

J. Wilfrid Jackson – his contribution to Conchology

Dr Brian Goodwin



John Wilfrid Jackson lived to a ripe old age, dying in his 99th year. During his life he made major contributions to conchology (the study of molluscs) and to the Conchological Society. As his obituary records, he also made telling contributions in local natural history, the study of cave mammals, archaeology, Carboniferous geology and the study of Brachiopods. A summary of the scientific papers he wrote, reflecting the breadth of his interests, is shown in the Table below.

Figure 1: Portrait of Jackson in his D.Sc. robes, paid for by friends from the GSGBI, in 1929.

A summary of J. Wilfrid Jackson's published works	
<u>Mollusca/Brachiopoda</u> - over 90 papers on recent molluscs and 5 on recent brachiopods, including important reports on material from the Scottish National Antarctic, British Antarctic (Scott's Terra Nova) and Siboga expeditions.	<u>Geology</u> - more than 50 papers, especially on the Carboniferous rocks and fossils from around Manchester, Cheshire and Derbyshire. An important work was his catalogue of the type and figured specimens in the Geology Department of Manchester Museum.
<u>Archaeology</u> - about 25 papers including ones on artefacts (bronze sword, cinerary urns, flint scrapers, neolithic pottery), general articles on prehistory in Derbyshire and Manchester and several papers on Irish archaeology, particularly from County Antrim.	<u>Bones</u> - about 80 published 'bone reports' on animal remains from sites around the UK including Stonehenge, Woodhenge, Grimes Graves and Maiden Castle. He also visited Egypt. In addition, he compiled over a 100 further reports which appear not to have been published.
<u>Caves</u> - 35 papers on caves, including from Derbyshire, Yorkshire, Scotland and Ireland. An important work is his chapter on 'Archaeology and Palaeontology' in the book 'British Caving' by Cullingford.	<u>Miscellaneous</u> - more than 30 works including obituaries, biographies and others such as papers on both recent and fossil myriapods (millipedes).

Jackson was born in Scarborough on 15th June 1880 but the family soon moved to Manchester in search of work for his father. His childhood and education are not well known, but certainly his formal schooling ended at the age of 12, in 1892, when he started his first full time job as office boy at the 'Clarion' newspaper. He soon moved into the cotton trade and later the wool industry, becoming Assistant Woollen Buyer for the South American shipping firm of Kolp, Kullman & Co. from 1904-1907. Having only a basic school education, Jackson realized the importance of further study whilst at work, taking certificate courses in shorthand, English, Spanish and Latin at the Lower Mosley Street Schools from 1902-1904, and in 1906 beginning classes in Geology at what is now U.M.I.S.T.

By this time, Jackson was not only working and studying but had also developed a keen interest in natural history, especially conchology. Quite how, when and why he became interested is unclear but Jackson himself recalled an epiphany on Mafeking Night (12th May 1900), when he visited the home of Robert Standen, a conchologist working at Manchester Museum, to inspect his shell collection. From this point on, at the age of 20, Jackson's interest in conchology took firm root and by January 1901 he had been nominated for, and elected to, the Conchological Society. He remained a member for the next 78 years, until his death, no doubt making him one of the longest serving members of the Society.

Without a scientific education or university degree, JWJ was perhaps aware of the need to establish some 'credentials' and he soon started publishing scientific papers in the Journal of Conchology. Many of Jackson's original notebooks and sketches remain in Buxton Museum's archive (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). The descriptions of snails mating must have seemed pretty 'racy' in the early 1900's!!

