

Dr. Arthur Francis George Kerr: Botanist and Physician a life well-lived.

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I was honoured and pleased but distinctly worried when I was asked by the Provost to give this year's Trinity Discourse. For me the choice of subject matter was obvious as I have been interested in Arthur Francis George Kerr for a number of years. Although he is well known in S.E. Asia, more specifically Thailand, he is, I fear, more or less unknown in his Alma Mater. My worry stemmed not from the person concerned but rather from the venue - which is not designed to show slides or normally equipped to do so. I thank Claire Tracey in the Provost's Office for her patience and work to install a suitable system.

For those working on the botany of S.E. Asia the life and work of A.F.G. Kerr has attracted interest for a number of years: there are currently 3 papers published on his life. The most comprehensive, by Jacobs (1962), runs to 66 pages in length and was compiled in cooperation with Kerr's surviving children. One might believe, therefore, that there'd be very little new to say; but I have found that Kerr is the gift that just keeps on giving and Parnell et al. (2015) and Parnell (2019) presented new information focussing primarily on his contributions in Botany and other, sometimes cognate, areas. Up until the Provost's request I had not investigated many details of his personal life, believing them to have been covered by Jacobs (1962): how wrong I was: it is certainly clear that some of the details of Kerr's life given in Jacobs (1962) require amendment and I welcome the opportunity to try to do so today as well as to present you with new information on a life well-lived.

Kerr's father, Elais William Kerr was the son of William Patterson Kerr, a Clergyman and Rector of Ballynure in Co. Antrim. Elias had graduated in 1872 from TCD as an M.B and Mast. Surg. and seemingly hoped that his children would at least follow him to TCD.

His mother, Fanny Brady, hailed from Falcarragh, a small village on the north coast of Co. Donegal, probably within but certainly adjacent to Tullaghobegley parish.

Elais and Fanny married in the parish of Tullaghobegley on the 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1875. Their marriage certificate (Fig. 1) indicates that Elias was a medical practitioner, resident at that time 77 km south in Kinloch, Co. Leitrim to which location they moved after their marriage.

SCHEDULE G.] Registrar's District of <i>Decemfranchy</i>								
1875. Marriage solemnized at <i>the Parish Church</i> in the Parish of <i>Tullaghobegly</i> in the Co. <i>Dougal</i>								
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
25	<i>3<sup>rd</sup></i> <i>February</i> <i>1875</i>	<i>Elias William Kerr</i> <i>Fanny Brady</i>	<i>full</i> <i>full</i>	<i>Bachelor</i> <i>Spinster</i>	<i>Medical</i> <i>—</i>	<i>Kilboct Colstrum</i> <i>Faleenagh</i>	<i>William Patterson, Kerr.</i> <i>George Fersen Brady</i>	<i>Clergyman</i> <i>Medical</i>
Married in the <i>Parish Church</i> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the <i>Church of Ireland</i> by <i>license</i> by me,								
This Marriage was solemnized between us, <i>Elias William Kerr</i> } in the Presence of us, <i>G. F. Brady</i> } <i>John W. Spenser</i> } <i>W. Stewart Griffith</i> } <i>White</i>								

Figure 1. Copy of A.F.G. Kerr's parent's marriage certificate.

Jacobs (1962) reports that A.F.G. Kerr, the second of his parent's children, was born at the village of Kinlough on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February 1877. Unfortunately, these data are not confirmed by his birth certificate that indicates the date as the 27<sup>th</sup> of February and the place of birth as Edenvalle (AKA Edenvella) a location about 1 km north-east of Kinlough (Fig. 2).

Superintendent Registrar's District <i>Ballyshannon</i>					Registrar's District <i>Timlough</i>					
BIRTHS Registered in the District of <i>Timlough</i> in the Union of <i>Ballyshannon</i>										
in the County of <i>Lutins</i>										
No.	Date and Place of Birth.	Name (if any)	Sex.	Name and Surname and Dwelling-place of Father.	Name and Surname and Maiden Surname of Mother.	Rank or Profession of Father.	Signature, Qualification, and Residence of Informant.	When Registered.	Signature of Registrar.	Regional Name, if added after Registration of Birth, and Date.
<i>269</i>	<i>Twenty Seventh</i> <i>February</i> <i>1877</i> <i>Edenvalle</i>	<i>Arthur Francis George</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Elias William Kerr</i> <i>Edenvalle</i>	<i>Fanny</i> <i>Kerr</i> <i>formerly</i> <i>Brady</i>	<i>Gentleman</i>	<i>Elias W. Kerr</i> <i>Father</i> <i>Edenvalle</i>	<i>Twenty</i> <i>Ninth</i> <i>March</i> <i>1877</i>	<i>Stephen</i> <i>Whittier</i> <i>Registrar.</i>	

Figure 2. Copy of A.F.G. Kerr's birth certificate.

A.F.G. Kerr's baptismal certificate does little to help clear up this discrepancy (Fig. 3). It indicates that Kerr was baptized, by his grandfather W.P. Kerr, on April 6<sup>th</sup> 1877 in Rossinver Parish at Mullough Church. Unfortunately, the baptismal certificate gives his date of birth as February 7<sup>th</sup>. It is also noticeable from the baptismal certificate that by this time the family had moved again, being now resident in Mullinalleck about 1 km north-east of Edenvella.

[Page 2 ]

BAPTISMS administered in the Church of *Millough* in the Parish  
of *Clonsilla* in the Diocese of *Kildare*, in the Year 1876

When Baptized	When Born	Child's Christian Name	Parents' Name		Abode	Quality, Trade, or Profession	By whom the Ceremony was Performed
			Christian	Surname			
1877 April 6 No. 14	Feb 7	Arthur Francis George	Elias & Fanny	Kerr	Millin -aleck	Physician	W.P. Kerr D.D.

Figure 3. Copy of A.F.G. Kerr's baptismal certificate.

It is also worth noting that the delay between the dates of birth and baptism, that might seem unusual by modern standards, was apparently, not unusual in 19<sup>th</sup>C. Ireland.

Kerr was the oldest of 6 brothers with one older Sister. The family soon moved to Dorset in the south of England and Kerr went to school in one of the oldest established school's there: Dorchester Grammar School (first established in 1567).

Kerr's university career commences with his matriculation (admittance) to Trinity College on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1894 (Parnell, 2015) at the age of 17 (Fig. 4 and TCD MUN V 24/6 folio 41v), where he was recorded as a Protestant belonging to the Church of Ireland and as a Pensioner ('Pens'). The Medical and Dental Student's register (General Council of Medical Education and Registration of the United Kingdom, 1896) show that he also registered on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1894 in the School of Medicine. There appears to be no evidence that he was in receipt of a scholarship, as is reported by Jacobs (1962).

