

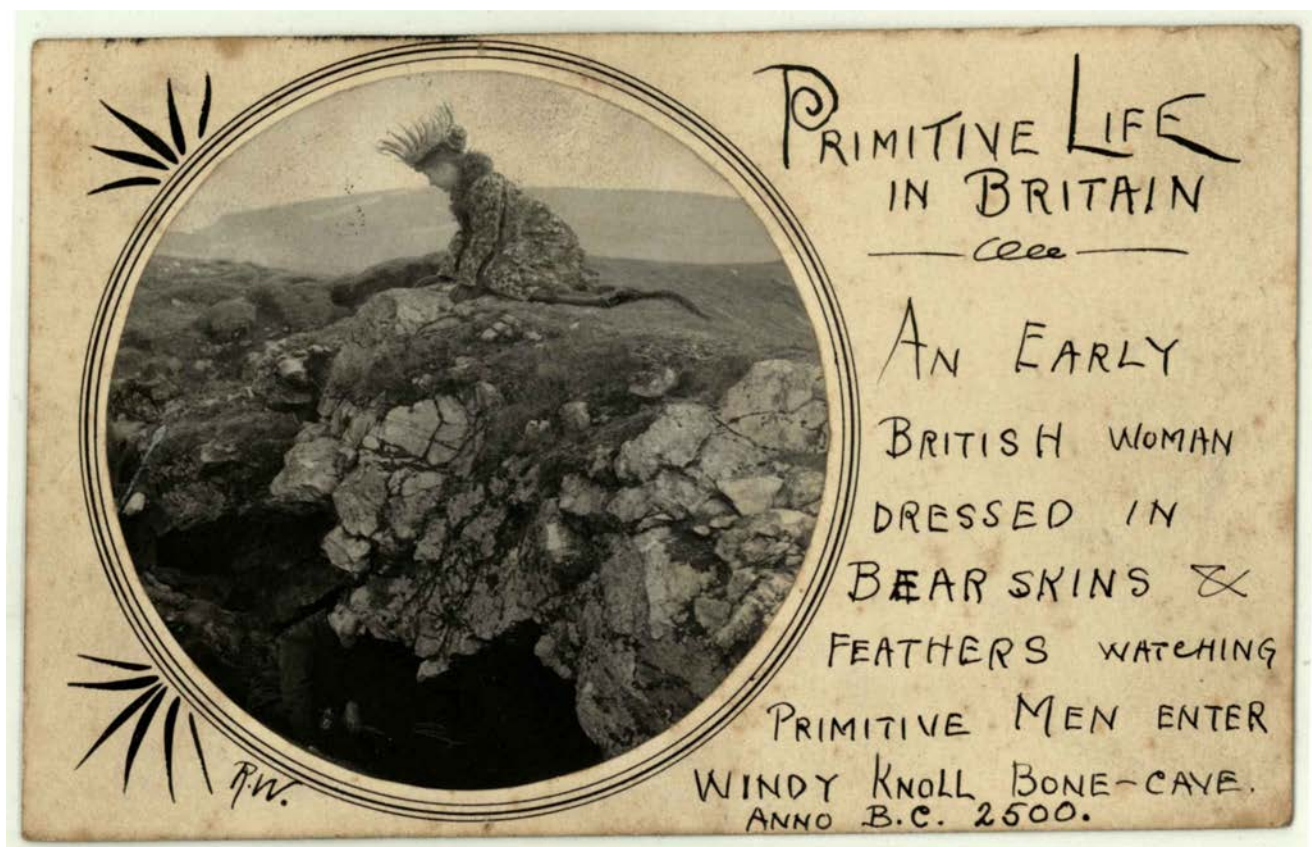
J. Wilfrid Jackson's conchological correspondents

J. Wilfrid Jackson produced a voluminous body of correspondence, much of which is preserved in the archives at Buxton Museum and Art Gallery. With his broad range of interests, JWJ knew and corresponded with many interesting and famous people including the archaeologist Sir Mortimer Wheeler, anthropologist Mary Leakey, and Sir Arthur Smith Woodward and Sir Arthur Keith (both associated with the 'Piltdown Hoax').

Not all of the material has been properly sorted and catalogued but we already know that it contains over 4,000 letters and there could be more than double that number. Of course it is hard for us now to appreciate how different the world of communication was in the early part of the 20th century. With no Internet, no TV, and only a rudimentary telephone network, the flow of information was centered firmly on the letter/postcard and the daily newspaper.

One 'life-long' relationship was with the Irish naturalist A.W. Stelfox. In 1968, many years after they first met, Arthur Stelfox wrote a letter to JWJ, enclosing a draft paper for comments. It was about a breeding colony of 4 adult white-shelled snails from Cranham Woods, Gloucestershire that Jackson had sent to Stelfox in 1914. These he had "bred in a small box for fifty four years" !!!

