

Date: Sat, 30 Dec 2000 00:46:53 -1000 (HST)
From: George H. Balazs <gbalazs@honlab.nmfs.hawaii.edu>
To: GeorgeH Balazs <gbalazs@honlab.nmfs.hawaii.edu>
Subject: Tom Harrisson and His Remarkable Life

"Explorer, museum curator, guerilla fighter, pioneer sociologist, documentary film maker, anthropologist-- Tom Harrisson was all these things. He was also arrogant, choleric, swashbuckling, often drunk and nearly always deliberately outrageous. In spite of these contradictions, he became a key figure in every enterprise he undertook. Judith Heimann describes how he did so. A brilliant and insightful biography"-David Attenborough.

Titled- "The Most Offending Soul Alive" by Judith M. Heimann, 480pp illustrated, University of Hawaii Press 1999. US\$26.95

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*****  
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"n, Jan 2001 18:35:05 -0500
de Silva" <gsdesilva@direct.com>
rge H. Balazs" <gbalazs@hcnlab.nmfs.hawaii.edu>
Re: Tom Harrison and His Remarkable Life (fwd)

Re

[The following text is in the "iso-8859-1" character set]
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To George my dear old friend and his charming lady Linda - A Very Happy and Prosperous 2001.

Many thanks for the note on our old friend Tom and the book on his life. The local book shop is ordering a copy for me. I still remember Grand Cayman where we drank and a lot and talked a lot. A great turtle man was lost when he coiled in his cable. He was also my mentor although we crossed swords at one time. He buried the hatchling when he realized that I was from Ceylon and not anywhere else. Later, I found that he had a heart of gold and was a very kind person and he put on this facade of aggressiveness to avoid being taken advantage of. I still hear from Barbara who is in Holland.

Regards, Stanley.

-----Original Message-----
From: George H. Balazs <gbalazs@hcnlab.nmfs.hawaii.edu>
To: George de Silva <gsdesilva@direct.com>
Date: 01 Januari 2001 17:41
Subject: Tom Harrison and His Remarkable Life (fwd)

"world within"

>Stanley, Happy New Year my Friend. I thought you would be interested in
>the message I wrote below. Aloha, Happy 2001! George

>----- Forwarded message -----

>Date: Sun, 31 Dec 2000 11:34:36 -1000 (HST)
>From: George H. Balazs <gbalazs@hcnlab.nmfs.hawaii.edu>
>To: SeaTurtle Biology/Conservation <CTURTLES@lists.ufl.edu>
>Subject: Tom Harrison and His Remarkable Life

>Dear Cturtle Readers: The year is closing quickly and I want to tell you
>about a new (1999) book I've only recently stumbled across. The book is
>about a man I feel fortunate to have known, but for all too brief a
>period. Tom Harrison's name and fortunes may not be well-known to many
>of the younger or even older sea turtle conservationists and scientists. Tom
>died before his time in 1976. A shock to many of us back then searching
>for guidance from the "older" set. Frankly, I haven't thought about Tom
>for some years. Out of sight, out of mind. Often a hard fact of the
>living toward those who have died. I'm not even sure if Tom's name has
>ever even appeared on Cturtle. It has, of course, in the Marine Turtle
>Newsletter, in the very first issue, in an obituary authored by Dr. Archie
>Carr (reprinted at the bottom of this message).

>David Attenborough gives the following brief description of the book.
>I've ordered it and will read with intense interest. And recall a man
>lecturing, and even scolding, the hell out of me the last time I was with
>him late at night at a bar Cayman.

>"Explorer, museum curator, guerilla fighter, pioneer sociologist,
>documentary film maker, anthropologist-- Tom Harrison was all these
>things. He was also arrogant, choleric, swashbuckling, often drunk and
>nearly always deliberately outrageous. In spite of these contradictions,
>he became a key figure in every enterprise he undertook. Judith Heimann
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>-David Attenborough.

>Titled- "The Most Offending Soul Alive- Tom Harrison and his remarkable
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>by Judith M. Heimann, 480pp illustrated, University of Hawaii Press 1999.
>US\$26.95

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>From: Marine Turtle Newsletter, No. 1, August 1976
>Tom Harrison: Obituary

>Prof^{essor} Tom Harrison, Co-Chairman of the Marine Turtle Group, and his
>wife Christina, were killed in a road accident in Bangkok last January.
>
>Tom was an incredibly versatile individual who has left his mark in many
>fields. His contributions to sea turtle conservation were enormous.
>Before the Japanese occupation the turtle egg industry of the Sarawak
>Islands (Talang 2 Besar, Talang 2 Kecil and Satang), off the southwest
>coast of Borneo, had been in the hands of a few prominent Malay families.
>In 1941 the industry was placed under a Turtle Trust Ordinance to be
>administered by the Curator of the Sarawak Museum. In 1947, Tom Harrison
>became Curator of the Museum. He took charge of the Turtle Islands,
>instigated regulation of the exploitation there, and established a
>tagging program. His adoption of a monel metal cow-ear tag as a fin-clip,
>replacing the unsatisfactory shell-tags previously used, was a milestone
>in sea turtle research procedure. On July 4, 1956, a turtle that had been
>tagged at one of the rookery islands three years before returned to nest.
>This was the first remigration of a tagged turtle, and since then,
>hundreds of similar returns recorded at the Sarawak rookery and elsewhere
>have shown that the three-year absence represented the predominant
>internigratory interval of the species. Tom's frequent short published
>accounts of his conservation problems and achievements at the islands
>attracted worldwide attention, which surely lengthened the
>survival-expectancy of Chelonia. When he died, the Turtle Group lost an
>irreplaceable officer, the green turtle a staunch benefactor, and the
>surviving Co-Chairman a valued friend. Archie Carr



Tom in the mid-1970s.

- 285-286; Max brought to, 319; relations with Malaysia, 336, 336fn
 skin infections, 47-48, 68, 74
 snakes: banded krait, 34-35, 192; flying, 274, 274fn; king cobra, 192, 274-275, 277
 Sochon, Maj. Bill, 176, 195-196, 198, 217; leads SEMUT 3, 197
 social hierarchy, 13, 72, 82, 127, 218, 263
 social surveys, 2-3, 128, 148, 242-243. See also qualitative vs. quantitative approach
 socio-economic survey: of Malays, 289; of Sarawak, 249. See also Colonial Social Science Research Council; Leach, E. R.
 SOE (Special Operations Executive), 170; Australian equivalent of, 173; London headquarters of, 197
 Solheim, Wilhelm G., II, 292, 300, 323, 356-357, 364, 448n
 Sommerfield, John, 142, 331
 South China Sea, 7, 35, 182, 247, 289
 Southwell, Hudson, Rev. and Mrs., 261-263, 396
 South West Bay (Malekula), 46, 91, 92
 Special Air Service. See SAS
 Special Allied Airborne Reconnaissance Force (SAARF), 370
 Special Forces ("Z" Special Unit advance headquarters on Labuan), 205, 207, 210, 213, 217. See also "Z" Special Unit
 Special Operations Executive. See SOE
 special operatives. See "Z" Special Unit
 Spender, Humphrey, 138, 140, 141, 144, 384; Inez, 152; Michael, 138, 140; Stephen, 8, 115, 125, 146, 152, 384-385
 Spoor, Colonel, 214, 217
 St. Christopher School, Letchworth, 161, 162
 St. Kilda. See Oxford-Cambridge Expedition to St. Kilda
 statistics. See qualitative vs. quantitative approach
 Steaming Hill Lake (Gaua), 57
 Stone Age, 313-314. See also New Guinea
Stone Men of Malekula (John Layard), 80
 Stonier, G. W., 131-132, 146, 147
 storepedo(s), 180, 184, 199, 204, 224
 Straits of Makassar, 174, 247
Straits Times (Kuala Lumpur), 316, 362
 stratigraphy, 321, 322-323, 356-357, 448n
 submarine, 174, 178. See also *Thetis*
 Sultan of Brunei. See Brunei, government of
 Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin College, 317
 Supreme Allied European headquarters, 371
 Surrealist(s), 113, 128, 130-131
 swiftlets, 252, 313. See also birds' nest, soup
 tabu(s), 72, 83
 Tabwemasana, Mount, 46, 48, 50
 Tagal(s), 207, 211, 252
 tagging: of birds, 16-17; of turtles, 285, 286-287, 311
 Tahiti, 75, 101-102
 Talang-Talang Besar. See Turtle Islands
 Tamabo Range, 177, 183, 247, 329
 tamaraw, 364-365, 365fn, 449n
 Tangoa (island), 46, 66
 Tarakan (Island), 173, 196, 198, 200, 221, 247
 Tarrant, Molly, 331, 384. See also Mass-Observation
 Tatarii (Santo), 46, 50, 51
 tattoos, 33, 76, 181
 Taumarama Bay (Malekula), 46, 83
 Tebedu, 247, 345
 teetotal, 261, 348
 television, THH's films for, 3, 291, 308, 312, 327, 340. See also BBC
Temenggong (Paramount Chief), 343
 Tenmaru (Malekula), 46, 83, 97, 413n
 Thailand, 247, 309, 388-389
Thetis (submarine), 157
 THH (Tom Harnett Harrisson). See Harrisson, Tom Harnett
Things Worth While (Evelyn Cheesman), 80
 THINK (National Army of Northern Borneo), 341. See also Brunei, Rebellion
The Times (London), 16, 38, 331-332, 375, 382, 387, 391
 Tinjar River, 7, 30, 32, 182, 247, 252
 Tirak, 80-81
 TNKU (National Army of Northern Borneo), 341-344
 trade goods, bolts of cloth, 251; fish hooks, 179; needles, 179
 Travellers' Club, 267
 Tredrea, Sgt. Jack, 184, 186
 Trevelyan, Julian, 141, 142, 144, 330
 "The Trobriands," 40
 trochus shell, 57, 59, 92
 Trusan River, 183, 190, 205, 210, 216, 221, 222, 223, 226, 252, 264
 Tuan, 186, 260, 271; Besar, 197; Mayor, 186, 261; Pil, 208; Tauh, 266
 turtle, conservation, 3, 275, 282, 283, 285-287, 311, 364-365; eggs, 59, 275, 285, 286-287; THH's collection of —shaped objects, 376, 397
 Turtle Board of Management, 275, 278
 Turtle Islands, 247, 275, 284, 286-287, 311, 316
 Tutoh River, 182, 188, 216, 220
 Tutong, 182, 208
 Tweedie, M. W. F. "Michael," 288, 308, 323, 393
 Ukong, 182, 202-203, 205, 207, 208
 ulu (upriver): 326, 328; Ulu Baram, 251; Ulu Baleh, 339



**The Most
Offending
Soul Alive**

*Tom Harrison
and His
Remarkable Life*

Judith M. Heimann

The Most Offending Soul Alive

*Tom Harrisson and
His Remarkable Life*

Judith M. Heimann

A Latitude 20 Book



University of Hawai'i Press
Honolulu

1997

Prologue

One day in 1975, the phone rang in my office in the consular section of the American embassy in Brussels. It was the British consul asking in a harassed voice if I knew a bizarre Englishman called Tom Harrison who claimed to know me. I cautiously admitted that we had been neighbors in Borneo, and the consul went on to explain that the man was in his outer office making an unholy fuss about the renewal of his passport. He was claiming that the birth date on it and on his birth certificate was wrong.

"Look," I said, cutting short this choleric colleague, "Do yourself a favor. Look him up in *Who's Who*."

The entry that the consul would have seen in *Who's Who 1975* began: "Harrison, Tom. DSO 1946, OBE 1959. . . Visiting Professor and Director of Mass-Observation Archive, University of Sussex . . ." and went on for twelve column-inches to mention, *inter alia*,

left Harrow (where wrote standard book on the birds of the district) to go on Oxford Expedition to Arctic Lapland; . . . one year living among cannibal mountain tribes of Malekula. . . Determined, instead of studying primitive people, to study the "cannibals of Britain," so started with Charles Madge new type of social research organization, called Mass-Observation . . . 1945 first white man to be dropped into Borneo to organize guerrillas in Sarawak and Dutch Borneo prior to Allied landings, . . . Government Ethnologist and Curator of Museum, Sarawak 1947-66 . . . St. Research Associate in Anthropology and Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University. . .

This was followed by a long list of publications on subjects ranging from ornithology to *Primitive Erotic Art*. His chief recreation was given as "living among strange people and listening to them talk about themselves."

