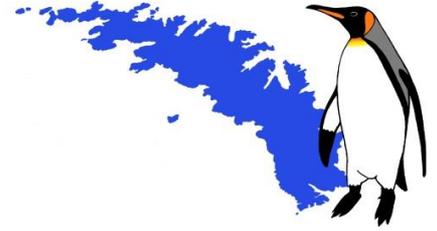


# South Georgia Association Newsletter

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*Large tabular icebergs seen north of Bird Island during scientific research from MV Pharos (Photo: K. Wells)*

In this issue: Antarctic Pioneer Capt. C.A. Larsen; The *Quest* and South Georgia; Reginald James Polar Medal donation; Shackleton memorial stone, Westminster Abbey; South Georgia Cemeteries; Science projects 2023-24; Place names at Salisbury Plain and Bay of Isles; South Georgia Heritage Trust news; South Georgia Government news; SG Association news, and Bill Block obituary.



*S. Georgia and Antarctic Pioneer  
Capt. Carl Anton Larsen (p.2)*



*The Quest and South Georgia (p.4)*



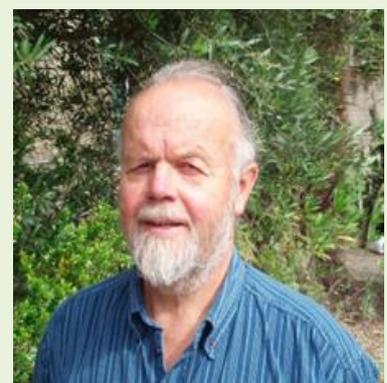
*Reginald James Polar Medal donation (p.7)*



*Shackleton memorial stone,  
Westminster Abbey (p.8)*



*2023-24 Scientific research projects  
(p.10-13)*



*Bill Block obituary (p.20)*

## **The South Georgia Association and Friends of Scott Polar Research Institute Meeting 20<sup>th</sup> July 2024**

We will hold a joint all-day event with the Friends of SPRI at the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> July. The programme will include a short South Georgia Association AGM, distinguished speakers, presentation of recent medals and Dinner at Jesus College, Cambridge. The cost for the day will be £120. (See p.18).

## South Georgia and Antarctic pioneer Captain Carl Anton (CA) Larsen (1860-1924)

Eva Marie Widmark

*2024 marks the centenary of the death of Captain Carl Anton Larsen - Norwegian whaler and Antarctic explorer. This article tells Larsen's story from the perspective of his great-granddaughter. Eva Marie's grandmother Nora was Larsen's daughter and spent part of her childhood living on South Georgia at Grytviken.*

Captain CA Larsen, founder of Grytviken, was born on 7 August 1860 in Østre-Halsen, Norway, and was the son of a Norwegian sea captain. The father passed on the love for the sea to his son who at the age of 21 earned his master's certificate. He became a pioneer of modern whaling in the Southern Ocean and a pioneer explorer from the Heroic Age.

The young Larsen started with bottlenose whaling in the Arctic, and soon got a reputation as a very capable captain. As the number of whales were declining in the Northern oceans, he looked for new areas and commanded the *Jason* expeditions 1892-93 and 1893-94 to the Antarctic to search for the Right whale. Larsen managed to reach 68°10'S on the western coast of the Weddell Sea (not exceeded until 1936) and he was known for his skilfulness of playing snooker with the ice floes. His curiosity and eagerness to discover also made Larsen the first person to use skis in the Antarctic.

He had a genuine interest in natural science but his modest background destined him for the sea and not for scientific studies. Instead, he promoted science when he could. Larsen's ability to combine his skills with his interests made him one of the most significant explorers of Antarctic waters by contributing important geographical mapping, oceanography, and scientific discoveries.

He found the first major fossil beds in Antarctica on Seymour Island and presented specimens of petrified wood to the Royal Geographical Society in London in 1895, contributing to sparking the Heroic Age. He received the Society's Back Award for 'applied or scientific geographical studies which make an outstanding contribution to the development of national and international public policy'. Roald Amundsen stated in his book "*The South Pole*": "It is not too much said about CA Larsen, that of all the catchers, who have visited the Antarctic regions, he is definitely the one who has brought home the most and best scientific results".

Dr. Otto Nordenskjöld wanted Larsen's well known navigation skills and asked him to command *Antarctic* (earlier owned by Sven Foyn and Alfred Nathorst) during the scientific Swedish Antarctic Expedition (SwAE) 1901-03, which explored the north-east part of the Antarctic Peninsula and northern Weddell Sea. It became one of the most remarkable and heroic expeditions and an epic of polar survival.

Nordenskjöld's team of 6 men stayed behind in January 1902 in a hut on Snow Hill Island to winter and carry out scientific work. When they were supposed to be picked up in late October 1902 the ice conditions were difficult. Larsen had to set ashore Johan Andersson, Samuel Duse and Toralf Grunden at Hope Bay to sledge to Snow Hill Island, while the ship once more tried to reach Nordenskjöld. The three men were stopped by open water had to return to Hope Bay. They built a tiny stone hut and killed penguins to survive the winter.



KAPTEIN C. A. LARSEN

*Captain Carl Anton Larsen.*

*Frontispiece, Risting, S.1929. Kapitein C. A. Larsen. Kristania: J. W. Cappelens Forlag.*

*(Photo: Larsen family collection, courtesy Eva-Marie Widmark)*



*Larsen with sextant. He was well-known for his navigational skills.*

*(Photo: Larsen family collection, courtesy Eva-Marie Widmark)*

The Nordenskjöld group became worried by not being relieved as planned and prepared for another winter. From 10<sup>th</sup> January the ship *Antarctic* was beset and increasingly damaged by the ice. Larsen tried to reach Paulet Island, which he knew of from his *Jason* expedition in 1894, but *Antarctic* sank on 12<sup>th</sup> February.

Now three separate parties were unaware of each other's situation and had to survive a winter without communication. Larsen with a crew of 21 managed to gather necessary equipment into lifeboats on an ice floe. After extreme difficulties crossing ice floes for 16 days, they succeeded in reaching, with three loaded boats, Paulet Island on 28<sup>th</sup> February. They built a 5 x 6 m stone hut roofed with sail canvas. It was late in the season and, for food and fuel, they had to kill some seals and 1,600 penguins before the animals left the area.

On 31<sup>st</sup> October after eight months Larsen felt that they had to make a new attempt to reach the others. Together with five crew members he rowed in icy waters to Hope Bay to find a note on 4<sup>th</sup> November that the three men had left on 28<sup>th</sup> September trying a second time to reach Snow Hill, which they did on 16<sup>th</sup> October. Larsen and his men continued to row and manoeuvre during terrible weather conditions through ice floes and broken ice. After securing the boat on the ice and a walk of 16 nautical miles [30 km], they reached Snow Hill Island at 9.30pm on 8<sup>th</sup> November 1903.

The Argentine *Corbeta Uruguay* had arrived the same morning to rescue the Nordenskjöld group and were preparing to leave immediately to look for Larsen and his crew. This was historical timing for a rescue and now *Uruguay* could fetch the crew at Paulet Island! On the way home they met a terrible storm in Bransfield Strait with three masts broken but still half attached. The Argentinian commander asked Larsen for advice, he said: give me an hour with three of my own crew and axes. When they had cut away as much as they dared of the masts, everybody had to go below deck. Larsen remained alone on the bridge and sheered the ship off, so everything on deck was emptied into the ocean. Rescued again!

This information became useful for Shackleton, when his *Endurance* went down 1916, not far from where *Antarctic* was lost. Larsen's Pesca people in Buenos Aires offered to rescue the Shackleton group at Elephant Island for free, but Shackleton turned down the offer.

### Larsen and whaling

In 1904 Larsen founded a whaling station in Grytviken, the first at South Georgia, and Compañía Argentina de Pesca, which opened up the whole of the Antarctic to industrial exploitation of whales. Whaling became an important aspect of Norway's economy and had profound effects on South Georgia and the surrounding ocean.

He realised early that whaling quotas were needed for the sustainability of the whaling industry but was out manoeuvred by capitalistic forces.

