The boy from Adelaide, C. T. Madigan

This is an edited version of a paper presented at Aurora Expedition Symposium, University of Adelaide 26 February 2014 to celebrate the centenary of the return of SY *Aurora* to Adelaide February 1914

HEATHER ROSSITER
BSc DipEd MAIBiol, Independent scholar

Also by Heather Rossiter

Mawson's Forgotten Men The 1911-1913 Antarctic Diary of Charles Turnbull Harrisson Edited by Heather Rossiter

Lady Spy, Gentleman Explorer The double life of Herbert Dyce Murphy

Antarctic Diaries of the Heroic Era: Imperfect records yet the best available as exemplified by the 1911-1913 Antarctic Diary of Charles Turnbull Harrisson, Western Base party, Australasian Antarctic Expedition

You can find out more about the work of Heather Rossiter at:
www.heatherrossiter.com

Published in 2015 by Heather Rossiter
www.heatherrossiter.com
Production by Fullcream Media
www.fullcream.com.au

ABSTRACT

The Antarctic Diaries of C.T. Madigan, transcribed by J.W. Madigan and published in 2012 as *Madigan's Account: the Mawson Expedition*, present a new perspective on the AAE 1911-1914. While the narrative of major events is familiar, emphasis and interpretation in Madigan's diaries undermine much of the mythology created around the expedition.

This author has previously argued that during the Heroic Era diaries were the most authoritative form of reporting Antarctic experience. Madigan's dairies not only record his experience; unintentionally they also record his changing awareness as events modified the way he perceived and understood Antarctica and the expedition. Educators refer to changes in perception and understanding as 'learning'. Much of Madigan's 'learning' was painful.

A diary is not only an authoritative record of experience; it is also a log of a changing persona as what is experienced transforms the self. In his diaries, Madigan both consciously and unconsciously reveals changes in his character and personality. The experiences that effected this transformation were sometimes tragic, others more benign. These will be examined.

Madigan returned from Antarctica in 1914 a very different person from the naïve, trusting young man who left Adelaide in 1911. His considerable contribution to the expedition is briefly examined.

INTRODUCTION

At a symposium held in Adelaide on 26 February 2014 to celebrate the arrival of the *Aurora* at Port Adelaide from Antarctica exactly a century before, it was appropriate to honour Cecil Thomas Madigan, a local lad. Though born in Renmark, SA, and primary schooled in country towns, it was at Adelaide High School and Prince Alfred College that Madigan began to shine. At the University of Adelaide he studied mining engineering, part of the course being given at the South Australian School of Mines and Industries. In 1910 he graduated BSc from the university with a Fellowship Diploma from the School of Mines. He was awarded a Rhodes scholarship and in 1911 sailed to England to take it up. Advised to delay and accept an offer to join the AAE, he returned almost immediately to Adelaide in the *Orvieto*.

C T Madigan sailed to Antarctica from Hobart on December 2, 1911 in the *Aurora*. What do we know about him? What kind of man had Adelaide produced?

A Rhodes scholarship tells us he was intelligent, industrious and a sportsman. He rowed with the Adelaide University Eight that took out all the honours in 1910, which implies he was a good oarsman with a knowledge of boats. In the 1908 university athletics carnival he won the High Jump. His university profile lists rifle shooting and mentions boxing. This establishes sporting ability and a high level of fitness.

Photographs show he was a handsome 22-year old, 1.92m [6'3"] tall with a

magnificent physique. Evidence from the early diary and letters in the family archive reveal a confident, socially adept man but one not socially ambitious. Nor was he impressed by social standing as a diary entry attests. In January 1913, when the *Aurora* brought a load of newspapers to Antarctica, Madigan learned that the husband of the woman he had been sweeping around the SS *Orvieto's* dance floor in 1911 was the incoming governor of Victoria.

'Holy sailor,' he wrote, 'when I think of the cool way I used to dance with Lady Fuller, I alternately blush or roar with laughter … I wonder what the other passengers thought of me; brassbound cheek, I suppose.'[1]

He was in love with his new fiancée, Wyn, and determined to marry her as soon as possible, despite his mother's reservations, and he was professionally ambitious. Above all he was an independent adventurous man: 'to act on my own responsibility I have always loved', he wrote.[2]

Besides his mining engineering knowledge, Madigan took to Antarctica a range of useful practical skills. In two university summer vacations he worked in a Kalgoorlie mine: above ground in 1907-08 and in the following summer underground. In the 1909-10 summer vacation he worked underground at Broken Hill and was promoted from the shovel to timberman. He boasted to a friend, "What I can't do with an axe, saw, level and piece of 10 x 10 timber ain't worth doing."[3]

---

1 *Madigan's Account: The Mawson Expedition, The Antarctic Diaries of C.T. Madigan 1911-1914*, transcribed by J. W. Madigan, Wellington Bridge Press, Hobart, 2012, March 27, 1913
2 ibid., 7 September, 1911
3 D. C. Madigan, *Vixere Fortes A Family Archive*, Hobart, 2000, p. 238.

