Obituary

Hugh Robert Mill

To cite this article: Hugh Robert Mill (1922) Obituary, Scottish Geographical Magazine, 38:2, 118-121, DOI: [10.1080/14702542208554240](https://doi.org/10.1080/14702542208554240)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14702542208554240>

Published online: 30 Jan 2008.

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OBITUARY.

SIR ERNEST SHACKLETON, C.V.O.

THE startlingly sudden death of Sir Ernest Shackleton on board his expedition ship the *Quest* on 5th January, the day after his arrival in South Georgia outward bound, has made a profound sensation and called forth a world-wide expression of sorrow and sympathy. The body was brought to Monte Video pending the decision of Lady Shackleton as to where the burial should take place, and she, with unerring instinct, decided that no place could be more appropriate than the sub-Antarctic island where he died and where in 1916 he had landed after his memorable boat voyage from Elephant Island. It was on the forty-eighth birthday of the late explorer that the Government of Uruguay accorded a State funeral as the body was placed on board the whaler *Woodville*, and on 1st March the interment took place at the little English church beside the Norwegian whaling station at Grytviken in South Georgia. The many memorial services in this country culminated in a magnificent ceremony in St. Paul's Cathedral on 2nd March when the Royal Geographical Society marshalled a distinguished company, including the representatives of the King, Queen Alexandra, the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Connaught, and many of the Government Departments, with travellers, geographers, and a great congregation of the general public. Why such almost unprecedented honour was done to the memory of a former Secretary of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, whose career was no primrose path of universal popularity, it is the purpose of this brief notice to set forth.

We believe the main cause was his vivid and dominating personality, endowed with an uncommon combination of qualities which inspired him to bring the latest developments of science and publicity into subservience to a spirit of romantic adventure akin rather to the surging impulses of the sixteenth century than to the more placid mental outlook of recent years.

Born in Ireland of English ancestry, Ernest Henry Shackleton came to London as a boy and was educated at Dulwich College. Preferring a sea-faring life to the medical profession, for which he had been destined, he found himself a junior officer on the Union-Castle Line at the time of the South African War, and there he made his first literary efforts in the editing of a ship's magazine and the authorship of a little book on life on board a transport. By dint of much asking and a steady determination not to take 'No' for an answer he secured the post of third lieutenant on the *Discovery*, and sailed in 1901 on the National Antarctic expedition, promoted by a joint Committee of the Royal Society and the Royal Geographical Society, under the command of Captain Robert Scott. Scott selected him as one of the small party who made the main southern journey on the Barrier Ice to the farthest south that had then been attained, 82° 17' S.; and on the return march in extremely trying

circumstances he all but succumbed to scurvy. To his intense disappointment he was invalided home in 1903 and formed the determination to show the world that he was not unfit for polar service. During four restless years he tried several "shore jobs," not all of them very congenial, though broken by a spirited candidature for Parliament when he stood for Dundee in the General Election of 1906. The chief value to him of those years was the experience he obtained of business methods, the facility he acquired as a public speaker, the friendships he formed, more especially while Secretary of this Society, and perhaps we should add the opposition his strong character excited, for his determination always rose highest when most opposed.

In 1907 he astonished his friends and the public alike by announcing that he had organised an expedition to the Antarctic regions in the little whaler *Nimrod*. His experiences on the *Discovery* expedition and his trained imagination enabled him to foresee all contingencies, and his organising power provided for them. He had his ship towed from New Zealand to the Antarctic circle to save his coal, and he had a new plan to land at King Edward Land and push south along the middle of the Great Barrier Ice. Failing to reach solid land his caution recoiled at the risk, afterwards taken by Amundsen, of wintering on the floating ice, and he changed his plans to suit the only alternative landing in Macmurdo Sound. Realising clearly that transport was the key to polar success, he had introduced a motor-car and Manchurian ponies into his equipment, and ascending to the great plateau he reached $88^{\circ} 23' S.$, 97 geographical miles from the Pole, and but for the loss of the last pony, on which he had relied for food, he would almost certainly have reached the Pole itself.

The able scientific staff of his expedition accomplished the two splendid feats of climbing Mount Erebus and reaching the South Magnetic Pole, while thanks to the kinematograph, which he was the first to introduce on a polar expedition, he was able on his return in 1909 to give the public a realisation of south polar life and travelling such as had never been possible before.

The originality and daring of this great achievement, the breaking with the old polar traditions which had hampered previous expeditions, and the substantial gains to knowledge garnered by the scientific staff brought to the leader the highest geographical awards of all countries and the honour of knighthood from his own.

Shackleton was not satisfied and longed eagerly to crown his polar career by reaching the South Pole. But for several years he had to struggle with the financial responsibilities of his expedition, and before he was ready to try again the Pole had been twice reached during the same Antarctic "day," once by the route he had planned from King Edward Land, and once by the route he had pioneered up the Beardmore Glacier.

