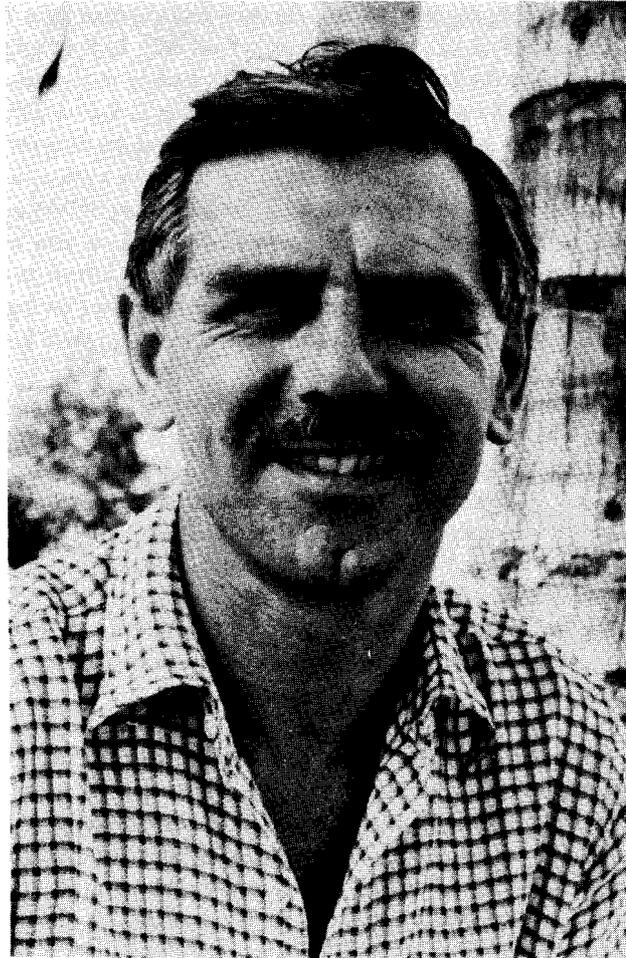


## ON RICHARD DENISON PURCHON



Richard Denison Purchon was born on 19 March 1916 in Sheffield, Yorkshire, England, the son of an architect, W. S. Purchon, who was later appointed to the Headship of the Welsh School of Architecture, Cardiff. His mother was Eleanor Maud Purchon (née Strong). It is perhaps from his father that the young Richard obtained his love of form and functional anatomy. Between 1934 and 1937 he read for an honour's degree in Zoology at the University of Bristol and attended vacation courses in marine zoology at Bangor and Plymouth and thus his future career was set. After graduating with a 1st class honour's degree, Richard was awarded a John Stewart Research Scholarship at Bristol where he undertook research on the intertidal biology of the

Bristol Channel and came under the closer influence of Professor (later Sir) Charles Maurice Yonge who was undertaking research, with his students, on bivalve functional morphology. Such work would eventually establish him and his group as the leading bivalve morphologists of this century. By sheer hard work, Richard completed his Ph.D. on the wood borer *Xylophaga dorsalis* in two years, just before the Second World War broke out.

A good athlete, Richard had joined Bristol University's Officer Training Corp and in 1939 he was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry. After training, he was posted with the British Expeditionary Force to France. Subsequent to time at the front, Richard and his comrades were captured by an overwhelming German force and spent the rest of the war in a succession of Prisoner of War camps in Germany. In the camps, his zoological skills sustained him and he studied nest building and chick rearing in Swallows (this work was later published in the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London*) and the behaviour of Bank crickets (these observations later being published in the popular magazine *Field Studies*). He also produced an English abridged translation of the Bivalvia section of F. Haas in H.G. Bronn's *Klassen und Ordnungen des Tierreichs*. Life in the Prisoner of War camps was spartan but Richard survived with the help of these zoological diversions and upon release was appointed to a position on the staff of the Department of Zoology, University College, Cardiff, where he remained until 1950. During this period, he pursued his marine biological interests and continued studying the shores of the Bristol Channel, but also investigated Lough Ine, Ireland.

