

Correspondence

British National Antarctic Expedition 1901–04: crew identities in extant photographs

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The centenary of the death of George Vince on Robert Falcon Scott's first expedition occurred on 11 March 2002, and it was one of the writer's aims for the last decade to succeed in identifying him in a contemporary photograph before that date. The staff of the Blandford Forum Museum Trust in Dorset, the county in which Vince was born, had never been able to identify him in any photo. However, they did have a group photo of the boys at the now defunct Bishop Wake's School, which he attended. As the photo was taken in 1892, when Vince was 12 years old, they believed it must have included Vince.

Among the few photographs in which Vince could be recognised was one in the *Weekly Press* (Fig. 1), taken some time after arrival at Lyttelton in December 1901, which was reproduced in *Antarctica unveiled* (Yelverton 2000: 93), the writer's history of the expedition, reviewed in the April 2002 issue of *Polar Record* (38 (205): 170–171). Having identified every other crew member in group photos taken in London, New Zealand, and the Antarctic before, during, or after the return of the expedition, a

process of elimination led to the conclusion that Vince was the left-hand man standing on the boom in that picture. This seemed to be borne out when that man's facial proportions were found to be virtually identical to those of one of the older boys in the photo from the Bishop Wake's School.

In 1998 Mrs Ann Shirley told the writer of a photo in the National Maritime Museum collection (Ford 1901; Fig. 2), found aboard *Discovery* when the vessel was being prepared for transfer to Dundee. It showed tow-netting operations at sea, and the four men in it were identified on the reverse as, from left to right, Hartley Ferrar (supervising), Petty Officer Edgar Evans (operating the winch), Frank Dailey (farther seaman), and Vince. Yet three facts — the left-hand man, supervising, clearly being Thomas Hodgson, the biologist, whose diary entry describes the operations on 20 November 1901 (Hodgson 1901–04); the man operating the winch (the donkeyman William Hubert) being so obviously unlike P.O. Evans; and the absurdity of the suggestion that Dailey, a naval warrant officer, would appear in able seaman's attire — combined to lead the writer to dismiss the identification of Vince.

However, in a scrapbook compiled by Sir Clements Markham, sold at Christie's on 25 September 2001, and now at Discovery Point, Dundee, Sir Clements identified Vince as second from the left on the boom in the Lyttelton photo (Fig. 1), and the facial proportions of that man match precisely those of the man identified as Vince in Figure 2.

Sir Clements identified the men on the boom in the Lyttelton photo as (from left to right): *Plumley, Vince, Wild, Evans, Walker, Whitfield, Duncan, Macfarlane, Dailey, and Dellbridge*. He identified the men on deck as (left to right): Blissett, *Lashly*, Page, Dell, Weller, Quartley, Smythe, Williamson, *Bonner*, and Pilbeam. Italics note where the



Fig. 1. Some of the crew of *Discovery* in Lyttelton, December 1901. Photo courtesy of the Scott Polar Research Institute.



Fig. 2. Tow-netting operations on the voyage to New Zealand. Photo copied by courtesy of the Royal Society.

identification was different from that in *Antarctica unveiled* (page 93).

Of these, Sir Clements' identifications of Miller, the sailmaker, and Able Seaman Bonner are demonstrably wrong. The shipwright, Duncan, appears to Miller's left in the well-known July 1901 Lafayette photo of the crew, taken in London, and it is Duncan of that photo, not Miller, who appears in Skelton's 30 September 1902 photo of mess no. 3 in the Antarctic (Skelton 1902). The man next to Pilbeam in the Lyttelton photo, whom Sir Clements identifies as Able Seaman Bonner, is wearing sea boots. These are only worn by the petty officers in the photo, so he cannot have been Able Seaman Bonner. The man's face equates readily to that of PO David Allan in other crew photos.

In Reginald Ford's portrait of AB William Peters (Ford 1902), Peters' facial proportions were similar to those of the second man on the boom. Therefore, the conclusion arrived at in captioning the Lyttelton photo for *Antarctica unveiled* was that Vince, by then aged 21, was the left-hand man. However, that conclusion was, in part, based on the assumption that the engine-room hands were not all present in the Lyttelton photo.

Circumstances beyond his control delayed the writer's acquisition of a 10x8" print of that photo, and, to meet the production deadline, identifications were made from a photocopy. In that copy the second man from the left on the deck appeared exactly like the Union Castle Seaman Robert Sinclair in a photo of some *Discovery* men at a North Canterbury Mounted Rifles camp (Mathias 1901). Now, under greater magnification, the actual print of the Lyttelton photo shows that Markham was correct in

identifying him as Chief Stoker William Lashly, whose presence makes it reasonable to assume that all the engine-room complement were on deck, including Stoker Frank Plumley and Leading Stoker Thomas Whitfield.

