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'A.K.A. HOME OF THE BLIZZARD': FACT AND ARTEFACT IN THE FILM ON THE AUSTRALIAN ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION, 1911–1914

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**"I cannot say that the Royal Company Islands do not exist"
– Captain John King Davis, telegram to Edgeworth David, August 1912.¹**

The subject of this paper is the official motion picture record of the first Australian-backed expedition to Antarctica, the Australasian Antarctic Expedition (AAE) of 1911–1914, and the footage from this record preserved today in the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA).² Its topic is a problem of cinema historiography. This archive of AAE film footage has a complex range of historical content and meanings: as primary documentation of the expedition and of man's first contact with Antarctica's natural history, as an artefact of the Edwardian popular culture in which it was created, even as data about the history of moving image preservation in Australia. But at the same time, this footage has another, far simpler and better-known identity: as a 'classic' 'work' of Australian national cinema, a documentary film known as *Home of the Blizzard* that has become iconic and fixed in Australia's popular national cultural and social history narrative. How do we reconcile the two identities? This is a complex task, especially when research into the AAE film archive reveals that the iconography of the 'classic' – how we think and remember it as a work of popular Australian national cinema – has become widely disassociated from the original footage's actual social and film histories.

To begin with, what is the history behind these actualities, the historical events that the AAE moving images recorded? The AAE's leader, Douglas Mawson, then a 28-year-old lecturer in geology at the University of Adelaide, was a hero of Ernest Shackleton's 1907–1909 *Nimrod* Antarctic expedition, where he was a member of the first party to reach the Magnetic South Pole. In late 1911, at the height of Edwardian polar exploration's 'Heroic Age', when Captain Scott and Roald Amundsen were making their rival dashes to the Pole, Mawson turned his expedition's attention instead to the exploration of a then virtually unknown but potentially geologically rich Adelie Land, to the south of Australia. Departing Hobart on 2 December 1911, the AAE had by early 1912 established a wireless base on Macquarie Island and

two on the Continent: a Main Base Camp at Cape Denison (the famous "Home of the Blizzard") and a second base on an ice shelf, 1000 km westward in Queen Mary Land. Spread over these three bases was a company of over 30, including the 24-year-old official photographer Frank Hurley, on his first polar expedition.

Both the AAE's Antarctic parties wintered through 1912 before undertaking extensive sledding expeditions at the beginning of the summer of 1912–1913. Although these journeys were in themselves extraordinary achievements, charting far more territory than any of the other Edwardian Antarctic expeditions, it was in tragedy that Mawson's fame was made. On 14 December 1912, 480 km out from the Base camp, Mawson was leading a party comprising Belgrave

Ninnis, a 22-year-old British Army officer, and Xavier Mertz, a 28-year-old Swiss, lawyer and ski champion. Without warning, Ninnis, leading the trio, was lost down a crevasse, taking with him most of the party's stores and survival gear. Attempting to make their way back to the camp, Mawson and Mertz were reduced to eating their sledding dogs; Mertz died of malnutrition on 8 January. Mawson struggled on another 160 km, making his way back to the camp on 8 February, only hours after the expedition's vessel, the *Aurora*, had been forced by deteriorating weather to return to Australia. Mawson recuperated with a small party over the following winter, staying on until retrieved by the *Aurora* the following summer, and returning to Australia in early 1914 to a knighthood and a hero's status.

As with nearly all of the Heroic Age polar expeditions, cinematography accompanied Mawson's expedition. Its immediate use was as a means of scientific documentation and as a way of paying the expedition's bills by commercially exploiting the moving images. In the unforeseen long run, the AAE's film record has also come to serve more transcendental purposes, providing a suite of moving images that have become part of the popular visual rhetoric of the Australian national experience. Its persistence in the Australian national 'imaginary' (to borrow Benedict Anderson's phrase) can be seen, for example, in *Happy Feet* (2006), where George Miller's digital penguins frequently pay their own homage to the AAE's iconic film moments.

As noted, the AAE film record has also given our national cinema heritage one of its canonical 'titles', *Home of the Blizzard*. However, notice the hesitation and the quotation marks used in describing the film artefact in this way. The NFSA's preserved AAE film footage is in fact spread over at least five title catalogue entries. As well as three reels catalogued as *Home of the Blizzard*, it also holds four reels of different footage catalogued under the title *The Mawson-Antarctic Expedition, 1911–1914, Version 1*; one described as *The Mawson*

Antarctic Expedition 1911–1914 [Off cuts]; another as *The Mawson Antarctic Expedition 1911–1914* [Excerpts from Off cuts]; and two (16mm) reels titled as *The Mawson Antarctic Expedition 1911–1914, Version 2*; henceforth I'll refer to this footage collectively, as the *Version 1* and *2* material.³ Despite *Home of the Blizzard's* reputation as a work of cinema, none of this footage seems to constitute a completed film. The *Version 1* and *2* material often repeats scenes or alternate shots, suggesting it is fragments of more than one complete work. The three *Home of the Blizzard* reels do have some episodic continuity and we can follow in them (despite a lack of intertitles) a haphazard narrative flow of the expedition's journey south, via Macquarie Island, to the establishment of the Adelie Land base camp and then to preparations for the sledding expeditions of the summer of 1911–1912. However, no version has head or tail credits, continuous intertitle cards (although cards are scattered through some of the *Version 1* and *2* footage) or the narrative structure of a commercially-released work from this period of cinema history.

Thus, for the NFSA, there is a factual conflict between, on the one hand, the canonical, classic Australian title, "*Home of the Blizzard*", with its popularly received and assumed history as a 'film', and on the other, a collection of footage that (partially) shares the same title, but has an obscured and confused provenience and form. This is a not uncommon problem in early Australian cinema historiography: take the distance there has long been between film historians' recognition of the complex, chimerical status of the film 'titles' *Soldiers of the Cross* (1900) or *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (Charles Tait, 1906; 1910) and a popular understanding of these as cohesive cinematic works.

Let's explore this estrangement between "*Home of the Blizzard*" and the evidence of (film) history. An NFSA access video re-confirms the received, cohesive historical understanding. At some point, an electronic title been added at the tape's head: "Home of the Blizzard... Frank Hurley... 1913". This tells us a few things we think we know about the film: firstly, it is called *Home of the Blizzard*; secondly, it was made by Frank Hurley; and thirdly, it was made or maybe released in 1913.

These historical facts have been transmitted through our screen culture (and even our wider, national culture), with more aggression since the 1990s and the renewed interest in Edwardian polar history. Take one highly visible international example: a scene in *Shackleton*, the 2002 TV mini-series written and directed by Charles Sturridge.

Ernest Shackleton (Kenneth Branagh) visits a London movie studio around mid-1914, before the departure of his soon to be famously heroic Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition (ITA). Shackleton is taken aside and shown a magnificent film of penguins and seals: *Home of the Blizzard*, a huge hit in Sydney that the studio is about to acquire the rights for. The filmmaker is Frank Hurley, and he will bring sponsorship income to Shackleton's expedition if he is taken as cinematographer.

But what, exactly, is the evidence for the facts stated at the head of the NFSA access tape, or for Sturridge's dramatisation? I'm not concerned as to whether the *Shackleton* scene is literal historical fact: in general Sturridge's work is well grounded in research, and of course the scene is an expository dramatic device, functioning to compress essential historical background information and motivations. The filmmakers are artists, not historians, and cannot be expected to rely on anything more than the secondary sources available to them. Presumably, they accessed the current body of research about early polar cinematography: for example, the 2001 coffee-table book, *South with Endurance: Shackleton's Antarctic Expedition 1914–1917: The Photographs of Frank Hurley*.⁴ As well as newly reprinted stills from the ITA Expedition, this book contains essays by the polar historian Shane Murphy and the photographic historians Gael Newton and Michael Gray. All three offer considerable authority for Sturridge's dramatisation. Here's Newton on Hurley's motion picture work for the AAE:

Hurley returned to Hobart from the Antarctic in early 1913.... Once back in Sydney, he worked long hours putting together a film and accompanying lectures to raise finance to assist the Aurora's return for Mawson. *Home of the Blizzard* premiered in Sydney that year. Hurley carefully honed his lecturing style so that he could give a polished performance when providing screen-side commentaries for the film or his lantern slides....⁵

And in another essay from the book, Newton and Gray argue that Hurley's

still photography and cinematographic work in the Antarctic had attracted considerable interest and praise worldwide, partly because of such films as *Home of the Blizzard*, [which] premier[ed] in Sydney in 1913 and later released in London.... [A] decisive factor in Shackleton's decision to take him as expedition photographer seem to have been financial. As Thomas Orde-lees noted, "Short of funds to the tune of £25,000... Sir Ernest was offered

this sum by an influential syndicate on the condition that he secured the services of the recently returned Mawson's Expedition cinematographer."⁶

