

Robin Hubbard

Edited transcript of an interview with Robin Hubbard (AD6/24/1/142), conducted by Chris Eldon-Lee, on 28th October 2011.

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Transcribers use of Symbols in text:

'-' denotes short pause

'...' denotes speech trailing off.

[00.00.00] Chris: This is Robin Hubbard, interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee, on the 28th October 2011. Robin Hubbard.

Robin: Well I'm called Robin Hubbard but I was actually christened Robert. I've never been called Robert, Edward Hubbard and I was born in a place called Barnston on the Wirral, in the 29th January 1942.

[00.00.25] Chris: So you are now sixty 'nine', and you went to school in the Liverpool area I guess?

Robin: Yes I went to Liverpool College, which is a private school but it's sort of largely day-boys.

[00.00.37] Chris: And then to University?

Robin: Yes I went to Liverpool University as well, [laughs], 'cause I don't think they could afford to send me away.

[00.00.44] Chris: What were you reading?

Robin: I read Dentistry.

[00.00.48] Chris: Why the fascination with Dentistry?

Robin: Well I don't know really, by mistake I would say. I remember once the Headmaster of the junior school came round and said 'I want all you boys who know what you want to do when you leave school to let me know what it is'. So I had no idea at all - did I want to be a sailor or a soldier or something like this. When they came to the guy next to me and he said 'I want to be a Dentist'. I said oh and said 'I want to be a Dentist too'.

[00.01.13] Chris: Really ?

Robin: He went on to become a Civil Engineer. Then after that I was thinking, well I don't know, here I am sort of heading me for Dentistry, and I'm not really sure how keen I am

on that, so maybe I will think of something else but no my parents kept sort of saying 'No you are going to be a Dentist'. So I became a Dentist.

[00.01.35] Chris: Any regrets all these years later?

Robin: Well I never particularly enjoyed Dentistry which is why I have always done jobs in interesting places like Antarctica and Canada and Borneo and things like this.

[00.01.47] Chris: So Dentistry was a tool in your kitbag to get round the world?

Robin: Well sort of, yes.

[00.01.53] Chris: And how did the Antarctic first appear in your life?

Robin: Well there was - the first job I did was in Dundee, I was a house surgeon in oral surgery in Dundee and one of the nurses there had a father, who was a flight lieutenant in the Air Force and had flown in the Antarctic. So I went round to their house one evening and I saw this guys films - and here's a chap doing some dentistry. That was a chap called Ian Barnes, I think he became a professor of something or other. I said 'Oh interesting', sort of tucked it at the back of my mind and then, after that I went and travelled round America for a couple of months and then did a locum job in Britain and then, all of a sudden I didn't have a job to do. I thought what shall I do, I know, so I telephoned the British Antarctic Survey and got on to Bill Sloman and six weeks later I set sail.

[00.02.45] Chris: Had you read about the Antarctic as a boy?

Robin: Not particularly, no.

[00.02.49] Chris: Seen the film?

Robin: No.

[00.00.00] Chris: So you didn't know much about it really?

Robin: Well I have always been interested geographically, I'm a pretty good geographer these days, so yes I knew about it geographically.

[00.03.05] Chris: Was Bill Sloman, was he looking for a dentist?

Robin: No I said 'Hello, I was just wondering if your needing a dentist', he said 'Hm!, dentist, Hom!, Oh I suppose we could use one..... are you interested? I said 'Well yes ...' [laughs], and then six months ... only six weeks later

[00.03.25] Chris: Six weeks - so did you have an interview or was that all ?

Robin: Yes I went down to London for the day on expenses, which struck me as pretty nice at the time, and I met Bill Sloman. Whether I met Vivian Fuchs at that stage I don't know, I can't remember ...

[00.03.44] Chris: Do you remember it being a rigorous interview or was it almost an old boys chat ?

Robin: Almost an old boys chat, yes.

[00.03.51] Chris: And were you surprised to be taken on?

Robin: Em I was quite pleased ... I don't recall being surprised, no.

[00.04.03] Chris: I should say were you surprised how quickly the turnaround was?

Robin: Well probably yes, I didn't really realise how most people were signed up six months at least in advance ...

[00.04.17] Chris: I guess you had to catch the boat didn't you? How did you get down there?

