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MICHAEL KERNEY (1934–2022)

Michael Kerney, one of the most distinguished and influential members that the Conchological Society has ever had, died at his home in King George Street, Greenwich, on 25th October aged 88. He joined the Society in 1953, served on its Council for many years and held the positions of Chair of the Publications Committee, President (1964–1965) and was Non-Marine Recorder for 37 years (1965–2002). He was also made an Honorary member of the Society.

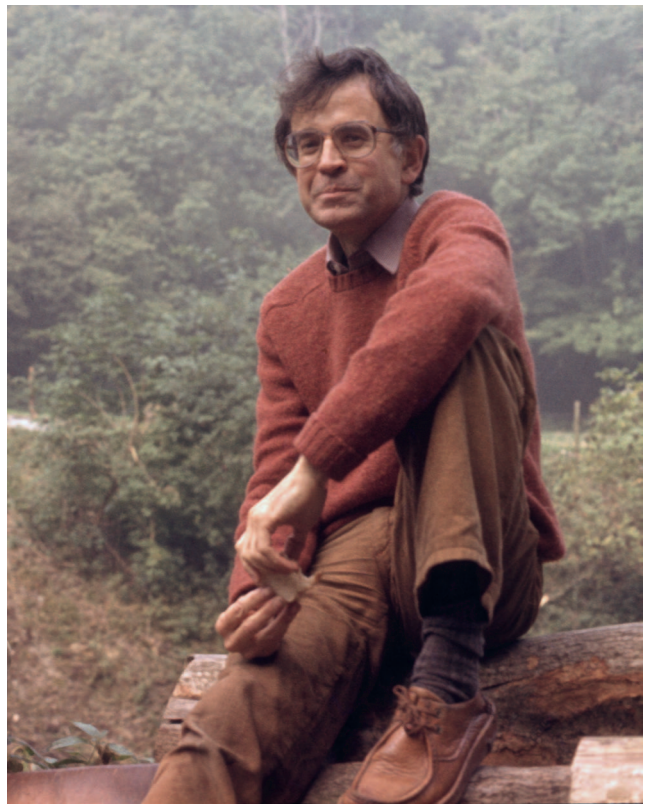
Michael was born in Croydon on 20th March 1934 and although universally known as "M.P." Kerney, he did have two additional initials. I discovered this when I consulted his Ph.D. thesis when I was his research student, but when I enquired what these initials stood for, he declined to tell me, saying that this was for me to find out. After nearly 50 years I have finally done so and can reveal that his full name was Michael Angelo Maurice Philip Kerney. I now completely understand why he dropped those two initials and was so coy and reluctant to divulge his full name. His exotic name stems from the fact that his mother was Spanish, whereas his father, who served in the Special Operations Executive (SOE) between 1939–1946, was a banker of Irish extraction. Michael told me that the family name was originally spelt "Kearney" but had been anglicized to "Kerney", but this must have occurred a very long time ago. His paternal grandfather was also named Michael Kerney and it was he who worked with the bookseller and publisher Bernard Quaritch on the transcription, translation and analysis of the *Spanish Letter of Columbus* written in 1493, the first piece of printing to reveal to the Old World the existence of the New (Quaritch & Kerney, 1891). Our Michael's parents lived in Upper Norwood, and there he attended St Joseph's College, a Catholic boys' secondary school founded by the De La Salle Brothers.

At University Michael studied languages at Trinity College Dublin but did not persist with this, preferring instead to study geology at Chelsea College, part of the University of London. From there he moved to Imperial College London, to embark on a Ph.D. under the supervision of Derek Ager. Michael's thesis entitled *Pleistocene non-marine Mollusca of the English interglacial deposits* was completed in 1959 (examined by Bruce Sparks from Cambridge) but since the research interests of his supervisor were decidedly focused on much older sediments (Mesozoic and earlier), we can assume that Michael undertook his research with only gentle guidance from Ager. His thesis reviewed what was known about the non-marine molluscs from many of the classic interglacial localities in southern England. New work was presented from several sites including Little Oakley in Essex (subsequent work there published by Preece, 1990a), Swanscombe, Kent, the site of "Swanscombe Man", later written up by Michael following John Waechter's excavations in the late 1960s (Kerney, 1971a), and Trafalgar Square in central London, where last interglacial sediments of the River Thames were exposed in foundations in the late 1950s. Michael co-authored an article on the Trafalgar Square excavations for the *Illustrated London News* that included an artist's reconstruction of the site with hippopotamus, straight-tusked elephant and lion, remains of which had all been recovered (Franks *et al*., 1958). The article also included a photograph of *Margaritifera auricularia* (now *Pseudunio auricularius*), a non-British pearl mussel that formerly lived in the Thames (Kerney, 1958; Preece 1999; see also Preece *et al*., 1983).

