

British Antarctic Survey Archives
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A recording of Surgeon Captain E W Bingham OBE, Commander of the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey between 1946 and 1947, in conversation with Miss Joanna Rae, Assistant Archivist of the British Antarctic Survey.

Date : 24 May 1985

Location : Captain Bingham's home at Halstock, near Yeovil, Somerset.

Part 1 (A)

Joanna Rae: Captain Bingham, could you give me a brief outline of your career before and since your service with the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey?

Captain Bingham: Well, yes. It'll be brief. I left school, actually, just after the First World War and went up to Trinity College, Dublin, to do medicine. In 1927, I joined the RN as a Surgeon Lieutenant and went off out to China on my first sea-going ship and, of course, China was a lovely country in those days, before the communist regime.

However, when I came back I got a job in a cadet's training ship down in Plymouth and while there, suddenly a signal came round from the Admiralty asking for a Medical Officer to volunteer for an Arctic expedition and, of course, this was something that I had been craving to do ever since I had been quite a young child. Why, I don't know, but I'd always made up my mind if I ever got a chance I'd go to the Polar Regions.

After a few hiccups, I finally got appointed to it precisely one week to a day before Quest's sail for Greenland from St. Catharine's dock. That was the British Arctic Erude Expedition led by Gino Watkins. That lasted of course the winter and back I came to this country and not very long afterwards I was suddenly sent for by the Medical Director General to say that there was going to be a winter survey party left in northern Labrador from HMS *Challenger*, which was one of the newer surveying ships in the Navy, and they wanted someone who'd had experience of living under canvass in polar regions and they hadn't got anybody else in the Navy – would I be prepared to go in an advisory position? Well, of course, I jumped at that, but I did mention that I'd been promised a specialist course in radiology and what was going to happen to that? I thought I'd better make this point and the MDG said "Oh, that's all right, we'll keep that for you after you get back".

Well, off I went to Labrador and, incidentally, I was made by Captain Wyatt, then captain of the *Challenger*, afterwards became Hydrographer of the Navy, said, "It's up to you, Bingham, you've got to get all the clothing, windproof, everything to do with the polar side of this thing. Tents, sledges, dogs, the lot." And he gave me about a week to do this in. so I had heard that in London, in Australia House, there was a lot of stuff belonging to Mawson, who in one expedition, had intended landing a party in the Antarctic and never did it and so all this stuff was there in cases, down in the basement at Australia House, so off I went there, and right enough there was a mass of stuff and I was able to buy the sleeping bags, the longjohns, the woollen vests, socks, mutlocks – everything you could want from a clothing point of view.

But when I was hunting through the, these were incidentally not the up-to-date type of sleeping bag, these were the old reindeer skin bags, and I was looking at these and one that the fellow put out and showed me, I said “No, I’m not having that beastly thing. Come on, open up, let me see some more”. And suddenly a voice behind me said, “What’s wrong with that one”. So I turned round and here was a long, tall man with a beard behind me. I said, “Look, if you’d ever slept in one of these you’d know what’s wrong with that one”. So he said, “Do you know who I am?”. I said “No”. “I’m Sir Douglas Mawson”. So I said, “Oh, I’m sorry Sir, you then would understand”. So he said, “Well, do you?”. So I said, “Yes”. And I told him I’d slept in them for a year and he immediately turned round and said, “Come on, open up a few cases”, and he wouldn’t let me take one that had the slightest sign of anything wrong with it, everything must be perfect. We got on very well together.

Anyway, after a year up there, or part of a year, we went down to, we did the summer survey first, I might say and then the ship left us and went down to come back the next summer. But before doing that we went down to Halifax to fill up the bunkers with oil, in the ship. And while there, I heard of a thing called the Northern Messenger, which was a organisation in Ottawa, I think I’m right in saying where you could write a letter of twenty-five words to this office and they would broadcast it to you. It was really meant for North West Mounted Police and Hudson Bay posts above the range of ordinary wireless stations and I bought a little second-hand short-wave receiving set for \$15, took it back up with me and notified the families of all the people involved, only nine of us all told, that their families could do this, and that the broadcast was on Saturday nights between 12 midnight and 1 o’clock in the morning, and every night we used to listen in for that.

This particular night, Dean - Lieutenant Dean, one of the serving officers always listened in with me. The poor chap was killed during this last war. And suddenly in the middle of this, letters coming for all the different places - we got to know all the names of the North West Mounted Police up in the far north - the announcer said, “Here is an important message for Surgeon Lieutenant Commander Bingham, from the British Admiralty”. And just with that, every dog in the settlement set up a wolf howl, including our own on our doorstep. And I can see Dean to this day rushing out and opening the door and screaming at these dogs to keep quiet. Well, of course, he might have saved his breath. However, when he came back we went on listening and said, “Oh dear, I wonder what that was all about”. And then the very last letter, they said “We will now repeat that important message from the British Admiralty”. And this was to know, was I prepared to go to the Antarctic the following summer on an expedition led by John Rymill? Well I had no way of sending an immediate wire back to say, yes please, but what I did do was I hired an eskimo dog team to go down the coast about 200 miles through the various Hudson Bay posts to the nearest wireless station and sent off a signal to say, yes, I was interested. So John, I know now, of course, actually eventually reached – got – this signal. And that’s how I came to go on the BGLE.

But when I got back to England the BGLE were just about to sail. I’d had no leave and no time to get anything ready and anyway, the dogs that they had sent on ahead had practically all died from distemper, or had hard pad as they term it. However, John wanted me to go off to Labrador or, by signal, to get these dogs. Now I had had a team in Labrador and having got this signal, I gave them to a little trapper friend of mine who’d gone on trips with me up, hunting caribou, while the other people were off doing their survey. And I made him a present of the team on condition that if the chance arose to get these dogs to the Antarctic with me, he must hand them back. And this actually happened - he did - all except

the bitch of the team, because the children had so much fallen in love with this they hid the bitch and nobody could find it until after the ship had sailed. But I got my dogs down to the Antarctic.

Well then, this purely arose because I'd had the experience with John Rymill in Greenland and they'd rather have a doctor who'd had experience before than somebody who hadn't. And then ten years afterwards, 1945, along comes this chance to go with FIDS. Now I know you want to know how it came that I came to join FIDS, I hardly know myself. At that time, I was in a job in London, at the end of the war, with the resounding title of "Senior Medical Officer RN Units London Area. London Area extended from Tilbury to Staines and right up to Oxford. They joined through Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire and parts of Wiltshire, there were a lot of WREN units, some of them large numbers of WRENs, all trying to crack German coded signals. And I had a group of about seven or eight young doctors, not so very young some of them, but there were certain lieutenants RNVI. Each of them had a group of seven or eight of these units to look after and my headquarters was a hospital for WRENs in Vincent Square, so all WREN patients needing hospital treatment came down to us. The male ones were sent to Chatham Hospital.

In the hospital, I was. Well first of all the medical Director General sent for me. Yes. And said, was I prepared to go on this expedition with FIDS and explained what it was all about. And I said, yes definitely, I was. He said, "The Colonial Office want to borrow you". So it just suited me very well, thank you very much. The next person to get in touch with me was Dr Brian Roberts. There was a committee of Brian Roberts, Wordie, Macintosh from the Discovery 2 investigations and Jukes and Barton of the Colonial Office, who were really organising this thing. But once I was appointed, as far as I could make out, they just handed over to me and said "Well, all right, get on with it." And I don't know whether you're going to come in then about the - getting left to my own devices, I suppose. If I pause, you step in.

