

# The Miss J. E. Linter (1844-1909) collection of land snails in the Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery, Exeter, England: A provisional assessment

*La collection des mollusques terrestres réalisée par Miss J. E. Linter (1844-1909) et conservée au Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery, Exeter, England: une évaluation provisoire*

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## KEY-WORDS

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## MOTS-CLÉS

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Exeter*

**Summary:** Miss J.E. Linter, an English lady-conchologist, originally came from Devon but spent most of her life in Twickenham, London. Her collection was started following her acquisition of the Theobald and Skinner collections and grew to some 15,000 shells. The collection is primarily of land snails from all parts of the world and contains primary and secondary type material of authors such as Sowerby, Gude, Möllendorff, Kobelt and Strebel and probably many others. She went on to amass a collection rich in species that are invaluable to taxonomic research and to wider biodiversity studies especially concerning conservation. Her collection is held at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery, Exeter.

**Résumé :** M<sup>lle</sup> J.E. Linter, une femme conchyliologue anglaise, est originaire du Devon mais a passé la plus grande partie de sa vie à Twickenham, Londres. Sa collection a été créée à la suite de l'acquisition des collections Theobald et Skinner et compte maintenant quelque 15 000 coquilles. La collection est principalement composée de coquilles terrestres de toutes les régions du monde et contient du matériel typique primaire et secondaire d'auteurs tels que Sowerby, Gude, Möllendorff, Kobelt et Strebel et probablement de nombreux autres. Elle a continué d'amasser une collection riche en espèces indispensables à la recherche taxinomique et aux études plus vastes sur la biodiversité, notamment en matière de conservation. Sa collection est conservée au Musée Mémorial Royal Albert, Exeter.

## Introduction

Miss Linter was one of the few ladies who, during the second half of the 19th century, had formed a large and important shell collection in the United Kingdom. However, until today she has remained unrecognised and her collection largely unknown. This perhaps came about because her collection was reported as

sold and dispersed in 1909 (Tomlin, 1949), but this must have been only a small part for she donated her main collection of some 15,000 specimens to the Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery in Exeter (RAMM) in 1909. Only two brief obituaries were published after her death (Anonymous, 1909; Smith, 1910) the latter noting the importance of her collection. Recently efforts were made to assess the scien-

1. [https://www.linter.co.uk/Index\\_of\\_People/William\\_Brine\\_Linter\\_1811-1892/william\\_brine\\_linter\\_1811-1892.html](https://www.linter.co.uk/Index_of_People/William_Brine_Linter_1811-1892/william_brine_linter_1811-1892.html).

2. [https://www.linter.co.uk/Index\\_of\\_People/William\\_Brine\\_Linter\\_1811-1892/william\\_brine\\_linter\\_1811-1892.html](https://www.linter.co.uk/Index_of_People/William_Brine_Linter_1811-1892/william_brine_linter_1811-1892.html).

3. Letter from Florence Jewell to F.R. Rowley 9 November 1909. RAMM Archives 0466.

4. Letter from Florence Jewell to F.R. Rowley 9 November 1909. RAMM Archives 0466.

5. [https://www.linter.co.uk/Index\\_of\\_People/William\\_Brine\\_Linter\\_1811-1892/william\\_brine\\_linter\\_1811-1892.html](https://www.linter.co.uk/Index_of_People/William_Brine_Linter_1811-1892/william_brine_linter_1811-1892.html).

tific value and research potential of the mollusc collections in RAMM beginning with the Montagu collection (Oliver, Morgenroth & Salvador, 2017; Oliver & Morgenroth, 2018) and now the Linter collection. The RAMM collections were examined for potential type material in the process of preparing content for the Great Britain Mollusca Types Database (Rowson et al, 2018) but for the Linter collection this was cursory due to the limited scope of the project. From various sources we have compiled a brief biography and will also highlight some of the collection, now in RAMM. However, this collection requires a full and detailed review to elucidate its true value and potential thus this paper is intended to promote an interest in the collection and bring it to the malacological community.

### Family history

Information on Miss Linter's family history is scant and the following is derived from correspondence between her executor, Miss Florence Jewell, and census records.