Tom's birth certificate, though he was unable to prove it to the consul, was indeed wrong. A badly handwritten record at the British consulate in Buenos Aires seemed to show his birth in April (26-4-11) instead of his actual birth date in September (26-9-11). Tom found this official "evidence" of a wrong birth date to be more than merely irritating. In notes for his projected autobiography, he describes his discovery of this error as "womb-traumatic." All his life, people had questioned his claims to have done various things. Now it appeared that even his birthday was being denied him.

He started making notes for an autobiography (which he had tentatively titled *Was I That Man?*) about this time, in the year before his sudden death in early 1976. He planned to write a "self-pitiless account" in which he would try "to find what such a life looks like to others, what DID I really do." Taking on his project two decades after his death, I have tried to be as pitiless as he proposed to be in drawing his portrait, in showing what his life looked like to others of his day, and what he "DID" really do. In doing so, I have kept within a value system he would recognize and eschewed attempts to judge him by 1990s standards, whether feminist, anticolonialist, or postmodernist.

I started with little knowledge and few preconceptions, having known him as a neighbor and casual friend during ten years in three countries. Beginning in 1986, I spent ten years retracing his steps, on four continents, and interviewing nearly 200 people who knew him or knew of him. My qualifications for this self-imposed task were a modest fluency in Malay, a little informal familiarity with anthropology, a few years spent in Borneo, and an ability to read difficult handwriting. After five years of desultory work on the book, I retired from the diplomatic service at the first possible moment in order to devote my full attention to the project. My motives were totally self-ish: I adore doing research and had long been looking for a subject that would take in two areas of the world that fascinate me, Northwest Europe and Southeast Asia. If I have succeeded in my goal, this book will allow you, the reader, to see for yourself this extraordinary man and draw your own conclusions about his life and work.

Tom Harrison began to make a name for himself in England in the late 1930s, first as an adventurer who had lived among cannibals and written a best-seller about his experiences that argued on behalf of cannibals' rights to their land and to their way of life. He next made news as the founder of Mass-Observation, an organization that pioneered doing social surveys in England. He often appeared in the press and on BBC radio and television (yes, television, in 1936) as a guest expert on birds, ecology, cannibals, and/or the latest popular dance craze. He had a weekly column as radio critic for *The Observer* and appeared often in periodicals as different as Tom Hopkinson's *Picture Post* and John Lehmann's avant garde *New Writing*.

He was on his way to becoming a household word in England when, in March 1945, wearing a parachutist's wings and the brand new crown of a British major, he jumped into a hidden valley in the middle of Borneo to set up an intelligence network behind Japanese lines with the help of a few dozen Australian officers and men. Not satisfied with so small or simple a task, he also raised a thousand-man army of blowpiping headhunters who killed or captured nearly 1500 Japanese, losing only 21 native fighters and no Australians. For this he won the DSO.

After the war, while the social survey techniques he had been the first to use in Britain became the tools of the new market research industry, he made his home in Borneo. There, he became, over the next two decades, an amateur expert in a bewildering number of fields, from paleontology (finding the remains of the oldest *Homo sapiens sapiens* known at the time) to founding the first orphanage for infant orangutans, to helping to pioneer the conservation of the green sea turtle, to making the Sarawak Museum, of which he became the curator, the model and inspiration for smaller Third World museums. At times he would be called away to draw on his knowledge of inland Borneo to help the Gurkhas or the Special Air Service (SAS) or local security forces with a local rebellion or a clandestine Indonesian incursion. He became the best-known person in Borneo, virtually the only one heard of by outsiders.

In England, though, he was heard of only rarely, as when one of a series of television films he did on Borneo won the Cannes *Grand Prix* for documentaries and was shown on the BBC. Thus, I cannot assume that any of Harrison's extraordinary achievements are familiar to the reader.

Worse still, of those who remember him, many are unwilling to believe that he did what he said he did. I have yet to catch him making a bald-faced lie in print, but he was certainly devious and would sometimes tailor the truth to lead the unwary to a false conclusion. He also sometimes telescoped the facts to make a story shorter or more striking, as, for example, when he said he was "sent down from both Oxford and Cambridge." In fact, he walked out of Cambridge but would probably have been sent down had he continued his rowdy carrying on with such disreputable young men as Malcolm Lowry. Though never enrolled at Oxford, he participated with great success in four Oxford expeditions but was for a time "banned" from the zoological department's premises and perhaps from Oxford University altogether. He would tell the long version if there was time or if his audience showed interest, but the phrase "sent down from Oxford and Cambridge" was in his view close enough to the truth to serve as shorthand for the facts.

Tom's habit of not always telling the exact literal truth, combined with the unlikely variety and range of his accomplishments, his skill at self-publicity, and his lifelong penchant for making enemies means virtually no achievement he claimed, or which has been claimed for him, was or is believed by the host of his detractors. For the biographer, this meant that every "fact" about Tom had to be confirmed by at least one other source known to be honest or at least impartial. When this could not be done, I have felt obliged to say so.

It is ironic that no such standards of reliability are demanded of his detractors. During his life and after his death, entirely unsubstantiated allegations were made against him, for example, that he had absconded with

treasures belonging to the Sarawak Museum. One cannot simply dismiss such unsupported allegations, however, because Tom's behavior was often so dreadful as to make many unprejudiced people ready to believe the worst about him. Indeed, although many of Tom's friends would agree with the late Lord Shackleton that Tom was "the most remarkable man of my generation," some otherwise clear-thinking people who knew him are unprepared to see any good in the life and work of such a man.

I find that view understandable but cannot share it. Tom could be dreadful, but he could also be witty, warm, exciting, engaging, encouraging, and, above all, life-enhancing. His curiosity and energy were inexhaustible. And whereas the scientists of his day sought discrete areas of study small enough to master, Tom was always looking for ways to connect information and ideas across disciplines. The narrower academicians saw him for the trespasser and marauder he was. They did not welcome him careering across their carefully fenced-in special areas and opening gates into neighboring fields—and doing so without even the license of a university degree. Yet modern scholars in a number of disciplines—archaeologists, conservationists, art historians, ornithologists, and guerrilla warfare specialists—believe Tom saw some things more clearly and widely and deeply than anyone else of his generation. Even in anthropology where he feuded actively with the establishment all his life, although his work had serious flaws, his instincts brought him very close to present thinking in some respects.

Astonishingly prolific, in addition to writing for scholarly audiences, he loved appearing in the popular press and in the media. This was not just to feed his ravenous ego but also because he felt compelled to popularize what he learned so that ordinary people—including the groups of people under study—could take advantage of his research. It is hard to know which were more offensive to the academic and scientific establishment: his vices or his virtues. He was a romantic polymath, a drunken bully, an original-thinking iconoclast, a dreadful husband and father, a fearless adventurer, a Richard Burton of his time.

In what follows, then, I shall try to show what kind of a man Tom Harrison was, in all his complexity, and what he did that makes him worth reading about.

friend Robby Robertson at Big Bay had a boat to lend him, but then the tail of a hurricane hit Santo. As he got near to Big Bay, Baker found the whole coast "littered with uprooted trees." He returned to Hog Harbour, convinced that Zita and Tom "had attempted to cross the 60 miles of open Pacific in an unsuitable boat and had been caught by the hurricane."

On Gaua, Zita and Tom tried to keep busy, while not wishing to stray from the coast for more than a night at a time in case a boat turned up. Tom did a census of the population and tried not to notice how anxious Zita was becoming as she thought of her worried husband. Their stores had given out and, not wanting to trespass indefinitely on the hospitality of their Japanese host, they went along the coast to a larger village where a deserted missionary's house had a few stores left. Zita recounted that "The natives there remembered me from a previous visit and just surpassed themselves with kindnesses. . . . Every day people would come in with bunches of bananas, oranges, coconuts, yams, chickens, fish and turtles' eggs. The last-named are just like ping-pong balls gone a bit flabby; they make awfully good scrambled eggs. . . ." Tom and Zita distributed to these friendly Gauans some of the missionaries' store of medicine but soon needed some themselves, as both of them had attacks of malaria. Zita's symptoms were "particularly alarming, as [they] had the extraordinary effect of making my head jerk backwards all the time, and we had just seen a native baby die with the same symptoms. Poor [Tom] was in an awful state, and when he wasn't busy being a good, sweet and efficient nurse, he spent the time staring at me as if waiting for the end." Next came a hurricane, causing damage to the village and confining them to their temporary home for several days. The storm also underlined the near hopelessness of expecting a boat to come for them until the hurricane season ended. "Then," Zita recalled, "miracle of miracles, six weeks after our arrival we were awakened one morning by a terrific blowing of conch shells and the stir of the whole village. I rushed out and saw everyone looking out to sea and pointing. There was a sail." The Gauans recognized the boat; it belonged to an intrepid island trader named Oliver Stephens, a well-known local "character." As Zita remarked, Stephens was "the only man in the group who defies hurricanes. He was often around collecting trochus shell . . . and he always anchored a few miles along the coast." Tom was having a bad spell of malaria, and so Zita rushed off without him to try to induce Oliver to take them back to Santo.

Back at Hog Harbour, having exhausted local possibilities, John Baker waited for the *Makambo* to turn up so he could convince the captain to take him to Gaua to look for his wife and Harrison. The steamer was days late, having had to shelter from the hurricane. Finally, on January 29, the *Makambo* arrived late at night. Baker went on board at once and got the captain's consent.

We were just about to start when [the captain] insisted that he could see a light far out to sea to the north. Neither the other officers nor I could see anything, and we disbelieved him; but gradually a flicker became visible, and then it was clearly a light gleaming through the pouring rain. . . . In a few minutes she was alongside. My good friend, Mr. Oliver [Stephens] . . . had brought them back.

Once back at their camp, regardless of how adventurous and idyllic the lovers' time on Gaua had been, the Bakers were "a couple in an expedition" again and Tom was the third man. Zita wrote to Naomi:

The present stage in the John-Tom problem is that I realise that John and I aren't "emancipated" or "modern" enough to go quite separate ways indifferently. A big quarrel is the only way we could part and a big quarrel means bitterness and that would spoil all the grand ten years we have had. Those ten years are the most real solid good things I have and I just couldn't throw them away—especially in this insecure and changing world.

In writing of "this insecure and changing world," Zita was delicately referring to the fact that, for a woman such as herself, who had no money of her own and no moneymaking skills except shorthand and typing, things had changed very little in the hundred years since Jane Austen's heroines had had to consider a prospective husband's financial prospects as a factor outweighing all others.

On February 14, 1934, Valentine's Day, Tom (who had no financial prospects whatever) seemed unaware of the way Zita's thoughts were turning. He wrote to Naomi:

Zita & John & a third Baker are apparently going soon. . . .

I'm bleeding all over because Zita is going. I am finally indisputably (who wants to argue with me anyway?) in love with Z. . . . Zita is completely mixed in me & I cannot escape it. I am sure 6 months mosquitos & America will not reduce or obliterate it all. And I am a fearfully one person person. It has all been most awful hell for me (& Zita in her way). . . .

Now the hell is nearly over. It remains to tiptilt it finally. Sooner or later I want my money back on the bottle. (Why in the hell can't I write straight English sense. . . . Damp rot? Simile the reaction.) It just isn't any fun being a lover, is it? Is it any fun having one? . . .

As a goodbye present I have written a long poem-prose for Z, called "Coconut Moon."* There seems to be room for something rather virile & think-

*The poem appears in *Savage Civilisation*, pp. 387-394 and is dedicated "for Zita, 14/2/34." A revised version was published on the letter page of the *New Statesman and Nation* on January 2, 1937, with unanticipated effects on Tom's career.

at that time—and look at its collections of the animal, plant, and insect life of Sarawak on the ground floor and the native art and artifacts displayed upstairs. He wrote in the *Gazette* that he was anxious to make the museum a place that “every visitor wants to see at once, and every old hand to visit regularly.” He arranged for it to be open eight hours a day and kept the atmosphere informal “so that even people from the far interior in loin cloths can feel relaxed and stay in the place all day if they like.” He wanted scientists and scholars from all over the world to use the tens of thousands of items in the reference collection crowded into two smaller buildings at the foot of Museum Hill. He was determined that the museum would be a “two-way, in and out breathing affair—not just a dump of dead corpses, dusty china and sleepy attendants.”

