

John (Jack) Hill

Edited transcript of an interview with wireless operator John Hill, who wintered at Deception Island and Halley Bay, conducted by Jaap Verdenius, on the 2nd February 1993.

**Transcribed by:** Mike Dixon, completing December 2021.

**BAS Archive ref:** AD6/24/3/16

Transcribers use of Symbols in text:

' - ' denotes short pause/change of direction , ' ~ ~ ' unintelligible , '.....' speech trailing off.

**Notes:** The recording is truncated at start and end, appearing to fade-in already commenced, and simply going silent at the end.

\*\*\*\*\*

John: ..... well some of the things that educational psychologists were propounding at the time, were very deep and obscure and yet when you saw it in practice it was as I say just common sense, it was almost what you would anticipate and expect it to be anyway. But there you are, now have you got specific questions you want to ask me about Antarctic things or do you want me to just chatter, because otherwise you'll have to stay here a week, [laughs]

[00.00.40] Jaap: I'm going to let you chat and I have some specific questions but they will come up at a certain moment ?

John: Ok.

[00.00.48] Jaap : So I'll keep them in mind ..... ?

John: Right, right.

[00.00.50] Jaap: My notebook somewhere I was just curious is there because before my girlfriend went to do furniture work, she studied education too .... ?

John: Really, what a coincidence.

[00.00.57] Jaap: Is there a sort of a link those two, because she was not the only one at the time ... ?

John: It's interesting you say that because I know a number of people who are furniture makers or potters or watercolourists who were teachers. I think many of us probably originally teachers I mean, I think many of us probably use these skills for teaching purposes and then perhaps got disillusioned with teaching.

I did, I got very disillusioned with school teaching under the state system and left it to become - it sounds pretentious but to use the craft I knew for my own purposes rather than for teaching purposes. But then in my case, and I still enjoy teaching, I went back into teaching at college level which was a different ball game to the state school system anyway.

In college the students were there because they wanted to be there not because the government said they had to be or the law said they had to be. So there was a completely different attitude.

Yes it's interesting because a lot of people that I know and clearly you were saying the same thing, were teachers and went into a craft occupation of some kind, quite a lot, almost boringly so, I usually find that you meet people who are selling pottery or whatever, and the chances are that maybe eight out of ten of them were former school teachers. [laughs]

[00.02.55] Jaap: Yes it's predictable. ?

John: Almost, yes, yeh, it's true. I enjoyed teaching, I didn't enjoy the politics of teaching, discipline was getting out of hand, we weren't allowed to punish children in ways that they probably needed punishing and so on, so I left teaching in 1980 and set up my own workshop.

But then, as I say I couldn't make enough money at it and I started doing part time work in a college. Interestingly enough, the part time work in the College became full time work because, I'd forgotten about this, the ship that Scott went to the Antarctic in, in 1904 called the *Discovery*, still exists and it used to be on the Embankment on the Thames in London.

It was taken over by somebody called the Maritime Trust who began to restore it and in order to keep the cost of it down, they were looking for colleges to get involved in the restoration, and the college I work for, we got involved in the restoration of the *Discovery*.

I in fact spent two years, not all the time because I was teaching students for their exams, but in amongst all that, we made pieces of furniture that went into the *Discovery*.

Five years ago or whatever it is when I left that college and I came to live here, I actually brought with me because I was restoring it, the ship's wheel of the *Discovery*. It hung in my workshop for about three months while I worked on it.

Since then I've also had the rum barrel, the barrel that they used to issue the rum to the sailors that came off the *Discovery* as well.

She's up in Dundee now in Scotland, so if you get anywhere near Dundee in Scotland go and have a look at the *Discovery*.

So that was a kind of nearly thirty years since I first went to the Antarctic, I find myself working on Scott's old ship, which was nice. I've got some photographs I'll show you afterwards if you like.

[00.05.23] Jaap : Was it like what you expected it to be ?

John: What when I went down, the first time ?

[00.05.35] Jaap: No the ship, the inside, the interior, the furniture ?

John: Well yes, it was more or less, I mean I'd seen it when it had been tied up on the Thames. As a matter of fact when I went to the Antarctic the second time, which was in 1961, I went in 1955 and came back in 1957, and didn't settle down, four years later applied to go

again, went to London to be interviewed, and was interviewed and offered the job at the interview.

I remember leaving the office in Crown Agents in London and walking along The Embankment and I actually paid my shilling or whatever it was to go on board the ship, because it was open as a tourist attraction. I wandered in that ship trying to make up my mind should I accept it, should I go, because I had a wife and I actually made the decision walking up and down the deck of the Discovery [laughs], which was interesting, and I did actually go. So yes I knew what it was like, I wasn't, and I'd read a lot about it as you can see up here so there were no surprises.

But it was interesting to work on it because we worked from old drawings and photographs that were, some of them from the archives at the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge, and it was good, it was enjoyable. Quite nostalgic, in fact I remember writing in my articles, this wheel was hung from a beam in the workshop, the ships wheel, which is five, nearly six feet in diameter it's a huge thing.

It was hung from a beam in the workshop which was convenient for me at working height and I remember one time sort of standing with my hands on rungs and imagining myself dashing off round the bottom of Cape Horn somewhere in this thing, a romantic mood. So that was good, all pure nostalgia really.

[00.07.37] Jaap: What made you decide to go back to Antarctica when you settled down, when you didn't settle down ?

John: When I didn't settle down, yeah !! I didn't go back because I hadn't settled down, I hadn't settled down because I wanted to go back if you see the difference in what I'm saying. When I went the first time I went to Deception Island which is well North in the Antarctic, it's in the Antarctic but only just and I just had this feeling I wanted to go further south and when the opportunity came to go further south to Halley Bay, I took it.

But as I say I'd applied for it and then I had second thoughts as it were after I'd been given the job because that's the kind of moment of truth if you like, you gotta decide and I don't regret having made that decision I went off and it was great.

Quite a few people that went to the Antarctic, went more than once, I'm not the only one who went more than once. Some people went several times. I don't know who holds the record now for the most visits, but there was a chap called Eric Salmon who sadly died last year and at one stage I think he'd been back five times, five separate expeditions, five separate trips.

People who had done two and three were fairly common but not everybody. Some people go and we all go as young men and you get it out of your system kind of thing, you know, but it just held a fascination for me, I mean I'd go again at the drop of a hat.

If a letter came through the post today and said "Dear Jack would you like to go back to the Antarctic ...", unhesitatingly I would say 'yes'. Whether I would want to go for a couple of years again is a different matter. I probably couldn't afford to be away from the business for two years now. By the time I came back they'd have forgotten who Jack Hill the chair-maker - the furniture maker was. So that would be a consideration.

I would like to go again, in fact even if I have to go as a tourist I might still make the trip again, I'd like to before I die, or whatever. But I also I've got ideas to parts for the book together and that the idea I've got for the book it's necessary to make a third trip because in the trips I've done already the first one was to the Shetland Islands, South Shetland Islands I should say, the South Shetland Islands which is where the early discoveries all took place, the Whalers the Grahamland Peninsula as the English call it or the Palmer Peninsula as the

Americans call it or the Antarctic Peninsula as it is now been renamed was where all the early discoveries were made. I've also been to the Weddell Sea area ...

[A heater makes a bang sound ...]

[00.11.00] Jaap: It's working ?

John: Yes, I'm just wondering what that was ...? [Goes to check heater]  
No it's ok.

[00.11.08] Jaap: It's just ~~~

John: Ok. Sorry about that, emm, I've been to the Antarctic Peninsula area which was where the early discoveries took place and when I went to Halley Bay that was down at the bottom of the Weddell Sea, where there was quite a lot of activity. Shackleton's ship the *Endurance* was wrecked in the Weddell Sea, but the part where most of the activity went on that is the Ross Sea area where Scott had his base and Amundsen took off from there as well I've never been to that side but I would like to go to that side so I could then write the book on the basis that I had visited all three scenes of activity if you like.

The idea of the book was to tell my story of visiting the Antarctic and weave in with it the history that took place when I was actually in those places which seems a nice vehicle really. But as I say it means I've got to go again [laughs] to do it properly. Whether the opportunity will come again or not I don't know.

[00.12.20] Jaap: And what did the second place, Halley Bay promise more to you at the time, than the place where you already had been, the Shetland Islands ?

John: Promise in what way, do you mean did I get more from it ?

[00.12.35] Jaap: Well you said that you had to go back, you didn't settle down because you had to go back, there was something more to get out of it ?

John: Ya I think so it was that, it wasn't necessarily Halley Bay although that materialised as being the place, it was just that I wanted to go back and to go further south and to go to a sledging base. Deception Island had not been a sledging base. It had in fact only been, I'm saying only, it had been a, it was a very small Island, it was about twelve miles by eight miles, and only in the winter when the sea ice was frozen could you actually go off and in fact the year I was there, the sea ice was never formed well enough for us to get off the island and I wanted to go, and it was a weather station mainly. I wanted to go further south to either something on the continent itself or some of the further islands further south that were linked by ice where there was more sledging and activity going on because we hadn't done any sledging at Deception Island at all. We had a sledge and we had a few dogs but they were mainly just for recreational purposes, but Halley Bay was a full scientific base and sledging base.

[House dog comes and interrupts: You may get barks on your tape later, now your being a good dog, you are. She gave hell to somebody yesterday ok, go on off you go, off .... hope she doesn't suddenly bark it sounds terrible in your earphones if she does.]

Where were we, it held more promise was I think the word you used in that context but I would have gone, even if it hadn't been to Halley Bay, if had been somewhere else, there was - they've changed the name of a lot of the bases now, but there was Base F as we call it in those days which was further south. That would have been fine.

But Halley Bay was nice in a way because it was actually on the Continent itself, it wasn't an island it's actually on an ice shelf. It was quite strange to realise the building we lived in was actually on a floating ice shelf, and some years after I left it, it actually floated off to sea as part of an iceberg kind of thing, was buried, and as I said earlier they're now on Halley Bay 5 I think, you know they've built subsequent huts since then.

We lived in part of the hut that had been built by the Royal Society Expedition in about nineteen fifty five six, when they had the IGY year International Geophysical Year, and the Royal Society built a base at Halley Bay, Then Fids as we were known, Falklands Islands Dependencies Survey, which subsequently became BAS the British Antarctic Survey, they reoccupied the base and we still lived in, still used anyway we didn't live in it but we used it part of the old IGY hut was still there, about forty feet down under the snow and my wireless cabin was down there as a matter of fact, but we had another hut up on top that had been built the year before I went that we actually lived in, and we built a hut when we were there which was a generator shed, a big building which we built.

[00.17.09] Jaap: What was it like to live under the ground for some time and to live under the ice.

John: It's strange, you get used to it you don't think about it after a while. It's a bit uncanny to start with and that incidentally was one of the big differences between Deception Island and Halley Bay. Deception Island was hut built on rocks and gravel and in the winter the snow was up to the roof line but in the summer it disappeared and we were back on volcanic gravel again.

At Halley Bay it was, there was no land in sight at all there wasn't a rock, we never saw a rock or a bit of gravel all the time we were there because it was purely ice. It's strange for example when we built the hut for the generators, and this is one of the things I used to point out to kids when I was lecturing on this subject, there were no doors or windows on this hut because within weeks of us having built it the snow was level with the roof anyway.

What you do is you build a kind of hatchway in the roof with a ladder going down into it and that's the front door. The drift snow accumulates you have to extend that hatchway with a box if you like and the lid further up because the thing just gets deeper and deeper. The problem is whenever you put anything on the surface in the Antarctic it forms a drift and it gets buried if you want to keep it there of use it you've got to either dig it out and lift it back up on top of the drift or in some way extend it.

For example we had the supply of fresh water at Halley Bay meant that two guys had to go outside with spades and a sledge and dig snow blocks which we then we had to dig them away from the base because toe dogs polluted the snow and the smoke from the chimneys because we burned coal would you believe, would dirty the snow.

We built downwind and away from the base and these snow blocks which would be big as you could carry were pushed down a funnel and into a big melt tank as we call it which was attached to the stove.

The funnel as we called it actually consisted of fifty gallon oil drums and we cut the tops and the bottoms off and just stood them wedged them one on top of the other so we had a kind of thirty foot tube eventually twenty foot tube whatever it was. So that was the water supply.

Things like that bring it back to you that it was a totally way of living, there were no taps to turn on and interestingly enough the system used to be we had a duties rota if you like, used to call it the magic wheel if I remember rightly, the wheel of fortune and this wheel of fortune allocated jobs and chores that you had to do.

For example nice bit of psychology this really, the day before it was your turn to fill the water tank it was your turn to have a bath. So the more water you used in this bath, the more snow you had to put in the tank.

You see what I'm saying so you tended to get into the habit of washing in sort of three inches of water in the bath so that you didn't have to put much snow in the following day.

It was things like that, that made you realise that it was a totally different way of life.

The living underground as it were literally under ice or under the snow it wasn't a problem.

I think you get I've read stuff particularly American books on America Expeditions where they get claustrophobia and men do funny things when they've got I think in one of the American Books I read that you develop a ten foot stare in a six foot room. I never felt anything like that I don't think it was detrimental, I'm sure it wasn't [laughs].