Juliana Emma Linter (**Fig. 1**) was born in Teignmouth, Devonshire, on 19 July 1844 as the fourth of six children born to William Brine Linter and Caroline Mary Nicholls<sup>1</sup>. She was the only girl. Both her father and grandfather were musicians<sup>2</sup> but in the census record of 1851 her father is listed as an organist. Florence Jewell wrote<sup>3</sup> that *“at an early age Miss Linter left 6 Saxe Street in Teignmouth for London to study and was for many years a regular reader at the British Museum”*. Census records show that she was not living with her parents in 1871, when she would have been 26 years old. She does not appear in any of the census records until 1881 when she was 36 years old and living as a boarder in Grosvenor Road, Twickenham, London. Here she is registered as a *“biological student”* but there is no evidence that she was formally enrolled in any college or university; perhaps this was a euphemism for her shell collecting. In 1891 she was boarding at Arragon Close, Richmond Road and registered as of *“private means”*, and was using this address in 1886 in the Conchologists Exchange. In the 1901 census she appears at Saville House, Heath Road, Twickenham but as a *“visitor”*. This appears to contradict Florence Jewell who wrote that Miss Linter had lived there for 20-30 years, certainly Miss Linter was writing from Saville House in 1902. Until 1902

Miss Linter has lived as a boarder and one must wonder how she was able to develop her collection when not owning her own property. In 1895 she was elected a member of the Malacological Society of London, but she seldom attended meetings; Smith (1910) said she was *“of a retiring disposition”*. Miss Linter never married and she died on 30 August 1909 after two years of ill health<sup>4</sup>.



Fig. 1. Photograph of Miss Linter given to RAMM by Florence Jewell 25 April 1910.

### Shell collecting

Linter began her collection of shells around 1880. The initial core of her collection is reported to have come from William Theobald (1829-1908) and the entirety of the collection of Colonel Skinner. These collections were primarily of Indian or South-east Asian origin but she rapidly expanded on this. Miss Linter's executor, companion and fellow shell collector Miss Florence Jewell (whom we also know little about) recalls in a letter to RAMM's curator FR Rowley that her favourite group were the Helicoidea, of which she had many unique specimens in her collection<sup>5</sup>.

The following extracts from correspondence between her and the curator of RAMM give a good indication of her attitude towards collecting as well as insight to the quality of the collection themselves.

On 25 July 1902 <sup>6</sup> she wrote to the curator:

“(...) for many years I have been collecting exotic land shells, in fact, my collection is about as complete as it can be, and I have spared no expense or labour in making it and keeping it up to date, by securing representatives in the finest condition of all new species found and described”.

In a letter from 5 August 1902 <sup>7</sup> she added :

“Since 1880 I have been constantly working it up; I began with the splendid collection of the late Major Skinner from Ceylon; this nucleus, which was rich in Ceylon and Indian forms, has considerably grown and I never lose an opportunity of acquiring any new or exceptionally rare species that are in the market. My correspondents are from all parts of the globe and hardly a week passes without my receiving more or less new material”.

A letter dated 17 December 1906 <sup>8</sup> to Johannes Thiele in Berlin (Fig. 2) illustrates her contacts with eminent conchologists of her day, here she mentions E. A. Smith and Prof. E. von Martens, noting that with the latter “I have often exchanged shells with the late Prof von Martens

and corresponded with him for years”.

According to Tomlin (1949) Linter “was to all intents and purposes a dealer (...) and exchanged largely”. However, it is unclear on what evidence Tomlin based his qualification as a dealer as this would imply the distribution of stock lists. To the contrary, we found only evidence that she exchanged shells. She put advertisements in American malacological journals like ‘The Conchologists’ Exchange’.

The first one read: “For exchange. Rare land shells from Ceylon; also new species of *Bulimus* from Mt. Roraima. Offers solicited”; it appeared in the issues of November and December 1886.

In January 1887 her advertisement read “Offered.—Ceylonese shells, including rare species of *Helix*, *Bulimus*, *Cyclophorus*, *Cataulus*, etc. Wanted.—Good foreign or British shells”.

Another advertisement was “Wanted.—South American land and fresh-water shells. Offered.—Ceylonese, Indian and others. Send list”, which appeared in the issues of September and October 1887.

A later announcement was found in ‘The Nautilus’ volume 11 of December 1897: “For exchange: *Helix latiaxis*, *linterae*, *tayloriana*; also

6. Letter from JE Linter to FR Rowley, 25 July 1902. RAMM Archives 0460.

7. Letter from JE Linter to FR Rowley, 05 August 1902. RAMM Archives 0462.

8. Letter from JE Linter to Johannes Thiele, 17 December 1906. Held in the Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin, no catalogue number.

