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Bryozoan exchange: Bassler and Hastings

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1. Introduction

The large transfer of material between the Natural History Museum, London [NHM] and U.S. National Museum, Washington [USNM] seems to have been planned some years in advance of the actual exchange. In 1926 on his first European trip,¹ Raymond Smith Bassler (1878–1961) (Figure 1) made his first visit to England meeting amongst others, William Dickson Lang (1878–1966) and Randolph Kirkpatrick (1853–1950).

It seems likely that during this visit the bryozoan exchange between the two museums was proposed, as on his return to Washington, Bassler wrote to Kirkpatrick:

There is no hurry about the bryozoan exchange and I feel that perhaps the better way would be for me to wait until my next visit to England and arrange for it personally. You will remember that it was not the species resulting from recent expeditions that I was after but instead minute fragments of the Challenger and other Busk species wherever such fragments could be spared without injuring your own specimens. Of course, I will be glad to send on our Philippine forms so that Sir Harmer can compare them with the “Siboga” species and I will keep your letter on my desk so that I prepare the collection as soon as possible. I am not afraid that you will not give me an adequate quid pro quo. I know we both have the same idea in making your collection and ours the two most complete bryozoan collections in the world and it will be my endeavor to provide you with specimens of as many of our species as possible. I would appreciate it if you would pass on my wishes and intentions to whomever will be in charge of the bryozoa in the future.²

However, it would be 1931 before these exchanges finally took place.



*Figure 1. Raymond Smith Bassler (1938).
From the Bassler Photo Collection, Department of Paleobiology,
National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution.*



*Figure 2. Anna Birchall Hastings (1938).
The Natural History Museum.*

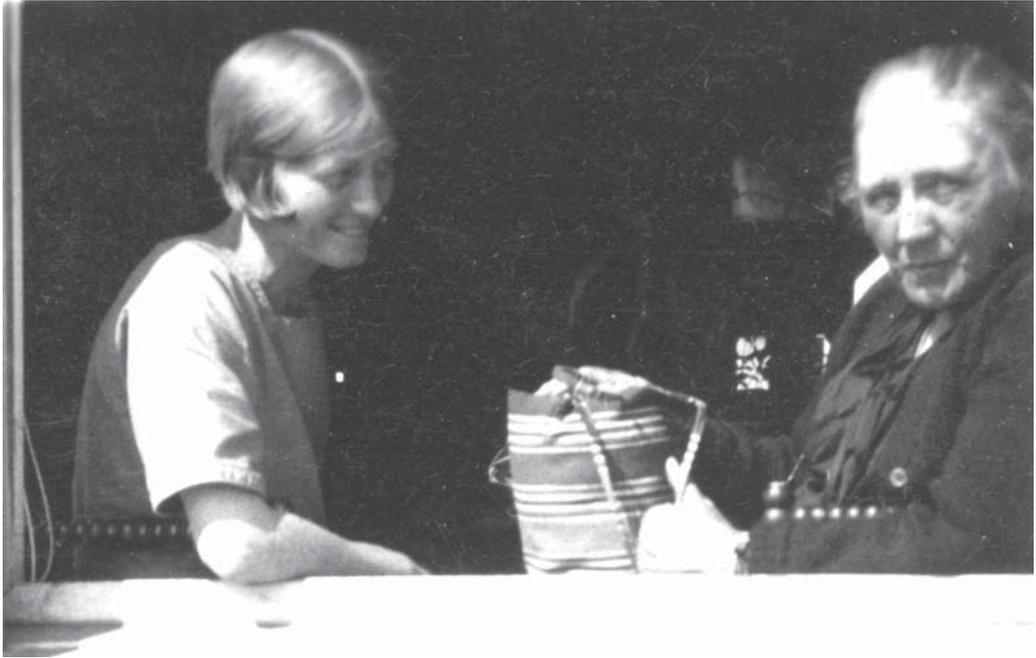


Figure 3. First picture Hastings sent to Bassler of her and her mother (1931). From the Bassler Photo Collection, Department of Paleobiology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution.

