

BARRY COLVILLE (1930–2023)

Barry's death in Edinburgh at the age of 92 on 9th January 2023 marks the passing of a truly remarkable man, someone who made a huge, lasting and unique contribution to many fields of malacology. Barry joined the Conchological Society in 1952, his impressive 71-year membership, including a term as Society President between 1993–94, made him one of the longest serving Society members.

Barry was born in Newcastle upon Tyne on 10th May 1930 to Edward and May Colville. His father was a medical officer for environmental health in Bridlington, a profession that Barry was also to later follow. He had two younger sisters Heather, now 90 and Tina who died at the age of 81 in 2018. Barry's early schooling was in Bridlington and Darlington but at the age of 14 he was sent to board at Epsom College, a popular choice for children of the medical profession. Fortuitously the Head of Biology at the school was Arthur Eskine Ellis, the author of *British Snails* (Oxford University Press, 1926), for many years the standard text on the subject. It is believed that Ellis played an important role in encouraging Barry's early molluscan interests. He made excellent progress at school; his developing interest in biology and a consuming passion for conchology being rewarded with the school's Smith Pearce Biology Prize in 1948. Upon leaving school in that year Barry entered Kings College Durham (confusingly the medical school is in Newcastle upon Tyne!) to study medicine graduating in 1953. It was during these medical studies that Barry met Ann Hopkinson, a fellow medical student whom he married in 1954. Between 1955 and 1958 he undertook a three-year commission as a medical officer in the army, a shrewd alternative option to National Service, allowing him to not only receive higher pay but also be accompanied by his wife on overseas duties. His army posting took him and Ann to Hong Kong where their enjoyable stay allowed them to travel (including to Japan) and it was here that their son, Alaric was born in 1957. Diana was born on their return to England in 1958, where Barry started life as a GP in Meanwood, Leeds, firstly as an assistant eventually leading to senior partner status. All accounts indicate that Barry not only excelled



Figure 1 A portrait of Barry taken at Pool Foot in October 2015. By Martin Willing

as a GP but worked to extend and develop his medical career. He set up a group practice health centre and was active in establishing not only GP training schemes, but additionally programmes to train the trainers! Barry also held a position as a tutor in general practice at Leeds University. He was active in the Royal College of General Practitioners, chair of Yorkshire Faculty 1977 and sat on the National Council 1979–82. He was elected a Fellow in 1971, at that time the youngest person to be awarded this honour. Barry worked long hours and Alaric recounts that he rarely returned home until 7.30 or 8.00pm and was often on call throughout the night. Despite his extremely demanding medical career he managed to actively pursue his malacological interests. Barry retired at the age of 60 in 1990 to spend many happy years together with Ann at their beloved house, 'Pool Foot' near Ambleside and Lake Windermere to enjoy his

numerous malacological, family pursuits and other interests.

Perhaps Barry's main contribution to British malacology was to share in and encourage the systematic search for and recording of small land snails in Britain and beyond. He was a gifted field worker with the remarkable ability of identifying areas of potentially suitable habitat to sample, a skill that produced rich results as shown by his many pioneering discoveries. He was one of the leading figures in the development (especially between the 1970s > 1990s) of removing bulk samples of vegetation and ground litter for later off-site processing. This typically involved drying samples in muslin bags and then systematically sieving material through a graded sieve nest. The resulting fractions were then methodically examined with a hand magnifying and finally a microscope for the smaller fractions. This technique allowed Barry to retrieve many tiny species that would otherwise be overlooked in the field.

Barry's fascination with tiny *Vertigo* whorl snails led to some groundbreaking discoveries. Working together with Adrian Norris in 1972 they confirmed the live presence of *Vertigo angustior* at Flordon Common²⁶ in east Norfolk (V.C. 27), at the time of discovery this being the only known extant population of the snail in England, Scotland or Wales. A further major *V. angustior* discovery came in May 1992⁸ when Barry visited a sand dune site at White Port on the Solway coast near Dalbeattie in south-west Scotland. Dead *V. angustior* of uncertain age had previously been found here by D. C.R.C Paul in 1974. This later visit found live snails, these being the first confirmed population of the species in Scotland (a significant northerly range extension from the *V. angustior* population at Gait Barrows NNR in Lancashire). Barry undertook further work at this site together with Ian Killeen in 2000²³ when they also investigated an additional 14 sites along the Solway coast in an unsuccessful attempt to find further populations and then later with Richard Marriott in 2011 when the vulnerability of the White Port site to coastal erosion became apparent^{24,25}.

