

British Antarctic Survey : Oral History Recording – Signy Memorabilia

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A recording of David Wynn-Williams and Cynan Ellis-Evans in conversation with Alison Martin, Archives Assistant, British Antarctic Survey.

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[tape does not appear to be recording for the first thirty seconds]

Cynan Ellis-Evans: OK, I was, I'm Cynan Ellis-Evans. I was at Signy Island from 1975 through till 1977, as a wintering freshwater microbiologist. In the second winter I was also winter Base Commander.

David Wynn-Williams-Williams : OK, I'm David Wynn-Williams. I went down in 1974, left UK November 7th and arrived at Signy February 3rd 1975. I left in 1977. I was appointed as terrestrial microbiologist, spent two winters, three summers there and then went back in 1980/81 season, 84/85, 87/88 and 1990/91 seasons.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : I've been back several times myself but I can't remember when I went down.[laughter].

OK, Memorabilia, item 1. Pomona was the replacement for Serolis, our original work craft and she came in in 1988 and was used to support the work of the inshore marine group. It's, the group is named after a feature of the landscape on Coronation Island, the very large ice sheet, the Pomona Plateau.

David Wynn-Williams : Mm. And that itself was named after the similar plateau in the Orkney Islands, north Orkneys.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : That's right. And Pete Macko, who's associated with several of these bits of memorabilia was a boatman of considerable note at Signy and also a very considerable shipbuilder himself. He could do all sorts of very fine work as carpenter, and made several of these items.

David Wynn-Williams-Williams : And John Brook was the biological assistant who used it a lot.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : No, John Brook used the Serolis. He didn't use. John Brook was down in my time

David Wynn-Williams-Williams : Oh, sorry, the earlier one, delete that one.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yes, he was on Serolis. Yes. But Pomona was. Pomona and Serolis gave us basically a facility to go rather further than we could with just the inflatables, but neither of them were absolute successes there at Signy because they were both designed for different waters altogether. They had great difficulty coping with the Southern Ocean and

Pomona, particularly, had trouble there with her engines there, which were not really set up for the cold. They didn't like working in cold temperatures at all.

Em, I think that's all I can think of for Pomona. She has, as I say, gone to Stanley. It was decided that it really wasn't in our interest to send her down to Rothera when the inshore marine moved there, eh, because she really doesn't handle, she's not designed for handling ice conditions and so we've gone for large inshore inflatable boats, inshore lifeboat type of boats. Er. She'll have gone to Stanley but we don't know yet who purchased her. But that was the plan, to sell her there.

The Serolis, which is item 2, was the original work craft and actually went in in my first season, in 1975/76 season. The first base, the first boatman using her was a guy called Nick Cox, who now has considerably legendary status within BAS and is the current Base Commander at the Ny-Alesund station, NERC research station on Spitzbergen. He did two winters there and did quite a lot of work with Serolis, er. She initially came down with a very, with an amazing A-frame on the back and she was supposedly going to be doing, basically going to be doing coring work and pulling nets and it turned out that the nets absolutely stopped her in the water, she didn't have enough power to pull them, so that was dropped very quickly, the planckton net work. And the first time we tried to use the corer, we switched on the winch and the winch proceeded to pull the boat underwater. It didn't have the capacity to lift the big Smith-McIntyre grabs that we were using. So she wasn't a great success on that and it has to be said that the way she was, had a cobbled engine in her, taken from a South Georgia boat, and it never worked very efficiently and they ended up having to redistribute weight in the Serolis to make her work, to cope with the fact that they'd taken the A-frame off, which made her very unseaworthy initially. When they put that weight in, she always had this bow-down attitude and this meant she didn't travel very well through most seas. So she was a bit of a disaster for us, we have to say.

But she was used from [19]76 through to [19]88 and there was a lot of affection for her from the various boatmen. In fact, there was a very large number of them actually wanted to purchase her originally. But I gather she eventually went to the Falkland Islands and that's the last I heard, was that she was sold there and didn't, she didn't go to any of the boatmen, who'd been craving her.

David Wynn-Williams : Pete Macko wanted to buy her himself.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Indeed.

David Wynn-Williams : The guy who made the models.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : The chap who made the models. Yes.

David Wynn-Williams : But she was the one who got damaged on the ship

Cynan Ellis-Evans : That's right.

David Wynn-Williams : Broke loose and got a hole in her on the way. I think Pete lost interest then.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : We used to have some amazing fun with her, trying to get her ashore, because she came with this amazing trolley, which took the entire base to get her onto the jib, up onto the slip, and she put holes in the barrow on a couple of occasions, because as she would come in, the wind, or tide, would just move her and she would slam into the supports at the front. And so she, so it was always one of the hairier events, trying to get her ashore or trying to launch her.

David Wynn-Williams : And people used to have to wade in the water at –1, trying to get her on to this darn cradle. Mmm.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yes, the Desmarestia is item 3, came originally from South Georgia. I don't know her history at South Georgia, but she had been there for some little while and she was brought down to Signy and that would have been, as you say, it was 1964-76. I particularly know of her really from about '69 through to '72, that she was, there was a number of stories come out there. Doug Bone, who is now part of BAS Marine Life Sciences, tells of many trips in her there, over to the Coronation, Coronation Island. But there, the most famous trip was apparently one made around, around 1971? I think it was around then, which had Ray Marks.

David Wynn-Williams : It was before I went. Ray Marks was one, so it must have been about 1971, '72

Cynan Ellis-Evans : and Jerry Light, who was then Base Commander, decided they were going to make a visit to the New Zealand, sorry, the Argentinians base at Orcadas, the best part of 40 miles away on Lorry Island and this trip was undertaken successfully. Given that the Desmarestia is just a small clinker-built dinghy and had a couple of very low pass seagull engines as its only motor power.

David Wynn-Williams : And no buoyancy tanks.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : No buoyancy tanks. It was a particularly hairy trip, which they undertook successfully. Unfortunately, having arrived at the Argentinian base and spent a little time talking with them and then duly turned round and come back, the Argentinians then released information to suggest that they had been shipwrecked, in effect, at Orcadas station and had to be rescued by the glorious Argentinian military presence, at Orcadas. This caused considerable outrage amongst the British Antarctic Survey and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the BAS staff had their knuckles wrapped rather soundly, but it has become one of the legendary trips. Suffice to say, no-one has ever done a trip as long as that since.

David Wynn-Williams : I think Sir Vivian Fuchs said, "This must not be repeated" and congratulated them on the trip, though.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : I think so. I saw Des right at the end of her career, as you did there, and really she was only being, she was originally being used to do the job the Serolis and Pomona did, which was basically supporting inshore marine research and it was obvious that she really wasn't up to it for the more detailed work that they wanted to do and more extensive sampling. And so she really, in the end, ended up as a jolly boat and was used on a number of occasions there to just do sailing round the cove there when the other boats were busy.

David Wynn-Williams : A leopard seal tried to climb into her once, I think it was Brian Kellett, and it was a very persistent one and he had to keep hitting it on the head with an oar before it lost interest. So it was very vulnerable, you know, because there are leopard seals there and they're just curious, but they're big.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : In fact, that reminds me of a story with Serolis. That we went out to Serolis and the, in the morning there, and we'd seen something moving around and there'd been a penguin there in the night and so we went out to have a look, myself and Nick Cox. And we just lifted ourselves over the side and looked in and there was this enormous leopard seal, sitting inside.

David Wynn-Williams : Inside it?

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Inside Serolis. And we looked at each other and decided to draw straws on who was going to persuade it to leave [lots of laughter]. In the end, we both chickened out and came back and just looked at it for the best part of a day until it decided to shift, shift itself from there. But it was one of the problems, because she used to. Both Serolis and later Pomono went out on a mooring, which was established in the middle of the er, middle of the, Factory Cove, and we had an outer mooring, which was further out into the Bay itself. And it was still referred to as the Serolis mooring for quite a long time. Whereas, we ran the inflatables off running moorings there, which run off from the shore. And those are still used on a yearly basis. But these, depending on the weather conditions and where the wind was coming from, Serolis or Pomono would be moved to one of these two sites.

Item 4 is "Mwwhh". "Mwwhh" there is named for the sound made not by baby fur seals as they have here, but the Weddell seals. They are some of the world's greatest actors and very, very affectionate characters and they do make this rather lovely noise when they're talking to their Mums. And Nick Cox, referred to earlier, he'd brought in the Serolis. He found this clinkerbuilt boat which had come, again, from South Georgia and had no name on it and we decided that we had to come up with a name and he was into Weddell seals at the time and came up with the idea of "Mwwhh". And that's what we stayed with. And he did her up in our first winter, second winter, is it? Second winter? Did he do it up the winter you were there?

David Wynn-Williams : He started.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Right.

David Wynn-Williams : It was quite a long term process.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yes, it was. Well, finally, he did it. He actually mounted a sail on it. We put the engines there, on the back - seagulls. But we didn't use them. We always used the sail. She didn't sail too well into the wind, it has to be said.

David Wynn-Williams : Wouldn't have a clue.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : She was again used purely for entertainment and on a number of occasions, rather than taking the fast trip across to Mirounga for the boat trips to do the lake work, we would take the more leisurely trip round in Mwwhh and have a lunch there, a picnic

lunch there at Stygian and we would sail round nice and leisurely, takes about three quarters of an hour instead of about five minutes.