While doing field work with the South Australian School of Mines he had learned basic surveying and in the mines he learnt about explosives–handy attributes in Antarctica. On geology excursions he had practiced survival skills relevant to life under canvas. And somewhere he picked up Morse code. He spent much of the last few weeks before he left for Hobart at the Adelaide Observatory being taught meteorology and astronomy by the Govt Astronomer and the Meteorologist.

We can justifiably conclude he was well suited to an Antarctic expedition. In fact, the AAE was fortunate to have such a man.

Each of the available AAE diaries has its own special quality. Madigan's diary, published in 2012 as *Madigan's Account: The Mawson Expedition, The Antarctic Diaries of C.T. Madigan 1911-1914*, is a revelation. The diary surprises with its openness. Madigan holds nothing back, tells not only what is happening but also how he feels about events and people. Unguarded, he reveals his innermost self. As this author has claimed in a previous paper[4], a diary is a log of a changing persona, and none more so than Madigan's.

His changing awareness is recorded in its pages. The expedition landed at Commonwealth Bay on 8 January 1912 and soon Madigan was writing, 'This is a beautiful place … to sit on the rocks … and see the sunset, the beautiful cloud effects and colours, the great ice barrier and ice rising for miles in the distance behind, the huge bergs with the fading rays of the sun … staining them purple and crimson … the seals sleeping on the shore or sporting in the

4 H. Rossiter, *Antarctic Diaries of the Heroic Era Imperfect records yet the best available as exemplified by the 1911-1913 Antarctic Diary of Charles Turnbull Harrisson, Western Base party, Australasian Antarctic Expedition*, 2013

water, the little Wilson petrels darting about … and most interesting of all, the ever-amusing penguins.'[5]

Even after enduring the 1912 winter he was still positive. 'The place seemed so homely now, the view so usual. On my right and behind me was the sea, with its bergs and ice islands; in front the Hut, the meteorological screens, the ruins of the wireless mast, and behind them the ice rising up to the great plateau ... I felt as if I had always been here; the other world seemed imaginary, cities, streets, ordinary clothing, women, my relations, Wyn: would I ever really be with them again?'[6]

But events modified the way he perceived and understood Antarctica and the expedition. With snow and wind 'to beggar description', Antarctica quickly became 'a fearful place'[7] and a year later it had become 'a strange and wonderful country, but in one week enough of it has been seen … There is an outcrop of rock three quarters of a mile long, backed by an immense, monotonous plateau. The sea in front with a group of ice-capped islands, several penguin rookeries, and nothing more.'

Why such a change in perception? His diary provides the answer. 'For nine months of the year the wind blows with unheard of velocity and accompanied by blinding snow. For weeks at a time it is impossible to see fifty yards, and none but a strong man in wind-proof clothing could leave the shelter of the Hut.'[8]

5 *Madigan's Account* 26 Feb 1912
6 ibid., 29 Oct 1912
7 ibid., 27 Feb 1912
8 ibid., 25 March 1913

How he perceived and understood Antarctica and the expedition was modified not only by the climate. C T Madigan was selected to lead the party delegated to wait and search for Ninnis, Mertz and Mawson when their failure to return to base forced the *Aurora* to sail without them on 8 February 1913. As is well known, Mawson returned alone later that same day, Ninnis and Mertz having died on the plateau. Madigan and his five companions were then doomed to endure a second winter at Commonwealth Bay, with Mawson, which was the greatest trial of all. In 1913 Madigan is seeing Antarctica through the eyes of a prisoner, a resentful prisoner, who had 'stood on a rocky ridge and watched [Aurora] go and smiled; we who had longed so for her, had dreamt for months of leaving'[9], and then had seen their sacrifice ignored.

