

Obituary - Henry Hacker 1876-1973. Mem. Qd. Museum 17:191-194.

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OBITUARY

Henry Hacker

1876-1973

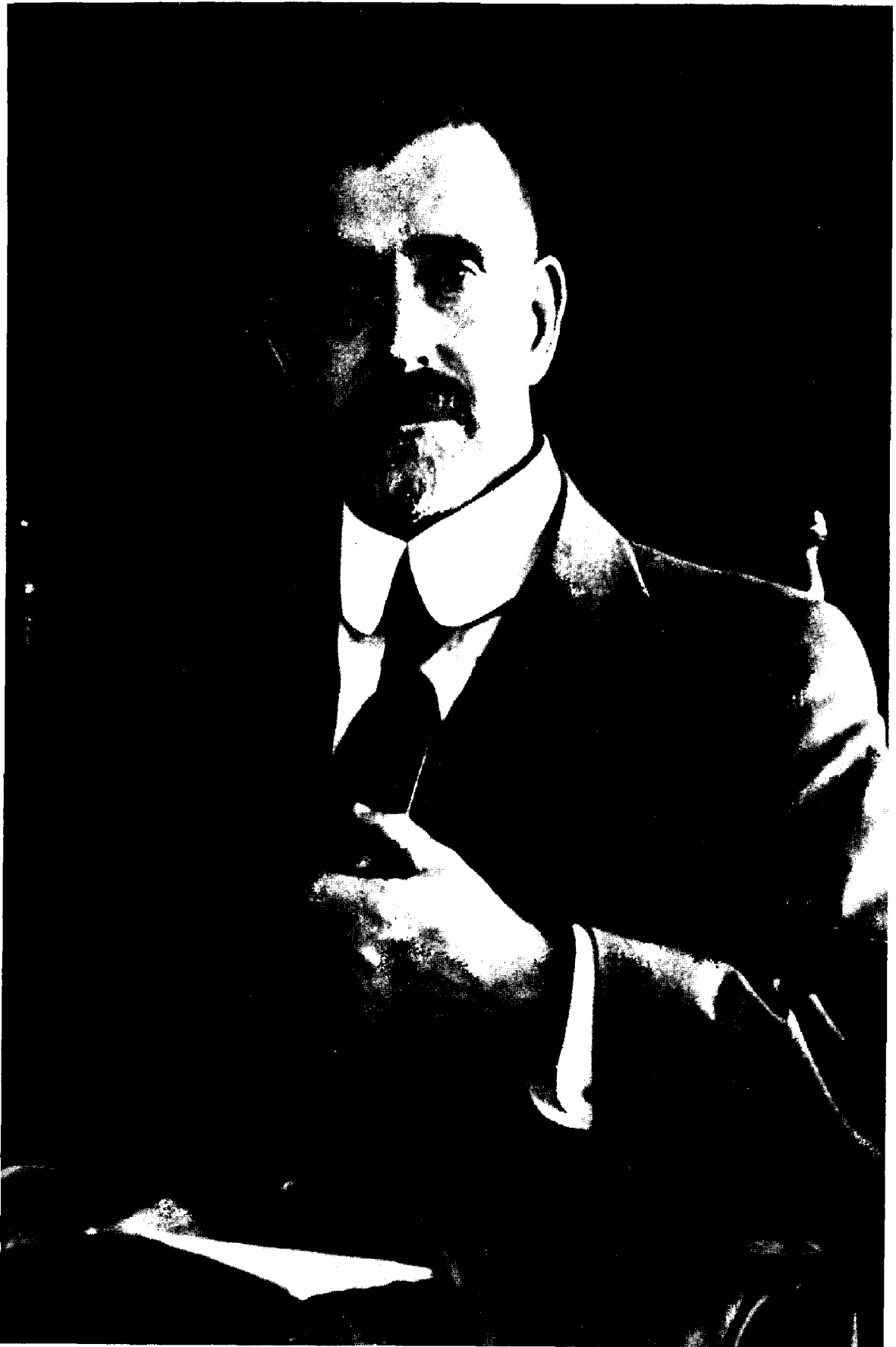
Henry Hacker, who had charge of the Queensland Museum's entomological collection from 1911 to 1943, was born at Slip, Walthamstow, Essex, England on 31st January, 1876 and died at Brisbane on 21st September, 1973.

