

Frank Wall Pioneer Snakeman of India

Frank Wall was born in Colombo in 1869. His father, George Wall, worked there and was responsible for initiating the study of natural history on the island. F. Wall studied medicine in London and joined the Indian Medical Service in 1893, serving until 1925. He became a member of the BNHS and went on to become a leading figure in the study of snakes of the Indian Empire.

During his tenure in the Indian Medical Service, Wall was stationed throughout the country in India, and also in Ceylon and Burma. He collected and studied snakes wherever he went during the three decades he lived in the Subcontinent. He preferred to be a field worker and chose to spend his time in the wild, rather than being a museum scientist. Yet he did not leave any museum unvisited, and

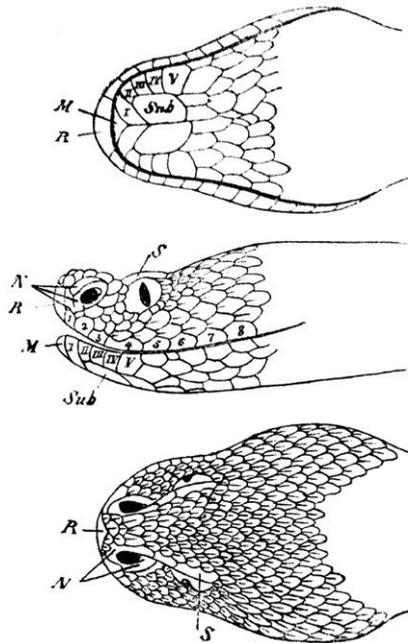


Illustration of *Hydrophis phipsoni* from
THE POISONOUS TERRESTRIAL SNAKES
by M.F. Wall

refurbished their collections with his research. For several years, Wall was the chief authority on Indian snakes.

Wall was a prolific writer who precisely combined both scientific and popular writing in the subject of his interest. He was a regular contributor to the *JBNHS*, and published a series of papers, pamphlets and books on the common Indian snakes, with valuable notes on their natural history, illustrated with fine coloured plates. Besides the *JBNHS*, he also wrote in several other Indian journals. His works include 'A Hand List of Snakes of the Indian Empire' in five parts, from 1923 to 1925, and 'A Popular Treatise on the Common Indian Snakes', in 28 parts, from 1906 to 1920, all of these published in the *Society's Journal*. Wall also brought out a book, *OPHIDIA TAPROBANICA OR THE SNAKES OF CEYLON*, published in 1921, a remarkable collection of references and research material.

Wall's specimens are distributed among the British Museum and many museums in India, especially in the Natural History Section of Prince of Wales Museum of Western India, Mumbai. On retiring to England, Wall donated his holotypes (the single specimen upon which the description of a new species is based in the original publication) and collection of skulls to the British Museum, and gave up any further work on the subject. Wall died in Bournemouth in 1950. His contributions changed the face of research in herpetology. ■

"Phipson took a special interest in snakes. He once removed a cobra out of his blanket and patted its coils to make it sit up and expand its hood before visitors. The cobra, probably startled, turned and struck at Phipson and buried its fangs in one of his fingers. Phipson displayed his usual coolness in this dreadful situation. His remedy was drastic. He went to the Society's small laboratory and applied some cyanide of potassium to the wound. Except for some swelling of the finger he fortunately escaped unharmed." †

... Quoted from: THE SONG OF THE MAGPIE ROBIN by Zafar Futehally

† The Editors do not recommend this remedy.