Joanna Rae : Right. What were your duties within the organisation.

Captain Bingham: Well, to begin with there wasn't an organisation to any great extent of course. I was appointed and as far as I could make out, it was then left to me to order all the stores, clothing, tents, sledges, everything that was required, for three years in at least five bases. My main duty, of course, was to be in charge and I was given a small office in Northumberland Avenue and a typist and that was the extent of the organisation as far as I was concerned.

Joanna Rae: And it appears that you were left very much to your own devices to obtain supplies immediately.

Captain Bingham: Yes.

Joanna Rae: Could you explain about that?

Captain Bingham: Well, as I say, there was practically no organisation and I sat down, having been told what the programme was, which in effect was that I was to build two new bases, one on Laurie Island to house four men, and one on Stonington Island, the furthest south of the bases, to, I think it was ten men they laid down were going to be there. Then there was Hope Bay, and I knew the number of men at Hope Bay base. Then there was Deception Island with four men and there was Port Lockroy with four men. So I had to make

out store lists for all those different bases and for two different places - Sandeford Bay and Argentine Islands, where there was already a house in existence, unoccupied, and we wanted to leave a store, a safety store, in case somebody got shipwrecked and for a party they could exist there, you see.

To make out all these lists, you had to remember that you had to think of everything from the proverbial needle to an anchor and, not having had experience in this before, it was terribly interesting to me, I must say. I learnt a tremendous lot. For example, to order nails, remembering that nails are at a premium when everybody is living in wooden houses and your very ship is wooden. And one thing I learnt for instance and never forgot, the weight per pound of all the different nails, because you don't order them by numbers but you want to know the number you've got. And so if you don't know the number per pound, you want to order say a stone, you know you've got fourteen times whatever a pound weighs.

One thing I learned, never forgot, was that the number of six-inch nails to a pound is precisely six. That wasn't very hard to forget. But it was, the same way with screw nails. I got a catalogue from a Nettleford firm and learnt all these, lots of things from them. Well then, of course, tools in those days were some of them made in England, war stock, were absolutely shocking. I remember watching a supposed to be claw hammer, hitting and driving in a six-inch nail. The nail didn't go in but the head of the hammer shattered in small bits. Now this is no use in the Antarctic, but I also knew that we'd had a lot of tools on the lease-land and I knew that there were quite a number of these had been returned to Chatham Dockyard, so I went down there, as it happened in uniform, and said what I wanted to do, borrowed a trolley and I went up and down, up and down, these sheds. I must have walked miles, among those sheds, picking out what I wanted, the best of everything in the way of chisels, rulers, hammers, everything like that, and we ended up with extremely good sets of tools. But the dockyard clerks and mateys down there, their eyes were goggling out of their head to see who allows this fellow. But nobody seemed to know who had given me permission. Well, in fact, nobody had. And so, I never got into any trouble about it.

Joanna Rae: You were never challenged.

Captain Bingham: I was never challenged because they took it for granted when I was in uniform that I must have been given permission to do this, you see. Well, as I told you, my headquarters were this hospital in Vincent Square. It had been a hospital for women and had been semi-blitzed and so was empty. I had to get that ready and going working order and I had a staff of three medical officers. The senior one of those, although he was still a sub-lieutenant, was Stuart Slessor, who was a highly trained gynaecologist, having at one time been, not Master of the Rotunda in Dublin, but the Deputy Master, and also General Surgeon. And, I was as I say - a lot of the secrecy was going on still. I was supposed to keep this all very quiet and I was organising it without telling anybody why I was doing it, or what I was doing in fact.

But one day, the representative from Dents Glove firm came to see me about some orders for mittens and I had been showing him a wolfskin mitt, which unfortunately, well I think possibly, in the light of what happened, fortunately, I left it lying on top of the desk instead of hiding it away in a drawer. And Stuart Slessor came in later, suddenly saw that and was interested and wanted to know what it was all about, you see. So I told him, "Oh, it's a mitt". And he knew, of course, I'd been on two other expeditions and so he started talking expeditions. And it gradually came to me that this fellow could be a very good type and one

who might well want to go down to the Antarctic, although he had a big future medically in front of him if he wanted it, you see. So after quite a lot of chat and I'd convinced myself that he really meant what he said, I said, "Well look Stuart, supposing you got an offer today to go to an Antarctic expedition. Do you mean to tell me that you would go and say yes straight away?" "I certainly would, I'd jump at it". I said, "Alright, you're going, in September". I never saw such a surprised fellow. But that was one of the best appointments that FIDS ever made. I made him my second-in-command, in actual fact, and he came down to Stonington Island with me. But, he was so popular with everybody that afterwards - incidentally being a Scot and having come from Fraserburgh, the country in the Falkland Islands is rather like the country round Fraserburgh and Sir Miles Clifford, the Governor, thought a lot of Stuart Slessor and tried to persuade him to join the Colonial Medical Service and come to Stanley. So Stuart said, "Alright, Sir, I will do that, provided I get a signed statement to say that all my colonial medical service would be done in the Falkland Islands, and not suddenly find myself sent off to the Gold Coast, or something like that." And Miles Clifford fixed that and Stuart Slessor spent the next twenty years after he left the FIDS down in the Falkland Islands, and so he met, probably short of the people up at your headquarters in Cambridge, he probably knows more Fids than anyone else alive, because he met them each time the new parties came, and when they were coming out and he was a terribly generous host - he was always having them up for meals at his house and, if he goes to an Antarctic Club dinner, you want see the way he's surrounded by people. They all know him and, I think, tremendous [tape unclear****]

Joanna Rae: That was the way one member of your party was recruited. What happened about the scientific staff?

Captain Bingham : Well now, before you go on to that, I might point out that I consider myself Fids No. 1, because I was the first appointed. And as a result, I reckon that Stuart Slessor is Fids No. 2, because he was first I recruited. Well, after that, you see, I can't really remember how I got the chaps. They were all sent to me, in turn, to be interviewed. But the contact, obviously, I think for the scientific ones, would have come through Brian Robb, which was his connections with Cambridge, you see. I think that must have been, I can't really remember how it was, but there were some Army chaps, two particularly I thought an awful lot of, Majors, there was a Tonkin and Sadler and they came along to see me, could they be taken on this expedition. Now how they came to know about it, I can't remember, but the fact remains that I had to take immediate action to get them demobbed, because time was very short by then. And the Army played ball and they were demobbed and came with us. Various fellows came. One or two I could see wouldn't be the type to take at all, but on the whole practically all the ones who came for interview were accepted and taken down.

But the science had not been brought to anything like the importance on the expedition then, of course, as it became afterwards. Survey was the main thing, because after all we were going down to a country, a lot of which had never been trodden on or mapped. But we did have constant meteorology and we did have a geologist. Otherwise, the fellows did odd things, scientific career, but mainly it was to do with surveying and sledging.

Joanna Rae : You mentioned there was still a degree of secrecy about the service at this time?

