

OBITUARY

JOHN HAYTER CRICKMAY

1909 - 2004



John Crickmay, who died in Winchester on 9th January, 2004, had been an Honorary Member of the Society for almost 54 years, having been elected at the AGM in March 1950, 'in recognition of his invaluable work for the Society'. Through his collaboration with the late Robin Bendall and other members of the Society, notably Joan Light, Noel Blackwell and Tom Zealley, in the re-surveying of G.B. Cave, the standards of cave surveying and the presentation of the results were raised to a higher level than had probably ever been achieved previously in Britain (Crickmay and Bendall, 1951).

John was born on 3rd March, 1909, at Leigh on Sea, Essex, son of Gordon and Monica Crickmay. Crickmays were well known as architects - one designed Nelson's column - and are still practising in Dorset, but John's branch of the family came from Wiltshire, his grandfather, Hayter Crickmay, was born in Hindon. John's formative years from 1914 to 1919, were spent in France, where his father while serving in the army established his family in a house well behind the lines. Family life ended in 1919, when John's father, having made a post-war fortune dealing in Army-surplus equipment, lost it at the Casino in Monte Carlo and never returned, leaving John's mother to bring up him and his two sisters on scanty means. Back in England, John found his halting English and his fluent but ungrammatical schoolboy French not to the liking of his teachers, but throughout his life he could think and dream in French and never lost his enjoyment of things French, including dancing in Parisian night clubs in pre-war days.

After boarding-school in Broadstairs, his mother got him a job as a clerk in the shipping office of the White Star Line, which he hated. He lost this job following the merger with Cunard in the 30's and was unemployed for 2-3 years. Following spells working at forestry and building log cabins in camps for young unemployed men, run by the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry at Sandy Balls in Hampshire and Shining Cliff in Derbyshire, he joined the Ordnance Survey, initially as a Field Surveyor, then in Survey Computation, and finally in the Archaeology Branch. His reminiscences of the Survey included the unavailing attempts in 1940 by "OGS" Crawford, the first Archaeology Officer, to persuade the Director General to

authorise the removal of historic archives of maps and archaeological records to safer places, before the destruction by incendiary bombs of the Survey's Southampton offices. For 2 years after retirement in 1972, he had a part-time post in the Geography Department at King Alfred's College, Winchester.

John's connection with the Society came about through chance. Early in 1945, while based in Weston-super-Mare for his work with the Survey, he happened to meet Rodney Pearce, then Secretary, in Burrington Combe. Rodney took him down Sidcot Swallet, John and the Society found each other congenial, and for over three decades thereafter when the work of the Society called for a surveyor, John willingly devoted weeks of his leave to provide the necessary expertise. At this time too he will have first met Bendall and John Pitts. In 1947 he began a detailed survey of Burrington Combe as an aid to the Society's work there, incidentally showing that the OS had displaced the road down the combe by about 5 m. Unfortunately out of the intended four sheets at 1:2500 scale, only the one covering the area south of the Society's hut was ever printed (Crickmay 1949), the data for the remaining sheets having been lost by the draughtsman to whom they were entrusted, but that sheet has been invaluable for later work, including publication of the excavations at Bos Swallet. After the work in G.B. Cave and the accompanying surface survey, still an essential guide for the Society's current work in Tynings Great Swallet and surveying connected with Prof. Leo Palmer's pioneering geophysical investigations, his later work with the Society was mainly on archaeological sites.

Sites surveyed by him for the Society included Burlledge hillfort overlooking the Chew Valley, known to Stukeley in the 18th Century as 'Bow Ditches' and rediscovered by Crook and Tratman (1954); Burrington hillfort; the southwestern part of Dolebury hillfort, for a proposed excavation by Tratman; the Brean Down Sand Cliff site in 1955 and Roman temple site in 1957-8; Picken's Hole in 1962-6; and the earthwork enclosure on the east side of the Blackwater valley at Charterhouse-on-Mendip (Williams, 1992, Fig. 6).

In much of this archaeological work I had the pleasure of working with him, we also worked together on sites unconnected with the Society, notably on survey of the megalithic chambered tomb at Tregiffian, St Buryan, in 1972-3, and at Stonehenge in 1979. This latter work followed a small roadside rescue excavation, directed by Mike Pitts (Pitts, 1982), which discovered the stone-hole for the vanished companion of the Heel Stone. Our job was to locate that excavation on the 1:200 aerial photogrammetric plan of Stonehenge and tie that into the National Grid. Accordingly John and I went to Stonehenge, uncovered Richard Atkinson's buried bronze survey "pin" at the centre of the sarsen circle and set up the theodolite over it, only to realise that because of the heavily overcast conditions, the trig points, on which we needed to sight, were invisible. So one of us had to drive boldly on to M.o.D. range land, park by the 'Bustard' trig pillar at Robin Hood's Ball, the Neolithic enclosure 5 km north-west of Stonehenge, and, imitating Alexander Thom, switch on the car headlights to show John its location. It was at Robin Hood's Ball on a pre-war Sunday morning, when John, having been assured the gunnery range would not be in use that day, was doing detail survey there, that tanks had suddenly appeared and opened fire, forcing him to stand up and wave his drawing board above his head like a white flag; fortunately nothing similar happened to us.

John was devoted to his family and especially to his twice widowed younger sister Joan, with whom he set up extremely hospitable house in Winchester when the OS moved back to Southampton in 1968, and to her children and grandchildren, often coming to the hut with his nephew Robin Kenworthy. He was humorous, adaptable and resilient and very sociable. He was an enthusiastic bridge-player, a co-founder of the still flourishing Winchester Bridge Club, and enjoyed bridge evenings at Burrington with Trat, Molly Hall, Bertie Crook, Father Lee and other old friends. One of his more surprising retirement pastimes was petit-point embroidery on

cushion covers of his own designs based on archaeological themes, such as the Battersea iron age shield and mosaic pavements from Roman villas at Sparsholt and Chedworth.

Our last work together for the Society was in 1985 on the new survey of King Arthur's Cave, as always with John a very pleasant excursion, whether surveying or in the pub afterwards, a pleasure continued to his final years.

Arthur ApSimon

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