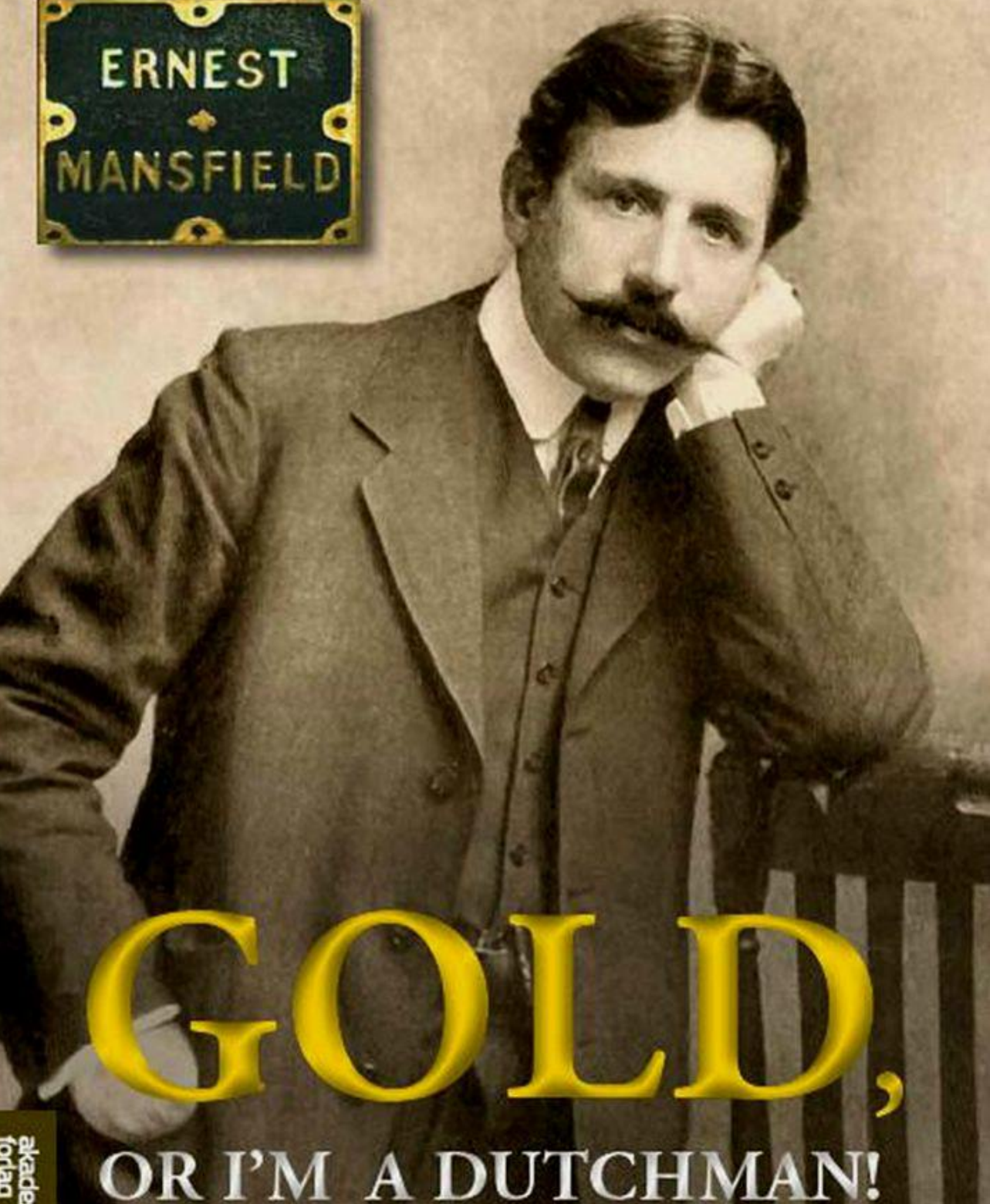


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**GOLD,**

**OR I'M A DUTCHMAN!**

SUSAN BARR, DAVID NEWMAN  
AND GREG NESTEROFF

# ERNEST MANSFIELD

(1862–1924)

**GOLD – OR I’M A DUTCHMAN**

included here are short extracts from some of the chapters of the 190 page book which were written by David Newman. The book was published in Norway and is available online.