A significant event occurred in 1978¹⁸ when Barry and Brian Coles discovered the first live population of *Vertigo geyeri* in Britain. The find was made during a survey of a calcareous fen lying close to Sunbiggin Tarn near Orton in

Cumbria. They visited the site as Barry had previously found a rather atypical '*Vertigo pygmaea*' there which later proved to be *V. geyeri*. Of considerable further interest was the additional discovery at the site of *Catinella* (now *Quickella*) *arenaria*, this being the second British location for this rare snail the other being the very different sand dunes at Braunton Burrows in north Devon. Barry and Brian continued their *V. geyeri* surveys in the Orton area adding further new sites (often of very limited size) and numerous further surveys and monitoring projects regularly occur in the area.

A further *V. geyeri* find was made on a Conchological Society field meeting in June 1994 when Barry found a few live snails in a hill-side calcareous flush draining into Cors Erddreiniog NNR on Anglesey, these being the first confirmed live records of the snail in Wales and so also only the second population of the snail recorded in Britain⁹.

Following Barry's discovery, specimens of what were initially thought to be *V. lilljeborgi*, collected at the site in 1988²⁹ from a pitfall trap as part of The Welsh Peatland Invertebrate Survey were re-examined by members of that survey team. They were shown instead to also be *V. geyeri*, although not recognised as such when first found (D. Boyce & M. Howe; personal communications).

A significant *V. geyeri* development occurred in 1995¹⁰ when Barry was invited by Scottish Natural Heritage to survey a suite of calcareous flushes in Perthshire in the vicinity of Blair Atholl and Pitlochry. 22 locations were surveyed in 10 areas with *V. geyeri* present at 8 sites, these being the first records for the species in Scotland. In 1998, working together with Ian Killeen, further *V. geyeri* populations were also discovered further north in the Deeside area²¹.

In May 1979 encouraged by the presence of a well-documented arctic-alpine flora, Barry and Brian Coles undertook surveys at Widdybank Fell in the Upper Teesdale National Nature Reserve. It was here that they scored yet another historic find with the discovery of the first *V. genesii* in Britain¹⁹. Fourteen years later and also as part of the 1995 Scottish Natural Heritage Perthshire flush surveys Barry discovered the first Scottish *V. genesii*¹⁰. The snail was found at 11 sites and in association with *V. geyeri* at 5 of these. As with the *V. geyeri* and *V. genesii* populations in the Pennines, numerous further survey



Figure 2 A portrait of Barry and Ann taken in the garden at Pool Foot in July 2017. By Martin Willing

and monitoring visits have taken place at both the Perthshire and Deeside since the first *V. geyeri* and *V. genesii* discoveries there (e.g. reference 20).

Barry scored yet another *Vertigo* 'first' in Wales in 1998 when commissioned by Natural Resources Wales to investigate the Llŷn Peninsula for further *V. geyeri* sites following the discovery of the species at Cors Geirch in 1996. Although Barry did not find further populations of the snail, he did, however, locate the first known population of *Vertigo moulinsiana* in Wales in fen at Cors Geirch, a site that has been studied extensively in the years since that first discovery.

Whilst living in Ambleside, Barry undertook wide-ranging surveys of Lake District lakes recording many new localities for the 'Near Threatened' *Vertigo lilljeborgi* and adding much to our understanding of the snail's erratic population fluctuations. He also recorded numerous new localities in the Lake District and central Pennines for two other locally distributed species, *Vertigo alpestris* and *V. pusilla*.