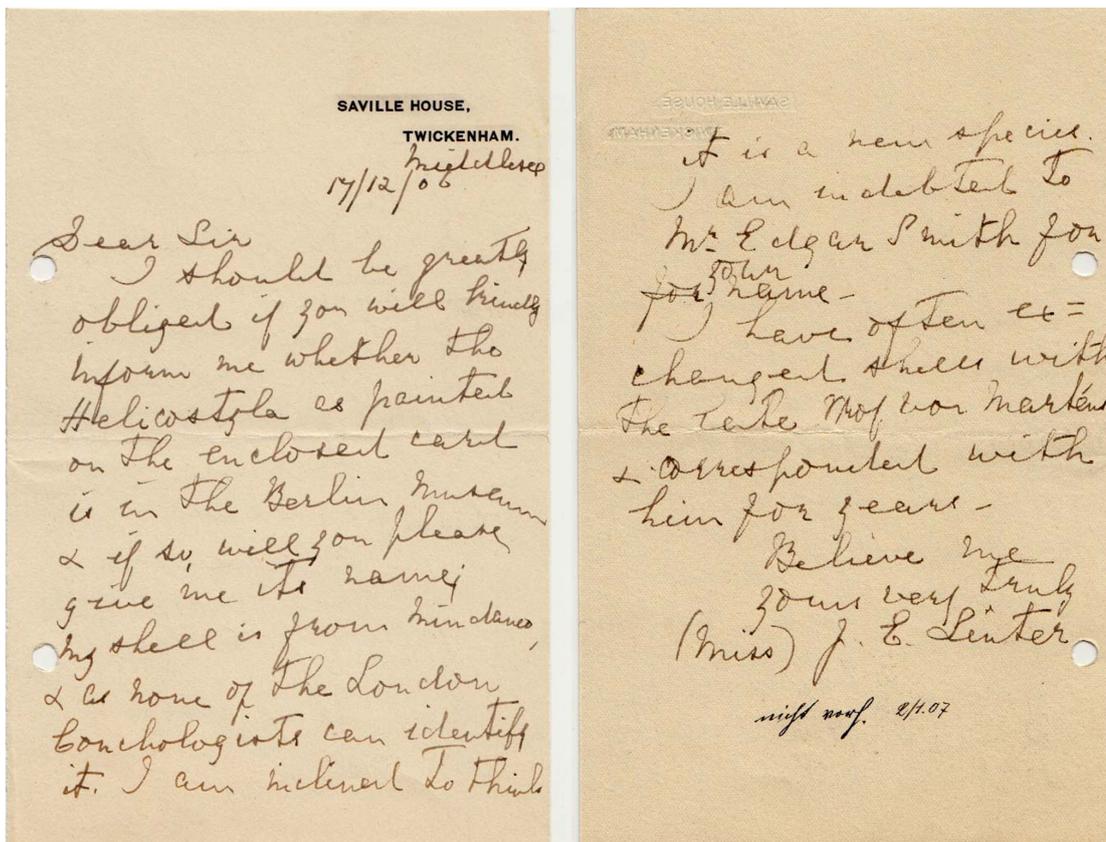


Fig. 2. Letter from JE Linter to Johannes Thiele mentioning EA Smith and Prof. E von Martens. From the archives of the Museum für Naturkunde (Museum of Natural History), Berlin.

large collection of land and marine (many rare). *Desiderata new or rare Helices*". This text was repeated in the issues of January–March 1898. Later during the year, there is an advertisement in the issues of October 1898–April 1899: "For disposal: A large collection of marine, freshwater, and land shells (many rare from India, Ceylon, New Guinea and Philippines, etc.). Wanted rare land or offers".

There is also evidence that she exchanged shells on the basis of lists of desiderata with Philippe Dautzenberg (Breure, 2015: 102). With Robert Jetschin she exchanged a type specimen of *Bulimus fulminans* var. *linterae* (Neubert & Janssen, 2004: 215). Both instances were during the 1890s. Some lots obtained through exchange with Miss Linter were found in the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Cambridge, Massachusetts (MCZ).