On completion of his Ph.D., Michael obtained a prestigious postdoctoral fellowship awarded by the Royal Commission for the Great Exhibition of 1851. During the tenure of this fellowship, Michael turned his attention to sediments (and their contained molluscan assemblages) that had formed on the Chalk during the Devensian Lateglacial, 13 ka–10 ka radiocarbon years ago (Kerney, 1963), and on the origin and age of a spectacular dry valley known as the Devil's Kneadingtrough (now often styled Devil's Kneading Trough) cut into the North Downs near Wye in Kent (Kerney *et al*., 1964). The last study arose from work initiated by geographers from University College London who were trying to understand the origin of this spectacular landform, now part of a National Nature Reserve owned and managed by Natural England. While they could produce detailed diagrams of the morphology of the valley, they needed someone to analyse and date the sediments remaining within it and extending

onto the Gault Clay plain beyond. Michael was recruited for this job. He painstakingly analysed the molluscan assemblages through the sedimentary sequences and was able to show that virtually all the erosion of this valley occurred during a short, intensely cold, episode at the end of the Pleistocene, known as the Younger Dryas. Michael's contribution was the critical component of this study, and he was justly given senior authorship. The investigation has become a seminal study in the geomorphology of chalklands.

Following his postdoctoral work in the early 1960s, Michael joined the staff of Imperial College as a lecturer in the Department of Geology. He taught palaeontology, soils, stratigraphy and Quaternary research in general, and continued his work on Quaternary sediments in southern England (e.g. Kerney, 1965, 1971b). His work, together with research undertaken by Bruce Sparks in Cambridge and Vojen Ložek in Prague, brought a new quantitative rigour to the subject that had been lacking in the work of earlier exponents, such as A.S. Kennard (Preece, 1990b). Michael also analysed samples from various archaeological excavations, the results of which often appeared as appendices to the main site reports. His presidential address to the Society focused on this general theme and was entitled *Snails and Man in Britain* (Kerney, 1966). He did not supervise many research students, but one collaboration is worth a mention. This relates to the late John Evans, who was based at the Institute of Archaeology, where he was supervised by Frederick Zeuner on a zooarchaeological project involving vertebrate remains. Zeuner died rather unexpectedly in November 1963 aged just 58, and it was Michael who came to the rescue, kindling John's interest in snails and acting as his replacement supervisor on this entirely different topic. John cut his malacological teeth on the Late-glacial and Holocene molluscan assemblages from a dry valley at Pitstone in Buckinghamshire (Evans, 1966), which showed great similarities to the sequences that Michael had described from other sites in south-east England. However, much older interglacial sediments were also discovered at the nearby site at Marsworth but a definitive account of these only appeared very much later (Murton *et al*., 2015). It was the land snail assemblages from archaeological sites, however, that formed the focus of John's Ph.D. thesis completed in 1967. This work formed the foundation for his book *Land snails in Archaeology*, which has now become a standard reference work in environmental archaeology (Evans, 1972; see review by Michael in *Antiquity* **48**: 75–76).



Michael at a Conchological Society field meeting at Glatting Hangar, a site for *Helicodonta obvoluta* in Sussex. Photo taken on 28th September 1985 by Martin Willing.

In 1968 Michael was invited by the British Geological Survey to analyse sediments from Holywell Coombe, Folkestone, a prospective site for the location of the Channel Tunnel. The sediments in this dry valley were extremely unusual because they were waterlogged, which consequently led to the preservation of organic remains, such as plant macrofossils and pollen, as well as the remains of beetles and other fossils. This provided a rare opportunity to relate the molluscan successions to the vegetational history, all of which could be accurately radiocarbon-dated (Kerney *et al*., 1980). Holywell Coombe was designated as the type site for a sequence of Late-glacial and Holocene mollusc zones that were broadly recognizable over large parts of southern England. This study provided

the foundation for later multidisciplinary investigations that followed the resurrection of plans to build the Channel Tunnel in 1987 (Preece & Bridgland, 1998, 1999).

