

FRED WOODEN

Edited transcript of interview with Fred Wooden conducted by Chris Eldon Lee on 12th December, 2011. BAS archives AD6/24/1/155. Transcribed by Allan Wearden, May 2018.

[Part 1 0:00:00] Lee: This is Fred Wooden interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 12th of December 2011. Fred Wooden part 1.

Wooden: My name is Fredrick Edward Wooden, date of birth is 12th of September 1923 and born at Southsea, Portsmouth.

[Part 1 0:00:24] Lee: You do a bit of family history work [Wooden: Yeah] so where does the name Wooden come from?

Wooden: It's rather unusual because there are several derivations of that are possibly one area near Winchester with name Wooden, 'W-double O-double T-O-N' is used and one of the family when he joined the navy he used the Wooden, 'double O-D-E-N'. But don't really know where our roots come from. The earliest record I've got is of a William Wooden married at St Mary's church in Portsmouth in 1871. Now it doesn't say where he was born I can't find any trace of him anywhere, but I have a sneaking suspicion he was born in 1858. Now there is a Wooden in London born at that date which could mean he may have lived somewhere near Deptford which is also a naval port. So we could have come from London, we don't know. The other area where there's a lot of Woodens in Great Yarmouth, which is another naval port, [Lee: Yeah], so we don't know where they came from either!

[Part 1 0:01:51] Lee: Was it a problem at school, the name?

Wooden: No problem at school although my school when I was 9, left at 9 years old near enough there was an Edward Wooden and we know he came from Great Yarmouth, and he also lived in the same area near Grantberry [Bransbury?] Park in Portsmouth where more less where I was born. So it's just one of those curious questions but of course there's always the other one, there's of course the V.C, of Wooden who we know was a German and he is listed as a V.C. and unfortunately he come to a sharp end when he had tooth ache, and he used his own pistol to try and shoot it out! [laughter!]

[Part 1 0:02:42] Lee: What was your father? [Wooden: That was Dover.] My father was a chief shipwright in the Royal Navy.

[Part 1 0:02:49] Lee: Ah so it's in the family is it?

Wooden: It's in the family oh yes, yes, and as I say being in Portsmouth I would assume we are also connected to the dockyard somewhere or other. Certainly in my mother's parents they lived in Portsmouth and he works in the dockyard, or my grandfather worked in the dockyard and he fell off the staging when he was early and he lost his voice, and would become deaf as well so that was another one of the sort of difficulties in the family! Mum had deaf and dumb parents, one of those oddities that you don't appreciate till you come across yourself, anyway we're getting by.

[Part 1 0:03:46] Lee: Was it inevitable that you would go into your father's profession?

Wooden: Not really, no it was one of those other things that in my early years I knew about the Antarctic. How I knew I haven't the foggiest idea but I think in 1932 we had an Odhams Encyclopaedia delivered, and in that lot, I think 8 volumes or something, there was an odd volume, with careers which gave all the details of what each person could do in each career and how to go about it! And of course I went through the book, being a 9 year old or there about, and picked out metallurgist, chemist and surveyor. Why? I think probably the fact it could mean it was dealing with something which was unknown and you were creating something, I don't know. Perhaps it was wanderlust as well because there was the surveying side because that cropped up later on! Much later, when of course the war came along and I passed the examination from the school to go into the dockyard, and Dad put me in there as a shipwright apprentice in the dockyard; whether he did it deliberately because he was a shipwright apprentice in his earlier days I don't know, but it meant that I had a 5 years' stay during the early part of the war years in the dockyard. And it transpired I didn't like the job, I hated being trapped as it were behind walls, with policemen at the doors guarding the entrance and things like this and I always wanted wander out in the valley and the hills. I joined the Youth Hostel Association went hiking at weekends during the war and it's more or less sprung from that. And one of my pals he knew my interest in the open air and he suggested I sort of apply to join the Ordnance Survey, but of course that's where the surveying came in and I jumped at it! I was selected and that was more or less the great change in my life, it's one of those things I'm glad happened!

[Part 1 0:06:25] Lee: That was after the war in 1947?

Wooden: That was 1947, that's right yes.

[Part 1 0:06:30] Lee: There's another couple of things from your childhood that I wanted to ask you about, one was where you think the interest in the Antarctic came from?

Wooden: Yes this is one of those puzzles because I can remember vividly the room behind our shop, and kneeling on the chair and I know what Dad's atlas looked like to this day and it was open more or less on the table, and why Mum and Dad were there talking about something I don't know but I made that remark saying 'That's where I'm going when I grow up'!

[Part 1 0:07:13] Lee: So you were pointing to the white bit at the bottom!?

Wooden: Presumably yes because the actual atlas had the Arctic on the top half and the Antarctic on the bottom half of the page! Why, it's just one of those unknown puzzles with me, I, it's that would have been about 1932, now there is a possibility about that time the *Penola* came in from the British Antarctic Expedition and I know she came into Portsmouth dockyard, and I can remember seeing the headlines in the paper about the *Penola*. Now whether that had anything to do with it I don't know, I've never really checked on it but I know the event happened I pointed to the Antarctic!

[Part 1 0:08:11] Lee: And you said?

Wooden: 'That's where I'm going when I grow up'. Now however you can analysis it I haven't the foggiest idea because I'm convinced there's always life after this one! There's to me no doubt about it, had one or two strange happenings in my life that pointed to guardian angels as you can probably gather! [laughter]

[Part 1 0:08:44] Lee: Were those events in the Antarctic?

Wooden: One of the events yeah, but the main one funnily enough was during my hiking. I was hiking in the, well north of Chichester, we were walking up I think it was probably Halnaker near Chichester, and all the party was up in front of me and I was the lone one at the back sort of thing and I gazed out to the sea, and I looked and all of a sudden a voice said to me 'You've got some relations over there'! And I turned around to face it from my right ear and there was nobody there at all, just an open field! And it was many, many years later doing the family history and it was my grandfather, my great grandfather rather, was married to her and to cap that when I went in the Ordnance Survey I got extra training to do, and we went to Epsom funnily enough for the training and I was sitting in the actual van with the driver by the side of me, and I was checking my ops book, a nice summers day, looked out the window and down the road sort of thing, and the driver was just reading a paper or something, I don't know what paper it was now and voice said to me in my right ear again, the same voice said 'You've got some relations down there'! And I turned to the driver and said 'What did you say?' and he said 'I didn't say anything!'. I said 'Did you hear anything?' he said 'No I didn't hear anything either!' and that was the same voice once again. Several years later I discovered my grandfather's brother was still alive and down the road, and I didn't know they were there! Unfortunately a couple of years later when I discovered this event, I checked down that road and unfortunately my grandfather's brother had died! But I still keep in contact with the family.

[Part 1 0:11:13] Lee: Did anything, was there any connection with your guardian angel whilst in the Antarctic at all?

Wooden: Well I think there must have been, because on the event when we went down the crevasse for example, my co-partner Dick Foster were pulling sledges and travelling in bad weather t and we shouldn't have been travelling, the fact we were on half rations and we were above the cloud level really that's what happening. We couldn't travel so we made a dash for it and we saw something dark up ahead so we turned right to avoid it and all of a sudden we went down! And I remember Dick shouting 'This is it Fred!' and all I could do was shout 'Help!' for some unknown reason, and I remember the sensation of falling and almost remember the actual sensation that I was saying 'How far, how far?!' And all of a sudden we come to an abrupt silence in soft snow, and we landed on a snow bridge and now if we'd have been 2 seconds earlier or 2 seconds later we would have gone down the bottom of the crevasse, we would have missed it! There was no other snow bridge anywhere near us except that one that we fell on! So whether you say your guardian angel was looking after you or not, I wouldn't really know!

[Part 1 0:12:55] Lee: That was Danco Island in 1956?

Wooden: Danco Island yes that's right.

[Part 1 0:12:59] Lee: Just after your birthday.

Wooden: That's right yes, just before Dick's birthday too! [laughter]

[Part 1 0:13:07] Lee: Did your guardian angel help you get out? [Wooden: Oh yeah!] Or was that Dick's work?

Wooden: One of those, the strange thing I can't remember, I have nothing written in my diary of it, what we did, the sledges must have passed over our heads and gone down lower on the snow slope. What we did whether we pulled the sledges up and took all the stuff off the sledges and got it up to the surface bit by bit, I just don't know I've got nothing written down at all and I don't remember anything about it! All I know that we did get out to the surface and I thanked Dick for it, and thanked God for it as well! And then we put up with was coming next as it were, but it's just one of those things, I suppose being a Fid I suppose you had to accept certain hardships and certain things similar, you didn't think about it when you joined it was part of an act of living I suppose. This is it a lot of other people have had something similar and think nothing of it but they get away with it! [laughter]

[Part 1 0:14:28] Lee: And Dick was?

Wooden: Dick Foster!

[Part 1 0:14:32] Lee: And am I right in thinking that it was he that managed to cut some steps?

