

REPORT TO THE BRITISH COUNCIL (AUSTRALIA) ON A CONSULTING AND LECTURE  
TOUR TO SYDNEY, HOBART, MELBOURNE, MOUNT GAMBIER, ADELAIDE AND FREMANTLE,

OCTOBER - NOVEMBER 1989.

By Ann Savours Shirley

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1) HOBART

The main purpose of my visit from 11 to 24 October was to advise the International Antarctic Centre, Hobart, (Director, Dr. Louise Crossley) on displays for the proposed National Antarctic Museum, which it was intended to set up on a site by the harbour near Salamanca Place. While there, I read all the display briefs and discussed them individually with their compilers. I also attended a week of meetings between the Director and staff of the Centre and the designers, which thrashed out the final form which the museum was to take. I had visited the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge and the Royal Geographical Society, South Kensington, before leaving England in order to ascertain what material might be lent to Hobart. I gave a public lecture on 20 October entitled "Discovering the Discovery" in the C.S.I.R.O. Marine Laboratories at which there was an audience of one hundred and thirty two. This was under the auspices of the Centre. While in Hobart I visited the Antarctic Division, which has organised the continuing Australian expeditions to the Antarctic since 1947, the Allport Library and Museum (State Library of Tasmania), Government House (including the site of the Rossbank Observatory of 1840 - 1854 set up by Sir John Franklin and Captain Sir James Clark Ross R.N. as the magnetic headquarters of the Antarctic exploring and scientific expedition of 1839 - 43 in H.M. Ships Erebus and Terror, on which I had published a paper in Annals of Science, Vol. 39, 1982, p. 527-64). I also visited the Australian Antarctic expedition ship Icebird, the old Sydney Harbour ferry North Head and the Tasmanian Museum. Also by invitation I attended the annual Seamen's Service on the anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar at St. George's, Battery Point. Since returning to England, I have agreed to contribute to a Festschrift in honour of Mr. Geoffrey Stilwell, A.M., Curator of the Allport Museum and Library, on three drawings in the collection, executed during the French Antarctic expedition of 1837 - 40. I first met Mr. Stilwell in 1960 - 61 during a previous research visit to Hobart. In the Tasmanian Museum, I was shown a fine collection of scrimshaw and a pocket medical kit used by Dr. Edward Wilson in the Antarctic, probably during Scott's last expedition, 1910 - 13. I have already edited Wilson's Discovery diaries 1901 - 04, but hope to illustrate a paper on Wilson for the Journal of the Royal Naval Medical Service with a photograph of the kit. I made a point of seeing the sledge flag on the walls of the Anglican Cathedral, given by Lady Franklin to Lieut. Hobson, R.N.

Sadly, the International Antarctic Centre and its proposed museum have been postponed indefinitely since my return home, owing to a shortage of public funds.

2) SYDNEY

I spent 7 to 10 October in Sydney, based in the offices of the new National Maritime Museum (Director Dr. Kevin Fewster), which is nearing completion. Mrs. Mary Louise Williams, Senior Curator, looked after me

very well, introducing all the staff and showing me the plans for the galleries. I gave a seminar at her request on the collecting policy and on the MSS collection of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, where I was until recently an Assistant Keeper. One evening I spoke about the Discovery (whose "biography" I have written) to an audience largely drawn from the staffs of the Australian National Maritime Museum and the Sydney Maritime Museum on board the old "preserved" ferry, Kanangra. I visited the Power House Museum (akin to the Science Museum, South Kensington) and the old Sydney Observatory, where I climbed the stairs and ladders to the time ball in company with the curator, Mr. David Dolan, who is Senior Curator of the Power House. He has the task of transforming the buildings (deserted by the astronomers) into a museum, as happened to the old Greenwich Observatory, now part of the National Maritime Museum. I was able to suggest the names of some former colleagues, for Mr. Dolan to contact in this connection.

