

Heinrich Zollinger (1818 – 1859)

The Zollinger family name has been prominent in the Zürich highlands of Switzerland for many centuries. Heinrich Zollinger, the son of Heinrich Zollinger, a merchant, and Dorothea, née Spahm, was born on 22 March 1818 in Feuerthalen, Switzerland. He trained as a schoolteacher in Küsnacht and in 1837 began studying botany at the University of Geneva under Augustin and Alphonse Pyramus Candolle, but unable to finance his studies, he returned to teaching at Herzogenbuchee (where he met his future wife) and at Horgen.

In 1841 the Dutch government appointed him an official plant collector in Batavia (Jakarta) on the island of Java in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), where he stayed with plantation owner Abraham Meyer and spent several years exploring and collecting plants on small government-financed scientific expeditions. From 1843 at the Buitenzorg (Bogor) Botanic Gardens, 30 km south of Jakarta, he worked on his collections from east and west Java. In 1846 he travelled to the islands of Bali and Lombok, and in 1847 he visited Sulawesi (Celebes), Flores and Sumbawa, where he led an expedition to the still smoking Mount Tombora to study the geology of the largest volcanic eruption in recorded history, and its effects on the local ecosystem. The first person to reach the caldera after the 1815 eruption, he calculated the altitude to be around 9,000' (2,743 m) above sea level, whereas before the eruption it had been 13,000' (nearly 4,000 m). Some vegetation had re-established, including a few trees on the lower slopes. Later that year he was recommended for the position of curator of the Buitenzorg gardens, but a Dutch botanist got the job. Disappointed, Zollinger returned to Switzerland and became director of the teachers' training college in Küsnacht.

In about 1850 he married Eliza Christine Moser (born 1835), but got itchy feet again and returned to Java in 1855 with his wife and two children, offering to collect rare plant specimens for collectors willing to subscribe to his expedition. Fortunately, in order to offset potential loss to his subscribers should he die in the process, he insured his life high enough to refund their investments. In Java once more, he also became deputy-director of a Dutch East Indies company planning to establish coconut plantations at Rogodjampi on the east coast. He seemed to have had time for both, as he continued to send plants back to Switzerland and Holland. Suffering long-term effects of malaria and advised to rest in the Bromo mountains, he died at Kandangan on 19 May 1859. He was 41 years old.

He had collected about 4,000 specimens, mainly vascular plants, but also algae, bryophytes and lichens. More than twenty species bear the epithet *zollingerii* in his honour. As well as his botanical work, he published articles on geology, meteorology and molluscs. Because Heinrich Zollinger did all his collecting in the Dutch East Indies, spoke fluent Dutch and was employed for a considerable time by the Dutch East Indies colonial government, he has usually been considered a Dutch citizen. There is a plaque dedicated to him at the Zürich Botanical Gardens, but his name is recognised today by only a few specialist botanists.

The species *Clavaria zollingeri* was described in 1846 by French mycologist Joseph-Henri Léveillé. He named it after Heinrich Zollinger, who researched the genus *Clavaria* and collected the type specimen in Java.



Clavaria zollingeri

Clavaria (Latin *clava* 'a club'; club-shaped) are terrestrial fungi that are either cylindrical to club-shaped or branched and coral-like, with a widespread distribution. Eighteen species were described from New Zealand in 1988. *Clavaria zollingeri*, commonly known as purple fingers or violet coral, has tubular, purple to pinkish-violet fruiting bodies up to 10 cm tall and 7 cm wide, solitary or in groups, the extremities of the branches usually rounded and brownish. Like other members of the club fungi, it is saprobic, deriving nutrients by breaking down organic matter. In England and Europe, where it is becoming rare, it grows in old grassland; in New Zealand it may be found on humus and earth under tree ferns.

PHOTO: Shirley Kerr