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## FOREWORD

For over 30 years, adventurer, prospector and author Ernest Mansfield circled the globe seeking fortunes from New Zealand to Canada to England to Svalbard. He seldom found them but left behind fascinating tales and a legacy of huts and mining equipment that continue to draw arctic cruise ship passengers and tourists. Mansfield's legacy is curious. In some places, he swept in as a powerful source of investment capital and put his stamp on local industry, only to be swiftly forgotten. In other locales, he is well remembered – both as a hero and a villain. He was charismatic and well liked by associates and employees, but his ventures did not always work out. Moreover, while he was a talented and shameless self-promoter, certain aspects of his personal life remain a mystery, as though deliberately erased.

Born in London, Mansfield emigrated to New Zealand when he was 16. He soon became an accomplished musician and composer in Wanganui, playing several instruments, giving banjo lessons and working in a music shop. By the age of 27, he was writing short stories and reporting for a local newspaper. He also edited several specialist magazines. It was probably as a journalist that he became interested in prospecting and the excitement of the gold rushes then prevalent in New Zealand. He became a registered broker of goldmine shares on the Auckland stock market, and his speculative and controversial enterprises were well documented in local newspapers. In his early 30s he travelled across Australia to the gold rush town of Kalgoorlie and again involved himself in prospecting and land speculation.

Across the Pacific Ocean, however, a bigger attraction loomed: the Klondike gold rush in Canada's Yukon, and he could not resist. Soon his combined prospecting, speculating and journalistic skills came to the fore, and in Nelson, British Columbia, during the late 1890s he developed and heavily promoted the Camp Mansfield mines in the Kootenay Mountains. His skills peaked when he orchestrated a five-day prison stay in the Nelson jail as a ruse to extract finances from his French investors to pay miners' wages. Just as suddenly as he arrived in Canada, he left, and in 1904 established himself with a new young wife in a tiny village in Essex, UK. There has never been gold in Goldhanger, but that did not inhibit his prospecting adventures.

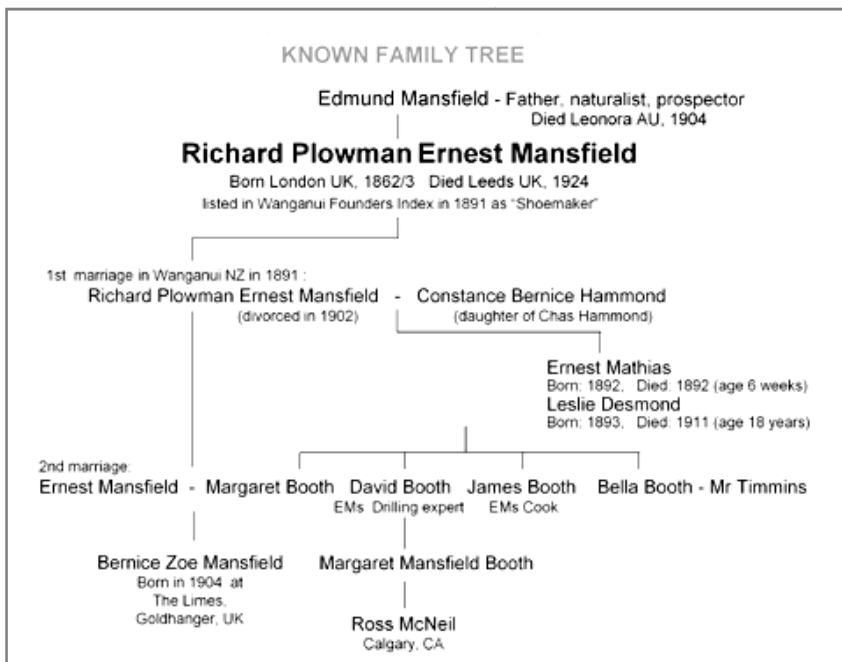
He became friends with the local rector and doctor and together they threw themselves into gold prospecting schemes in largely unexplored Svalbard. Dr John Salter, famed for a diary recording travelling and hunting exploits with friends in high places, dedicated a chapter in his *Reminiscences* to their experiences. The three men worked well together, employing skilled Goldhanger men to build huts in Svalbard. While over-wintering alone in one of these remote cabins, Mansfield wrote his first semi-autobiographical and science-fiction based novel, *Astria – The Ice Maiden*, which contains several amazing scientific predictions. The trio formed the Northern Exploration Company (NEC) in 1910, raising substantial capital on the London stock market to develop their gold, marble, coal, asbestos and zinc claims and mines on Svalbard. Over 50 buildings were erected, with many named after the founder (Camp Mansfield), his family (Camp Zoe – his daughter), his wife, mistresses and major shareholders (Camp Morton – the Earl of Morton) and some of these still stand. His marble quarry is known today – 100 years later – by the imposing name of New London (Ny-London).

