

A replacement at Halley base

The British Antarctic Survey has chosen the design of Faber Maunsell and Hugh Broughton Architects for the new Halley VI. The new modular station, elevated on ski-based jackable legs to avoid snow burial, can be towed across the ice. The modules are simple to construct and can be re-arranged or relocated inland periodically as the ice shelf flows towards the sea. A central module packed with stimulating areas for recreation and relaxation is flanked by a series of modules designed to suit the changing needs of the science programmes. It features renewable energy sources and new environmental strategies for fuel, waste and material handling. The station will replace Halley V which is located on the Brunt Ice Shelf, which is 150m thick and flows at 0.4km per year northwest from Coats Land towards the sea. At regular intervals it calves huge icebergs, the next one being predicted for



An image of the future Halley VI (British Antarctic Survey)

2010. The construction will begin in January 2007 and is expected to be operational by December 2008. For more information see www.antarctica.ac.uk.

Meanwhile, in a less futuristic part of BAS, the new Port Lockroy team is preparing to head South to open the museum and post office to visitors for the 10th season of operating the restored historic base. Rick Atkinson, Mairi Nicholson and Graham Gillie will be re-vamping the shop area and providing a new and improved range of merchandise, stamps and first day covers.

Ross Sea Huts Conservation

The best things in life seem to be those that are least expected. Back in the autumn of 2001 I received a fax from a firm of project managers in New Zealand asking if I would be interested in acting as a "peer reviewer" for a Conservation Plan. Under normal circumstances I would have probably thrown this request into the wastepaper bin and got on with the job in hand – but something stopped me and my cautious reply that perhaps they could tell me a bit more about it was the start of a life changing involvement with the Antarctic Heritage Trust (AHT).

For some twenty five years before the call from New Zealand I had been leading a (relatively) blameless life as a partner of a British firm of Conservation Architects, Purcell Miller and Tritton, repairing National Trust houses, Churches, Cathedrals, Museums and Galleries – but very few timber framed huts and certainly none in polar regions. To my excitement and surprise I found that this lack of experience was not seen as a handicap as it was for my and my firm's knowledge and experience of conservation philosophy and international best practice that was wanted.

AHT eased their new advisor gently into the role - with drafts of the Conservation Plan for Shackleton's Hut to consider and no warning of what was to come! From this modest beginning I have found myself swept up by the enthusiasm of Nigel Watson, the Director of AHT in New Zealand, and his team. To date this has involved acquiring a whole wall full of books on Antarctica, two trips to New Zealand, forty days in Antarctica (28 of them under canvas), writing the conservation plan for the Huts at Cape Adare, having endless teleconferences (which, to suit the NZ and Australian participants, usually take place at 10.00p.m. GMT) and generally, according to my family, becoming an Antarctic bore!

The visit to the historic huts sites on Ross Island and at Cape Adare was an enormous privilege – the beauty of the place and the way that it continues to haunt ones thoughts and dreams long after one has left is a recurrent theme amongst those who have been fortunate enough to

go. Such are the difficulties of transport in Antarctica that the preferred method of working is to be dumped at each site with tents and supplies and then to stay there until the job in hand is done. This gives the unexpected luxury of time to think about the full range of possibilities for the future of these extraordinary sites. The practical problems of conserving the Huts and their contents are, of course, a major focus of the AHT's activity and these problems are many and varied. How rapidly are the various decay mechanisms working; do we fully understand the risks to the structures and the contents; what will be the likely means of failure will it be sudden and catastrophic or a gradual decay; where should conservation work take place, at the Hut sites or back in a laboratory in New Zealand; what are the logistics and programming implications of getting material to the site and taking objects away for conservation? These are interesting problems and to be able to sit and ponder them on the spot is a great experience. However, the even more fascinating questions, for someone who has spent his life working in the field of conservation are around the whole philosophy of why one is doing this work and for whom.

For anyone who has seen the Huts and probably for most people who have read the accounts of the journeys in Antarctica in the "Heroic Age" the reasons for striving to conserve these sites in their entirety are pretty self evident - perhaps it can be simply summed up in the phrase "because they are still there". A more striking and immediate monument to the struggles of these extraordinary men cannot be imagined. This, sadly, is not a view that is universal. The National Heritage Memorial Fund in rejecting the AHT's request for help with the financing of the repairs concluded that it did not want, as a matter of policy, to make grants outside Britain – the context being that it did not represent value for money as the conserved Huts would be seen by so few people. Many people concerned with the protection of the Antarctic environment may see these Huts as little more than

man made pollution in an otherwise unspoiled area. Others who love the writings and admire the achievements of the men involved with the Huts feel that it would be a more fitting end for these sites if they are allowed to return to a natural state with the gradual decay and disintegration of the Huts and their contents. All of these are serious and challenging views for the conservator.

