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*Recording an Illustrious Past: extracts from
Robert Bage's Antarctic diary*

READERS OF THE DECEMBER 2012 issue of this journal will recall the article* that introduced a recent acquisition of the State Library of Victoria (SLV), the Antarctic diary written by Robert Bage. Bage was a team member of Douglas Mawson's 1911-14 scientific and exploratory expedition to Antarctica. In the following pages a number of extracts from this Diary are reproduced for the first time, giving wider access to many interesting and hitherto unknown aspects of the Mawson Expedition. The extracts have been collected and arranged thematically rather than chronologically to better reflect the contents of the Diary and as an indication of Bage's many recurring interests.

Bage was a professional engineer who, prior to his Antarctic trip, had trained at Melbourne University and worked for the Queensland Railways before joining the Army Corps of Engineers. After his selection as a member of the Expedition, he was granted leave from the Army and turned his very considerable talents for practical matters, his jovial good nature and his unflinching determination towards the service of Mawson and the Expedition of which he was now part. Following his return from Antarctica, Bage returned to regular soldiering and, by April 1915, was under fire at Gallipoli. He was killed in action while pegging out an advanced infantry post—a great loss to his regiment and the nation.

In the copy now lodged at SLV, the 'diary' is, in fact, a mixture of letters and memoir. Early sections of his Diary were written in the form of letters home to his family. A later, more substantial, section took the form of a sort of day book in which he recorded the continuing round of activities, together with many very interesting sidelights on life as it was lived at the extreme end of the world, amid the cold and the wind of Antarctica. Like most diarists, Bage is quite self-conscious about keeping a daily written record of his activities. At the start of the expedition he writes letters home to his family and asks that they keep these letters, 'as it is all I've got so far in the way of a diary'. Later, after expeditionary storage boxes have been unpacked, he begins his diary proper using a blank notebook. He and other expeditioners talk about their diary-writing, which is seen as a legitimate and worthwhile activity for preserving a record of their activities and as a means of self-expression.

Bage the diarist is at his most interesting, it may be said, when he is recording some of the 'unofficial' and incidental aspects of life at the pole—that is to say, when he is recording such things as meal-time rituals, birthday celebrations, conversational exchanges, the funny incidents that emerge during the course of everyday activities, the

*Chris Elmore, 'One of Mawson's 'Forgotten Men': Robert Bage and his Antarctic diary', La Trobe Journal, no.90, December, 2012 Dec, pp. 125- 135.



Frank Hurley, *photographer*, A corner of the hut, Bage mending his sleeping-bag, Australasian Antarctic Expedition, 1911-1914. Gelatin silver photograph. National Library of Australia, Sir Douglas Mawson Collection of Antarctic Photographs.

practicalities of everyday tasks, and, in general, those aspects of life which other diarists might have considered too trivial or transitory to record in official accounts of the expedition. He gives us, in effect, the human and personal face of the expedition rather than its scientific findings or its organisational details.

II

Bage writes throughout with a freshness and a sense of excitement for all he sees and does. We perceive the mind of a young man aged in his early twenties describing his first great journey into an exciting new realm of experience. This perspective imparts an acuteness of vision to his descriptions which can make some of the other expedition diaries seem somewhat bland. A case in point are his impressions of the great ice barrier that first blocked the expedition ship from making landfall, and, after this barrier had been overcome, the eventual landing of their vessel at Cape Dennison.

Captain Davis, master of the expedition ship *Aurora*, in his account of the landing, is much weighed down by the duties of a ship's captain, and spends many words describing the vagaries of the weather, the lowering and storage of the small boats, the unloading of supplies and other practical details. When he describes the features of the scene, such as nearby penguin rookeries, the features of the land, or the state of the snow coverage, he does so as a matter of record and gives us no indication as to what effect it might be having on him, and with little apparent awareness of the beauty or visual sweep of the area. Likewise, Mawson, as expedition leader, obviously had his mind elsewhere when writing up his experience with the ice barrier and the landing at Cape Denison. In his 'Abbreviated Log' of the Expedition, Mawson tersely notes for 3 January 1912, 'Sighted ice barrier' and, equally tersely for 6 January, 'Sighted first rock'. Bage, on the other hand, gives us a magnificent visual panorama of both the ice barrier and the eventual landing site as they enter Commonwealth Bay:

On Wednesday I had the four to eight morning watch and had been on deck about one hour when we saw a long line of barrier ice. This naturally caused great excitement as there was no idea of a barrier here. For four or five hours we skirted the pack about five miles from the barrier, going west and then saw that the barrier cliff stopped suddenly and a water sky showed over the pack, so we turned south and barged straight into the pack. In about an hour we were in clear water just under the eastern side of a barrier running south as far as we could see. We ran down this about fourteen miles when we came to another corner round which the barrier trends about south east, also as far as we can see and in clear water too. The glass was falling and a south-easterly wind [was] springing up so we came back found this last corner and have been running up and down this fourteen-mile face, sheltering from our first blizzard. . . . At present it is blowing and snowing hard although we are well under the lee of the barrier. It must be terrible on top of the barrier. Yesterday the barrier was a beautiful sight in the sun while today we can only see it now and then though we are only half a mile away. It has a vertical face about fifty feet high, above which it slopes gradually up to about 120 feet. Along all the fourteen miles which we have seen closely there is not a single crack or crevasse.