Many Scottish and Norwegian miners were employed over a 10-year period, and newspaper reports about their achievements went around the world. Mansfield's second book, written in 1913, was also semi-autobiographical, based on his early New Zealand and Australian experiences. It is more philosophical than the first as it opines about prospectors, miners and their difficult relationships with the professions, rich investors, bankers and politicians. Also in that year doubts about the viability of the mines emerged. Combined with the Great War, the 1920s depression and the Treaty giving the sovereignty of the Spitsbergen archipelago – now named Svalbard – to Norway, the company never recovered. In addition to his two books and the NEC publications, Mansfield left behind a wealth of newspaper and magazine articles. These, together with Dr Salter's diary and many never-before-published photographs made available by members of his family and relatives of the Goldhanger men involved in early expeditions, give new insight into this extraordinary man and his Klondike-like activities on three continents.

This biography is a collaboration between authors in England, Norway and Canada, who independently became fascinated with Ernest Mansfield before joining forces to tell his story.

## Introduction

Ernest Richard Mansfield was born in London in 1862. According to his semi-autographical novel *Astria – The Ice Maiden*, he “had to hustle for my own living ever since I was twelve”. Maybe this is so, but it has not been possible to find any more details of his early life. From about the age of 16, however, when it seems he emigrated alone to New Zealand, the amount of information about his life steadily grows. Some facts that one would dearly love to know have unfortunately remained elusive. It would seem that Ernest himself was a little careful about which facts – or were they all facts? – he wished to have handed down to posterity. In this account the authors have distinguished between what they have uncovered as facts, possible facts and unknown facts. The story has fascinated us more and more as this amazing man’s activities have gradually been revealed in all their colourful diversity.



## ERNEST IN NEW ZEALAND

(c. 1878–1897)

IN MANSFIELD'S NOVEL *ASTRIA – The Ice Maiden* (1910), the main character states that “before I was sixteen New Zealand was my home” which, if the novel is semi-autobiographical as it is believed to be, would make the year around 1878. The basic facts in the novel have a very clear foundation in Mansfield's own life and it is therefore possible to infer that he in fact did emigrate to New Zealand at the age of 15–16. A “shipping intelligence” report in the *Wanganui Herald* in 1880 lists a “Mansfield,” but without a first name one cannot be sure it is the same person.

His presence in New Zealand can be definitely registered from September 1890, when he was 22 years old and he starts to appear in newspapers as Ernest Mansfield in Wanganui (*Wanganui Herald* and *Wanganui Chronicle*). In his second novel, *Ralph Raymond* (1913), the hero is again presented with the statement that “the New Zealand goldfields is where I worked and lived since I was a lad of sixteen and now I am twenty-six” (he was 51 years old when the novel appeared).

Accepting that Ernest probably did emigrate from London at the age of 15–16, the question would be what it was that brought a boy this young to emigrate from England to New Zealand? Nowadays one could imagine that this would be an unusual event, at least if the boy emigrated alone, without his family. In the 1870s this was, however, not unusual. School leaving age was 14–15 and the child was then considered adult. Prospects of jobs and advancement in life were not so good for many in England, and the chances of making it good in the overseas colonies – Australia, Canada, New Zealand – could certainly attract an adventurous and enterprising soul, as Ernest showed himself to be in his later life. In addition the 1870s was a period of organised immigration to New Zealand with 38 000 arriving in 1874 alone (<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/history-of-immigration/8>). New Zealand was at this time in decline, both with regard to wool prices and gold production – the latter being a subject that Ernest was to devote particular energy to some years later. In 1870 the New Zealand government appointed an agent general in London to advertise the advantages of emigration to New Zealand, and in addition free or assisted passages were offered. According to the website *Te Ara (Encyclopædia of New Zealand)* (<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/history-of-immigration/8>), almost half of the new immigrants from 1871–1885 arrived on the government-assisted system and three-quarters of these sailed direct from the UK.

