

NIGEL BACON

Edited transcript of interview with Nigel Bacon conducted by Jaap Verdenius in 1993. BAS archives AD6/24/3/35. Transcribed by Allan Wearden, September 2020.

[0:00:00] Verdenius: I'll just let turn round because, I'll just let it run.

Bacon: Yes.

[0:00:13] Verdenius: I'll just let it run, but when your letters was it what you expected or was it a lot unexpected things that you came across?

Bacon: I'd no idea what to expect when I went down not really. I mean you have ideas in your mind as to, I was 19 when I went down so I'd been working in the West End of London as commis chef out of college. I'd been to catering college in Manchester, and saw the job as an opportunity to travel really and I suppose there was an adventurous element in applying and the chance to see a bit of the world. And applied for the job and I was younger than I should have been to get the job, I think you had to be over 21 and I think the hotel I was working at I think had some influence in my getting the job. They at least thought I'd be able to cook something reasonably from the experience I'd had in the West End!

[0:01:38] Verdenius: What was the average age of base when you were there?

Bacon: What was the average age? The majority of the base were I suppose postgraduates so they would be early 20's I would say, 22/23/24, the diesel mechanic when I went down there must have been mid 30's I think - Alan Green - I don't know, he seemed old then [laughing]! He was I think he would have been in his 40's then wouldn't he, and has was going down to build a base at Deception Island which in fact is - no I don't think they have a base there anymore because the island blew it's top quite a few years ago, I don't how many years ago now it must be 12 or 14 years ago it erupted! And I don't think they have a permanent base there anymore more but they built a similar construction to the one they have at Signy which was made out of these glass fibre modules which I don't know if you've seen photographs of that? And Alan had been down the previous year that I went down in '64 to actually put that together and I think he might have wintered over there as well, yeah.

[0:03:11] Verdenius: You were you the youngest?

Bacon: Pardon?

[0:03:15] Verdenius: Were you the youngest?

Bacon: I was definitely the youngest yes [laughing] on the, yes!

[0:03:22] Verdenius: Was there a big difference?

Bacon: How do you mean? To the attitude of the others do you mean?

[0:03:32] Verdenius: Yeah, to you?

Bacon: I suppose so yeah, I must have been...I must have been wanting to sort of prove myself a little bit I suppose and perhaps a bit of an upstart at times! It was looking back now of how people related to one another there, it was not an unreal sort of situation it was just I think it's the same in any sort of close knit group...there's quite a lot of, I don't know, posturing and reactions one to another, not as you would sort of relate to people in a normal environment with families or females or whatever else, it was a small close-knit group of males and it became quite...I suppose quite schoolboy in humour, a sort of quirky humour that used to go on, and it got quite cynical at times! The day to day was quite routine and people seemed to sort of create situations [laughter] to sort of, I suppose, relieve the monotony. I think that used to happen and I suppose people do it in this country anyway, if you're bored you usually find something to shake you out of your boredom, create situations. But I remember being told that the Americans had sent various psychologists down there, very sort of shrink conscious, and they tried to study sort of how people behaved there, their psyche that sort of situation on an American base. I'm not sure there was all sorts of highfalutin conclusion drawn as to why people behave as they do in those sort of circumstances? It's basically getting on with learning how to get on with people really, in sort of close-knit communities in difficult circumstances very often. But all the bases were quite different in their function; we were considered to have the sort of...cushy in terms of the environment it was known as 'The banana belt' at Signy because the furthest away from the South Pole! But it was the, yeah it was the major station for studying any biological pursuit and it was a sort of breeding ground for penguins and skuas, giant petrels. All sorts of wild life used to migrate to and from Signy and surrounding areas and therefore it was a sort of natural place for a biological station to develop.

[0:07:21] Verdenius: Therefore the occupation of the base was scientists in the environment?

