



*W. H. Searle*

## OBITUARY

WILLIAM H. SEARLE, B.E.M.

By the death at the age of 84 of Mr William H. Searle there passed away, on 6 April 1960, one who had served the Laboratory longer than anyone else and who, during his 63 years as fisherman-collector, had installed himself in the affections of countless biologists the world over. From December 1895 until his retirement on 30 September 1958 his assiduous and unwearied devotion to his collecting duties, year in and year out whatever the weather, on the shore or in his boats, earned him the lasting gratitude of all those innumerable research workers, teachers and students who relied on 'Bill' to procure living material for their researches or studies. He, more than anyone else, knew where the animals were to be found, how to capture them without damage and how to ensure their safe arrival at the Laboratory hours later. More than one student who had been collecting on the shore alongside Bill has later been astonished to observe the large and varied assortment of creatures emerging alive and kicking from one small and tightly packed basket. He had a keen eye for the little things—*Gromia*, praniza larvae and the like, from the rock crevices he split open with his crow-bar. These he would carefully transfer from silted rock surface to honey jar on the point of his pocket-knife. He knew well their scientific names, though foreigners would often have difficulty in recognizing them when pronounced with a strong Devonshire accent. It was usually the old names current during his youth that he knew, and he was not alone in deploring the activities of systematists in so frequently changing and re-changing so many of them.

Bill often spoke of the wonderful time he spent with the late Dr E. J. Allen, F.R.S., and the late Mr R. A. Todd exploring, for its fauna, the Salcombe estuary during the summer of 1900, when so much was excitingly new. Collecting trips to Salcombe with Bill, even thirty years later, are still as green in the memory of a younger generation as were then the acres of *Zostera* amid which Bill's fork turned up rare and fascinating things. He was largely responsible for discovering the riches of the rocky reefs at Wembury Point; in those days walking there and back from Turnchapel, no short distance when carrying a crowbar and one or two loaded collecting baskets.

Of the boats he used in Plymouth Sound and immediate environs the small sailing ship 'Anton Dohrn' was worked by him for many years single-handed. He served aboard 'Busy Bee', 'Huxley', and 'Oithona', and from 1923 onwards skippered the motor-boat 'Gammarus'. In those days 'Gammarus' had a stout mast on which with a following wind Bill would hoist sail to help her along, for in her early years she was rather underpowered.

Bill's knowledge of the bottom of Plymouth Sound was unrivalled; legend has it that caught by a sudden sea-fog he could always tell where he was by dredging up a sample of the bottom. Like so many of the older seamen he could not swim, and he chewed, not smoked, tobacco.

Well deserved honours came to Bill late. In 1953 he was elected an associate member of the M.B.A.; he received the Queen's Coronation Medal and in 1957 the British Empire Medal. When he retired he could look back with pride on a long life well spent in the service of science.

D. P. WILSON