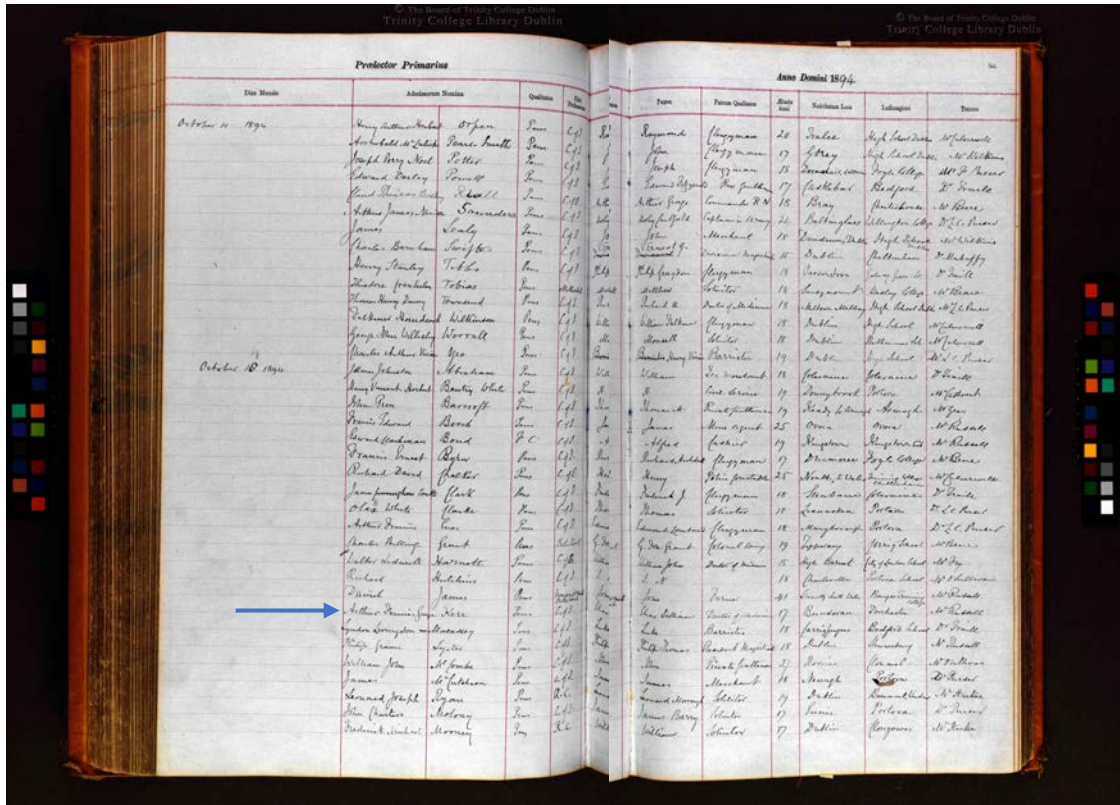


Figure 4. Photograph of the entry record for A.F.G. Kerr into TCD. Courtesy of TCD Library (MUN V 23 7 324). Kerr's entry is the eighth from the foot of the page and is arrowed.

By 1894 the statutory length of the medical course had increased to 5 years (from a minimum of 45 months) on foot of the General Medical Council's report of 1890 (Youngson, 1989). Incidentally, the extension to 5 years did not sit well with the authorities in Trinity College Dublin as expressed in The Lancet of 1891 (Youngson, 1989) who notes that 'the 5-year curriculum proposal "stank particularly in the nostrils of the authorities of Dublin University, because of the extraordinary proposal to spend six months of the last year in learning medicine from a practitioner who had forgotten all he knew forty or fifty years before' (Lancet 1891, 1, p. 1222)." Kerr, would therefore have been expected to graduate around 1899/1900.

Kerr then graduated as a Senior Moderator (B.A. Mod. (Honors) in the Winter of 1897 (Fig. 5) on the 17<sup>th</sup> of December (Aisling Lockhart, Pers. Comm.) - in modern parlance this equates to a very high quality First Class degree. Though Fig. 5 shows no indication that he received a Gold Medal the Medical Directory of 1942 indicates that he did receive one: which confirms the comment of Jacobs (1962) and reflects McDowell and Webb (1982) statement that all Senior Moderators were given Gold Medals.

1897.

## SENIOR MODERATORS.

<p><i>Mathematics.</i> Pilkington, Francis John. White, Harry Fredk. Hill de Vere. Cotter, Joseph Rogerson.</p> <p><i>Classics.</i> Porter, Andrew Marshall. Boxwell, William. Walsh, Ernst. †</p> <p><i>Ethics and Logics.</i> †Meredith, James Creed. Studdert-Kennedy, William.</p>	<p><i>Experimental Science.</i> †Cotter, Joseph Rogerson.</p> <p><i>Natural Science.</i> Kerr, Arthur Francis George. Holmes, Gordon Morgan.</p> <p><i>History and Political Science.</i> †Shanks, Walter. O'Brien, James.</p> <p><i>Modern Literature.</i> Evans, Arthur William. Rowan, Edward William.</p>
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## JUNIOR MODERATORS.

<p><i>Classics.</i> Orr, John.</p> <p><i>Ethics and Logics.</i> Alcock, Daniel Robert.</p>	<p><i>Experimental Science.</i> Pilkington, Francis John.</p> <p><i>History and Political Science.</i> Mussen, Alfred. Walsh, John Edward. Franks, James Gordon.</p>
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## SUPPLEMENTAL GOLD MEDALLISTS.

<p><i>History and Political Science.</i> Magill, Andrew Philip.</p>	<p><i>Modern Literature.</i> Brown, Robert. Adams, William Augustus.</p>
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## SUPPLEMENTAL SILVER MEDALLIST.

*Classics.*  
Fitz Gibbon, Maurice.

## RESPONDENTS.

<p><i>January.</i> [None.]</p> <p><i>April.</i> Merrick, Herbert Alex. Stewart.</p> <p><i>June.</i> Cooper, Arthur James. Ellison, Charles Stuart. Hyde, Dermot Owen. Pringle, Harold.</p>	<p><i>December.</i> Davison, John Clarke. Thompson, Herbert Marshall. Berryman, William John. Siye, Robert. James, Daniel. Stronge, Herbert Cecil.</p>
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† Large Gold Medal.

† See List of Scholars.

Figure 5. Copy of the graduation record for A.F.G. Kerr's first graduation (arrowed).

Surprisingly, towards the end of his medical education, and before he had completed the course Kerr travelled on the *Hesperus* on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1899 to Melbourne (D.A. Simpson, pers. comm). The *Hesperus* was formerly a clipper [[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hesperus\\_\(clipper\\_ship\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hesperus_(clipper_ship))] and would have been a fast ship (Fig. 6).



Figure 6. SS. Hesperus (ca. 1885). State Library of Victoria.

Indeed, the Adelaide Registrar notes that the Hesperus made some 'splendid passages' the fastest being 71 days from London to Melbourne

[<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/63751723> ]. Kerr's passage is therefore likely to have been swift despite the fact that by the time of his voyage the Hesperis had been transformed into a sail training ship (being converted in 1890)

[[https://www.clydeships.co.uk/view.php?year\\_built=&builder=&ref=21863](https://www.clydeships.co.uk/view.php?year_built=&builder=&ref=21863)] whose purpose was to train sea cadets under the 'Brassey Scheme'

[<https://aim25.com/cats/126/18049.htm> ]. Though designed to hold a maximum of about 30 cadets

[<https://www.thebluejackets.co.uk/research/organisation/BrasseyScheme>] the manifest of his voyage shows that it also accommodated 25 passengers: Kerr, who travelled as a student, therefore likely arrived in Melbourne in mid-March 1899.

So far, my colleague David Simpson (Pers. com.) has not been able to confirm that Kerr returned to England and thence Ireland on the same ship. If he did do so he must have left almost immediately as the Hesperus was sold as a sail training ship on 25/7/1899 to the Imperial Russian Government

[[https://www.clydeships.co.uk/view.php?year\\_built=&builder=&ref=21863](https://www.clydeships.co.uk/view.php?year_built=&builder=&ref=21863)].

