



Cheltenham In Antarctica : The Life of edward Wilson

David Wilson, David Elder, Nicholas Reardon

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Edward Adrian Wilson is perhaps the most famous native son of Cheltenham. In

the early years of the 20th Century, he was one of the major influences and

personalities of the heroic age of Antarctic exploration and has also been

recognised as one of the top ranking ornithologists and naturalists in the United

Kingdom during this period. He was also one of the last great scientific expedition

artists.

Despite this, remarkably little has been published about him. His father wrote an

unpublished biography of him shortly after his death. This was an important

source for George Seaver, who published three volumes of biography on Edward

Wilson in the 1930s and 40s, fortunately quoting extensively from his letters and

diaries. After the appearance of the first two volumes much of the source material

that Seaver had used was destroyed, most of it on the instructions of Oriana,

Edward Wilson's widow. There was nothing malicious in this: she simply thought

that she had done her public duty in allowing a biography to be published and did

not want strangers digging around in her private correspondence after her death.

In the 1960s and 70s, through the Scott Polar Research Institute, the Antarctic

expedition diaries of Edward Wilson and a volume of his Antarctic bird pictures

were published. Several people tried to write new biographies in the 1970s and

80s but all failed for the lack of new material: due to the subsequent events,

George Seaver's books and the published diaries already contained much of the

source material about the life of Edward Wilson.

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