Michael was promoted to Reader in Palaeontology but during the mid-1980s there was increasing pressure on him to teach more applied aspects of geology that lay outside of his immediate interests, and he became increasingly unhappy. He decided to take early retirement and become a Scientific Associate at the Natural History Museum, just around the corner, with the specific aim of bringing the second edition of the Atlas to publication (see below). Here he remained until the early 2000s, when he vacated his office and moved his activities to his home in Greenwich. This period coincided with a general deterioration in his eyesight, which had never been good. He wore glasses with thick lenses and suffered from glaucoma and he had a detached retina, which caused blindness in one eye. This caused him much distress and must have contributed to his drift away from malacology to pursue other interests.

Many members of the Conchological Society will know Michael as the coordinator of the non-marine mapping scheme, which he took over in 1965. This ambitious project set out to record an average of 60% of the estimated species living in each 10km square of the National grid. The coverage map in the second edition of the Atlas published in 1999 (the first edition appeared in 1976) suggests that this target had largely been achieved for most parts of the British Isles (Kerney, 1999). This did not happen by accident but was the result of strategic planning. In the early years of the project, Michael would publish annual updates of the coverage in the *Conchologists' Newsletter*, so that members could focus their efforts in areas from which few records had been submitted. Several expeditions were organized by members of the Conchological Society to record in particularly neglected areas, especially in parts of Ireland and Scotland. These mapping expeditions could be quite intensive, aiming to maximize the number of records by visiting places in each square where a diversity of habitats might be represented in a small area. Where several cars of experienced recorders were involved, the mapping was not done communally but each car was allotted different squares to cover, so the whole enterprise became somewhat competitive in a friendly kind of way as record cards from each group were carefully compared each evening. The maps in the Atlas also included old (pre-1965) records, as well as fossil occurrences dating from the Late-glacial and Holocene and this historical dimension clearly highlighted those species expanding their ranges and those that were in decline. Such information is of direct conservation interest, a theme that he expounded with Alan Stubbs in small booklet published by the Nature Conservancy Council (Kerney & Stubbs, 1980). As the mapping scheme took off, so did the membership of the Society, which suddenly found a sense of collective purpose around which to focus its activities. The success of this long-term mapping project, perhaps the most thorough ever undertaken for an invertebrate group of comparable size, can in large part be attributed to Michael's quiet guiding influence and dedication. Not only did he highlight the areas that needed attention, but he carefully scrutinized all the records submitted to him, deleting dubious ones, unless supported by voucher specimens. His role as Non-marine Recorder was therefore far from passive and required enormous patience and tact. To ensure the accuracy of records, he essentially provided an informal identification service and was famous for answering enquiries by return post. This is how I first made contact with Michael, as a schoolboy back in 1965, immediately after he had taken over the coordination of the mapping scheme.

Members will also know Michael as the co-author with Robert Cameron of the Collins *Field Guide of the land snails of Britain and North-west Europe* (Kerney & Cameron, 1979), known amongst practitioners as "The Field Guide" or more usually "Kerney and Cameron". Robert Cameron has kindly provided some information about the origin of the Field Guide, which dates back to 1973, when he was approached by Collins to see if he was interested in writing it. Realising that the task was beyond him, he wrote to Michael to see if he would be interested in a collaboration. Michael's reply was both moving and characteristic:

My first reaction was to say no (pressure of work, lack of competence, etc – and I am basically rather a lazy person). But of course, there is a great need for such a work, and it seems to me that the ultimate

success of any project to map European molluscs on an international basis must depend on the availability of books of this kind. This very point was made forcibly by Frank Perring in the annual BRC meeting of biological societies which I attended last Saturday. So, I think, yes, I am definitely interested in the idea. (letter to RADC, 11 November 1973)

With Michael on board, things began to take shape. Gordon Riley, who had provided illustrations for other Collins Field Guides, was engaged to do the artwork. It was mainly Michael who wrote to experts in other countries, and who obtained specimens from museums and private collections for Gordon to illustrate. Robert was mainly involved in getting live specimens, especially slugs, to Gordon in Hinckley, no great distance from Birmingham where he then worked. The assembly of specimens for illustration was not as straightforward as is sounds, as stated in a letter to Robert in December 1974:

The main problem is getting specimens that are fresh, clean and typical in every respect – or at least conforming with one's abstract, intellectual idea of what the species should look like.

I remember looking with Michael for potential specimens to illustrate and finding that almost every specimen had some blemish or minor defect that departed in some subtle way from the idealized "norm".