David Wynn-Williams : She had no keel so she used to go sideways.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : That's right, yes. But she was never used for anything other than pure entertainment and she, she left Signy some, some years ago, 1980's. I wasn't around at that time but I think she went off to the Falklands, most things end up in the Falklands.

Beedge - I know very little about other than she was sitting there. She had been used along with Desmarestia. They were more or less contemporaries and all I ever saw was the name plaque there because she had gone by the time I got there

David Wynn-Williams : It was '73 because I went there in '74, yes.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yes, she was again the same style as Desmarestia essentially. But, and in fact that might be the one inaccuracy. I would have to check whether it was Beedge or Desmarestia that went to Orcadas.

David Wynn-Williams : I think it had to be the Desmarestia.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : I think it was Des

David Wynn-Williams : because she was the bigger one.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : I'm pretty sure it was the Des. But

David Wynn-Williams : oh, so, so ... the same size. Twelve foot.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : yep. But Mr Bone would be able to answer that one.

No. 6 is Serolis, that's, that's covered above.

No. 7 – Tonsberg House. I think you probably know more about that than I do.

David Wynn-Williams : OK. The whaling company that operated at Signy Island was the Tonsberg Hvalfangeri from Tonsberg in Norway and the Tonsberg House was built on the foundations of the whaling factory, which was there from 1921-23. The whaling factory was never used in anger, very briefly, because it took so long to dig it out after the winter and this was something it's going to be very interesting to see what happens now, it's a summer only station. The whalers abandoned the place because you couldn't dig it out fast enough and so by the time they got it going, it was towards the end of the season.

The building was there from 1921-23. There are photographs of it in the blue photograph album, which you've probably got in Archives. By the time Gordon Robin and Dick Laws were there in '47 all the outer walls had gone and you could see all the boilers and the thing gradually disintegrated and the big cylindrical thing on the foreshore still at Signy, is the steam generator that operated those boilers. There was a dormitory associated with the Tonsberg Company and a lot of the wood that was used for that was also used for building huts, possibly making Tonsberg House as well, although.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Tonsberg came, it was actually built in the '60s, I've seen the pictures and Tonsberg was actually erected in UK. Test-erected, so everything came in. I think the bits may have been used to make the connections.

David Wynn-Williams : Yes, just extras. I've got a collection of photographs, I've got a file of photographs of the building of Tonsberg House, if ever you need to see those, I've got those at home. What's that – Myriam Booth gave it to me many years ago and I've got a lot of Signy archive stuff at home, em, fairly well documented. So if you need further information I could dig that out, but a lot of it needs to go on computer, because when I collected all this lot it was before computers.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Basically, we took the barrel stave and they carved Tonsberg House onto it. That was then put up as a memory of the whaling station, which had been on the same site, but essentially was just to indicate, just a memorabilia there attached to Tonsberg House.

David Wynn-Williams : That's right, and the house itself was built in the sixties, er, a chap called Ron Pinder who lives locally was there, he's worth talking to if you want to follow that one up. Ron Pinder, P-i-n-d-e-r.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : He did many things on Signy.

David Wynn-Williams : That's right. So they used the foundations of the whaling factory as a good solid base and, er, it had a big crest on the side of a couple of elephant seals rearing up. I don't know if you've seen pictures of this, with the motto "sempo in excreta". And if your latin is workable, you'll understand that one. I think it was a gin bottle in the middle, wasn't it?

Cynan Ellis-Evans : The last wintering party at Signy actually adopted that as their crest, which has gone on the rugby shirts.

David Wynn-Williams : That's right. There's an interesting story associated with this, you know. It was a very fine crest, er, but apparently whoever was the senior officer here at headquarters or wherever HQ was, it was in London then, did not like this. It might have been Sir Miles Clifford or someone like that, felt it was inappropriate to have this rather crude emblem alongside the official post office emblem, you know, which had the Royal Crest on and everything. So the Base Commander was ordered to take it down, there was a visit from a Russian ship that season and the, one of the senior men saw this crest sort of lying around, took an immediate fancy to it and was solemnly presented with it as a souvenir, so as far as we know it's in Moscow now [laughter].

Em, The house itself was a wooden house, it had the generator sheds at the seaward end, and then a series of offices and a met shack with a bunk in it.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : That's right. The two generators were called Snoopy and the Red Baron.

David Wynn-Williams : That's right.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : and they were taken out the season I went in, '75-76 season.

David Wynn-Williams : Yes, we had to take those out. I've got photographs of the furs coming out.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : and we then replaced them with the three Rolls Royce generators.

David Wynn-Williams : Yes, so the plaque refers to the original Tonsberg House.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yes, that's right. Which in fact, curious there, was so well made that despite being hacked around by generations of Fids, it was still assessed by the surveyors as the best, best maintained building and it was in best condition on the whole of the Signy site. It says something for the quality of its build.

David Wynn-Williams : Incidentally, dating from the whaling factory days, the emergency hut which is there at Signy at the moment was actually built by the whalers and that is the original Signy building, if you like, dating from the original factory which was the foundation of this house.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : We now use that as our emergency hut, and it again is a beautifully maintained building, so they built well in those days.

David Wynn-Williams : And the hinges and the hasps and everything are obviously home-made by the blacksmith at the whaling station.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yep. These other items are a bit, are rather smaller-scale items. They refer to, they more referred to individuals than being much long in tradition. The Signy Gaff there was basically presented to people there who were in the marine group. There were several people at that time, who used to regularly make mistakes like dropping pieces of equipment over the side of the boat just as we were about to start and so this joke started up of having a model boat hook there, which, and it was put up and initially each year somebody's name was put alongside it, but it didn't actually go on for too far.

David Wynn-Williams : Didn't Dave Walton get presented with it because of the Markov?.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yes, I believe he was. Yes, yes, the Markov.

David Wynn-Williams : Do you want that story now? Were you on base at the time?

Cynan Ellis-Evans : We can do that later on. I was too, I was part of that scam.

The Signy scabbard there, again, is just something that. There was. Some people constantly lost their knives there when they went diving there. They always seemed to be catching them on things and loosing them. And so it was decided that they would give this empty scabbard to people there to commemorate that, their clumsiness basically. But the significance there is the, that at one point in time, around the time we were there the, there'd been. This whaling vessel many years before had gone over onto the west coast of the island and gone in behind the jebson rocks, foolishly thinking that it was going to get itself protected from the big storm it was outrunning. And it didn't, it got itself swept into, into a harbour, which is now Jebson Harbour, and it crashed up onto the shore there and they had to abandon it. The, there was

some suggestions and in fact it was such a clumsy piece of work that in fact it might have been an insurance job.

David Wynn-Williams : Yes, that's the rumour.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : because it's really strange that, you know, the whalers knew that the only safe anchorage on Signy is where the base is, anywhere else is dodgy, particularly on the west coast. But they went in anywhere there and they ran it ashore and that was it. That got progressively crushed by the ice over the years but it was still sitting there with lots of memorabilia, very shallow water, and became a very popular dive site, a real wrecker's paradise. We dived down and retrieved pieces of it, there are things like the porthole, one of the portholes from it is still on the base, which has a nice, has a nice picture. It was a pen and ink drawing of the wreck and that's inside this, it's all beautifully polished up brass. But various other items were taken from it and one of the items there was this scabbard, which was found on the wreck; lots of other items disappeared. The wreck's now completely flattened by the ice and really there's nothing worth diving in, but around the '70's it was a pretty reasonable diving site and that was at the time when diving really took off at Signy, when we moved from doing less than a hundred dives there, to doing several hundred dives a year.

David Wynn-Williams : In those days, you could swim round the propeller and see the pipes of the boilers. Em, the ship sank in 1912 and there's a description of the event written by a man called Moyes, who was the magistrate from presumably the Falklands and he just happened to be visiting the island, inspecting whaling leases and that sort of thing. And he gives a description of these men coming over the ridge at Signy Island, from the wreck and the reason there's this rumour about insurance is they had all their kit with them. [laughs] which seems a bit of a coincidence if you've just been shipwrecked.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Insurance jobs were a big business job there in the whaling, sealing days down there.

David Wynn-Williams : And Moyes conducted a sort of investigation and a sale actually at the time and I forget how much money changed hands, but it was a very small amount of money.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : In fact Moyes Point is named for him.

David Wynn-Williams : Yes, Moyes Point. And there is a copy of that report. I've got a copy of it, it should be in the Library as well. Yep.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Item 10, FS Polarstern. Em,

David Wynn-Williams : Yep, there's a plaque to her.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yes. I don't know much about that. It appeared at a time when I wasn't on base and it just commemorated the fact there. The Polarstern made, did quite a bit of work round the South Orkney islands and became quite a regular visitor to Signy at one time and, er, this was one of the first major visits that they made and they, Polarstern handed over this, this bell, which Pete Macko duly mounted onto a nice piece of wood. And it's hung up there.

Two black and white photographs and a letter from Harry G Heywood. A glazed cracked frame. Heywood was basically at Base F. I don't. [tape goes off and back on].

David Wynn-Williams : Dave Fletcher was Base Commander and he had a box of pipes and he had these crates of Capstan cigarettes, they're the ones with the sailor and the beard etc. That's right. And he was trying to get us to smoke the things because he wanted to clear the loft out. But they were standard issue in those days and we also had big flagons of Pusser's Rum. It was the end of the era, you know, these are big earthenware flagons in wicker baskets and they came with these Capstan cigarettes and pipe tobacco as well and pipes.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : If one didn't get you, the other certainly would.