He liked the fact that many requests for information came to the museum from outside the country: “a planter in Papua asking about flowers; a linguist in London wanting local vocabularies; an archaeologist [asking] about Stone-Age finds.” He was equally determined to keep up a productive dialogue with the people of Sarawak:

Inside Sarawak during a typical recent period [mid 1947] we answered queries about guano in bird caves; the *maias* (orang-utan) population; the long-term effects of *tuba* [native vegetal poison] fishing; animals suitable for designs on stamps; how long it takes a termite to travel a foot; . . . flying* and spitting snakes; construction pattern of a Murut longhouse; difference between a Penan and a Punan (Answer: Nil?); does a crocodile have a tongue? (Answer: Yes, always, or it couldn't be); how many eggs a turtle lays (average, Sarawak, about 109); . . . the identification of a stone for a Chinese trader (antimony); and how to feed a *wah-wah* [gibbon] in six easy lessons! All part of the Museum's job—and a pleasure.

As he began, so he continued. Over the next twenty years, Tom would move heaven and earth to make this museum the best of its kind: a local Asian museum responsive to local people's interests, “so arranged that even illiterate people can enjoy the museum,” and yet a resource for the world of art and science as well. That he achieved his goal is something agreed on by virtually everyone who knows the Sarawak Museum. He developed it, as one knowledgeable witness confirms, “into an institution of world standing.”

He had display cases showing stuffed animals in natural poses and settings and live animals in a miniature zoo behind the museum. One of the first animals he obtained for his zoo was a spectacularly fierce six-foot king

*Tom dropped a “flying,” that is, gliding, snake from the museum's upstairs window to see how far it could “fly.” Answer: 50 yards.

Now that Tom had made Kuching his base of operations, he added to the excellent local multiethnic museum staff that he had begun hiring two years earlier. He was pleased with the staff but did not tell them so. Instead, as he had done in his SEMUT days, he would shout and go into towering rages in front of them, shaking and turning red in the face.

He was, however, also full of stimulating ideas and would push his staff to do new things. He was particularly good at getting his subordinates, many of whose written English was poor, to note down what they knew about birds or animals or people or customs or legends; he would then edit or rewrite or get translated what they had written and have it published in the *Journal* with the staff member named as author or co-author. In that sense he was encouraging and productive. Almost all of the permanent staff Tom hired for the museum stayed with him the next two decades. They learned to discount his loud threats and rages and enjoy the excitement of participating in new and ambitious projects.

Benedict Sandin, the Iban who would succeed Tom as museum curator—and one of the men who worked closest with Tom and received more than his share of Tom's scoldings—later noted that although Tom bullied his staff and “frequently demanded the work to be done with unreasonable speed,” he would do everything to rescue any of his staff from danger and was helpful with personal problems. Sandin conceded that Tom “could be extremely harsh” to his subordinates, but if he found their work satisfactory “they could be certain that this would be rewarded by an increase in salary.” Because of Tom's close personal ties with the appropriate higher-ups in the Sarawak government, Tom's “promise for promotion,” Sandin averred, “was virtually a certainty.” Tom also saw to it that almost all of his professional staff, however modest or nonexistent their educational backgrounds, received fully funded training abroad—a year or two in England, New Zealand, Australia, or Hawaii—to equip them to do their jobs better.

The museum was housed in one of Kuching's grandest buildings. The second Rajah's architect had modeled it on a nineteenth-century neorenaissance French town hall. Elegantly wide, it crowned a hill above the well-tended lawns of the museum gardens. The gardens, with their flower beds and wrought-iron bandstand, could have graced the park of any pretty provincial town in Europe. On Sunday afternoons, young Malays conducted a promenade there similar to what one finds in Latin countries. The girls in long bright-colored tunics and sarongs of artificial silk would saunter together along the paths and by the bandstand, tittering behind their hands, pretending not to see the freshly combed white-shirted young men watching them for signs of encouragement.

Tom wanted these Malay young people and all the other people of Sarawak to come inside the museum—the only one on the island of Borneo

cobra, a gift from a local donor. Feeding time attracted a crowd because the snake was so fast and furious in attacking its prey, but keeping the cobra fed—it would only eat live snakes—eventually proved to be impossible, and the animal died. The zoo had better luck keeping orangutans. It was, even then, illegal for Sarawakians to have these rare, friendly, herbivore hominoid apes as pets or to capture them without specific permission from the game warden. Confiscated orangutans were given to the curator to care for.

Other jobs that went with being museum curator and editor of the *Sarawak Museum Journal* were the administration and regular inspection of the green sea turtle egg industry of Sarawak, which was conducted on three so-called Turtle Islands off the southwest coast. Ex officio, Tom was also one of the colony's officers responsible for natural conservation, and for protecting natural parks, game reserves, and ancient monuments. He was keeper of the state archives and in charge of setting rules to control the collection and trade in edible birds' nests (one of the most expensive delicacies in Chinese cuisine) and, later, to control the cave guano industry. Any archaeological dig required his permission, as did the export of items of historical value, such as ancient porcelain or old carvings or textiles. Finally, as the acknowledged specialist on the Kelabits and their *orang ulu* neighbors in the central uplands, he also could expect to be consulted on any governmental contact with those groups. All these roles (except those to do with the *orang ulu* and guano) had been part of Tom's predecessors' responsibilities. But, in Tom's hands, the job of museum curator and government ethnographer grew to be more activist. This was a result of his great energy, imagination, and breadth of interest. He also knew how to present a proposal for a project in a way that would attract funds from the Colonial Office and other donors both within Sarawak and abroad.

Always on the lookout for good Museum staff, he rarely missed a chance to enlist volunteers to help the museum carry out its many old and new activities. For example, Neville Haile, a new officer in Sarawak's Geological Survey Department, was encouraged by Tom to continue his hobby of collecting frogs and lizards and to donate them to the museum. Haile remembers:

Tom made me Honorary Curator of Reptiles and Amphibians. He got anybody who showed an interest made an Honorary Curator and their picture, drawn by a local artist, would be displayed in the Museum—a good piece of Public Relations. . . . He was always very positive when it came to Natural History and he was interested in everything. If anyone brought along any sort of specimen to show him, he would not say, "Oh this is the commonest beetle, there are millions of them." No, he would always say, "Oh, this is very interesting. Where did you get it?" and he would encourage people to write [chiefly for the *Sarawak Museum Journal*] and to do research and to do all sorts of things, amateurs or not.

They were not all amateurs. In 1950, for example, Robert Inger, curator of reptiles at Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History, came out for six months at Tom's encouragement to collect and study reptiles and amphibians and to make observations on their ecological distribution. Inger was delighted with the breadth of Tom's interests and recalls that "I could talk to Tom about frogs and he would be just as interested as if he were a herpetologist or I could talk to him about lizards and he would have the same acute kind of interest," although on such matters he found Tom to be more interested than knowledgeable.

In his never-ending search for funds for the museum and for material for study or display, Tom sought out members of Kuching's biggest and richest ethnic group, the Chinese. The Ong family, descendants of an enterprising Hokkien who came to Sarawak in the 1840s, was socially one of the leading Chinese families of Kuching. Since the Ongs (almost to a man—or woman) were charming, well educated, intelligent, scientifically curious, and tolerant, they got on well with Tom. Tom had already met Ong Kee Hui in 1946, when Tom had come breezing into the Land Survey, Agriculture and Forest Department, where Ong was head of the agriculture section, to complain to Ong's boss, David Leach, the head of the combined department, that the Sarawak map was all wrong on its inner border. (In the 1990s, it still was.) Tom became acquainted with other members of the Ong family via the Kuching Turf Club, which Henry Ong—Ong Kee Hui's younger brother—had helped to found after the war. Henry, a man of wide interests and a serious amateur collector and breeder of "everything that lives in the water," from wild plants to uncultivated fish, liked Tom's omnivorous curiosity.

Henry recalls:

There was a time when every day, instead of going home, I used to call in at the Museum (my father's house being down the hill) and Tom used to stop me and ask me to share his lunch. All he had for his lunch was two boiled eggs and coffee and a bit of toast. (And he expected me to thrive on that!) He was so engrossed in things that he paid no attention to what he ate. . . . He would be writing away and he always had something outrageous to say—either angry or upset or impatient. . . . But he would then always end up by getting me interested in what he was doing. He was good at cajoling you into being used in his scheme, on his team.

Gradually, via the Turf Club and via the newly established Kuching branch of the Rotary Club, which Tom joined expressly for the purpose of cultivating the Chinese and other local business and professional leaders, Tom rounded up Henry's elder brother Ong Kee Hui; his father, Ong Kwan Hin; a close family friend, C. P. Law; and others knowledgeable about Chinese

and an irrepressible sense of fun, the chief trait that drew the two men together. Because Sir Abell was five years older than Tom and, even more, because he was Tom's hierarchical superior, Tom was careful not to allow the uglier side of his personality to have free rein in the governor's company.

Abell thought of Tom as the only person who really knew anything about Sarawak worth knowing. He admired how Tom had made the museum the best in Southeast Asia. He liked the way, when Tom took on a project, such as the green sea turtles, that he would get everybody interested. "Tom got into everything," Abell recalled. For example, "when they renovated the Council Negri building [Sarawak's parliament], Tom was responsible for its decoration and saw to it that the Kayans decorated the ceiling panels, which are very beautiful." "But," admitted Abell ruefully, "Tom used to get people into boiling rages by his manner of using money." For example, Abell recalled:

In his annual budget to Andrews, then Sarawak Financial Secretary, Tom put in a request for better office equipment for the Museum, more typewriters, etc., and this was granted. But the next year the same request went in. Andrews said, "Hold on, now, I already gave you the money for that last year." And Tom answered, "Come and see what I *did* buy with that money." It was something else for the Museum that was in itself acceptable but had not been requested. So Andrews came to me about it and I said, "Well, Tom still does need those typewriters," so he got the money a second time. But Tom was always doing that sort of thing.

Sir Anthony, in his attitude toward the local people, was a man whom the first White Rajah, His Highness Rajah Sir James Brooke, looking down from his portrait on the dining room wall, must surely have smiled upon. A typical story about his accessibility to Sarawakians comes from Margaret Young:

It was my husband Bob's first day as private secretary to Abell. Abell had a VIP dinner he was giving that evening—the High Commissioner was in town—and that day Mr. Yap (a Chinese from some bazaar up country) rang up and spoke to Bob, who told Abell that Yap had called to say he was in town today and that Abell had said he wanted him to dine at the Astana when next he came to town. Efforts to make it the next night failed; Yap was going back in the morning. So Abell said that it had to be tonight, then.

So Yap came, with his wife and his nine year-old daughter. I was sat next to the little girl to help her sort her way through the ranks of cutlery and she never put a foot wrong. But the fun really began when Yap had had a fair amount to drink. There were two bottles of port circulating, and when one of the bottles got to Mr. Yap, he leapt from his chair and started filling everyone's glass and shouting "Yam Sing" [Chinese for "bottoms up"].

First everyone was a bit shocked. [Short of digging up a cricket pitch, it is hard to imagine anything in those days that would have been more upsetting to a

colonial Englishman's sense of propriety.] But then everybody started to enjoy themselves as Yap danced around the table. For some of those stuffy people, I think it made their evening.

There are countless stories of parties at the Astana in Abell's day, from 1950 to 1959, and Tom was present at some of the wilder ones, often bringing with him his *orang ulu* retinue, including Sigang. After one particularly liquid lunch, Kuching residents remember Tom swimming the river from below Astana Hill back to the town side, followed by an interested iguana.

Tom never gave lunch or dinner parties but would often have people come to stay. There were sometimes a dozen *orang ulu* guests sleeping in the back of the house, but he would invite expatriates to stay with him as well. He would also offer visitors the use of his house when he planned to be away. An expatriate couple from an outstation remember that in 1951 they were booked into the Resthouse, which seemed a dreary uncomfortable place, when "suddenly like a rush of wind Tom arrived and said, 'You can't possibly stay here. You can have my house as I'm off to the Kelabit country,' and rushed out. (He was always in a fearful hurry.) As he did so, he called over his shoulder, 'Don't put soap in the turtles' eyes.' With this mystifying statement . . . he was gone." Soon someone from the museum came to take the visitors to the house in Pig Lane.

It was a wooden bungalow on low stilts. Beneath it was a honey bear [a benign-looking but dangerous animal] and near the house was a tethered Rhinoceros Hornbill. With its red eye and huge bill it was a formidable-looking bird.