(Thursday 4 January 1912, pages 21-22)

In the evening we suddenly saw the barrier loom up ahead, square to our course. We could not see very far either way so all there was to do was to follow it south west. Towards midnight we sighted our first land! And found ourselves in a large bay about ten miles across. On the east the barrier disappeared southward into the snow and mist while to the west was apparently a mountain range. It was completely covered with ice and had a barrier foot of fifty to a hundred feet high but sloped upwards gradually to probably 1000 feet. The water shallowed to thirty or forty fathoms and we steamed cautiously past rocky islands a few yards in diameter, all snow-covered. The covering was washed away at the edges so we could really see the rocks. The barrier foot round the land was far more irregular than the barrier proper, showing that the ice was being freed over rocks and not floating. In one place we saw a huge ice scarp fully 200 feet high. At the foot just above the water were two large rocks evidently too strong for the ice which had opened out behind them. Those two rocks were the only signs of land we could see for miles. Once or twice to the south west we thought we could see a high mountain through the clouds but no-one was sure of it.

(Tuesday 9 January 1912, pages 24-5)

This is later followed with an account of the landing at Cape Denison:

We steamed in about three hours, probably fifteen miles, and then hove to in about fifty fathoms, in absolutely calm water. We got the whaler over and Dr Mawson, [explorer Frank] Wild, [engineer C. T.] Madigan, [motor engineer F. H.] Bickerton, [engineer A. L.] Kennedy, [engineer E. N.] Webb and I rowed off towards the rocks, which were apparently about a quarter-mile away. As we got in, the rocks resolved into a number of small islands and we had to row about two miles till we found ourselves in a beautiful little boat harbour with seven or eight feet of water and easy landing either on rocks sloping down into the water or onto a little ice foot about eight feet above the water. At about 4:30 [p.m.] we stepped on to (we hope) genuine Antarctic continent. . . . On either side of the harbour are rocky hillocks up to possibly 150 feet. While Dr Mawson and Wild were prospecting for a hut site, the rest of us snowballed and went about half a mile up the ice slope where we got a glorious view. It was very hot work in the sun as there was no wind, although it was only thirty-four degrees in the shade. The bay is semi-circular and we were on a point projecting a little bit right at the middle of it. We looked down on all the little wedding-cake islands and beyond them could see the ship absurdly small alongside even a small berg. The crow's nest was just about level with the flat top of the berg.

(Tuesday 9 January 1912, pages 26-7)

These detailed accounts appear early in the Diary and set the precedent for many more descriptions of geographical sightings, such as Bage's descriptions of the Aurora Australis and St Elmo's fire. One example, which occurred later into the expedition, during November 1912, as Bage, [photographer Frank] Hurley and Webb leave on a sledging party aiming to reach the south magnetic pole, we get a wonderful description of inland snow country, and the changes that it can undergo from place to place. To Bage, this is a wonderful sight, even if the word 'scenery' can hardly be used to suggest the conventionally picturesque:

We were off early on the 18th and for the first time were able to appreciate the 'scenery'. Glorious sunshine overhead and all around snow—gorgeous light

and shadow in the sunshine but very different from the smooth soft white mantle dreamt of by most Australians. Here and there indeed were smooth patches which we called bowling greens, but these were hard and slippery as polished marble with much the same translucent appearance. Practically all the country however was a jumbled mass of small sastrugi [parallel wave-like ridges caused by winds on the surface of hard snow] averaging perhaps a foot in height with here and there an old gnarled veteran twice as high. The smaller sastrugi were evidently newer, but were already hard enough to resist anything less than the sharpest blow from a pointed shovel, upon which large pieces would break off. To either side the snow rolled away for miles; behind, perhaps a mile away, was the top of the last rise we had come up, while in front we made our first acquaintance with the accursed next ridge that is always ahead of you on the plateau. Generally we passed from one ridge to another so gradually that we could never say for certain just when we had topped one: still the next ridge was always there.

As we went on after lunch the country changed in a wonderful manner, the sastrugi gradually becoming smaller and finally all disappearing, and that night we camped on a surface totally different from anything we had seen before or met later. It was soft enough to push a bamboo in anywhere about a foot. It was evidently fairly old and laid down in calm weather, as on digging down it gradually became more compact, but we found no hard windswept layers marking each successive snowfall such as we had met with elsewhere. It proved later that we were commencing a gradual descent of 1500 feet down the north side of the valley feeding the glacier, which both eastern parties crossed on the east side of Mount Outlook. It is possible that there is a cushion of dead air more or less permanently over the north side of this valley.