A number of similar versions of this account can be found in the Hurley literature, on screen and online: for example in Anthony Buckley's 1966 documentary on Hurley, *Sand, Snow and Savages*, a 2001 episode of the ABC TV series *Australian Story*, and webpages on the photographer on the US Kodak website.⁷ But what is the authority for each of these sources, and for this body of historical narrative about Hurley's AAE work, its commercial release and public recognition? *South with Endurance* is not annotated and as such can hardly be classified as academically rigorous; its bibliography lists general references to key primary archives and oral histories, but there is little specific primary citation. Instead, familiar names from the body of Frank Hurley-ography loom large: Frank Legg, David Millar, and Leonard Bickel – Hurley's previous popular biographers up to the time of *South with Endurance's* publication.⁸

Take an extract from Millar's 1984 *From Snowdrift to Shellfire*. This is a typical retelling of the story that had been earlier recounted in Legg and Toni Hurley's biography *Once More Unto My Adventure* (1966), and repeated in Bickel's *In Search of Frank Hurley* (1980):⁹

The need for Hurley's film to recoup expenses was critical. Working long hours, Hurley put together *Home of the Blizzard* and the three months after his return it was being screened in Sydney to enormous crowds. As it was printed before the advent of talking pictures, Hurley stood beside the screen at every evening showing, reciting the story of the Mawson expedition.¹⁰

Millar also relates a critical episode that likewise appears in Legg and Toni Hurley's earlier work. Hurley has returned to London, from Shackleton's ITA Expedition, and in November 1916 sees,

... for the first time, the final editions of his film of the Mawson expedition, *Home of the Blizzard*. Despite some scratching of the positive caused by sloppy handling, he was very happy with the final result. For the British release, it was renamed *Life in the Antarctic*.¹¹

Aside from ignoring ringing contradictions (Millar seems untroubled by the change of title or Hurley's curiosity about the content of a film he'd supposedly seen *ad nauseam* three years earlier), what is Millar's, or Hurley's other biographers, evidence for these events?

Again, citations are elusive. Bickel's work lacks annotation; Millar's is incidental at best and the account of Hurley's first presentation of *Home of the Blizzard* is not acknowledged to a specific source. In his 1925 memoir *Argonauts of the South*, Hurley himself doesn't mention any of these post-AAE activities – either lecturing in 1913 or working on the release of 'his' *Home of the Blizzard*.¹² One suspects Millar and Bickel's source may have been Legg and Toni Hurley's initial biography, which in turn also lacks citation, presumably having relied on conversations with Frank Hurley (that Legg and Toni Hurley indicate are the book's main source). The only 'hard' or primary citation of a *Home of the Blizzard* film in any of these three accounts is to an entry in Hurley's diary, held in the National Library of Australia, which recounts the 1916 London viewing.¹³ Even here, the writers are contradictory: Millar interprets the diary as suggesting that Hurley saw the film at Mawson's then London residence; Legg and Toni Hurley that he saw it with another friend at a cinema.

Thus there is little primary corroboration for the core of the episode dramatised in *Shackleton*, or for the title/year/author attribution at the head of the NFSA tape. They are not necessarily untrue, but they are close to being historical factoids. And these factoids have been critical in creating the received history of the 'canonical 1913-released film' *Home of the Blizzard*.

Having stripped this story down to these unreliable historical axioms, I'll now attempt to rebuild a more complete history of the AAE footage – in release, in popular reception and in private hands. To do this, I'll make use of some of the truth statements made in the Hurley literature, and in popular dramatic works such as Sturridge's *Shackleton*:

1. That Frank Hurley directed or was the film's 'auteur';
2. That he subsequently lectured with the AAE film;
3. That Hurley 'owned' the AAE film and must be the source for the surviving film material;
4. That the film was called *Home of the Blizzard* on its release;
5. That the *Home of the Blizzard* held in the NFSA archive should in fact be dated 1913.

We can put the story of the AAE film together in some detail, by drawing on the more familiar sources of film history: the AAE's official documents, correspondence between Australian government agencies

and Mawson, the personal papers of key expedition members, plus newspaper reviews and film trade journals in Australia, New Zealand, the US and UK. But as a film archive, we can do more than this. We can also look closely at the surviving film footage and use it as historical evidence in issues of authorship and form.

1. QUESTIONS OF AUTHORSHIP

Did Frank Hurley 'direct' *Home of the Blizzard*?

Douglas Mawson, scientist and modernist, realised early on the value of photography. In fact, Mawson and his academic mentor Edgeworth David had become the de facto photographers on Shackleton's 1907 *Nimrod* Expedition, contributing to the first, now lost film coverage of any Antarctic Expedition.¹⁴ Mawson was amongst the many amateurs who also shot stills on the AAE, although his surviving plates suggest his limited skills. Although on later occasions claiming to have been the official photographer on the *Nimrod* expedition – he was in fact appointed as its "Physicist" – Mawson may have known enough about photographic craft to know his own limitations. Professionals would be required to provide documentation of sufficient quality to fulfil not just the scientific but also the merchandising outcomes of their expedition. Even if still photography was rapidly becoming an everyman skill by the Edwardian era, cinematographer was a new caste of technologist.

In June 1911 Mawson contracted with the Australian office of Gaumont to provide "negatives taken (on the expedition) to be returned to us for exploitation on the basis of 50% each of the gross returns...". Gaumont would also "... instruct [a] cameraman..." if necessary.¹⁵ What the AAE was contracted to deliver needs emphasis: actuality footage for Gaumont to "exploit" as it saw fit, not a completed official film.

As Stephen Martin's research reminds us, Frank Hurley nearly didn't go to Antarctica.¹⁶ Of course Hurley used to remind everyone of this; his version of how he had to talk his way into the job and over the head of a preferred candidate on the train to Melbourne is repeated in Legg, Bickel, and elsewhere. But verification for this is elusive, whereas solid documentation shows Hurley still needed to 'apply' for the job in writing and offer references.¹⁷

In accepting Hurley's application in early October 1911, Mawson acknowledged that Hurley's darkroom knowledge was

"extraordinary" but seems to have still been hesitant.¹⁸ For there is evidence not of Hurley talking himself into the job but of his mother nearly talking him out of it. In early October 1911, Mawson received a letter from Margaret Hurley, warning that her son Frank "... has an internal complaint, ... lung trouble so bad that I do not think he would come back if he started..." (Of course, she asked "... do not mention to my son that I have written you."¹⁹) Although Mawson was a King, Country and Motherhood man, it's unlikely he automatically accepted that Mother knew best. Yet Mrs Hurley's letter renewed doubts Mawson entertained about this self-making man, who did not belong to the caste of officers and graduate gentlemen who he imagined appropriate. By this time Gaumont's Australian manager Fred Gent was already instructing Hurley in operating the supplied Preswitch cinematograph camera. His apprenticeship was "... very satisfactory indeed..." and Hurley was already establishing his renown as the Mr Gadget of polar exploration, designing "... a clockwork arrangement to run the camera to get particular natural history studies" which Gent was having fabricated.²⁰ (Hurley may have used this device to shoot his own film self-portrait, walking towards the camera, probably on the day of the Western Base Party's relief in February 1913 (Fig. 1).) However, Mawson telegrammed Hurley on 12 October, loyally concealing the source of his concern, but insisting upon a full medical examination, as he had "... grave doubts as to your general health and strength being sufficiently strong for the arduous work of the Antarctic."²¹

Clearly bemused by Mawson's sudden doubts, Hurley had a medical clearance within 24 hours. But Mawson was still troubled. A few days later he wrote to Gent,



Fig. 1: Moving image (self-?) portrait of Frank Hurley, probably shot onboard the *Aurora*, 23 February 1913. *The Mawson Antarctic Expedition 1911–1914, Version 2*, NFSA Collection, title no.1356 [Timecode 00:10:45:00].

asking that "... if you know Hurley is not robust, please inform me..." – and canvassing more 'suitable' alternatives:

I have been given to understand that Hurley is an unusually good photographer, if this is not so, or indeed he does not considerably excel Mr. Primmer as a photographer (not a cinematographer) I should certainly rule him out again. I have a feel that we should have Primmer as expert cinematographer [sic] apart from general photographer. I believe he is just the type of man suitable for expedition work. His navy training and his robust constitution are very desirable. I must say that I am still wanting Primmer. It may be we shall take both if available....²²

Were Hurley's go-getting charms counter-attractive to Mawson's wary temperament? This is the earliest of a lifetime of correspondence that continued into both men's dotage, in which Mawson's expressions of admiration for Hurley's skills are mediated with distrust. Perhaps it is no wonder then that Hurley was so energetic, up mast and over bow, in search of that perfect shot: he had to prove his mum and Mawson wrong. As Hurley's AAE appointment was his calling card to his engagement with Shackleton's 1914 ITA Expedition, and the international fame that brought, Antarctic exploration's hall of fame might have been very different if mother had got her way.

