

## **SYMPHONY NO. 8 (ANTARCTIC SYMPHONY)**

### Prelude

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### Postlude

## **Prelude**

In May 1996, I was not unduly surprised to hear David Whelton on the phone. David was the manager of the Philharmonia Orchestra in London, for whom Peter Maxwell Davies (hereinafter referred to as Max) had composed four works over a period of years, the latest one being his *Symphony No. 5* the previous year. However, my astonishment grew as David proceeded. He told me that he had been approached by Lynton McLain, who worked for the British Antarctic Survey. Mr. McLain had come up with the most extraordinary suggestion. He wanted to commission Max, on behalf of BAS (British Antarctic Survey), to write a symphony to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of famous 1947 film of *Scott of the Antarctic*. The film had starred John Mills, and it depicted Scott's famous endeavour to be the first to reach the South Pole, and his disappointment of finding the Norwegian flag already planted when he arrived there, and the deaths of the whole company before they were able to get back to their base camp. The film was also famous for the music written for it by Ralph Vaughan Williams. RVW had liked his music so much that a few years later he reworked it into a symphony, which he called *Sinfonia Antarctica*, and it was his seventh symphony. Lynton McLain's suggestion was that Max's piece would be performed in 1997 that is one year following this first approach.

But this was not all. There was a condition attached to this commission. Max would have to go himself to the Antarctic, and to experience what it was like actually to be there. This would be as far away as it was possible to imagine from the place where Vaughan Williams had composed his Antarctic music in the comfort of his own Surrey home. It might be that Mr. McLain had suggested Max as the composer because he had shown very considerable commitment to the environment, having written a satirical cabaret called *The Yellow Cake Revue* which was a series of songs

and piano interludes in support of the anti-uranium mining campaign in Orkney during the late 1970s.

This certainly was the most outlandish of any of the propositions Max had ever had to compose music. But Max was never one to be put off by any new challenge, and when I told him about it, he was somewhat taken aback, but he accepted immediately. That is to say he accepted the point of writing a symphony based on the fact that he would go to the Antarctic, but the timing could not possibly work. Max was at full stretch with a very long list of commissions, and it was not realistic to think in terms of anything less than a five year delay in the new work having a first performance.

There were many conversations going backwards and forwards between David Whelton on behalf of the Philharmonia, and Lynton McLain and others on behalf of BAS. It was agreed that Max would deliver his symphony within the time frame that had been suggested, but that Max's visit to the Antarctic would be as soon as was convenient. The ideal time for a visit would be in the English mid-winter, which was the southern hemisphere's mid-summer, that is to say December into January. 1996 was already too late to make suitable arrangements, and so it was decided that Max would go on his famous journey in December 1997.

Thereafter both Max and I were introduced to the people who worked at the British Antarctic Survey, whose headquarters were in Cambridge. Then the next surprise arrived. The invitation to go to the Antarctic was extended to me. It was felt that Max needed to have a close friend to accompany him, and that friend should be me. I can't say that I yelped with joy at the prospect. I have never been remotely in the category of intrepid travellers. I much prefer a gentle walk around the park, and if things go beyond that, I need to have an expert walker with me who knows precisely the territory involved. Or, to put it bluntly, I was terrified, and although my husband Michael did much to help boost my confidence, I remained more than a little uneasy throughout all the months leading up to the trip.

During that period, I developed a close relationship with the team at BAS, especially with the two people who were going to be on the trip with Max and me. These were [Julian Paren](#), who was the director's assistant and who was a great expert on ice, and [Linda Capper](#), the press officer. Julian had been to the Antarctic with BAS many times previously. The forthcoming trip was to be the first for Linda.

In July 1997 Max and I went to Cambridge to be fitted out. It was a boiling hot day, and we were rummaging around in the BAS store rooms to get the right size of clothing. It seemed ludicrous, but of course we needed each item, from various different kinds of boots right through to the outer wear of coats and fur hats, and also our kit bags.

The shape of the trip was gradually emerging. We were going to stay at Rothera Research Station, the BAS base on the Antarctic Peninsula on Adelaide Island. The usual journey of BAS personnel was to fly to the Falkland Islands and then fly onto Rothera. However, our route was to be different. We were to fly to the Falkland Islands, but from there we were to take a ship on a five day journey to Rothera. Julian Paren said that this would be by far the best way to gradually approach the whole ambience of the Antarctic, rather than just to touch down on a runway after six hours

of flying. The ship was RRS (Royal Research Ship) James Clark Ross and it was an ice-breaker.

The news that we were to take a sea voyage in the South Atlantic filled me with even more dismay. I was extremely liable to be sea-sick, and I had taken great pains over more than thirty years never to go near a boat. But there was nothing I could do about it. Copious communications as to everything connected with Rothera and our journey kept arriving. One of these letters listed out in full some basic survival exercises which we would have on our arrival. My feelings veered between overwhelming apprehension, and some kind of hysterical humour. How could all this be about to be happening to me, and what on earth did any of it have to do with being the manager of a composer of classical music?

There were to be five of us on this journey – Max, Julian Paren, Linda Capper, me and BAS's official photographer, [Peter Bucktrout](#). Peter was to take still and moving photographs of everything throughout, including our journey and our stay in Rothera. Julian referred to our little group as a 'task force'.

And so, on Monday 15 December 1997, we set out. Once we arrived at our destination at Rothera, we were allowed to send emails, and for I will now be including some extracts from those emails which I sent to my husband Michael

## **22<sup>nd</sup> December 1997**

### *Rothera Research Station Antarctica*

*“The story briefly so far. We had an easy ride to the Woodgates, where we had a wonderful and relaxed afternoon, and we were wined and dined. It was the perfect start, and at moments I forgot that we were going forward. I was a bit nervous about finding Brize Norton, but that proved easy too, and I parked my car very near to the terminal building. It was absolutely freezing cold at that point, as the weather had started deteriorating in the U.K. Linda, Julian Paren and Pete Bucktrout were there to greet us and they had checked in some while before. We had a bit of a wait as there was a long queue. They said that they had put us together, but when I looked at our tickets, this was not the case, so I went back, and they re-seated us further forward, which in fact turned out to be better seats which had much more legroom. I hardly noticed the first part of the journey at all, as I just slept soundly, and then, eight hours later we arrived at Ascension Island, into the blazing heat. We walked across the tarmac to a pound. This is the first time in my life that I have ever been impounded. You are put in a cage and not allowed to take*

*photographs. It is a strict military base in the middle of nowhere. Very odd. I had put my red beret on to keep off the wind, and I was immediately told to take it off. The second part of the journey, roughly the same time in length as the first, was spent in dozing off and reading *Terra Incognita*, which is the book which Janet (John Manger's partner) sent to me, and which I enjoyed and which gave me some idea as to what to expect.*

*On arrival in Mount Pleasant, which is the airport for the Falkland Islands, we stood in a queue, and then Max's name was called out, and it seemed as if Max, Julian and I were to be given VIP treatment. Excellent. They took us into a room, and then said that they thought that Max should have been there a week previously, and that therefore they hadn't got anything ready for him, and that there would be no coffee. They said that we would be travelling the hour or so to Stanley in a car, and not in the coach with the others, but this also turned out not to be the case. They also said that they would collect our luggage for us, but this took at least three times as long as all the others (34 BAS people altogether), and they were all waiting for us on the coach. So much for VIP treatment.*

*The road from Mount Pleasant to Stanley was the main and only road on the island. The Falkland Islands consist of many islands, and this is the main one, like in Orkney. It was a good hour's drive, not in the utmost comfort. The road is very bumpy, and there is no traffic whatsoever. The scenery is dramatic, and there are absolutely no trees whatsoever. There are sheep wandering around all over the place. We arrived in Stanley which is the small town where everyone lives, and I was amused to see one of the streets called Thatcher Drive, at which I laughed every time I passed it. We drove on past the town to where the ship, the *James Clark Ross*, was anchored, and the coach arrived alongside, and in just a few minutes everyone was up the gangway and onto the ship with their luggage and into their cabins. Julian has been looking after me, particularly, the whole time, and frankly I don't know what I would have done without him. He helped me carry my luggage to the cabin, and I have been lucky enough to have a cabin to myself. Max has got the ultimate. It is called Chief Engineer's Cabin, and it consists of a suite, with two huge rooms, one of which is a sitting room, with computer installed and a three-piece suite. Very nice indeed. We were greeted by the Captain, Christopher Elliott, who has been very friendly the whole time. It is a wonderful ship, with everything that is needed to do this particular kind of work. We had supper and then went to bed. The food*

*was very good, and at night it is served in two sitting and I have the vegetarian option each time.*

*The following day we were picked up by Becky Ingham from the Falklands Conservation - we being Julian, Linda, Max and myself - and we drove back all the way to Mount Pleasant, which is about 40 miles. Every vehicle in the Falkland Islands, as far as I can see, is a Rover of some kind or other - range Rover or whatever, and my goodness, you really do need it. This one was very dirty, and had no seats in the back, and so we sat somehow along the ledges. The discomfort was acute, and I was not at all happy. Becky took us to Bertha's Beach, entrance to which can only be obtained by special people, and you can only reach it through a gate with a key. This we obtained from the military at Mount Pleasant, and when I say military, I mean military. It is a fortress there. I forgot to mention that as we were coming in to land, we were accompanied by two tornado planes on either side who rode with us for about 10 minutes. This Beach was superb, and we drove along the shore in the Range Rover to the place where the penguins nest. This particular breed is called Gentoo, and they come up from the beach onto the dune inland. It was a magnificent sight. The smell is something else - remember those seals in South Africa? The sand is silver white, and we walked inland to where the sheep were grazing, and everywhere there were so many different kinds of birds. What a treat to be able to see whole colonies of birds in this way. And also to be told what each of the birds is. We then bumped our way back and had lunch in some kind of restaurant in Mount Pleasant, and then drove back to Stanley, and then on to another place called Gypsy Cove, which is where the Argentineans invaded. All those beaches are mined and you can't go anywhere near them. This is a delightful place, and again more penguins and you go very close to them and they don't take any notice of you. I should say that the approach to this place was like no other I have ever encountered. The Range Rover bumped up and down through totally impassable terrain, which made the day we had in Safari in South Africa look like nothing. I think that Range Rovers are distinctly under-used when I see what they can actually do.*

*We then returned to the ship, and Chris Elliott, the captain, had arranged transport for us to go into Stanley to the Governor's supper. We duly arrived promptly at 7.30 to the most beautiful house built in around 1850 or so, and which has recently been renovated (I was intrigued to see that they had exactly the same wall-paper that we had in Wood Vale in the drawing room). The very last vestiges of Empire are still here, with portraits of all the monarchs stretching back for two hundred years on the walls, of course, and the appropriate servants to help you with your*