'I stayed here at great cost for Ninnis and Mertz, and lastly [Mawson], and we have not even received his thanks, but quite the reverse.'[10]

Several weeks later, Mawson 'used words to me I won't take from anyone, and I told him so … I have made a big sacrifice for this show, and have not even had a 'thankyou' from him … there is general dissatisfaction, everyone shares my opinion … the way he talks of Ninnis and Mertz has disgusted us from the first. From the day he came back my dislike for him has increased ... [He] did what is characteristic of his nature, used bad language … so I gave him a few home truths … I am sorry it occurred but it was entirely his fault ... I am sick and weary of the expedition and this place.'[11]

Madigan is revealing his disillusionment.

9 ibid., 13 Feb 1913
10 ibid., 1 April 1913
11 ibid., 16 April 1913

Other character and personality changes are apparent in the pages of the diary. Given Madigan's wide-ranging experience and high achievements, it is not surprising that he left Australia a self-confident man. Three weeks into the journey, after the ship grounded in Caroline Cove, he wrote, 'I never seem afraid … I always seem to take it for granted that we can get out of any difficulty. I never doubt it till a thing is very apparently impossible.'[12]

Contrast this with his diary entry after returning from a two-week, 100-mile [160km] sledging journey, the longest trip made in the first year. On the eighth day out a blizzard confined him and team mates Close and Whetter to the tent. 'This was the worst time; shivering cold, fifty miles from the Hut, the tent likely to go … tearing in several places. The situation was serious … we had only two weeks' provisions. I prayed that night.' he wrote, and continued, 'I have lived a life of comparative ease and comfort; those two weeks were the hardest, most dangerous and most uncomfortable I have experienced; any one day was worse than I [could] have imagined.'[13]

What effect did this have on his confidence? 'A reaction set in after reaching the Hut and I have pretty well laid up since.'[14] 'The [meteorological] observations last night were the first time I had been out of the Hut since coming back.'[15] A few days later he acknowledges what kept him in the Hut for those six days. 'Today is the first day I have been out all day since returning. I must admit I was sick of the wind and snow, and afraid of it, and wished never to go sledging … again; but now I have regained my confidence in this dreadful region, or what of it I had, for truly it is a god-forsaken country.'[16] Another six

12 ibid., 25 Dec 1911
13 ibid., 1 Oct 1912
14 ibid., 1 Oct 1912
15 ibid., 3 Oct 1912
16 ibid., 5 Oct 1912

days and he is writing, 'I am as keen as a knife to get away sledging again.'[17]

And he did go sledging again, then 'crash! – jerk! And I was in darkness; almost wrenched in halves by the sudden stop, as my sledge belt caught me after a sheer drop of twenty four feet. I was hanging in a crevasse with vertical walls about four feet apart, and blue fathomless bottom … I have had a lucky escape from an awful death … It is wonderful that the rope held after such a big pull with my fourteen stone.'[18]

The following day he acknowledges, 'That fall down the crevasse yesterday shook my nerve a bit … I went ahead as usual today to see if [the lids] were safe: and I tell you when a bit of pie-crust broke under my feet, my heart would leap in a nasty way.'[19] But he hadn't exorcised the experience yet. A few days later, 'Had a rotten dream last night, dreamed of crevasses. Once out of this place safely, you don't catch C T in the Antarctic again.'[20] How these chaps must have laughed when they read Mawson's heroics in *Home of the Blizzard*, although they were not unprepared for it, Madigan writing, 'in this show it is Mawson first and the rest nowhere … he has sent messages which make him appear a hero. His journey was a most unexpected failure, against every principle of sledging in this country … He only saw the coast I did, visited no rocks, has no reliable astronomical observations … I don't want to defame him, but I guess his journey will appear … as the principal journey. I may be wrong. We shall see.'[21]

Fear crept into his lexicon. The Madigan who wrote in 1911, 'I never seem afraid', in late 1913 admits, 'Fears often come to me, horrible fears. There are

17 ibid., 11 Oct 1912
18 ibid., 9 March1913
19 ibid., 24 Nov 1912
20 ibid., 26 Nov 1912
21 ibid., 23 Oct 1913

so many things that might happen to the ship; I get quite nervous every time I think of it. I *dare* not think of us not getting away this year.'[22]

Such entries show that Antarctica tested his courage and confidence: he learnt "fear". However, given his post-Antarctic record in the Sudan and in Central Australia I conclude these attributes were shaken, not permanently damaged.