Experience has shown that a second polar expedition by the same explorer is seldom so fortunate as the first. In 1913 Shackleton

decided to attempt the crossing of the Antarctic Continent from the Weddell Sea, a plan originally contemplated by Dr. Bruce and tried in vain by Lieut. Filchner in the *Deutschland* in 1912. He sailed just as the War broke out in 1914, the Government having refused his offer of ship, stores, and men for national service. Escaping the hostile fleet under Von Spee, which might easily have sunk the *Endurance*, he met more serious opposition from the unprecedented severity of the season, but forced his way through the ice-floes of the Weddell Sea and along the coast of Coats Land. Before a suitable position at which to attempt a landing was reached the ice closed round the *Endurance* and drifted her northwards to destruction. From this complete failure of his plans Shackleton emerged triumphant with the most hazardous and successful of polar retreats to his credit. He kept his men together on the ridging and splitting floes until the last cake of ice melted beneath them in the Southern Ocean. Then in three small boats the whole party reached the inhospitable Elephant Island, and in the 800-mile boat voyage with five companions to South Georgia, the nightmare crossing of the snow-clad mountain backbone of the island, and the four successive attempts in the most inadequate small craft to rescue his comrades, Shackleton crowded into a few months an epic of devotion, courage, and persistence that will always hold its place beside the most moving records of romantic adventure since the world began. Every one who sailed on the *Endurance* returned alive.

After going to New Zealand and sailing in the *Aurora* to bring back the survivors of his Ross Sea party, Shackleton, like all his men, joined in the last stages of the Great War. He served in the Murman Expedition, where his polar experiences proved of the utmost value in directing the equipment and transport on that Arctic coast. His friends had hoped that after twenty years of adventure and struggle he would settle down to an easy life at home; but he had no sooner cleared his financial responsibilities by strenuous lecturing than his ever-restless mind turned to one more polar campaign. He thought of trying the North, but finally settled the plans of the Shackleton-Rowett expedition to include visits to many little-known and the search for several doubtful oceanic islands, and in particular to explore the Enderby Quadrant of the Antarctic. The arrangements were made with great rapidity, and the little *Quest* sailed in September 1921. From the outset misfortune beset the expedition. The weather was bad, the vessel which should prove handy enough among the ice-floes was too small to meet contrary winds and high seas in the open ocean without causing the greatest discomfort. In the end his health gave way, and he acknowledged in his diary that never before in all his life of protracted voyages had he so earnestly longed to reach port. He reached it only to die.

Shackleton had the gift of inspiring the confidence and affection of his companions, and, as he expected, many of those who were with him in the *Endurance* and survived the War came to him from all parts of the world, to join the *Quest*. That little vessel pursued her voyage from

South Georgia on 16th January 1922 with the expedition under the command of Commander Frank Wild, R.N., and with Captain Worsley as master of the ship, to carry out the programme arranged by the late leader.

Shackleton had a fine literary style, and his two books *The Heart of the Antarctic* and *South* show how his mind was saturated with poetry. He was no vulgar notoriety hunter but a great soul deeply moved by the glory of great deeds grandly done, and his memory will survive as an inspiration to explorers.

HUGH ROBERT MILL.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

EUROPE.

Scottish Mountains and Mountaineering.—In the issue of this *Magazine* for October 1920 we noted the publication of a Section of a *Guide*, in process of preparation by the Scottish Mountaineering Club. We have recently received the first part of this *Guide* (Section A), forming the general introduction to the whole. It includes articles on geology, meteorology, botany, and bird life, in addition to a number of more or less technical papers dealing with climbing conditions in Scotland in summer and winter, rock and snow craft, and so forth. There is also an interesting revision of Sir Hugh Munro's Classified Tables of the Scottish Mountains attaining 3000 feet. Like the Section on Ben Nevis previously noticed here, the present part is illustrated by some remarkably fine photographs, of which the most beautiful is perhaps that of Binnein Mor, in the Mamore Forest Group, taken at Easter, and showing superb stretches of snow. Less beautiful, but perhaps even more instructive, is a plate showing Ben More and Stobinian as seen on a March day with drifting snow. The curiously Arctic effect in this picture is much enhanced by the figures in the foreground, furnished with what Sir Leslie Stephen used to call the "dreadful implements" of their craft.

The scientific articles are contributed by well-known authorities on the subjects dealt with, and contain many details of much value. We may note, for example, that Professor Bower, in his article on "Scottish Mountain Botany," makes the suggestion that the appearance of shore plants, such as thrift, scurvy-grass, and so forth, on the higher levels of the Scottish hills, may be due not only to survival, the suggestion most commonly made, but also to direct transference of the seeds by sea-birds. As he points out, in Scotland the shores upon which such species grow are never very far away from the mountains, and it is quite common to find sea-birds on the higher levels of the hills. The whole article, with its careful account of the characteristics of the Scottish Alpine flora, and its discussions of the distribution of the more interesting species, is worthy of careful study.