Bacon: Yes it was mainly biologists. There was a marine zoologist; there was an embryologist when I was down, studying penguin egg embryology; there was a, I don't know, a ???[incomprehensible], he was studying limpets anyway, the study of limpets. Somebody else studying skuas, brown skuas, blue eyed shags, and there were different programmes that went on by anyone who was interested in taking them up. Bird-ringing used to take place and one of the ornithologists would get some help, you'd go out ringing the chicks of giant petrels, and tagging seals as well. I got involved in tagging seals as a sort of a diversion from cooking all the time, it was a diversion yes! It was very interesting so I suppose looking back it was very enjoyable part of my life really, in seeing the world and I suppose learning how to get on with people.

[0:08:53] Verdenius: Do you the first day or the first week what kind of impression the situation made on you?

Bacon: Arriving at the base you mean? Yes we arrived on about the 20th of December and there was about 30 people on the base there, and it was a hive of activity because the boat was being unloaded with the stores for the year, and they were about to build a bulk storage tank for diesel fuel. And there was a team of welders that had come down, so there was a lot of activity in sort of building projects and getting things off and on and transferring

personnel, so my first impression was of this hive of activity around what was sort of basically a building site I suppose! There was, sort of food crates all over the place, and parts for generators, sections of metal for building this tank. The cook who I took over from I spent about a day with him but he obviously wanted to get out of the base as quickly as he could [laughing]! He'd fortunately for him secured a 'Summer Charlie' they call it, where they go and visit all the other bases on the way out, and he was very quick to find some other occupation! And it was quite easy to do whilst the boat was being unloaded and I was sort of thrown right in doing the job, cooking for about 30 people! Christmas dinner [laughing] was the first thing I seem to remember that sticks in my mind, producing a dinner for 30 or so, - I think there might have been more that actually - on this solid fuel cooker, which needed kicking to make it work very often! And there was some naval hydrographers who were camped on the slope behind the base, they were invited to come down and have Christmas lunch. I suppose the impression was, yeah, the whole thing sort of...the talk about 'FID power', everything was sort of done manually, and the teamwork and comradely I suppose was the thing which struck me - that was the most, that was quite impressive. The amount of wildlife, the sort of the smell of the place I suppose you always smell places. I remember on the boat as we were approaching round South Georgia for instance you got the sort of the smell of the ice off the glacier and it was sort of quite distinctive. I don't know that ice smells particularly but whatever it is that grows around it or you can sort of smell the cold!

[0:12:31] Verdenius: Ice and the sea?

Bacon: Yes, there's a sort of smell to it, the sea and ice combined perhaps I don't know, but the sort of smell of it as I remember it sort of evocative somehow? But it was just this very busy place that was changing personnel, and in the evenings when there was time to relax people got a few beers out or a bottle of scotch or something or whatever and people relaxed and enjoyed themselves. It was just like sort of going out to the local I suppose [laughing] and everyone was getting to know one and another, sort of warts and all!

[0:13:17] Verdenius: Pardon?

Bacon: Warts and all! People's good and bad points I was meaning, you sort of found out there are a whole variety of backgrounds sort of all thrust together, sort thrown into a bag if you like. And it was interesting to see how people related in that situation, whereas in life in the UK that would have, they would have not been thrown together quite as much as down there on the base. We had two Geordie welders and a sort of a welder off the Clydeside building this tank, with sort of refined ornithologists who had been to university and had perhaps had come from a good backgrounds [laughing]! And everyone was mixed into together so there was quite a reaction to people...and I think people were sort of making a bit of a social statement of themselves a bit because it didn't really matter anyway, they had a job to get on with!

[0:14:31] Verdenius: A sort of social statement?

Bacon: Well about where they were from or who they were [laughing] and what they stood for and one or two of the, one or two people had something not to actually say but they

wanted to let people know who they were and what the crack was; there was all this inter reaction of backgrounds and types of people which was very interesting, very amusing at times as well! And people like Alan, who've you interviewed, had seen it before [laughing], and there was quite a bit of the old hands that had been there a year, and were able to relate and pass on their experiences. And there were all the raw recruits who perhaps thought they knew it all or whatever and didn't and they started find out. There was all that sort of thing, bit like the first day at school [laughter]!

