

The Wilson Art Gallery & Museum Information Sheet



Edward Adrian Wilson: the artist



Toy soldier, sketched when Wilson was five, 1887.

Edward Wilson, the Antarctic explorer, was the last of the great expedition artists. He was also a fine artist in his own right. He was born in Cheltenham and from an early age liked to draw. His father noted that 'he never tires of drawing ... soldiers, funny little figures full of action and all his own, for he disdains the idea of copying anything'. His mother bought him his first and only formal drawing lessons when he was still a young child. Remarkably his only other training was through art classes at Cheltenham College. He yearned for further training for many years.

The College taught excellent drawing skills. Many students would become army officers and surgeons, both professions requiring accurate recording skills. His father's passion for nature also fuelled Wilson's own interest in the natural world. In his view there was no substitute for observing birds and animals in their natural environment. He used to spend many hours on the hills around

Cheltenham, particularly at The Crippetts in Leckhampton, just listening and looking. He said he felt so close to nature he could hear a bird's heartbeat!

Wilson wanted to depict animals and birds from life. However, the fashion at the time was for drawing from dead specimens. Wilson did initially do this, but as his skills developed he concentrated on portraying living creatures and plants. His scrapbooks, known as the Nature Notebooks, show this change in style very clearly. The skills he taught himself in Britain and later in Norway were to stand him in good stead when he was confronted with depicting the Antarctic.



Bramble, drawn at The Crippetts, 27 August 1896.

Most of this early work is in pencil and ink but as he developed his technique he used watercolours more. His colour sense was extraordinary, and seen at its finest in the images he painted in the Antarctic. Here the subtle changing colours of the skies are