The writing was apportioned according to their relative strengths. Michael covered the majority of species, and all issues of nomenclature and distribution, whereas Robert dealt with the Helicidae, broadly Helicoidea today, the slugs and most of the introductory material. As regards nomenclature, Michael was extremely conservative, opting for the simplest solution – he was basically a 'lumper', but could be persuaded to change his mind when shown relevant specimens. The geographical area covered by the book was defined partly by political but also biogeographical boundaries. Southern France was excluded because of the high diversity of species that occurred around the Mediterranean region. At the time this issue seemed too daunting to address, but in retrospect he regretted this decision, since the terrestrial molluscan fauna of Mediterranean France proved to be not as complex as had been feared. The production of the maps for each species involved much work, integrating data from the literature and from colleagues. Some furnished the requested data promptly but not everyone. For example, Michael knew that Henrik Waldén had an unrivalled knowledge of the distribution of land snails in Sweden, but it was proving extremely difficult to get him to provide this information, despite repeated requests. In the end Michael reasoned that the best tactic would be to send him a set of maps, which he knew contained inaccurate information, to provoke him into action. The ploy worked and a heavily annotated set of maps was returned soon after.

The Field Guide was finally published in 1979 to widespread acclaim. Here, at last, was an affordable, beautifully illustrated, and comprehensive guide containing all the basic information needed to identify lands snails in NW Europe. A Dutch edition, more or less a straight translation, appeared the following year: *Elseviers Slakkengids* (1980), Elsevier, Amsterdam/ Brussel, translated and edited by Edi Gittenberger. It was followed by a German edition in collaboration with Jürgen Jungbluth, which expanded the area covered to include additional countries to the south and east (Kerney *et al*., 1983) and finally a French edition, substantially revised and edited by Alain Bertrand, in 1999*: Guide des escargots et limaces d'Europe. Delachaux et Niestlé*. Strangely, this edition excluded those countries added by Jungbluth, but it did extend the coverage to include Mediterranean France. There is no doubt that these guides have been extremely successful in generating renewed interest in the land snail fauna of Europe as a whole.

Michael's interests, however, extended far beyond the world of snails. He had long been interested in architecture and it was not unusual to include a visit to a particular church at the end of a day's fieldwork. Michael would produce the relevant volume of Pevsner from his bag, and he would then demonstrate some feature of architectural interest. In his later years he had a major input to the revised editions of Pevsner, but it was Victorian stained glass that really attracted his attention. He wrote several articles for the *Journal of Stained Glass* and developed a particular interest in the work of Frederick Preedy (1820–1898), following the discovery of drawings by this craftsman in the cellar of a bookshop in Stratford-upon-Avon (Kerney, 2001). Michael managed to save these important drawings from dispersal, and they are now archived with the Royal Institute of British Architects. He became

Michael taking photographs of a stained-glass window

an Honorary Member of the British Society of Master Glass Painters and in 2005 was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries (FSA).

Michael was also active in preserving buildings in the neighbourhood of his home in Greenwich. He liaised with the local planning authorities, which resulted in preservation orders being placed on buildings of particular interest, thwarting any attempts by developers to "improve" the area. One of his campaigns was to harmonise the railings along King George Street, which he eventually managed to achieve following resistance from a neighbour who was reluctant to demolish a wall that he had recently built in front of his house.

Michael was an extremely private person and not someone who was easy to get to know well, allowing only brief glimpses into his family background. He did not find modern life much to his liking. He could drive a car but never did so unless absolutely forced to do so. He was therefore reliant on friends to take him on field trips and to visit churches that were not accessible by public transport. He never really took to the computer but was obliged to use one during the final stages of the preparation of the Atlas. He did, however, use a computer to build a database of stained glass in British churches. One of his main concerns during the last few years of his life was how his extensive database would be accessed using more modern computer software. He was an excellent correspondent by letter but, needless to say, he never used email. He was a quiet, kind man, who was generous with his time and who commanded respect from all those who knew him. He is survived by his sister, Louise Connett.

I am most grateful to Trisha Burgess, Robert Cameron, June Chatfield, Maya Donelan, Rosemary Hill, Peter Mordan, Fred Naggs, Adrian Norris, Martin Willing and Paul Trynka for help in preparing this obituary.

Richard C. Preece
Department of Zoology
University of Cambridge
CAMBRIDGE CB2 3EJ
rcp1001@cam.ac.uk

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