

Richard Richardson Mole

By HANS BOOS and VICTOR QUESNEL

Family Life and Business Interests

R.R. Mole was born at Fore St., Bridgewater, Somerset, England on 27th September 1860, the elder son of Richard Hopkins Mole and his wife Eliza, nee Howels. (The names Richard and Richardson appear repeatedly in the Mole genealogy). We know nothing of his years at school but we know that on leaving school he became a journalist and worked for several British newspapers.

A publication by Jose M. Bodu records that Mole arrived in Trinidad "on 14th September 1886 by the DSS "Antilles", under engagement to "Public Opinion" newspaper". Presumably the newspaper had advertised in England for someone to fill a vacant post and Mole had applied and been successful. He was "the first Englishman to be associated with the Colonial Press in the capacity of a shorthand reporter". However, he did not remain long with "Public Opinion" because by 1891 his name appears as a clerk to the Attorney General of the Trinidad Government in the 1891 and 1982 editions of the Colonial Office List.

He remained an even shorter time in this post for in 1892 he was joined by his brother Arthur Hopkins Mole, born on the 22nd May 1863, and together they founded the firm of Mole Brothers, Bookbinders, Printers and Publishers. Two years later Arthur died from "pernicious bilious remittent fever" (yellow fever), but Mole carried on the business for many years thereafter, joined later by his first son and a cousin.



There is an area of uncertainty here for we know that Mole worked for a time in the Government Printing Office – the obituaries in both the Trinidad Guardian and the Port of Spain Gazette say so – but the obituary in the Trinidad Guardian states that he left the Government Printing Office in 1898 to found his newspaper "The Mirror". This newspaper was indeed founded in 1898 but by then Mole had already founded Mole Brothers so that it is highly unlikely that Mole was still at the Government Printing Office in 1898. In our view it is more likely that Mole got a temporary job at the Government Printing Office after he left "Public Opinion", going from there to the Attorney General's office and then leaving the post to found his own business firm.

On 5th December 1888, at the Wesleyan Chapel at the corner of Duke and Hanover Streets, Mole married Georgina Elizabeth Hibbs who was born in 1861 in England. We do not know what brought her to Trinidad but she arrived here "towards the end of 1888 and a few weeks after was married to Mr. R.R. Mole". (Hanover Street was the part of the present Abercromby Street between Knox Street and Park Street. Above Park Street in the "new town" laid out about 1802, the name changed

again to Cumberland Street. According to Carlton Ottley in "The story of Port of Spain" the name was changed in 1900. An old map of the early 1800s reprinted in "Voices in the Street" by Olga Mavrogordato shows that Hanover Street ran into Woodford Square (then Brunswick Square) and there was no Knox Street. Also, on that map, Park Street is spelt Parck Street. The church in which Mole was married still stands there today).

The Moles had five children, Henry Rowels Richardson, Marjorie Frances Lois, Arthur Hopkins (Jack), Richard Richardson (Ritchie), and Gertrude Monica (Gerty). Henry Rowels Richardson left Trinidad in 1911 to enter the publishing business in New York. There on 8th September 1912 he married Eleanor Mary Bowen, the youngest surviving daughter of George Frederick Bowen, who had also been born in Trinidad but whom he had not met there. Their eldest son, Henry Rowels Richardson, came to Trinidad in 1980 in pursuit of knowledge of his grandparents and it is to him that we are indebted for discovering so much of what we now know about Mole. All the factual material and all the quotations in this article are from his "Notes on G.F. Bowen and R.R. Mole and their families".

After a long illness Mole's wife died on 29th June, 1908 at the early age of 47 at 52 Richmond Street, Port of Spain, which had been the family home for many years. Mole married his second wife, Charlotte Alison Fidler, on 18th November 1911 at the same church in which he had married his first wife. Of the marriage there was one child, a daughter Carleton Erica, born on 2nd March 1917 and later to become Mrs. Erica Mitchell.

On 28th January 1898 Mole launched "The Mirror" a daily paper that must be considered a success. Its circulation rose from 3000 in 1903 to 3500 in 1904. We do not know what its circulation was when it ceased publication on 12th December 1916 but the closure when it came was sudden and unrelated to circulation. There are hints that Mole, a forthright man, had annoyed some highly placed Government officials and that these had managed to cut off his supply of newsprint.

Mole Brothers also published a yearly Almanac which gave details of the main events of the preceding year and it is now a good source of information for the period it covers. Apparently the work of the Mole "Printerie" was considered first-rate for at the Agricultural and Industrial Exhibition held at the Princes Building from 29th January to 3rd February 1912 "1st and 2nd prizes for excellence in typographical display were won by staff of The Mirror".

Early in World War I Mole's two younger sons, Jack and Ritchie, "volunteered individually for British

Army Service, but they did not join any of the contingents which left Trinidad for this purpose". Henry Howels had already left Trinidad for New York and none of Mole's sons ever returned to Trinidad.

Mole himself left Trinidad for England on 17th May 1917, after the demise of The Mirror, having spent thirty years in Trinidad. However, he did not stay long there. He went to India in August or September 1918 and remained there two years. He revisited England, and perhaps Trinidad, in 1920. He was in Singapore in 1921 and 1922 but returned to Trinidad in 1922 "where after a couple of months sojourn he left for England". He returned to Trinidad towards the end of 1923 and remained here until his death in an absurd accident. "While reposing in a hammock at his house the double strands which sustained it became loose and he fell to the floor striking his head heavily. Doctor A. Reid was called in and for a time the patient rallied from the shock" but on 3rd October he lapsed into unconsciousness and died on 5th October 1926. He is buried in the Lapeyrouse Cemetery. The bearers at the funeral included F.W. Ulrich, T.I. Potter and H. Caracciolo.