David Wynn-Williams : Yeh, and we stole a furtive coffee at smoko and it was a Royal Navy tradition and what they used to do was knock off for a puff and a pipe and have a coffee at the same time.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : That actually is right. These Capstan cigarettes did turn up. Most of the huts when I went down in the 70's had tins of those sitting there. Nobody on base bar Mal Dry, who was the radio operator who came in, was an ex RAF radio operator, came in to Signy in my second winter and he was the only smoker on the base and he proceeded to smoke the entire allocation for the base of cigarettes and was reduced to smoking these things by the end. So he went through quite a few of them. But they turned up at an awful lot of the field huts in the early days and then got steadily cleared out as we, we just really weren't a smoking base.

But there, that's interesting, that point. The, Tonsberg House when it was built, the sleeping accommodation was not in the main building, it was up above it in the attic, the loft space was actually the sleeping quarters for everybody. And subsequently there, it got used on a more intermittent basis in the summer when we went up to over thirty people and they had nowhere to sleep and so we'd sleep a few up there. But generally, it steadily developed into becoming the food store. And this enormous food store was there, which was of course a phenomenal weight, for a building which was never designed to handle that and we were always wondering whether we'd put in one tin too many. And down at one end was always the goodies area, which were special goodies boxes and entertainment boxes come in and things like the cigarettes and so forth were stored down there at one time. Yeh.

David Wynn-Williams : Sorry, Merchant Ships.

Item 13 is the Soviet Merchant Ships booklet, which basically. We get a lot of soviet ships, eastern block ships that come down, particularly fishing fleets, come down and it was, we were given instructions from London, as it was, originally, that we should always try and identify these ships and make a note of them and report that back to UK. And so this stayed on base endlessly there, to pull these out.

There was this famous scam that was worked on one occasion there where we had a number of worthy senior members of BAS staff on the base and this radio message came in, rather crackled and disturbed, saying that the Academic Markov was in the vicinity and could they come in and visit the base. And was there a senior scientist on the base and could they come to the radio and tell the ship about what sort of things they were doing. And the ship was moving towards the, moving towards Signy and was hoping to arrive at some point in time.

This conversation, we unfortunately involved Dr David Walton and there was also Dr Martin White, were on base at the time, plus myself. And various people were brought in to speak to them. Several of us started to smell rats there when a couple of phrases, which should only have been known to Signy people turned up in the Markov's conversation. And we became very very suspicious and started to back off. But Dr Walton, not being a Signy man or a South Georgia man, was not aware and proceeded to give a very detailed breakdown of what was being done at the base and what was being done by BAS as a whole and didn't even pick up there on the fact that they'd actually called him by his nickname at one point, thought that he'd actually misheard this. Of course, what it turned out was that the – electrician?

David Wynn-Williams : I wasn't on base at the time.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : I think it was the electrician and the diesel mechanic had set up a radio in the genny shed and were actually broadcasting from there. And eventually they had to just. It was very much like one of these television programmes. They come up and admit what it was and there was great embarrassment allround

David Wynn-Williams : Beadles About! [television programme]

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Beadles About. Yes. It became quite a story.

David Wynn-Williams : Quite a legend.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : USARP. I know. That was on base when I arrived. That is an old, that is an old, old um.

David Wynn-Williams : Manhattan. She was an old ship.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yes, the Manhattan came in there. Late sixties, I would say.

Alison Martin : Seventy one actually.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Seventy one. Yep. It was certainly, it was just one of the visiting ships. I haven't got any information on that.

Antarctica – The Record of Sounds of Antarctica. By Ed Mickleburgh. Now, Ed Mickleburgh was a met man at Signy, back in the sixties and he then went off and carved out a career for himself as a cameraman and was very interested in polar regions and he came down to make a film about Antarctica and recorded a lot of sounds of animals whilst he was there. And he turned this into a record, which we then had a copy on base. Some of it is very, very good indeed. He came back subsequently and did more work when the John Biscoe film was made. He was involved on the base at that time, by which time he'd overstayed his welcome, I think. But he came round photographing, he did underwater photography for the BBC and then he also was making his own film about, about Signy Island, I think particularly the penguins and so he's done, he's done, he subsequently moved to Scotland and has done several films on Scottish topics. But I haven't heard a lot of him in the last five or ten years.

David Wynn-Williams : Me neither. He insisted on clearing up the base before he started filming because it was a bit of a tip. So he was responsible for making the place look respectable. He did a good job from that point of view.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Signy plans, the base buildings. No, not much on that.

David Wynn-Williams : OK. Greenpeace – self explanatory.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : USARP. No.

David Wynn-Williams : USARP. Polish Academy of Sciences.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Ah, the Henry Arktowski Antarctic Station. That was a station on King George Island. Um, but I think that this was, in fact, given to us by the scientists who were on one of their marine cruise ships. They had a number of, the Soviets as well had a large number of research vessels in support of their fishing activities and I think that that's, that reflects their visit by one of these Soviet block research vessels.

Badger, ah, badger. I was down in 1994 at Signy and we woke up one morning to the smell of a wood-burning stove, sorry, wood burning, I should say not wood burning – coal burning stove, which of course has not existed at Signy since 1975, when they took out the old coal burning stove.

David Wynn-Williams : the old aga

Cynan Ellis-Evans : and put in the magnificent double aga. That was the other thing that came in with Serolis, was the new agas were put in, which have now finished there. They're not going to be used in the new summer base. So they run from 1975 through to 1996.

We woke up to this smell, looked outside and there was this yacht with a, um, chinese lattine, not lattine, a chinese

David Wynn-Williams : Junk rig?

Cynan Ellis-Evans : junk rig on it, very peculiar. An English couple from Lancashire. He was a boat builder, she was a civil servant and raised the money which basically they'd been using ever since. They built the boat and they've been living off that money for the last ten years, cruising the world. They had just been down in the Falklands at, staying with the Poncets and they decided they were on their way to South America, sorry, on their way to South Africa, and they came across to us, very rare that we get much in the way of yachts our way. But they came across to, to us and they were then going on to South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands before heading over to South Africa.

They are great collectors of rum. They had this amazing book where they had, they would find different rums and try them out on friends and get, there was a whole series of comments. I've, there was well over a hundred different rums that they'd tried in their many years of travelling. Particularly, they'd spent a long time in the Caribbean and they were fantastic, knowledge they had on rums and we drunk quite a bit of it, a variety of it down there, a couple of memorable evenings on Board. But they, they organised trips there. On Christmas Day a number of people went on the boat and sailed up the coast of Coronation and back. They stayed with us for about five or six days before moving on. Very nice couple.

David Wynn-Williams : Next one. Iceberg. David Lewis?

Cynan Ellis-Evans : This is icebergs. David Lewis of Australia.

David Wynn-Williams : Yep, circumnavigated the Antarctic, got turned over a couple of times, lost his mast, had to be, not actually rescued. He limped into Palmer Station, the American base, and they set him up with a new mast. And I think he came from Palmer to Signy and it was before I went

Cynan Ellis-Evans : That's right

David Wynn-Williams : must have been 1972 or 73.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : yes, something, early seventies.

David Wynn-Williams : Mmm, and he visited Signy Island, just a social visit.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : it's actually mentioned in his book. Yeh. But he came in. I should say this other one, the Inverness yacht club. It's faded here. But this is the Awanee. This is the Awanee. Before my time, it was 1971. But there, we had the picture of her and again, it was one of these rare occasions when a yacht decided to visit Signy Island. The South Orkneys are really off the yachters' route and we are a long way from anywhere, so these are quite, quite rare and important events as far as we were concerned. Whereas, some of the bigger ships, I could take or leave.

David Wynn-Williams : Have you got the comments of all these ships? [tape goes off and back on]. OK. Really quite dramatic. Came for a visit. I've got some cine film of her sailing,

Cynan Ellis-Evans : What's the name of her again?

David Wynn-Williams : The Shackleton, this is the Royal Research ship Shackleton. She was a NERC ship, not a BAS ship. The most revolting colour, sort of rusty orange hull and puke green superstructure. Really revolting. I've got some cine film of her sailing in. She had a stern sail, a little mast, and they used to save fuel by sailing in every now and then. And, no, hang on, I'm mixing that up with The Hero. Forget that. But, Shackleton came in, social visit and Philip Warne was the captain and he came ashore with all the rest of the lads, a very humble man. I just happened to be taking him for a walk and I didn't know who he was, he wasn't in uniform at the time, and asked him what his speciality was and he said, "Oh, I'm the captain". Just as humble as that. But, he then had a saga leaving Signy going back to Port Stanley because he was intercepted by the Argentinians and because

Cynan Ellis-Evans : an Argentinian Destroyer.

David Wynn-Williams : That's right. And because the ship was called The Shackleton, the Argies were under the impression that Lord Shackleton was on Board and it was in the days of delicate politics and the Argentinian captain commanded him to stop, stop engines and Philip Warne refused. He said "I'm on the high seas, you have no right to intercept me" and the Argentine captain repeated this warning and said, "I'll fire a warning shot across your bows". And Philip said "You have no right to stop me". And then you hear "boom, boom". And there's a tape of this 'cos the First Mate recorded this, he whipped a cassette recorder out, plonked it on the pinnacle and tape-recorded the conversation, and you can hear the

shells being fired across the bow. So Philip did eventually take the hint. And then the captain said, em, “You will be escorted by me to an Argentinian port, which port do you wish to go to?” And Philip very quickly said, “Take me to Port Stanley”. Because the Argentinians claimed it as an Argentinian port and that’s where he was going anyway. And thereby he avoided the diplomatic incident, because the Argentinian had no alternative to that.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : The other point is, was that they stopped shelling, wasn’t there, was that he said that he actually had a ship full of explosives. And whilst they wanted to stop them, they didn’t want the risk that they would, that their shelling wouldn’t be accurate enough and they might hit the ship and then it was full of explosives for seismic work I assume, and that would have blown the ship up. So that would have been very embarrassing for them and so he actually stopped them shelling from that in the end.