I have no doubts at all that these sites must be saved and that the possibilities of remote access through the internet and by interactive DVD make it less important that very few people will ever be able to see them on the spot. Very few of us will ever see a whale but this does not stop one feeling passionate about the need to conserve them. Proper stewardship of the sites can minimise any problems of pollution and interference with wildlife and the environment. By rigorously applying the best standards of conservation any worries over authenticity can also be allayed. There is always a delicate balance in any conservation project over how much you renew and how over a period of time the authenticity of the original article may be compromised. The team that AHT have working on the design and management of this project are very sensitive to these issues with the desire for minimal intervention being balanced against the realities of working in the Antarctic environment and the need for any intervention to have a significant life expectancy.

Working on the future plans for these historic sites has made a fascinating contrast to the normal work going through the firm, which has included in the last couple of years the recreation of the interior of the Hawksmoor church at Spitalfields in London and the conservation and cleaning of the west front of St Paul's Cathedral. The debates around the future of these remote historic huts have had an impact on the philosophical approach to all the work we are doing. I very much hope to remain involved with AHT and to continue to contribute to their future programme of work.

Michael Morrison, Purcell Miller Tritton, September 2005.

Bergy Bits

The Newsletter of the Friends of Antarctica

Friends of Antarctica News...

All 'Friends of Antarctica' should have received an invitation to our Antarctic Reception at the splendid Locarno Rooms at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on Monday 10th October. We are honoured that HRH the Princess Royal has agreed to be our guest. The reception is being held for the Ross Sea Huts. Now that work is underway funds are needed now more than ever.

We are indebted to Quark Expeditions and their UK travel partner Discover the World for their generous sponsorship. Discover the World, one of the UK's leading specialist tour operators, offers a vast selection of imaginative adventure and wildlife holidays through seven specialist travel programmes. With many years of operating in the polar regions, the Pole to Pole programme includes a wide-ranging collection of expedition cruises to the Arctic and Antarctic. Aimed at the discerning traveller, the choice of contrasting voyages is certain to appeal to anyone who has ever aspired to travel to the poles. For further information please visit the website www.discover-the-world.co.uk/antarctica or call 01737 214250.

The Leaffield Mystery

A remarkable tale that there was a duplicate of one of Captain Scott's huts at Leaffield in Oxfordshire came to the attention of Alan Carroll in December 2001. Keith Holmes, another resident of that county was alerted, and they made a site visit few days later.

One glance was enough to show it closely resembled not Scott's hut but Shackleton's 1907 Nimrod Expedition building at Cape Royds, which was made by Humphreys of Knightsbridge. They are just about the same size and shape, having similar gambrel ends and, visually at least, the same ventilators in the roof. The Leaffield building seemed considerably lower compared with photographs of Shackleton's Cape Royds hut, until one took into account that the Oxfordshire hut had no void under it. An initial run round with a tape showed only minor dimensional differences, with the floor to eaves height the same and the interior arrangement of trusses, stanchions and iron cleats giving it the hallmark of a Humphreys prefabricated hut.

They wondered if they could put a date on this and find out whether it started its working life there. Somewhat inconclusive, study of the Ordnance Survey map showed no building present in 1921 and, although it appears to be on the 1975 edition, local Historical Groups could not

advise when the building was erected at this location. One local myth is that this hut was made as a demonstrator to show expedition members how it should be erected, but no evidence was found to justify this. It may simply be a standard prefabricated hut of that era subsequently dismantled and re-erected at Leaffield.

Further structural details were examined on a second visit when the loft was opened for access. Yet more similarities emerged, despite the Oxfordshire hut having no porch. Due to changes of use over the years, the position of windows and doors had been changed more than once. The hut appeared in very good condition, having recently been refurbished and in regular use as a workshop.

After NZAHT was informed of this find, they responded with a request for assistance in obtaining technical information about the Cape Royds hut in preparation for the drawing up of proposals for its conservation. A considerable amount of information was gleaned. Working independently, Keith Holmes located the Humphreys Iron Works original 1907 quotation and specification, which had been submitted to Lt. Shackleton and subsequently deposited in the Latrobe Library in Australia.

Taking advantage of the offer by Judge Appleton in BB 11 (2000), the log and diary of the erection of Shackleton's

We are also very grateful to the architects and historic building consultants, Purcell Miller Tritton for their sponsorship of the event. In this issue, Director Micheael Morrison highlights the historic building conservation work carried out on the huts by the company.