(18 November 1912, pages 176-8)

As the weeks and months rolled on, it became obvious that Mawson had chosen for the Main Base one of the windiest spots on the entire Antarctic Continent. Bage describes the fearsome winds they encountered on a regular basis, noting sometimes with amusement and sometimes with exasperation, that human existence had to accommodate these winds or nothing at all would ever have got done. Among a number of rueful comments about the wind is this: 'Another still day. Three days without wind! Just like heaven.' And this: 'By eleven p.m. it had dropped to what we consider a dead calm, probably ten miles per hour.' Finally: 'Wind merely humming outside now not shrieking as usual.' Bage and his companions never seem to have lost their sense of humour when dealing with the wind. On one occasion, when Bage and A. J. Hodgeman had to venture outside, it had

snowed a bit during the night and was blowing hard this morning with drift. Hodgeman and I during morning went across to Magnetic Hut to get timber and tarred rope for door. Both had felt boots on as we expected to find snow on the flat. Instead however it was all polished ice and we glissaded across. No attempt at walking. Simply skidded as if going downhill. Spent most of the time being blown against one another. Did the last 100 yards sitting down and blowing along in fine style. Coming back was harder work and took about three quarters of an hour as we climbed along the ridge, so only had a few yards of ice to cross. Found out after that wind was seventy-six miles per hour and [temperature was] fourteen degrees Fahrenheit.

(Saturday 16 March 1912, page 68)



Frank Hurley, *photographer*, Bage in the Hut, Australasian Antarctic Expedition, 1911-1914. Photonegative, half plate image. State Library of New South Wales, Home and Away – 36103.



Archibald Lang McLean, *photographer*, At 65 miles, Southern journey. Bage instructing Hunter in the use of the artificial horizon, Australasian Antarctic Expedition, 1911-1914. Photonegative, quarter plate image. State Library of New South Wales, Home and Away – 37837.

However, even the good-natured Bage could reach his limits with the unrelenting nature of the wind, noting on several occasions that their long-suffering anemometer (whom they had playfully dubbed “Anny”) was proving barely a match for the winds it was supposed to be measuring. At one stage, Bage allowed himself a rare show of irritability over this constant battering (a battering which, in normal life, it has to be said, is scarcely credible):

It blew pretty hard again on Saturday but got calm on Sunday, average being only forty-six miles per hour and five degrees. Webb managed to get a time shot in on one star only at 5:30 p.m. and then wind and drift came up and we’ve had our worst blizzard so far. Culminated on Tuesday night when it was ninety-seven miles per hour from three a.m. to four a.m. the average from then a.m. Tuesday to then a.m. today being 90.08 miles per hour, 2161 miles run. Monday was nearly as bad but unfortunately the clock on Anny stopped so we have no actual record for the day. It is really getting a bit over the fence, but still if it must blow let’s hope for a hundred miles per hour average for a day. Maddy [Madigan] and Webb get the worst of it, Webb especially having to go across to the Magnetic Hut at all times and weathers. On Tuesday night I was night watchman so found out a little what a ninety-five mile-per-hour wind is like. It is indescribable. Practically crawling unless one has long spike crampons. Can only see about five feet down wind and nothing at all up wind. Still the screen is close at hand and even if one missed it the wire stays make a good noise and guide one to it. There is an electric light fixed up inside so you don’t have to carry a lantern out which is a great comfort but even so one has to hang onto the screen while standing in its lee to read the temperature. The whole screen is heaving and shaking though it is solidly built and jammed into clefts in the rock and also has wire stays. Today (Wednesday) it has been gradually calming down and is now only about seventy-five miles per hour (seventy-seven is a hurricane as far as Beaufort’s Scale goes) so we are in danger of having our record of seventy-six miles per hour so far for this month spoilt. Seventy-six miles per hour for a fortnight, which includes two quite decent days, is a bit solid.

(Wednesday 15 May 1912, pages 105-6)

III

As well as the above geographical and meteorological descriptions, Bage is also at his best when describing the sometimes humorous antics of the Antarctic wildlife which members of the expedition run across from time to time, and on which they relied for their source of meat. Bage’s robust good humour, and that of many companions, also stretched to a few shenanigans with penguins, presumably the smaller variety:

The penguins were awfully funny. One would come three or four hundred yards across to us all by himself to see what we were. We dropped a coat over one and he had a glorious fight with it and looked for more.

(Tuesday 9 January 1911, page 27)

On the 12th in a seventy mile-per-hour wind, ‘Dad’ McLean [A. L. McLean, expedition doctor] caught the first penguin. Great excitement. Beautifully fat and healthy-looking. Nobody dreamt that even a penguin would climb ashore against such a wind.

(Sunday 20 October 1912, page 162)

On one occasion, the use of a live penguin as a sort of theatrical prop had unfortunate consequences:

Hurley and [biologist J. G.] Hunter [were, respectively,] cook and mess man today. At tea they appeared one in football and other in cricket togs. Gave us part songs during courses. One of these a great success. Chorus furnished by live penguin they tied to a plate and produced from dark room at critical moment. Huge success till they dropped the plate.

(Monday 18 March 1912, page 69)

The same unrestrained standards must have applied in the case of other wild animals, such as sea elephants and seals, a considerable number of which appear to have ended up at the end of a speeding bullet, especially when the dogs needed feeding or protecting from harm:

Yesterday evening after tea we were cutting across a tongue of pack [ice] when a sea leopard was seen quite close. It was shot and two of the seamen got across the ice and put a line round it and we all hauled it on board. One of them got a ducking while getting on board but he was holding the line at the time so is none the worse. The [sea] leopard was skinned and its meat taken for the dogs. Skin should make a good specimen [being] eight foot eight inches long and four foot eleven inches girth.

(Monday 1 January 1912, page 19)

During morning a large sea elephant was found on the rock fifty yards from hut. It was making for the dogs and was only a few feet from [one of our dogs whom we called] Johnson when Dr Mawson shot it. Should be a valuable skin and probably two months meat for the dogs. Also blubber for the fire. Jolly handy to the hut.