In 1950, Richard took up a position as the first Raffles Professor of Zoology at the University of Malaya, Singapore. There, he and the Professor of Botany, Eric Holttum, designed the first year laboratory and began teaching Botany and Zoology, respectively, to the Intermediate Science and Pre-medical students unsupported by either lecturers or trained laboratory assistants, and without a local biological supply firm. He had to write and type his own dissection schedules but this finally resulted in a useful '*Practical Animal Biology for the Tropics*', published in 1957 by University Tutorial Press, Cambridge. Richard also began the setting up of a teaching museum and the training of biology technicians. Early in his stay in Singapore, Richard instituted the Wallace Memorial Lecture series, the first being given by Michael Tweedie in 1953; Richard gave the third in 1955.

For research, Richard focussed attention on the shores of Singapore, notably those at Bedok where he collected and studied *Atrina*, *Malleus* and the watering-pot shell *Brechites* alive. He also visited and stayed at the Raffles Light where he worked with a Botany lecturer, Ivan Enoch, on the shores, but also investigated the rich bivalve fauna of adjacent shores and reefs. Several papers were published on these bivalves, but their diversity enabled him to commence work on a comparative survey of bivalve stomach architecture which eventually allowed him to uncover phylogenetic links between certain superfamilies of the class and thus to develop a new system of classification.

When the Singapore Regional Fisheries Unit was founded, Richard Ommaney was appointed the first director, with a fledgling staff. Initial facilities on the dock were poor, prompting Richard Purchon to offer the Unit space in the Zoology Department until new buildings were ready for occupation. He also set up two huts, one on the Raffles Light, the other in the Taman Negara National Park, to service ecological expeditions. Richard visited the reserve with Michael Tweedie to collect live Malayan fish for the Van Kleef Aquarium in Singapore.

Richard also persuaded the Nuffield Foundation to instigate a Travelling Scholarship scheme that would bring eminent scientists to Singapore to help study its rich marine life. Although the scheme did not fully get off the ground until he had left Singapore, Richard believes this to be one of his most significant achievements.

During his ten years in Singapore, Richard served as Dean of Science and as Acting Vice-Chancellor of the University. In 1960 he left Singapore to take up the Chair of Zoology at the University of Accra, Ghana, where he continued work on the Bivalvia with a study of *Egeria*, but also produced a West African edition of his '*Practical Animal Biology for the Tropics*' book. Unable to settle in Accra, however, he soon left and took up the Chair of Zoology and headship of the Botany and Zoology Department at Chelsea College, University of London. During his time in Chelsea, Richard served as Chairman of the Board of Studies in Zoology of the University of London. He also joined the Committee awarding the Nuffield Foundation Travelling Scholarships in Marine Biology and organized a symposium for the recipients of the fellowship scheme, under the auspices of the Royal Society. This was reported upon in *Biologist*, the journal of the Institute of Biology. At Chelsea College, Richard took me on as his first research student (1966-1969) to work on the Bivalvia, naturally.

Between 1969 and 1971, Richard was elected President of the Malacological Society of London giving a Presidential address in 1972 on '*Digestion in the Bivalvia*'. At Chelsea, he also took the time to write a '*Biology of the Mollusca*', published by Pergamon Press in 1968. This book, an invaluable personal insight into the Mollusca, has become a standard text for many researchers world wide.

In 1973 and 1974, Richard and his wife, "Tim", took a 15 month sabbatical leave and returned to Singapore and Malaysia to extensively collect marine molluscs. This extended period of research, resulted in publication of three papers on the Mollusca of the Malaysian peninsula, supplementing earlier work.

Richard's career in Zoology spanned 41 years until his retirement in 1981. Even in retirement, however, his writing has continued with two important papers on the evolution and classification of the Bivalvia being published in 1987 in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*. In 1990, he published his most recent paper on stomach morphology in a memorial volume to his first teacher, Sir Maurice Yonge. After his retirement from Chelsea College, the University of London conferred on him the title of Emeritus Professor of Zoology.

For his contribution to Malacology, The Malacological Society of London, elected him to Honorary membership in 1990, an honour it had similarly conferred upon his former teacher, Maurice Yonge. Modestly, Richard felt it was underserved; I do not agree. It is, moreover, also true that during his time in Singapore, as the first occupant of the Raffles Chair in Zoology, he set in process the developments that have made Zoology at the National University of Singapore a dynamic and thriving subject for teaching and research.

Today, Richard lives, in retirement, with his wife, in the countryside of Kent, Great Britain.

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