

MARTIN PINDER

Edited transcript of a recording of Martin Pinder interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 21st June 2011. BAS Archives AD6/24/1/129 Transcribed by Andy Smith, 23rd October 2015.

[0:00:00] Lee: This is Martin Pinder, recorded by Chris Eldon Lee on the 21st of June 2011. Martin Pinder.

Pinder: My name is Martin James Pinder, born in Hastings on the 29th of January 1946.

[0:00:17] Lee: So that makes you how many years old now?

Pinder: 65.

[0:00:26] Lee: You don't feel it, do you?

Pinder: No, not at all.

[0:00:31] Lee: Tell me a bit about your background. What sort of schooling did you have, Martin?

Pinder: Most of my schooling was in private schools. I went to a boarding school when I was 7 years old, at King's Langley, and then my parents moved to North Wales and I went to a prep school in Prestatyn, St Chad's School. And when I was 13, I got two scholarships: one to go to a school, Kent College, Canterbury, and one to go to Rannoch School in Scotland, Perthshire, which was run by an ex Assistant Headmaster from Gordonstoun, on similar lines. So there was a lot of Outward Bound activities: rock climbing, hillwalking, sailing. All sorts of things so that's really when I developed an interest in the great outdoors.

[0:01:33] Lee: When you say you were offered a scholarship, does that suggest that you were academically bright?

Pinder: Possibly not. Certainly the school, whilst it was excellent for Outward Bound activities, it wasn't an academic success. I was taking A-levels. I only got 6 O-levels, and after two terms of that, I thought 'Really, I've outgrown the school' so I left when I was 17 and went to Hereford Technical College. Oh, I got a job at a local hotel, doing up all kinds of things: stoking the boiler, cleaning the toilets, polishing the shoes in the morning, going and collecting the newspapers and delivering them. My parents said 'Well if you are going to do this, you had better go and get trained in it. So I did two years at Hereford College, catering college, and my final year at Birmingham College of Food, and took a course in Hotel Management. In between that, I had got a job for the summer in a hotel in France, and when I finished, I got a job in Switzerland, first of all as a waiter and then head waiter, and then as a chef in a hotel in Zurich.

[0:03:05] Lee: Was it an intended career for yourself, this hotelier business, or was it just something you fell into?

Pinder: It was something really I fell into. I really wanted to go to Art College. I came up to Shrewsbury and they asked me to bring examples of my work, like a portfolio, which I didn't have. So I hurriedly put together some things and the interviewer, probably the Principal of the Art College, said I had no talent whatsoever, and even if I did, there were no jobs in it. So I was declined. That's why I fell back on catering.

[0:03:46] Lee: And what did your father do for a living?

Pinder: He was self-employed, sales agent. Very successful and very hardworking. He used to sell fancy goods to little gift shops but his main money came from trade shows where he would sell to big department stores and get great big orders. Because he was self-employed, he would get 10%/ 15% of every order. So he wasn't well off but comfortably off.

[0:04:22] Lee: And what is your first recollection of knowing that a place called the Antarctic existed? What was your first brush with it?

Pinder: Well it was when the loch in Rannoch froze over – I think it was 1963 – and it was about 10 miles long and 2-3 miles wide and the bottom third of it froze over and there was about a foot of ice, and the edge of it would go up and down. And we could skate on it and open your duffel coat and go whizzing along. And obviously I had heard of Scott and Shackleton, and read about it. Then I found Jeremy Bailey who I had known at my first boarding school, because his mum was a friend of my mum, and at weekends they would come and take myself and my brother ... We watched the Coronation at their house on a tiny little television, 1957¹. And Jeremy Bailey went down the Antarctic; unfortunately he lost his life in a crevasse. I think it was 1966². But I saw lots of his black and white photos and it just interested me.

[0:05:45] Lee: You knew Jeremy personally, did you?

Pinder: Yes I did, yes.

[0:05:48] Lee: You were in the same year at school?

Pinder: No, he wasn't at the school. We just knew him, through my mother and she was close friends with his mother.

[0:05:59] Lee: What are your memories of Jeremy?

Pinder: Well of course I was only about 7 or 8, so all I remember: we used to love going to his house because up in the attic they had this enormous model train set. It went round the door, so once you were in, you couldn't open the door, otherwise the track would move out and the trains would all crash. We used to have great fun there. And his brother, I think he is doing something with the Memorial Trust³ at the moment.

¹ The Coronation was in 1953.

² Actually it was in October 1965.

³ Brian Dorsett-Bailey, Jeremy's brother, is a trustee of the British Antarctic Monument Trust,

[0:06:40] Lee: Did Jeremy talk to you about the Antarctic? Do you remember that particularly? Did he have penguins in his bedroom?

Pinder: No, we didn't have contact with him apart from when I was very young, very small.

[0:06:50] Lee: And the fact that he had died in that Muskeg crevasse accident, did that not in any way put you off wanting to go to the Antarctic? Because you were in the unusual position, amongst potential Fids, of actually knowing somebody who didn't come back.

Pinder: No, it didn't. In actual fact, I wanted to find out what happened, because I know his mother (Dulcie) didn't believe the BAS version of the tragic accident.

[0:07:19] Lee: Can you expand on that?

Pinder: Well apparently they were off course. They should have had a dog team leading to probe for any crevasses, and the Muskeg went down and Jeremy was in the cab. The dog team came back and a chap went down on a rope. He was so horrifically injured, even if he could have got him out, he wouldn't have survived. But the person – I do not know his name – had to go back to base knowing that he had had to leave somebody who wasn't actually dead. So it was a horrific thing for him.

[0:08:02] Lee: His name was Ross.

Pinder: Was it? Yeah.

[0:08:05] Lee: So that is a story his mother heard?

Pinder: Yes.

[0:08:09] Lee: From other Fids?

