



Robert Veitch

ROBERT VEITCH 1890-1972

by

J. C. H. Gill, M.B.E., B.A., LL.B., F.R.Hist.S.Q.*

When one considers and compares the endowments received by the State libraries of Australia from non-government sources, Queensland has had a poor record of donations and bequests.

Therefore, after Robert Veitch had died on 22 September 1972 and the Library Board of Queensland was informed that one fourth of his residuary estate had been left to the Board to endow in perpetuity any extraordinary publishing activities it might undertake, the news was received with considerable gratitude. When, eventually, the Board received just on \$25 000, as the proceeds of the bequest, it was considered that some appropriate recognition of the late Robert Veitch should be made.

It was decided that a short biography of the Library Board's most generous donor to date should be published in *Queensland Heritage*, to place on lasting record an outline of his life and professional career. The research into his life has revealed a scientist of considerable stature, particularly in the field of entomology.

Robert Veitch was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, on 15 August 1890. His father John Veitch was a solicitor and his mother had been born Ann Sinclair Campbell. The family lived at 7 Queen's Crescent, Edinburgh. Robert was reared in a comfortable upper middle class atmosphere and attended Daniel Stewart's College in 1898 and 1899. After this he attended the Royal High School from 1900 to 1908 from which he matriculated to Edinburgh University in September 1908 when he was just eighteen years of age. Veitch graduated B.Sc. (Agric) on 31 March 1911 and B.Sc. (Forestry) on 29 March 1912. He won the medal (1st place) in the first forestry course 1910-11, was second in agricultural entomology, 1909-10, third in forest entomology and fourth in agricultural chemistry, also in 1909-10. He won merit certificates of slightly lower ratings in several other classes. During his degree course he received his field training in forestry in southern Germany. In 1910-11 he was a member of the Committee of the Edinburgh University Agricultural Society.

After graduation Veitch was employed as an assistant at the Imperial Institute of Entomology, British Museum, London, from January 1913 to March 1914. There is no doubt that his intense interest in scientific literature and records was engendered there.

Then in July 1914 his career really commenced when he took up the position of entomologist with the Colonial Sugar Refining Company Limited in the Fiji Islands. He occupied this position until July 1925. During that time he became a specialist in Fiji sugar cane pests. A bibliography of his publications whilst in the employ of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company appears in Appendix A.

In 1919 he married Miss Alice Esmée Berry at Lautoka in Fiji. Veitch was then 28 years old.

Veitch had considerable opportunities for travel particularly to sugar cane producing areas in which his company was interested. Thus he visited and became well known in Australian cane growing areas, sugar refining establishments, and sugar research stations.

Following the retirement of the veteran Henry Tryon from the position of Government Entomologist and Vegetable Pathologist in

the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Stock, Robert Veitch was appointed, on 10 July 1925, to the newly created position of Chief Entomologist in the Department. He was directly responsible for an intensification of entomological research within Queensland and he also had administrative responsibilities in relation to the Plant Pathology Branch then led by J. H. Simmonds. In furtherance of this Veitch was gazetted on 14 October 1929 as an inspector under the Diseases in Plants Acts.

For a number of years and until other policies were developed, honours graduates from the comparatively new (1927) Faculty of Agriculture within the University of Queensland were available for appointment to the entomological branch. The Government availed itself of this local recruit source. Appointees worked under Veitch's direction on a number of entomological problems in a gradually increasing number of entomological field stations which the Department established in the more important areas of primary production.

As chief entomologist, with official duties in regard to plant pathology, Veitch considered that there were staff imbalances in his division. As a result of his viewpoint being accepted by the Government officially sponsored consultations took place in 1936 between Veitch and the late Professor E. J. Goddard, Queensland's Professor of Biology for a quarter of a century (1923-1948). Professor Goddard had pressed for the establishment of the Faculty of Agriculture. This had come to pass in 1927 when Professor J. K. Murray was appointed the first incumbent of the chair of Agriculture.

As a result of these consultations a Division of Plant Industry (Research) was established within the Department of Agriculture and Stock and Veitch, as chief entomologist, also undertook the direction of this new division. The apparent staff imbalance in relation to entomology was then resolved by the movement of various officers to responsibilities in the other fields of research available in the newly created research branches. The resultant diversification of disciplines could only be of benefit to primary production in the plant industry in Queensland.

The next major change took place when research in plant industry was expanded to include a larger diversity of research and in addition production advisory and regulatory services to growers. As the Department's areas of responsibility increased other divisions of primary industry and production apart from plant industry were growing apace also. In the post-World War II years a great upsurge of activity took place in the department. On 1 July 1947 the brilliant Arthur Frank Bell was appointed Under Secretary. On the same day Robert Veitch took up office as Assistant Under Secretary (Technical). By this time Veitch had been granted a Fellowship of the Royal Entomological Society—a quite rare distinction for a scientist operating so far away from the United Kingdom. On the other hand by this time Veitch had a formidable list of publications to his credit which clearly entitled him to this distinction. Despite the pressure of administrative duties, it is remarkable how much scientific research and subsequent publication were achieved by Veitch during his career. Appendix B sets out the papers published by him during his life in Queensland.