As a professional upstart at the beginning of his film career and as a photographic elder statesman at its end, Hurley also had to keep the reputations of rivals at bay. As Mawson's letter suggests, the historic presence of Richard Primmer may have been preying on his mind. Or even conveniently forgotten. Primmer – Gaumont's main stringer prior to the First World War – was one of Australia's leading first-generation actuality and newsreel cinematographers, alongside Bert Ive and Joseph Perry. In the long run of Australian film history he tends to be eclipsed: it is largely forgotten that he also shot Francis Brittle's first feature, the now lost *Across Australia* (1911). Neglect seems complete regarding his contribution to the AAE film. Fred Gent would obviously resist Mawson's attempts to borrow his leading staff cameraman, but there is specific evidence that Primmer shot at least two sections of footage on AAE assignment. And the footage itself makes a strong circumstantial case that it would have been logistically difficult for Hurley not to have needed a second unit.

Take the departure of the AAE on 2 December 1911. Finalising their contract in the few days before, Fred Gent wrote to Mawson that the document would be sent

"... by special messenger, in the person of Mr. R. Primmer, who is journeying to Hobart expressly to take a picture of the departure of your ship..."²³ The Hobart *Mercury's* detailed accounts of the AAE departure curiously refer to the "cinematographers" – plural – at work covering the occasion.²⁴ And the surviving motion- and still-picture record of the day insists that there must have been at least two cinematographers at work covering the occasion. (Or maybe more: Chris Long has suggested that local Spencer Picture's stringer, Herbert Wyndham, was also present shooting newsreel actuality.²⁵)

Although Hurley's still camera seems strangely inactive (he may have had his hands full with cinema alone), that warm Derwent River afternoon was well covered by many still photographers, most magnificently Xavier Mertz, aloft in the *Aurora's* crow's nest. Another portfolio, of first officer Percy Gray, includes amongst its shots of the chase flotilla one that has in its foreground a shadowy photographer stationed at the vantage of the *Aurora's* stern. A figure also appears in this position to the

right of shot 4 of the *Home the Blizzard* film, as the vessel pulls away (Fig. 2). His kit reflects the clothing Hurley wore in at least one surviving shipboard still (although the hat makes it impossible to tell). If it is, he of course could not have simultaneously been filming the departure shot on Queens Wharf. If it is not, then it might still have been possible for the mercurial photographer to have shot the departure on the wharf, jumped aboard one of the chasing pleasure craft and then transferred to the *Aurora* down river, say, when the dogs were brought on board at the Quarantine Station. And although shots 5 and 6 of the *Home of the Blizzard* footage suggest that he would have given the *Aurora* a good head start, a following shot is indeed of an approach to the *Aurora's* stern (Fig. 3).²⁶ But there was no need to wrestle with this. Surviving footage in the *Version 1* and *2* material demonstrate that there must have been at least two units. Shots in this footage of the Hobart throng on Queens Pier (Fig. 4) as well as views of the Derwent and the chase flotilla (Fig. 5), must have been exposed from *onboard* the *Aurora*. And this footage must have been shot



Fig. 2



Fig. 4



Fig. 3



Fig. 5

Four frame enlargements from the AAE film record show how likely it is that more than one cinematographer covered the AAE's departure from Hobart on 2 December 1911. From the *Home of the Blizzard* footage, Fig. 2 [Timecode 00:02:08:01] shows the stern of the *Aurora* as it pulls away from Queens Wharf, Hobart, whilst Fig. 3 [Timecode 00:02:49:14] is taken further down the Derwent, from a vessel in the chase flotilla. The reverse of these camera positions can be found in *The Mawson Antarctic Expedition 1911–1914, Version 2*. Fig. 4 [Timecode 00:46:56:08] and Fig. 5 [Timecode 00:47:25:17] are clearly shot from the stern of the *Aurora*, at almost the same instant as the first two positions. *Home of the Blizzard*, NFSACollection, title no.6465.

almost simultaneously to the footage taken from the shore and of the vessel departing Queens Pier, familiar from the *Home of the Blizzard* film. (Unfortunately the camera position on the *Aurora* was most likely on the upper deck, which is frustratingly out of shot in the sequence of the departure in *Home of the Blizzard*; as is, in the *Version 1* and *2* material and again frustratingly, the likely reciprocal onshore camera position that would have been used by Primmer (?) to film the *Aurora*'s departure.)

Beyond the events of this day, any adequate reading of the AAE's history causes one to realise that Hurley's Preswitch camera couldn't possibly have been everywhere during the expedition. "... [Then] there is a Mr. Primmer, who is a cinematographer...", Captain John King Davis writes in his personal log at the beginning of the *Aurora*'s "winter cruise" in May 1912, a series of sidebar oceanographic research voyages Davis undertook to the islands and seas between Australia and the Antarctic.²⁷ George F Ainsworth's narrative about the work of another AAE sidebar activity, the research and communications base at Macquarie Island, also mentions Primmer's presence on the *Aurora* when it arrived at Macquarie Island on 7 July 1912.²⁸ And five official AAE stills, documenting the *Aurora*'s 1912 visit to the sub-Antarctic Auckland Islands, are credited to "Primmer", with one even being inscribed as being of "... Primmer in view".²⁹ There is no account of Primmer's work on the voyage except in passing, such as a mention in Davis' log that the dull winter sub-Antarctic light gave little opportunity to shoot footage. Nonetheless, Primmer seems to have shot at least a few hundred feet of usable coverage. Mawson's correspondence, along with notes he made for the lectures he gave in London and New York in 1914–1915, also frequently refers to Auckland Island footage as well as New Zealand footage. We also know that, at the conclusion of the *Aurora*'s May cruise, Davis and Conrad Eitel (the expedition's press agent) gave a lecture on the AAE's mission and accomplishments in New Zealand, at Wellington Town Hall on the evening of 23 July. Davis' talk was illustrated with "... the exhibition of a number of lantern slides and some 4000 feet of cinematographic pictures..." and included "... views of the graves at Port Ross [in the Auckland] ... [and] the rockbound coasts of the Auckland Island...".³⁰ (This was, of course, a film screening in mid-1912; an event I will discuss below.) Hurley never went near either locale.

Primmer's authorship of a number of other sequences is also possible. The Wellington newspaper report also mentions views of

Macquarie Island – although whether these were printed from Primmer's new footage or from Hurley's earlier visit is unclear. We have evidence that Gaumont had been unhappy with Hurley's first motion pictures, brought back with the *Aurora* on the March 1912 return voyage, and that the company felt compelled to dispatch its experienced stringer to do Macquarie Island pickups. Fred Gent, corresponding with Eitel, mentions that "... to make the films worth that money (the distribution rights) we think that the subjects brought back by Primmer would probably have to be included."³¹ It is also apparent that some of the Macquarie Island footage that has survived in the *Version 1* and *2* material is of a different time of year and climate to shots taken in December 1911: these scenes depict a coming ashore in far more inclement weather by a party that doesn't seem dressed for polar exploration. This footage could date from the *Aurora*'s May 1912 visit (Fig. 6).

Additionally there is also the problem of pre-December 1911 footage. The *Version 1* and *2* footage includes sequences and intertitles showing the *Aurora*'s departure from London, and what probably is (considering the vast array of His Majesty's pre-War naval firepower) its July 1911 journey along the south coast of England. More curiously, the first three shots of *Home of the Blizzard* – traditionally thought to be of the *Aurora* in Hobart – are almost certainly of the vessel tied up to a gravel wharf in London, rather than the timber of Hobart's Queen's Pier. This is confirmed by photographs from Davis' AAE memoir of

the *Aurora* in London. *Versions 1* and *2* also include extensive footage of loading stores onto the *Aurora* from this same gravel wharf (Fig. 7).

The *Version 1* and *2* footage also includes shots of two young men lounging around on deck (Fig. 8). These seem to illustrate Captain Davis' recollections of the voyage from London and his first impressions of the young Swiss dilettante Mertz and gentleman-officer Ninnis, who were his only passengers on the *Aurora* at that time: "... they will certainly have a bad time later on if they are slack as they are now...".³² Whilst we have a number of still photographic portraits of Mertz and Ninnis on the voyage out, here



Fig. 7: The loading of the *Aurora* at a gravel wharf, similar to its London berth (the *Aurora*'s Hobart berth was timber). Frame enlargement, *The Mawson Antarctic Expedition 1911–1914, Version 2* [Timecode 00:05:06:23].



Fig. 6: The beach is almost certainly on Macquarie Island, but the weather and dress of crew members in shot differs noticeably from that seen in footage taken during the establishment of the AAE's base on the island in December 1911 and seen in the *Home of the Blizzard* footage. Frame enlargement, *The Mawson Antarctic Expedition 1911–1914, Version 2* [Timecode 01:32:02:04].