Pinder: Yes, because the actual report which should have been still on base, was not there. I am not suggesting it was a cover-up or anything. I think it was just to save people's personal feelings.

[0:08:27] Lee: There's more than one version of the story?

Pinder: Yes.

[0:08:31] Lee: Perhaps it's best not to speculate now, but I will come back to that with you later on, if you like. So you were not deterred by Jeremy's death?

Pinder: No. Because as a cook, I shouldn't have been out in the field anyhow, unless the base had sent me out because they didn't like my cooking.

[0:08:50] Lee: So tell me about the process of getting this job in the Antarctic, then.

Pinder: I had worked myself up. I was Assistant Manager at the St Vincent Rocks Hotel in Bristol, which is just up by the Clifton Suspension Bridge, opposite what used to be called the I think it's called the Avon Gorge Hotel now but it used to be called the Grand Spa. I had gone as far as I could. I was Assistant Manager, but I was only 22, 21/22, and there was no way I could have become a manager, even in a public house, because the company; most of them then wanted married couples because you get two for the price of one, or one and a half for the price of one. They offered me a job as a Banqueting Manager at a very posh hotel in Oxford, and at the same time I think, I saw in the *Daily Telegraph* an advert: 'Cooks wanted for British Antarctic Survey.' I said 'Oh that would be wonderful.' I went to the interview, was successful and it was only when I had to go and get on the ship in Southampton and set off, I thought 'Oh my goodness, what have I done now? Two years; two and a half years.' But I am very glad I did it because it was a life-changing experience.

[0:10:22] Lee: What do you remember of the interview for the job, appreciating it is 40 years ago?

Pinder: I think I was interviewed by Bill Sloman and Eric Salmon. They asked me what my likes and dislikes and obviously asked me about the various schools I had been to.

[0:10:47] Lee: Was it rigorous?

Pinder: No it wasn't really. It was very relaxed. It was just like having a conversation.

[0:10:58] Lee: Were you surprised to get the job?

Pinder: No, not really because I had quite a wealth of experience. I suppose in a way I was because although I had worked as a chef and second chef etc. etc., I hadn't spent my whole career as a cook or a chef. It was more in management, accounts and reception. So I had a general experience of hotel work but I hadn't spent my whole career to date working as a chef. So in that way I suppose I was surprised.

[0:11:46] Lee: Well perhaps there is more to the job than just simply cooking. You have got to manage resources extremely efficiently, haven't you?

Pinder: Yes, and plan menus and keep the troops happy.

[0:11:58] Lee: And your Outward Bound experience, did that come in useful?

Pinder: Well it certainly did because I could ski – not fantastically but I could get about on skis and go downhill and I knew a bit about rock climbing and snow and ice climbing. I knew how to use ropes and ice axes and crampons. So I think, well certainly when I got there, it did.

[0:12:25] Lee: When you stepped on board the *Perla Dan*, in December '68, did you have any misgivings or were you just kind of overwhelmed by the prospect before you but keen to go still?

Pinder: Well, once I had stepped aboard and once the ship had sailed, I thought ‘Well, this is it. I can’t suddenly say “No, I have changed my mind.” ’

[0:12:49] Lee: Did that cross your mind?

Pinder: Not at all, not at all. But of course you don’t know anybody.

[0:12:55] Lee: You had not been to Cambridge, had you? You had not been to the briefing course?

Pinder: No, I didn’t go to Cambridge. I wasn’t asked to go. Perhaps I was late. I think I possibly was. Wasn’t there a cook who had to be ... , had to go back?

[0:13:11] Lee: I’m not sure, but the conference would normally be in September.

Pinder: No, because I had packed my job in at the hotel in July I think, so I don’t know why ... I think that was one of the reasons. I think there was a cook from Adelaide that had to be airlifted out so they were short of a cook and said ‘Right, you are in.’

[0:13:37] Lee: So you were a last-minute recruit?

Pinder: I think so.

[0:13:42] Lee: OK. It’s not clear. Don’t worry about that. Did you know where you were going, because they sent you to Signy, didn’t they?

Pinder: Yes. I did know where I was going.

[0:13:52] Lee: Did you know where it was?

Pinder: I did, yes. The South Orkneys, which I thought was nice, because the north Orkneys (the Orkneys) and this was the South Orkneys. Yes, I did quite a bit of research before I got there.

[0:14:08] Lee: And when you got there, what was it like?

Pinder: It was fabulous, absolutely fabulous.

[0:14:14] Lee: How do you mean?

Pinder: It looked out, and from the base: just Coronation Island and all the snow-covered peaks and the glaciers, and the elephant seals. The first time I went for a walk I heard this sort of ‘Hlerr. Errr’ and I thought someone had brought a motorbike down to the base, and it was these elephant seals on the ... making this noise. And the penguins, oh you would see them. You would go round quite high up the side of a hill and there would be a penguin halfway up the hill, squawking. We didn’t see any whales there. We did on the way down. And of course we had giant petrels. So it was the wildlife I just thought was absolutely fabulous, and the colour of the sea. It was a beautiful place.

[0:15:14] Lee: Was wildlife an interest you had anyway, from your outdoor work?

Pinder: It must have been. I went down with a Kodak Instamatic camera, which everybody laughed at, but each of the bases has their own darkroom and quite a good supply of printing equipment. But after a short while I got myself a better camera equipment, because you could get it duty free and I used to go out and I had an Olympus Pen FT which is half-frame, so you get 72 on one roll of film. I would use it almost like a diary; I would go out and take You get a half-frame mentality because you take two or three of the same subject. And then I would do contact prints of the whole and then do postcard size of the whole lot and if any I thought were good enough, then I would blow up to ... With that size you could blow them up to 8" by 10" with not too much grain.

[0:16:28] Lee: This was a hobby that you developed before you went South?