It's quite snug and tidy down under. In fact one of the problems was that in one of the huts and this is subsequently they've changed the system of building but the type of hut we had was literally just a building that you'd build outside here.

The early one even to the fact that they had rolls of roofing felt, to keep the rain out kind of thing. But what used to happen although the buildings themselves were quite well insulated, there would be some residual heat would escape from the building and it would melt the snow that lay nearest the building so although you were twenty feet below the snow, the snow in some cases wasn't actually resting on the hut itself there was a kind of melted area around it.

Of course sometimes if the hut developed an area where the insulation broke down or something, you get this snow melting quite a lot and you'd actually get water dripping into the building.

This is what happened to the old IGY Hut, because it wasn't all being used it started to leak as it were and then as the ice and snow settled back on the building it started to actually crush the building.

Before I left, the IGY building was all at one end was quite badly crushed and six by three's and six by four beams were just cracked straight through with the gradual pressure of the snow.

Subsequent buildings that they built down there they now build them inside a kind of reinforced tube and then they build the actual building inside it. In my day it was just an ordinary wooden building.

Deception was different as I say it was just a, in fact the hut we lived in on Deception Island had been there for donkeys years, it was actually a whalers - Deception Island had been a whaling station and in the early part of the century 1910, 1912, the hut that we actually lived in had been a whalers dormitory kind of thing and that was built by Norwegian whalers.

It was quite an incredible building, that. I will always remember it had two inch thick tongue and groove planking on the outside, one of the ways of building wooden buildings is that you have what they call tongue and groove planking. It's pieces of wood and one edge of one of them has got a groove in it and the other edge has a lip in it and they fit together.

In this country if you buy a wooden building you may be lucky to get half inch tongue and groove. This was two inches thick tongue and groove it was massive absolutely.

But there was a huge contrast between the two places I mean it was quite incredible. I also spent some time at a base at Signy Island as well, which is still operational I think, yes it is, Signy is still operational, Deception is no more the island was volcanic and the volcano erupted in '67 I think, '67 possibly. So there isn't a base on that island anymore. It gets visited occasionally by people who are interested in how the vegetation has grown again and so on - the wildlife has grown back after the eruption.

Deception Island was, it was quite an eye opener really it was 1955 and I'm sure the Antarctic is a totally different place now, technology has moved on. We used a lot of ex army ex navy equipment when I was there at that time.

[00.25.45] Jaap: Do you remember the first day that you got there, you arrived there ?

John: At Deception ?

[00.25.53] Jaap: Yes.

John: Yes I can, I can remember seeing this island and the ship went towards it, and deep down we knew what the skipper was doing but it looked as though he was just heading for the rocks and then suddenly there was this little tiny entrance because the island itself is a volcanic cone if you like, it's a flooded volcano crater - you've seen pictures of it?

There is this little tiny entrance which is called ... Neptune's Bellows we used to call it no no, was it yes, the Bellows that's right and you slip the ship in and just go inside. I can remember that and when you get inside and this huge panorama opens inside.

The thing about Deception at that time of the year which is summer, is that a lot of the snow disappears, melts, blows away and you are left with this black volcanic ash and the whole scene is quite incredible really is all black and white because the black ash and the white snow or in some cases the snow is dirty as well.

I can remember that quite clearly. I can't remember much about the details because what happens when you arrive in an Antarctic base is for several days you have got to work extremely hard unloading the ship because everybody is in a big hurry because of changing weather conditions and so the first few days on a base is very hectic and very strenuous.

At Deception Island we had stuff to unload and the unloading is usually done by putting stuff over the side into a flat-bottom boat called a scow which is then towed in and beached, and you wade out into the water and unload it and take whatever packing case.

An interesting little thing I could tell you and it certainly applied when I went back the second time, was that when you're unloading ship, you get very clever and you look for the boxes that you know aren't going to be very heavy and usually size has got no relationship to it for example you see a huge packing case that says Kellogs on the side of it then it's going to be full of breakfast cereal so although it's big it's going to be very light, but if you see a small box that says Exide on it, it's going to contain a couple of tractor batteries, which although its small are going to be extremely heavy.

So you can see all the new boys picking up the small boxes and all the old hands picking up the big ones.

Of course the nasty bit is that as I said earlier we burned coal and so you've got to unload a year's supply of coal out of the ship. So you go down there thinking you are going to be an Antarctic explorer and you finish up being a stevedore kind of thing.

So I don't remember much of the first few days apart from that and Deception was funny because it was visited several times by other ships and other people after I had arrived and it was sort of several weeks before the last ship came, and we were actually left on our own. I think that's a poignant time when you see that last ship sail away and you know that you are going to be there on your own for about a year, ten months to a year. I remember that day.

[00.29.32] Jaap: You remember that feeling ?

John: Yes, I was twenty three at the time and yes I remember that and thinking is it going to be ok, there were six of us are we going to get on you know, this, are we going to get on ok. It was fine, we had arguments but you don't .., if you have an argument it's gone the next day very often or certainly the day after that. Nobody holds any grudges sort of thing there were arguments about various things.

I remember one time having this violent row with one of the guys whose name was Jim Fellows, he's still around Jim, I haven't seen him for a few years because I'd used some nails I hadn't realised but he had painstakingly pulled these nails from a packing case and straightened them out and put them in a jam jar and I'd gone into the workshop and used Jim's nails and quite rightly he gave me a real rollicking because I'd used his nails and he was perfectly entitled to but it was ok the next day and we were the best of friends again. That's one of the differences I think in this, when I was teaching if you had a row with anybody then they never spoke to you again probably. Permanent resentment but that didn't happen down there. I remember that.

Difficult you know, to keep remembering these things, it's thirty odd years ago. A lot of the memories do stay because they're vivid and they're special and they're the first time and they've never happened again you know what I mean they're very special things in that respect.

It's difficult, since you rang me and said you were coming, I've been sort of trying to piece things together, that's why I scribbled some things down on here but it's very difficult and one thing can lead on to another one it sort of jogs the memory again and so on.

[00.31.37] Jaap: Maybe you can tell me what your day would look like, what the base's day, especially your day would look like.?

John: An average day?

[00.31.45] Jaap: Yes.

John: Well .... let's take Halley Bay, again it would have been different at Deception, let's take Halley Bay. My day was governed by the fact, and other peoples were as well, my personal day was governed by the fact that as the radio operator on the base and I was the only one, I had to be at my radio set at certain times during the day, in other words we had what we called skeds, schedules if you like. Radio schedules.

So my day was governed by, I think I can remember the times, the first one was ten am the morning, and the next one was three in the afternoon, and the next one was six I think in the evening, something like that. There may have been four, I'm not sure. Oh sorry, there were four, there was one at ten at night.

I had to be at the radio each of those times and my job was to send weather information that we collected on the base, that was all in code, official telegrams about base running and routine and so on and personal letters and telegrams that we all got on the base.



I in return would receive official telegrams and personal telegrams back the other way.

[00.33.24] Jaap: Did all communication go in Morse?

John: It was all in Morse in those days, which I had learned in the Air Force and in the Navy. My official day would start at ten and I'm afraid I did tend to get into a rather silly routine down there I used to get up about nine thirty in the morning, other people got up at all different times. We slept in cubicles with two bunks in each cubicle, there were no doors on the cubicles, I always remember that, there was a passageway and everybody had a bunk and there were two bunks, so you came and went as you wished, you know what I mean, there was no sort of set time for getting up.

Breakfast was at a set time I was going to say the other routine were meals that was the other fixed time but I used to miss breakfast, used to get up about nine thirty a very quick wash because there wasn't a lot of available water, cup of coffee down on the wireless cabin, work for about half an hour three quarters of an hour whatever and then I was free in inverted commas then until lunchtime.

Everybody had work to do, there was food boxes to bring in, all our food was stacked outside in boxes and that drifted over like everything else, so in this base routine you all had your jobs and you'd spend Thursday morning whatever it was digging out food boxes or digging out coal or whatever.

We had twenty one dogs which needed feeding, somebody actually had that job for feeding but he used to like help and we used enjoy helping and in the summer months we used to go off and kill seals to feed the dogs so there was always plenty to do.

A lot of routine work. So meal time would come along and then shortly after that I'd have another radio sked and so my day was partitioned by these radio schedules and the other work was fitted in between.

Nobody ever, I mean the people who were doing scientific work would have their observations to make, the weather men had observations to make at set times. We all had other work to do besides what we called base work. Everybody had their own scientific work or whatever it was and so the day was parcelled up.

Now it sounds terribly boring, it wasn't in actual fact and there were breaks in the routine because fortunately one of the guys on the base whose name was Barry-something but I can't remember his last name, he was also a wireless operator he'd been in the Merchant Navy and he would take over my wireless skeds on some days so that I could go out sledging or sealing or whatever.

So the routine was broken up and I in fact made quite a long sledge journey, we made a journey with - we had tractors on that base, Muskeg tractors and I was one of a party of five with two other tractors we went off on what is known as a depot laying expedition.

We went off with several tons of supplies and sledged out I forget how far it was, two or three hundred miles and left these supplies and then came back so that the next year another expedition, you know the system they could go on further so we left a cache or a depot of food for them.

I was away on that for about ten days and there were other odd little expeditions which were sort of overnight little things.

That was a day, meals were excellent generally they were pretty boring because it, the food was good because it was the same. At Halley Bay we actually had two professional cooks who did all the cooking in turns, they used to do a week on and a week off cooking. But they always had a kitchen assistant as he was called, a cooks assistant, and we all took it in turns to be a cooks assistant.

At Deception Island it had been quite different we hadn't had a cook and each of us, there were six of us at Deception Island, there were twenty one of us at Halley Bay, quite a different ball game altogether.

At Deception Island we didn't have a cook and we didn't have a doctor either. We used to take it in turns to be cook, so in addition to all your other jobs that you had to do, you had to be cook for a week as well. You had to cook all the meals of all six people and again we had an assistant who was usually the cook who was coming on next week part of the routine.

That was a bit strange, fortunately I'd done a lot of climbing and camping and so I was ok at cooking. There were one or two people who clearly hadn't so much as boiled an egg probably before they went down there [laughs].

We used to do alright, we made bread every day and ate quite well. As I say at Halley Bay we did have two professional cooks and we had a doctor and out of the twenty one people I suppose several were scientists from universities doing various types of research and there were maybe half a dozen meteorologists, five meteorologists, myself a wireless operator, a diesel mechanic, a doctor, two cooks, couple of guys who went down there to build the hut and then stayed on as what were known as general assistants.

That was an interesting thing, they used to have at the back of your name in these whatever it was there were initial letters that said what you were I was for example a WOM, I was a wireless operator mechanic. The met-men would have MET behind their name they were meteorologists and there was this interesting designation of GA that people used to get at the back of the thing and it actually stood for general assistant. Everybody liked to say it actually stood for gentleman adventurer. [laughs] That's an interesting little thing I've just remembered, all these gentlemen adventurers.

No it was good, people had slightly different days and we all got together for the evening meal and lunch, and in the middle of the day we used to have what Naval expression we used to call it smoko. At sea you had these you can only smoke at a certain times in the Royal Navy and when it's coffee time it's also have a fag time kind of thing it was then anyway it's probably less now. It was known as smoko.

Cook always had to produce, whoever was cook had to produce some kind of biscuits or cake for the afternoon smoko, it was sort of expected of you. Incidentally on the cooking, the most used cookbook was the 'Penguin Book of Cookery', Penguin the publishers. It was amazing I remember at Deception Island the recipes that were mostly used were the really greasy pages because they had been used so often.

Somebody actually wrote a book on cookery while he was down there I can't remember his name he was a cook and he actually wrote a book and it was called 'Fit for a Fid'. It was a cookery book of the kind of meals that could be produced with the kind of food that was available.

[00.41.14] Jaap: What kind of meals could you produce?

John: Well, most of the stuff we had, probably 90% of the what we ate was from cans or in packets, and again in those days, for example when I went back the second time, instant soups were just in their infancy they were just starting to have soups in packets they were around and we did have them but they weren't much on sale in the shops in this country.

Pretty well everything was tinned or packeted or dried.

At Halley Bay we did in fact take in with us quite a bit of fresh food and we just buried it in the snow. It was rather interesting, because they buried it in the snow outside the hut nearest to the kitchen and then made a hole in the wall and it was a kind of a fridge, you know, permanent fridge.

We took sides of beef in and some vegetables, trouble is a lot of vegetables like potatoes and so on, they just collapse if they are frozen, I know you can get rapid freeze dried food and that kind of thing but just sticking potatoes out in the snowdrift doesn't do them a lot of good. We were able to have for special occasions, the cook would rustle up a bit of fresh steak that had been there for like five months or so and it was still quite edible because it's a natural refrigerator in a sense down there.

We ate occasional sealmeat, I didn't like it I'm not particularly much of a meat eater anyway, but that was one way of relieving the diet and getting some fresh food and also and I did mention this when we talked on the phone.

It wasn't much but it was a contribution, having been the first time I decided that I didn't see any reason why in the right conditions we could grow some of our own food.

I was quite a keen gardener and when I went back the second time I took with me the means of producing vegetables, some vegetables, using a system called hydroponics which is where instead of growing stuff in soil, you grow it in some kind of a medium which is fed with all the chemicals that plants need.