Wooden: Oh Dick he was, he used to work for I think it was W.J. Simms, Sons and Cooke Ltd as a site surveyor something like that, wasn't too sure but he was also a sort of amateur mountaineer and he was certainly he was brave enough to attempt the ice wall with an ice pick, to make footholds and we used the tent pegs we drove them in the wall as well, to stand on and we were only about 18 to 20 foot down something like that, from the surface I can't quite remember the crevasse was about 7 foot wide so it was a big one, quite a wide one really!

[Part 1 0:15:31] Lee: And you've no idea how deep it was?

Wooden: No idea, we just couldn't see the bottom it was in darkness down there, but just the hole above that we'd come through!

[Part 1 0:15:40] Lee: There's a reference in your letter, your remarkably good letter, to the last bit being a case of tunnelling out through the snow?

Wooden: Oh yeah.

[Part 1 0:15:48] Lee: I don't quite understand that.

Wooden: Well what happened was that you had the glacier ice then you had a heavy snowfall on top, well you could go up the ice sort of thing then all of a sudden you meet the hardened

snow and then the soft snow above that, that had fallen so once you reach the top of that hard ice you could go more or less at an angle up to the surface, but if you tried to get up you just pulled more snow down so really you had to make a tunnel really and, let's have a look, it's one of those I don't think I could have made it myself! But as I say Dick being a mountaineer he was made of sterner stuff than me I think, but I thought I had some photographs here?

[Part 1 0:16:44] Lee: Let's look at them later on!

Wooden: That's alright I've got it, OK. But yes tunnelled up there and I suppose it must have taken at least an hour to get all the stuff up to the surface, I must have unpacked it from the sledges and got it up bit by bit, and got the sledges up on to the surface and Dick must have pulled them up on the end of a rope, because I came up last of all after about 7 hours!

[Part 1 0:17:17] Lee: On a rope?

Wooden: On a rope yeah, I don't think I could have made it any other way! [laughter]

[Part 1 0:17:23] Lee: I don't suppose you'd had much in the way of crevasse rescue training had you?

Wooden: None at all, none at all!

[Part 1 0:17:27] Lee: So it was lucky Dick was a mountaineer

Wooden: This is one of those things that you know in hindsight; you realise you were going into a dangerous area and it was a bunch of amateurs, going down and making the best of it! It's a fellow, I think he was geologist Brian Hobbs, he also went down in his day and he said that afterwards we was more or less, we were left to find our own way and to find the best way of doing things. I suppose this is the English nature I suppose we were adaptable we'd find a way somehow, and muddled through and come up trumps! It's, I mean, when we went down to base O we went down to build a new base, well the ship was loaded up with stores, 2 years of food for us and things like that, and they didn't know where they were going to put the base! You would have thought that somebody would have found the year before a site and said 'Look we'll put the base there!' and then next year load the ship up and send them down, but no it was one of those hit and miss things again!

[Part 1 0:19:05] Lee: A bit like gypsies roaming around looking for somewhere to settle?

Wooden: Oh yes this is quite true, except in many of those cases they have got deep knowledge of where to look! It's just like an instinct like migration across the Sahara Desert or somewhere like that looking for a waterhole, somehow they manage to find these waterholes travelling miles and miles of sand with perhaps nothing to guide them but the sun, I don't know how they do it!

[Part 1 0:19:38] Lee: When you got back to the surface after that crevasse, the glacial crevasse, had you at any time thought you weren't going to make it!? Had you contemplated rather earlier in that place?

Wooden: I don't think we thought of a thing like that. I don't know it was living for that particularly moment; it even the day after we had after the crevasse there we nearly lost the tent, now if we had lost the tent perhaps we may have even perished! We just don't know because the wind can be very strong as it proved later on because it blew 3 of us over, did one gust! I don't know, you don't think about things like that, that you're not going to make it, you just sort of muddle through and make the best of whatever situations you find yourself.

[Part 1 0:20:40] Lee: What happened about the tent pegs because the last we heard they were stuck in the crevasse, did you ever recover them?

Wooden: No there still there! [laughter] But even so we had to use the, I think the tripod, the survey tripod, and I presume that is also still there!

[Part 1 0:21:03] Lee: What did you use the tripod for?

Wooden: Well actually that was the theodolite.

[Part 1 0:21:08] Lee: Oh I see!

Wooden: Oh more or less as a support perhaps to get a first stage I can't remember the sequence I know we used the sledge to stand, on for Dick to attack the ice wall because I've got a photograph of it here in actual fact, but it's no I think we make the best of whatever situation we find ourselves in!

[Part 1 0:21:35] Lee: Were you in shock afterwards?

Wooden: Oh definitely, definitely! On the next day in actual fact Dick, both Dick and myself were sort of shaking and I don't think we had anything to eat either, we just laid in our sleeping bags and more or less tried to sleep it out! And we got over it after 24 hours I think and managed to resume normal work as it were, but no, no it was certainly very shaky as you would expect, don't do things like that every day, but tried not to anyway! [laughter]

[Part 1 0:22:18] Lee: But you've lived for 55 years since, haven't you!?

Wooden: Oh crumbs, I don't know if Dick is still around, I don't contact him but I presume we're alright, we keep our fingers crossed.

[Part 1 0:22:32] Lee: Alright, lovely to hear that. Let's go back though to earlier in your life and I'm interested to know where this clear fascination in photography came from, can you pin it down?

Wooden: Well I think Dad in actual fact had a Vest Pocket Kodak Autographic and he used to be able to take photographs and scribble on the back there and it would come out on the print, and it was a small Vest Pocket Kodak and he used to do a lot of printing for the gas paper and the gaslight paper. Put it into a frame and a negative and hold it up to the sun and then develop it in solutions etc, and I suppose as a kid I used to watch these things develop and thought to myself, 'Oh I better sort of thing have a go myself', and of course that started my interest in sort of developing and not so much taking photographs, but certainly in the

developing side of it, and I suppose when my step brother, I've got 2 step brothers, and when one of them obviously bought a camera through, I think it was Black Cat Tobacco coupons(!) I think they were, and he started taking photographs, family photographs as well. I borrowed his camera once or twice to take one or two photographs and I suppose that stuck and eventually I had a box camera myself, which I kept until the beginning of the war as matter in actual fact.

[Part 1 0:24:20] Lee: It all started when you were about 7 years old?

Wooden: It started when I was about 7 years old yes, and because of course Dad and my brother more or less spotted it by family photographs and that was it, I was hooked!

[Part 1 0:24:36] Lee: Well whilst you were in the naval dockyard [Wooden: Yes?] during in the second world war in Portsmouth, you got drafted in to take photographs didn't you, because you were there?

Wooden: Oh yes that's right! It's one of the strange things, it was a 5 year apprenticeship and I was coming up to sort of the 5th year, in which you do a 6 months period in the drawing office, you do go out on the ships measure up and come back and draw diagrams etc. And in the corner of the drawing office there was sort of the mess room where we have all our meals, you're not allowed to actually have meals in the drawing office itself, and adjoining that was the photographic darkroom. Of course the photographers used to come out into the mess room and have their meals, sit at whatever table was available, I must have sat at the same table of either the assistant or the actual photographer and happened to mention the fact that I was interested in photography etc. And think it must have sprung from that because I was on the spot, and although they trawled the dockyard for volunteers to take over as it were, the fact that I was on the spot may have actually clinched this whole problem! I was just removed from the shipwright apprenticeship training and given this 6 months' period training in the darkroom as it were! [laughter]

[Part 1 0:26:14] Lee: Which coincided with the build up to and the departure for D-Day?

Wooden: That's right.

[Part 1 0:26:18] Lee: You were taking photographs in the dockyard?

Wooden: Oh yes that's right, and of course the interesting part about it we only used plate cameras, we didn't use film! Though we had the old camera with the tripod there, the blanket over our heads focusing away to get the actual picture correct and then pressing the trigger to take the photograph! And all that more or less Victorian sort of idea of a cameraman, an' it was only in later years when after I went back to the shipwright apprenticeship that they trawled the dockyard, and found a joiner who was also a photographic interest bloke and he sort of introduced the film camera to the dockyard. So that was when the glass plate cameras finished basically and they from then onwards they just used film, and all the plates as far as I know were then sorted through and they went up to some repository up in Chatham. And those of interest of the D-Day period they were sent o the National Archives at, don't know if it was at Kew or the other place now.

[Part 1 0:27:49] Lee: How much, let me ask you a few questions about that?

Wooden: Yeah.

[Part 1 0:27:52] Lee: First of all were you given free range to photograph what you liked or you were being told what?

Wooden: Oh we were being told what to do more less, the senior members and the Admiral's Superintendent people like that had charge of the naval properties in the whole area and they came up with the sort of thing they wanted certain things sorted out. Like one case at Fort Cumberland the sea was in undermining the defences at Fort Cumberland, and that came under the naval sort of protection as it were and we had to go out on the beach past all the barbed wire etc. and do police inspections because nobody was allowed on the front in that period, to take photographs of all the soil and all the shingle actually being removed from under the sort of foundations, and that was the sort of thing that we were more less involved with. Any new machinery for example, that had to have an instruction manual so we had to have this whatever it was like a blow torch or something like that, and taken apart and photographed individually for the illustrations in the manual for people to use it. Think ships that had been altered in the dockyard and their superstructure had been added to, or something like that had to be photographed for the naval recognition photographs for ships at sea, needed to recognize each other! Identity photographs because everybody walking into the dockyard had to have a photographic picture at the gate of entry, and the person concerted actually had to check your face with a photograph the he actually held himself, before he would let you in the dockyard! So I had to do all the identity photographs to take.

