A Vision for South Georgia...

From September 7th to 9th, SGHT welcomed 63 delegates from 8 different countries to Dundee to take part in the South Georgia Industrial Heritage Conference. Delegates included the Commissioner for South Georgia, Nigel Haywood, and the Senior Executive for GSGSSI, Dr. Martin Collins. The conference was organised in partnership with the South Georgia Association, TICCH (The International Committee for the Conservation of Industrial Heritage) and with support from the Government of South Georgia and Prof. Frederik Paulsen among others.

On Wednesday 7th delegates arrived at SGHT HQ in Verdant Works for a reception and registration. Young pipers and drummers from the nearby Harris Academy welcomed delegates in the courtyard of Verdant Works. They enjoyed a tour of Verdant Works Museum before hearing welcome speeches from Prof. David Munro and Dundee's Lord Provost, John Letford. The Museums Director for Dundee Heritage Trust, Gill Poulter, gave a fascinating talk on Dundee's many links with the Antarctic. During a lively reception delegates admired an exhibition of photographs of Leith whaling station by local photographer and former South Georgia whaler John Alexander.

Thursday morning found everyone at Discovery Point in the Falcon Scott Suite which overlooks the RRS Discovery. Vice-chair of SGHT, Prof. Elaine Shemilt had created a wonderful print work of the maps of South Georgia for the conference, which were on display inside and outside the suite for delegates to admire. The first excellent paper was given by the conference’s key note speaker Susan Barr, President, International Polar Heritage Committee, ICOMOS. Susan’s talk was followed by speakers who were uniformly interesting, entertaining and who addressed the key questions of the conference. Trustee Prof. Frederik Paulsen completed the talks with an inspiring memorial lecture describing the life of the founder of SGHT, the late Brigadier David Nicholls RM and his vision for South Georgia.

After Thursday's talks delegates enjoyed a champagne reception followed by a tour of RRS Discovery, with artist Bridget Steed projecting her artwork conceived at Grytviken within the vessel. On the same night everyone enjoyed a delicious meal followed by a very energetic ceilidh on board the frigate Unicorn. As delegates made their way back to their hotels they could see Bridget's final projection of Grytviken, dazzlingly displayed on the hull of the RRS Discovery.

During the workshops on Friday morning all of the delegates had the opportunity to discuss one of the central themes of the conference. The key points from the workshops and all of the papers will be published in a conference journal kindly sponsored by the South Georgia Government. On Friday afternoon the most energetic delegates joined a walking tour of Dundee's historical sites with Prof. David Munro, a perfect ending to a most enjoyable and educational few days.
An Update from our Curator  By Elsa Davidson

The collection of the South Georgia Museum will be enhanced next season with the addition of a number of copies of important charts relating to the island. At the beginning of May I had the opportunity to visit the archives at the UK Hydrographic Office in Taunton, Somerset to view a range of material relating to South Georgia.

The charts included a German plan of Royal Bay and Moltke Harbour which was created as a result of work undertaken by the German scientific expedition during the International Polar Year of 1882-1883. The expedition undertook a range of astronomical, meteorological, geomagnetic and gravimetric observations and a transit of Venus was observed in December 1882. The team also created the first telegraph system to be used in the Antarctic. (Headland 1984). Other highlights included charts of the drift of Endurance across the Weddell Sea in 1915 and the tracks of Quest around South Georgia in 1922 which were created by Frank Worsley. Thank you to Rear Admiral Lambert for taking the time to meet with me, Andy Willett for demonstrating the current chart production process for South Georgia and to the team in the archives for all their help with accessing and copying material.

Update on our Oral History Project..

The Ex-Whalers Oral History Project continues to develop with new interviews across the country. Recent participants include Sir Gerald Elliot, former Chairman of Christian Salvesen and author of A Whaling Enterprise (1998). Sir Elliot’s publication is available from the SGHT website. The creation of a related exhibition in South Georgia has proved popular with visitors and those of you interested in South Georgia’s whaling history can now access a range of audio clips from the SGHT website. The oral history was also featured in a presentation at the SGHT Industrial Heritage Conference in Dundee in September this year. My paper considers the valuable role of oral history in recording and preserving industrial heritage and the remarkable personal insights it can reveal. Finally, the audio material has also been harnessed by former museum assistant and artist in residence Bridget Steed, who has used clips in her contribution to the Annual Exhibition of the Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh. The clever design incorporates the voices of ex-whalers inside painted whale ear bones which visitors are invited to engage with. Thank you once again to everyone who has helped to make the oral history project such a success.