Pinder: Developed, yes.

[0:16:31] Lee: Sorry, no pun intended.

Pinder: No I had never used a camera.

[0:16:36] Lee: Oh right. You learned on base or were you being taught by somebody?

Pinder: Oh yes. There were people who would go and show you how to unload, take the film and put it into the developing tank and show you how to print things. It was excellent and I think that was one of the best things about there because if you were interested, you could learn from the scientists and help them with their work. And lots of them wanted to come and make bread and ... Of course I had a day off a week and they would take it in turns cooking. Some of them just enjoyed it so much. So we learned off each other. It was very good.

[0:17:20] Lee: What were the catering facilities like at Signy in the late 60's, '69?

Pinder: Well it was an Aga, coal-fired Aga stove which you had to keep in and that was the night met man's duty to do because if it went out, it was a devil to fire up. You would have to open up the flue and put newspaper in the flue to get an updraught to get it to go again. But it very rarely went out. You had to make sure you didn't run out of fuel. Obviously we didn't have a dishwasher. We had an electric kettle.

[0:18:03] Lee: The Aga was it, was it really?

Pinder: Yes.

[0:18:06] Lee: And no fridge, I guess.

Pinder: No fridge. You didn't really need one because you could out your stuff outside. No that's interesting. No we did have a fridge, for the sea samples of various different ...

[0:18:25] Lee: A research fridge rather than a food fridge?

Pinder: Yes. We would keep any frozen food in that.

[0:18:32] Lee: What about things like grilling? Did you have a grill?

Pinder: No, we didn't have a grill.

[0:18:37] Lee: Toaster?

Pinder: A toaster we had, yes.

[0:18:41] Lee: So it was fairly basic?

Pinder: Very basic

[0:18:44] Lee: Compared to hotels in Bristol you had worked at before. And what about the handover period? You were taking over from Alan Spencer, nicknamed Spanner?

Pinder: Yes.

[0:18:54] Lee: Did you have much of a handover period or was that not necessary?

Pinder: It was about a week. Basically he just showed me round, showed me where all the stores were and that was it. He was off.

[0:19:15] Lee: Had you had any say in what stores were to be delivered to Signy that winter?

Pinder: Not for the winter I was there, but I did for the next year.

[0:19:24] Lee: You ordered for the following ...?

Pinder: Yes, and I put a notice up on the board asking for suggestions of what people thought we should get in. And then when it arrived, it bore little resemblance to what I had indented for. So I had to get in touch with BAS HQ and they actually rectified it.

[0:19:53] Lee: So what sort of things were you asking for, for the second season? In other words, what sort of things were you frustrated that you didn't have?

Pinder: I think it was different types of jam, more of the luxury type of foods, but then Fids always want that. I thought we were very well supplied.

[0:20:22] Lee: Really?

Pinder: Yes, very well.

[0:20:23] Lee: And was it traditional English fare, or was there continental food or overseas food involved?

Pinder: No, it was traditional English.

[0:20:31] Lee: No pasta?

Pinder: Oh yes, we had pasta, sorry, but I considered that English.

[0:20:37] Lee: These days, yes. Then rice?

Pinder: Yes.

[0:20:39] Lee: So you were able to cook Italian?

Pinder: Yes, Chinese.

[0:20:42] Lee: Indian?

Pinder: Yes. We had curries.

[0:20:48] Lee: A lot of it was pre-prepared, canned stuff, wasn't it, I would imagine?

Pinder: We had bacon that was tinned, and sausages were tinned. The one complaint was: we had copious supplies of dehydrated vegetables, like green beans in a great big tin, 4 kilogram tin. And dried egg. I did swap loads of cases of that with Gerry Cutland off the *Biscoe* for more luxury items, and after the *Biscoe* left, these cases of dried egg and dried beans kept floating up onto the beach, because either he or his crew had chucked them overboard because they didn't like them.

[0:21:43] Lee: [Laughs] So he was able to see you right, so to speak.

Pinder: Yes. Perhaps he was being nice, and giving us stuff that we really wanted. We had two and a half tons of this dried egg. Well we had quite a lot really.

[0:22:01] Lee: Did you ever have cause to use his book, *Fit for a Fid*?

Pinder: I have still got one of the original A4 things and yes, I did, because we did eat shag, or cormorants but they weren't very pleasant. Penguins were OK but you could only eat the breast meat off the penguin. At Signy we had *Notothenia neglecta*, under-the-ice fish, which Eric Twelves used to catch; not very many but enough to feed us a meal. They were delicious, absolutely delicious.

[0:22:39] Lee: So were you out shooting wildlife yourself? Seal and ...?

Pinder: We didn't shoot to eat. If somebody like Jim Conroy shot some GPs⁴ to dissect them and find out what they had in their stomachs, then you could eat that, but at Signy we didn't. At Halley we did shoot seals, but again for scientific purposes, not for food. I did cook them, but there's only certain bits of each animal that you could eat.

⁴ Giant petrels.

[0:23:18] Lee: Mmm. So how good was *Fit for a Fid*?

Pinder: Very concise, very good indeed. I mean if you were down there today, you could use it, except you wouldn't be allowed to any more. You couldn't go out and cosh a penguin over the head and bring it back and eat it. That would go against all the principles of conservation, wouldn't it?

[0:23:47] Lee: Over 40 years ago, you could?

Pinder: Yes.

[0:23:50] Lee: So you were using *Fit for a Fid* a fair bit, were you?

Pinder: No, because I used my own recipes. For example, if it was penguin, seal or shag, then yes I would use that because obviously you don't get those on an English menu, do you? Although nowadays I see a lot of pubs have put on things like alligator steak, kangaroo steak, and buffalo. It seems to be the in thing.