Sales of natural objects were not uncommon during the 19th and early part of the 20th centuries and we have evidence that Miss Linter bought many of her shells from dealers or at

shell sales. One sale of shells was particularly renowned for the quality of the shells and the fact that many had been illustrated in Reeve and Sowerby's *Conchologia Iconica*. This was the sale of the Sir David Barclay collection, which lasted over three days in 1891. Labels on some Linter boxes indicate that she purchased from this sale and two items are of particular interest, *Cyclostoma formosa* and *Cyclostoma deburghiae*. Both species are mentioned on the front cover of the sale catalogue and in the listings as "extremely rare". The illustrated pages here (Fig. 3) are from the copy owned by James Cosmo Melvill and now in the archive of the National Museum of Wales. Melvill attended this sale and records the prices for all the lots. Lots 734 and 739 match the label data in the Linter collection as do the prices indicated by Melvill. Lot 734 marked as 35/- (= £1/15/-) and 739 marked as 80/- (= £4-0-0). These prices equate to €165 and €360 in today's value and indicate that Miss Linter had considerable means and was willing to pay these high prices for rare shells.

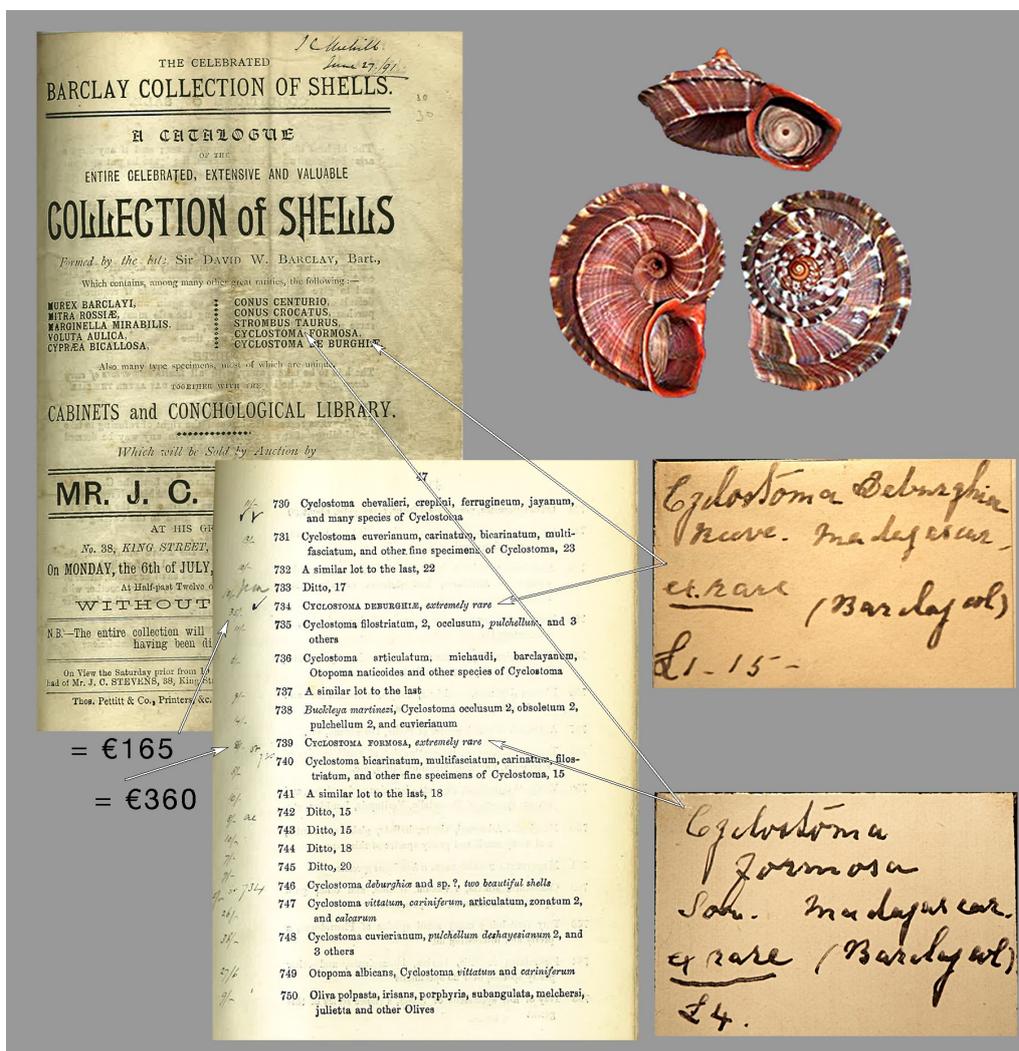


Fig. 3. Examples of rare shells purchased by Miss Linter from the sale of the Barclay Collection. Labels are from her collection and in her hand writing. Catalogue pages from a copy held by the National Museum of Wales.