In fact, we have so far been unable to determine when Kerr made his return voyage from Australia to England and thence Ireland. It was not uncommon for students of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> C to take some time off to do something else or to raise money to pay for their course (Kelly, 2017) a practise that likely continued into Kerr's time (Harriet Wheelock, pers. comm.) and Jacobs (1962) indicates that Kerr's family were poor. In Kerr's case, however, it seems somewhat unlikely that this can have been the sole motivation for his voyage as he must have spent a minimum of ca. 110 and up to ca. 140 days in travel not earning any money. Therefore, it may be that a combination of reasons led Kerr to intermit his study with a trip Australia: perhaps he just wanted to travel or perhaps he needed a break from the course - Youngson (1989) indicates, that 'professional teaching was often dull, and many lectures - were not worth hearing.' Whatever the proximate cause, Kerr's stay in Australia may well have been months long.

It appears likely that Kerr spent an entire year absent from his formal medical studies as he only graduated as a Doctor (B.A.O., B.Ch., M.B.) in the Spring of 1901 (Parnell, 2015) on 19<sup>th</sup> February (Aisling Lockhart, Pers. Comm.) 6 years after commencing his course.

Rapidly thereafter, he commenced work as a Medical Doctor being recorded on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1901 in the 1901 census as a physician presumably assisting his father in St. Peters, Dorchester (Public Records Office RG13/2001). At that time ca. 50% of graduating Irish doctors emigrated, mostly to England, Wales or Scotland or to work in the Army or Navy, only very few venturing elsewhere (Jones, 2010). Kerr was one of the small latter band and his destination of choice (Thailand) appears unique.

Jacobs (1962) indicates that Kerr obtained his job in Thailand via H.H. Dixon, Professor of Botany in TCD - Kerr writes to Dixon on 18/1/1931 '*and then for getting me the job out here. It seems a long time ago now that you told me of Jobson's letter, just about 30 years ago.*'.. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any more information on this process, yet.

Thailand is a large country (Fig. 7), about the same area (ca. 500,000 km<sup>2</sup>) as metropolitan France with a similar population (ca. 70 million), with forests (including plantations) covering ca. 30% of the land surface but with intact forest cover much less. When Kerr arrived in Thailand the population was probably about 7 million (rising to 8 million in 1911 and 16 million in 1943 (Anon, 1974) just after Kerr's death), the country's political borders enclosed a slightly larger area and almost the whole country was covered in natural mostly intact forest of various types.



Figure 7. Map of Thailand from the Encyclopædia Britannica.

Kerr's diaries indicate that he was working in Thailand as a Doctor by 20<sup>th</sup> June 1901 (RBG Kew Archives Ker/1/1), not in 1902 as suggested by Jacobs (1962). The journey from Southampton to Bangkok via Suez is about 10,000 nautical miles with a minimum transit time of 1,000 hours or 42 days [<http://ports.com/sea-route/port-of-london,united-kingdom/bangkok-modern-terminal,thailand/>]. It is evident, therefore, that Kerr must have left Britain soon after the census.

Initially Kerr acted as assistant to Dr. Hugh Campbell Highet (Jacobs, 1962) who was physician to the British Legation at Bangkok (Anon, 1929). Kerr's diary (RBG Kew Archives Ker/1/1) indicates that he consulted Dr. Highet about a medical case on 20<sup>th</sup> June 1901 thereby indicating that initially Kerr was initially resident in Bangkok. That would make good sense as Dr. Highet's wife was Mary Lilius Judd whose sister, Daisy Muriel Judd, reputedly first met Kerr on the boat trip out to Bangkok. She and Kerr married in August 1903 around the time that he was appointed medical officer at Chiangmai (Jacobs, 1962) (Fig. 8).

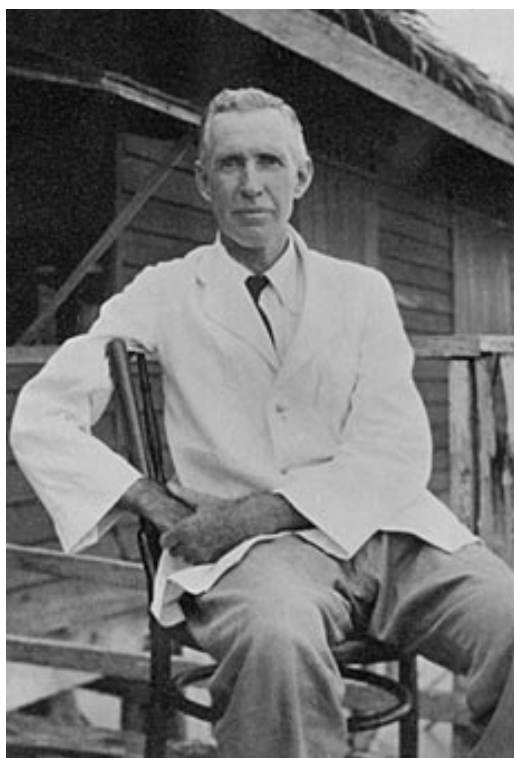


Figure 8. A.F.G. Kerr at Chiang Mai (Jacobs, 1962), Kerr Archive, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

At that time, there was no road or railway connection between Bangkok and Chiang Mai: so the journey between them took between 4 weeks (Jacobs, 1962) and a more likely 42 days (Subrahmanyam, 2013). The physical remoteness of Chiang Mai was matched by its remoteness to central governmental control from Bangkok. Although Chiang Mai had become a province of Thailand in 1899, the penultimate King of Lanna and 8<sup>th</sup> ruler of Chiang Mai, Prince Intawaroros Suriyawong, was still, at least nominally, in charge until 1909 when he became ill (Anon, 2023a, b, c). It was also infrastructure-light at that time as there was no piped water, no indoor sanitation, no gas and no electricity. So, cooking used fire-wood; paraffin, candles and probably acetylene providing lighting.

Whilst at Chiang Mai, Kerr became known as a fine and caring Doctor but found time to develop an interest in Orchids. He began to sketch those that he had found and grown at home. And he sent some to the Botanic Gardens in Trinity College, eventually gifting



them over 200 species and making their Thai orchid collection arguably the finest in Europe. He also trained himself as a surveyor and photographer.

Kerr went on leave back to Europe in 1908 (Jacobs, 1962) and graduated again from TCD in the Summer/Autumn of 1908 (Parnell, 2012) with a M.D' At the same time he appears to have donated a small collection of 10 skulls to Trinity College, where they remain in the Anatomy Museum: Parnell (2019) provides further details. He combined his TCD graduation with a visit to Kew (Jacobs quotes a letter of 12<sup>th</sup> September 1908 for correspondence with Prain) and his graduation with a Diploma in Tropical Medicine from the University of Cambridge (Kirkpatrick Index, Medical Directory, 1942). At Kew he met R.A. Rolfe, Kew's Orchidologist, who realised Kerr's potential and who persuaded the Keeper, Dr. O. Stapf and the Director Sir David Prain, to support Kerr's work. Returning to Thailand Kerr started collecting in earnest on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1908. To facilitate access to suitable habitats he built a hut at 650m on the nearby mountain of Doi Chiang Dao (2,174m) and continued collecting. He sent material to Kew where W.G. Craib, later Professor of Botany in Aberdeen, identified them. In 1909 the first new species was described *Oberonia umbraticola* Rolfe - interestingly this had been sent to Kew from the Trinity College Botanic Garden, then at Ballsbridge, by H.H. Dixon. Hardly spectacular, and only separable from a similar Himalayan species when 'its excessively minute flowers are boiled up and compared side to side' (Anon, 1909), it was a specialist find and is now a synonym of a more widely spread species (Fig. 9. *Oberonia pachyrachis* Richb.f. ex Hook.f.).