So I took the chemicals with me, we called in a Deception Island on the way there and I filled sacks with this volcanic gravel which was perfect as a growing medium. Totally inert, germ free, as it would be down there and I set up a greenhouse at Halley Bay in the wireless cabin with artificial light, fluorescent tubes, and started off tomato plants and lettuce plants and peas and cress and all that kind of thing.

I eventually built a greenhouse on the outside because in the summer you have continuous daylight or there's bags of sunlight, and we actually produced tomatoes and lettuce and lots of cress. Wasn't a lot but it was nice, it was nice to sit down to a meal of fresh tomatoes every now and again. It didn't happen a lot, there wasn't the space I mean to do it for twenty-one people on a regular basis you'd need acres of green earth, but that worked.

As I say we used to have special meals on - we used to celebrate peoples birthdays, Saturday night at Halley Bay anyway tended to be a bit of a special day anyway, the Saturday evening meal was a bit special and we used to have a film at Halley Bay we had a film, we didn't have enough to last - I think we had about forty full length films and a projector of course, and so Saturday night was a good meal, we'd usually open a bottle of something or a few cans of beer, a few bottles of beer and have a film.

So Saturday night was a kind of - like it is - I do not know what it is in your country but Saturday night always as youngsters anyway, Saturday night was always the night for a night out kind of thing. That was the nearest we got to a night out.

[00.45.36] Jaap: What did you talk about at these Saturday nights, in terms of - I mean you don't have the football, do you talk about the ice, or did you talk about girls or... ?

John: Let me just excuse myself for a minute, and I'll be back. (leaves the room)

I don't think conversation on Saturday night was any different to what it was any other night. Saturday night was probably the one occasion when probably most of us were in the building - we used to have this room we called the lounge and it had a little tiny bar in the corner, not much booze in it, because that was very limited.

There were some chairs and we had a library we had a lot of books and we had a record player. People would sit around and smoke and talk and so on, I think most evenings pretty well everybody got in there at some time, some stayed later than others. Some went to bed early, I was always as I was saying earlier, I used to start my day at nine thirty but I would end it at about one am in the morning, that was my sort of day.

It tended to be a late start and a late to bed. As I say sometimes I was down on the wireless cabinet, I had to a wireless thing at ten o'clock at night when some of the guys had gone to bed already.

Our conversation used to range widely it was quite amazing, we had a kind of unwritten rule that we wouldn't have any discussions on politics or religion. But we had discussions on politics and religion it was just that if it started to get heated somebody would remind the participants of this little unwritten rule and it would end, you know, that was all it was.

Certainly we talked about girls, yeah I mean everybody was interested in women there weren't any there, and I suppose the conversation went - certainly we couldn't discuss that days football match, but you'd talk about your work or you'd be talking about you'd be planning something maybe a couple of the guys were going off on a trip somewhere and we had to arrange different things. It's difficult to know just what - just where the conversations went.

I read an interesting little story somewhere once about the Antarctic where they said - actually it's to do with the Arctic, and this guy was saying that he was obviously with some expedition up there in an old building and he said if voices, if conversation could be frozen in the same way that water could be frozen, snow could be frozen, and that if you could melt this frozen conversation again what stories this hut would have to tell kind of thing and I often think it would be the same at Halley Bay or any other bases for that matter.

The hut we did our talking is now at the bottom of the sea.

It varied, we did silly things, grown men do silly things when they are in situations like that rather like rugby players do at the end of the rugby match I suppose there was a bit of that kind of atmosphere. We had for example a group of musicians who were known as the Halley Orchestra slightly different spelling to the John Barbirolli version.

We used to entertain our companions occasionally by playing traditional jazz music. I had some drums, I took some bongo drums and we made a cymbal. One of the guys played clarinet, and we had a man who made himself a base with a tea-chest and one string, we had a guitar, and something else I can't remember what it was. Somewhere, it's on reel to reel tape, I made some tape recordings obviously it's on the old reel to reel thing, Halley Orchestra or the Halley Bay Hot Five as we were known. We used to do that.

We would play games like scrabble and monopoly and this kind of thing and people played cards. As I said there were lots of records but we just had the one film show each week and some of the films were more popular than others.

I can always remember there was one film with Sophia Loren in it and we must have played that film a dozen times I would think and it got to the stage eventually where we played it so often we used to leave the sound off and the guys would speak the dialogue to the film [laughs]. But these are the kind of silly things that grown up men do in situations like that.

[00.50.30] Jaap: Which film was that ?

John: The film was called 'The Key' it was a very old black and white movie with Sophia Loren in it. It wasn't a particularly sort of female sexy film, it was actually a jolly good story I thought, it was quite an early one, probably made in the fifties I would think. I remember that one, and we had Shell had contributed quite a lot of films about car race meetings and we had the French Mille Miglia I remember and we used to play it backwards just for fun.

[00.51.07] Jaap: Mille Miglia ?

John: The Mille Miglia is a French car race, not sure what it means. Little bit like Le Mans. The Le Mans race and so we used to play that backwards but they were just silly things. When we had the film on Saturday night I've always been a reasonable illustrator, and I used to make these little tiny slides and we used to put adverts, you know in the cinema in your country do you have advertisements on the cinema before the actual film, well I used to make up these advertisements which we showed in the interval in the film - oh yeah, there had to be an interval because I had to go and do the radio skeds and so about five minutes to ten, the film would stop and there would be an interval while Jack went and sent off - the Metman had to do his reading and I had to go off and send my radio stuff. On Saturday nights we kept it very short.

I use to work an operator in Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands and there was this kind of understanding that Saturday nights everything was kept very short. We only sent the absolute essentials there were no business telegrams, no private telegrams just the weather information and anything that was really urgent. So there was this interval and in the interval we used to show these adverts, silly things really, people would advertise fourteen pairs of unused underpants and things like this.

On one occasion we mislaid one of our tractors we found it again, it just got drifted over and we couldn't find it for a couple of days and we had this advert saying a reward is offered for the return of this tractor and so on, things like that. We used to celebrate peoples birthdays. We would wait until two or three people had had a birthday all close together, then we'd have a birthday party for Jim and Fred and Harry all at once. The cook would make a cake and decorate it, I with another guy we'd make invitation cards, invite everybody to this thing. Occasionally people would delve into the bottom their suitcases and pull out a jacket and a tie, special occasion.

[00.53.49] Jaap: What did you do on Sundays?

John: Just another day I'm afraid.

[00.53.54] Jaap: Did you go to church?

John: Hardly, hardly, not really it's one big church really, I certainly am not a terribly religious man I mean I'm a church goer I'm a Christian and I'm a believer but I'm not a regular church goer, used to sing in a choir. Used to sing in a church choir.

One of the things I scribbled down here in actual fact is there is a positive religious aura if you like, it sounds a little bit silly not silly but it sounds a little bit over the top to say you can feel a little bit closer to god in a place like that but I think you can and I think for me anyway and other people I've talked to have said this, that people who don't often say their prayers found themselves saying their prayers occasionally down there.

You find yourself in a nasty situation of bad weather or whatever, and a little prayer seemed to help. So there was that slight aspect, not everybody would agree with this not everybody would probably want to talk about it. I certainly felt it a little bit.

The majority of people who go on these things, they certainly were in my day anyway, they were ... they weren't rough diamonds that's the wrong word but they were characters, y'know what I mean they were ... the mere fact that you, A) volunteer, I mean it's all a voluntary thing, nobody has to go. The mere fact that you have volunteered to do something like that means that you march to a different tune to the majority of people.

I mean people used to say to me, 'Why on earth do you want to go and cut yourself off from the rest of the world by going to the Antarctic'. I used to very facetiously say 'If you need to ask the question, you would never really understand the answer'.

Now I know that was a bit facetious but if people cannot understand why fellas go down there, then they have no understanding of why when it's explained to them they wouldn't understand. There's that kind of aspect.

It does have a kind of .... awe inspiring - see one of Scott's famous words and I think it's very often mis-interpreted by people.

When Robert Falcon Scott, who was not my hero by the way he was a bit of a fool in retrospect and too much of the British naval officer sort of type. Adamson went, not Adamson, Amundsen rather sailed to the pole there and back no problems, ate his dogs. British would never eat their dogs.

But anyway another story. When Scott got to the pole his famous words that were in his diary he said 'God this is an awful place'. Now the word awful in the English language tends nowadays to mean something uragh, not nice you know it's an awful meal or it's an awful day it's pouring with rain and it's cold. Awful means something not nice. I don't think Scott meant it in that sense because awful is also connected with awe-inspiring in other words it's an awe-ful place, I don't know if I'm right about that I've never seen anybody else write it down but I actually think that Scott was saying 'This is an awe-inspiring place', not 'It's a terrible place'. I could be wrong who is to know [laughs].

[00.57.35] Jaap: *unintelligible*

John: I just thought perhaps I might find the actual quotation and you'd see what I was saying. He said 'We found the marks of dogs, many dogs' ..... and it's all in the same thing. I read the other day where some Norwegian expedition is planning to dig down and find Amundsen's old tent, seems have you heard that? Seems quite incredible doesn't it? They would be very clever to pinpoint the spot I would think to start with but probably with satellite navigation systems and so on they could probably do that. Wonder how far down it is. No I can't find it. I thought it was more likely to be in a book written by someone else about Scott, rather than by Scott himself. But I'll find it for you afterwards of you like. I don't know what else I'd said on here .... have you got anything specific you want to ask or shall I just carry on

[00.59.02] Jaap: ~~~~ about awe-inspiring place but you said that Scott is not your hero?

John: Not particularly, I mean before I went to the Antarctic I'd always associated - if anybody mentioned the Antarctic we automatically thought of Captain Scott.

I think lots of people still do, but in fact in retrospect it's very important that one understands it in retrospect you can see that in fact that Scott's expedition and his death was one could say almost not necessary.

What happened was a tragedy was turned into a glorious tragedy in England in Edwardian times in England, to have died for your country in such glorious circumstances made men heroes, and it got into the literature and so on - I mean I'm not knocking the system at all. He has been knocked back, I don't know if you've read that but that is a remarkable book.

Huntford, he's also written a book on Shackleton but Ronald Huntford's book on Scott and Amundsen, and years before that, Gordon Hayes had written this one, 'An analysis of Scott's Expedition'. Again as I keep repeating in retrospect there was quite a lot of information on food values in those days, what food, I mean for example Scott's party was almost definitely suffering from scurvy before they reached the pole because their diet had been wrong.

We know now that it was wrong and people have said that there is no real reason for him to have - he could have improved his diet is what they are saying is that there was sufficient although vitamin content of food was very rudimentary at the time there was some knowledge of it and that a total lack of fresh food was definitely a bad thing.

Amundsen got it right and he did it the week before, so looking back Scott has been criticized in quite a number of areas because of this slightly dogmatic naval discipline attitude to things and the English attitude to things.

[01.01.44] Jaap: Yesterday I spoke to somebody who went to Deception Island in 1946. He told me that he had at that time suffered some preliminary symptoms of scurvy.

John: Yes, yes.

[01.01.46] Jaap: For which there was no need because they had vitamin pills.?

John: That's right, we had - wasn't Ralph Lenton was it?

[01.01.47] Jaap: No.

John: What was his name?

[01.01.48] Jaap: James Andrews.

John: Don't know the name. Was he in the navy - I'm sorry we shouldn't be doing this really, was he with FIDS or was he with the navy.

[01.02.23] Jaap: With FIDS I think?

John: It was very early days wasn't it. Bingham was around at the same time if I remember rightly, yeah. Yes, we had lots of vitamin C tablets and sometimes we took them and oddly enough if I feel under the weather now, if I get cold symptoms I - and Fran's the same in fact she took some this morning as a matter of fact, we give ourselves a massive dose of Vitamin

C and it seems to take off the cold symptoms it's quite remarkable I still do it, keep a bottle a tub of Vitamin C powder.

It's one of the most important vitamins really. We had - although the food was as I say a lot of it was largely dried we did have vitamin tablets and vitamin supplements and although they weren't around in Scott's day certainly if he had supplemented his diet with perhaps more fresh meat,

I mean I know they ate the ponies at one stage, but they didn't have a lot of ponies and that was very very early on in the journey the ponies didn't go very far with them whereas Amundsen had actually programmed his journey to include having dogs all the way and the physical effort that Scott and his four companions in pulling their sledges on the wrong diet, was they were literally heading for disaster before they even reached the pole. Looking back on it it's unfair to criticize at the time.

Oddly enough right at this very moment though I think he has arrived now there's a young chap who funnily enough lives not far from here, Ranulph Fiennes, who is at the pole now he and another chap have man-hauled their sledges - have you read about this in the papers? He - it was in our local newspaper as a matter of fact, he was expected to arrive in fact he was planning to arrive on the 14th January which if I remember rightly was when Scott arrived. but he found the pole very different now, someone described it to me the other day the pole now as being an American colony. Because there is of course a huge American base there.

My Antarctic hero if I do have one, is actually Shackleton. When I went to the Antarctic the first time I hadn't been a great scholar of Antarctic before I went. I knew about Scott's Expedition and I probably knew about Shackleton possibly, I knew where the Antarctic was, I knew it didn't have Eskimo's and didn't have any polar bears.

