The Man who Ate the Zoo

The Rev. William Buckland, father of the subject of this highly entertaining book by environmental journalist Richard Girling (who recently gave us The Hunt for the Golden Mole), would also fit the description in its title (though perhaps he is less ‘forgotten’ today). Son Frank was more than a chip off the old block – a childlike man who revered his great father and sought all his life to emulate him – including his zoophagous habits.

Although solemn scientists regarded him as a gadfly, he became, if anything, more famous than dad: a sort of Victorian cross between David Bellamy and Brian Blessed who, as well as entertaining audiences and readers with his boundless enthusiasm for natural history, rose from being a military medic to Inspector of Her Majesty’s Fisheries (in which post he was succeeded by none other than Thomas Huxley).

Frank was a barrel of a boy who got larger as he aged but never really grew up. Even as a man, he was likely to produce slow-worms from his pockets or wade into icy waters to see what it really felt like to be a salmon, or defend his views with the incontestible but specious logic of a 10-year-old. (He approved of poor children not wearing shoes, explaining that shoe leather gets thinner as you wear it. Human leather gets thicker. QED.)

So why ‘forgotten’ today? Frank made two career ‘mistakes’. First, he maintained the creationist views of his father, long after 1859. As a result, his popular books dated quickly and condemned him a stuckist. Second, he committed the unforgivable sin of having fun, and being popular. Today he poses the biographer a difficult and unusual problem, namely the near volume of his writings, much of which were either wholly or semi-autobiographical.

He also hoarded personal papers, any of which are preserved. Add to this the fact that innumerable anecdotes in his short, packed and highly useful career have been retailed by my other authors, and we have un table embarras de richesse.

Current Perspectives on Zinc Deposits 2015

The Irish Association for Economic Geology (IAEG) is an active association in organizing conferences. Each decade or so it also contributes publications focused on an issue of importance to the Irish or European mining sector. This new publication is a departure from this in that there is much more of a global approach taken focused on a single commodity, in this case Zinc.

The papers in this volume arise out of a conference in 2010 (ZINC2010) held in Cork, Ireland, and is a compilation of papers presented there by selected authors. Zinc is a pertinent commodity for Ireland that has a large number of world-class zinc deposits, some of which are covered by papers in this volume. The volume contains papers by the keynote speakers as full papers (7) or extended abstracts (5) as well as 17 other extended abstracts by other authors. In addition a further previously published paper is included in the appendix.

A comprehensive array of topics is covered by the 29 articles, ranging from regional studies to detailed case studies with an excellent overview paper by Huston et al. on all zinc deposit types. The papers contain both original research on the formation of zinc deposits, as well as the paper by Piercey et al. on VMS deposits discussing controls on the formation of zinc-rich deposits, to laboratory studies such as one by Boyce et al. on zinc geochemistry and the formation of sphalerite to excellent review papers such as the one by Wilkinson and Hitzman reviewing the key processes responsible for formation of the Irish orrefield.

Probably my favourite paper in the volume is an overview by Borgen on non-sulphide zinc deposits focusing on the supergene geochemistry that can give rise to such potentially economic deposits. A nice feature of the article is the use of hand specimen photographs and photographs of ore exposure in open pits, particularly from Angourian in Iran and explanation of the exploration method of ‘zinczap’ solution, appropriately illustrated with suitable photographs.

Overall the volume adds significantly to this important but often overlooked commodity. The volume seems relatively free of errors and the editors and authors have done an excellent job of completing the publication. If there is one small criticism it is that for many of the articles, presumably submitted in 2010, the references are less than current and only a few of the keynote papers appear to have been revised to include relevant more recent papers post 2010. But this is a small gripe and in no way diminishes the relevance of the volume not just to those working in the zinc industry but economic geology in general and particularly useful as a reference source for students and researchers.

Reviewed by: Rob Bowell

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