Robin: On the "Perla Dan", which was a chartered Danish ship about 1300 Tons as I recall maybe about 1600, only one thousand and something tons and it went along at about nine knots and took about three weeks to Montivideo, couple of days in Montivideo, then another week to the Falkland Islands, as I recall.

[00.04.42] Chris: How were you taking to this because this is a very different way of life I guess, being on a ship with all these men heading the same place?

Robin: Well I thoroughly enjoyed it ...

[00.04.52] Chris: And when you got there - to the Antarctic, what impressed you about it, what were your first impressions?

Robin: Well I was just intrigued and fascinated and more or less as I expected I suppose, but I went round everywhere where British people had a base at that time, went to Halley Bay and South Georgia and all down the Antarctic Peninsula as well.

[00.05.20] Chris: So were you a kind of flying dentist or a shipping dentist?

Robin: Basically I slept on the ship apart from two weeks when we did a Decca hi-fix Survey of some place south of Anvers Island as I recall, when the cook Bernie Chapple and myself and this Decca hi-fix engineer were camped on this island for two weeks just about the end of the season probably, so that it got fairly cold and windy.

[00.05.50] Chris: They didn't need a dentist on that trip I suppose, you were there in a different capacity?

Robin: No I was cooking in fact, Bernard was totally jarred off with having been cook for a couple of years and he didn't want to cook a thing ever again, so I did it.

[00.06.05] Chris: So it was a good opportunity, a jolly?

Robin: Yes, oh yes, for sure.

[00.60.09] Chris: Lets go back to your being a ship based dentist, in fact even now the dentists tend to be on the ships all the time, fifty years later. So were you simply going around looking for bad teeth?

Robin: I would get to a place, a base where we would relieve them because they hadn't seen anybody since the end of the previous year, and I would look at all their teeth and do anything I found, and then after that I would join in with whatever was happening, work on the building site perhaps.

[00.06.43] Chris: So you became a GA effectively, for a while?

Robin: Ya.

[00.06.45] Chris: What are your memories of that period, your first trip, your first visit was to Halley I think was it, no.?

Robin: Deception and Signy, and then Halley no ... before that, we went to South Georgia for two or three days.

[00.07.02] Chris: Deception, Signy, then South Georgia, where they had their own dentist I think didn't they at South Georgia, is that right?

Robin: Oh, I don't think so.

[00.07.12] Chris: No were you doing any dental work there?

Robin: Probably a couple of scraps only, because there were no people on South Georgia at the time although there is a Shackleton Base Shackleton Hut and I don't really recall what they had in the way of personnel. I don't think they had too many.

[00.07.34] Chris: Were you finding .. at Deception and Signy were you finding there were problems with peoples teeth or - were your skills required shall we say?

Robin: Oh yes I think so, I know I kept a diary of all that I did, and a description of the dental state and everything I did for everybody and basically I saw most of the people. They had been there all winter and hadn't seen a dentist for a year or at least a year, and they tend not to be very good in oral hygiene and they all needed at least a scaling and odd couple of fillings and some people needed quite a few fillings as I recall.

[00.08.19] Chris: How well kitted out was the surgery on the ship?

Robin: Not really, I took my box of tools which is a little wooden case, and they had a drill which had two speeds ... this drill was a motor which sat on the patient's chest which was held on by a leather strap round their neck. It had two speeds, slow and not so very slow.

[00.08.46] Chris: Were you able to do what you wanted or were you compromised by the equipment?

Robin: We didn't have any X-Ray machines, so there were a couple of times when I could have done with some X-Rays. Basically you had to lack of X-Rays was a real thing that I

missed and then I didn't have a high speed drill, except that in my training I had only been using high speed drills in the last year or something like that.

[00.09.13] Chris: Anaesthetics, were you able to give people an anaesthetic?

Robin: Local anaesthetics, yes.

[00.09.19] Chris: So it wasn't that bad?

Robin: No, no.

[00.09.23] Chris: But it could have been better?

Robin: Basically, on the 'Perla Dan' I used the bathroom in the cabin I shared with Dick Williams who was the doctor, who was Australian. So I just used our cabin bathroom and then after probably at Halley Bay, I changed onto to the 'John Biscoe' and again I think I used a bathroom on the 'John Biscoe'.

[00.09.56] Chris: So the high speed drill, sorry the slow speed drill you took with you - was actually on the ship already?

Robin: I think the low speed drill belonged to BAS.