David Wynn-Williams : That’s right. But that was quite an important story, it had all sorts of implications. The other one I got confused with for a moment was The Hero, No. 10. The research vessel Hero, she came in when I was there, 1977, and she did sail in. She had a little mast on the stern.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : She had a little mast on the stern. They used to keep her bow into the sea there, when she was coming along, yeh.

David Wynn-Williams : That’s right, and she was a wooden ship sheathed in green heart, just like the old Terra Nova and the Discovery and so on. And she eventually was abandoned because she got the terrado worm, she got the wood worm, which finished off a lot of ships.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : She used to run out of Ushuaia there. They operated out of Ushuaia down to Palmer Station and in fact the time I came down, mid seventies, Bransfield was doing the relief of Palmer Station because, really, Hero couldn’t take enough cargo for her, which meant that we actually in the early days had this wonderful trip - you [to David Wynn-Williams] had the same thing but your ship broke down, that we went across to Jacksonville, a marine, a naval establishment there on the coast of Florida and we’d go over there, load up with cargo and then sail down through the Caribbean and down the coast of Brazil and all the rest of it, a very, very exotic trip, and do the relief of, of Palmer Station before coming up to do the relief of Signy. And, traditionally, in those days, we didn’t go in as we do now in November time, into Signy. The first relief was actually in January, it was much much later.

David Wynn-Williams : Could I just refer back to the Walter Hervig and the Vaiser, two German ships. The Walter Hervig was officially a research ship and the Vaiser was one of these deep sea trawlers and The Earwig, as we used to call her, was full of computers and all sorts of electronic gadgetry for finding krill. But

Cynan Ellis-Evans : she was the pre Polarstern.

David Wynn-Williams : That’s right. And it was in the early days of research for krill in that area. And, the captain of the Vaiser didn’t have any sophisticated kit, but he had a lifetime of experience, and when they were working in the waters around Signy Island, it was the Vaiser that always caught the krill, because the Captain’s nose was much more efficient than any of the computers. And they actually gave us krill, and we had krill on toast. They had a krill factory actually built into the ship itself.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : We had curried krill.

David Wynn-Williams : Curried krill.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : And the Julius Fok, item 5, came in two years later in a follow-up piece of work where they had a lot of technologists on Board trying to find a way to make krill appetising.

David Wynn-Williams : Almirante. What would that be? Number 6.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : I don't know what that is. It's Almirante Bizarre.

David Wynn-Williams : I wonder if it's San Martine?

Cynan Ellis-Evans : No, San Martine is further down. Here's the San Martin.

David Wynn-Williams: OK.

Cynan Ellis-Evans: San Martin came.

David Wynn-Williams: Oh, hang on. Yes, not a yacht. A big icebreaker.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yachts is the next category. But it's Argentine Navy. And the San Martin was an ex United States coastguard icebreaking vessel, worked the Arctic. And they sold her. She was quite small and they sold her to the Argentinians, well passed her sell by date, we thought. And she came in stacked full of Argentinians, in my middle winter, so that is the '76/'77 summer season. We were waiting for John Biscoe to come in and she turned up. It was the only time she ever came to Signy and she came in, apparently saying that she didn't think the base was occupied. Well, there was obviously a flag and smoke coming out, it was a bit of a job. And the two of us spotted her because we were out digging out the base at the time. And she came ashore and was. She'd been hit, she'd hit some rocks and she was effectively trying to say that we had put the rocks there and we could have marked them on the map. Well of course the whole area was full of old rocks there, which, em, lurgy rocks, which people don't have on their, on the bathymetric naval charts.

And she came ashore and that's where they had the classic case where they went and put in that landing craft at the end of the jetty and we said, "We're on springs, so the tide'll go out beyond the end of the jetty and you'll be grounded". And they just said, "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes" thereand ignored us. And sure enough, absolutely high and dry, never seen such a low tide.

David Wynn-Williams : We could walk round the boat.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : We could walk round the boat. And suddenly they all decided that they wanted to go back onto the ship, onto the San Martin, and of course they couldn't do it.

David Wynn-Williams : For three hours

Cynan Ellis-Evans: And so they were sitting around. And of course there is, the captain was one.

David Wynn-Williams : Admiral.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : The Admiral of the overall fleet was another character and then you had the Commander of the marine contingent. And all three were talking to radios which were, simultaneously, which weren't working properly because the seawater had got into them. And then they went and used our radio and were talking simultaneously into our one radio, trying to get through. There was a great joke, as many photographs were taken of, and a great embarrassment to the Argentine navy. She never came back.

The Neveny there was a Polish, that's item nineteen. She was actually a Soviet fleet, but in fact she was a Polish vessel and she was effectively a fishing vessel, really, wasn't she? And she came in and visited there in the time of Martin White which I think is the late sixties and early seventies. And she came ashore and made a visit there whilst they were in the middle of a marine cruise that they were doing. And it's from that that the famous Svetlana's Passage is derived but that's another story, which we won't go into yet.

David Wynn-Williams : won't put on tape.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Giovanni [Ajome, Captain], San Giuseppe Due. Do you want to?

David Wynn-Williams : I don't remember that.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : All I know about that was that it was

David Wynn-Williams : Before I came

Cynan Ellis-Evans : It was an Italian, the first Italian expedition to the Antarctic. She was actually, she had motor power, but essentially she was a three-masted vessel there, with almost sort of Arab lanteen sails. And she sailed down, apparently there was just, it was a constant Latin arguments and there were, they basically ended up that the crew and the scientists, they were all in total disagreement with the Captain and leader of the expedition.

David Wynn-Williams : That was at South Georgia wasn't it?

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yes.

David Wynn-Williams : They mutinied.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : They got. They mutinied when they got to South Georgia. And apparently they never really got to do anything much at all, but they obviously made it down to the South Orkneys, made the visit, but we never heard sight or sound of what happened to them afterwards.

David Wynn-Williams : Lindblad Explorer? That should be Lindblad not Lindbald. She went down when I first went down and John Green was on Board. John Green was SECFIDS, the original sort of administrative officer in Stanley, I think it was based. There are legendary stories about John. He was down as one of these guides. I'll just tell you one story, just that it does go on tape somewhere. It was a story Eric Salmon told me, which is a classic.

John was also the Commander in Chief of the Falkland Islands Defence Force. And he was down there when the Duke of Edinburgh did the Royal tour in Britannia. And John was in his full dress uniform waiting for the Duke of Edinburgh and this dress uniform included dress cords, you know, these long tassle things. And the Duke wasn't due for about an hour and John was sitting in his office with his feet on the desk and a drawer open and this is all relevant.

Side B

He walked into his office and John tried to jump to his feet. As he jumped to his feet his dress cords went into the drawer, which then slammed shut and as he stood up, he got half way up and then nearly strangled on his dress cords. And Prince Philip took one look at him and said, "Would you like me to go out and come in again?"

That was John Green and he came down to Signy as one of the original guides in the early days of tourism. This was a particularly relevant visit, because in those days tourist ships were, well I think it was the only one, about eighty people on board.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : The other, item 27.

Alison Martin : Can I stop you there.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Item 27 in the photographs is Damien II, from 1984. Damien made, has made several visits to Signy over the years. Damien I was originally crewed by

David Wynn-Williams : Jerome and Sally Poncet.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : No, the Damien I was crewed by Jerome and his brother and they came down and made the first trip down and then wrote a book about yachting in the Antarctic, which then some people took as a, what was, what would be the term for it?

David Wynn-Williams : Oh, you're thinking of the Bazeel, there was another one called the Bazeel. The guy who sailed that wrote "The Looters Guide to South Georgia". Is that what you're thinking of?

Cynan Ellis-Evans : No, yer man wrote "The Looter's Guide to the Antarctic" basically, that's what you're thinking of. Yes. But basically, he, Jerome wrote this thing with his brother and he also made a film about it. Subsequently, that trip, he met up with Sally in Australia and married her and they then purchased the Damien II, a much more seaworthy craft altogether. I should say that Jerome has a reputation as being one of the great yachtsmen of the world, he has a phenomenal reputation worldwide, done a lot of long distance work. They're based largely now on, they've bought an island in the Falklands, I forget the name of it now, and they're living there with their various kids, a couple of whom have been born in the Antarctic and brought up.

David Wynn-Williams : Dion.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yes. The one was actually born while they overwintered at Horseshoe Island, if I remember rightly.

David Wynn-Williams : No, it was somewhere at South G. because the child had to be registered and the Base Commander was the magistrate, didn't have any birth records, so little Dion's passport says he is SG1, SG1 is the number. Now the interesting thing was, Sally had him at Lea Harbour, I think, I think that was the one. They were obviously operating round Grytviken but they didn't want to inconvenience the base so they sailed round to Lea, she had little Dion there, I think it was Dion.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yes, I thought that they actually had one, she produced one while they were wintering. They overwintered at the old British base at Horseshoe Bay in Marguerite Bay. Horseshoe Island, not Horseshoe Bay, I should say. I think, they certainly overwintered there with Damien, there, and I thought that she produced while they were there. But that's one to check up on. But certainly they came in on a trip, there, they came in to us in 1984 and they actually had some people who were from, there was a guy from South Georgia, Bird Island, who was later involved in that book with the Waltons.

