

KEN HILL

This is Ken Hill, recorded at his home in King's Lynn, Norfolk by Chris Eldon Lee on 2 September, 2010. BAS Ref.: AD6-24-1-85-1-1. Transcribed by Neil MacPherson on 10 December, 2015.

[Part 1 0:00:00] Lee: This is Ken Hill, recorded by Chris Eldon Lee on 2 September, 2010. Ken Hill, Part 1.

Bowler: Yes, I'm Ken Hill, Kenneth Vernon Hill. I was born on the 22 November, 1934, in south London.

[Part 1 0:00:21] Lee: You're going to be 76 next birthday.

Bowler: Yes.

[Part 1 0:00:25] Lee: Tell me a bit about your childhood. What did your parents do?

Bowler: My father was an estate agent's clerk. He insisted on calling himself an estate agent's clerk but he did quite a lot of other work like surveying. And we were brought up in Mitcham in Surrey, which is part of London really. My mother didn't work except during the war in the local factory. I started school in September 1939, which has other resonances, and I left school...Secondary school, I failed the eleven plus, twice, and I left school at 15 and went to do a job in London, which was a filing clerk.

[Part 1 0:01:25] Lee: Were you evacuated at all during the war?

Bowler: Only very briefly. My parents had friends in South Wales and we went there for about a month.

[Part 1 0:01:35] Lee: The phoney war?

Bowler: Can't... I don't know. Sometime during the war, yeah.

[Part 1 0:01:42] Lee: And what was this job in London, Ken?

Bowler: Filing clerk is just filing other people's papers. It was for a company called Linotype and Machinery which used to make big huffing and wheezing linotype machines which set hot metal, matrices and it was used in the print industry heavily. They were a big name in pre-war years and just after the war, supplying clients of Commonwealth countries with print, printing works.

[Part 1 0:02:22] Lee: What would you say was your first awareness or brush with the Antarctic?

Bowler: It was really when I saw the advertisement for a FIDS Radio Operator in, it must have been 1955 towards the end of the year. I went to the London office of FIDS and was interviewed and I thought I would just go along and see what it was all about. They offered me a job straight away. They said : 'Could I leave next week?' I said: 'No.' So I left at Christmas time in 1955. But I had been in the meantime in the Navy for my national service. My father was in the Navy during the war and he continued to be in the Royal Naval Volunteer Wireless Reserves and I had joined that organisation too and I went for one night a week in the year before I was 18 to a ship on the Embankment and learned morse, so that when I was called up I was able to go into the Navy.

[Part 1 0:03:49] Lee: What was it about the advert that made you actually want to apply?

Bowler: I don't think it was any intrinsic value in the advertisement but it hit me at a time when I was thoroughly bored with what I was doing. I'd been in this filing clerk job for three years after I left school and then my national service was two years, and I went back to the same company for a year, and I knew it wasn't what I wanted to do. But I didn't know what I wanted to do and this advertisement was in the Evening News and, as I was coming home on the Underground on a dark, gloomy night, it inspired me to think: 'Well, maybe I could go to the Antarctic.'

[Part 1 0:04:52] Lee: How much would you have known about the Antarctic at that point? Had you seen the famous film or read the book?

Bowler: No, I don't think I had. I was interested in the possibility of travelling but, no, I had no particular interest in the Antarctic.

[Part 1 0:05:16] Lee: So it was just a case of going somewhere else?

Bowler: Yes.

[Part 1 0:05:20] Lee: Ok. Was there any opposition to this idea from anybody in the family?

Bowler: My father was not exactly opposed to it, he was at pains to point out that I had joined a company, I'd been there for some years, they knew my value to them and it looked as though it would be a job for life and I should think very seriously about giving it up. His background was, of course, growing up during the Depression. So he was a one-company man and that advice grew out of his experience and I perfectly understand it. But I so wanted to get out of where I was that I pursued it.

[Part 1 0:06:24] Lee: What do you remember about the interview? Do you remember who was there and the kinds of things they asked you?

Bowler: Ah, god...

[Part 1 0:06:35] Lee: It's a long time ago.

Bowler: It is, yes. They took my word for what I could do. I didn't have a test in Morse or anything.

[Part 1 0:06:49] Lee: So your Navy experience was critical, wasn't it?

Bowler: Yes, and they were clearly short of people and they asked me if I could leave next week.

[Part 1 0:07:01] Lee: Why couldn't you?

Bowler: Erm... I suppose it was possible but I didn't want to do it that quickly because of my family and various other things.

[Part 1 0:07:21] Lee: But FIDS were willing to put off for a month.

Bowler: Well, there was a second... there were two ships going and the *Shackleton* was the one I went on.

[Part 1 0:07:34] Lee: Were you surprised to get the job?

Bowler: A little, yes. Yes.

[Part 1 0:07:40] Lee: Did you begin to worry about it or have any second thoughts?

Bowler: No.

[Part 1 0:07:45] Lee: You were that keen.

Bowler: Yeah. Yeah, I was keen to travel and that seemed a great way to do it.

[Part 1 0:07:56] Lee: So tell me about that period between being given the job and the sailing. Was it fairly hectic? A month, it wasn't that long, was it?

Bowler: No.

[Part 1 0:08:06] Lee: Did they train you at all?

Bowler: No. I seem to remember having an interview with somebody about a geodesic... some ground reading instrument. I can't remember much

about it except that I was clearly thought not suitable for it. Nothing further happened and they just took me for my radio experience. I was quite involved with the church where my father was organist at the time. At his church there were various activities going on. I had a girlfriend. I wanted to spend time organising my departure, as it were. That's really why I didn't go immediately.

[Part 1 0:09:14] Lee: Did they talk to you about your Christian commitment? Or did that happen later on? It's interesting how different chaps deal with it in the Antarctic... miles to the nearest church.

Bowler: Yes.

[Part 1 0:09:24] Lee: So you boarded the *Shackleton* in December I guess that would be.

Bowler: Yes. It was, if I recall, December 19th.

[Part 1 0:09:38] Lee: 1955?

Bowler: Yes. My father took the day off work and drove me down to Southampton and he came on board and we said goodbye and I thought, you know, that's it, I won't see him for a while. The ship was delayed and we were invited to go home for Christmas. So eventually we left on 29th December.

[Part 1 0:10:13] Lee: What do you remember of a) the journey south and b) the arrival at, I guess, Stanley first of all. Did you go to Monte?

Bowler: Yes, we also stopped at Cape Verde Islands. I recall it was something to do with extra water because someone had not used the shower properly. But, anyway, we took on extra water there. And Montevideo... I was delighted by the voyage. I'd done a bit of sea travel in the Navy. I'd been to the Mediterranean and to be actually heading on a long journey was great and there were a lot of new people to meet and that was good too. It was entirely delightful. Nothing to do, sit in the sun. It was great.

[Part 1 0:11:18] Lee: Your diary talks a lot about reading a great deal. You must have got through nearly all your books by the time you got there.

Bowler: Yes. Yes and there were a fair few on the base which I enjoyed. I'd always been a great reader since early in my life and I think it led to my fascination with words and how to put them together.

[Part 1 0:11:48] Lee: So how would you describe, in your own words, the Bay of Biscay?

Bowler: I don't have any memory of rough weather, so it must have been Ok.

[Part 1 0:12:04] Lee: What were your first impressions when you got down to the Falklands?

