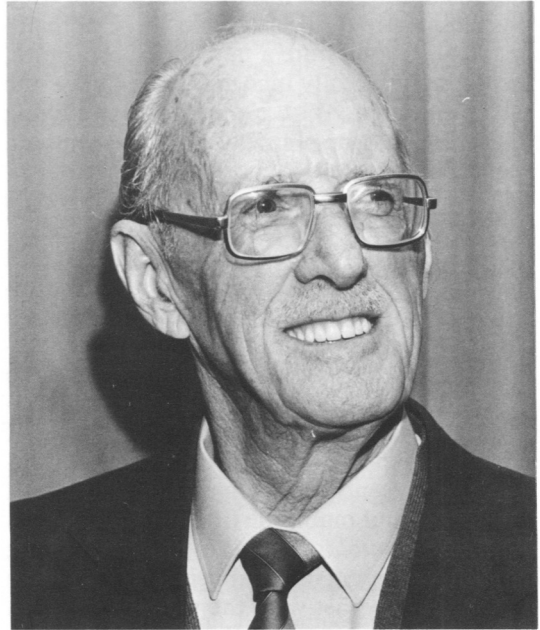


MEMORIAL

EDMUND D. GILL
1908–1986

Edmund Gill, who passed away on 13 July 1986, had been Curator of Fossils at the National Museum in Melbourne (1948–1964) and later (1964–1973) its Deputy/Assistant Director. He was in fact a gifted amateur who had turned professional but who always retained the enthusiasm of the unrepentant amateur, mingled with the ardor of the true scientist. During the 1930's, Edmund had been a Baptist minister, much involved with youth work, and was for a time director of the Baptist youth service in Victoria. He was led to paleontology and stratigraphy by chance, having had to take a science course at Melbourne University as part of his arts degree. Inevitably, he tried to convey to fellow Baptists something of his fascination with evolutionary paleontology; in this he was not successful. He became fascinated with the faunas of the "Yeringian" and "Tanjilian" sequences, then thought to be Silurian, of central Victoria. Interleaved with pastoral duties he made vast and systematic collections, particularly of the "Yeringian" brachiopods, trilobites, and plants of central Victoria—in fact everything that took his eye; his was a particularly sharp and questioning eye! Impressed by the late Jack Shirley's work on trilobites, the Lower Devonian faunas of New Zealand, and Jack's perceptive analysis of Silurian–Devonian faunal patterns, Ed described salient elements of the Victorian "Yeringian" and "Tanjilian" faunas and concluded they were much younger (Devonian rather than Silurian) than had been supposed. Publication of his conclusions, long since universally accepted and built upon, seems to have inaugurated a chain of controversies in which Ed seemed always to be taking a minority viewpoint—often a minority of one!

Ed's initial infatuation with trilobites and the brachiopods omnipresent in the Devonian of southeastern Australia became more and more supplanted by Quaternary geology, landforms, and the paleontology vital to underpinning conclusions as to ages and envi-



ronments. He wrote voluminously on fossil man in Australia, paleopedology, dating Cenozoic vertebrates, and deciphering their environments and even did pivotal work on the dating of tektite showers by archeological excavation. He was a tireless popularizer of science; an avalanche of popular articles, often on paleontology, came from his pen. He returned again and again to Pleistocene and Holocene stratigraphy, strandlines, and paleoecology, making numerous seminal and occasionally controversial contributions. His last monograph brought together over 50 years of intermittent work on Quaternary stratigraphy, shore platforms, and paleoecology of coastal terrains about Warrnambool in southeastern Australia. His 1986 discovery of what appear to be 80,000-year-old middens may have nearly doubled the apparent antiquity of man in Australia.

Unwittingly, Ed became something of a gentle gadfly at scientific conferences and colloquia, but was unfailingly honest and tem-

perate, even under circumstances that would have provoked invective from lesser souls. He was never given to throwing mud pies. Ed was quick with intuition and thus frequently premature in enthusiastically articulating conclusions that often, nevertheless, were to prove correct. He won many battles and lost a few. As a minor example, he tried unsuccessfully (Gill, 1949) to have us paleontologists substitute a new term, *prosopon*, for the semantically incorrect way we use the term *ornament*. With an eye for compelling data, he could be sinewy in argument, even theatrical, but benignly so.

It was a crusty and complacent geologic community in which Ed endeavored to make his way; publication was rare; optimism and infatuation with new ideas were not fashionable. He confronted more than his fair share of intellectual intimidation, but never submitted to it. If a manuscript was rejected, he never hesitated to rework it and submit elsewhere. As a consequence, his hundreds of scientific papers (at least 480 of them) appeared in an enormous diversity of journals, ephemeral and main line (including the *Journal of Paleontology*), making it a daunting task to document his published oeuvre. He was incredibly fast with the pen, but his pen could never keep up with the flow of his ideas.

Ed had a splendid vision of science and was tireless in nurturing it. Witness his years (1956–1970) as successively secretary, research secretary, and president of the Royal Society of Victoria. The Society had become introverted, near moribund, and operated on a minuscule budget, but Ed went into highways and byways, sought finance for publications and symposia (especially interdisciplinary ones), increased membership, greatly improved the quality of its journal, and was primarily responsible for turning it into the leading nonspecialized scientific society in Australia. Ed took strength from confounding the pessimists. He was never a scientific chauvinist but welcomed and encouraged re-

search of all kinds by no matter from whom and no matter where. Numerous groups and individuals from the northern hemisphere who came to attack problems in Australia used the National Museum in Melbourne as their base and can be said to have worked under Ed's aegis.

Ed had suffered from cardiac problems for 25 years but was irrepressible; he was active and bubbling with ideas right to the end. He was a great family man, proud of his four children. The oldest, Adrian, a world leader in ocean-atmosphere dynamics, died suddenly in April; Ed passed away a mere three months later. He and his wife Kath, who survives him, derived great pleasure from the enormous geographic spread and diversity of interests of their friends.

Ed was remarkable for the heterogeneity—one should perhaps say polarities—of his interests and for the way he related to people of all ages. He could communicate science and the excitement of discovery to academics and laborers, small children and nonagenarians. The value he placed on people was immediately evident to all who met him. His altruism and intellectual generosity were proverbial. He was a global personality with global interests and globe-encompassing friendships. Science, and specifically a broad swath of our paleontological and related sciences, has lost much with his passing.

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REFERENCE

- GILL, E. D. 1949. *Prosopon*, a term proposed to replace the biologically erroneous term *ornament*. *Journal of Paleontology*, 23:572.