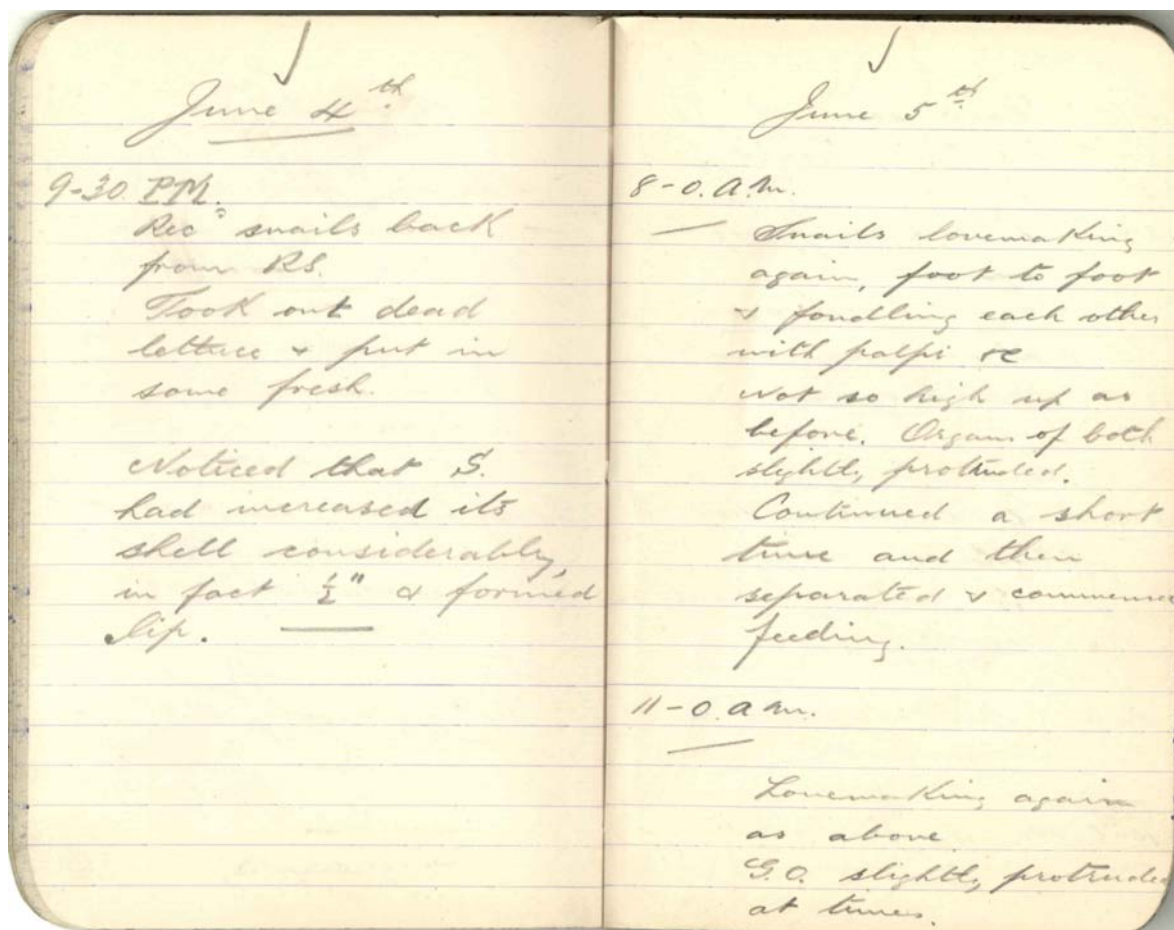


Figure 2: Jackson's notebook of 1906 recording an attempt to breed from a sinistral *Helix pomatia*. The RS refers to Robert Standen, Jackson's soon to be father-in-law.

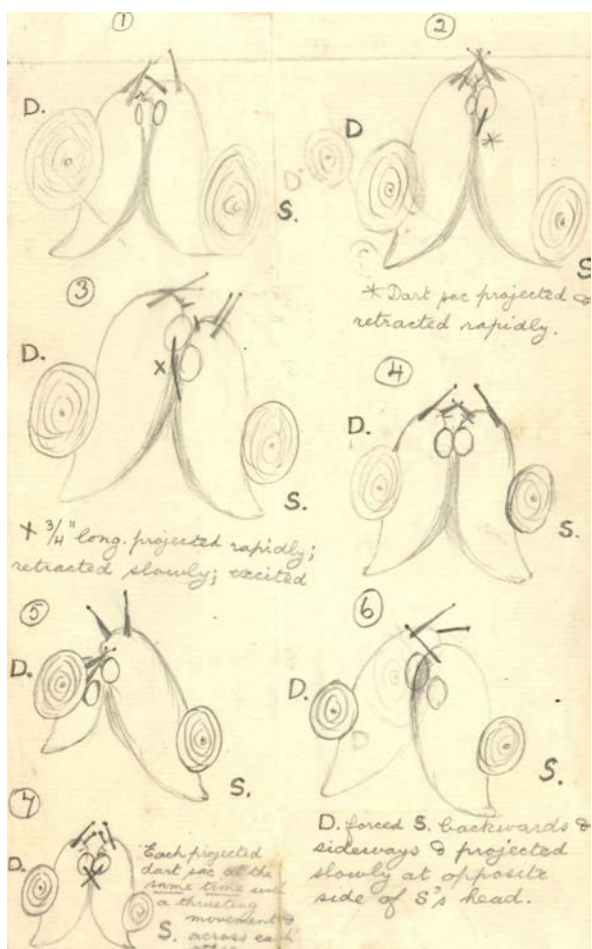


Figure 3: Sketch of 1906 showing snails 'lovemaking'.