Bowler: I felt I was just hungry for foreign places. I was just interested in the history of it, how the British happened to be there and with my background I joined up with the Free Church there. Forres MacQuorn was the preacher too. He'd written a history of the Falkland Islands, so that went very well. Yeah, I was just hungry for new experiences

[Part 1 0:12:29] Lee: Did you know from the outset that you were going to get posted to Hope Bay?

Bowler: I believe I was going somewhere else originally. I can't quite recall where it was Hope Bay I learned from Port Stanley. And again, I was looking forward to it, wanted all the experience I could get of foreign places, and that's really foreign.

[Part 1 0:13:36] Lee: But it's British actually [Laughter].

Bowler: No, I mean foreign to my experience.

[Part 1 0:13:42] Lee: Yes, I know. So, I 'm just wondering if you had much of an image of the Antarctic in your mind before you got there? And did it match up to it?

Bowler: I don't recall doing much homework about it. The most striking thing which I mentioned in my film, I think, about travelling south across Drake Passage in the old *John Biscoe*, the wooden ship, where they showed 'Scott of the Antarctic' in the hold where the screen was suspended from the overhead deck and it was swaying with the movement of the ship so that it went in and of focus, but that was quite an inspiring moment to be going down to the Antarctic and to be seeing a representation of Scott's voyage at the time.

[Part 1 0:14:55] Lee: Was he an inspiration, Captain Scott?

Bowler: I admired what he did. It didn't inspire me to be doing anything like he was doing but, as I said, I was hungry for the experience.

[Part 1 0:15:20] Lee: So you get to Hope Bay. Paint a little portrait of the Bay and the base as you found it in the early part of 1956.

Bowler: Yes. I took a movie film with the camera that I bought in Port Stanley on the way down and that triggers my visual memory of Mount Flora and the foreshore with the Argentine base and the British base halfway up the hill. The actual going into the hut, I think I slept the first night in Hope Bay on the ship. I think we moved into the hut the next day and I had

about half an hour with the departing radio operator to show me what to do. Fortunately there was enough information there for me to get into the swing of it. Yes, penguins, whales on the way down, icebergs, it was all an introduction to the continent. Summer, sunny weather but I knew I would be there for a year through the winter so that again was something to look forward to really.

[Part 1 0:17:07] Lee: Was the radio equipment familiar to you or was it something you'd never seen before in your life?

Bowler: I hadn't seen it before, no, but I'd used quite a lot of different stuff in the Navy, so it grew quickly familiar.

[Part 1 0:17:28] Lee: No great challenge.

Bowler: No, the biggest challenge was in the winter with the aerials which kept being blown down and you had to rearrange them. But that wasn't just a challenge because you needed to get it back as it was. You thought: 'Maybe if I do this, it will be better.' So you were always trying to adjust things so that the signal would be clearer.

[Part 1 0:17:56] Lee: So you had an understanding not just of operating radios but also you talk about taking the car bonnet up. You understood what happened underneath?

Bowler: I wouldn't say I understood it but I was very willing and keen to experiment to see if I could improve what was there.

[Part 1 0:18:14] Lee: What were the most common problems you met whilst trying to operate the radio, particularly in the winter months?

Bowler: I think just the variability of the signal. I can't think of anything really. It was difficult to hear the signals that you wanted to differentiate from all the other noise from the loudspeaker but I'd had a lot of experience of that in the Navy. So, you develop your ear so that you hear a lot of the signals but you can concentrate on one and the mind somehow makes the other signals less noisy.

[Part 1 0:19:13] Lee: A human filter. Was it purely morse or was there voice work as well?

There was some voice work but we seemed not to be well equipped with... I don't know whether it was the equipment or where we were in the Antarctic but it was...

[Part 1 0:19:32] Lee: Location?

Bowler: Yeah. It was not often possible to use voice. Certainly not with the Falkland Islands.

[Part 1 0:19:43] Lee: You also eventually got yourself a radio ham call sign.

Bowler: That's right, yes, it took a long while.

[Part 1 0:19:50] Lee: Tell me about that.

Bowler: That was interesting. My father became an amateur at the same time. He...

[Part 1 0:20:02] Lee: Was that the plan?

Bowler: Sorry?

[Part 1 0:20:04] Lee: Was that a plan?

Bowler: Yes, I think it was, yeah. He got equipment at home and we said we'd be listening out on a certain frequency at a certain time but I never heard his signals. But I did manage to send morse to somebody who was about five miles away from where I lived and he telephoned my father and said: 'He's there, he's there.' But he still couldn't hear me.

[Part 1 0:20:38] Lee: So the radio ham work was still by morse?

Bowler: Yes, and I communicated with other people in South America and North America, one or two in Australia. I think I still have a stack of cards amateur people send to each other to commemorate a contact.

[Part 1 0:21:06] Lee: You say in your diary how odd it felt to be morseing to a lady radio ham.

Bowler: I don't remember that but, yes, I can understand that it's a collision of two worlds.

[Part 1 0:21:28] Lee: What I found interesting was that a lot of the Fids I talk to turn their back on the rest of the world for their 18 months or two and a half years. They really don't care what's happening. Well, they lose interest, shall we say, in what's happening in the rest of the world, except of course for the radio operators because they have contact with the rest of the world on a regular basis. You seem very keen, again from your diaries, to try and pick up news, BBC programmes beamed down to the Antarctic. So you were still in touch, weren't you?

Bowler: Yeah. I was following the Suez crisis and things like that.

[Part 1 0:22:12] Lee: How did you feel hearing about potential crises emerging in the rest of the World? One is impotent in the Antarctic, you can't do ...

Bowler: Yes. You're a pure spectator but you're part of the World, you're going back to it, so the more you can learn about what's happening while you're away, the better able you will be when you come back to readjust. I found that my horizons were drawing in as the light disappeared and the winter came. I found that I was more concentrated on my life in the hut and around the hut. It wasn't to the exclusion of what was happening elsewhere somehow. It's difficult to explain. When you're in your normal life, there's a mist that comes with actions which are further away and that mist closed in so that a greater proportion of your mental activity was involved with what was happening now in the hut and in the surroundings, rather than at home where you have a broader input from the outside world.

[Part 1 0:23:55] Lee: Somebody said to me that going to the Antarctic is the nearest you'll get to leaving the planet.

Bowler: Yes, I agree with that. I used to go for walks, sometimes at night, down to the beach and there was nothing human there at all and I enjoyed that experience. It wasn't humbling really but I realised that I was a very small part of a very big universe. You begin to appreciate the extent of your influence and ability when you're in that kind of situation.

[Part 1 0:25:00] Lee: Was that brought about by the beauty of the place or by the isolation or both?

Bowler: Yeah, I guess it's beautiful. The beauty of the place wasn't really what impressed me, it was the rawness, the naturalness of it.

[Part 1 0:25:27] Lee: Pristine nature.

Bowler: Yes. Pristine, I guess so. I would think of it as more 'raw' was the word I would use.

[Part 1 0:25:46] Lee: You still managed to listen to BBC broadcast through the winter and you briefly talk about a remarkable test match and I looked it up and of course it was Jim Laker's 19 wickets, wasn't it, against the Australians?

Bowler: Was it?

[Part 1 0:26:00] Lee: Yes.

Bowler: I can't [say] I'm terribly interested in cricket now. In those days, I guess...

[Part 1 0:26:09] Lee: You listened to religious broadcasts on the BBC too. Tell me about trying to keep your faith going in the Antarctic because I gather it's not that easy because there's so little support.