I repeatedly get asked this when I came back and gave lectures, people would say, 'Is it true what they say about the Eskimo's, do they lend you their wives?' I say 'Well I've no idea because there aren't any Eskimo's in the Antarctic and then they'll say 'Did you see any polar bears and I used to say 'No I'm sorry I didn't see any polar bears'.

What irritates me - in fact I had a Christmas card off an old friend of mine who's an ex Antarctic friend - we are still in contact, he sent me this Christmas card and it had an iceberg in the front and it had polar bears and penguins on it and he just put a big exclamation mark on it, because people still get it wrong.

But, I've forgotten what I was saying now, drifted off on Christmas cards, Shackleton.

When I went to the Antarctic the first time and was at Deception, it was then that I started to read the original Antarctic books in fact several of those on that shelf the second shelf, are pretty typical of what each base would have as a library. It was one of the things that Fids had always done is to along with all the saucy novels and the paperbacks and the Nevil Shutes and so on would be a slightly more literate library which had various classical pieces of work in it including an Antarctic library.

So I started to read then the original Antarctic books and got really interested as you can see from my library there. I began to realise that Shackleton had been a slightly misaligned man. He'd always been on the shadow of Scott, he'd always been number two if you like in most people's estimation.

Are you familiar with the Shackleton story?



When you realise the kind of guy he was and the expeditions he had been on against a lot of difficulties, never lost a man as they say, brought them all back home safely only to have a lot of them killed in the Great War which was sad.

Shackleton, if I do have an Antarctic hero then as I say Shackleton would be the one. Although again if there people who are pro Scott and anti Shackleton who would say that Shackleton made a lot of mistakes that he should never have got his ship crushed on the Weddel Sea, he should never have gone onto the ice that far and so on.

But then, having myself, half a century later been in the Weddell Sea in a steel ship and we were held in the ice for nearly a week it's very easy to make that mistake even with all the modern navigation equipment and whatever.

We didn't get crushed obviously but we were stuck and could have been stuck for a long time you're very much reliant upon which way the wind is blowing and whether the ice moves out and so on.

But that's quite an experience to find yourself a couple of hundred people in a metal box with just acres of ice in every direction and unable to move. You really begin to feel that - us little puny men are not really in charge on this planet. There are other forces that are much stronger than we are. There is absolutely bugger-all we could have done in that situation, if the ice had chosen to stay where it was and get thicker and so on, the chances of getting any form of rescue operation out there would have been pretty remote, probably better now but not much so if the ice is that thick the chance of getting another ship into it almost as remote. Britain doesn't own an icebreaker by the way, never has. I think the nearest icebreaker at that particular time looking back on it, was somewhere round in the Ross Sea one of the American icebreakers in the Ross Sea somewhere.

There were no airplanes that could have reached us, I mean I'm dramatising a little bit but it is a situation that can happen, could still happen.

Greenpeace lost a ship a couple of years ago down there didn't they? They got ~~~~.

[01.09.35] Jaap: You also have a book of ~~~~ here ?

John: Yes. I've collected one or two Arctic books as well I've only been to the Norwegian Arctic.

[01.09.46] Jaap: ~~~ is not an Arctic book, it's an Antarctic book ?

John: That one, I beg your pardon, yes he went both ways. This is an Arctic expedition he actually went out, I think it was Greenland and he went and isolated himself in an ice cap station for several months I forget what it was, three or four months. Oh beg your pardon, I'm totally confused there is a mention here, My stay at latitude eighty degrees eight minutes south, so it was in the south I do beg your pardon, it was from the Little America base wasn't it ? Yes that's right but he did spend time in the north as well but you are absolutely right. Yeah I've got several books on Shackleton, that one is Margery and James Fishers and then this one and I've got his two-volume expedition book. That's a rather interesting one, it's a fairly modern one, Scott's Men.

It's rather along the lines that you're talking about now, it's the ordinary men if you like who were with Scott who recounted their activities.

I must confess, I don't think I've actually read all of these but I've dipped into them over the years. I'm familiar with what's in most of them and I still buy them if I see them appearing in - and people buy them me for Christmas. I still get people buy me books as Christmas

presents. There you are, that was a Christmas present this last Christmas I think, by Richard Laws.

Next to it a book on Spanish design and architecture you see it's amazing how things - those are mostly Fran's books in there, I have a room upstairs which I use as an office and all my books are up there and they are nearly all furniture books of course [laughs], or books on furniture.

[01.12.19] Jaap: What struck me when I heard you on the phone was that you went back after some time to dig deeper, is that ~~~ ?

John: Yes, yes.

[01.12.33] Jaap: And when I asked you about if there were any events that were standing out you then said well no. It seems like more sort of grey. ?

John: What, that stood out in the second trip ?

[01.12.45] Jaap: I asked if yeah there were events that stood out like highlights, and you said no it was kind of sort of grey ?

John: Hmm, I don't remember saying that - it sounds as though I'm lowering my tone a bit somewhere by saying it was grey, do you mean when I went back the second time?

[01.13.02] Jaap: Yes ?

John: I think when you asked me it's difficult like that - I was only saying to Fran this morning as a matter of fact, there was so much of it - and I mentioned it to you when we started, there's so much of it that was - became a part of your life down there and the whole thing became, for me the whole thing became a pretty wonderful experience that it's difficult to find highlights in it all it was a kind of high all the way along. It wasn't that kind of thing it was up there and stayed there kind of thing. There may have been the odd little peak - you know what I'm saying graphically what I'm doing by saying this that the whole thing -

[01.13.51] Jaap: ~~ worry about?

John: The mere fact that I was back there again was a terrific high for me to actually be back, I mean just going to Southampton which isn't far from here now, just going to Southampton and getting on the ship that was taking the expedition down.

Actually being among a group of young men who were going for the first time and I think there were two or three of us on board who had been before.

It sounds terribly big headed but that puts you in a rather special position with all these guys who were maybe the same age or a little bit younger and they looked upon us who had been before as being sort of something a bit special, so immediately you sort of go up a rung on the ladder. You realise that you have done something special by having been once before.

Specially in their eyes anyway and everybody is eager for knowledge what's it going to be like, and is it really cold and all this kind of thing. On the way to Halley Bay it was rather nice because I was able to visit the two islands I'd spent time on before. We went to Deception Island and we went to Signy Island and we went to South Georgia.

I'd been to all these places before and we went to Montevideo in South America, and Punta Arenas and I was able to visit all these places again five years later as it were.

Not having consciously thought when I came home the first time that I would ever go back again - when I came home from the first trip I didn't at that time consciously think I want to go back, it was a gradual thing, it came on it came to me gradually that I wanted to go back.

So here I was five years later, four years later actually going back, visiting the places I had been to before, going on Deception Island and it's still occupied by the British then and seeing the place again.

Going to Signy, arriving at Halley Bay, now arriving at Halley Bay I can remember that more vividly because there was just this expanse of white ice, this ice cliff that seemed to stretch for ever and it is the end of the Filchner Ice Shelf if I remember rightly. It's Coats Land anyway.

That was quite dramatic and there were these little tiny figures on the top sort of waving to us and we eventually docked and started unloading ship. Then the whole thing to be a member of a bigger expedition was both very different there had only been six of us before, to be a member of a bigger expedition which had a bigger programme of sledging and scientific work and so on, the whole thing made me I know it made other people because they said it. It makes you feel an essential part, a very important and an essential part of something that's pretty big and important and essential.

Looking back now and saying it cold it sounds a little bit big-headed in a way but I don't know - it's better than being a faceless commuter going to an office in London or wherever in Manchester every day.

That you are doing a job which is pretty different than what a lot of other people do and you are all experts in inverted commas, at whatever you're there for because otherwise you wouldn't be there.

They don't take anybody, you've got to be able to do the job and you are on your own there's no sort of saying I've got a problem can you send a mechanic in to mend it or whatever, your there.

Even the guys doing the research work - I remember one chap who actually helped me with the radio a few times because I wasn't the best of radio mechanics, I'm OK but I'm not the best, and a chap called Stuart Marsden who was from Sheffield University. He was doing some research on interestingly the ionosphere and they were doing studies on the ozone layer. I'm not sure of the details but it was around that time that they started suspecting that there was this hole in the ozone that we all know about now and he had some instruments it was a radar system really.

He was tracking the levels and the density of the ozone layer. But Stuart was an astrophysicist and an excellent electronics mechanic as well, he had those two combinations.

So there was always this - for me again and other people have said the same, there's this feeling that you're an important cog in a pretty important piece of machinery.

That in itself gives people a high, you get that feeling all the time. There are a group of us now have been to the Antarctic, we'd probably all be talking about football or women or something, we wouldn't be talking about what we were saying, you accept it as part of your job for that particular time for a year or two years or whatever it's going to be.

So many people including me - I came back from my second trip and I'd sorted me head out a bit by that time and decided what I wanted to do and I went off and trained as a school teacher.

But I think it's a kind of - someone was saying a few years ago we were talking similar lines about this and saying that he suddenly said, he was a man about my age and I'm 60 in a few months time. He was saying that - he was a lecturer at Southampton University and he said

that looking back, he seemed to have crowded all of his life into the first quarter of his life, in other words by the time he was 28, he'd been in Kenya, he'd been in Australia, he'd climbed Mt Kenya, and he'd been in several other places in Africa and then at 27 or 28 he'd come back to England and become a lecturer at Southampton University, and hadn't done a thing since then.

So I think again to some extent a lot of people who perhaps go to the Antarctic, they crowd this couple or three or four or five whatever years it is of incredible adventure, can't think of a better word, and then settle down and as I have done now, I've just become for the last thirty years I've done a lot of things, but I haven't done anything as exciting as going back to the Antarctic again.

It's just that little bit special, you know if people say oh I have spent two years in Kenya it doesn't have the same ring about it as somebody says I've spent two years in the Antarctic. The Antarctic in many people's minds is still a very remote place. It isn't half as remote as it used to be, good heavens, I hear of people getting there in week, fly to New Zealand or wherever and two days later they are at the South Pole, less than a week.

Whereas, when we went it was all by sea and you arrive in the Antarctic very gradually, it's not a sudden change. I think something like an average of about 6 weeks was our journey time, and that in itself brings you slowly to or slowly away from this pretty incredible place.

[01.22.04] Jaap: Six weeks ?

John: The sea journey yes, well probably about three and a half weeks to Montevideo and then a week out to the Falkland Islands where we used to get all our equipment in those days and you'd be another week in the Falklands and then a week ten days to the actual base, depending on how far you were going of course.

I actually spent some time in the Falklands as well on the way back. What may be of interest and I hate to mention it because our royal family keep getting a lot of stick in the press at the moment, but whilst I was at Deception one of the highlights at Deception to some extent was that at the end of the year having spent the winter there, in the spring, summer actually, of what would it be 1956/7, we got a visit from Prince Philip as he was then, the Duke of Edinburgh as he is now, Queen's husband, and he was on a - he'd been to - the Commonwealth Games were held in Australia that year and he'd been to the Games in the Royal Yacht *Brittania* and he came back via these northern Antarctic bases - visited two of the bases and so we got a visit from the royal yacht *Brittania* and that was a sort of highlight.

About a week before it was due we had a naval officer arrive who knew all the protocol that we sort of rough guys didn't know and brought a royal standard with him and I actually talked to the radio operator on the royal yacht *Brittania* when they were coming in.

Prince Philip came ashore with a bevy of men, people, and we all had a meal together and a few drinks together. Because as the ships come back they bring booze in for you, it's always one of the things you look forward to, most people do anyway, I'm not a great drinker but it was nice to have a ice can of beer. Then we all went out and had a meal and a film I remember on board the royal yacht *Brittania* and that was a kind of a highlight, that was something a bit nice in a way.

I can even remember the film that we saw it was an old American musical called *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*. The film is about seven brothers who lived in a hut up in the mountains and they get themselves seven young women who come out and marry them and

it's all song and dance. But apparently the film was chosen because they said the six of us in this island reminded them rather of these seven guys and they could imagine seven women well six women anyway coming out and settling in with us. That was part of that scenario.

It's difficult to - high spots at Halley Bay? I suppose as I said earlier it's a very routine kind of thing with interesting bits going on - I was never bored, I've got to tell you that it's a sort of situation where people would say 'Do you ever get bored down there', and the answer quite frankly is no.

You sometimes get a kind of boredom or a sort of lethargy which occasionally probably people admitted it was a touch of homesickness but I don't think anybody ever admits to that but it goes away very soon. People don't get morose and sit around, you're busy all the time. There's too much going on to get bored. I never get bored here though, that's just the point.

[01.25.56] Jaap: Were there letters from home ?

John: We didn't get any actual letters, because once the last ship goes there's no contact at all then but you can keep in touch with home by sending telegrams through the wireless operator, at normal telegram rates which were a bit expensive.

There was a system arranged where we could get what we called airletters. Once a month, each man was allowed a hundred words in and a hundred words out, in other words people in England could send a hundred words and he could send a hundred words or you could send two letters of fifty words each.