*coats and to serve the very excellent meal (it was salmon, so absolutely no problems for me). One of the fellows there, called Don, has been there for umpteen years and was there when the Argentineans occupied the house, when they took all the portraits off the wall, but otherwise didn't mistreat the place. What a to do. Richard Ralph himself was of course very pleasant, and was without his wife, as there seems to have been something of a scandal in that he has found a girl-friend, and the wife has returned back to England. Oh dear. Incidentally, just whilst I am thinking of it, there was a journalist with us on our outing, and she was putting the Max story on her website, so it might be there for you to see. The address is [www.sartma.com](http://www.sartma.com) and this stands for South Atlantic Remote Territories Media Association, and her name is Juanita Brock, and I learnt more from her than from anyone. She is an independent. The Governor had invited several of the locals for dinner, including Tom and Megan Eggeling who live in Stromness and he worked on the Council along with Norman Rushbrook (Dorothy's husband) but they both seemed to have lost their jobs at the same time, and so now Tom is here and enjoys it very much. It is definitely the old colonial style there, like Hong Kong but on a tiny scale.*

*And so to the boat which set sail at 9am. At 10am we all gathered in the bar to be given a briefing about what to do in the event of fire on the ship or any kind of alarms, and I was terrified out of my wits thinking about it all. We brought our safety belts and also the special suits and had to put them on. We had practise going into the life-boats and belt up, and were shown the special doors which separate each area to stop water coming through. And, almost the moment the boat started, I felt sea-sick, despite having taken the pills and despite continuing to take the pills*

### [Rothera Research Station](#)

#### **22<sup>nd</sup> December 1997 – second email**

*I didn't finish writing the first part of this at all on the same day, But, to continue. I became sea-sick virtually the moment the ship set sailed, and it was perfectly horrible, as I knew all along that it would be. I was by no means the only person like this. Linda was afflicted as well and many others. The result of all this was that I was only actually sick twice, but I felt HORRIBLE for almost three days, and I could do nothing else except lie flat on my back in the cabin. Anything else at all was impossible. I tried getting up. I tried sitting up, but every time I had to rush back, as I*

*felt the awful sensation coming over me. It was an effort to get off the bunk and take the two steps to the toilet, and there was no question of taking a shower or anything like that, and I didn't eat one single thing - the mere thought of food was enough to set me off again. I actually asked to see the doctor, who was a young woman called Mandy, who herself was not available because she was feeling sick as well. She eventually came to see me, and said that I should keep taking sips of water just to stop myself from becoming de-hydrated. Max came in to see me from time to time, reporting on various happenings, and Julian popped in as well, but frankly I was just concentrating on how to get from one roll to the other as the ship swayed. Everyone is now saying that this was one of the calmest crossings through the Drake Passage, for so it is called, that they have known for a long time, but it was more than enough for me. And then, finally, on the third day, I got up and starting to work on the *Orchestral Guide* with all the corrections with Ruth had given me, and I found it very hard going, and had to keep lying down. At one stage I got up and did what I thought was a new work (*St. Thomas Wake*), only to find, when I had completed it that I had already done it a couple of hours before, but had forgotten all about it. Well, in the end, towards supper time, I thought that I would have a go and see about eating something, and went into the dining room, and actually ate a meal. It felt very strange.*

*But the worse was over, and the next morning (i.e. 21<sup>st</sup> December - the longest day of the year down here), was the day in which we were going to anchor and get off and visit Port Lochroy, which is an historic site. We were to leave off two men who were going to open up the huts for the summer and stay there, and they were to welcome all the cruise visitors who come now in quite large numbers throughout these next weeks, and they sell them all sorts of momentos and particularly postcards and stamps. The scenery was now becoming spectacular. The weather was by no means bright and sunny. It was overcast and there was a mist hanging low over the mountains, for there were high mountains all around, and the icebergs were everywhere. The description of the ice-bergs would require several books in their own right, but I will just say that they come in all different shapes and sizes, some absolutely vast, and some tiny, and some of them have got the most amazing colour of blue underneath the water.*

*In order to get to Port Lochroy, we had to get into another craft which would transport us from the *James Clark Ross* onto the shore. In order to get into this other craft (boat), you had to get down a ladder. Julian had very rightly worked out that I wouldn't be at all happy in this activity,*

*and had arranged for him and me to enter the craft whilst it was still on the deck of the JCR (as the boat is called), and then it would be lowered down into the water by winches, and this is what happened.*

*Previous to this I had to get used to my out-door clothes, which are the ones which BAS have provided and which are in the kit-bag. Julian came in to the cabin and I lay everything out on the bed. This was in order to see what I actually had, as everyone appears to get different things. He then told me what I should put on for the next day, and the previous evening I spent a couple of hours trying everything on and trying to work it all out, for these things are not at all straight-forward, with lots of belts, and buckles and toggles and so on. I thought that it would all be rather awful, and everything would weigh so much and I would never be able to take one step in the boots. But, in the event, all the clothes felt extremely comfortable, including the boots.*

*We had some time on the deck, getting used to the cold. But, to my great surprise, despite the fact that it is cold, just like in Russia, if you have the proper clothing, you don't feel it. Everyone has got different gear. Some have got their own stuff. Some have got BAS issue from years ago. Some of the men are in boiler-suits. Nobody looks the same at all. Julian seems to walk about perpetually with nothing at all on his head. Linda is the only person so far to emerge with a fur hat. I put on your fur hat which you gave me, but I found that in both positions it just wasn't comfortable (i.e. either with the flaps up or down), and that I am better off with the balaclava which I was given rolled up in a band around my head - it feels lighter and somehow warmer.*

*Before entering into the craft to go ashore, we all have to put on a life-jacket. This is not the same sort as the ones we have in our cabins for an emergency. All of these operations take a long time and are distinctly fiddly. Julian and I duly were winched down into the water and everyone else came into the craft by means of the ladder. The craft was also loaded up with all the supplies for the two men staying at Port Lochroy, and on arrival, everyone helped to carry these off and up to the huts.*

*It was all very exciting, and we approached the hut, and had some difficulty in landing. As we got there, we could see hundreds of penguins, sitting everywhere, all nesting, and about to hatch chicks any day now. You had to pick your way carefully through all these nests in order to get anywhere on this small island. The reason for this being an historic site is that it was used as a British Base from about 1944 until 1962, and it has very recently been brought up to scratch so that it can be historic,*



*and it has all the old tins of treacle, jam, coffee etc from the period of its main activity.*

*I should say that all the while Max has been interviewed and photographed, both for the TV film and for the radio documentary. He has been kept very busy, and he has also been writing his journal, which he will give to me today (at least the first part), so that I can start to write it out. Of course he won't be able to use all he has written because it is far too much, but he will have it and he will edit it as we go along until we get to the end when we will get down to the right number of words. This is going to be quite a job. His journal is marvellous, as you would imagine.*

*Well, there we were, finally, after all the talking and preparation. We were actually in the Antarctic, in a very wintry scene, and I was walking about (instead of lying prone in the cabin). The position of Port Lockroy is breathtaking, with the mountains all around, most of which we were unable to see because of the mist which was covering them, but even that which we did see was enough to make a gigantic impression. As we had approached, I noticed a flagpole and said to Julian that there was no flag there, and he said that they wouldn't fly the flag during the winter, and that this was the first time that it was being opened up for the summer. And then, during our short couple of hours there, it was Max who raised the flag, with some considerably difficulty owing to the rope not being what it should have been, and he was much photographed doing this activity.*

*We returned to the boat in time for lunch, and this time I was able to climb up the ladder. We had lunch, and almost immediately Julian came in and said that the Captain had invited us (i.e. Julian, Linda, Pete - the photographer who comes with us everywhere - Max and myself, to go to the next place when the boat stopped. This was to be a couple of hours later to a place which had previously been a BAS station called Faraday, but which had recently been given to the Ukraine for their station as BAS couldn't afford to keep it up. This was a rather new set-up, and another craft was to take provisions and mail for the people who were staying there. But previous to this, the JCR sailed through what is definitely the most spectacular scenery I have ever seen in my whole life, which is called the Lemaire Channel, with huge high mountains very close in on either side, and ice-bergs all the way, and penguins diving in and out of the water and skidding across the ice. Having taken off my outside clothes for lunch, I then put them on again, and spent two entire hours on the Forecastle Deck (pronounced 'folkscle' as it seems) watching this miraculous scene unfold, and even catching an avalanche crashing down*

*on our right side, and with the snow starting, and, wonder of wonders, not feeling cold.*

*We arrived again, and this time it was another, much small craft for just a few people, and again Julian and I were winched down into the water, and the others came down on a very much longer ladder which I didn't like the look of at all.*

*At the quayside, there were several people waiting to greet us. These were the Ukrainians, who hauled us up out of the boat, and we trudged through a lot of snow to the huts. What a surprise. This was my first experience of what you can actually make of nothing in a remote place. It was quite beautiful. It was of course previously a BAS station and the Ukrainians had taken it over and had kept it in mint condition. Everything is there; a bar (seemingly the most famous bar in the Antarctic), a billiard table, a room for CDs and a large dining room, a room for disrobing and robing (a very necessary part of Antarctic activity), and a long corridor with many rooms. There are 13 people on that station, and they have stayed there the whole winter. There were four women and nine men. About three of them speak English, especially one woman who seems to run the whole show. Every room has got a computer in it, and they are using Windows 95, with an English/Russian keyboard. There is a room for keeping healthy, with all kinds of machines in it. There was one room with skies - loads and loads of skis of all sorts. They are all doing research for their own government. Drinks were produced in great quantity, including some sort of Ukrainian cognac, and some vodka, and many sweets. They were so friendly and so anxious to show us what they were doing and how grateful they were to BAS for giving them the Station which is now called Vernansky after one of their famous scientists. This was the time when it came home to me that the Ukraine is now not part of the USSR, but a country, and a very large country - the size and population of France, in its own right., and proudly independent, and anxious to have its own Antarctic station and make its own contribution. Maybe the Ukraine could be one of the places that the symphony could visit, with concerts in Kiev and Odessa....*

*It was a lovely visit, and we stayed for an hour and a half - one of the most unusual visits I have ever made. I looked through the old LPs, and the first one I came upon with Menuhin playing the Mendelssohn and Bruch Concertos, conducted by Walter Susskind. The connection with the symphony and Janis is strong down here in this remote place.*

*We got back on board, and after supper, I went to Max's room, almost for the first time, owing to either being sick or being busy, and he read me out what he had written so far.*

*I also made a fax to send to Bill Cosel with Max's guidance for how he thinks Mavis might be filmed, and I put this on a disc and took it upstairs to the communications place, and Charlie, who is in charge, kindly sent it off for me. So I hope that Bill will have the fax by now, and I asked him to confirm to you that he has received it.*

*I haven't sent anything to you until now because of feeling unwell and you being in Paris. However, I hope that by Tuesday or Wednesday we will be fully in contact. At the moment it is 7am and I have been up in bright sunshine since 5am and this is our last day on the JCR. We should arrive in Rothera towards the evening, but will probably stay on board this evening again and get off at Rothera tomorrow morning - something like 24 hours from now.*

*This has definitely been the best and most spectacular way to make this epic journey, despite three days of extreme discomfort, which I hope is now well and truly behind me. Everyone has been most friendly. I think that all the scientists are PhDs and everyone is brilliant at their job. How to make what they actually do intelligible to the lay person is another matter, and that is where Julian comes in, because he has such a huge grasp of absolutely everything (and any other subject as well, incidentally). He went to Highgate School by the way.*