[0:24:21] Lee: So the recipes you took South with you, I suppose every good chef would take his favourite recipes, in a folder. What was your signature dish, if you had such a thing in those days?

Pinder: I don't work on recipes. It just comes out of my head. It's a bit like mixing concrete. I'm not suggesting it comes out like concrete. I can see something and then I can adapt it with the ingredients that I have got, to make it come out the same.

[0:24:51] Lee: Let me re-phrase the question. Were there meals you made which were in demand to be repeated?

Pinder: I think my pears in curry cream sauce was an absolute favourite.

[0:25:03] Lee: They are so legendary, even I have heard about this. Tell me a bit more about it.

Pinder: Well basically it's just whipped cream with a little bit of caster sugar and a tiny bit of curry power, and then you can use melon but obviously we didn't have melon down there but we had tinned pears and then you just coat the pears with this curry cream sauce. It sounds revolting but you can either have it as a starter or as a dessert and it's really refreshing. It's got to be served, obviously, chilled which is no problem there.

[0:25:47] Lee: And what about a main course that you were asked to do more than once?

Pinder: I suppose Spanish omelette where you have got dehydrated onions. You do it in a big tray and onions, bacon, potato. Obviously all these things are tinned. Garlic puree. And the other one I think: I used to make about 12 lb of bread every day.

[0:26:21] Lee: In the Aga?

Pinder: Yes.

[0:26:23] Lee: Was it difficult to control?

Pinder: No no. And I would use a third of it to do four loaves. Another third, I would do pizza and then the dough: I put grated cheese, tomato puree, lots of things, so the dough wasn't just basic bread; it was actually flavoured. And then put the topping on it. And the other third I would put sugar in it and cinnamon and make doughnuts and deep fry those. So it was multi-fuelled and I think the pizza went down very well.

[0:27:10] Lee: Did you ever use penguin eggs?

Pinder: Penguin eggs? At Signy we had loads of them. We'd keep them in a big long box in flour and they would last for a year. They were excellent for baking and omelettes but no good for frying like a fried egg because the albumen (the white) wouldn't set. It would just remain horrible, runny and clear. So it was a bit off-putting. You wouldn't want to eat that like that so couldn't use them as fried eggs but for baking and omelettes, they were fine. Lots of them would lay three eggs; well obviously you would only take one egg. They couldn't rear three chicks anyhow, so it wasn't cruel.

[0:28:14] Lee: Tell me a bit about the other things you did, when you when you weren't actually chained to your Aga.

Pinder: Each day somebody would be on gash hand, either a scientist or some other member of the base team. So they had to stay there and they would be responsible for washing up, clearing the base up. So I would do breakfast. Most days, if the weather was fine, I would get the lunch prepared and ask the gash hand to dish it up, and then I would be out either skiing, photographing, just walking round the island.

[0:29:00] Lee: So you had a fair bit of spare time, then?

Pinder: No, because I would get the gash hand to do smoko. I would be back for lunch and then I would pop out again in the afternoon. So yes, I was out an awful lot, and then cooked the evening meal when I came back. The one time I remember I came back to base and the divers, because sometimes it is warmer in the water than it is out, but then they have got to get back to base quickly and get changed. I'd come back in a hurry – because I was always late – to do the evening meal, and they would all be lined up against the Aga warming their behinds. I got fed up of saying 'Excuse me, excuse me.' So I lifted the lid up on one of the hotplates on the Aga and poured a load of Cayenne pepper on it, then just put it down and I went and sat in the lounge. A couple of minutes later, [coughs] we had to evacuate the base, open all the windows and the doors, but they didn't do it again.

[0:30:16] Lee: They got the message, did they?

Pinder: Yes.

[0:30:18] Lee: I have also got a note here to ask you about green bread.

Pinder: Oh I did that once as well. You make loaves and you go away somewhere. No-one can resist fresh bread and instead of cutting it properly, they'd just tear it to bits. So I'd come back and there would be a few little bread crumbs left on the plate. I said 'I can't be doing with this' so I put green vegetable dye in the dough and that slowed the consumption down.

[0:30:49] Lee: They thought it was mouldy, did they?

Pinder: Yeah. It tasted the same but didn't look very pleasant.

[0:30:55] Lee: Sorry we are drifting about a bit. It doesn't matter. When you did have time to get out and into the field, between your mealtimes, what were your favourite occupations? What was your favourite place to go or favourite thing to see?

Pinder: Well there were two huts where you could go and stay for as long as you liked.

[0:31:17] Lee: You mean overnight?

Pinder: Yes. One was at Gourlay and the other was at Foca, and at Gourlay you had obviously loads of penguins – a big penguin colony – but also fur seals. I used to go out sometimes just to enjoy skiing, and going up on the proper mountains and skiing back down, but other times I would just go out taking photographs. But I did spend three nights at Gourlay and three nights at Foca, because people on base would say 'If you want to go and take your pictures, go for a couple of nights.'

[0:32:04] Lee: Were you taking ciné film by this time as well?

Pinder: I did, yes, I took a lot of ciné film. I had a battery operated one in the first year at Signy. I remember I filmed from my bunkroom Coronation Island and put the lens of the ciné camera up against one lens of the binoculars and filmed it, traversed it slowly. When I eventually, after a year, got this film back, I thought 'This isn't mine.' It looked like somebody flying through the Alps. But we went up Wave Peak and Edwin Mickleburgh, who actually made a film (the BBC has put it on), he lugged all his 16mm camera equipment up to the top. I say lugged it. It was in an aluminium case but I imagine it was quite bulky and heavy, and it just wouldn't work. But this little one worked fine. So I got some wonderful footage of seals, Weddell seals; one where I am on the sea ice and there is open water and the seal looks up at me and just with a flick of its tail glides underneath the sea ice. Fantastic. And another one I have got was a shag, blue-eyed shag at the sea, and it had got this fish in its mouth. It looked almost as big as itself and threw it up in the air so it changed so it was head down, and then just gulped it down. Horrible to think, isn't it, swallow them live.