[Part 1 0:30:03] Lee: Well it was a time of great secrecy for obviously reasons!

Wooden: Oh yes this is the bit that puzzles me, that I could be allowed to do that sort of thing, and as far as I know I was never vetted. I may well have been checked on but I never went up before anybody as far as I know that asked me questions or anything like that, but there you are it's one of those oddities about the British way of doing things I think!
[laughter]

[Part 1 0:30:37] Lee: Did you know before D -Day happened, that it was about to happen?

Wooden: No I didn't!

[Part 1 0:30:39] Lee: No, no.

Wooden: No, no idea. All we knew was that there was a build up of ships!

[Part 1 0:30:49] Lee: Did you guess?

Wooden: The Admiral's Superintendent or somebody above him wanted to have a pictorial record of what was happening, but even on D-Day we were unaware that, we went to work obviously but unaware that D-Day had started! Unless the only sort of evidence we had was that everything was missing! [laughter] So we knew something had happened!

[Part 1 0:31:18] Lee: It had all gone!

Wooden: It had all gone that's right!

[Part 1 0:31:21] Lee: Had you guessed?

Wooden: So it's one of those things you just assume that you knew the answer, and you probably guessed right that all the shipping had gone and of course Portsmouth of course we had all the air armada going over as well, with, squadrons and squadrons of aircraft flying out to the channel, so we knew something was going on! But, oh no, its one of those things, officers to the Admiral's Superintendent eventually we must have known, but how far down the ladder that went we just don't know!

[Part 1 0:32:13] Lee: You got called up yourself not long after?

Wooden: Oh yes, that's one of another thing of course being a lad I suppose and had a lot of pals that actually went in the RAF, I joined the RAF Volunteer Reserve training for a pilot and I went up to Oxford to have my medical and interview etc, and I got accepted as an RAF pilot under training and sent back into the dockyard because I was in a reserved occupation awaiting call up, and I was given an RAF number and everything else and of course this went on and on, and I realised that because I was in a reserved occupation that I may not ever be needed! So I wrote and asked for my discharge from that volunteer arrangement, and only a few months later after I got that discharge I was called up to the Navy! [laughter] So it didn't work out in that sense.

[Part 1 0:33:32] Lee: No, but the timing was as such?

Wooden: The timing was very peculiar!

[Part 1 0:33:36] Lee: It was just before the atomic bomb!

Wooden: That's right, that's another thing I had in the navy, I had 2 embarkation leaves and they were both cancelled and eventually I stayed on at Corsham in Wiltshire on the base camp, as a shipwright and that's where the Duke of Edinburgh was, of course I used to see him around the camp etc. I used to work on the camp staff and I got demobbed from there basically, as I was at Corsham, HMS *Royal Arthur* at Corsham.

[Part 1 0:34:16] Lee: Tell me about this interest in surveying, which led you to the Ordnance Survey because this was a sort of sideways step for you?

Wooden: I think in actual fact I was always interested in, not getting lost, but always wandering away from Mum and Dad etc, looking into shop windows and things like this, I was never really one to be tied to a particular spot put it this way, always looked to see what was round the corner or of course surveying is one of those efforts that allows you do just that. It's, you're expected to see what's round the corner and make sure everybody else is informed about it and of course it grows from that, sort of instinct even in the Antarctic, for example you know full well that just over the hill there you're going to be treading where nobody else has trod before! And don't know whether it gives you a feeling of greatness or

what it is, it's more of a curiosity I suppose wondering what's there, I mean I've heard this before of why people go exploring, and they say 'Well it's because it's there!' I mean people go up to the moon we know that and things like that because it's there, it's I don't know don't know what causes it, apart from instinct and curiosity!

[Part 1 0:36:00] Lee: Was it a profession you enjoyed?

Wooden: Oh very much so yeah, it was a godsend really. In fact I would recommend it to anybody it has a feeling of freedom should we say, of not being bound by the office routine because you visit everywhere that you can think of, there's no place that you don't visit! I mean before, when I joined the Ordnance Survey rather I was sent to the Portsmouth office, and one of the places we visited what was then the Queen Alexandra Hospital, well we surveyed that hospital, I helped to survey it put it that way and of course the people of my sort of effort in the Ordnance Survey, they were also employed in surveying the dockyard and things like this. So people's back gardens and things like this, you met people you talked of all sorts of things whether it was police and landladies you name it, you talked to anybody that was around and you weren't afraid to sort of present yourself in conversation, so it gave you sort a feeling of being useful put it that way. I would recommend it to anybody!

[Part 1 0:37:50] Lee: How come you applied to FIDS then, this is 1955?

Wooden: That was a part sort of, once again this feeling of the effect of the Antarctic I suppose through the various channels of the Ordnance Survey had staff who were more or less, we weren't academic put it this way but by the way we were taught we were very good surveyors, we weren't, we didn't have to pass exams as the academics would have to do for the Royal Institute of Surveyors for example. But we would guarantee, that majority of us would guarantee that we were better surveyors that they were in land usage! And this is the sort of thing, the instinct that we still have in actual fact we still think we are better than those people were! And in the Antarctic one of the fellows that was put in charge of me in actual fact, I consider was a poorer surveyor than I was, although he got the Polar Medal and I didn't! [laughter] This is one of those things that does hurt at some times!

[Part 1 0:39:17] Lee: Do you want to name him or are you carefully not naming him!?

Wooden: Oh I should name him all right, in fact I've named him before! But he was a very good Fid there's no question about it.

[Part 1 0:39:28] Lee: Who was he?

Wooden: Pardon?

[Part 1 0:39:30] Lee: Who was he?

Wooden: Oh well, Bryan Holmes was the person concerned! He was a very good Fid and he would, he also was a part mountaineer and he would do all the sort of the really difficult observation posts, so he deserved his Polar Medal there's no question about it! But it hurt me with the fact he was called surveyor and I was called assistant surveyor! [laughter]

[Part 1 0:40:07] Lee: You did some training with Alfred Stephenson?

Wooden: That's right yes.

[Part 1 0:40:10] Lee: Field astro course, tell me about that?

Wooden: Well this is one of those things that all surveyors going down south, one had to be proficient in location where they were and the only way to do it was by star observations or sun observations, using the theodolite and Steve in actual fact arranged a course at university, think it was at University College outdoor setup at Silwood Park, where we used the actual parade ground there for setting up our theodolite for night observations, and Steve was a very good surveyor himself and he was a good astro man as well, so he was very good instructor. And the 4 of us that was more or less Doug Bridger and Pete Barley, myself and can't think of the other one, you mentioned his name.

[Part 1 0:41:18] Lee: Jim Madell!

Wooden: Jim Madell, that's right, the 4 of us actually had the course, a week's course and we passed out at the end, according to Steve we passed out alright and in fact Steve took a photograph of the 4 of us in actual fact. And we went back to the Ordnance Survey and we were given special permission to use the compound at night and borrow all the O.S. equipment, their econometrist and theodolites and that was quite interesting part that was.

[Part 1 0:41:58] Lee: You were doing night stuff and observations?

Wooden: Night observations that's right, we didn't do any day observations at the Ordnance Survey but, not that I remember anyway it was a bit of a tickle going in there at night. Looking up at sky to see if there was any stars up there, and saying 'Right phone Peter up and off we go', but there it is we got by!

[Part 1 0:42:27] Lee: You were just familiarising yourself with the skies or what was the reason for that?

Wooden: Oh yes and no, I mean because the sky in the Northern Hemisphere is different to the Southern Hemisphere, it's just the sort technical sort of expertise of timing the actual observation and using the timepiece and then doing the calculations afterwards. It was, that is what we would do in the south but in the sky the stars are obviously different, sort of the constellations etc involved so when we went down south we had of course get used to a new star atlas as it were! And there it is you get by and once again the British attitude. [laughter]

[Part 1 0:43:29] Lee: What was this topo course at Boxhill?

Wooden: That was more or less, it was when we were down in the Antarctic it was, they realised you would be sledging either man hauling or perhaps dog sledging, and it meant you had a milometer that you measured the distance you travelled, you had a compass, saying what direction you were travelling in that line and then if you could do a star observation or sun observation, you could pinpoint where you ended up, you could actually plot that on a map. While at Boxhill we used a car, an actual car milometer and drove the car over fields

with a compass direction and plotted it, and distance and compass direction and used a sort of a sun observation thing to find out where we were! It's more or less, just same technique but using different items for each particular item you wish like distance and direction and position, it's it wasn't good in actual fact but it, well it gave it air I suppose! [laughter] It, the sequence of events more or less were the same and it got you into some sort of habit the way you work, it was good I've got to think.

[Part 1 0:45:15] Lee: You were clearly intending to take photographs in the Antarctic, so you went and choose a camera?