[00.10.07] Chris: Right but you transferred it from one ship to the next with you?

Robin: I think so, actually I don't, I'm sure I did, must have done.

[00.10.18] Chris: Ships didn't come equipped with a drill?

Robin: No, no.

[00.10.21] Chris: Ok. You had the great opportunity to see round the whaling station at South Georgia didn't you?

Robin: Yes I did.

[00.10.26] Chris: What were your feelings about that?

Robin: Well it wasn't operating at the time, which I was fairly glad about and I went to see Sir Earnest Shackleton's grave and when I went back to South Georgia toward the end of the trip, I went and had a good couple of hikes up on the ridges after they had been snowed upon, in some beautiful weather, so I thoroughly enjoyed that. I have at home a harpoon head which I took home, stole from the base I suppose, I think whaling had finished at that time, hadn't it?

[00.11.13] Chris: I think probably yes. It would have been an old whaling station, but probably still in fairly good condition, compared to how it was a few years back.

Robin: Yes, there were a few whale hunters around little small boats with guns on the foredeck.

[00.11.27] Chris: A lot of people have a lot of affection for South Georgia, for its beauty and bird life. Were you struck by this?

Robin: Yes absolutely. The water was so beautiful and clear and blue and the weather was pretty good as well when I was in South Georgia. So yes.

[00.11.50] Chris: Tell me about the other things you had to do, because apart from dentistry which was the skin you arrived with, you had to pick up skills of other things such as hair cutting and so on?

Robin: Yes indeed, yes, I really quite enjoyed haircutting [laughs] and I remember one guy coming in from in Halley Bay who'd been out travelling for three months or so and came in with his hair down to his shoulders and a big beard and things like this. He came to be trimmed up by me and I have a before and after photographs of him, one sort of all shaggy and his hair down over his shoulders and a big beard, another all trimmed and neat.

[00.12.23] Chris: Was that something you had already learned how to do anyway 'cause ...?

Robin: No but I've always sort of ..., I tend to do my own hair actually as well, so

[00.12.33] Chris: So you volunteered to

Robin: Yes and I did him, he was the guy that came in with the most hair but I think I did two or three other as well. Another thing we did was we took out George McCloud's appendix.

[00.12.43] Chris: Well let me ask you about that because I'd quite like you to talk me through that process, 'cause you were in the room at the time, weren't you ?

Robin: Yes I was yes, well there were three doctors in fact;

[00.12.54] Chris: John Brotherhood was one of them I think ?

Robin: John Brotherhood was one of them

[00.13.00] Chris: Talk me through it ?

Robin: Well we had to go down to the bowels of the earth which was probably the Halley1 or something, which is about sixty feet down the shafts, and we get to this place and I was really just like an assistant, you know I didn't really have a particular job to do I don't think. Maybe I passed the sutures and things like this but there were three doctors doing it, and one of them doing the anaesthetic and I don't recall which it was.

[00.13.38] Chris: What were the conditions like under which you were working ?

Robin: Well it was alright except one of the walls was ice and there wasn't a single right-angle in it because everything tends to warp under flowing ice doesn't it? It was about sixty feet down below the surface.

[00.13.56] Chris: Was there plenty of light, electric light?

Robin: As I recall there must have been, yes, but I know it was a particularly difficult appendix because it had been sort of grumbling on for several years so it was all sort of sclerosed up and things like this so it wasn't you didn't just get in and expose the appendix and snip it off and remove it, it had to be detached from all the

[00.14.19] Chris: Neighbouring organs?

Robin: Yes.

[00.14.21] Chris: Yes. Fuchs said it took quite some time to find it, in 'Ice and Men'?

Robin: Yes, well it probably did yes. This is an awful long time ago you know. I remember three doctors, one of whom was John Brotherhood, and the other one was probably Dick Williams. Then there was third guy as well whom I don't recall ... ahhhh no he did go to Canada this third guy, who was ... do you know his name?

[00.14.48] Chris: I'll have to look it up, it'll be probably here, I was reading it before, in fact I wasn't - yes I was, here we go ... Ron Lloyd.

Robin: Ron Lloyd. Anyway he has since moved to Ontario and I was in touch with him by letter, about ten years ago.

[00.15.17] Chris: Did he have a sense that you were making history by performing this appendectomy in the Antarctic?