He started his study of entomology at the British Museum and it is likely that he also acquired a grounding in bee-keeping in England. However, he soon embarked on a wandering, adventurous life. He came to Australia and gold fever seems to have caught him. He visited Kalgoorlie and Coolgardie in Western Australia, and in November, 1898 took out a Miner's Right at Charters Towers. About 1897-8 he began collecting Australian insects.

He served as a Trooper in the Boer War and took his discharge at Durban on 27 November 1901, giving his trade as miner and his intended place of residence as Johannesburg. He was still in the Transvaal in June 1902 but later that year he made the first of three major collecting trips to parts of Australia which, previous to his visits, were entomologically unknown and of which he wrote interesting accounts. The first was a bicycle trip from Adelaide 300 miles by road to Port Augusta and then a further 258 miles northwest to Tarcoola (now on the Trans-Australia Railway) following camel pads, tracks about 2 feet wide. When riding he was so embedded in bundles that people used to wonder what it was coming along. For meat he depended on emus and rabbits which were present in thousands. His return journey was in winter and the beetles collected were left with Rev. T. Blackburn in Adelaide and the new species described by Blackburn, Sloane, Carter and Lea. (*Ent. Soc. Qd. Minutes*, 27 March, 1935).

In August 1904, Hacker took out a Miner's Right at Cairns. He travelled by boat to Port Stewart and cycled to Coen which he made his base. The bicycle was of little use for riding but was invaluable for transporting equipment and stores. After a mishap he joined the frame together with hardwood pegs and fencing wire and used it for hundreds of miles more. He got two sawyers to fell a small patch of scrub for him, and he visited this every night with a hurricane lamp. It was during the wet season, and although he had many wettings he made a good collection from this patch. There were dangerous episodes with sunstroke and with a group of aborigines at a spot where a man had been speared. From his collections, Lea, Sloane and Carter described 51 new species of beetles. (*Ent. Soc. Qd. Minutes*, 8th August, 1932, 27 March 1935).

He was in Brisbane in 1907 but having business in Cloncurry took ship to Townsville and train to Charters Towers, whence he set out on 7 February to bicycle over 500 miles to Cloncurry, collecting beetles along the way. The weather was exceedingly hot and dry but four days beyond Richmond (where the railway ended) the rain fell in torrents. 'It was impossible to ride or even push my bicycle through the wet black soil, so I shouldered it at sunrise and started to walk to the next stopping place, Fisher's Creek, a distance of forty



miles.' With the help of a little riding he reached it at midnight and arrived at Cloncurry about midday on 20 February. Lea reported that Hacker sent him from this trip 128 species of beetles, probably more than half of them new to science, (*Tasm. Nat.* 1 (2): 12-13 1907).

In 1909 Hacker married Constance Callaghan (d. 1970), sister of a school-teacher friend. They had a happy family life and reared three sons and two daughters. They settled in the Upper Mulgrave valley south of Cairns, but their rubber farm was unsuccessful and they came to Brisbane. Perhaps it was of this period that Hacker wrote: 'Many years ago in N. Queensland I successfully worked large flowering blood-woods with the aid of a pair of climbing irons. Taking some lunch and a bottle of water I used to sit among the branches from early morning till about midday. The net was attached to a long bamboo so that all the branches could be reached. In catching large Buprestidae and Cetonidae, a tap on the underside of the branch with the rim of the net was sufficient to cause them to tumble in. Such fine species as *Calodema plebejus* and *regalis*, *Metaxyorpha hauseri* and *gloriosa*, besides many fine *Stigmodera*, large Cetonidae, and innumerable smaller insects were collected by this method.' (*Ent. Soc. Qd. Minutes*, 27 March 1935).

He sold (probably in 1910) his private collection of about 6000 species of Australian Coleoptera to the National Museum, Berlin. He applied for a position on the staff of the Queensland Museum citing A.M. Lea, C. French, A. J. Turner, H. Tryon, W. Froggatt and T. Sloane as all being acquainted with his work, and on 7 March 1911 he was appointed to the Museum staff.