Fig. 8: This shot was probably also taken off the south coast of England during the *Aurora*'s journey south. The man reading on the left is identifiable the Swiss expeditioner, Xavier Mertz; the figure standing, right, is possibly Belgrave Ninnis. Both were to die during the AAE's 1912–1913 sledding expeditions. Frame enlargement, *The Mawson Antarctic Expedition 1911–1914, Version 2* [Timecode 01:01:23:12].

poignantly are probably the first moving images of those two spirits japing about in the last year of their lives.

These shots are a thrilling discovery. But they beg the question, who shot this footage? No account of the *Aurora's* London to Hobart voyage mentions a cinematographer on board. Hurley's application to join the AAE hadn't even been refereed by his mother when the vessel slipped its Thames mooring in late July 1911. The late 1911 correspondence over Hurley's fitness does include an elliptical reference on 11 October, to the fact that Primmer had just arrived on "... the SS *Eastern*... today and... [was] going into quarantine...".³³ The overloaded and sluggish *Aurora* took from 4 August to 4 November to get from Cardiff to Hobart, via the Cape; a quick liner could then do London–Sydney in less than two thirds of the time via Suez. But the Sydney shipping news indicates that the SS *Eastern* arrived from "... Japan, via Thursday Island", more likely suggesting Primmer was returning instead from his early-1911 Cape York cycling expedition with Francis Birtles to shoot *Across Australia*.³⁴ At best guess, a Gaumont UK stringer signed on for the trip from London to the coaling depot at Cardiff, the *Aurora's* last UK landfall. Although if this is correct, it adds at least a third (or maybe fourth?) hand to the AAE's camerawork.

Beyond the cinematography, there is the problem of the 'authorship' of the completed film. But the problem here is, 'Which film?' Gaumont's contract, as I previously mentioned, was not for a completed documentary. (The concept of the Documentary as a discreet motion picture 'work' or art, as we understand it now, was still less than coherent at this time. This is still the era of the 'actuality', of cameramen capturing 'views'.) Gaumont would have understood that the key to exploiting the film rights of the AAE material in this era would have been the utility of the footage in all formats: the use of the material in one-reelers, newsreels, within multi-media live lectures or in feature formats. It must be remembered that Mawson's contract with Gaumont was for the "negatives taken..." – not for a final film.

Attendant biographers like Legg, Millar and Bickel, and to some degree Hurley himself, have not only contributed to the legend of 'Frank Hurley' but they have also retrospectively re-made the AAE film as *his* work, in the manner that we regard *In the South with Captain Scott* (1912) as Herbert Ponting's, or *Pearls and Savages* (1922) and *The Siege of the South* (1930) as works 'made' by Hurley himself. However, primary sources contradict notions of Hurley's authorship.

Beyond the cinematography, there is the problem of the 'authorship' of the completed film. But the problem here is, 'Which film?'

Hurley's own 1925 memoir, *Argonauts of the South*, makes one major problem clear: Hurley was absent from Sydney for most of 1913.³⁵ Let's look at what we know of his movements through that year. The AAE returned in March 1913. The *Australasian Photo-Review*, the Kodak Australasia house journal that played a considerable role in fostering Hurley's reputation, reports Hurley's return in September, from "... an extensive tour of Java...", a month after the AAE film's 1913 capital city season had finished.³⁶ Within two months, he was gone again with the December AAE relief expedition. We don't know exactly when Hurley left for Java, but we have considerable correspondence between Hurley, Gaumont and Professor Edgeworth David (Mawson's mentor and advisor) – most of it a hot pursuit of unfulfilled promises made by Hurley for the delivery of stills for use in lectures and the film. No letter from Hurley in Sydney is dated later than June 1913.³⁷

When he was there, what did and could he contribute? Hurley had an association with Gaumont before the AAE job; both shared Kodak Australasia's York St, Sydney offices. While he was a quick learner, at the time he had no experience as a film editor, nor in shaping moving image material into commercial actuality narrative. As such, the 1913 footage is more likely to have been shaped for commercial release by Gaumont's boss Fred Gent or Richard Primmer (possibly working with AAE publicist Conrad Eitel) than by Frank Hurley.

And why would he feel the great need to be involved? Hurley's role in the project was in many ways ideal, a contractual position of all responsibility, but no obligation. Whilst, as Robert Dixon points out, the AAE firmly reserved intellectual property rights over all still- and moving-image photography taken on the expedition, the contracts Hurley and other members of the AAE staff signed were, for the times, surprisingly respectful of what we'd now call their 'Moral rights'.³⁸ Confirming Hurley's final appointment (for £300) in October 1911, Mawson indicated that whilst his work was "... copyright of the expedition..." it would "... always be published under the name of the photographer subscribed".³⁹ Indeed this has proven to be one of the good fortunes in

researching the AAE's photographic record. In an era when there is little respect for individual creative rights in the commercial arts we are very clear about who took what on the expedition, especially those besides Frank Hurley: the manifest crediting of individual expedition members for the stills used in Mawson's 1915 two-volume *Home of the Blizzard* reminds us of just how voracious Hurley's reputation as a photographer can be, with a number of iconic images, to this day often popularly associated with Hurley, clearly credited as the work of others (the photography of Xavier Mertz, maybe the most talented of the AAE's amateurs, noticeably suffers from this). Imbued with the careful practices of authorship and attribution in academic publication, it was Mawson's fair management of the AAE's commercial protocols that in fact first drew the public's attention to Frank Hurley's work. As contractually agreed, Hurley's sole credit for the AAE film certainly appears on an intertitle card amongst the surviving *Version 1* and *2* footage and was frequently noted by newspaper reviewers from the AAE film's public screenings, a rare accolade for an Australian cinematographer at that time (Fig. 9).⁴⁰ By comparison, Richard Primmer remained at all times on the Gaumont payroll, and was owed no such contractual rights by either his employer, or the AAE.

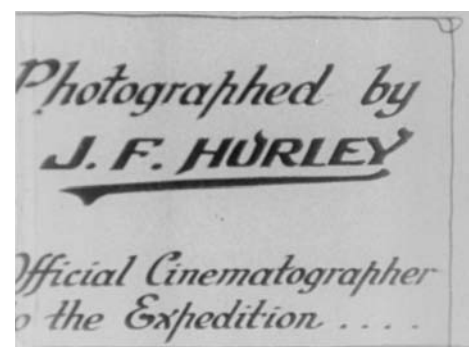


Fig. 9: Although the expedition's moving images remained the AAE's intellectual property, Frank Hurley's credit for the work was clearly acknowledged, as per his contract. Frame enlargement, *The Mawson Antarctic Expedition 1911–1914, Version 2* [Timecode 00:42:08:13].

2. PUBLIC SPEAKING

Did Frank Hurley lecture with the AAE film?

Not being about to edit the 1913 film release also means that Hurley was almost certainly in Java when it premiered in Melbourne at West's Picture Palace on Saturday 19 July (not in Sydney, as is always stated). No review or advertisement for the 1913 season mentions his live presence, nor anyone else's for that matter.

So was Hurley spinning a yarn when he told of lecturing with the AAE film? The fault might rest with his hagiographers rather than Hurley himself. Many Hurley scholars have written in detail of Hurley's successful 1919 Australian lecturing tour with *In the Grip of the Polar Ice*, his own 'cut' of Shackleton's ITA Expedition footage (originally released in the UK in 1918 as *South*). Alasdair McGregor and, more recently, Robert Dixon have also outlined Hurley's interest in likewise reviving the AAE footage for re-release at this time; although, as McGregor makes clear, despite the success of *In the Grip of the Polar Ice* the AAE follow-up was to disappear unseen, into a mire of litigation, false promises and bad blood between Mawson and Hurley – one of the many sources of irritation that would persist between the two men throughout their lives.⁴¹ Phillip Ayres' 1999 biography of Douglas Mawson describes the almost as difficult collaboration with Hurley on their later British, Australian, New Zealand Antarctic Research Expedition (BANZARE) film, best known in its 1930 sound re-release *Siege of the South*. Less widely known is the earlier commercial release of the BANZARE film, the silent *Southward Ho with Mawson* (1929). As Ayres notes, contemporary press reviews clearly report that this first version had the same very familiar structure of Hurley's earlier 'Lecture films' of the 1910s and early 1920s: a multi-media fusion of lantern slide, gramophone, silent motion picture and Hurley's own entertaining patter.⁴² It sounds all too familiar. Accounts of either of his silent Antarctic film presentations could be one of Hurley's supposed 1913 shows – except they were performed in 1919 and 1929. One can't help but wonder if his biographers might have crossed Hurley's recollections of his lecturing with his subsequent Antarctic material with the AAE film?

3. OWNERSHIP AND SURVIVING FOOTAGE

Did Frank Hurley 'own' the AAE film? Was he the source for the surviving film material?