*Chairman, John Oxley Library Advisory Committee, Chairman Library Board of Queensland, Chairman Queensland Museum Trustees.

Veitch turned 65 years of age on 15 August 1955 but his term of office was extended to 31 December 1956 when his official retirement took place. The Department was reluctant to lose his expertise any earlier than was necessary and Veitch, himself, was dedicated to his work.

In May 1958 Bell, the Under Secretary, died unexpectedly at the comparatively early age of 58 years.

Veitch had been succeeded on his retirement by Dr. W. A. T. Summerville who assumed the office of Assistant Under Secretary (Technical) on 1 January 1957. Summerville was appointed Under Secretary to replace Bell on 26 June 1958.

By the time of Bell's death a reconstruction of the Department of Agriculture and Stock (arising out of a change of Government in 1957) was under way. To assist Summerville Veitch was recalled as a part time consultant on 26 May 1958. His consultancy which required his presence in the Department for three days per week was originally to expire on 31 December 1958. Extended six months at a time, the consultancy eventually expired on 30 June 1960, some six weeks prior to Veitch's seventieth birthday.

As a consultant Veitch assisted in certain administrative matters. In particular he completed the preparation and editing of departmental handbooks for use by primary producers. The regard in which he was held by the Government and the Department is evidenced by the length of his retainer as a consultant.

On 14 July 1964 his wife died. There were no children of the marriage. His only surviving close relative was his sister, Miss Amelia Sinclair Veitch, but she also predeceased him.

Having a sizeable estate he decided to exercise a general charitable intent after providing legacies for some distant relatives and friends. Further legacies were provided for Scottish charities which had enjoyed the support of the Veitch family in the past. Then three fourths of his residuary estate was left to St. Andrew's War

Memorial Hospital in Brisbane and the remaining one fourth for the Library Board of Queensland. The terms of the latter bequest appear in Appendix C. He asked that the residuary bequests be associated not only with himself but also with the late Mrs. Veitch as a memorial to them both.

When he died on 22 September 1972 Veitch had lived to see many of the aspects of development and expansion which had been begun in the Department of Agriculture and Stock during his service there, reach fruition or continue to expand in the Department of Primary Industries, the successor in name to his old department.

As a personality Veitch on first meeting seemed to be the typical dour, hard-headed, canny Scot. But once his confidence had been won he turned out to be a warm, kindly man, with a quite puckish sense of humour. To the end of his life he pursued his scientific interests; learned journals on his subjects came to him from all over the world.

He was a proud and independent man and even after the deaths of his wife and sister he maintained his own home at 24 Sefton Avenue, Clayfield, a Brisbane suburb, right up to within a month or so of his death when failing health compelled him to go to the nursing home where he died.

In writing this brief biography of Robert Veitch, I have drawn on my personal knowledge of him gained over a period of fifteen years prior to his death. I am indebted to some notes made by his executor Mr. J. A. Weddell who was a friend of longstanding. Other information has been obtained from Charles Finlayson, the Keeper of the Manuscripts, Edinburgh University, Mrs J. B. Ashley, Chief Librarian of C.S.R. Limited (the successor to the Colonial Sugar Refining Company Limited), and Miss R. Hollindale, Librarian, Department of Primary Industries, Brisbane. Lastly a search through Public Service Board records and the *Queensland Government Gazette* has confirmed or revealed all relevant information and dates concerning his service with the Government of Queensland.

APPENDIX A

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PUBLICATIONS BY ROBERT VEITCH WHILE HE WORKED AS AN ENTOMOLOGIST FOR THE COLONIAL SUGAR REFINING COMPANY

The Cane Beetle Borer in Fiji (Agricultural Report 4). Colonial Sugar Refining Company, Sydney, 1922.

The Hornet in Fiji. W. E. Smith Ltd., Sydney, 1917.

Notes on Some Attempts to Control Fijian Plantation Pests by the

Introduction of Parasites and Predators, in Pan-Pacific Science Congress, 1923, *Proceedings*, pp. 377-83.

The Sugar Cane Wire Worm in Fiji. Colonial Sugar Refining Company, Sydney, 1922.

APPENDIX B

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PUBLICATIONS BY ROBERT VEITCH WHILST AN OFFICER OF THE QUEENSLAND DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND STOCK 1925-1956

BOOKS

Cotton Growing in Queensland. Pt 2. Cotton Pests. Queensland Department of Agriculture and Stock, Division of Plant Industry, Brisbane, 1942.

Insect Pests and Their Control. Queensland Department of Agriculture and Stock, Brisbane, 1963.

Pests and Diseases of Queensland Fruits and Vegetables, by Robert Veitch and J. H. Simmonds. Division of Entomology and Plant Pathology, Queensland Department of Agriculture and Stock, Brisbane, 1929.