Inside, the house was fascinating. . . . On the window ledge in a cage was a Pen-tailed Shrew, with a foxy smell very strong for such a tiny animal to emit.

The inside door of the bathroom opened off the bedroom and was in darkness until I opened the outer door off the garden. There was a terribly strong fishy smell and as the outer door opened I found the reason not only for the smell but for Tom's parting remark. All the walls had shelves with enamel basins filled with tiny turtles, each with a number painted on the carapace. Almost daily, someone arrived from the Museum to measure their growth. (Sometime later they were taken back to the sea near their islands and released.) I left the outside door open, a mistake which became evident the next time I went there. On the wooden water tub meant for our use was a grey heron sitting on the edge, hissing and making dives at me with its very sharp bill. I retreated into the garden.

The houseguests felt that "It was nonetheless a delightful stay and we learned to avoid the hazards. If we left the inner door to the bathroom open, we would find ourselves pinioned in the passage by the heron. . . . We learned to listen for the little bell on one of its legs to warn of its presence." They did wonder, though, what Tom was doing with those turtles in his bath.

Chapter 32

Turtles

What *was* Tom doing with all those turtles in his bathroom?

The so-called Turtle Islands off the southwest coast of Borneo did and still do provide among the world's richest sources of green turtle eggs. Control of the industry was vested in a Turtle Board of Management, with the museum curator as executive officer. In line with strongly held local traditions, the board did not permit the killing of turtles, only the collection of eggs. The turtle board's executive officer oversaw proper collection of the eggs to assure their continued supply and made sure that the proceeds went to appropriate Malay charities and religious institutions after reimbursement to the museum for administrative costs.

The edible green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), found in all warm oceans, was and still is a mysterious reptile. It lives in saltwater all of its adult life except for a few hours during breeding season, when the female lays her eggs in a hole that she has dug in the sandy beach of a particular coral island to which she returns whenever she lays eggs. The eggs take fifty or more days to hatch in their nest a foot deep in the clean coral sand just above the high-water mark. The hatchlings scramble toward the water and are never seen again until they are adults. By 1995, some evidence had emerged that the newly hatched green turtles swim out quickly and within forty-eight hours are in the main ocean.

Adult males and females appear in the shallow water off the beach from time to time all year long, most often in the middle of the year. There they mate in a remarkably clumsy exercise in which the female keeps turning the wrong way and other males try to push the winning male off his slippery perch atop the female's shell. The fertilized female lumbers onto the shore after dark about four weeks later to lay her eggs. At that point in her breeding cycle, any light or noise, large object, or almost anything else will frighten the skittish female back to sea. But once she has arrived above the high-water

mark and has dug a hole in the sand with her front flippers and begun depositing eggs, nothing can distract her from her duties until she has laid her eggs, covered the nest with sand, and headed back to sea before dawn.

Tom ensured that a turtle-watcher waited on the beach during the laying process. As soon as the female turtle finished and started off, he would mark the nesting area with a flagged stick. In the morning, the watcher and his helpers would dig up all the eggs, take some for sale, and—a Tom Harrisson innovation—redeposit others in temperature-controlled fenced-off hatchery areas, safe from other females accidentally digging them up.

When Tom took over responsibility for the Turtle Islands in 1947, it was known that there were many fewer eggs being laid in the Turtle Islands (and in all known green turtle egg sites throughout the world) than there had been before World War II. Experts everywhere feared that the green turtle, like so many other reptiles hunted for food, was in danger of extinction. Before the war, the three little Turtle Islands had produced two to three million eggs a year. At a price of between six and ten cents Straits per egg (about one-third the cost of a hen's egg), turtle eggs were an inexpensive and much appreciated seasonal protein source for Chinese, Malays, and Dayaks alike.

One of the "perks" of being curator was control over visitation of the Turtle Islands, veritable tropical paradises. Consonant with the turtles' needs, the water was crystal clear, the sand clean and white, and the number of people around very, very few. Tom banned all visits to the islands except with his permission, to prevent people disturbing the females arriving to lay eggs. Tom's little bungalow on the main Turtle Island of Talang-Talang Besar was, as described by a VIP visitor, "a dream, a tiny hut of wood and thatched with palm leaves." Knowing precisely how to impress important guests, Tom stocked the museum launch with champagne and served picnic meals on the old Rajah's crested china dinner service, to the mild annoyance of Governor Abell, who had given the china to Tom for the museum.

The Turtle Islands also provided a locale and an occasion for an annual wild party of just the sort Tom enjoyed. This was the so-called *Semah* ceremony, a Malayo-Dayak rite that took place a few weeks after the end of the Muslim fasting month. The *Semah* rite goes back to pre-Muslim ceremonies, combining singing, dancing, and uninterrupted playing of drums, gongs, and other musical instruments all through the night.

It ended with a big egg battle the next morning, in which sides were chosen and one side stayed on shore as defenders, representing the old year's turtles, while the other arrived as invaders from the sea, representing the new year's turtles. Each side was armed with turtle eggs. As the invaders approached the shore, both sides fired their ping-pong-like missiles. The game was rigged to assure victory for the invaders, since otherwise—or so the

local people believed—the turtles might not return the following year. During the battle no one was spared, and everybody ended up covered with raw egg. It was a messy, rowdy game, involving only men. The combatants—especially Tom's guests—were encouraged to shrug off their inhibitions by the generous provision of alcohol. Ong Kee Hui, a guest one year during the 1950s, remembers that "It was fun throwing turtle eggs at the Governor." One year Tom brought along a wastepaper basket to wear on his head like a helmet. The next year, several government offices were denuded of wastepaper baskets for a few days in May.

In spite of the amusement Tom obtained from his turtle stewardship, he was in deadly earnest about wanting to find out why the number of eggs kept dropping. Nothing was known about how and where the turtles lived when not mating or laying eggs, what they ate, how long they lived, whether and how often they returned to the same beach, how many eggs a female laid each year, or how many clutches she laid in a year. In 1951, Tom decided that nothing could be learned about egg production variation without knowing more about the adult females. The next year he invited a thirty-one-year-old American zoologist at the University of Malaya in Singapore, John R. Hendrickson, to come and collaborate with him in studying the turtles.

Hendrickson seemed a good choice. He was certainly enthusiastic. He tried to label about 250 of the laying females but had difficulty drilling holes in their shells to attach the tags; furthermore, the copper tags he used tended to disintegrate in the ocean. He then had an idea that became a major contribution to the study of turtles worldwide. He used tags such as those that were used in the United States to clip to a cow's ear, and he arranged for the tags to be made out of monel metal (a nickel-copper alloy). Making a slit on the inner edge of a female turtle's front flipper and inserting the nonrusting tag could be done quickly and painlessly while she was absorbed in egg-laying. From this point on, turtle tagging everywhere in the world has been done this way. Tom was duly impressed. He left Hendrickson in charge of this tagging effort while he went up-country for a trip expected to last six weeks. Hendrickson and his helpers set about tagging every female turtle they felt they could without unacceptable disturbance to them. They had tagged about 1,500 females on Talang-Talang Besar (the biggest turtle island) by the time Tom got back in April 1953, two months later than he had planned.

Tom was by then not only sick from scrub typhus, contracted in the uplands, but also exhausted from walking down to the coast after the Auster sent to bring him home had turned upside down and crashed on take-off with him inside it. This accident, in February 1953, was almost an exact replay of the crash when he had taken off in the first Auster to try to fly out of the Bawang Plain in 1945. Once again, it was the first flight from a new

airstrip, this time at Bario, built thanks to Tom's lobbying on behalf of the insistent Penghulu Lawai Besara. But this time Tom was forty-one years old.

While Tom was delayed up-country, Hendrickson, in addition to tagging females, had tried to learn more about the turtles' lives. He had tried to follow the hatchlings into the sea, but all he had learned was that young turtles once at sea are very good at avoiding large objects, such as a man or a canoe. Undaunted, Hendrickson tried to learn more about how the adults mated. To do this, he floated by them on an air mattress, using his hands as paddles. Twice, a tiger shark, the adult turtle's most dangerous predator aside from man, approached and Hendrickson had scurried back to shore. One night, Hendrickson waded out waist deep. His back bent over the water, he got very close to a mating couple when another male tried to mount *him*. The zoologist limped back to shore and told the story to someone, who told it to Tom.

Later, after a row in which Hendrickson accused Tom of "stealing" his field notes to publish them in the *Sarawak Museum Journal* as his own, (publishing without alerting the younger man and "scooping" him in the process), Tom told a friend that he had had to send Hendrickson back to Singapore after the man had become so besotted with the sea turtles that he had tried to participate in their sex life. This is a typical Tom throwaway line, a telescoped, funny, and scurrilous story that has elements of truth but gives a totally false impression. As to the rights and wrongs of Tom's use of Hendrickson's turtle field notes, it is likely that Tom incorporated the zoologist's notes in his own reports without attribution. Since his M-O days, Tom had never been overly conscientious about giving others written credit for work done on a project that he had organized or arranged.

Yet undoubtedly the most important factor gradually creating bad feeling between Tom and Hendrickson ultimately culminating in this row was that Tom, from 1953 onward, became increasingly unhappy with the whole tagging project, especially Hendrickson's zeal in carrying it out. In the three years that followed the 1953 tagging season, not a single turtle tagged in 1953 or later returned to the Turtle Islands. In 1954, Tom cut back on tagging, and in early 1955, he suspended the program altogether, by which time about 4,000 turtles had been tagged in all.

Thanks to the continued tagging of females in 1954 and early 1955, Tom had more information, but it only served to increase his dismay. A check of the tags on incoming females confirmed a tentative finding from the 1952 copper tagging season: females laid eggs not once a year, as had been supposed, but from two to seven times a laying season. Since they produced about a hundred eggs in each clutch, the number of adult females involved in laying a million eggs, the total annual output of the three Turtle Islands at this time, was much smaller (1,400 to 5,000 females) than the 10,000 previ-

ously estimated. If the 4,000 tagged females of 1953–1955 never returned, Tom and Hendrickson, by scaring them off, would have precipitated a much greater catastrophe in three years than many years of gradual decline. (Had Tom known that evidence now suggests that the green turtle can live 40 or more years, he would have been still more upset.)

Fortunately, on July 4, 1956, after three years' absence, the first of the 1953 monel tags turned up on a healthy female's flipper as she lumbered up the beach at Talang-Talang Besar. Over the next two weeks, a dozen more appeared from that group and still more came over the next several years. One question about the green turtle now appeared answered: green turtles lay several times a laying year but breed only one year in three, four, or five years. Information from other sources on the basis of the Hendrickson tags showed that the turtles migrate hundreds, perhaps thousands, of miles during the nonlaying years.

Tom also made some significant discoveries about the juvenile green turtle, not in the wild but using the large numbers of baby turtles raised in tubs by himself and his friends. He learned what these young turtles eat (fish and shrimp, not vegetal matter as had been thought); what water they like (very clean, very salty); what kinds of swimming they are able to do soon and what kinds they do later; and many other new facts about them. Into the mid-1960s, Tom continued his studies of seasonality, clutch size, individual fecundity, diet, fertility, growth, location of breeding areas, and learning skills of green turtles raised in aquaria and looked into different modes of protecting the next generation.

Ultimately, the problem of turtle population decline remained unsolved. Although conservation publicity led to turtle soup no longer being on the menu in most of the places where it had been served, accidental capture of turtles in fine-mesh fishing and shrimping nets and the destruction of the turtles' habitat continued—and still continues—to threaten their survival. Tom's work on the green turtle, however, added to his international reputation as a conservationist and would gain him a position on the turtle survival committee of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the world's leading conservationist organization, then based in Morges, near Lausanne, Switzerland. Until the green turtle's habitat is improved and protected, little can be done to ease its plight, but Tom added significantly to the small amount known about it.



▲ **Figure 29** The Sarawak Museum, built in 1891 by Rajah Charles Brooke on the recommendation of naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace.
(©Albert Teo)



Figure 30 Tom on the phone at Pig Lane, circa 1950.

