

21 December, 1901: DISCOVERY LEFT

LYTTELTON, NEW ZEALAND

The prospect is not inviting, and many people born and nurtured in a temperate climate might well shrink from it. But happily Englishmen are not in the habit of shrinking from uninviting prospects. Hardship and danger to many of them are additional incentives to enterprises such as that on which the crew of the Discovery is about to embark. It matters very little to them whether they are exchanging the frigid climate of the Antarctic for the temperate zones where the sun shines brightly and odd and its attendant suffering, if not unknown, are not everyday occurrence-. What does matter to them is that they are going to try to achieve something that has not been done before, and that is an object which always appeals with irresistible fascination to an Englishman, be he scientist) or sailor.

Editorial, *The Star*, 20 December, 1901.

The *Discovery*, of Captain Robert Falcon Scott's British National Antarctic Expedition, 1901–04, arrived at Lyttelton, New Zealand, at 11.45p.m., 28 November, 1901. The expedition was right on schedule and Ranulph Fiennes put this down to 'highly efficient seamanship'. On arrival, Third Lieutenant Ernest Shackleton, rushed ashore in the early hours of the morning and hurried to the postmaster's house. The postmaster, having to rise out of bed, opened his door and found Shackleton smiling. He apologised for troubling the postmaster and requested the post for the men of the expedition. Shackleton was desperate for news from his beloved Emily Dorman but he also knew that Edward A. Wilson—surgeon, zoologist and artist of the expedition—was married only a fortnight before leaving England and was also looking for news from home. It was there in New Zealand that Shackleton heard of the death of Charles Dorman, Emily's father and that Emily was free to determine her own husband and future.

The ship and its crew were to stay at Lyttelton until 21 December, 1901, as much work needed to be done. The ship's rigging needed to be thoroughly overhauled, the magnetic instruments had to be reset, the ship's leaks needed much attention and the supplies were to be completed unpacked, stocked, replacements made and then all reloaded onto the ship.

Though the expedition had briefly stopped at the remote Macquarie Island to allow Wilson to collect rare bird specimens, the ship's last port was Cape Town, South Africa. As it was at that time designated an 'infected port', it was necessary for a Health Officer to inspect the ship before allowing it admittance. This was carried out on the morning of 29 November. When the ship reached the wharf, an unofficial welcome was accorded the expedition by the Mayor of Christchurch, Mr A. E. G. Rhodes, the Mayor of Lyttelton, Mr T. C. Field, and other local notables. The expedition made a strong first impression to the reporters of *The Press* upon its arrival.

If the *Discovery* is the best equipped Polar vessel that has yet been known, it is equally true that she is manned by as fine a crew as ever set out to solve the secrets of the Polar World.

The reporters at Lyttelton asked Scott about the ship's seaworthiness and the rumours that she was substantially leaking. The public mind had apparently been 'a good deal exercised' by these thoughts. Scott said that she was leaking but that it was normal for a new ship to do so. Although the leaking was somewhat more than what would be normally expected, Scott was 'quite prepared to go on' after the work was carried out in dock.



I *Discovery* at dock in Lyttelton

Despite Scott's request that the people of Lyttelton and New Zealand be patient in their desires to see and board the *Discovery*, thousands arrived at the wharves of Lyttelton over the weekend.

It was estimated that two thousand people came from Christchurch alone on Sunday, 1 December. The visitors were mostly permitted to roam freely around the ship. Apart for the essential works to be done, there was little activity on board and most of the crew were allowed Friday and Saturday to themselves. The crew spent their free days in Christchurch and elsewhere. Some of the officers attended a special Communion Service at 8am at St Saviour's Church, West Lyttelton, on Sunday morning. With the weekend over, the men returned to the ship and work began in earnest on Monday, 2 December. By 4 December, *The New Zealand Herald* reported that the *Discovery* was 'placed in the dock at Lyttelton to-day for cleaning and recaulking.' The ship came out of dock at Lyttelton on 13 December and the officers and men of the expedition said that they were absolutely satisfied with her at that stage.

The crew were busy painting the spars and masts of *Discovery* on 16 December which caused a little annoyance to some people as the public were not admitted onto the ship until late in the afternoon. The presence of the Antarctic adventure ship was still attracting new visitors and they were travelling great distances to witness the vessel first hand. She was then brought to Lyttelton Graving Dock at 7am, Wednesday, 18 December. The report of *The Lyttelton Times* of the following day is informative and is quoted below.

