# WOSA Newsletter 2021

*President 2019 -21*
*Patsy Castree*

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| **President 2019 - 2021** | **Patsy Castree** |
| **Chairman** | Tony Ferguson |
| **Secretary** | Dorothy Pearlman |
| **Treasurer** | Mark Elliott |
| **Editor** | Marjorie Taylor |
| **Social Secretary** | Patsy Castree |
| **Membership Secretary** | Helen Morris |
| **Committee** | Malcolm Bell<br>Jill Forrest<br>Max Friedheim<br>Maurice Tate<br>Iain Gillies |

## Editorial

This last year has been a very strange one for everybody, including WOSA. Since WOSA was formed in 1891, the Old Scholars have managed to meet and hold an AGM every year. During the war this was difficult but still possible because the Headmaster organised it to be held at the school. Due to wartime restrictions the meeting was limited to an AGM and lunch. There were no extra events or evening dinner. As there was petrol rationing most Old Scholars who attended were local, and travelled by bicycle and left after lunch. A few who had travelled further stayed overnight in the dorms and went home after breakfast on Sunday. Last year, as we were unable to have an AGM in 2020, we had to carry over the Officers and Committee for another year. During the war years this happened on several occasions.

Presidents
James Harrod (1940, 1941)
Thomas Edward Williamson (1942, 1943, 1944)
Millie Macdonald (1945, 1946)

Because of the Covid restrictions Old Scholars have not been able to meet, even in small groups, but have been able to keep in touch by phone or social media. Committee meetings have taken place by Zoom. Due to the circumstances we are unable to hold the annual reunion in July, but we are looking at alternatives for later in the year, and will keep you informed when a decision has been made.

Marjorie Taylor (Editor)

# Notes from The Chairman

Dear Old Scholars,

Welcome to this edition of the WOSA Newsletter. I and all of the Committee of the Wigton Old Scholars Association dearly hope that this finds you and your loved ones keeping well and staying safe.
A momentous year with a world wide pandemic affecting every country, region, and community to which in order to reach old scholars this newsletter is distributed. There will be amongst us those who have lost close family, friends and colleagues and our hearts go out to you where you have been affected in this way. A greater number will have seen plans placed on hold and activities curtailed. For others no doubt financial hardship will have followed. It is with feeling that we extend our thoughts to all those in the wider WOSA family touched in such ways.
COVID-19 disrupted our plans to stage the Summer Re-union in 2020 and I am sorry to say here that it will do so again for this year 2021. The Committee met on zoom recently following the announcement of the Government's road map for easing lockdown in order to consider the prospects for the the AGM and the Reunion. We concluded that there is little opportunity to book a venue, arrange catering and circulate details to the membership while having to reckon on the uncertainty that would accompany staging the event. With safety our highest priority, and guidances on social distancing, numbers and venues we may not be confident that this could be offered as it has in the past, so regrettably this is the decision that has been made.
We will continue to watch the progress of the roll out of the vaccination programme, and look for opportunities later in the year to see if it might be possible to stage an event, perhaps smaller in scale, and with other changes to the format to see if an alternative could be organised. We truly hope so, for if there has been a realisation to emerge from this experience it has been the centrality of social contact in sustaining ourselves in these dark times. In meeting in person, renewing acquaintances and extending the warmth of human friendship so much part of the experience that we treasure.
Thank you all for your patience, understanding and all the support that is freely given and in abundance that makes WOSA unique and will continue to prosper in the hope of a better tomorrow.
In fellowship and on behalf of the WOSA Committee.

Tony Ferguson (Chairman)

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Peter Kurer has written a book about his life story which is to be published in July. The title of the book is: "**There is no such thing as coincidence"**
The publishers are "**My Voice",** a Manchester publisher who are interested in recording the lives of people who have survived the holocaust.