David Wynn-Williams : Oh, yes, a chap called Copestake.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : That's right, it was Paul Copestake.

David Wynn-Williams : Paul Copestake.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Paul Copestake was involved and there was another guy then, a young lad who I've seen subsequently who was making a film and he was down there and he was a Bird Island person.

But whatever, but whatever. They came in and they. Jerome has a habit of going into every bay, everywhere, that's his big thing he's got over everybody else. He's virtually sailed into every cove you can, going to South Georgia and the Peninsula. And he knows them very intimately. But he has banged his yacht several times doing so. Steel hull. Anyway, he hit something the same way as San Martin hit something, on the way to Signy. A spike just came up from nowhere and he hit that and he started finding oil getting into the water supplies, so they came across to Signy and we actually tipped the yacht over onto the slip and we have pictures of her tipped over on the slip, which in fact we put a few more dents into her in doing that. And the base diesel mechanic then went down with his oxycetylane torch and sealed up the appropriate leaks there and sorted it out. And we then had them round for a few days where again they took various members of the base out at various times for trips down the coast. And very, very pleasant it was as well.

Alison Martin : And BAS has at some time chartered

Cynan Ellis-Evans : They chartered Damien, particularly the birds and seals people, but also the geologists have chartered her there. She is a particularly good craft for, for getting in and supporting small field parties there in isolated positions. And it's worked very effectively. And for doing things like the survey, the seal survey around South Georgia, the only way you can do it is to get very close in to shore and just slowly work your way past, counting them. You can't go ashore, you work it from the boat. And she's perfect for that and he knows so much about those waters, he knows more about it than anybody, any other living person I would say. So he's perfect for that.

All of these are modern affairs. These, I don't know much on these pictures. But there is this, which relates to you. Item 52 in this landscapes. Coronation Island from Signy Island panorama. And also item 53 Coronation Island from Signy Island, panorama, two layers. And that's the, that's your panoramas that you've made.

David Wynn-Williams : That's right, so that was 19-, must have been 1975/76. And I took this panorama, but when I stuck it all together it was too big to get home, so I donated it to the base, and one of the people mounted it and put it on display. It was taken from Tioga and it's a view of the whole of Coronation Island.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yes. Right. Have you any idea what that is?

David Wynn-Williams : No. I don't remember that.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : I tried to remember when the military came down. They used to come down South to help with South Georgia.

David Wynn-Williams : NAAFI Singapore

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Singapore. No.

David Wynn-Williams : No, just don't know

Cynan Ellis-Evans : That wasn't on the base when we were there, that's come in subsequently and I'm trying to think what activities would have resulted in the military group coming in.

David Wynn-Williams : It could have been Endurance, someone on Endurance.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yes, yes

Alison Martin : and that was the Falkland Islands Provost?

David Wynn-Williams : Yes, that's right. And the Provost Unit, presumably, is military police?

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yes

David Wynn-Williams : Yes, it says Royal Military Police. OK, so that must be post-war, post Falklands. Yes. OK.

Alright, JCR. How about that?

Cynan Ellis-Evans ; Her first visit to Signy.

David Wynn-Williams ; Yep, right. And this. I think I must have brought this back after my season, now dated '82/'83. I went down as a guest scientist with NZARP, as it was in those days, New Zealand Antarctic Research Programme, and I took a BAS plaque down and I think that they probably gave me this in return. So the next time I was at Signy, which would have been '84/'85, I presented this.

USARP - that was the visit of the Hero we were talking about.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : One of the many visits of the Hero. That was on base before I arrived.

David Wynn-Williams : Yea, it must have been that first year I was there, she came in under sail.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : She used to do a lot of work there supporting geology parties. The Americans were quite active working the South Orkneys at one point in time.

David Wynn-Williams : Just remembered a classic story, a good one. Janet Thomson, now running the Map Department. Right. OK. Mike [her husband] had been coming down with BAS for many years as a geologist. Janet is a geologist in her own right but was not allowed to come down with BAS because she was a woman. So, she decided she was going South and if the Brits wouldn't take her, the Americans could. So she managed to negotiate a place with an American research team and she came down to Signy Island, a British base, on an American ship. And I remember, she'd been ashore and I was going to visit the ship and the person in front of me, going up the rope ladder had a pair of nylons on. And I felt, I don't know any men who wear nylons, you know. But of course, the rest of her kit was full Antarctic kit so it could have been anyone. And I suddenly realised, I was climbing a ladder behind Janet Thomson, who'd come down as a guest scientist with the Americans on the Hero.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : The interesting thing was I came in to the base lounge at that point in time and found virtually the entire base behind the bar, as if they'd been cornered. And they were all behind the bar drinking there quietly and over in the corner were, over where the hi-fi was, there were two enormous American marines, absolute giants there, all clad in their polar gear. And the time there was a diminutive boy-like thing. And Nick Cox, it was always Nick seemed to be the one, said "Damn, that's a woman" [lots of laughter]. And the base really didn't know quite what to make of it though. We'd had a long winter there, men only.

David Wynn-Williams : Two and a half years is a long time!

Cynan Ellis-Evans : And they really didn't know quite how to handle it. And apparently the Americans didn't know quite how we'd handle it. But they put these two enormous marines as body guards there. She didn't need that looking after. But, quite a story [lots of laughter].

David Wynn-Williams : Absolutely, that was Hero, anyway. Where were we?

Cynan Ellis-Evans : There's a whole series now of ones which basically reflect the interest of the Germans in the South Orkneys. They'd done a lot of work, particularly to the north of the South Orkneys. And so, we have the various Herwig and Meteor, the Herwig Vaiser. Where we haven't got one is the Herwig and the Julius Fock came down. The first one was this Herwig Vaiser and then there was Julius Fock and Herwig and then we had the Meteor and the Herwig. And then subsequently, we had, when the new Polarstern came in, the all-singing and dancing German vessel. And the Herwig again came down in support in 1983/85, so there's a continuous record of German visits to the area. And initially we used to, in the early days there, they used to actually come in and they'd have a couple of days sitting off the base and we would go on board and they would come ashore and we would take them round

and show them our sites and all the rest of it and we would go on board and seemd to drink a lot of schnapps, as I seem to recall.

David Wynn-Williams : Yes, Jegermeister

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yes, very worried. But subsequently, when they got the big Polarstern, she tended to stay out most of the time. She came in on one occasion at any rate, but more often than not she was to the north and we'd just fly a helicopter over, usually with some rather nice German beer on it, and we'd just make a social call and that's how some of these come in. The Giuseppe Due there is a follow-on from what we said earlier.

The other thing that we've had a lot of are things like the Lindblad Explorer and the World Discover. There's been a long tradition of both those ships coming down to the South Orkneys and in the early days we did initially let them come ashore at Signy, as the way they did at Faraday. But eventually we decided that in fact the whole of our island was really a study sight and we couldn't afford to have these numbers of people coming in regularly and tramping across to the areas where they wanted to look at penguins and the like. And they took over the base when they did it, as well.

Alison Martin : These are tourist ships?

Cynan Ellis-Evans : These are tourist ships that were coming in. So what we decided in the end was that we, in fact that we would offer them an area over on Coronation Island, which has fantastic scenery, you're sitting underneath a - Sunshine Glacier - a magnificent glacier. And there was a nice little field hut in Shingle Cove, which they could go and have a look at, a bit of history there. And there was a few penguins and seals and nice, safe anchorage for them. And they've really got the impression now that Signy is a research island and is not to be touched. And for years now all of the research vessels, since the Discoverer and the Lindblad, have consistently gone to this Shingle Cove area.

David Wynn-Williams : And the tradition is we go on board the ships, you know, they send a launch for us, and then we give a slide show as we sail over to Shingle. So by the time they actually arrive and drop anchor, they're right up to speed as to what we're doing and who we are and how we go about things and also about the wildlife they're going to see. They're very well briefed. And something I've discovered they still do, is they play a cassette which I made in 1980 of a conversation with Signy Sørllle. I don't know if you know it, but the story of Signy Island itself, it was charted by Captain Petter Sørllle, who was a Norwegian whaling captain, and he was the guy who invented the stern slip in the big whaling factory ships, which actually finished off the whales.

Anyway, he named Signy Island after his wife, who had only been about 19/20-ish at the time, sorry twenty years old. And this was about 1915, he actually named the island.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : There were several offshore rocks.

David Wynn-Williams : Yes. Gerd Island

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Several offshore rocks are named after his daughters.

David Wynn-Williams : Yes. Gerd Island is named after Gerd Strangger, you know, who is still alive and well and full of fun.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : and coming along to the fortieth anniversary of Signy.

David Wynn-Williams : and is looking forward to the fiftieth as well. And, anyway, I went up to visit Signy Sørlle herself, who was an old lady over ninety, in 1980, and I just tape-recorded the conversation with her and Gerd Strangger, her daughter, and I gave a copy of this to the Lindblad and they used this, they actually play it to sort of put the history of the island in perspective, as well as the wildlife.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : I think you see there, as you say, it's the Discoverer and so forth, has given plaques. Now we've moved them across to Coronation Island, we don't get the plaques because they don't come ashore so we don't have these exchanges, and so most of the reference you see to cruise ships are photographs that we've taken. There was much more of a tradition with some of these earlier plaques there of the ships coming in and actually visiting the bases.