Alas, the planned event in Whitby had to be called off because we could not attract the numbers to make it worth while. But we are not deterred. Next year, the twenty ninth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting will take place in Edinburgh between 12th and 23rd June. We are told by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that quite a splash is being planned for this meeting, making use of the new exhibition facilities at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre. The Trust has been invited to take part together with other British and foreign Antarctic governments and operators. These intergovernmental meetings have provided for the governance of the Antarctic by international agreement since the Treaty was signed in Washington in 1959. It provides for the protection of Antarctic historic sites like the Scott and Shackleton huts on Ross Island as well as Port Lockroy, the original BAS station, on the Antarctic Peninsula. While the meeting is for national operators only, the accompanying exhibition will be open to all - perhaps an opportunity for Friends to gather. We will tell you more about it in the next issue of *Bergy Bits*.

hut, together with stage-by-stage photographs, were made available for study to Purcell Miller Tritton, the Conservation Architects appointed in the UK to assist the NZAHT in their search.

That was three years ago. Since then the Oxfordshire hut has changed hands while conservation work on the Cape Royds hut continues. The hunt continues to unearth original specifications of some of the 1907 'bought-in' items, so that any replacement of worn or damaged materials to be introduced will be as near to the originals as possible, while ensuring these replacements have no adverse environmental impact.



Cape Royds hut in 1908 (Alexander Turnbull Library)



The Leaffield hut today (Keith Holmes)

The Union flag was flown at half-mast at the British Antarctic Survey Headquarters in Cambridge on the day of Gwion 'Taff' Davies' funeral in June. He was the last surviving member of the Operation Tabarin team of 14 men who wintered ashore during 1944 and 1945. Before his death, Gwion had seen the successful outcome of his lengthy campaign to ensure the posthumous award of the silver Polar Medal to Tabarin's Senior Wireless Operator, 'Fram' Farrington.

Operation Tabarin was but one of 256 military operations initiated in 1943, the only operation which did not follow Naval procedure for naming such secret exercises. Depending upon reference sources selected, the period between its conception in February 1943 and its eventual departure the following November might just as readily be described as a 'triumph of dedication and hard work over adversity' or conversely, 'an utter shambles.'

Inevitably, amid the chaos and confusion of war, many compromises were made before suitable men could first be located then freed from their wartime duties. People were often posted at short notice, without any real knowledge of their duties, or even of their final destination. In most cases, anyone foolish enough to ask the question, 'Where am I being posted?' or 'For what purpose?' would usually be met with a stoney silence. A multitude of equipment and material had to be found, diverted from other departmental demands and tediously gathered together.

The objective for the selected 15-man team was to set up two bases: one at Hope Bay and a second on Deception Island. On sighting HMS Bransfield, the ship originally allocated to the expedition, one recruit immediately resigned, thereby reducing the party to 14. The Bransfield proved unseaworthy for the task and the expedition was transferred to the Highland Monarch. Heading for the Falkland Islands, every few days the men would be mustered on the boat-deck, eagerly anticipating at last being briefed on the as yet undisclosed aims and objectives of the expedition. Instead they were instructed by their leader not to discuss the reason for their presence on board with the crew or other passengers – a task made easier by ignorance.

There is no doubt that leader Jimmy Marr, skipper Victor Marchesi and the Governor of the Falkland Islands, Sir Alan Cardinall, had no knowledge of the real purpose of the expedition. Being wartime, the odds of this expedition reaching the Antarctic were very slim: as Jimmy Marr was to write, 'Some of the equipment was trans-shipped ten times before it eventually arrived.' Apparently, the only written orders Marr received was a set of procedures to be adopted should foreign forces be encountered – the risible penultimate paragraph could best be likened to a parent instructing a child, 'If you are bullied and cannot 'phone me about it, ask the bully to tell his parents what he did to you, and make certain he asks his parents to contact us to explain what happened.' Surveyor Andrew Taylor felt there was only one possible answer to the arrival of an armed foreign ship – 'Make them a cup of tea!'



Unloading building material for Base A, (British Antarctic Survey Archives Service)

Once the first base, 'Base B' had been established on Deception Island, an attempt was made to land at Hope Bay. Ice conditions rendered this impossible, so the Fitzroy and William Scoresby, co-opted to carry the expedition south from the Falkland Islands, steamed slowly down the west coast of the peninsula, searching for a possible landing site on the mainland. Forced to compromise, the second base was set up in Port Lockroy, unfortunately curtailing any chance of survey work on the mainland until the following year. Meanwhile the building that had been supplied was soon extended, using material salvaged from the old whaling station at Deception and other timber abandoned at Port Lockroy by whalers in 1931. 'Base A' now provided a more commodious 'static' base for the

nine men, many of whom would have spent considerable time working on the mainland, had they been able to land at Hope Bay. Before the end of the first summer one man was relieved of his duties at Port Lockroy and, as a matter of urgency, Johnny Blyth had to be hurriedly recruited in the Falkland Islands as a replacement.