Above: SGHT.1995.5.208 – Insulator from the first telegraph system in South Georgia. This porcelain insulator was part of an electrical time synchronisation system.

Left: SGHT.1997.5.251 – An earthenware bottle from the German expedition of 1882-1883.

A plaque commemorating the Shetland seamen who worked in the South Georgia whaling industry was unveiled in Lerwick on the 22nd May 2011. The plaque was created following 12 months of fundraising by the ex-Whalers Association in Shetland. The engraving reads: ‘South Atlantic Whalers. Erected by the Shetland ex-Whalers Association in tribute to all the Shetlanders who, from 1908 to 1963, worked in the Antarctic with the whaling fleets of Chr. Salvesen & Co., Leith. Through the 1930’s depression and post war austerity, money earned at the Antarctic Whaling sustained many families and helped to stem the flow of emigration from the islands till the fishing industry improved in the 1960’s and the oil industry arrived in the 1970’s.

South Georgia Heritage Trust – Protecting the past and future of South Georgia. www.sght.org
SGHT PR reaches new heights

From Jane & Susannah at Firebird PR.

This year, the Trust has held two special events in London to celebrate the successful completion of the Phase I trial of the Habitat Restoration Project: a lecture at the Academy of Medical Sciences and a fundraising reception at the House of Lords. The lecture, delivered by Project Director Tony Martin, was well attended, attracting an audience of over 75 guests with representation from a broad range of prominent organisations such as the charities RSPB and British Trust for Ornithology, as well as the Open University, British Antarctic Survey, officials from the South Georgia Government and staff from the field team. The fundraising reception was also a very special event, with patrons of the charity, The Princess Royal and Baroness Young, as well as The Lord Speaker Baroness d’Souza, speaking and also meeting guests.

Despite the geographical remoteness of South Georgia, the interest shown in the projects by guests at both events demonstrates they were keen to hear about the latest developments of the project as well as the Trust’s future plans for protecting the island’s native birds. Furthermore, science correspondent Jonathan Amos and columnist Charles Clover each attended an event and wrote pieces for BBC News online and the Sunday Times, respectively. As a PR agency we are often very close to our subject matter, but the nearest we have got to the isolated island and wildlife of South Georgia is living vicariously through the experiences of the field team. It is not hard to be seduced by the stunning photography of imposing glaciers or cheeky penguins - the stuff of glossy coffee-table books - and even at such a distance the dedication and passion of the field team was infectious. Working with the Trust has also meant working with many of the partners involved in this truly global project, not just the media but also pest control specialists, experts on glaciers, cruise operators and helicopter suppliers amongst others, all skilled people working with many of the partners involved in this truly global project, not just the media but also pest control specialists, experts on glaciers, cruise operators and helicopter suppliers amongst others, all skilled people who have come together to help realise the Trust’s ambitious vision. Communications is our job, and there were definitely some communication challenges along the way: even in this age of rapid technological advances, the Skype connection crackled and phased in and out like an early radio transmission, making interviews between the team on the ground and journalists in the UK difficult to organise!

Although the Project has been years in the planning, and the trial phase has come to a completion, this is really just the start of the Habitat Restoration Project, with plenty more exciting stories still to tell about the eradication programme as well as the historic heritage of South Georgia.

The Challenges of Fundraising

By Peter Taylor, Fundraising Director, SGHT.

Starting work at SGHT has been a stimulating and very different experience for me. My ten years in fundraising have been very much UK based, and in the case of my last post at the Mary Rose Trust, focused on Portsmouth Harbour. It has therefore been intriguing to begin raising funds for a project some 8,000 miles away.

However, I quickly caught the enthusiasm and passion for South Georgia from my new colleagues and it is quite amazing how many people, once they have experienced the island’s unique charm, become devoted to the cause despite its remoteness from any major civilisation.