After the water had been pumped out of the dock, a gang of workmen began the task of removing the plates which protect the vessel's stem against ice. They were affixed by means of galvanised iron screws from 6 to 8in in length, and about an inch and a quarter in diameter. The extraction of these screws was a somewhat difficult job, and occupied a considerable time. On the plates being removed, it was discovered that what had been stated to be solid woodwork, was hardly as solid as had been imagined, and that through the effect of concussion, probably in the ice, water was finding its way through into a compartment which is divided from the rest of the vessel by a watertight bulkhead. The inflow was very small, and could not have caused any danger, as a very little work at the pumps every day would have obviated any trouble that might have arisen. The stem was, however, thoroughly caulked yesterday, and the timbers beneath the plates made absolutely impervious to water. The replacing of the plates was begun last night, and the work continued all night. The plates are not this time secured by screws, but affixed by iron bolts slightly larger in diameter than the screws, and driven in firmly. It is expected that the *Discovery* will come out of dock to-day. She is to leave Lyttelton on Saturday afternoon.

The expedition members were treated to many special events, concerts, dinners, receptions and religious services during their time in Lyttleton and the schedule started very soon after their arrival. Scott, the officers and the scientific staff were entertained by the Canterbury Club on Thursday, 5 December, at 7pm. The petty officers and crew of the *Discovery* were entertained at a smoke concert given by the Sydenham and Addington Working Men's Club on Saturday evening, 7 December. *The Star* described it as a 'very pleasant evening' with musical items being given by some of the visitors and others.' On Tuesday, 10 December, the Philosophical Institute of Canterbury hosted a dinner at Warners' Hotel for the officers and scientific staff. On Wednesday, 11 December, the citizens of Lyttelton entertained Captain Scott, his officers and the scientific staff and the warrant officers and crew were entertained likewise the following night.

His Excellency the Governor-General of New Zealand, Uchter Knox, 5th Earl of Ranfurly, arrived in Lyttelton on the morning of Friday, 13 December to visit *Discovery*. He was accompanied by Captain Alexander. The visit was, as *The Lyttelton Times* observed, 'quite an informal one'. Scott and his officers showed the Governor-General around the ship and entertained him at lunch. The Earl of Ranfurly was said to take a great interest in the polar equipment. A further smoke concert was held for all of the crew in the Oddfellows' Hall, Winchester Street, that evening.

The Star reported on 18 December that Scott had received a cable message from King Edward VII. It simply read '[w]ish you all Godspeed and success, and a safe return.' With his monarch's good wishes in mind. The entertainments of the evening of 18 December must have been particularly splendid—the officers of *Discovery* and other vessels in Lyttelton were hosted by the ladies of Christchurch and treated to a Cinderella Ball in the Art Gallery.

The state of the expedition's stores and provisions was also the cause of much work. Every item on board was to be unloaded, listed and reloaded with the items needed much later to be stored in the deepest sections of the ship. Scott chose Shackleton to supervise these tasks. Scott wrote that this 'meant a good deal of labour, but ensured our being able to take advantage of every corner of the hold-space.' Provisions that had been damaged throughout the journey by the leaks were to be replaced by purchasing new supplies in New Zealand. There was also a large quantity of stores that had been sent ahead of the *Discovery* and then sent to Lyttelton

from Melbourne. It was a huge undertaking to fill *Discovery* with as much as possible and to use their space to its optimum. As Scott wrote in *The Voyage of the Discovery*:

As the month of December advanced the *Discovery* became a very busy scene; parties of men were employed in stowing every hole and corner of the available storage space, the upper deck was littered with packing cases of all sorts, whilst many truck-loads of stores still stood waiting on the wharf. As usual in such cases, the prospect of getting everything stowed seemed hopeless.

