

OBITUARY OF FREDERICK RICHARD WOODWARD (1939–2020)

Frederick Richard Woodward (Fig. 1) who joined the Conchological Society in 1958 and became its President in 1992–93, has died at the age of eighty-one (Sutcliffe, 2021). Known to almost everyone as Fred, he was born in Rubrey in Birmingham. Although life was tough for Fred from the start, he overcame adversity and distinguished himself academically and socially. By his own admission he had an unhappy childhood, the few pleasures he enjoyed being derived mostly from the world of nature and from cross-country running and football. As a schoolboy he had a traineeship at Birmingham City FC but could not develop as a professional player due to injuries. These activities led to him developing leg mobility problems in later life. He retained sporting interests as a Glasgow Rangers season-ticket holder for many years and playing in Glasgow Museum's cricket team. Essentially, however, he was a loner, regularly spending many hours on his own, but never idle.



Figure 1 Fred Woodward at the door of Peter Dance's residence in Carlisle 2013. (Reproduced courtesy of Glasgow Museums)

Pursuing natural history he served as a volunteer in the Saturday Morning Club at Birmingham Museum from the age of eleven. Through his attachment to natural history and geology he became a familiar figure in the Birmingham Natural History and Philosophical Society for which he became Zoological Section officer. He retained life-long friendships with several of his fellow members from this period. Having volunteered from 1958 at the Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery he was employed as a technician in 1961 (see Kelly, 1961; Mulhearn, 2013). Simultaneously, and determined to succeed, he enrolled at Gosta Green Technical College where he studied geology and zoology, and eventually obtained a degree awarded externally by the University of London. During this time he did some voluntary work in the then British Museum (Natural History) where he and Peter Dance first met. While in Birmingham Fred took part in the Museum collecting expeditions to Puffin Island, Anglesey (Kelly, 1961; Smith, *et al.* 1962).

Encouraged by museum workers he met, notably Nora Fisher MacMillan ("Mrs Mac"), curator of Mollusca at Liverpool Museums, he began searching for curatorial posts. Fred probably first met Mrs Mac through Conchological Society events (she was Secretary of the Society for many years). After obtaining a post as an Assistant Keeper at Liverpool Museums, in 1964, his curatorial specialisation in Mollusca became firmly cemented. The following year he moved to Paisley Museum as Curator of Natural History and from there to the Shipley Art Gallery & Museum, Gateshead. Here he was as much involved with the world of art as with that of nature. After a stint at South Shields Museum, Tyne and Wear, he moved to Glasgow City Museums at Kelvingrove (1980), where he stayed until retirement (1992).

The larger freshwater bivalves attracted him from a young age and by 1961 he claimed to have a personal collection of over 1000 specimens most of which he had collected in the UK. Included were pearl mussels *Margaritifera margaritifera* (Linnaeus, 1758) and their pearls, apparently from some rivers in Devon and Cornwall (Kelly, 1961). Also in the 1960s, in association with Tom Pain, he produced a series of well-researched articles

on the systematics of various genera native to Africa. Thus at an early age he became an authority on Unionoidea. His large personal collection, grown to over 5000 specimens, was donated to Sunderland Museum (see <http://fenscore.natsca.org/cgi-bin/fensearch?s=woodward+sunderland>). Other material, including large pearl mussel samples from heaps of dead shells created by unlicensed pearl fishing on Scottish river banks, is in Glasgow Museums. Work on these bivalves has been acknowledged by the small number of workers who specialise in them but the pearl mussel has ensured that his name is likely to be remembered by a wider audience. As an expert on them and a member of the Mollusc Specialist Group of the IUCN Species Survival Commission he was involved with the conservation and protection of freshwater mussels. He took part in meetings with the Council for Europe which led to some species getting more protection under the European Habitats Directive and the Bern Convention (Woodward, 1996a; 1996b). This work also was instrumental in getting *M. margaritifera* protected in the UK by the Wildlife & Countryside Act.

In 1994 he saw into print *The Scottish Pearl in its World Context*. Because it seems to have had a very limited print run this book is relatively little known, which is a pity because it is full of interesting facts about the freshwater pearl mussel not readily available elsewhere. Fred's particular interest in *M. margaritifera*, an outwardly unattractive species, was twofold: the pearls it produces and the activities of those who collect them. The book is also the main source of information about what may be described as the biggest adventure of Fred's life. In 1992, in recognition of the high quality of his work on the freshwater pearl mussel, he was awarded a British Council Grant enabling him to fly to Moscow, to accompany some Russian colleagues to the Varzuga River System on the Kola Peninsula. As he explains in the book, the purpose of visiting this forbidding part of Russia, situated largely within the Arctic Circle, was "to see first hand what may be one of the most pristine natural pearl mussel populations in the world." The arduous nature of the expedition is described graphically by Fred, which makes the book worth reading on this account alone.