## The Linter collection: a re-appraisal

### Dispersal & curation of the collection

On 20 December 1892 Miss Linter donated her collection of around 800 fossil shells of British molluscs and brachiopods to RAMM (EXEMS: 32/1892). In a letter dated 25 July 1902 she enquires whether this collection is on display and should she choose to donate her extensive exotic land shell collection in the future whether it would also be accepted. The then curator, F.R. Rowley, assured her that they were in the process of redisplaying the entire palaeontology collection to accommodate her donation and that any future donations would be gratefully accepted.

On 2 October 1909 Jewell wrote<sup>9</sup> to RAMM offering the foreign land shell collection. In her will Linter wrote,

*“I bequeath to the Exeter Albert Memorial Museum my collection of Foreign Land Shells and the cabinet containing them and also my collection of British Shells upon condition that the same are kept in a separate and distinct collection and labelled or described as “The Linter Collections” and are made accessible and open to the public within twelve months”.*

The collection (accession number EXEMS:

1720/1909) comprised around 15,000 specimens housed in a 46-drawer cabinet. The majority are land snails but there are some marine and freshwater specimens.

Today, the collection at RAMM remains in Linter’s glass-lidded, black and white cardboard boxes (Fig. 4). Many include a small slip of paper in her hand with the species name and some also have collection or purchase information on the base of the box. The original cabinet Linter bequeathed no longer exists but the collection is arranged and numbered according to Linter’s original catalogue dated November 1903 (also in RAMM’s possession). The ‘D’ followed by a number in the individual accession numbers denotes the drawer the specimen was originally stored in. Some numbers also contain letter codes (e.g. ‘F’ for freshwater). A complete listing of the collection is available.

However, there is a sale list of an auction on 19 October 1909 at J. C. Stevens Auction Rooms, Covent Garden, London (Tomlin, 1949). Stevens specialised in the sale of natural history specimens. It states the sale will include ‘A catalogue of Land, Marine & Freshwater shells from the collection of the late Miss J. E. Linter, together with the cabinets in which they are contained’ as well as books, corals, minerals and fossils from her collection. From the copy held in the Tomlin collection at the National Museum of

9. Letter from Florence Jewell to F.R. Rowley 9 November 1909. RAMM Archives 0466.



Fig. 4. Part of the Linter collection in its original boxes but now in modern racking.

Wales (Fig. 5) it can be seen that relatively few molluscan (243) lots were auctioned, among which were ‘co-types’ of *Helix boucardi* Angas, 1878, and three *Cylindrella* species. It is unknown what prices were realised and whom were the buyers. Specimens from this Linter sale could be widely dispersed but it is difficult to separate such from specimens that she exchanged during her lifetime. The National Museum of Wales has recognised nine lots as ‘ex Linter coll’ but these could have been purchased by Tomlin or Melvill. We do know, however, that Tomlin’s copy of Theobald and Hanley was formerly that of Miss Linter. Other than the molluscan shells the sale also included birds’ eggs, fossils, minerals and corals. Of the birds’ eggs there were Australian, North American and Asian species represented, some from the Australian collector AEL Bertling. The sale of these miscellaneous items supports Tomlin’s (1949) premise that Miss Linter was a dealer in natural history specimens.