Captain Bingham : Well there was complete secrecy, you see, as far as one could manage it. But, any of these fellows who were recruited onto the expedition were warned that

they musn't go shouting about where they were going, just keep it to themselves and then quietly they'd go off. You see, it wasn't like the average expedition starting from England. Our chaps and all the stores had to be taken by ship to Montevideo because a little trepassy had already been booked before I had anything to do with it, to sail to Montevideo from St. John's. Now I sent Stuart's letter off to Labrador to buy dogs for us and take them to St. John's and he did that and then sailed South with the trepassy to Montevideo to meet up with the main bulk of our stores and Fitzroy came up from Stanley, so that they were both there together. And Fitzroy and trepassy took all our stores down as far as Stanley, where for the first time we all met. I didn't go with the party because there was a lot of things left undone, as you can imagine, in the rush we had with this large organisation, organising our getting away, there was a lot of work to be done for one person. And another chap from the SAS and the Army, known as Paddy Main, a very famous character, who had four DSO's – he was terribly keen to come. The other two young, the majors, who'd been with him knew him well and I remember Jukes and Barton, the Colonial Office, when I talked about this, said, "Well, are you wise taking a character like that, he's by the way of being a bit of a wild man and will you be able to control him?" and I said, "Well, he's an Ulsterman like myself. I know the breed and I reckon he'll be loyal to me and that's that". And down he came. Unfortunately, he had done a lot of parachute jumping in and out of planes, you see, during the campaign in Europe and it had injured his back, which I didn't know about. And when we were handling cargo, I suddenly realised that this back was giving him a lot of trouble. So when we got to Stanley, although he and I were asked to live in Government House during the short time we were there, I always insisted on him being up at 6 o'clock and off to handle, work the cargo, just to test him out. And it became obvious and I had to tell him that I couldn't take him - he would be a handicap to us. And of course he was very cut up, but took it like a man and he said, "Well, would there be any chance of my getting down on one of the ships that's coming out again, just so that I can have a look at the Antarctic?". So I arranged that for him and he went down in *Fitzroy* and saw Deception and I'm not sure whether he ever got to Hope Bay, but anyway, he came back up to Stanley and then home.

Joanna Rae : What did you tell your friends you were doing while you were absent for two years?

Captain Bingham : Pardon?

Joanna Rae : What did you tell your friends you were doing while you were absent for two years?

Captain Bingham : Oh well, friends that I knew well enough, they knew perfectly well what I do. My relations all knew, you see. But the country at large didn't know anything about it.

Joanna Rae : When you eventually arrived in the Antarctic, you had the responsibility of establishing two new bases, at Cape Geddes in Laurie Island and Stonington Island in Marguerite Bay. How did you go about selecting the sites?

Captain Bingham : Well, when you say that they selected – I was told to build a base at Cape Geddes – I was told to build a base on Laurie Island, but neither they nor I, I don't suppose, had ever heard of Cape Geddes, see, but Laurie Island, what was my first job, I'd a whole list of jobs that I was given, in more or less in order of priority and the first one was to get a hut built on, or a house built on Laurie Island, purely because the Argentines already

had a base there and had had one for some years, that's old history of how they came to be there. But I was told to build a house reasonably near the Argentine base, but completely out of sight of it, and we searched the coast and found two sites. The first one we landed at and examined looked alright for a site, but it was a dangerous one because we could see where there had been a lot of rock fall and some of the rocks, large rocks, were sitting right where we would need to be putting the house. So we had to leave that one and the only other place we could find was Cape Geddes, where there was a lovely bench, but for landing stores it was on a very open coast, there was a cliff of about 15 or 16 feet, rock, sheer rock, down into the sea, so you couldn't beach a boat and unload it. Everything came – cases and sacks of coal – everything had to be roped up, hauled up onto the top of this cliff and then carried up to the site. And then, of course, when the wind came onshore, the whole, bumping up against this cliff were bergy bits and so on and the boats just couldn't come in at all. In the end, of course, we always land the timber first and we did that and when we started building the hut, days we just could sit and look at the, what we'd done ashore and couldn't get ashore, so in the end, we decided to land with three others and live ashore, although the house wasn't built and we didn't take a tent because we had a corner in the house we thought would do us, to snuggle down onto, hopefully, and remembering of course it was the Antarctic summer. And, we got on there building the house without any further stops. Some days, two and three days, the people in the ship could watch us work but couldn't help us, it was a very lucky thing we had landed.

Joanna Rae : Was it very cold at night?

Captain Bingham : It was, the first few nights, but gradually we – actually we lived in the porch because we worked quickly to get the porch as airtight or as weathertight as we could make it and then another thing – after about the third night, it was, we opened up one or two cases and discovered the one with the mattresses in it. Of course, that made it easier, because otherwise we were lying on the boards.

Then we went off next, but as soon as we'd done that we went in and visited the Argentines, without telling them at all that we'd just built a house, but they were, it was the most interesting place, I'm sure that's been told afterwards. And then we went round the corner to Sandeford Bay and left a depot there, but no-one could ever use that as a base because it was slap in the middle of an enormous penguin rookery and the stench would have made it impossible. But, of course, it was useful to keep stores if somebody was shipwrecked.

And then on to Deception and ...

Joanna Rae : Was the Sandeford Bay hut built with the intention of becoming a base?

Captain Bingham : Well, I think so, but it had been done, it had been built the year before by the people in *Scorsby*, HMS *Scorsby*, who really didn't know anything about that sort of thing and they may, well I don't know when they built it but they couldn't have got near the place at a time when there weren't penguins there, I should have thought. But possibly, they didn't realise what a stench penguins can make.

Joanna Rae : You were saying that you were given a list of jobs, of duties, when you went down. Who gave you them?

Captain Bingham: Well mainly Dr Brian Roberts, but it was an agreement with this committee, you see and I knew the bases I had to change the personnel with. I knew the sites where I had to build the two new houses and where I had to put the depots. You see, one of them was the Argentine islands from my own old northern base onto the BGLE [unclear****],..... and it was in excellent condition. But there was an Argentine – metal Argentine – flag on top of that. We took that and sent it off up to Stanley to the Governor in due course. The other thing was, I was instructed that I must take uniform down with me, it seemed an awful business to have to do and every time I saw a crowd of Argentines or Chileans onshore, not in ships but onshore, erecting tents or looking as if they were going to build a base, I had to land and I was handed a big parchment statement in very legal and governmental language, a great big red seal and a big red ribbon hanging down from it. I had to unroll this and read this out to these people. And really, you felt a bit of a fool at times, particularly on one occasion where I landed and there was a young army officer, an awfully nice young fellow, a lieutenant he was, and he had landed on a small island not far from Port Lockroy and, on passing, we saw him so we stopped the ship, landed, and I had already read this thing to him in two different places twice, so when I landed he was all full of grins and he just said, “Hurry up, Sir, and get it off your chest and then we’ll have a drink”, which is what we did. And he didn’t even have cups for this camp he had, he had bowls, so we drink brandy out of bowls. But a very friendly visit altogether.

That was really the attitude mainly between the landing parties. There was no sort of nastiness or hatred between the parties. It was the governments that were at loggerheads, not the actual people in the field, you see.

Joanna Rae : Did they exchange protest notes with you, did they give you protest notes?

Captain Bingham : No, nobody ever gave me a protest note, though I did read somewhere of someone, I think it was Andrew, Dr Andrew, who was at Deception Island, in charge for a while, during the summer when there was a lot of ships calling in there. And I believe that there, on one occasion they had to exchange a protest note, but I’m not dead certain of that. It rather surprised me to hear about it. But nobody ever gave me any protest note in return.

Joanna Rae : So then you got down to Stonington Island?