No historian has ever suggested it, but popular assumption often has it that, having 'directed' *Home of the Blizzard*, Hurley must have been the source for the surviving footage. Where else would this footage have come from? A history of a film's provenance, survival and preservation often contributes to an understanding of its original form and creative processes. So can myths about provenance. There are other legends: amongst some senior NFSA archivists who had worked with the NFSA's predecessor, the Film Division of the National Library (NLFD), there is some cultural memory of *Home of the Blizzard* having been acquired from the British Film Institute (BFI) in the 1960s. And it is hard not to deduce that many references, in popular histories, to the AAE film being *Home of the Blizzard* can be sourced to the NLFD and NFSA's own public catalogues – that the institution itself is probably one of the main agents in disseminating the attribution of title, directorial 'author' and year ("Home of the Blizzard... Frank Hurley... 1913"). It is an inherent risk for the institution of a national film archive, if it is to assume a role of clearing house and arbitrator of knowledge about the history of national cinemas. It is a risk even if the film archive makes no claims for that authority: its catalogue is instinctively seen by a culture as historical authority rather than simply metadata.

If that is so, where did the NFSA's own historical conceptualisation of the film material emerge from? After all, unlike the video reproduction, the original negatives of the film the NFSA calls *Home of the Blizzard* lack any identifiers beyond occasional reel numbers. The BFI's Archives are not aware of holding *Home of the Blizzard*, any Mawson AAE material or even any unidentified silent Antarctic footage that might be of AAE origin.⁴³

Fortunately, another accidental reality of national collecting institutions is that, after a while, their own administrative records can transform into historic artefacts. An NFSA file, "Sir Douglas Mawson. OBE, FRS, DSC, BE (historical)",⁴⁴ outlines the acquisition history for the AAE material and a fascinating narrative of the concerns of two national institutions: on the one hand, Sir Douglas Mawson trying to confirm his public legacy in his twilight years; and on the other, the NLFD trying to establish its place

in the formative culture of screen archiving in Australia.

In November 1955, the then 73-year-old Mawson contacted the NLFD regarding the film of his 1929–1931 BANZARE Expedition. Aware that the NLFD held a negative of Hurley's commercial release version of *Siege of the South*, he asked that the library embargo access, hoping to re-release a new cut of the footage in order to fund BANZARE's scientific research publication program (which, as Mawson biographer Philip Ayres notes, continued, epically, until 1975).⁴⁵ This time, Mawson implied, the film would be without Hurley's original voice-over, which he described as "... second-rate... introducing Mickey-mouse and boxing arena jargon...".⁴⁶ Agreeing to Mawson's request and understanding the opportunity, Deputy Librarian Brumester used this as an excuse to also ask Mawson to consider the deposit of his other Antarctic archives with the National Library.⁴⁷ His papers were already committed to the University of Adelaide; however, Mawson indicated there was still an apparently considerable collection of positive and negative motion picture film material in his possession, with no determined future.

The correspondence continued through 1956, now mostly between Mawson and Film Division head H L White. White learnt Mawson had in fact been in contact with the BFI's National Film Archive in the UK since 1954; a true Edwardian, Mawson initially had difficulty grasping the Australian rather than 'British' heritage value of the material, and had only made contact with the National Library as a result of prompting by the BFI. Of more alarm was a piece of correspondence forwarded to White by the BFI in mid-March 1956, where Mawson casually indicated that something was already being done locally about his film holdings⁴⁸:

The Commonwealth Government has had an officer visit me and overhaul the negatives and positives in my possession. The cinema film of our Australasian Antarctic Expedition of 1911–14 has been reported still printable. Some of the positives have deteriorated beyond redemption... It has been arranged with the Commonwealth National Films organization that the negative be carefully copied...⁴⁹

To White, this 'Commonwealth Officer' must have seemed like some kind of film heritage Man in Black, mysterious and alarming. If Mawson did not entrust the future of his clearly important materials to the only film archive in the Commonwealth, then to whom? Alarmed but deferential, White wrote to Mawson on 24 July, pleading

for the Library to be kept in the loop: "We are ourselves actively engaged in copying for preservation... and are of course most anxious that films of the importance of yours be preserved in the national collection..."⁵⁰ Mawson, now frail and finding it difficult to keep up with his correspondence, delayed any clarification until mid-May 1958. He then revealed that the 'Commonwealth Officer' was in fact Alec Campbell-Drury, head of the photographic division of the Antarctic Division. After another tangent into his mixed feelings regarding Hurley's contribution – acknowledging his skills, for all his vulgarity ("In artistry and technique... [he] is unique. Ponting himself... once told me: 'Tell him that he is better man than me in polar exploration films'") – Mawson outlined the condition of both the AAE and BANZARE films. Campbell-Drury had gone though the "... negative and some old prints which I have...";

... [H]e finds some shrinkage and some of the prints are not so stable as others and have chemically deteriorated and have had to be thrown away. Other positive is still in good condition and I am told that negative could still be made from any undeteriorated positive.⁵¹

Antarctic Division papers confirm that Mawson had probably also been in discussions about his film collection with its head, Dr Phillip Law, as far back as 1954. In September that year Law had seconded the renowned Anglo-Austrian scientific journalist and filmmaker Anthony Michaelis – then briefly on staff at the University of Sydney – to visit Adelaide. Michaelis reported back on Mawson's apparently depressing re-acquaintance with his long neglected nitrate film trove: "... can after can of spoilt film and the loss of the negatives has certainly shown to Sir Douglas that his insurance policy is by no means of a permanent nature, and I think he was really quite upset".⁵² Campbell-Drury's 1958 visit appears to have just been the mopping up operation. Mawson advised White that the footage had gone to the Division's photographic studios in the Melbourne suburb of Richmond, where Campbell-Drury would "... go through these films carefully, retaining all that can still be useful". He did agree that "... a Commonwealth Government Department..." would strike a negative and that "... arrangements will then be made for your film library to get a negative copy...".

This was not reassurance. It merely converted alarm into consternation. White wrote to Commonwealth Film Unit (CFU) head Stanley Hawes, trying to find out if the CFU was doing the printing. Hawes agreed it should be the Library's job, but

had heard nothing about it. Through July, White pleaded the various parties: with the Department of External Affairs; with Law for the footage Campbell-Drury discarded to be deposited with the National Library; and with Mawson, to whom he suggested the Library would be keen to do the copying work on the AAE film at least from "... one complete print". But it was too late. Mawson wrote to White that the material had already gone to Campbell-Drury. However, some compromise seems to have been reached; External Affairs agreed in August that "... no editing is being done other than the rejection of film which has decomposed with age" and agreed to deposit the 'preserved' footage with the library.⁵³

In fact, the NLFD had little to offer in alternative means of preserving the film at that time, given its resources and knowledge base in the late 1950s. The National Library was then reliant on external commercial lab work, and also practiced some of the now questionable archiving habits of the era, especially the tendency to print 35mm down to 16mm, or to discard nitrate after the printing of safety materials. In retrospect, it is fortunate that the final supply-chain utilised the then considerable in-house photographic resources of the Antarctic Division, and of a photographic professional who was a stakeholder in the survival of the material and a confidant of the donor. Indeed, the evidence suggests that Campbell-Drury did about as good as he could. But that still leaves questions that the, as yet, unformulated values of Australian moving image archiving and the largely non-existent discipline of local film history did not know to ask or answer.

Mawson died in October 1958. Eighteen months later, and after what must have been a worrying period of silence for White and the Library, the Antarctic Division's R J Thompson sent a long memo to White on the outcome of Campbell-Drury's work. Overall the film "... has been held by this Division rather longer than was intended", as the positive material had proved to be badly deteriorated and poorly stored, although the negative footage was in slightly better condition. He advised that he intended to forward the library "... 74 cans each measuring 10 3/4 inches in diameter: ... AAE... (silent film cuts) 38 reels; AAE... 'Home of the Blizzard' Silent lecture film, 5 reels; AAE negative film, 13 reels". This is the first mention of the title *Home of the Blizzard* in any of this correspondence – interestingly, Mawson had never referred to the material by this name, always calling it the "AAE film".⁵⁴

Campbell-Drury's attached 'Condition Report' included photographs confirming just how advanced the deterioration was in the 10,000 feet or so of positive footage (Fig. 10). Much was either utterly destroyed, "... or had suffered complete bleaching of the image, due to the fumes and insufficient washing and/or fixation at the time of processing...". Campbell-Drury was frank:

[M]ost... had passed the danger point [for spontaneous combustion]... [as] the tin container had deteriorated so badly that the rolls of film had actually eaten their way out.... In some cases it was possible to count the number of rolls of film in a can without removing the lid by the fine brown powdered rust heaps [sic] up in little cones on the tops of the lids....