He introduced a special currency for the crew to encourage savings and in 1908 he initiated a foundation for widows and families of disabled whalers.

In 1911 he introduced 10 reindeer from Norway to South Georgia for meat variety for the crew. They thrived, and much later became a threat to the indigenous flora and fauna. In 2017 the last of 6,750 reindeer were culled.

In 1913 he financed the main part of the world's most southern Lutheran church at Grytviken, including paying the priests' salaries. The church is now in regular use by visitors to the island.

Larsen's family also lived at Grytviken whilst he was manager of the whaling station.



*Whaling at Grytviken, c. 1911. CA Larsen is to the left. (Photo: Larsen family collection, courtesy Eva Marie Widmark, probably taken by E. Binnie)*



*Larsen family snowball fight at Grytviken (Photo: Larsen family collection, courtesy Eva Marie Widmark)*

He wanted, but didn't manage, to buy *Compañía Argentina de Pesca* and left Grytviken as manager in 1914. With a new company in 1923 he was the first to begin pelagic (open ocean) whaling in the Ross Sea. His second voyage into the difficult icy Ross Sea became successful, but he died on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 1924 whilst in command of whaling factory ship *Sir James Clark Ross*.

Larsen is commemorated in the place names *Larsen Point* and *Larsen Harbour* on South Georgia; *Mount Larsen* on Thule Island (South Sandwich Islands) and several place names in Antarctica, including *Larsen Ice Shelf* on the Weddell Sea side of the Antarctic Peninsula. He has also been celebrated in stamp issues from both SGSSI and BAT.

**2024 is a year with several significant CA Larsen anniversaries:**

**1894:** Captain CA Larsen returned with scientific discoveries on his 2nd *Jason* expedition in the Weddell Sea.

**1904:** Safe return from the Nordenskjöld expedition 1901-04.

**1904:** Captain CA Larsen established his life in Grytviken with *Compañía Argentina de Pesca*.

**1924:** Died in the Ross Sea on his 2nd prosperous expedition to that area.



*Stamp issues from SGSSI in their 'Ships and Explorers' issue (2015) and BAT as part of their 'Explorers' set (1973).*



**The Quest and South Georgia Jan Chojecki**

In October 1921, RYS *Quest* laboured her way south through the Atlantic. She was heading towards Rio de Janeiro for repairs, blighted by problems that had beset the Shackleton-Rowett Expedition since its departure from Britain the previous month. Shackleton spoke to George Hubert Wilkins, the Australian acting as naturalist and photographer, and Canadian George Vibert Douglas, the geologist, about sending them ahead to South Georgia, to carry out research on the island. Wilkins wrote in his journal "Talk of going to South Georgia and doing work... is rot.....not South Georgia, it has been done so often". A few weeks later, writing to the ornithologist Percy Lowe at the Natural History Museum in London, he was similarly downbeat "... if we do not succeed in breaking new ground on the South and West coast, I am afraid we will not find anything more than the numerous trained observers that have already visited the other districts."

In the event, between them, Wilkins and Douglas spent over 140 days on South Georgia, much of the time carrying out their studies and collecting samples and specimens, most of which made their way back to Britain and into research collections. Wilkins' experiences are particularly well documented in his journals and notebooks.

Over the course of the Shackleton-Rowett Expedition, Wilkins collected almost 350 bird specimens, with a large number being from South Georgia. Over 200 of these birds are still present in the Natural History Museum's collection at Tring, compared to just eight from Shackleton's 1907-09 British Antarctic Expedition on *Nimrod*. These, and *Quest's* other materials, records and data, are regarded as a collection of significant breadth and diversity and they represent part of the key baseline data for modern Antarctic and ocean science.

Furthermore, Wilkins' photographic record and accompanying, largely unpublished, journals form a unique and substantial snapshot of the wildlife and people of South Georgia in the heyday of the whaling industry.

Sent ahead from Rio, Wilkins and Douglas arrived at the whaling station at Prince Olav Harbour, on 8 December 1921. They were met by Captain Lars Anderson and other staff of Lever Brothers' Southern Whaling Company. Over the next few days, they headed to the northern extremities of South Georgia, in a borrowed whaler the *Southern Breeze*,



*The day of Quest's departure from London. Left to right: George Vibert Douglas, Douglas Jeffrey, Frank Wild, Leonard Hussey, George Hubert Wilkins. (Photo: Jan Chojecki archive).*

and made a crossing on foot from Ice Bay (Ice Fjord) to Rosita Harbour. After a few days back at Prince Olav Harbour they transferred to the Christian Salvesen's station at Leith Harbour, meeting Leganger Hansen, sometimes called "the king of South Georgia".

At neighbouring Stromness, they met with Petter Sørle who, in 1916, had received Shackleton, Frank Worsley and Tom Crean after they had crossed the island following their epic journey from Elephant Island in the *James Caird*. On 15 December, they arrived at Grytviken, meeting the magistrate Edward Binnie and the whaling station manager Fridthjof Jacobsen. Of Binnie, Wilkins wrote "Binnie was not at all anxious to help and he told us frankly that he would not go out of his way to help anyone associated with Shackleton whom he did not like." At any rate, a small whaling boat, the *Little Karl*, was put at their disposal by the Norwegians. Douglas took this vessel and transferred to the southern tip of the island where he carried out his geological surveys around the area of Doubtful Bay.

Meanwhile, Wilkins returned to Prince Olav Harbour. He had skills in photography gained as an official war photographer in WWI. On top of his role as the expedition's naturalist, he had taken over the additional role of photographer, to include both still photography and cinefilm, after John Charles Bee Mason had been sent home with acute seasickness. *Quest* was packed with all kinds of photographic equipment. Both Shackleton and the expedition's financier John Quiller Rowett recognised the importance and commercial value of a "popular film" to tell the story to the eager audiences back at home, and indeed all around the world.

It was at this time that Wilkins started making a series of colour photographs using the Lumière "autochrome" process. These beautiful images of the whaling stations, bird nesting grounds, and other South Georgia landscapes are possibly the first, certainly among the earliest, colour images made on South Georgia. The plates are in excellent condition and the pictures will soon be available in various formats.

Wilkins spent most of the last fortnight of December 1921 camped precariously at Elsa Bay (Elsehul) in the north-west of the island. He was, by training, an electrical engineer not a naturalist. Nonetheless, he was a competent amateur ornithologist. Enduring all kinds of weather, he diligently studied and photographed the birdlife and collected numerous samples of birds of at least 23 different species. His commitment can be appreciated from this diary entry, upon encountering an albatross feeding a previous year's juvenile:

"My cameras were a mile and a half away but I thought it better to make an effort to get a picture of them if I could so I ran back as fast as I could and brought the still camera. The movie was far too heavy for me to carry and get back there before it was too dark. I had been quick - 25 minutes for "the going" was hard - but luckily when I returned the old bird was still feeding the "young" one that was just about as big as its parent, that is if it was its parent. There was no means of telling. I got a couple of pictures of the feeding and I hope that they will be ok".

Having apparently overcome his earlier reticence about studying South Georgia nature, Wilkins was particularly excited to observe the then rarely collected Grey-headed Mollymawk (Albatross).



*Sir Ernest Shackleton and John Quiller Rowett, London, 1921 (Photo: Jan Chojecki archive)*



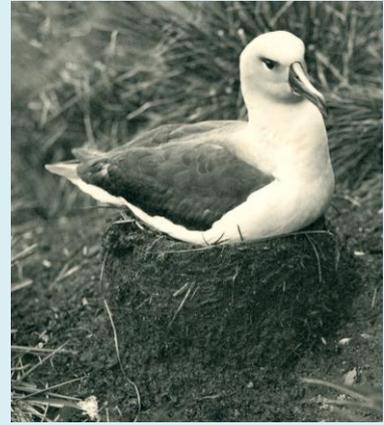
*Autochrome photographs by Wilkins, South Georgia, December 1921 (Photo: Jan Chojecki archive)*



*Wilkins' camp, Elsa Bay, South Georgia (Photo: The Ohio State University, provided by Jan Chojecki)*

He did not seem too perturbed when he met Leganger Hansen and his men out collecting albatross eggs to supply the whaling station with food – reporting over 3,000 eggs collected on a two-day trip. Three thousand was also the approximate number of whales accounted for annually by the South Georgia whaling industry at that time.