How and why Ernest ended up in the town of Wanganui is not known. He was perhaps placed there in connection with the assisted immigration scheme. The *Wanganui Founders Index* entry for Ernest held in the Wanganui Museum gives his occupation as “shoemaker” and his father's name as Edmund with an occupation as “naturalist”.

## ERNEST IN ENGLAND

(1904–1924)

THERE IS A GAP from mid-1901 to Mansfield's arrival in England in 1904 and it has not been possible to fill it with any certainty. At this point, therefore, this remains one of the mysteries of his remarkable life. However, after travelling all around the world it is certain that Ernest Mansfield returned to the UK in 1904 at the age of 42 to reside in the village of Goldhanger in Essex. The local medical general practitioner Doctor Salter informs us in his published diary (Thompson 1933) that Mansfield and "his nice fresh pretty-looking Scotch wife" took a cottage at Goldhanger and that the doctor himself delivered their baby Bernice Zoe there. There have never been any gold mines in or near Goldhanger despite its name, so the reason for coming to Essex can only be surmised: It is known Mansfield went to London in 1899 to attend "The Greater Britain Exhibition" with a mining colleague, a Mr Timmins. We know that the sister of Margaret Mansfield, Bella Booth, later married Mr Timmins and it is also known that the Goldhanger rector, the Rev. Frederick Gardner, had professional connections with a Rev. Timmins and that one of his daughters, Angela, later married a Rev. Timmins. So it seems very likely that it was a combination of family and professional connections that brought Ernest to Goldhanger.

Baptismal records in St Peter's Church, Goldhanger, reveal that the baptism of Bernice Zoe Mansfield took place in June 1904 and the ceremony was conducted by the Rev. Gardner, who later went to Svalbard several times with Mansfield. The birth of Bernice Zoe was registered at the Maldon Register Office in Essex UK, using the English spelling of Zoe (birth certificate (20.6.1904)). The mother's maiden name was given as Margaret Booth with the address of The Limes, Goldhanger. The house called "The Limes" at that time was owned by the Rev. Gardner in 1904 and was subsequently renamed "The Old Parsonage" and was used as the residence for the curates who were employees of the Rector. The Rev. Gardner's first journey to Svalbard took place in 1904. The Rector's second journey to Svalbard, this time with Ernest, was in 1905 (see the later section about the Rev. Gardner).

Dr Salter lived two miles from Goldhanger, in the village of Tolleshunt D'Arcy, and had been the general practitioner for a large rural area that included the village of Goldhanger. The doctor was extremely wealthy and travelled extensively in Europe, which he recorded comprehensively in his diaries (Thompson 1933). The doctor and the rector obviously knew each other extremely well even before Ernest arrived, and the partnership formed between the three men was pivotal in their exploration of Spitsbergen and the initial formation of their own company in 1905. It seems Dr Salter himself never went to Svalbard, although he undoubtedly provided significant financial and moral support (see the later section about Dr Salter).



## NEC CABINS IN SVALBARD

FOR 25 YEARS FROM 1904, Ernest Mansfield and the Northern Exploration Company made many claims, established various sites and erected numerous huts in pursuit of their mining interests in Spitsbergen. Immediately after the break caused by World War I the NEC stated that their 1918 expedition had provided huts and equipment for 100 men, while the 1919 expedition would “provide accommodation and equipment for at least 500 men” (*The Times* 27.6.1919). The company also claimed to own 5000 square miles of territory by the end of that year (*The Times* 17.12.1919). When the company was sold to the Norwegian government in 1932, NEC was the biggest property owner on Svalbard, owning around 58 buildings, with 34 mining claims spread over at least 16 sites (Hoel 1966:481–83). These maps give an indication of the scale of the company’s operations at their peak:

Many of the cabins were given special “Camp” names by Ernest Mansfield and the Company. However, over time some had more than one name, and the same names were used at more than one location. In addition, over the years some of the sites at remote locations were identified by more than one place name and some huts were even moved to different locations. This results in some uncertainty as to exactly how many NEC huts originally existed and how many of those still exist today.

As well as building their own camps and claim huts, the company also purchased huts from experienced and well-known Svalbard hunters and trappers and employed these men to overwinter at the properties and protect their claims. These included Henry Rudi, Arthur and Johan Oxaas, Gustav Lindquist, Johan Hagerup and August Olafson.