The shrinkage in this footage was up to six per cent, but Campbell-Drury believed that this could be step-printed once it had been "humidified". Importantly, he also reported that much "of the material had been dyed as was the early custom. Amber dye giving the brighter effect of warmth and sunlight and the blue-green dye simulating coldness in the snowscape section.... Most of the dyes had faded...". This fact and the surviving intertitles Campbell-Drury identified indicate that these were release prints, not cutting room floor offcuts. Unfortunately, in order to reprint the film, it would be necessary to "... bleach..." out what dye had survived, "... back to its original black and white...".

Campbell-Drury's report suggests a good grasp of film preservation process. He replaced the original film cans and understood the urgency of "immediate attention if duplication is to be carried out", at the same time also appreciating the need for caution in the film's preservation strategy.

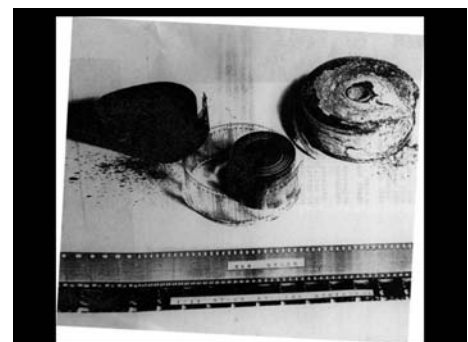


Fig. 10: The advanced state of decomposition of the original AAE 35mm film footage, c. 1960. 'General report on condition of film, 20.10.1955 [sic]', NFSA file 98/01142 Sir Douglas Mawson.

The correspondence between Campbell-Drury and White on the copying of the footage illuminates something of how the received story of the AAE film evolved in the context of film archiving practices of the time...

Of the surviving negative film, “approx. 5,968 feet”, he concluded:

It is intended to have some pieces of the badly shrunken film projected to observe its effect on the screen and determine whether or not it was shot at sound or silent speed. This test together with chemical tests on the dyes etc. to [be] carried out at the Antarctic Division darkroom will determine finally just what can be done in regard to making duplicates.⁵⁵

But it is still unclear how aggressive he was in discarding damaged film and to what extent he destroyed material that might have been potentially salvageable, even with then state-of-the-art preservation techniques.

The surviving, post-cull, Mawson collection was forwarded to the NLFD in May 1960. White immediately involved himself in arrangements for the footage to be copied to safety film at the commercial Automatic Film Laboratory in Sydney, beginning with four reels of positive in July. “We have about 30 more reels... in about the same condition”, White wrote to Automatic Lab, adding that the first reels are a film “... called ‘Home of the Blizzard’ and is the only surviving material of this particular film.”⁵⁶ White was beginning with the reels of what Campbell-Drury had referred to as the “Silent lecture film”, the material both in the best condition and which seemed the most narratively cohesive. Automatic’s inspection of these reels found “most of film in good to fair condition [but] app [sic] 100 to 200 ft in reel 2 the image has faded almost away...”. Indeed, it should be noted that there is a discrepancy between the number of reels sent to Automatic (four) and the number Campbell-Drury first indicted made up the ‘lecture film’ (five).⁵⁷ Was it human error, or was one reel not copied at that time due to the reported advanced fade? The surviving *Home of the Blizzard* certainly does have some very wobbly continuity around reel 2, apparent even without subtitles or script.

By early 1961, 16mm prints had been made of these first reels, and a start seems to have

been made on the remaining 38 cans of silent film cuts. White was already thinking of a way to “piece together a complete film of the expedition with suitable titles”.⁵⁸ His ‘Memoriam for the Librarian’ summarises the actions taken and proposed:

1. Negative... 13 reels transferred
 2. Positive... 5 reels transferred
- These five reels form the film “HOME OF THE BLIZZARD” which was edited from the whole material to form a popular illustration to lectures on the Expedition...
3. Positive... 38 reels still to be transferred

Of the 38 reels, 13 would be the same as the 13 reels of negative mentioned in (1.) However, the reels do not match and it seems that the material is so confused that the only same course is to transfer all 38 with the certainty that there will be some duplication... [I]t seems possible that by transferring everything we have we shall end up with a nearly complete record.⁵⁹

The correspondence between Campbell-Drury and White on the copying of the footage illuminates something of how the received story of the AAE film evolved, in the context of film archiving practices of the time and the not always sophisticated policies of a nascent moving image archive. For example, White intended to destroy the originals after copying to the cost-saving 16mm format, but fortunately Campbell-Drury had more foresight than the film archivist, pointing out that, as “there are no other records of the 1911–14 AAE film it might be advisable to keep it in its present 35mm form.... It is assumed that this could then [be] reprinted down to 16mm positive if so required.”⁶⁰

White seems to have agreed to send at least some of this copied material back to the Antarctic Division, in the hope that the Division’s inside knowledge could contribute to a reconstruction. He was also convinced that there must have once been an original script of the ‘lecture film’, and much of his later correspondence involves inquiries about its possible survival.⁶¹ Campbell-Drury had

sighted no such script, but suggested that a reconstruction was possible through reference to the subtitles and alternative footage in the AAE negative material. White tried the few surviving AAE expeditioners, such as Davis, Cecil Madigan, F L Stillwell, and, of course, Frank Hurley particularly, of whom he asked about “... any notes on the making of the film? In particular, we thought that you might have a copy of the lecture which accompanied the edited version ‘HOME OF THE BLIZZARD’”.⁶²

Thus the current received history of *Home of the Blizzard* falls into place. It only needs Hurley to have the last word. White seems to have received no reply to his letter to Hurley about an AAE lecture script, although other on-file correspondence suggests that NLFD staff were in regular contact with daughter, Toni Hurley. However, Hurley did subsequently emerge, prior to his death in January 1962, to reclaim guardianship of the AAE film material, possibly in the wake of the Sydney Film Festival’s June 1961 retrospective of his work. Later in 1961, and clearly in response to the AAE footage having now come into the hands of the Commonwealth, Hurley agreed to be interviewed on camera by a CFU crew. The footage was utilised by the CFU for two released films productions: *Mawson’s Expedition to the Antarctic* (1961), essentially Hurley’s oral history of his AAE experiences; and *Antarctic Pioneers* (1962), an expansion of the first film release soon after his death, which added footage and recollections from Hurley’s later BANZARE experience (and also, oddly, gave the impression of his involvement in post-BANZARE Antarctic activity in which he took no part).

These two productions are valuable in suggesting what footage, amongst the 51 reels that survived apart from the *Home of the Blizzard* ‘lecture film’, may have been copied by that time. Scenes not in *Home of the Blizzard*, but in the *Version 1* and *2* footage appear there, for example, the Hobart departure in November 1911, the establishment of Commonwealth Bay, and the recovered Western base party onboard ship in March 1913. But strangely the selection of footage that accompanies Hurley’s oral account of the AAE Expedition plays loose with the events: the March 1913 footage is used to illustrate the November 1911 departure, for instance. The edit was probably assembled in-house by the CFU at the time; Hurley may not have been consulted. But, as I have argued, he may not have had as detailed a knowledge of the footage as has been assumed. Only the few AAE survivors then still alive would have known any better.

4. QUESTIONS OF TITLE

Was the official AAE film called *Home of the Blizzard* on its release?

I have noted Mawson's unwillingness to call the AAE film by the title others have always been enthusiastic to use: *Home of the Blizzard*. This is not an entirely original train of thought. That any official, commercially-released AAE film was in fact distributed under this title has long been suspect amongst the Australian film history community. Chris Long has pointed out discrepancies between the *Home of the Blizzard* material held at the NFSA and descriptions of the film released in 1913.⁶³ Eric Reade's *Australian Silent Films* notes both *Dr. Mawson's Antarctic Film Series* and *Life in the Antarctic* as titles used in 1913 – but also somehow (reflecting an *idée fixe* of Australian film history) that “it had been titled *Home of the Blizzard*”.⁶⁴ Ken Berryman and Ina Bertrand's respective entries for

The Oxford Companion to Australian Cinema reiterate doubts about the film's iterations.⁶⁵ Oddly, even the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) prefers *Dr Mawson in the Antarctic*.⁶⁶

In fact, and as Reade alludes, *Life in the Antarctic* is just one of the titles used amongst the bombast of the newspaper advertisements for the AAE film in Sydney and Melbourne in 1913. This is an era when typeface repetition was a substitute for artwork in newspaper cinema advertisement, and as such it can be difficult to work out what the film was called from the column ads or reviews. “*The Mawson Antarctic Expedition*” or “*Life in the Antarctic*” are just some of the headlines the Melbourne *Argus*' column advertisements manage to give the film, over its July Melbourne season.⁶⁷ When it reached West's Sydney Crystal Palace, *The Sydney Morning Herald*'s column advertisement for 4 August describes the film as “*Dr. Mawson's Antarctic Film Series*” – then later “*The Mawson Pictures*”.⁶⁸

None of the newspaper reviews for the film indicate a specific descriptor for the film, apart from nomenclature like “the official Antarctic pictures”. Internal Gaumont, AAE and Spencer's Pictures paperwork is equally uncertain on what to call the 1913 film. When Gaumont supplies Conrad Eitel with 1913 season receipts on 5 September 1913, they are for “The Mawson Film”; supplying receipts for its negligible tour of Western Australia in October, it is now “*Dr. Mawson's South Pole Film*”.⁶⁹ West's Film Exchange, when corresponding with Eitel over the supply of foyer publicity material in August 1913, vaguely calls it “the Mawson Pictures”.⁷⁰ When Mawson insured the negative, it was described as “*Antarctica*”.⁷¹ The only title never used in 1913 was *Home of the Blizzard*.