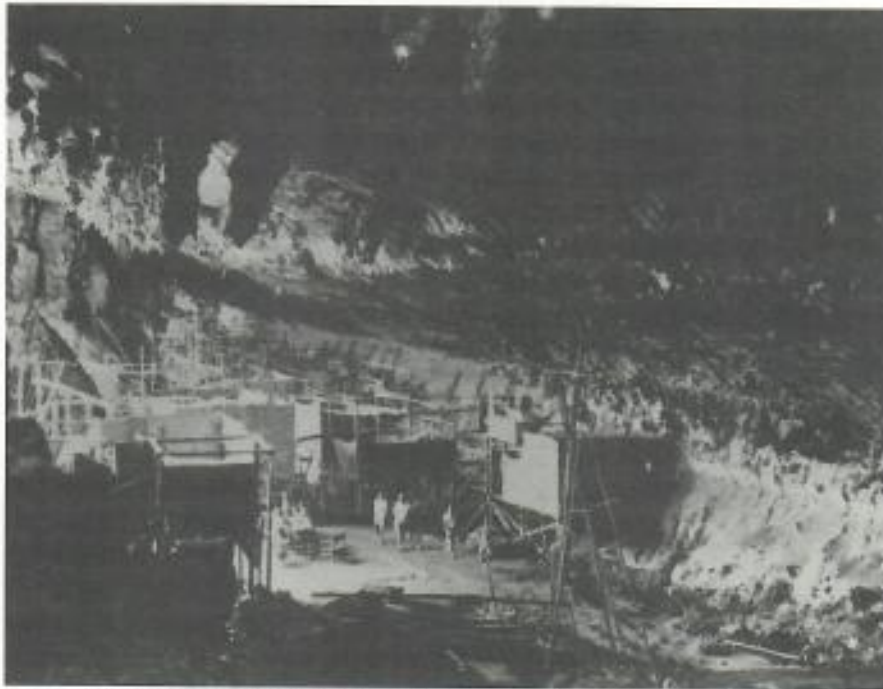


Figure 31 The Great Cave of Niah, showing the area where the archaeological staff slept in the late 1950s and early 1960s.



Figure 32 Plankwalk to the Niah cave, over the swamp, in 1966. (Robert Pringle)



Figure 43 Lian Labang, Tom's Kelabit long-time aide and friend, pours a drink down Tom's throat one last time, at the Kuching airport on October 1, 1966.



Figure 44 Tom and Christine in 1970.
(Ludmilla Forani-Rhein)



Figure 41 Tom showing a mysterious life-size carving near Santubong to senior Sarawak officials while Stan O'Connor looks on, 1966.



Figure 42 Tom calling on Tan Sri Taib bin Mahmud and Puan Sri Laila in 1966 to celebrate the Muslim holiday, Hari Raya Idul Fitri. Tan Sri Taib later became Sarawak's chief minister. (©Hedda Morrison)

still in Sarawak. The crisis had been precipitated by a visit that the boy's mother had made to Bryanston. Bidy arrived in a highly inebriated state and, when paying a call on the headmaster, had started to undress in his office. This incident, or rather the way Max's schoolmates ragged him about it, was thought at the time to have caused the already high-strung fifteen-year-old to snap. With Bidy clearly incapable and Tom out of the country, Max's godfather, Admiral Sir Charles Lambe, now second sea lord, had been rung up and asked to take the boy out of school. Lambe placed Max in the Bethlem Royal Hospital in Kent, which was in those days just such a place as its corrupted name, Bedlam, would conjure up.

Tom was at a loss about what to do. He did not have custody of the boy and, having put in train so many projects for 1956 and the first half of 1957 involving big sums of money and many other people, he appears to have felt he had to wait until at least May 1957—after the Niah digging season and the completion of the television films—before he could return once more to England to try again to gain custody of his only child.

Tom and Barbara returned to Sarawak on March 21, 1956, a week after their wedding, and set up housekeeping in Pig Lane. Sigang had already gone back to Bario. Next, Barbara removed a pair of doves that had previously inhabited the bedroom. Without touching any of Tom's papers, which she knew would throw him into a frenzy, she started to make the house more attractive. Staying with them in Pig Lane were some very fine *orang ulu* carvers and painters (Berawans and Kenyahs). They decorated the walls and ceilings of the house and the museum with murals in bold red, black, green, white, and yellow, often with graceful black tendrils curling out from a central tree or dragon figure. The carvings were also in bold colors but were chunkier. Many of them—the Berawan pieces especially—looked like a cross between European gargoyles and Indian temple carvings, with humans and animals engaged in various kinds of sexual congress.

Everywhere one looked there were fascinating things. There were finely woven Bornean straw hats and mats and blankets as well as daggers and swords in intricately carved bamboo holders. There were lacy Kenyah carvings, given to Tom when he had visited the Bahau-Kayan River valley toward the end of the war. There was also Tom's vast collection (mostly bought abroad) of intricately carved amber-colored hornbill ivory and rhino horn, and his smaller collection of ancient blue and white Chinese and Thai porcelain, much of it bought in Thailand and Singapore, as well as things Tom had bought in Sarawak for the museum and had brought home to study.

Barbara displayed all of these objects to their best advantage, while respecting the ensemble as having long surrounded Tom and having become part of him. She later wrote: "This house and its contents have grown over the years. . . . It has grown to fit its master, his ideas and fancy, his work. It

is a living thing. . . . You either love it or hate it." Because it was Tom's, she loved it.

She next began a campaign to get Tom's drinking under control. She placed the gin, whisky, and brandy bottles out of sight, and came to an agreement with Tom that he would ask her to get the bottle and serve him when he wanted a drink. She would give him a drink whenever he asked, but the bottle would not simply sit by his side until it was empty. The program worked and gave his life a real renewal.

Tom assessed his first year of marriage to Barbara, 1956, as the "hardest (but I think the most useful) year since the War. Being married to a nice girl makes such a difference. . . ." This remark, written in a letter to a happily married man he knew, is the warmest tribute to Barbara that I found in Tom's personal writings. At no time did he say either to her or to anyone else that he had married her for love. To her he would say, in a joking manner, "I married you because I needed a secretary." In a letter to the anthropologist Derek Freeman, he announced that he was now married to "a German girl, archaeologist, stenographer, etc. This makes it easier to keep the moth out of the old suits."

This cold-blooded comment may be a fairly accurate gauge of his feelings at the time. As with Bidy, the sexual spark began to flicker even before they married. Whatever his reason for marrying, it was clear to all of Tom's friends that Barbara was doing him a lot of good. He was now sober most of the time and able to focus for longer periods on his big projects rather than flitting restlessly from one subject to another.

One of the reasons, perhaps, why Tom was now willing to reduce his consumption of alcohol was that he was ambitious to accomplish an enormous amount during what he expected to be the second half of his life. In his youth, he had had a premonition that he would die at age thirty-six. Having passed that hurdle, he now expected to live into his eighties. A year earlier, 1955, at age forty-four, he had written:

As I have a satisfactory secured job and as I [still have half my life] in front of me, I am not hurrying. Except only in things which may vanish if I do not hurry. For this reason, I have rather concentrated on folklore and archaeology with several major sites. . . . I [also] hope to complete a report on the Malay community next year and I think it may be an interesting one which will both fit in and contrast with the Leach series.

Later in the same letter, Tom wrote, "Of course, I try to do too much but I will not stop myself." Thanks to a dictating machine, he was "writing 8000 words a day."

In addition to all his writing in 1956, Tom had another cause for satisfaction (and relief!) when he and Barbara, on a combined honeymoon-and-

research trip to the Turtle Islands, were present on July 4 when the first of the 1953 monel-tagged turtles lumbered up the beach to lay her eggs again after a three-year absence, to be followed soon thereafter by other female turtles of that cohort.

Tom's efforts to preserve Borneo's fauna took another step forward that year, partly thanks to Barbara. She felt sorry for the captive orangutan juveniles in their cages behind the museum and worried about all the dreadful things that the zoo's visitors gave them to eat. When Tom suggested that she take the next orangutan baby that was confiscated to Pig Lane and look after it in their bathroom, Barbara agreed enthusiastically.

They named their first orangutan baby "Bob," after Dr. Robert Inger, curator of reptiles at the Chicago Field Museum of Natural History, who was returning to Sarawak in December to continue his observations and study the reptile collection of the Sarawak Museum—"countless bottles packed full with snakes, lizards, frogs, turtles."

Inger was only one of a string of foreign scientists who came to Sarawak during the 1950s, many of them at Tom's behest. One who arrived in August 1956 was Gathorne Gathorne-Hardy, Viscount Medway, the eldest son of the Fourth Earl of Cranbrook and the nephew of Max's godmother Ruth Gathorne-Hardy. Lord Medway, just down from Cambridge, came to Kuching as a very low-paid technical assistant at the museum. He stayed in a new guesthouse Tom had had built that year at the bottom of the garden in Pig Lane for visiting scientists and *orang ulu* guests.

Tom was delighted to have Medway working for him. This tall, slender, quiet young man of twenty-two with a quick mind and imagination was seriously interested in zoology (his father was an expert on prehistoric fauna). He had the inbred self-confidence needed to get along with Tom without confronting him or suffering tongue lashings by him. Tom had encouraged him to come to Sarawak to collect material for a doctoral dissertation in zoology, perhaps on the swiftlets that made the edible bird nests.

Quite aside from Medway's talents and tact, Tom enjoyed having a lord working for him and loved to brag about it—not always to great effect. In writing to encourage Inger's second visit, Tom noted that "we are very lucky to have Lord Medway working with us," to which the American replied, "I look forward to meeting Mr. Medway when I come." Tom wrote again to Inger saying something about "Lord Medway, (who incidentally is a peer of the realm)," only to get another note from Inger in which "Mr. Medway" is mentioned.

In late 1956, however, Tom heard of another "expert" visitor who would be coming to do research the following spring and objected violently. The "expert" was the noted historian Sir Steven Runciman. He was coming, at the behest of the Colonial Office, to write a history of the Crown Colony as

part of a series of histories of British colonies. Sir Steven, whose specialty was the Middle Ages and who had never before attempted to write a modern history or anything about the Far East, had been chosen because a friend of his was the public relations officer in Sarawak and had suggested him.

Sir Steven mildly recalls that Tom "had made it clear that he did not approve of me being invited to write the history of the Rajahs, on the reasonable grounds that I knew nothing about their country." What Tom actually said, or rather shouted, to the denizens of the Aurora Bar as part of a long diatribe was, "Why, of all people, they should have chosen that mincing little queen!" Tom's real objection to Runciman was not the historian's alleged sexual orientation but that he would be presenting Sarawak to the world without any commitment to the people or the place.

Despite his annoyance about Runciman, Tom, looking back over the past year as he sat at his dining table with Barbara, Medway, and Bob Inger at Christmas 1956, had much cause for satisfaction. His new wife had made his house a charming place to live and entertain; she was also helping transform the immense flow of his writings from tape to typescript while entering fully into his professional interests, especially archaeology and saving orangutans. He had two affectionate orangutan babies. The second one, the tiny Eve, arrived just in time for Christmas. Lord Medway, almost a nephew, was proving an excellent assistant. The BBC was prepared to underwrite, help produce, and air the series of six films that Tom and Hugh Gibb planned to make the following February through May. The Sarawak and Brunei governments, and the Shell companies of both places, were ready to provide the money, logistics, and some of the personnel to make an extensive dig at the Niah caves.

Fitter than he had been in years, Tom also felt more in control of his job than ever before. He had written Derek Freeman in October, "I am getting gradually more organized. The stage seems to be passing when I have to fight. Now I have to argue." All in all, 1956 had been a great year, so long as one ignored the fate of Tom's son, still incarcerated at Bethlem Hospital, a fact Tom did not share with anyone in Sarawak except Barbara.

In late February 1957 the Niah dig advance party moved up the Niah River to Pangkalan Lobang, the nearest landing place by shallow-draft boat to the caves, bringing literally tons of equipment and provisions needed for a two-month stay, a few skilled technicians, and a handful of experienced Malay diggers from the Sarawak River delta.

The caves were a mile and a half inland from Pangkalan Lobang through swampy and often flooded jungle scattered with sharp limestone rocks. A plankwalk, starting at Pangkalan Lobang and ending at the Great Cave, had been put there years earlier to help the guano diggers bring their heavy gunny sacks from the cave to the launches for shipment to Miri. The plankwalk was

On their way home from Brunei, Barbara was allowed to enter Sarawak. Tom went on to England and thence back to Cornell while Barbara stayed in Borneo to complete some research. Tom took advantage of her absence from Cornell to engage in "rutting," as one of his friends described it. He boasted to his close men friends about sleeping with Cornell secretaries and picking up women in the elevator on the way up to his flat.