Captain Bingham : Well then, Stonington Island, of course that was very much easier from the way of landing stores, because you had a pebble beach and a reasonably level place to build your hut. We had a most comfortable house there and it didn’t take us all that long to build it. The trepassy stayed there until we were just about finished, we were still living in the American huts because we found there the American base over on the other side of the so-called island. I don’t know that it is even an island, but it certainly, it doesn’t act as an island because you can drive straight off it up onto the glacier. But whether the sea runs round underneath that or not, I couldn’t tell you. But the trepassy left when we were within a day or so of being able to shift into our own base. In the meantime, we lived in the American base, which was in a state of chaos.

A thing that rather worried me, the attitude that there must have been. They had shot their dogs, tethered in position, in sight of each other. Now any time we had ever had to do away with dogs, when I was down there, I insisted that the dog was put into harness and walked off

completely out of sight and sound of anything else, you see, and then, just while they were still pulling, you could shoot them in the back of the head and they knew nothing about it. But to shoot dogs and have a fellow go round with a rifle, when often they're in sight of each other, I can't credit that they could do that, but apparently they did.

The generator was apparently left running, the lights were switched on, or had been. I mean you could see that that was so there, it was a very, very big hut built with great big slabs of pre-constituted panels and with the shrinking there was quite a - anything from an eighth to a half an inch crack between them and all that was covered with very strong cavas outside. Well all that had blown away. And so when we were living in it, if you got a wind from one side at the time and it was snowing, you just your bunks sprinkled with snow. You woke up in the morning, you were under layers of snow.

Joanna Rae : It must have been freezing.

Captain Bingham : But at the far end was a step down into what was their galley, with their cement floor and all the moisture that had come in through the years had lain there and was just solid to the level of the other floor, with ice. We had to chip all that out, got the range going and we lived there quite reasonably comfortably, until we were able to shift into our own place.

Part 1(B)

Joanna Rae : Did you choose Stonington Island because the American base had been there?

Captain Bingham : No, no, but I was told to go to Marguerite Bay and suggested to me that a very good site had been seen in Stonington Island, you see, with an - well, you see the whole way down the coast, after you leave Hope Bay, you can get up onto the top. But all the rest of that coast, there isn't one place which you can really get up onto the inland thing with dog teams. You could do it by mountaineering, but you can't carry all that sort of stuff on your back. And as it proved, there was this easy - well it wasn't easy, it was a dangerous route, because it was over very crevassed country, but I mean from the point of view of not being precipitous, you could drive up for quite a long way inland and then there was a very steep bank, so there would be a slope as they called it and that was steep, but although there was an enormous crevasse half-way down that, but it was always so solid with snow, it never gave us any trouble. We got quite used to just going over it as if it wasn't there.

Joanna Rae : Could you tell me something about life at Base C while you were there?

Captain Bingham : Well, I mean life, with one exception, was very much like any other expedition. We had our open bunk room and I'm a tremendous believer in the open bunk room, I think that a base, if there's ever going to be trouble, you'll always get it at a base where they have separate or maybe cubicles for two or something like that, because if a fellow's got a moan and a groan and he can go into his own cubicle with his pal and work on it, it gets worse and worse. But if he's got to get rid of his moan in public in front of everybody else, you find practically it never arises. If it does and he's feeling sulky, he gets on his bunk, turns his face to the wall and everybody knows to leave him alone until he feels

better and when he gets up he'll be one of the crowd again without any further nonsense. So, I'm a very strong believer in that.

But, there is always work on an Antarctic expedition. There's so much to do, there's none of this so-called weary Arctic winter waiting for the spring to come before you can do anything. There's always enough light in the middle - reflected light, to be able to drive dogs for an hour maybe, and if you're feeling short of something to do, take your dog team and have a run round the Bay. But when you get down there there's a lot of work to be done, you've got to make your traces for your dog teams, you've got to make the harness for each individual dog. Each dog has got a fitted harness with. What I used to do in the BGLE, I took down coloured tab ribbons and sewed them on to the shoulder of the dog's harness, so that when an owner went to harness up his dogs he knew blue belongs to that dog, red belongs to that, red and yellow belongs to that and so on. And that that harness before being sown up was pinned on, in position on a dog and lines made for it had to be sown, so you knew it would fit him. It was no good in trying to drive dogs with an ill-fitting harness, you'll get sores all over them. The sledges are brought down in small bits, you've got to fit those altogether and really well, otherwise they would never stand up to the roughgoing over hard snowdrifts. You've got to sort out all your stores and get it in place, so that when you want to get, say, a case of jam, you don't find you're getting a case of bully beef or something like that, that's all got to be sorted out and listed, so that you know where it is, because it can get covered over with snow. There's something to do all the time and it keeps people busy and happy. You've got to learn to use skis if you haven't had any, you've got to learn to walk on snow shoes, you've got to use, to learn to use a long dog whip without cutting your face open with it, which is very easy to do, or take an ear off. They're very powerful things, those whips.

No, I think it was quite a - it's an interesting life, there's plenty to do.

Joanna Rae : What about during days of blizzard – were you still ****... harness?

Captain Bingham : Oh, well, yes, I mean there's nothing to stop you doing your harness and your – making your – doing your sledges and all the rest of it. If it's particularly good weather you get on with the jobs that you want to do outdoors and reserve those jobs for days when you can't get out. And then every day, remember, your only method of getting water is to go out and cut solid blocks of hardpacked snow or better still, if you can get it, ice, and melt it down, you see.

Joanna Rae : Why is the ice better?

Captain Bingham : What?

Joanna Rae : Why is the ice better than snow?

Captain Bingham : Well, I mean, you take a block of very hard packed snow and a block of ice of exactly the same size and put them in two pans and melt them down. You just want to see how much water you get out of the ice instead of the snow. The snow goes, gives you about that much, you see. And actually if you've got a suitable iceberg, frozen in near the base you can go out with the sledge and chip the ice because icebergs are freshwater ice, because they're frozen rainwater really, you see, where if you take sea ice of course that is salt.

Joanna Rae : I suppose you had to get food for the dogs?

Captain Bingham : Well, yes, of course you have and even in the winter, if you keep your eyes open, every now and again you'll find if there's a tidecrack somewhere, you'll find a seal that's come out through that onto the surface, but if you're wise before the sea freezes over you will keep an eye and lay up a good big store of seals and if there's an ice cliff here, we did in the BGLE, we had a big ice slope that came down near our base and I was in charge of the dogs there. And we carved out all, quite a large cavern inside this ice cliff and put all our seals in there. And so they kept frozen, it was like in a deep freeze. The dogs couldn't get at them, for one thing, and secondly they kept instead of all running away in fat into the, the blubber, you see.

I know you were interested to hear about the Christmas cake, incidentally, in connection with that. Well, how that happened, well I didn't know anything about it until Christmas Day and we'd had quite a reasonable lunch, but when it came to teatime, usually you know, I don't know that we were quite as good, we'd no bread you see. We made all our own scones and our own bread down there, we didn't live on ship's biscuits or anything like. But when it came to tea, there was a big tin put in front of me to open and when I opened it there was an enormous fruit cake, in fact a Christmas cake decorated with a sledge made from tin foil. And the icing was done in different colours. How they got the colouring, I know how they got the red – from beetroot – but what they got the other colouring from I don't know. But this was done by Butler and Tonkin, secretly, one time when I was away sledging and they never told me anything about it until Christmas Day came and here it was and.

Joanna Rae : That must have been lovely.

Captain Bingham : It was.