HISTORICAL PERSONNEL

Roald Amundsen: polar explorer; first man to the South Pole in 1912

Australasian Films: Australian film exchange, established November 1912

Leonard Bickel: journalist and historian; Frank Hurley biographer, *In Search of Frank Hurley* (1980)

Alec Campbell-Drury: official photographer, Australian Antarctic Division, late 1950s

Edgeworth David: geologist and polar explorer, *Nimrod* Expedition (1907–1909); Chairman, Australasian Antarctic Expedition

Captain Sir John King Davis: navigator, marine researcher and explorer; Captain of Australasian Antarctic Expedition vessel SS *Aurora*

Conrad Eitel: publicity agent, Australasian Antarctic Expedition

Frederick Gent: manager, Gaumont Australia (film production company); later Australasian Films and Gaumont UK

(Captain) Frank Hurley: photographer and official cinematographer,

Australasian Antarctic Expedition (1911–1914), Imperial Antarctic Expedition (1914–1916), British Australian, New Zealand, Antarctic Research Expedition (BANZARE) (1929–1931)

Dr Phillip Law: polar explorer 1940s–1960s; founding head of Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition (ANARE) and Antarctic Division, Department of External Affairs

Frank Legg: journalist and Frank Hurley biographer, *Once More Unto My Adventure* (1966)

Sir Douglas Mawson: geologist, photographer, businessman and polar explorer; leader, Australasian Antarctic Expedition (1911–1914), British Australian, New Zealand, Antarctic Research Expedition (BANZARE) (1929–1931)

Xavier Mertz: polar explorer, AAE; died in Antarctica, 1913

Anthony Michealis: scientific journalist and filmmaker

David Millar: journalist and Frank Hurley biographer, *From Snowdrift to Shellfire* (1984)

Belgrave Ninnis: polar explorer, AAE; died in Antarctica, 1912

Hebert Ponting: polar photographer for Captain Robert Falcon Scott's British Antarctic Expedition (1910–1913)

Richard Primmer: contract cinematographer, Gaumont Australia

Robert Falcon Scott: polar explorer, leader of the British Antarctic Expedition (1910–1913); died March 1912

Ernest Shackleton: polar explorer; leader of the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition (ITA) (1914–1916)

Spencer's Pictures: Australian film production company and exchange; amalgamated into Australasian Films, November 1912

Charles Sturridge: filmmaker, writer and director of *Shackleton* (2002)

West's Pictures: Australian film exchange; amalgamated into Australasian Films, November 1912

H L White: librarian, National Library Film Division, 1950s–1960s

Frank Wild: polar explorer; senior on many expeditions lead by Mawson, Scott, Shackleton

CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have argued against long standing assumptions about Frank Hurley's role in the making of *Home of the Blizzard*, suggesting that this in fact went little beyond that of cinematographer. I have also suggested that even this role wasn't his alone: others, especially Gaumont Australia's then cameraman Richard Primmer, contributed to the now iconic moving imagery of the Australasian Antarctic Expedition. And by looking at the provenience of the AAE footage held by the NFSA, including the *Home of the Blizzard* material, I have begun to examine Sir Douglas Mawson's poorly understood role as its 'producer' and auteur.

Frank Hurley's historic celebrity, and its occasionally voracious tendency to claim retrospective authorship over every project which he brushed past, is the first confronting problem in the issue of *Home of the Blizzard* for Australian cinema history studies. But it is only a point of entry into the core discussion. What exactly was – or, is – the film Graham Shirley and Brian Adams' *Australian Cinema: The First Eighty Years* has described as "...the earliest Australian feature-length film to survive in its entirety"?⁷² And is it? As the complex history outlined already show us, this is far from being the end of the story. In a future article, I will argue that the NFSA video title – "Home of the Blizzard... Frank Hurley... 1913" – is something of a misnomer. None of the descriptors of the AAE footage are in fact correct: neither the title *Home of the Blizzard*, nor 'made' by Frank Hurley, nor the release date of 1913 explain the true history of the footage. As a result I will focus further on Mawson's 'authorship' of the AAE film, and also on a likely reason why Mawson may have been a little obtuse – and some of Hurley's biographers a little confused – about the title of the film: the variety of versions of the AAE film that in fact circulated in the years after and even before 1913 hold the key. To do so, I will look in detail at the history, form and possible content of at least six substantially different commercially-released versions of the AAE footage that can be identified:

May–July 1912, Australia

July–August 1913, Australia

August–September 1914, Australia

October 1914–1915, North America

May 1915, London

1916–? in distribution, North America

1919–? in distribution, UK/Europe?

As can be seen, many of these dates confound not only the received story of the film and assumptions about its content, but also the presumption that the NFSA's *Home of the Blizzard* footage is that of the film released in 1913.

Finally I will attempt to reconcile the many different AAE-released film offspring with the footage preserved by the NFSA, in an attempt to confirm what has actually survived from the slate, and what can be reconstructed. After all, the possibility of film restoration is always the nicest outcome of writing film history.

Quentin Turnour is the Chief Cinema Programmer at the National Film and Sound Archive in Canberra.

- 1 John King Davis to Edgeworth David, John King Davis Papers, State Library of Victoria, MS8311.
- 2 The collaborative role of those who have made possible this essay cannot be understated, especially Alasdair McGregor, whose research for his biography, *Frank Hurley: A Photographer's Life* (Viking Australia, Melbourne, 2004), first opened this can of worms. Deep thanks go to Alasdair for what was generously shared and for his own acknowledgment to me in *A Photographer's Life*. Sections in this essay relating to Frank Hurley's AAE activities do draw from the same well of primary sources, and are also told in McGregor's book, although with different emphasis – especially the circumstances of Hurley's AAE appointment. Also essential has been Mark Pharoah, archivist at the Mawson Collection at the South Australian Museum and Mawson Collection's volunteer researcher Clive Wilson-Roberts; Gareth Thomas and various members of the Friends of Mawson, especially Nancy Robinson Flannery and Ian Flannery. Again, all should be seen as collaborators on this essay. Ken Berryman, Helen Tully and Andy Martin from the NFSA, Adele Hann from the Adelaide International Film Festival, Juanita Kwok of the Sydney Asia-Pacific Film Festival, Suzie Gasper, the AFI Research Collection and Screen Tasmania also all gave assistance at various times. The first draft of this essay was written in 2002, with its contents presented in shorter form at the 2002 Film and History Conference at Flinders University, and in program notes for a live performance of the surviving script of Mawson's US lecture film, presented by the Friends of Mawson and the South Australian Museum at the Adelaide International Film Festival in January 2005. Its current form results from further discussion with McGregor and Pharoah, as well as the NFSA Journal editorial team and Jeanette Delamoir. Just prior to going to press, the author's attention was drawn to the mid-2006 publication of Robert Dixon's article, 'Travelling Mass-Media Circus: Frank Hurley's Synchronized Lecture Entertainments', *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 33:1, Summer 2006, pp.60–87. Dixon's work is acknowledged, and this essay's text and endnotes reflect its presence.
- 3 NFSA Collection, title no.6465: *Home of the Blizzard*; NFSA Collection, title no.11174: *The Mawson Antarctic Expedition, 1911–1914, Version 1*; NFSA Collection, title no.1356: *The Mawson Antarctic Expedition 1911–1914, Version 2*; NFSA Collection, title no.13141: *The Mawson Antarctic Expedition 1911–1914 (Off cuts)*.
- 4 Frank Hurley, *South with Endurance: Shackleton's Antarctic Expedition 1914–1917: The Photographs of Frank Hurley*, Viking/Penguin, Ringwood, 2001.