So you became very clever at writing cryptic messages and leaving out the 'and's and the 'to's' and the 'buts' kind of thing and writing a kind of ....

(dog interrupts momentarily), 'oh your not to come up here, that's your settee out there go on, you're a good dog ...'

[01.26.58] Jaap: You have an example ?

John: Yes, I'll go and find one in a minute. In fact I found my diary that I'd kept when I was in the Antarctic. And interleaved in the diary are some of the airletters that I received and they are a little bit poignant because the lady I live with now not my wife.

I left my wife six years ago when I came down here but the letters that I got from the Antarctic were from her, so it's a little bit poignant reading them.

We were very much in love at the time but - well we are we are still friends, we are good friends but we are not married anymore.

I'll go and find those because they might be of interest to you. I had to take - the wireless operators job and that could be of interest - the wireless operators job was - part of the job anyway was to send and receive all these airletters. Now that's an interesting thing really because, for a start it was hard work, twenty one men meant 2100 words and everyone went a little bit over the top so I was getting something like about 2500 words or something in these airletters. Radio conditions were often very poor and what we did to solve it.

I'm sure they have much better systems now - in those days we had a machine called the Creed machine which you typed like an ordinary typewriter. Pretty ancient equipment this that I'm describing now. You type like a typewriter and it made a punched tape and you could then feed that punched tape into a machine that sent Morse, and because it was a mechanical device you could crank up the speed and send at a 100 words a minute.

Now nobody can take Morse at 100 words a minute it's too fast, 20 to 25 words is about average most taking speed. Some clever people can at slightly more than 25, my speed was

just over 20 so what we used to do, we used to use an ordinary reel to reel tape recorder and we used to send these airletters at 75 words a minute on the Creed machine because you can pick your speed from 1 word a minute to 100 words a minute.

We used to send at about 70 words a minute on the Creed machine, record them on the reel to reel tape and then reduce the speed which in those - I don't know if they still work the same but you could reduce it by thirds, you could go down to a third of the speed so you've got about 22 words a minute.

We used to send all these airletters and I used to have them on a tape and then I would sit there with earphones on and transcribe them into words. What it meant, was that everybody else on the base, I'd read their letters [laughs] and I was the only one who got private mail because nobody read mine. What they used to make me do was pin mine on the notice board in the living room so that they could read mine as well. That was part of the fun really.

The wireless operator was a slightly privileged person in a way because he knew all the news, I had to sign the official Secrets Act before I went which I had already signed in the navy anyway, because obviously you are privy to a lot of private stuff and you don't go blabbing it about obviously. I mean I never discussed other peoples letters with other people.

They were private to them but they knew I knew as it were, and that was useful in a way.

I would very often get guys who used to get - are you familiar with the expression getting a 'Dear John ...'?

It's an American expression, it means when a girlfriend writes you a letter and says she is finished with you and it's called a 'Dear John', don't ask me why. Some of the guys would get "Dear Johns" from girlfriends that they had left back in England and that was always a bad time. Because you'd give a guy this letter where his girlfriend had said 'I'm sorry but I've found someone else' and this kind of thing you'd try and do that in a good time.

I would very often make some excuse and say to them 'If you call in the wireless cabin in about half an hour, I'll have an letter for you, and they'd say 'Oh great' you see, and they'd come in and you'd give them the letter on their own and say 'Read it before you leave here', and they can read it virtually in private that way. Whereas if they read it - usually you went up and you handed the airletters out when everybody was together, and I used to think it was better that some guy had got a 'Dear John' or a bit of bad news I mean we had a chap whose mother died whilst we were down there things like that. Although that was on a telegram, that was a slightly different thing.

But other people - it was always a point of fun, we had one guy who reckoned himself to be a bit of a character and he had four or five girlfriends he'd left behind. He used to get letters from all these girls and gradually they dropped him one by one. The first one of course I felt terrible about it, having to give old Bob this letter and that was it.

But he made a bit of a joke about it and then the second one I decided I would have a bit of fun with him and ... oh I'm sorry I'm going ahead with the story - he used to get these incredibly passionate letters to begin with and I used to go up with these and I used to pick up a pair of fire tongs and hand him this letter and say it's red hot this letter giving him this letter with the fire tongs but then eventually they dropped him and on one of the letters I actually edged the message part of it - I got some black ink and I edged the message part of it with black like a funeral letter kind of think and I edged it with black and I said I'm sorry Bob you've got another one and he took it in good part really.

Shall I go and bring this diary and show you .....

I found these - that slightly battered one is the one I kept - unfortunately they are not very complete, there are whole patches where they missed, where I've missed things I don't know

why. That was one that kept on the first trip which is not complete by any means. I noticed actually that it's got all the call signs and the frequencies in it that I used to - I couldn't possibly remember any of this but I'd written all the call signs and frequencies of all the bases. They were all those bases in the Antarctic when I went there the first time. Some of them were big ones and fully manned and some of them were small ones and only manned during the winter, sorry during the summer rather.

We all had this - that was me Deception Island Base B they all had letters and these are the radio call-signs ZHF22, Hope Bay was still there Stanley Met, Anvers, they've all disappeared I think now, a lot of them have disappeared.

Ships call-signs, *Shackleton*, *John Biscoe*, *HMS Protector* that was the navy ship I came back on the *Protector* after my first trip. I got transferred from Deception Island at the end of the summer because the wireless operator at Signy Island had oddly enough a slipped disc in his back and he'd had to be taken out to hospital.

*HMS Protector* took me from Deception Island to Signy Island to relieve him. One of the things that I hadn't mentioned is that in those days, Deception Island was occupied by Britain, Chile and Argentina and quite frankly, one of the reasons we were there was to make a political presence because Argentina and Chile claim the same slice of the Antarctic Continent that we did. We used to have to go over to the Argentinean base and to the Chilean base with things that were called protest notes and they were very elaborate bits of paper with the coat of arms at the top that said 'We the representatives of Her Majesty's Imperial Government object to your presence on British territory and we would give them one of these and they would give us a similar thing all written in Spanish with a big eagle at the top, presumably it said the same thing. Then we'd spend the day drinking their wine and they drank our whisky. We got on great with them, the Argentineans and the Chileans. But there was this political cold war all the time.

[01.35.53] Jaap: Did the officials know ?

John: Yes I suppose they did in a way and vice versa with the Chileans and Argentineans because I remember one of the Chilean commanders of a base disappeared when the ships came back he was taken off the base very quickly, I think he'd been fraternising with the British too much.

[01.36.20] Jaap: Did you also notice that the officials I mean the British officials notice that you were .... ?

John: Yes they were aware of it I think. I think it had been going on for quite a few years, that there was this exchange that was not - whilst it was frowned upon there's not a lot they could do about it. We were told to keep - I mean to some extent it was politic from our point of view to keep good relations with us. We were six civilians, think we had one 303 rifle that we used to use for sealing for shooting seals and the Argentineans were naval personnel and there were about twenty of them and they were presumably armed to the teeth, and the Chileans were Chilean Air Force personnel oddly enough. The Chilean base commander was a high ranking officer and they used to walk around with a pistol a revolver in a holster. So it was better that we keep good relations with them [laughs].

These are the Chilean ships that I used to work on the radio. I talked to them by radio quite a lot. In a way, I wasn't quite as cut off as the other fellows because I had contact by the radio and I used to do a lot of work on the amateur radio as well.

Are you familiar with radio ham? There's an organisation called Amateur Radio and it's international it's worldwide, and people set up little radio cabins were allocated a frequency, they were all the amateur call-signs (perusal of diary and papers). I was VP8BW. You get them all over the world are you not familiar, this is a whole new world for you. The Americans are very keen on it and you talk to each other on the radio and then you send each other cards to say that you've had a conversation. I had cards - I just kept a few, Hawaii, Czechoslovakia, Liverpool, another English one, Canada, Portuguese West Africa, and you just keep in contact by radio. A lot of people build their own radio sets and just keep in contact. That was my card that I made, I drew it and photographed it and that's Deception Island by the way you've probably seen photographs of it you'll recognise it. It's just a kind of fraternity of radio operators that just talk to each other.

[01.39.10] Jaap: Where are these cards sent ?

John: There's a bureau, there's actually a thing called the Radio Society of Great Britain and having contacted somebody you send a card to them and then they have a distribution organisation it's national - you must have it in Holland - I haven't got any cards from Holland. Amateur radio, and it's usually abbreviated to ham radio. French transmitting station. People collect rare cards if you see what I mean, rare stations are collectible and of course being in the Antarctic was a very rare station and I was very collectible. That was one way of keeping in touch. Actually, you'd get cards addressed to - that's all you need as an address look, Radio VP8BW Port Stanley, Falklands and it would get delivered. I used to get letters addressed to Jack, radio operator, the Antarctic and things like that. It was absolutely incredible.

There you are look, VP8BW Signy Island, Antarctica.

Service by the QSL - I forget what it means, Delta Radio Club and it's been sent on by them obviously. One in Scotland there, South Africa, Poland, Russia USSR or whatever it's called now.

[01.40.51] Jaap: ~~ still being able to receive ~~ ?

John: Yes, during good conditions it was quite incredible, on short wave you can - I mean I sometimes listen to short wave radio now - I don't have a transmitter I'm not even licensed to do it in England I haven't got a license in England. I would have G license in England but I've never applied for one here. Something I'm saving for me old age, when I just want to sit around and you don't have to keep watching that thing [laughs].

That was the old diary and it goes back quite a way that one that was 1955 to 57 but then this one was the one I kept at Halley Bay and this is not fully up to date but interleaved I came across one or two of these airletters - [perusing papers], and this is my writing obviously but it was sent by - it's quite a long one this and this is how I would have written it down so it's probably got the odd spelling mistake in it. That's the kind of thing you would get, there are 150 words in this. I've said we used to go over the top.

Oh to be in England is a line from somebody's poem.

Commas unfortunately were always counted as words and they were spelt out, and full stops as well. Steep was a dog we had. So that was nice. All I want is you comma, that was nice at the time. Our Sprite and a mortar walk on that. We had a car which was an Austin Healy Sprite. Was having a bad time there - lots of kisses on that one as well.

Seeing old pals from school Daves H and F I don't know who that would be. Wanted to know how you were, told them, darling miss you love you.



So it was all a bit nostalgic reading those again last night. I'm very happy now with the lady I've got. There's another one - oh must have been telling someone about the hydroponics, 'Great news re the hydroponics glad I've success with the peas, delicious I bet that progress hope the tomatoes - it's silly talking about gardening in the Antarctic but I did have this thing.

These were the kind of message forms, it's a standard naval message form - revised October 1935 - I like that, and I would write these out in longhand or type them for the guys. QSL means received that's right, I remember what it was. 3rd of the twelfth, that would have been 3rd of December nineteen - never bothered with... It was sent on November 8th and I got it on the 3rd December. The thing was, Marion who was my wife then would have written that letter on a air-mail form, it would have been sent to Port Stanley, and the girl in the office would have opened it, opened all the letters she would have read it obviously, it was then passed on to a wireless operator. It was marked up for which base it was going to it was then passed on to a wireless operator he would read it, transmitted in morse and I would receive it, I would read it then I'd hand it on to the guy who was going to get it so it wasn't private by any means because three people had read it on the way. It was the nearest we got to mail and that happened once a month.

Diary:

"10th August: Someone saw the sun today, just for a few brief moments through the clouds, because it was total darkness in the summer - in the winter which is the English summer. By the time I got up it had gone, see I told you I wasn't an early riser. Tomorrow is the day it should be back according to nautical almanac. So the long polar night is over. All the things I intended to do during the winter and only half of them done"

That's typical,

"Radio conditions for Z8, that was Port Stanley, had snag on the main receiver, rectify valve, down on the stabiliser, neon sticking, valve chain - erected a drip catcher over the" remember earlier on I said it used to rain in,

"over the bottom hut, so that the boarding I put up there won't freeze over.

Check my transmitter - record?"

Oh transistor tape recorder yes I had a small tape recorder;

"fitted new batteries"

That's why I was interested in yours.

"another anemone shoot showing" I was growing anemones at the time,

"finished off Comets and making ready for tomorrow"

Oh yeah that might interest you, we published a little book while we were down there called the Halley Comet, here it is.

Halley Bay was named after Halley the astronomer who had discovered a comet, and so we called this publication the Halley Comet. I did the lettering and drew up this business, 1962, and then we photographed it and this was just done on a typewriter and Charlie Spaans who was a South African with us, he did the drawings of the cartoons and everybody contributed something, various little stories;

[01.47.03] Jaap: You know who will hear about this ?

John: You know who will hear about this, stealing the penguin eggs?

[01.47.19] Jaap: Clairvoyant?

John: Yeah I'm not sure what that one is there;

Reading from the Halley Comet;

"this is Mr Java he says he's from the Times he wants to see Mr Jarbrown".  
That's actually a play on words because the base leader was Jarman, and the deputy base leader was Brown, Dr Brown. He was the Doctor. I keep in touch with Dr Brown, he's down at Wareham.

All contributed something slightly different. That's going back a long way.

"I thought you'd packed the bloody primus ??"

Obviously two men inside the tent arguing, typical thing. We all had our portraits taken to go in there, there we are, that was the base members we stuck it on a board and I did all the lettering at bottom - it actually says what we were but you can hardly read it at the bottom. That's me stuck up there, three - seven yes twenty-one that's right.

