



OBITUARY

TOM IREDALE (1880 - 1972)

GILBERT P. WHITLEY AND WINSTON F. PONDER

The Australian Museum, Sydney.

Plate 34

Tom Iredale, who had been Conchologist at the Australian Museum, Sydney, for twenty years, died at Curl Curl, New South Wales, on 12th April 1972 at the age of 92.

Almost every important work on molluscan systematics now mentions his name, for he enjoyed solving taxonomic problems and he had written more than 170 papers on mollusca (apart from many other subjects) and proposed well over two thousand new scientific names. He was an early exponent of ecology in zoology; he coined new words such as ecomorphs and nannomorphs, and proposed a method of naming living molluscs to indicate their relationship to fossil ancestors. Most of his molluscan type-specimens are in the Canterbury Museum, Christchurch, New Zealand, the British Museum (Natural History), London, and the Australian Museum, Sydney.

As long ago as 1914, William H. Dall of the Smithsonian Institution wrote to Iredale who was then working at the British Museum:

"I am just back from my summering on Mt. Monadnock and looking over the Mal. Soc. numbers for the summer find your papers on nomenclature. I think some millionaire ought to endow a chair of molluscan nomenclature with a view to getting a perfect Nomenclator, and nominate you as incumbent for life. You certainly have a genius for that line of work . . ."

Iredale was born in Cumberland, England, on 24th March 1880. He was always interested in birds and general natural history, but when he was 21 years old, he sailed to New Zealand for health reasons, where he was introduced to the study of Mollusca by his friend, W. R. B. Oliver, a botanist and ecologist. The two men visited the Kermadec Islands for ten months in 1908 where they met Roy Bell who was later to collect large quantities of specimens for Iredale on Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands, in Victoria and southern New South Wales.

Iredale left New Zealand in 1908 for England but, on the way, Charles Hedley persuaded him to stay for the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science Congress in Brisbane. Thus in February 1909 Iredale had a first hand experience with Queensland molluscs by collecting at Caloundra (where he examined the G. Gross collection); he also visited Port Curtis.

Tom Iredale's name first appeared in the registers of conchology in the Australian Museum as early as 1906, when he had sent two *Cyclostrema* from Lyttleton, New Zealand. Other gifts of New Zealand shells

followed, and in 1909 and in later years, shells from the Kermadec Islands arrived. In 1913, shells which had been collected by Iredale at Caloundra are noticed and a year later (probably after comparative study at the British Museum) further Caloundra and Kermadecs shells are registered. These are but the first-fruits of many years of further collecting by Tom Iredale, in Victoria, New South Wales, Lord Howe Island and Queensland.

From 1909 to 1923, Iredale spent a great deal of time at the British Museum in Kensington assisting Gregory Mathews in the production of *The Birds of Australia*, identifying molluscs and writing papers on molluscan nomenclature and bibliographic problems. One of his finest efforts was his critical commentary, published in 1915, on Suter's *Manual of the New Zealand Mollusca*. He collaborated with C. D. O'Donoghue to produce a *List of British Nudibranchiate Mollusca*, published in 1923 and he helped C. D. Sherborn compile his great *Index Animalium*. Iredale considered his most spectacular discovery to be *Sherbornia mirabilis*, a gastropod he named from the Indian Ocean in 1917. As a result of his work on the shells of the Kermadecs, Iredale was offered collections from Fiji, New Zealand, Christmas Island, the Monte Bello Islands and elsewhere, but he declined a proffered museum appointment in Honolulu. Instead, he came to Sydney in 1923 for the Pan Pacific Science Congress and went on a collecting trip with Henry A. Pilsbry of Philadelphia who was also in Australia for the Congress.

Iredale was to cause a lot of controversy with his philosophy on genera and species. His explanations for proposing new names were often excessively brief and only those who had watched him at work realised that hours of observation and research were often condensed into a line or two. As early as 1924 he erected 111 new names in a paper based on Roy Bell's collections from south-eastern Australia and was always a 'splitter' rather than a 'lumper'.

Although Iredale was basically a museum worker, he loved field work and considered this very important to gain a proper understanding of the animals he was studying.

He was acutely aware of the importance of history and geography in zoology and was meticulously accurate in bibliographical matters. He wrote many papers on the old-time naturalists, generally to establish their type-localities and to ensure that proper credit was given to them for the scientific names they had bestowed.

After working as a freelance worker with Hedley at the Australian Museum, Iredale was appointed as an Assistant in the Conchology Department, becoming Conchologist in 1924, with Miss Joyce Allan as assistant, when Hedley left to become Director of the Great Barrier Reef Committee. In those days, two other well known conchologists, John Brazier and Thomas Whitelegge, who had been retrenched during the 1893 depression, visited the Museum from time to time. From 1923, Iredale worked consistently on the monograph of loricates with Basset Hull, Miss Allan producing the illustrations. His other molluscan work during his employment

PLATE 34. Tom Iredale

1. November 1908. Taken on Sunday (= Raoul) Island, Kermadec Group.
2. July 1932. Taken in Sydney.
3. September 1938. Taken at the Annual Meeting of the Royal Zoological Society of N.S.W., when he became President.
4. March 1964. (Photograph by Keith Hindwood).



as conchologist included papers on "cuttle-bones," reports on shells from the New South Wales continental shelf and from the Sydney area, notes on Queensland shells, shipworms (Teredinidae), land snails and freshwater mussels. Iredale took part in the Great Barrier Reef Expedition to Low Isles, Queensland, in 1928 - 1929. In 1939 he published the first part of the Report, which dealt with the lower bivalves, but the other parts of this controversial report were never published, although some of the partially completed manuscript is in the Australian Museum.

Amongst his important molluscan reference works, we may mention his lists of the Australian, Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands and Papuan land shells, the freshwater molluscs of Australia and the marine ones of New South Wales (the latter with D. F. McMichael, a trainee who joined the museum staff in 1948, became assistant curator under Joyce Allan and Curator of Molluscs in 1957). He also had in train a review of Indo-Pacific Strombidae, illustrated by Charles Laceron, but, like another review of the genus *Janthina*, it was never published. A bibliography and index of his scientific names has been published by McMichael and Whitley (1956), and one of us (G.P.W.) has recently prepared a full account of Iredale's life and works, bringing his bibliography and index up to date.

He was most generous in putting information at his colleagues' disposal and encouraged many younger zoologists to publish their findings. He was a member of the Malacological Society and the Zoological Society in London and other societies in England and Australia. He was President and a Fellow of the Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales and was awarded the Clarke Medal by the Royal Society of New South Wales in 1959. He was an Honorary Associate of the Australian Museum until his death which deprived us of a cheerful, witty friend and a revered colleague.

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