

## Introducing Julian Tenison-Woods and Malacca

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### Abstract

In 1883 and 1884, the Australian pioneer scientist and priest, Julian Tenison-Woods, conducted geological, zoological, and geographical research in the area which is now Malaysia. The government of the Straits Settlements commissioned this research, and reports made by Tenison-Woods to the government contain some of the results. One of these reports on the geology and mineralogy of Malacca is printed in this issue of the *Journal & Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales* and this short text is an introduction to Tenison-Woods' report.

### The Source

The *Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements* may seem an unusual place for geological reports, but we should not be surprised. We can recall that the *Proceedings* (in a similar usage as parliamentary papers in Australia) include a variety of reports and other materials which were tabled for the use of Legislative Councillors and the public. In those *Proceedings* we can find the work of one of Australia's pioneer scientists, Fr. Julian Edmund Tenison-Woods. Readers may already be familiar with Tenison-Woods as an honorary member of the Royal Society of New South Wales, who in 1888 was awarded the Society's Clarke Medal for distinguished contribution to the geology of Australia. Between 1877 and 1888, Tenison-Woods contributed fifteen papers to the Society's *Journal*, listed below.

In the *Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements for 1885*, we read a series of appendices. The second of these, laid before the Council on 22 January 1885, is the *Report on the Geology and Mineralogy of the State of Malacca*, by Tenison-Woods. (Tenison-Woods, 1885a) This report is

not included in the lists of Tenison-Woods' publications prepared by Sr. Margaret Press, although it is mentioned in her biography. (Press 2004, p. 210). This introduction will give background information about Tenison-Woods' visit to the Straits Settlements.

However, before proceeding, acknowledgement must be given to Mr Tim Yap Fuan of the library of the National University of Singapore, who brought this document to modern readers. Mr Tim's familiarity with the Straits Settlements' documents is evident from the speed with which he was able to find this report.

### Julian Tenison-Woods, pioneer Australian scientist

Clergy were prominent among pioneer scientists in Australia. (The Royal Society of New South Wales named its Clark Medal for Anglican clergyman and geologist William Branwhite Clark, a founder of the Society.) As a young man, Julian Woods (as he was then known) had migrated from his native England to Australia, and after brief studies at Sevenhill College in South Australia — where his scientific interests were encouraged by Jesuit John Hinteroecker, who had

been a professor of natural science in Linz (Anon. 1924, p. 4) — Woods was ordained as a Catholic priest. He served for ten years in rural South Australia, where he began publishing on scientific subjects. Julian is best known for his relationship with Australia's first Catholic Saint, Mary of the Cross MacKillop, whom he met in Penola, and with whom he worked in the foundation of the Sisters of St Joseph. Woods went on to be a pioneer in education as the first director of Catholic Education in South Australia, and as a founder of other religious orders. Leaving South Australia, he worked for many years as an itinerant missionary up and down the east coast of Australia and in Tasmania. Woods has been the subject of some book-length biographies and numerous journal articles (O'Neill 1929; Hepburn 1979; Doherty 1996; Press 2004). Woods himself wrote extensively, and began using the name Tenison-Woods to distinguish himself from other scientists named Woods (his mother's maiden name was Tenison), and henceforth we will use this name. After publishing a number of articles (Wilson 2011, p 30), at only thirty years of age he embarked on his first book on the geology of South Australia (Tenison-Woods 1862). His commitment to science and to publication in the journals of learned societies and in the popular press continued for the rest of his life. He was still dictating publications in his last illness. Tenison-Woods died in October 1889, honoured especially by the scientific community.

One aspect of Tenison-Woods' later work was writing reports for government. In 1881 he had reported to the Queensland Government on mining for tin (Tenison-Woods 1881). The New South Wales government had requested a book on fish and fisheries, commissioned for the Fisheries Exhibition

in London in 1883 (Tenison-Woods 1883a). Further reports to government are discussed below.

From 1875 to 1880 Sir Frederick Weld, of a recusant Catholic family, was Governor of Tasmania. At this time Tenison-Woods was conducting missions for the Catholic Church, and was also researching and writing as he travelled. Weld chaired some of Tenison-Woods' public lectures, and was president of the Royal Society of Tasmania when Tenison-Woods presented his researches (Somerville 1943 p199). It is to Weld that we owe the next chapter in Tenison-Woods' life.