With a storm raging on Christmas Eve, Wilkins decided to celebrate early “I had a jolly fine meal, which was quite acceptable in the cold conditions for the storm is still blowing and the wind is lurking round the tent threatening to tear it down any minute”. He roasted a duck, some onions and potatoes and had some tinned peas, followed by some cake that Bostock [the station manager at Prince Olav Harbour] had given him. He also had with him some nuts, dry ginger, a bottle of wine and a bottle of good, old brandy.



*Nesting Grey-headed Mollymawk, S. Georgia, December 1921, Wilkins (Photo: J. Chojecki archive)*

Wilkins continued collecting a host of specimens from across the animal and plant kingdoms before returning to Prince Olav Harbour on 31 December, to bring in 1922 with the men of the whaling station. After preparing a batch of his specimens for shipment to Britain, on 6 January 1922 Wilkins went to Grytviken to meet the recently arrived *Quest* and was stunned to learn that Shackleton had died during the early hours of the previous day.

While Frank Wild, who assumed command, made plans for the expedition to go on, Wilkins continued his studies. On 12 January, he filmed a day’s whaling, noted in his diary as aboard the *Lorka* [*sic*, actually *Orva*], one of the Norwegian whalecatchers – creating an important record of the industry in action at that time.

*Quest* left South Georgia on 18 January 1922, intending to explore the coast of Antarctica’s Enderby Quadrant. Ice fields prevented them reaching far in this destination and instead *Quest* wandered across the Weddell Sea to Elephant Island, and eventually back to South Georgia, arriving on 6 April.

The crew were surprised to learn that in their absence Shackleton’s body had been returned to and buried at Grytviken, at Lady Shackleton’s instructions, instead of being sent to England.

While the ship was serviced following the weeks in the icy ocean, Wilkins and Douglas once again went off investigating. The crew were appreciative of the great hospitality and assistance given to them by the South Georgia people, not least of the first hot baths they had had for months.

On 28 April, Wilkins found time for an excursion with Douglas, under the guidance of Frank Worsley, to examine part of the route taken by Shackleton, Worsley and Tom Crean across South Georgia in 1916.

The men of the *Quest*’s final act before departing South Georgia for the last time was to erect a memorial cairn to Sir Ernest Shackleton at the entrance to Grytviken’s King Edward Cove. *Quest* left Grytviken on 7 May 1922, but returned the following morning to disembark Edward Binnie’s dog, Mickey, found hiding aboard.

*Jan Chojecki’s book of the Quest expedition – The Quest Chronicle - was published in 2022. Jan is the grandson of John Quiller Rowett. More information at [www.questchronicle.org.uk](http://www.questchronicle.org.uk)*



*Shackleton’s 1916 trail revisited, Wilkins, 28 April 1922. Worsley in foreground, Douglas in distance. (Photo: Jan Chojecki archive)*



*Quest’s crew at Shackleton’s memorial cairn, King Edward Cove, South Georgia. 5 May 1922 (Photo: Jan Chojecki archive)*

## Endurance Expedition Polar Medal donated to the South Georgia Museum

Sarah Lurcock

The South Georgia Museum was very pleased to receive a donation of a very significant Polar Medal that was awarded to Reginald James, the *Endurance* expedition physicist who survived the wreck of *Endurance* during the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition 1914-1917. The Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition was led by Sir Ernest Shackleton and is one of the greatest stories of survival against the odds and is strongly linked to the sub-Antarctic island of South Georgia.

*Endurance* became trapped in the ice of the Weddell Sea and eventually broke up and sank, forcing the men of the expedition to take to the ice where they set up camp. James played an important part in saving the expedition members by calculating the drift of the ice floe they were on so they had some idea of their location; information vital for when they were forced by the breaking up of the floe to take to the boats and sail to find land. James was later awarded the silver Polar Medal for his contributions to the expedition. James's Polar Medal has now been donated to the South Georgia Museum by the James family as part of a larger donation of items belonging to Reginald James.

Following the *Endurance* expedition James married and soon after, in 1937, moved to South Africa. There he became Professor of physics at the University of Cape Town; going on to serve as the University's Vice Chancellor. He died in Cape Town in 1964 at the age of 73.

James' sons, Viv and John, decided the South Georgia Museum was the best place to house their father's Polar Medal, but how best to get it safely there? The Captain of *Swan Hellenic's* expedition ship *SH Diana* was able to assist. Captain Kai Ukkonen kindly agreed to act as a courier. The medal was handed to him in Cape Town by Viv James. The ship then sailed to South Georgia where, on 2 December 2023 the medal was safely handed to the South Georgia Museum in a short ceremony in the church at Grytviken in front of the ship's guests.



*Reginald James' Polar Medal*

At the ceremony, SGHT Director for South Georgia Deirdre Mitchell said: "I am delighted to accept Reginald James' medal on behalf of the South Georgia Museum. James played a key role in the *Endurance* Expedition, as shown by the fact that he received a silver Polar Medal – a mark of the esteem in which Shackleton held him.

It feels appropriate that that medal has now come to South Georgia – from where James departed on *Endurance* in 1914, and where his expedition leader, 'The Boss', Sir Ernest Shackleton now rests. We will be hugely proud to display this medal in the South Georgia Museum, and we look forward to sharing James' story with future visitors to South Georgia."

Two other items made up the full donation. Along with the Polar Medal and a smaller dress medal (still in the original Royal Mint envelope), there is a copy of Shackleton's book 'South' with a message to James and a signature in the flyleaf from Shackleton reading: "To Jimmy with all good memories from "The Boss" E.H. Shackleton 1920"; and a typed copy of James' diary from 1914 to July 1915.

This diary includes his account of the time the shipwrecked men spent on Elephant Island and is considered to give the best insight into what conditions were really like for the men left there. It has James' corrections and edits written in pencil in it, and small drawings too, and is described by the South Georgia Museum Curator Jayne Pierce as being "Just gorgeous".



*Expedition leader Scottie Kiefer, Viv James and Capt. Kai Ukkonen (L-R) on the bridge of S.H. Diana.  
(Photo: G. Skorokhod, Swan Hellenic)*

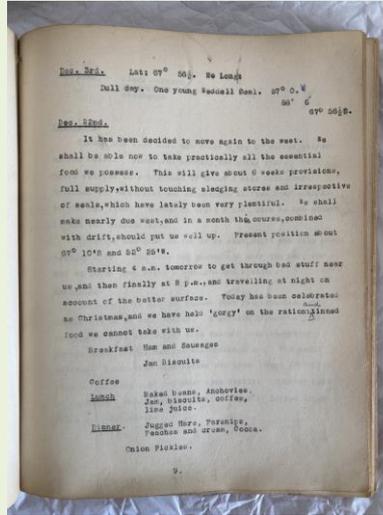
The two books are well used so the Curator is investigating whether they would benefit from some conservation work before they too are carried down to the island.

This is the second very significant donation made to the South Georgia Museum by the James family. They previously donated the *James Caird* almanac – one of the highlights of the Museum Collection.

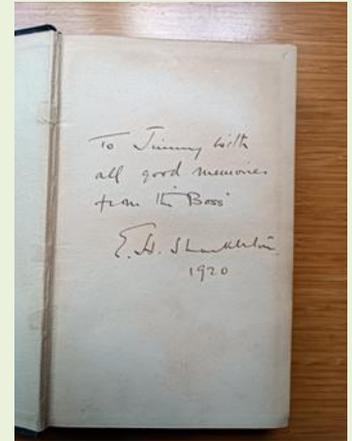
<https://sgmuseum.gs/highlights-7/>

The South Georgia Museum Collection contains many significant objects relating to the Endurance Expedition and Sir Ernest Shackleton. Find out more about Sir Ernest Shackleton, the Endurance Expedition and their links with South Georgia:

<https://sght.org/sir-ernest-shackleton/>



*Part of the typed copy of James' diary, 1914 to July 1915.*



*The flyleaf of James' copy of Shackleton's 'South', 1920*

The South Georgia Museum at Grytviken and its collections are owned by the Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands. The museum is managed and operated by the South Georgia Heritage Trust.