David Wynn-Williams : Yes. The Orcadas connection is an interesting one, it's a delicate one. Sometimes you have a radio operator at Orcadas who speaks good English, or someone on base who speaks good Spanish and you have a really good season. And then other seasons, there's just no communication whatsoever. They're a purely military base.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : They're politically told they should not communicate with us. But they are, it's all military personnel. They have a fence around the base, so people aren't, don't go outside that territory, they sit on a, it's a low lying beach, isn't it, in effect, it's where they've got. It's like a big point, and they just live within that, they just do met, they don't do anything else. And its military personnel, we know that they do get aircraft visits.

David Wynn-Williams : C130's

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Every once in a while you can hear the noise of the C130's, it tends to come in on the north side of Coronation, so we don't see it too often. But that's the only sort of contact we have with them really.

David Wynn-Williams : It's a strange situation because we have a very strong collaboration running with the University of Buenos Aires and the Institute of Antarctica via a whole string of people now. Gustavo Ferreiro is the Head of Biology at Institute of Antarctica and he's very keen on collaborating with BAS.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : But, we are talking about the military, that's the difference.

David Wynn-Williams : That's right. And we get on fine with the scientists. I mean as many as eight scientists we collaborate with, directly or indirectly now, get on fine with them. But the military, we have to handle with kid gloves. It's a sad situation, they despair as much as we do. So that's two plaques from them.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yes.

David Wynn-Williams : The story is Bruce led the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition to the South Orkneys in 1901-1904 and at the end of his expedition he offered the meteorological station that he'd established to the British government and the British government said they weren't interested, so he then went to Buenos Aires and offered the place to the Argentinians. They said "yes please" and they've been operating it ever since, so they are over forty years ahead of us in terms of the claim.

Alison Martin : In Orcadas?

David Wynn-Williams : Yes, in Orcadas. Because the British government was so narrow-minded they couldn't see the point of a met station in the Antarctic. So, if it ever comes to a political barney in the South Orkneys, the Argentinians have got us licked because of the government's stupidity.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : The interesting point though is that from a scientific point of view, Lynch Island - not Lynch Island – Laurie Island, has turned out to be far less interesting than Signy Island. Signy Island is definitely the best place for doing the sort of work that we've been doing.

David Wynn-Williams : For the biology.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : And so, in the end we actually went to the right place, even though we didn't necessarily go there for that reason.

David Wynn-Williams : That's right.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : But, we wouldn't have gone to Laurie Island since the Argentinians were there. What else?

David Wynn-Williams : East Wind. East Wind was a big icebreaker. Charles Swithinbank had a photograph of her? Was it, the East Win? One of the winds.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yes, it was East Wind, described as East Wind, South Wind and all the rest of it, yes.

David Wynn-Williams : It might have been North Wind. Huge things. And they must have had a visit, it was 1967, it was before our time.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : We never saw them.

David Wynn-Williams : No. Penguin encounters? Sea world?

Cynan Ellis-Evans : I suspect that this is actually from one of the cruise ships.

David Wynn-Williams : Yes, I think so too.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : And that somebody came in. You know, we often had people, you'd have people like your penguin or seal experts from America working at one of these places and they would bring their plaque along. They came along as lecturers on board the ship and I

think that's where that came from. 'Cos I don't recall it being down there when I first came South.

David Wynn-Williams : I haven't seen it.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : So I think it must have been, we've had a lot more tourist ships.

Alison Martin : Sea World is actually a tourist attraction.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Exactly. I suspect it may be that it may be a noted scientist from there has come on the cruise ships.

David Wynn-Williams : It might well have been Frank Todd. Frank Todd went South when I first went South in 1974. He was supposed to be going South for a fortnight to Palmer Station to collect penguins and because we had all sorts of engine trouble, well no, it wasn't engine trouble, it was rudder post trouble, because we hit a hurricane in the Bay of Biscay, nowhere near the Antarctic. The ship was in dry dock for three weeks in Baltimore and then there were so many holdups. He was South for about a month and a half or something. I remember him being furious at the time. But he was the guy who got this penguin encounter going. He collected the original penguins and then started breeding them. So now they don't need to collect penguins, they've just got their own eggs, so it might well have been Frank Todd, I think.

OK, when I was down there - the 1975/77 stretch - Julian Priddle did one. There must have been two of them.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : He did a winter magazine called "Groans".

David Wynn-Williams : Oh, there was, that must have been a different one, because he actually did a midwinter mag which was just the Signy midwinter magazine, with articles, he invited articles. And there was "Scott's Last Jolly". Nick Cox did a skit of "Scott's Last Jolly".

Cynan Ellis-Evans: And I think I did one on Idi Amin, if I remember rightly.

David Wynn-Williams : Yes, I did a sort of serious one about the sounds of the Antarctic. I got really quite poetic about it, you know, the sounds of wind and animals and everything.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : there was a lot of stick.

David Wynn-Williams : not really the sort of thing

Cynan Ellis-Evans : I was linking through the mutts, the chin, the

David Wynn-Williams : Pink

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Pink, yes, wasn't it, that we had the various mutts

David Wynn-Williams : Chief Mutt

Cynan Ellis-Evans : there which are the

David Wynn-Williams : Sheathbills

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Sheathbills, around the base in winter.

David Wynn-Williams : Land birds.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : The king of these mutts was one we called Pink.

David Wynn-Williams : Because he had a pink ring on his leg.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : He had a pink ring on his. Yes. And I went and likened him to Idi Amin and did a skit on that.

David Wynn-Williams : He wrote a report.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yes, and there was, as you say, Scott's Last Jolly.

David Wynn-Williams : And the silver Mukluk. Julian did that.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yes.

David Wynn-Williams : Cinderella and the Silver Mukluk.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Because we then came up there the following year. We did one of these and myself and Nick Cox wrote "Little Red Sledging Anorak goes to Foca".

David Wynn-Williams : OK

Cynan Ellis-Evans : There, which was a skit on Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf was replaced by a leopard seal. Things like this. Yes. But.

David Wynn-Williams : there was a lot of culture. You know, sort of culture in terms of tradition, on the base. And that's one of the things I feel very strongly about. We had lots of rituals like the making of the midwinter presents.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : I've just suddenly remembered it now. That's how it went, was that you had a midwinter magazine which sometimes came out. It was very much hit and miss as to whether it came up each year. And then "Groans" was basically pictures of everybody on the base, put together in a skittish manner.

David Wynn-Williams : with captions.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : And so they would take those and they would try to take some of the elements of their character and use cutouts from magazines, wasn't it? They'd cut out things there and they would then start putting rather rude comments about them, and the rest. And that was the way they used to do it. We used to have this, we'd have a couple of pages devoted to each person. And so everybody had their character assassinated.

David Wynn-Williams : Assassinated.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : and that was the “Groans”. “Groans” had died. They’d been there in the sixties and they’d died in the seventies and towards the end of the seventies, we started them up again and they seem to have disappeared once more. It’s one of the things about bases is that it’s what happens to the base is not tied down formally. It depends on the personalities and therefore evolves all the time. Like the fact now that they don’t dress up for Saturdays. They decided a few years ago. Well that was a big thing for us, it’s not for them.

Alison Martin : Used to dress up?

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Used to dress up in UK clothes. For a Saturday.

David Wynn-Williams : Just respectable clothes, even a tie.

Cynan Ellis-Evans: The main feature is that when you’re down in the Antarctic, it’s very easy to lose track of time and we felt it was important to establish that a week had come to a close, and so you actually mark time that way, and this was the way we did it, was to have a special meal on a Saturday. Usually some wine was lobbed by the gash man and we’d eat a little later, there was a better meal again would be done, usually to candlelight.

David Wynn-Williams : Mmm, that’s right.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : And we would, you know, it’s just relaxed. Where, instead of having the meal and going back to the office, we dressed up in UK gear rather than the FID gear we normally would wear during the week and instead of going back to the office or the labs to do more work, we’d actually sit around with the candlelight and everything and just talk.

David Wynn-Williams : Or have a stomp, depending on how it went.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Or have a stomp, depending on how it went, and we would be doing, you know, the bridge club would be meeting there, there would be somebody playing some chess. We’d have some music on.

David Wynn-Williams : Or names off

Cynan Ellis-Evans : And it was just a social evening to mark the week. The tendency has been now, since videos and so forth have come in, those sort of stretches are gone. Because that was another feature isn’t it? When we went down in the seventies, there wasn’t any movies.

David Wynn-Williams : We entertained ourselves.

Cynan Ellis-Evans :What happened was when a ship came in, if the sea was right they would bring their projector ashore and they would show us a film.

David Wynn-Williams : Robin Hood?

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Robin Hood. Three times in one night.

David Wynn-Williams : The cartoon.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : It's on television next week.

David Wynn-Williams : Is it, oh right. Oh, let's watch it [laughs].

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Watch it, yes, get all your key friends in.

David Wynn-Williams : We all fell in love with Maid Marion, because the fox had long eyelashes.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Well, not all of us.

David Wynn-Williams : Some of us fell in love with Maid Marion [laughs].

Cynan Ellis-Evans : But yes, that sort of feature was one of the things that was strong and we had maybe three or four films in the year and then what happened is that we then got the video, we got our own projector and started showing a film a week. And then it moved out, we got videos and now we've got video machines in various parts of the base and so people. It's a changing pattern, that's what happens, these evolve. The base magazines reflect more things that happened in the past than what really, what's been happening in recent times there, because we've moved away from those, I think, to all intents.