Figure 9. *Oberonia pachyrachis* Richb.f. ex Hook.f. eFlora of India [<https://efloraofindia.com/2012/12/28/oberonia-pachyrachis/>]

His collecting trips were always on a substantial scale, a scale that only increased as time went on, and a scale that demanded considerable logistical support of various types. For example, Kerr's diaries show that he made extensive use of ponies to transport material on his early expeditions (RBG Kew Archives Ker/1/1 & Ker/1/2); this did not always work out well as the ponies were often unreliable. One of many potential extracts from his diaries dated 14<sup>th</sup> April 1904 (RBG Kew Archives Ker/1/1) states that 'I dressed before 5 a.m. Six of the ponies have disappeared ... 5.30 a.m. no sign of ponies'. Why then did Kerr use ponies at all? I suspect that a major reason was cost as he used ponies at a time when his collecting expeditions were second to his main profession as a medical doctor and he was therefore unlikely to have had income specifically designed to cover the cost of an expedition.

In 1911 he travelled south to Si Racha, beyond Bangkok, where he met and befriended Mrs. Emily Collins (AKA D.J. Collins), who was interested in natural history and whom he persuaded to collect plants. Though Mrs Collins was one of the first people that Kerr persuaded to collect plants for him (ca. 2,800 numbers): there were many others - at least 17 who collected about 16,000 numbers in total or perhaps ca. 64,000 herbarium sheets.

In June 1913 Kerr again took leave and visited Dublin (where he met Dixon and Joly) and Kew returning to Thailand in early 1914 just before the commencement of the First World War. Kerr appears to have been intensely patriotic, always standing up whenever God Save the King was played on the wireless, but as he was absolutely tone deaf he could not tell one melody from another. In his latter years, he apparently had to ask if he should get to his feet when something patriotic was played on the wireless. On 13<sup>th</sup> August 1915 he enrolled in the Royal Army Medical Corps, was appointed a Captain and served at the front on France. Later deemed unfit for service due a chest complaint, he went to live for a period of time with his family in the South of France.

Leaving his family in Europe he travelled back to the far east and was back in Bangkok on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1919. He resumed plant collecting on 30<sup>th</sup> March and on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1919, two weeks after his wife and second daughter came to join him, his salary as a doctor was agreed. But, it was a difficult time for him as his position as a physician had been taken by a Thai doctor and because a member of the Royal family, Prince Rangat Prayurasakdi, ordered him to go to Chiang Mai, which push he resisted. On top of all of this his father died in June 1920.

On February 6<sup>th</sup> 1920 a royal patron, Prince Bidyalongkorn, Vice Minister in charge of the Ministry of Commerce and Communication (Fig. 10), asked him to write a report on the formation of a botanical section. He agreed to become the first Government Botanist on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1920 at a salary of between 1,500 to 1,880 Ticals (AKA Bhat), equivalent to £125 and £150 (rising through a change in the fixed exchange rate in 1923 to £150-£180). But it was not until 1<sup>st</sup> September 1920 that he started work as government botanist finally signing his contract on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1920, obviously after

he had started work. Some of the difficulty posed by Kerr's writing may be gathered from the entry in his diary relating to some of these events (Fig. 11).

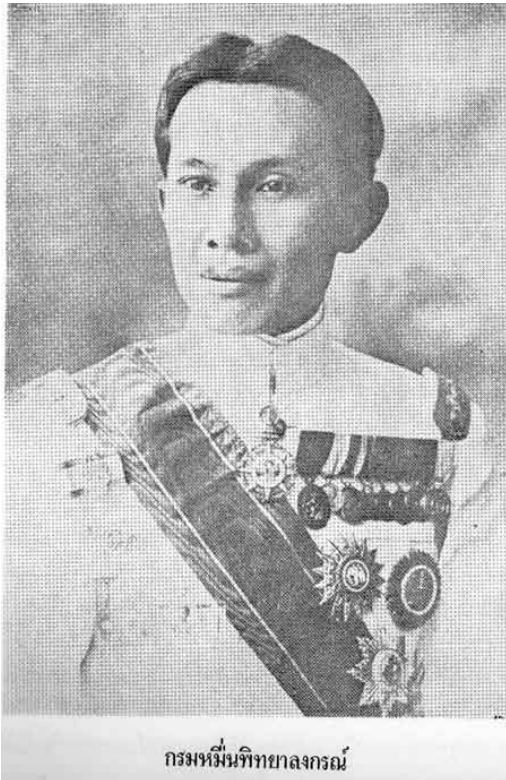


Figure 10. Prince Bidyalongkorn = Prince Rajani Chamcharas, Vice Minister, Ministry of Commerce and Communication. Image from Wikipedia.

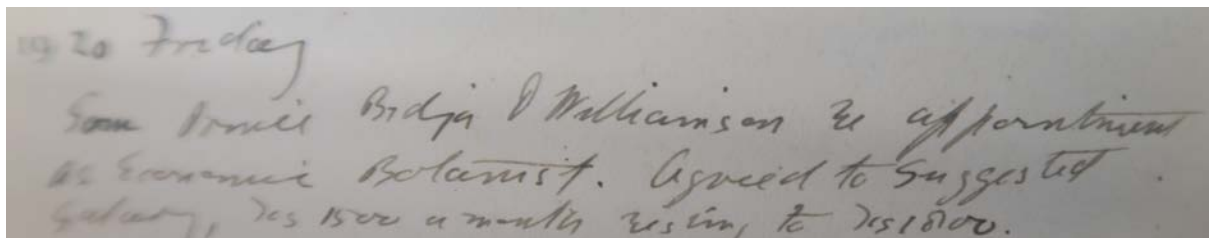


Figure 11. Entry in Kerr's Diary for 16<sup>th</sup> July 1920 agreeing to his job and salary. Kerr archive, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew.

Kerr was an avid and exceptionally able photographer. There are probably at least 3,000 photographs and negatives and ca. 4,200 black and white prints of his scattered through various collections, with the vast majority being in K. TCD contains a small number of 2' square glass lantern slides and film negatives: examples of the former are shown in Figs. 12 & 21Top).

The slide of *Eichornia crassipes* (Mart.) Solms (Fig. 12) is typical of many of Kerr's photographs and slides. It is combines historical, sociological and biological interest showing the early spread of this highly invasive weed in Thailand at the start of last century as well as some of the standard boats of the time.



Figure 12. *Eichhornia crassipes* (Mart.)Solms. Herbarium Trinity College Dublin Archive.

In order to begin to understand the flora of what was an almost completely unexplored country botanically Kerr proposed to undertake a collecting trip of between 2-3 months, usually during the dry season in January and February, every year. Kerr used a variety of conveyance for his collecting trips: his diaries and photograph albums indicating that he used boats, ponies, elephants, bullock carts, motor cars and trains (Parnell, 2019).

