

## From Hilton to the Antarctic



The Rectory garden, Hilton

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of July 1901, Edward Adrian Wilson and Oriana Souper were married in Hilton Church. He was a young doctor who was to become a distinguished Antarctic explorer and she was the eldest daughter of the Reverend Francis Souper, Vicar of Hilton from 1898-1908. They had been engaged since the 19<sup>th</sup> of October 1899 and decided to get married when Wilson was chosen by Scott to go on his first Antarctic expedition, although they would have only six weeks together before he sailed.

Ted met Oriana when she was invited to tea at the Battersea Mission where he was lodging during his medical training at St. George's Hospital. Rather shy in social gatherings, he removed himself quickly after the initial introduction, only to turn back and sit on the stairs to listen. A further few meetings established a rapport strengthened by her appointment to the post of Matron at a school in Cheltenham where Ted's family lived. He wrote to ask his family to be kind to her, which they were, as indeed was he....always!

Wilson's combination of skills as a naturalist, artist and doctor made him an excellent choice for Scott's expeditions. He was extremely hardy, demanding of himself and utterly reliable. His personal qualities evoked great praise from his comrades. They loved him for his modesty, humour and integrity. In his quiet way he encouraged confidence and fellow explorers confided in their 'Uncle Bill'.

These qualities were also shown in his relationship with Oriana whom he loved and respected deeply. She shared his passion for the natural world and became an excellent ornithologist in her own right.

The first expedition sailed out on August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1901 on The Discovery and returned via New Zealand, where Oriana and Ted were re-united three years later. They had an exciting tour of North Island after many celebratory parties for the safe return of the explorers, The Discovery having been dangerously trapped in ice over many months.

On their return to England, Ted was very busy presenting scientific papers and drawings to museums and societies. Not wishing to practise as a doctor he was happy to be given the opportunity to combine field work and science in the post of Field Observer, investigating Grouse Disease, a serious problem at the time. Though he had no interest in shooting and was an early ecologist and conservationist, he relished the challenge of solving the problem. Oriana proved herself an able assistant in this work which occupied them in harmonious industry for five years. Wilson even turned down Shackleton's entreaties for him to join another journey south; he felt it

was important to finish his work, tracking down the lethal organism, which ultimately was discovered to be a nematode (*trichostrongylus pergracilis*).

However, he was ready and very willing to join Scott's second and final expedition to the Antarctic as its Chief Scientific Officer and expedition artist. The aim of both expeditions was the furtherance of science and in this they succeeded unquestionably. The ambition to be the first men to reach the South Pole ended, as we know, in the tragic death of four very brave men, including Edward Wilson.

Oriana did not re-marry. She shared her husband's faith and belief in a life of service, dedicating herself to preserving his memory and bestowing on the Scott Polar Research Institute many of Ted's water-colour and pencil sketches. Her first trip to New Zealand gave her a love of the country and she re-visited it often. During WW1 she gave outstanding service to the New Zealand Red Cross and was awarded a C.B.E. in recognition.

### **Post-script: No Penguins on The Green**

A frail man in a wheelchair when I met him, Vic Oakett came from a long line of Hiltonians and lived in a cottage on Graveley Way. Edward Wilson had been his boyhood hero and he was determined to see some memorial to the man who was the epitome of high-minded endeavour. Vic's idea of a statue of a penguin on the village green, so horrified many villagers that the idea morphed into a week-long celebration of Wilson's life with an exhibition, lectures and the church decorated as for an Edwardian wedding. We had two great successes: we tracked down a wedding photograph through Ted's great nephew, Michael Wilson, who joined us for the first weekend. A chance meeting with a charming woman in the Scott Polar Institute who was guarding a helter-skelter penguin toy, found us another ally and personal connection. She was the daughter of H. T. Ferrar, the first expedition's geologist and went on to give her enthusiastic support to the village event.

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