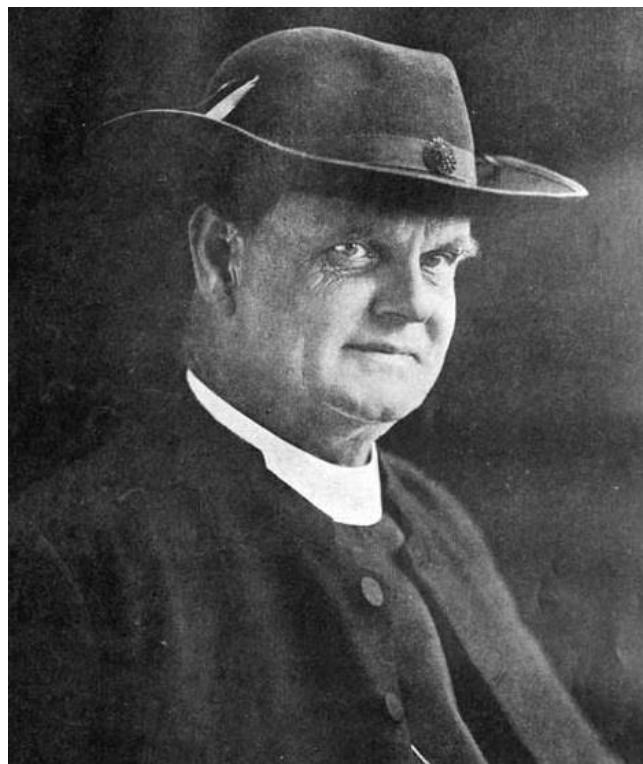
Shackleton had done a very good job at loading the ship with three years' supplies. However, there was still more to load. Towards the end of the time in Lyttelton, prefabricated huts, many tons of coal and gallons of paraffin were all put on the decks. Twenty-three sledge-dogs from Russia were chained to kennels amidships and forty-five sheep that Shackleton had been gifted (initially, twenty-five Canterbury flock owners were willing to contribute ten sheep each) were penned up on a bed of coal sacks out of the reach of the dogs. *The Press* later told of the difficulties of loading the sheep:

Getting the sheep aboard was a difficult undertaking, in the absence of a suitable gangway. A couple of sailors would seize a sheep by the legs and drag the struggling animal up the gangway on its back. The method answered its purpose all right, but in one instance the sheep got the best of the tussle, and managed to push a bluejacket off the gangway into the water, to the huge delight of his shipmates. The dripping tar was speedily hauled aboard again, none the worse for his involuntary bath.

The work of refitting and stowing *Discovery* continued vigorously into Friday, 20 December, but all was ready for departure the following day. Lyttelton put on quite a show for the occasion. The Lyttelton Marine Band played on the wharf and the Christchurch Garrison Band were invited to play aboard the vessels that were to accompany *Discovery* out of the harbour. She was to be escorted by the steamers *Rotomahana*, *Te Anau*, *Cygnets*, *John Anderson*, *Mararoa* and *Poheraua*. The procession was led by the warships *Lizard* and *Edngarooma*. Keen spectators could pay the fare of 2s. (children were 1s.) to be aboard the steamers.

The Right Rev. Churchill Julius, Bishop of Christchurch, conducted a simple service aboard the ship at 11am on the morning of Saturday, 21 December. By 2pm, the ship was 'ready for

sea and very deeply laden', as Scott wrote. The harbour had been decorated with flags for the occasion and the crowds gathered shouted cheers, sang songs and waved hats and handkerchiefs in farewell. *Discovery* steamed slowly out of the harbour between the two warships with the music and good will from the steamers in the ears of the crew. The ship's ensign was dipped three times as a final gesture of farewell to the people gathered at Lyttelton.



2 The Right Rev. Churchill Julius, Bishop of Christchurch.

The Press was very enthusiastic about the success of the farewell ceremonies for the polar expedition.

They [the sights and sounds of the day] rank, as among the most interesting that Lyttelton has ever seen, and he must have been a dullwitted spectator who was not touched by some unwonted thrill as, amid the cheers of the crowded wharves and shipping, the little vessel moved slowly away.



3 *Discovery* leaving Lyttelton.

In recognition for the kindness and generosity of the people of Lyttelton and wider New Zealand, Scott wrote to the editor of *The Star* and the letter was published 23 December, 1901.