Joanna Rae : Could you tell me if your services as a doctor were required? *****

Captain Bingham : No, definitely no, not my services. BGLE and in fact the other three expeditions I'd been on, I was always the doctor. But as leader I was very determined that I would not be the doctor, for a very sound reason I think. The doctor is the person to whom chaps who are feeling a bit tensed up and out of sorts and so on, mentally, will go and let their hair down to the doctor. Now they can't very well do that to the leader and I was very aware of this, having listened to many a wobegone tale, you see. So, they went to Stuart Slessor, who was an excellent fellow and they all had great faith in him and. No, no, I think it's quite wrong for the doctor to be the leader of an expedition. I mean, if he happens to be a doctor, well then he ought to have someone else doing the medical work, without any doubt.

Joanna Rae : Did you find discipline came naturally, or were some people difficult to manage?

Captain Bingham : No, I don't think so. You see, there was this about it. Quite a number of those fellows had been in the services. Even though they mightn't have been regular Army, Navy or Airforce chaps, they had had a certain amount of service discipline and that's a tremendous help. But, of course, some fellows - whether they'd been all their life in the services or not - can be troublesome. But I have never met - have never been on an expedition in which anybody became an insufferable nuisance, ever. And I think that this is

wise selection. You want to select a man first and foremost where he's going to live in isolation like that for long periods and in front of all his – there's nowhere where he can hide away – you want to take that first and the scientific thing comes second. Mark you, you want to get a first class scientist, yes, but it means if you have two of them you select the man who's the best mixer of the two, rather than the fellow who might have a slightly higher degree, if you've got sense that is. And I'm quite sure that Bunny Fuchs in his day was very aware of that.

Joanna Rae : Yes, that's still goes today in fact.

Captain Bingham : Yes, I'm sure it is.

Joanna Rae : Would you describe your process in training a dog team, because I was very interested to read in the BAS Club Newsletter that you usually have six dogs and one bitch in a team? I didn't realise you had to be so strict.

Captain Bingham : Yes, well, you certainly don't want more than one bitch in the team, because they can lead to all sorts of trouble. But, the dogs run better if they've got one bitch with them. And it's the same, I mean it's just human nature to like to have somebody of the other sex, you know, around. We did have, of course, during the - I don't know whether you've ever read the book on BGLE – but at one time we had a colossal, the first time I'd ever met it, we had a litter of eight bitches and one dog pup. And we wanted dogs, you see, and I said, right, we'll make this into a team. And I put the dog in the lead with eight bitches behind him, when they were big enough to start training. God help me, you never saw such a performance [laughs]. Everybody roared laughing, to train them of course, well I mean this is really irrelevant but you could take a good team out, you see, and drive it round in a circle and then drive it again and make cross patches, so that when you came to a place you could give the word of command to go left or right and the dogs had to take the right one, you see. If you told it to go right or left and so on, as opposed to – eventually, of course, even on plain snow, if you had a good leader you can tell it to go right and it would go right. But to get the youngsters, you see, they'll follow a trail, they won't leave a trail once they're on it. But if you come to a junction, you've got to get them used to the word of command to go left or right. That's how you get them to know it.

Joanna Rae : Do you use the whip to make them go right?

Captain Bingham : Yes, not by hitting them. But, you see, you can [whip noise] like that up and you turn, say, to go left and you put that up the right side, they hear this going whistling round and they shear away from it. And they suddenly realise that everytime he gives that certain sound, I'm going to get hit if I don't turn that way. So he does, you see, that's how they learn. But those, that bitch team as we called it, the dog – mark you they were, I was training when they were still pretty young and they would go alright for a while and then suddenly the dog would decide, to the devil with this, I've had enough and he'd curl up in the snow like that. Everyone of the eight bitches would pile up on top of him and they'd lie in a tight knot and as each one was on a separate cord, remember, or trace, you'd a whale of a job, because as soon as you got one out, back it would go – you'd have needed half a dozen people to help you. And many a laugh - these fellows at the base could see me out over the fjord doing this. And I remember on one occasion we came back and I was driving round to come up the proper way, up to approach the base and the dog decided, no – there's a short cut, and he just [whip noise] like that, across rocks, tops of barrows of fuel oil, cases of –

packed cases and all the rest of it. Rumbling, jumbling, you never saw such a performance [laughs]. He got his way, however, in the end. Well I mentioned this in the thing, that, you know, Quentin Riley used to drive that thing and he thought the world of his bitch team, and it was a fast little team, you know. But of course it didn't have the power that a team of dogs would have had. Because, they're smaller, the bitches, and less heavily boned.

Joanna Rae : Did you use dogs a lot while you were at Stonington?

Captain Bingham : Oh yes, we had no other way of transport, you see. We'd no airplane. The airplane arrived down as I was going out and they used it then from then on and it can be very useful, you see, in helping to lay a depot, for instance. But, a dog team can take you a lot of places that no mechanical transport can safely take you, of course. There is that. I notice Bunny Fuchs talks about that in his book. I think he realises ..

Joanna Rae : Yes, he seems very fond of dogs, doesn't he?

Captain Bingham : Yes, yes. But he was also very fond of mechanical transport.

I had to say something about Bunny at the – there was a big meeting after he came back from crossing the Antarctic. I was asked to say something about the trip and all the rest of it. And I got a rubbing about that. I said, “you know, he may have used mechanical transport, but at any rate he'd got the common sense to take a dog team with him in case he got into trouble [laughs]. Oh Bunny Fuchs knows that dogs have got their place, there's no doubt about that [laughs].

Joanna Rae : How did your dogs manage up slopes – Soda Slope?

Captain Bingham : Well, you couldn't, we did drive them up with light loads, you could only take rather less than half a load and the men shoving and pushing as well and it depended on whether there'd been much wind to harden the surface or not, you see. But in the end, he'd got a tackle at the top and fastened the team on to it, pulling downhill. And then, a team on the sledge side, you see, pulling up. So that you had a dog team pulling down, pulling up and they got loads up quite reasonably well that way, you see.

Joanna Rae : Was it practical in the long term, or was it to use that method to get up on to the plateau?

Captain Bingham : Well, there was no other way you could get up – there was no other way you could get up. And we had – there was this – you see, we had a long, long way over through the crevassed area on the glacier and we came to this sort of clip, and the thing that I didn't even know, right at the foot of that sort of thing there were crevasses, which any time I was there, were filled in .

But one of the fellows fell into a crevasse right at the foot of it. Of course, I don't know exactly where he was, whether he was where we used to camp. I never saw any sign of crevasses there, or never had any trouble with them. But one fellow fell into a crevasse right at the foot of it, and so on.

Well, then we got up onto another bench, you see, and turned sharp right to get up a further very steep slope, but nothing like as bad as the bottom one. And it was up on the top

of that that we built our - and I think we'd five tonnes, or something like that, of stuff up there, ready for our trips, you see.

Joanna Rae : Did you get very tired and depressed and what were your feelings when you were doing something like trying to get the supplies up a slope like that?

Captain Bingham : Well, no, I mean it was just a job that had to be done and, you see, we had the same thing in Greenland, at ?Wartons? [****text unclear] at BARE. They had this exactly the same slope, and sometimes there was no ice and no snow on that at all, it was just shear ice. And just couldn't do anything with it then. A man could get up a bit with crampons.