(Sunday 11 February 1912, page 43)

All afternoon nearly all hands were skinning the sea elephant. Seventeen feet six inches long about, and I should think about two or three tons in weight. Blubber about four inches thick, a lot of tackle had to be rigged to turn the body over while skinning. The tongue was brought in for cooking. It is a huge affair, about five inches wide at top and 12 x 8 inches at the root and fifteen inches long.

(Monday 12 February 1912, page 44)

Two snow petrels caught yesterday by Hunter on their nest in a rock crack are living peacefully in a home-made cage. Want to get them alive to Australia if possible. White giant petrel seen today near hut [which] was shot by Bickerton. Very funny to see about fifty of the 150 seals (who were airing round the boat harbour) doing a dash for the water at the sound of the gun.

(Wednesday 28 February 1912, page 56)

Wind dropped a bit today and in the morning nearly everyone was out killing penguins.

(Tuesday 26 March 1912, page 75)

Tough measures for tough circumstances, so one supposes, although Bage also records more humane, scientific and photographic encounters with wild life as well:

Time was occupied with dinner and photographing all the birds that gathered round the ship. A bit of meat tied at the end of a string makes an albatross very excited and some of the snaps should be good.

(12 December 1911, page 3)

In the morning Hurley got good photos of seals in a wee bay in the boat harbour. Young ice floes have a seal on each of them.

(Friday 15th March 1912, page 67)

As far as relations with the animal kingdom go, quite a different attitude from the ready killing of local wildlife may be seen in the keen interest that expeditioners took in the health and survival of the expedition's dog teams. Even though this was not Bage's special area of responsibility (being handled mainly by Belgrave Ninnis), he must have realised, like all his colleagues, that the success or failure of many team goals depended quite heavily on these dogs, even though the party did, in fact, have access to some rudimentary mechanical transport, which, however, was very basic by today's standards. These days, no dogs are used in Antarctica for environmental reasons, but for the Mawson Expedition 'no dogs' meant 'no sledging' and therefore no long-range travel outside Base Camp. Issues and problems arising from the dogs and sledging were taken very seriously by Bage in his diary:

[On arrival at Macquarie Island] the *Toroa* party all went ashore and joined Webb and [dog handler Belgrave] Ninnis who had been living with the Islanders for some time, Webb taking magnetic observations and Ninnis looking after the dogs. The dogs were all tied to a rope among the tussocks on the flat about a quarter-mile from the hut. The rope has to be weighted down pretty well as when they see their tucker coming they all pull one way with a will. They were fed on the island once a day on sea elephant meat or blubber, roughly about one and a half pounds each, I should judge, and were all looking particularly fit when we left.

(Friday 29 December 1911, pages 8-9)

Yesterday we had each to make our own sledge harness. It has to be sewn up out of a strip of canvas and it is pretty hard until one gets used to getting the most out of the sail maker's 'palm'. The harness is very simple. It is a strip about four inches wide which passes round the hips very loosely, the ends of the strip being joined by a strongly sewn strip about one and a half inches wide and seven inches long round which the pulling rope passes. A couple of shoulder straps prevent it falling below the hips. It is worn low on the hips so as not to effect one's dinner if any. Wild tells us that if worn higher it is almost impossible to pull when hungry. It's rather a good idea each man making his own for then he has only himself to blame if it carries away. Before we go [on] any real sledging trips however, they will probably all be strengthened with the sewing machine and tested to a ton or so.

(Monday 1 January 1912, pages 18-19)

Working on sledges again fitting kerosene tray and cooker box. After dinner news came in that our best dog sledge had blown away. It was seen blowing slowly out of the boat harbour. No earthly chance of saving it as it was blowing far too hard for the whaler [to be used to recover it].

(Thursday 15 February 1912, page 47)



Frank Hurley, *photographer*, Washing up after dinner at the winter quarters, Cape Denison; left to right, Hunter Hodgeman, Bage, Australasian Antarctic Expedition, 1911-1914. Photonegative. State Library of New South Wales, Home and Away – 36823.

[Two of our dogs named] Shackleton and Ginger [were] used to haul timber to Magnetic Hut. Apparently dogs are used to it as four others came alongside sledge and wanted to join in.

(Wednesday 28 February 1912, pages 56-7)

In evening someone noticed that [our dog] Caruso had a sore neck. He was brought into the outer hut and a terrible gash was found more than half way round his neck, about one inch deep in the blubber which was gaping open. Somehow he had caught his head in a piece of marline (goodness knows where he got it for we haven't any) and had twisted and twisted till he got it free for it was hanging loose. Of course he was in no pain for the wound was frozen up. McLean put in three stitches, [with expedition doctor L. A.] Whetter administering chloroform and he is now doing quite well in a large case under the bench. Apparently one can't kill one of these dogs by ordinary means.

(Thursday 7 March 1912, pages 61-2)

[Mountaineer and skiing expert Xavier] Mertz and Ninnis have started training the dogs a bit and have actually managed to make them pull against a sixty mile-per-hour wind which is very unusual. Had a ride back against moderate wind (about forty) in fine style till they struck the pressure ridges where the landing place used to be.

