

OBITUARIES

PROFESSOR R.J.G. SAVAGE 1927-1998

It is with feelings of great sadness and loss that we record the untimely death on 9th May, of Robert Savage, President of the Society for thirteen years between 1977 and 1990, a vice-president from 1991 and an editorial advisor or member of the editorial committee from 1966 to 1990.

Bob was born in Belfast, where his father was a civil servant, but was proud to trace his ancestry from an Ulster family of Norman origin, first established in the Ards peninsula of County Down in the late 12th century; Edmund Spencer's 16th century 'Savage of the Ards'. The eponymous Robert le Sauvage was one of the twenty knightly companions of John de Courcy, who led the first Anglo-Norman foray north into Ulster in 1177. Knowing this, it was an irresistible temptation to see Norman lineage in Bob's tall spare frame, his high cheekbones and forehead, his aquiline nose, his patrician assurance and quiet dignity combined with charm and a bubbling sense of humour. His twinkling eye and his lightly pitched Ulster voice as he embarked on the leg-pulling of a serious colleague or on a less than serious geological anecdote remain as vivid memories.

Bob was educated in Belfast and Dublin, going on to read Zoology and Geology at Queen's University, Belfast, before completing his studies with a PhD at University College, London. He came to the Geology Department in Bristol in 1954, initially as curator of the Geology Museum, subsequently as a lecturer, remaining until his retirement in 1992. An occasion which he recalled with particular pleasure and humour, was showing H.M. The Queen round the museum when she came to open the Queen's Building.

Vertebrate palaeontology was his chosen field, with a wide compass, but with the evolution of Tertiary mammals as the central theme. His achievements in teaching at undergraduate and post-graduate level, in fieldwork across five continents, Europe, Asia, South America, Australia and, especially, Africa, and in laboratory study and publication and editing of major works of scholarship and haute vulgarisation, are appropriately chronicled in obituary notices elsewhere and in the appreciation given by Prof. Benton at the celebratory meeting held in his honour by the Linnean Society of London in 1994. They were recognised by the award first in 1966 of the title of Reader and then in 1982 of a Personal Chair.

Among his many other interests were historic buildings and gardens, artificial grottoes and follies. Fittingly the gathering at Goldney House after his funeral allowed us to visit the beautiful grotto in whose restoration he played a leading role.

In Bristol, Bob was soon involved with the Society's work, in 1955 he was helping Desmond Donovan to recover and identify faunal material from the late Pleistocene 'Bone Bed' at Brean Down. Between 1960 and 1980, five papers by him appeared in *Proceedings*, mostly on mammalian faunal remains from sites investigated by the Society, but also including a find of Merck's Rhinoceros from Worlebury Hill, Weston-super-Mare (1980). He contributed book reviews and obituary notices, including those for two other distinguished palaeontologists, Martin Hinton and Wilfred Jackson, and for our former president, Dr E.K. Tratman, as well as a bibliography of Tratman's publications. He was always willing to oblige with spot identifications of remains from excavations in progress, including the occasion when Tratman approached him in the Senior Common Room, bearing a fossil tooth from the quarry at



Bob Savage

Photograph by courtesy of the University of Bristol

Westbury, sub-Mendip, exclaiming, "If this isn't hippopotamus, I'll eat my hat!"; to which Savage replied, "Good Gracious, Trat! this is Sabre-toothed Cat!", at once confirming the early date of the site.

For many years he watched over editors of the *Proceedings*, and the civilised occasions when the editorial committee gathered at his beautiful house on Clifton Vale under his urbane and diplomatic chairmanship, were a source of much pleasure.

While Bob was President the University invariably consulted him on any matters relating to the UBSS or caves in general. After his retirement from the presidency and later from the University, he continued to speak for the Society in the corridors of (university) power. One major achievement was to get the terms of the Tratman Fund (arising from E.K.T.'s bequest to the University) settled, providing a postgraduate studentship open to a range of appropriate disciplines, with a moiety of the income available to the Society to top up the resources for

publication of Proceedings and to assist field study or expeditions by members, particularly undergraduates. He remained alert to threatening clouds on our horizon, ready to preside at meetings when needed, briefing and giving much needed advice and counsel to a new president.

It would be ungenerous not to mention here the many warm and enduring friendships formed with colleagues, those with whom he worked, notably Louis, Mary and Richard Leakey in Kenya, and members of the Society, including Martin Hinton and his wife, Dina Dobson Hinton, then our vice-presidents, to whose house in Wrington, he was a frequent kind and supportive visitor in their later years. Though he was Martin's literary executor and thus best placed to know what part if any he may have played in the Piltdown forgery, Bob always maintained a discrete but teasing silence on the subject.

With humour and friendship also went personal courage and fortitude and a strong sense of responsibility in caring for family, for friends and for the Society's affairs. His physical and intellectual energies had appeared unabated in retirement so that his fatal illness, the first signs of which appeared at the end of 1997, came as a sad shock. Despite its rapid worsening, he completed work in progress and set his affairs in order, even to the detailed arrangements for his funeral, including the valedictory greeting recorded by him and the ecologically responsible choice of a wicker coffin. The tributes, on behalf of his family, the University, the Geology Department and the National Trust, spoken at the funeral ceremony, to which so very many came to bid him farewell, were ample testimony of the esteem and affection in which he was held.

In 1969 he married Shirley Coryndon, who was a specialist in fossil hippopotami, hence the numerous amusing hippo figurines that decorated their house. Tragically this happy marriage of shared goals and interests was cut short by her early death in 1976. Our sympathies are with his family in their grievous loss.

A.M.A. and D.T.D.

BENTON, M.J. 1994. Professor R.J.G. Savage: an appreciation. *Zoological Journal of the Linnean Society* (1994). **112**. p3-p12.

MISS E.M. (MOLLY) HALL 1910-1998

Molly Hall, christened Edna Mary but always known as Molly, who died in Paulton Hospital just before Easter, had been a member of the Society for sixty-seven years. She was very much a local girl, born in Paulton where her father was a mining engineer employed in the Somerset coalfield, attending school in Paulton, reading English at Bristol University, returning to teach for most of her working career at Paulton Secondary School, latterly in Midsomer Norton and then finally at a private school at Cranmore.

She was one of four children; her younger sister Brenda is happily still very much alive. Molly had been a baby-sitter for Bertie and Marjorie Crook's eldest son, Peter, and went with them when they moved to Tinsbury, living as one of the family for over 40 years. When the 'Laurels' was sold after Bertie's death in 1973, Molly moved next door to 'Little Orchard', made available to her following a wish expressed in Bertie's will. There she lived first in a trailer caravan, where she contrived to be marvellously hospitable until the cottage became