Bowler: Right, yeah. I didn't keep it going, in fact. It wasn't that I didn't keep it going, but again the whole upbringing in... not strict, but orderly Christian upbringing and I realised then that there are other people in the world that have a fairly ordinary Buddhist upbringing or whatever else. It seemed to me that whatever I had gleaned from that kind of upbringing was not peculiar to Christianity and that it was just one of several religions. And then, as life developed, not particularly at that point, but I realised that I didn't really have any faith. It had been the example of my parents and the church that I went to had brought me to a certain understanding of Christianity and I realised that it was because of that influence that I held that belief, what belief I had.

And I gradually realised that there was nothing really substantial about the faith that I arrived in the Antarctic with, and that there was no reason to continue it and to continue in the belief that I had been brought up with. So... and that has been a gradual development since that time. I don't know, nobody knows, but my tendency is to believe that there is no life after death and that one is on this earth to do what one likes and, ideally, if you have a kind of religious upbringing that gives you a sense of what people needed to do in order to live peacefully and in an orderly way and for the best results for mankind. So you glean out of that, I glean out of that an approach to life which I thought was most likely to bring me satisfaction and to fit in with the rest of the World.

[Part 1 0:29:43] Lee: That's a surprising answer. That's the last answer I expected, so thank you for talking about that. Do you think this change of philosophy happened because you were in a meditative environment, the pristine Antarctic environment that we talked about?

Bowler: It was an influence, yeah. It didn't all happen then. It happened more gradually after I came back but it was, I think, being in the Antarctic and having that experience was a very real pointer to what happened afterwards to my life.

[Part 1 0:30:32] Lee: And how did that manifest itself? Did you stop listening to the BBC church services and perhaps not... ?

Bowler: No, I listened to them all the time I was there. As I say, it was a gradual effect which grew out of my experience then. I mean when I got back to Port Stanley, I went back to the church again. Sang a solo in church. So I was still involved with it, willing to participate, but it gradually faded away.

[Part 1 0:31:12] Lee: Did your Christianity in the Antarctic mark you out from the other men at all?

Bowler: Very little, I think. I was a teetotaller. That set me apart a bit and I remained a teetotaller all the time I was there.

[Part 1 0:31:34] Lee: You were about to ???[inaudible] at that time.

Bowler: Yeah. I smoked, but then that was a different kind of thing. My father was a smoker. But no, I don't think so. I'm not a very demonstrative person, I would never try and persuade people to be a Christian. That's really foreign to my nature in the same way that I will not try and persuade people that there is no afterlife. It's what happened to me and I don't feel... I don't have any missionary blood in me or anything like that. I did have a bible and it was up on my shelf, so that would probably be a marker.

[Part 1 0:32:42] Lee: I noticed, reading the diaries that, please excuse me if I got the wrong impression here, that when the other lads went out to socialise with the Argies you tended not to go. You were much happier staying back and listening to music or reading literature. And you're a cultured man. We're sitting here surrounded by works of art which I presume are your ??? [inaudible]. I hope I'm right.

Bowler: No, they're my wife's.

[Part 1 0:33:10] Lee: They're your wife's. Ok. But you play the piano and other instruments. So I'm just wondering whether you were one of the lads or whether there was this cultural divide between yourself...because, let's face it, most Fids are handy with their hands and come from a different wellspring.

Bowler: Yes. Everybody feels they're different. It seems to me that everybody is different. Whether it was marked, any more marked in me than with other people, I'm not sure. I did tend not to go drinking parties.

[Part 1 0:33:57] Lee: Because you didn't drink.

Bowler: Yes. And it's... If you've ever been a teetotaller, but a teetotaller at a party tends to be a bit of a drawback, both to the rest of the party and to the person concerned. I've never enjoyed being drunk.

[Part 1 0:34:24] Lee: So you did take to drink eventually.

Bowler: I started drinking when I met my wife. [Laughter]. No, she had a more rounded approach to life. So, yes, we had wine all the time.

[Part 1 0:34:45] Lee: So, there's a unit at Hope Bay, and I appreciate it kept on changing, even in the short 14 months you were there. Was it a base that was quite well connected? Did people get on really well with each other? There was space and room and tolerance for individuals with different viewpoints.

Bowler: Yes, there were 12 of us and that immediately gives you space from other people and I remember I didn't talk to one guy for about six weeks but it wasn't ... there wasn't any lingering, there wasn't any animosity during that time. I think that we both preferred not to talk.

[Part 1 0:35:39] Lee: When you did talk as a group, and again you allude to this in your diaries, one got the impression you had some quite interesting discussions.

Bowler: Yes, there weren't regular... I mean the conversations weren't all that interesting, they weren't interesting all the time but there were times when somebody had a particularly strong opinion and it sparked off other people so that it was a rewarding experience to have gone through, yeah.

[Part 1 0:36:16] Lee: So you'd talk about politics or religion or what would you...?

Bowler: No, we'd tend to not talk about those two subjects.

[Part 1 0:36:27] Lee: On purpose?

Bowler: Yes. I think it was quite well accepted at the time that these were things you didn't really talk about. They were liable to spark off animosity.

[Part 1 0:36:48] Lee: Division. So, what sort of things came up? If those two great topics of conversation were verboten, what came up instead?

Bowler: Music. It's difficult to remember now but I remember having conversation about music. We had a guy who had brought a collection of LPs and an electric gramophone, as opposed to a wind-up one which we were supplied with, and his... John Noble, the meteorologist, and he was interested in opera, had quite a selection of operatic records and that nurtured in me an interest in opera as well. We talked sometimes about that, the story behind operas, that sort of thing. So, I can't remember anything that really... I haven't read the diaries recently. [Laughter]. When I look at my diaries – I have it all on computer – I look up and see what was I doing this day in 1956, and I read it and I've completely forgotten most of it, which is why it's delightful to have it to remind one of what was going on then.

[Part 1 0:38:38] Lee: It's a very good diary because it talks about the minutiae of the organisation of the base and who was doing what, where and when. But you also do reveal quite a lot about the other, more philosophical side of life.

Bowler: Right.

[Part 1 0:38:52] Lee: If I read you a little bit from Friday 22 June, 1956. 'No matter whose vocabulary I borrowed, I would never be able to give an adequate description of the sheer beauty of this night. I bathed late and the full moon lured me into emptying the ??? [inaudible] and filling the tank immediately instead of tomorrow. Even that did not allow a good look, so I donned windproofs and walked down to the beach herded by two of the young pups. There I could do nothing but sit and gaze. The full moon, the clear skies, the waves rolling onto the beach, each crowned by reflected silver. Stranded ice floes, their mass exposed by the ebb tide, still, brilliant, silent and solitary. I sat till my hands and feet were numb by the 10 degrees Fahrenheit, then slowly came up again, stopping every few yards to refresh my view. The most moving scene yet to be revealed to my dumbed eyes.' So you clearly had a deep affection for the place.

Bowler: Yes, yes. The natural surroundings. I already talked to someone about that. Previously, seeing the raw nature of the place.

[Part 1 0:40:10] Lee: Back to the music because you had the recordings but you also tried to create live music down there as well. There seems to have been a guitar appeared from somewhere.

Bowler: Yes, it belonged to the Base Leader, Ron Worswick. I learned to play the piano early but I never got particularly good at it but I marked the edge of the bench in the radio office with a keyboard so that I could imagine playing it and imagine the music that I was playing. I think that idea came from reading about Albert Schweitzer who was a superb organist who gave up his life to go to Africa and this was something that he did when he was not having an instrument. He drew out a keyboard on a table and that's what I did.

[Part 1 0:41:18] Lee: Did you have access to a piano at all?

Bowler: There was one at the Argentine base but it was in a terrible shape and it was cruel to listen to it.