It was not just with *Vertigo* species that Barry produced significant new records. In September 1972 he collected three unfamiliar slugs from The Abbey, a popular tourist spot by Lake Windermere. These were sent to Dr. C.O. van Regteren Altena in Leiden who identified them as *Boettgerilla pallens*, the first confirmed records

of this non-native slug in Britain. A subsequent, jointly produced paper describing this new find³ included valuable information describing the slug's anatomy and ecology making a significant contribution to the then sparse literature concerning this species.

Barry also has the distinction of recording the first population to Britain and Ireland of the scarce *Pupilla pratensis* (now renamed *P. alpicola*) when he surveyed a calcareous flush site at Braelangwell on the Black Isle in East Ross in May 2005³⁰. He visited this site as Mike and Liz Howe had previously recorded *Vertigo geyeri* and *V. genesii* there whilst undertaking an entomological survey in 1998. Further confirmation of this new discovery was made in November 2005 when Barry revisited the site with Richard Marriott.

On one of his many malacological visits to Ireland, in May 1991, Barry made a visit to the Shannon estuary to check out records of *Pseudamnicola confusa* (currently *Mercuria anatina*) made nearly 100 years before between 1907 > 1910. Not only did he succeed in reconfirming the presence of the target snail, but he also found two populations of *Assimineia grayana*, a species hitherto unknown in Ireland⁷. In both cases *A. grayana* was living on mud beneath *Carex* sp and in close association with *P. confusa* plus a mixture



Figure 3 Barry photographing a *Vertigo geyeri* calcareous flush habitat near Orton in the western Pennines. (June 1998). By Martin Willing

of freshwater, terrestrial and brackish water species.

Barry travelled extensively overseas during his life collecting molluscs in a wide variety of places including Poland, Scandinavia and the Pyrenees, but one of his key interests concerned the rich endemic molluscan faunas of some Atlantic islands; he made many trips to the Canarian Archipelago and the Madeira islands both with various groups of fellow malacologists²⁷ and also on family holidays. It was on Maderia that he managed to achieve yet another notable find. There are two key centres of species diversity for the genus *Leiostyla* in the Caucasus and on the Atlantic islands especially Madeira. In the period 1992–1995 the National Museum of Wales undertook a series of Madeiran expeditions to survey endemic molluscs especially *Leiostyla* spp. in the deep ravines lying high on the main island. It was on one of these expeditions, accompanied by Mary Seddon and Ian Killeen that Barry

found an unfamiliar *Leiostyla* unlike any previously described species. The find was extracted from litter samples collected from woodland in the valley of the Ribeira de Faja da Nogueira at 1000m altitude. This undescribed species was later appropriately named *Leiostyla colvillei* sp. nov. in recognition of its finder's malacological achievements²⁸.

During his long and productive malacological studies Barry amassed a large, well curated and scientifically valuable voucher and research collection. In 2018 when health issues forced him to move with Ann into sheltered accommodation in Windermere, Barry's whole collection was transferred to the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. Here, after it was quarantined all the Scottish material was removed and accessioned into the main collections. The remaining material from England, Wales, Ireland and elsewhere in the world and was then transferred to the National Museum of Wales where, following accession it was also incorporated into their collections. Monitoring of collection usage has shown that the Colville collections in Scotland and Wales have been used by researchers on *Pupilla* and *Vertigo* and were also examined during the production of the recently published Field Studies Council's freshwater snail book.

The following references covering a 40-year period show Barry working both independently and in collaboration with many others to produce numerous papers and reports documenting his wide-ranging molluscan interests; a considerable achievement.

There is of course so much more to Barry than as a very successful medical doctor and accomplished malacologist. He was in many ways a perfect father, grandfather and great grandfather. Speaking of his father, Alaric wrote, "Its odd how when you are young you don't realise how lucky and privileged you are with your parents. It gradually dawned upon me that we had things that others did not have, and some of the things we did were not only fun, good, interesting but also unusual. I once asked someone where their dad kept his snails only to be given a blank disbelieving look. We went for walks in the country, we learnt about natural history and wild things. We went camping and fishing – which a lot of people did not have the opportunity to. Also, we were, I think given a lot of freedom, many opportunities but not in any way ignored or left to get ourselves into danger".