[0:15:36] Verdenius: You were cook seven days a week?

Bacon: No. For some reason they must have felt sorry for the people in the galley, the cook. The tradition at Signy was that the cook got a day off on Sunday, so there used to be a rota for Sunday cook and I got the day off and offered some advice from a distance if it was needed to whoever was on duty! And yes I could go and have a walk round or interest myself in something else or write letters home or whatever or take some photographs. Photography seemed to take up everyone's interest, that was quite a ...it had quite a following. There was a very good library everybody read a lot always had their faces buried in books. Food seemed to take a more important role in perhaps it would do in normal day-to-day life; can't really say, it was a sort of, I think it was focus of people's interest in that particular circumstance.

[0:17:05] Verdenius: What did you put on?

Bacon: The food was basically dry rations; they used to have some experimental foods, I seemed to remember they'd just started with a sort of accelerated freeze dried foods, which are these foods that are frozen and dried instantly so they don't return to ambient temperature they go from frozen to dried in sort of in a matter of seconds, and some of those are quite good. They were wanted to know, the suppliers were wanting to know how well they performed, and they had the benefit of very little weight. There was a lot of dried food used down there, but most of it was of indifferent quality, dried vegetables for instance, and there were a lot of tinned foods as well, tinned foods and meat. The menu, I used to supplement the menu, and people before me had done the same, by trading with the stewards on the boats, and we were able to trade cigarettes because cigarettes were issued at the time, half the base seemed to smoke I seem to remember, but there was quite a surplus of cigarettes that we used to barter for fresh food of one type or another, or goodies as they might have been called! Maybe some wine from Uruguay or fresh meat of one type or another. If the steward on one of the boats had got a surplus of something then he'd trade for cigarettes which he could in turn sell and top up his stock in one of the ports they visited, cigarettes were always, I suppose it's a bit like in prisons, they used to have 'snout' didn't they, tobacco which was used for trading?!

[0:19:08] Verdenius: Did you have a currency?

Bacon: No, no money didn't, there was an account kept of salary in Port Stanley where the sort of administration office was, you could send so much money home to your own bank account but everything was done on a 'slate' everything was 'found', you didn't have to

purchase anything; people would purchase on your behalf in Port Stanley for beer or whatever and then you could have it sent down. But even on the boats you would have some kind of docket system to debit your account with the Survey, so money wasn't a feature really.

[0:19:55] Verdenius: There were no substitute currencies?

Bacon: There was no substitute currencies no, so there used to be this sort of barter trading with cigarettes from the bases which all the stewards were well aware of, and you to try and get the best deal for a few thousand cigarettes! So that used improve the variety of the things that you could use on the menu, and as well as that at the time, (it's much more environmentally conscious now), the scientist that might have been studying seals or shags or fish or whatever, there was colleague Indigo used to go trapping fish and when he'd taken all the bits and pieces out that he wanted, usually from the guts or the head, he used to give me what was left and use to take the fillets off and were able to have fish every Friday as it happened, through the year. And also we used to go and take penguins and shoot seals and shags and - what else did we try? - I think that was about it,. Oh there was a fellow came down from the British Museum and he started collecting some seaweed, he was interested in seaweed, and he started bringing a few species of seaweed that he'd collected that he claimed were edible, but weren't very popular [laughing] in fact! But we tried and vary the menu as much as we could with whatever fresh things there were around because the supplies were fairly limited, it was sort of corned beef and tinned stewed steak and that sort of thing and tinned ham and tinned bacon, but just to vary the menu and get something fresh on the menu we used to go and take what was around flying or crawling around [laughing] the island without upsetting anyone's study or depleting the population of birds. We used to take penguin eggs as well which I'm not sure if they allow them to do that sort of thing now but I'm sure it happens and that they do.

[0:22:20] Verdenius: How do you prepare penguin meat?

Bacon: Penguin meat?

[0:22:30] Verdenuis: Did you have a recipe?

