

The Sealers' Shanty

A Journal of Sealers' Stories

Volume 11

1903 -1982

Alan Villiers - Writer and Whaler

Alan Villiers started his life as an adventurer by going to sea at the age of fifteen. He worked in Hobart for the *Mercury* in the early 1820s before taking leave to visit Antarctica on a Norwegian whaling voyage. He returned to the *Mercury* and achieved his dream of being a reporter, but was unable to resist the call of the sea for long. He became a sea Captain in the 'last days of sail' and wrote many adventure books about sailing.

A remarkable man

Melbourne-born Alan Villiers (1903-1982) was fifteen when he first went to sea. He spent several months working in a Jam Factory on the Hobart waterfront, then worked as a proof reader for the Hobart *Mercury*. At the age of 20, he took leave from the *Mercury* to join a five month Norwegian whaling voyage to Antarctica aboard the *Sir James Clark Ross*.



Alan Villiers as a young adventurer.
Photo Jack Cato.

On the way to Antarctica, Villiers visited Macquarie Island and later wrote this comic description of the island's 'little Charlie Chaplins':

A penguin rookery at Macquarie Island is a wonderful sight, despite the frightful din and the fearsome odor. The penguins wander happily and unconcernedly about in their clean white jackets and jet black coats, shuffling around like so many thousand little Charlie Chaplins, hobbling along, gesticulating, bowing, squawking, waddling about to meet the strange new long-legged 'penguins' from the North. They are friendly little birds and quite strangers to fear, trusting and quaint, pretty and amusing. The Victoria penguin is particularly handsome with his golden crown and long golden eyebrows. One and all come up (or try to come up, rather) to welcome the stranger to their shores, like fussy old men in dress suits as they bow and wave their flippers, gesticulate and squawk with a great show of pomposity and fussiness. It seemed a dreadful thing that such friendly birds should ever be slaughtered in their innocence, merely because their round, fat, little bodies contain oil. They seem like children, as indeed they are in their simplicity, their friendliness, their love of play and of pretense.'



After he returned from Antarctica, Alan Villiers achieved his burning ambition of becoming a reporter with the *Hobart Mercury* between 1924 and 1929. He was unable to ignore the call of the sea for long and resigned to become an adventurer, film maker and author. **Villiers wrote more than 30 books about his adventures at sea, including his children's novel, *Whalers Under the Midnight Sun* which won the Australian Book Council's Children's Book of the Year, 1950.**

References

Villiers, A.J., *Whalers of the Midnight Sun*.

Villiers, A., J., *Whaling in the Frozen South: Being the story of the 1923-24 Norwegian Whaling Expedition to the Antarctic*, Bobs Merrill Company, Indianapolis pp 41-42.

Further **R**eadings

You can read about the Macquarie Island penguin oiling business on Macquarie Island in:

[Sinking a small Fortune - Joseph Hatch and the Oiling Industry](#)