



*Plate 18. 'Photograph by Arts Faculty Photographic Unit'.*

## UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL

## SPECIAL CONGREGATION

to celebrate the Centenary of the  
Foundation of University College, Bristol  
on 11th October 1976  
in the Colston Hall

DR. E. K. TRATMAN

ORATOR: PROFESSOR DINELEY

*Madam Chancellor,*

It is my unusual privilege to present to you a cave-man – not a club-wielding neanderthaloid of course but a true troglodyte none the less. The name of Edgar Kingsley Tratman is almost synonymous with scientific speleology in this country – in short he is a very big cave man.

Professor Tratman was born a Bristolian in 1899, a member of a local family still well-known for its catering to those who “mess about in boats” and larger sea-going craft. He was educated at Clifton College and at this University, where he obtained the degree of Bachelor of Dental Surgery in 1924. It was during this time that his experience of dental cavities was supplemented by inspection of cavities of a more geological kind. He became a founder member of the University of Bristol Speleological Society and it has been an interest that he has sustained to the present day. Dental practice in Bristol and a Dental Tutorship at the University for a number of years followed naturally enough, but election in 1929 to the Chair of Dental Surgery at the King Edward VII College of Medicine at Singapore was perhaps less foreseeable.

The lure of the Malayan molar and the oriental odontoma was strong enough to keep Tratman in the Far East until 1950. There was vast experience to be had in Malaya, not only in dental practice but also in teaching dentistry, organising dental services and in research. Our man in Malaya accomplished wonders and when the College became the University of Malaya he was for some years Dean of Medicine and in 1949 was awarded the OBE.

With the arrival of the Japanese in the Second World War, Professor Tratman was interned in a prison camp where he became Dentist and Medical Officer. His energies, ingenuity, skill and cheery character did much to alleviate the sufferings of his fellow prisoners and thwart his captors. To prevent the stock of dental gold falling into Japanese hands he hid it in a water tank in the college roof. When the war was over he successfully went diving for gold in the University's attic.

In 1950 Professor Tratman returned to England to become Professor of Dental Surgery in London, bringing with him the degree of M.D., *honoris causa*, from the University of Malaya. Finding London life perhaps less attractive than that in Bristol, he returned to his native city in 1953 and to clinical teaching at this University. He was thus employed to the full for another ten years.

So much would be a credit to any determined dentist, but here we trace Tratman's other record, that of speleologist. The scientific study of caves appealed to him while a student and for almost 60 years he has been a member or officer of the University of Bristol Speleological Society, influencing its explorations and embellishing its Journal.

Universities, as you must know, *Madam Chancellor*, seem to proliferate societies devoted to obscure – even to extraordinary – causes or aims. Perhaps it is not so unexpected that Bristol students should found a society to take an interest in their local underworld – I mean of course the caves and pot holes of Mendip. The Speleological Society, suitably housed in the deepest basement of the oldest building in the University, is something of a subterranean celebrity. It is not a fraternity of pot-holing dare-devils so much as a circle of adventurous spirits who have explored methodically the natural

history and antiquities of regions below the green hills of Somerset. These explorations have been disciplined and important contributions to science and archaeology, and under the Tratman banner they have led the field. The Society has some notable "firsts" such as the earliest study of a living British cave fauna, the earliest use of cine film (monochrome and colour) in caves, the earliest publication of colour plates of caves in scientific journals, and geologically the oldest evidence of Man in Britain.

As a mark of recognition of his services to archaeology in Britain Professor Tratman was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1938.

The previously extravagant and haphazard excavation of caves in the West of England has been replaced by scientific dissection and survey, using all manner of sophisticated techniques. Behind such operations there must be a guiding intelligence. Professor Tratman has provided this so successfully that the Society has now the most complete library of its kind in Britain and one of the most important museum collections of artefacts and cave materials.

Sad to say, the museum collections and the Spelaeological library were destroyed in the Bristol blitz, but Tratman's energies and influence were such that in 1955 when Sir Philip Morris re-opened the museum it had made good its losses by the addition of impressive new collections.

Fourteen volumes of the *Proceedings* of the Society have now appeared and Professor Tratman has 49 articles published in them. He has dealt with cave and exploration reports, archaeology from Palaeolithic to Roman, Mendip hydrology and of course human remains, especially teeth. The journal is sent all over the world. Thus the activity of a society that has included very many students and "old boys" has established itself in the best scientific traditions; its field work, carefully and thoroughly executed, is recorded faithfully and disseminated to the world of learning. These generations of students have found E. K. Tratman not only a spelaeologist of international renown but also a genial guide and friend ever ready to listen to their talk and offer help where needed.

The Tratman back has bent in the caves of Spain, France, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, South Wales and Ireland, as well as in those of Mendip, but it is with Swildon's Hole and the caves at Rowberrow, Priddy and Goatchurch that his name will principally be linked. The departed shades of Megalithic men who once may have lived in such regions must have peered over Tratman's shoulder while he was thus engaged. They would surely have admired his skill and patience in exploring the realms of damp and darkness.

Such is the contribution of Edgar Kingsley Tratman to dentistry and medical teaching and to scientific spelaeology that I present him to you, *Madam Chancellor*, as eminently worthy of the degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*.