(Friday 14 June 1912, pages 120-21)

IV

A good diarist will interest their readers through a combination of the incidental anecdote and the onward sweep of the day-to-day narrative, not unlike (one hesitates to suggest) a sort of higher-order television soap opera. Bage is particularly good at this, especially in the way he recounts numerous incidents associated with mealtimes. Given the limited options for entertainment, the social dimension of shared meals and the importance of nutritious food for survival, Bage's frequent mention of this aspect of their lives together is quite understandable. Members of the Main Base party were assigned duties as cook and 'mess man' on a rotating basis. The job of mess man, Bage tells us, was straightforward and menial, requiring one to collect water, dump the slops, wash the dishes and keep things neat and tidy in the kitchen:

[I am] Mess man today, [and geographer J. H.] Close [is] cook. I turn out at 7:30, lay table, mix milk, get ice and coal in, etc. Had a stiff day as we came after a rather careless pair [of previous cook and mess man] and everything was dirty. However it is fairly decent now. It is fairly strenuous work as we had our worst blizzard so far (eighty-seven miles per hour on anemometer) last night and it has been bad all day. Quite hard work to go out to get ice or empty buckets [as the] rubbish sledge [is] not used in a high wind. Only have to throw up a bucket of rubbish tins etc. and they are blown straight out to sea. Had record wash up. Finished at 8:20 thanks to Ninnis, Maddy and Bick[erton] drying up.

(Saturday 23 March 1912, page 73)

It was, however, 'a pretty rotten job in bad weather' because the day

is mostly passed in washing up and above all fetching ice from the store verandah along the little store tunnel and filling the melters which seem to have an enormous capacity. Then all this water has to be taken out again when dirtied in buckets right to the end of the front tunnel and dumped in a sump there unless you have spilt it over yourself in the tunnel which is the usual thing to do.

(Thursday 25 April 1912, page 94)

The job of cook was more straightforward, although it appears from Bage's diary that there was wide variation in the culinary expertise of the various cooks who took their turn, with quite a few disasters and near-disasters, including one by Bage himself:

One accident today. The third baked tapioca came to grief just as I was taking it out of the oven. Tray slipped and skin of it slid gently onto floor. Rest of it OK though. Also, top of a pepper pot was unscrewed and Hodge spoilt most of his roast penguin amidst loud cheers.

(Monday 11th March 1912, page 64)

So bad was some of the cooking that membership to the so-called Crook Cooks Association, or C.C.A. for short, was soon being handed out to those of the party who proved themselves the least adept in the culinary arts. One of the first of these memberships was awarded to Mawson himself, followed in quick succession by Madigan and Ninnis, and then Whetter and Close:

Great amusement at dinner when Dr M. was nominated by Hurley for honorary membership of the Crook Cooks' Association. Motion spoken to by Whetter as President and Close and [naturalist and historian H. D.] Murphy as Vice-presidents. Motion put—ayes seventeen noes one, the ayes have it. This was on account of some Neolithic bread he constructed last night while night watchman.

(Sunday 28 April, 1912 pages 95-6)

Madigan and Ninnis were cooks this afternoon and had various misfortunes. In thawing out some eggs for a custard Maddy left them too long and when he opened them found them hard boiled. However the resulting custard was better than some we've had. Pastry also refused to rise as oven was cold. After dinner Hurley and I nominated both to the Crook Cooks' Association. Heated debate, Dr M, Close as G.P.M. C.C.A., Whetter as President, [geologist C. F.] Laseron, etc. all spoke. Madigan tried too, but was howled down. Mertz spoke last against nomination as he had done his worst—burnt stews, made heavy bread, kicked over two blanc manges while they were cooling in the tunnel and yet he was not elected. Vote taken, nine to seven against. Maddy returned thanks in a few 'well chosen' words.

(Saturday 4 May 1912, pages 99-100)

Whetter and Close are cook and mess man today and are popularly known as Erebus and Terror or (since they are prominent members of the C.C.A.), Terribus and Error. Tonight at five minutes to six they were both asleep or 'extinct' (according to Hoyle) so we were not surprised when we found the soup almost charred.

(Friday 14 June 1912, pages 121-2)

During their time at the Base, Ninnis continued to display his limitations as a cook:

Great excitement at lunch yesterday. Ninnis and Maddy [Madigan] were cook and mess man and fixed up a salmon kedgeree à la Beaton. Mrs Beaton read two ounces butter, salt and pepper (cayenne), and they, after much discussion, put in two ounces of butter, two ounces salt and *two ounces pepper* with horrible results, especially to Mertz who can't eat ordinary curry.

(Saturday 27 July 1912, pages 137-8)

Luckily, not all the expeditioners proved to be inept as cooks, and, according to Bage, Laseron was capable of a good meal, and on 31 July [1912] dinner was 'a triumph' with pastries modelled as miniature versions of the *Aurora*, their supply ship. Mertz also did well with his supper of cod's roe and toast, which 'all who were not in bed fell to as if it were the first meal for weeks'. (p. 142)

V

Closely related to his detailed accounts of mealtimes and food, are Bage's very full accounts of significant social occasions. Again, in comparing Bage's diary with others which covered the same events, there is a fullness and detail in Bage which is often absent in the other diaries written by expeditioners. Mawson's entries for Midwinter's Day and the following days, for example, record only a small part of what Bage gives us, as the following extracts from Bage demonstrate:

Great preparations on the way for twenty-first [of the month, which is] Midwinter's Day. Hurley and Hodgy [Hodgeman] working on menu and several of us working up speeches (or rather, should be).