As an entomologist he undoubtedly had skill and enthusiasm, and nowhere is this skill and enthusiasm more evident than in the collections and the *Memoirs* of the Queensland Museum. He was most outstanding in his collecting ability and in his powers of observation. Many of his contributions to the *Memoirs* consisted of notes and observations on the collection, life histories, and habits of Australian insects. In these he often passed collecting hints on to other entomologists, for example, in Vol. 6, page 107 he writes ' to take note of all the dams and waterholes in the district to be collected over, and visit them in November or December. About that time they will be nearly dry and the mud around the edges visited by many fine wasps and bees.' His other papers in the *Memoirs*, one of which was written in conjunction with T. D. A. Cockerell, concern the taxonomy of various Hymenoptera and Homoptera. Throughout the *Memoirs* there are papers by such authors as Lea and Cockerell in which Hacker's name constantly appears as the collector of many new species. Many other new species have been described by other authors and in other journals.

During Hacker's era not only were the collections increased but he encouraged specialists to identify his material. He would sort the material into conspecific groups and gave every group numbers. One or two specimens from each species group were forwarded to the specialist concerned who would return a list of identifications with the corresponding numbers. In such a system one would expect errors, but in fact, Hacker's eye for a species is proving very accurate when the material is re-examined by today's specialists.

His collecting ability and knowledge of insect life histories was also evident in the museum displays he prepared for the instruction and enjoyment of the public. Both the collection and displays still have examples of his skill at preserving caterpillars by inflation

and drying. Another of his skills was also seen in these displays, notably photography, an interest stimulated by Tom Marshall, a young Museum Assistant who often accompanied Hacker on collecting trips to the Mt. Glorious area. The displays contained clear and sharp photo-micrographs of fleas, lice and mosquitoes which Hacker produced using equipment improvised from cardboard cylinders and rubber bands. Further evidence of his photographic skill can be seen in the plates accompanying his papers in the *Memoirs*.

In 1929 Robert Veitch arranged for Hacker to be seconded to the Department of Agriculture and Stock to identify and build up its reference collection, while continuing to work one or two days a week at the Museum. Though eventually he became an officer of the Department, this arrangement continued until his retirement on 30 June 1943. When the serious bee disease, American foulbrood, was identified at Clear Mountain in 1931, none of the senior entomologists in the Department was experienced in beekeeping. Hacker was appointed an Inspector of Apiaries in February 1931 and was actively engaged on this for about a year.

The beekeepers found him an unusual character to deal with, with his small goatee beard and rather dapper English-style suit, waistcoat and tie, which he wore even to the roughest spots. He was very knowledgeable about bees, particularly in relation to diseases and pests, and the youthful Charlie Roff found it very interesting and instructive to accompany him. On other occasions when he was issuing certificates for export of queen bees, John Weddell went with him. Both found it a very exciting experience, for at this time Hacker travelled with a motorcycle and sidecar in which was the apiary equipment as well as the passenger. He would 'go like hell' irrespective of the kind of road, never slackening at corners and, coming back into town among the slow traffic, would point at a gap between two vehicles and somehow pass through.

For the Department Hacker produced several extension articles on bees, the most important of these was the Department's first extension Bulletin for beekeepers, 'An introduction to beekeeping'. The basic information in it on the life history of the honey bee is as sound now as when it was written, though the equipment described is outdated.

It was fortunate indeed for Queensland and for entomology that in days when jobs for entomologists were few Henry Hacker was able to obtain a post at the Queensland Museum where he could give all his time to entomology.

His interest was extended to other orders besides Coleoptera by the need to build up the Museum's collection, and it was further stimulated by visits from and correspondence with leading specialists from other states and overseas. He was one of the founders of The Entomological Society of Queensland in 1923, and at its meetings, by his papers, exhibits and informed comments on the exhibits of others, he was able to pass on much of his great knowledge to younger entomologists. By consent of the Society's Council, parts of its tribute to him (Marks, E. N., 1973. *Ent. Soc. Qd News Bull.* 100: 13-16) have been reproduced here.

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