

On William Wood's General Conchology and Index Testaceologicus

by

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William Wood (1774-1857) began his working life as a surgeon, but in 1815 he entered business as a bookseller and eventually turned publisher. He wrote several books on natural-history subjects and two of these are devoted to shells: "General Conchology" and "Index Testaceologicus".

GENERAL CONCHOLOGY

This book, the remnant of an over-ambitious plan "to describe every species of shell". (p. iii of the Advertisement in the book), described and illustrated the chitons, barnacles (then classified with molluscs) and some of the bivalves. The artist was James Sowerby (1752-1822) whose talents were more often employed in the illustration of expensive botanical works. The first issue is dated on the title page "1815"; it was re-issued in 1835 (this issue lacking the four-page "Advertisement" and the words "Vol. I" on the title page). The complete collation of the first issue is as follows: title page, pp. 1-7, i-lxi, i-iv (Advertisement), 1-246, pls. 1-59+4* (Wood, 1814-15).

As pointed out by Iredale (1922: 91) this was issued in parts but he was able to give details of the first part only. Because many species were described as new to science in this book further information on the dates of issue of the parts is desirable. An incomplete set of parts in original wrappers was acquired by the British Museum (Natural History) a few years ago and provides some additional information.

Unfortunately each wrapper is undated and there are no clues in the text to suggest the dates of issue of the parts. The first part, as shown by Iredale, is dated on p. iv "April 1814". The contents of the other ten parts in this copy indicate that a part was issued each month for a year. As this cannot be proved, however, it is not possible to give a more precise date than "1815" to any part except the first.

For bibliographic purposes it may be useful to have details of the

contents of each part and these are given below, each part number being indicated by roman numerals.

I, pp. i-iv (Advertisement), [p. iv dated "April, 1814"] pp. 1-16, pls. 1-5.

II, pp. 17-32, pls. 4*, 6-9.

III, pp. 33-48, pls. 10-14.

IV, pp. 49-64, pls. 15-19.

V, pp. 65-80, pls. 20-24.

VI, pp. 81-96, pls. 25-29.

VII, pp. 97-112, pls. 30-34.

VIII, pp. 113-128, pls. 35-39.

IX, [sewed-in sheet advertising Yosy's "General Description of Switzerland"] pp. 129-144, pls. 40-44.

X, pp. 145-160, pls. 45-49.

XI, pp. 161-176, pls. 50-54.

INDEX TESTACEOLOGICUS

From lack of public support the projected continuation of "General Conchology" was dropped. In 1818, however, Wood gave to the world the first edition of a modest work which, ultimately, proved to be a very acceptable compromise: the "Index Testaceologicus". The first edition listed all the shells known to him and gave brief synonymies for each species. Some copies contain eight coloured plates and these were engraved by Wood himself as a minute "WW" at the base of each testifies. He was also the publisher (Wood, 1818).

The second and subsequent editions have been dealt with in some detail by Reynell (1918) and Wilkins (1957). Reynell's article covers all that is known of the dates of issue of the various editions and Wilkins discusses several of the shells illustrated. This note adds a little information which may be of interest to students of this well-known book.

A two-page prospectus in my possession reads: "To be published by subscription,/ a complete/ Illustration of the Index Testaceologicus,/ or/ Catalogue of Shells,/ British and Foreign,/ By W. Wood, F.R.S. & L.S." It goes on to say that "The Subscription will positively close on the First of January, 1823, after which the price to Non-subscribers will be

A Plain Copy	£ 2 12 6
The same coloured	5 5 0
With two sets of plates	5 15 6'

By modern standards this must be considered very expensive for a book of such modest proportions, but it sold extremely well. Its merits were entirely iconographical. It was intended that James Sowerby should, once again, be the illustrator, but he died having completed only the first six plates. The illustrations on these plates were nearly all copies (sometimes reversed) of the illustrations he had drawn for "General Conchology". They differed principally in being much smaller than the originals, being little more than "thumb-nail sketches". Altogether the second edition contained, according to the title page, 2300 figures (Wood, 1823-25). Apart from those on the first six plates they were all the work of "Mr. Wood, Jun." (Wilkins, 1957: 157). In his Preface the author says "the figures are for the most part original" (Wood, 1823-25: v). This is contradicted by Sylvanus Hanley in his Introduction to the 1856 edition: "almost all the engravings, excepting those of the Supplement, were copied from published drawings" (Hanley, 1856: ii). An inspection of the figures indicates that most of them are derived from earlier illustrations. On Plate 14 several species of *Conus* are shown as sinistral specimens (sinistrality being unknown for this genus in 1825) and shows that Wood was not as vigilant as he might have been considering that they were "executed under the immediate inspection of the author" (Wood, 1823-25: v).