Bacon: Well there was a steward who'd been down on the *Biscoe* called Jerry Cutland I think his name was and he was the steward on the *Biscoe* when I went down, and he was a Cornishman and he'd written a sort of account of recipes that he'd tried when he was on one of the bases, I'm not sure where, [Note: It was base F: AW] called *Fit for a Fid*, and that described how to cook seal meat or what you might use, but basically all the meats were fairly dark in colour, and most of them were surrounded by a fair thickness of blubber. So you'd sort of take the meat only and fillet that off, and in the case of a penguin it was a question of just slitting the bird up the front after it had been killed and just taking the fillet of meat off either side of the breast bone, and there wasn't very much else that was worth using . (In fact the carcasses were used for fish bait, for baiting fish traps), and you could cut that into thin slices and the meat was quite fine grained and it was quite tasty. I used to cook it in a mixture of butter and beef suet, which sounds a bit odd, but to impart a sort of beefy flavour

to it. But there was a particular smell and taint if you like, taint, taste, which was based on what the creature had been feeding on which was usually crustaceans at one type and another, and that's the same for seals or penguins or whatever; most of the meat had this sort of fishy quality to them [laughing]!

[0:24:21] Verdenius: Was seal popular to eat?

Bacon: Seal, seal meat, yes it was. We used to do all sorts of things with that, roasted with Yorkshire pudding, we used to have seal liver, that was very, very rich in vitamin D apparently! And we used to make seal liver pate and even penguin liver pate, and blue eyed shag also featured on the menu, so we tried all these things and omelettes with penguin eggs. There was a great collection of penguin eggs which used to take place as soon as the first eggs had been laid which was usually around October. The first troops of penguins used to wonder back over the sea ice which was probably breaking out at the time, and they used to rest on the rookeries and they had the indignity of being up ended, used to grab them by the tail to see if they'd laid an egg [laughing]! And [laughing] the first ones that were laid went straight back to base and were in a frying pan with bacon because with being fresh eggs they were much esteemed by people on the base whose diet had got probably got a bit boring over the wintertime.

[0:25:50] Verdenius: The first penguin eggs of the year!

Bacon: The first penguin egg of the year! And these birds always laid a second egg so there was no sort of loss to the population of penguins, they laid another one they laid a second egg and when the embryologist was down, Colin Herbert, it was his job with some help to collect these penguin eggs, he was quite keen on getting the timing of the development of the embryo down to sort of hours and minutes. So he went and collected a whole, he sort of cleared a whole rookery of eggs so that the penguins would lay another one and then he could monitor exactly when their eggs dropped and then he could sort of stage their development from there. So he sort of helped in gathering these eggs and they were preserved in flour so sort of cleaned up and put in sledging boxes and preserved in flour, and used to last through the year, although the fact they were fresh meant they tasted a lot better than if they'd been stuck in flour for six or eight months! But we used to use all sorts of local produce if you like, and even attempted to grow it. There was a little lean-to greenhouse on the base, we used to try and grow...spinach one time which was not very successful because after having a few boxes of spinach growing it sort of boiled down to about one portion! [Laughing] It was sort of nothing by the time it was cooked! We used to grow cress quite easily, salad cress...sort of optimistically tried to grow tomatoes. At Halley Bay they managed to grow some tomatoes indoors under artificial light and using chemicals basically, and I think this was a scientific experiment, and heartened to hear this, and I tried to grow some in this greenhouse, but the tomato was just about - in these days it would have been in vogue - as the tomato was just about the size of a cherry, these cherry tomatoes, about this size that's about as big as it got! And I grew a cucumber that was about the size of a half respectable gherkin, so some of these attempts to grow things were good and some were not so good really. I

think it was because of the limited light even in the summer that it was very often overcast, conditions weren't always favourable to growing a lot of produce that way.

[0:28:40] Verdenius: Incidentally I spoke to the man who started this greenhouse at Halley Bay.

Bacon: Did you!

[0:28:48] Verdenius: Yeah.

Bacon: Who was that?

[0:28:50] Verdenius: Geoff Hill.

