In the annals of Antarctic exploration the names Shackleton, Scott and Mawson are well known and documented. However there were many others involved in the expeditions. The name of Ninnis came to light recently when Hayward's Auction House sold some sketches by Aubrey Howard Ninnis, and the trail was very interesting.

On 4 August 1914 Ernest Shackleton left Buenos Aires in *Endurance* for the Weddell Sea on his 'Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition' which aimed to cross the continent from the Weddell Sea via the South Pole to McMurdo Sound.

Aurora was a steam yacht built in Glasgow in 1876 for a whaling company operating out of New Foundland from 1876 to 1910. In 1910 she was bought by Douglas Mawson for his Australasian Antarctic Expedition.

In 1914 Sir Ernest Shackleton tasked Aurora to help set up supply depots along the route for his Trans-Antarctic Expedition. The *Aurora* sailed from Sydney on15 December 1914 for the Ross Sea where she moored to the shore in Cape Evans Bay, McMurdo Sound. Her mission was to land supplies and lay depots inland to 80 degrees south for the Shackleton party.

Though secured to shore by six wire cable attached to anchors embedded in the ice, the Aurora was carried away by a blizzard on 6 May 1915 and driven many miles out to sea. Ten men were stranded

on shore, but Ninnis was stranded on board. The ship managed to break free of the ice on 18 July 1915, and after much drama she finally berthed at Port Chalmers on 3 April 1916.

Aubrey Howard Ninnis had signed on as a motor tractor specialist for this first voyage of the Aurora along with other crew members, was lionised in Dunedin.

Meanwhile Shackleton and the Endurance had their own problems which ended up with Shackleton and some of his men making it to South Georgia. Once the men he had left behind in the Weddell Sea had been rescued Shackleton made his way back to Dunedin on 19 December 1916 to direct the rescue effort for his abandoned men at McMurdo, on board *Aurora*.   Again Aubrey Howard Ninnis was on board but this time as purser.

The ship arrived at Cape Evans on 10 January 1917 and found seven survivors who were very pleased to see them. Three men had lost their lives in the intervening period. They struggled back in bad weather but finally docked in Wellington on 9 February 1917.

Ninnis settled in Dunedin where he joined the Naval Reserve, and followed a career with the NZ Broadcasting Service, where he eventually became Station Manager for radio station 4YA.

Died 1 August 1956 age 73, so born about 1883, ashes buried Dunedin's Anderson's Bay Cemetery in the Soldiers Graves area, commemorated with a bronze plaque. His death record shows him as an engineer.

Polar exploration was in the Ninnis blood. British Arctic explorer Belgrave Ninnis MD (1837-1922) was Inspector Surgeon General of the Royal Navy and member of Sir George Nares British Arctic Expedition of 1875-76.

His son Belgrave Edward Sutton Ninnis (1887-1912) was a British Military Officer who joined Mawson's Australasian Antarctic Expedition in London in 1910. On the trip out to Hobart on board the *Aurora* Ninnis became firm friends with Dr Xavier Mertz, a Swiss mountaineer.

Ninnis was part of a 36 man party which set out for the Antarctic on 2 December 1911 and a base was built on Macquarie Island.

On 10 November 1912 Mawson, Mertz and Ninnis set out to survey King George V Land and were crossing the Ninnis Glacier when Ninnis fell through a snow-covered crevasse, along with six dogs and most of the rations, their tent and other essential supplies. Belgrave Edward Sutton Ninnis was never seen again.

A number of Antarctic features are named after the *Aurora,* and B. E. S. Ninnis :

Mount Aurora

Aurora Heights

Aurora Subglacial basin

Aurora Peak

Aurora Glacier

Ninnis Glacier

Ninnis Glacier Tongue

Mertz-Ninnis Valley

And what happened to the valiant ship Aurora? She was last seen when she departed Newcastle, New South Wales, bound for Chile with a cargo of coal. She was posted as missing on 2 January 1918; it is believed that she was a casualty of World War 1.

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand from "Last Port to Antarctica" by Ian Church and Internet material sourced by Jude Ferguson of Hayward's Auction House.