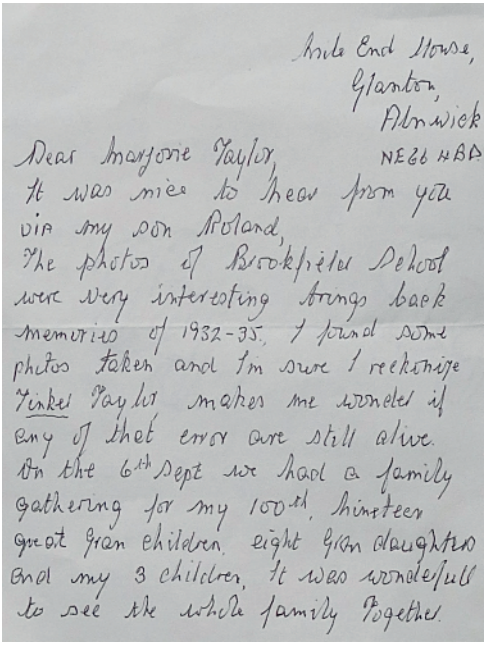
If you would like to hear more about the book, contact the editor or Peter and we will let you know when it becomes available.
Peter will be celebrating his 90th. Birthday in April.

In the previous newsletter we announced that Peter had been awarded the British Empire Medal.

After some delays due to restrictions due to the pandemic, The Lord Lieutenant of Manchester came to Peter's house to present him with his award.

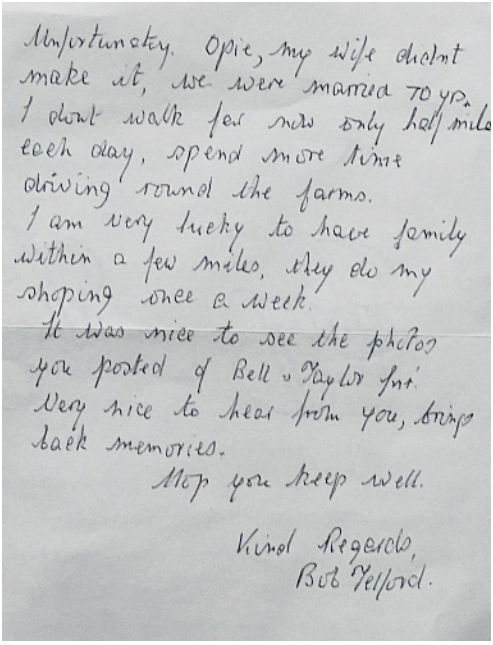
# Congratulations

In September 2020 Bob Telford, who was at Brookfield from 1932 to 1935, celebrated his hundredth birthday with his extended family. The Old Scholars Committee sent him a card, and he replied with the letter below.



Hole End House,
Glanton,
Alnwick
NE66 4BA

Dear Marjorie Taylor,
It was nice to hear from you via my son Roland,
The photos of Brookfield School were very interesting brings back memories of 1932-35, I found some photos taken and I'm sure I recognize Vinkel Taylor makes me wonder if any of that error are still alive.
On the 6th Sept we had a family gathering for my 100th, thirteen great gran children, eight gran daughters and my 3 children, it was wonderfull to see the whole family togethe.



Unfortunately, Opie, my wife didnt make it, we were married 70 yrs.
I dont walk far now only half mile each day, spend more time driving round the farms.
I am very lucky to have family within a few miles, they do my shoping once a week.
It was nice to see the photos you posted of Bell & Taylor fmi.
Very nice to hear from you, brings back memories.
Hop you keep well.

Kind Regards,
Bob Telford.

*Bob and his family at the birthday celebration*

# Recognition of a career in the Arctic and Antarctic

*Nick Cox*

One of the most uncommon, meaningful and well-merited accolades the world of science has to offer has been accorded to Nicholas Cox, a Brookfield scholar of the 1960s who has had a mountain in Antarctica named after him.

Nick has spent 45 years in the service of the British Antarctic Survey, most of them in unbelievably arduous conditions on one polar icecap or the other, often in permanent darkness and ferocious cold, loving every minute of it. While many of us have spent our careers plodding between office and suburbia, Nick Cox has been striding out with dog teams across uniquely challenging and utterly beguiling landscapes, often hundreds of miles from human companionship, battling the planet's most ferocious weather with little hope of rescue, reliant on his own skills, his strength, and sometimes his luck for survival.

