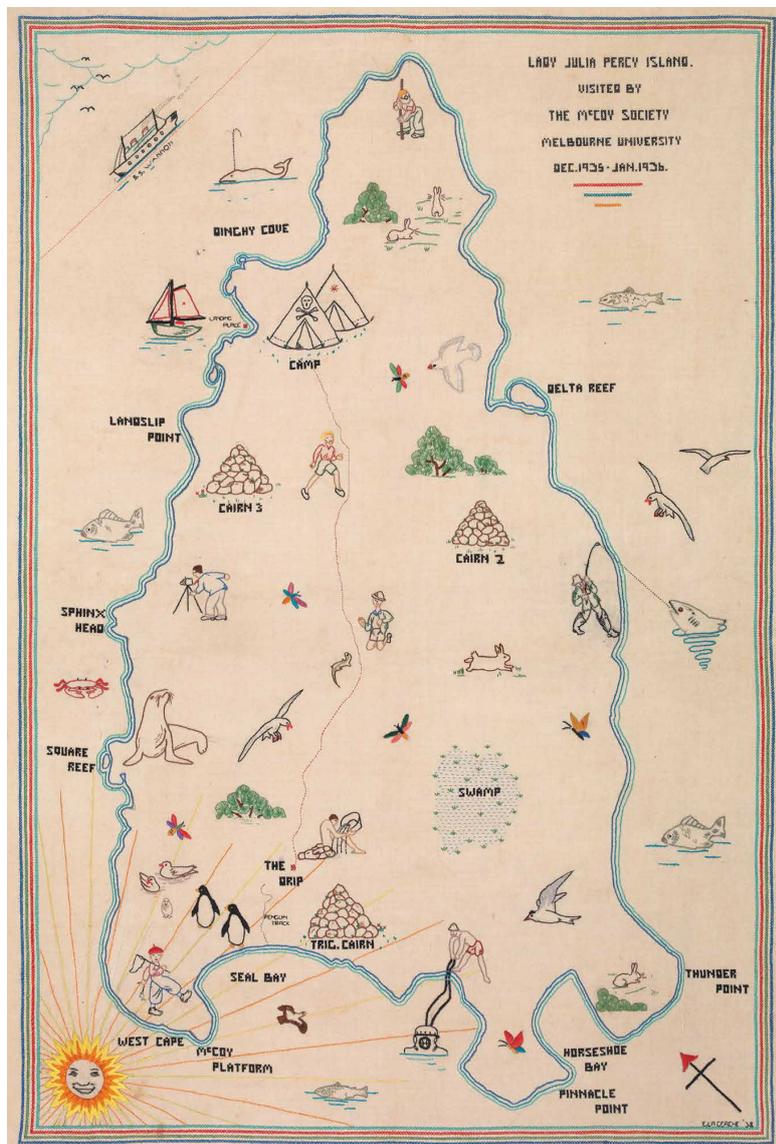


# The McCoy Society's 1936 expedition to Lady Julia Percy Island

## Specimens in the Tiegs Zoology Museum

Rohan Long



Lady Julia Percy Island (LJPI) is a small, uninhabited basaltic island, about eight kilometres off the western Victorian coast. In 1935 the island was chosen as the inaugural expedition site of the McCoy Society for Field Investigation and Research. The McCoy Society was established that year by staff and students of the Zoology Department of the University of Melbourne, with an aim to undertake multidisciplinary studies in the field. Its first president, Professor Frederic Wood Jones (pictured on page 5),<sup>1</sup> thought that the society should focus its study on island ecosystems. He reasoned that these had clear boundaries, were rarely explored, and were intrinsically interesting to scientists for their animal and plant communities.<sup>2</sup>

The society stayed on the island for six weeks in 1936, from 11 January until 20 February, with a rotating roster of scientists changing weekly. Wood Jones envisioned nothing less than a 'complete ecological survey' of the island.<sup>3</sup> The LJPI crew incorporated geologists, botanists and microbiologists, as well as zoologists specialising in marine invertebrates, insects, worms, crustaceans, spiders, fish, reptiles, birds and mammals. The team collected many specimens that were taken back to the university for study. The thoroughness of the

Previous page: Eugenie La Gerche, *Lady Julia Percy Island*, 1938, multi-coloured cotton threads embroidered on woven linen fabric, 86.0 × 56.6 cm (sight). 1999.0013, donated to the Faculty of Science by the artist, Mrs Eugenie Johnston (née La Gerche) 1999, University of Melbourne Art Collection.