Queensland Agricultural and Pastoral Handbook. Vol 3. Insect Pests and Their Control. Government Printer, Brisbane, 1938.

PERIODICAL ARTICLES

- Agricultural Extension Work. *Queensland Agricultural Journal* (hereafter cited as *Q.A.J.*) 82, 1956, pp. 559-60.
- Banana Thrips Control. *Q.A.J.* 41, 1934, pp. 124-7.
- Biological Control of Insect Pests. *Q.A.J.* 37, 1932, pp. 301-3.
- The Brown Vegetable Weevil. *Q.A.J.* 43, 1935, pp. 442-4.
- Cabbage Pests and Their Control. *Q.A.J.* 43, 1935, pp. 332-5.
- The Control of Rats and Mice. *Q.A.J.* 43, 1935, pp. 530-1.
- Corn Ear Worm. *Q.A.J.* 44, 1935, pp. 280-5.
- Corn Ear Worm on Tomatoes. *Q.A.J.* 28, 1927, pp. 585-8.
- Cutworm Control. *Q.A.J.* 40, 1933, pp. 180-2.
- Cutworms and Army Worms. *Q.A.J.* 29, 1928, pp. 203-7.
- Dusting for an Important Queensland Insect Pest. *Q.A.J.* 26, 1926, p. 511.
- Economic Entomology. *Q.A.J.* 36, 1931, pp. 391-3.
- Grape Phylloxera. *Q.A.J.* 39, 1933, pp. 79-83.
- Grasshopper Control. *Q.A.J.* 42, 1934, pp. 512-13.
- The History of Economic Entomology in Australia. *Q.A.J.* 40, 1933, pp. 94-7.
- An Important Queensland Insect Pest. *Q.A.J.* 26, 1926, pp. 385-6.
- Insect Anatomy. *Q.A.J.* 31, 1927, pp. 27-31.
- Insect Enemies of Lantana. *Q.A.J.* 44, 1935, pp. 142-4.
- Insecticides. *Q.A.J.* 31, 1929, pp. 277-86.
- Insecticides. *Q.A.J.* 49, 1938, pp. 584-603.
- Insects and Their Relatives. *Q.A.J.* 27, 1927, pp. 139-44.
- The Lantana Leaf Bug in Queensland. *Q.A.J.* 55, 1941, pp. 270-2.
- The Leaf-Eating Ladybird. *Q.A.J.* 36, 1931, pp. 484-4.
- Pests of Bananas. *Q.A.J.* 32, 1929, pp. 255-74.
- Pests of Citrus. *Q.A.J.* 32, 1929, pp. 136-50.
- Pests of Deciduous Fruits. *Q.A.J.* 32, 1929, pp. 13-27.
- The Potato Tuber Moth. *Q.A.J.* 31, 1929, pp. 206-7.
- Potato Tuber Moth and its Control. *Q.A.J.* 44, 1935, pp. 694-6.
- Queensland Fruitfly Control. *Q.A.J.* 42, 1934, pp. 672-3.
- Red Shouldered Leaf Beetle. *Q.A.J.* 45, 1936, pp. 128-30.
- Red Spider. *Q.A.J.* 48, 1937, pp. 4-5.
- Rice Weevil in Maize. *Q.A.J.* 42, 1934, pp. 328-31.
- Root Knot Nematode and its Control. *Q.A.J.* 43, 1935, pp. 242-4.
- Some Common Vegetable Pests. *Q.A.J.* 33, 1930, pp. 311-15.
- Some Hawaiian Experiments in the Biological Control of Insect Pests. *Q.A.J.* 28, 1927, pp. 145-8.
- Some Hints Regarding Entomological Enquiries. *Q.A.J.* 25, 1926, pp. 425-6.
- Timber borers. *Q.A.J.* 39, 1933, pp. 122-7.

APPENDIX C

EXTRACT FROM THE WILL OF ROBERT VEITCH

AND AS TO the remaining one-quarter thereof for THE LIBRARY BOARD OF QUEENSLAND for the endowment in perpetuity of the publishing activities of the said Board over and above its normal activities and requirements and to be applied at the discretion of the said Board in or toward the following objects—

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- (b) From time to time the translation from foreign languages into English of manuscripts books and documents relating to Australasia and the Pacific; and
- (c) From time to time the reproduction in any form deemed suitable by the said Board of books and documents relating

to Australasia and the Pacific which have become so scarce that they are not available to students or the handling of the originals of which is deemed by the said Board to be inadvisable

AND I DIRECT that there shall be no editing whatsoever of any manuscript so reproduced but that the reproduction thereof shall conform as closely to the original as possible and shall include all faults of orthography and all alterations corrections and inter-lineations of every kind which occur in such original manuscript as it is my express intention that the reader of the reproduction of such manuscript shall thereby gain as much insight as is possible into the character mentality and style of the writer thereof PROVIDED HOWEVER that the explanation and elucidation of the text of any such manuscript by means of notes at the end of the reproduction of any such manuscript shall be permissible.