He has faced down the psychological demons that accompany unremitting isolation, and on his journey from carpenter-boatman to Base Commander he has helped many younger colleagues to develop the mental fortitude without which they could not function in that alien world. Often he has been called upon to break up fights between dogs, and sometimes between men. The dangers are extreme – in Nick's first six years in Antarctica, ten of his colleagues were killed, in most cases simply vanishing without trace. He has been awarded two Polar Medals and an MBE, and when one hears him tell his extraordinary stories in his self-effacing, matter-of-fact way, one might be excused for thinking that naming a mountain after him was the least they could do.

And it's some mountain. Mt Cox, at 9,700 feet twice the height of Ben Nevis, lies in the Rouen Range on the vast, icebound Alexander Island, and those who have seen it – there aren't many – say that it boasts a sheer 5,000-foot icefall down one side. But Nick has never seen Mt Cox, nor is he likely to. At 67 he is probably in his last year as a polar explorer, and piece by piece he is handing over to his successors. How he is going to miss it!

It's impossible to capture more than a shadow of Nick's remarkable career in a brief article, but while we wait for his autobiography, here's the potted version. Since the age of six, when his parents gave him *The Puffin Book of Polar Exploration*, Nick has been determined to make a living in the high latitudes. At Brookfield he met John Bull, who'd spent two seasons in the Antarctic in the 1950s and who fed Nick's passion with tales told at chat sessions in the little Tutorial Room, next to the girl prefects' study. "John said that not a day went by that he did not think about Antarctica," Nick says. "It had gripped him the way it was to grip me. He was wistful about it – he should have gone again."

John advised Nick to write to Bill Sloman, Head of Establishment at BAS in London. Sloman replied in an encouraging but practical manner, pointing out that the minimum age was 21 (Nick was 16) and – rather pointedly – that he had nothing to offer. John Bull, who'd gone to Antarctica as a diesel mechanic, suggested the way to make himself useful was to get a trade. "I went down to the phone box at Greenacres," says Nick, "called my parents and said I wanted to leave Brookfield to do an apprenticeship. They were behind me all the way."

Nick served a four-year apprenticeship with a carpenter in Caldbeck – "everything done the old-fashioned way, with traditional disciplines" – and through colleagues of his father, the GP in Caldbeck, he learned rudimentary dentistry and sophisticated first aid, even observing at operations (BAS did not have doctors at all its bases in those days).

When he finally went to BAS for his interview, they certainly couldn't say he had nothing to offer. He was taken on as a boatman-carpenter.

Nick first went south in 1975, when things were fairly primitive. After the Heroic Age of Scott, Shackleton and Amundsen, nothing much had happened between the wars. (In fact the first man to reach the South Pole overland after Scott in 1912 was Sir Edmund Hillary in 1958.) "The bases were poorly heated, you could get 100 words out a month by Telex, the food was pretty appalling – we ate seal and penguin, which of course you can't do now.

"The clothing was little different from Scott's time. It was ex-Korean War battledress trousers, a rather nasty string vest and a tartan shirt. We had woolly balaclavas, heavy leather sledging mitts like those Shackleton wore, and on our feet we wore canvas mukluks, similar to the finnesko of the Heroic Age, with two felt liners and three pairs of socks. The saving grace was Ventile, an anorak made of closely-woven Egyptian cotton. "You couldn't afford to raise a sweat when you were driving dogs or skiing, because it would freeze on you. So we'd wear this flimsy cotton windproof anorak, windy trousers, and under that a pair of pyjamas. I can remember driving dogs, getting down to minus 38 and putting a jersey on."

Nick went first to the BAS base at Signy Island, where John Bull had been before him. "You have to be absolutely self-reliant – it's lovely, it's the best thing," he says. "Everything is down to you. If you put your gloves on the ground and you don't put a weight on them, or the fingertips aren't pointing into wind, you might lose them and you could be in a right mess. If your tent blows away, if you lose bits of gear, you'll be in a world of trouble, and it's all down to you. You're in an environment human beings are not supposed to be in, and it's wonderfully exciting."