Bacon: Ah!

[0:28:53] Verdenius: And he told me about it.

Bacon: At Halley Bay?

[0:28:55] Verdenius: Hydro-hydro?

Bacon: Hydroponics is it?

[0:28:58] Verdenius: Hydroponics. [Bacon: Yeah] And it was quite a success just with just two lights.

Bacon: Yes I think they used ultraviolet light and yes, I mean the tomatoes, they grew tomatoes and not sure what it tasted of...but the sort of the development of that I suppose hydroponics, I mean in your country there are sort of vast areas of glass and they grow things all the year round.

[0:29:30] Verdenius: Yes on soil.

Bacon: But they have soil yes. There was sort of poor quality soil there and at Deception Island and I know up in Iceland they use the...oh dear they use the thermos, the core heat from the ground to heat their glass houses there and they do a lot of growing by those means and hydroponics, and yes it's a science in itself which has developed. It was a bit crude when I was down there but we used to attempt to grow all sorts of different things but, not that successfully!

[0:30:17] Verdenius: Did you go sledging at all?

Bacon: Yes, there were there were two skidoos, the Bombardier skidoos, which we used for laying depots. We had an emergency hut at ...just out on the peninsula, the point I'm just trying to remember the name of it, no! And there was a depot there for emergencies if the base should burn down or there was some other catastrophe. And there was also a depot on Coronation Island; if anyone got stranded, they'd gone over say on the sea ice say and if the sea ice had broken out, there was some means for them to survive for a week or two until they could be relieved in some way. And there were a couple of field huts on Signy that we

used for, if people were seal tagging or bird ringing they'd use those as a base rather than keep returning to the main base hut, and they would be used as a means of relief; if you [laughing] got fed up of the same locality it was nice to go out to one of these huts just sort of get away for a day or two to relieve the tedium!

[0:31:41] Verdenius: Did you do that?

Bacon: Yes I did at. Foca point there was a hut there and we used to do seal tagging or penguin ringing, giant petrel ringing in fact it was, because there was quite a colony along the north west coast of Signy and it was about a couple of miles from the base. Have you seen a map of the island?

[0:32:12] Verdenius: Of Signy Island?

Bacon: Yeah, it's not very big!

[0:32:17] Verdenius: Yes Coronation Island on the other side is bigger?

Bacon: Yes, we used to out via boat in the summer sometimes as well. I remember going out on a boat trip for about 12 miles on a particularly nice day with, there was a professor from the Royal Society, Professor Fogg, and about four or five of us went out, looked at one of the islands off Coronation Island and took a few samples. That was quite a pleasant journey. But it was basically a static base, it wasn't sort of where the dog sledging went on from, for a time, from the Marguerite Bay area, although I don't think they have many dogs at all down there now. They're using tractors of one kind or another or skidoos, and these skidoos were sort of in the development stage, quite a recent innovation I think. Use them in Canada and Alaska, Bombardier skidoo I think is a Canadian company and the Japanese make these sort of motor toboggans now and they're a very effective means of getting around. I'll go and get a map of the island it'll help me relate if you don't mind, if that's alright?

Bacon: That's Berntsen Point there's a field hut, but the.....yeah it would be about three or four miles long by a mile and a half wide at the widest point.

[0:34:18] Verdenius: How long did you stay there, for how many days?

Bacon: Oh not more, usually it was two or three days yeah, yes. Away from the main hut do you mean?

[0:34:32] Verdenius: Yes.

Bacon: Yes usually two or three days, yes I suppose it did get a bit tedious at times particularly with the same people. There was winter and a summer population, a winter and summer population on the base and I think it was 11 the first year or 12, it was 11 or 12 in my two years wintering over and these were scientists with long term studies. And then in the summer time, which was when all the activity was there was people with summer programmes of one kind or another, people studying mosses or lichens for instance, which was difficult or impossible, or soil or people studying the fresh water lakes, aspects of fresh water biology, they would come down for the summer period only. Or there would be

building parties or there would be these naval hydrographers that were sort of charting the waters around Coronation or Signy Island as happened the first year I was down there. So in the winter I suppose it got a bit tedious with the same crew of people so it was welcome relief to go to these places, or trips out for a day to Coronation Island or maybe a couple of days. I don't seem to remember staying away on Coronation Island but we certainly went to field huts now and again.