We are working in a challenging fundraising environment at present, it will be necessary to effectively communicate the unique significance of our Habitat Restoration Project and bring it into the living rooms of potential supporters ahead of other UK conservation projects vying for donations. A review of South Georgia visitors who have sponsored a hectare shows we have a significant following in the USA, Australia, new Zealand and Holland. The challenge here is communicating effectively with these groups and encouraging them to give again and more generously.

This is a totally fascinating project and appeals to a wide range of audiences – there are so many opportunities to secure the funding we need: the task is to identify and engage with those people who can help us reach our target as quickly as possible.

South Georgia Heritage Trust – Protecting the past and future of South Georgia. www.sght.org
We are pleased to invite you to participate in a very special South Georgia Heritage Trust (SGHT) voyage to Antarctica, South Georgia and the Falklands Islands, departing Ushuaia, Argentina on 20th Nov 2011, returning on the 8th Dec.

This Expedition Cruise has been made possible by our collaboration with industry-leading operator One Ocean Expeditions, well known for high quality, safe and responsible Polar Expeditions. Their experienced, knowledgeable and passenger oriented staff will ensure that we have the best possible experiences on this awe inspiring voyage of a lifetime. Their well equipped, ice-strengthened ship Akademic Ioffe takes only 100 passengers and is ideally suited for our voyage. Furthermore, we are thrilled to offer this incredible trip at some of the most competitive rates in the industry.

For this voyage only, One Ocean Expeditions will make a generous donation for each and every ‘SGHT’ passenger who books. This money will go to the ‘SGHT Habitat Restoration project’ to remove rats from South Georgia. Phase 1 of this monumental conservation project is already done. The entire project will take a further five years. Once completed, the removal of the rats will help safeguard the ecology and future of South Georgia’s wildlife. Millions of seabirds are expected to return to boost the already teeming wildlife of this jewel in the crown. Your booking on this cruise will help to ensure the success of this incredible project.

To book as part of the SGHT group, or with any other enquiry, please call us at U.K. +44 (0)1382 229792 or USA +1 970 704 9178 (Denise) or email alison.neil@sght.org.

Representing SGHT on this voyage is experienced southern ocean traveler and committed Trustee of SGHT Michael Moore. Michael is dedicated to the long term protection of South Georgia, the Falkland Islands and Antarctica.

Michael Moore
Michael Moore grew up in the U.K. He has a veterinary degree from the University of Cambridge in the U.K., and a PhD from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI) and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He has been based at WHOI in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, USA since 1986. He has a longstanding interest in human interactions with marine mammals, both intentional, such as whaling and whale watching, and unintentional such as vessel collisions and fishing gear entanglement.

He currently provides veterinary support to the Marine Mammal Rescue and Research Division of the International Fund for Animal Welfare, supporting their work with live and dead stranded marine mammals on Cape Cod in Massachusetts. His research encompasses the forensic analysis of marine mammal mortalities, especially in regard to the accurate diagnosis of perceived human impacts and the prevalence of zoonotic agents, the interaction of natural and manmade impacts on fish and marine mammal stocks, development of systems to enhance medical intervention with large whales, and the pathophysiology of marine mammal diving. He works closely with the Right Whale Consortium, curating and contributing to the right whale necropsy database. He has recently undertaken a series of projects related to better understanding how diving mammals manage gas under pressure. He has been a trustee of the SGHT since its inception, and has a deep interest in the conservation of wildlife on and around South Georgia and the Antarctic in general. Join Michael out on deck, ashore and in the Zodiacs. Michael is an avid sailor and skilled boatman, feeling very much at home on the water.

We look forward to travelling with you to some of the most remarkable places in the world - South Georgia, the Falkland Islands and Antarctica.

With warmest regards,

Michael Moore and all of us at the South Georgia Heritage Trust

South Georgia Heritage Trust – Protecting the past and future of South Georgia. www.sght.org
SGHT goes Stateside

The USA is home to some of SGHT’s most generous and loyal supporters. A three-quarter million dollar leadership gift pledged by the Island Foundation of Massachusetts, USA back in 2007 provided the vital seed funding for the Habitat Restoration Project. In 2007-08 donations from USA supporters made possible the purchase of the replica of Sir Ernest Shackleton’s lifeboat, the James Caird, for the South Georgia Museum.