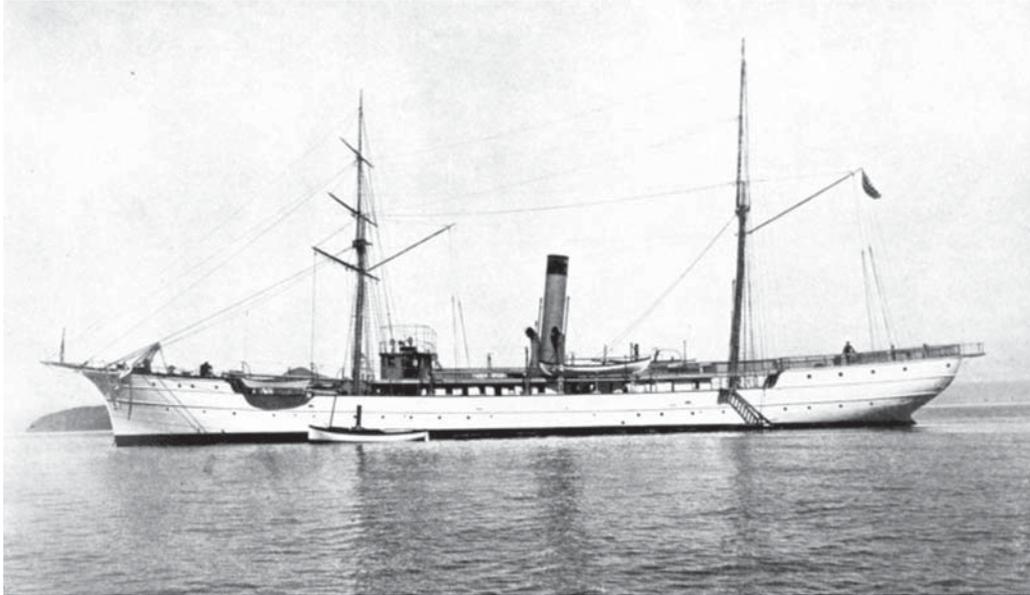
2. The exchange

In 1927, Kirkpatrick retired and his place was taken by Anna Birchall Hastings (Figure 2). Over the following years Hastings and Bassler corresponded and exchanged photographs (Figure 3).

It was in the summer of 1931, however, that they apparently met for the first time, when Bassler and his wife arrived in London having secured passage aboard the *Aquitania*.³ Not much is actually recorded about his visit to the NHM, other than Bassler's name appearing in a list of visiting investigators for the year,⁴ but over subsequent months a flurry of correspondence ensued.

By November, Hastings had organised for duplicate Busk specimens to be sent to Washington in exchange for Philippines material collected by the *Albatross* (Figure 4) and described by Bassler and his French colleague, Ferdinand Canu. Much was made about the quality of material being sent either way. In a letter from Hastings to Bassler dated 11th August, 1931 she wrote:

The Busk specimens, as you already know, are bits of the originals, and, in sending you specimens of species recorded or described in my own papers, I shall be prepared to vouch for their authenticity and shall intend them to be regarded as in the nature of types.⁵



*Figure 4. U.S. Research Vessel Albatross.
Department of Paleobiology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution.*

There is no doubt that these exchanges created much excitement on either side of the Atlantic. In January 1932, having just returned from the US Geological Society meeting in Tulsa, Bassler wrote to Hastings:

Have now just returned to find the two boxes of bryozoa which again pleases me very much.⁶

He goes on to say:

Just now I am carefully unpacking your bryozoa and placing them into our biological series. It is taking some time because I have to please myself by examining every specimen closely. There are many rare species in the lot that I have never hoped to see and I am correspondingly grateful to you for making our receipt of them possible.

In return, Hastings wrote on March 15th 1932 thanking Bassler “for the splendid consignment”⁷ of material from Hawaii and the Gulf of Mexico.

The correspondence between Bassler and Hastings was fairly regular during the early 1930s, but became more sporadic in the mid to late 30s. At the USNM the correspondence finally stops between November 1939 and July 1942 with only three letters after these dates. The July 1942 letter was a double one from both Hastings and Henry Dighton Thomas announcing their marriage in June of 1941 and that they were expecting “a little stranger”⁸ in the fall of 1942. Since Bassler retired in 1948, he probably kept his



Figure 5. A wedding photo of Anna Hastings and Henry Dighton Thomas. From the Bassler Photo Collection, Department of Paleobiology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution.

correspondence private after that time. Correspondence in the NHM Bryozoa archives, however, indicates that Bassler and Hastings were still writing to each other in 1959. On the whole their letters seem fairly formal and polite, including discussion of Sir Sidney Harmer's dislike of Canu and Bassler's taxonomy and lack of adherence to the rules of nomenclature. However, the exchange of family photographs (Figure 5) and calendars at Christmas would seem to indicate that Bassler and Hastings had a lasting friendship and mutual admiration that spanned over thirty years until Bassler's death in 1961.

3. Conclusions

Today, the bryozoans that were part of this international exchange still exist in the collections of these great institutions (see Appendix 1). At the Natural History Museum

the Bassler Recent material, although kept amongst the general collection, is easily spotted due to the distinctive small white boxes in which it is housed (Figure 6).

Material sent to the U.S. National Museum is just as distinctive and ranges from the vintage slides of the Busk collection (Figure 7) to the handwritten labels in Hastings' beautiful script (Figure 8).