But I remember in that particular expedition, going up this steep bank, it was only about five miles away from the base, from the – before you ever got started, went up the glacier and then this great place and we were heaving and heaving. Jimmy Scott, who was on a – you may have met him, you know, he wrote all the – well I think he still does, *The Telegraph*, on polar matters. But he, he and I were at the back of this sledge and the dogs pulling and we were urging the dogs on and we were on our hands and knees, shouldering the sledge, heaving, and when we stopped - Jimmy Scott had got his Rugby Blue, you see, at Cambridge – and he turned to me and he said, “You know, doc, we used to think we were really working hard in those rucker matches, didn't we”. He said, “it was nothing to this” [laughs]. I always remembered that.

Actually, I was a three-quarter, but he was a forward so he knew what a heavy work the scrum was. He said, “it was never anything like this”. I always remember that.

Joanna Rae : There must have been some very worrying moments, for example when you lost radio contact with the base.

Captain Bingham : Yes, it was worrying, but once winter had set in and the base goes off, I think it was just away, like that, hundreds of miles from you, there's just nothing you can do and there's no good in sitting worrying too much about it. Geddes, you see, went off almost immediately, although Butler, who was the senior wireless fellow and the one outstanding – he had actually set the whole thing up and had used the machine back and forth to the ship with no trouble whatsoever and we'd hardly left when the thing broke down, you see, and he couldn't – it was really, I think, inefficiency on the wireless fellow's thing, there's no doubt about that, I think. And so we sent scores back with Butler, who set the thing up again, and we also gave them a new generator, as far as I remember.

But I think, a third time Butler helped them out over it before we finally sailed off down South. And then later on, off they went again and, of course, they were off, they weren't able to do their met all year. But it was – I must say, I've a lot of time for young Choyce, who was the head of that base, because he had this fellow who was obviously being inefficient, completely, and he as leader of the base must have been very annoyed that he couldn't really do the work that he was sent there to do. But at the end of the year, all four of them were willing to volunteer for another year's work. So that, I mean, they can't have been too unhappy, you see.

Joanna Rae : No.

Captain Bingham : Well then, later on, through the winter Deception suddenly went off the air. I wasn't too worried about them actually because there was so much timber and old huts and houses and whatnots about Deception Island. I mean, if you'd got an ounce of sense you could have built another hut from just by taking down boards from the ones that were already there, so that I wasn't really particularly worried about them and their's burnt down, of course, through a certain amount of carelessness I imagine. But they didn't come to any harm.

Joanna Rae : You've told me something already about your relations with Argentine and Chile expeditions. Could you tell me something about your meetings with the RARE expeditions?

Captain Bingham : With Ronne?

Joanna Rae : Yes.

Captain Bingham : Yes, well that was, of course, later on, because you never met the Chileans and Argentines in those days except up north, because they didn't have any bases down as far south as Marguerite Bay, you see, though the ships did later on put in, but never while I was there, actually. Well then, when I had gone up to – supposed to be on my way home and as I have told you I think the Governor wanted to go round all the bases, and wanted me to come with him, so we turned round and came down again and the Trepassy and the Fitzroy arrived down at Stonington Island to find that Ronne had arrived there and the Governor, you know, was playing it very coolly and trying to keep the – as good a feeling as possible. But Ronny's reception was very cool and it was quite obvious that he didn't believe a word that Butler had told him about what had happened to the stores and things at that hut, because we really had cleaned that place up, damn it we'd lived in it and we weren't going to live in squalor. Mark you, we only lived there for about a fortnight, I suppose, while we finished off the hut. But, in the meantime, we'd kept it clean and they had packed up a lot of the things which - we imagine that the Americans left in a hurry and that's why they'd shot the dogs where they had and walked out leaving the generator running and all the rest of it. Because, there were rock specimens, all those sort of things, were lying about the place and we had these sorted out and packed into cases and nailed down, ready for handing back to some ship that could take them back to the States, you see.

And then the Chileans were the first ones, I think, arrived and they landed and they, I suppose, thought there was grub or cigarettes or booze or something in them and they broke all these cases up and ruffled through them and scattered them all over the place, made a shocking mess of the place. And they just – when our fellows went over, I wasn't there at the time, you see, I was up in Stanley. Butler and his crowd went over and protested to these fellows and said, "For God's sake, stop this nonsense over specimens", and so on. They just wouldn't pay any attention. So they got hold of one of the officers who came ashore and he told them to pack in and they all started to run off back to the ship, throwing the stuff on the base and all this stuff was scattered over, clothing and lots of things was scattered all over the – on the way down to the boats towards this ship. It really was a disgraceful performance.

But the Governor, actually, asked Ronny and Darlington, who was Ronny's No. 2, and the two wives, because you see they had these two girls on board. And they came to lunch and I was got into uniform, the Governor got into uniform and we were properly shaved and brushed and cleaned and all the rest of it in honour of these ladies. You wanted to

see some of the rig that their men came in. One fellow came in jeans and a filthy, thick, old, grey woollen undershirt that looked as if it had – should have been in the tub about two months before, and his braces over the shoulder, and sat down to lunch, looking [mumbles].

I mean, it was such a pity that sort of thing. However, it ended up quite friendly and then they gave a cocktail party on board the *Fitzroy* that evening for all the FIDS chaps and the American fellows. But, we had – I know you're anxious to know about the night we were supposed to leave. Well, we had got down all the cases of specimens from Stonington Island base, our base, you see, had been put on board and we'd been up and, fellows who were going to spend the year had joined the base and taken over from the fellows who were going home. And some of the fellows who were going home had already left, you see, and gone up on the first trip up to Stanley. For instance, Sadler, who didn't want to do a second year, had sailed with the *Sheffield* and got taken home on her. But the new ones were in the base and, of course, they were over the rise on the other side. These ships were all on what we knew as the back bay and between Stonington Island and the glacier was a bay running in. And we were going to leave at first light, everything ready for sail. And suddenly, there was pandemonium because a fire broke out on board *Trepassy* and this was either in or just next door to the engine room, which was rather frightening because a great big store of enormous tank of diesel oil was sitting on top of the roof of the engine room and, of course, if that had gone off the whole ship would have gone up in a sheet of flame.

And the *Fitzroy*, you see, was anchored ahead of the *Trepassy* and *Trepassy*, by the way, had swung round and had gone ashore on a rocky ridge, stern over. White was then captain of the *Trepassy*, let out more chain, dropped the ship back alongside *Trepassy* so that he could help with the more powerful pumps of the *Fitzroy*, a bigger ship, to help to put out the fire, you see – and he went aground. So we then had – both the British ships were aground and the *Trepassy* on fire. So you could imagine my feelings about the matter. However, after quite a long time, poor old Captain Burn, who was a man well over sixty, and really had worked like a black at this fire, did a sort of semi collapse and we had to take him into the *Fitzroy* and put him to bed in a bunk, you see. And this First Mate, Stone, was a magnificent fellow and he was fighting the flames and got it. But they started running along backwards when the main fire was out, they found that it was smouldering along the main beams supporting the after deck and they had to rip up the deck to get at this to try and make sure that these didn't catch fire. Eventually, the ship wouldn't have been able to go to sea at all. And they got it patched up and we sailed the following afternoon, I think it was, or evening. But I know that in the meantime a gale sprang up. Very lucky it didn't spring up while they were aground, knocked their bottom off when they, you know. But apparently, now I read this in, I think it's Fuchs's book and I'm not sure how accurate it is, because I remember nothing whatever about this and I was there in one of the ships. It said that they drifted down on the *City of Beaumont*, the American ship, and that the cables and anchors all got entangled and there was an awful mess and it looked as if any minute the whole three ships would drift up against the face of the glacier.

