

Dr. Douglas Patrick Wilson, D.Sc., F.R.P.S.

Douglas Patrick Wilson ("D.P." as he was known to most colleagues) was born at Moss Side, Manchester on the 7th August 1902 and died in Plymouth on the 18th December 1991 aged 89 years.

The family soon moved to Mayfield Road, Walley Range, Manchester the home of his maternal grand-father, and where, after learning the rudiments of the three Rs at a private dame-school, D.P. was educated at The Hulme Grammar School Manchester 1911-1919.

His family intended a business career for him, but the pull of Natural History and especially aquatic life was too strong and he enrolled in Zoology in Manchester University in 1923. His youthful interest in marine life (for several years he kept rudd, carp, stickleback and other freshwater fish in a large iron tank in the garden at Mayfield Road!) compelled attendance at marine biology courses at Port Erin, Millport and Plymouth.

In 1926, D.P. graduated B.Sc. with First Class/Honours in Zoology and successfully obtained a Government Grant to study the development of polychaete worms in the Plymouth Laboratory of the Marine Biological Association.

He was appointed Assistant Naturalist in April 1928 and he remained actively in the Laboratory until he retired in 1969 as Senior Principal Scientific Officer: he was appointed Deputy Director in 1958. During this period, his love of photography was early noted by his many students. For his photographic work which appeared in many works books and magazines as well as his own Natural History volumes, he was elected an Associate of the Royal Photographic Society followed by Fellowship in 1938. His marine biology research

became known nationally. During this period, D.P. wrote his two books: "Life of the Shore and Shallow Sea" (1935, revised Edn. 1951) and "They Live in the Sea" (1947), and internationally famous and recognised. He was elected a Fellow of the Institute of Biology in 1964, and a Foreign Member of the Royal Danish Academy of Science and Letters Copenhagen in 1965.



Between 1930 and 1940, D.P. organised and conducted Easter Vacation Courses at the Marine Biological Laboratory in Plymouth which he continued after the War in 1946-48. A total of 584 members of staff attended such classes - many of them became famous and distinguished Zoologists - one a Nobel prize winner and a President of the Marine Biological Association.

International acclaim resulted from his studies on the development and metamorphosis of marine invertebrate larvae and his colour photography of marine life.

During the days of the bombardment of the City, D.P. organised with few remaining students air-raid precautions against fire and explosive bombs at the Laboratory. It was his team that saved the major

part of the Building by putting out incendiary bombs.

In his period as Deputy Director he was responsible for the complete re-building of the Aquarium which was re-opened in 1959. D.P. continued active research after his retirement in 1969 and was still working in the Laboratory until 1981.

After the end of the War, in addition to his other professional work, he helped to re-establish local learned Societies, especially the Athenaeum, of which he was President in 1961/2. He was amongst those who persisted in the construction of the new Athenaeum building

to replace the bombed-out shell. In 1961, as President, he presided over the Civic Opening of the new building by the Lord Mayor of Plymouth.

For his long and faithful service to the Athenaeum, he was elected a Honorary Life Member in 1968.

Throughout all the years of his professional and academic life, Douglas Wilson was a family man. In 1931, he had met Alison Westbrook, herself an experienced botanist with a promising career in seaweed studies and they were married. Alison was a true and perfect partner - cultured, scholarly, practical and throughout his research work, an able assistant and helpful associate. Alison herself became President of the Athenaeum in 1963/4. Alison and D.P. formed a unique team giving and guidance to the Athenaeum over many years as Members of many Committees. They were prolific and liberal exhibitors to the Conversazioni and always available and prepared to provide whatever assistance was necessary. Alison passed away on the 2nd October 1978 and her Obituary written by the late John Dawe appears in Volume IV of the Proceedings of the Athenaeum for 1977-8.

At the Conversazione on the 18th September 1980, D.P. presented to the Athenaeum the current Vice-President's Badge of office in memory of his late Wife who has for so many years served on the Council of the Athenaeum.

What gave D.P. an immense amount of pleasure and satisfaction was in 1987 when the highest award of Honorary Fellowship of the Royal Photographic Society was unexpectedly conferred upon him in recognition of his pioneering work in photomicrography.

The possessor of a large library of technical books and a vast collection of slides and photographs all assiduously collated and catalogued to the Wilson high standard, D.P. was always prepared to help and make these valuable resources available for the benefit of the Athenaeum.

With the passing of Douglas Wilson, an association of over half-a-century has ended: the Athenaeum has lost a treasured and revered Member, a wise and patient Counsellor, and a generous benefactor both academically and materially.

D.P. is survived by his daughter Hester and his son Richard and by six grand-children. The Writer is indebted to Hester and Richard for the splendid happy photograph of their remarkable parents, which is gladly reproduced by his Notes.

David Powell

(President: 1968-69-70)

Marjorie Alison Wilson (née Westbrook) was born at Gillingham, Kent, on 29th August 1903 and died in Plymouth on 2nd October 1978.

After attending school in Stoke, Plymouth the years 1921-1931 were spent at Westfield College, University of London, graduating with a first class honours degree in Botany and then continuing as a research student and member of staff until her marriage to D. P. Wilson of the Marine Biological Laboratory, Plymouth. In the 1920s and 1930s she published pioneering papers on the structure and cytology of a number of red seaweeds (Rhodophyta) and subsequently gave considerable assistance to her husband in his marine biological researches.

Alison Wilson (as she was popularly known) was a keen conservationist contributing records to the Atlas of British Flora and to a mapping scheme for the Devon Flora. Her dedicated enthusiasm was responsible for the preservation of the 'Plymouth Pear' (*Pyrus cordata*) when its sole habitat in Britain was threatened by industrial development at Estover. She was an Honorary Member and a Past President of the Plymouth and District Field Club and an active member of the Plymouth and District Branch of The Devonshire Association, both of which societies hold some of their meetings in our Athenæum building. She was also held in high regard by the Women's Institute in Devon for the help she gave in their affairs.

Her first recorded lecture to Athenæum members was in January 1953 when she spoke on nineteenth century "Custom and Costume" and the last lecture was in March 1978 on "Looking at Tombstones" when, as always, the lecture was a model of lucid presentation, excellently illustrated with slides of a rare quality. At our Conversazionies and Anniversary Meetings she presented exhibitions on a great variety of subjects. In the first volume of our 'Proceedings' (1967) there is a fascinating account by her of the Athenæum during its first hundred and fifty years. A valued member of the Athenæum Council and various committees for many years she was Vice President in 1962 and for the following two years discharged the duties of President with dignity, devotion and distinction as she guided the Athenæum through a difficult period of its history.

As a person she was reluctant to criticise, generous in commendation and modest concerning her not inconsiderable accomplishments. Her mind was like a many faceted gem reflecting a scintillating variety of interests and her insatiable search for knowledge took her into such diverse realms as classical and modern Greece, archaeology, local history, and the manual skills of Honiton lace-making, silversmithing and the making of jewellery, all of which gave opportunity for her meticulous attention to detail and originality of design. Her later years were beset with increasing illness which she bore uncomplainingly without any slackening in her activities until forced to enter hospital and undergo a severe operation ten weeks before she died.

Her death has left a void which it will be difficult to fill for a very long time. She is greatly missed by her husband, son, daughter and most of her six grandchildren one of whom, born after her death, is named Alison after her.