

## A VISIT TO OLD FORT "PRINCE OF WALES" ON THE BAY

By CHRIS. HARDING, *District Manager, Nelson River*

**D**URING the late summer and fall of 1920 I had the experience of a short stay at Port Churchill, and fortunately was able to visit the ruins of old Fort "Prince of Wales," one of the strongest fortifications of its day in North America. It lies today a mass of crumbling rock and masonry, truly a relic of bygone days.

Many famous adventurers and navigators have visited this point in the past but none came to stay, and those who were compelled to remain met with death and disaster. As early as 1686 the Hudson's Bay Company established a trading post here, but the present structure was not commenced until a much later date.

The Fort, which is well defined, is a square building with projecting V-shaped buttresses at each corner. I counted thirty-six cannon of two sizes on the bastions. The larger of these are about twelve feet long, all rusty and covered with willow growth. The stone houses inside the Fort have long since fallen in, no doubt destroyed by La Perouse when the Fort was captured by him in 1782. The decay is internal, as the outside walls are as solid as ever though much weather worn. The archway, which is the only inlet, has fallen into ruins.

I found following names carved on the rocks outside the archway: Henry Robinson, Rotherhith, 1733; Gilford Long, Rotherhith, Facit 1754; Wm. Mathews, Rotherhith, 1755.

A window sash still hangs in one of the lower windows facing the east. There appear to have been four wells, one in each corner of the fort, which are now filled up with debris. These I suppose contained the water supply intended for the inmates of the fort in case of siege. In those days fighting was in progress between the English and French for the supremacy of Hudson Bay. One is much impressed with the desolation of the surroundings and the imposing structure of this ancient fortress. I tried to picture the past and wondered what kind of men were those who came, lived, and labored on such inhospitable shores.



*Ancient bulwark of H.B.C. trade in ruins*

It was from here that Samuel Hearne made his three famous journeys which resulted in the discovery of the Coppermine river and the Polar ocean. It was here that Moses Norton, governor of Fort "Prince of Wales," a full-blooded Indian, ruled with a rod of iron. He died here eventually. I looked around in hopes of finding the old burial ground or some remains as a relic but all is barren.

The old wagon or sled trail where the rocks were quarried is still discernible. The old fort is well situated at the mouth of the Churchill river—the latter was named after Lord Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, and a former governor of the Hudson's Bay Company.

Nature has certainly been niggardly in not bestowing a haven of refuge for shipping on the Western side of Hudson Bay, a distance of one thousand miles of coast line stretching from Cape Henrietta Maria to Chesterfield inlet. Churchill harbor is an oval basin about seven miles by three miles broad. The entire basin is strewn with boulders of all sizes and at low water it is difficult to make a landing even in a small boat drawing two feet of water.

There is a channel, in which the depth of water varies according to the tide, in abnormal low water three and a half fathoms being measured, and at high tide about six fathoms. These tides are the cause of strong currents of at least six knots an hour, coming and going everlastingly, and these, added to the strong winds that prevail, cause Churchill harbor to be in a continual state of disturbance. During north-easterly gales, great swells come rolling in, ships often drag their anchors and small boats cannot live.