Wooden: Oh no doubt about it, it was I had a Kodak Retinette camera, no I had a Retina camera, Kodak Retina camera myself that had bellows. Now one of the things down south is the fact that temperature, the cold temperatures in actual fact moisture would actually probably causes those bellows to split. So what it meant that I had to have a camera that didn't have bellows and about that time the Kodak people introduced the Kodak Retinette, which was basically a solid camera with a lens attached to a solid front there was no bellows at all, and I went to Kodak House to find out more about what this camera could do and whether or not the actual cold temperatures would actually freeze, or prevent some of the movements in the camera, and they assured me that it was perfectly good for those temperatures and this was one of the things that I introduced to the Survey I think, because that eventually became the standard issue camera for the survey parties in many years afterwards! But, when I was in Port Stanley the doctor on the *Shackleton* he wanted a camera himself. Of course being a doctor he had more money than I, he wanted a Leica which was probably the best camera in the world! So they had introduced a Leica M3 at that time, which has since proved to be probably one of the best cameras ever produced and I went out with Doc Evans into Port Stanley, and when he bought his I thought, 'Yeah I like the look of that', and I bought mine as well! [laughter] So I've still got it, but I haven't used it for years now, it's one of those things that I'm glad I bought, I got rid of my actual camera bellows etc and I passed that off to my cousin who didn't have a camera, so my cousin has probably still got it, but he had family.

[Part 1 0:48:09] Lee: You also took an enlarger, a fairly small one, tell me about that.

Wooden: That's right yeah!

[Part 1 0:48:16] Tell me about that.

Wooden: Well it was one of those things that I wanted to be sort of self contained, as a unit of developing, printing and taking my own photographs, I didn't want to have to go to somebody else. And I hunted around, and I went to think it was Wallace Heaton's in New Bond Street they are the big camera shop in London, and the manager there, he suggested I have this like an attaché-case size item and insides was an enlarger unit that you would take to pieces fold up into various parts in the attaché-case, and they were made by Durst and they were called Durst Reporters presumably after newspaper reporters doing the selfsame thing themselves, and it proved invaluable because I've still got it! And it's for 35mm there's only one size film it would take, but the majority of cameras at that stage were in the 35mm range

that probably for the size and convenience, and compactness of the equipment the larger size being 3¼ inch and 2¼ inch which was probably too big to take! And people that would actually wanting to take photographs used 35mm, so there we are it proved invaluable on the boat on the way down and on the way back and also while on the base! It's, although while on the base we had to make an adaption because we lost both of our wind generators and in fact in the first couple of months so we had no electricity for the year!

[Part 1 0:50:28] Lee: This is at Danco?

Wooden: That's right so we for the light source for the enlarger we had to use a Bialaddin paraffin lamp, so cut a hole in the darkroom wall and put the lamp one side and put the enlarger on the other side! [laughter] And that's how we managed to carry on while we were south!

[Part 1 0:50:50] Lee: So how did that work in detail? You put something over the hole to stop the light from coming through?

Wooden: Oh it, the actual the hole in itself was just where the actual light from the Bialaddin lamp would shine through, as you say that once the actual fitting is on the inside of the darkroom there's no need to put any other light preventing piece in its way, no light can get into the darkroom other than through the enlarger from that way, so it stayed in place until we move then to base J. And once again we had the problem that although we had the wind generator the batteries wouldn't hold a charge! [laughter] There we are, we got by eventually.

[Part 1 0:51:51] Lee: Well not many people used paraffin lamps to enlarge or project photographs!

Wooden: True enough, its well it's one of those things all about the British way of things again! [laughter] You always find a way you muddle through in some way or other, but you come up with a result!

[Part 1 0:52:14] Lee: The ship you went south on, at Christmas '55 was the *Shackleton*?

Wooden: That's right yes.

[Part 1 0:52:21] Lee: And that wasn't a straight forward event was it either?

Wooden: No that was true. One of those oddities again while we were on that astro course at Sunningdale, we were due to leave the course in a couple of days and join the *John Biscoe*. And apparently the *John Biscoe* was either overpopulated or something but we were put off until December and join the *Shackleton*, but I'd already left the Ordnance Survey and was hoping that I would be with the Falkland Islands Dependence Survey, and they didn't want me until December! So we went back to the Ordnance Survey and said 'Well, look who's going to employ us?' And so the Ordnance Survey said 'Well you're really our employees, you're only loaned the Falkland Island Dependence Survey, we'll take you back. And that's what happened, we stayed with the Ordnance Survey, and then when we come up to on the

sailing date and the Board of Trade came along and said 'Look we're not sure about the stability of the *Shackleton*!?'

[Part 1 0:53:41] Lee: She was brand new was she?

Wooden: She was brand new! She was the MV *Arundel* I think from Sweden and she was renamed *Shackleton* and they didn't like the buoyancy, they had to put more ballast in the base so we were sent home! So we had Christmas at home and then we had a telegram saying 'Report on' (I think it was) 'the 29th of December sailing that afternoon!' And that is what happened, we got the Christmas at home thank goodness, all because the *Shackleton* wasn't stable! [laughter]

[Part 1 0:54:24] Lee: When you left you didn't get very far?

Wooden: No we just went, as Mum and Dad came down there and of course Dad being a sailor he pointed to the end of the quay there and storm cones were being hoisted! He knew what that meant, but I didn't until we got down the Channel and it was a bit rough in the Channel, so we had, well Bill Johnston the skipper he realised a lot of us were either seasick or a bit uncomfortable put it that way! And he decided to call in at on the Cornish coast there, so that's what we did we stayed there for the night.

[Part 1 0:55:12] Lee: Torbay!

Wooden: Torbay, and we proceeded the following morning into the Bay of Biscay, but it was a bit restful put it that way! [laughter]

[Part 1 0:55:25] Lee: You shared a cabin with Wally Herbert, and later much later you shared a flat with him in London.

Wooden: That's right yes.

[Part 1 0:55:31] Lee: Tell me about him. I never met Wally Herbert, tell me about him?

Wooden: He was a grand lad. In actual fact he in many ways he was able to take courageous decisions and he also was, he would look after his friends! Put it that way he had his heart in the right place. See, he did talking books for the blind for example which actually may not be well known. Sometimes in the evening he would be reading out books etc and also making his lecture notes, things like this. And I have a pen picture of him I don't know where it came from it could have been second hand or third hand or fourth hand I don't know. But of Wally going out on to a snow bridge over a crevasse, jumping up and down on it saying 'Come on lads its safe!' [laughter] and that is typical Wally. He was able to take sort of courageous decisions and then make sure his friends were OK, like for example in the flat one morning we got up and there wasn't enough food in the flat for 2 breakfasts, so Wally cooked the breakfast and gave it all to me and then said 'Off you go, catch a train up to London, and I'll go out and get something for myself'. Now he could have divided that amount up into 2 and each have a little, but no, Wally said 'You take the lot'! That is Wally, he put himself second and yet he was able to take certain decisions just like crossing the back

of the Antarctic spine, where you had to go over a dangerous area, not know whether having got through the dangerous area whether he was going to get down back to sea level again, having to come back through that dangerous area again, but no he pressed on ahead and this is Wally. He as I say, he was a strange, well he wasn't a strange person he was self assured, put it this way he knew what he wanted and he was able to execute it to his advantage as proved in the later years. He got several awards, he was a member I think of the Explorers Club, of the United States Explorers Club for example. For having done his National Service abroad he decided to hitchhike home, this is basically what he did when he came back from the Antarctic he hitch hiked through South America on his way home! This is typical Wally, he went through Bolivia which is a notorious place really to be as an individual, yet he used to work his way through being well and truly an accomplished artist, he used to do sketches of people he met as part of repayment for looking after him etc. That's it, that was Wally and I didn't realise he was such a good artist until recent years, I mean some his work is more or less photographic it's really remarkable!

[Part 1 0:59:43] Lee: The other person that you would have got to know on that voyage was the Captain Bill Johnston?

Wooden: Oh Bill, yes.

[Part 1 0:59:48] Lee: What did you make of him?

Wooden: He was a figure of his own obviously!

[Part 1 0:59:53] Lee: How do you mean?

Wooden: Well he used to be quite blunt in his command but once again he was an excellent seaman! And he was full of a sort of helpful advice put it that way, I mean I spent a lot of time actually on the weather bridge, taking photographs and things like that, I mean he could have stopped me from going up there and things like that but no, he's I suppose he used to like his drink put it that way, but?

[Part 1 1:00:46] Lee: On duty!?

Wooden: I think possibly yes, yes I wouldn't be absolutely sure about that one, but I should imagine knowing or seeing the person and what he was like off duty I would imagine that he was quite capable of having a tippie or two on duty. I know there were times like when John Wynn Edwards was coming home on the *John Biscoe* for example, that John used to be up on the bridge. Actually although he was a naval officer he had control of the *John Biscoe* when Bill Johnston was in his cabin, but nobody queried whether Bill was having a sleep or whether his was having a tippie! [laughter] But no he was a good character and is well and truly named by Johnston Peak above Wilhelmina Bay he'll be up there for many, many years, not many people can get up there! But sad to see him go, in actual fact he was a true character, yes nice to have met people like that!

