia, His Excellency Nigel Phillips CBE, and brought together representatives from the Falkland Islands Government, UK Parliament, British Antarctic Survey, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators and Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, as well as me - the Rector of South Georgia.

We had the opportunity to meet staff from GSGSSI, British Antarctic Survey and the South Georgia Heritage Trust to see firsthand the work being done to conserve both the natural and human heritage of the island. As well as a chance to see scientific study sites used by the British Antarctic Survey to monitor higher predators such as penguins and seals, we were able to visit the tide water glaciers in Cumberland Bay and the Drygalski Fjord.

I had the rare opportunity to lead a Sunday service of Holy Communion at the old whalers church at Grytviken. It was attended by all the participants in the group as well as most of the residents currently living on South Georgia and those who had arrived by yacht. The sermon was on the wilderness and the spiritual value of silence. It mentioned the story of Jonah and crying out to God from the belly of the whale. There could not have been a more fitting setting for such a sermon.

We returned on 18 March after a, relatively, calm crossing aboard the *Pharos SG*!



*A model of the church in Sandefjord Museum.*



## Mapping South Georgia's dynamic coastal margin

The first island-wide effort to identify and map the coastal habitats of South Georgia since Jenny Scott and Sally Poncet's pioneering work in 2003 is now underway. The South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute (SAERI) is leading this research project, supported by the Darwin Initiative through UK Government funding. It is using free medium resolution satellite imagery alongside other spatial information and local expert knowledge to develop the first, island-wide, 'satellite-derived' broad scale coastal margin (terrestrial, intertidal and subtidal) habitat maps for this remote and beautiful island. Where there are gaps in these broad scale maps, or additional information is needed to meet stakeholder priorities, fine scale habitat maps will be developed with the aid of very high resolution satellite imagery and imagery captured by drones.

South Georgia is home to globally important populations of marine birds and mammals, and their breeding habitat extends around its coastline. The habitat models (computer software 'trained' to identify and classify habitats from imagery, either from satellites or drones) and maps produced by this project will provide an important baseline for use in conservation planning, decision making and monitoring by GSGSSI and other stakeholders.

In November and December 2017, with the support of GSGSSI, project researchers worked alongside a rat-monitoring expedition team based aboard *Pharos SG*. They landed on some of the least visited beaches on the island. Watched by penguins, fur seals and elephant seals, they worked in sun, rain and snow, collecting vital information on a range of remarkable and diverse habitats. These data will help validate the habitat models created for South Georgia. A return research expedition is being planned for February 2019.

The project is truly an international collaboration. Together SAERI, Oregon State University, the UK Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Shallow Marine Surveys Group, Falkland Islands Government and GSGSSI represent the leading edge in remote sensing, ecological knowledge and field expertise.

If you have information that can help us with this research, have views about priority areas/habitats that should be a focus for fine scale mapping or would just like to know more, please get in touch with the project manager, Neil Golding ([ProjectManager.CM@env.institute.ac.fk](mailto:ProjectManager.CM@env.institute.ac.fk)).



*Overlooking Gold Harbour, with Pharos SG awaiting the return of the field team.*

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*The recent issue of fur seal-themed stamps.*

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Contributions should be submitted, at least one month before publication, to the editor:

Robert Burton, 63 Common Lane, Hemingford Abbots, Huntingdon PE28 9AW. Email: [rwburton@ntlworld.com](mailto:rwburton@ntlworld.com)