*So this is the end of my first Email which of course is considerably longer than we discussed, if you get my meaning, but it seems that it might be all right and pass. Give my love to mummy and to the family when you see them for Christmas. There are Christmas decorations everywhere, particularly in the bar and everyone is gearing up for it.*

*Rothera Research Station*

**24 December 1997**

*Anyway, here we are. It is our second day here, and Max and I are waiting to hear whether or not we will be taking our first ride up in a plane this afternoon, as an opportunity has presented itself. When I say opportunity, I think that that is the way that it will be going all the time from now on, and we will only know from minute to minute what is actually happening.*

*I will try to revert to where I left off from my last long email to you (which was also the first). The last days on the ship were totally spectacular. It was marvellous not being sea-sick, and I had to get used to the fact that I could actually stand upright without needing to lie on my back in the bunk. From that moment on I began to enjoy the boat, which was very comfortable. The food, including the vegetarian option was plentiful and excellent. We all ate in the officers' dining room, and we all mixed around and spoke to whoever was sitting with you at the table for six. They gave you a choice of a starter or soup, then the main meal, and then a desert or cheese, but in fact if you wanted you could have any of those things. The officers were extremely smart in their uniforms. Of course, some of the time they were in boiler suits when they were working, but the moment they appeared anywhere else, they were wonderfully turned out, and by talking to them I managed to find out quite a bit about ship's life. The Captain, Chris Elliot, is an exceptional man by any standards, and I was very thrilled to learn all about how the James Clark Ross came to be planned and to be built, and what a huge part in it all he had had in the design. We had the two visits on one day, as I wrote to you, visiting the Ukrainian station and being so warmly welcome, as well as going ashore for a few hours to leave two men to man Port Lochroy, which is an historical site. These two men stay there for the summer, mainly to cater for the tourist ships. Penguins are everywhere, and I forgot to mention that the smell around there is about as bad as it was on that island off Cape Town with the seals.*

*The sea ice is absolutely everywhere, and you sail past hundreds of icebergs, of the most amazing sizes and shapes, with colours the likes of which you can't imagine, mostly of some kind of unearthly blue underneath the water. The scenery on either side of where we were was, for that stretch of the journey, mountains on either side, and all I can say is that I have never seen, or even remotely imagined, such beauty and such grandeur.*

*We had hoped to arrive at Rothera on the evening of 22<sup>nd</sup>, but the ice was very thick, and so we got to very near, and then we anchored off-shore, and the following morning, at 6am, the James Clark Ross started its approach. I went on to the bridge, and stood near to the captain, trying to be as unobtrusive as possible. Chris (Elliott - the captain), and his first and second mate were docking this huge chunk of metal, and at the same time pushing the bits of ice that were impeding it (the ship) gently aside. I have never seen a more skilful operation, and my heart was in my mouth for about 90 minutes. Nobody else was with me watching all of this. We*

*had also been very lucky the previous day to be given a tour around the engine rooms. You have never seen anything like it. The complexity of it all and the precision with how it has all been put together is staggering. It was the Chief Engineer (Dave Cutting) who showed it all to us, going up and down steps, and bending low to avoid very low ceilings or whatever it was that was above us. Dave said that the British Ships Engineers are the most in demand in the whole world, as they are so far superior to all the others, and that the world is his oyster. People had tried other engineers from other countries, and there had been so many catastrophes and disasters by attempts to cut costs that the owners realised that it was costing them far more money that way than having people who really know their jobs.*

*In fact, if there is one thing I have gathered so far that is that the staff that BAS employ is all absolutely top notch in their jobs, and what a thrill it is to be able to enjoy people doing a good job.*

*So, we docked yesterday, and the weather was improving. The off-loading of the ship is a gigantic operation which will take a very large number of men around four full days to complete. In the meanwhile, we had our group of BAS people who all had to be accommodated and it wasn't until rather late in the afternoon that it was our turn i.e. the Maxwell Davies Task Force as it is called. We have been allocated a lady called Rachel Duncan who is going to look after us when we go out 'into the field', and she is delightful. She gave us a quick showing round of the base.*

*How can I describe it? I would say that it is a mixture of an industrial site, together with an airport, together with any number of different kinds of vehicles moving about. There are a lot of huts, some of which are laboratories, and some of which combine living space and all the office space, and dining room and bar and so on. We are all housed in another hut just along which has only been going for one year. There are four of us in my room. There is Linda Capper, Anya Reading (who I met at Cambridge in the summer), and another lady called Alison. I haven't had this kind of what I would call barracks accommodation for about 30 years when I went with Zamira to the Edinburgh Festival in 1967 and we stayed in one of those university hostels, along with members of the London Symphony Orchestra. (I bet you that these days none of the orchestra members would agree to being put up in a hostel like that). Each one of us has got a bunk (mine is the bottom part of a two-tiered one), and a wardrobe, with hanging space and drawers (no hangers).*

*There is a ladies toilet and shower room, and a laundry, with a washing machine, tumble-drier and iron.*

*The most important room in any of these buildings is something called the Boot Room. Whilst you are walking outside, you must put on your boots, and then when you come in, you must take them off, and all of this is a big performance.*

*As to the winter clothes, well, what can I say? We need absolutely every single item of the kit we were given, and it certainly makes much more sense to have them here than it did on that incredibly hot day when we tried them on in Cambridge last July. However, what you put on for any one single journey outside, and by this I include walking from our sleeping hut (it isn't a hut - it is a long, low building), to the main building for the meals or whatever, is a huge problem. You need enough outer-wear so as not to be cold, and yet you don't want too much for when you come inside, as the buildings are well heated. The most important thing is the sun-glasses, which are not like ordinary sun-glasses, but which have black sides (very sensible indeed as that is where the sun comes in) from the intense white glare from the white snow, and also sun-cream to plaster on any exposed parts. I carry one of my black bags with me everywhere, because the main lesson I have learnt very quickly is that whatever it is that you need is invariably in another place, which is very annoying.*

*We have briefings of varying kinds from Paul Rose, the Base Commander. Nobody can be expected to absorb all this information at first go, but luckily there are people around to ask. There is a big learning curve on every front. So far none of this has included any of these 'survival training' items, but from what I can gather, we will be doing this piece-meal as we go along for what might be appropriate for the actual place we will be visiting that or the next day.*

*The view from Rothera is utterly wonderful, but Rothera itself is not delightful, but we have hopes of going away, including, perhaps, in just a few minutes. Our lives will be like this - from one moment to the next.*

*Max is making umpteen radio interviews. Everyone wants him, and don't worry about The Observer. These interviews are not written diaries, and they are off-the cuff, and in any case, all the requests came in (and are still flooding in) only in the last days, and Linda, quite rightly, says that BAS are promoting this and they want as much and as wide-spread a publicity as they can get, and she is quite right.*

*If you receive this in time, one of the interviews I know about will be on BBC Radio 5 Live between 2pm and 5pm on Christmas day, and you could phone up the BBC 0171 580 4468) to enquire on which frequency you can find it. He has also done the BBC World Service, Radio Scotland and something called Talk Radio (twice).*

*I can't get used to the vastness and the beauty of it all. We have been extremely lucky with the weather. Today it is blazing sunshine, and rather warm. I am not sure what that means, but it is very pleasant. Of course, we haven't been out into the field yet, where the colder weather will reach us, but the clothes they have given us are entirely and brilliantly suited to the job. It is all like an unreal dream, and yet, here I am living it. I haven't yet had a chance to talk too much to the scientists. I must say that we are busy the whole time and there has hardly been a moment in which I could write to you. And it is going to continue to be busy. But that is all part of it.*

*We still don't know about this plane departure. This is the way it works here. Everything is dependent on what the pilots say (and incidentally Andy Alsop is here of course). By the way, if you could phone Gunnie up and tell her that I have received her Christmas letter and many thanks etc. I am glad that I brought the book of poetry (The Rattle Bag) and the book of essays (John Gross's Anthology), because you can just read one of them (a short piece), in between the next whatever it is that you might have to do. It is difficult to find a run of time, despite what you might have thought.*

*I must repeat again, and again, what a treasure Julian is. He knows absolutely every single detail about every single subject that comes up. He knows every mountain, every valley, the history of whatever it is. There is nobody in the entire world who could give us the background to everything that is going on. I can't imagine how they are getting on without him at BAS, and we have the luck to be educated in this way.*

*Hooray, the news has just come through that we will be leaving to take the first flight in one hour from now. We have to take our cold weather gear with us, in spite of the fact it isn't cold. This is going to be Max, Pete Bucktrout (the photographer), and me and the pilot, and the purpose of this trip is for Pete to take shots of Rothera from the air in its present format, and I shall be doing the same. The fact that the James Clark Ross is docked is a huge additional bonus.*

*Rother Research Station*

**25 December 1997**

*Well, this is Christmas day. The order of things has been changed for today. There is no breakfast, but there is a brunch at 10AM, and then the main Christmas meal will be at 5PM. I think that people will start drinking at about 10AM and continue through the day. Michael, if there is one thing that is making me feel 'not at home' here, it is the drinking. The problem is that there is nowhere for me to go to get away from it. It was the same on the ship. Everyone just drinks ALL THE TIME, and they get drunk and drunk (not on duty I might say), and their speech slurs, and, well, I just don't like it. And I can't join in with my soft drink. Any excuse for a party. They grab hold of you and offer you a drink, and it is hard to get away. Last night, which was Christmas Eve, the Captain of the ship, Chris Elliott, about whom I have written, invited everyone on Rothera to a party on board the ship - AFT (one has got to get used to all these nautical terms). I couldn't see where on earth they would have room, because it had been so packed up tight for the whole journey. But, with the monumental amount of off-loading that has gone on here with all the provisions, there was a huge space, and this is where the party was held. The drink was Mulled Wine, which Chris had made himself, having phoned home to his wife in the UK to get the recipe. And there he was, with a fire made for a barbecue (a huge one), with a vast bowl placed on top of it, and a vast ladle, dipping into plastic mugs as everyone arrived. I was given my usual soft drink, and it turned out that I was the ONLY person not drinking the mulled wine. There are 82 at Rothera today, and there is a crew of 28 people, so the numbers were large. I didn't stay longer than about an hour or so, just to show my face, so that nobody would think that I was not joining in*

*I find it difficult to describe what it was like, at 10pm, with the sun high in the sky shining across the frozen sea (the sea hasn't yet melted which it should have done at this time of the summer), and to the vast expanse of the hundreds of square miles around us, with mountains, frozen sea, and [icebergs](#) frozen into the sea. The whole thing is totally unreal, and you will have to read Max's description of it all, because his diary is utterly wonderful. He is keeping a very full diary, and he will then edit it for the Observer, but he has such a gift for writing, and I don't only mean music. My efforts are puny compared to his. He reads me out each portion as he has written it, and then he is making a fair copy, and I will then type that out. So far I haven't had anything to type, but I hope that by the end of today, I will have it all.*



