



NORMAN DENBIGH RILEY 1890–1979

[Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum (Nat. Hist.)]

OBITUARY

NORMAN DENBIGH RILEY C.B.E. 1890-1979

Norman Denbigh Riley died 26 May 1979 after a long, exhausting illness. He had been with us as a friend and mentor for so long that it is hard to believe that we shall not see him again. He was born in London, 26 September 1890. Since his schoolboy days at Dulwich College, he was always interested in natural history, especially that of butterflies and moths. He was encouraged in this by the well-known lepidopterist Richard South, who lived next door to the Riley family in Balham, SW London. When he left school, Norman attended a course in Entomology at the Imperial College, where he found work as demonstrator to Sir Ray Lankester, then Director of the British Museum (Natural History). Two years later, in 1911, at the age of 21, he was appointed to the Museum Staff as Assistant, to work in the Department of Entomology.

In 1914 with the outbreak of the first World War, Norman joined the Army (RASC) serving in France and elsewhere. At the end of the war he was discharged, with the rank of Captain. He again took up his life at the British Museum where in 1932 he became head ("Keeper") of the Department of Entomology. Some years later, the accommodations in the Department obviously were inadequate, so the entire wing of the Museum was rebuilt, and the Department reorganized. The move into the new quarters was completed in 1952. This permitted the full expression of Norman's experience and originality. Both he and the official architect were largely responsible for the plans of the new wing.

He always was eager to acquire important material of every kind for the Museum, sometimes by purchase, but more often by gift. In these endeavors he was most successful. Today the scope of the collection is worldwide, forming part of an institution that is renowned internationally. The collections frequently are visited by entomologists from all over the world. Norman and his wife Edith were both extremely hospitable and they delighted in entertaining visitors from overseas at their house in Wimbledon, visits which will be remembered with gratitude by entomologists from many countries.

Norman was an excellent Committee-man, with an attractive and friendly personality. He was a good (and often witty) speaker. With his experience and ability, it is not surprising that he became involved in national and international entomological matters. He served as Secretary (1926-1928 and 1941-1951) and as Treasurer (1939-1940) to the Entomological Society of London. He was elected President in 1952. Norman was a charter member of the Lepidopterists' Society and served on the Council. He became Vice-president in 1954 and President in 1958. He also joined the Zoological Society (of London) and he had many friends among the active British zoologists.

As the years passed, Norman became associated with various projects which absorbed his restless energy. In 1923, on the retirement of Richard South, he became owner and editor of *The Entomologist*, at that time probably the most popular of the smaller entomological periodicals. It flourished under his direction. He remained sole editor for 36 years until his retirement in 1959. From 1950 until 1965 he served on the International Commission for Zoological Nomenclature, part of the time as Secretary, and as a member of the Editorial Committee. He was most active in the preparation of the present International Code.

In later years when he and I were closely associated over the publication of the book *A Field Guide to the Butterflies of Britain and Europe*, he remained intensely interested in all matters of nomenclature and emphatic over the strict application of the Code.

In his position as Keeper of the Department of Entomology at the British Museum, he was concerned with the International Congresses, most of which he was able to attend. He became Permanent Secretary for the Congresses in 1948, a most suitable appointment, in view of his flair for administrative work. A few years later, 1952, he was astonished and delighted to find himself appointed CBE on the Honours List, a

well-deserved distinction, in view of the time and effort he spent on matters of public interest.

The list of his scientific publications includes over 400 items on a wide variety of subjects. Many of these are comments on topical matters, reviews of books and meetings, etc., most of them published in his magazine, *The Entomologist*. He published many short descriptions of newly discovered taxa, usually Lycaenidae, his favorite butterfly family. His more important publications include the *Field Guide to the Butterflies of the West Indies*, the first modern collected account of the butterflies in these interesting islands, published by Collins, London, in 1975 when the author was aged 84!

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Date of Issue (Vol. 34, No. 1): 22 May 1980