Find out more here: <https://sgmuseum.gs/about-us/>

## Shackleton memorial stone, Westminster Abbey

### David Drewry

On a surprisingly warm 15<sup>th</sup> February afternoon the Princess Royal, accompanied by her husband, Admiral Timothy Lawrence, attended the ceremony to unveil the memorial stone in the South Cloister of Westminster Abbey to commemorate the life and deeds of Sir Ernest Shackleton CVO OBE.

The idea to have a plaque installed and for Shackleton to be thus recognised amongst the panoply of Britain's famous explorers – James Cook, Francis Drake, Francis Chichester and Astronomer Edmond Halley, was the brainchild of Tim Winter RN and supported principally by the James Caird Society. Alexandra Shackleton was intimately involved in this initiative throughout the several years it required to obtain the necessary agreement of the Abbey and permissions.

At an early stage the SGA was invited to give its support and responded readily and positively with a donation of £1500 towards the production of the Memorial Stone. This was crafted by Mr Will Davies who incorporated Connemara marble and Kilkenny limestone to reflect Shackleton's Irish heritage (he was born in Kilkea, Co. Kildare, on February 15, 1874). The stone is also inscribed with the names of Shackleton's expedition ships and his family motto, "*fortitudine vincimus*" – by endurance we conquer.



*Memorial plaque (Photo: Courtesy of Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey)*

The Dedication Ceremony commenced at 5pm in the Abbey with attendance by the Lord Mayor of London and HRH The Princess Royal and her husband. A number of invited guests, representing the family and a wide range of Shackleton interests, were present some having travelled from Ireland and parts of mainland Europe. David Tatham and David Drewry attended on behalf of SGA and Bob Headland was also there in a different capacity.

Following the immaculately conducted Evensong, with singing of extraordinary purity by the choir, that filled the massive Abbey with otherworldly sound, invited guests made their way to the South Cloister. Here the group gathered around the plaque covered by the Abbey flag. There were several short readings and tributes to Shackleton led by the Dean of Westminster, the Very Reverend Dr David Hoyle KCVO, including one read by Alexandra Shackleton. Thereafter the Princess Royal stepped forward to unveil the memorial plaque.

After a suitable time admiring this new addition to the Abbey, the guests made their way to the Jerusalem Chamber where at a Reception the HRH was introduced and spoke with them.

Alexandra Shackleton concluded this element of the Abbey ceremonies with a few words. Later that evening there was a further and convivial gathering of the guests from the Abbey, joined by other supporters, at the Royal Overseas League. It concluded what had been a most memorable and uplifting “polar” occasion.



*Alexandra Shackleton reading prior to the unveiling. The Princess Royal is in the foreground. (Photo: D. Drenry)*

## South Georgia Cemeteries

### Sarah Lurcock

*South Georgia's Cemeteries* is a website dedicated to documenting all the known grave sites on South Georgia. Each grave has information and a photograph. The website was started twenty years ago as a personal project of SGA member Patrick (Pat) Lurcock. Pat wanted to secure the website's future and so the South Georgia Heritage Trust has agreed to host it on the South Georgia Museum website, though Pat will continue to update it.

South Georgia has several cemeteries. All the main whaling stations had one, and there are two at Leith Harbour. There are also other known graves around the island.



*Husvik Cemetery (Photo: P. Lurcock)*

As well as documenting the graves there is information about those known to have been lost at sea off the island and also of ashes interred or scattered there and of maintenance to the cemeteries. In total, there are 301 names, comprising 245 graves of people who died on SG, another 40 lost at sea, with a further 10 scattering of ashes and 6 memorials for people associated with South Georgia who died elsewhere.

The website is dedicated to the families of those buried on the island. Being such a remote place, it is hard for relatives to visit graves in person, so at least they can see the grave online. Family members have also sometimes sent information about their relatives to be added to the entry.

The website was recently moved to the new web-address which is: [www.cems.sgmuseum.gs](http://www.cems.sgmuseum.gs)

## South Georgia scientific research 2023-24

*The following pages highlight some of the scientific research carried out on and around South Georgia during the 2023-24 austral summer.*

### 1) April Western Core Box Survey, Katie Wells and Carrie Gunn, British Antarctic Survey

In April 2024, we were delighted to join the MV *Pharos* SG to carry out the Western Core Box (WCB) survey. The WCB acoustic survey has been undertaken since 1995, contributing to long term monitoring of krill biomass in the region. It is made up of eight semi-randomly spaced transects orientated north-south, lying just north of Bird Island, South Georgia. For this rotation, our primary aim was to complete six of the 40 n.m. [75 km] transects at a speed of ten knots [18 km/h] during daylight hours, whilst maintaining a continuous presence observing for marine mammals on the bridge.



*MV Pharos SG off King Edward Point, Grytviken in the background (Photo: K. Wells)*

The *Pharos* SG is fitted with a Simrad EK80 split-beam echosounder, with 38 and 120 kHz transducers, which allows acoustic data to be collected continuously on its transits between the Falkland Islands and South Georgia, as well as during our routine surveys of core boxes and Cumberland Bay.

A conductivity temperature depth profiler (CTD) was deployed before the start, *en route* between (off-shelf) and at the end of daytime transects. These CTD profiles are used to derive estimates of temperature, salinity and hence sound speed and absorption co-efficient which compound the acoustic data gathered.

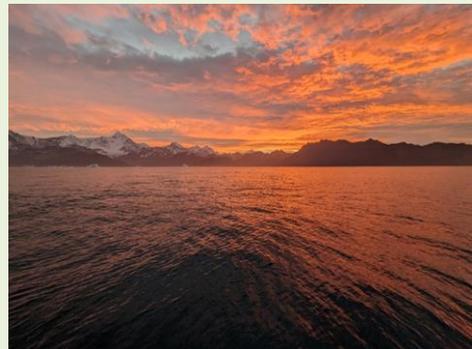
Each pair of transects took around nine hours (four hours per transect plus steaming between the two). This time frame allowed us to finish each day with a target trawl for zooplankton, having identified potential krill swarms from the EK80 acoustic feedback.

In total seven trawls were conducted after sunset at the near shore end of the transects, and in Cumberland Bay, with a modest catch of 114 krill. These trawls allow us to gain an understanding of the zooplankton community, and to estimate krill length frequencies from which total krill biomass can be calculated.

*We are hugely grateful to the crew of the MV Pharos SG. From Captain and officers through to deck crew, catering staff and engineers, all were enthusiastic, interested, and keen to support the science being undertaken. Their support has been integral to the success of this survey and those previous.*



*Deploying the CTD (Photo: K. Wells)*



*Sunset on return to Cumberland Bay (Photo: K. Wells)*

## 2) Surveying South Georgia's Wanderers

Sally Poncet

South Georgia's entire wandering albatross population was censused this past austral summer, the fourth such survey since the yacht *Totorore* carried out a winter count of chicks in 1984. Summer surveys of breeding pairs started in 2004 when GSGSSI commissioned a census of all black-browed, grey-headed and wandering albatross colonies, with researchers working from the yacht *SV Ada II*. Wanderers were censused again in 2015 from *MV Hans Hansson*. *SV Vinson of Antarctica* was the survey platform in 2024. The yacht was crewed by Justino Borreguero (skipper), Tor Bovim, Skip Novak, Jennifer Coombs and local pilot Dion Poncet; the survey team consisted of Jen Black, Andy Black, Sally Poncet (Antarctic Research Trust), (Ken Passfield (Antarctic Research Trust) and Kelvin Floyd. Wanderer counts took place between 16<sup>th</sup> January and 12<sup>th</sup> February 2024. Other work carried out during the charter included assessments of HPAI (bird flu) and vegetation surveys. Charter costs were shared jointly by the GSGSSI and project partner, the Antarctic Research Trust; funding was also received from the South Georgia Heritage Trust, UK Blue Belt and Darwin initiative.