*I don't think that Max is enjoying the Rothera part of the journey very much. When I say 'I don't think', I should say that I know. He is very much affected by the army-like atmosphere that prevails and the conditions. On the ship, he had these magnificent quarters, and it was as luxurious as it is possible to be. And three meals were served in splendour, and he could have a bottle of wine on his table at every meal. However, here it is very different indeed, and the whole place is ugly and is nothing but functional. Everyone sleeps four in a room, and Max absolutely loathes that, as the other men snore, and are sleeping when he wants to find things, and the curtains are drawn, and there is nowhere to take things out of the case, and no hangers to hang things up. The place he has got to write, which is a laboratory (everything is a lab), is as dismal as can be, but he has some kind of something on which to sit (it isn't a chair), and he was utterly depressed when we first arrived, and the thought of enduring all this for another two weeks.*

*I must say that it doesn't bother me at all. Of course I like my own room, but the bed is comfortable, and the other women in the room shower and keep themselves clean (which maybe the men don't do - I don't know), and they don't snore, and they don't make a noise when someone is sleeping. I have got a wardrobe, but it is a constant struggle to find things, and whereas at home I can just put my hand on whatever I want immediately, here it takes me many minutes to find anything.*

*It is also a constant struggle to know what to put on at any given moment. At home, I get dressed once a day, in the morning, and, with very rare exceptions I don't change until I go to bed. Here I have been changing five or six times a day. It depends on what you are going to do in the next hour or so. If you are just going to walk across from where we sleep to where we eat, you have one set of clothes. If you are going to walk anywhere else at Rothera, say, down to the ship, you have another set of clothes. If you are going to take a local flight, it is another thing. And so on. But you don't wear your boots inside. I have got two pairs of boots, but so far have only worn one of them. At first I thought I wouldn't be able to take a single step in them, they are so huge and bulky, but, to my vast surprise, they are very comfortable, and of course entirely suited to the job of walking around on uncertain territory, whatever it might be. And, as part of the issue, we have thermal socks (blue), and then woollen socks (thick red), and these go on prior to putting on the boots. On entering every building, you have to go to the Boot Room, and disrobe. Of course, there are dozens of other boots around which look identical to yours, so you have to find a way of marking them. But the boots are all*

*different in fact, however similar they look. Sometimes I take the boots off, and just walk around in the thick red socks.*

*The other essential things are that you must put the sun-glasses on as everything is very bright. These are not sunglasses such as we have at home. They are much better, I think the sort they use for skiing, with side-flaps, and they are very effective. But you must put them with a string around your neck, because you must put them on the moment you go outside, as the glare is tremendous. You must also put on sun-cream, as the air is so dry. Max and Julian are walking around with white faces the whole time, as they are putting on so much cream, which seems to be difficult to be absorbed if they haven't shaved.*

*There are many women here, and somehow it seems as if these women want to behave like men. There is no question of them leaving all the heaving and carrying of very heavy items indeed to the men. They have to, and do do, everything as if they were men. I am so glad that I bought those trousers. If you remember, I bought the trousers to go to Moscow, and you said that they wouldn't be warm enough there. But I didn't wear the trousers once in Moscow, despite having taken them along. But I don't know what I would have done without them on this trip. Going up and downstairs on the ship the whole time, and climbing on an off boats, and, well, everything, would have been totally impossible without the trousers, and despite the fact that I haven't worn trousers for 30 years, I feel quite comfortable in them. Most of the women haven't got a skirt with them at all here, which is causing a problem today, being Christmas, as this Christmas dinner is supposed to be one at which skirts are worn. I somehow thought that I would be wearing skirts around at Rothera, and the moleskin trousers out in the field. But it hasn't worked like that. Those moleskins are very comfortable and warm, but even then, when we go out somewhere, I shall need to wear the thermal underwear underneath that.*

*There is no way we are going to know what we will be doing from day to day, or even from hour to hour. All of this is going to be entirely dependent on how the planes are disposed. And the planes are disposed according to the weather. For instance, yesterday, when I said that we might be going up into the air, we were told that it might happen some time in the afternoon. But every half hour or so, there was a different message. And then, finally, we were told to 'muster' (this is the word) and it would take us about 15 minutes to walk across to where the hanger for the plane is, and that we would be going up. The 'we' would be Pete, who would be taking aerial shots, and Max and I, to get a feel for what it is like.*

*There are rules and rules and rules for everything, and there is no way that we have learnt what all of these are in such a short time, despite all the many different kinds of briefings we have had. The run-way is in use all the time, and so you can't it unless there is an all-clear. There is a traffic light at either side which tells you not to cross if a plane is coming in to land. Most of the work of Rothera is that of planes taking people and supplies to where they need to go.*

*The weather these last two days has been extraordinary. There has been brilliant sunshine, and it has not been cold. I suppose the temperature would be just about freezing, but, somehow, it just doesn't feel like that. Julian was terribly disappointed that the main day on the ship, when we could get the best scenery, was cloudy and even foggy, so we just didn't get the view. But I am not expecting anything at all, and so everything is a bonus.*

*And so here we were, climbing into a small plane. First the contents of the plane from the previous flight had to be off-loaded. There was masses of stuff. This all belonged to Anya Reading, who I had met at Cambridge when we went there, and who plays the cello, and who loves classical music. I couldn't believe how much is needed. So much of it is camping equipment, which you have to have every time you go anywhere, in case the weather turns bad and you get stuck. Well, all this gear was taken off, and the plane cleared, and Pete, Max and I climbed in. Pete was in front with the pilot, Jeff, and Max and I on a seat behind, but after the plane took off, we could move about a bit. I am not at all used to going in small planes, other than that one in which we went to Macau that time, and this, in itself was an extraordinary experience. We were just so lucky with the weather. The idea was to fly round and round over Rothera for Pete to get his shots, and this is what we did, but I got my shots as well, and I knew that I was being able to get pictures which very few other people would ever be able to do, and in those kind of weather conditions.*

*It was wonderful. [Rothera](#) looks like nothing as compared to everything around. [Having the ship docked there was an added visual bonus.](#) I can't describe the location to you on paper, but just to say that Rothera is an island in between a big island off the main coastline. Thus there is a huge bay, which is frozen, and there are hundreds of icebergs in the bay which are frozen into the bay. And both the big main island (Adelaide), and the coastline, are mountainous, and are covered in snow and covered in glaciers. And we flew around and around. We were able to see, very clearly, how the ship had cut through the ice. There is a narrow ribbon*

*stretching into the distance. The icebergs are endlessly fascinating. Julian is a glaciologist (one of the most famous in the world I am told), and he describes it all so well, and indeed everything. I loved every second of this privileged ride, and I hope that I have got some exceptional photography, but you never know.*

*When we got back, Julian said that we must take the walk around the island. Julian has been looking after me like nobody's business and he wouldn't let me do anything that he didn't think I was up to. He said it would take an hour and a half, and so Max and I set off to walk round the shoreline. This was superb, and I managed not to take any kind of a bag with me. This, in itself, was an achievement, as I seem to need so many things on the way. The walk didn't prove too difficult, and in a flash we were away from the barracks and industrial complex, and into another world entirely. I was getting used to my boots by now. The thing is to put you foot down in confidence and to hope that what you are stepping on is not going to give way, either by being a wobbly stone, or some kind of snow or ice which goes down further than you had bargained for. I kept close to Max, as he is very agile and used to all of this. We sat on a big boulder for a long time and looked at it all, and I kept on wondering whether this ice-berg was bigger than the Albert Hall, or that iceberg was bigger than Kings Cross Station (they certainly looked bigger than those things to me). The icebergs looked about 500 yards away, and Julian said that they were seven miles or so. The mountains on the mainland looked about a mile or so away, and Julian said that they are 20 miles, which is as if you are looking across the English Channel, and it is as nothing. And the mountains further back and further away are 120 miles away, and it is all clear, clear, clear. There is no pollution and just dry air. The bay, called Margarita Bay, and everything that we are looking at, at one glance, is hundreds of square miles. This is the hardest part to take in, and I haven't yet managed to adjust my mind to coping with the scale of this. I think I like the ice-bergs the best so far, with all the amazing colour of blue at or about the line where the water would be, which is now frozen ice.*

*Max has just moved in to this office. It belongs to Linda, Julian, Linda and Pete. He really doesn't like his other place, and the pop music is belting out hear him, and so he is most unhappy, and he asked if could be in our office (laboratory), which is really just long benches with electric outlets all the way along, and stools. Max has been given a label which says British Antarctic Survey – Max. We other four have also got ours. He is writing a fair copy of his diary, which he will give to me later on in the day.*

*I will be working most of the day here, while everyone will get more and drunk. I think that they open up all their presents in public here. The mail delivery was a huge item. You can imagine everyone craving for news and items from home, especially at Christmas time. But then, if you are going to come and spend four months here, let alone two and a half years, you have to be a special kind of person.*

*I will never get used to the fact that I am here. How can this be? How can it be that a person like me can be having this totally unreal experience?*

*Rothera Research Station*

**27 December 1997**

*So, after twelve days, which is exactly half way through this journey, we finally got away from the base here at Rothera. We assembled (mustered!) at 8am, and walked over to where the planes take off. The plan was that the first plane would take Max, Pete, Rachael (who is Max's Field Assistant), and would be piloted by Andy Alsop. The second plane would take Linda, Julian, Karl (the second Field Assistant), and be piloted by Jeff. It was another superlative day. Of course, nobody has ever seen such skies. The air is so clear, with no pollution that every tiny thing radiates as never before.*

*The amount of gear to take is truly astonishing. Any time anyone goes up in a plane, they have to have emergency kit with them to stay the night, just in case a sudden storm blows up and they can't get back. And staying the night includes camping equipment, plus food and medical stuff, as well as all the radio connections etc.*

*Max's plane got off exactly on time, and our plane was due to follow shortly afterwards. However, the hitch was that there was a nut which was not behaving somewhere in the wheel/ski section, and the mechanic had to work on it. The pilot said we would be 20 minutes, but the mechanic, being more realistic, said it would take a lot longer than that. Now I know the reason why they always make announcements on the planes, telling you it will be a wait of so many minutes and it is invariably much longer. It is the pilots who are thinking wishfully. And so it was that we waited for the best part of an hour and a half, whilst this nut was being replaced. You are always made aware of the dire necessity of mechanics here. In fact, I think that in our lives as a whole we are*

*entirely dependent on mechanics, but it is not so obvious in places other than somewhere as remote as this. They have £6 million worth of spare parts here for mechanic things. You can see the size of the problem.*

*We have all been given a BAS rucksack to go out into the field. Into this rucksack we put our waterproofs, and our mittens, and, today, the thermos flasks containing whatever the chosen liquid might be. We also took biscuits and chocolate, and I attempted to make a cheese sandwich will fell to pieces and crumbled everywhere. Everything, but everything is provided here. Toothpaste, jam, coffee, Horlicks, Ovaltine, cheese, coffee, toilet paper, cleaning materials, stationery, sun cream. You don't have to provide yourself with anything at all. You just help yourself to whatever it is that you need. So if you are going out into the field just for the day, as we were, you take a snack. If, however, you are going to stay the night, as Max is, then that is a very different matter altogether. There is an ENORMOUS kit which has to be assembled. That is what the Field Assistant (Rachel) does. The scientist who goes with (or, in this case Max), doesn't really have to think about anything other than doing his or her science in the field.*

