

Frank Wild

by Leif Mills

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THE PRINTING PRESS

It was Shackleton's idea to take a printing press on the expedition and to produce a book—the first book to be produced in the Antarctic. During the winter of 1902 during his period with the *Discovery* expedition, Shackleton had been the editor of the 'South Polar Times'—a typed paper which appeared for a few months. It had been a popular innovation with Scott's men. There had also been a typed sheet called 'Blizzard'. This time though Shackleton wanted—as far as conditions would permit—a 'proper' book.

Wild and Joyce were sent on a three week printing course at a printers in Hampshire and there they learned the rudiments of the printing process. The printing company lent the expedition a letterpress and a small etching press, and gave paper, type and ink.

In the expedition's hut at Cape Royds Wild and Joyce shared a cubicle which was known as 'Rogues Retreat'. Like all the other cubicles it was small and cramped and full of their gear. They also had the printing press there and the printing equipment. Altogether they printed 120 pages for the book, containing articles by members of the expedition. There were ten articles in the book, five of which were ascribed to particular expedition members with the others being anonymous. Wild himself wrote one of the articles, called 'An Ancient Manuscript', under the name in the index of 'Shellback'. It was written in an allegorical and almost poetical style and described the reasons for, and establishment of, the expedition. He signed

the article 'Wand ERER'.

George Marston—known as 'Putty'—drew the eleven illustrations in the book and designed the cover. Marston was the official artist of the expedition—he himself being a qualified art teacher in London. Bernard Day, a motor engineer, made the covers for the book from the Venesta board—a type of primitive plywood—which was used for the cases containing the provisions for the expedition. He cut, planed and polished the wood and bevelled the edges. The pages were sewn together with strong twine. The front and back boards of each book were covered in brown leather.

The book was called 'Aurora Australis'. Up to one hundred copies of each page were printed (the exact number is not known) but only between twenty five to thirty copies were sewn and bound. The publisher's page stated "Published at the Winter Quarters of the British Antarctic Expedition 1907, during the winter months of April, May, June, July, 1908. Illustrated with lithographs and etchings by George Marston. Printed at the sign of 'The Penguins' by Joyce and Wild. Latitude 77° 32' south Longitude 166° 12' east Antarctica".

It is one of the rarest books ever and it is not known whether more than a handful still survive. Shackleton was the editor of the book and wrote two prefaces to it (and also two poems under a pseudonym). In the second—'additional'—preface Shackleton wrote "Since writing the preface for this book I have again looked over its pages, and though I can see but little not up to usual standard in bookmaking, the printers are not satisfied that it is everything it ought to be. But the reader will understand better the difficulty of producing such a book quite up to the mark when he is told that, owing to the low temperature in the hut, the only way to keep the printing ink in a fit

state to use was to have a candle burning under the inking plate; and so, if some pages are printed more lightly than others it is due to the difficulty of regulating the heat, and consequently the thinning or thickening of the ink. Again the printing office was only six feet by seven and had to accommodate a large sewing machine and bunks for two men, so the lack of room was a disadvantage; but I feel sure that those who see this book will not be captious critics. The printing was entirely done by Joyce and Wild, the lithography and etchings by Marston, and the covers made of provision cases were manufactured by Day. It is therefore to these four that the carrying out of the *Aurora Australis* is due; most of us have contributed an article of some sort, and I as Editor feel an interest in the work, as it was a pleasure to see it progressing; and I trust that all who have a copy will think kindly of the first attempt to print a book and illustrate it in the depth of an *Antarctic Winter*”.

It could be said that Shackleton—in this small instance as in other much larger ones—wanted to go one better than Scott. Whatever the reason, the book stands out as one of the most remarkable printed books ever produced. But long before the book was finished, and long before Wild wrote to his friend Dell about learning printing, it was a fairly close run thing whether the British Antarctic Expedition would ever get under way. As was to become usual for Shackleton he was beset by problems of finding sufficient backers for the expedition, of finding enough money and of pressures of time.

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There was an indirect criticism of Wild by Marshall over the proposed publication of the first Antarctic book. Marshall wrote [diary 25 April 1908] that in that evening there had been a discussion on the book in the hut. “Shackleton agreed to call it ‘Antarctic Ice Flowers’. 150 copies to be printed and money divided. Wild suggested that Marston and Joyce should get extra remuneration. This is quite out of the question so shall probably not reproduce here but typewrite and wait till we get to England.” There is no other reference to this; Wild did not mention it in his memoirs or his diary. If he did suggest it, it was significant that he did not suggest extra money for himself though he and Joyce shared the task of printing. For Marshall, too, to suggest that the matter was “quite out of question” seems odd if there was to be a commercial publishing of the book in England.

On April 26 [diary] Marshall wrote “After dinner Shacks declared his determination to type journal and reproduce later in England. Joyce etc. seem very sick but they have cut their own throats”. In fact, as recorded earlier, the book was printed in the hut and about twenty five to thirty copies were sewn and bound. The idea of publishing it in England and putting it up for sale was not pursued—if it was ever contemplated.

When the articles for the book were prepared and available for the others to read, Marshall commented on the article by Wild and wrote [ibid 28 June 1908] “Wild article prompted by Shackleton—is full of cheap flattery and should never be printed”. It seems that Marshall’s comment was directed more at Shackleton than Wild. When later [ibid 8 Aug 1908] he read the article by Mawson he wrote—in spite of his harsh comments on him on the voyage from New Zealand—“Mawson written very good article for book”, Apart from Shackleton and Joyce, Marshall’s opinion of the others was clearly not always critical.

When Shackleton's book of the expedition—'The Heart of the Antarctic'—was published, the publishers brought out a special edition of three hundred copies of it, containing some of the poems, articles and drawings used in *Aurora Australis* but the latter was not published as a separate and complete book until 1988 (by Airline Publishing of Shrewsbury).

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Note: A few obvious errors have been included ("but only between twenty five to thirty copies were sewn and bound", " It is one of the rarest books ever and it is not known whether more than a handful still survive." "The front and back boards of each book were covered in brown leather.")