Madigan recognised and deplored that he was a man of mood swings. He apparently hid it well as, to my knowledge, no other diarist has commented on it. Even in the first few weeks, his diary records days of blackness followed by a return to his habitual cheerfulness. In the bleak second winter when 'Jeffryes has gone insane. Are our troubles never going to cease?'[23] he can write, 'I feel rather cheerful today, I don't know why, these moods take me about once a month. I seem able to see things cheerfully when I know everything is wretched.'[24] And again he writes, 'I go through many stages of depression, abject and thorough, and counterpoising good spirits. I am of a very variable temperament, a fact to be regretted. I feel utterly different at different times; of course the conditions here accentuate this quality … During the three hours I lay on my bunk last night I felt utterly wretched; all my hopes and plans seem to be miscarrying … I have displeased my Mother, I have brought care and anxiety to Wyn, and oh! how time is slipping underneath my feet: and yet when I got off my bunk, I laughed and talked and quite enjoyed myself. (Liar.)'[25]

22 ibid., 12 Sept 1913
23 ibid., 12 July 1913
24 ibid., 28 May 1913
25 ibid., 26 July 1913

The change in his mood swings is a matter of degree, not of absolutes, and too trivial to be labelled bipolarity. Antarctica worsened, but did not initiate the syndrome. He fought against it. 'I feel better today than I have any day for the past week. It is no good giving way. I have been playing the gramophone furiously, and doing my best for the spirits of others. The jokes I make would bring tears to anyone's eyes.'[26]

He recognizes that activity is therapy. 'Thank goodness my time is well filled in … I go outside every day, of necessity [to record meteorological readings], up the hill, a good climb, and this does me good. I am always outside from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.; there are the midday observations at the screen and the dogs to feed.'[27]

Many entries refer to the dogs, a responsibility he assumed in the second year. Their importance to his well-being is encapsulated in, 'I don't know how I should get along without them; it is a real pleasure to have them swarming around me.'[28] But, 'The one bright spot … without which I would be hopelessly depressed, is that there is one who … could find a way to send a message immediately, and I am more grateful for that message than she can ever know.' The one bright spot is Wyn, Wynnis Knight Wollaston, his fiancée, who got a wireless message through quite early in the second winter.[29]

Although Madigan writes often about who might read his diary, he never considers its therapeutic value. As Graham Greene wrote, 'Writing is a form of therapy; sometimes I wonder how all those who do not write …

---

26 ibid., 14 July 1913
27 ibid., 12 September1913
28 ibid., 2 Oct 1913
29 ibid., 9 April 1913

can manage to escape the madness, the melancholia, the panic fear which is inherent in the human situation.'[30] There was never more need of such therapy than in Antarctica during the second winter.

Madigan recognizes and records other changes in his personality. 'Impatience and inaction are eating me up. I can't rest. To see time slipping by, and to be no nearer my glorious goal, is hard to bear. To think of Wyn waiting and longing drives me mad.'[31] And, 'I feel yrs older … Bick and I both say we can't imagine ever feeling young or light-hearted or really happy again … I knew what I was doing when I saw the launch pushed off from the ice for the last time; and yet all was in vain: and here we are, cooped up with a lunatic.'[32] Nor can the once light-hearted, amusing Madigan comply when at McLean's birthday dinner in 1913, 'Mawson wanted some funny stories about sledging, but I can't be funny now, at least not on demand. I don't think anyone can.'[33]

Madigan returned from Antarctica in 1914 a very different person from the naïve, trusting young man who left Adelaide in 1911. 'I am a lot older than I would have been if the time had been spent at Oxford.'[34] It was a physically and emotionally hardened Madigan who stepped ashore from Aurora on 26 February 1914. He was no longer a careless young man; his dry humour was temporarily in abeyance; he had learned what fear was and could no longer

30 Greene, G., *Ways of Escape*, Penguin Books, London, 1981, p. 9.
31 Madigan's Account 30 May 1913
32 ibid., 21 Sept 1913
33 ibid., 27 March 1913
34 ibid., 15 October 1913

write, 'I never seem afraid'.

There were other changes of course, positive changes, deliberately fostered. Madigan was not a man to waste opportunities for self-improvement either of the hands or the mind. His time with the AAE may have been punishing but it was also profitable. He returned to Adelaide with new skills and greater knowledge. On the voyage down he upgraded his boating skills to sailing ship competency: hoisting sail, climbing the rigging, handling the wheel. From the bosun he took lessons in knot tying and rope splicing, skills he used in Antarctica to make sledging ropes and mooring lines. Recognising that accurate navigation would be vital in a land without landmarks, he practiced taking latitude and longitude observations and interpreting them to establish the ship's position, and he studied the associated texts, *Plain Table Work, Triangulation and Astronomy*. Nor was less specialized knowledge neglected. Like most of the expeditioners he read *Hints to Travellers*.