*Pete was in the first plane with Max, and whilst we were waiting with our plane, they set up the tent and got ready for our plane to fly over the landing site, so that he could take a photo of Max's plane (but it wasn't Max's plane, if you see what I mean). The flight was at least as superb as anything I have ever experienced. It was only 20 minutes or so. We flew low over the mountains, and we landed at [Jones Ice Shelf](#). That is a huge sheet over ice floating on water (as opposed to a sheet of ice on rocks - you see I am learning - it helps that Julian is one of the foremost glaciologists in the world. We looked at a vast expanse of white, surrounded by huge rugged white-capped mountains all around. In order to get good film, our pilot had been asked to make several landings, which he did, so we kept on swooping down, and then rushed upwards again. I kept my video running the whole time, as I knew that I would never, ever have another opportunity like this again.*

*It seems that there is a commercial firm which flies people around the Antarctic. They start from the tip of South America, and then fly to a central place somewhere in the Antarctic, and then from there you can fly off to different destinations, such at the South Pole, or the Highest Mountain (whatever it is called), and so on. The cost of this is astronomical. It is \$38,000 just to get your to that central depot, and then the same again for each of the other destinations. And this Jones Ice Shelf is one of the re-fuelling stops - a much-loved place. So you can imagine*

*what the cost of being able to get to a place like this would be in any situation other than the one in which I amazingly find myself now. Landing on snow skis was perfectly good, although I was somewhat nervous as I could see all the crevasses around as we flew over. But these pilots do nothing else but land in this kind of territory.*

*We got out of the plane, and Max was there waiting for us. The tent was already almost up, but there a few last-minute touches, which had been left especially for the filming. The weather was warm - you could take your hat and jacket off. I have no idea about temperature. I don't think that this makes any difference. What counts is how you feel, and somehow it just didn't feel cold. The main activity was Max being interviewed and filmed, and this took the best part of two hours. And, in between, an attempt was made for the filming of Max talking to David Whelton (who was at the EMI studios in Abbey Road) also being filmed. This was to be done on a field radio, but they just couldn't make the connection, and I could imagine David waiting and nothing happening, and being very cross because he had interrupted his holiday in order to do this bit of filming. However, it turned out that the fault was at the London end, and so the filming has been re-scheduled.*

*I climbed into the tent just to get the feel of it. It was very cosy indeed. You are way off the ice, lying on thick, comfortable fleecy type of materials. There are two beds in the tent, and the food and cooker are in between. The type of tent is one which has been used for at least the last forty years, with some small refinements. Rachel was doing everything. As well as the boxes inside the tent, there were a whole lot outside the tent, placed in a certain very strict order. And, a short way away, a ditch was dug from the snow, which was piled up high to one side, and that was the toilet facility. I had always wondered how it worked, and now we knew. Rachel said she wanted to go, at which point all the men walked away from where she was, and everyone turned their back on the situation.*

*Max was photographed in every possible kind of situation. I would say that once he realised that we weren't going to have to go through all the Survival Training which had been promised (threatened), and that we wouldn't actually have to learn how to put the tent up, but that he would just have to give the occasional helping hand with this and that, he cheered up no end. But you must admit that to get Max to be in this situation i.e. sleeping in a tent in the Antarctic, has taken the most incredible amount of whatever it has been, and all the support staff to make him feel comfortable has been colossal. Julian is worried that Max*

*will get fed up with this life, and that he will start react against to all the interviews and the photographs and so on. The worst part of it is the communal living, as you never have a single moment to be on your own.*

*We had the snack, with the thermos flasks, and the biscuits and chocolate, and then the second party (i.e. our party) climbed back into the plane, and took off, but again with a few goes so that Pete could get some really good pictures. Whatever I say to you on paper can never, ever describe the beauty and grandeur of this place. If you imagine yourself at the top of the Himalayas, you wouldn't be able to have such an impression as I had today. And don't worry about me walking off on my own. I just stick with the others all the time. I am far too scared to do any kind of independent walking. Those mukluks are extremely comfortable, especially on the ice we encountered today, which was so much easier than the soft snow we had yesterday when we had to get out of the Snowcat.*

*And so now Max is there, alone with Rachel, and having, for the first time, the experience he was sent down here for, and if he manages to capture one-hundredth of the grandeur of this place in his symphony, he will be doing well. And, of course, you know that he will be able to do it.*

*I have absolutely no idea whatsoever what tomorrow will bring. I haven't heard any news more or less since we left, so I don't know what is going on in the world. This has now become my world, at least for these few days.*

*I don't think that Cambridge is operational over these days of Christmas and Sunday (today), so you might get a clutch of Emails altogether.*

*Alice, in my room, talks in her sleep. She was having quite a lengthy conversation last night. You get all sorts. The lady's shower and toilet room is not too bad, but the girl whose duty it was to clean everything today (it goes in a rota) said that the men's toilets are absolutely ghastly - smelly and dirty. Poor Max.*

*So far I haven't had to sleep in the tent and therefore not to be near to a flush toilet, and I must say that was the area of activity that was worrying me the most about the trip, but it looks as if I might not have to do it, which comes as a great relief.*

*Rothera Research Station*



**29 December 1997**

*The weather still continues to be brilliant, but, as they keep telling us, you never know how long it is going to last. I have never, and I will never, ever experience such clarity of air.*

*The pattern of what is happening is now emerging. They are bending over backwards to send Max into the field, in whatever way they can, either by putting him with an oil-run, which is when they put oil cans into the depots, which is the main occupation of the entire Antarctic thrust, or by making a special outing for him. As far as I am concerned, it is difficult for them to find spaces, and that includes Julian, and also Linda and even Pete. However, every moment it is different.*

*Max was brought back yesterday afternoon, after his first night in the field at Jones Ice Shelf. It looked as if the weather was closing in, and they thought he might be stuck for a week, so they sent a plane out for him, and they cleared up the tent in half an hour, and he was back here, full of beans and enthusiasm. He obviously has enjoyed that a thousand times more than staying here at Rothera, which indeed is rather trying, as it is entirely communal living and you never get a single moment to yourself, and the noise around is terrible, what with the thumping overhead, the music blaring out, the machines whizzing and whirring, the planes taking off and landing, and a thousand different occupations. But, out there, in the tent, and walking around on the ice shelf, Max found all that peace and inspiration which was the reason for coming.*

*Then we were told that today we would be here, and Max was to take the opportunity to catch up with his writing. And we were sitting here at 8am, when Tudor Morgan, the Field Operations manager, came in and asked if Max would like to go on an oil-run which was leaving in five minutes. Max put down his pencil and rushed about to find his boots and gloves and to pack a lunch, and off he went. It seems that his journey today is one of the best and, again, the real crux of what he is likely to see. Julian was extremely happy and relieved that this has been managed, because he was getting very nervous that it might be that Max wouldn't be able to make this trip until, say 2<sup>nd</sup> January, and that it would be very possible that he would get stuck where he was, and thus miss the deadline for returning. So what this means is that Max will at least have had the major experiences well into the time allocated. It might also mean that the rest of the time might be an anti-climax, but it also allows for him to absorb what he has seen and felt, and make the radio and television interviews and write his diary under less pressure. Although, I must say, they*

*certainly move you about here, and there is very little time to do anything contemplative.*

*I am on a re-deployment training course today. At first I was told that I wouldn't be doing it, and then I was. So far we have had three courses. The first was the Medical Officers briefing, explaining what was in the First Aid box which you take with you into the field. It is an enormous box, full of absolutely everything - it is a miniature hospital in fact - and I have been given a plastic bag full of my own immediate possible requirement. Needless to say I didn't understand a word that was being said with all those names of medicines and drugs. I started to quiver with fear at the possibilities of what could happen to any of us.*

*After that we were shown the Base Vehicles and Skidoo. There are hundreds of different kinds of vehicles which ride around here, of all shapes and sizes. The terrain is very rocky, and they have all got big wheels which grips whatever it is that they have to traverse. The mechanic showed us how the engines work, and the dipstick, and the start, but it was all terrifying. Some of us were asked to 'have a go' and I kept well out of it. I would need a 30-lesson training course on any of those items. The skidoo is a sort of motorised toboggan which zips along over the snow, instead of the dogs which were phased out about 4 years or so ago. I didn't like the look of that one either. They all tell you that it is a doddle and there is nothing to it, but I wouldn't like to be spending any time at all driving those things. They are what I call 'boys toys' and, frankly, they are not for me. I suppose, now, in an emergency, I would have some tiny idea of what to do, but not very much. We will have another lesson soon on the radio soon.*

*Oh yes, another lesson was on Field Met. This consisted of having to read the weather situation, in case you are in the field, and you need to tell the pilot who is coming to collect you what the weather is like and whether he would be able to land or not. We were told about wind direction, wind speed, visibility, contrast, horizontal definition, time, total cloud, individual cloud layers, temperature and pressure, significant weather, estimating wind speed. As you might imagine, I found all this very difficult, although when we had to go outside and Lucy (for such was her name) asked us to say what we were looking at in Weather Observation Form speak, I seemed to be able to do it, not because of what she had been telling us about cloud formations of stratus, strato-cumulus, cumulus, nimbo-stratus, alto-cumulus, cirrus and so on, but just from common sense of what it looked like. One obviously needs a huge amount of practise. I kept wondering how the other people were absorbing what*

*we were being told. It helped to have colour pictures as to the different cloud formations.*

*I have absolutely no idea what I should be doing from one minute to the next. I just sit here at the computer, working on the new Orchestral Guide, and if someone comes in and tells me to go somewhere, I just stop and go there. Every time you go anywhere that is away from the main central area, and that includes going for a walk round the point, or to where the aircraft take off, you have to 'tag' out, and gives an estimate of the time you are due back. When you get back, you cross yourself off, but if you are not back within one hour of the time you said you would be, then someone comes to look for you. The risks of things happening here are so big that they have to take more than every possible precaution. But don't worry about me, because I don't take one step without being with somebody.*

*I go to bed rather early, and I get up very early, at 5am and get to the computer. It is still not clear whether I will have a night camping out, but we will see. I have had absolutely no connection with home whatsoever. I haven't tried to listen to the short-wave radio - there hasn't been a moment.*

*Last night at about 11 pm, with the sun shining down, Julian, Linda, Pete and I went out for a walk, and I asked Pete if he would take a photograph of me with the Chanukiah. And we set it all up, and fixed the candles in, and Pete took photographs. It was one of the weirdest experiences that you could imagine. What with Pesach in Macau, and now Chanukah in the Antarctic, I am not doing too badly as far as yiddishkeit is concerned. I couldn't light the candles inside, as any flame is strictly forbidden, owing to the fire risk, which is great. That is why we went outside, but in any case, for the photograph, one had to see the scenery, with all the icebergs behind.*