There was another issue in 1828, almost identical to that of 1825, which was called the second edition on the title page but which is really the third (Wood, 1828a). In the same year Wood issued a "Supplement" and it is this which is of most importance today as it contains illustrations of and proposes new names for many species (Wood, 1828b). Most of the 480 illustrations, which are of very high quality, were drawn from specimens then contained in the British Museum or the private collections of John Edward Gray (Keeper of Zoology at the British Museum from 1840 to 1874), Mrs. Mawe, or that of Wood himself.

A number of the specimens illustrated have been found in the shell collection of the British Museum (Natural History) but the location of the majority of them is unknown. Wilkins has discussed the confusion that exists in connection with the authorship of the new names. The confusion arose in the first place because Wood adopted manuscript names copied from labels in the collections he utilized. Hanley made matters worse by attributing authorship to Gray, Mawe, or Leach rather than to Wood. Another complication arises from Wood's apparent propensity for giving new names to species already described by others under different names. It is not

surprising that he gave unnecessary new names to species already endowed with names; that has been done often enough, and innocently, by generations of zoologists. It is surprising, however, that he seems to have been unaware that some of the re-named species had been described only three years before in the "Tankerville Catalogue" by the first G.B. Sowerby (1825).

It can be shown that some of the new taxa in the "Index" are based on the same specimens as those which Sowerby had before him when describing the novelties from the Tankerville collection! This is certainly true, for instance, of Wood's *Murex papilla* (p. 14, pl. 5 *Murex* fig. 2). His drawing is of a shell in the British Museum (Natural History) which is marked in ink "1641". That is the number printed in the "Tankerville Catalogue" (p. 63) and the shell is described in the Appendix to that work (p. xviii) under the name *Ranella verrucosa*. Similarly Wood's drawing of *Murex bicarinatus* (p. 15, pl. 5 *Murex* fig. 7) is based on a shell in the same museum marked "1503". That is the "Tankerville Catalogue" number (p. 58) of the species described in the Appendix (p. xiv) as *Pleurotoma cryptorrhaphæ*. Consequently each shell is the holotype of two taxa, one attributable to Wood and the other to Sowerby.

As Wood is the undoubted author of the "Index Testaceologicus" it would be reasonable to accuse him of unethical behaviour. But such an accusation is unjustified because there is evidence to suggest that the real villain of the piece was Dr. Joseph Goodall (1760-1840) who, as Provost of Eton College, one would have supposed a model of propriety. Thirty years after the "Supplement" was published J.E. Gray, in a discreet footnote, disclosed the awful truth: "Many of the names of the shells in Wood's Suppl. were arbitrarily altered by the late Dr. Goodall as the work passed through the press, overlooking the fact that some of them had been established by prior publication" (Gray, 1858:55).

Except as publisher Wood's only other contribution to the book was the publication of a list of the plates "with the Lamarckian names adapted to the figures in each plate" (Wood, 1829). The "Index Testaceologicus" was re-issued in a larger format by Hanley in 1856, no doubt to the great delight of its aged author.

REFERENCES

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- , 1818. *Index Testaceologicus; or a catalogue of shells, British and Foreign, arranged according to the Linnean system; with the Latin and English names, references to figures, and places where found: i-viii, 1-188, [+2], 8 pls.* London.
- , 1823-25. [Second edition of above title]. i-xxxii, [+2], 1-188, [+2], 38 pls. London [this was issued in two parts as shown by Reynell (see reference above). The first part, comprising pp. vii-viii, 1-64 and pls. 1-13, appeared in or before June 1823. The copy of this part owned by Reynell is now in the National Museum of Wales.
- According to the British Museum (Natural History) Catalogue of Books 5: 2353 (1915), the second part contained the title page and preface, the text from p. 65 and the last 26 plates. It also refers to four pages of preliminary matter issued with the first part and subsequently cancelled. These cancelled pages are present in the Reynell copy].
- , 1828a. [Third edition of above title, but called "Second Edition, corrected and revised" on title page]: i-xxii, [+1], 1-212, 38 pls. London.
- , 1828b. Supplement to the *Index Testaceologicus; or a catalogue of shells, British and Foreign: i-iv, [+1], 1-59, 8*

pls. London (the Preface is dated May 17, 1828).

———, 1829. A list of the plates of the "Index Testaceologicus", with the Lamarckian names adapted to the figures in each plate: 1-34. London (although sometimes found bound at the end of the main work this list was published separately).