[0:34:09] Lee: And you were climbing at Sandy Fjords as well?

Pinder: Yes, we went with Dave Rinning, Elliott Wright and John Edwards and we went over to Coronation Street. Coronation Street? Coronation Island.

[0:34:24] Lee: [Laughs] You are not the first Fid to make that mistake.

Pinder: On the sea ice, we were manhauling. Signy in those days, well they hadn't for a long time had dog teams and we couldn't take the skidoo, although I think possibly we had taken a skidoo and a sledge full of our food boxes, prior. And we spent I think it possibly was four or five weeks going across the Pomona Plateau to the Sandy Fjord, and we climbed four different peaks. It wasn't a technically difficult climb although it was about a foot deep with rime frost in parts. So very difficult to belay or to get any points where you could anchor yourself to. And then coming back, that was the only dangerous bit, crossing over the glacier.

[0:35:24] Pinder: We were a little bit off route because we came back a different way. Elliott and John were ahead and Dave and I were behind. The sledge broke a crevasse bridge and I just thought 'What on Earth was that?' because there was a big boom, as though somebody had fired a cannon at us. And a great plume of snow came up in the air and the sledge had just broken – it was just leaning over this ... and you could ... I took a photo looking down and it seemed to be bottomless. It was black. We could have dropped down that and we wouldn't have got out. I had unhitched myself from the sledge because I thought 'If the sledge goes down, then it's going to pull me down with it.' But we extracted it and went round and we were much more careful after that.

[0:36:20] Lee: I was going to say, did your memories of what happened to Jeremy Bailey influence the way you did your fieldwork?

Pinder: Well if you are driving in a motorised vehicle, you can't have somebody walking in front with what we used to call a bog-chisel, which is like an aluminium pole with a sharp end on it, probing every ... And that's possibly why the dog teams would ... But then if you are in a hurry, you sometimes disregard what should be basic safety rules.

[0:37:00] Lee: In any case a dog team might happily cross a snow bridge and a rather heavier Muskeg not.

Pinder: ... go through. I've been running with a dog team; we were running along a crevasse instead of across it, and the skis were going down. Ooh dear. But again, I had a dog team, we didn't exactly know where we were, and I was shouting them 'Irrah' to go right. Was it? I can't remember. 'Auk' left I think, and they wouldn't go the way that I wanted, but they suddenly served up there and found an old marker post which a previous team had left out there. You put a number on them so we knew exactly where we were then. So you could say that the dogs had sort of saved us.

[0:37:52] Lee: Was there a time when you feared for your life, whilst you were in the Antarctic?

Pinder: I think that crevasse was possibly the one. There was another one at Halley Bay where I stupidly went out onto the sea ice to take some photos of some crabeater seals. In previous years two people had been blown out to sea and never got back, on a similar thing. But I kept an eye on the gap so I knew I could jump over.

[0:38:37] Lee: Let's talk about Halley because you did your first season at Signy in '69 and then for 1970 did you choose to go to Halley or were they just transferring you?

Pinder: No, I wanted to go down the Peninsula. I wanted to go to either Adelaide or Argentine Island, but they said 'No, but you can go to Halley if you want.'

[0:38:56] Lee: And you had a choice of going to Halley or going home?

Pinder: No, or remaining at Signy.

[0:39:02] Lee: So you chose to go to Halley?

Pinder: Yes.

[0:39:04] Lee: Just for the experience?

Pinder: Just for the experience, basically.

[0:39:08] Lee: How was it because it's very different from Signy, isn't it?

Pinder: When we arrived, I know now that all the base members from Halley do it deliberately, they put on their stinkiest seal blubber-covered anoraks and trousers, and it was like we were being invaded by Neanderthal men. Because of course we were all in lounge suits and they came on and wanted the bosun so they could get all their beer and whisky and so on. It was completely different from Signy. When we had parties and everyone would get dressed up and behave properly, it just appeared to me to be much rowdier and rougher, but I suppose there were twice the number of Fids there than there were at Signy. I think the thing that struck me was the complete lack ... There was no scenery to speak of. It was just flat apart from the edge of the shelf which was quite dramatic in places, and no wildlife to speak of. It was very rare that you saw even a bird. So I missed that and I missed the scenery of the South Orkneys, but apart from that, when I did go out on expeditions, it was very dramatic, going up onto the main Antarctic continent.

[0:40:55] Lee: So tell me about some of the trips you did, because there were two cooks at Halley?

Pinder: Yes.

[0:40:59] Lee: So therefore you must have had a bit more spare time?

Pinder: We did a week on and a week off in the winter, and then a month on and a month off in the summer. But obviously if you wanted to go on a trip that was 6 weeks, then fair enough.

[0:41:15] Lee: But one cook could feed the whole base?

Pinder: Yes, especially in the summer, because there were so many people away on field trips. So there weren't the full complement of 26.

[0:41:26] Lee: Where did you go on your field trips?

Pinder: I went onto the Lower Ice Shelf with a chap called Malcolm Guyatt, to do levelling, and we went with a skidoo and shortly after we got back from doing all this levelling, the whole bit of that ice shelf floated away, so all the work was a complete waste of time. I went with Mark Vallance and Doc Leith and I can't remember his name. He was ... operated the thing to track the weather balloons. He was seconded from the RAF. Bill somebody⁵ and we went up to re-trace the Wright Line that Graham Wright had put in, because the other, Bob-Pi, crossing was so heavily crevassed, it was considered too dangerous to take the vehicles up there. So Graham Wright and we went to re-trace this and we were away I suppose three weeks possibly, and that was excellent fun.

[0:42:48] Lee: That was onto the Continent itself, was it?