The following summer the base at Hope Bay 'Base D' was finally built and supplied with the first sledge dogs, to the delight of those men who had transferred from the confines of Port Lockroy, eager to taste both the hard work and the challenge of long-distance fieldwork. Another hut was erected at Sandefjord Bay on Coronation Island but never occupied when it was realised, in the following year, that it had been built in the middle of a penguin colony: it was later dismantled and relocated.

In due course, the men of Operation Tabarin finally arrived back in Britain in 1946. To their surprise, there was nobody at the dock to meet them, so they said their farewells and quietly dispersed, as did so many other men and women who had been engaged in wartime work. The Peninsula did have one advantage as a wartime posting, however: men at the bases listening to the

chimes of Big Ben on the radio would occasionally hear the sound of anti-aircraft fire as the chimes faded away, reminding them that civilians at home were much closer to the front line than they were.

As Gwion Davies recalled, 'Down there, when the wind was blasting away, I used to give thanks I was not in the Malayan jungle and swamps, fighting off mosquitoes and being shot at by the Japanese.'

Operation Tabarin set up the first four British Antarctic bases: one was never occupied and two were later destroyed by fire. Of the originals, only Base 'A' at Port Lockroy remains, restored nearly ten years ago under the auspices of the UKAHT.

Despite a shaky start, during the two years of Operation Tabarin 35 man-years of base occupation had produced a firm foundation upon which the Falkland Islands Dependencies was to grow, evolving into the British Antarctic Survey. 20 years later, many other bases had been set up and 1213 man-years of work had been achieved. The successful work carried out during the International Geophysical Year had emphasised the importance of scientific study and the subsequent growth of international co-operation led to the formation of the Antarctic Treaty.

Alan Carroll, September 2005



Tabarin sledge dogs at Hope Bay, i.e the second year of Tabarin. Note the fan trace which the dogs had been used to in Newfoundland. These were the forebears of many later FIDS dogs, photo by 'Jimmy' Marshall

Operation Tabarin members on the deck of the Royal Navy ship H.M.S. Eagle at Deception Island during the second summer; (standing L to R) Berry, James, Matheson, Russell, Lamb, Farrington, Donnachie, Reece, Taylor, Davies, Smith, Back; (sitting L to R) Ashton, Blyth, Marshall, Flett (British Antarctic Survey Archives Service)

New Permanent Gallery in Dundee

Dundee Heritage Trust has received a grant of £50,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund towards the creation of a brand new 'The Forgotten Years' gallery within the Discovery Point museum. The gallery will focus on the history of RRS Discovery from 1905 to 1931 which includes the Hudson Bay Company years, the Discovery Oceanographic Expedition of 1925-27 (the first maritime research undertaken to explore the natural habitat of the whale and its exploitation as a resource) and the British

Australian New Zealand Antarctic Research Expedition of 1929-31 (an extensive survey of the land masses and oceans of the South Atlantic and Antarctic under the leadership of Sir Douglas Mawson).

The new gallery will interpret this important story in a more involving way, increasing people's understanding and enjoyment of their maritime heritage and providing a greatly enhanced visitor experience. This exciting development will open in March 2006.

If anybody knows the whereabouts of any relevant research or display material Dundee Heritage Trust would be very pleased to hear from you. Please contact Gill Poulter, Heritage & Exhibitions Director on 01382 225282 or gillpoulter@dundeeheritage.co.uk

Dates for your diary...

• **The Lost Pictures of Discovery** - Images from two unique albums showing Discovery's construction, launch and voyage into the unknown Antarctic. This exhibition is a fascinating insight into the early history of Discovery from her construction at Dundee's Panmure Shipyard, through her launch amid cheering crowds, to the long southward voyage. Taken from two albums of the period – one is the personal album/scrapbook of Sir Clements Markham of the Royal Geographical Society, the "father" of Discovery's 1901-04 expedition, the other belonged to someone very closely connected to the building and launch of the ship. Both the albums have been acquired at auction by Dundee Heritage Trust during recent years. Most of the images are very rare or unique and many will never have been seen in public before. The exhibition runs from 29 October to 2 February

2006 in the Café at Discovery Point, Dundee. Admission free. For further information please contact Niall Cooper, Collections Assistant on 01382 225282 or niallcooper@dundeeheritage.co.uk

• **Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery** has a new 'Antarctic Connections' exhibition as part of the SeaPlymouth exhibition. It includes artefacts from the Discovery, Aurora, and Terra Nova expeditions and runs until the end of December. Admission free, open Tuesday to Saturday. Call 01752 304774

• **The Scott Polar Research Institute** has a full and interesting programme of lectures related to Antarctica too long to list here. For details contact 01223 336540