[Part 1 0:41:31] Lee: So you were restricted to the guitar.

Bowler: Yes, yes, which I had not played before but we had a record of Burl Ives and I learned some of the songs from that.

[Part 1 0:41:47] Lee: So you basically learned the guitar.

Bowler: To a certain extent, yes. I have a pretty good ear for music, so when I hear things played after a while I can imitate it. But it was really just imitation. When we came back through Stanley, I actually performed for the Falkland Islands Broadcasting a half hour session of folk songs with another borrowed guitar in Port Stanley.

[Part 1 0:42:29] Lee: Any good?

Bowler: Well, I've lost the tape long since. I doubt whether they kept it. [Laughter].

[Part 1 0:42:39] Lee: Did you keep any tapes? Because you had a tape recorder with you as well and you recorded music and BBC programmes and also the midwinter radio communication parties ???[inaudible] you were there for.

Bowler: I didn't keep any, no.

[Part 1 0:42:56] Lee: You didn't. Ok. It was worth a try. So you were using radio as a working, professional tool but also for entertainment as well. There's a thing, you talk about 'Hope Bay Broadcasting Company'. Do you want to elaborate on that slightly?

Bowler: That's when the people at View Point, the sub-base 17 miles away on Duse Bay, and we use to relay... I don't think we relayed our own records, but we would relay radio programmes from our own receiver across to the little receiver at Duse Bay. We would chat as well

[Part 1 0:43:54] Lee: That sounds as if that was quite important. It's 17 miles, isn't it, to View Point? So if you're out there with only a couple of guys, to suddenly get some contact with the outside world, was that important?

Bowler: I guess so. I spent a month at View Point and I used the transmitter that we had there and the transceiver to try and reach other stations. I don't know that I had much success but...yeah, I thought it was a good thing to be doing, to try and pass on some music and stuff to these guys who were all alone.

[Part 1 0:44:58] Lee: You sent some recordings home. I guess those have also not survived. You were sending messages back to the family by tape, which was quite innovative for the 50's.

Bowler: I'd completely forgotten that. I guess so. If it's in the diary, it must be true.

[Part 1 0:45:24] Lee: It did mention it, unless I've misunderstood. I think you did. Tell me a bit about the Argentinians then because I know you didn't go there that often but you did have contact with them. Were there three bases in Hope Bay?

Bowler: Yes, there was an Argentine Navy base, an Argentine Army base and us.

[Part 1 0:45:44] Lee: All in walking distance on a good day?

Bowler: Yes, about three quarters of a mile or something.

[Part 1 0:45:55] Lee: How much fraternisation was there?

Bowler: It varied. It was worse in winter, of course. We did have an occasion where Ron Worswick had a diplomatic note to give to the Argentine Base Leader. I remember them going off. I think there was Ron and two others with a bottle of whisky in one hand and a note in the other because you cannot nurture a diplomatic relationship in a place like that. You must always be... well it always was for us, a social link rather than a country link.

[Part 1 0:46:51] Lee: So, man on man rather than nation on nation. Were they different from Fids?

Bowler: Probably not, I don't think. They were all army or navy people so that's one distinction. We were civilian. I don't think there was very much to choose between us. The language was a barrier. There was one guy during the summer who'd been brought up in England. I think his father was English, he was Argentine. I got on very well with him, we talked a lot about Argentina. Apart from that it was swapping. I remember we were swapping bottles of Bovril for bottles of wine. It seemed to us a very good exchange since we had a lot of Bovril. Very little Marmite but a lot of Bovril.

[Part 1 0:48:14] Lee: They had their own radio stations so I guess you had a look at them.

Bowler: I don't recall seeing them at all.

[Part 1 0:48:22] Lee: Ok. There was an incident in March '56 when in your diary it just says it was a devil of a day and further investigations revealed that an Argentinean officer went missing at that point. What do you remember of that incident. This was 9 March, '56.

Bowler: Yes, right. It was the Argentines had a hut on one side of a little bay and on the other side of the bay there was a tide recorder and the system for them was to go and read the tide recorder every few hours. These two guys went off in a rowing boat when they shouldn't really have done. It was a question of going by boat or walking round and these two guys went off and the wind blew them out into the main bay and one of them dived off and swam back and the other one was never seen again, or the boat. That was a tragic incident. There were other ships in the vicinity and they did their best to come into the bay and search but nothing was ever found. That was a reminder of the rawness of the place, yeah.

[Part 1 0:50:06] Lee: What could you do to help at your base?

Bowler: Nothing. That was the tragedy of it. There was nothing we... Ok, we had a little rowing boat as well. I'm not sure we did use that, but it was bad weather and it probably wouldn't have been very wise to do that anyway. It's just being useless. I mean you can radio people and ask them to help but inevitably they would be a long way away and it would take them a while to get there, which would be too late. But I remember it as a very harrowing day and something which stopped me writing my diary. Not a lot did.

[Part 1 0:51:06] Lee: Did it have a lasting effect on morale at all, either in your base or the Argentinean base?

Bowler: I'm not sure about the reaction in the Argentinean base. One can imagine it, but as far as we were concerned it was just a sobering few days.

[Part 1 0:51:28] Lee: Did anything change? Was there any change in what we would now call health and safety regulations? Common sense was probably...

Bowler: I'm sure there was, there would have been in the Argentinean base, yes. If there is any kind of wind, you must walk round rather than take the boat.

[Part 1 0:51:53] Lee: You also, rather interestingly, went up to visit the burnt out hut, the Ellery hut, at Hope Bay. I wonder if you could paint me a little pen portrait of that day?

Bowler: There was very little there. It must have been during the summer when the ice, the snow had revealed the weather ??? [inaudible]. But, as I say, there was very little there. I did find a couple of pennies burned together, which I brought back with me. Again, it was a sobering experience to actually see. I didn't know a lot about what had happened. I read some more about it afterwards. A frightful experience.

[Part 1 0:52:55] Lee: And again, were you aware that your own procedures at the new Hope Bay were influenced by what happened previously, so there's more care and attention paid to fire risk?

Bowler: I don't know how they would have compared to the original ones but certainly but I wasn't aware of any signs up saying: 'Remember what happened in 1940.' But I think we probably relied a lot on people's common sense. There was more of it about in those days. [Laughter].

[Part 1 0:53:44] Lee: Did you have a night man? Who stayed up?

Bowler: Yes, the metman stayed up to do the observations at various times, so he was awake at various times during the night, but he was ordered to stay awake all the time.

[Part 1 0:54:08] Lee: What advantage did you gain to your culinary skills in the Antarctic because you each took a turn to be the kitchen?

Bowler: Well, it was the beginning of my culinary experience 'cos I... Oh, no, I had done a little cooking in the Navy. Part of my National Service was on a minesweeper. That was a 14-man crew, which may have meant something in the interview, how I recall it. We did a little bit of cooking but it was sausages and stuff. But it was certainly a baptism of fire as far as cooking was concerned. I was the only radio operator so I had all the schedules to do when I was cooking. A bit wearing at times but other people were very helpful and realised that when I was cook there would be times when I would need help. Making bread and all that was something I had never done before, of course, and never since, in fact. [Laughter]. I think to myself that sometimes I might like to do a little more bread-making but I've never done it. But, yes, it was good. It certainly helped me later in life, yeah. For most of our married life after I retired, we took it in turns to cook each day, and it seemed a very natural and fair thing to do.

[Part 1 0:56:09] Lee: Did you develop any signature dishes the TV cooks might like to...?