Well now, I'm sorry, but I honestly, I never remembered anything about that. I do know that it was either *Trepassy* or the *Fitzroy* who dragged her anchor and slid past the [****] end and they got out bumpers, you know, where two ships meet. Trying to remember the name of the thing but not bumpers, but anyway. The wind didn't – they didn't hit but they just grazed past each other and they shouted ahead to warn the *City of Beaumont* and only one fellow looked over the side and didn't seem to be even interested – just like that. And he just – his eyes grew big when he saw this thing drifting down but he did nothing whatever

about it and we passed safely and that was that. That evening they got the *Trepassy* going, it was a magnificent job, the seamanship, that got that *Trepassy* back up to Stanley. She sailed back home to – perfectly alright – to Stanley eventually.

Joanna Rae : Was she a steamship or a, you know, a diesel?

Captain Bingham : Well, she wasn't a diesel electric like the *John Biscoe*, but she was a ship driven by a diesel engine.

Joanna Rae : Did she have sails at all?

Captain Bingham : Oh yes, she had sails, steady sails. In fact, I was just reading in my diary last night. On one occasion, Captain Burden was down. You see, the first year that I was down there Captain Shepherd was in command and he had been in command of *The Eagle* the year before when they lost the bows of the ship. But it was Captain Burden next year and he was a magnificent old seaman. We'd ran into a hundred mile an hour gale, oh, somewhere off not far from Elephant Island on our way down, and there were long streamers of bay ice, only maybe some places about six feet wide only. But they flattened the sea to a tremendous extent because there's three or four feet deep below. And they'd spent the whole night steaming up and down like this in a line, always being driven back all the time because the thing was floating fast, you see. But it kept us in reasonably calm weather and after twenty four hours the wind dropped and all was well, but it was a magnificent business.

Joanna Rae : Have you got any particular memories of the crew during your time on the ships, because I understand that Shepherd himself was quite a remarkable character.

Captain Bingham : Well, I don't know about a remarkable character. He was a first class seaman and an extremely nice chap and – very nice fellow – to get on with and work with. And by goodness, he'd got guts. When - you see, a Captain, it's not a case of him having guts so much as having the knowledge to know to what extent he can safely risk his ship and that sounds a contradiction in terms. But it isn't really. He knows there's a risk there, but he doesn't take one that he doesn't feel he can manage, you see and he got the ship out of tight places time and again, without, no question of getting in a panic or anything else. The – I think I did tell you before we were recording about the Stone looking through the *City of Beaumont*. You see, the Captain of the *City of Beaumont*, I don't think that was recorded - was a *City of Beaumont* - he was a magnificent old boy and he was no youngster either, incidentally. He was saying that, you know, we were silly to have such a small little ship as *Trepassy*. Why don't you get one of the same as ours, for instance, and he told me about this ship lying over on the east coast. It had never been in the west, so we said it would be free of worm, as indeed theirs was, you see. Diesel electric, he said there's very – there's absolutely radar in it, everything, just as she stopped being an HM or a US Navy ship, you see. And they're a drug on the market, you can have them to – sell for £7,500, it worked out, in what he told me in dollars. And I got Stone, with his permission, the Captain's permission, to go over and thoroughly examine. He gave a full report, right – he crawled round the bilges of the ship to get – to have a look at – her bottom was perfectly alright and everything, you see. Gave it a first class thing and he said "If the other's anything like that", he said "colossal bargain". So I sent a code signal to Barton in the Colonial Office, suggesting they should be bought and suggesting that somebody should go over and buy it quietly.

When I got back to England and asked him, “Did you by a chance do anything about that ship?” his only reply was “Oh, nonsense, Bingham, you know you forgot two noughts”. Well, of course, I didn’t forget two noughts and this was all straight from the horse’s mouth and I told them that I had arranged with Stone that when he got back to St. John’s, he would be prepared to go down and buy this ship quietly on behalf of the Colonial Office. He, incidentally – the Stone family for three generations had been building wooden ships, the like of *Trepassy*, sealers and trawlers and so on, in Newfoundland. And he knew wooden ships inside out. And Barton said, “Oh, we can’t do work like that, that’s not the way the Colonial Office works”. So an open telegram was sent to the – I think it’s North American – British North American Shipping [end of tape].

Part 2 (A)

Joanna Rae : If you could start from when - from your return to the UK.

Captain Bingham : From when?

Joanna Rae : From your return to the UK, and the Colonial Office man, what he said.

Captain Bingham : Oh, yes, yes. Well, as I told you we had had a First Mate, Stone, in *Trepassy*, thoroughly examine the *City of Beaumont* and said of the ship that this Captain of the *Beaumont* was advising us to buy. And it would carry 750 tonnes instead of a hundred tonnes, or something like that. A much better thing altogether and could carry very many more personnel.

But anyway, I asked if they’d done anything about it and I was told “No”, - I’d forgotten two noughts. And of course this was rubbish. However, eventually the ship was bought, but they – it was bought by – as I warned them this was what would happen and the captain told me that this would happen if you started letting anybody know the British Government was interested. It had been bought by a speculator, who stripped the thing down to bare essentials and then sold it for £25,000 instead of £7,500. And, when it came back to England you could see that it was – it’s soft wooded ship and therefore must be fortified along the waterline and bows, the very least, if not down further. The whole bottom should be done with it really, with greenhard, and I tried to get the Colonial Office to agree to do that, it would only have cost them a comparatively small amount of money. They refused to do it and said, “Oh, that’ll be alright, we’ll do it next year”. I said, “you’ll be lucky if there’s a ship to do it with”. And it came back and I think if you look up the reports you’ll find the disgraceful condition in which - some of the ribs are almost showing through, where the outer ribs had been shorn off by ice, was it, rips it off just like a razor. It cost them, I believe I’m right in saying, something like £70,000, to put the greenhard on instead of the comparatively small amount it could have cost. And then it was sold to New Zealand, I don’t know how many years afterwards, because they said that there were signs of worm in it and it appears the New Zealanders couldn’t find any sign of worm in it anywhere and never have been able to find worms. And they are still using it for work down to the Antarctic.

But, mark you, the powers that be have got a lot of first class ships built, now in millions.

Joanna Rae : That’s right, yes, yes, indeed. Did you leave the Survey immediately on your return to England?

Captain Bingham : No, no. When I got back, the Colonial Office asked the Admiralty, could I be retained for another six months. And this was to get the next Survey relief crowd ready and get the dogs for them. I went over, actually, and got dogs for them for Base D, taking one of the chaps who was going to stay down there. I loved it – just – it was right up my street, that [laughs]. And did the interviewing of these people – one of the people I interviewed to go down then was Bunny Fuchs. And he was just talking about that not long ago and, in fact, he wrote it in my copy of “Of Ice and Men”. The fact that I’d – [laughs] – yes. No, I’d another six months of it and then went back to my normal duties.

