

The Melvill-Tomlin Collection

Background

In this story, we feature our latest collaboration with Amgueddfa Cymru - Museum Wales. This collaborative project focuses on locating, cataloguing, and digitising all specimens in the Melvill-Tomlin collection of molluscs (housed in the National Museum Cardiff) from Singapore.

The collection of shells in Amgueddfa Cymru consists of approximately three quarters of a million specimens. The collection is named after two individuals who owned separate shell collections. One was started in 1853 by James Melvill and later sold to John Tomlin in 1919. After the passing of Tomlin in 1954, Amgueddfa Cymru received the entire collection in 1955¹. Specimens from this collection have been used to make significant contributions to science, with nearly two thousand new species and varieties being named and described from this collection alone.

Within the Melvill-Tomlin collection, approximately one thousand mollusc specimens were collected from Singapore by two prominent collectors—Samuel Archer and Michael Wilmer Forbes Tweedie. Despite the large number of specimens, they largely remain understudied. To date, only four papers that made use of Singapore material in the collection have been published. Preliminary surveys of the collection revealed several first records for Singapore, suggesting great historical and scientific research potential for a better understanding of the malacofauna of the island. This collaboration between Amgueddfa Cymru and the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum would be one of great significance towards a better understanding of Singapore's biodiversity and biodiversity histories.

Digitisation workflow

[video]

The video above was created by the project collaborators at Amgueddfa Cymru. It showcases the Melvill-Tomlin collection and the workflow/protocol for digitising the molluscs. The video offers a behind-the-scenes look at how specimens are being transformed into digital figure plates (i.e., a composite image of various aspects of the specimen and its labels), before ultimately being featured on the "Specimens" page on the SIGNIFY website.

Text by: Tricia J. Y. Cho

References

1. Amgueddfa Cymru (2007) One collection - 786,000 shells - Cataloguing and curating the Melvill-Tomlin shell collection.
<https://museum.wales/articles/1299/One-collection---786000-shells----Cataloguing-and-curating-the-Melvill-Tomlin-shell-collection/> (Accessed 6 March 2025).