*The conversation here is all shop. That means, only what is happening here, today, at this moment, with all the projects and people. The whole of this vast, gigantic operation is to enable about 20 scientists (of great renown and repute) to be able to do their field work. The amount of back-up, in terms of men, machinery, resources, time, and effort and so on is for this one aim. However, there is no doubt that despite all this emphasis on science, there is a political element to it. You don't have a run-way, hanger and wharf to dock a ship the size of the James Clark Ross merely for scientific reasons. Somewhere the need to have a*

*presence must be paramount, otherwise all that money would simply not be forthcoming. You can't imagine the scale of it. Everything is big here.*

*I am gradually getting to talking to some of the people here, but not so many - only as the occasion arises. I chatted to one of the joiners today. He goes to all the England Soccer matches, especially the away fixtures. It costs him £500 each time, and he attends every single match. He reckons that England have got a good chance for the World Cup next year. But it seems strange to me that people can spend that kind of money without batting an eyelid.*

*If it seems as if I am talking mainly about Rothera, that is because that is what I am doing. I am in the glorious scenery, with not much chance of actually being outside, but mostly confined to quarters, but that is probably for the best.*

*The next briefing we had was all to do with radio communications and computers etc. The computer part was the only section of what I was supposed to learn that I knew anything about, due to my experience. Thus I thought that if I would spend some more time on each of the items that we have been briefed on, I would be able to master them, as I seem to have been able to do with the computer aspect, much to my surprise. The Rothera operations gives flight following and local flight information for the BAS Air Unit and other aircraft operating in the area; field party communications; communications with other Antarctic stations and ships; communications to BAS HQ at Cambridge and the collection of weather information from other stations. We were shown the Field Radio and how to set it up and how to put the wires in and how to operate the radio, setting the frequencies and tuning, transmitting the common procedure words and phrases such as 'Roger', which means 'I have received all of your last transmission' and 'standby' which means 'wait and I will call you', and 'Charlie Charlie' which means 'that is correct and so on. In the end the language which people talk to each other is a string of codes, which one absolutely must know. I thought to myself that in the event of something ghastly happening, the only thing that matters is being able to make radio contact and having the people talk you through whatever situation you might find yourself (exactly as Keith does with us when we are in trouble).*

*Rothera Research Station*

**30<sup>th</sup> December 1997**

*It is now the following morning, and Max has just been told that he is going on another journey today with Anya Reading to look at seismology (waves in the earth). And Paul Rose has told me that before I leave he is now almost certain that I will get one night in the tent. I am less apprehensive about the tent now that I have actually been in one and seen how cosy it is, and how there is someone there to look after you.*

*You have to put lots and lots of sun cream on all exposed parts of your body, which means your face, because of the ultra-violet rays which are terribly dangerous. Equally, you must not go out without putting on the very dark sun-glasses with the flaps at the side, because of the intense brightness of the snow and the reflection. Thus every single time you go outside, you have to do a whole lot of things, which is very time consuming.*

*Rothera Research Station*

**31 December 1997**

*I have just received your Email written earlier on today. The time at the moment is just before 8pm and everyone is getting ready for the New Year's Eve celebration dinner. The last Email I sent you was just before I was supposed to go with Max to Fossil Bluff. However, the weather turned very bad and windy, and it was decided that it would be entirely unsuitable for me to go in a small aircraft which was going to be bumpy all the way on a long flight. Everyone knew that I am not such a good traveller when it comes to things like this, having seen that I had been sea-sick for three days, and they rightly judged that I would probably get very sick on the flight, and someone being sick in a small plane is not at all a good idea for anyone involved. So Max went off, with his people, and I remained here for another day. However, if the weather gets good tomorrow, I will go in the plane, and go and collect him, as it were. It is hard to describe how every single circumstance is brought to bear on what anyone is doing at any one time. The main purpose of all the flights is to move scientists and petrol into the field, and everything and everyone else has to be fitted in around all of this.*

*As a result, I have had several days not going out too much. But I have not been at all idle. I have been working very hard on the new *Orchestral Guide*, and by now I have done the main part of the work, which has taken a huge amount of time. I am glad that I brought it with me.*

*The weather has changed a lot. For the first eight days or so, we had brilliant, clear weather, which is most unusual. However, things have now changed to what I assume is more normal Antarctic weather, which means that there is snow, and lots of wind, and it is very cold indeed. Every single time you walk out of a door into the outside, you have to have a huge dressing programme. You have to put on two pairs of socks, and then your boots. I have two pairs of boots, one with steel toe-caps and the other ones long, white and spongy, for walking on the ice. The steel toe-caps are for walking about here on Rothera, and you need them. Then you have to be sure you are wearing thick moleskin trousers, preferably with the long-johns underneath. Then you have at least three layers of things on the upper part of your body, including two layers of fleeces. Then you have one pair of gloves, and over the gloves you wear the mittens, which have fleece inside. And then you have to put the sun-cream on your face, as this is exposed. And then you put the hat on. I have been wearing a sort of ski-hat which I bought on the ship, because neither the balaclava nor the fur hat seems to do the job at all well. Then you must put the sun-glasses on, and, to my dismay, I lost mine yesterday. I can't think where I put them, but luckily they had provided me with an additional different pair in my kit. And all of this just to walk a few steps to go from where we sleep to where we have the lab which serves as the office for our team, and it is also where the dining room and all the operations are.*

*I have been seeing various things around the camp, and I am just overwhelmed by the amount of sheer brilliance of all the technicians in whatever field they are working. There are the aviation mechanics who of course look after the fleet of planes. There are the vehicle mechanics who look after the hundreds of different kind of machines which go about the camp, and also the skidoos, which are the motorised toboggans which take people up and around in the snow, and to which the sledges are attached to carry all the equipment. There are the boat mechanics that look after the fleet of ships.*

### *Rothera Research Station*

**1<sup>st</sup> January 1998**

*It is now nearly 6pm. I had written the first part of this letter yesterday, and since then we have spoken over the phone this morning, and then later I spoke to mummy. I am going to try to describe what happened today, and I want to do this as soon as possible after the event. It is now*

*6.30pm and we arrived back from our trip to Fossil Bluff about an hour ago.*

*So this is how it happened. The decisions about what is going to happen during the day are made at 7.45am after the meeting with the weather men, when they look at all the reports in all the areas around and see what is going to be possible. The plan was that Julian, Linda, Pete and I would be flown by Andy Alsop down to Fossil Bluff to see Max and to film him there and do some recordings, and then to return, leaving Max there for a second night. This is what you would call a day trip, but of the most exaggerated sort imaginable. So, Julian came in to say that we were on and that we should get ready to fly immediately. I had prepared for the previous day to do the same thing, but it didn't happen because of the wind. I have to get dressed in the pitch dark, because the curtains are drawn and there are always people sleeping. This means having to get all the clothes and everything out the previous evening, which I had done, and so I was ready. So we put on our outer clothes and made our way over to the plane. Andy filled up with petrol, and then Julian said that I would be sitting in the front next to Andy, whilst the others would all be sitting in the back. I tried to climb into the seat, but it was much too high for me, so I got in through the back where the others had got in, and made my way to the front. I was strapped in, and off we went. So there I was, next to the pilot in a plane, and it was wonderful. We were going to fly something like 300 miles or so (London- Carlisle), and being in the front like that was a totally different experience. The weather was not brilliant, but it was clear, and I loved the grey skies. There is an enormous bay, called Marguerite Bay which is just to the south of where we are, and the part near to us here at Rothera is now ice-free, but further down it is solid ice for a huge area. Then we flew through George VI Sound, with Alexander Island on one side and the Mainland on the other side. And then we approached where we had to go, and we landed on the ice on the skies, and were greeted by two people, Jenny and Seamus, who were waiting with Skidoos and sledges by a row of petrol barrels. Everything is geared to these barrels. The whole point of Fossil Bluff is that it is a place where they store the barrels in order to be able to fly further south. We all climbed out, and I was put on the back of a Skidoo, as was Linda on the back of another Skidoo, with all the men hanging on to the sledges. All the photographic gear was on the sledges. What a ride. It was a couple of miles, flying through at a tremendous speed. Jenny was driving my Skidoo and she said that if I saw the sledge coming towards me I should get my feet out of the way. I didn't at all see how I would do that. It was horribly uncomfortable and the expression on my face of the sheer terror must have been something to see. Anyway,*

*finally we arrived, and I was so thankful to get out, and was already worrying about the return journey.*

*Fossil Bluff is a small hut, built on stilts, on a mound, surrounded by mountains, and hundreds of miles of snow. It is wild, and desolate. We climbed the steep steps into the hut, which has got a wide wooden balcony all around, and also a boot room. The inside takes you back to another time and another world, with all the old tins they keep there, rather like Port Lochroy which we visited from the boat, but this is even more remote. Max was staying there with Jenny, Seamus - who is the head of the computers and the radio here at Rothera, but who is having a 'holiday' there - , and Ian, who is the Field Assistant. There are four bunks, two on top of two, and the table in the middle, and the Raeburn cooker (if you can believe it). The water is got from the ice which they collect and put in a huge container. The kettle was boiling merrily, and we eventually had tomato soup which was made from a packet (I have never had soup made from a packet before). Linda and Pete continued making the film and the radio recordings with Max, who was obviously enjoying every moment of being there - far more than here at Rothera. We had some nice conversation, and I managed to learn quite a lot more about radio communications, because Jenny showed it to me, and, as you know, I always do better in a private lesson than in a class. Eventually it was time to go. I was dreading the ride back in the Skidoo. I thought that they went so very fast and wondered if it was necessary to go at that speed. This time I arranged my legs in a different way from the outward journey, and so it was much less harrowing. Max said that he had absolutely loathed his journey on the sledge when he had to cling on for dear life. He has got his return journey to the plane still to come.*

*I thought that I would not be sitting in the front again, and that it would be someone else's turn, but no, there I was again. And then, Michael, this is what happened. And don't faint. After about 15 minutes (the total flight time took 90 minutes), Andy offered that I would pilot the plane. He had offered it on the outward journey, and, mindful of all your instructions, I had refused. However, Jenny and Seamus said that I shouldn't have refused, and that if it was offered again, I should accept. And so I accepted. What I imagined was that I would hold the controls for about 10 seconds and that would be it. What actually happened was that I held the controls and Andy showed me what to do to turn the plane to the left and to the right, and it continued and continued, and there I was PILOTING THE PLANE. I have never been so utterly terrified in all my life. He told me to fix my eyes on some distant cloud, and to make straight for it. I kept on thinking, from minute to minute, that he would*