(Tuesday June 18 1912, page 123)

Today is being celebrated as Midwinter's Day and we are having a *holiday*. First holiday since we have been here. Breakfast was not till nine a.m. and consisted of porridge with sugar instead of honey, special milk, bacon and eggs, and coffee. Maddy had to do instruments, dogs were fed and I had to do clocks and tide gauge but otherwise no work was done and everyone except [wireless operator W. H.] Hannam and Bick[erton] (cooking) went out for a walk. It was glorious out. Only about fifteen mile per hour wind so one didn't notice the minus sixteen degrees, in fact I got in perspiring after walking to the eastern end of our little bit of the world, i.e. up to where the ice cliffs begin about a mile away. Beautiful pink glow on tips of rocky hills and ice slopes.

(Friday 21 June 1912, Midwinter's Day, page 123)

Dinner on Midwinter's Night exceeded all expectations. Magnificent menu which could not have been surpassed in civilisation, and then some good speeches, mostly by Dr M. The '98 Burgundy was used to drink to "French achievement" and had been presented by Charcot who did a lot for this expedition. After the speeches we had songs starting with the Adelie Anthem written by Dad McLean and then [the] Brutus and Cassius scene from [Shakespeare's] 'Julius Caesar' by Maddy and McLean. Hurley took a flashlight which came out very well. Broke up about eleven p.m. and all hands helped cleaning and washing up etc. and then 'Auld Lang Syne' at 11:50.

(Sunday 23 June 1912, page 124)

Mawson's diary gives us some of the breakfast details and the walk outside which most members of the party took, but does not mention the Midwinter's Night dinner, so does not capture the sense of fun and relaxation of the occasion as Bage does, who must have been a very convivial sort of chap to whom such occasions were always memorable.

In similar fashion, Bage relates other important social occasions, including the King's Birthday, Swiss Confederation Day (in honour of their colleague Xavier Mertz, who was Swiss), various birthdays of team members, and other light-hearted social occasions. These seem to have been regularly referred to by team members as 'auspicious occasions'. The following are typical:

King's Birthday. Working eighty to ninety but still no drift. Down to tide gauge in morning and then worked on time book. Special dinner tonight and then drank the King's health, Dr M. mentioning that he regretted that the masts were not up so that he could send the King a message [by radio]. It struck me (and I think most of us) as rather wonderful and perhaps almost pathetic somehow, for a party of us all alone in this weird country to be singing 'God Save the King' just as it was being sung all over the world, but nowhere to such a wild accompaniment [by the wind] on the roof.

(Monday 3 June 1912, page 116)

Swiss Confederation Day today so of course an 'auspicious occasion' in honour of Xavier Mertz. Swagger dinner with various fancy things Xavier had brought from

Switzerland. After dinner while we were smoking, Xavier gave us a lecturette on Switzerland, simply wonderful considering he was speaking in a foreign language. Drank health of Switzerland and of Xavier himself.

(Thursday 1 August 1912, page 140)

Hodgy's birthday today. Special dinner, toast, etc. Song by Hurley and Hunter to tune 'Harrigan,' refrain being 'There he is, that's him.' At 8:30 a grand concert started with the Adelie Band rendering it. Then followed various items, the whole being quite fair.

(Thursday 8 August 1912, page 143)

That night we had an 'auspicious occasion' with menu, etc. '*to commemorate the three [sledging] journeys and particularly to congratulate the western reconnaissance party on their safe return from [their] hundred-mile journey in record weather, average wind at hut [being] fifty-nine miles per hour for the fortnight and their temperatures varying between zero and minus thirty-five degrees Fahrenheit*'.

(Thursday 1 October 1912, page 159)

The day before (Sunday 6th) was Xavier Mertz's thirtieth birthday. It was also the first Sunday off under the new [work] regime. First 'holiday' since we left Hobart, except Midwinter's Day. Had a special birthday dinner and then a little sing-song, also a play (when I say play!) by Hurley, Hunter, [mechanic P. E.] Correll and Laseron, made up apparently on the spur of the moment, entitled 'Revenge'. We accused the actors of forgetting their cues, but were told there weren't any.

(Sunday 20 October 1912, pages 161-2)

That night the 'Grand Opera' which had been advertised for some days, 'The Washerwoman's Secret', cast same as before with addition of Dad McLean as 'Jemima'. It was a huge success. Kept us all in fits of laughter from nine p.m. to 11:30. It was a tragedy. About ten songs had been written or altered for the occasion and it was really wonderful. Hoyle as Dr Stakenhoiser was perhaps the best, while Dad McLean made a splendid Jemima. The stage was most of the hut, the auditorium being the table which was enclosed in blankets as curtains. All complete even to apples, oranges and lemonade! Lollies! by Hodgy. Outside it was blowing great gusts and the hut fairly shook in some of the gusts.

(Sunday 20 October 1912, page 162)

The 18th was Herbert Murphy's birthday and the last for some time, and was also the birthday of the first seal pup. Another dinner and speeches. Herbert kept us going for a long time on various yarns, chiefly Russian.