Bowler: No, I think cinnamon porridge invented or thought I invented while I was there.

[Part 1 0:56:28] Lee: You were using, from time to time if not quite frequently, you were using raw materials found around – penguins and seals. Tell me about cooking a seal.

Bowler: I've never done it. We left it to Hugh Simpson, our doctor. I tell a lie, yes, I did cook seal when we were at View Point. I actually killed and cooked and ate a seal, not all of it, once, which I found very satisfying.

But at base, Hugh Simpson was the most adventurous cook and he did a stuffed seal heart, I remember once, which was delicious. Quite what he stuffed it with I can't recall.

[Part 1 0:57:23] Lee: He had to utilise his professional skills at least on one occasion when you damaged your knee.

Bowler: Yes. The knee, I probably twisted it. I was hoping to re-roof the hut with rubberoid and part of the system was to take off all the batons that were on top of the rubberoid to hold it on to the roof and they were all tossed on to the ground to be used later. I slid off the roof, not accidentally, but I happened to have... I was wearing plimsolls and I trod on a nail that was sticking up through a piece of wood and I couldn't walk around very easily for a week or two. That was frustrating, but it's the only reason that I feature in one shot in my film because I gave this camera to somebody else and they took a picture of me standing limply in the doorway.

[Part 1 0:58:48] Lee: It was a nail in the foot injury. Did that lead to the swollen knee or was that a separate incident?

Bowler: That must have been a separate incident.

[Part 1 0:58:57] Lee: You were laid out for a while.

Bowler: Yeah. I don't recall that one.

[Part 1 0:59:02] Lee: Ok. Let's take a break, Ken, and we'll come back and do some more.

This is Ken Hill, recorded by Chris Eldon Lee on 2 September 2010. BAS Ref.: AD6-24-1-85-1-2. Ken Hill, Part 2.

[Part 2 0:00:00] Lee: Let's talk a bit about View Point, if we may Ken, because you eventually got there. At that point, I think the hut was still being built, wasn't it?

Bowler: No, it had recently been built. I arrived there with Nick Nicholls¹. The hut had been delivered when the *Shackleton* was there and I helped to offload it on to the rocks which was a very long and tedious and knuckle stripping process. But by the time I got round there with Nick Nicholls it had been finished. There were various bits that needed to be done a bit later but largely it was Ok. But the journey to View Point was my first introduction to sledging and the first time I attempted the journey with

¹ General Assistant.

Jim Madell². No, not with Jim Madell, with David Larmour³ from Northern Ireland.

[Part 2 0:01:41] Lee: George Larmour.

Bowler: George Larmour, yeah. He and I set off and we were away for three or four days and we didn't make it. George had done the trip before, it was a bit misty and we missed the route down from the mountains to the north side of Duse Bay and we ended up on the glacier to one side of the Crossing Point and we realised that we were not doing very well, so we decided to camp. Which we did on glare ice which was very tricky and that night was one of the worst I've ever spent because the glacier was moving, infinitesimally of course, but each time there was a crack in the ice and they weren't regular and you would try and dose off and there'd be a new crack. And then there'd be another one 90 seconds later, then there'd be a gap of three minutes. So every crack fed your imagination that this glacier was actually moving because we didn't know how far we were from the edge. Totally irrational thoughts. Your mind was arguing one thing but your body was fighting it with more horrendous thoughts and we were very glad to see the dawn.

We could actually assess where we were and we decided to go back. That took a couple of days and we spent one night in an Argentinean refugio which had been stacked up with boxes of food. Again, it was glare ice and we'd already broken several tent pegs trying to get them into the ice. So we slept inside the refugio in the gap between the boxes of food and the roof. Just a single plank wooden hut in very low temperatures and high winds. George got a little frost nip on his ear which he didn't know about until the blister burst and the liquid ran down his neck. So, it was pretty hairy and when we eventually decided to head for home, when we got there, we were very relieved to get back and I think they were quite relieved to see us as well as we weren't terribly experienced at sledging and camping and all the rest. So that was pretty hairy but the second time we took two and a half hours for the whole trip and we were in a party of two or three sledges about what you do and other people donyway, so that was great.

But that experience was unique, to be in a hut with one other person for a month. There were other people coming and going during that time. That was interesting because you don't normally have that experience, do you? Unless you're married, I suppose, but, even then, you're doing different things. If you're with one other person in a hut, 24 hours a day for a month, it's an experience that's unique, as I said, and it teaches you

² Surveyor.

³ Meteorologist.

things about what you do and what other people do and the interaction that makes it just one of the other things that makes up life really.

[Part 2 0:06:30] Lee: Was there a kind of pattern to that relationship during the month that it goes through sine waves of good moments and bad moments or...?

Bowler: I can't remember any pattern about it, no. I think at one stage I must have annoyed Nick very much because he was a smoker and I wasn't at that time. I used to wake him up with a cup of coffee and a lit cigarette. I can't imagine now why I did that [Laughter] or he didn't thump me on the head. No, it was amicable all the time, really.

[Part 2 0:07:21] Lee: What was the value of View Point and the hut?

Bowler: It was another meteorological base manned only during the summer, obviously giving some perspective to weather reporting. And it was a stopover point for sledging parties going south. During my time there Wally Herbert did quite an extensive surveying trip to the south. As to the value of the hut to the survey, I'm not sure, apart from those things.

[Part 2 0:08:07] Lee: I gather the view was quite spectacular, across Duse Bay.

Bowler: Yes. It was a huge big bay with mountains all round it, depending on the weather of course. That's another great thing. The weather's constantly changing. You never see... or I wasn't really conscious of having the same weather conditions twice, except maybe if it's very low mist.

[Part 2 0:08:42] Lee: So to get there you were sledging with dogs, I imagine.

Bowler: Yes.

[Part 2 0:08:46] Lee: We haven't talked about dogs yet, so... I think this is the first time I've seen colour film of a dog team from behind, i.e. shot from the sledge.

Bowler: Right.

[Part 2 0:08:56] Lee: How did you get on with the dogs? Did you actually have much to do with them?

Bowler: I... not a great deal. I've still got a scar on my little finger from when I tried to separate fighting huskies with my hands. I was very soon told that you don't interrupt fighting huskies with hands, only with feet. Yeah, I enjoyed driving them and learning the commands. I just couldn't believe how keen and eager the dogs were to be travelling. I think it probably shows in my film because I did a long footage of the puppies and of the sledging, which was a bit tricky. I had to leave the sledge and

film for a while. There's nothing staged during my film of sledging. It's as it happened, and stop and run like hell to catch up with them afterwards. Yes, I did enjoy the dogs. I think everybody appreciates that they fulfil a role in that kind of situation now. They are affectionate, you can stroke them and things like that, which you otherwise do...

[Part 2 0:10:48] Lee: So you view the dogs with a sense of affection too?

Bowler: Yeah.

[Part 2 0:10:51] Lee: So when there were tragedies with the dogs, I think you had several dogs die being strangled in ropes whilst fighting or...

Bowler: Yes, we lost a dog on that first trip to Duse Bay. It just got out of its harness and disappeared down a crevasse. We could hear it but it was clearly a long way away. We didn't have the skills to go down and get it, so we just left it there.

[Part 2 0:11:28] Lee: How do you balance that sense of affection, in the same way as perhaps nurses have a duty of care towards their patients but they have to keep a distance? I wonder whether you felt the same dilemma with dogs, because they were working animals?

Bowler: Yes, we were aware that they would never be pets. Puppies, maybe, they were more accessible and playful than the adults. We were conscious that... I was obviously told at some stage that these are working dogs and you don't treat them like pets.