Eugenie La Gerche (1914–1999) graduated with a BA from the University of Melbourne in 1938 and became an accomplished watercolourist. In 1939 she married Dr Charles Hugh Johnston (MBBS 1937), who served as medical officer on early expeditions of the McCoy Society. This embroidered map includes depictions of undergraduate students Leo Stach (top), B.A. 'Bert' Pearl (photographer, middle left), Maurice Blackburn (kneeling, middle), Hugh Johnston (fishing, middle right), J.A. (Alan) Tubb (wearing red beret, bottom left) and John Dyason (with diving helmet, bottom right).<sup>4</sup>

enterprise is illustrated by the fact that not only birds were collected and identified; even the fleas found on a Mutton-bird were documented, preserved in formalin and sent to an expert at the University of Sydney for identification to aid in further research.<sup>5</sup>

The first crew members arrived at Port Fairy on 9 January 1936, along with the bulk of the equipment needed for the expedition. By 10 January the entire first week's complement had arrived by car

and train. All were welcomed by the mayor of Port Fairy and the secretary of the Port Fairy Progress Association, and treated to a special dinner to celebrate the occasion. The following morning, after a 'rather unpleasant' two-and-a-half hours aboard the deep-sea fishing boat *Amaryllis*,<sup>6</sup> the crew dropped anchor about 100 metres offshore of the island. The final approach was made in a small dinghy, owing to sheer cliffs and a lack of suitable landing places for large vessels.



Below: Members of the McCoy Society unloading equipment on Lady Julia Percy Island, 1936. Photograph attributed to B.A. 'Bert' Pearl. 1991.0014.00020, McCoy Society for Research and Investigation, University of Melbourne Archives.

The society's first impressions of the island were very good, although apparently were 'slightly modified over time'<sup>7</sup>—perhaps due to the bleakness and isolation of the field site (see inside back cover). A camp of three tents and a marquee was erected in the northern part of the island, about 140 metres from the coastal cliffs. As there are no trees on LJPI, the only protection from the sea breeze was a low, bracken-covered ridge to the west.

The crew soon settled into a routine of scientific industry, preferring a schedule of two regular communal meals—breakfast and dinner—so they could enjoy uninterrupted work during the day. (In addition to catching fish for scientific specimens, 'many first class food fish were freely caught' from the reefs surrounding the island.<sup>8</sup>) Days were spent collecting specimens and undertaking surveys; nights were spent preserving specimens and writing up observations. Recreation was sparse on the uninhabited island, but the scientists were entertained at night by a wireless radio and, through correspondence with the local station, 3HA in Hamilton, they were able to submit requests for programming content and enjoyed the occasional 'cheerio' from the on-air presenters.<sup>9</sup> The team members



Left: Professor Frederic Wood Jones, president of the McCoy Society, on the expedition to Lady Julia Percy Island, 1936. Photograph attributed to B.A. 'Bert' Pearl. 1991.0014.00019, McCoy Society for Research and Investigation, University of Melbourne Archives.

Below: Members of the McCoy Society eating breakfast on Lady Julia Percy Island, 1936. Photograph attributed to B.A. 'Bert' Pearl. 1991.0014.00022, McCoy Society for Research and Investigation, University of Melbourne Archives.

were never short of company, receiving visitors to their island on most days of their stay. On 9 February the crew was visited by two boats, the *Bluenose* and the *Rachel Irene*, and two groups totalling 56 people disembarked, greeted the scientists and explored the island.<sup>10</sup> Over the course of the expedition more than 100 people visited, although, according to the field report, 'few showed any desire to stay behind'.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the standard scientific and camping gear, the crew lugged a movie camera capable of recording onto nitrate-based film. The short silent film, now held by the National Film and Sound Archive, depicts the scientists going about their work. Correspondence indicates that, after the return of the expedition, the film was pitched to Hoyts Cinemas in Melbourne as a potential addition to its movie program. The general manager of Hoyts politely replied that, while the film had 'some interesting matter and some fine scenic shots, it would not in its present state be suitable entertainment for theatre audiences'.<sup>12</sup>

Over the course of six weeks, the society collected four Australian Fur-seals (*Arctocephalus pusillus*), two Little Penguins (*Eudyptula minor*), five Mutton-birds, now commonly known as Short-tailed Shearwaters



**Right:** Alan Tubb with a young Little Penguin (*Eudyptula minor*), Lady Julia Percy Island, 1936. Photograph attributed to B.A. 'Bert' Pearl and inscribed verso *Canned penguin*. 1991.0014.00023, McCoy Society for Research and Investigation, University of Melbourne Archives.