Part of the romance of polar exploration was dog-driving, something that was stopped in 1994 by a treaty which banned non-indigenous animals from the Antarctic. "Each base was doing an average of 30,000 miles a year with dogs," Nick says. "We used dogs in winter and skidoos in summer. You'd take a scientist and leave in September, and you'd not get back until March. I loved the dog driving, it was just such a treat." Nick has countless stories that underline his love for dogs, particularly the big Greenland dogs employed in polar exploration, which he used self-developed techniques to train. You can't develop such a bond with a skidoo, and they're more dangerous. "I had my closest call riding a skidoo in front of tractor train, when I saw in my peripheral vision a tiny crack in the snow, no more than a pencil mark… I stopped, got off and poked the snow with my ice chisel… it gave way, and I found I was quarter of the way along a cornice that would have given way if I'd gone another foot or two, dropping me into a huge crevasse from which there would have been no escape."

The continent has many novel ways to bump you off – the Antarctic Memorial Trust lists 29 Britons who've been killed in the modern era, dying by ice and fire, one hit by an aeroplane, one attacked by a leopard seal, but most pitching into crevasses or floating out on the sea ice, with no trace ever being found. And Nick knew too many of them. "I had many narrow scrapes," he says. "Dramas never seem that bad when they're happening… I've often fallen into crevasses, a sludge avalanche once nearly got the better of me… boating is one of the most dangerous things we do. The number of near-misses I had in boats over the years… People ask if you're an adrenaline junkie, but far from it, you have to be the very opposite – I'm such a plodder, so cautious. There's

an old polar saying, “wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait… go.” I’ve been stuck in a tent for two weeks waiting, and I know people who’ve sat tight in tents for six weeks, waiting, waiting for the right moment to move. There’s enough drama out there without you creating it.”

For his first three years he stayed in the south over winter, and just four days after he turned up back in England he was offered a job skippering a small 28-foot boat deploying geologists around Svalbard in the Arctic. He jumped at the chance. “I’d been away for nearly three years and I went straight up and had an incredible season, doing one and a half thousand nautical miles, getting stuck in ice, had a fire on board, nobody knew where I was, going at around all over Svalbard at five or six knots. I absolutely loved it. When I came home from that I went back down south to do another year and a half, and came back from that and went straight up to the Arctic again. I did six seasons skippering that boat, then I’d go south and do the summer season in the Antarctic.

The cold is not the main enemy. “As long as you’re sensible you can combat the cold, but psychologically it’s not an easy environment. People suffer from ‘institutional paranoia’, when long-term isolation magnifies the tiniest thing into an enormous problem. I’ve had to intervene in many fights where good people had got fixated over the silliest thing, and it’s so easy to do. You don’t go to the Antarctic because you love isolation, but you have to be able to cope with it. I’m a social animal, I love it when there are people there, and I like the contrast when they are not. I love to be out on the Fells on my own, but when I meet someone you can’t shut me up, I’m terrible.”

Selection comes down to personal instincts. “I’ve done so much interviewing,” Nick says, “and you get people who are qualified to the hilt, and I’d do a bit of digging about compatibility, and how would they get along with people they might find a bit irritating, and there’s no way you’d want to spend an afternoon with that person, much less all winter in a hut.”

How on earth do you meet girls? “When I came home in 1988 I found the Cambridge Arctic Shelf Programme, across the road from BAS, had just taken on this pretty young thing, Katie, who’d just left university as a geologist, and we fairly soon fell in love with each other. The following year she was recruited for field work on Bear Island, and I organised her season. I flew up to Svalbard and got the boat ready, then bless her heart, we had that season together on Bear Island, then I shot off down to the Antarctic for the summer season.

“The following summer and we decided to get married, and that’s when the government decided they wanted an Arctic station and asked me to switch from being an Antarctic Base Commander to setting up this new operation. So I got home from the Antarctic in April 1991, we got married in May and Kate came up with me to Svalbard – she got a job with the Norwegians there.” Their children Joseph and Charlotte went there every northern summer too, from the ages of one to five; Joe later worked in the Artic and has done two seasons in the Antarctic.

It may seem a bit of a stretch, but Nick credits Brookfield with teaching him some life lessons that have served him in good stead on the ice. “The characters, the variety of people at Brookfield equip you to deal with anyone,” he says. “It really was an extraordinary place. We had so much fun, it was near-anarchy and I loved every minute of that, too.”

