

David Elder, *'He went about doing Good': the life of Dr Edward Thomas Wilson of Cheltenham.* (The Hobnob Press 2022.) 276 pp, numerous colour and b/w ill. [ISBN 978-1-914407-25-3].

David Elder has written many books about Cheltenham in which he enthuses about the town and this biography enthusiastically describes the life of a Cheltenham doctor who has captured Elder's attention and admiration. Dr Wilson had a remarkable life, and the story is well worth reading. Writing a biography is never easy but this time the author had the advantage of drawing upon a two-volume hand-written autobiography that gives much information about the thoughts of the man as well as much factual material.

Dr Edward Thomas Wilson lived from 1832 until 1918 and his life could so easily have been overshadowed by the incredible stories of his famous son Dr Ted Wilson who died in Antarctica with Captain Scott and his brother Sir Charles Wilson who attempted to rescue General Gordon from Khartoum. The life stories of these two famous men are broadened by this biography. Dr ET Wilson spent all his working life in Cheltenham. After a privileged upbringing in Pembrokeshire and at Oxford University, he had his clinical training at St George's Hospital, London before spending a short time in Paris.

He was appointed physician to the Cheltenham General Hospital and Dispensary in 1859 and until his marriage in 1866, spent much time establishing his practice and beginning many of the interests that made his life so worthwhile. For many years he was medical officer to Cheltenham College and Cheltenham Ladies' College. In common with many physicians at this time he was fascinated with the natural world and experimented with ways of recording this by photography and by recording the prevalence of disease. His interest in public health lasted throughout his life and centred on Cheltenham's water supply. He described many battles with the authorities when he tried to stop the use of water derived from the river. Probably because of these battles he was never appointed to the post of Medical Officer of Health.

Two other public health initiatives, though, gave him more personal satisfaction, the first being the creation of an infectious disease or fever hospital, known as the Delancy Hospital, and the other being the start of a district nursing service. The fever hospital proved its worth in the control of smallpox and scarlet fever in the town.

Wilson had a large family and there is much information within the book about this including the typical losses at this time from childhood deaths. He spent much time with his family both locally and abroad. Much of this local exploration led to subjects for talks to the Cheltenham Natural History Society of which he was president over many years. He was an early conservationist encouraging the end of the fur trade and the 'appropriate' amount of bird's nesting, in which he indulged for most of his life(!). Many of the items he collected ended up in the town's museum that Wilson originated, and which is named after him and his son.

This biography is beautifully presented, with fine illustrations and extensive notes and index. Many reviewers try to find errors and I found none apart from doubting that Wilson, as a boy, repeatedly crossed the Avon Gorge in Bristol in a basket pulled by ropes as he travelled between Liverpool and Pembrokeshire; he might have done once. David Elder has certainly encouraged me to re-visit Cheltenham to look at the many sites associated with Dr Wilson.

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