A close friendship that began when Jackson was starting out in conchology was with Robert Welch, a naturalist and photographer of repute from Ireland. Following correspondence and shell exchange, JWJ visited Ireland in summer 1904 and made personal contact. Later that year Jackson, inspired by Welch's photography, purchased his first camera and for the rest of his life photographed, developed and printed all his own material. Figure 4 shows one of several, often witty, cards sent from Welch to JWJ over their long friendship which lasted until 1936 when Welch died.

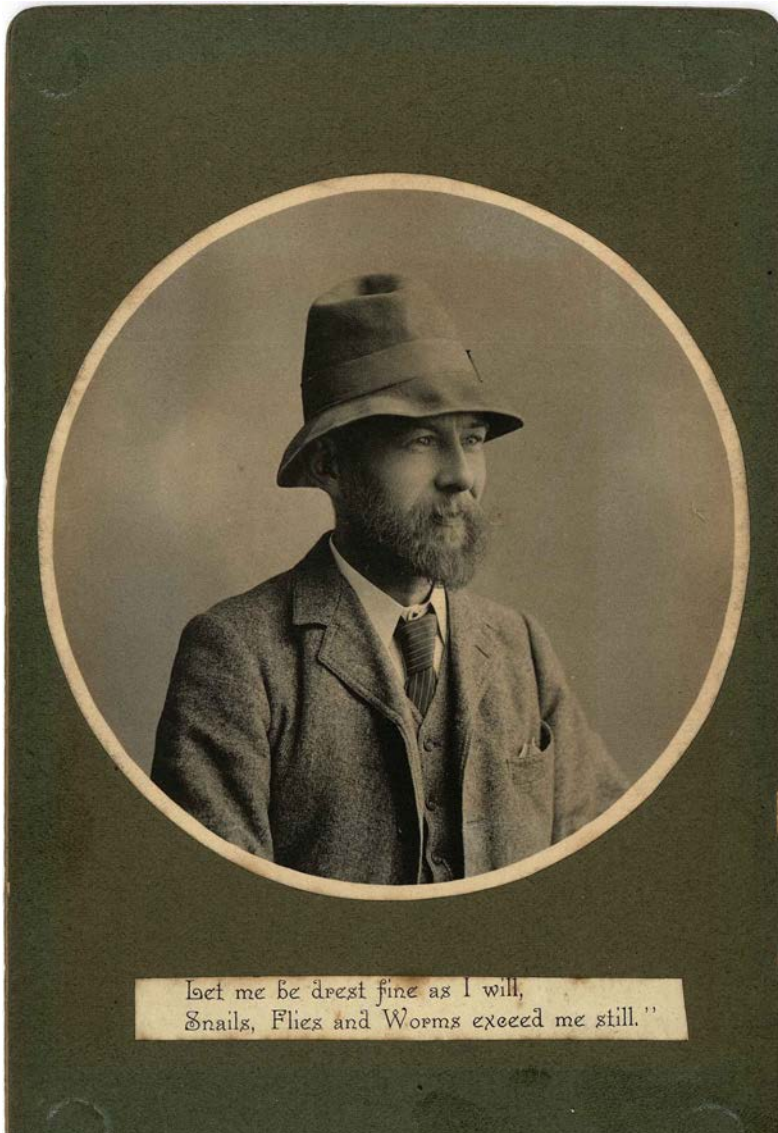


Figure 4: Postcard of, and from, Jackson's friend Robert Welch. Welch was a well-known Irish naturalist and eminent photographer – included among his subjects was 'The Titanic'.

Jackson must have made a strong impression in Conchological Society circles, because in 1904 he was elected to the Council and he remained an officer, in one role or another, for the next 40 odd years, until his retirement in 1945. He certainly made a strong impression in the Standen household for in 1906 he married Robert's daughter, Alicia Mayor Standen and soon after, in 1907, he successfully applied for a post at Manchester Museum, where Robert Standen worked as Assistant Keeper. William Boyd Dawkins (later Sir WBD) was part of the interview panel and on appointment he took JWJ under his wing, supervising him in curatorial duties and research on the osteology of mammals. Having already attended Dawkins' public

lectures on geology and archaeology, the influence exerted may well have been responsible for Jackson's expanding interests towards geology and archaeology. Jackson and Dawkins maintained a close personal and professional relationship until the latter's death in 1929. For example, they both made important contributions to the Glastonbury Lake Village excavations (WBD on the human remains and JWJ on animal remains) and one of the last things they worked together on was the re-opening of cave excavations at Creswell Crags, Dawkins as Chair of the Committee and Jackson as the bone expert. When Dawkins died his widow presented to the town of Buxton his library and a significant amount of correspondence, together with furniture, pictures and other archive material. These have been incorporated into a 'Boyd Dawkins Room' at Buxton Museum (see Figure 5), subsequently augmented by similar material when Jackson later died.