(Sunday 20 October 1912, page 165)

As a fun-loving young man with a sometimes wicked sense of humour, Bage tells a good story. He is especially good with those stories which record the misfortunes of his fellow expeditioners. In these cases, he is able to let the story 'tell itself' without the need to embellish the details or explain the point. In this respect, his stories are understated and generally very amusing, as the following extracts demonstrate:

Mertz is in our watch for meals only. He is very funny in some of his English (though remarkably good on the whole). He told the steward the other day that 'too little porridge is plenty, too much is enough'. This morning he came up to see the new year in, with a sleeping bag over his arm just in pyjamas (temperature

twenty-six degrees) and while waiting for the photo he got into the bag. Hannam picked up some snow and threw it over him and he said, 'No, no, no! Hannam! That is not serious.'

(Monday 1 January 1912, page 20)

Dr McLean had a regular afternoon of it. Came on roof to fill cracks and led off by dropping tin of tacks. Got them up again and about five minutes after I heard a twang and a crash. He had slipped down himself and had caught the chimney stay wire to save himself. The screw of the guy [rope] carried away and [a] bottom length of pipe fell right out below, much to Ninnis' excitement. After repairs to self and chimney he started again only to lose his paint pot. A lovely black skin resulted which he afterwards found trickled through verandah roof on to *his own* clothes. Such is life!

(Tuesday 6 February 1912, pages 38-9)

About eleven p.m. three or four of us were reading the Encyclopedia Britt[annica] which is on the shelves in good order, when the cowl [on the roof] started turning. It was not running time so Bickerton went up to stop it. Had us all in fits of laughter by slipping into the gutter a couple of times, as he forgot he had ski boots and not sea boots on. Just when he had settled the cowl by straightening it, a hideous din arose from the [photographic] dark room. Xavier Mertz was inside and couldn't get out. The [door] hook was jammed had to be unscrewed. We offered to bore holes in the door so that he could sleep comfortably. Offer rejected without thanks.

(Wednesday 7 February 1912, page 40)

The [current] championship is for dropping things and up to date has been held continuously by Mertz (Facile princeps), anything from an ice-axe to a needle.

(Friday 19 April 1912, page 91)

Most humorous event of the last few days occurred on Saturday night. It was a 'run' on the bank conducted by 'Hoyle, Hunter and Co'. These two have been saving chocolate, matches, candles and other coin of the realm until they have a small tin case nearly full which is kept locked in the dark room. They were driving a hard bargain with McLean over something and unwisely had the box open on the table. Dr M was passing and suddenly said, 'What's in the Butcher's Shop? About ten voices answered 'steaks' and there was a frantic rush with result that Hoyle, on recovering ten minutes after, declared the Bank broken. Not to be outdone though, they made several counter attacks on sleeping occupants of bunks and next day stated that the Bank had survived the crisis on 'Black Saturday' and was more financial than ever.

(Wednesday 15 May 1912, page 106)

Hurley has been a source of great amusement all day. Had his hair cut last night and then cut off his moustache, beard and most of his eyebrows. It's an 'orrible affair' but we all have hopes that time will improve it.

(Tuesday 30 July 1912, pages 138-9)

VI

Perhaps one of the greatest joys of reading Bage's Diary is that it describes the very practical concerns of everyday life, not just his 'official' duties or his own narrow interests. Being a man who enjoyed the company of others, he does not restrict his entries to what he alone was doing, but gives an account of his companions and the social interactions within the group. From a few entries assembled almost at random, it is possible to build up a very detailed picture of daily life in the hut and how men passed their time within their restricted circumstances. This makes a very significant change from many of the diaries written by other members of the team, none of which captures quite the same vividness of description and sense of immediacy as Bage's words. The following extracts demonstrate this point:

First attempt at skiing today. Great sport, but Mertz looks rather too marvellous on them. Penguins beginning to emigrate already.

(Thursday 1 February 1912, page 36)

After dinner of roast mutton and plum pudding some went out with skis and some of us with hockey sticks. Not enough of us to have a game, so after about a half-hour we came back. I put in one of the new windows and then listened to [my fellow expeditioner] Correll on the piccolo. Jolly good. Sitting on the ice leaning against the Grasshopper engine case and a group of seven or eight of us round him.

(Sunday 4 February 1912, page 37)

After tea of soup, turkey, mushrooms, beans, plum pudding and coffee and tea, did a bit more work and then cut Dr Mawson's hair. Made a fair job. Bickerton trimmed his beard. Gramophone was cleaned out as oil had stiffened up and we had a few records while I packed away clothes under bunk. Burberries [insulated outer clothing] worn today for first time by Dr M. and Madigan working in the wind at the anemometer. Now (twelve midnight) it is pretty chilly, eleven degrees Fahrenheit outside and twenty-five degrees in. Hut is not nearly airtight though it is hardly shaking at all. Stove is burning nearly full bore but doesn't seem to do much. Quite nippy on fingers while working in bed. However there are lots of places [in the walls and roof] to patch up here and [the] second hut is not nearly tight yet and [has] no vestibule entrance. Just had some bread and butter and honey with Johnny Hunter who is watchman as he cannot yet use his fingers [after a bout of frost bite].