But you see that was in 1947 – it would be forty eight by then, I suppose. And so I’d another ten years in the Navy. And I was very lucky in some of the jobs I had. One of them was actually as Fleet Medical Officer of the Home Fleet, when Sir George Creasey was the CNC of the Home Fleet and, of course, the Flag Ship was HMS *Vanguard*, who was only just finished at the very end of the war and had never fired a shot in anger, but was a most magnificent ship. The captain’s quarters, of course, were the – you see, she was fitted out because of being finished just when she wasn’t going to be required for war work, to take the King and Queen and the two princesses down to South Africa. Now the Captain of the Fleet, who was a great friend of mine and the ship, he had one of their cabins as his - day cabins – as his night cabin and of course each of those princesses had a private bathroom. So we’d two private bathrooms. One, his private bathroom and the other his steward could do his dobi in [laughs]. And the King’s quarters, you see, Sir George Creasey had that. And, oh, it really was palatial and Sir George Creasey was one of the old Navy, who liked giving dinner parties and, of course, all the silver belonging to the *Vanguards* of wayback was available, and when you saw a big dinner party in that big dining room, which was the King’s dining room, you see, for entertaining, when he was doing that trip, it really was a sight worth seeing, wonderful.

Joanna Rae : It must have been wonderful, yes.

Captain Bingham : It was wonderful. But, of course, there isn’t any of that now really, to any extent as far as I know in the Navy.

Joanna Rae : What about when the Governor was giving his dinner down at Stonington, was that anything comparable or was that quite low-key, do you think?

Captain Bingham : Oh, for heaven’s sake, he didn’t give a dinner party anyway. In Stonington?

Joanna Rae : I thought he gave a dinner for Ronne.

Captain Bingham : Oh, a lunch. He asked them over to lunch.

Joanna Rae : Ah, so it was much more informal?

Captain Bingham : Oh well, it was, yes, I mean it was only in the little dining room on the ship, which only seated a small number of people, and, well you can imagine the rig. When the CNC gave a dinner party you were in mess dress, not mess undress, but mess dress – all medals and everything, you know. It really was, it was a wonderful sight. But he liked entertaining. Mark you, he had to pay for that out of his own pocket to a great extent. He was

allowed a certain amount of entertainment money, official entertainment money. But if he wanted to entertain in addition to that, he just footed the bill.

Well then, you see, I ran on up to – I was connected with the Fleet Air Arm for my last job in the Navy and then retired in 1958 and hunted round for a job and finally was given the job of Medical Superintendent, to the Chapel Allerton War Pensioners Hospital and there were some poor fellows who'd been there in, well coming for treatment in the hospital, from the First World War, and there were a lot of others who had been in hospital continuously after the Second World War and would never leave, of course, that was the hub. And then eventually, before I left it was handed over to the National Health Service by the government, with the stipulation that I must be retained there as a Medical Superintendent, so as to safeguard the rights of the pensioners, so that they couldn't be pushed into a corner, you see, or anything like that. So that was [mumble] .

Joanna Rae : I think we're just about finished.

Captain Bingham : We've finished anyway, haven't we?

Joanna Rae : I think we are just about finished. Could I just ask you if you've got – what is your most vivid memory, or feelings, about the expeditions, the FIDS Expedition?

Captain Bingham : Well,

Joanna Rae : Well, just sum it up.

Captain Bingham : Yes. To sum it up. I start on a very low key. The amount of cipher work was really unbelievable and it's a most interesting thing to me that the number of people who get in touch with me about the expedition and later on talk about, or if you look at their diaries, they talk about helping the Commander with decoding up to a late hour last night, and so on. And just recently, I've got in touch with the chap who was a wireless operator in *Trepassy* and he talks of, "You surely remember me because I used to sit up to all hours helping you with coding and decoding". Wherever you – and I mean it ruined the expedition. Of course it was necessary, it was a political expedition at that time and I suppose it had to be done, but honestly a lot of the things that were coded and decoded could just as well have been sent in plain language and it wouldn't have mattered to anybody.

Joanna Rae : That's right.

Captain Bingham : Even the Argentine's and Chileans if they'd seen it, it wouldn't have done them any good whatsoever. But one or two highlights. One was of course at a time when poor old John Tomkin went down the crevasse. What happened was, we had started off because we were cutting the route for the following sledges. They hadn't even come up the height onto the glacier from the base. And the dogs were pulling, they were pulling well but they'd a very heavy load and the going was heavy, you see, and it was up a fairly steepish bit and I said to John Tomkin, "I wonder if you'd mind nipping ahead and just giving them a lead because the dogs have got something to look at and they go better and then". Very foolish of me, I suppose in a way, but we'd been over that glacier two or three times and nobody had ever had any trouble with crevasses in it. And John, of course, was a biggish, heavyish fellow and he got about, oh I suppose, sixty or seventy yards ahead and he thought, "Well, I'm too far ahead", so he stopped and he just happened to stop on top of a crevasse.

Now, if he'd walked on across he probably would have been perfectly alright, but suddenly – and I was looking at him and driving toward him and suddenly he just wasn't there and there was just this little round hole in the ice.

However, after about three hours' work of one thing and another and chipping him out, because he was jammed tight, we got him out, horrible.

Joanna Rae : And he was no worse for the experience?

Captain Bingham : Oh, he was for quite a while because he was down there and his arms and forearms and hands were just about completely paralysed. It took a long time working on them to get them back to normal. But before the year was out he was sledging again.

Another amusing, although it could have been tragic thing, was after I'd injured my back and come back and was at base, all the rest of the fellows were away with the exception of the meteorologist, Salter, and Butler the wireless chap. And Butler, this particular – it was a lovely day – and he and I decided we'd walk across the, oh I don't know what you'd call it, a Sound really between Stonington Island, the base, it was I suppose about three or four miles, to get, or look for skua eggs, on this island. But between the two there was a big wide crack that seemed to form, as far as I could make out, every year, oh about seven or eight feet high and with the movement of the ice and the currents or something, it never froze over. Thin little bits of ice, you know, would look as if they were going to meet but never really did.

Anyway, Salter who knew nothing whatever about ice, had been all this time at the base doing met, you see, decided this lovely day he'd walk out apparently to meet us. And we were on our way home. We saw him and so we were just taking a spell sitting down on a bergy bit and, you know, having a rest, watched him coming and then suddenly for some unknown reason he started to want to cross this ice crack. And we could see what was going to happen, so we shouted and screamed at him to - not to cross, stay where he was, stay where he was. Oh, nothing would stop him. He paid no attention, he just stopped and down he went. And, you see you can't get out of that because it's so – your hands are wet, so was the ice and you haven't got – if you try to scramble on to it, the ice gives way, until you can get to the really hard ice and then by that time you're so cold I don't think you could get out.

Anyway, we raced as fast as we could, you see. Now, Butler didn't know much about ice either at that time, because he hadn't been on sledging trips or anything and was too busy with all this signals and so on, you see. And when we got up, he started straight to go out to give a pull at this fellow and I shouted at him, "Stop where you are for God's sake". Too late, he just walked on this ice and down he went. And I suddenly realised that within perhaps a hundred miles I was the only person upright. Two fellows were in the sea with very little hope of getting out and all the rest were off sledging. But I'd got my long ice spear, I never went out on the ice without it, you know, you use for testing ice with it. And by using the other end of that and supporting them, by getting between their legs and keeping them up like that, dragging them gradually over, I got Butler out, you see, because you can pull them out if you're on solid ground. But he can't pull himself because he keeps slipping back. And then with his help we got Salter out too. And these bedraggled-looking creatures went back to base very wiser, much wiser in the future.

Joanna Rae : Well thank you ever so much for talking to me, it's been smashing.

Captain Bingham : Well, it's been very interesting to relive some of the memories, you know.