South Georgia is home to the third largest breeding population of wandering albatross in the world. The species is red-listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as Vulnerable and is one of the 30 species listed under the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatross and Petrels (ACAP). As part of its commitment to ACAP, GSGSSI carries out an island-wide census of wanderers every 10 years.

With wanderers nesting at widely scattered sites around South Georgia, and weather and ice conditions causing occasional delays, it took 14 days to cover 33 of the 34 known breeding sites. We landed at nearly all of the south coast sites including Annenkov Island and islands and headlands in the remote Diaz Cove area, rarely visited areas in spectacular landscapes, backed by the ice-covered summits of the island's mountain chain, and this year dotted with icebergs.

Bird Island hosts the largest wanderer population at South Georgia; counts here are done by British Antarctic Survey (BAS) personnel every year. This year there were an estimated 696 pairs after accounting for egg loss (eggs are laid in December, so a small number of nests will have failed before the census date).

At the other 33 sites, we counted a total of 567 breeding pairs – this figure will be corrected to allow for egg loss using a correction factor derived from the previous 5 years' average for the Wanderer Ridge study colony on Bird Island. Signs of bird flu (HPAI) were detected in wanderers at 5 of the 34 known breeding sites, with by far the most being at Bird Island.

Surveying often involved landing the team on exposed rocky coastlines, sometimes with the yacht close inshore having to manoeuvre amongst ice. Once ashore, the focus was on finding wanderers, using GPS positions of nests and field sketch maps from the 2004 and 2015 surveys. Wandering albatrosses that fail in incubation will usually breed the following season, whereas pairs that breed successfully return to the same nest area every two years, and any newly established pairs usually nest in the vicinity, mostly on gently sloping open ground away from tall dense tussac. Nonetheless, our search effort at some locations such as Annenkov Island did involve some arduous hikes through tussac and up and over steep ridges and valleys, taking in some of South Georgia's most spectacular scenery.



*Displaying wanderers on Annenkov Island. SV Vinson of Antarctica in the background. (Photo: Skip Novak)*



*SV Vinson of Antarctica amongst the ice in Queen Maud Bay (Photo: Kelvin Floyd)*

Data collection was very simple in comparison: the position of each bird (both displaying and breeding) was recorded along with several environmental variables using a mobile phone app developed by Kelvin Floyd.

We were able to land at 26 of the 33 breeding locations; swell or ice conditions prevented landings at the others. However, counts for these sites were obtained from distant vantage points through binoculars or from the boat or from drone imagery.

Looking at the field counts, we find that the total number of breeding pairs across all locations except Bird Island increased by 10% between 2015 and 2024. Bird Island's continues to decline, from 723 pairs in 2015 to 696 in 2024.



*Ken Passfield recording albatross locations with the mobile phone app on Annenkov Island. (Photo: Skip Novak)*

The reasons for this are unclear, but the most likely explanation based on recent tracking work is that this population has a greater overlap with demersal and pelagic longline fishing effort off South America, and so experiences higher bycatch rates. Another possibility is reduced recruitment of young birds into the Bird Island breeding population, perhaps due to disturbance by fur seals (already known to cause shifts in nest distribution at Bird Island); or disturbance by people (Bird Island has a year-round human presence, the other sites have none). The future of the South Georgia wanderer population is uncertain, especially now that they have HPAI to contend with in addition to the perils of poorly-regulated high seas fisheries, as well as entirely unregulated (illegal) fishing which continue to kill birds.

### 3) Update on Darwin Plus ‘Hungry Humpbacks’ research project

**Stephanie Martin**



This summer an international team of researchers worked on the BAS-led research project “*Hungry Humpbacks: Measuring seasonal foraging intensity at South Georgia.*”

Whales are the greatest krill predators at South Georgia (SG), yet their impacts on krill stocks are poorly understood. Recent whale surveys have revealed high summer abundance and extended use of SG waters into winter, which coincides with use by a krill fishery. To better understand how whales impact krill, this project measures how whale foraging intensity varies across the feeding season in SG. This is achieved using drones to measure body conditions and satellite tracking of diving rates to measure season-specific krill consumption.

The summer season was split into two survey efforts based at King Edward Point (KEP). From mid-November 2023 until mid-January, a drone pilot, Nico Lewin, and an assistant, Penny Clarke, surveyed from the cliffs off Sappho Point and used the Maiviken Hut for overnight stays on several occasions. This involved 14 km round trip hikes carrying heavy equipment in challenging weather conditions, and despite equipment failures, they recorded images of one humpback whale out of the four animals they observed.



The six-person boat-based team arrived at KEP in mid-January with five scientists and one dedicated jet boat driver who had overwintered in previous seasons. The two KEP ‘boaties’ greatly supported the team when conducting surveys from Stromness to St. Andrews Bay

*The team comprised:*

*Jen Jackson, Stephanie Martin, Amy Kennedy (University of Washington and NOAA Fisheries, USA), Fredrik Christiansen (Aarhus University, Copenhagen), Nico Lewin (Whale Conservation Institute, Argentina),*

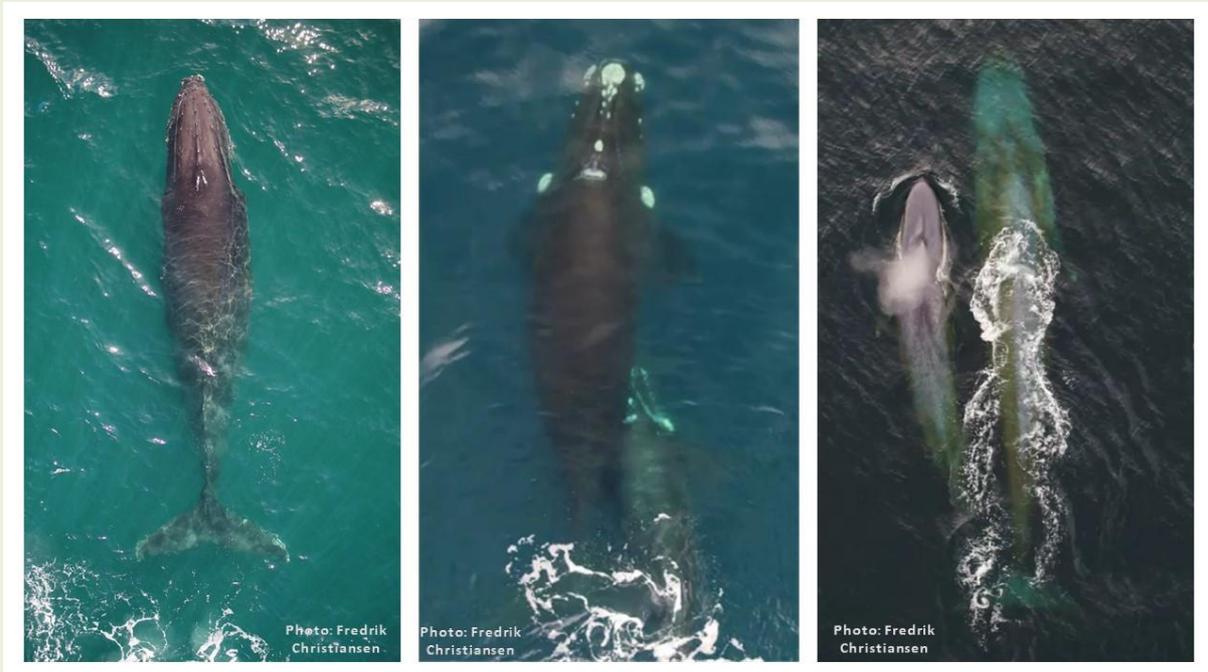
using the station's jet boats and the RIBs (rigid inflatable boats) out to five nautical miles. Most whales were sighted in January and February before the breakup of iceberg D-30A to the north, which brought large tabular icebergs close to shore in the team's survey area.