While there is still some difficulty in equating the left-hand man's facial proportions to Plumley's appearance in subsequent photos, hindsight makes it apparent that Peters' face has a more forward jutting chin than the second man on the boom in the Lyttelton photo. The much slimmed face of Whitfield, compared to his appearance in the Lafayette photo had deceived the writer into believing he was not present, but, again with hindsight, logic suggests the change in his appearance would have been an inevitable result of the excessive stokehold temperatures, endured for long periods when passing through the tropics, and prolonged periods of steaming on the voyage out. So the conclusion must be that Markham is correct about both Plumley and Vince.

A further case of mistaken identities in *Antarctica unveiled* should also be mentioned. Edward Wilson's great-nephew, David Wilson, has pointed out that a copy of the photo of Shackleton's first sledge (Shackleton 1902; reproduced in Yelverton 2000: 122) is in one of Edward Wilson's personal photo albums in the Scott Polar Research Institute collection, and that Wilson's diary makes it clear that he and his companions, rather than three seamen, pulled the sledge with the pram through 'The Gap' on 18 February 1902. Neither the writer, nor anyone he consulted, had been able to recognise the left-hand man in the picture, which led to the conclusion that the men in the photo must have been seamen. But reference to Hodgson's diary (Hodgson 1901–04: 19 February 1902) implies that he

helped them pull their kit to the starting point, from which it followed that he is (recognisably, by hindsight) the left-hand man in the traces, standing in for Shackleton, who took the photo.

The necessary alterations will appear in any new edition of *Antarctica unveiled*. In the meantime, it is hoped that this letter will serve to correct the identities of the men in these photographs, and particularly, for the first time, that of George Vince, in the centenary of his death.

References

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Disposal of unissued Polar Medal

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In the *London Gazette* of 1 May 1934 it was announced that a number of Polar Medals in bronze were to be awarded to those who took part in the British, Australian, New Zealand Antarctic Research Expedition (BANZARE) under Sir Douglas Mawson. This expedition in RRS *Discovery* (Robert Falcon Scott's old ship) explored some 2500 miles of the Antarctic coastline between Kaiser Wilhelm II Land and Coats Land during two extensive cruises between 1929 and 1931.

In addition to the scientists and ship's officers, the company of *Discovery* was made up of sailors from a number of different countries, including one Finn, an able seaman apparently named Louis Parviainen, who was on board for the second cruise in 1930–31.

When the time came to issue the medals three years after the end of the expedition, no address could be found for this seaman, and the medal roll in the Public Record Office had 'No address – Sent to RGS Sept 1934' against his name. Although the medal was sent to the Royal Geographical Society, in common with a number of other Polar Medals awarded to seamen during the 1930s, the medal eventually found its way to the Admiralty, where it languished until 1970, before being sent to the Army Medal Office, where it remained until early in 2001.

The officer-in-charge of the Army Medal Office then informed me that he had no requirement for it amongst his representative display of medals, and that he would like it to go to a more appropriate home. As it had never been presented to the recipient, and was thus still the property of the Crown, he sought my advice.

It was thought that if Parviainen could not be traced in 1934, to attempt to trace him or his family in 2001 — when, if he were alive, he would have been about 100 years old — would be a fruitless exercise. As a medal that never reached its recipient, it would not have been proper to sell

it, and issuing it to a polar institution or museum for display would have achieved nothing, as the appropriate ones — such as the Scott Polar Research Institute or the National Maritime Museum — already had examples of Polar Medals in bronze. An alternative course was therefore proposed.

Parviainen was the only Finnish citizen to be awarded the British Polar Medal, and it was felt that it would be a very friendly and appropriate gesture to present his medal to the National Museum of Finland in Helsinki, where it could be displayed as a unique award to a Finn amongst the polar collection of artifacts housed there. In the late spring of 2001, this idea was submitted by the Defence Services Secretary to Her Majesty The Queen, who firmly sanctioned the proposal and 'was genuinely fascinated' by the story. Correspondence was thereupon opened with the National Museum, and in the middle of May it was learned that the Museum would be delighted to receive the medal. Miss Alyson Bailes, the British Ambassador, recommended the autumn as a good time for the presentation.

In June, the Keeper of Coins and Medals, Mr Tuukka Talvio, indicated that his research showed Parviainen's name connected him with an east Finnish 'clan,' and that some 6000 people bore the same last name. He also reported that he had been in contact with a board member of the Parviainen 'family association.' Meanwhile, having told Mr Talvio that the only information available in Britain was that Parviainen had been born in 1898 in Helsingfors and that he had joined *Discovery* in Melbourne, it was decided to examine the ship's papers in the Public Record Office. Here it was found that his forename was actually 'Lauri,' and that a careless clerk in the 1930s had transcribed this as 'Louis' in all papers relating to the medal, and that 'Louis' had also been engraved on the medal.

In August, there came news that the Parviainen archivists had also identified the seaman as Lauri Parviainen, and that he had died childless in 1940, although his brother had a family. A week later this background was revised when it was discovered that he had actually lived until 1978 and