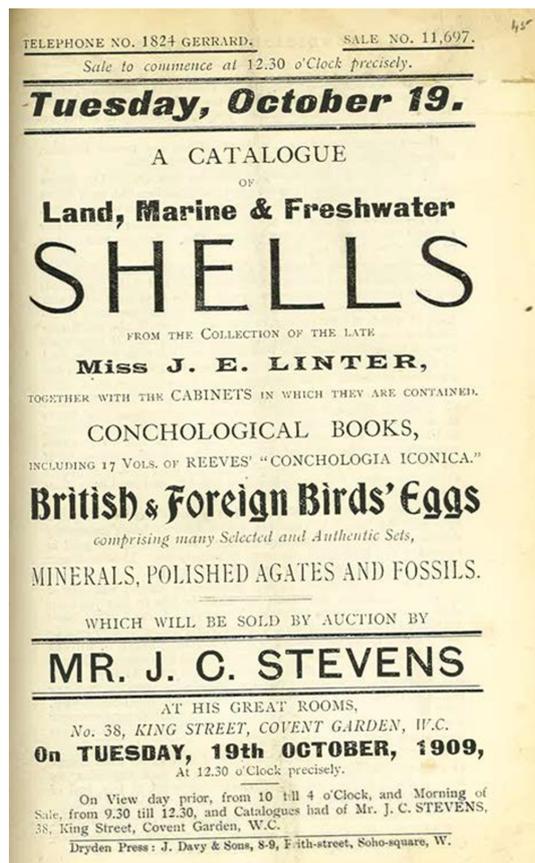


Fig. 5. Title page of the sale catalogue of the Linter Collection in 1909.

#### Known type material and eponymous taxa

Miss Linter never published any scientific papers but was generous in giving access to others who thanked her by creating a number of eponyms in her honour or citing the pre-

sence of types in her collection. These have been investigated through the GB Mollusca Types project (Rowson et al, 2018) but the full potential of possible type material has yet to be completed and can only be done with the help of taxonomic specialists. The eponyms were created by Sowerby, Gude, Möllendorff and Kobelt thus indicating her expansive contacts. Gerard Gude in particular used shells from the Linter collection in his studies, a holotype of one of his species is present.

***Achatina linterae*** Sowerby, 1890 – holotype, EXEMS: 1720/1909/XXX/167/1 Writing on shell states Cape of Good Hope, type description states Port Elizabeth. Shell matches all other elements of description and figure.

***Bulimus fulminans* var. *linterae*** Sowerby, 1890 - Lectotype and paralectotype at Natural History Museum London NHMUK: 1889.4.25.1-2. Paralectotypes EXEMS: 1720/1909/D25/32a-o. From ‘Mount Roraima, British Guiana’.

***Buliminus (Napaesus) linterae*** Kobelt 1899 - ‘nördlichen Indien?’ given by Miss Linter to Kobelt as *Buliminus arcuatus* var. (Gude, 1914) Lectotype in Senckenberg Museum, SMF-238412.

***Chloritis fausta*** Gude, 1906 - Holotype – EXEMS: 1720/1909/XXX/1 from New Mecklenberg [Papua New Guinea]

***Chloritis linterae*** Gude, 1905 - Holotype EXEMS: 1720/1909/D17/84b from ‘Aru Island, Indonesia’.

***Opithostoma linterae*** Sowerby 1896 - Syn-types EXEMS: 1720/1909/D41/242 and 243/1-6 from ‘Sarawak’.

***Plectopylis linterae*** Möllendorff, 1897 - from ‘Pegu’ – Lectotype in Senckenberg Museum, SMF-9280. EXEMS 1720/1909/D7/48a-e

***Papuina linterae*** Möllendorff, 1897 - from ‘Neuguinea’ – Lectotype (Holotype?) in Senckenberg Museum SMF-8655. EXEMS 1720/1909/D18/61a-b

#### Potential type material

Beyond the eponyms and specimens specifically cited as type in publications examples of further potential type material have been discovered to date. The presence of “TYPE” on a label from collections of this period cannot be taken as indicating type material for it may also mean “typical” or perhaps “topotypical”.



Fig. 6. Labels of known provenance in the Linter collection, some indicating presence of type material. (a) Label in Linter handwriting, (WT) indicating from Theobald collection. (b) Mollendorff label with that of Frühstorfer indicating origin. (c) Label in Linter handwriting, (VG) indicating from Gredler collection. (d) Messenger label. (e) Label indicating that lot is ex auct Mabilie. (f) Label from Dupuis collection. (g) label typical of many indicating source as H. Strebel. (h) Label indicating lot came from Arango.