Pinder: Yes.

[0:42:50] Lee: Why was it fun? What was special about it?

Pinder: Well it was brilliant weather all the time and I took loads of ciné film. By that time I had a wind-up camera with a zoom lens and everything. I just thought it was magic, and we were very lucky with the weather; we weren't snowed in at all.

[0:43:14] Lee: What were you doing on these trips? Were you actually the cook for the trip or were you just ...? What was your role on these trips?

Pinder: No I wasn't taken as a cook then. We would take it in turns to do the ...

[0:43:27] Lee: So you were just going as a GA, were you?

Pinder: Yes, basically, and on that one Doc Leith was taking blood samples from us every day.

[0:43:37] Lee: Do you know why?

Pinder: No I don't. Perhaps he was a vampire.

[0:43:48] Lee: You also went to visit the emperor penguins with your camera?

Pinder: Oh yes I did. That was with Doc Leith again and Bob Wells, and it was about -40 so Ron Gill couldn't get any of the vehicles started. So we man-hauled down there and spent the first night in a three-man tent. The next day Ron had managed to get a vehicle started and he pulled down a caboosie. It's like a caravan on a sledge. So we stayed in there. And the one night I was on the top bunk. Because you wake up in the morning, even though you have pulled your hood tight round there, all your eyebrows would be frosted and your moustache and your beard. And I had tied this up tight and I had rolled off the top bunk in the middle of the night and neither Bob nor

⁵ Bruce Jarvis. (Source: Keith Holmes' list of winterers.)

Iain Leith; they just fell about laughing because they said I was squirming around like a bionic worm on the floor trying to get up, because I panicked. I thought the whole thing had gone down a crevasse. I didn't understand that I had fallen off the top bunk.

[0:45:16] Lee: So you have to tie that from the inside, effectively?

Pinder: Yes.

[0:45:20] Lee: So getting out again might be quite tricky?

Pinder: Well, especially in the dark when you have fallen from ???
[incomprehensible] Now the emperor penguins, we built an enclosure because Doc Leith wanted to test the core temperature of both the parent bird and the chick. We had a tent on the sea ice where the emperor penguin colony was but you could only work for ... because you had to take your gloves off to fiddle around with this wire to erect the mesh round the cage, and you could only do that for about the first time 20 minutes. Then you would have to go inside the tent to get your hands back. And the next time it was slower. It was cold, it really was.

[0:46:12] Lee: When you say you were testing the core temperature of the penguins, was this anal thermometers you were using?

Pinder: Yes, but unfortunately we found that once a human had touched a penguin, the parent would discard it.

[0:46:27] Lee: The chick?

Pinder: Yes, the chick. So we adopted two of them, brought them back to base. They slept in Iain's sleeping bag I think. Brought them back to base and hand-reared them. We used to take them out on trips on a sledge down to the sea. But they wouldn't go back. We didn't know what to do. It was horrible. The dogs I think killed both of them. Although we put them in ... sunk the cage right deep, the dogs still managed to dig right down. Oh dear. So really that demonstrates that you shouldn't interfere with wildlife.

[0:47:13] Lee: How did you raise them and what were you feeding them on?

Pinder: Tinned sardines mainly and pilchards. You would grunge it up and use a hypodermic. They were funny. Gerrr! [imitation of penguin call] Gerr! I did take a lot of ciné film of the emperor penguins and I also got a Uher tape recorder which I have still got but it's very old now. I took that down, lugged it around because it worked on batteries and of course off mains, and it had a power pack as well, and I recorded the emperor penguins. I got that through 'Mick' Mickleburgh's father, who worked at BBC Bristol Wildlife place. When I came back, Mick was making a record of Sounds of the Antarctic: whales and icebergs and birds, and he had heard that I had a recording of the emperor penguins. So he came up and said could he use that. I said 'Of course.' I think I got paid about £4 17s 6d and a free copy of the record, and I am mentioned in the front cover. But I have never had any royalties from it, so I don't think it made the Top Twenty.

[0:48:46] Lee: It wasn't a best seller?

Pinder: No.

[0:48:48] Lee: The two penguin chicks you reared, how far did you get with them? Several months old or into their adult plumage?

Pinder: Not into the adult plumage but they were about 3-foot high. So pretty nearly, yes. It wouldn't have been much longer before they would have fledged.

[0:49:10] Lee: And the plan was to release them back to the rookery?

Pinder: Yes, but they had become humanised and I don't think even that would have worked. It may have done. It's a bit like that film *Happy Feet*. Have you seen that?

[0:49:25] Lee: No, I haven't but I know what you mean. Tell me a bit about the radio ham work you were doing, because you set up radio bases both at Halley and Signy, I believe.

Pinder: Not at Signy.

[0:49:36] Lee: Not at Signy? OK.

Pinder: At Signy I did a Morse code sort of evening class with Jake Howarth.

[0:49:44] Lee: How had you learned? Oh you learned it from him?

Pinder: Yes. Well there was a few of us and I found that it's easy to transmit and hard to receive.

[0:49:57] Lee: Tell me about the radio ham work.

Pinder: You needed 10 words a minute receiving and transmitting to get your amateur licence which was issued from the Falklands. When I went down to Halley, there was an ionosphericist (I only know him as Graunch). I can't remember his name now⁶. Anyhow because they had to send up things into the ionosphere, and then receive, bounce them back, so they had a good receiver there which you could pick up the World Service. Then he said 'Why don't we a transmitter out of the old base?' So we trogged off down there with a skidoo and a sledge, put an A-frame up with a Handy-Hauler. No we didn't; we used a skidoo with a pulley system, crawled down through this, it was about forty feet I think, went down on a Dexion ladder, and crawled through ice-covered little tunnels to get to the radio shack.

[0:51:25] Lee: Was this on the IGY Hut or Halley-I?

