

to Valparaiso and again reported his findings to Captain Shirreff, who decided to engage Captain Smith and charter the *Williams* 'for a voyage of discovery towards the South Pole'. They would be accompanied by a surveying party under Edward Bransfield, Master of the *Andromache*, a Royal Navy ship at that time in Valparaiso. Three midshipmen (C.W. Poynter, T.M. Bone and P.J. Blake, with Vincent Dick, AB) from HMS *Andromache* were to accompany the expedition; with Adam Young, Assistant Surgeon from HMS *Slaney*, and some other ratings.

Consequently the *Williams* sailed on her fourth voyage southwards on 19 December 1819,<sup>2</sup> and it is this voyage which is the subject of the manuscript journal of Charles Wittit Poynter (1798-1878, one of the three midshipmen) which the Alexander Turnbull Library acquired in 1995.<sup>3</sup> Until the journal became available, the story of the discovery of New South Shetland was known only through contemporary reports in three of the literary journals of 1820-21 and lesser sources.<sup>4</sup> Poynter's journal is the only surviving first-hand account of the voyage, as far as is known,<sup>5</sup> and its value lies in the fact that it is nearly continuous, describing what was seen, in the manner of a seaman. The three midshipmen, though young – Poynter was 23 years old when they left the new land, and the others were a few years younger – were all able to keep watch and make observations for position, take bearings and make sketches of what they saw. Poynter's comments were precise and seamanlike, with no obscurities of his making. He described all he saw of the many islands and coasts of New South Shetland and, on 30 January 1820, wrote of his hopes that they had discovered the 'Southern Continent' of Antarctica.

#### *In The Service of His Majesty*

Charles Wittit Poynter, the son of James Methurst Poynter and his wife Elizabeth Peck, of Deal, Kent, was baptised on 22 March 1798.<sup>6</sup> In *The Universal British Directory* of 1790, published by Wilkes and Barfoot, his father is shown to be 'Gentry' and a Freeman of the Borough of Deal, a man of standing locally. J.M. Poynter was said to have been a commander of one of the East India Company's ships but, strangely, his name does not appear in Hardy's *List of East India Company Ships, 1760-1810*. From 1811 to 1823 he had been Captain of Sandown Castle, a coastal fort at the north end of the town. The young Charles therefore grew up in a maritime environment.

We do not know how Charles was accepted into the Navy. To have a future in the service, a young man needed patronage or 'influence'. The fact that Captain E.W.C.R. Owen took Poynter into the *Cornwall* with him in 1813-14 as Volunteer of the First Class, and in 1816-17 as Midshipman into the *Northumberland* when that ship was at Sheerness and when Owen was Rear Admiral, suggests a connection which cannot now be traced. However, in his 'Formula' sent to O'Byrne the naval biographer, Poynter referred to Captain Owen as 'a friend of my father'.<sup>7</sup>

After his first six years of service, the young man could take his examination for