To recognise the continuing support that US citizens wish to give to South Georgia and the SGHT, a new independent charitable organisation has been created in Colorado, USA. This new sister organisation of SGHT, named FOSGI (Friends of South Georgia Island), will be able to receive tax-deductible donations from US donors directly once it has received IRS approval. With a Board of Directors headed up by SGHT Trustee Ms. Denise Landau and with SGHT’s US Trustee Dr. Michael Moore also sitting on the board, FOSGI will provide a presence and a focal point for South Georgia support within the USA, as well as ensuring that gifts received are used to benefit South Georgia.

Look out for a special announcement in the coming months once FOSGI receives its tax exempt status.

Information for US citizens on making a tax-deductible donation to South Georgia can be found on the SGHT website at http://www.sght.org/make-donation.

More goodies in the Museum Shop….

Liz Adams, SGHT Buyer

Time has flown since leaving SG in November. It was a magical experience and I can’t believe I am back here already, playing a small part in supporting this amazing charity.

As soon as Christmas was over I started the task of sourcing new exciting products for the coming season.

I’ve found lots of new jewellery, including a collection from the Natural History museum depicting penguin images taken from Captain Cook’s voyages.

I have included a small selection of the new merchandise, but there are many more new items for 2011.

We have warm and stylish hats and wrist warmers in a range of styles and colours. Fine china mugs, T-shirts and a selection of jewellery, not forgetting the ever popular penguins.

We also have some carved wooden albatross. We will of course have all of our previously stocked range of books, posters, prints and clothing, with a few new additions. I have also purchased some new units to help upgrade the shop displays, and to give it a new look, which will also be visitor friendly. So do come and see us!
Frank Wild ashes to rest in Grytviken, South Georgia

For seven years, Angie Butler has been researching the inspiring, but often overlooked story of Frank Wild (1873-1939), Shackleton’s lieutenant who was left in charge of the crew on Elephant Island while Shackleton and others went for rescue. Thanks to Angie’s research, the ashes of Frank Wild have been discovered and, with the blessing of the Wild family and support of cruise operator One Ocean Expeditions, they will be returned to South Georgia to be interred in Grytviken cemetery next to Shackleton. The cruise leaves on the 20 November with the ceremony taking place on the 27th Nov at the cemetery in South Georgia. Wild’s last resting place next to ‘The Boss’ will be marked by a memorial stone in granite, which SGHT is helping to bring to South Georgia.

Several members of Frank Wild’s family will join the cruise to Wild’s last resting place, as will Shackleton’s granddaughter the Hon. Alexandra Shackleton. SGHT Trustee and expert in marine biology Dr Michael Moore will be representing the SGHT on the November cruise. Operator One Ocean Expeditions’ will give a generous donation to the SGHT Habitat Restoration project for every passenger who books through SGHT (see article above). This promises to be a truly historic cruise and ceremony at Grytviken.

“Putting South Georgia on the Map”
Tells us, for the first time, the full story behind Duncan Carse’s expeditions to South Georgia in the 1950’s. The book can be purchased on Alec’s website at: http://www.alectrendall.com.au/

South Georgia Heritage Trust – Protecting the past and future of South Georgia. www.sght.org
Museum’s strap-tooth whale adds a piece to the beaked whale puzzle

The museum’s strap-toothed whale now forms part of a published study of the beaked whales of the Falkland Islands and South Georgia. The records from both the Falkland Islands and South Georgia were gathered from previously published scientific papers going back to 1866, specimens held in museums and from skulls held by Falkland Islanders by Helen Otley, a biologist who worked in the Falkland Islands during 2001 – 2008. The paper is published in the Journal of the Marine Biological Association of the United Kingdom.

Helen explained that much of the beaked whale identification in the Falklands was undertaken during the 1980’s and 1990’s by Stanley naturalist John Smith, with identification confirmed by genetic analysis recently conducted by Dr. Merel Dalebout at the University of New South Wales in Australia.