[Part 1 1:02:14] Lee: Was there anything of note on the voyage down that you remember, I think there was there a problem with water supply wasn't there?

Wooden: Oh yes it was one of those things that, don't know how it happened, I don't think the plumbing on the *Shackleton* was fool proof because I, once or twice we were aware that the fresh water didn't taste right! Now it was basically saltwater nothing else it was probably safe, but it got so bad that Bill realised that he had to do something about it, I think they probably emptied the tanks and refilled them it was at what, St Vincent on the Cape Verde Islands, I think that's where we moored at and then proceeded down farther south, but it was one of those minor hiccups! That was I think bound to happen due to taking over a new vessel without really having studied how it was built.

[Part 1 1:03:28] Lee: Was she in terms of being a good seagoing vessel, was she good?

Wooden: She was good, but she was certainly a much more stable ship than the little *John Biscoe*, the bathtub as it were we used to roll, bounce up and down as a boom defence vessel that was and the people used to say if you can stand that you can stand anything! The *Shackleton* was much more a stable ship in say being preventing people from being seasick put it that way, I should imagine that if we had gone actually on the *John Biscoe*, myself may well have been suffering, I'd no trouble on the *Shackleton* at all. It was a nice looking ship too it was completely sort of, what I'll it was good say for an artist to probably draw it as a ship, there was no heavy superstructure or anything like that everything seemed to be right in its place and in right proportions, and as you expect a ship to be! Nowadays everything seems to be overburdened especially the big passenger ships seem to be all little windows, piled up at the side of the ship etc, it was good yeah!

[Part 1 1:05:10] Lee: What point did you find out where it was you were going to go, the fact you were going to open up a brand new station at Brabant Island?

Wooden: I think that must have been at Port Stanley. We knew that we were going to a new base, and it was said Brabant Island and while we knew that it was sort of Brabant Island, we would be more or less stuck on an Island, we wouldn't be able to travel to the mainland for example and things like that. So I don't think we really thought about it we knew that we had to build a base, that was mentioned and although I think we would have all liked being on the mainland and we just resigned ourselves to the fact we were builders basically! How long it would take us we had no idea, I mean we were never told that it would take so long or so short, we just said we knew we had to build a base and nobody asked the question 'Well how long do you think it will be, before we are able to say we are finished?' we just got on with the job. Once again we were back to this question again about not training people or not telling people actually full information, which one would expect it, it's there we are we got by, and we didn't build it where we intended building it! [laughter]

[Part 1 1:07:00] Lee: There was real shenanigans about where it was going to go wasn't there, because several false alarms or starts?

Wooden: Yes this is, it wasn't Bill's fault in actual fact but as far as I'm concerned because as we all know there was a base built later on Brabant Island, but it was on the western edge of Brabant Island which I would imagine, as Bill said, a bit fraught with danger with unloading and resupplying because Bellingshausen Sea was a bit rough out there at times,

and we never even ventured on that part of the island, we only went down the northern side and the eastern side of the island. We were told as far as I was concerned, that the southern part of the island had been inspected the year before. Well I don't know what Bill made of it but that's where the base was eventually built for the army, there we are.

[Part 1 1:08:26] Lee: They had to bring the helicopters in didn't they in to help find somewhere?

Wooden: Well yes this is it, I mean Bill was getting a bit worried I think, because he had a shipload of people basically who shouldn't be there, plus a load of stores that shouldn't be there! And he had a further commitment of going south to supply the southern bases, and he wanted to get rid of this lot as quick as possible I think and although he hunted the Brabant Coast and he realised that was a none starter! And he had to turn his attentions to wherever it was in that particular area, so the only way he could do it he couldn't use it by steaming, he had to realise that he didn't have time on his hands to visit all the areas by steaming so he called in the helicopter I think and asked for them to sort things out for him. But I've no idea whether that in actual fact happened, but anyway we met the *Protector* in Gerlache Straits and the second officer Adam Kerr and our Base Leader Dick Foster, they went up in a helicopter and they searched the mainland coast and looking for a possible sites presumably just a site to build the hut, not an ideal position to work a survey inland. Of course this island came up in the Errera Channel that had a penguin rookery on it which would provide food for example, and it was adequate, may well have been geological raised beach I don't know. But there was plenty of sort of platforms, rocky platform or debris, rough debris platforms were adequate to put a base hut.

[Part 1 1:10:50] Lee: And that was Danco Island?

Wooden: That was Danco Island, well eventually it was called Danco Island, I don't know what it was called.

[Part 1 1:10:56] Paradise Harbour was it?

Wooden: Well Paradise that was farther south, about 25 miles farther south. But anyway what happened we didn't like the area really because a part said because they didn't think they could up into the spine of the Antarctic Peninsula, from that particular area, and Bill decided 'Well we better look further south then'. And he went into, that was, where was it into Lemaire Channel area there and nothing there at all so we eventually ended up at Port Lockroy, where he asked us 'Well can't find anything anywhere else would you be prepared to go back to Danco Island?' And of course we reluctantly said 'Yes if a mountaineering party could give us a clue whether or not we could get up into the Antarctic Peninsula', and that is how it was left. So Bill the following day we went back to Danco Island, so I went ashore with the second officer Adam Kerr, we sited the base hut more or less where we thought it would be an adequate position, and waited for the field party to decide whether or not a route was possible to the Antarctic Peninsula. And they came back and they weren't sure, but Bill said 'Well I think there is a route in Andvord Bay just round the corner, I'll authorise building the base!' So he went ashore he altered the position of the base hut that we

had made slightly, he just moved it a bit farther along the coast and that's where we built the base! And well it's a while ago now the base hut has been removed! [laughter]

[Part 1 1:13:14] Lee: That's good.

Wooden: All my good work gone for a Burton!

[Part 1 1:13:18] Lee: Lets pause there Fred for a moment.

Fred Wooden: Part 2:

[Part 2 0:00:00] Lee: This is Fred Wooden interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 12th of December 2011. Fred Wooden part 2. Tell me about building the base at Danco Island, was it a tough job?

Wooden: Not really, no it wasn't that as I say a tough job it was a Bolton & Paul design when they obviously they had a good blueprint etc. And of course we had Dick Foster who was member of Costains who were quite an important builders in all sorts of buildings and properties, he was more or less like a quantity surveyor as well. So he knew the actual building sequences that should take place one after another so he was able to organize the work party, into sort of what each person should be doing or help etc. in one way or another. And so he was very, very good at that, Dick, and of course we had to do the foundations first, which was fairly difficult work because it was in a rock debris situation plus probably actually rock underneath the debris and that had to be cleared, and we had to make concrete pillars to raise the floor up like a foot or two foot more or less, so that you get an air current under the hut itself otherwise you get a build-up of snow! And that really which builds up underneath the building and it becomes an embarrassment, because it blocks up the ventilation and well being of the actual floor itself then that was very hard work, and in fact working with moisture and cement meant that down south where it is extremely cold you got cracked hands and you're thumbs especially, the finger prints on your thumbs etc were badly cracked so that was painful!

[Part 2 0:02:42] And once you got over that sort of thing and you were able to dispense with the idea of having cement which was the actual big culprit I think, we come to the woodwork things like that which was much more pleasant to work with and it all had to be cut to size and then fitted properly, over the actual beams etc and the floor joists and the flooring had to be double diagonal sort of thing for strength. And that was all done in quite good order in actual fact. Meanwhile we had to sleep in our tents in sleeping bags etc, nowhere else to go, and the meals were actually cooked in what we made of a little bothy with all the packing cases and tarpaulin sheets over the top as a roof sort of thing with a bar hanging up so we could eat our meals during the day and do all the cooking etc, so that was a nice warm little spot. And then once the flooring was on and all the insulation on the ground section was done, we could put up the frame work which was all itemised and labelled as to where it should go, and what it should fit into like tongue and grooving when instead of having to screw or nail up structures it just slotted together like a big jigsaw puzzle! And once all the

framework was up and then the walling could go up with the insulation all the rubberised and things like that for waterproofing you get the ceiling joists up, and put the floor on for the attic and the roof over the top make it sort of watertight and windproof to a certain extent. We didn't put the windows in and doors in till very late so it was windblown but it was a shelter and we all mucked in sort of thing and we worked probably all the daylight hours that we could usefully employ, and by the time I think it was March, in March matter of fact, all the main housing and the roof all that lot, and all the waterproofing and including windows and I think doors were all in by the time the *Shackleton* called for her last port of call, before going back to UK. So we were quite content, Bill Johnston was very pleased anyway that we'd got so far ahead, got the work done, and he was able to leave knowing full well that we were hopefully safe and sound!

[Part 2 0:05:57] Lee: So how long did it take to get to the relatively fit state, 2 or 3 months?

Wooden: Well the actual finished state, you mean the actual time we got all the beds up and things like that it was probably another month, sort of work. We had a lot of stuff to dig out of fallen snow and things like this and to find out what fitted what, and where certain things were and certain things were obviously missing, because either they hadn't been put on the ship in the first place or basically or they were buried, so we just did without them as it were and got by and it was about a month or so. It was peaceful sort of work that wasn't sort of demanding in the sort of hardships we just jogged on, everybody knew what they were doing. Everybody had to take turns in cooking for one week which did help in many respects in it meant if you had split fingers for example and things like this, it got a week's respite really to make them better. It's anyway I think we all really enjoyed it making our own home!