When he became the Government Botanist things changed. His salary was substantial for that time and is indicative of the scale of resources made available to him as Government Botanist. These resources enabled his later expeditions to be of much greater scale than previously, with very large numbers of carriers (AKA porters) and elephants being employed and ponies being replaced by elephants, for example. For example, 31 carriers were employed on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1924 (Ker/1/23) along with guides and path cutters. Nevertheless, as Parnell (2019) indicates both ponies and elephants (Fig. 13) posed their own though different, problems.



Figure 13. Photograph of elephants being prepared for a collecting trip: Kerr Archives Royal Botanic Gardens Kew.

An entry from 21<sup>st</sup> December 1928 (Ker/1/26) laments the weakness and relatively high cost of the elephants saying 'they barely took four mens loads one elephant costs five men'. So, although the scale of the expeditions had changed some of the difficulties Kerr encountered earlier had not as Kerr's later diaries also often lament the late arrival of the carriers delaying his departure (Parnell, 2019). Kerr was allowed to base himself in Chiang Mai and began his first trip on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1921.

Just immediately before completion of his first trip, on 13<sup>th</sup> October 1921, Kerr's beloved wife died, probably of malaria and was buried in Chiang Mai (Fig. 14). This left Kerr, who had just signed a contract for the job of his dreams with his daughters who he could not easily care for: and who may well not have wanted to stay in Thailand following their Mother's death. Currently, it is unclear if Kerr's eldest daughter (Eileen Mary born 10<sup>th</sup> November 1904) had joined the family in Thailand by this time. It is possible that only the three youngest were there (Barbara Muriel born 21<sup>st</sup> September 1913, Ann Frances born 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1920 and Kathleen Patricia Brady born 25<sup>th</sup> July 1921).



Figure 14. Photograph by Tanawat Chaowasku of Daisy Muriel Kerr's grave in Chiang Mai.

One of his brothers, F.H.W. Kerr a clergyman, happened to be visiting him at that time. Almost immediately, they both left Thailand on 28<sup>th</sup> October with his daughters for England where he left them in the care of their Aunt in Hayes, Kent. Very soon afterwards Kerr returned to Thailand. Subsequently and tragically, his youngest daughter, Kathleen, died aged 4 on 27<sup>th</sup> June 1926 from brain cancer in Hayes. As Kathleen was born on July 25<sup>th</sup> 1921 she must have been only 4 months old when the sea voyage carrying her from Thailand to England was undertaken.

Returning shortly thereafter to Thailand Kerr recommenced his collecting activities. By superimposing his known collecting localities on a present-day map of the rivers of Thailand (Fig. 15) it becomes clear just how important boats were to Kerr in his travels (Fig. 16) as many of the locations are close to rivers though there are relatively few surviving photographs of the boats he must have used.

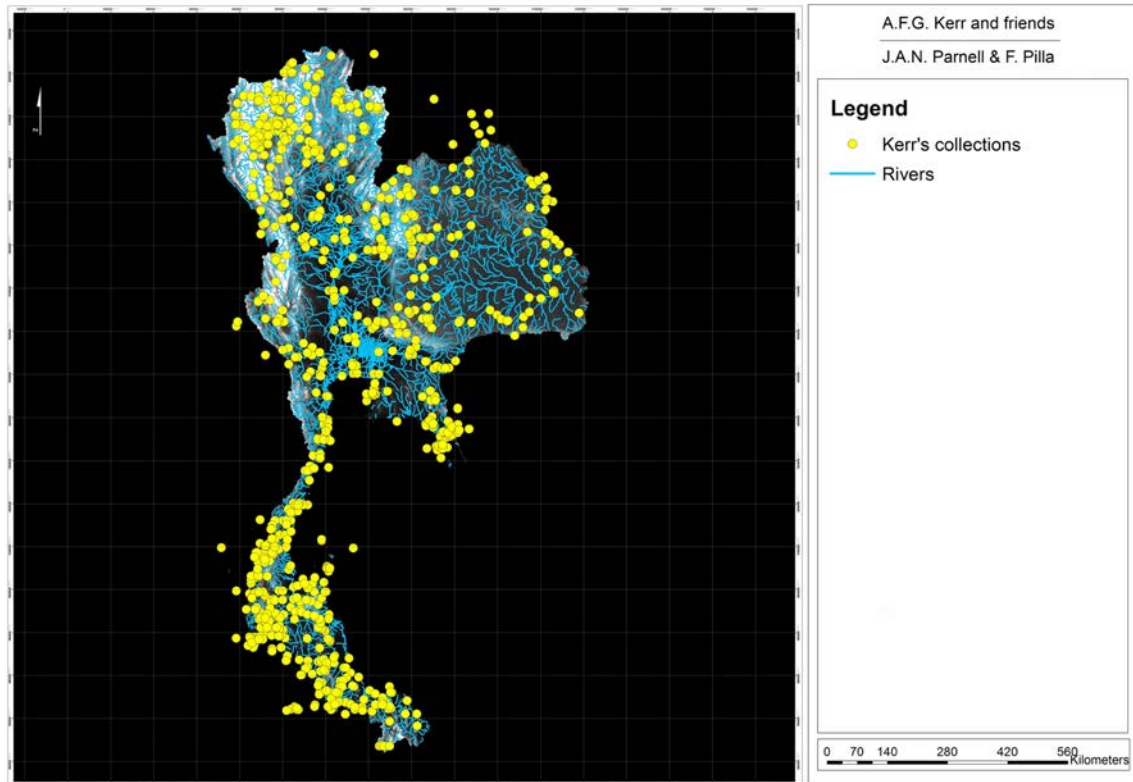


Figure 15. Map of Kerr's collecting localities superimposed on the rivers of Thailand.



Figure 16. A photograph of a boat from the Kerr archive, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

As with most explorers of the time, it is also now clear that Kerr did not travel light or by himself in the field (Fig. 17).



Figure 17. A.F.G. Kerr in his tent on field-work. Photograph: Kerr archive, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew.

Road and railway development was minimal for most of Kerr's residency in Thailand. Due to the efforts of His Royal Highness Prince Purachatra Jayakara railway development preceded road development cutting the transit time between Chang Mai and Bangkok from about 42 days to slightly about 26 hours (Parnell, 2019) and Kerr's dairies confirm that he used the railways increasingly frequently (Fig. 18).



Figure. 18. Photograph of a train crash: Kerr Archive, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew.



Despite a range of conveyance being eventually available to Kerr it is clear that for much of his time in Thailand he travelled on foot, often covering huge distances (in one trip walking 1,800km (Jacobs, 1962) (Fig. 19). As Parnell *et al.* (2015) indicated Kerr was 'a very active, indeed almost unbelievably active, field botanist'.



Figure 19. Photograph of one of Kerr's collecting trips: Kerr archive, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew.

So, although the scale of the expeditions had changed some of the difficulties Kerr encountered earlier had not as Kerr's later diaries also often lament the late arrival of the carriers delaying his departure.

In fact, road development remained minimal for almost all of Kerr's stay in Thailand (Fig. 20), indeed no public money was spent on roads until after 1932 (Wilson, 1983 as cited in Subrahmanyam, 2013).



Figure 20. Photographs of cars being used on one of Kerr's collecting trip: Kerr archive, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew.