The team had a very busy season! Over 2,200 km of visual transect data were conducted, and 34 cetacean sightings were recorded during the field season. Drone images and identification photos were collected from humpback whales, southern right whales, Antarctic blue whales, fin whales, and Antarctic killer whales. Biopsy samples for genetic, hormone, and isotope analysis were collected from humpback whales, southern right whales, and an Antarctic blue whale. A particular highlight was 12<sup>th</sup> February, when the team observed a southern right whale mother and calf pair plus an Antarctic blue whale mother and calf pair within two miles of each other!

*Joanna L. Kershaw (University of Aberdeen), Henry Slessor, Penny Clarke, Bob Pratt, A.J. Houston and Louie Day.*



*Nico Lewin carries equipment through the valley between Maiviken Hut and Maiviken Bay. (Photo: Penny Clarke)*



*Drone images of a humpback whale, southern right whale mother and calf, and Antarctic blue whale mother and calf.*

The main focus species for the season was humpback whales, but the swell conditions were too rough to attempt any satellite tagging when humpback whales were in the area. The team successfully tagged a southern right whale (named “Disco” after Discovery House, where the team stayed at KEP) on 9<sup>th</sup> March. The tag continues to transmit, and Disco’s movement can be followed at this website: <https://www.bas.ac.uk/project/south-georgia-right-whale-project/>

Now that the South Georgia fieldwork has finished, the team is back at BAS in Cambridge and busy analysing all the data.

An ambitious season contributed to the overall project aim of obtaining scientific evidence to improve the Government of South Georgia and South Sandwich Island's capability to manage its krill fishery sustainably by incorporating the level of impact that whales, the largest krill predators, have on the fishery.

## Place names at Salisbury Plain and Bay of Isles, South Georgia

Adrian Fox, and Elena Field (UK Antarctic Place-names Committee)

Place names on South Georgia are a fascinating short-hand for the history of exploration, sealing and whaling and science on the island, with the earliest names dating from Cook's first charting of the island in January 1775. This article is the third in a series highlighting the place names of landmarks at the more frequently visited areas of South Georgia.

**Salisbury Plain** is the site of the second-largest king penguin colony on South Georgia, is part of long-term studies of penguin populations on the island and is a popular site for expedition tour ship and other visits. The islands in **Bay of Isles** are important bird breeding sites, including for wandering albatrosses, giant petrels and South Georgia pipits.

**Salisbury Plain** itself was named by the Discovery Investigations (DI) in 1929-30, presumably after the feature in England and emphasising its large, open expanse. Two glaciers lie to its south and are conspicuous from seaward:

**Grace Glacier** is to the west. It was mapped and named after his wife Grace by Robert Cushman Murphy (**Murphy Wall** to the west), an American ornithologist who made collections on SG for the American Museum of Natural History, New York, in 1912-13.

**Lucas Glacier** was roughly mapped by Murphy and named by him after Frederic Lucas, Director of the American Museum of Natural History who suggested Murphy's visit.

Further east, **Morris Glacier** was similarly named by Murphy for Edward Lyman Morris, botanist and Head of the Department of Natural Science, Brooklyn Museum, New York, at that time.

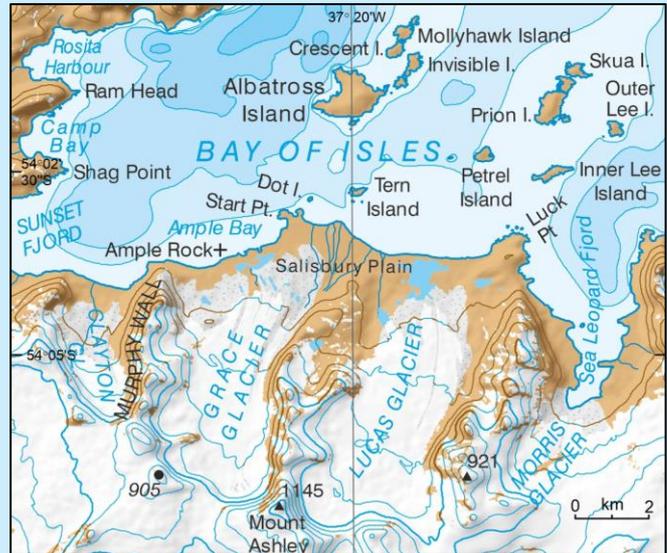
**Ample Bay**, **Ample Rock** (in association), **Dot Island** **Start Point** (the start of Salisbury Plain), **Sea Leopard Fjord** and **Sunset Fjord** were sketched and named descriptively by Murphy in 1912-13.

**Luck Point** at the eastern end of Salisbury Plain was named by the DI in 1929-30.

**Bay of Isles** is one of the oldest toponyms on SG, discovered and named descriptively by Cook on 17 January 1775. Murphy, an ornithologist, charted several of the islands in the bay in 1912-13, and named **Albatross Island** and **Prion Island** after the birds found there.

The DI later recharted the islands in 1929-30 and further developed the avian naming theme with **Mollyhawk**, **Petrel**, **Skua** and **Tern** islands. Murphy applied the descriptive names **Inner Lee** and **Outer Lee** islands and the DI later applied the descriptive names **Crescent Island** and **Invisible Island**.

The Antarctic Place-names Committee advises the Commissioner of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands on matters relating to place-naming on South Georgia, and if appropriate, endorsement of place names rests with the Commissioner. More information about South Georgia place names and an online gazetteer and web-map can be found at: <https://apc.antarctica.ac.uk/>



Based on an extract from British Antarctic Survey, 2021. *South Georgia and The Shackleton Crossing*, 1:200 000 and 1:40 000 scale, BAS (Misc 12).



King penguins at Salisbury Plain. The rookery is the second largest on South Georgia, with about 75,000 pairs. (Photo: A. Fox)

## South Georgia Heritage Trust - news from South Georgia

The 2023-24 season has continued to be a very busy one on South Georgia at both the museum and beyond. The museum has welcomed record numbers of visitors once again, with visitors for the season expected to reach 15,000 for the first time ever! Opening the museum and delivering tours has kept the team very busy but, in between ship visits, they have been able to undertake several exciting projects.

December saw the SGHT team tackle a major object store move, relocating collection items from a store above the post office into the main museum itself. Making use of a ship-free time window at the start of the month, the team moved over 200 objects (including skis, an armchair and a cross-former!) into their new stores in the museum building.

Throughout the season, the team continued with a series of display updates – installing new interpretation panels throughout the museum and completely re-painting the Larsen Room. New interpretation panels have been very well received by visitors and we look forward to continuing this project next season as well.

### Collections care and management

The museum also received a hugely important new acquisition in December, in the form of Reginald James' Polar Medal. James was the Physicist on Shackleton's *Endurance* expedition and played a crucial role in calculating the ship's drift in the ice. Kindly donated by James' sons, the medal was carefully couriered to the island from Cape Town by *SH Diana* and handed over in a small ceremony in the Whaler's Church in Grytviken. It is now on display in the museum's Fullerton Room, where it has been greatly admired by this season's visitors. (*See the full report on p. 7*).

From new arrivals to recent departures, the end of the season saw the Hope Point Cross begin its long journey north. This will eventually culminate with the cross going on display in new galleries being designed by Dundee Heritage Trust.

Beyond the museum, the island has faced some challenges this season – particularly in the form of the arrival of HPAI (Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza). This was not unexpected but was nevertheless a sad development which had implications for the island's wildlife and tourism industry. At some sites around the island, large scale mortalities of both fur and elephant seals were recorded, while above average mortality was observed in skuas. The arrival of bird flu prompted the enactment of GSGSSI's tiered response, which saw access to some areas of the island restricted, either temporarily or for the rest of the season.

Visiting ships adapted to the new situation (for example, offering zodiac outings and ship cruises where landings weren't possible) and, as a result, the tourism season on the island was able to continue with only a handful of cancelled visits. (*See GSGSSI news below*).