[0:36:17] Verdenius: ???[Inaudible]

Bacon: It was it seemed a long time at that age [laughter] in one place! But looking back now it was relatively a short spell.

[0:36:42] Verdenius: Three years?

Bacon: Well it was two and a half years yes. I was, I left in October '64 to go down from Southampton and got back in August '67, and that was after three months in North and South America. And I had a month travelling back around different bases and then three or four weeks in the Falkland Islands as well. I got off the boat - they needed one or two berths on the *Shackleton* to take people to and from South Georgia - so I got off the boat there and stayed in Port Stanley, did a few jobs for the Survey people living there. And enjoyed having a look round the Falkland Islands as well which was interesting, particularly with having seen reports on the conflict, it was interesting to having been there and flown over it. One of the things I remember doing which was most enjoyable was going on the government air service, did a sort of mail drop all around the sheep stations and little hamlets and villages around the Falkland Islands, both East and West Falklands. Every time the supply boat came in, there was a boat called the *Darwin* which used to ply between Montevideo and Port Stanley about once a month and that used to bring the surface mail, well it was the only mail then to the islands. After that had all been sorted at the post office in Port Stanley they used to take off in, I think it was a De Havilland Otter seaplane, and they used to drop mail around the camp as they called the hinterland of the Falklands. And if you volunteered you could go along provided you threw the mail out of the window, threw it out at the right time! So you got a sort of an air tour of the Falkland Islands which you know was fascinating really calling at all these different places. So yeah that was very enjoyable throwing mail bags out of this hole in the floor of the plane, yeah it was good fun!

[0:39:18] Verdenius: Remember when you came there you were plunged right middle of the Antarctic summer?

Bacon: Yes it was.

[0:39:26] Virtually all daylight?

Bacon: Yes virtually all daylight!

[0:39:30] Verdenius: Did you enjoy that?

Bacon: Yes, yes it didn't bother me too much really; yes it was quite enjoyable the best weather in fact was in the winter! The summer months there was quite a lot of high humidity and low cloud and rain in fact on Signy, and although there were some fine days in the summer...the clearer colder days where there was not much wind were in the middle of winter. So clearer better weather particularly for photographs was in the winter period and we just had, in the depths of winter I seem to remember it almost got light at 10 or 11 o'clock, the latitude was I think about 62, 62 degrees south, it was the same latitude as Oslo! So it wasn't too desperate, too extreme. At Halley Bay for instance I think they have about, a 100 days of darkness around midwinter time either side of midwinter. It didn't really matter anyway because they were beneath the ground [laughing]! But...yes the life was very routine I suppose and I value the time in sort of learning about fellow beings [laughing] in how to relate to them. I suppose you learn to get on with people I suppose one way or another because it's a question in having to! Some people went down, there were obviously people with widely different personalities both in the summer and the winter, and some had shorter fuses than others, some suffered a bit because things might haven't gone well, the programmes for instance might not have gone well, so it was coping with all those sort of things yeah. But I found the job quite challenging I suppose when I went down there I was....I hadn't taken the job to sort of further my culinary skills because it was a question of sort of using knowledge and skills acquired down south, it was sort of adapting those sort of previous experience and using it and learning and how coping in that sort of situation, but I found the experience down there invaluable in culinary amazingly!

[0:42:43] Verdenius: Had you any idea what you would do after Antarctica?

Bacon: No I hadn't got a clue really, not a clue! I thought of one or two avenues. There was a fellow who'd been seconded from the RAF who was telling me about life in the RAF and what sort of catering jobs there were available and how it was a way of travelling further and seeing the world and getting paid for it, and then I sort of toyed with the idea of applying to the RAF. I rejoined a firm that I'd worked for previously in a management capacity and been in catering management ever since then.