*take over, but no, it went on and on and on. I thought I would faint. I had spots in front of my eyes and made a mental note to go and visit Mr. Van Oldenburgh as soon as I got home (which I will do in any case as I have had some other trouble with my eyes), and I clutched the wheel (or whatever it is called) for all I was worth. Andy kept telling me to relax and I tried to relax but within ten seconds my arm muscles tensed up something shocking. He then told me to make for that bundle of clouds which was over a particular mountain over which he wished to fly directly, and I stared in front, and couldn't imagine how the plane stayed up in the air. This is exactly how it happened, so you mustn't be cross with me. And, as you can see, I am still here. I did promise you that I wouldn't go off by myself, and I have kept rigidly to this, but this bombshell came out of nowhere. I would say I was flying that Twin Otter plane for about 45 minutes or maybe a bit less. I did have the consolation of knowing the help was very near at hand, and that I was unlikely to encounter any other stray planes flying around. But I am sure this is highly illegal and that one is not supposed to do it, but there it was. When Andy took the controls again, to my enormous relief, I put my head in my hands for a good ten minutes before I dared to look around again. None of the others behind in the plane realised at all that this was what was happening, and even when we landed, and got out and walked away from the hanger, they still didn't know until I spelled it out to them, and I said to Julian that he would have a lot of explaining to do to you. Anyway, here I am, safe and sound. Unfortunately I don't think that I am the person to do these sorts of things. Any of the others would have welcomed the chance to do this and to relish it, and would have loved the challenge and the thrill of it all, but I just am not that kind of a person. You remember that I didn't want to learn to drive at all, and I still don't like driving and only do so as a necessity (although the Polo has improved matters).*

*It was a wonderful day, especially now that I am back here, and waiting for supper which will happen right now. I have no idea how my films will come out, but I have got the knowledge that Pete is taking film, and still film and everything the whole time and I am sure that he will give me a copy eventually.*

*As I am clicking away here, Julian is reading a copy of his report (he is here to do a report), and Linda is tapping away on her Notebook Computer. She has been very busy with all the filming and recording and making notes all the while.*

*There was a party here for New Year, which was in another building from the ones which we have been using which is called Phase III and that is where all the General Assistants hang out and get all their things ready to take into the field, and all the skies and the mending of the sledges. The food was served over there and lots of drinks, and they hung red and blue stuff over the windows which gave it the atmosphere of a disco, and the usual loud music. I stayed for about an hour and then retired quietly to bed.*

*Concerning the Camerata Accademica in Salzburg, I have spoken to Max about Spell and the optional trombones and percussion and he says that he would definitely prefer to have them if it would be possible.*

*Rothera Research Station*

**6<sup>th</sup> January 1998**

*My mind is now turning to the awful possibility of us not getting back on Sunday, which means that we will be in trouble with Linz, and Max conducting the two orchestras. As you will see from the schedule, he has a Press Conference on the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup>, and rehearsals in Salzburg in the afternoon and evening. I am now wondering if it might be worth getting someone to stand by to see about those first rehearsals with the Camerata Accademica in Salzburg. I have talked about it with Max, and I have suggested Peter Bergamin, and to my intense relief, he said that this would be alright - I had thought I might have some difficulties on this.*

*What I am thinking is that it might be an idea to give Peter a call and tell him what the situation is, and see if he might come over and borrow the relevant scores the ones I have. He would need Conductor's scores to perform from, and this will take time to make up. The scores, for Salzburg, that Peter would need would be Strathclyde Concerto No. 3 for Horn and Trumpet, A Spell for Green Corn, and Seven in Nomine. There is also the Bach 4<sup>th</sup> Brandenburg concerto. Whilst he is there, at the same time, you could also give him the score of Mavis in Las Vegas and of the Piano Concerto, which is what is needed for the Bruckner Orchestra Linz.*

*It would also be worth giving Bruce McCrea at the Hire Library at Booseys (tel: 0171 291 7271 to see if he has a conductor's score of*

*Strathclyde 3 and Seven in Nomine (or even make them up), and also giving the same call to Paul Narey at Bury St. Edmunds, to see about the conductor's scores of Mavis, the Piano Concerto and A Spell for Green Corn, and this could be sent on the van to Frith Street. Peter could go and pick all of these scores up at Regent Street and Frith Street respectively. I don't know what Peter is doing, but my impression is that he has got a lot of free time on his hands and would be willing to undertake this sort of thing. I'll worry about the Sibelius later, as that is a different matter. Julian keeps on insisting that it is going to work out, but, so far it hasn't and who knows? I should stress that the most important thing will be Strathclyde 3, because that is the most difficult of the works which the Salzburg orchestra is going to play, and they will need their rehearsal time, and this is the piece which Peter, if he can do all this, should concentrate on.*

*Since I wrote the above paragraphs, I have talked to Julian, and he is also now somewhat apprehensive, and he is going to make a report to his Director, called Christopher Rapley, who started his job yesterday, poor chap.*

*Looking at the worst, if it turns out that we can't be back in the UK on 11<sup>th</sup> January, the next plane would arrive on 15<sup>th</sup> January, which is the day Max is supposed to travel to Linz. He doesn't actually start rehearsals in Salzburg, as I said, until the afternoon of the 16<sup>th</sup>. Technically, it might be possible for Max to get to Brize Norton, and then go to Heathrow, and get himself to Linz all on the same day, provided he had his scores for both Linz, Salzburg and Manchester with him, together with his clothes, and his tails. I suppose that Paul could send all of these could be sent to London, which would obviate the necessity of Max going to Edinburgh, and thus saving a whole day, to all intents and purposes.*

*I also had thoughts that even if the plane does manage to get here from the Falklands, and we have been waiting five days now, we also have to get back to the Falklands, but they assure me that this is not a problem. What a fix to find ourselves in.*

*I will be bringing the Observer item home with me, and it will be on a disc which I will give to Lisa O'Kelly. I also have got ten pictures which Pete has taken with his digital camera, which I have also got on a disc, which I will be able to send to the Observer, together with captions. So it is all ready. I think that Lisa should send a bike round on Monday 12<sup>th</sup>, when I am home, to collect these items, or I might be able to Email them. In fact, I could try to Email them from here, but I am rather reluctant to*

*do so, firstly because I don't have the Observer or Lisa O'Kelly and the Picture Editor's E Mail addresses, and secondly, Pete has been having trouble sending picture Emails back to Cambridge, and I have had trouble sending you a long Email (as for instance those four separate ones I had to send you to break things up). I have been having an immense amount of trouble with the computer functions in general. I have no trouble at all with my own Notebook . That has behaved wonderfully well. It is to do with the computers they have here. That is because so many different people use them, and, clearly, they do not go through all the correct procedures which they are supposed to do, and each and every single time I come to one of them, there is something wrong and something different, not mentioning the fact that the printer in the computer room has been out of order since the moment we arrived here. We can print, but you then have to go upstairs to get to another room, and that room is off the main communications room, and the door to that is very often shut, and when the door is shut, you are not allowed to go in, because they are talking to the pilots or something like that.*

*Could you contact Keith, and ask him to send me an Email with instructions of what to do with this disc of photos I have got of Max. I want to put them on to my hard disc. I tried to do it here, but found, and I saved the photos in Word, and found, to my horror, that each picture had consumed 2,333 K of memory, so I hastily deleted them. These ten photos are saved on the disc which I have in JPG, so I assume that I would just go through the usual process with photos, and save them also in JPG, where they would be about 15 K of memory. I want to have them myself for any other journals and magazines and newspapers which might want to use them.*

*Rachel Duncan, who was the General Assistant who took Max out into the field, said that they had mentioned to her friend, Stephen Venables (I think that is his name) that she was seeing Max here, and he seems to be Britain's leading mountaineer (the types I mix with these days!) and that he wants to interview Max for one of the newspapers from an 'outdoor' point of view (or, at least, this will be different from the usual Arts point of view), so he will be contacting me when I get back home (if I get back home!!) One of the mountaineering magazines is called High. Paul Rose, the Station Commander here, who not only climbs mountains, including Everest, but also trains the SCUBA divers as I told you, was telling me how he is intending to climb Everest in 2001, and what he has to do, and about the yaks which carry all the gear and so on. Some people's lives....*

*This morning I went for a walk by myself, contrary to your instructions. I took courage in my hands, and walked the whole way round the run way here. That is about 2 miles, and I can't tell you the bliss and relief it was to be able to perambulate on the flat, which I have not been able to do for one single second since I left home. On the ship it was up and down the stairs, and here it is either over rocks and stones, or ice, or snow, or whatever. And I thought to myself that I have been able to take this stroll, on the flat, on a run way, at the tax-payer's expense, and at the expense of the government having spent £12 million on putting this down, especially for me. Julian is only happy when he is climbing something. The relief of walking along the flat was indescribable, and so now I have found this, I will do it until we leave.*

*I have received your Email written earlier on today when you said that you now know when we are supposed to come and have been in touch with a new person at Cambridge. Another person you could contact is Denise Chapman, who might be the person who wrote to you officially about our delay. Anyway, she will definitely know what is going on.*

*Julian has paid Max and my post office account. You have to pay this either by cheque or cash. It doesn't come off our BAS account. So if you could make a cheque out, on Max's account, for £114.70 and send it to Julian, it would be a nice surprise for when he gets home. There might be a small sum later. If you think this is a lot, this is because both of us sent at least 130 postcards, so we had to buy the postcards and pay for the stamps. I never send cards to anyone, but this time I sent cards to absolutely everyone.*

*They fired another rocket yesterday evening. As I said, this is a team of German scientists who are here for about 4 months doing these experiments. They have taken two weeks to make it possible to fire the rocket. They are a mobile rocket team and they mostly go to the north of Norway or very remote places. The team leader told me that there probably aren't more than 15 sites anywhere in the world - most of them are in the USA, and here I am, right in the midst of it. Everyone gathers outside to watch the launch. There is the count-down, and them - WHOOM. One of the chaps here had left his video camera right where the launch is. He left it for 30 minutes, and then he went to collect the film, and played it through on the giant television which is in the dining room (which is the hub of the whole Rothera operation. Everyone was there and watching. There was the rocket, poised for action, and we waited. When it went off, it was such a loud bang and it gave me such a shock that I shrieked and nearly followed the rocket up into space. This*

*set everyone into wild laughter. They replayed the shot several time, but none of them were as thrilling or as terrifying as the first one.*

*I did some washing this afternoon, only the washing machine started to leak, and great foams of soap and water came gushing out. Why this should happen to me I don't know.*

*I will phone you as soon as I know when (and if) we are leaving Rothera, and you will be able to track me from there. I have never been in such a situation in my life. Never mind, I am reading and relaxing, and there are no more terrifying outings to contend with.*

*Upland Goose Hotel  
Stanley,  
Falkland Sslands*

**10<sup>th</sup> January 1998**

*It is 6.15am and we have to be ready to drive to Mount Pleasant Airport in half an hour. However, we have been told that the forecast is that there might be gales of 28 knots per hour, and if this is the case, then the TriStar plane leaving for Ascension/Brize Norton will not take off and there might be delays of hours or even a day or so. I must say that I am none too keen on all these potential delays, which turn out to be deal delays, especially in view of Linz. It leaves me feeling so absolutely helpless.*

*It was a very strange day yesterday. When you phoned to say that Michael Tippett had died and that the Associated Press wanted a statement from Max, I felt a very long way from home, and yet, at the same time, it felt very close. Max sat down to write what you had asked him to do immediately, but I then had problems in sending the fax. I typed the message into my notebook computer, and then transferred the message onto a disc, in order to take it downstairs to the reception here in order to be able to print it out, in order to be able to send the fax. However, I was completely unable to even start the word processor here - I didn't have a clue, and was told to wait until the secretary arrived, and she was late in coming, by which time I was getting agitated. So I asked Julian if we could go over to the BAS Office here, which is manned by Myriam Booth, and this we did, and we walked along the street. Once I was there, I was able to handle the computer, which had the same network system that I had by now become accustomed to both on the*