### **Julian Tenison-Woods in the Straits Settlements**

For reasons beyond the scope of this paper, opportunities for Tenison-Woods to serve as an itinerant missionary became fewer in the 1880s. By this time Weld had become Governor of the Straits Settlements, and he invited Tenison-Woods to conduct a geological survey in the Straits Settlements and Peninsular Malaya. Tenison-Woods accepted this invitation, and in mid-1883 began the journey to Singapore. On the way, the Queensland government commissioned a report on coal resources (Tenison-Woods 1883b; Tenison-Woods 1883c). His journey, assisted by letters of introduction from Weld, took Tenison-Woods through what is now Indonesia, and in October 1883 he arrived in Singapore.

Weld left for a visit to England, where he found time to address the Royal Colonial Institute. Describing the geography and geology of peninsular Malaya, Weld remarked: "The exact facts will be reported on by the Rev. Julian Tenison-Woods, a well-known geologist, who has just visited the district

on behalf of the Perak Government” (Weld 1883-1884, p266).

Tenison-Woods soon embarked on a preliminary journey north, returning to Singapore in time for Christmas, 1883. During 1884, he continued his research, which generated a number of scientific papers. One of these was the report on Malacca reproduced below. Another was the report on Perak, which Tenison-Woods also published in Sydney (Tenison-Woods 1885b). Some of his later travels included a voyage on *HMS Pegasus*, and it was on *Pegasus* that in 1885 he was able to visit Labuan and Brunei. The results of his observations on coal were published in England (Tenison-Woods 1885c). Soon after, Tenison-Woods had the opportunity to travel on *HMS Flying Fish*, then conducting surveys in south-east Asia, planning to return ultimately to Australia. Changes of plan along the way meant that Woods did not return to Australia until June 1886, when he disembarked in Darwin.

### The scientific output of Julian Tenison-Woods

Reports for government were an important part of Tenison-Woods' scientific output. Here we have a report from his work in Malacca made available to modern readers. After his return to Australia, he continued to accept government commissions. In 1886 he reported to the government of South Australia on the geology of the then Northern Territory of South Australia (Tenison-Woods 1886). Perhaps other reports might again become available, including a report on coal which was mentioned in one of the notices of his death (Anon. 1889, p 6). Besides reports, Tenison-Woods also wrote regularly for the popular press and gave interviews on scientific topics. He was respected for his

ability to articulate his scientific knowledge for a general audience.

Nevertheless, at the heart of his scientific output we find lectures and papers for learned societies. Without a university degree, Tenison-Woods, like many of his contemporary scientists, found his membership of learned societies provided validation of his work, and a congenial company of largely amateur scientists. While Tenison-Woods contributed most to the Linnaean Society of New South Wales, and served as its president, he contributed to other learned societies (King 2016, p 49.) Honorary memberships also served him well, providing opportunities for his interaction with knowledgeable scientists. In the Straits Settlements he became an honorary member of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, and published in the branch's journal. We can conclude by recalling his status as an honorary member of the Royal Society of New South Wales, and as a frequent contributor to its journal.

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## Appendix

A list of the contributions by Fr. Julian Tenison-Woods to the Royal Society of New South Wales:

- "On the Tertiary deposits of Australia" (1877) *JProcRSNSW*, 11: 65-82.
- "On some new Australian polyzoa" (1877) *JProcRSNSW*, 11: 83-84.
- "The palæontological evidence of Australian Tertiary formations" (1877) *JProcRSNSW*, 11: 113-128.
- "On some Australian Tertiary corals" (1877) *JProcRSNSW*, 11: 183-195.
- "Tasmanian forests: their botany and economical value" (1878) *JProcRSNSW*, 12: 17-28.
- "The molluscan fauna of Tasmania" (1878) *JProcRSNSW*, 12: 29-56.
- "On some Australian tertiary fossil corals and polyzoa" (1878) *JProcRSNSW*, 12: 57-61.
- "On the anatomy of *Distichopora*, with a monograph of the genus" (1879) *JProcRSNSW*, 13: 49-63.
- "The Hawkesbury Sandstone" (1882) *JProcRSNSW*, 16: 53-116.
- "On some carboniferous marine fossils" (1882) *JProcRSNSW*, 16: 143-145.
- "On some Mesozoic fossils from the Palmer River, Queensland" (1882) *JProcRSNSW*, 16: 147-154.
- "A fossil plant formation of central Queensland" (1882) *JProcRSNSW*, 16: 179-192.
- "On the Wianamatta shales" (1883) *JProcRSNSW*, 17: 75-85.
- "On the anatomy and life history of Mollusca peculiar to Australia" (1888) *JProcRSNSW*, 12: 106-187.
- "The desert sandstone" (1888) *JProcRSNSW*, 12: 290-335.