Nick is now 67 and still running the station in the Arctic, but he’s engaged in a drawn-out handover process, so this year or next he will bow out. He has some amorphous plans for retirement, restoring boats, a bit of carpentry… he has a cottage on the west coast of Ireland. But the Antarctic will always be in his soul. “I’m going to so, so miss it,” he says. “I could never get enough. But I must bow to the inevitable – and, particularly in the early years, I had the best life has to offer.”

Oddly enough Nick Cox is not the first Brookfield man to have an Antarctic feature named after him. Bull Ridge, high on the slopes of Mt. Francais, is named after John Bull who was part of the team that surveyed the mountain in 1956. John taught outdoor activities at Brookfield from 1966 to 1969.

Written by Pat Malone after an interview with NIck

# WOSA Financial Report

| Income and Expenditure for year ended 31st. December 2019 | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 2019 | | | | 2018 | |
| | Receipts | Payments | Balance | | Receipts | Payments | Balance |
| **Magazine** | | | | | | | |
| Printing | | £367.00 | | | | £363.00 | |
| Newsletter postage | | £238.65 | | | | £222.29 | |
| Stationery etc. | | £37.67 | | | | £249.30 | |
| **Magazine Total** | | £643.32 | (£643.32) | | | £834.59 | (£834.59) |
| | | | | | | | |
| **Reunion** | | | | | | | |
| Dinner (Saturday) | £2362.10 | £2352.10 | | | £1778.80 | £1755.00 | |
| Refund | **(£156.90)** | | | | | **£45.50** | |
| **Total** | **£2205.20** | **£2352.10** | **(£146.90)** | | **£1778.80** | **£1800.50** | **(£21.70)** |
| | | | | | | | |
| **General Fund** | | | | | | | |
| Subscriptions | £40.00 | | | | £160.00 | | |
| Donations | £32.00 | | | | £20.00 | | |
| Sales | £77.50 | | | | £191.50 | £20.00 | |
| Website | | £77.18 | | | | | |
| Bank charge | | | | | | £4.00 | |
| | | | | | | | |
| **Total General** | **£149.80** | **£77.18** | **£77.62** | | **£371.50** | **£24.00** | **£347.50** |
| | | | | | | | |
| **Overall Total** | **£2150.30** | **£2659.09** | **(£508.79)** | | **£2150.30** | **£2659.09** | **(£508.79)** |
| | | | | | | | |
| **Outstanding** | | | | | | | |
| Cumberland News | | | | | | | |
| Website | | | | | | | |
| **Total** | | | | | | | |
| **Overall Total** | **£2355.00** | **£3072.60** | **(£707.60)** | | **£2150.50** | **£2659.09** | **(£508.79)** |
| | | | | | | | |
| **Bank balances at 31st December** | | | | | | | **Difference** |
| HSBC | £6993.07 | | | | £7710.67 | | |
| Cash | | | | | | | |
| **Total** | **£6993.07** | | | | **£7710.67** | | |
| Owing | | | | | | | |
| **Balance** | **£6993.07** | | | | **£7710.67** | | **(£717.60)** |

# In Memoriam

Michael Slack (1958-63) died 2001
Hans Eirew (1940-41) October 2019
John Cuthbertson (1947-52) December 2019
Ann Famelton (1958-63) 7th.March 2020
Lorna Barr nee Herbert (1952-54) 14th. April 2020
Alfred Jefferson (1938-45) 27th. April 2020
Ewen Scott (1944-47 and 1950) 6th.May 2020
Ian Williamson (1945-51) 12th. August 2020
Diana Robison (1948-55) 13th. August 2020
Mary Lowe nee Drummond (1936-41) 3rd October 2020
Barbara Dodd nee Morton (1941-44) 2nd. November 2020
John Proudlock (1953-59) 4th. November 2020
Michael Connon (1955-60) 27th. December 2020
John Dargue (1954-58) Decembeer 2020
Felicity Hill (left 1984) 26th. January 2021
Andrew Butler (left 1979) 27th. January 2021
Norman Lowe (1930-37) 27th. January 2021

The late Michael Connon pictured with his three sons who all played rugby to a high level. Brett Connon plays professionally and is currently a member of the Newcastle Falcons team, and also represented Ireland at under 21 level. The other two boys have both played first team club rugby for Blaydon and Carlisle.