Mole seems to have been a man of great determination, "an uncompromising advocate of what he thought to be right", broadminded and frank, a man of few prejudices, and in speech a man of few words. He was a co-leader of a non-denominational religious organization called The Port of Spain Brotherhood which met mainly at the Tranquility Methodist Church and whose meetings were well attended. He was a member of the Royal Victoria Institute and of the Public Library Committee. According to his daughter Erica, he loved music, particularly organ music, and used to sit up front in church where he could hear the music well. He was also interested in literature for 'according to "The Mirror" of 12th October 1899, he was to give a lecture illustrated by recitations and songs on "Tennyson".' From Erica's account of him (Mole died when she was only nine years old) it would seem that he was a devoted father, often reading books to her, teaching her how to type and taking an interest in her musical studies. Apparently he always wore white suits except on Sundays and special occasions.*

It is not surprising that such a man should be associated with the founding of a society to cater to his special interests and it is to these interests that we must now turn.

Mole The Naturalist

We do not know if Mole was a naturalist before coming to Trinidad. If he was not, it is likely that his close

* While suits were fashionable as late as 1934. See Arthur Greenball's article in this issue.

friend F.W. Urich sparked his interest. But we do not know how the two met. H.H.R. Mole says that "the first evidence of his work in that field dates from 1891.

In that year:

a) In collaboration with his friend F.W. Urich, RRM began a series of donations of animals to the Zoological Society of London, which by 1910 had resulted in a total of 81 animals being given to that Society:

b) "Notes on Some Reptiles from Trinidad", by RRM and F.W. Urich was published in the Proceedings of the Zoological Society of that year.

c) The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club was established in 1891 and RRM was a founder member".

As we saw earlier, in 1892 with his brother Arthur, Mole founded Mole Brothers and it was fortunate for The Trinidad Field Naturalists' Club (and for us now) that he did so, for almost immediately the new firm began publishing a journal for the infant club. Without Mole Brothers there may have been no journal and without the journal we would be without the most important source of information on those early years. The journal was published every two months from April 1892 to 1896. In those four years the journal published eleven of Mole's papers, one with F.W. Urich as co-author. Of these eleven, six were on snakes and the others on general topics.

It is worth pausing for a moment here to reflect on how enthusiastic a herpetologist Mole must have been. He had in 1891 been only five years in the country having arrived from a land with almost no snakes. Yet in just five years he was writing papers on them and writing with the authority of a man who knows his subject intimately. Snakes are not the easiest of animals to find or to study, yet Mole found them, kept them in captivity and studied their habits. There is no doubt that Mole became the country's greatest authority on snakes until the modern era began with Garth Underwood.

Mole served on the Publications and General Business Committees of the club in 1894 and 1895, was President in 1901 and Vice-President from 1902 to 1904. The Mirror Almanac for 1910 records that Mole was one of the two Vice-Presidents and presumably this means that Mole was a Vice-President in 1909. However, Caracciolo, in later years, said that the club was dormant from 1907 to 1924. There is thus a need to determine just what was happening in those years. Both statements cannot be right.

Mole's donations to the Zoological Society of London lasted until 1910 and in those 19 years he sent 81 living specimens. In 1896 he became a corresponding member of the society. Mole also shipped specimens to the New York Zoological Society one of which was the "largest and finest specimen of *Boa constrictor* ever

exhibited in the Reptile House". This boa had come from Venezuela (in 1906) where it had been stealing turkeys, chickens and dogs in the town of Amacaro. After a lengthy watch for it the snake was caught. Hearing of its capture (how we do not know) Mole travelled to Venezuela, secured the snake and shipped it to New York. It was eleven feet seven inches long (3.56 m).

It was Mole too who shipped "Big Annie" to New York. She was an anaconda eighteen feet long (5.54 m) that weighed 138 lb. (62.7 kg) and was one of the prize exhibits of the zoo. According to Ditmars (in 1934) she produced 74 young and her offspring "are scattered all over the United States in various Zoological Parks". Among the other animals that Mole sent were bush masters, fer-de-lance, coral snakes, some non-venomous snakes, turtles, lizards and amphibians.

Mole sent many specimens to the British Museum (Natural History) for identification and corresponded regularly with Prof. Boulanger F.R.S. who was then in charge of the collection of reptiles. He also sent specimens to Dr. Boettger at Frankfurt-am-Main among which was a beautiful little lizard that was new to science. Boettger named it *Sphaerodactylus molei*.

A letter of 16th Sept. 1912 from Dr. Raymond Ditmars of the New York Zoological Society to Mole shows the high esteem that others had for him. Ditmars said in part; "I wish to heartily thank you for your interest and trouble in filling our orders for reptiles and insects from your vicinity. The specimens you have sent us have been uniformly satisfactory. It is seldom we are fortunate to be in touch with a collector who knows exactly what we want . . ."

After his return from India and England Mole spent the remaining years of his life in compiling what was up to that time the most comprehensive account of the snakes of Trinidad. The scientific version was published in the Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London in 1924. The popular version was published as a series of twenty seven articles in the Port of Spain Gazette in 1926. In 1925 and 1926, too, Mole published in the Port of Spain Gazette twenty eight articles on animals other than snakes, thus proving his considerable knowledge outside of his specialty. His death came, as his obituary in the Port of Spain Gazette said, "when his familiar initials R.R.M. had hardly absorbed the printing ink in which they were set at the end of alas! his final of a series of interesting articles . . ." We, now, must be ever grateful that he did manage to write that final article, that from his pen there is no "Unfinished Symphony" to leave us wondering what might have been. Mole gave us all he had in him to give.