David Wynn-Williams : And we used to give each other slide shows on Sunday as well, and they were often very good you know, because people had been on expeditions and they'd show slides of something totally different. Yes.

Alison Martin : And Signy women?

David Wynn-Williams : That was after my time. We didn't have women.[laughter].

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Signy women. I don't know about actually. I really don't know much about that. Er, maybe it's the fact that since we're. Women first started going down in the early eighties. We put, yes early eighties isn't it? mid eighties. I'd set up. What I'd set up is fact was I was going to put in the first women. I'd approached Dick Laws who was then the Director and he told me "over my dead body".[laughter] And I got the women in the season that he retired. And Dave Drewry took over. So it must be the mid eighties.

David Wynn-Williams : Val Juneman was the first woman, wasn't she?

Cynan Ellis-Evans : And that was the point. I'd originally set it up there, and I'd gone to all the trouble of sorting it out to have women on the base and it was going to be Dr Debbie Oppenheim, a diatomist, and Sandra McInnes, my technician here. They were going to be the first women going in for a summer at Signy. And suddenly out of the blue the interviews went through and a woman was appointed as the soil chemist and the way it worked out with the shipping was that she was going, she went in ahead and so she, although we'd set it up initially, it was going to be a couple of freshwater people would go in, it turned out it was a terrestrial scientist was the first woman to summer at Signy.

David Wynn-Williams : On her own for Christmas, which was a bit dubious.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : That's right, yes. And our people came in in the second half of the season. They came in in January. So those, that must have been about '85/'86, somewhere around there, I think, now I'm thinking about it. And subsequent to that, there's been obviously a large number of women have gone down and we've actually had wintering women in recent times. And I suspect that those, that women's book is something that's evolved over the last six or seven years, because I don't recall seeing it.

The quote book stands right there. The quote book is if anybody makes any stupid remark there, even if they haven't intended it to be stupid, it ends up in the books.

David Wynn-Williams : It used to be really sort of quite witty, but it just got cruder and cruder, which spoilt it, you know, because it was good in the early days.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : It ended up there, I think you can trace it back to Harrison.

David Wynn-Williams : Paul Harrison?

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Paul Harrison – Harrisburg. There, that, Paul Harrison went down, he was one of these guys who was always getting fag ends, he always came in on a conversation half-way through and misunderstood it and would then make some glorious remark there, which showed he was completely off the mark and they went into the books. And it ended up that he was for ever making these things and everybody duly copied everything down. And that in fact is the point, from the point there where they actually filled the book with Harrison's statements, there. The quote book went off, but before that there were some remarkable lines in it.

David Wynn-Williams : Well do you remember, I got caught out at my wedding? Bill Block sent a tel down to the base – I think you were there – um, saying, did David say anything in the quote book that I can use as ammunition at the Reception, because Bill was my Best Man. And I was sitting next to the vicar and Bill said, "Oh, we've had this message from the Antarctic. Apparently, David in the quote book said, "I've learnt a lot since I've started reading Playboy"". Oh, God [laughs].

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yes, I think my classic line was I sent out a thing to Barry Heywood saying "I'm having problems". My first two telexes went out and I said "I'm really having problems with these samples. I'm getting through there, but there's been a lot of problems with the samplings, a lot of problems with the weather conditions there, which aren't suitable for doing the kind of work I'm interested in". And he came back to me saying, "Bad weather is part of your contract". [laughter] Now, that's the sort of thing that went in.

Yes, I've no idea about some dull [unintelligible]. And. Photo competition entries. There is a tremendous standard of photography amongsts BAS staff in the field. They really are very, very high quality. Ed Lemon, a chemist working for me at Signy, some years ago – he won the Best Young Photographer award there, and he's not necessarily the best photographer we've had. He entered them and won the thing. But we have a competition every year and there's a whole series of photographs there, taken, and so we have, scenes appear, pictures of people, pictures of scenes, things like this. We also have some bizarre categories – one is the Daphne M. Goodall Award. Daphne came down on the Lindblad, I think?

David Wynn-Williams : No, it was the Chilean one. The Chilean tourist ship.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Came down on a tourist ship, anyway. And she did this fast tour there of the Antarctic. Took a series of excruciatingly bad photographs there.

David Wynn-Williams : Dreadful.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : And published them all in this little book she wrote of her account. And we of course got a copy.

David Wynn-Williams : “A Last Continent”.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : She characterised by taking a photograph there, would be an albatross flying a mile away

David Wynn-Williams : It could be a sparrow!

Cynan Ellis-Evans : and she would have a 50 ml lense there, or preferably a 28 ml lense, and would take this picture. And if you looked very carefully, there was this little fleck on it. And it became a characteristic that it had to be something that was, you didn't take it purposefully,

David Wynn-Williams : No, it had to be an accident.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : you actually took it, you know, like you say you would take a picture, say there is a fantastic leopard seal, just taking a penguin here, but a wave came up in front of it. And you might just see a little bit of a leg of a penguin seal and maybe the tail of the leopard seal. And the Daphne M Goodall Award was, became one of the really, real high spots of the photographic competition.

David Wynn-Williams : I remember one classic. There was this one that won it one year was when HMS Endurance was coming into Signy. And the guy took the photograph just as an island got in the way, so all you could see is the mast, and it was outright winner [laughter]. There's the Prince Edward one.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : It was the Prince Edward.

David Wynn-Williams : Andrew, Andrew. Prince Andrew.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Prince Andrew awards. What do they call it?

David Wynn-Williams : Technical incompetence.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Technical incompetence, that's right.

David Wynn-Williams : as distinct from compositional incompetence. And I don't know if you've seen his book, but there's a classic one of a photograph of a windmill at the far side of a field, and his own shadow is right across the field.

Alison Martin : Where is that? In which book?

David Wynn-Williams : He wrote a book of photographs, one of these royal books, you know, only published because it was him. I mean, he's taken photographs of Trooping the Colour from the balcony of Horseguards and he's got a big chunk of balcony right in the foreground, absolutely appalling.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : The only other one there, the "Logger cassettes and videos", not relevant. But the "Photograph of Female Staff". Up to a few years ago women started going to, into the Antarctic on a serious basis, coming into Signy there to not only summer but to winter. We used to get photographs sent down each year of the female staff at the BAS HQ. And this was, would be duly sent down there to bolster the morale of the men on base there. And as that was about the only women you saw, other than the ones in Playboy and the like, it was quite popular wasn't it? We used to get it. It used to come out and it used to go up onto the board and it was nice to actually, some of the people you'd see back in UK, and it was nice to see their picture again.

David Wynn-Williams : Thinking of the Playboy problem. We always had a water shortage problem at Signy Island. You either melted the snow or you had to rely on meltwater coming down during the summer. And there was always this awkward patch when there wasn't any snow and ice around and there wasn't any meltwater because, you know, it hadn't accumulated. And on the shower, we only had one shower a fortnight, that's all we were allowed. And we had to minimise the amount of water you actually used when we were having a shower. So we had this virtually life-sized picture on it, on the outside the shower, of a stark-naked man and woman embracing in a shower, and it just had the heading, "Save water, share a shower". And that was up there for a while, but eventually we had to take it down because we just couldn't stand the strain. But it was serious in those days, you know, the water just would not go around.

[taped switched off and on here] Because they were operating when I first came.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yes, base diaries used to be a regular thing, that whoever was doing the nightwatch used to write up a diary of what was happening and it was used very effectively there for the end of the month, somebody had to write the base newsletter and you wanted to know what everybody had done and you're always desperate. There's always somebody who's a little bit quiet and you're desperately trying to avoid saying "He did his work again" or, you know, "he turned up for meals. He is alive Mother". And so this was a very useful way of doing it. And it worked very well for a while, but it actually did need people to make positive commitment to writing it. And people eventually started to get out of doing it, they would just write any old rubbish in there and they would forget days and then they would make it up. And of course if you try and write it subsequently, that's exactly the problem with trying to write the monthport. So that went by the way, but there was a lot of information in there about the everyday life on the base.

The Foca Hut journals are very interesting in that in the early days we actually used to maintain met. over at Foca and in fact there were a couple of people there and there's a lovely sequence there when they actually had a husky over there and they used to be, used to go and do his run down the coast with the dog, give the dog a walk, and he wandered down and in fact he pulled out that guy who did that, pulled out some really nice information about the lakes in those days. He used to make notes about them. And that's in the Foca Journal and we've been able to use that subsequently to say things about how the lakes were in those

early days. And subsequently Foca Hut became a jolly hut and so people have, rather than working there, they were basically going over and just having a couple of nights and people just made comments in there. It's particularly useful there that if people had to go out and search for somebody, they'd go to the journal and check, because you should put in there your route back

David Wynn-Williams : and time.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : and so that was one of the features that kept them going. But it's expanded thing that people would write down, sometimes write pages and pages of philosophy and I don't know what else.

David Wynn-Williams : Descriptions of animal scenes, that sort of thing.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Marvellous reading. Just sit down in the evening there with a nice warm drink there and just work through what people were doing twenty/thirty years ago.

David Wynn-Williams : What was fun was your own entries were there, and that's quite creepy, you know, because your mind, your approach changes, you know, particularly your first impressions are very vivid and it's intriguing, sort of re-living what it felt like first time.