[01.48.22] Jaap: Where were these photos made?

John: These were taken on the base in fact Stuart he was also a very good photographer. He was the guy I told you about he was an astrophysicist and an electronics man. He draped a bit of curtain material and we fixed up some photographic lights and he took them all as portraits. He was rather good.

These were the type of shirt we were issued with - this is all issue stuff by the way, we were issued with these thick check shirts and these Norwegian type sweaters. I've still got one of mine I still wear it.

This is going back a long way. ( Perusing the base member photos)

He's still a prominent member of FIDS, his name is Paul Whiteman. He's actually in charge of the British Antarctic Survey aerial activities. He was an aero mechanic.

He's dead now, [pointing to another photo in Halley Comet], he went back and went down a crevasse a few years later.

I keep in touch with him, Frank Bent and I see him occasionally.

He was the base leader, that's Dr Brown is there, he was quite older than the rest of us as you can probably tell. He was in his thirties, I was about twenty-eight on that occasion and that guy who was actually in the air force and he'd been sort of seconded. He was about my age as well but we were the three eldest.

[01.50.12] Jaap: Some look quite young ?

John: Yes some of them, twenties yeah, he was one of the cooks, he was the other cook, Rod. I think Mike was about our age as well, Mike Jarman.  
So that was an interesting little publication.

[01.50.34] Jaap: Where was it made ?

John: It was actually made on the base. Most of my photographs were slides. I'd learned bookbinding at school and I bound them all up as you can see it's printed on whatever paper we had at the time, it's not even all the same paper.

[01.50.59] Jaap: What kind of machine did you have ?

John: For typing ? Just an ordinary typewriter.

[01.51.04] Jaap: But for reproduction ?

John: Ah well what we did you see in fact you will see some of those are in black and some of them are in blue - they are all in black in mine maybe I was fortunate. No I see some are in blue and we just use carbon papers. We used a typewriter with about four carbons in so we had to type it maybe six times, to get twenty four copies, because we all had a copy each and we kept one on the base and sent one off to the London office and so on. So it was a laboriously done job. With a PC and a photocopy machine now, it would make life a lot easier. It was properly bound and we used carpet tape to bind the edges, this was tape that was supplied for edging carpets, I don't know why but we just had it.

[01.52.12] Jaap: What is in it, there is some poems, ?

John: Yes, a bit of poetry in it, some of it is .... see there's an advert in that look, but this is the kind of thing, "one vintage 1932 chain-driven Ionosond, right hand drive. An Ionosond was the machine that they used for measuring the ionosphere, the ozone layer.

"Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit by our fruit shall we be known the rest is up to you chaps" that's today's ~ message, from a copy of the 1962 *Halley Comet*.

People contributed little articles, a lot of it is not understandable because it was kind of in things down there, do you know what I mean, it was topical down there and some of it some of the language in it in fact is what was topical down there because a kind of language develops, that is only understood by people down there. One or two bits were serious there's somebody .....

[01.53.31] Jaap: Can you give me an example ?

John: "Fids aint what they used to be";  
that's a poem that somebody made up to the tune of there's a song called 'things', da da da da..  
I can't remember now, "Fids aint what they used to be".

Example of what, sorry?

[01.53.31] Jaap: Of the idiosyncratic .... ?

[perusing a copy of *Halley Comet*]

John: Alright, yeh, let me find - that's a serious one, that's about the advance party of the Commonwealth Institute, Commonwealth Expedition rather; 'just find something .....

The Halley Surprise this is called, I don't know who wrote this, I'll find you one that I wrote in a minute.

"The hard midwinter stared down from jet June sky onto Charlie Spaans Bell-tower, at the eastern end of Ken's Cathedral"

Now Charlie Spans Bell-tower was a tower that they built for the Met instruments to go on, and Charley Spans had been the guy who built it.

"to the eastern end of Ken's Cathedral ..."

Kens Cathedral was the hut that we built to house the generator because Ken was the generator mechanic, ok?

"In the tower, the Ringos were assembling for their weekly practise and the captain of the Ringos, the venerable Shep",

that's the name of one of our dogs,

"was counting up his team. McNabb Kelly, Boo Boo Larsen, wer bees orpto, I told them to look up Cambridge for tonight",

but this all in Devonshire dialect,

"thou can't trust the younguns nowadays dinno"

These are all dogs, in fact what he's done, he's used the dogs as a bell ringing team in a church tower which doesn't exist. Then he goes on about, it's a more serious article about Campanology which is the fancy word for bell ringing ...

[noise of turning pages]

There you are, there's a type of humour,

"I told you the bloody compass was wrong" [laughs]

Where was that bit that I just saw ....., yes, this a piece that's typically ..... this is visitors day, it's a spoof on having invited a lot of visitors to Halley Bay,

"It was a perfect day at Halley Bay. The sky was almost free of cloud. The sun was beating down and the local icebergs were refracted well above the horizon",

and it goes on a bit there.

"The first coach of visitors came into view over the horizon and as I parked the DB4GT between Paul's SAAB and the VW of Bob Lee",

Oh we used to talk cars a lot by the way. Cars were a topic of conversation.

[Johns dog moaning in the background - complaining about the talking ??]

"The chippies had done a really splendid job with the new car park. Gone were the days of ashes now replaced by shining tarmac. In the middle, in the centre of the square flew the Union Jack"

which was just pure fantasy really.

"The front entrance to the new living hut was certainly an improvement on last years as the five steps were now surmounted by four pillars, which supported a semicircular porch and housed the BAS coat of arms in neon lights"

It's all pure fantasy [laughs].

[01.56.57] Jaap: Rejection from 1965 from 1962 ?

John: Yes that right it's after we had gone you see, we were surmising on how the base would change and there would be cars and neon lights and so on. It was just as I say pure fantasy really.

"After smoko the base was open to inspection and various little parties set off in all directions. Over the intercom could be heard the strains of Beethoven's fifth symphony. While passing through the link piece, one could hear the strains of possibly Thornton but we never did find out who it was."

The link piece was where the toilets were by the way, that's what that is a reference to. Some of this is unreadable, I don't remember what half of it was all about myself actually. There was also a profile of each chap on the base ....

Ah there's a poem: my Husky Team;

"I met an ancient man who mused with Bunny to the pole,  
said I in all that land so hushed what most inspired your soul  
he looked at me with bleary eyes he scratched his hairy head  
you know explorers just can't lie so here's the dope he said."

It's a play on one of Jack London's poems I think.

Bunny was Fuchs. He's sir now isn't he, sir Fuchs, his nickname was Bunny.

What's his name? Sir Vivian Fuchs.

Somewhere there was a little profile of everybody. The letterings just gone off, I should really get it retyped I think because it .... I couldn't even remember what that was - twelve other people. Somebody wrote this little thing and you had to guess who they were. They were descriptions of twelve blokes that were with us on the base .... I don't know I'm not recognising any of them ..... no don't know who any of them are, not recognise any of them.

[01.59.52] Jaap: "Mr Marconi of the air" ?

John: "Mr Marconi of the air, great friend of Coldarks"

..... might have been me, it's the only reference to anything to do vaguely with radio isn't it. I don't remember what the reference is to Coldarks was there .....

"Recently procured the doorkey"

I know who that was, that was one of the cooks, because he actually had his twenty-first birthday whilst he was on the base..... This is the one that I wrote,

"The horticultural news from our gardening correspondent",  
and as I think I told you I was doing this experimental stuff with hydroponics .....

Here's bits of it, everybody had a little profile of themselves in it just to .....

[02.01.00] Jaap: ~~~ Halley Bay agricultural year show.

John: Yes, Where was that, that one ? that was pure fantasy you see.

"Halley Bay horticultural society's annual show yesterday, held this year in the lush splendour of the newly completed emperor emporium".

Just play on words.

"Pushing through the vast throng of twenty thousand who were attending the show on that day, we made our way to the exhibition hall where some of the finest Antarctic horticulturalists were exhibiting ....".

Oh yes,

"an almost overpowering perfume which upon enquiry was told came from a newly

introduced hybrid, *latrinum elsanvulgaris*".

That's a play on words because Elsan is the chemical toilets that we used to use.

"Mr vermiculite",

vermiculite is the material that you should grow the plants in but I was using volcanic ..... and I just made a play on words with latin words "alscostatinit" a new variety.

"A perfectly cylindrical measuring 3" in diameter by 6" high"

which is about the size of the tins that we had all of our food - oh I know what it was - Lusk. Andrew Lusk was the firm who packaged all the food for the exhibition and tinit is a tin obviously.

So Andrew Lusk was the firm that did all the tinning all the canning, because it was all specially done.

"Second and third prizes this year were both taken by Messrs Buttfoot of Halley", whoever they are,

"with the two splendid examples of early potato, Pom pompadour and strip non-scripta".

Well Pom, perhaps you don't remember was the original powdered potato. You mixed - you added in a packet and mixed it with water and it sort of made a potato paste and it was called Pom.

We also had dried potato strips, but you don't see them anymore but they were strips of potato dried and you soak them in water and then you could cook them and you got kind of mashed potato out of them, so that's what that is about.

[Turning diary pages]

[02.03.24] Jaap: I would like to go through the things that you wrote down.

John: Ok we'll do that, let me just whilst we're still talking on that let me just show you one or two photographs.

[John starts looking through photographs and describing the images].

(no images are included with the recording) ]

Most of my stuff was taken in colour, but these were some old black & white ones and I didn't really do black & white, a lot of these in fact were photographs that were given to me.

You know I said about filling the water tanks with snow, well that's what we were doing there in fact.

That's one of the entrances into the building, it's in a snow drift. We would go up the ladder and down into the top in there.

That was sledging.

Being 'attacked' by dogs here, that was how deep we had to dig down to get our food supplies sometimes, they were all marked on stakes.

That was my wireless cabin at Halley Bay with the two clocks, one was kitchen time and one was GMT because I work my radio to GMT but I ate according to kitchen time.

That in fact is - wasn't there but that's the entrance to the building and in the summer I built this little greenhouse on the back of it, and I grew tomatoes in there.

That was Halley Bay and that's just about aials and this was the bell tower I've just been mentioning with the met instruments on it.

That's a chimney from one of the fires or it may have been just a ventilator, they're not in any special order these.

That was when we started building the hut and we in fact put this wire mesh on the floor and then built the hut on that.

That was a beery night on the boat going out.

That's again one of those digging food boxes out, that's one of the dogs there.

Snow goggles on most of the time you see otherwise you can easily get snow-blindness.

This was when we went off and did a depot-laying trip and that's looking back toward the base, and I think there were three of these piles of food and we marked them with flags and so on.

That was actually me coming back out of a crevasse can you see the big hole there and this is the end of the sledge, we had lost one sledge down the crevasse. We were pulling two sleds with the tractor and a couple of us went back and had to cut the sledge away. Chopping up food for the dogs.

That's another crevasse, that way up, with a dog. These wheels by the way on the sledge is for measuring distance.

That's another crevasse, that's someone else's photograph that. Probably me standing there.

That was on the tractor journey, stopped for a brew of tea and the tractors are held on at the back here. There are several of those actually as I said they are not in any particular order.

That was sledging with the dogs again.

[02.06.31] Jaap: Did you make tea on the road ?

John: Well we used to have a meal in the tent in the morning and a meal in the tent in the evening. We used to stop round about lunchtime and I think as a matter of fact we have got a Thermos flask there. If you were organised you would fill Thermos flasks in the morning. If not you get the Primus out and brew tea at lunchtime and have a snack, biscuit or chocolate or something like that at lunchtime.

This was - I mean I've travelled with the tractors but this was the nicest with the dogs. I did some travelling with the dogs but not a lot.

That's down another hole in the snow.

That was taken in the north of England actually, that was in the Lake District a few years ago.

Another view of the wireless cabin.

This was this machine that sent the - this was the high speed Morse setup that I had, the typewriter and the tape recorder and this was the Creed machine with these reels on here.

That was the depot again that we laid, and you can see it there.

Another picture of me I think, with dogs , somebody else took.

And another one, that's a close-up on the same one really.

That's a good picture isn't it. A real good one that.

Somebody using a - that was what he was trying to do.

They're all the same people that were in those individual pictures but this was sort of a working day we were just outside on the - this was the roof of the hut actually before it had drifted over. He pressed the button too quick, I always thought it was worth keeping, that.

That was a picture I sent home to my wife when we were doing some climbing in South Georgia.

That you've seen, Tenzing Hill, you know, Tenzing was one of the Sherpas with Hillary.

I don't know what that was, identity certificate, oh yeh I was in Gibraltar in the Navy that was my identity card.

That was Deception Island with - and as you can see the snow just disappears almost in the Summer, almost completely.

That was also Deception Island in the winter, we had killed a seal. Two of the guys, John Smith and Jim Fellows.

That was me at Halley Bay mending the radio aerials.  
These are mostly penguins I think.

That's in the bar at Halley Bay on one of our - I think - we used to celebrate mid-winters day of course and in fact I still do here.

