

OBITUARY

CHRISTOPHER J. HAWKES

19 July 1930 - 13 March 2013



Christopher John Hawkes was first introduced to caving as a pupil at Sidcot School in Somerset, where he was a near contemporary of Willie Stanton and just a few years behind the Stride Brothers, all of whom later became members of this Society in one way or another. On leaving school, he remained an active caver with the Wessex Cave Club, taking part in many caving trips and acting as journal editor from 1961 to 1965.

National Service and then work took him away from Mendip, to Shropshire and eventually to Leicester, but he, Elizabeth and the children moved back, first to Bristol, in 1967, and then to Mendip. Bishop's Cottage in Westbury-sub-Mendip was bought, in 1971, to bring him close to the important dig at Westbury Quarry. The cottage was a ruin, enabling him to design and build the house that he wanted. There he remained for the rest of his life and there he died.

The cave dig at Totty Pot, above Cheddar Gorge, in the early 1960s, named after Christopher's young daughter Sarah's potty which had been put into use as a digging skip, led to the discovery of human bones and much other archaeological material, and this brought together his love of archaeology and his love of caving. He dug with Tratman at various sites in Cheddar Gorge and at Wookey Hole and collected specimens from Westbury Quarry; this led to his election to this Society in 1974. In 1982 he took over from Bob Savage as our Museum Curator, at a time when the collection was in need of much care following the Geography Department fire in January 1982 and he subsequently nursed the material through several moves until it found its present home in *The Stables*. In 1984, in recognition of his sterling work after the fire, he was elected as a vice-president of the Society. Along with a small group of helpers, he planned and produced the museum displays and made sure that they were ready for the official opening of *The Stables* by Sir John Wills on March 5th 1993.

Christopher remained as our curator until 2008 when increasingly poor eyesight made it impossible for him to drive into Bristol from his home in Westbury-sub-Mendip for his regular working evenings. During this period, as well as liaising with workers at numerous other museums, both local and national who wished to view and study our material, he

encouraged a number of keen young archaeology students and helped further their careers. Jodie Lewis writes “Chris encouraged my interest in Mendip archaeology when I was a undergraduate, nurtured me as a postgraduate, and was fully supportive of my later academic career. He showed me the wonders of Wells Museum, let me loose in the archives and introduced me to artefacts, papers, people and sites that were essential to my work: I owe him a great debt.”

He remained interested in caving, more than just from an archaeological perspective, and accompanied us to Co. Clare on a number of occasions in the 1980s. This mix of skills made him the perfect person to bring in when, in 1986, bones were discovered by Pete & Alison Moody in Charterhouse Warren Farm Swallet in a chamber at the bottom of a very awkward entrance pitch.

Although he did dig at numerous sites, mostly on Mendip, his most important role in archaeology was as museum curator, both for us and for the Wells and Mendip Museum. He knew his sites and his material extremely well and was very good at putting researchers and collections in contact. Although extremely important, this role is largely unsung and means that his contribution to archaeological research is not obvious in the publication record, indeed he never really enjoyed actually putting pen to paper. Even so he is credited as co-author in half a dozen reports in these *Proceedings* including important ones on Charterhouse Warren Farm Swallet, and Rhinoceros Hole.

In recent years Christopher had suffered from the debilitating effects of Parkinson’s Disease, rendering him increasingly frail, and he passed away on the 13th of March. His funeral on the 28th of March at Mendip Crematorium was followed by refreshments at, of course, Wells and Mendip Museum and saw a large contingent from the Society amongst the many friends and relatives gathered to remember him.

GJM