*James Clark Ross and at Rothera, and I was quickly able to install the disc, and to get it on to the screen and then to print it off and then to send the fax. I sent the fax to the AP, and also another one to Sally Groves, from Max and from me. Later on in the day, at 6pm our time here, I was finally able to reach the BBC World Service, and I caught the end of a programme on Tippett and Merion Bowen was talking. It was also in the News on the World Service. So a great deal of fuss has obviously been made, and I can imagine Nicholas Kenyon and everyone running around at the BBC to plan large-scale tributes with, obviously, performances of A Child of our Time and so on. Sally Groves must be out of her mind with upset. I am still thinking of the expression on her face when we met her at Job about six weeks ago. Can it really only be six weeks ago? It seems like several life-times.*

*These last days before arriving home have also been strange, although, I must say, that everything has been strange, on each in its own way. All the luggage was collected at the door of the main building in order to drive it to the Dash 7. It isn't that far, but, as I have kept on say, every single step at Rothera was a difficult one, and with luggage, the more so. And it seemed that Linda had decided that she would do the driving of the John Deere, which is the little sort of vehicle, of which they have many, which are at Rothera to take this sort of burden around. She found it difficult to start, but she managed alright. The others had all walked over to the plane, but I came with her. It was snowing by this time. It had hardly snowed at all the whole time we were in the Antarctic, but now the weather looked as if it were changing.*

*There was a small reception committee waiting at the foot of the small flight of steps - and then we climbed into the plane - that plane for which we had been waiting for so long and so impatiently. In normal circumstances, in commercial use, the plane holds 52 passengers. For BAS, it holds 16 passengers and the rest is for cargo. And on the plane we had the two pilots, and David Wynn-Williams, the head of Terrestrial Biology at BAS, Julian, Max and me. David was put in charge of safety, as he had done the trip many times before, and in charge of the 'refreshments'. This consisted of boiling the water, plus the tea-bag and a packet of biscuits. In other words, there were six of us in this plane, and we could have held a small dance in the available space. David, helped by Julian, prepared the 'in-flight' cup of tea, which they handed out to Max, and to the two pilots (I had my usual cup of hot water). It was all most amusing, and ridiculous. I was so utterly relieved to be on my way.*

This ended the extracts from my emails on the trip.

## **Postlude**

And now, retrospectively what are my lasting impressions of that trip? My only real physical trouble was my sea-sickness on board the James Clark Ross. Otherwise I can't say I was in any way inconvenienced. I had no pain whatsoever from coldness, either inside any of the buildings, which were wonderfully heated, or outside where the clothing gear which had been loaned by BAS was more than sufficient to deal with the temperatures. I shared a room with Linda Capper, the seismologist Anya Reading, who had the bunk over me, and the marine assistant Alice Chapman, who had learned her scuba diving in Orkney under the tuition of the man who lived right next door to Archie and Elizabeth Bevan in Stromness.

This room was basic and perfectly adequate to the needs of those few weeks, with a chair and a cupboard for each of the two bunks. The toilet and shower room where one could also do one's washing was just along the corridor. We had our own boot room where all the donning and doffing of clothes and boots took place. There was a gang-plank walk from our hut to what I called the main building which was where we had our meals. We had three meals every day and I always had the vegetarian option. As we had come on the ship which brought the provisions there was a lot of fresh food. I had some splendid conversations with whoever I sat down with at the table. Although I do recall that much of these conversations were taken up with everyone's experiences concerning crevasses.

My main problem was coming to terms with how to walk as I found getting used to the boots extremely difficult. Things improved when I found that I could take something that approximated to walk round the landing strip for the large aircraft. I did have the feeling of being a fraud, for what on earth was my *raison d'être* because I was in no way employed in my usual functions as being Max's manager.

But it was the people who made the greatest impression. During those few short weeks, there were two lasting romances. Anya Reading, in the bunk above me, practising her cello and being passionately devoted to the playing of Steven Isserlis, started and continued a relationship with the doctor, David Rigg. Rachael Duncan, who at the start of our stay had been assigned to spend all her time looking after Max, suddenly disappeared from the scene, and then re-emerged and she got together and then married Tudor Morgan, the field operations manager.

Of our own 'task force', Pete Bucktrout was an extraordinary photographer. He was with us every step of the way, carrying all his various cameras, both still and moving. In other circumstances there would have been a crew of a least three people to do the tasks he undertook. Linda Capper created all the excitement and opportunities for the widest possible interest in Max's experiences, which people then remembered when it came to the actual performance of the symphony. Sometimes I had the feeling that more people knew what was happening to us tucked away at the end of the earth than we knew what was happening in the wide world.



But, above all, it was Julian Paren who remains in my memory. His job was to look after and to instruct Max, but I came in for all his care. I was sixty-two during that trip. Officially BAS does not allow any of its personnel to go to the Antarctic after the age of sixty. And this was my first time, and I was well over the age limit. I was nervous the whole time. I was terrified before I went, and the feeling continued the whole time, and even now, all these years later, my stomach still turns over. Without Julian's never-ending care and attention, it would all have been very different. He looked after me in the same way as I was looking after my very elderly mother, and was ever in attendance when I was slipping around in my boots like a new-born foal. I will always be grateful to him. He provided all the information necessary for Max to know what everything was about and for Max to write his own diary.

The Antarctic is the ultimate place for taking photographs, but my own interest in photography is always of people as I know that no pictures that I would take of what I saw around me in the way of scenery could ever do justice to the reality. I did light my Chanukah candles and wondered whether this might be the first time that had been done in the Antarctic. Who knows? I still find it totally impossible to believe that any of this happened. I have all the images implanted in my memory, and yet they refuse to join up to the rest of my life. Maybe this is because humans are simply not supposed to be in such a deeply hostile place. On stepping out of the plane which took us from Rothera back to Port Stanley, I saw grass, and suddenly it seemed to be as if the whole of civilisation, as I know and love it, was encapsulated in one single blade of grass, and I am every grateful to be living in an environment which supports such a civilisation. When I switched on my radio the morning after arriving home, I heard the announcer say "Max is back"! What a brilliant job Linda had done.

Max himself loved the whole thing. He was in every way more suited to go on the trip, having had to experience the rigours of an Orkney winter out there on Hoy all by himself. He had only recently had a hernia operation prior to us setting out, and I was not at all pleased when he kept insisting that he would carry his kit bag as the occasion arose but he insisted and there was nothing I could do to dissuade him. He had his own very luxurious cabin on the James Clark Ross next to that of the captain, and was very content with that. He was also virtually the only person on the ship who did not suffer sea-sickness. At Rothera, the promised space in which he could work did not materialise, and he was not too pleased with that. Neither was the fact that he had to share his sleeping quarters with three others, as did everyone. But, very speedily, the three others in his room disappeared and were not replaced, so he had the room to himself and he could work there, so he was content. He took to his boots almost immediately and so was not incapacitated as I was. He took his notebook everywhere and wrote copious notes about everything, listening intently to everything that was being told to him by whichever expert, and most particularly by Julian Paren. I thought that the trip for Max had been a most positive one in every way and that it had been a visionary idea that he should be sent to the Antarctic as preparation for writing his symphony.

After our return, we slipped into our own busy lives again for several years until the time was ready for the symphony to be performed and the great event of the premiere was to happen. Max wrote the symphony in plenty of good time for Boosey & Hawkes to get all the parts ready and there were no last minute emergencies in any of the preparations. There was a spat which arose between the Philharmonia Orchestra

and the BBC Scottish Orchestra, the latter of which was going to perform the symphony at the St. Magnus Festival in Orkney a month after the May premiere at the Royal Festival hall. The Philharmonia had the rights to the first broadcast performance, but the BBC Scottish said that they would have the first broadcast as they would in any case take a recording at their performance and they threatened that if they could not make a recording and broadcast it almost immediately afterwards, they would not perform the symphony. However, in the end David Whelton at the Philharmonia prevailed and that matter was settled. The Philharmonia's performance was recorded and broadcast the day following the premiere, and likewise the BBC Scottish Orchestra's performance a month later was also recorded and was also broadcast a few later afterwards. The more the merrier.

But otherwise it was Linda Capper again was in action, and once again Max was at full stretch with all the interviews. Suddenly the Antarctic was everywhere and there seemed to be a genuine interest in the place and in Max and what he was doing. Someone at the British Antarctic Survey was assigned to deal with everything connected with the event.

As always, parties are attached to an event. Sometimes I think that the party seems to be more important than the event itself. Everyone wanted to have some kind of a party, and I found that parties had been arranged for before the concert, during the interval of the concert and after the concert. I knew perfectly well that Max would not be able to enjoy any of these, in the case of the first two because he never ate or drank anything before he was on duty to conduct, and after the concert because everyone would be rushing up to him.

So I decided that I needed to give a party myself at my own flat, where Max could relax away from the event. I decided to call that evening 'Four Parties and a Symphony'. I think that my main concern was that [Ursula Vaughan Williams](#), who was Ralph's widow, by this time very elderly, would attend the performance. Max himself had, as a student, had been present at the first performance of RVW's symphony in Manchester in May 1953 by the Halle orchestra conducted by John Barbirolli, and he had seen Vaughan Williams' then young wife Ursula with him. My first attempts at getting Ursula Vaughan Williams to attend were unsuccessful, and I was very upset about it. However, in the end, I got my friend Oliver Davies, who knew her well, to prevail on the man who was very close to her, to point out how important an occasion this was, and how the whole thing had been started as a tribute to Vaughan Williams and his own symphony and she accepted, and indeed attended the symphony and all the four parties involved.

From the first moment of the first rehearsal, I felt that Max had miraculously managed to capture the atmosphere, and this impression grew with each further rehearsal and ultimately the premiere performance itself. When there has been such a build-up to what actually happens, it seems hard to concentrate on the music as it is happening, but my own feeling was that it proved to be as powerful a creation as the people who had had the original vision had hoped that it would be. The orchestra responded to Max, as I was sure that they would, and it turned out to be an outstanding and memorable musical event, with a packed and eager audience who responded most positively.

*Antarctic Symphony (Symphony No. 8)*

The Philharmonia had organised two subsequent performances immediately following the one at the Royal Festival Hall on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2001. The first, at the De Montfort Hall in Leicester brought out even more wonders in the symphony, whereas the one at the Theatre Royal in Brighton a couple of days later did the symphony no service at all as the acoustics were terrible for an orchestra on stage. Thereafter, Max conducted the BBC Scottish Symphony at the St. Magnus Festival in June, and the broadcast came a couple of nights later. Over the next couple of years the symphony was performed in San Francisco, in Manchester, in several towns in the Netherlands, in Tasmania, in Ljubljana and in Bremen. A film was made with the BBC Philharmonic using a great deal of the footage which Pete Bucktrout had made, but I thought that was less successful. The music itself should be in the foreground, and not as a backdrop to the scenery of the Antarctic.

I still find it incomprehensible that I went to the Antarctic, as it was so far out of my other experiences, but the music of the symphony survives to remind me.