We had quite a party the other week, not this year, we didn't do it this year, last year we didn't so it but the year before we had a bit of a party here and celebrated mid-summers day and mid-winters day kind of thing, but that was a mid-winters day do. As I say people would get a clean shirt out - a guy there look wearing a jacket.

Penguin.

Shorthand on the back of that one, whatever that says. This is the kind of stupid thing we got up to. These four guys shaved their heads - silly really, pack of, suits of cards and this one had an arrow point on the top of his head, it all grew again you know, I mean you can do things like that.

That's another copy of that portrait thing.



Crevasses.

That's me in the wireless cabin.

That's me with a tractor.

That was the building when we were building it, quite big. Mesh on the floor and then wood and this metal framework then all clad with ....

That's me again, that was used in an article somewhere.

Wireless cabin.

Skiing somewhere.

Penguins.

That was the hut when it was finished and then it disappeared and this was a radar scanner that we had for scanning the weather balloons.

That was going down to the - we used to call that going down to the beach at Halley Bay.

That's actually where we used to unload the ship.

I think these are just odds and sods of various kinds now.....

That's not Halley Bay is it, [laughs]

[02.11.04] Jaap: No.

John: That's interesting in a way because the hut's down there, there's one of the chimneys coming up and there's a sledge there laden with snow which will be dropped down, we brought it in from somewhere and we'll drop it down into the melt-tank.

One of my tomato plants under a fluorescent tube, an Osram 40Watt tube.

More penguins.

That was the Uruguayan Navy in Montevideo.

That was a birthday cake we a Christmas cake we made for someone.

Don't know whose that was.

That was we celebrated the opening of the grouse shooting season, it being a traditional thing to do.

There's some more things growing.

Dogs on the food boxes.

Setting off a weather balloon.

As I say most of my stuff is on colour and it's more difficult to start looking at slides.  
You want some random pages out of here you say?  
[searching Diary pages .....]

[02.13.03] Jaap: There are some pages on how do you say, hardship ...?

John: There's no hardship [laughs]

It would be difficult actually to find - when was that, February, I'm looking for dates really I mean mostly during the winter as I say it was pretty well routine and we weren't going anywhere.

"October 11th: New sledging programme and I'm changed to a different journey, namely the depot laying trip in readiness to the Tottan's journey next year, which Fuchs has asked us to lay. I prefer to go on this trip rather than the hut journey which I consider to be rather a waste of time, I don't know why. We have to leave on the 16th that was five days after."

"October 12: Bring up petrol drums which we will be taking out with us for the petrol dump. Of course everything has to be dug out about 2 feet below the surface. Rest of fuel brought up from the dump and a start made on loading the sledges. Man-food and dog-food boxes brought over. We doctored ours, Rod and I who I will be sharing the tent with."

We had these boxes of food and when I say doctored them, we used to take out things we didn't like and put in things we did like.

"The food boxes contained 10 days rations for two men. We took out some items and substituted others"  
and this is interesting.

"I don't know how I'm going to manage to eat the hard-tack biscuits. Still I suppose I can always dunk them".

Dunking means dipping biscuits into tea and at the time, I have dentures and my bottom dentures were broken so I only had half a set of teeth, so I was going to have trouble.

"It began to blow today and by late afternoon we were working in 15knots and heavy drift and it was most unpleasant. In the evening preparing tents, checking equipment, etc.

"15th October: It's still blowing and now it's up to 30 knots and it's minus 35 degrees, ughhh!" - I've put there. That's pretty cold when it's 30 knots of wind and minus 35.

"Working in the genny shed, blowing up the tractor tyres, all 16 of them. This is a devil of a job trying to get pressure up to 75 pounds per square inch. Paul and Ken busy servicing the Muskegs changing the oil, etc. Quite like old times, to be lying on my back and working on a vehicle. In the evening tidied up the long wire aerial and made switching facilities in the radio cabin. It's still blowing hard and I reckon it will be still blowing tomorrow.

16th October: No early call it's still blowing, 30knots minus 26 degrees. So we went back to sleep.

Spent the day sending out airletters and completing getting ready for the journey. I think we are all pretty glad we didn't go today because everybody was worn out. As I write this it's almost midnight and the wind is down to 10 knots so all being well we should be away tomorrow.

17th October: Left base in the afternoon."

The next entry is the 30th October that's ~~~ 13 days later. No entries for 13 days.

"The date is now 30th October and arrived back at base late last night. We had a great day yesterday travelled ninety miles"

but the details are in a separate diary which runs from the 17th October to the 29th, and I can't find that unfortunately.

"It's good to be back at the base, had a wonderful meal, a fresh steak, nicely cooked and a lovely new baked bread"

See your thoughts are on food all the time.

"Had a beer, and turned in and had a good night's sleep. Been busy since lunchtime, took over the radio skeds again at noon. It's queer to be operating again. I feel as though I've been away from it for years".

I obviously didn't take this with me on the journey, I must have written it on something else smaller and lighter but I just don't know where that is.

That's a telegram by the way look, that was a different thing.

No letter since June, worried your alright. August.

To be quite honest with you what might have been called hardships, you sort of gloss over them, they're part of your life. It's a like - people go on holiday from this country, they go to Morocco for holiday and they come back and say 'Oh it was awful it was hot'. Well of course it was bloody hot, they went to Morocco. I mean if you don't want it to be hot, don't go to Morocco. If you go to the Antarctic it's no good saying all the time 'Oh it was damn cold' because you know it's going to be cold.

So I'm afraid what is ~ regarded as hardship is part and parcel of what you expect anyway. I've been a damn sight colder in England because down there you know it's going to be cold and so you dress accordingly. Whereas here I mean I don't know about you but I wear these trousers summer and winter, I don't have special trousers for the winter and special trousers for the summer, whereas in the Antarctic you dress accordingly. To be outside at minus 35 degrees we can work outside, that photograph of me working on the aerials wherever it was, the radio aerials, do you remember them, that one, you can't see it but my beard is a mass of ice and it was probably about minus 20, I mean I'm wearing my gloves obviously, but here if it was minus 5 or 6 outside it would feel jolly cold you know, you would feel it more.

[02.20.09] Jaap: Did you have entries in your diary which are specially dedicated to reflection on ~~

John: I would have to read through it again to find things like that, to be honest, I only came across it the other day not having seen it for over 20 years probably. In fact I wasn't even sure that I had it because since we moved down from the north of England, things have got mislaid and lost.

There's an entry here;

"17th May; went outside and cleared a fault on the radio aerials which had twisted together in the winds which had been pretty strong these past few days. High drift forms in the lee of the tower and then scours away. I found a pair of pliers which I dropped two weeks ago now lying on top of the snow. Just that the snow moves around a lot.

There's nothing really that - no great rugged stuff, perhaps when you've been and come back you get a bit blasé and as I say maybe things that were fairly routine would to some people seem to be pretty special. That's not to say it wasn't all memorable

"We did a lot of digging at Halley Bay, went out to continue digging to find the hole completely filled by drift in spite of the fact that it was covered by a sheet of plywood. An hour's digging brought me back to my previous level and I continued down another four or five feet now though a mixture of ice and cinders. It's like digging through concrete. I dug a long hole through the snow above the radio cabin so that I could bring the aerials directly out"

because obviously if you are 30 feet under the snow the aerials have got to come outside. Previously they'd gone out to the end of the hut and gone off in a very tortuous route they were too long and they were giving trouble and I re-routed the aerials but it meant digging this damn great hole down thirty feet of snow.

One of those pictures in there when I was using an auger to drill down because I knew I was getting near to the hut and I didn't want to dig away the foundation that I was standing on.

[02.23.12] Jaap: Why did they build on ice ?

John: Why ? Yes, well, good question. It's partly because the ice-shelf - if you consider the Antarctic as a landmass like that, which is covered in ice, and then off the edge of the landmass the ice has run off onto the sea and is actually floating. We are talking about ice which is probably several hundred feet thick. We are talking about ice cliffs which are 300 feet high and probably twice as much actually in the sea, on the old theory that there's more in the water than above. So we are talking about very thick ice.

It is moving outward slightly and bits break off and become icebergs. That's how icebergs are formed because the ice-shelf is moving outwards and as bits break off, calve it's called. That area is relatively flat and it's maybe twenty or thirty miles in that particular part away from solid land and where the ice joins the land it's very very crevassed because it's what's called a hinge area I think. The land is fixed but the ice is moving and you always get a very very heavily crevassed area there. So to actually try and build a hut, you couldn't build a hut in a crevassed area because it's too dangerous.

You would have to either build it on the ice-shelf or go much further inland and build it on where the ice is more solid further inland. That's a hell of a long journey from a ship to where the base would be and as I said earlier, the ship can't hang around for too long. It comes in and puts stuff down and goes.

The inland bases, and Britain doesn't have any are normally supplied by air. The Americans have the base at the South Pole, everything's got to be flown in. Even at McMurdo Sound, a lot of stuff is flown in as well but usually the bases that are on the sea edge, they try and get them as safe and as close to the edge as they can for logistics purposes really.

So we built a base at Halley Bay, at any other place other than on top of the ice-shelf, would have been logistically impossible and in fact they are still building them in roughly the same

place. They are not in exactly the same place they have moved around a little bit, the place where we were able to land the ship or anchor a ship rather and sledge off supplies the ice there is all broken up and they are in a different place.

I think one year they had to make quite a considerable journey from where the ship was to where they were building the base. Again that landing facility is provided by the fact that either the ice cliff has collapsed or has got a snow drift so there is a kind of natural ramp leading up onto the top. Basically what you've got the actual continent itself with an ice cover and the ice-shelf is several hundred feet thick floating on the sea.

Immediately in front of that there is then the remains of the sea ice which is several feet thick and in the winter that extends for hundreds of miles, but in the summer it breaks up and you can then bring a ship in. At Halley Bay the year I went in there was about a mile of sea-ice and the ship simply anchored alongside the sea-ice and unloaded stuff onto the sledges which we then sled the mile across the sea-ice, up the ramp and to where the base was which - I'm guessing probably two miles, a mile and a half to two miles from where the ship was.

What you try to do is move everything because there was a bit of a disaster when Fuchs advance party went down to the Antarctic before they did the crossing of the Antarctic. They took an advance party and the weather was really foul and to save time they unloaded the ship onto the sea-ice and then the ship left. The idea was that men who were left would come down to the sea-ice and move it. Well they moved some of it and came back several days later and it had gone. The sea-ice had broken up and it had all floated out to sea. They didn't even have a hut to live in. They lived in a packing case, one of the tractors was in a huge packing case, big as this room we're in, which had been deck cargo on the ship and they actually lived in that packing case all winter which is pretty terrible, and so there has always been a policy of not to leave stuff on the sea-ice.

It was necessary because of the weather conditions they had at the time. It was the year that I was actually at Deception Island because we used to talk to them on the radio. Everything they had been issued with they wore it all the time, they worked in it, slept in it, ate in it. There were five or six of them there were, and I used to talk to the radio operator, I say talk to him, it was Morse. They survived but they had a very rough time. That kind ruggedness is the kind of thing that happens when you have an accident, it's not what happens when you are living in your ordered routine.

Looking at it, I mean I have said earlier that it's a place where you feel very small, you are very much at the mercy of the weather and nature and the elements possibly and all this, but possibly it's even more so now is that you are cocooned to a certain extent in the environment, the artificial environment that you make with what you take with you.

I went sledging and I went on a tractor journey and when you're out on those kind of journeys then it's not much different to what it was like in Scott's day.

I mean on the tractor journey we lived in a tent, we carried tents with us and at the end of each day's journey we had to put up that tent. We were away for 13 days, we'd only gone for a week initially, when we'd laid the depot and we had a blizzard which lasted for about three days and we couldn't move. We were literally trapped where we were for three whole days. Now, we'd allocated ourselves a certain amount of food and fuel to get us out and back again, and if we'd been held any longer, fortunately for us we'd just taken out 7 tons of food and fuel for a depot. So if we'd started to run out of food and fuel then I'm sure we would have used some of what was in the depot, it would have been silly not to.

There was no immediate danger but in the circumstances, had we moved off in the direction of the base and been going two days and then we'd had a blizzard, that held us up for three days then it could have been quite a different story. It's that side of luck or god's looking after you, you know you never quite make up your mind what it is. Each individual makes up his

mind. So there are hardships and people still do get killed and get frostbite just as they have always done and probably always will do. Back at base - back at the ranch as we used to say it can be pretty comfortable in my opinion.

You can see here, we don't exactly live in the lap of luxury, and the nicest thing I do is Fran and I early morning, Fran does it more than I do, is to take the dog for a 2 mile walk before breakfast. Not everybody wants to do that, some people want to be in a greater level of comfort and would consider a hut in the Antarctic not being a great level of comfort. Which is what I said earlier that many people who ask why people go to the Antarctic would never really understand or fully appreciate the kind of answer that they would get.