[Part 2 0:07:25] Lee: You were there of course to do survey work.

Wooden: That's right.

[Part 2 0:07:29] Lee: And that I guess was somewhat frustrating was it?

Wooden: Well it was frustrating because being on an island meant that all you could do was to work locally, there were very few landing points anywhere near base that you could work from and move inland, and the landing point was there yes! But once on there you couldn't move more than 20 or 30 feet which is not very good if you want to do some survey work, so it really meant my survey or our survey work was having a plan of the area so the sort of the Admiralty or whatever ship that was in the area could do soundings and find out where the best anchorage position was, and so this is what I was engaged on. But once we got that sorted out then we could perhaps move farther in the Anvers Bay or Paradise Harbour area for example, or Wilhelmina Bay or even into the Gerlache Strait area to do farther extensions to what more or less would be a shipping map or chart. The idea of having to travel long distances and take sun observations and things like that didn't exist, because once the actual base hut had had its astro position fixed then any triangulation and survey work from that fix would be quite enough, you didn't have to do a second one. And if you had to travel a long distance then that would have been necessary to do more than one astro fix but no, the base survey was very, very local in many respects.

[Part 2 0:09:44] Lee: Was there no way to get into the interior of the island?

Wooden: Well not really, no, we had several attempts to try and force a route but they all led to one point, which we later called 'The Downfall', because that was it we got up to what, a 4000 odd feet up there and looked over the edge there and there was a 50 foot drop and there was a sharp arête running up to the main platform! And if we got across that arête and got up into the spine of the Antarctic Peninsula up to what we called then the Forbidden Plateau it was one of those frustrating things, every point that we turned to led to this one position, 'The Downfall'! It, why Bill didn't see that from the sea in Andvord Bay perhaps he never visited I don't know, but he just went on hearsay but certainly that was no route up from where we built the base.

[Part 2 0:10:55] You mentioned of course that Danco Island as a British Antarctic Survey base was very short lived!

Wooden: It was short lived because even for met observations it was surrounded by high mountains, so I mean they had a local climate so that was no good for the overall picture of what the Antarctic Peninsula was doing, so it was very, very local. It was a shame really because as far as the base hut was concerned it was quite a good hut. And we had a penguin rookery we'd have eggs and penguin and things like that plenty of seals up in the area as well for the things, but no it was sad to see it go but there we are.

[Part 2 0:11:48] Lee: Let's talk about one or two highs and lows and there's one low when one of your colleagues John Ketley got a message in October '55, [Wooden: Oh yeah poor old John!] '56, October '56?

Wooden: Think he lived at about Whitton in Surrey I think, but John was a youngster he was the youngest member of the party and he had red hair or ginger, and he was a very rock & roll type of lad and he wasn't what I'd say an accomplished surveyor in actual fact! He was, he had survey knowledge but I don't know where he got it from in actual fact, but from the services or not I don't know, never queried that one, but he was good a plane tabling which once the positions of certain points are fixed you could build on those and do, make the actual map on a sheet of paper and that was John's idea and he was sort of a lively lad. And of course we never thought anything was wrong at all and one day we had a coded message come through, which I took down and I didn't have the knowledge to decipher it and Dick eventually deciphered it and it was unfortunate that poor John's mother had died in fact! So it's one of those things that base members feel very acutely because when it happens to one of your pals, and you don't know how he's going to react. John being a youngster it was even more so we didn't know how he was going to react, but we sort of gave him a free rein saying 'If you want to go up into the darkroom and anything like that, or hide or what you're welcome to help wherever we can give it' you see. So John took himself up to the darkroom with his radio and he played one of the United States stations for music etc. and he stayed up there a couple of days. In actual fact we took his food up to him which he ate alright, and after that he came down more or less right as rain as you'd hope for really! He'd accepted the result and we all sent a message to his dad from the base expressing our condolences etc

and John had a reply back, so I think he more or less accepted the fact that that was going to happen anyway we didn't know. I mean his mum had been ill for some time so I should imagine John must have been aware of it and realised that it was likely to happen while he was down there, but yes he was a good lad he really went on to Anvers Island for his second year.

[Part 2 0:15:31] Lee: You had a surprise visit from a member of the Royal Family?

Wooden: That's right that was a surprise too because!

[Part 2 0:15:38] Lee: Duke of Edinburgh!

Wooden: We didn't know much about what was going on obviously and there was a rumour that there would be a visit of a ship etc, with somebody onboard, we didn't know whether it was going to be the governor or anything like that you see. And so we carried on our local survey business and I was with, I think it was Pidge Palmer, I think our radio op in our little boat going out to the nearest island. And I could hear this aircraft overhead and thought to myself 'I don't know if that's the Argentine air force up there or what it is', and this noise kept buzzing around and all of a sudden I saw over the top of Ronge Island a helicopter and they were obviously searching for something. But we didn't know where it came from or anything and we carried on to this island to carry out the survey work, and all of a sudden they came down and flew over the top of us, several feet as it were! And we realised that something was up so it more or less indicated for us to return to the island so we made a dash back to the base hut, and he had landed on the beach alongside the base hut and there was a naval lieutenant pilot there who we later learned when we had a conversation with him, that he was looking for the base hut so that he knew where the *John Biscoe* could land the Duke of Edinburgh! So that was, he came ashore shortly afterwards think it was the following day, not sure, but he came ashore he came in to see us, there was just the 3 of us because our other 3 members were at Wilhelmina Bay and he wanted to know all the story, of about how the base was built etc wanted to know what was going on, he was very, very pleasant and of course he left shortly afterwards and think they went on to Port Lockroy, but yes it was quite good.

[Part 2 0:18:07] Lee: Did you dress up?

Wooden: No funnily enough it's one of those strange things that don't always realise, he was saying in the mess deck there he said he was glad he came on this visit, because he didn't have to wear a tie! [laughter] You don't have to think about these things about people having to dress up for the occasion and that he didn't have to dress up on this occasion! It was very human, yeah it was good.

[Part 2 0:18:41] Lee: At the end season you all left base O, was it then decided it wouldn't be used again the following season?

Wooden: No it was used the following season and we left all our results and thing like that to the incoming staff as it were, and we had hoped the base hut would continue as a sort of refuge if it wasn't being used at all, because any port in a storm I think in those areas is a

great help! You don't know when expeditions or whatever it is people travelling down there need a place of comfort, but I think the actual base hut itself had deteriorated and I don't know why. I can understand why the base hut at J at Prospect Point deteriorated did, but can't understand why the one at base O, Danco Island. It could have been the fact the storms in actual fact ruined the roof, insulation or protection I don't know, they decided anyway they would keep the base much farther south, base W. They were keeping the Bolton & Paul hut at that one, obviously it was in much colder climate than the base O one, therefore probably a greater chance of being kept sort of less expense as it were keeping it watertight, snow tight or whatever you like to call it. No just, base J the Prospect Point one, the base hut a lot of the woodwork the structure of the hut itself was immersed in seawater when the new ship had presumably a gash actually I suppose in the plating, and a lot of it got soaked with saltwater. Knowing what salt does it absorbs moisture from the air anyway, so this could have caused the rotting of the wood actually in the Prospect Point one. That's why they decided to get rid of that one.

[Part 2 0:21:13] Lee: Let's get ourselves to base J Prospect Point. [Wooden: Yeah] You were all shipped out and basically there was the same process again [Wooden: Oh yes exactly] trying to find somewhere to put the hut!

Wooden: Well I don't know that was already carried out and done for us, so by the time I got there they'd done the concrete pillars or at least they had prepared a lot of the work for concrete pillars, so I can in after several days after they having started it and having some sited the place, for a start I don't know who sited it for example or whether any preparation had been done to find out if there was a route inland, it's one of those oddities because when we tried to find a route inland we found it impossible! So it's a mote point as to why it was there, it could be another case where the ship has stuff onboard and had to get rid of it and could say 'Well we'll put it down to the nearest place that we can find to site it and hope for the best'. I don't know we've never understood that one! It, anyway it's one of those areas that are much more open and the temperature, the annual temperature are obviously a lot lower than they were at Danco Islands, had sea ice which meant that we could use the dogs that were allocated to us for distant travelling. And this gave us a sort of new lease of life, we had not exactly freedom but we had movement away from the base area which we didn't get at base O, and so consequently we had a lot of work with the inner coastal area and the outer islands. Now this coincided with the naval party that had been working at Anvers Island, they wanted to move south into the Grandidier Channel which we were working in so I think, behind the scenes it was agreed we would join the naval party come summer season and we would work together, as a naval unit instead of a FID unit. Having done our FIDS due work during the winter and hey presto that's basically what happened thank goodness because that's the best part of my life down there! It, we were under naval command and not under a FID command and having been very pro-naval I suppose that may have helped, it was very good John Wynn Edwards also a local man actually he comes from Hayling Island and so we kept it all very local as it were.

[Part 2 0:24:28] Lee: Was there a distinct difference in the ethos between FID management and Navy management?