Another Irish friend was the eminent photographer, Robert Welch. There was some 'serious' correspondence between Welch and Jackson but much of what survives is of a light-hearted nature. Below is one of Welch's postcards showing Alicia (Jackson's wife, Robert Standen's daughter) in fur coat and feathered headdress, Jackson with spear (9 o'clock) and Robert Standen, entering the cave (7 o'clock).



Many letters to Jackson were from conchologists looking for something (books, shells, etc.) or seeking information – his role as Secretary of the Conchological Society for nearly 30 years meant that he had

established an extensive network of contacts. Often, letters might start with a bit of 'small talk', get down to business, throw in a bit of gossip, and end with best wishes to the family. The following, from John Read le Brockton Tomlin, is a fairly typical example:

"23 Boscobel Rd.
S. Leonards/Sea

20.IV.47

Dear Jackson

I have often wondered during our arctic winter how you fared. You see I know Buxton from having lived in Darley Dale & often been over for hockey matches & the like.

I have often intended to ask whether by any chance you have a Bursa (or Gyrina) gigantea Lam. you could sell me. I know that Stan had several.

Have you still got the Scalarias that Stan had from R.D.Darbishire?

And can you tell me of any one from whom I could buy a sinistral Valvata piscinalis? I know that several have been found at different times. I fancy that Pickering had it.

You would hear of Connolly's death – he was found dead in bed one morning at his hotel. You may know that he sold his coll'n to the B.M. several years ago, & had spent about the last 3 years incorporating it, at the B.M.'s expense!

I hope that all the Jackson family is going strong?

With many greetings,

Yours,

J.R.le B. Tomlin"

[N.B. Major Connolly (1872-1947) was a British army officer who had been President of Conchological Society in 1930, and was a "connoisseur of wine and an expert on potted meats"!! – see also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthew_William_Kemble_Connolly.]

Another writer of interest was the shell and book collector Arthur Blok who worked as a patent expert for the British Government. In the summer of 1945 he informed JWJ that for future Conchological Society lists,

"after my name the queer letters O.B.E. shd. appear", adding "I hope you do not think me an immodest fellow in mentioning it: I am far too old for vanities now & I only mention it because I know you like to keep your records accurate."

Blok went on to explain that,

"for the last 3 ½ years I've been working in connection with the atomic bomb" which has "left precious little time for anything but bed & work with blitzes & crossings of the Atlantic for light relief. Spero melivra! [a Google translation = to hope for better] But not yet I fear for the work continues."

In fact, the O.B.E. was for outstanding scientific services during World War II, and the letter was dated 18th August 1945, just a few days after the Americans detonated the Nagasaki and Hiroshima bombs.

Among the longest standing and most prolific of JWJ's pen pals was Alfred Santer Kennard, undoubtedly one of the most colourful conchological characters of the first half of the 20th Century. Kennard's letters are always detailed, chatty, and often contain gossip or social commentary. It could be said that Kennard was somewhat xenophobic, and certainly not very fond of Germans. There were, however, some mitigating circumstances that can best be summarized in a short list – incendiaries,

bombs and robots (V1s or doodlebugs). Living in Kent during WWII was to bear the brunt of the wartime aerial bombardment and this was vividly related in his letters:

“the last raid on London wasn’t nice. They dropped 3 bombs about ¼ mile away, shook our place & killed 5.” – 12.8.41

“I had a narrow squeak March 25. 1000 incendiaries dropped on an area 200yds square. Two fires in front garden, one in back & a direct hit in the front bedroom smashed a washstand & broke some china & glass but was a dud.” – 2.4.44

“We are having a hell of a time with the Robots. Beckenham has had over 100, over 60 within a mile of this house.” -24.8.44

“We are still lively. I was busy this morning when a terrific explosion, windows shook, doors flew open & a fanlight of mine blew out but the hinges held.” – 9.1.45

Among the other famous names of conchology in the Jackson Archive at Buxton Museum we may find Fred Taylor (see below, with JWJ at the Conchological Society annual meeting in 1904), A.E.Trueman, J. Cosmo Melvill and Nora MacMillan.



Of course it remains frustrating that in any correspondence archive there is often an incomplete record, or, in some cases, a one-sided set of letters (i.e. either from or to). So, if anyone knows the whereabouts of any Jackson related correspondence, please contact Buxton Museum and Art Gallery, Terrace Road, Buxton SK17 6DA (tel: 01629 533540 or email: buxton.museum@derbyshire.gov.uk).