**Below:** McCoy Society expedition members trying out diving equipment, Lady Julia Percy Island, 1936. Photograph attributed to B.A. 'Bert' Pearl. 1991.0014.00001, McCoy Society for Research and Investigation, University of Melbourne Archives.



(*Ardenna tenuirostris*), one Australasian Pipit (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*), one White-fronted Chat (*Epithianura albifrons*),<sup>13</sup> at least 13 skinks and five fish, and hundreds of invertebrates.<sup>14</sup> Most of the remaining animal specimens are held in Melbourne Museum. One or two plant specimens ended up in the University of Melbourne Herbarium and the National Herbarium of Victoria.<sup>15</sup> Eighteen specimens of marine invertebrates found their way into the collection of the Department of Zoology at the University of Melbourne (although only three are recorded in the register of what is now the Tiegs Zoology Museum). This has always been a working, teaching collection; information about items' provenance and history has often been neglected. Presumably the items from the expedition were added to the collection in an ad hoc manner, according to their particular relevance to the contemporary zoological curriculum.

One such specimen is a dried and mounted sea star labelled with the defunct scientific name *Astroconus australis*, now known as *Conocladus australis*. This Basket Star, as it is commonly known, was collected at 25 fathoms (45 metres) depth off West Cape—a stubby peninsula ending in a flat shore platform extending from the south-west corner of the



island. The specimen was collected by J.A. (Alan) Tubb, honorary secretary of the McCoy Society and an active member of the Zoology Department in the 1930s. Tubb was responsible for writing eight of the chapters in the final expedition report and for collecting and registering countless specimens into the teaching collection. In the chapter of the field report dealing with Echinodermata—sea urchins, sea stars and kin—zoologist L.W. (Leo) Stach noted that ‘this common deep water form was found with the arms entwined about a fragment of sponge.

Other records of the same mode of occurrence indicate that this is apparently the normal method of feeding<sup>16</sup>. Indeed, the specimen in the Tiegs Zoology Museum (above, centre) is mounted entwined around a dried piece of sponge, just as it would have been when alive.

Another sea star species from the expedition that was added to the teaching collection is a jar containing five specimens of *Patiriella calcar*, commonly known as the Cushion Sea Star. Although this item is not mentioned anywhere in the museum register, the field report notes that

this species was collected at ‘Dinghy Cove’, close to the main camp on the north of the island. Unlike most of the collection’s fluid-preserved specimens, which are housed in purpose-built, handmade glass jars, these sea stars have been preserved in an Agee brand commercial fruit-preserving jar—possibly a reflection of the demands of remote field work. A note on the jar indicates that these were used as demonstration specimens to teach zoology students about sea star tube feet (appendages used in locomotion and feeding, unique to the echinoderm family).

Two further echinoderm specimens in the Tiegs Zoology Museum collection, a sea urchin (*Goniocidaris geranioides*, see page 10) and a group of five sea stars (*Tosia australis*), though unlisted in the museum's register, were given uncharacteristically detailed labels containing taxonomic information, a precise locality, and date, and are attributed to the McCoy Society. Both specimens are loose, without a jar or container. The five *T. australis* are bound together with string, like a parcel, and stacked from largest to smallest (pictured opposite, above). Both species were collected in January 1936: the *Goniocidaris* off West Cape and the *Tosia* from the 'Bathing Pool' in Dinghy Cove.

Tubb had an interest in ascidians (immobile, filter-feeding marine invertebrates commonly known as sea squirts), as he was studying the group for a Master of Science degree at the university. He submitted his thesis at the start of 1937 in two volumes, the first an exhaustive review of the evolutionary relationships among ascidians, and the second an investigation of sessile animals' adaptations to their environment.<sup>17</sup> LJPI was one of the main collecting sites for his research, along with San Remo, Flinders and Balnarring Beach. In the collection are nine

ascidian specimens collected on LJPI by Tubb that are absent from the museum register. All are housed in small jars with glass stoppers and labelled with full scientific names, locality and the identity of their collector.