[Part 2 0:12:16] Lee: Did you have to train them, the new ones, the pups that came through?

Bowler: There seemed little need for training. They seemed to take naturally to it. That was another thing that surprised me. The puppies see the adults pulling sledges, I guess that's part of it. But there was no point, I didn't see a point anyway where a puppy was put into a team and it just stood there. When the other dogs started pulling away it went, pulling for all it was worth.

[Part 2 0:13:03] Lee: You were testing out, I think you were the first team to test out ropes made from nylon. Do you remember that?

Bowler: Not at all. I remember having a plastic cover over the rungs of the sledges which was a new venture. A new kind of plastic.

[Part 2 0:13:29] Lee: How was that?

Bowler: It seemed to work very well. It's like formica, although I obviously haven't driven sledges without that kind of thing, but with straight wooden runners. But it certainly seemed to work very well.

[Part 2 0:13:52] Lee: There's a surprising amount of transferring of dogs from base to base. Were you aware of that?

Bowler: Yes. During the summer, moving teams from one place to another, that was always exciting because you had to get them into the scow, the sort of barge, to take them out to the ship. That was fraught with excitement.

[Part 2 0:14:21] Lee: I'm not clear why the dogs were moving around so much.

Bowler: I think probably the sledging programme said that I will do this island this summer, so they would take a team and sledge over.

[Part 2 0:14:40] Lee: Did the blues ever hit Hope Bay whilst you were there?

Bowler: Collectively, no. I don't think it did. It did personally for me for a short time. I got a 'Dear John' letter from my girlfriend and that made me a bit depressed for a while but, no, I can't remember any over bearing cloud of gloom about the place.

[Part 2 0:15:18] Lee: How did you cope with the news from home?

Bowler: How does one ever? You rationalise it to yourself and I guess... I can't remember very much about it at all now but I think you have that knowledge that in a year or two you won't remember very much about it, so you store it away in your life experience box.

[Part 2 0:15:51] Lee: Can I talk to you about one or two of your colleagues because you certainly met Wally Herbert? Was he there when you were there?

Bowler: Yes, he was there for a whole winter.

[Part 2 0:16:03] Lee: What did you make of him? He rose quite high, didn't he, in Antarctic circles?

Bowler: Right. I think I was always aware that he had unusual qualities.

[Part 2 0:16:17] Lee: How do you mean?

Bowler: Well, his background. He was born in India, I think, and already he had a very varied life before he came to FIDS. I don't know, one just has this feeling about people that they are very able and creative and will do well.

[Part 2 0:16:52] Lee: Who else stands out in your memory, 50-odd years later?

Bowler: Hugh Simpson was a rather memorable character, not just because of his stuffed seal heart. He was very good at his job and one of the lads, as it were. I remember, perhaps because I was a participant in it, he had various methods of relieving constipation. I remember the shelf on which he had a row of bottles and it was labelled 'Purges of Progressive Power.' I liked the alliteration.

[Part 2 0:17:50] Lee: Was constipation an occupational hazard?

Bowler: Yes, I don't know whether I had it more than the others but it's one of those things that comes up and the sooner you can alleviate it, the better.

[Part 2 0:18:10] Lee: That's because of the diet, I guess, or lack of movement, physical exercise?

Bowler: Yes, probably, in the winter. I remember Hugh's approach to sledging was that, unless you're going on a very long journey, it was better not to poo until you got back. So he would go away for a week or so and then just take one of the things that was two-thirds of the way along the shelf and get back to normal. But I guess since he understood all that, it didn't do any harm. Anyway, it was much more convenient, of course, not having to poo out on the ice-shelf.

[Part 2 0:19:04] Lee: Right, because it was chilly. Oh, right, you're the first Fid bold enough to mention this area of conversation. So you were recommended to actually become constipated?

Bowler: No, no, no. It's what Hugh did, his approach. I'm not sure how I came to know that. [Laughter]. Certainly, it would have been an example to other people.

[Part 2 0:19:37] Lee: Did you try and follow suit?

Bowler: No, I can't recall anything about that side of my sledging life. Certainly, I'm confident I didn't do anything on the four days of that first trip.

[Part 2 0:19:56] Lee: I'm thinking of some of the things you talked about on the phone a while ago. Let's go back to the Argentinean base because there's a story apparently about political busts.

Bowler: Yes. The Argentineans had a little platform on a promontory by the water, where they had a flagpole and where I think the flag was raised and lowered every day. At the four corners of this area there were busts of the political leaders in Argentina, maybe a historic figure or two but

certainly some of the current ones and, while we were there, there was a revolution in Argentina of a kind, of a sort. And two of the guys whose busts were on this promontory fell out of favour, so their busts were broken off and thrown into the sea. But later in the year they had a counter-revolution, I suppose, and these two guys came back into favour whereupon they had to fish their busts out of the sea and put them back.

[Part 2 0:21:25] Lee: Did you get a sense of whether the Argentineans were doing this off their own bat or they had received instructions from Buenos Aires?

Bowler: I really don't know. I imagine since the busts must have come from Argentina, they may have had some directions, I'm not sure.

[Part 2 0:21:44] Lee: I guess it was a source of amusement for the Brits?

Bowler: Yes, for the Brits.

[Part 2 0:21:54] Lee: You talked about this terrifying night camping on the glacier on your doomed trip to View Point. Were there other near misses or worrying experiences?

Bowler: I only remember the one other one which is when I went for a walk with a couple of dogs. I guess I shouldn't have gone where I did. I went up the slope of Mount Flora and then I came back, as I thought to myself, along the beach. Of course it wasn't the beach and there was a scree slope and it went away quite a steep incline down to the water and you could see it continuing below the water for quite a while. I started to cross this slope and every step forward was sort of half a step down and I tried to project this trajectory across this slope and tried to estimate to myself whether I could actually get across to the other side of this scree slope before I hit the water. But I did, so that was ok, but it was a bit of a trying time which I don't think I mentioned to anybody.

[Part 2 0:23:23] Lee: Were there other moments where, in retrospect, you did things that were a bit silly?

Bowler: Yes, when I was doing the aerals once in the winter. They were held up with 'D' shackles, brackets shaped like a horseshoe with a screw through the ends. I was holding something in one hand and undoing this thing in the other. I had gloves on, of course, it was cold, and I didn't think at the time that I should have put it in my pocket but I actually put it in my mouth. It froze to my lips but I had the presence of mind not to pull it out again but to wait till the warmth of my lips had warmed up the metal and I could take it out. All I had was a sort of small blister and discomfort for a couple of days.

[Part 2 0:24:26] Lee: You were left with a small piece of metal that would warm up.

Bowler: Yes.

[Part 2 0:24:34] Lee: I've heard of similar stories with tacks, tacking down felting on roofs. Like any roofer, they put tacks in their mouth and suddenly they realise that ??? [inaudible]. At that time there was a general policy of the base being changed every year, so that guys were doing two years and so with the new recruits arriving there was already half an experienced base onboard. And by some form of osmosis, their experiences are transferred to new guys to help them avoid falling into pits like that. Was that the case with you?