Pinder: Halley-I, and the ice crystals in there were absolutely fantastic. I took loads of black & white photos of them. Anyway we dragged this thing along. It was only hauling it up we realised how heavy it was. We didn't ...; we used a skidoo and it

⁶ Keith Chappell.

actually buckled the A-frame that we'd erected but luckily we had just got it to the top, took it back to the Beastie Hut, hauled it down the shaft into there. Graunch then converted it from being AM to go out on Single Sideband and I used to spend hours there. You'd do 'CQ, CQ' and so anyone ... but everybody wants to talk, make contact with somebody in the Antarctic.

[0:52:24] Lee: This was all voice work or ...?

Pinder: Voice. yes, and I got through to King Hussein at one time.

[0:52:31] Lee: Of Jordan?

Pinder: Yes. He didn't speak. He just changed signal strength to QSL. And I got through to somebody in Japan. I couldn't help remembering Tony Hancock's *Radio Ham*. 'What is the weather like there? It is not raining here also.' And in those days you weren't allowed to pass ... Like if I'd have got in touch with a radio ham in England, he couldn't put me through to my Mum and Dad, but he could pass messages on, and I did. There was only two weeks in the year when you could, because of the ionosphere and the bounce or something, only about two weeks in the year when you could get through to the UK.

[0:53:19] Pinder: Just before Christmas I got through to somebody in Cwmbran and I said 'Would you ring my Dad up and wish him Happy Christmas, or ring my parents up?' So he did that and next time I got hold of him he said 'Huh, your father said "What the bloody hell is he doing in Cwmbran? I thought he was in the Antarctic?"' Oh gosh. But I established lots of contacts in South America and when I came out, I spent some time in South America; I would go and visit these people and they would treat you like royalty. It was absolutely amazing.

[0:53:58] Lee: What was the therapeutic benefit of being a radio ham?

Pinder: It was just chatting to people on the outside, and it was interesting learning about other people's equipment. It just becomes like a network, like a Friends Reunited or something.

[0:54:24] Lee: Does it help keep you sane?

Pinder: I didn't have any problem with that. I don't think I suffered from Midwinter Madness, because I was always inventing things to do.

[0:54:38] Lee: How were you able to follow world events? Were you aware of what was happening on the rest of the planet?

Pinder: Not really. I used to get the BBC World Service, just to get a Top Twenty, because we had a magazine at Halley and I just put that. And the reception was never very good but you didn't really bother about the news and world events. In some ways it's a bit like when you go on holiday. My wife is and I suppose I am a copious soap person but if you miss *Coronation Street* or *Home and Away* for a couple of days, you don't miss it at all. And if you don't get a daily newspaper you don't miss that at all.

[0:55:34] Lee: There were one or two incidents that I have been asked to ask you about. One was about the Argentinians visiting Halley which was a common experience?

Pinder: No no, they only happened once. We had the Americans visit from the *USS Glacier*⁷.

[0:55:50] Lee: So how did the Argentinians get there?

Pinder: They flew in a helicopter from their ship. They were all dressed up as Admirals or Vice Admirals. Of course we were all in our scruffy old anoraks.

[0:56:06] Lee: Did they just turn up or was it a planned ...

Pinder: No, they had been in touch on the radio, so we knew they were coming. And I found actually, in the bar, I could understand the Argentinians although I couldn't really speak fluent Spanish but I could understand them – there was so much sign language – better than the Americans and their drawl. We had an 8-man sledge behind a skidoo. As I say, they were all immaculate in uniforms bright red or bright black.

[0:56:45] Lee: But you went to get them, did you?

Pinder: From the helicopter and bring them back to base because they couldn't land very close to the base because of all the radio masts and somebody went and tied a skull and crossbones to the bottom of the helicopter. And somebody else hoisted up ... Bob Wells had brought his bicycle down with him, which sounds silly but you could actually cycle because the snow crust was so hard, and somebody hoisted that up the radio mast. So when they took off, I got loads of photos of this skull and crossbones, and I thought when the Falkands War started, I thought perhaps I should send to a newspaper but I thought 'No, not really.' Especially when it got serious and they sunk the *Belgrano*.

[0:57:39] Lee: 'Ask about the Fairey Lansing Snowmobile.' What does it mean by that?

Pinder: It was an aeroplane that had crashed but the engine was still intact and it was put on a bodywork and obviously on skis with the engine mounted behind. It would do 90 miles an hour.

[0:58:04] Lee: Really?

Pinder: Yep. And we all used to get six of us behind this. Mind you, you would get covered in splatters of oil, and Fin⁸ (I can't remember his name), Fin it was who maintained it and did it up again, so it had a resurgence. It would go in and out of the radio masts. You would let the rope down for somebody to ski across and when they were halfway across, you would jerk it up, so they would go off and the idea was to be the last one standing.

⁷ By 1970 it was the *USCGC Glacier*, operated by the US Coast Guard.

⁸ Ian Smith.

[0:58:37] Lee: So when you say it pulled six of you, you mean like a skiing speedboat?

Pinder: Yes, similar to water-skiing⁹. You could go right out on the side, turn sideways, then arc round and pick up a heck of a speed. It's a wonder none of us ever broke any limbs doing that.

[0:58:56] Lee: I was going to ask you whether you bothered to tell HQ about this.

Pinder: No¹⁰.

[0:59:02] Lee: What happened to the machine in the end?

Pinder: I don't know. I doubt if it would still be there. They probably wouldn't be allowed to use it now. I don't know¹¹.

[0:59:17] Lee: Scary moments? You mentioned the trip to Coronation Island and the crevasses, but apparently there was an incident with leopard seals coming up.