Figure 4 Barry wearing his ‘trade-mark’ head magnifier looking for *Vertigo angustior* at the Giant’s Causeway, Co, Antrim. (June 2003). By David Holyoak

Barry was never happier than when engaged with his grandchildren (who nicknamed him ‘snaily grandpa’) and great grandchildren. Tributes read at his memorial service provide ample evidence of their deep affection for their grandfather and their lasting appreciation of his kindness to them. One such fond anecdote recounts, “*I remember having a conversation a number of years ago at the kitchen table in Pool Foot about not what our actual age was, but the age we feel. When it came to Grandpa’s turn to respond, he said simply and without hesitation; twelve. I have thought since that time that it explains well why Grandpa was such a good companion to us, his grandchildren. When Grandpa was looking after you, you were all part of the same gang. Mostly, he was the ringleader and we were his willing, and sometimes gullible subjects*”. Many of the grandchildren’s fond memories of grandpa were of ‘snaily trips’, many in Cumbria, but also in Scotland, Ireland and the Canary Islands.

In addition to family involvements and malacological pursuits Barry also managed time for other interests and activities. Especially after retirement, Barry and Ann enjoyed travel, managing to visit countries on all the continents except

Antarctica. He enjoyed fishing (especially in his younger years) photography, card and board games including bridge at which he excelled, at one time being the Cumbrian County champion. He will also be remembered for his penchant for fast driving (according to Alaric maybe too fast!) which led to the end of two cars, a red mini and silver Volvo 365; fortunately, he never injured anyone although sometimes providing others with ‘white-knuckle’ rides! One of his grandchildren wondered “*Did Grandpa learn to drive at the Paddy Hopkirk School of Motoring?*” Another observed that, “*All the grandchildren enjoyed road trips with grandpa. His best remembered car has to be his small grey Peugeot which he used to bomb around the country roads to our delight along with some satisfying revving sound effects as he eased his foot down on the accelerator*”.

Even in his later years Barry’s sense of adventure and molluscan curiosity didn’t diminish but sometimes led him into some ‘tight spots’. Thus in 2012 at the age of 82 he joined a British Pteridological Society trip to Germany and Austria reasoning that where there are ferns then there are also likely to be snails. An ‘incident’ happened in Austria when he was scouring a vertiginous hillside. Barry grabbed a rock which came off in his hand and with a cry of “oh no” he started falling, rolling some hundred feet down the slope before coming to a halt at the foot of a sapling. The party feared that he had been killed, but Barry was made of sterner stuff. A rescue helicopter was called, and Barry winched aloft. The party were delighted to learn later that day that he was safe in a local hospital having broken his sternum and fractured a vertebra resulting in him being partially encased in a plaster shell. Despite Barry’s desire to discharge himself almost immediately he was persuaded to stay and recover, eventually being repatriated in the care of Alaric who had flown out to escort him home. Barry made a rapid and complete recovery.

Despite his considerable achievements in so many fields, Barry was a surprisingly modest and measured person. He conversed in a confident, reassuring and softly spoken manner; he was kind, charming but with an endearing sense of fun and slight mischief. He was generous with his time and always happy to share his knowledge and skills. Barry was certainly a ‘malacological trail-blazer’ – a pioneer who led the way



Figure 5 Barry showing shells for a newspaper photo-shoot. (1968) By *The Bradford Telegraph & Argus*.

that others have since followed. He leaves an enviable legacy of malacological achievements but also of memories that friends, colleagues and family members will recall with fondness for many years to come. On a personal level I feel a considerable sense of loss in not being able to talk to Barry again, but am nevertheless grateful to have spent time with him – treasured moments.

I am most grateful to Dave Boyce, Brian Coles, Alaric Colville, Diana Ennos, Roland Ennos, David Holyoak, Mike Howe, Richard Marriott, Adrian Norris, Ben Rowson, Peter Topley and Tom Walker for help in preparing this obituary.

Martin J. Willing

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