### 3) MELBOURNE

It so happened that the National Conference of the Museums Association of Australia was taking place at the University of Melbourne, from 25 - 28 October. Here I was welcomed as an honoured guest, as were two other delegates from overseas. I was struck with the liveliness of the museum scene in Australia, perhaps occasioned in part from the celebration of the 1988 bicentenary. The speaker at the conference dinner (held in the members' rooms of the Melbourne Cricket Club, adjoining the Museum of Sport) advised curators to examine the sort of history they were portraying and warned them against the "sanitisation" of the past.

I gave two talks aboard the restored barque Polly Woodside (National Trust of Australia) at South Wharf Dock, where is also situated the Melbourne Maritime Museum. The first was the "Key Note Address" at a meeting of the Maritime Museum Council (Directors, Curators and Committee members of Australia's maritime museums), and was entitled "Collections policies in maritime museums and experiences of establishing the Polar Gallery, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, U.K.". The second (a public lecture) was about the Discovery, which carried Sir Douglas Mawson and party South during the BANZARE Expedition 1929 - 31. The host on both occasions was Commander Michael Parker C.V.O., R.N. who presented me with the Polly Woodside gold medal after the second talk. Interestingly, he told me that it was he who initiated the Duke of Edinburgh's visit to the Antarctic c. 1967, when Sir Raymond Priestley was Prince Philip's guide and mentor.

I was able to visit the University Archives during a lunch hour where the Archivist had kindly informed me I should find Captain Scott's pipe, said to have been found in the tent on the "Great Ice Barrier" and given to Sir David Orme Masson two years later by Lady Scott. I also learnt that the papers of Dr. Fritz Loewe are now deposited in the University Archives. At the weekend, I was able to work in the State Library of Victoria on the papers of Captain John King Davis, one of the skippers of Shackleton's and Mawson's ships in the Southern Ocean. These papers had been closed to scholars until recently. I hope to be able to incorporate some of this research into my "biography" of the Discovery. The Manuscripts Librarian, Mr. Tony Marshall, was most helpful on this occasion.

I took the opportunity while in Melbourne, to contact Dr. Philip Law, A.O., C.B.E., Director of the Antarctic Division from 1948 to 1966, who

had enabled me to visit Macquarie Island in 1960 in the Australian National Antarctic Expedition ship Magga Dan. He showed me the recently published official track chart of voyages and traverses made in the Australian sector of the Antarctic during the "Law Era", which he had laboriously compiled. We were able to talk about many matters of common interest over lunch at his home and I was delighted to see some of Nel Law's paintings of the Antarctic. It was very sad, however, to see her so badly affected by a stroke.

#### 4) MOUNT GAMBIER AND PENOLA, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The name "Penola" has been familiar to me ever since I joined the staff of the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge, in 1954. The then Director, Dr. Colin Bertram and Senior Research Associate, Dr. Brian Roberts C.M.G., had both sailed at 4 knots from the London River to the Antarctic in the topsail schooner Penola in 1934, during the outward voyage of the British Graham Land Expedition 1934 - 37. The expedition was led by John Rymill, who named the vessel after the 4000 acre Old Penola Estate, where he was brought up and to which he returned later in life. Some five years ago, I was associated with the production of the expedition film, with the then Film Officer of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, Philip Sugg and with another expedition member, Mr. Duncan Carse.

It was therefore a particular pleasure to be met as arranged at Mount Gambier Airport on 31 October by Dr. Eleanor Rymill, John Rymill's widow. She kindly drove me round the landscape of the extinct volcano and also showed me the full size "cut-away" replica of the brig Lady Nelson, the exploring and survey vessel commanded by Lieut. James Grant, R.N. who sighted and named Mount Gambier from her decks in 1800. The original Lady Nelson played a conspicuous part in the early history of Australia.

I stayed overnight at Dr. Rymill's white boarded cottage on the Old Penola Estate, which overlooks a deep lagoon frequented by water fowl and bordered by stately old Blue Gums. We had a number of interesting conversations about her late husband (whose life is being written by Mr. John Béchervaise, the Australian Antarctic explorer and writer), about the "Green Triangle" region of South Australia and about the British Graham Land Expedition.