[0:43:39] Verdenius: Because of the effects of being down in the Antarctic for quite a long time?

Bacon: I'm sorry Jaap?

[0:43:47] Verdenius: Basically you'd been there for quite a long time down there, compared to if you like go to do like a research job?

Bacon: Yes.

[0:43:57] Verdenius: Lot of people stay shorter but also if they have a long term programme it's sort of an advantage?

Bacon: Yes.

[0:44:10] Verdenius: Did you have a contract for all of the time?

Bacon: For two years yes, yes the contract was for two years, and I understand now that one of two people who have been down, when we went to Whitby last October I was told of someone that had been cooking at Signy since I'd been there in fact had gone down, he was quite a bit older than me and he'd sort of virtually semi-retired and he'd gone to a reunion and learned they were short of cooks, so he's said [laughing] 'Well I'm quite happy to go down', and he went down and did another year! So it was quite interesting to hear that sort of thing, they don't sort of attract hordes of bright eyed people wanting to go down now [laughing], because the idea of being away from home and loved ones for 12 months isn't everyone's idea of fun, and I suppose the life would still suit single young males I guess rather than sort of middle aged or certainly married people, young married people. Maybe people in retirement it might suit them the life but I don't know?

[0:45:30] Verdenius: Did you get news from home?

Bacon: Yes, we used to get newsletters and tune into the BBC World Service. A lot of the radio operators were also radio hams, and they used to relate items of news or contacts, other ham contacts that they'd made but the communications are much improved now with technology.

[0:46:04] Verdenius: Did you stay up to date with say current news?

Bacon: Well the sort of significant things were I think as we pulled out of Southampton Water it was about the time the Heath government fell and the Wilson government came in. And was sort of reasonably interested because Harold Wilson and George Brown and I think Callaghan had quite a few dinners at the hotel where I worked, which was 'Brown's Hotel' and I'd sort of taken an interest because we'd [laughing] sort of cooked for these people and they got into power! But after leaving the country the sort of the current news current events, they were something going on in the background as it were. You weren't really as interested as perhaps you might have been expected to have been. You certainly wanted to hear from home you were interested in hearing from your family and friends, and their opportunity to do that you used to have newsletters which you could send out, you got so many words a month I seem to remember there was a monthly newsletter that you could send, and similarly there was one sent from home. And there was a programme that the BBC used to beam down called, *Calling the Antarctic* where you'd actually hear your parents over the radio or your girlfriends or wives or sweethearts or whatever, and you got so many minutes. They used to deal with I'm not sure if it was each base at a time or they'd go through the wintering personnel on the six bases in alphabetical order and you'd have a request played for you and that was quite nice. But I understand now that you [laughing] they have sort of satellite telephones so they can sort of phone up, yes!

[0:48:22] Verdenius: What do you write if you have this how many letters in a month? What do you write because then you have to choose what you tell?

Bacon: It was very often once you'd sort of given people an idea of what went on it was very often difficult writing things to sort of fill the pages up sometimes yes. I haven't sort of been a great letter writer anyway but the letters, my mother died two years ago and she'd kept all

the letters that I'd sent home, which was a bit of a surprise to me, but sort of kept them sort out of interest. So the ones that I wrote home I'm sort of able to relate to, nice to look back on them now and postcards I sent coming back through South America keeping in touch. But the concerns and aspirations that I had between 19 & 21 were I suppose what you would expect of someone at that age! Things that I remember happening are England winning the World Cup obviously which was quite a significant happening; I think the Vietnam War was of concern, there was a bit of uneasy about the Argentinian presence even then. There was some Argentinean/Irishman that had landed on the racecourse in Port Stanley the year before we went down and caused a bit of a stir and claimed the island back for the Argentinians! There was a base at Laurie Island which was about 12 miles down off the other end of Coronation Island and there was occasional radio contact with them, but nothing else. But at Deception Island there was both a Chilean and Argentinian and a British base and they used to be rather formal in their treatment of one or another's bases, political reasons I suppose. The Chilean and Argentinian bases were run by their military, either the air force or the navy or the army or a combination, but when the boats had gone they used to sort of settle down to life in the winter, wintering over...the relationship changed and they sort of had parties at one or others' bases and exchange presents and gifts and all sorts of things, so it was very nice at Deception Island I believe this was!