Wooden: I would say that naval command was much more in control of events put it that way, I don't know whether if it was just because a different type of work that we were involved with between base J and base O, where one was local and one was not local. The idea of transport was one thing where we had dogs in the winter and the naval launch in the summer, we only had small boats actually in base O and it meant there was a lot more danger in using a small boat that there was perhaps in travelling on sea ice, and naval launch I don't know, mind you we nearly did come across on sea ice the ice couldn't have been very thick! We used to go through with an ice chisel used to go straight through the ice so we had to be very careful where we trod, and of course always on skis to lessen the per pound per square inch on the surface of the area, which was another thing.

[Part 2 0:25:56] Lee: So was the surveying from base, from Prospect Point from base J that was always done on the sea ice with dogs, you never got into the interior again?

Wooden: No, we never got into the interior at all; with base J it's mainly, it once again it was oriented to hydrographic survey in requirements, where the control points could be sited by using sextants instead of theodolites. When you are sounding on a ship you are basically on open sites with a sextant, which is more or less held horizontally and therefore your line of vision is something like 30 feet above sea level in the distance, which meant that your survey stations ideally would be about that distance above sea level at any particular landing point in the area. Whereas normal survey techniques it doesn't matter how high up. It could be 4000 feet up provided you could see the actual point with a theodolite it didn't matter, you couldn't reach it with a sextant because you had to tip the sextant up to try and see it! But, no it was basically an ideal situation for naval hydrographic surveying that's how I would think, that we were fortunate that not only did we have to climb up mountainsides to do our survey stations, but we could put it on headlands above sea level, which meant that we could visit more spots with less hardships and I think it gave us a greater sort of happiness as it were. Being able to do the job we were sent down there for, it was just the way things turned out perhaps I don't know the guardian angel again looking after us!?

[Part 2 0:28:24] Lee: You say it was much colder at Prospect than it was at Danco. [Wooden: Oh yes!] How did that manifest itself?

Wooden: Well we expected it to be cold in the Antarctic yes, but some of the temperatures we didn't expect, and we went down to -24 one of the survey trips!

[Part 2 0:28:47] Lee: That's Fahrenheit?

Wooden: That's right and you could see a steam rising up off the ice, the sea ice etc and that was jolly cold, I mean even in the base hut when you couldn't touch any metal or anything like that (!) otherwise it hurt your fingers, you didn't get that at base O, and base O was more or less you think of an extremely cold Scottish temperature during winter, that is what about what we had to put up with at base O it was not exactly what they call the banana belt, but it was cold no question about it, but nothing like the temperatures you get farther south, I mean it gets even colder much farther south like Alexandra Island and bases like that! Fossil Bluff they went down way below what was happening to sustain you had to dress up in really thick

clothing for that! But no, base O we got by, we got acclimatised which is another aspect of what certain people at home didn't realise that, to see anybody walking down in the Antarctic with an open necked shirt on or something like that, you just couldn't believe and yet it didn't feel cold this it, the body had accepted that lower temperature as being normal!

[Part 2 0:30:35] Lee: But you had to keep busy didn't you?

Wooden: Pardon!?

[Part 2 0:30:37] Lee: You had to keep busy didn't you?

Wooden: Oh yeah, yeah you had to keep moving. Mind you when there was no wind at all that is slightly a different story, one of those strange aspects that I never experienced before, there was no breeze on one occasion and you could strip off more or less, strip off almost bare skin! And I carried on digging a snow pit to dig out some stuff at base O for example and didn't feel cold at all, and directly a breeze comes up that's it you're rushing to put on warm clothing and things like that! But when there's no wind it's quite strange, you don't expect it.

[Part 2 0:31:30] Lee: There was quite a substantial sledging survey trip in August of that year 1957?

Wooden: Yes.

[Part 2 0:31:38] Lee: 20 days August 5th to the 25th '57? [Wooden: Yes.] With 2 sledges, you were on one of those?

Wooden: Yes that's right.

[Part 2 0:31:44] Lee: Tell me about that expedition?

Wooden: Well this is one of those things that we realised that we wanted to do a control over the Granddier Channel, certainly the southern part of it, and that was a part of our responsibility from Prospect Point, and it meant that the outer islands had to be visited and the inner coastal area had to be visited. So Ron Miller, who was our base leader, decides that there should be a party doing the outer islands and a party doing the inner islands. Now up the way up we had to erect our survey stations and on the way back we had to observe them to make sure each party knew exactly where the stations were, we had to exchange partners at the far end of the journey before returning back southwards. So this is what happened that we went up, I went up the coastal area, and Brian actually went up the coastal area and when we got up to the northern end we swapped partners, and came back down south and observing all the way with theodolite observing and funnily enough we arrived both at the base station on the same day (!), which we didn't expect. Now during in that time we hoped to be in contact by radio, but one thing our radios didn't always work so it was just more or less what we saw through the theodolite, whether or not the coastal party or the inner area party or the outer area party rather were actually up on their site to do any observations. One thing we did notice we were, what, about 20 miles apart we knew that the dogs in our team

could hear the dogs of the other team farther out to sea! Their hearing must be extreme they used to be constantly looking out to sea as they were running along, and it was fairly obvious to us that they could hear the other dogs, it was quite strange!

[Part 2 0:34:18] Lee: Was this when you had air support, you had some aerial photographs taken?

Wooden: Not, we didn't know about that, in actual fact we knew that the Hunting Aerial Survey had flying over the area, but we had no idea what they had taken or what they needed to control the photographs in actual fact on the Grandidier Channel, that open area there they didn't get any photographs at all! And when we come to do the actual map at the Overseas Survey, we had to borrow some of the actual detail from an Argentine map! But its, but no its one of those things that we could have done with more information of what was happening on the grander scale. I keep saying this about our pre-training and things like that it wasn't to me enough to be a 100% safe as it were, we were just left to our own devices and this is it, it was only when we got back home we realised the area that we had been working in putting all the control down we had air photo cover for! And normally what we was doing while down there we were providing information so that they could do a survey at ground level, without having recourse to air photographs. Had we known that air photographs were being used our technique would have been slightly different or should have been slightly different I mean!

[Part 2 0:36:10] Lee: What went wrong, why weren't you aware of that situation?

Wooden: We knew that the photographs were taken because now if you have an air photograph, you want to be able to put that in its correct position and ideally that put it in its correct position, you want to have 2 photographs that are stereoscopic.

[Part 2 0:36:31] Lee: Yes.

Wooden: So in that stereoscopic part of those 2 photographs it's where the actual ground survey point should be. Well we didn't know where those points would be at all we were just making survey points to suit ourselves at ground level, which would be suitable perhaps for hydrographic survey. We had no idea when the points we were supplying would be useful for air photographs, so there was that mix that we didn't know what was going on!

[Part 2 0:37:08] Lee: And you didn't know because the Navy and FIDS or the Navy and Hunting's weren't talking to each other what was it, did you ever get to the bottom of it?

Wooden: Well they were talking but the point is you had to have sort of a visual arrangement, so you knew that where the actual overlapping photographs of the stereoscopic part of the photographs of the overlapping photographs were was actually on the ground, then you could put a point in the particular area on the ground. Later seeing those photographs without knowing where the actual overlap was you had to put a point down to suit the ground survey, sort of if we had gone down in the Antarctic with the photographs in our hands that would have been much better - because we were down there where they were taking the photographs there was no way we were going to make it absolutely right!

[Part 2 0:38:13] Lee: I think that lesson was learned later wasn't it?

Wooden: I think it must have been, yes it must have been. We've learned a lot since those early days even like the Argentine Islands which is in the northern part of Grandidier Channel, now there's dozens and dozens of small islands in there and it meant we had to do a ground survey, we would months and months trying to survey all those islands from the ground. Now Hunting Aero Survey they got air photographs' cover of that area or part of that area, but they hadn't completed everything so what the Navy decided to do was send a helicopter up, and take photographs from some helicopter. Now a helicopter vibrates quite a lot, and it's very shaky and a wave here and there it won't keep on a definite course, and they took the whole line of photographs and I was able to plot those actually in sort of a rough position enough to prevent us from then having to do a ground survey. So that's one of the things that the naval photography helicopter was able to provide for us which was great help. They learnt a lot from that I think because it meant that under certain circumstances a helicopter can be used, and whereas before they said that it was too unstable!

[Part 2 0:39:59] Lee: At the end of your year at Prospect Point did you feel though that you'd achieved everything that you could expect to achieve?

Wooden: No, nobody ever does that! [laughter] One of those funny things that I think everybody that comes back from south, say to themselves I wish I could have done better! It's this question of hindsight again where you're out in the unknown you don't know fully what's going to happen, and you do something and you think is right then when you come back home you say 'Know well I could have improved on that sort of thing'! You're always left with this feeling I think that I could have done better, but you did well and this is it you came up with an answer and that answer is better than what there was before, but having the fact there was better there before is perhaps good enough for some people! You could have done much more accurately if such and such something happened. You see it's this question of hindsight again, it's a wonderful thing!