Foca Hut was definitely made from the remains of the whalers' dormitory 1921/23. They took the wood over there and used it to build the hut.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : That was an amazing hut there, because it had all this sort of lining of, felt lining, which was coming down off the roof and there'd been generations of FIDS had been cooking there and there were fats and oil and all sorts. The hut itself was built on to the earth in effect there, and it had mats into it, which had sort of embedded themselves into the floor, become part of the floor and everytime there was a melt, snow melt, the melt went straight through, across the floor. So you'd be walking around from bed to chair to the table and trying to keep your feet off the ground there, once you'd taken off your boots. But it was a grubby sort of place, but it was my, I took responsibility for the hut for the two years I was there and it was a wonderful hut there to stay in, great character. It's been replaced by a much more modern affair, which is infinitely more comfortable, water doesn't come through it. It's very, very nicely set up and it's in actually a better view than the old one. But it lacks the character and the entries reflect that, that it's now more of a holiday hut, just a passing through hut, rather than the old, the work tradition that was there. Because they used to have somebody on a bicycle, used to turn this bicycle which powered a generator, which then powered up the radio so that they could communicate. And at one point in time there was also a telephone link and for years, all through

David Wynn-Williams : I kept on tripping over this cable.

Cynan Ellis- Evans : the seventies and the eighties they'd abandoned this, this telephone link. The cabling was all over the ice cap and so we were constantly picking up reels of this stuff, and taking it back.

David Wynn-Williams : We used to trip over loops of it, because it would be buried in the snow and, you know, you'd be walking, stepping into the snow itself and you couldn't see the wire and so you would wonder why you were flat on your face.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : The Hunting Lodge is actually, that is the old Gourlay Hut and that's down beside, which cove?

David Wynn-Williams : It's down, it's on the Gourlay Peninsula and the cove is, it's near Filer Haven.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : It's near Filer Haven.

David Wynn-Williams : Where Roger Filer died.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Well, yes, that's right and where his memorial is.

David Wynn-Williams : Is that Gourlay Cove?

Cynan Ellis-Evans : The hunting lodge there is basically a large packing case, in effect. The remains of that were used to build. Is it two people, they accommodate there, a small table. And David Wynn

David Wynn-Williams : That was my patch.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : took responsibility for that because at the time that he was there, the terrestrial programme, Signy Island's reference sight, was based near Gourlay.

David Wynn-Williams : on the Gourlay Peninsula.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : near the Gourlay Peninsula. And it was these two SIR sites. And so this was a very neat place to go off. It's in amongst all the penguin colonies and it's a delightful place, if a little grubby.

David Wynn-Williams : That's right. It's a very good place for wildlife and the log book records that, you know, when people sighted the first seal and all that sort of thing. That's all in there as well.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : It says something of just how poorly it compares in terms of its appearance to the other huts that it was given the grand aim of ??[inintelligible]

David Wynn-Williams : Files - travel, item 5. The tradition was to try and put in a South American trip when you went home and after being South for two and a half years, people were generous with leave, so I took two and a half months coming home. And so I got off the ship in Montevideo and flew home from Barbados.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : That was the tradition, wasn't it, that you actually went to South American ports, we didn't go to Stanley at our end of trip the way we do now, because we didn't have the airbridge.

David Wynn-Williams : That's right. So Monte was the stopping off place and we used to do these trips and then as soon as we got back to UK, we'd type it up and get the thing straight back down to the base for the following season. So that there was this tradition of

passing on the tips about where to go, what not to go, what to eat, and what not to eat and so on. Latest prices

Cynan Ellis-Evans : ...Latest prices. It meant they were only a year out of date. It was very much done from a Fid's viewpoint and so it was very valuable information put alongside what South American handbook you had with you.

David Wynn-Williams : And this was one of the things about Signy. It was very much a sort of family place. We were always trying to help each other in one way or another. People would take on different roles, like looking after the magazines or the records or something like that. And so, particularly in the days before videos, we'd entertain each other. And also, there was this business of providing each other with information, either through slide shows or by writing these reports. It was a very tight-knit group.

[tape goes off and on] Right, talking about the record of telexes that came back during the Falklands War. I was at headquarters, Alan Hemmings was the Biological Assistant, I was the guy who appointed him, and he was very sensitive to the situation, very interested in politics and he now actually works for – ASOC is it? One of these organisations concerned with environmental issues and so on, he's very much a politician. And he put this remarkable collection of telexes together. I've got a copy of it and there's some in the library as well. And, he just kept a note of all the interactions that were going on. It was all a bit delicate, because Signy was a civilian base, not a military base, and Bransfield was a civilian ship, and so on. But obviously we were very concerned about the people who had been taken prisoner of war, you know, they were our civilians if you like and they were floating around the South Atlantic on the Bahia Paraiso, which was the one that subsequently sank.

But perhaps, just put on tape my reactions here. I remember quite vividly a chap called Richard Crabree, who was a geographer/geologist, I think.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : He now works for the Perse School.

David Wynn-Williams : Perse School. He's Head of Geography there. And he brought a little transistor radio in at lunch time and I remember, it must have been a sort of twelve o'clock news flash, the BBC had got wind of the fact that the Argentinians had invaded and – we all knew it was coming. I was editor of the BAS Club Newsletter at the time and I'd published a little article about the possibility of an invasion and Enrico Ross who was I think a foreign minister had said he was going to prevent the Brits from having their 150th anniversary celebrations. And we all believed that, it only seemed to be the government who didn't believe it.

And so when they did actually invade, part of the reaction was - well, we knew it was coming and the second was, my God, they've actually done it. So that's what it was like at this end. What was it like your end?

Cynan Ellis-Evans : That was the funny thing, I was on Signy that summer and, having got onto the base, I've been through in the seventies all these things like the Shackleton scare. We'd had David Owen there and despatched the submarine on another occasion. And so, to people who've been down before, really the feeling was – what can happen? – you know, we weren't aware of all the detail that was back in the UK, we were just getting what we could over the World Service and what was coming through on the very few tels that were really

coming our way with any information on it. And we just had the impression, this was just the Argentinians shouting again and nothing would come of it. I can remember declaring that well, there's no way they're going to do anything and they promptly went and invaded the, invaded the Falklands, wasn't it?

David Wynn-Williams : Yes, it all started with the scrap merchants at Leith and they were spies.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : We just didn't believe anything would happen and in they went, and there they made the first invasion, and then I said "Well, that was a big gesture and so forth, nothing more will come from that, I can't imagine anything else happening there, it'll all quieten down." The next thing you know, they've taken the Falklands there, and then they went off and they declared on South Georgia.

David Wynn-Williams : South Georgia.

Alison Martin : And there were people in the field?

David Wynn-Williams : Oh yes.

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Well, that's right. That was the thing. We've been talking with South Georgia quite actively and it was, um, you know, I knew a lot of people and to then realise that we'd been talking with them and then suddenly they went off the air, and the next thing we heard was an announcement there over the World Service that the Argentinians said that they had taken South Georgia and that various British personnel had now disappeared off the face of the earth as far as we were concerned. We were very concerned about that and we were having talks with the Bransfield, deciding what was going to happen and eventually we decided the Bransfield would come and pick us up.

And in fact I was one of the three married men that was down at the time and I was only recently married there and we were concerned there that we would actually inform our, our wives, back in UK, and in fact that was one of the things that to this day my wife has never forgiven them, because we were, I was told there on the message there that when we got on board the ship we would be allowed to talk in a brief, we would have, a brief message would be sent out to say that we were OK. We got on board the ship and we were then told that the Ministry of Defence had said there was to be no communications with UK and we just did our touch.

We just disappeared off the face of the earth for the best part of a couple of weeks and the next thing we heard, because we were sailing up on, we moved over to the South Sandwich Islands and were sailing up the coast of Africa, hearing on the World Service that British scientists, the Bransfield had been captured near the coast of Chile there, between Chile and Argentina, that area had been captured and they actually were able to name the married people that were on board there. And we, our names came out and of course there was great concern here and then when they came in to try and find out about it, we basically, they were basically told "we can't tell you anything" and it was in fact Bill Block who went up and got the information, to say, he's on the Bransfield, he is safe.

My last message from the base had been to say, "I'm about to get onto the Bransfield". And we went, there was great concern because we were all very concerned about the people at

South Georgia and there was, in fact I remember being up in the early hours of the morning and, the crew were mainly Falkland Islanders, quite adamant they wanted to go to the Falkland Islands, to see their families. And Stewart Lawrence, out on the foredeck there, arguing with them for a long, long time, must have been a good part of an hour, basically arguing the nonsense of the case and that we just couldn't go to the Falklands, that was just giving a great coup to the Argentinians. And I remember looking out, just wondering what was happening when you see that sort of thing going on. And then the talk there, that we were told that we were to head north. So we headed north with, as he put it, "north with a lot of west in it" [laughter]. And we curved round and our feeling, having talked on a bit, was that potentially, we could sneak in to one of the fjords and get people ashore. We had enough people on board who knew the score, could actually have gone in and maybe pulled out the people who sit in the field camps. Because there were a number of people at the base had been captured, but the people who had already moved out to the field huts were still there.

Alison Martin : This is South Georgia?

Cynan Ellis-Evans : Yes, and we felt that if we could get them out. But then an announcement came out that the three Argentinian submarines being monitored by the Navy had disappeared and we decided it was not a good idea to be around and, quite sensibly, we were moved away. And in fact, as it turned out, one of those submarines did appear at South Georgia.

David Wynn-Williams : and got sunk by [tape does off here].

End of second side of tape.