*Captain Kai Ukkonen hands the medal to SGHT Director Deirdre Mitchell, in Grytviken church*



*The Hope Point Cross*

*(Photo: Jayne Pierce, SG Museum website)*

This austral summer King Edward Point has been hosting scientists, including from the British Antarctic Survey's 'Hungry Humpbacks' project. They have spent several months surveying whales around the island with the aim of increasing understanding of krill levels around South Georgia. (*See the full report on p.12*).

During their work, the 'Hungry Humpbacks' team have faced an unexpected challenge in the huge numbers of icebergs which have been present all around the island this year. (*See the photo from Katie Wells on p.1*). These vast tabular bergs will have broken off an iceshelf in Antarctica, before gradually drifting north to reach South Georgia. Several individuals that have been coming to the island for decades have commented on how unusual this proliferation is.

*Deirdre Mitchell, South Georgia Heritage Trust Director, South Georgia*

**From Andrew Fleming, BAS:** There have been a number of large icebergs passing through this area in the last year which might be the source of any recently seen tabular bergs. Iceberg A76 (which broke from the Ronne Ice Shelf in May 2021) was still going past South Georgia in late 2023. There are a number of other named bergs currently being tracked by the US National Ice Center, including D28 and D30 (icebergs with a 'D' name originate in Antarctica between 90°E - 0°). The current smaller tabular bergs are likely to have resulted from the breakup of any of these larger named bergs as they move into warmer waters north of SG. The current positions of all bergs tracked by the NIC are available on: [www.polarview.aq](http://www.polarview.aq)

## South Georgia Government News

*Compiled by the editor based on a meeting between Laura Sinclair Willis CEO GSGSSI, and the SGA Chairman, Secretary, and newsletter editor, 15<sup>th</sup> March 2024, and material from the GSGSSI website. Thanks to Fran Prince for meeting notes.*

### **Bird Flu (HPAI)**

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) was first detected in the brown skua population on Bird Island, South Georgia in October 2023. Since then, British Antarctic Survey scientists and Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) personnel have undertaken monitoring across the Territory. The teams have been closely supported by the UK Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) via testing at their laboratories in Weybridge, UK.

HPAI has now been confirmed from 23 sites across South Georgia. Species which have historically tested positive for HPAI H5N1 include: brown skua, kelp gull, wandering albatross, elephant seal and Antarctic fur seal. The most recent results from samples taken in early February 2024 have confirmed the presence of the disease in one colony of gentoo penguins and one colony of king penguins on South Georgia. Whilst the virus has been detected at a range of sites and in several species, the effects appear to be localised. GSGSSI will continue to work with partner agencies to monitor the impact of the disease on wildlife in the Territories.

Genomic sequencing surveillance data analysed to-date has confirmed previous assessments that there is no increased risk to human health. The risk of human infection with H5N1 remains very low. Guidance for those visiting the Territory is available in the Biosecurity Handbook. As part of the response to HPAI, some sites on South Georgia are closed to visitors. At other sites, visitors are asked to continue following established biosecurity procedures to decontaminate clothing, footwear and field equipment before and after any landing between regions and sites.

### **Enhancements to Marine Protection in the Southern Ocean**

The Commissioner for South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI) announced on February 26<sup>th</sup> plans to extend the spatial extent of No Take Zones in the SGSSI Marine Protected Area (MPA), increasing their area from 283,000 km<sup>2</sup> to 449,000 km<sup>2</sup>. These additional measures will result in 36% of the SGSSI Maritime Zone being closed to fishing activity. An additional 17,000 km<sup>2</sup> will be closed to krill fishing through the introduction of additional pelagic closed areas.

These enhanced restrictions will supplement existing marine protection measures in SGSSI waters, where tourism and sustainable fisheries are strictly controlled. Current measures already include seasonal closures that limit fishing activity to the winter months in order to reduce potential interactions with breeding seals and seabirds, and the prohibition of bottom trawling across the entire maritime zone.

During the 5 months when highly regulated, licensed fishing is permitted, 40% of the MPA will now be closed to krill fishing, with 95% closed to longline fishing. The greatly enlarged network of No Take Zones prohibits fishing in the most

biodiverse and potentially vulnerable habitats as well as covering regions identified by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) experts as Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs).

This announcement follows the conclusion of the second 5-yearly review, by a panel of independent experts, of the 1.24 million km<sup>2</sup> MPA, which was established in 2012. The panel determined that the MPA is meeting intended objectives as laid out in the Management Plan and noted the very high level of compliance with protection measures.

### **Cruise Ship activities**

A successful season with similar numbers of visitors to last year, though a slight drop because of fewer vessels due to cancellations because of bird flu. There were 110-120 vessels. A new operator Viking Cruises visited for the first time. Operators were well informed in advance by Jen Black and the visitor team of any issues, particularly with regard to restrictions on landings. At some sites more zodiac cruises were provided, actually giving guests a better (and closer) view of penguin colonies than shore visits.

### **South Georgia Heritage Trust and museum**

SGHT have funding for a new exhibit in the Grytviken Museum next year. This is from Darwin Plus Local, a new funding scheme of smaller amounts (and less admin) for in-territory groups. The shop will be converted into an exhibit on whales, giving a modern look on their present state and recovery from whaling. This will assist the SG Government funding stream, important in case of difficulties with the fishery. A South Georgia tartan has been registered, and plans for weaving are in progress.

The Milestone Success Criteria have a new target in a Strategy for Tourism and Visitors by the end of next year. Work is underway on this, to put in writing the aims and limits that should be expected for SG tourism and so inform the Tourism revenue source.

### **Legislation**

There is now a dedicated South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands Laws website: <https://laws.gov.gs/> describing the periods of history of law making. Some law updates include:

New Currency Ordinance – stamps and coins, (with increase in value);

Minor amendments to Marriage Laws on South Georgia;

Draft Biosecurity Legislation, with end of 2024 as target;

New Immigration Legislation, this includes visitors having to apply to visit in advance

Intention to revisit Statute Reform Ordinance to weed out unnecessary wording.

### **CCAMLR**

The Russian delegation had difficulty getting visas for Australia so arrived late at the CCAMLR meetings this year. They would not agree to any decisions they had missed. As a result, there is no agreed catch limit to sub area 48.3 (SG), but 48.3 is open for toothfish fishery under domestic measures. The operators are content with this arrangement and licences will be issued for one year plus one rollover year. Most of the catch is going to the Far East and Singapore. None is going to the US. Florida has a court case ongoing with Southern Cross Seafoods vs NOA of US, so the US is blocking imports. Only UK flagged ships are applying for licences. The fishery is operating, but not as securely as the SG Government would like.

The krill fishery is also operating well, with nine vessels coming this season, including modern Norwegian trawlers. The fishery is Marine Stewardship certified. Accidental by-catch is very rare.

### **M.V. *Pharos SG***

*Pharos SG* ownership has been transferred from the current operator Byron Marine to Workboat Services (FI) and with the same crew. This will be until April 2028, when M.V. *Pharos SG* will be replaced with a new ship. Talks are underway with BAS for collaboration on a potential ship to also service BAS island bases.

### **New Staff**

Mairi Macleod has taken over from Steve Winn as Director of Operations. Mairi has worked with SGHT on the habitat restoration project, with tourist operators ALE and White Desert, and has previously been KEP Station Leader.

## South Georgia Association News

### All-day event with Friends of SPRI, incorporating the 2024 Annual General Meeting, 20 July 2024

We will hold a joint all-day event with the Friends of SPRI at the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge on Saturday 20 July 2024. The programme will include a short South Georgia Association AGM, distinguished speakers, presentation of recent medals and Dinner at Jesus College, Cambridge. The cost for the day will be £120.

#### Speakers for the day include:

*Julian Dowdeswell:* Ice and Environmental Change.

*Eva Marie Widmark:* Carl Anton Larsen (1860-1924), a Pioneer from the Heroic Age.

*Andy Beharrell:* Sailing a 100 year-old herring drifter below 50 degrees south – demanding and enchanting in equal measure.

*John Dudeney, Paul Rodhouse and Mark Belchier:* 120 years of management and mismanagement of Antarctic marine living resources.