One ascidian specimen collected by Tubb on the expedition was mounted and catalogued, but not until two decades later: a colonial sea squirt *Polycitor circes*, which wasn't entered into the museum register until 1955.<sup>18</sup> In the field report, Tubb records that several colonies of this species were observed on the island's intertidal zone, sheltered by overhanging rock ledges. This small specimen is housed in a handmade, rectangular battery jar, typical of the preservation conventions of mid-20th-century natural history museums (see inside front cover).

Two uncatalogued specimens of barnacles were recently found among the crustaceans in the Tiegs Zoology Museum collection. Like the other unregistered specimens from the expedition, these were labelled with valuable information, including the identity of the collector. The specimens, of the species *Chamaesipho columna* and *Tetraclita purpurascens*, were both collected by Tubb at the West Cape site in February 1936. These species were described as two of three very common barnacles

found along the coastal rocks of most of the island. Although *T. purpurascens* is strictly a marine species, Tubb observed that the LJPI representatives were sometimes found more than 10 metres above the waterline, only receiving a spray of water at high tide.<sup>19</sup> This specimen comprises a single barnacle contained in a small, flat-bottomed glass tube enclosed by a cork stopper. This is an uncommon container for specimens in the collection and, like the use of fruit-preserving jars, may be indicative of the use of different preservation practices in the field, rather than in the laboratory.





Biscuit Sea Star (*Tosia australis*).  
Collected on Lady Julia Percy Island by  
the McCoy Society, 1936. Tiegs Zoology  
Museum, University of Melbourne.

At the close of the 1936 expedition, the McCoy Society reported that the trip was free of serious accident or injury, the food was good, morale had remained high, and much was added to scientific knowledge in many disciplines. It was an unqualified success that set the template for many future expeditions to isolated and ecologically unique sites such as the Sir Joseph Banks Group of islands (an archipelago off the South Australian coast), King Island in Bass Strait and Mount Hunter Peninsula on Wilsons Promontory.

By the 1970s, remote fieldwork had become more commonplace, interdepartmental collaborations were less of a novelty, and interest in the McCoy Society slowly waned. The society's final research expedition was in 1998, when a team made its way to tiny Pelican Island in Westernport Bay—intentionally aiming to replicate the spirit of the LJPI expedition.<sup>20</sup> Results of this field research were published, and remaining funds were donated to the library of the Royal Society of Victoria.

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The Tiegs Zoology Museum is a collection of zoological specimens, mostly collected from the late 19th to mid-20th century. Part of the School of BioSciences, the collection is used for undergraduate teaching, group visits and research. Inquiries may be addressed to Rohan Long: [rohan.long@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:rohan.long@unimelb.edu.au).

### Specimens collected on the McCoy Society's 1936 expedition to Lady Julia Percy Island, now held in the Tiegs Zoology Museum

#### phylum Nemertea

##### class Anopla

Ribbon Worm (*Lineus vittatus*)

container: small ground-glass jar with glass stopper and affixed label; white card with ink writing inside container  
label transcription: 'NEMERTINEA / CEREBRATULIDAE / LINEUS VITTATUS / LADY JULIA PERCY Is. / Refer Q&G / Voyage Astrolabe / p287. Vol.4.'<sup>21</sup>  
no accession number  
(pictured opposite)

#### phylum Mollusca

##### class Gastropoda

Sea Slug (*Aplysia* sp.)

container: small ground-glass jar with glass stopper and affixed label  
label transcription: 'MOLLUSCA / GASTROPODA Aplysia sp / Julia Percy Is. '36 / MUZD2740.'  
MUZD2740, accessioned 1990

#### phylum Arthropoda

##### subphylum Crustacea

Barnacle (*Chamaesipho columna*)

container: small ground-glass jar with glass stopper; white card with ink writing inside container in addition to affixed label

label transcription: 'CRUSTACEA / CIRRIPIEDIA / Fam.

Chthalamidae / Chamaesipho columna / (Spengler 1790)

card transcription: 'CIRREPEDIA

[sic] (Balanonorpha) / Fam.

CHTHALAMIDAE /

Chamaesipho columna (Spengler) /

West Cape. Lady Julia Percy Is. /

Feb 1936. A. Tubb.'

no accession number

Barnacle (*Tetraclita purpurascens*)

container: small flat-bottomed glass cylinder with cork stopper; white card with ink writing inside container

card transcription: 'CIRREPEDIA

(Balanomorpha) / Fam.