Robin: Perhaps, perhaps yes [laughs]

[00.15.29] Chris: When the operation was complete, what happened to the patient?

Robin: Well that's a good question, I don't really know, I'm sure he was bandaged up and had to go and recuperate for a couple of weeks.

[00.15.47] Chris: He was transferred to the ship, do you remember that much?

Robin: No. Another thing I recall is that a dog had been run over by a sledge. The dog was called Casey and she came in with a the skin sort of... anyway I remember assisting and doing a few, probably thirty or forty sutures into her.

[00.16.10] Chris: And how was she in the end?

Robin: She died, alas. That was quite fun to do ... I think she died a few weeks later not apparently as a result of all the trauma she'd undergone I think.

[00.16.28] Chris: You were lucky really because you were a dentist, you were travelling round from base to base you probably got to see more of the Antarctic than most people?

Robin: I think so yes.

[00.16.34] Chris: So where else did you find yourself?

Robin: I remember seeing the South Sandwich Islands because they had the only, at that stage of my life, the only live volcano at that stage seen, so there is one smoking away. Then we went down to Antarctica, then down to Halley Bay, and after that we went to the Argentine Islands, probably went - possibly we called in at Signy first but I'm not sure about that, so went down to the Argentine Islands which were actually - since we did this cruise on 2000 which you were on weren't you,

[00.17.09] Chris: The Marguerite Bay trip yes.

Robin: Yes, well the ice was completely different at that stage, it was far far icier and it seems to have retreated from the rock edge by about forty feet or so and there were a couple of dead planes up on the Fuchs Ice Piedmont and we used to go and ski-jore around them.

[00.17.39] Chris: Again you were involved in relief work and shifting bags of coal I seem to ...?

Robin: Yes that was at Stonington, yes, and I think these sacks weighed 150lbs or something like that, a hundredweight and a half or something like that, and the first time you tried to pick one up you couldn't shift it and after a while you were sort of practically throwing them around.

[00.17.59] Chris: Because you got stronger or you got used to it or the muscles tone perhaps?

Robin: I don't know, but it was a lovely day and I remember doing it with my shirt off as were several of us, there was not a breath of wind, and it was about minus five or something like that baking hot it felt ...

[00.18.19] Chris: You also went to the American base at Palmer?

Robin: We did yes but I don't recall that too much. That struck me as a sort of not important American base probably, and a bit run down. I think it had been a British base beforehand, hadn't it?

[00.18.36] Chris: I don't know.

Robin: Anvers Island.

[00.00.00] Chris: O'h right Anvers Island, ok. So were you struck by a difference in the American way of doing things to what you have seen on British bases?

Robin: Well I don't think I was there long enough to notice, so I would say no. I was struck by some differences, but I don't really recall what it was.

[00.19.00] Chris: Ok. How did you get on with sterilising your equipment because presumably you had to change it between patients?

Robin: We just had a boiling water steriliser. You made sure that everything you used was boiled for five minutes, which probably doesn't sound very much these days does it? But it all seemed to work.

[00.19.21] Chris: And how were Fids generally with dentists? I mean we all hate the dentist, or the joke is that people hate going to the dentist, were Fids any different?

Robin: No I think most of them were quite please to see me. I know there was a guy called David Matthews who actually refused to see me. I was quite friendly with him as well, but he still refused to come and see me.

[00.19.43] Chris: He'd rather have a toothache?

Robin: Ya. But, so I never saw his teeth, but apart from that it was a nice matey do, you know, everybody was friendly with everybody.

[00.19.58] Chris: Do you feel yourself to be a Fid, because you have had a very different experience from most of the guys who were here today at the reunion?

Robin: Well not really no. But I did spend this two weeks on shore manning the hi-fix station which sort of helped me rather to become a Fid, I think.

[00.20.18] Chris: So you qualify ?

Robin: Yes just about. [Laughs]

[00.20.24] Chris: What else, there's a reference here to some sunbathing with not much clothing on, is that appropriate?

Robin: When we were doing this hi-fix expedition on the island, one day was particularly nice and sunny and warm and there was a little ice-floe floating in a old melt pool or something, so we took turns to get naked on this ice-floe and get photographed. But it was a bit chilly!

[00.20.54] Chris: Yes I should think it was?