“Beaked whales are still the holy grail for marine mammal science – many species are known from less than 10 live sightings worldwide or 20 skulls scattered across museums in different countries”, says Helen. “In the end, John and I collated 37 records of beaked whales stranded in the Falklands, representing seven species - Strap-toothed whales, Andrew’s beaked whales, Arnoux’s beaked whales, Cuvier’s beaked whales, Gray’s beaked whale, Hector’s beaked whales and southern bottlenose whales”. The publication confirms that the Falkland Islands - Tierra del Fuego region is one of the world’s key areas for beaked whales.

South Georgia’s strap-toothed whale – its skull, lower jaw and ribs - was found in 2001 in Larsen Harbour by Mark and Fraser Carpenter visiting on a yacht. Merel Dalebout looked at photos of the specimen kindly taken by the Museum Curator and identified it as a young but sexually mature male based on the presence of erupted teeth. Merel explains that “the majority of males known for this species either have un-erupted, undeveloped teeth (subadults) or long, fully-developed strap-like teeth (sexually-mature adults). Therefore, the South Georgia specimen is quite unique amongst all the specimens held in museums”.

The genetic analysis was conducted using a tiny amount of bone shaving drilled from the lower jaw by the museum’s taxidermist Steve Massam during one of his visits. “To a museum visitor, the drill hole can’t be seen, but all the same, I trusted Steve could do the best job” Helen explained.

Using funding provided by Falkland Island Government’s Environmental Studies Budget and Falklands Conservation’s Conservation Grants Scheme, Merel Dalebout was able to confirm identification of all the skulls available and to compare the genetic types for the Falklands-South Georgia individuals with the genetic characteristics of other sampled strap-toothed whales stranded in New Zealand, South Australia and South Africa.

Helen explains the results, “Whilst a couple of the Falkland Islands strap-toothed whales had some unique genetic haplotypes, South Georgia’s specimen had some of the same haplotypes as whales stranded in the Falklands, New Zealand, South Australia and South Africa.” Given the small number of strap-toothed whales genetically typed, the results are not unsurprising for a species with a circumpolar distribution.

Visitors to South Georgia can see the strap-toothed whale in the museum and other species of beaked whale can be seen in the Falkland Islands Museum and also in the garden of Mike Butcher’s home, both in Stanley.
Marine discoveries abound (and plenty of fur seals) in beautiful South Georgia  By Dr Paul Brewin, SMSG

We came, we collected, we swam with fur seals. Although one of our lasting impressions of our expedition to South Georgia is of fascination, and sometimes trepidation, of the ubiquitous fur seals, it will be the discoveries made during our biodiversity survey of South Georgia’s intertidal and subtidal marine habitats that will be drawn on by scientists and policy makers for many generations to come.

In Nov-Dec 2010, the Shallow Marine Survey Group completed the largest marine biological survey of South Georgia since the Discovery Expeditions of 1925, visiting 25 sites between Bird Island and Cooper Bay, and including 64 hours in the frigid 0°C water. We collected more than 4347 specimens of marine flora and fauna producing an extensive reference collection of specimens, and although much of the analysis is still ongoing, it is likely that we will have increased the inventory of South Georgia’s flora and fauna significantly due to the extensive range of habitats surveyed.

There were numerous endemic species previously unrecorded and a number of cosmopolitan species that appear to be extending their southern distribution range; such data may help with future studies of climate change or impacts of increased human activity in the region. We explored extensive underwater forests of bladder kelp (Macrocystis pyrifera) and the very large and impressive Himantothallus grandifolius alga that dominated the seabed. These provided multi-storied habitats for a huge array of colourful plants and animals living on the seabed and on the kelp itself.

Even on the seemingly depauperate shores, under-sides of rocks and rock-pools were teeming with life, including new species records for South Georgia right on Grytviken’s door-step. Visiting algal and sponge specialists, Drs Emma Wells and Claire Goodwin respectively, were particularly impressed with much of what they encountered in those groups, and are very anxious to make a return trip next year, as are we all are!

Special thanks to the SGHT for financial support of this work, in addition to Darwin Initiative and JNCC (UK) grants, a Shackleton Scholarship, and the British Antarctic Survey and the Govt. of South Georgia research partners.

To find out more about SMSG’s work and other research supported by SGHT, visit the SGHT website at http://www.sght.org/grants-and-bursaries