

Obituaries

David Smith, noted painter, died on 1 September 1999. He had just returned home from presenting a retrospective exhibition of his paintings in Japan, and was in the midst of planning his next project.

Born 79 years ago, the son of a Lowestoft fisherman, Smith had an affinity with all things nautical, as well as the stomach to cope with the worst storms at sea. The panoramic skies of East Anglia and a turbulent North Sea were natural backdrops from which to develop his eye for the light and drama of nature. It was this ability that, in 1961, impressed me and eventually led to an introduction to the director of the British Antarctic Survey, Dr Richard M. Laws, in 1975, and thence to invitations to join the RRS *Bransfield* for the 1975/76 and 1979/80 southern voyages. That enlightened patronage gave birth to many remarkable images of Antarctica. On those voyages, he mixed with everyone and found his way into every nook and cranny of the ship or base where he happened to be, sketching and photographing at every conceivable opportunity, and earning for himself the affectionate nickname 'The Hobbit.'

The Antarctic experience led to a major commission from Trinity House to capture the essence of the light-houses around Britain and resulted in a liberally illustrated *View from the sea*, with text by Richard Woodman. Work for the Finnish Tourist Board followed, and then, during the last 10 years, a riot of colour was generated as Smith explored the harbours and towns of Japan, where his work was greatly appreciated. Gregarious and never idle, Smith invested in a riotous round-the-world cruise aboard *QE II*, giving rise to a fascinating booklet, *QE II: portrait of a great ship*, showing life behind the scenes. As on *Bransfield*, his reputation for 'popping up everywhere' soon earned him a friendly appellation, 'the mushroom.' Typically, he made friends with the captain, crew, and passengers. He likened his time on *QE II* to that on *Bransfield* as being 'just super.' Those who were privileged to have received regular mailings of his daily diary could not help but chortle at his shrewd observations of his fellow, extremely well-heeled passengers. It is a great pity that Smith's more relaxed personal writing seemed to be stifled when he was preparing an illustrated Antarctic diary. Regrettably, no publisher could be found. The loss is ours, because the illustrations of men and life aboard the two BAS ships *Bransfield* and *John Biscoe* and at the bases are a tribute to those who work in Antarctica.

Smith's paintings, water-colour sketches, drawings, and etchings are almost invariably imbued with vigour. They are not to everyone's taste, but one cannot ignore them. The large-scale canvasses command attention, cover a range of experience, and give vibrant life to landscapes and industrial activity, which inspired some of his best work. Sometimes painting in that environment required ingenuity. A number of *in situ* paintings at Halley

and other Antarctic locations owe their existence to the fact that there was a handy supply of gin to use as thinner. But one of his favourite paintings — a large canvas showing tractor tracks on the sea ice at Halley — remains without a permanent home with a wall big enough to do it justice. He never forgot his indebtedness to BAS and to the Antarctic community. SPRI and the BAS Club Disaster Fund have both benefited from his generosity.

In fact, anyone who has visited the Scott Polar within the last 20 years cannot but be impressed by Smith's magnificent palette-knife painting of a tabular iceberg, which, at present, graces the museum. Visitors to BAS will also have been aware of two palette-knife works and other paintings that were stylistically different. These contrasting styles represent part of the artist's personal experimentation during the two voyages south, which resulted in major exhibitions and a collaboration with Professor G.E. Fogg in their book *The explorations of Antarctica*.

Smith was ambivalent towards the art establishment, often going his own way against the fashion, but he was always pleased when recognised professionally. He and his widow Elizabeth (née Hawes) led crowded professional lives, and he was particularly proud when she became professor of singing at Trinity College, London. They had two daughters.

Smith was at one time quite an accomplished pianist, but artistic commissions and developing problems with his fingers pared back that ability. Besides his passion for art, he was an able carpenter and joiner, keen on models (especially railways and ships), and built a six-inch reflector telescope that was housed in the loft of their London home. He was an ideal practical man for the Antarctic.

Of compact build, Smith was a larger-than-life character who was driven by a restless artistic energy that concealed a generous nature and a shrewd business head. He had friends at all levels of society, who will miss his friendship; his infectious laughter, hospitality, and generosity; and his nagging to get one to do one thing or another.

David Limbert

Captain David Harrison Turnbull, former commanding officer of RRS *Shackleton*, died August 1999, aged 78.

Turnbull was born on 24 July 1921 at Timaru in New Zealand. The sea was in his blood, as he came from a family of merchants and shipping agents. At 16 he chose a seafaring career, and was apprenticed by the Port Line. Two years later, the Second World War broke out, and Turnbull served as an officer in the Merchant Navy, working on the supply convoys between Britain and New Zealand, as well as those that ran between Britain and North America.

At the end of the war, his merchant marine career continued with a position at the Union Steam Ship Com-

pany, and then Holme and Co., where he finally earned his Master's certificate. In 1953 he took command of his first ship with a wealth of experience to his credit. After 1956, he moved to London, where he served as a nautical surveyor to the Board of Trade, and was eventually appointed to the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey.