Kerr was clearly an assiduous collector of a variety of plant material and together with his friends was responsible for ca. 41,646 individual vascular plant collections (A huge total, made more remarkable as the material was usually collected in triplicate, quadruplicate or often quintuplicate: a minimum total of ca. 150,000 herbarium sheets flowing from Kerr and his friends activity seems reasonable, though still astonishing. Kerr's material formed the basis for the first, ultimately failed, attempt to comprehensively describe the flora of Thailand (*Flora Siamensis Enumeratio*).

Table 1. Numbers of plants collected by Kerr and by his friends.

Type	Estimated number of collections
Mosses	>594
Orchids	2,273
Other vascular plants	23,162
Vascular plants collected by his friends	16,211
Fungi	16

Kerr's collecting localities, as held in the Thai Biogeography Group's database, are shown in Fig. 21 Top, whilst the lower element of that figure shows the distribution of all collection localities for all samples held in the Thai Biogeography groups database in 2015. As can be seen the gaps present in the collecting activity of Kerr still persist, though reduced, today.

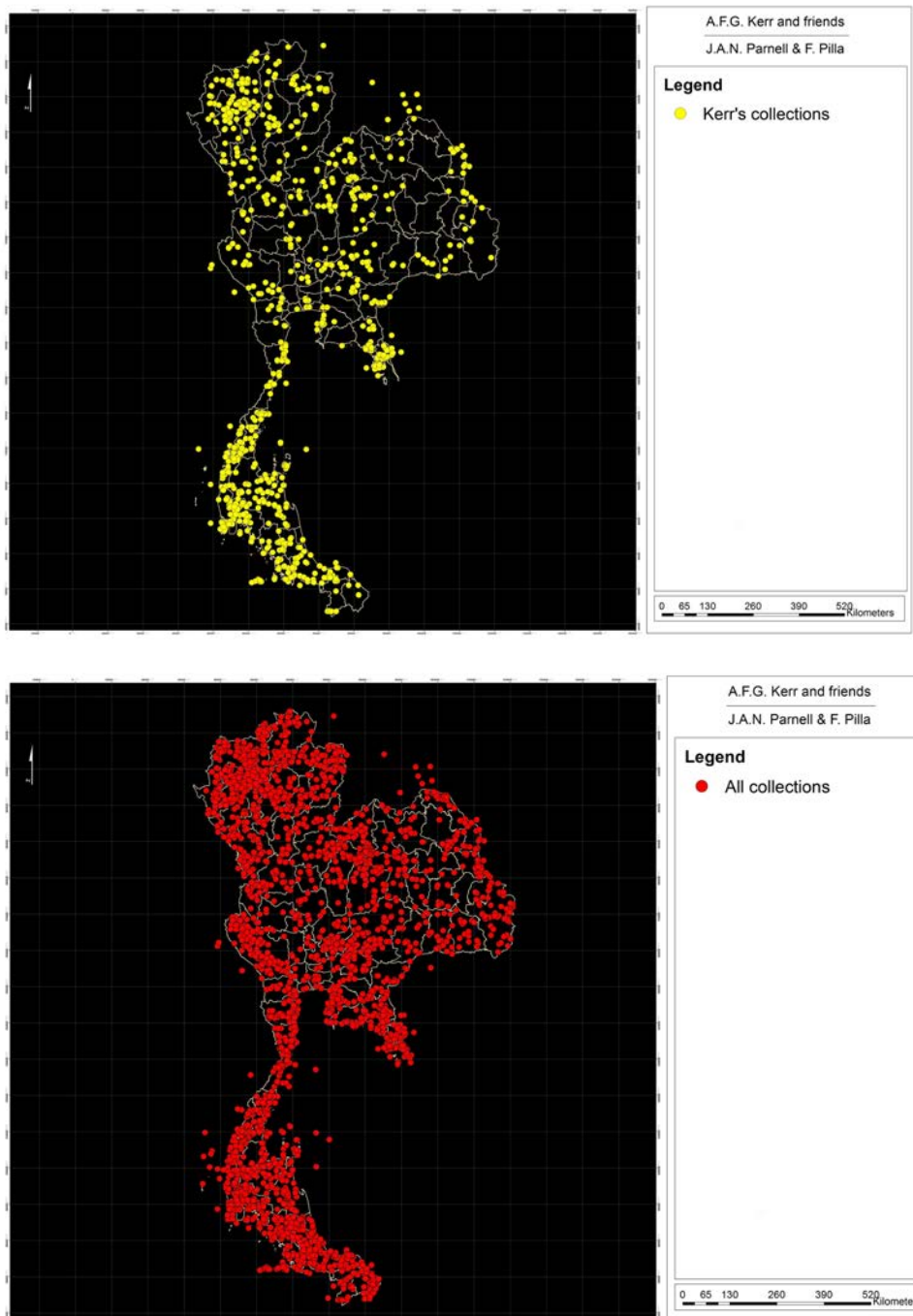


Figure 21. Top: Map of Thailand showing Kerr's collecting localities. Lower: showing collecting localities held in the Thai Biogeography groups database in 2015 (ca. 43,400 records).

### Photography

As is evident from the above images Kerr was an avid and exceptionally able photographer. There are probably at least 3,000 photographs and negatives and ca. 4,200 black and white prints of his scattered through various collections, with the vast majority being in K. TCD contains a small number of 2" square glass lantern slides: examples are shown in Figs. 12 & 22 Top).

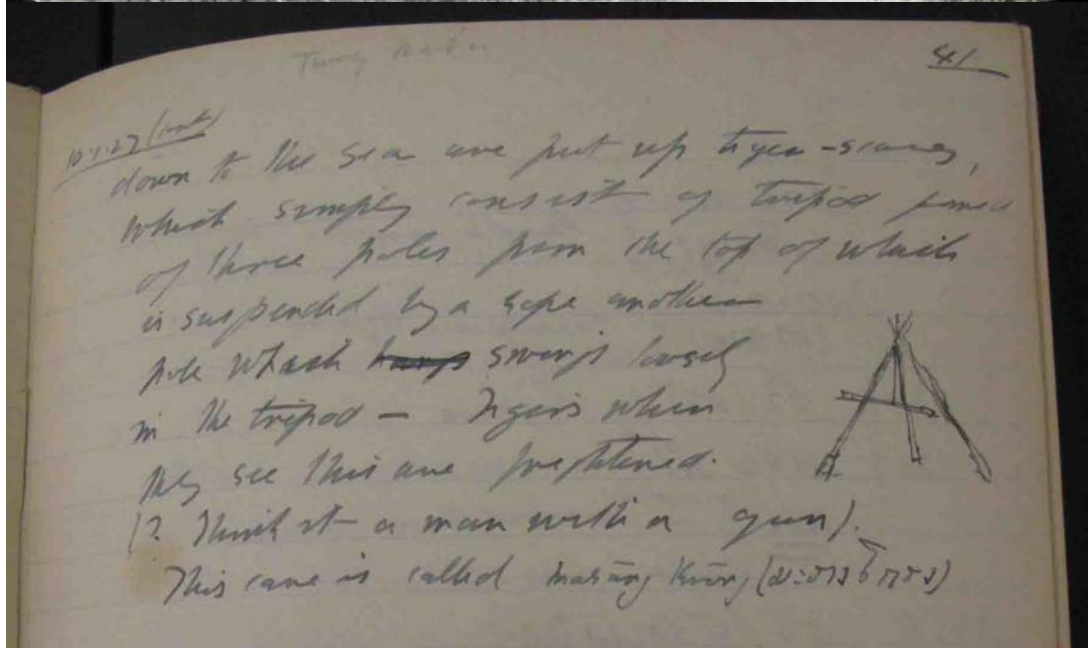


Figure 22. Top: photograph of Scare Tiger: Herbarium archive, Trinity College Dublin;  
 Lower: diary entry Kerr archive, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew.