[0:51:31] Verdenius: Do you remember any Argentinians' ships visiting your base?

Bacon: There were no Argentinians that visited us. We had a visit from a Russian factory ship or a Russian whale catcher I should say, and a Polish boat as well - well it was a Russian boat out of Poland, a Polish port, and they were research's boats of a kind and we had quite a memorable time with the Russian boat that visited us out of Odessa, yes, and Alan Green would remember that I would think!?

[0:52:23] Verdenius: Why?

Well he was on the base then and we had quite a merry time and it was quite an unusual in terms of what happened. On other bases it was quite an unusual occurrence, there wasn't a lot of visiting from different nationalities it was occasional and usually a bit formal. But this was quite a bit sort of...it was a nice cultural exchange. It was good time both the base personnel had a good time when they were entertained on the boat, and we gave the Russians we entertained them on the base on Saturday night, it was over a weekend. And there was this very attractive Russian lady who was the wife of the director of this research ship, who I think had been in one or two Russian films, she was a sort of model I suppose, who caused quite a stir as being a female who, it was bit like *South Pacific* in where they hadn't seen a women in years!! [Laughter] So she caused quite a stir...when she came ashore. Women I think it's quite common place now for female graduates to go down and do summer programmes, it's I suppose enlightened now with equal opportunities and quite rightly. There's no reason why females shouldn't go down but I don't think they tend to winter over quite the same, don't think so, but they certainly go down for the summer now. At the time I was down seeing a female on the base was very [laughter] unusual!

[0:54:37] Verdenius: The Russians have more women in the Antarctic?

Bacon: Yes they do. I think the factory ships, the whaling factory ships which were still operating when we were going down, sort of had women along, wives or whatever. And they have a sort of different view....of taking women in those sort of circumstances.

[0:55:17] Verdenius: Alan Green told me nothing about this visit of this boat!?

Bacon: [Laughing] I've got a photograph of him doing the Highland Fling with some Russians somewhere, he was doing the Highland Fling yes, dancing around. It was a bit unusual to see a group of Russians and a group of British sort of dancing around after they'd had a lot to drink! It was just over that particular weekend [laughing], no he probably wouldn't remember he'd had a bit to drink that night I seem to recall! I kept a diary of all the menus I used to serve and I was looking through those the other day, so things like seals and penguins and different things are in my diaries so you could have browse through those if you want to?

[0:56:27] Verdenius: If you could look up a good penguin...recipe?

Bacon: Dish yes. Would you like a beer or something like that?

[0:56:43] Verdenius: I don't think beer.

Bacon: Whisky or wine, do you like wine?

Interesting clips:

- Arrival at Signy to a very busy base with about 30 people there, the outgoing cook spent one day with him before finding other work and then going a jolly south! So rather thrown in the deep end! [0:08:53]
- Trialling the new AFD [accelerated freeze dried] foods, and trading with the boats for fresh goods in the exchange for cigarettes? [0:17:05]
- Adding to the diet from the local wildlife and even trying seaweed! [0:19:55]
- How to prepare penguin and other meats for the table? [0:22:30]
- The annual great penguin egg collection including some for science. Growing some things in the base greenhouse with mixed results, with spinach being a big mistake! [0:24:02]
- Talking about the success that they had with growing tomatoes on hydroponics at Halley Bay. [0:28:58]
- Using the field huts on Signy for both science and jollies. [0:31:41]
- On the way home and going around the camp as a volunteer on the seaplane to throw mail out at various settlements! [0:36:42]
- Infamous visit of a Russian research ship containing a very attractive Russian actress and the Highland Fling being performed in the base bar, by both ships and base people! [0:52:23]