Robin: Then another thing I did I went swimming at Deception Island, which I did not write down. So what happened then ...? anyway you could feel see the sea was really quite warm because of the warm springs blubbing up. Then the tide came in and what I didn't realise was the hot springs got quietened down by the tide so it was actually cracking cold by the time I got into the water. After that I came out so cold that the Bosun gave me the whole of his rum tot for the day they still had tots of rum in the navy in those days, which is actually quite a lot of really strong rum. Have you ever seen a rum tot?

[00.21.44] Chris: I've heard about them.

Robin: Anyway they are about sort of four or five rums I think, so I swallowed this down and after that ... I woke up with a dreadful hangover. [laughs]

[00.22.00] Chris: How big a, if you look back over your life, how important are those two years to you. Did they change you at all, would you say?

Robin: Well I think they - it sounds good on your Cv, having been to the Antarctic so when I next applied for an interesting - about four years later I applied for this job in Brunei, having been to the Antarctic was probably what got me that job, which was a very nice job as well.

[00.22.28] Chris: So they were impressed by that line on your Cv?

Robin: I think so yes. That was three years in Brunei with no income tax, tax-free everything and free accommodation and god knows what. So that was really quite good. They paid me about the same as the British Prime Minister got paid in those days which was only six thousand pounds a year which doesn't sound too good now but it seemed quite a lot in those days.

[00.22.50] Chris: And you bumped into somebody in Brunei, who you'd met in the Antarctic ?

Robin: Ya, just as I was about to leave, I bumped into this hi-fix engineer, who I spent two weeks camping with this island with Bernard Chapple. But I was actually in a hurry because I was leaving the next day and was getting things finished off and bumped into him in town, and I don't recall his name.

[00.23.16] Chris: Ok, there was some talk when I started doing the interviews, about Fids having dental treatment before they went south?

Robin: I think they did yes. Basically they all had to be dentally fit as they went south but they would spend one or maybe even two winters down there. Perhaps not taking particularly good care of their teeth, eating who knows what, so it was quite good for them to be checked out.

[00.23.47] Chris: Did the climate affect their teeth, I mean cold weather and freezing conditions?

Robin: They said so but I don't believe that it did. I think it was just sloppy dental hygiene, lots of sugar and things like this.

[00.24.02] Chris: Did you have any scary moments on the ship, any bad nights?

Robin: A katabatic wind blew in at Halley Bay A katabatic wind blows off the land onto the sea. So there is a lot breaking up of the ice, to which the ship was tethered, so we woke up in the morning with the ship still tethered to it's ice floe but sort of floating about a mile out to sea, and a screeching wind so had to get back ashore. That was sort of - it was not frightening for me, no. But it was interesting, and perhaps it was frightening for other people, I don't know.

[00.24.42] Chris: In retrospect, perhaps it was more frightening than it was at the time?

Robin: Well, I was only on the ship at the time and I sort of trusted the Captain.

[00.24.52] Chris: What were your feelings about the wildlife you came across. Did you see any spectacular examples of wildlife?

Robin: Well lots of seals, but what we didn't see too many of was whales. All the time we were steaming around we had to man a whale watch so we had to get above the bridge, and count any whales. All the hours I did up there I didn't - I imagined I saw a whale in the distance and reported it but I don't think I did whereas going down in the year 2000, there were whales everywhere. Do you remember? That would seem incredible compared with the way it was when I was there previously, and similarly fur seals. There were fur seals everywhere weren't there? Well I don't think there was a single fur seal, apparently there were six breeding pairs around the whole continent. So they probably have one pup a year and all the pups probably live thirty or forty years or something, so the population of fur seals seemed to have increased unimaginably.

[00.26.02] Chris: How did you take to the penguins?

Robin: Well yes I like the penguins except that going down subsequently on Marguerite Bay 2000, weren't they awfully smelly?

[00.26.17] Chris: Oh yeahh!

Robin: Yeah, well I didn't really notice them smelling when I was there previously.

[00.26.22] Chris: They can't have got smellier, can they?

Robin: No but I guess one didn't go and traipse around an adelic rookery or something like that. One place probably in South Georgia we had a king penguin on board which was a bit dopey, so we dressed him up and put a tie on him....

[00.26.40] Chris: A bow tie?

Robin: No just a fids tie actually, and put a camera round his neck, and he just stood there looking ... so I got photographs of him.

[00.26.51] Chris: How did they get on board, did you bring him on board?