All huts and cabins (and all other fixed and movable cultural heritage) in Svalbard that predate 1946 are automatically protected according to the Svalbard Environmental Protection Act (2001). According to this Act “No person may damage, dig up, move, remove, alter, cover up, conceal or disfigure protected structures and sites or movable historical objects, including any security zone, or initiate measures that may entail a risk of this happening” (§42). A total of 162 huts and cabins in various stages from well maintained to ruins are spread around the archipelago, and it is clear that not all of these can be kept in good condition even though the Governor of Svalbard uses considerable resources annually to protect and maintain historical locations.

# ERNEST'S LITERARY

## AND MUSICAL ENDEAVOURS

ERNEST'S LITERARY AND MUSICAL creativity evolved and developed throughout his career and encompassed (in approximate chronological order) short story and poetry writing, music and composing, editing magazines, writing newspaper and promotional articles and finally the authorship of two novels.

### *Short Stories*

Ernest's first known literary endeavours were in 1889 at the age of 27 while living in Wanganui, on the North Island of New Zealand. A literary magazine called *The Family Friend* (10.7.1889) published two of his short stories entitled *Father's Picture* and *Three Christmas Days*. Later in that same year the *Canterbury Star* (19.11.1889) newspaper published anonymously a story entitled *A Terrible Ride*, which a year later was reprinted in a supplement of the *Wanganui Herald* (31.10.1890) under his name. The story is very short and describes an incident and an apparent murder on a stagecoach going to Glasgow.

Articles in the *Wanganui Herald* (1890) over the following year refer to seven of his short stories:

*Two Chums*, *Three Christmas Days*, *Father's Pictures*, *A Terrible Ride*, *A Poor Little Waife*, *How I Got My Name* and *A Real Romance*. The *Wanganui Herald* (15.11.1890) reviewed *Two Chums* thus: "... Mr Ernest Mansfield, whose literary efforts are always perused with interest. The plot of "Two Chums" is of a most romantic and engrossing description. A number of the most interesting scenes being laid in New Zealand, while the characters give excellent scope for some intensely dramatic situations".

In January 1891, *How I Got My Name* was printed in full in the *Wanganui Herald* (17.1.1891) and was sub-titled: *A true and authentic account of a christening party*. The story is based on a journey on the London South Western Express train.

*A Real Romance* was also printed in June 1891 in the *Wanganui Herald* (16.6.1891). The newspaper introduced the story with "On our fourth page will be found an interesting and locally-written story, entitled, "A Real Romance", by Mr Ernest Mansfield, who will be remembered as the author of "Three Christmas Days" and several other excellent literary efforts". Only the first scene has been found and is about a miserly father and his desire to find a suitably rich husband for his beautiful daughter called Zoe. Ernest named his daughter Zoe in 1904, some 13 years after this story was written.

# ERNEST'S

## PERSONALITY – WAS HE A DREAMER OR A SWINDLER?

ERNEST MANSFIELD DIED IN a Leeds nursing home, now part of Leeds General Infirmary, on 1 December 1924 at the age of 64. It is not known why he was in the nursing home. His death certificate (1.12.1924) records the cause of death as kidney stones and blood clots following surgery. The address of the deceased and his widow Margaret Mansfield was given on the certificate as 96 Park Hill, Clapham Park, London. This is the same address as that on Bernice Zoe Mansfield's visiting card that appears inside the bound copy of *Astria – The Ice Maiden* in the possession of one of the current authors. No newspaper obituary has been found in the UK. However, there was a very short death notice in *The Times* (2.12.1924) and two obituaries in Norwegian newspapers from that period (see the chapter *Ernest in Svalbard*).

The authors have succeeded in tracking down only a few of Ernest's daughter Zoe's movements after his death in 1924 when she would have been 20 years old. In March 1928 her engagement was announced in *The Times* to a Ft Lt Cyril Ferdinand Briggs, with a wedding planned to take place in Bombay, India, on 18 May 1928. Ft Lt Briggs was a member of the R101 airship crew, which crashed on its maiden voyage to India in October 1930, killing 48 of the 54 people on board; however, neither Ft Lt Briggs nor Zoe were listed amongst the casualties or survivors, and the relatives of Ernest's wife Margaret (nee Booth) believe that Zoe did get married in India and later returned to London.