The Photograph in Fig. 22 is labelled as a 'Scare Tiger'. It is difficult to see how this apparatus functioned from the photograph, but nevertheless it is of historic and social interest. By chance, whilst I was browsing through Kerr's written archives in K I came across one of Kerr's diaries with the following entry (Fig. 22 lower) that explains exactly how the 'Scare Tiger' was intended to work. As can be seen from this extract Kerr's writing was often almost illegible. The entry, though, is typical of much of the information contained in Kerr's diaries spanning both Botany and sociology.

Furthermore, it is clear that Kerr was deeply interested in Thai culture as he also recorded folklore and travellers' tales in his diaries. For example, the photograph in Fig. 23 and an associated diary entry indicate an interest in some of the Northern Hilltribes and their dress.

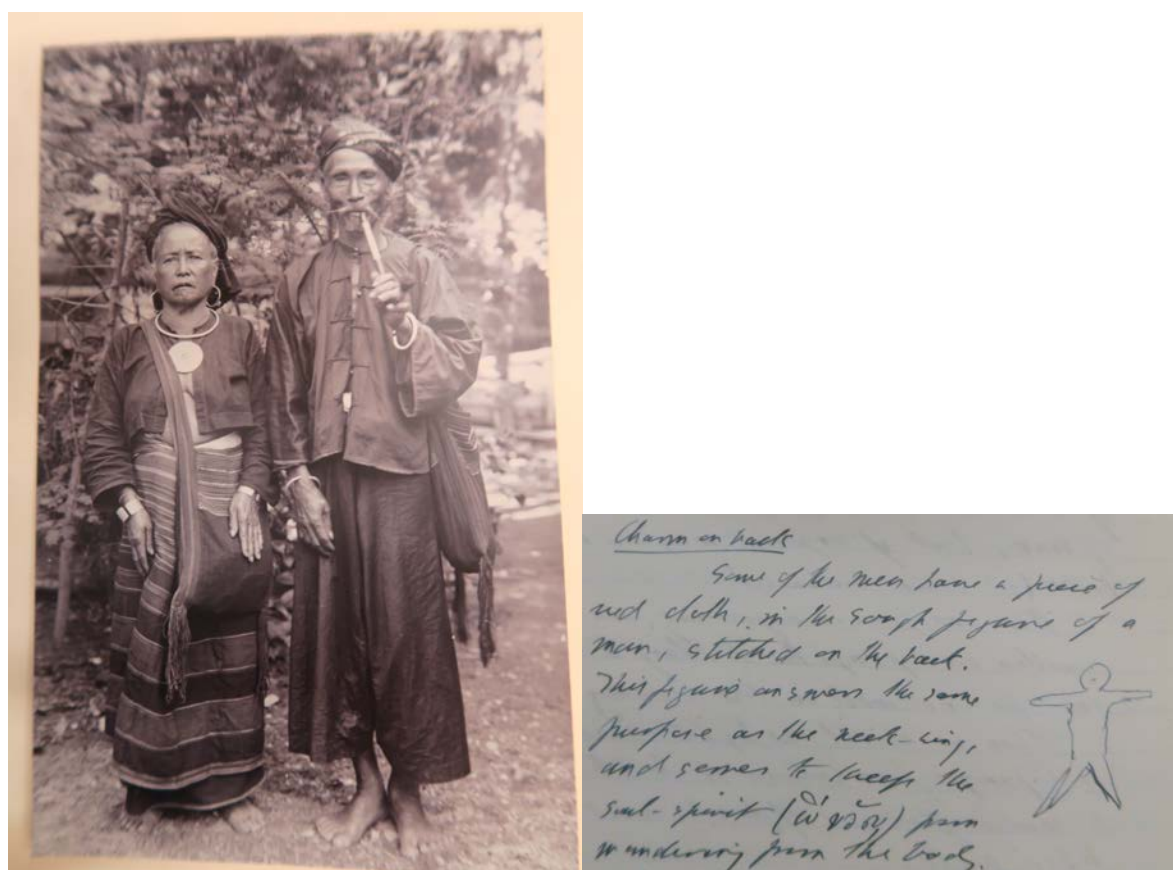


Figure 23. Left: Photograph of two hilltribe people: Right a relevant diary entry. Both from the Kerr archive, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew.

And Kerr (RBG Kew Archives Ker/1/23 in the Kerr archive, Kew) outlines those rules of conduct that he can recall (he recalled 6 out of a total of 8) as follows: 'If a man wishes to be prosperous & happy there are eight rules he must obey according to the soothsayers. They are as far as I can remember as follows:

1. Wash the face and hands on rising in the morning; & before speaking to anyone
2. Eat facing the East
3. Defecate facing the West

- 4.
5. Do not go to bed in same clothes as worn during the day
6. Wife and husband must not sleep together in Wan Pra on a birthday
7. Wife on rising in morning must not cross any part of the husband's body and must not make a noise to awaken him.
8. '

Elsewhere, for example, Kerr's diaries contain plan drawings of various temple complexes and commentary on the frequency of road traffic (bullock carts) and their loads. Some materials are of general archaeological interest. For example Kerr's early photograph of the newly restored World Heritage temple complex at Khao Panom Rung (Fig. 24 Left) would have helped with the historically based restoration that was undertaken, if it had been available.



Figure 24. Left: Black and White photograph: Kerr archive, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew: Right: Colour photograph of Khao Panom Rung: <https://trip101.com/article/phanom-rung-historical-park-largest-khmer-temple-complex-in-thailand>

Therefore, his notebooks provide a rich source of information for anyone interested in the history and development of Thailand as well, of course, in its Botany.

### Maps

As Parnell *et al.* (2015) and Parnell (2019) pointed out Kerr was able to construct detailed, accurate and precise maps of his expeditions enabled by his keeping of incredibly detailed notes in his diary. For example, at one point he states: 'At 7.15 our direction S by E. At 7.35 crossed a small stream running W. At 7.53 our direction turned E round a small ravine then southwards again, by 8pm S.S.E. Here we met some

pines, though we have been ascending gradually ~~we are not~~ the height can not be very great. At 8.20 our direction was E by S. At 8.30 reached highest point...' (Kerr archive, Royal Botanic gardens Kew - Ker/1/1). As Parnell (2019) states 'to record, consistently, this level of detail in his diaries, whilst collecting plant material, drawing maps, taking photographs whilst moving at pace often on foot through difficult terrain is to me, and I suspect to all field botanists, an astonishing, if not awe-inspiring, feat'. His diary field sketch map, the final published map and a current image of the island of Kaw Tao, are shown in Fig. 25: it is clear that his maps are surprisingly accurate.