(Friday 9 February 1912, pages 41-2)

Ink froze in pot today and Webb put it on stove to thaw with result that pewter [container] half melted but ink did not.

(Saturday 10 February 1912, pages 42-3)

After tea knocked off early and had a bit of a wash and read for a little and am now in bed listening to Sousa's band on the gramophone. 'Our Miss Gibbs' is just finished. First time I've managed to turn in early.

(Monday 12 February 1912, page 44)

Decided that ordinary hell would have no terrors for us. Each would have a particular hell. Hodgeman was to walk eternally round asking for his two-foot rule and knocking over nail tins. Ninnis was to be in [latitude] 89° 59' S and suddenly find himself back on the *Aurora* from Cape [Dennison] to Hobart forever. I was to

be lying in bed with an empty pipe and tobacco out of reach all round. Madigan was to be trudging through a blizzard back to a hut at an infinite distance with anemometer charts with thumb marks on them. Bickerton to be continually winding up a motor which wouldn't start because it was choked with hundreds of pillows.

(Thursday 15 February 1912, pages 47-8)

At tea this evening Dr M. rose and reminded us that one twelfth of our time had gone already, and though much had been done, everything was yet to be done. He said everyone had worked well but two deserved special mention and then called out Hurley to say a few words. Hurley had a brilliant speech ready and presented Close with a medal of copper and Murphy with one cut out of bread which he had made out of ordinary instead of self-raising flour. Murphy in returning thanks said he considered we all needed medals for eating his cooking at all. Close's medal was for valour in stalking the seal. Also great sport re custard [powder] which got confused with the milk [powder]. Even Murphy put custard in his tea.

(Saturday 17th February 1912, page 49)

Spent day improving clothing, adjusting Burberrys. Have been standing still for ten minutes in forty mile per hour breeze by meteorological screen, temperature ten degrees, and could only feel cold on face. Of course, had a good deal of clothing but Burberrys are marvellous. Fitted them over normal cold-weather sledging gear [consisting of] Finnesko stockings, two pairs of socks, combinations, singlet, fleece suit, three sweaters, two helmets. . . . Hannam snoring beautifully. I have just brought in the silencer of the wireless engine and a length of hose pipe and rigged it alongside his bunk. Hunter has been holding the gramophone [horn amplifier] over his [Hannam's] face and it makes a really alarming noise.

(Wednesday 21 February 1912, page 52)

On night watch last night. Soaked some clothes. Haven't washed any since Hobart. Helped Hannam make some bread. In middle of baking had to go up and clear chimney. Then at midnight took readings at screen, etc. Struggle up snow slope right up to screen. Much easier now rocks are covered as one can't lose the way. Then sift cinders and fill ice box from ice sledge. Had a cup of cocoa and then had to turn out for an hour and twenty minutes to dig out four dogs snowed up in the Maternity Home. When you can't hear them howl you know it's time to dig them out. After that had my bath! First since December 6th. Flat canvas bath. Absolutely top hole, as Madigan would say. Did not get clothes hung up till five a.m. so they are now frozen up outside till I get another chance to dry them. Observations again at six. [Stoke] stove up and call Webb (cook) at 6:45. Then dug out front door till 'Rise and Shine' at 7:15. After breakfast turned in till 5 p.m. Fixing up clothing this evening while gram. playing. Wind much milder today, only forty miles per hour, and very little drift. No time to spare on night watch in bad weather as every trip outside means putting on frozen Burberrys. Dark till four a.m. now. Dr M. had football bladder flying round hut this evening. Great sport till it hit business end of a needle.

(Monday 4 March 1912, pages 58-9)

The last of these extracts might serve as a typical 'day-in-the-life' summary at the Antarctic Main Base. It and the other representative extracts record in direct and

simple prose that peculiar combination, in constrained circumstances, of the practical difficulties, the maddening little irritations and the ease with which one could become almost obsessive about one's personal and professional habits.

VII

Bage's diary entries support the view that he was a very social being but that he was also a very hard-working and practical member of the team. He records a great many aspects of his life in Antarctica and, apart from the themes mentioned already, is very informative when it comes to identifying and explaining the work tasks that he and others were required to complete. He is a good source for recognising the significant points of progress towards the team's long-term goals. He talks intelligently about their equipment and its failings, their accidents and medical emergencies, their difficult problems and improvised solutions, and the issues related to their supplies and provisions.

As was pointed out in the earlier article on Bage, it is unfortunate that the Diary as we have it is truncated. The text breaks off in mid-sentence on page 178 of the manuscript, suggesting that the writer fully intended to recommence his task at some later date, but, for some reason, never did. This is evident also from the following page, which has been paginated ready for the next section of text, which never appeared, and evident also from the large expanse of bound empty pages which, presumably, would have allowed ample space for the completion of the full transcription. For this copy of the diary is indeed a transcription, not the original, of family letters and a diary now lost, and is also most probably in Bage's own hand, as advised by Dorothy Wardle, the last family member to possess the diary and the one who donated it to SLV.

On the whole, Bage's straightforward and vivid diary entries really bring to life the experiences of the men who prosecuted the 1911-14 Antarctic Expedition almost exactly one hundred years ago. For this reason alone, it is a magnificent historical source and, since its accession into a public institution, will take its place among the other diaries which tell us so much, each in its own way, about Mawson and his men.