- 5 Gael Newton, 'The Perfect Picture: James Francis Hurley', in *South with Endurance*, p.44.
- 6 Michael Gray and Gael Newton, 'Pioneer of Polar Photography', in *South with Endurance*, p.232.
- 7 See the *Australian Story* transcript: www.abc.net.au/austory/transcripts/s305854.htm (accessed 10 June 2007); www.kodak.com/US/en/corp/features/endurance/ (accessed 10 June 2007).
- 8 As distinct from the most recent Hurley biography, Alasdair McGregor's *Frank Hurley: A Photographer's Life* is both well referenced and deals more critically with the received history of the AAE film footage.
- 9 David Millar, *From Snowdrift to Shellfire*, David Ell Press, Sydney, 1984; Frank Legg and Toni Hurley, *Once More Unto My Adventure*, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1966; Leonard Bickel, *In Search of Frank Hurley*, McMillan, South Melbourne, 1980.
- 10 Millar, *From Snowdrift to Shellfire*, p.29.
- 11 Millar, *From Snowdrift to Shellfire*, p.42.
- 12 Frank Hurley, *Argonauts of the South*, Putnam, New York, 1925.
- 13 See Legg and Hurley, *Once More Unto My Adventure*, p.83. Hurley's actual diary entry reads: "5/12.16... Afternoon with Mawson and Webb to the Gaumont Coy – Shepherd's Bush. To see the Australian [sic] Antarctica film projected. This excellent production appears to have become much scratched by handling. The subjects are magnificent..." See Hurley Diaries, National Library of Australia, NS 883.
- 14 This was released in Australia around 1909 as *Shackleton's Dash to the Pole*. Mawson seems at one point to have had possession of some of the *Nimrod* expedition footage, screening it to potential AAE investors and in pre-AAE departure lectures, for example in a talk given at the Hobart City Hall in late November 1911.
- 15 Gent to Mawson, 24 November 1911. Australasian Antarctic Papers, State Library of NSW, Mitchell Library, MLMSS171, Vol. 21, p.11.
- 16 Correspondence regarding the following first gained wide circulation in the State Library of NSW's exhibition of AAE records, *Lines on the Ice*, curated by Stephen Martin, 8 July – 27 October 2002.
- 17 Although the famous train carriage interview was only ever reported by Hurley, Alasdair McGregor argues that Mawson gave it de facto confirmation – by not disagreeing – in correspondence between the two prior to the 1925 publication of Hurley's *Argonauts of the Sea*. See McGregor, *A Photographer's Life*, p.31.
- 18 Mawson to Ghent [sic], 12 October 1911, Mitchell Library, MLMSS171, Vol. 14, p.269.
- 19 Mrs M A Hurley to Mawson, 6 October 1911, Mitchell Library, MLMSS171, Vol. 14, p.268.
- 20 Gent to Mawson, 16 October 1911, Mitchell Library, MLMSS171, Vol. 14, p.285. More traditional accounts mention Hurley's friend Henri Malliard as having done this. The Gaumont-Mawson correspondence doesn't mention Malliard, but Hurley does mention that he had been practicing with a Pathe camera, possibly in an extra-curricular capacity with Malliard.
- 21 Mawson to Hurley, 12 October 1911, Mitchell Library, MLMSS171AAE, Vol. 14, p.271.
- 22 Mawson to Gent, 14 October 1911, Mitchell Library, MLMSS171, Vol. 14, pp.279–281.
- 23 Gaumont/Gent to Mawson, 24 November 1911, Mitchell Library, MLMSS171, Vol. 14, p.11.
- 24 Mercury (Hobart, Tas), 5 December 1911, p.6.

- 25 Chris Long, *Tasmanian Photographers 1840–1940: A Directory*, Tasmanian Historical Research Association/Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, 1995, p.130.
- 26 Some of this footage has been printed back-to-front.
- 27 'Personal Log, Aurora, AAE', John King Davis Papers, 1840–1967, State Library of Victoria, MS8311.
- 28 Sir Douglas Mawson, *Home of the Blizzard*, abridged edition, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1930, p.365.
- 29 See 'The provision depot on Auckland Island. Primmer in view', Mitchell Library, SLNSV, ON144/Q44.
- 30 Undated Wellington [NZ] newspaper clipping, 1912, John King Davis Papers, State Library of Victoria, MS8311.
- 31 Gent to Eitel, 12 July 1912, Mitchell Library, MLMSS171, Vol. 21, p.53.
- 32 'Personal Log, Aurora, AAE', John King Davis Papers, State Library of Victoria, MS8311. See also John King Davis, *With the Aurora in the Antarctica*, Andrew Melrose, London, 1919, opp. p.10.
- 33 Gent to Mawson, 11 November 1911, Mitchell Library, MLMSS171, Vol. 14, p.269.
- 34 'Shipping News', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 October 1911, p.11.
- 35 See Hurley, *Argonauts of the South*, pp.108–109.
- 36 *Australasian Photo-Review*, 22 September 1913, p.498.
- 37 See the various correspondences in 6DM, Mawson Collection, South Australian Museum.
- 38 Dixon, 'Travelling Mass-Media Circus', p.67.
- 39 Mawson to Hurley, 20 October 1911, Mitchell Library, MLMSS 171, Vol. 14, p.293. After his own rise to fame, Hurley corresponded extensively with Mawson, in the hope of claiming a percentage of the takings of Mawson's own AAE presentations.
- 40 See NFSA Collection, title no.1356: *The Mawson Antarctic Expedition 1911–1914, Version 2*.
- 41 See McGregor, *A Photographer's Life*, pp.208–210; Dixon, 'Travelling Mass-Media Circus', pp.75–77.
- 42 Philip Ayres, *Douglas Mawson: A Life*, The Miegunyah Press/Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1999, pp.194–195.
- 43 The BFI in fact referred the producers of *Shackleton* to the NFSA for the material used in the mini-series.
- 44 National Film and Sound Archives (NFSA), National Library, FD 9/1/18.
- 45 See Ayres, *Douglas Mawson*, p.140.
- 46 Mawson to T V Holland (National Library), 3 November 1955, NFSA National Library, FD 9/1/18.
- 47 Brumester to Mawson, 30 November 1955, NFSA National Library, FD 9/1/18.
- 48 Mawson to Liam O'Leary (BFI), 12 March 1956, NFSA National Library, FD 9/1/18.
- 49 Mawson to White, 1 May 1958, NFSA National Library, FD 9/1/18.
- 50 White to Mawson, 24 July 1956, NFSA National Library, FD 9/1/18.
- 51 Mawson to White, 1 May 1958, NFSA National Library, FD 9/1/18.
- 52 See Phillip Law <> Anthony Michaelis correspondence, Aug–Sept 1954, National Archives of Australia, NAA, CA1873.
- 53 See White to Stanley Hawes, 4 July 1958; White to Department of External Affairs, 11 July 1958; White to Mawson, 15 July 1958; Mawson to White, 15 August 1958; Department of External Affairs to White, 18 August 1958, NFSA National Library, FD 9/1/18.
- 54 Thompson to White, 29 February 1960, NFSA National Library, FD 9/1/18.
- 55 'General report on condition of film, 20.10.1955 [sic]', NFSA National Library, FD 9/1/18.
- 56 White to the Manager, Automatic Laboratory, 8 June 1960, NFSA National Library, FD 9/1/18.
- 57 D Dove (Automatic Film Laboratory) to White, 24 June 1960, NFSA National Library, FD 9/1/18. Automatic attached two very faded frames of the film to the letter – which were still attached when the file was rediscovered in 2002.
- 58 White to Campbell-Drury, 19 January 1961, NFSA National Library, FD 9/1/18.
- 59 H L White, 'Memoriam for the Librarian', 21 April 1961, NFSA National Library, FD 9/1/18.
- 60 Campbell-Drury to White, 26 May 1960, NFSA National Library, FD 9/1/18.
- 61 White to Campbell-Drury, 18 July 1960; Campbell-Drury to White, 9 May 1961, NFSA National Library, FD 9/1/18.
- 62 White to Hurley, 13 May 1960, NFSA National Library, FD 9/1/18.
- 63 Long presumes that this was the UK release version. See Chris Long, 'Documentary and Non-Fiction', in *The Oxford Companion to Australian Cinema*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1995, p.113; Chris Long and Wendy Rodgers, 'Australian Film History: Three New Projects', *Cinema Papers*, October 1998, p.39.
- 64 Eric Reade, *Australian Silent Films*, Landsdowne Press, Melbourne, 1970, pp.72–73.
- 65 Ken Berryman, 'Lost Films', in *The Oxford Companion to Australian Cinema*, p.270; Ina Bertrand, 'Frank Hurley', in *The Oxford Companion to Australian Cinema*, p.223.
- 66 See www.imdb.com/title/tt0002973/ (accessed 6 June 2007).
- 67 For example, see *Argus* (Melbourne), 21 July 1913, p.9; 24 July 1913, p.12; 26 July 1913, p.24.
- 68 *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 August 1913, p.2.
- 69 Mitchell Library, MLMSS171, Vol. 21, pp.93–95, 117–119.
- 70 West's Film Exchange to Eitel, 16 August 1913, Mitchell Library, MLMSS171, Vol. 17, p.439.
- 71 Robinson and Mitchell to Eitel, 13.10.13, Mitchell Library, MLMSS171, Vol. 21, p.103.
- 72 Graham Shirley and Brian Adams, *Australian Cinema: The First Eighty Years*, revised edition, Currency Press, Sydney, 1989, p.285.

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