[Part 2 0:41:14] Lee: There's two more things I particularly want to ask you about Fred, I know you came back from the Antarctic and carried on working for FIDs for a while.

Wooden: That's right two and half years!

[Part 2 0:41:24] Lee: Two and half years a lot of it was writing up the work you'd done down there.

Wooden: That's right yeah, well a lot of it was fronting aerial photographs.

[Part 2 0:41:35] Lee: What was your connection with the place naming committee?

Wooden: Well that was interesting because although I went out there for my own area, the base O area and the base J area, I think Brian Roberts, who was the head of the postal section, of the Polar Section at the Foreign Office, he was also secretary of the Place Names Committee. He wanted somebody who would inspect The Hunting's Aerial Survey to find out whether or not certain place names were in the right place, whether in actual fact a

previous expedition that had been down there had got their quota of place names correct and all this business, and whether or not that the photograph showed up areas where there should be place names and there wasn't any. And he was a great one for being very pedantic in, he wanted absolute accuracy and the statements etc and I think probably he realised that he had got hold of somebody that probably would more or less have same similar thoughts that he had. Now I very more or less, very not exactly pedantic but I like to be to be very accurate as far as possible, and I'm not that sort of too critical of my own work but I would hope that I would come up with a good answer! And the fact that I was in situation again and he wanted somebody to do that particular work he fought for me to stay on!

[Part 2 0:43:27] Now in my terms of reference I was not allowed permanently, I think it was something like 3 months I was given, and I had to return to the Ordnance Survey and apparently I think he had several letters to Sir Vivian Fuchs I think to try and keep me, and in the end I think both of them won, in actual fact and I was kept on for two and half years solely on looking at the Hunting Aerial Survey, that included areas like South Georgia and places like that, areas that I hadn't even visited! And as I say I got a whole list of place name sheets that I was involved in, I think it must have been somewhere near enough a 1000 names I suppose, and of course I had to check on all the previous expeditions that had been down there, like those in the 1800's and things like this. All the information came back from Scott Polar down to the Foreign Office, I saw the original charts and original statements written up by some of these early explorers, and I had to deduce from what I saw on stereoscope what they were describing! And I was able to pinpoint probably several places that hadn't been sort of fully recognised and the name was probably misplaced in several places, and so was able to determine that was the particular spot where the name was originally given and that was it.

[Part 2 0:45:12] Lee: So your concern was not choosing names but placing them in the right place?

Wooden: Placing them in the right place. And also, as you say, in naming features that require a name because there were visual aspects, which needed for reference purposes or for rescue points or for report writing and things like this.

[Part 2 0:45:33] Lee: Is there a Wooden Glacier or a Fred Nunatak?

Wooden: There is Wooden Peak! [laughter] Now that is Holtedahl Bay, that's at the bottom end of Grandidier Channel, that's what, I think its 6000ft up or 9000ft, quite a big one, anyway it is a peak!

[Part 2 0:45:56] Lee: Tell me about your role in the location of the U.S. station!

Wooden: Oh the U.S. station; that was interesting because I, my address then was Hayling Avenue in Portsmouth then and I got a letter from the United States, the Antarctic people, and they were wanting to put a biological station somewhere on the Antarctic Peninsula, and they wanted to know also what type boat would be suitable for that particular area. Well they must have read a report that in the *Polar Record* about John Wynn Edwards party in the

Grandidier Channel and the only place I could think of as far as a biological station was concerned, would be where there was a lot of islands and that to me would be the Argentine Islands, the northern end of the Grandidier Channel. And as far as the boat is concerned, I was more or less nonplussed as I didn't know what sort of thing would be suitable working through the little islands etc. So I thought I better go out and see Brian up in the Foreign Office, so I took the letter up to Brian in the Foreign Office, more or less discussed it and said 'I can't help, here it's all yours [laughter] Brian!' He obviously knew that the Anvers Island station was becoming extinct shortly so he suggested that as a fact it was very, very close to the Argentine Islands also in effect the Bellingshausen Sea was next door as it were, and shipping could get in quite easily into that area, he suggested perhaps they'd like to have a look at the Anvers, base N, the Anvers Island area for their biological station. So of course right alongside you had a snow platform which is also useful for short range aircraft, which is another thing for helicopters, so it turned out it was an ideal location really for the Americans to take, which they did, but it was all Brian's work really not mine - I set the ball rolling! And I'm glad in a way because the fact that the Argentine Islands themselves, base F, was taken over by basically the Russians weren't they, the Ukrainians that's right there, there now which they're very, very pro-British in actual fact I was surprised about that!

[Part 2 0:49:00] Lee: I have one final question for you this is to do with grave of Edward Bransfield.

Wooden: Yes right.

[Part 2 0:49:08] Lee: Which was located in Brighton and you'd been there twice [Wooden: Yes, right] once in 1959 and again in '95?

Wooden: Yes that's right yeah. That was another sideline that working with Brian up in the Foreign Office in the research department Stanhope Street and with Ena Thomas obviously his secretary, and one sunny day we were up there working away and Brian walked over to the window and looked down into the street below, and there was he suddenly said 'We're all going to the seaside'! And we wondered what the hell was going on here, we didn't realise then there was an Antarctic item to it and 'Right let's go!' So we got into Brian's car and he took Ena back to her apartment to pick up some gear, and he went to his own apartment to pick up some stuff and he drove me to Clavering Avenue at Hammersmith to pick my camera, my own camera, and that's where Wally Herbert was, and we went off down the road to Brighton! And I hadn't realised before, the year before they had been down there and they had asked one of the staff down there where Bransfield's grave was and he didn't know. But anyway they searched and searched and eventually found it all covered in bracken and was hidden, and so Brian decided that we would leave it in their hands to clear it and he would come down the following year which is the year we are talking about. And we went down to see if they had cleared it or not, and we found they had cleared it up to a point and from then onwards I took an interest in it, I don't know why, mainly I think from the fact that I was probably living quite close to Brighton and they were up in London or something like that. I thought 'Well I'll keep an eye on this and see what happens', and eventually I decided or I'll go down and have a look at it, and went down to Brighton cemetery got round and I

couldn't find it! And I thought 'Well what's happened?' I sort of realised there had been a large clearance of graves etc and eventually when I did find it, I found the actual line of graves next to it, they'd reached the next grave line to the Bransfield's grave itself.

[Part 2 0:52:03] Lee: So it was under threat was it?

Wooden: So I thought, 'Well it looks like it's under threat', so I surveyed it I went down to Brighton library and got the Ordnance Survey map out and sketched from the Ordnance Survey map, and went back to the cemetery and plotted its position and took the photographs etc, and then I wrote to, I think it was Bob Headland I think in the Scott Polar, saying that could we get the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments to put a clamp on it, put a protection order on it? And he wrote to them and asked about it and they wrote back eventually and said it was out of their remit! But suggested he contact the local diocesan office about the importance of the grave, and which he did and got a reply back and eventually we were sort of wondering what was the next stage and out of the blue came a request from Scott Polar from a woman Mrs Salter asking for more information about her ancestor Edward Bransfield! And this was completely out of the blue well within a couple of weeks!

[Part 2 0:53:26] Lee: Your guardian angel again?

Wooden: Yes that's right because I said at the time I said 'Where do we find a person that knows anything about it'? [laughter] And of course a lot of letters have been passed since then and I've helped her in actual fact to more or less make sure the grave was renovated, and the stone well sort of re-cut as it were and make people aware here was a man who probably first sighted or sort of plotted part of the Antarctic Continent! But it's one of those things that was the Duke of Edinburgh had to be involved and I got her to contact him which he pulled one or two strings, I think contacted Trinity House and The Worship Company of Shipwrights etc and they come up with the money for renovating the grave. And then we had the ceremony with all the local people etc, Diocesan Office and Scott Polar and the Admiralty and Trinity House they all came and we had ceremony over the grave and that's how it stays at the moment. So very pleased about that one yes!

[Part 2 0:55:06] Lee: That's a great story Fred it's been a real pleasure thank you very much.

Wooden: Oh thank you for your efforts, because I wouldn't have been able to do it otherwise! [laughter]

Possible extracts:

- Falling into a crevasse with Dick Foster. [Part 1 0:11:13]
- Using a plate camera in Portsmouth naval dockyard. [Part 1 0:26:18]
- Seeing the start of D day. [Part 1 0:31:18]
- Being taught by Alfred Stephenson [Part 1 0:40:07]
- Buying a Leica camera in the Falkland Islands. [Part 1 0:45:15]

- Printing photos without any power. [Part 1 0:50:50]
- Sharing a cabin and later a flat with Wally Herbert. [Part 1 0:55:31]
- Building the new base hut at the Danco Islands. [Part 2 0:00:00]
- The downfall of any plans to reach the interior. [Part 2 0:09:44]
- The visit of the Duke of Edinburgh and his comment. [Part 2 0:15:33]
- Working with the Royal Navy at Prospect Point. [Part 2 0:24:28]
- Working for the Antarctic place name committee. [Part 2 0:41:35]
- Being involved in finding the site for the new US base at Palmer Station on Anvers Island. [Part 2 0:45:35]
- The grave of Edward Bransfield in Brighton.[Part 2 0:49:08]