When Barbara returned and there were once again two people in one small apartment, Tom felt cramped. Fortunately, they had a temporary respite from overcrowding when they were offered the use of a colleague's house for the summer. For three months, they enjoyed this charming house and garden. In July, they both went to a fauna conservationist conference on the East Coast, where they met Charles Lindbergh, the famous aviator, who was active in conservation matters.

Tom and Barbara had to give back the borrowed house at the end of the summer but found a slightly bigger apartment in their old building. They were in the process of moving into it in early September when Benedict Sandin came for a month's visit to the United States, a trip that Tom had arranged so that he could take Sandin to the founding meeting of a new association to bring together social scientists interested in Borneo. The result of an idea of Tom's, it was called the Borneo Research Council and is still active.

Leaving Barbara to complete the move to the new apartment, Tom, Benedict Sandin, and Stan Bedlington went to New York, Connecticut, and Maine to see people connected with the new Borneo Research Council. During this trip, the three men stopped at the home of a Wall Street millionaire, who had a large house in Connecticut. The tycoon, an elderly man, having given his three guests an excellent elegantly served dinner, went to bed early and left them to help themselves to nightcaps. The three men spent the next few hours availing themselves generously of their host's brandy. The main purpose of the trip was a visit to an island just off the coast of Maine owned by one of the prime movers of the Borneo Research Council, the young anthropologist George Appell. The meeting was successful and, in this Borneo context, Tom was a star again. But at the Appell home, as at the tycoon's, and at the homes of most of his colleagues in Cornell, Tom could see that many people—some younger, some older, but all having done less that was memorable than he—were living in far greater comfort and security than he could hope for. Despite his earlier boast to Lord Medway that he could easily raise money in America for Southeast Asian projects, he now saw that America's dislike for the Vietnam War would soon dry up the sources of money for such studies, making it improbable that his contract would be renewed on more favorable terms. Furthermore, if Kahin learned that Tom was *persona non grata* in Sarawak, he might not renew the con-

tract on any terms. A visit to Ithaca in October by Bill Solheim, by then professor at the University of Hawai'i's East-West Center and famous in his field, must have added to Tom's sense that once again he was being left behind while younger men moved ahead.

Soon winter came to Ithaca. In late November, Tom and Barbara invited two couples to their apartment for dinner, one being the Bedlingtons. Stan Bedlington remembers:

It started to snow, one of the biggest snowstorms in years. So we started drinking and we went through every single bottle of wine in the house. And it was so bad that the other guests could not drive home. At one stage the evening got very bawdy and the men started talking about male underpants and we started dropping our trousers and showing what sort of underpants we wore and Tom was wearing a pair with a Union Jack.

As always in convivial male company, Tom's language was full of slangy sexual and bathroom words, like a Harrow schoolboy's.

Tom hated the cold and, when the fall term came to an end, he and Barbara were able (thanks to the sultan of Brunei) to escape from Ithaca's infamous winter weather and fly off to the tropics. They stayed a month at the Brunei Resthouse as guests of the sultan and were treated as distinguished visitors. It must have been a great pleasure for Tom to be back in a world he understood and which valued him. Even more soothing to his ego, he was being interviewed and followed about almost everywhere he went during the winter and spring of 1968-1969 by a British writer named Timothy Green, who was doing Tom's "profile" for a book about four living "adventurers" of renown. In addition to the section on Tom, the book, which was published in 1970 under the title *The Adventurers*, included the life stories of Jane Goodall (the chimpanzee expert), Wilfred Thesiger (the explorer of Arabia), and Col. Sir Hugh Boustead, a soldier and colonial administrator in the Sudan and Arabia. Tom must have been pleased to be in such distinguished company.

Shortly after New Year's Day 1969, Tom left Barbara in Borneo and flew to Manila to work on conservation business on behalf of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the World Wildlife Fund. For six weeks, he wandered through Philippine jungles to survey the situation of the tamaraw, a small water buffalo that in historic times had been confined to the island of Mindoro where its numbers had now shrunk to a total of perhaps a hundred animals. He did a similar survey of the monkey-eating eagle (now more often called the Philippine eagle), which is the Philippine national bird and an even more endangered species than the tamaraw. A deputation led by Charles Lindbergh and Tom paid a call in February on Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos to persuade him to enforce the

Philippine law that theoretically protected these endangered fauna. Marcos endorsed the plan that Tom and Lindbergh proposed for the protection of these animals. In addition, largely thanks to Tom's efforts, a Philippine Wildlife Conservation Association was established with adequate capital from private Philippine sources; it made saving the tamaraw its first project.*

Barbara and Tom met again in mid-March in Morges, Switzerland, the headquarters of the IUCN. They attended meetings for several days on endangered species, and Tom worked with the great American turtle conservationist Archie Carr on strategies to protect the green turtle. One afternoon, there was a cocktail reception and a presentation to the IUCN of a statue, attended by its sculptor. She was a middle-aged Belgian widow, the Baroness Forani. Small, wiry, blonde, and vivacious, with a lined, expressive face, she looked somewhat like Zita might have, had she still been alive. Tom spoke to her and found her charming. She also appeared to find him interesting and, as a joke, gave him a stuffed toy turtle in recognition of his connection with turtle conservation. She also gave him her address in case he ever came to Brussels, where she lived, or to Cannes, where she spent summers in an apartment that she owned in a chateau overlooking the beach.

By early May, Tom and Barbara were back in Ithaca. The previous summer, Tom had failed his driver's test again, from a seeming inability to make himself follow the examiner's instructions; he never drove again. And so, on lovely spring days, he had Barbara drive him around the Finger Lakes, some of New York state's loveliest countryside. He enjoyed these rides, but he was becoming restless and bored. The publications he was preparing show it. Never a painstaking editor, he seemed more careless and impatient than ever. His long book, *The Malays of South-West Sarawak Before Malaysia* (published in 1970 by Macmillan in London and by Michigan State University in Lansing), shows that, at the end, he had no patience left. One of his reviewers, Gale Dixon, noted that "This big, heavy volume is packed with good information important to professional anthropologists, historians, economists, geographers and sociologists and of interest to a wide readership of informed people who make the social sciences their avocation." But this reviewer, and nearly everybody else who tried to find a path through the dense jungle of prose that continues for 650 pages, became filled with rage and sorrow at Tom's "bad grammar, awkward sentences and utter lack of organization."

There were similar problems with his next two publications. These were two "data papers" written in collaboration with Dr. Stanley O'Connor, a

*The Philippine eagle is still approaching extinction as its forest habitat disappears, but Tom's work was effective in helping save the tamaraw. By 1987, the conservation program he started had led to a three-fold increase in the number of these animals.

Cornell art historian who had come to Sarawak to participate in the Sarawak River delta digs. One of these "data papers" is on their excavations of the prehistoric iron industry at Santubong, the other on the gold and megalithic activity found at the site. The data paper on the iron industry was truly pioneering, one of his reviewers remarked, but also "maddening in presentation . . .," and "so inflated and colloquial" that it "threatens to bring the craft of prehistoric archaeology into disrepute." (See Notes and Sources for recent views on this work.)

The other data paper, *Gold and megalithic activity in prehistoric and recent west Borneo*, was applauded by a reviewer (Dales, in *Man*) for the fact that "Lengthy and fascinating discussions are presented on the history and uses of gold in South-east Asia in both ancient and modern times. Equally interesting material is presented on the . . . widespread use of both megalithic monuments and arrangements of small stones [associated with the gold and iron, which has] prompted the authors to introduce the term 'micro-megalithic'. . . ." (See Notes and Sources for recent work drawing upon this data paper.) Yet this same reviewer, while finding the book "literally a gold-mine of information," also complained of its "disjointed presentation." Could one blame Tom's co-author, Stan O'Connor, for its faults? Only in that O'Connor found Tom's convoluted, involuted way of connecting things so interesting he did not mind that Tom's sentences gave the reader the sense of riding on a roller-coaster. For O'Connor, Tom's idiosyncratic daring was an exhilarating change from the often narrow-focused and conventional prose of archaeological and art historical writing.

Others were more censorious. An archaeologist at the University of London, I. C. Glover, reviewing the second book, gave a contemptuous rendering of its ideas before coming to a crashing conclusion: "A reviewer of the authors' previous publication . . . noted that it 'threatens to bring the craft of prehistoric archaeology into disrepute'; one fears that this has now been achieved and the next casualty can only be Cornell University if the Southeast Asia Program continues to lend its name to such work."

Fortunately for Tom, by the time of this appallingly harsh review, he was no longer associated with Cornell University. Long before this review appeared, Tom was no longer living in the Untites States, or with Barbara. His entire life had changed.

Chapter 44

Second Youth

In the spring of 1970, *The Times* reported that "Tom Harrisson, the celebrated anthropologist, who over 30 years ago founded Mass-Observation—the first of the now prolific organizations for discovering and tabulating public opinion—is to spend three years at the University of Sussex sorting through the material he collected during the 12 years he ran the organization. . . ."

Over the next few years, Tom had all the major dailies and weeklies write about the new Mass-Observation Archive. Drawing on his experience with the media, when some television photographers were coming to film the archive at its new home at the University of Sussex, he asked the M-O archivist, Dorothy Sheridan, to take a felt-tip pen and quickly write out big legible labels, such as "Sex," "Money," and "War," and tape them onto the file cabinets without regard to the files' actual contents, which no one yet had had time to sort through. He explained to Sheridan, whose first day of work this was, that file cabinets were not photogenic in themselves and the photographers would need something to take pictures of.

In April 1970, Tom went to Brussels and collected Christine and Ludmilla and Christine's car to go back to England to see his mother's sister, Aunt Violet, and retrace the steps of his childhood. When they reached the corner of the road where seven-year-old Tom had stood waving goodbye to the car that was carrying his parents away, he burst into tears. He told them how his parents had stayed away for years; how his father had not cared for him but only for his brother; and how he, Tom, had done everything in his power, even scandalous things, to get his father's attention, if not his respect.

Much of the time that Tom and Christine were together was spent not in tears but in laughter. Christine loved to play the monkey and do clownish things, such as fart and make rude noises, and Tom enjoyed it, too. He called her "Monkey" or "Connie" (from *con*, a French term of abuse with roughly the same connotations as "asshole"). She called him "Baby."

Christine bought a minivan that she called the "Tom bus." They would go around in it with the grandchildren, who found Christine's and Tom's outrageous manners delightful. Once, Tom and Christine and her four little granddaughters went to the beaches of Zeeland, in the Netherlands, where they all behaved riotously and were thrown out of restaurants. Christine would organize birthday parties and frequent unibirthday parties that were gay and full of silly behavior. She would make everybody wear clown makeup while she, with a pair of underpants on her head as a hat, directed them in an improvised pantomime.

One of the things this odd couple had in common was a horror of being bored. They went to great lengths to avoid it. One day Ludmilla found a cheap package trip for a week's skiing at St. Moritz. Christine and Tom said, "What a good idea! We will go there too." But instead of flying with Ludmilla and staying at her bargain pension, they reserved a room at a famous hotel and drove there in Baron Forani's splendid ancient Jaguar sports car. In order to do honor to the old car, they decided to dress appropriately to the period. They found some old parachutist uniforms from the war in the basement. Tom and Christine put these on and wrapped themselves in old parachutes. They wore old Lindbergh-type aviator's goggles, and Christine had her hair curled in a 1940s style. In this getup, they drove all the way from Brussels to the door of their chic St. Moritz hotel. Tom had not had so much fun since the days when he was courting Biddy, and on a whim she had hired out the floor of a hotel and ordered up magnums of champagne.

As with many wealthy people, Christine had a miserly side. She hated wasting the free hotel breakfast. She would pack up the uneaten croissants and the brioches, the little pats of butter and the little pots of jam and, to Tom's great amusement, sneak them out of the hotel in her bag so that they could have them to snack on at a picnic lunch.

This was Tom's first experience of living as a European on the continent, and he was intrigued. After Tom introduced Christine to his family, she—after some hesitation—let him meet her relatives in Wallonia, rich farmers who lacked Christine's international sophistication. She was worried that he, being such a snob, might not like her Arlon family, but, once again, his genuine interest in people and love of novelty made him a good guest in new surroundings.

