

# Introducing Julian Tenison-Woods and the mines and minerals of the Malay Peninsula

Roderick O'Brien

School of Management, University of South Australia, Adelaide, Australia

E-mail: Roderick.O'Brien@unisa.edu.au

## 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. During a visit to Hong Kong in 1885, Tenison-Woods lectured on the mines and minerals of the Malay Peninsula, which was reported at length in the local *China Mail* newspaper. The Governor, Sir George Bowen, presided at the lecture, and sent the newspaper text, along with his own comments, to the Colonial Office. The editor of the *Journal & Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales* has included these materials in this issue, and this short text is an introduction.

## The Source

Recently the *Journal & Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales* published a government report by pioneer scientist Julian Tenison-Woods on the mines and mineralogy of Malacca (Tenison-Woods 2017). That report on Malacca was one of the fruits of the research conducted by Tenison-Woods in the Malay Peninsula in 1883 and 1884. After his work in that area, Tenison-Woods travelled in south-east and east Asia, including four visits to Hong Kong (O'Brien 1984). During one of these visits, in February 1885, Tenison-Woods delivered a public lecture on the mines and minerals of the Malay Peninsula. The lecture was reported in the local newspaper, the *China Mail*. The Governor, Sir George Bowen, presided at the lecture, and the next day he sent a copy of the newspaper report with a covering letter to the Colonial Office (Bowen 1885).

Tenison-Woods was keen that his researches should be published, and in a timely manner. Some of his publications on

his work in the Malay Peninsula are readily available (O'Brien 2017), but others have remained hidden in colonial-era documents. Your editor has already generously published the report on Malacca (Tenison-Woods 2017), and now publishes the newspaper text and Governor Bowen's letter, taken from the files of the Colonial Office. A newspaper report on a public lecture has its own flavour, including notes of audience participation and the introductory and concluding remarks. The occasion also provides an insight into the financial links between Hong Kong and the mines of the Malay Peninsula. This lecture bears comparison with another lecture given in Perak in 1884, over two sessions (Tenison-Woods 1884). While the science is consistent, in Hong Kong there is a different audience, and Tenison-Woods expands his lecture to include economic issues of interest to the Hong Kong listeners.

Historian Christopher Munn of the University of Hong Kong has kindly and skilfully brought to contemporary attention the

Colonial Office files, and has helped with background information on the Governor, Sir George Bowen, whose participation is reported.

### **Julian Tenison-Woods: Religion and Science**

Because an introduction to Fr. Julian Tenison-Woods is available with the report on Malacca (O'Brien 2017), he need not be introduced again.

However, the opening by Sir George Bowen specifically raises the question of science and religion, and was promptly reported in England, thus there is an opportunity to examine Tenison-Woods' own views. Both science and religion are interwoven in Tenison-Woods' remarkable life. In 1857, his first scientific publication on Australian geology was published in Victoria, dealing with metamorphic rocks in the Clare district north of Adelaide (Tenison-Woods 1857). The Clare district was the location of Sevenhill College, where Tenison-Woods undertook brief training with the Jesuits, and 1857 was also the year of his ordination as a Catholic priest, and his assignment to his first parish of Penola in the south-east of South Australia. He spent ten years as the parish priest of Penola, and by 1862, published his first book-length study of geology, principally on the region of his ministry (Tenison-Woods 1862). Tenison-Woods ended his first paper with a description of the sea "leaving rocks and stones to tell to man, the magnitude and power of the earth's Great Framer (Tenison-Woods 1857, 176). And in his first book, he wrote: "Let us congratulate ourselves that Geology displays as much the wonders of the Creator as its sister sciences, Chemistry, Mineralogy, or Botany as they bewilder us with visions of God's immensity..." (Tenison-Woods 1862, 350).

He remained a committed Catholic priest and a keen scientist for the rest of his life. Mary MacKillop (latterly Saint Mary of the Cross) wrote that his missionary work in Tasmania gave him an opportunity to restart his scientific work. "A geologist or botanist finds many things to interest him in Tasmania, and Father Tenison Woods, being both, was naturally much pleased. In his spare moments, as usual, he made notes and wrote scientific papers . . . It was a long time since he had published any scientific writings; they were continued now as long as he lived, but they never interfered with his religious duties" (Mother Mary of the Cross MacKillop, 2010, 203).

Tenison-Woods did not respond to Governor Bowen's remarks on religion. After all, he was the guest of the Governor. Privately, he wrote a few days afterwards to his friend William Archer in Australia: "I had reason however to remember you without this reminder for I have been staying with Sir Geo. Bowen who more than once mentioned your name in connection with his reminiscences of Victoria. I have found him most kind and hospitable, but from the enclosed extract I send you it appears that he does not succeed in pleasing everyone. He took the chair at a lecture I gave when as you perceive his remarks were not in the best of taste — a weak point in his speechifying which was well-known to you" (Player, 1983).

### **Sir George Bowen, Governor**

Sir George Bowen was Governor of Hong Kong from 1883 to 1887. An Oxford graduate in classics, he regularly displayed his classical scholarship. An anonymous note on the Colonial Office file reads, "I haven't come across copies of the Governor's writings without some Greek or Latin verse in it!" In the Ionian islands he began a career of over-

seas service which included office as the first Governor of Queensland (1859–1868), and Governor of Victoria (1873–1879). Bowen's hospitality and tactlessness were both well-known: opinions about his ministry as governor varied (McConnel 2013).

In his report to the Colonial Office, Bowen highlights two aspects of Tenison-Woods' lecture which he considered important. The first was political, as Bowen noted the disputed boundary between Siam (Thailand) and the Malay states. The second was economic, as Bowen noted Tenison-Woods' cautious endorsement of the methods of Chinese labour as more appropriate than the methods of European technology.

It is not clear when Bowen and Tenison-Woods first met. Bowen, in his introduction, says that Tenison-Woods reminded him "that he was my guest nearly a quarter of a century ago, when I was first Governor of the great colony of Queensland." But in 1860, Tenison-Woods had not long commenced his "ten years in the bush" at Penola, and his biographers do not mention travel to Queensland.

Bowen is glowing in his introduction of Tenison-Woods, complimenting him on his scientific work, and on his book on exploration (Tenison-Woods 1865). In response, Tenison-Woods said that "he had been a witness to the great efforts His Excellency had made to forward anything which favoured the advance of science, whether geological or geographical in [the Australian] colonies." One biographer records that Bowen encouraged the exploration of northern and inland Queensland, and that he accompanied an expedition which led to the formation of a coaling station and settlement at Cape York, in Queensland's far north (Carlyle 1901). He was the first president of the Philosophi-

cal Society of Queensland (later to become the Royal Society of Queensland) which had been founded shortly before his arrival. (The Society first met on 1 March 1859, just before the colony was proclaimed in London on 6 June 1859. Bowen did not arrive until December.) Bowen's lengthy collection of letters and papers, published towards the end of his career, makes no mention of the advancement of science in Hong Kong (Bowen and Lane-Poole, 1889). The establishment of the Hong Kong Observatory had been approved in 1882, and Bowen is remembered for implementing that decision in 1883 (Hong Kong Observatory, undated).

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