#### 5) ADELAIDE

The Mawson Institute for Antarctic Research, University of Adelaide, was my host institution between 1 and 4 November. I stayed at the Kathleen Lumley Postgraduate College, where I had the pleasure of meeting a number of the residents, both South Australian and overseas, including Miss Leith MacGillivray, who showed me the temporary exhibition about John Rymill at her place of work, the Mortlock Library. The Director of the Mawson Institute, Dr. Fred Jacka, and his small staff, made me very welcome and I was glad to see the little museum of Mawson relics, arranged by Mr. Richard Ferguson, where the Antarctic explorer's famous half sledge is held on temporary loan from the Royal Geographical Society of London.

I took the train on 3 November to Port Adelaide in order to visit the delightful South Australian Maritime Museum, whose present Director

made me most welcome and whose founder Director is now Director of the Australian National Maritime Museum in Sydney. That afternoon I gave a talk to the staff of the History Trust of South Australia, which is the organising body not only for the S.A. Maritime Museum, but also for Old Parliament House, the Migration Museum and the Birdwood Mill National Motor Museum. I enjoyed visiting the South Australian Museum and Art Gallery after my seminar.

#### 6) FREMANTLE

The train journey of 37 hours in the "Trans Australian" across the Nullarbor Plains from Adelaide to Perth provided not only an interesting experience, but a chance to catch up on diary writing. The Director, Mr. Kurt Peterson, and staff of the Western Australian Maritime Museum, were my hosts in Fremantle from 6 to 9 November. In contrast to Perth, which suffers from the "high rise" mania, Fremantle's buildings are on a pleasantly human scale. Before the days of air travel, it was the first port of call for the many passenger liners to Australia. In the museum's galleries is material recovered from Dutch East Indiamen wrecked on the coast of Western Australia between 1629 and 1727, including silver coins, cannon, ships' timbers, fittings and instruments for navigation. The museum building of dressed stone was formerly the Commissariat store of the original penal settlement during the mid-19th Century. There is naturally a strong conservation section in the museum, which is a branch of the Western Australian Museum in Perth, which I also visited during my stay. Dr. John Bannister, a whale biologist, is its Director. I had met him at the conference on whaling records at Kendall Whaling Museum, Sharon, Mass. c. 1974. He brought a couple of senior curators from Perth to join the Fremantle staff for my last lecture in Australia, again about Captain Scott's Discovery, which was the most popular topic of the three I had come prepared to give. The Fremantle Maritime Museum publishes a number of interesting free leaflets, available in the galleries: on the museum itself, on the Dutch wrecks, including the Batavia timbers project and on Dirk Hartog's inscribed pewter plate, which was nailed to a post ashore in 1616 to commemorate his landing on the western coast of Australia from the V.O.C. ship Eendracht. As far as is known, he was the first European to set foot there. I took the opportunity to visit the Endeavour replica, being constructed in Fremantle, of which my former Greenwich colleague, David White, is in charge. The project is financed by the Bond Corporation as a bicentennial gift to Australia.

#### Conclusion

So ended what might be termed the "official" side of my round-the-world journey. I had met with the warmest of welcomes from East to West of Australia. It was a tremendous experience to visit so many State capitals after nearly thirty years\*, strengthening old friendships and professional contacts and of course making new ones. It is much to be regretted that proposals for the International Antarctic Centre have been shelved indefinitely, but I hope to keep in touch with Dr. Crossley with whose work I was greatly impressed and to whom I am much indebted in many ways, and with many of the curators, historians and ship restorers met in Hobart and elsewhere - in fact I anticipate a stream of visitors from 'down under' to Canterbury!

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\* In 1960 - 61 I spent a year in Australia and New Zealand, based at the Australian National University, working in museums and libraries, and cataloguing the polar and whaling MSS in their collections, as well as researching papers for publication, such as Rosbank in the State Archives of Tasmania.

While touching at Honolulu, Singapore and Hong Kong, I took the opportunity to meet members of the Hakluyt Society (of which I am a member of Council), and of the Society for Nautical Research (of which I am Honorary Secretary). Again, the contact was valuable and the welcomes warm.

I appreciate the British Council's award of a travel grant very much indeed. My own knowledge has been increased and my horizons widened, while those whom I met know they can call on me for help - or to discuss many matters of common scholarly, maritime or polar interest.

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