He admired Christine's handsome Brussels house and promptly took over one of the nicer rooms for his office. To commemorate the toy turtle that Christine had given him in Morges, he began with Christine's enthusiastic complicity to fill all the house's empty surfaces, including the window sills, with a growing collection of "turtles," everything they could find in the shape of a turtle, from valuable T'ang pottery tomb statues to cheap plastic shapes meant to float in the bath. Members of Christine's family saw the encroachment of this turtle collection on her house as indicative of Tom's territoriality.

ver saw it in the beam of his headlights, it was too late to avoid it. The log stove in the left windshield and impaled the passengers in the first two rows.

It was the kind of accident that occasionally happens on Thai roads. As often in such circumstances, the driver ran away, abandoning the damaged bus and its passengers, four of whom were dead. These four were Tom, Christine, and two Thais.

Epilogue

One afternoon in January 1976, the same British consul who had phoned months earlier to ask if I knew a man named Tom Harrisson rang up again, sounding equally harassed, to ask if I knew Tom's next of kin.

The man has got himself killed in a road accident way off in Thailand somewhere and nobody knows how to get in touch with his family—or with his Belgian wife's for that matter.

It seemed incredible that such a powerful force had been extinguished by a mere accident. As one of his M-O colleagues wrote of Tom, "It is still bewildering to contemplate this brutal halt to his energy, creativity and panache."

Arrangements were made for Tom and Christine to be cremated at a Buddhist *wat* in a fashionable Bangkok suburb. The cremation was to be done by the *wat's* Buddhist monks, but the little ceremony that preceded it was led by an Anglican clergyman. One of Tom's American Cornell students was living in Bangkok and came to the service. He recalls that there was just a handful of people. The Belgian and British embassies each sent someone. The clergyman, who knew nothing about the dead couple, mouthed a few platitudes and opened the Book of Common Prayer, and Tom's Singapore friend read the lesson. The florid British embassy official, who appeared to have drunk his lunch, looked about him and commented aloud on how he loathed "all this superstition."

The "superstition" the diplomat loathed was not the pallid little Anglican service but the more colorful Buddhist cremation ceremonies that were going on about the *wat*. During the ceremony for Tom and Christine, a half-dozen ovens were in use, with crowds of people moving in and out, going to this or that cremation.

Thai Buddhist funerals often last four or five days. Much prestige is attached to having the *wat* full of friends, relatives, and business contacts during those days. The Cornell student, married to a Thai, explained:

If it is an important person who has died or is the chief mourner, the place will be packed and everybody will be coming in and loading the place up with flowers and it is just like a long wake. And the monks will be sitting around chanting and there will be incense burning and maybe you will have people bringing in a traditional Thai orchestra that will play music and sing and chant.

While Tom and Christine would have enjoyed all this hubbub, most of the Europeans there for Tom's and Christine's cremation "looked extremely uncomfortable and did not know what to do." The two coffins were closed because of the damage caused by the accident. Tom's coffin was big and difficult to maneuver. It took some twenty minutes to get it into the furnace.

Peter Harrisson, who happened to be visiting Bangkok a few days after the cremation, collected Tom's and Christine's effects and handed them over, along with the ashes, to Tom's solicitor in London, who forwarded them to Brussels. There, some weeks later, a small group huddled under umbrellas on a cold wet day to watch a Belgian veterans' association pay homage to Christine's Croix de Guerre before her ashes and Tom's were placed in the grave dug ten years earlier for Baron Forani. No mark on the baron's tombstone was made then or later to indicate that the grave also harbors Christine's and Tom's remains. Tom, who in his marriages had been like a cuckoo, habitually taking over nests built by others, undoubtedly would not have minded. It was not in a cemetery that he wished to be remembered.

Mary Adams, to whom word came in London three days after Tom's death, knew precisely how Tom would want his death commemorated. She saw that the press was informed and that timely obituaries appeared on the BBC and in *The Times*. *The Times* had a draft obituary of Tom on file in its "morgue," written by Sir. W. Le Gros Clark, a polymath and a great scientist, who had predeceased Tom. Mary Adams undoubtedly helped bring the obituary up to date. It is, in the opinion of most people who knew and liked Tom, the best statement to appear in the press, giving the real flavor of the man and his gifts. She asked Professor Asa Briggs to chair a memorial meeting in Tom's honor, to be held in London on the premises of the Royal Society of Arts. Briggs was already vice chancellor of Sussex University and about to become a Life Peer that year. With his consent, Adams set about finding the right people to speak.

The meeting took place on March 17, 1976, and many people who knew Tom attended, to listen to recollections of him by the speakers Mary Adams had chosen. She almost forgot that Tom had a brother but remembered in time to write to ask him if he wanted to be part of the program. Bill answered, "I would like to come along to listen."

Max Nicholson, the speaker who had known Tom earliest, was first. His subject was not only Tom's work in ornithology but the "amazing intricacy of his interests and life pattern." Nicholson claimed that this pattern, which resembled "a patchwork of conventionally unrelated elements" had been put in place right at the start of Tom's career and had been assembled "with consummate skill to compose the total Tom harmony." He cited the extraordinary number and variety of things Tom had done in ornithology between the ages

of seventeen and twenty: several major bird censuses, the scientific soundness of which had been confirmed many times since; two Arctic expeditions; a paper on bird flight in *Nature* and numerous articles in other learned journals.

Nicholson pointed out that all during the time that Tom was busily pioneering in ornithology, he was also interested in many other things, each part of the patchwork. After the expeditions to Sarawak and the New Hebrides, Nicholson asserts, Tom was ready to transmute what he knew about birds and was learning about people into "a new kind of organised effort to understand what makes people tick in society"—Mass-Observation. Before he was twenty-six, the major pieces of the patchwork were already basted together.

Nicholson reminded his audience what Tom had written as his credo, in his *Letter to Oxford*, early in 1933, when he was twenty-one:

Be mob-conscious, it is one of the grandest feelings[. . .] Argue for arguing's sake occasionally—just to make people see there are two sides, to make them *aware*. . . . Never swallow anything or anyone whole before you know exactly what it is you are swallowing[. . .] Do not be content to see something wrong; do something about it, put it right[. . .] Don't be afraid all the time. Attack as well as defend. Put some guts into things. . . . There is no excuse for anyone to be miserable for more than one day a month, unless he is hungry or ill. . . .

This all sounds like a sermon. And so it bloody is. Things are wrong, you will agree. They have got to be made alright. I mean to try, and a lot of little shots like you might have a crack at it too. . . .

Asa Briggs spoke along the lines of a letter he wrote to *The Times* a week after the accident, in which he stated that "During what proved, alas, to be his last years, Tom Harrisson was as vigorous and as inquisitive as he was during the early years of Mass-Observation." Eschewing nostalgia, Briggs added, Tom had remained "as curious about [students' and colleagues'] attitudes and ways in Brighton as he was about those of the people of Bolton."

Lord Shackleton, having used alcohol to try to anaesthetize the pain of losing one of his oldest friends, could not recall later what he had said at the memorial meeting. He could only comment afterward that he would, "without hesitation, describe Tom as the most remarkable man of my generation."

Richard Fitter, a vice president of Fauna and Flora International and a long-time officer of IUCN, focused chiefly on Tom as "one of the buccaneers of wildlife conservation." Tom's buccaneering, in Fitter's view, was as much in evidence around a conference table at Morges as in the jungles of Southeast Asia:

There was nobody like Tom Harrisson for blowing away cobwebs, sweeping away outworn rules, and penetrating behind bureaucratic verbiage and obstructions. . . . Indeed, perhaps his greatest value to the conservation movement was his readiness to speak his mind, however unpalatable his views might be.

Charles Madge, prevented by sudden illness from attending the meeting, had planned to speak about his days with Tom as co-founder of Mass-Observation. Although he acknowledged having "had some difficulty in reconciling myself to Tom's showmanship and to the excessive claims that he tended to make for his work," he had found Tom's "energy and magnetism . . . irresistible."

Michael Tweedie spoke of Tom's contributions to archaeology, especially the Deep Skull, and Malcolm MacDonald told of Tom in Borneo, his work for the Sarawak Museum, and his guerrilla operations during the war. Mary Adams spoke about Tom during M-O in wartime, his many appearances on BBC television and radio from 1936 onward, and his insightful critical reviews of wartime BBC broadcasting that he wrote for *The Observer*. Hugh Gibb described making award-winning films with Tom.

Tom would probably have wanted most to be remembered for his anthropological work, which was never taken seriously by the professionals. His books *Savage Civilisation* and *World Within* and his Mass-Observation publications were admired by the reading public for their insights about "primitive" peoples abroad and "the man on the street" at home. The information in them was far deeper than one would find in a travel book about the former or a market survey on the latter. Yet even his best works lacked the theoretical underpinning and methodological discipline that would have helped them cross the threshold into serious anthropology or sociology.

On the other hand, his anthropological and sociological writings were filled with insights and connections between things that in many ways were more enlightening than a standard anthropological work and without some of its failings. Lauriston Sharp, a Cornell anthropology professor who had long worked on Southeast Asia, made his students read Tom's *Savage Civilisation* description of Big Nambas initiation rites to teach them how it felt to be a traditional Melanesian teenager. Professor Sharp complained that one could read Sir Edmund Leach's classic, *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, and come away with the wholly false impression that the modern world's value systems had not impinged on the people that Leach had studied. Leach, like most social anthropologists of the "British School" writing at that time, had limited the discussion in this early work of his to traditional systems. Tom's writings were never so narrowly focused or narrow-minded. Moreover, their purpose was less to inform and impress establishment scholars than to enlighten the general public and, especially, to help the group being studied.

An archaeologist seeking to assess Tom's contributions to his field gave one of the best descriptions of the problem that exists in trying to define Tom's intellectual and scientific legacy:

We live and work in an age of extreme academic specialization. The proper course for the proper scholar is to claim for himself a precisely defined area of interest and to remain strictly within those boundaries. Woe be unto him who steps beyond—intellectually or geographically. He is regarded with suspicion and mistrust by his colleagues. He has lost his label. One difficulty we experience in understanding Tom Harrisson's career is that he never had a label. We cannot define him by discipline. . . . It was in ornithology that he began his scientific career and he maintained a keen interest in it throughout his life. But his paramount interest was in Borneo. Every aspect of it fascinated him—its land, its people, its plants, its wildlife, its history. As an ethnographer he understood better than most that the lives of no people could be fully appreciated without some knowledge of their past. It was inevitable that his catholic interests would eventually engross him in Borneo's prehistory. . . .

This man, being an archaeologist, does not realize that some of the accomplishments Tom is best known for have nothing to do with Borneo. In England, Tom is best known for *Mass-Observation*; in international circles, for fauna conservation; in the South Pacific, for his early work on the New Hebrides; in Australia, for his wartime guerrilla operations. This is without mentioning his stellar work on radio, television, and in documentary films, some about Borneo, but some on entirely different subjects.

The archaeologist rightly points out Tom's first and most enduring area of interest: birds. Lord Medway (now Lord Cranbrook), trying after Tom's death to conjure up a picture of him, describes him

clad in singlet and checked sarong, seated commandingly at his desk in that unique house in Pig Lane, or at a table in the cave mouth at Niah, or on a veranda at Santubong . . . or Talang-talang, talking or writing, and suddenly dropping everything to snatch up the ever-handly pair of binoculars, observe the behaviour of some particular bird, scribble a note in his illegible handwriting on a fresh page of a school exercise-book, and then resume his former business.

It is certainly as a "bird man" that Tom was first brought to the frontiers of science. His interest in birds never ended. Medway is undoubtedly correct in stating that "I have often heard it said that in *Mass-Observation*, Tom Harrisson applied to people the techniques of bird-watching. On the other hand, I am certain that whenever observing humans, he also invariably had an eye and part of his mind on the surrounding birds."

Nonetheless, the connecting thread that ran through Tom's main interests was not birds or Borneo but, simply, people. The most important insights he brought to ornithology were on the links between bird and man. For example, his best-known work on birds in the New Hebrides is on their use as

auguries and, in Borneo, on the use of their migrations to determine the farming calendar. Similarly, although Tom's work about turtles covered many aspects, his interest in them was aroused by people in Sarawak wanting and needing turtle eggs. His interest in the orangutan was in large part because it is a near relative of man. His efforts in archaeology were in order to learn more about the past of people he cared about.