Figure 5: The Boyd Dawkins Room at Buxton Museum and Art Gallery. Dawkins was a mentor to Jackson at Manchester Museum and both of them left substantial amounts of archive material to Buxton Museum, some of which is on show in the Boyd Dawkins Room.

Because JWJ was employed at Manchester Museum to look after the geological collections, and because his interests were rapidly expanding into caves, bones and archaeology, it is somewhat inevitable that his conchology output slowed after the end of the First World War. During the War years though he devoted significant effort in researching a series of papers on 'ethno-conchology'. These articles (on the shell-purple industry, cowries as currency, shell trumpets, pearls, etc.) were soon augmented and worked up into a book – "Shells as Evidence of the Migration of Early Culture" – published in 1917. This work remains a comprehensive collection of facts about the cultural use of shells in early human societies. The year 1917 also marked Jackson's election as Secretary of the Conchological Society, a post he held until his retirement in 1945, with the exception of his Presidential year in 1924.

One notable feature of JWJ's work as he expanded his expertise was his ability to 'cross-fertilize' his interests, for example, archaeology and conchology in his book (above). Most workers concentrated on recent **or** fossil molluscs, recent **or** fossil brachiopods – Jackson managed to be an expert in all of these (and in many others areas) and he used his knowledge of living groups to interpret fossil faunas. One of the most significant contributions he made was in his reporting of the usually ignored rodent bones and Mollusca from cave excavations that gave important clues to the wider ecology of the area and prevailing environmental conditions.

Jackson spent his whole 'academic' working career at Manchester Museum and as his expertise and reputation grew he was recognized by a string of awards and honours. Manchester University awarded him his M.Sc. (1921) and D.Sc. (1929), and he received the Murchison Award from the Geological Society of London in 1934. Figure 1 shows Jackson in his D.Sc. robes. He was a founder member of the British Spelaeological Association and served on the Council for British Archaeology, and on the Peak Park Planning Board. Presidencies came thick and fast - 5 between 1940-1945, including that of the Yorkshire Naturalists Union.

J Wilfrid Jackson wrote well over 300 scientific papers. Nearly 100 works were on conchology (excluding fossils), with some interesting ones produced in his later years. These included his Conchological Society Presidential Address on the distribution of Pearl Mussels, which utilized palaeontological evidence as well as extensive private records, as well as carefully researched biographies on Captain Thomas Brown and Martin Lister, the latter his Presidential Address to the Yorkshire Naturalists Union. As he got older, Jackson saw many of his friends and colleagues die and as an 'elder statesman' of the Conchological Society he wrote many obituaries, the first of which in 1925 was for Robert Standen, his father-in-law.

Jackson's last curatorial job at Manchester Museum, at the end of the Second World War, was the transfer of fossil collections of Sir Arthur Smith Woodward (who died in 1944) from Macclesfield to Manchester. Sir Arthur, a fossil fish expert at the Natural History Museum whose reputation suffered as a result of his involvement in the 'Piltdown' controversy, had been a close friend of both Sir William Boyd Dawkins and Jackson.

On retirement, Jackson (together with wife and daughter, both called Alicia) moved to Buxton, where he had established close links with the Museum, and had acted as 'Honorary Consultant' since 1929. He continued publishing a steady stream of papers (especially on the animal remains excavated from archaeological sites) into the 1960's. Gradually though the focus of his activities switched to actively passing on his knowledge and he undertook lectures to Societies and schools, organized and led geology excursions and ran numerous WEA classes and Summer Schools. He was revered by many of his students. In an appreciation published soon after he died, one of them noted "we were receiving the results and conclusions of almost a life time's experience and intensive study. How fortunate we were!" Remarkably, Jackson carried on his WEA classes until 1971, when he was into his 90's.

To the end he was generous with his time and encouraging of young and older 'students' alike. A current volunteer at Buxton Museum, Clive Champion, who is working on Jackson's extensive collection of fossil Brachiopoda, recalls a visit when he was a young man, to see Jackson. After a pleasant afternoon spent discussing all manner of brachiopod matters, the 98 year old JWJ offered any further help and assistance, but stressed "probably best not to wait too long"!

The final paragraph from Bishop's (1982) biographical sketch (see below) summed JWJ up well:

"We have in Jackson one of those very keen men who delighted in the pursuit of natural science as a hobby, and with hardly any formal training, had the motivation to turn their hobby into a lifelong career without seeking any self-advancement in their position, career-wise or socially."

References

Bishop, M. (Ed.) 1982. The Cave Hunters: Biographical sketches of the lives of Sir William Boyd Dawkins and Dr. J. Wilfrid Jackson. Derbyshire Museum Service.

Eagar, R.M.C., 1978. John Wilfrid Jackson, 1880-1978. *Journal of Conchology*, **30**, p.222.