It's difficult as I said, one of my friends, good friend of mine who went back, lost his life in a crevasse with a tractor, three of them went down a crevasse. Perfectly safe you may think, I remember on this trip, that one photograph that I showed you where we lost a sledge in a crevasse. I went out and - the two of us went out - there were two of us in the cab, we stopped the tractor and went back and this sledge was hanging in the crevasse like that, we'd gone over the crevasse obviously I mean it was lucky that we hadn't gone in. We'd felt this terrific bump and gone the other side and this thing was hanging in there. I really ought not to admit this on tape but I remember instantly doing that, getting the sledge sorted out, and getting back in the cab and being absolutely riveted with fear. I couldn't move I mean - I've been frightened at other times when I was climbing, I used to do a lot of climbing and you get frightened when your climbing. But again, if you don't want to get frightened you don't go climbing. It's one of those things so you don't think - you don't admit to being frightened.

I remember sitting on that cab being absolutely scared stiff because the other lads who were out had started prodding and found we were in a really crevassed area and for minutes, I don't know how long, it may have been 2 minutes it may have been 10 minutes I don't know, I was petrified with fear. I got over it went out and here I am, I'm still here so it must have been ok. That was a single incident in a whole year. It was no big deal really looking back on it.

Yeah I remember that, I remember sitting in the cab looking out and thinking there are crevasses round here - we're talking about crevasses as wide as this building is wide, just big enough to take the whole tractor. One tractor at that stage was on the other side of this crevassed area and Dougie Brown was driving that one, and he in fact diverted about a mile to a place where this same tractor that we'd crossed was now and he could cross it. Then we hitched both tractors together on the theory that if one went down the other could hold it back, and we got out of it, it was ok.

On this journey by the way, although you are navigating with a compass, the return journey is comparatively easy because as you go out - we used to call it flagging the route, we'd stick 10 foot bamboo pole with a little flag on the top so all we had to theoretically was follow the flags back. If you have got dogs, it's even easier because you can follow the dog droppings, [laughs] it's always a good way of finding your way back. On the way back we followed these poles and we left the poles in, the markers, so that the next party who followed us, and they did the following year, they had a flagged route to follow and that part of the journey for them would have been made comparatively easy and that was rather nice because they actually went out to some mountains that had been seen from the air but had never been visited called the Tottan Mountains. The following year when they came back one of them I met up with - I still have it somewhere, he brought me a piece of this mountain back, a sample of rock from this mountain which was always a nice memento.

Oh you turn everything into a bit of a joke I mean for example I just remembered now saying that, we were known as the Tottans advance party, five of us went out depot laying we were the Tottans advance party. In all the photographs in the books of Scott and Shackleton and so on, they always had pennants they always had flags on their sledges, they always had their family crest and all this sort of thing, so for a bit of fun I made up a flag for our expedition and because we were the Tottans advance party which spells TAP, I just made a tap, a bathroom tap and stitched it on this flag and so we were the TAP expedition. You make all as humorous as possible rather than as rugged as possible.

[02.37.08] Jaap: What I wondered was there is a sort of paradox between going back to Antarctica to get into this white unknown, almost unknown region, and staying there under the ground in the base.

John: Yes and being encapsulated, yes. Yes I take your point and it's an interesting one, that I think that you could look at it that way and to a large extent it's, it is so and what I've said tends to emphasise that I'm trying not to give that impression but it is exactly that. There is definitely a tendency of that. If you spend 400 days in the Antarctic including a winter, during the whole of the winter you are totally isolated, no other visitors just the group that were landed. By the very nature of things you tend to be encapsulated because it's dark for a lot of that time, the weather is pretty foul, the temperature is low, your work that you've gone down there to do at that time, in my case it was being a wireless operator, in other cases it was doing the scientific work, it is actually in the base, it takes place in the base or very close to it, there's no need if you like even to go outside. Some guys used to have competitions amongst themselves to see who could stay in longest and not go out for a week and things like that. Most of us, unless the weather was bad, would make some reason to go outside even just to go outside and have a walk around.

Certainly once a week you would have to go out to bring in food supplies and in those days, it isn't done anymore for environmental reasons, but in those days at the end of every week we had to get rid of all our rubbish. Because all those tins and packets accumulate and the empty boxes and so on.

Saturday mornings were what we called gash day. Gash is a naval expression for rubbish. On Saturday mornings we would have a gash morning and you'd get rid of the rubbish and we used to sledge it out onto the sea-ice, so that in the summer the ice melted and it just sank into the sea. Well environmentally they don't do that anymore but it was done then, or it was burned, at Halley Bay it was burned mostly.

At Signy Island I think it's marked on the map there is actually a small inlet and it's actually, maybe it's just our name for it I'm not sure, it's actually called Gash Cove and it's where all the rubbish was dumped in there for donkeys years.

I mean the Antarctic in some areas has been a real dumping ground believe you me, Greenpeace making all the waves that they did, did a good thing. The irony of it is looking back, ships were going down there full of men and equipment and coming back empty, and now they come back with all the rubbish, or at least that's what's supposed to be happening which I think is a good thing.

At least once a week you would get yourself involved in some kind of outdoor work, either voluntarily or because it just happened to be your turn to do it. Then in the summer time some of the work did entail travelling away from base like this depot laying job we did.

People made other journeys, and in the winter we fed the dogs on pemmican which is a dried food and part of the winter we fed them on seal that we killed in the summer and was left frozen. But then in the summer you were out sealing for maybe - it would depend some days

you go out sealing and not get any. Some days you'd get one and that would last the dogs for two days probably. Occasionally you'd go out and maybe come back with a dozen so you wouldn't have to go out then for a week, you'd go out as demand needed.

[02.41.37] Jaap: You go out as demands needed you to go out?

John: Not only no, people would - I certainly did and others did as well, you would go out because you wanted to. It was only in the vicinity of the base, it may have been to go sealing. In the summer would be off onto the sea ice and round the - there was an area out there we used to call the Gin Bottle, it was a funny iceberg that had gone aground and the sea-ice used to break up round it and so it was a place where seals would come out of the sea onto the sea-ice and we used to go there. That was about 4 miles away, you'd either take a tractor - we had two of these Muskeg tractors, I'd have take a tractor or a team of dogs.

Again you see the dogs needed training, the dogs had to be exercised if you like just like my dog gets taken for a walk and in the summer again there were dog exercising trips and so on. Which oddly enough at Halley Bay, I didn't get a lot involved in mainly because I had this regular schedule with the radio and that for me and did for other people as well, it meant that if you had these regular schedules then you were rather fixed in, you know you had to be there. Although there were days when I missed I must admit and there were days when as I've said I could get this other guy to do the odd one for me. I was just reading here actually when I read that bit to you about the journey that we made, I'd said something in there about Barry had very kindly looked after the radio for longer than had been intended.

[02.43.34] Is there something in the notes that you made that we ~

John: Yes let's have a look through and then we'll have a bit of lunch. Yes some of it - a lot of it we've actually talked about, I pre-empted some of your questions. We mentioned things being a paradox and that triggered off something because one of the things it did for me, and it's a paradox really, is that having gone to the Antarctic, and looking back on it in later life perhaps, when you're 27 you don't philosophise quite as much you do when you are 57, but certainly looking back it paradoxically it made me more tolerant and less tolerant.

It made me more tolerant of people - peoples weakness if you like, more understanding that people have weaknesses, we all have weaknesses. More sympathetic to people who have got problems either of their own making or like the little thing about when guys used to get these "dear john letters" I would try and give them the letter so that they could read it privately, that kind of thing.

But it also and it's not stood me in good stead in some cases, it made me less tolerant of silliness and pettiness in people and stupidity and man's inhumanity to man and so on. So that's a real sort of mixed up feeling and I'm sure looking back that it was a kind of improvement of my understanding of people that was developed during that time, and certainly the interaction between two people or the interaction between one person and a group of people.

I mean I remember in teacher training we did a lot of study on - you are probably familiar with group dynamics, the way in which people within a group interact. Although I didn't know this when I was the Antarctic because I hadn't studied it, I hadn't attended lectures in it and I hadn't been aware of it looking back on it the group dynamics within that group of 21 people particularly, which was big enough to form separate groups.



It was a little microcosm of life because we were really you know, 21 guys in that kind of situation, it's little world of your own a little commonwealth that's developed.

That was interesting and I've written down it also makes you more appreciative of the small things in life, things that we take for granted a lot of the time, too numerous to name really but odd little things.

On a winters day if I go for a walk and the sun comes out through the clouds I appreciate the warmth that the sun gives, it probably raises the temperature a degree and a half but I actually notice it. And another thing, and I remember this quite distinctly as well is that I enjoy the green-ness of every springtime which in the Antarctic the colour green doesn't exist.

There is nothing green, I'm talking about in nature, there's nothing brown even at Halley Bay it was just white snow. Having said that it changed colour a lot because in the different light I've seen green icebergs and pink icebergs and all kinds of things. I've written down here that when I got back from - and it's quite important in a way when I got back from Halley Bay, one of the first things I did I walked along the jetty along the front at Port Stanley to where the war memorial is, because I'd remembered that there was a grass lawn in front of this war memorial and I just wanted to go and sit on some grass, silly really. I remember doing that. As I've said earlier this feeling of achievement if you like that you've been to a place where not many people have been and yet - what have I put here?

" and yet you feel very humble overwhelmed by the space",

and I've put in here this little bit about Scott's awful place which I was talking about I think he meant awe inspiring.

I find it difficult to put into words, the feeling, I don't want to give the idea that the whole thing was bland and boring and uninteresting, it was up there on a high all the time and the whole thing was great and the mere fact that I would go again at the drop of a hat, is probably some indication of the effect it had on me.

[02.48.49] Jaap: What you said about it made you less tolerant about silliness, was this in a way that for instance my people that I know said like 'Ignorance is evil' - goes together ?

Jack: Yes, yes, we have a saying here which is "ignorance is bliss", not quite the same thing. Explain a little more about what you mean by ignorance is evil?

[02.49.23] Jaap: Well the ignorance goes together with evil or when you are not containing knowledge.

Jack: Are you using ignorance in the term of not being aware?

[02.49.48] Jaap: Yes.

Jack: Right yes, that's right I understand what you mean, I'm trying to think of another symbol that's used in the same light. But yes, you're on the right - there is slight different shades of meaning but I know what you mean and yes I think that's true. Many people go around wearing what we call blinkers - horses used to wear blinkers in other words they only can look straight ahead and I think a lot of people perhaps pass through life wearing blinkers not being aware of everything else that is going on around them. There is an ignorance of everything else that happened.

Is that the sort of thing you mean ?

[02.50.27] Jaap: This change sort of happens during your stay there. Can you tell what triggered it off ?

Jack: Well the situation clearly which is a kind of unique situation, I'd spent, it may not be entirely - as I say I've come to this conclusion many years later and it was a very formative time in my life in my twenties obviously. I think educationally I was what was known as a late developer.

I went off and did my qualifications to get into teacher training college which were what we call in England "O-levels". O and A levels, which most youngsters take when they are 16 and 18. I'd been to the Antarctic twice, I'd been in the navy and the air force. I'd done a lot of climbing, and the ripe old age of 27 I took my O levels and A levels, I was like 10 years late. I took a degree when I was 30, and so I've always been 10,12 years retarded education [laughs] and so consequently I think that some of the things that I've become aware of have come later in life, and I've been aware of them later in life rather than earlier in life. I've always felt that the Antarctic was a very formative educationally and psychologically for me, but it came in my twenties rather than, you know most people acquire their education in their late teens, although that's not necessarily strictly true.

I'd spent a lot of time in reasonable isolation, the service to some extent is a kind of a man's world your part of a bigger community. At sea on a ship is a man's world but you're not away from another life more than a week or 10 days at a time. I'd done quite a bit of climbing in Britain and I say Britain because I did a lot of it in Scotland, and that would be two or four or maybe half a dozen guys and, maybe a couple of women in that case who were climbing and you'd camp or you'd be in a youth hostel or in a mountain hut. So I'd always been part of a - my environment had included a fair bit of what to many people would have been isolated little groups of people living in fairly close proximity. So the Antarctic didn't hold too many surprises for me when I found myself with this group of 21 people except, that it was for a much much longer time than it had ever been before.

Even at Deception Island it was a full 10 months, 9 nearly 10 months, and at Halley Bay it was almost within a week exactly a year and I think you - partly you find yourself being part of this group and partly the group has its effect on you as well - bit difficult and I'm getting in a bit deep here in a sort of psychological sociological thing.

I think you begin to realise that when I came back and went into teaching, now maybe your girlfriend would bear me out on this, maybe the staffroom of a school which is full of teachers is not a good comparison to make but by and large there is so much pettiness and silliness in life and certainly I noticed it in teaching that it used to really irritate me and I once lost a very good job because I got one my Antarctic mates to write a reference for a teaching post that I applied for and he put in it "a good sense of humour and the inability to tolerate fools will stand him in good stead".

I did not get the job and I'm quite sure it was this "doesn't stand fools easily", in other words if somebody irritates me or I find is a fool or isn't doing it right I usually tell them about it. In school teaching that wouldn't have been a good thing, in some walks of life it would, I'm quite sure I lost the job because of that quite honestly.

I don't think I can tell you more on that, but I'm getting in very deep on it and probably skating round what could be a better answer. A bit out of my depth. I get the impression that if I hadn't been to the Antarctic I would probably have been a different person the rest of my life. I think I would have been less appreciative, I would have been less tolerant and yet more tolerant in some cases, and I certainly don't think it did me any harm anyway, but zip ...

[02.56.06] End