His primordial interest in people is most evident in his Mass-Observation research and in his studies of native groups in Sarawak and the New Hebrides. All the knowledge he obtained by this research was meant to be passed back to the people themselves or to be used on their behalf. Because of a commitment to the people of Borneo's interior, he had stayed at war against the Japanese for months after "peace" had been officially declared. Tom's and SEMUT 1's stubborn refusal to abandon a commitment to the people who had risked their lives for them may help explain why Borneo, unlike other Japanese-occupied areas of Southeast Asia, did not get caught up in postwar anticolonialist belligerence.

To Tom, omnivorously curious though he was, knowledge for its own sake was sterile. It had to be part of a dialogue with the affected people, helping them to change or to adapt to changes thrust upon them. This was what had led him not only to strengthen the Sarawak Museum but also to play a key role in creating museums in Brunei and Sabah. If knowledge was power, it was uncivil and immoral not to share it with the mass of people. He insisted on getting things into print, on the air, or in the museum as quickly as possible in a form that ordinary people could grasp and use. That is one reason why Tom was seen as "unscientific" and would have remained an unwanted outsider to the academic world even if he had had dozens of degrees or diplomas. It is no wonder that Mary Adams was one of the few to understand him. Like her, Tom cared desperately about educating the general public.

What is Tom's legacy? To answer the question literally first, Tom's will, dated January 9, 1971, left everything to Christine. If she did not survive him, it all went to "my son Maxwell Barr Harrison but in that event I give to such charity as my executors think best £1000, my collection of objects, my personal chattels and unpublished writings (except Mass-Observation archives which I give to Sussex University)." There was little money in Tom's estate for Max to inherit. Probated in February 1976, it had a net value of well under £5000. According to Christine's daughter Ludmilla, Tom's "collection of objects" was given, along with Christine's, to various French museums.

Of more permanent value than his "collection of objects" were Tom's papers. These were divided by his trustees according to subject. All the M-O material and everything that did not belong elsewhere went to the M-O Archive at Sussex University. The Borneo peacetime material was given to the

Malaysian National Archive in Kuala Lumpur. The SEMUT papers were donated to the Australian War Memorial Library's archives in Canberra. One of Tom's detractors claims that "much of his writing was too hasty and careless to endure," which is true, although, thanks to Tom's immense production, that still leaves a handful of books in print decades after his death. The same critic predicted that Tom's voluminous notes "would probably be unintelligible to anyone else." They have proved intelligible, though barely.

But what Tom would have found to be the most valuable part of his legacy is what remains in people's memories. In the Kelabit highlands, Tom is still remembered as their principal benefactor. Asked by a visitor to name the person who had helped them the most, Kelabit leaders in the late 1970s, by then very devout Christians, nonetheless rated Tom as having done more for them than anyone else, even the Reverend Hudson Southwell.

Dorothy Sheridan, whose job as M-O archivist makes her a sort of official keeper of the Harrisson flame, had a personal problem to resolve upon hearing of Tom's death: what to do with the £100 he had given her to buy a used car. She knew that she could not buy that car. The cash he had given her was not nearly enough and she could not make up the difference. So, in an effort to be true to the spirit of the gift, she bought a motorbike with the money:

I taught myself to ride this motorbike and I used to whip round and, when I got on it, I would think that "If it hadn't been for Tom Harrisson, I wouldn't be on this motorbike." I did eventually get a car and learn to drive—in order to go up to Scotland to see an old M-O diarist, Naomi Mitchison.

For Sheridan, Tom—though dead—was still a liberating and encouraging force.

For Michael Chong in Sabah, word of Tom's death brought a different reaction. Chong's feelings toward Tom had always been mixed. He could still hear the famous voice echoing through the Great Cave at Niah, shouting: "Bloody fool, I don't know what the North Borneo Government is going to do with you!" But he also could not forget that, without Tom's efforts, he would not have had a career at the Sabah Museum.

When I was applying for museum training in the UK, I did not have the educational background for it. I had only passed Form I in 1952. But, when Tom went to the UK in 1967, he worked to patch things up for me and I went to the UK in 1968. First I went to the Commonwealth Institute in London, then Glasgow for three months, then Leicester for three months. Then it was display, conservation and cataloguing at Liverpool and finally back to London where I was with the Horniman Museum for fifteen months while attending lectures at the University of London as an unenrolled student. That too was Tom Harrisson. He helped me a lot.

With all this training, Chong was offered the curatorship of the Sabah Museum, but timidity caused him to give back the top job after only a month in office. A similar diffidence caused him to pass on to his boss Tom's request in December 1975 to come to Sabah for Christmas. As Chong recalled in 1991, "The Director was away and the letter was never attended to. And today, I must say that I feel a bit guilty. His trip might have been to Sabah instead of to Thailand. Much as I wanted to help, I was not the head. But, sometimes, I feel guilty about it, still today."

Shariffuddin, Tom's first Brunei Museum trainee, upon hearing of Tom's death, went to Brussels as on a pilgrimage, to see Tom's turtle collection. Sharif had once been asked by Tom: "What is your hobby?"

And I said I did not have a hobby. And Tom got very angry with me. "You have to have a hobby," he said. "Otherwise you are wasting your time." I went to Tom and Christine's house with Tom's lawyer from London. Harrison, when I was in Brunei, had asked me to collect for him turtles and anything about turtles. And he said he had a nice collection of turtles and I wanted to see it, simply to see how it was. But it was not there. . . . So when I came back home I said "OK, I'll take up collecting turtles." So now I collect turtles, like Harrison did.

"I could never decide if he was a goody or a baddie," reflected Nic Hill, Tom's English godson's brother, unconsciously reverting to the vocabulary he would have used in the days when he had known Tom best, when Tom had taken him for an unforgettable ride with a giant panda. It is a question that deserves examination.

If one listened only to the gossip of old Sarawak hands, one could easily conclude that Tom was a "baddie." As one of his friends remarked to me in 1995, all of Tom's admirers acknowledge his faults, but few of his detractors concede that he had virtues. One of the few who does is a Malay, Datuk Amar Abang Yusuf Puteh. Yusuf Puteh, who held high office in Sarawak after Tom retired, remembers and still resents that Tom had "little to do with the local intellectuals," aside from those on his own staff or those working in his research areas. He blames the snub on a mixture of arrogance and jealousy on Tom's part. "As a person, there were a lot of minuses about Tom. And with the expats, that was where he [most] showed his arrogance. He would even chase a Head of Department from Talang-Talang." Nonetheless, Yusuf Puteh says that "As regards Tom's contribution to Sarawak, I would without hesitation see him as a big plus. Nobody else would have done what he did in his day, in a singlet and shorts and no shoes. He was a pioneer, without all the facilities and amenities that they have now. . . ."

Alastair Morrison, whose great dislike of Tom somewhat distorts his otherwise gentle memoir of Sarawak's colonial era (*Fair Land Sarawak*), is like

Yusuf Puteh, nonetheless willing to admit that Tom did some things of value. Because of this, many people regard his assessment of Tom in that memoir as the best and the fairest to appear in print. Morrison describes Tom as "an extraordinarily gifted, imaginative, wayward egocentric who seemed to take perverse pleasure in misusing or failing to use to the full his great endowment of talent. His life seemed to be devoted very largely to flouting the elementary disciplines and restraints which form the basis of civilized life and good scholarship." He goes on at some length, conscientiously trying to weigh Tom's worth, and ends with the statement that "Not all his deeds, however, were evil. He did some good in his own way and despite the many unpleasant episodes with which he was associated, Sarawak would have been a duller and poorer place without him."

Drawing on many of the same facts but on others as well, I have come to a rather different assessment than has Morrison. My main conclusion is that Tom was a strong force for good in an almost countless variety of fields. Certainly he would have been a stronger force for good if he had been better able to control his temper. Had he not made the enemies that blocked his return to Sarawak, does anyone seriously believe we would still be waiting to learn how old the Niah Deep Skull is? And almost certainly, if he had been better trained for some of his work, archaeology and anthropology, especially, his achievements might have been more readily accepted by the world of science. But most of the work would never have been done at all without his curiosity, energy, and drive, not to mention his skill as a publicist and fund raiser. The guano diggers would have carried away Sarawak's prehistory, and the missionaries and the transistor radios would have wiped out the traces of the upland cultures he so lovingly recorded before they all but disappeared.

Tom is accused of having kept out experts who would have done the work better. But look around Southeast Asia, in places where he was not present and thus was unable to prevent good work being done by others, and compare it with what was done while Tom ruled the roost in Sarawak. I think the facts show that Sarawak's contributions to anthropology and archaeology (to name merely the two most deprecated of Tom's areas of interest) stand up well. Indonesia might have had better anthropologists and Thailand better archaeologists, but nowhere was so much good work done in both of those fields simultaneously as in little Sarawak before 1968. The reason is simple: Sarawak had Tom.

Bishop Galvin, whom Tom encouraged to write up what he learned about the people of the Baram River valley, was asked to assess Tom in 1976, shortly after Tom's death. Galvin asserted that Tom's "place is shoulder to shoulder with Wallace" and the other great naturalists of Borneo's heroic age. The bishop, who had spent many years in Sarawak, claimed that "To the

ordinary people of Sarawak [Tom] was a giant, not a goblin; someone from outer space but not an ogre."

Tom's character was extremely complex with many dark sides. He was, for example, an appalling husband and father. Yet he also often showed a genuinely caring interest in people individually and in society at large and a high courage and enthusiasm many people, including the author, found life-enhancing.

Professor Stanley O'Connor, a colleague and a close friend during Tom's last ten years, captures the excitement of being in Tom's presence. He recalls traveling with him in 1966, during the time the two of them were doing research on the iron industry in the Sarawak River delta:

On one of those trips [in the delta] Tom insisted that we go ashore at a charcoal burner's post several miles above Santubong. By then it was evident that charcoal was the fuel for the ancient iron hearths at Santubong, and it was typical of his approach to recovering archaeological material that he should interpolate it into the lived world of the present. As we stood in the cool domed oven in a clearing on the river bank, Tom's conversation turned through the growth pattern of mangrove trees, the price of charcoal, the movements and values of Malay wood gatherers, the pig and coconut raising of the Chinese owners, the fragrance of food cooking over charcoal in Kuching, the use of palm fronds for sails over the firewood boats. And, then shifting slightly but without perceptible break, back down into the deep trenches where the charcoal mixed with iron slag and Chinese stoneware sherds from the Sung dynasty. It was rather like taking up residence in the shifting, transparent planes and interpenetrating space of a cubist painting.

Having had a word on Tom from so many people, let us give him a last word of his own. Three months before he died, preparing notes for his autobiography, Tom scribbled on a card a short list of "Words I Hate." Two of the words he hated were "*Obvious*—nothing is" and "*Vulgar*—everything should be". He did not leave a card to show what words he loved the most, but one of them surely must have been "*Alive*."

"Explorer, museum curator, guerilla fighter, pioneer sociologist, documentary filmmaker, anthropologist—Tom Harrison was all these things. He was also arrogant, choleric, swashbuckling, often drunk and nearly always deliberately outrageous. In spite of these contradictions, he became a key figure in every enterprise he undertook. Judith Heimann describes how he did so. A brilliant and insightful biography."

—David Attenborough

"Judith Heimann has taken on the challenge of exploring the many lives of Tom Harrison and has come up with an unusual and richly textured biography. Like Heimann, I met Harrison many years ago in Borneo, and there he is in these pages, in his full controversial glory, digging into ethnology, ornithology, anthropology. Harrison once asked whether before he died he could achieve 'that youthful promise of semi-genius.' Heimann checks it out in revealing detail; her findings add up to a roller-coaster story of an unconventional man who embraced the natural world with the enthusiasm of an Alfred Russel Wallace."

—Bernard Kalb

An English eccentric and adventurer, Tom Harrison (1911–1976) sought knowledge and renown in a dizzying number of fields, while breaking most of the rules of civilized society. He was a precursor in the field of modern market research; he won the DSO for his World War II service in Borneo; he led efforts to save the orangutan, the green sea turtle, and other endangered species; he discovered the oldest modern human skull known at the time. This hugely enjoyable story of Harrison's extravagant, controversial life offers a sympathetic and insightful look at a charismatic figure who offended as many people as he impressed at the twilight of colonialism on the fringes of the British empire.

Judith M. Heimann has spent much of her life in Western Europe and Southeast Asia, as a diplomat's wife and a diplomat herself. She first met Tom Harrison while living in Borneo. Heimann spent a decade researching Harrison's life, sifting through countless stories and rumors and traveling to four continents in the process.

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