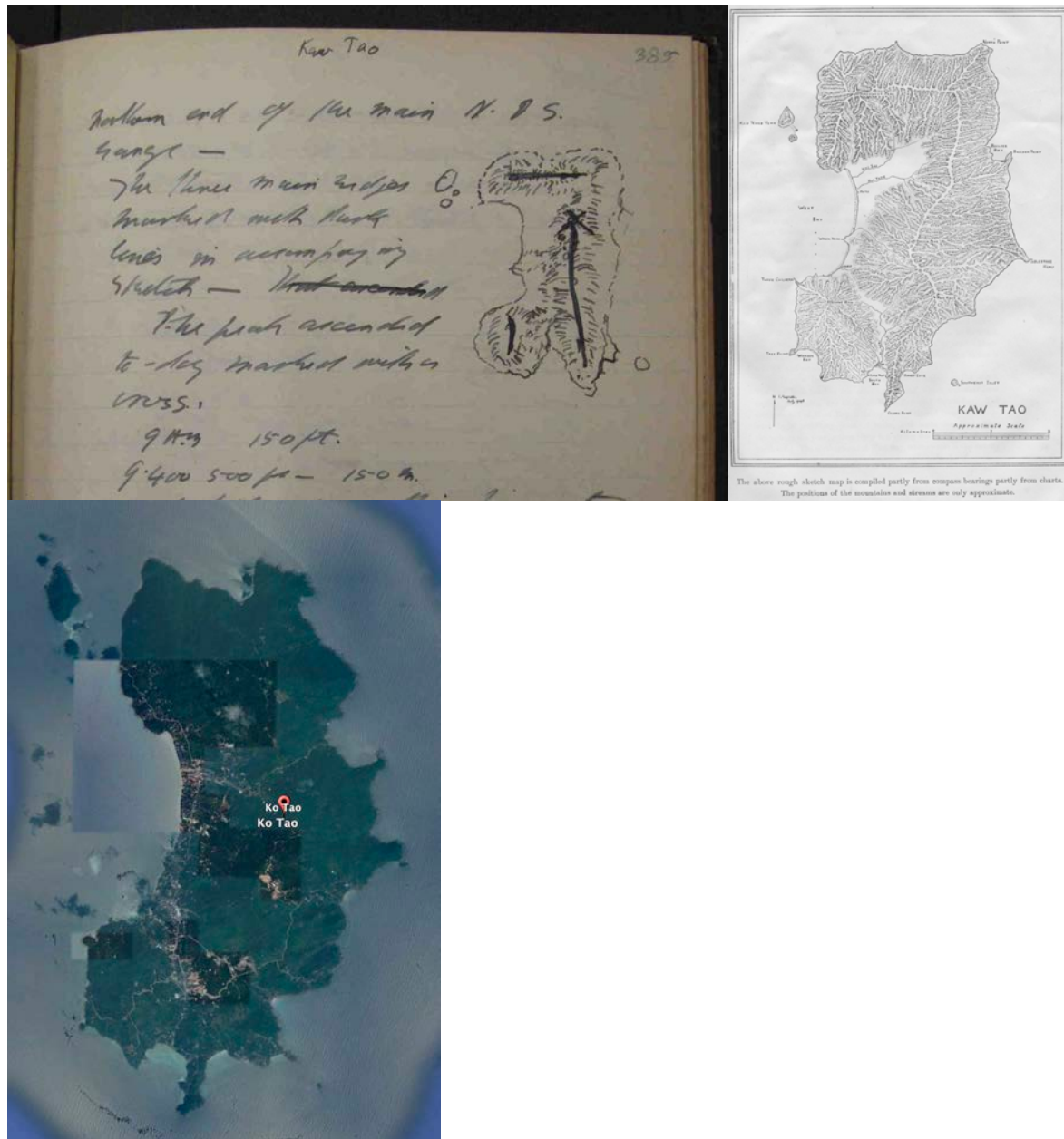


Figure 25. Left: Photograph of an entry by A.F.G. Kerr relating to his trip to Kaw Tao. Kerr archive, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew (KER/1/28); Right: Map of Khao Tao from Kerr (1928). Foot: Image of Kao Tao from Google Earth (downloaded 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2023).

Kerr was by now very well known in Thailand. For example, he acted as Lord of the Ploughing, a ceremony currently presided over by the King (Fig. 26). In March 1932 Kerr was promoted to Director General of the Department of Agricultural Research following its transfer from the Ministry of Lands and Agriculture to the Ministry of Commerce and Communications (Jacobs, 1962). But, the same year Kerr resigned from his job and left Thailand for good (Jacobs, 1962). Apparently, King Rama VII, the last absolute monarch of Thailand and the first constitutional monarch remarked 'that he was sorry to hear that this outstanding foreigner resigned from his job' (Triboun, pers. comm). I suspect, though admittedly without firm evidence, that the constitutional upheaval in Thailand at that time may have firmed-up his resolution to leave.



Figure 26. Left: A.F.G. Kerr dressed as Phraya Raek Na (Lord of Ploughing) for Raek Nah Khwan (Jacobs, 1962): Right a contemporary image of the same ceremony (courtesy of Professor P. Chantaranonthai)

On returning to England Kerr settled into life with his three remaining daughters in Hayes, visiting Kew a few days every week. His friend and collaborator Professor Craib, from Aberdeen University, then fell ill and died: this left the Flora Siamensis Enumeratio without its editor. Kerr then took over this role producing parts 3 & 4 of Volume 2. He is also credited with authorship of Volume 3 (parts 1 & 2) despite them being published a decade after his death (1951 & 1954). The final part of Volume 3, published in 1962 (Barnett, 1962), also relied heavily on Kerr's notes and collections - little new material having been collected subsequent to his departure from Thailand.



Kerr death certificate (Fig. 27) shows that he passed away in Hayes, Kent on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1942 not the 21<sup>st</sup> January 1942 as Jacobs (1962) states, due to heart trouble and asthma and bronchitis.

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF DEATH

GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number 4648864-1

REGISTRATION DISTRICT BROMLEY  
1942 DEATH in the Sub-district of Bromley in the County of Kent

No.	When and where died	Name and surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of death	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
357	22nd January 1942 Street House Hayes, Kent	Arthur Francis George Kerr	Male	66 years	Medical Practitioner M.D.	1. a myocardial degeneration b. Chronic Bronchitis c. Asthma certified by Sidney J. Proctor M.R.C.S.	Edwin W. Kerr Daughter Present at the death Street House Hayes	22nd Jan 1942 H.M. Gussone Registrar	H.M. Gussone Registrar

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Deaths in the District above mentioned.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 26th day of February 2013

DVD 455925

CAUTION: THERE ARE OFFENCES RELATING TO FALSIFYING OR ALTERING A CERTIFICATE AND USING OR POSSESSING A FALSE CERTIFICATE ©CROWN COPYRIGHT  
WARNING: A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY.

See note overleaf

GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE  
ENGLAND

Figure 27. Certified copy of A.F.G. Kerr's death certificate.

His epitaph is framed by various things. He is known in Thailand as the Father of Thai Botany and the Father of Economic Botany; 143 plant species have been named in his honour: perhaps most touching of all is his grave that carries the wonderfully appropriate and touching inscription 'Botanist in Thailand': truly his was a life well-lived.

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A. Sathapattayanon, P. Sukkharak, G. Staples, J. Strijk, S. Suddee, S. Sungkaew, K. Tangjitman, A. Teerwatananon, J. Tovanonont, T. Ung, A. Trias Blasi, W.J.J.O. de Wilde, P. Wilkin, & T. Yahara for providing the data used for the distribution maps, to F. Pilla for producing the maps and again to D.A. Simpson for sharing information relating to some early events in Kerr's life and for commenting on an early draft of this discourse.

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