The collection contains material of thirty species described by Theobald (Fig. 6a), but also material of other 19th century pioneers of Indian malacology such as W.H. Benson (1803-1870), W.T. Blanford (1832-1905), and R.H. Beddome (1839-1911). They were all contemporaries of Theobald and over 150 of their species are represented. While the shells in the Linter collection are not primary type specimens many will come from the type locality (topotypes) and could be considered for type status. Other Asian material contains lots collected by Hans Frühstorfer (1866-1922) and described by O.F. von Möllendorff (1848-1903) (Fig. 6b). A number of Asian clausiliids marked 'Type, Gredler' (Fig. 6c) are present but there is no indica-

tion if these were exchanged directly with V. Gredler (1823-1912) or were acquired through an intermediary dealer.

Material from Tonkin (Vietnam) is present from the French collector L.G.M. Messenger (1852-1915) (Fig. 6d) (Breure & Pall-Gergely, in press) and a series of *Cyclophorus courbeti* is present. Other material of French origin is indicated by labels such as 'Mabilie ex auct' (J. Mabilie, 1831-1904) (Fig. 6e). Some labels such as those of Dupuis are readily recognisable (Fig. 6f) but it is not yet known if this was from Henri Dupuis (1819-1889) or Paul Dupuis (1869-1931).

The Neotropical part of the collection consists

of around 440 lots, rich in South American taxa, a part of the world not well represented in most collections. Some lots represent rare species and one of these deserves to be highlighted. In 1872 J.C.H. Crosse (1826-1898) described two shells on loan from Orton, collected by J. Hauxwell near Pebas in Peru, as *Bulimus hauxwelli* (now *Plekocheilus (Spartonion) hauxwelli*). These shells became part of the MCZ collection. Later, Pilsbry had the holotype on loan to illustrate it for his *Manual of Conchology*, but after being returned the shell was lost. In the Linter collection one specimen was found of this extremely rare species labelled 'Peru', which proved to be very helpful to judge the systematic position of this taxon (Breure & Mogollón, 2016).

Also present are lots labelled '*H. Strebel legit*' (Fig. 6g) and are labelled as co-type or are topotypes. Given the destruction and loss of the H.W. Strebel (1834-1914) collection in Hamburg, these specimens may take on a special

significance. Another intriguing find was of one lot of a Cuban species described by Arango and marked 'from original lot' (Fig. 6h) thus at least a topotype. While the initial core of the collection centred on Indian and Southeast Asian species the collection is well represented in most other continents and produces not only specimens of taxonomic interest but some with a historical background as in the following example. In 1836-37 Sir James Edward Alexander led an expedition to explore Namaqualand (a region of what is now Namibia). From this expedition a species was described by Gray (in Alexander 1838) as *Dorcasia alexanderi*. In the Linter collection two specimens were found with a label (Fig. 7) stating "*Helix alexandra Gr Namaqualand This is the only state in wh<sup>h</sup> (which) this extremely rare shell has been brought out, as far as I know. I saw Sir J. Alexander & this was bought by Chapman the traveller*". Further research is needed to clarify the status of these specimens but undoubtedly part of the original lot.