Robin: I guess somebody must have done - wasn't me.

[00.26.58] Chris: How was the ship the 'John Biscoe', in those days - were talking about the mid sixties, I mean was it a good ship to be on, was it bad in bad weather?

Robin: I don't know, it's a bit hard to say because the previous ship I'd been on was even smaller and that wasn't particularly good in bad weather either. They roll around and ...

[00.27.29] Chris: Did you ever feel em, nervous?

Robin: No, should I have done?

[00.27.31] Chris: No, I'm not suggesting [laughs]

Robin: No, I thoroughly enjoyed being at sea.

[00.27.40] Chris: What - I'm not quite sure whether how you can apply Antarctic experience to Brunei, what do you think you brought back from the Antarctic which you have kind of used in later life in terms of skills or abilities or just approach to life?

Robin: Nothing that I can think of really, except that I don't really mind getting by with sort of inadequate equipment, because that is what I had to do in the Antarctic and it didn't really bother me to get along without a dental assistant as well so I didn't mind doing things for myself.

[00.28.20] Chris: So you became self-sufficient, or more self-sufficient?

Robin: More self-sufficient, and such that I really didn't mind being self-sufficient. Whereas most dentists seem unable to work without a couple of assistants hanging round them. Well it doesn't bother me too much.

[00.28.37] Chris: Was that the case then is that more the case today. I mean dentists in the sixties had to have assistants did they?

Robin: Well I'm sure they all did have apart from people in the Antarctic, yes I'm sure they've always had assistants.

[00.28.52] Chris: Who was the captain of the 'Biscoe, when you were on her for a season?

Robin: I don't recall who the captain was. I remember the first mate was Malcolm somebody or other who was quite nice and there was a South African third mate called ... perhaps you have his name written down

[00.29.16] Chris: I haven't no; How were you treated, were you treated as an officer of the ship or as a fid or a...?

Robin: Treated as a fid really, not particularly as an officer of the ship.

[00. 29.26] Chris: So you weren't dining at the captain's table?

Robin: No.

[00.29.34] Chris: Were you glad you went?

Robin: Oh yes, yes, most definitely. In fact looking back in my life, that was perhaps the best thing I've done in my life, and Brunei was perhaps the next best. Since then, it has all been a bit downhill.

[00.29.53] Chris: Awww! [laughs] But you actually went to Canada didn't you for quite a long time.

Robin: For twenty six years, yes.

[00. 29.52] Chris: In the northern frozen territories or further south?

Robin: No further south but in British Columbia which is the westernmost province but on the eastern side, on the Alberta side. So in the Rocky Mountain trench really, which is sort of like being in the Alps because of the pretty high mountains, and there are an awful lot of Swiss people and Austrian people and German people from the Alps.

[00.30.23] Chris: Why did you leave?

Robin: Basically, my clientele was getting pretty old so I would do two weeks without seeing anybody under about eighty, so you could retire when you were sixty. So I thought well I'll retire and I'll try to get a job back in Britain, because you could go and work for the community dental service and get a salary and six weeks paid hot-paid leave.

[00. 30.56] Chris: So that's what you did. Back to Britain?

Robin: Yes, so I applied for jobs in various places, I only applied for jobs in places which sounded as if they might have been pleasant [laughs]. Then Taunton offered me this job. I also applied for ones in Torquay and the Isle of Man and Kings Lynn I think.

[00.31.18] Chris: When the Marguerite Bay 2000 trip was mooted, what was your reaction were you determined to go straight away or, did you think about it for a while.

Robin: I probably thought about it for a while. I think I was still in Canada at the time, wasn't I?

[00. 31.32] Chris: I think you probably were, yes.

Robin: 2000, yes I was. Well I thought well I'll go on that so I put my name down and went.

[00. 31.43] Chris: What was it like going back?

Robin: Well it was pretty nice to see people again, I really quite like Argentina as well. I thought Ushuaia was pretty pleasant. What I didn't really like particularly was you were sort of limited to the ship, weren't we, and if you got somewhere you could go for a good hike on shore, well they didn't like you going for a hike on shore.

[00. 32.23] Chris: Were you aware how the Antarctic had changed in the intervening 40 years - 35 years?

Robin: Not really no, although I was probably assuming that it had though I didn't really know what way it had changed.

[00.32.28] Chris: Was it nostalgic or disappointment or ?

