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## Biography of Shackleton, Sir Ernest Henry

# Shackleton, Ernest Henry (1874-1922)



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Shackleton was born on 15 February 1874 in Kilkea, Ireland, one of six children of Anglo-Irish parents. In 1880, the family moved from their farm to Dublin, where his father Henry studied medicine. On qualifying in 1884, his father took up a practice in south London, and between 1887 and 1890, Shackleton was educated at Dulwich College. On leaving school, he entered the Merchant Navy, serving in the square-rigged ship *Hoghton Tower* until 1894 when he transferred to tramp steamers. In 1896, he qualified as first mate, and two years later, was certified as master, joining the Union Castle line in 1899.

In 1901, he became a sub-lieutenant in the Royal Naval Reserve, and joined the **British National Antarctic Expedition, 1901 - 1904** (leader **Robert Falcon Scott**), serving as third officer in *Discovery*. During the expedition, he was responsible for sea water analysis and was editor of the expedition newspaper, *South Polar Times*. In November 1902, Shackleton accompanied Scott and Edward Wilson on the first major sledging journey, exploring inland across the Ross Ice Shelf toward the South Pole. On 30 December 1902, they reached 82°17'S, a record farthest south. Although weakened by scurvy on the return journey he struggled back, to his intense disappointment he was invalided home in March 1903 on the relief ship the *Morning*.

On his return to Britain, Shackleton married Emily Dorman with whom he had three children Raymond, Cecily and Edward. Shackleton settled in Edinburgh, becoming secretary of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society. After standing unsuccessfully for Parliament as liberal-unionist candidate for Dundee in 1906, he became personal assistant to Mr William Beardmore, head of the Glasgow firm of naval ship builders and armour plate manufacturers. In 1907, he announced his plans for an expedition to the South Pole and, after raising funds with great difficulty, set out with the **British Antarctic Expedition, 1907 - 1909**

Departing from London on the expedition ship **Nimrod** in July 1907, he landed at Ross Island in February 1908. In October 1908, the main polar party, consisting of Shackleton, Eric Marshall, **Frank Wild** and Jameson Adams, set out from Cape Royds, crossing the Ross Ice Shelf and discovering a way through the mountains by means of the Beardmore Glacier. On inadequate rations, they man-hauled across the polar plateau, reaching 88°26'S on 9 January 1909 before turning back.

On his return, Shackleton was knighted and was awarded several medals, including the Special Gold Medal from the Royal Geographical Society. After experiencing limited success in various business enterprises, Shackleton began to plan an expedition to cross Antarctica between the Ross and Weddell Seas. One ship, **Endurance**, would land a sledging party in the Weddell Sea while another, Aurora, would land a party at McMurdo Sound in the Ross Sea to lay depots in support of the crossing party. Following months of fund-raising, Shackleton secured money from Sir James Caird (a jute manufacturer), the government and the Royal Geographic Society. Shackleton set out from Plymouth in **Endurance** on the **Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition, 1914 - 1917**. In December 1914, **Endurance** sailed from South Georgia towards the Weddell Sea, where she became beset in heavy pack ice in January 1915. After the ship was crushed, the crew lived for six months on drifting ice until this broke up north-east of the Antarctic Peninsula. Proceeding in three open boats (named after benefactors: the **Stancomb-Willis**, the **Dudley Docker** and the **James Caird**) the party of twenty-eight men reached Elephant Island on 15 April 1916. To seek help, Shackleton set out with five men in the **James Caird** on an epic 800mile, sixteen-day voyage to South Georgia. On arrival there, Shackleton, Frank Worsley and Tom Crean made the first crossing of the Allardyce Range a rugged mountain interior, reaching Stromness Bay whaling station on 20 May 1916. After three unsuccessful attempts to rescue the Elephant Island party, Shackleton finally reached the stranded men in the Chilean naval steam tug **Yelcho** on 30 August 1916.

On return to Great Britain, Shackleton was sent by the British government on a propaganda mission to South America, and between 1918 and 1919, served with the North Russian expeditionary force, receiving the O.B.E. (military) in 1919. After the war, he became involved in a succession of business enterprises, all of which ended in disappointment, as did a plan for an expedition to Arctic Canada. With the support of John Quiller Rowett, he decided to head south once more, leading the **Shackleton-Rowett Antarctic Expedition, 1921-1922**, to the Southern Ocean. Sailing from London on the **Quest** on 21 September 1921, the expedition arrived in South Georgia on 5 January 1922. Shackleton suffered a heart attack and died the next day at Grytviken, he was 48 years old. At the request of his wife he was buried at Grytviken in the whalers' graveyard overlooking the bay.

## Published Work

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## Further Information

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