Sir, — May I be allowed, through your columns, to thank the people of Christchurch, Lyttelton and the Canterbury district, for the extraordinarily kind and sympathetic reception which we have met with at their hands? It is difficult for me to express our gratitude for such general and generous hospitality, and I have found it impossible to even acknowledge many acts of individual kindness that have gone to help our work and to provide for our future comfort. The great pressure of work will, I trust, excuse such apparent courtesy. I hope our many visitors will consider we have done our best to satisfy their kindly interest in the ship. Some, I fear have been disappointed in their wish to see all that was to be seen, but it must be remembered the *Discovery* is a small object on which to focus so much attention, and it has been above all things necessary to avoid interruption to the work of preparation. New Zealand is the base of our future work, and we go south feeling we have the warm wishes of the people of New Zealand for our success. However doubtful that success may be, we know that a warm welcome awaits us at our base if we have done our best to succeed. Therefore, all our little band wish their last word to be ‘Au revoir.’ — Yours faithfully, ROBT. F. SCOTT, Captain. Antarctic ship *Discovery*, at Lyttelton, Dec. 21, 1901.

Whilst the crew waved back to the cheering crowds, ‘there happened’, in the words of Scott, ‘one of those tragedies that awake one to the grim realities of life’. Some of the ship’s crew were in the rigging or on the masts returning the waves and cheers of the crowds. Charles Bonner, an enthusiastic, young seaman from London, climbed above the crow’s nest to the top of the mainmast. He may be the man mentioned later by *The Press* in the following description:

Perched away up on the truck of the Discovery’s mainmast, above the white crow’s nest, a bluejacket spent his time waving a great black handkerchief and saluting the excursion steamers with weird acrobatic feats.

Though the cause of his loss of balance is unknown, Bonner fell and came hurtling downwards over 120 feet. He fell head first on the corner of an iron deckhouse and died instantly. Having reached Lyttelton Heads, the warships then cheered openly as *Discovery* passed between them. However, a message was signalled to them from *Discovery*: ‘Please do not cheer; a man has been killed by falling from aloft’.

Bonner’s death changed the atmosphere of the ship’s arrival at Port Chalmers. They arrived with the blue ensign flying at half on the mizzenmast, the mark of respect to the memory of the deceased. The coroner, Mr C. C. Graham, visited to ship to hold an inquest. Bonner was accompanied to a Port Chalmers cemetery by a naval honour guard and was buried within two hours of the inquest. *The Otago Daily Times* reported the funeral on Tuesday, 7 January, 1902:

Later on the melancholy task of coffining the body, which had been placed on a table on the deck, enclosed by canvas, was performed, and at quarter to six the funeral, with military honours, left the Bowen Pier. The *Ringarooma* bluejackets with arms reversed, led the way, then came a gun-carriage with the coffin, covered with the Union Jack, eight of the deceased’s comrades acting as pall-bearers, the captain, officers, and crew, of the *Discovery* followed, then came more bluejackets from the warship, and the public, among whom we noticed Mr G L Denniston (Mayor of Dunedin), Mr John Mill (Mayor of Port Chalmers), and Mr E G Allen, MHR. A beautiful floral wreath sent by the crew of HMS *Ringarooma*, was placed on the coffin. The body was interred in the new cemetery, the Rev. Mr Kewley officiating at the grave.



4 Charles Bonner A.B.

Despite the sadness and shock that Bonner's death had caused, the expedition had to proceed. The most important thing for the expedition at Port Chalmers was coal. Another forty-five tons of coal was added to the already crowded deck, which, with the 285 tons in the bunkers, brought the total to 330 tons of coal.

The officers and scientific staff were entertained at dinner in Port Chalmers by the members of the Fernhill Club on Monday, 23 December. On the morning of 24 December, Scott and the crew said their goodbyes and extended their gratitude to those who assisted them at Port Chalmers. Scott addressed a letter to the Mayor of Port Chalmers.

For generosity to the expedition, and your kindness to us all, may I send you a last word of grateful thanks. We leave with the happiest remembrances of New Zealand and its people. Yours ever sincerely— Robert Scott, captain.

By noon, *Discovery* had passed the harbour bar and was on her way to Antarctica. Scott wistfully wrote:

The last view of civilisation, the last sight of fields, and trees, and flowers, had come and gone on Christmas Eve, 1901, and as the night fell, the blue outline of friendly New Zealand was lost to us in the northern twilight.

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Images

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Head and shoulders studio portrait of Able Seaman C. Bonner. Scott Polar Research Institute Picture Library catalogue.

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