Pinder: When Les Graves and I were walking, because after the sea ice had gone out, it leaves almost like a walkway of ice by the sea. You can walk round. It doesn't go all the way sometimes, obviously ??? [incomprehensible]. We were walking round this and this leopard seal popped its head out of the water and turned round and then swam and was trying to climb out to get us. Les was not actually smacking it on the head but just prodding on the head with his ice axe. But I would dread to think what might have happened had we had fallen in. It's weird that you can swim with the Weddell seals and elephant seals and they will just ..., nosey, they will just come. But leopard seals ... Although Doug Allan did take some underwater film of a leopard seal, but they are such fearsome looking creatures. I mean their jaws go right back. They look almost reptilian.

[1:00:35] Lee: He had a very relaxed attitude towards them, Doug Allan. I saw him on Sunday morning, but you regarded them as threats, did you?

Pinder: Well they certainly ... unless they were just being inquisitive, but in those days we used a place called Gash Cove; where we used to go and tip all the gash and at one time I was in the boat and some leopard seal just put its head up. It was almost as though it was coming for us. Whether it's because of the ferocious way they look or you see them taking a penguin and tossing about in its jaws and throwing it in the air. Because there was a lady Fid who was killed by a leopard seal.

[1:01:23] Lee: Yes, Kirsty Brown.

⁹ This is known as ski-joring.

¹⁰ HQ knew about the snowplane. They had tried it out at Adelaide Island before it was sent in to Halley (Source: Ted Clapp, quoted on the Z-Fids website.)

¹¹ It was abandoned at Halley-II. Details on www.zfids.org.uk.

Pinder: I don't know how or what happened, whether it attacked her or just got her breathing apparatus. I don't know. But you say Doug Allan was quite happy with them?

[1:01:40] Lee: Yes. He seemed to develop a tactic for working out whether they were going to be aggressive or not, and as you say, he has got some great footage, underwater footage of leopard seals, so he lived to tell the tale. Just to finish off, then, if I may, you were lucky enough to see some auroras whilst you were at Halley?

Pinder: Oh yes, absolutely fantastic.

[1:02:01] Lee: Tell me about that, and how you felt about it.

Pinder: Well I am not a religious person but some of the natural beauty there, the sunsets, the sunrises, and especially the aurora. Although you know the scientific explanation for it, it still makes you feel as though Somebody up there is just waving His hand around to create this fantastic thing, and it really was. I tried and tried to get photographs of it but none of them came out. No, it really was awe inspiring.

[1:02:39] Lee: Can you elaborate on that a little bit? Did you feel the hand of the Creator?

Pinder: Well that's what I would like to say, although I am not religious and you could explain the scientific causes of it, but it still felt as though you were down here and Somebody up there was painting the sky for you, yes.

[1:03:05] Lee: There are two views about having been in the Antarctic for a while. Some people felt it interrupted their career and didn't do them any good at all. Other people felt their career benefitted subsequently from the Antarctic experience, and I wonder which camp you fall into? First of all, did you use anything you learned in the Antarctic in your later life and did the experience, did that line on your CV help?

Pinder: I certainly learned so many varied things, obviously photography being one of them. I think it made me an all-round better person, better at getting on with all sorts of people, better at adapting to different situations and perhaps more self-confident, even garrulous. I certainly think it helped me become a college lecturer. It helped me equate to students. Yes, so I think I benefitted enormously.

[1:04:18] Lee: Was it strange going back into ... I think you went back into hotel work for a while when you got back, didn't you?

Pinder: Yes.

[1:04:24] Lee: Was it strange going back to a fully equipped kitchen and equipment?

Pinder: Well I was on the managerial side but the first job I had, because I said to myself 'I don't really want to work indoors.' It was the summer and I worked for Lang's Pipeline; we were putting a pipeline from Milford Haven through to Wolverhampton. We did all the special crossings of rivers, so it involved blowing

things up, and it was great fun. Because you don't dig a trench; you've got great big machines to do all that, and cranes. But then I drifted back into hotel work as a waiter. No, it wasn't strange really because it was what I knew best, But then it was my first wife who suggested I go to college and train how to lecture people in hotel management and cheffing.

[1:05:25] Lee: Looking back over your career, Martin, how highly do you rate the Antarctic period?

Pinder: I know I shouldn't dwell in the past but I would say it was the highlight of my life really.

[1:05:40] Lee: And the fact that that highlight took place quite early in your life, does that have any ongoing repercussions? Did you later on feel as though you had peaked early or ...?

Pinder: No, because as I say, I used the experience as a springboard for lots of different things that have happened throughout my life.

[1:06:07] Lee: So it was a good grounding?

Pinder: Absolutely.

[1:06:11] Lee: That's marvellous, Martin. Thank very much indeed.

Pinder: Well, thank you.

[1:06:17] [End]

ENDS

Possible extracts:

- Friendship with Jeremy Bailey (who died in a crevasse accident). [0:05:45]
- View from Signy base. [0:14:14]
- Taking half-frame photographs of wildlife. [0:15:14]
- The Aga and other kitchen equipment at Signy. [0:17:20]
- Dried egg and dried vegetables not popular. [0:20:48]
- Eating the local birds, fish and seals. [0:22:01]
- Lots of penguin eggs used. [0:27:10]
- Clearing the stove area with Cayenne pepper. [0:29:00]
- Green bread. [0:30:18]
- Peak climbing and a crevasse incident on Signy. [0:34:24]
- Arrival at Halley - very different from Signy. [0:39:08]
- Falling from the top bunk in a caboose. [0:43:48]
- Adopting a couple of penguin chicks. [0:46:27]
- Retrieving a transmitter from the old base. [0:49:57]
- Radio hamming; contact with King Hussein. [0:52:31]
- A Argentinian visit and a skull & crossbones. [0:56:06]
- The Lansing snowplane. [0:57:39]
- Close encounter with a leopard seal. [0:59:17]