But while he focused on what might be useful in the south, Oxford was always at the back of his mind. To improve his German language skills and Mertz his English language, the two conversed, set each other written work and corrected it. This practice continued in Antarctica; Science German was mandatory for higher science degrees at the time.

In Antarctica the learning pace increased. He gained unexpected manual skills, such as using a sewing machine and a typewriter, and honed his carpentry, while acquiring skills more obviously associated with exploration and staying alive in a hostile environment: how to sledge, drive a dog team, pitch a tent in a gale, recognise a sunken crevasse lid. 'I have learned to keep

rigidly to the hollows,'[35] he wrote (there are no crevasses in the hollows). He became an expert navigator, invaluable to a man who was later to lead the first party to cross the Simpson Desert. Interestingly, he read the Holy Koran. But preparation for Oxford was not neglected: he read and made notes on university texts, *Igneous rocks and Mineralogy*, 'a good study of these and I will be fairly well up and ready for Oxford.'[36] Probably his most significant lesson was how to survive in extreme psychological and climatic conditions – even from that futile second year he extracted something positive. As he later wrote to his mother, 'the biggest lesson I learnt in the Antarctic was to make the best of existing circumstances.'[37]

Madigan's contribution to the AAE was considerable; his role in the expedition was wide-ranging. Perhaps his greatest feat was his leadership of the Eastern Party, one of the three successful explorative journeys (the others were led by Bage and Bickerton). With McLean and Correll, Madigan travelled out almost 300 miles east of Commonwealth Bay, mapped the coast, explored the geology, recorded the terrain, discovered mountains, made careful astronomical and meteorological observations, and returned safely. During that journey, when the three men were starving, he made a heroic lone trek to recover a food depot which, had it been written up in McLean's overblown prose, would be sensational!

Madigan's party brought from the East an important collection of geological specimens whose analysis, together with Madigan's reports on diorite cliffs and underlying sedimentary rocks, make an important contribution to

35 ibid., 4 January 1913
36 ibid., 10 May 1913
37 *Vixere Fortes*, p. 313.

Mawson's paper on the geology of what was later named King George Land. [Mawson, D., AAE 1911-14 Scientific Reports Series A vol. 3 (xi)]

Of greatest long-term significance is the meteorological baseline for Commonwealth Bay which he and assistant meteorologist A J Hodgeman, also from Adelaide and rarely honoured, established. For two years, from 31 January 1912 until 15 December 1913, blizzard or not, day after day, unless out sledging, they recorded data from the instruments on Observatory Hill and from the anemometer on a rocky point nearby. Under Madigan's direction the data that defined the terrible climate was gathered. Dearly bought charts and measurements were brought into the hut and their substance entered into log books.

In the 1920's, having survived WWI and finally rung down his Rhodes scholarship, Madigan compiled and analysed these records. They were published in June 1929 in AAE 1911-14 Scientific Reports Series B vol. iv. — a substantial 279pp work, 160 of them Tables, 20 plates, 24 Figs and 2 appendices, with descriptions of methodology and instruments, discussion and conclusions. For this meteorological work Oxford University[38] awarded him DSc. So it was disappointing to find late in 2013, on a website concerned with investigating Antarctic climate, an intention 'to traverse, reproduce and extend Mawson's experiments and observations that he conducted during the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration'. It is regrettable that people still fail to recognize there were 31 members of the AAE and few did less than Mawson. Madigan was the meteorologist at Commonwealth Bay, Moyes at the Western Base and Ainsworth at Macquarie Island – as his grandson recounted so

38 ibid., p. 366.

tellingly in an earlier paper at the same symposium.

And it must not be forgotten that by accepting leadership of the team assigned to search for Mawson's party Madigan gave a second year to the AAE, as did four other men, an unhappy, unnecessary year.

CONCLUSION

Madigan had much to give the AAE 1911-14. His diaries record not only his experience in Antarctica, but also the many changes in his perception, character and understanding. Some of the changes were short term, a few were negative, but most were positive. His contribution to the expedition, which was extensive, remains of vital usefulness in the 21st century.

Perhaps Adelaide and South Australia will, through greater knowledge, develop a deeper appreciation of the hometown boy's accomplishments.

Attending this symposium were C T Madigan's daughter, sculptor Rosemary Madigan, and his granddaughter Julia Madigan, transcriber and publisher of his diary, together with other proud descendants.

HEATHER ROSSITER
www.heatherrossiter.com