Bowler: It was, yes. I'm not sure how much policy there was behind it because when you go into the variations of 12 bases and four visiting ships during the summer, it's quite tricky to work out that kind of stuff. Certainly in my case when I arrived, I'd waved goodbye to the previous radio operator after half an hour. It didn't work as far as the radio skills went. Otherwise I think it worked pretty well. As I say, there were three or four ships coming in and each visit somebody left or somebody came. I'm not sure any great planning genius was behind it. But yes, it was osmosis I suppose. What particularly I remember was that we had skis on the base and nobody had skied before. We had a book about it and we all read it and we put on skis and we went out and we all fell over and did funny things. Then, at some stage in the summer, somebody arrived who could ski. He went out and skied and we all went out and skied because we saw somebody doing it, and we realised how you moved your legs and what muscles were involved and how the balance went, which are things you can't get from a book. So, yes, skills are passed on by all the senses that you have.

[Part 2 0:27:14] Lee: You talk quite a lot about skiing in your diary, I wonder if at the end of your 14 months you were passably good at it?

Bowler: Yeah, passably good is probably a good description. I've never done it since and, when I'm talking to people who've been skiing, I long for them to say, 'Have you ever skied?' And I say, 'Only in the Antarctic.' [Laughter].

[Part 2 0:27:45] Lee: Did you have anything to do with the Chileans at all?

Bowler: Yes, at one stage, while I was at View Point a party of Chileans came across the Peninsula visiting Hope Bay and their first contact was with us at View Point. They didn't seem very confident about travelling and we walked across the ice when we saw them in the distance, to greet them. They were looking pretty miserable. One of the guys had frostbitten feet

or felt that he was getting frostbitten feet, so they stayed the night with us and Nick and I decided that we would offer this guy a sip from our half bottle of brandy, which was all that was on the base. So, we sat him down and we gave him the bottle and while Nick was trying to find the glass or something to drink from, this guy took the top off and poured it over his foot, which was quite an eye-opener. [Laughter]. Not that I was drinking at the time but it has a certain... yes, the value of brandy increases with your distance from civilisation.

[Part 2 0:29:33] Lee: All the Fids had chosen to be there. I'd ask you if there was a difference between the Argentineans and the Fids. The Fids had chosen to be there. One gets the impression that the Argentineans and Chileans were sent. Did you sense that? They were posted, should we say?

Bowler: I didn't get that sense. I rather feel that they had either volunteered or they had to accept a challenge. A bit like in the Navy, submariners. When they go into submarines, they take a cut in pay, I believe, because it's a privilege or it's a good thing to do for your career. In the same way I had imagined that as meteorologists if you go to the Antarctic it's good for your career, unlike radio operators, your career was destined for the rubbish bin anyway. No, I didn't feel they were there unwillingly.

[Part 2 0:30:58] Lee: Also in your diary, you describe several rather spectacular sunsets and perhaps you could talk about that because the sunsets were getting earlier and earlier.

Bowler: Yes, and longer and longer.

[Part 2 0:31:14] Lee: Oh, really?

Bowler: I remember the sun ... when you're at the Pole, of course, the sun appears and stays in the sky for a lot of the summer. Where we were it was just bouncing up enough to clear the horizon for a couple of hours in the middle of winter. Never actually lost sight of the sun but during that time when the sun was just above the horizon, there's be a sunset for two or three hours in the middle of the day. Yeah, in the middle of the day. So that was quite striking and they were always different, of course, and the colours were dramatic.

[Part 2 0:32:24] Lee: Were they frequent or were they a rarity? You talk in your filming about there having been 20 days in which you could do filming in your 14 months.

Bowler: Yeah, sometimes there was so much cloud, often there was so much cloud you couldn't see it. It was very striking. We actually had one of these events where you get mock suns, parhelion I think it is, where the

sun is in the centre of a circle and there's another circle leading off from the top of that circle and you can imagine the whole pattern taking up the whole sky. Because this was a very clear representation of it because there was a rainbow travelling completely around the horizon and mock suns at various points on it. I mean it wasn't complete but you would see, through what was there, how it would have been if it was complete. It was absolutely magic. Of course, you get your camera out and you see one tiny section of this which is influencing the whole sky. It really was an amazing sight.

[Part 2 0:34:11] Lee: The rainbow across the whole horizon, was this the usual arch or more of a flattened arch?

Bowler: No, a straight line rainbow just above the horizon all the way round.

[Part 2 0:34:28] Lee: A rare sight I would think. How was the gathering gloom as the days got shorter and the nights got longer when you bedded down for the winter? How did you cope with that, emotionally?

Bowler: It was Ok. It was like the whole venture really. I knew I was going to be involved in it before, a maximum of 18 months. That I was going out in one summer, it would get wintry then it would get light again. I could see the whole experience in my own mind before I started and it fitted that image that I had for it. It was more extreme in parts than I had imagined but it all fitted the broad pattern

[Part 2 0:35:32] Lee: So was there a changing mood in the hut as the nights overwhelmed you? You never quite had 24 hours darkness, had you? There was always some light in the day.

Bowler: No. Some light, yeah. Couple of hours in the middle of winter over noon. Yeah, I mean everyone slept more, we ate more. I am less than 12 stones now, I was 14 stone after I came out of the Antarctic. So, all these immediate things like sleep, eat, you did more of because there was more time in which you couldn't do anything. It was different slightly for me because I still had the radio schedules to do but other people had less to do. So one adjusts one's life to that in whatever way you can. You read if the generator's running.

[Part 2 0:37:01] Lee: I gather there were several problems with the generator over the time you were there, so I guess you were without light quite a lot, were you?

Bowler: I don't recall long periods. Derek Clarke was very good at his job and, when I had a schedule, I used to start the generator myself. I wasn't familiar with diesel engines but I got the hang of it. One time, I started the engine and it started in reverse which can happen with diesel engines

with manual turnover. You keep turning, you get a good swing and you get a good turning of the engine and you press the compressor. I must have tailed off in my energy for the swinging and pressed the compressor just before it got to the top or something and it started in reverse and all the exhaust came out of the intake and I managed to stop it. Derek was very constrained about all the cleaning he would have to do, taking the engine apart, part of it, in order to clean the stuff before it would start again. But we had to. It was Ok.

[Part 2 0:38:40] Lee: Technology. Of course, after you'd left FIDS, it went on in leaps and bounds. I think fairly recently you went back to have a look at the comms room at Cambridge. Did you recognise anything inside it?

Bowler: Not a thing. I was expecting quite a big bank of machinery and all there was was a computer, telephone and a fax machine, I think, and it was all done by satellite and they could save everything until conditions were right and then just beam it all up and it went all over the Antarctic very quickly. So that was a great surprise. I went to visit BAS in Cambridge with Jack Hill, my namesake, although we're not related, a few years back. That was the most surprising thing really. It was a big office with very little in it.

[Part 2 0:39:54] Lee: Or the office is really the same, it's just that the contents have got smaller as the technology has progressed. How did you feel about your approaching departure from the Antarctic? Were you glad to leave or were you sorry to?

Bowler: I was quite glad to leave because it was over. The winter was over, my work was over. I remember coming back from the Antarctic was a long process. There was no flying in those days. I remember the biggest change was leaving the base hut and moving on to the ship. We all got colds which was a by-product of that because we'd been without germs the whole year. As soon as the ship comes in and somebody's got a cold and it just... everybody gets it. But that was the biggest psychological change, moving from my bunk in the hut into the ship. Everything else then became gradual but that was the biggest change. But again, enjoyable because I was travelling and getting back to what I had left. Going home is always a welcome experience.

[Part 2 0:41:28] Lee: You continued to travel even after FIDS, didn't you?