He was prepared to endure discomfort and even to risk life and limb in search of an elusive

mollusc. One such species, *Vertigo modesta arctica* (Wallenberg 1858), occurs at two Scottish locations in the Grampian Mountains, Inverness-shire. Fred decided to go alone to Ben Alder, one of the known sites, perhaps not a good idea because of the difficult terrain. He achieved his objective and, with a collecting tube containing three or four examples of this tiny mollusc in his hand, began the return journey. Suddenly he slipped, started sliding down a rugged slope, before colliding with a boulder, still clutching the precious sample but almost dislocating his thumb while doing so. He may have been a museum man, first and foremost, but he was certainly not just a closet naturalist.

He was always on the lookout for natural history material of historic importance to add to museum collections and was deeply interested and knowledgeable in the history of collecting. In 1983 he attended The National Butterfly Museum Sale and acquired valuable material for Glasgow Museums. He negotiated acquiring some important mollusc collections for Glasgow Museums, one of which was the acquisition as a bequest of Robert (Bob) P. Scase's large world mollusc collection. This was made easier than normal as Bob was a life-long friend. Several judicious purchases of rare species, related archives and illustrated work for Glasgow Museums collections were achieved such as obtaining for Glasgow Museums several copies of the rare albums of Scottish seaweeds, entitled *Treasures of the Deep*, assembled in the 1850s by members of the Rev. David Landsborough's family (Woodward, 1985b). An enterprise at Glasgow was to encourage the local diving club by hosting their indoor meetings and promoting the recording of underwater faunas. The museum collections were enhanced considerably by fresh material. There was parallel involvement with The Porcupine Society of which Fred was a founder member and Newsletter Editor of the first volume (1976–1980). A topic of interest was researching the biography of Captain John Laskey who impacted on the world of Mollusca in several ways. It is unfortunate that he did not formally publish these discoveries but his files are deposited in the University of Glasgow's Hunterian Museum. This research received some expression through the medium of temporary exhibitions in Glasgow.



Figure 2 Fred Woodward at Glasgow Museums Resource Centre, post-retirement, during part of a transfer of knowledge project. (Reproduced courtesy of Glasgow Museums)

Fred's connection with Glasgow Museums continued until shortly before he died. Although he had been retired for 21 years, in 2013 he agreed to come into the museum one day a week as part of the Museum Association's Monument Fellowship (Fig. 2). He went through the mollusc collection with members of staff, contextualising important specimens and imparting information to enhance specimen records (Mulhearn, 2013). He donated many of his own books and archives to Glasgow Museums.

In his Foreword to Fred's 1994 *Pearl* book Tony Andrews, Director of the British Council, Scotland, says "Fred Woodward is the champion of *Margaritifera margaritifera* ... His main concern is for its wellbeing and yet he manages to introduce an elegiac sympathy for the Scottish group of professional pearl fishers". Sympathy was something that came naturally to Fred, whose early years had been blighted by its absence, and it came to play an important part in his private life. With his wife Ann they joined forces as

foster parents with considerable success, caring for numerous children and adopting one of the girls, Kirsty, into their own family to accompany their own two children, Karen and David.

On 2 December 2020 Frederick Richard Woodward died of cancer. He had achieved much during a long career as a museum professional, but his diminutive stature and innate modesty seemed to ensure he would have a low profile. The singularity of his interests meant that few, apart from his family, a friend or two and close former colleagues were aware of his passing. This is regrettable, for he was much more than the champion of the freshwater pearl mussel. His professional accomplishments allied to his caring personality show that he lived a life that was productive, honourable and, in several ways, admirable – an impressive legacy for anyone.

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Neothauma ecclesi Crowley, Pain & Woodward, 1964
Nyassunio ecclesi Woodward (in Crowley, Pain & Woodward) 1964
Pleiodon waterstoni Pain & Woodward (in Crowley, Pain & Woodward) 1964
Prisodontopsis aviculaeformis Woodward, 1991

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