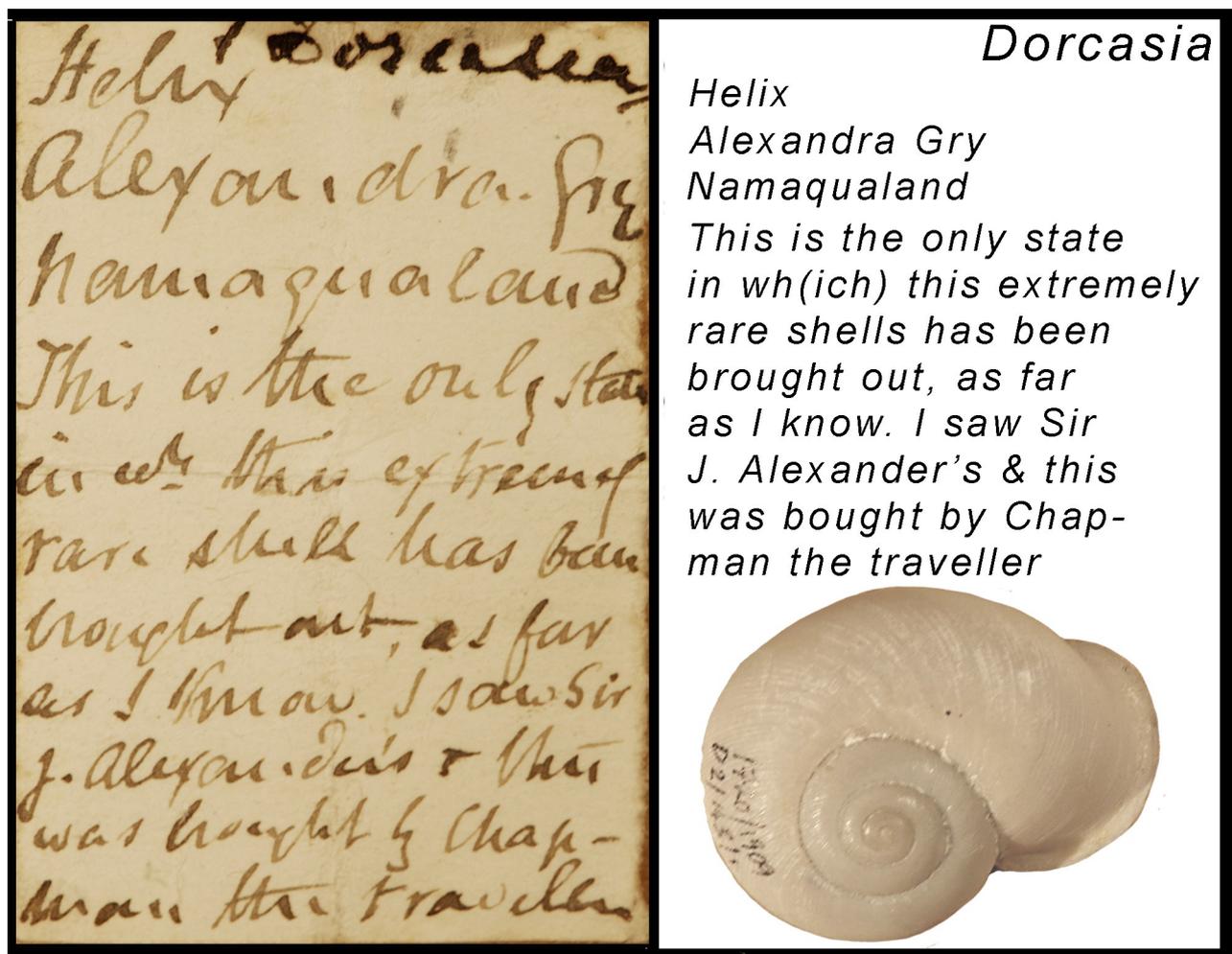


Fig. 7. *Dorcasia alexandri* Gray, EXEMS: 1720/1909/D2/143/1-2.



Fig. 8. A variety of labels with as yet unidentified provenance of the original collectors.

An ongoing priority for the Linter collection is to recognise the full range of provenances present, which must be done by identifying labels. A number of as yet unidentified labels are shown on **Figure 8**, but these represent a small proportion of the lots yet to be curated and it is hoped that this paper will encourage further use of the collection by taxonomic experts.

Since the Victorian era there has been rapid loss and degradation of natural environments such that many species have become endangered or even extinct. The Linter collection predates this biodiversity loss and therefore contains many species that fall into this category. Especially vulnerable have been island faunas and perhaps the best-known cases of ex-

inction are from Hawaii. Hawaiian achatinellids were frequently collected and are not uncommon in collections, but much rarer are those from other islands in Polynesia and the Indo-West Pacific. So far 17 species of the genus *Partula* that are extinct or extinct in the wild have been recognised in the Linter collection. Similarly, is a series of Madeiran land snails marked as ‘*ex. Wollaston*’; T.V. Wollaston (1822-1878) was a pioneer of the study of the fauna of Macaronesia.

### Discussion

We hope to have shown that this collection not only contains a few known type specimens but that there may be many others present and thus warrant further curatorial research. The collection is rich in land snails that were collected before the large-scale environmental changes of the twentieth century. Consequently, many species may now be difficult or even impossible to collect and this collection could be a source of supplementary material for taxonomic research. Although the locality data are not precise the collection does give an indication of biodiversity richness at numerous localities across the world and may now contain many taxa that are not present in museum collections in their countries of origin.

Miss Linter was undoubtedly a serious and determined collector but her retiring nature leaves us with more questions than answers. Why did she take to shell collecting? What were her early connections with William Theobald and the elusive Colonel Skinner? Sadly, Miss Linter remains a rather enigmatic Victorian lady but hopefully now her legacy in the form of her collection will be recognised and used.

### Acknowledgements

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