Bowler: Yes, I was going on a round-the-world trip with a friend of mine and we thought we would go to France, get a job on a farm, save some money and then move on and go all the way round the world. We discovered that the easiest way, or the cheapest way to get to France was via Jersey, so we went to Jersey and we had about four hours between ships and we

found Jersey was full of French farm workers looking for work. We thought perhaps it wasn't a good idea to go looking for farm work in France, so we stayed in Jersey and very shortly afterwards my friend was repatriated to England because he was discovered taking pennies out of toilet doors in public conveniences. So that knocked that on the head. I stayed in Jersey and did a little trip in France afterwards. But I've done various bits of travelling and enjoyed it. I went to Canada and America for five months shortly after I came back from the Antarctic. I have family over there, so I was travelling round visiting various bits of family for quite a long time.

[Part 2 0:43:05] Lee: What happened to your career?

Bowler: Well, radio operator's work [was] on the way out as far as working life was concerned because more and more communications was being done automatically. A bit like cars when they first came out, everybody had a chauffeur to drive it for them and after a time they discovered how easy it was to drive, so they did it themselves. I realised that the skills that I had which were morse, which didn't have a very great future, and typing, which did have a future of a kind, but when I came back, well it wasn't till some time afterwards, I realised that the thing I had been doing a lot of in my life, was writing, writing the diary in the Antarctic. When I went to America I wrote articles for my local newspaper, so I began to think that perhaps journalism would be a good thing to do. So I got a job in Fleet Street with Press Association but I was what's called a telephone reporter. Reporters would go out on stories and they would phone in their stories to Fleet Street and they would dictate it to people like me and I would type it from dictation.

Again, it's another dying skill because reporters now email their stories in to head office. But, I was working in a news environment which I thoroughly enjoyed. There was shift work which I also enjoyed, having days off in mid-week in the summer. Great. I'd seen that job as a step towards journalism but it wasn't. I was in the wrong union. I married in 1962 and my wife very bravely was working at the time and suggested that I took a year off to do some GCE's full-time, which I did, and I got my qualifications in English and applied for journalists jobs for six months before I found a job on a little trade magazine. I went on from there, not as far as I wanted to because I really wanted to work on a newspaper. But I was in the trade press because of my slightly technical background. It was interesting. I used to go and see people who had just bought computers. I would be paid by the person who'd sold them the computer, so they never sent me to a client they'd had problems with. My job was to write up the story of how they'd bought this computer and how marvellous it was and what they'd been able to do with it.

[Part 2 0:46:39] Lee: Did that mean you had to understand computers yourself?

Bowler: No, I've never been a very technical person but I seemed to be able to understand what computers did rather than how they did it, so I could appreciate how they could do a company's accounts, for instance, with a lot less manual input. So I did quite a lot of that at a time when computers... in the '70's when computers were just beginning to come in to companies. I would write a story about a lampshade manufacturer who'd bought a computer to do his accounting and I'd say how they got on with it and that story would go into the lampshade weekly newspaper or monthly. It would spread the story about how fine computers were. I really tried to look for problems because, ok, you can write a story saying how marvellous are, but if you write a story saying: 'I thought computers were marvellous but I came across this problem.' If you write it like that and you write how the problem was solved, then it's more understandable and better, for the computer company as well.

So I then got into more and more technical stuff and I went freelance in public relations which is something a lot of journalists do. They go into public relations because the money's better. I got into technical things like ground-probing radar where a man had developed this system where he could detect land mines with a technology that had been previously quite easy because land mines were made of metal and you could find them with a metal detector. They're now probably about 98% plastic. Difficult to find. But he had developed this system, so I did publicity for that company. That was quite a challenging job. As a freelancer, which I enjoyed, but which my wife didn't because we never knew how much money we'd earn in a year and it was difficult to get ???[inaudible]. Yes, that was a continuing challenge which I quite enjoy.

[Part 2 0:49:34] Lee: Did you stay in journalism for your working life?

Bowler: From that time, yes. From when I was 35.

[Part 2 0:49:46] Lee: You've done some lecturing about the Antarctic at some point or talking about it?

Bowler: Yes, when I came back I had a letter from the Commonwealth Institute, I think it was still called the Imperial Institute then, explaining that they had a couple of lecturers for each country of the Commonwealth and they would, since I'd been to the Antarctic which very few people had, would I consider giving lectures for them? I laid the letter on one side and thought it's not for me, I can't lecture, but then I had my film developed and put it together and found I couldn't stop talking about it. I went to schools for the Commonwealth Institute for three times and thoroughly

enjoyed it. They put me in a hotel in a town and I would do three or four lectures a day showing my film which I took the projector round with me and the screen. It was great and I kept all the rewards of teaching and the 'ooo's' and the 'aaah's' and the interest in the subject and then at the end of the lesson I would go. Not have to give the homework out and all that.

[Part 2 0:51:18] Lee: Did you ever get to go back to the Antarctic?

Bowler: No, I didn't. I did think about it when these tourist ships started to go down there, particularly when I discovered, even quite recently, there were tall ships going to the Antarctic in the summer. I found very attractive. Then I thought, well, I haven't been to the Arctic, so if I'm going to go to polar regions, I'd like to go there. Last year I got to hear of a trip on a Russian icebreaker that goes through the Northwest Passage which I was very interest in. But I had a hip operation about that time, so I've put it off. But maybe still do it.

[Part 2 0:52:10] Lee: I just want to finish off by asking you how your Antarctic experience shaped or changed your life. We've already talked quite a bit about how it began with a transition from Baptist to atheist, if that's the correct way of putting it. Were there any other lasting effects on you, do you think?

Bowler: I don't know, I was reading quite a lot before I went to the Antarctic and I read a lot in the Antarctic and I think that did develop my interest in English and how to express things. I'm much happier at a keyboard than I am at a microphone. I tend to think at the same speed at which I type so it's a more direct link where others have that kind of immediacy between their brain and their tongue. I don't have that. It's fluency in writing that I think developed while I was in the Antarctic.

[Part 2 0:53:20] Lee: Unless there's anything else that you particularly want to say anything, I think you've covered the ground beautifully. Thank you very much.

Bowler: Good. Well, I'd just like to mention that we're sitting in my house and out of the window, is an eighteenth century building called *Bank House* where Samuel Gurney Cresswell was born and he was the guy who was in the McClure expedition looking for Franklin in the 1850's. I've got interested in his life and in that whole period because of my Antarctic experience but also being so close to where he lived. I was fascinated to read a month ago that the ship on which Samuel Gurney Cresswell arrived in the Northwest Passage, which he had to abandon, and was crushed in the ice and sank. That ship has recently been rediscovered by Canadian archaeologists, so we should have some nice imagery of it eventually. They're not going to raise it but it's been well preserved in Mercy Bay where they stay. He was the first person or one of three

people who actually went through the Northwest Passage, although not in a ship, in 1853. I find that whole period very interesting.

[Part 2 0:55:02] Lee: Ken, thank you very much.

ENDS.

Possible points of interest:

[Part 1 0:20:04] – Ham radio signal to his father in Surrey.

[Part 1 0:28:07] – Realising that his religious faith was not lasting.

[Part 1 0:31:12] – A teetotaller among Fids.

[Part 1 0:40:10] – Imaginary piano keyboard on office bench.

[Part 1 0:48:00] – Swapping Bovril for wine with Argentinians.

[Part 1 0:49:40] – Tragic loss of Argentinian in small boat.

[Part 2 0:02:00] - Inexperienced team turn back on trip to View Point.

[Part 2 0:09:20] – Use feet, not hands, with fighting huskies.

[Part 2 0:14:40] – Receives ‘Dear John’ letter.

[Part 2 0:02:00] – Dr Simpson’s ‘Purges of Progressive Power’.