Robin: Well..... what does nostalgic mean?

[00. 32.38] Chris: Well did it conjure up memories your trips 35 years previously?

Robin: Well probably yes, yes it did.

[00.32.48] Chris: Such as?

Robin: Such as!

[00.32.54] Chris: What are your strongest memories from your two years in the Antarctic, looking back at it now?

Robin: Well first of all I didn't go for two years I was just the summers I was a summer person. Well I really thoroughly enjoyed this hi-fix camping on a little island. The whole thing was a joy actually. We did the seal hunting trip as well which was not particularly a joy for me because I'm not really into killing things. We actually slaughtered about 300 seals for dog food, I think the bosun went down with a rifle and shot them in the head then gutted them then and there on the spot.

[00.33.37] Chris: Were you ever defeated by anybody's teeth, whilst you were down there?

Robin: Yes I had to take a tooth out of the doctor, and it was an upper four and upper fours tend to have twisty roots and they do tend to have two of them. This tooth broke and I never succeeded in getting the roots out.

[00.34.03] Chris: Really?

Robin: No, and I had him there for about an hour and a half or something gouging around with elevators and who knows what but still it refused to move at all, and it would have been nice to have had an XRay machine for that.

[00.34.16] Chris: Yeah ... how was he afterwards?

Robin: I don't know, but he said he was alright but I'm not sure I would have been alright.

[00.34.30] Chris: It would carried on hurting wouldn't it?

Robin: I think so - well it was probably hurting because it's nerve was inflamed so having broken it off, then the nerve was opened up so perhaps it didn't hurt, but I'm afraid I don't really know.

[00.34.48] Chris: Was there anything that could be done about the diet of the Fids at the time, if the diet was contributing towards their dental problems?

Robin: Well not so much the diet as their lack of oral hygiene I think.

[00.34.59] Chris: They just didn't bother to clean their teeth?

Robin: Yes, so I was always telling them to brush their teeth and use their dental floss and things like this but whether they did or not who could say.

[00.35.11] Chris: Ok, that's great that's everything I need to ask you Robin, unless there is something else you were keen to tell me - I had some notes here which

Robin: There was one guy called Alasdair McArthur have you heard of him at all?

[00.35.26] Chris: The name rings a bell

Robin: I think he was the grandson of the guy who introduced Merino sheep to Australia and he was a base leader, Halley Bay, perhaps, Stonington maybe, and he was quite a nice guy but anyway he is probably filthy rich now, and his grandfather introduced Merino sheep to Australia.

And eh, oh that's right, at the start of it they had two other people on board, one was Monsieur Holland who was the Gouverneur de Territoir Francaise Australienne et Antartique, so he was actually the Governor of the French Antarctic territories and Isle's Crozet and places like that and Kerguelen I think and he and I got on quite well together ...

[00.36.20] Chris: In what way what was he like?

Robin: He was very pleasant as I recall and perhaps I didn't mind practising my French on him. There was also a guy from Alaska as well who had this enormous telephoto lens, biggest telephoto lens I had seen at that stage in my life.

[00.36.43] Chris: Good ok, anything else on your notes, I don't want to deprive you of the opportunity

Robin: Oh we had a little ... I tend to have to do a VD clinic once a while when there was no doctor around, and one of the seamen from the 'John Biscoe' as I recall had two eyes, an eye tattooed on each buttock, much bigger than full size eye tattooed onto each buttock and he had gonorrhoea.

[00.37.20] Chris: He was a sailor, he wasn't a Fid, he was a sailor? Was that something you had been trained to do - a clap clinic.

Robin: No, no, but there is nobody else to do it.

[00.37.34] Chris: How are you identifying these diseases?

Robin: Well gonorrhoea just by the symptoms, and ... I've done bacteriology course and things ... I knew what gonorrhoea was, it was gonorrhoea alright and I knew exactly how to treat it as well which is just penicillin.

[00.37.55] Chris: So you didn't have to look in the manual or

Robin: No I didn't need to, didn't need to.

[00.38.08] Chris: This was rather more that you bargained for when you signed up to be a dentist I imagine?

Robin: Well yes, well I was signing up for fun rather than dentistry, you know [laughs], no, to experience life.

[00.38.17] Chris: Good, ok, shall we call it a day?

Robin: Yes.

[00.38.18] Chris: Thank you very much indeed. Thank you

END