BALANIDAE / s.p. Balanus /

Tetraclitus purpurascens (Woods) /

West Cape. Lady Julia Percy Is. /

Feb 1936. A. Tubb.'

no accession number

Barnacle (*Scalpellum scalpellum*)

container: small ground-glass jar with glass stopper; white paper with ink writing folded inside



Sea urchin (*Goniocidaris geranioides turbaria*).  
Collected on Lady Julia Percy Island by  
the McCoy Society, 1936. Tiegs Zoology  
Museum, University of Melbourne.

container in addition to affixed  
label  
label transcription: 'CRUSTACEA /  
CIRRIPEDIA / Scalpellum  
vulgare'

paper transcription: 'Arthropoda /  
class Crustacea / subclass  
Entomostraca / order Cirripedia /  
suborder Pedunculata / family  
Polyaspidae / Scalpellum vulgare'  
no accession number

**phylum Echinodermata**  
**subphylum Asterozoa**

Basket Star (*Conocladus australis*)  
container: dried specimen wrapped  
around dried sponge fragment and  
mounted on block of black-painted  
wood; label hand-written in white  
ink on wooden block  
label transcription: 'Astroconus  
australis / MUZD2267'  
MUZD2267  
(pictured on page 7)

Cushion Sea Star (*Patiriella calcar*)  
container: Agee brand glass fruit-  
preserving jar with rubber ring seal  
and metal clamp on lid; affixed  
label  
label transcription:  
'ECHINODERMATA /  
ASTEROIDEA / Asteriella  
(Patiriella) calcar / Lady J. Percy  
Is. / Tube feet'  
no accession number

Biscuit Sea Star (*Tosia australis*)  
five dried specimens stacked in order  
of size and secured with string;  
card label with black ink tied to the  
stack

label transcription: 'ASTEROIDEA /  
*Tosia australis* var. / australogorum /  
Bathing Pool, Dinghy Cove, /  
Lady Julia Percy Isld. McCoy Soc.  
1/36'  
no accession number  
(pictured on page 9)

**subphylum Echinozoa**

Sea urchin (*Goniocidaris geranioides  
turbaria*)  
container: two dried specimens in  
cardboard tray lined with cotton  
wool; card with ink writing inside  
container  
label transcription: 'Goniocidaris  
geranioides / var. turbaria  
(Lamarck, 1816) / 25 fathoms  
off West Cape, / Lady Julia Percy  
Island. / McCoy Soc., 1/36'  
no accession number  
(pictured above)

**phylum Chordata**  
**subphylum Tunicata**

Colonial sea squirt (*Aplidium* sp.)  
container: small ground-glass jar with  
glass stopper and affixed label  
label transcription:  
'UROCHORDATA /  
*Amaroucium albidum* / Lady

Julia Percy Is. / McCoy Society /  
Coll + named A J Tubb'  
no accession number

Colonial sea squirt (*Aplidium  
constrictum*)

container: small ground-glass jar  
with glass stopper and affixed label  
label transcription:  
'UROCHORDATA /  
*Amaroucium constrictum* / Lady  
Julia Percy Is. McCoy Society /  
Coll + named A J Tubb'  
no accession number

Colonial sea squirt (*Aplidium exile*)

container: small ground-glass jar  
with glass stopper and affixed label  
label transcription:  
'UROCHORDATA /  
*Amaroucium exile* / Lady Julia  
Percy Is. McCoy Society / Coll +  
named A J Tubb'  
no accession number

Colonial sea squirt (*Aplidium  
globosum*)

container: small ground-glass jar  
with glass stopper and affixed label  
label transcription:  
'UROCHORDATA /  
*Amaroucium globosum* / Lady  
Julia Percy Is. McCoy Society /  
Coll + named A J Tubb'  
no accession number

Colonial sea squirt (*Aplidium variable*)  
container: small ground-glass jar with glass stopper and affixed label  
label transcription:  
'UROCHORDATA /  
Amaroucium variable / Lady  
Julia Percy Is. McCoy Society /  
Coll + named A J Tubb'  
no accession number

Orange-tipped Sea Squirt (*Corella eumyota*)  
container: small ground-glass jar with glass stopper and affixed label  
label transcription:  
'UROCHORDATA / Corella  
eumyota / Lady Julia Percy Is.  
McCoy Society / Coll + named  
A J Tubb'  
no accession number

