

TEXT Revised- Lucy Docker

Over the past year or two, during the days of Covid, a group of polar people congregated on ZOOM each Friday at 17:31 to talk about this & that. At least three of those people are present with us today and are well known to most of you.

Queries—some polar, others unrelated; some serious, others silly—were often raised and discussed. One that I want to tell you about here in Athy relates to **Dudley Docker [1]**, who many of you will know as a financial supporter of Sir Ernest Shackleton's *Endurance* expedition. His donation of **£10,000 [2]** was rewarded by one of the three ship's boats being named for him **[3]**.

The query in question had to do with Lucy Constance Docker, Dudley's wife. Little is known of her, other than that she was quite fetching in appearance. **[4]** And, until recently, no other image of her was known to exist.

One participant in our Zoom group reminded us that Sir Ernest had always had an eye for the ladies and wondered whether he might have been 'overly friendly' with Lucy Constance Docker, the result being that generous donation to the expedition.

Having nothing better to do, I decided to look into this matter a bit more closely. I started off by thoroughly re-examining all the Shackleton material in my collection and then delving deep into the Internet. But I drew a blank. I eventually came upon a person in the UK—a source I've pledged not to reveal—who sent me in the direction of the historic port of King's Lynn, Norfolk.

Ignoring the restrictions of Covid, I soon found myself in the **Lynn Museum [5]** in Market Street. I had been told that a diary resided there for the year 1914 that, although unsigned, was—my confidential source swore—the diary of Lucy Constance Docker!

The archivist, **Jane Norcross [6]**, was very accommodating when I visited and retrieved the diary and laid it down before me **[7]**.

I paged through it without noting anything of any particular interest until I came upon the entry for Friday, February 13, 1914. I was struck as though a lightning bolt had shot down from above.

Let me share the entry with you **[8]**.

*“February 13, 1914. Left **The Gables [9]** and went by motor to **The Trout [10]** in King's Lynn where, by prior arrangement, I met E who had booked **rooms [11]** in the rear apartments of the inn. The three days & nights that followed were pure bliss.*

Once settled in our rooms he drew me close and pressed his lips to mine and showed the most extreme passion imaginable!

It was only with the greatest effort that I was able to cause him to pause in his affections.

But he did as I implored and reined in his amorous advances. Once collected, he fell to his knees and brought my trembling hands to his cheeks and began to sob uncontrollably. “Lucy, my darling, could you spare, say, 10,000 quid for the expedition? I’ll name a life boat after you!”

I gave this a moment’s thought and responded:

“What the hell, sure! £10,000 it is! But name it for Dudley... we must be discreet.”

February 14, 1914

The next morning, after lying in bed for what seemed like forever and enjoying a light breakfast [12] in our rooms, we wandered out of King’s Lynn [13] along the Ouse towards The Wash and traipsed across the open countryside, running and laughing, hand-in-hand, deliriously happy [14]. It seemed like summer to us though it was a frosty February.”

●●●●●●●●

So that was long ago. Today, *The Trout* still stands in King's Lynn but today you'll find a Blue Plaque on the façade [15] which reads: "Lucy Docker & Ernest Shackleton stayed here for 3 nights. Trout Inn. King's Lynn" [16]

Alas, it was just a weekend dalliance. Lucy and Dudley lived on together for many years and remain together today in All Saints Churchyard, Coleshill, Buckinghamshire. [17]

It was an interesting piece of research and I'm happy to have been able to report on it here at Athy.

A closing note: Recently the Shackleton Museum was offered miniature portraits of both Dudley and Lucy, who in her later years, as you can see, remains as fetching as ever.

END