
PETER BERG

From the Archives

The archives of the Alpine Club stretch back to the foundation of the club in 1857 and long before, with some documents dating from the 18th century. As well as Club records, the collection includes letters and diaries, guides' books (*Führerbücher*), tapes and film material and newspaper cuttings. Access to this wealth of material, one of the most significant mountaineering archives in the world, has up to now been difficult as we have only had a very limited catalogue. This is now changing, as with the help of a generous grant from the Pilgrim Trust we have been able to engage a professional archivist for two years to compile a complete computer database catalogue including cross-references and notes on provenance, where available. This work should be finished by the middle of 2002, and it is the intention that the catalogue should be available on the Internet to anyone who might be interested.

As a step towards familiarising readers with this mine of information, we plan to publish a selection of papers from the archives in the AJ each year. We begin with a poignant pair of letters from one of the darkest chapters of mountaineering history, both addressed to the Revd. Joseph McCormick:

Monte Rosa Hotel, Thursday, 5am. [13 July 1865]

My dear M'C,

We and Whympfer are just off to try the Cervin. You can hear about our movements from the landlord of the Monte Rosa Hotel. Follow us, if you like. We expect to sleep out tonight, and to make the attempt tomorrow. Please give an eye to Campbell as long as you are with him, and take him to the Riffel, in case you go there. We expect to be back tomorrow. It is possible that we might be out a second night, but not likely.

Ever yours affectionately,
C. HUDSON

Hotel du Mont Rose, Zermatt, July 15 [1865]

My dear Sir

I am told that you are a friend of the Revd C. Hudson who was with me yesterday on the Matterhorn; I regret most deeply to say that an accident has occurred to him. I am afraid a fatal one. A party of guides have been sent immediately from here to search for him, and I follow them, but I wish particularly to have an Englishman with me and I therefore beg, if you can possibly return here by 4.30 p.m. to do so, in order to go with me.

I am, my dear Sir,

Yours very truly
EDWARD WHYMPER

Revd. J. M. McCormack [sic]

These letters are bound into archive volume B14/128 together with the following handwritten covering note, giving a clear account of their provenance:

LETTERS BY THE REV CHARLES HUDSON AND EDWARD WHYMPER
RELATING TO THE MATTERHORN DISASTER OF 1865

The letter by Charles Hudson was written to the Rev J. McCormick at 5 am on July 13th 1865 at the Monte Rosa Hotel, Zermatt immediately before the party left for the Matterhorn, and the letter by Edward Whympers immediately on returning from the mountain after the accident in which Charles Hudson, Lord Francis Douglas, Hadow and the guide, Michel Croz lost their lives. These letters were given to me by the late Rev. Pat McCormick (son of Canon McCormick), Rector of St Martins-in-the-Fields, London.

FRANK S. SMYTHE

Presented to the Alpine Club by Mrs. F. S. Smythe, 1954

The letters are both in excellent condition. Hudson's is scrawled on what is probably a piece of scrap paper – as might be expected at so early an hour – and Whympers' is carefully written in a neat hand on blue paper embossed with the word 'Bath', presumably a souvenir from some other hotel.

Volume B49/27 contains a fragment of a letter from T W Hinchcliffe to an unknown correspondent, which provides a sad footnote:

What dreadful news we have had this year from Zermatt! Hudson was, altogether, the finest and best fellow and most attractive man I ever had the pleasure of knowing...

For more information about those involved in the accident, see Alan Lyall's book *The First Descent of the Matterhorn*, Gomer, 1997. I would like to thank our archivist, Susan Scott, for locating these papers for me – using the 'Search' facility which is a feature of the AdLib database.

Peter Berg is the Alpine Club's Honorary Archivist