Sea Squirt (*Distaplia* sp.)  
container: small ground-glass jar with glass stopper and affixed label  
label transcription:  
'UROCHORDATA / Fam  
Clavelinidae / Distaplia murrayi /  
Lady Julia Percy Is. McCoy  
Society / On kelp roots 6  
fathoms / Coll, named, Classif.  
A J Tubb'  
no accession number

Colonial sea squirt (*Polycitor circes*)  
container: small, rectangular, hand-blown glass jar with black-painted top; black label hand-written in white ink, pasted to front of jar  
label transcription: 'Polycitor / circes /  
MUZD2445'  
MUZD2445, mounted and  
accessioned 1955  
(pictured on inside front cover)

Colonial sea squirt (*Polycitor circes*)  
container: small ground-glass jar with glass stopper and affixed label  
label transcription:  
'UROCHORDATA, Polycitor  
circes, Julia Percy Is. McCoy Society,  
Coll, named, classif. A J Tubb'  
no accession number

- 1 Frederic Wood Jones (1879–1954), then chair of anatomy at the University of Melbourne, was also a naturalist and anthropologist. (Monica MacCallum, 'Jones, Frederic Wood (1879–1954)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 9, Melbourne University Press, 1983.)
- 2 David H. Ashton, 'The history of the McCoy Society', *Victorian Naturalist*, vol. 118, part 6, 2001, pp. 321–7.
- 3 Frederic Wood Jones, 'The McCoy Society's expedition to Lady Julia Percy Island', *Nature*, no. 138, 28 November 1936, pp. 906–8.
- 4 'Pearls for breakfast: Lucky scientist: McCoy expedition', *Argus*, 30 December 1936, p. 8; 'Scientists arrive', *Port Lincoln Times*, 8 January 1937, p. 6; 'Taffetas and lace for bride', *Argus*, 7 November 1939, p. 5; Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, catalogue sheet and object file 1999.0013.
- 5 Kenneth J. Clinton to A.J. Tubb, 6 November 1936. Box 1, 1991.0014, University of

- Melbourne, School of Botany, McCoy Society for Research and Investigation, University of Melbourne Archives (UMA).
- 6 A.J. Tubb, 'McCoy Society for Field Investigation and Research. Report on expedition to Lady Julia Percy Is. January 12th. – February 20th. 1936'. Box 1, 1991.0014, UMA. Tubb's name is sometimes given as J.A. Tubb, sometimes as A.J. Tubb.
  - 7 Tubb, 'McCoy Society ... Report'.
  - 8 Tubb, 'McCoy Society ... Report'.
  - 9 R.A. Fitto to Maurice Blackburn, 21 January 1936. Box 1, 1991.0014, UMA.
  - 10 Tubb, 'McCoy Society ... Report'.
  - 11 Tubb, 'McCoy Society ... Report'.
  - 12 G. Leoman to Dr G.L. Wood, 24 November 1936. Box 1, 1991.0014, UMA.
  - 13 McCoy Society game permit report, 23 March 1936, A.J. Tubb. Box 1, 1991.0014, UMA.
  - 14 *Atlas of living Australia*, [ala.org.au](http://ala.org.au), viewed 20 July 2017.
  - 15 Jo Birch, personal communication to Rohan Long, 20 July 2017.
  - 16 L.W. Stach, in Frederic Wood Jones et al., 'Lady Julia Percy Island: 1935 expedition', Reports of the McCoy Society for Field Investigation and Research, reprinted from *The Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria*, vol. 49, Melbourne: H.J. Green, Government Printer, 1937, pp. 327–437.
  - 17 J.A. Tubb, 'Ascidiacea: Adaptation to a sedentary environment', MSc thesis, University of Melbourne, 1937.
  - 18 'Register of specimens in the museum of the Biological School', University of Melbourne, 1893. Tieg's Zoology Museum, School of BioSciences, University of Melbourne.
  - 19 Tubb, in Wood Jones et al., 'Lady Julia Percy Island: 1935 expedition'.
  - 20 Ashton, 'The history of the McCoy Society'.
  - 21 This is a reference to [J.R.C. Quoy and P. Gaimard], *Voyage de découvertes de l'Astrolabe: Exécuté par ordre du Roi, pendant les années 1826–1827–1828–1829... Tome Quatrième*, Paris: J. Tastu, 1833, p. 287 (<https://biodiversitylibrary.org/page/2064627>).