*David Drewry:* The land beneath the ice.

Refreshments will be provided throughout the day including lunch.

The Dinner will start at 7.00 with pre-dinner drinks in the College gardens (weather permitting!) followed by dinner in the Upper Hall.

Further details and information on discounted accommodation at Jesus College are available on the South Georgia Association website. Booking details have been sent to Members and will be published on the SGA website.

#### Morag Husband Campbell Medal 2024

The South Georgia Association is delighted to announce the award of the Morag Husband Campbell medal for 2024 to **Ian Hart**, in recognition of his “outstanding and sustained support for the history, heritage and knowledge of South Georgia”.

**The Medal** has been made possible by a generous bequest from a long-standing supporter of the Association, Miss Morag Husband Campbell. She was so enthralled when visiting South Georgia, she determined to leave a bequest to the SGA. The Medal comprises a Sterling silver relief medallion, 60 mm in diameter. The name of the awardee, with year of the award, is inscribed on the reverse.

**The 2024 Recipient:** Ian Hart is the leading historian of the Southern whaling industry which played a fundamental part in the history of the settlement of South Georgia and its economy. He assisted Nigel Bonner in establishing the South Georgia Whaling Museum at Grytviken in the early 1990s. Ian Hart undertook the first curatorial work creating a ledger for recording the artefacts and items for the emergent Museum in Grytviken from 1992 to 1995.

He has devoted many years of study in Britain and Norway tracing the development of the whaling industry from its pioneering days to its eventual decline and withdrawal from the island in 1965. In addition to numerous articles, he has written a series of detailed and authoritative works on aspects of South Georgia’s history, and several other books in regard to whaling in and around Antarctica.

Furthermore, he is a contributor of 23 entries to *The Dictionary of Falklands Biography (including South Georgia). From Discovery up to 1981*. [edited by David Tatham].

[Revised on-line with additional contributions to 2021 <https://falklandsbiographies.org>]



*The Morag Husband Campbell medal*



*The Grytviken Museum Team 1993: From the left: Ian Hart, Nigel Bonner, Bob Kluzniak*

The Award will be presented to Ian Hart at a dinner at Jesus College, Cambridge, part of a joint all-day event with the Friends of SPRI at the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge on 20<sup>th</sup> July (see above for full details of this event).

### **South Georgia Association Treasurer role**

The South Georgia Association is seeking someone to join the Committee as Treasurer. For further details and to express interest please contact the Secretary, Fran Prince. This is a voluntary role.

Details of the existing Committee Members are available on the SG Association website.

The role involves 1) Financial control for the Association by: Operation of the Associations' bank account, book-keeping, budgeting and preparation of financial reports to the Committee, and 2) The preparation of annual accounts and liaison with the Society's auditor.

The Treasurer would also be expected to contribute to the Society as a Committee Member – attending Committee meetings twice yearly, the AGM and other events, and being an advocate for the Society.

### **South Georgia Association Initiative funding**

The Association has funds available for making small grants towards projects, particularly with thanks to a bequest by SGA founder-member Bob Burton. Applications are welcomed from Members of the Association who wish to initiate or support projects that will stimulate awareness of, and interest in, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands.

Recent awards from the initiative funding scheme have included the following:

#### **2024: Westminster Abbey Shackleton Memorial**

The SGA made a donation in support of the installation of a memorial plaque to Sir Ernest Shackleton in Westminster Abbey (see a full article on p. 8).

#### **2023: Beyond South Georgia – Stage Workshops**

James Burke is being helped with the production of marketing materials to promote the story of Shackleton's incredible journey from Antarctica to South Georgia and the subsequent rescue of his expedition from Elephant Island. The ultimate aim is to bring this story, and the people and the environments in it, to the stage.

Further details on the SGA Initiative funding and for making an application can be found on the website (<https://southgeorgiaassociation.org/>). Applications can be made at any time and awards are normally for a maximum of £1,000 per project.

### **South Georgia Association Committee members in the London marathon**

SG Association Committee members Martin Collins and David Rootes recently ran in the London marathon.

Martin ran dressed as an albatross(!) and was raising money for Falklands Conservation and Maggie's Cancer Care.

David ran for the charity Phab Kids, which provides support for children, young people and adults with a range of disabilities.

*Martin Collins running the remarkable marathon time of 3hr 32 mins dressed as an albatross!*



## William 'Bill' Block (1937-2023)

*Terrestrial ecologist at British Antarctic Survey 1976-1997, working extensively on South Georgia, and later Emeritus Fellow at BAS.*

It is with great sadness to report the passing of William (Bill) Block (BSc, MA, PhD, DSc) on 9th November 2023 after a short illness. Bill was born in 1937 in Lowestoft. He read Zoology at Durham University, graduating in 1960 and gaining his PhD in 1963.

He held a lectureship in Makerere, Uganda, from 1963 to 1967 then moved to the University of Leicester until 1976. In 1971-72 he was awarded leave of absence for seven months and, with a Leverhulme Research Fellowship, was able to accompany Peter Tilbrook, then BAS Head of Terrestrial Zoology, as a visiting scientist to work at Signy Research Station in the South Orkney Islands.

He joined BAS in 1976 as Head of the Zoology Section within the Terrestrial Biology Division, retiring in 1997 but remaining at BAS HQ, first as a Senior Research Scientist then as an Emeritus Fellow until his death.

In retirement he held Honorary Professorships at the University of East Anglia (Norwich), Birmingham University and Abertay University (Dundee). He also had a long involvement with The South Georgia Association and coordinated its Initiative Funding for many years.

Bill's interests and area of expertise were in soil invertebrates, particularly mites and springtails. He had a global reputation as a polar invertebrate ecologist and physiologist (cryobiology), combining his expertise with fellow BAS biologists in wider studies of Antarctic terrestrial ecosystem dynamics. His field research took him to South Georgia, Signy, Rothera, Alexander Island, Victoria Land, and also Alaska and Svalbard in the Arctic and the Swiss Alps, usually working in collaboration with eminent researchers from various countries.

In 1976-77, with Ron Lewis-Smith, Bill established the South Georgia Reference Sites Programme in the Maidalen area near Maiviken where various terrestrial biology studies were concentrated until the Argentine conflict. However, the field hut they erected for the purpose exists to this day! He also undertook research from the Managers' Villa at Husvik in the 1990s.

One of several species of Antarctic arthropods new to science discovered by Bill was named for him – *Mucronothrus blocki* (an oribatid mite). Block Lake near Husvik whaling station on South Georgia was named after him. He was awarded the Polar Medal in 1989 for his contribution to Antarctic Science.

Bill, and his wife May, had a long association with the Cambridge Canoe Club and, in retirement, he took up beekeeping as a hobby and was an active and expert member of the Cambridge Beekeeping Association. For many years he was also an active contributor to courses at the University of the Third Age in Cambridge.

We offer May and her family the Association's deepest condolences.

*Ron Lewis-Smith, 6<sup>th</sup> May 2024.*



*Photo: C. L. Eldon, Reproduced courtesy of the British Antarctic Survey Archives Service.*

*Archives ref AD6/24/1/32/H Copyright UKRI/BAS*

*This photo was taken as part of the British Antarctic Oral History Interviews programme. Bill's fascinating interview is available at: <https://basclub.org/oral-history/index/AD6-24-1-32/>*



*Bill Block in action in the field with a 'pooter' – a device for capturing invertebrates such as mites and springtails, Marguerite Bay 1992-93. (Photo: P. Bucktrout, British Antarctic Survey).*

**Editor's Note:** Thanks to the contributors, notably: Eva Marie Widmark, Jan Chojecki, Pat and Sarah Lurcock, David Drewry, Katie Wells, Sally Poncet, Stephanie Martin, Deirdre Mitchell, Ron Lewis-Smith, Fran Prince and Bob Headland. The South Georgia Association newsletter is produced twice a year, in May and November. Contributions should be submitted, at least one month before publication, to the editor: Adrian Fox ([ajfo@exchange.nerc.ac.uk](mailto:ajfo@exchange.nerc.ac.uk))