Despite the huge amount of material written about Ernest during his lifetime by himself and by others, he remains somewhat of an enigma and is still surrounded by several mysteries, anomalies, and contradictions. One hundred years on, it is difficult to comprehend what actually happened in some of these situations and hence piece together facets of his character that relate to them. From articles written by his contemporaries he was clearly popular with both business colleagues and those working for him and was clearly effective at making friends and establishing business partnerships in new situations as he travelled around the world.

His communication skills would not have been restricted to his role as a journalist and author. His verbal skills, evident from the number of speeches he is known to have made, would have meant that he was always good company and integrated well at any level of society. After Ernest's death Birger Jacobsen wrote: "Mansfield was of a magnificent character with a strongly developed poetic vein and an exaggerated imagination". Dr Salter wrote of him: "Talkative and given to exaggeration... His geese were always swans." There are also several accounts of his involvement with clubs and societies around the world.

*In his second book Ernest referred to “swindlers” in relation to prospectors and promoters. From what we have learnt, did he fit his own description of a swindler?*

In the English language “swindler” has definite negative connotations such as cheat, conman, shark, crook, and fraudster, and it was one of many strong and emotive words that Ernest chose to use in the second book. Having investigated what we can about some of the mysteries and contradictions of his life, we have perhaps come a little closer to answering this pivotal question.

The writings of his contemporaries indicate that at the time Ernest was not seen as a swindler. Far from it, he seems to have been admired and treated with respect by his workers and associates. He was also well received by the members of the upper echelons of the society that he chose to cultivate and depend on for financial backing. He was plainly a popular and respected person in his day, so could hardly have had an undesirable reputation.

Ernest’s well-developed *modus operandi* was to “boost and boom the shares” and then sell and get out, at the optimum moment. This and his director’s salary were probably his main sources of income. At the time this was considered to be legitimate business practice, it was widespread and the proceeds were counted as a perk for many company executives. However, today it would be seen as “insider trading”, would be considered to be unethical and is illegal in many countries.

In contrast, there is no evidence that he actually made a fortune from prospecting anywhere around the world and, because he never gave up trying to find that pot of gold, “dreamer” is an appropriate description. Perhaps we are left with one final question ...

*What then were his most notable achievements?*

After one hundred years the most noteworthy achievement of Ernest Mansfield’s life is undoubtedly the image that he left us of himself and his fascinating lifestyle. We have come closer to this through his two semiautobiographical novels, the numerous newspaper articles written by him, the company prospectuses, photographs and maps. That image is of a well-liked and charismatic individual, a musician, composer, writer, author, poet and journalist. An adventurer, prospector, promoter and publicist. A maverick, a visionary and a romantic, maybe a likable rogue and certainly a dreamer. An enigma and an enduring character of intrigue, still able today to convey to us something of his world.



## “Gold, or I’m a Dutchman!”

Ernest Mansfield exclaimed as he pored over specimens of rock and sand that the local rector had brought back from Svalbard to the small English village of Goldhanger. His unshakable belief in the ultimate strike sent Mansfield into the Arctic as one of the pioneers of the ‘Klondike period’ in Svalbard and established his name amongst the unforgettable historical personalities of the time. His flamboyant style and lavish, self-promoting writings give us today nuggets of information about the man, and leave some tantalising questions about his true character.

In this book we follow Ernest Mansfield’s tracks through three continents: from his native England to New Zealand, Canada, Scotland and Svalbard, and back to England – with forays into Australia and northern USA. He left behind him material traces in the form of half-attempted mine workings and quarries, huts and miners’ living quarters, machinery, and abandoned tools. He also left behind books, poetry, and newspaper articles. Perhaps most of all, he left behind an aura of mystery about himself and a legend in the history of an Arctic archipelago.

*Susan Barr* lives in Norway and has worked with the history and cultural heritage of Svalbard and other polar areas since 1979. She first published about Ernest Mansfield in 1985.

*David Newman* is a retired computer programmer who has lived in Goldhanger for 40 years and decided to investigate the stories of locals who searched for gold on Spitsbergen.

*Greg Nesteroff* is a newspaper reporter and local historian in Nelson, British Columbia, Canada who learned of Mansfield’s forgotten connection to the area.