

## TO PROFESSOR A.F. O'FARRELL ON HIS 70th BIRTHDAY

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*Received August 21, 1986*

A short biography is given of A.F. O'FARRELL (born 9 Jan. 1917, Assam, India; inaugural Professor of Zoology at the University of New England, Australia), a student, and mentor of students, of Australian Odonata, with notes on his work and a list of his papers on dragonflies.



*A.F. O'Farrell*

*ANTONY FREDERICK LOUIS O'FARRELL was born on 9 January, 1917, at Badlipar, Assam, India, of Irish parentage; his father spent most of his life in Assam, working for the Brahmaputra Steam Navigation Company. An only child, Tony accompanied his parents to England when his father retired in 1920-21. His father's early death, and his own serious illness, dogged Tony's childhood and delayed the start of his formal education until he was 12-13 years old. His informal education, however, started during his convalescence in a farmhouse surrounded by the largely unspoilt forests of the Weald, where his zeal for the study of insects was kindled. His entomological activities continued at Wimbledon College in London and, in due course,*

he graduated from the Royal College of Science in 1939, with First Class Honours and the Forbes Memorial Medal in Entomology. Plans for a Ph. D. were thwarted by, in Tony's words, "one Adolf Hitler, who decided to turn on World War II in spite of my good intentions". Declared unfit for flying duties, Tony became a part-time soldier in the Berkshire and East Sussex units of the Home Guard ("Dad's Army"), while working, from 1940-42, on problems caused by elaterid beetle larvae (wireworms) to crops grown on old pastures ploughed for conversion to arable land. By 1942, the emergency storage of wheat and other foodstuffs, often in unsuitable places, had produced major problems with insect pests, and Tony was posted to Belfast to work on them. There he met and, in 1944, married MARY ISABEL MILLEN.

In 1947, Tony and Isabel moved to Australia, when he was appointed Senior Lecturer-in-Charge of the Department of Zoology and Botany at the New England University College in Armidale, in north-eastern New South Wales. He played a very active role in the formative years of the College, and of the University into which it matured in 1954; in September, 1955, he became inaugural Professor of Zoology, a position he retained until he retired in February, 1982. For many years he was Dean of the Faculty of Science.

Tony's enthusiasm for Odonata began early, and has since remained a major part of his entomological interests. Paradoxically, though, he has published relatively little on the order. Since his arrival in Australia, his major publications have described studies on the physiology of regeneration in insects, particularly cockroaches, studies undertaken in collaboration with his close colleague the late Alexander STOCK. At the same time, however, he collected Odonata in many parts of eastern Australia, particularly in north-eastern New South Wales, ably assisted by the late C.W. FRAZIER and by many students. During attempts to photograph the vividly-coloured species of *Diphlebia* (*Amphipterygidae*), Tony chilled them, thus discovering temperature-dependent colour change in Odonata, on which he (and his student John VERON) published extensively in the 1960's and 1970's.

His general knowledge of the Australian Odonata was ably expressed in his chapter on them in "The insects of Australia" (1970) and its supplement in 1974; the chapter on Odonata now being prepared by J.A.L. WATSON for the revised edition of this text will require little change from the original, except for bringing the account of the fauna up-to-date. Some of this updating will depend heavily on material that resulted from Tony's and his students' field work, particularly those in the 1970's sponsored by the Australian Biological Resources Survey. This material is now in the Australian National Insect Collection, Canberra, and figures prominently in his student Bill STEWART's studies of *Diphlebia* (1980), G. THEISCHINGER and O'FARRELL's revision of *Austroargiolestes* (*Megapodagrionidae*) later in this volume, and WATSON's revision of the Australian *Gomphidae*, now near completion. It is characteristic of Tony that, as a good

teacher, he has freely made available the knowledge and material he has accumulated to all those who have sought it, including ourselves; our perspectives on gomphids and megapodagrionids (not to mention other odonates!) owe much to him.

Far from being restricted to entomology, Tony's zoological interests are wide. It suffices to mention the Marine Field Station at Arrawarra Headland, on the northern coast of New South Wales. Having searched for, then found, a site where both tropical and temperate marine biology could be studied, Tony fought hard and successfully for the establishment of a laboratory there. It is now, very appropriately, named after him.



Fig. 2. A recent portrait: Tony's broad zoological interests...

In recent years, Tony's problems with arthritis and weight have limited his ability to pursue Odonata in the field. His enjoyment of dragonflies, is, however, undiminished, as is his sharing of it; long may it remain so!

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Portrait on p. 373 dated August 19, 1953. (Inter-varsity debate, New England University College).