

AV 14: George Colin Lawder Bertram oral history summary

Recorded at home in Graffham, West Sussex. Interviewed by Bernard Stonehouse (BS), 10.9.2000

[01.01.07]. [00.00.30 conversation with BS about name] [00.01.20] Description of Colin Bertram's (CB) early years and schooling; father deputy director of Civil Aviation. [00.03.05] Memories of his interest in the polar regions beginning on Bear Island; undergraduate connections at Cambridge including mention of George Binney, James Wordie his tutor at St. Johns, David Lack, Longstaff and Charles Elton. [00.05.05] Memories of expedition to Bird Island with David Lack studying birds. [00.06.00] Memories of travelling with Charcot on the Pourquoi-Pas to East Greenland; mention of Brian Roberts and of Charcot's death. [00.08.20] Description of the British Graham Land Expedition (BGLE) including mention of John Rymill; Colonial Office interest in the expedition; bases at the Argentine Islands and the Debenhams; comments on studying seals and killing c.700 seals to feed the 85 dogs on the expedition. [00.14.22] Memories of Lancelot Fleming BGLE geologist and ordained priest. [00.16.55] Memories of John Rymill (JR) including comments on JR's dyslexia and JR's wife's involvement in producing an account of the expedition. [00.18.15] Conversation about tents, dog harnesses, sledges and dog driving techniques used on the BGLE that were then used by Operation Tabarin and by BS on the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey. BGLE techniques and equipment based on Gino Watkins earlier expeditions to Greenland; mention of Ted Bingham. [00.22.25] Comments on CB's BGLE dog team and sledging routes; mention of Terra Firma Islands and King George VI Sound; comments on BGLE aircraft; mention of Hampton; comments on BGLE relying on the land rather than depot laying on a long journey. [00.25.15] Memories of Brian (Birley) Roberts (BBR) illness and CB and BR's pioneering work on the Wilsons Petrels. [00.27.55] Description CB's second son Brian Bertram's career. [00.28.50] Description of CB's return to Cambridge in 1937 to write up work on seals for his PhD; discussion on studying seals. [00.30.35] Description of work in the war including writing a book on polar clothing for the war office; inventing the string vest; becoming chief fisheries officer in Palestine; joining the Middle East supply centre. [00.32.02] Memories of the Scott Polar Research Institute (SPRI) including becoming Director in 1949 for 7 years and tutoring at St. John's; SPRI was small and mainly known as a repository; mention of Jim Simpson's North Greenland expedition; SPRI had very little funding and not part of the University; mention of Polar Record. [00.36.00] Memories of BBR and the Polar library; Comments on public interest in polar matters after the war. [00.38.00] Brief memories of CB's 37-year career at Cambridge University as a tutor; comments on arctic expeditions being out of fashion; Elton and Binney's expeditions provided foundations for science of ecology. [00.40.24] Conversation about CB's work as a field biologist; mention of Conrad Lorenz; comments on killing seals. [00.42.15] Memories of studying seals on the Pribilof Islands; CB one of the first Fulbright Scholars; mention of Vic Scheffer. [00.44.15] Comments on walrus and birds. [00.45.40] Description of his role as tutor at St. John's college; mainly concerned with admissions and supervision. CB did not teach. [00.47.00] Mention of CB's flight over the north pole [00.47.30 Break in recording] [00.47.55] Muddled conversation about his time at SPRI. [00.50.45] Description of his flight over the north pole with the RAF including landing at Thule. [00.52.50] CB reading from his autobiography about the flight. [00.58.45] Memories of returning to Antarctica with Steve from the British Antarctic Survey; mention of Alexander Island and Fossil Bluff [01.01.07 END].