In summary: Hastings dispatched mainly *Challenger* and *Rattlesnake* material from the collection of George Busk, which were considered at that time to be duplicates. In return Bassler sent *Albatross* material, relevant to works by himself and Ferdinand Canu, mainly from the Philippines, Hawaii and the Gulf of Mexico.

Raymond Bassler's 1926 vision continues to help bryozoan researchers worldwide.

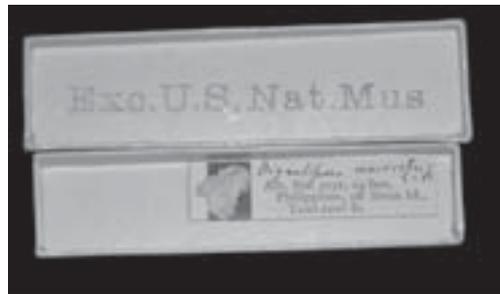
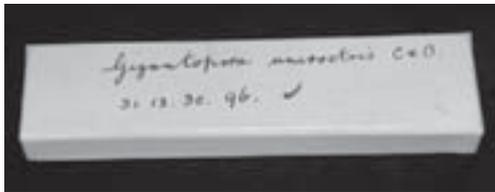


Figure 6 (left and right). "Bassler" box. The Natural History Museum.

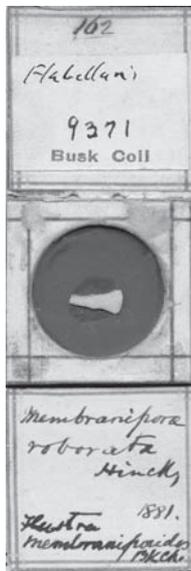


Figure 7. Slide from the Busk collection. Department of Paleobiology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution.

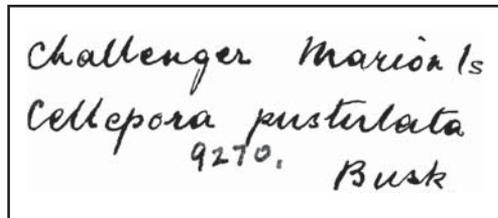


Figure 8. Anna Hastings' handwritten label. Department of Paleobiology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution.

4. Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Tracy E. Robinson and her colleagues in the Office of the Smithsonian Institution Archives for access to Bassler's files and to Polly Tucker for help in accessing files in the Natural History Museum's main Archives.

Appendix 1

Material sent to the U.S. National Museum from the Natural History Museum

- 181 species from the Voyage of HMS *Challenger*
- 41 species from Voyage of HMS *Rattlesnake*
- 16 British species from the Busk and Hincks Collections
- 8 species from the Cambridge Expedition to Suez Canal
- 48 species from the C. Crossland Expedition on SY *St. George*
- 15 from the Great Barrier Reef Expedition
- 5 species from the Bassett-Smith Collection
- 2 species from the Voyage of HMS *Alert*
- 12 species from the Busk Collection
- 198 miscellaneous specimens

Material sent to the Natural History Museum from the U.S. National Museum

- 200 Recent species from the Philippines
- 33 Recent species from the Philippines and Mexico
- 106 Recent species from the Gulf of Mexico and Hawaii
- 36 Recent species from the Galapagos
- Fossil material from Vincentown Marl (Paleocene of New Jersey)
- Fossil material from the Yorktown Formation (Pliocene of Virginia and North Carolina), Jacksonian (Late Eocene of the Gulf Coast, USA), and Australian Tertiary Polyzoa
- 46 tubes of Tertiary Polyzoa
- Palaeozoic bryozoans from North America and the 'Baltic Provinces'

Notes

- 1 Sanner J. 2002. Canu and Bassler, p. 243-250. In: Wyse Jackson, P.N. & Spencer Jones, M.E. (eds) *Annals of Bryozoology: aspects of the history of research on bryozoans*. International Bryozoology Association, Dublin, 382 pp.

- 2 R. S. Bassler to R. Kirkpatrick, 4th December 1926, NHM Recent Bryozoa archives.
- 3 R. S. Bassler to W. D. Lang, 24th March 1931, NHM Archives Ref. DF100/80/38.
- 4 Trustees minutes, 6th May 1932. List of visiting investigators between 30th June 1931 and 6th May 1932. NHM Archives Ref. DF205/97
- 5 A. B. Hastings to R. S. Bassler, 11th August 1931, Smithsonian Institution Archives, record unit 7234, Ray S. Bassler Papers, 1875–1961 and undated.
- 6 R. S. Bassler to A. B. Hastings, 7th January 1932, NHM Recent Bryozoa archives.
- 7 A. B. Hastings to R. S. Bassler, 15th March 1932, NHM Recent Bryozoa archives.
- 8 A. B. Hastings & H. Dighton Thomas to R. S. Bassler, 2nd July 1942, Smithsonian Institution Archives, record unit 7234, Ray S. Bassler Papers, 1875–1961 and undated.