

## Henry Tryon (1856 - 1943)

HENRY TRYON, (1856-1943), scientist, was born on 20 December 1856 at Buckfastleigh, Devon, England, son of Henry Curling Tryon, gentleman, and his wife Elizabeth Anne, née Obree. Educated locally at Sherwood College, Henry later abandoned medical studies at University College, London, to pursue his interest in natural science. In Sweden, New Zealand (while managing a grazing property for his father) and from 1882 in the North Queensland sugar-lands, he collected plant and insect specimens, many of which he donated to the Queensland Museum in 1882-83.

Appointed honorary clerical and scientific assistant at the museum in 1882, Tryon was officially employed there from 4 September 1883 and promoted to assistant curator in 1885. On 22 December he married English-born Henrietta Powys Foy with Anglican rites at St John's Church, Brisbane. From 1887 he also undertook scientific work for the Department of Agriculture, improving the quality of pleuro-pneumonia vaccines and investigating the fruit-fly problem on the Darling Downs. His work for a government board of inquiry into mange-affected stock in 1887-88, and for a New South Wales royal commission into the destruction of rabbits in 1888-89, was widely acclaimed. These secondments created friction between the museum and department which was exacerbated by Tryon's 'disrespectful and antagonistic' attitude to the museum curator; the dissension ended in 1893 when Tryon was retrenched.

He became government entomologist in August 1894 and vegetable pathologist in 1901. His expedition to New Guinea in 1895-96 acquired sixty-six new varieties of sugar-cane, of which Badila was to prosper. The author of several papers on prickly pear after 1899, Tryon was appointed in 1911 to a government board of advice headed by [Professor B. D. Steele](#). In 1912-14 Tryon and [Professor T. H. Johnston](#), who were dubbed 'the prickly pair', travelled abroad to investigate remedies and imported cochineal insects which succeeded against tree pear, but Tryon's efforts to rear cactoblastis failed. He described bacterial wilt of the potato, introduced lantana-fly (*Agromyza* [now *Ophiomyia*] *lantanae*) and identified and named buffalo-fly (*Lyperosia* [now *Haematobia irritans*] *exigua*) in 1912.

A naturalist of the old school, Tryon had wide-ranging scientific interests. Linnaeus, rather than [Darwin](#), was his model: he loved precise, practical work in taxonomy, anatomy and the biological control of pests, but showed little interest in natural philosophy. He combined keen eyesight and physical vigour with meticulousness and intellect; he was equally at home in the field where he adopted an easy loping gait, in the laboratory, and in meetings of scientific associations where he was 'the terror of inexperienced or ill-prepared speakers'. Tall, pale and of medium build, he could be irascible and over-critical in both personal and public relationships. Conflict often resulted.

Founding secretary of the Royal Society of Queensland (1883-88) and its representative at meetings to form the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science in 1886, Tryon resigned from the society in 1891 after clashing with its council; with the exception of two stormy years, he remained outside the society until 1920; he was given life membership in 1929 in recognition of his scientific contribution. In his career he wrote at least 150 reports and papers. His association with various field naturalists' clubs included the [Gould](#) League of Bird Lovers of which he was a president.

Retiring from the public service in 1925, he continued as a 'temporary' to 1929. Tryon then lived in some poverty as a quasi-pensioner of the State. Survived by a daughter, he died in Brisbane Hospital on 15 November 1943 and was cremated. The Queensland fruit-fly *Dacus tryoni* was named after him.

### Select Bibliography

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**Author:** G. N. Logan

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