Turnbull's first appointment with FIDS was as first officer aboard *John Biscoe* in 1958. In 1959 he became master of *John Biscoe's* sister support ship RRS *Shackleton*. His duties included supplying the eight FIDS stations, the most southerly of which was Stonington Island, and conducting a survey of the South Shetlands Islands and the Gerlache Strait. Turnbull's surveying work continued in the 1960/61 season, when *Shackleton* joined forces with Royal Navy officers aboard *Protector* and charted the Joinville Islands.

The event in Turnbull's life perhaps best remembered by his polar colleagues is his daring rescue of fellow British Antarctic Survey personnel during the volcanic eruption of Deception Island in 1967. Turnbull was master of *Shackleton* when the news came through that an eruption was in progress in the South Shetland Islands, and that the British base there was in danger. By the time *Shackleton* arrived, the Chilean station had been destroyed and the British station badly damaged. With Chilean and Argentine research vessels, Turnbull quickly organised the evacuation of the scientists, and then returned two days later — when eruptions were still continuing — in an attempt to salvage the scientists' belongings and equipment.

When Turnbull resigned his command of *Shackleton* in 1970, he had completed 13 Antarctic voyages, and his contribution to polar exploration and research was acknowledged by the naming of Turnbull Point, the westernmost tip of d'Urville Island in the Joinville group. He continued to serve at sea after leaving FIDS, until he rejoined the Board of Trade in 1977. He retired in 1983.

Turnbull's nautical interests were reflected in his membership of various organisations, including Trinity House, the Honourable Company of Master Mariners, the Royal Geographical Society, and the Antarctic Club. He married Barbara Jones in 1945, and they had a son and a daughter.

E. Cruwys

John Bentley, who sailed as a cadet to the Antarctic during the *Discovery* Expedition of 1925–27, died aged 89 in July 1999.

Born at Bexleyheath, Kent, on 11 October 1909, he learned seamanship at the Thames Nautical Training School, HMS *Worcester*, passing out as top cadet in 1925. The Colonial Office was at that time refitting the Royal Research Ship *Discovery*, built for the National Antarctic Expedition of 1901–04. Bentley was one of three cadets in their mid-teens to be selected for the 1925–27 voyage, the aim of which was to establish a scientific basis for the protection of the great whales and at the same time to regulate Antarctic whaling, enabling the industry to continue. Bentley attended both the colloquia held at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, after *Discovery* had been acquired by the Maritime Trust from the Admi-

rality. He spoke at the second, in June 1980, quoting from his letters home. Perhaps one of his vivid descriptions of life and work aboard the ever-rolling wooden barque is worth repeating here.

It is difficult to describe what it is like being at sea in a sailing ship — sailing quietly without engine power. There is the creaking of the wooden hull, the sound of the wind in the rigging and the rushing of the water swishing past the hull. Lying in one's bunk with just a thickness of wood between one and the sea beyond, one can imagine that the ship is actually carrying on a conversation with the sea. Up aloft it is even more marvellous, looking down from perhaps the topgallant yardarm into a midnight sea, illuminated by the masses of plankton drifting by, giving out their luminous and mysterious light. (Savours 1992: 189)

Discovery had been refitted with oceanographic gear and laboratories, including nets for collecting the creatures of the sea. In Cape Town, said Bentley, 'a dear old lady came aboard to see the ship...and as she was looking round, noticed one of the large hoops that we used for the nets. Mr Goodchild, the third officer, happened to be passing by and she asked him what it was for. So he told her that this was put over the stern to teach whales to jump through it, after which they were sent to various circuses' (J. Bentley, Greenwich, 26 June 1980). Young as he was, Bentley on occasion had sole charge of the bridge, when the vessel was short-handed. Taking in and setting sail were very difficult, when the rigging was covered in ice and the sails were frozen stiff.

Going aloft, up the weather rigging one was just about flattened against the ratlines and climbing was difficult, particularly going over the futtock shrouds, when at the end of a roll, one was almost parallel to the sea. Then on to the topgallant yard — always my particular baby — and out to the yardarm fighting the canvas all the way, gripping the sail and trying to lean over it against the yard, whilst wrestling with the gaskets, endeavouring to secure it to the yard before it blew away again. (J. Bentley, Greenwich, 26 June 1980)

'He was frequently sent to the mast head "for the good of his soul" and once was frozen into the crow's nest,' according to the obituary in *The Daily Telegraph* (3 August 1999). However, he did not mention these punishments (superseded by then in the Royal Navy) in his talk.

Bentley joined the Palestine Police Force and then the Northern Rhodesian Police in the 1930s. After the Second World War, he became an administrator in Northern Rhodesia, meeting many of the political figures of the time, such as Sir Roy Welensky and Kenneth Kaunda. During the civil war in the Congo of 1959–60, he helped to organise the exodus of large numbers of foreign nationals, especially Belgian and American. He was made an OBE in 1957 (*The Daily Telegraph* 3 August 1999).

Ann Savours

Reference

Savours, A. 1992. *The voyages of the 'Discovery'*. London: Virgin.