

OBITUARY

ANTONY BOYCOTT
1st April 1951 - 7th June 2024



Antony Boycott, known as Antony to his mother, Ant to his father and Tony to his many friends, was born in Westminster Hospital, London. His father Brian was an exuberant out-going scientist. His mother Marjorie, a quiet, unassuming, very determined woman, was a source of enormous strength to both her husband and her son throughout their lives. Tony's younger brother Richard, was sadly born with cerebral palsy when Tony was six and died only six years later.

Tony studied at Emanuel School in Battersea, south London, then came to Bristol in 1969 to study biochemistry but after a year, he changed direction to study medicine. He joined UBSS in his first year and remained a member. His first caving trip (other than to showcaves with his parents) was on 4th October 1969 to Sump 1 in Swildon's Hole.

While a student, Tony also took up cave diving. In July 1975 he became the first person to extend a cave by diving in Scotland, passing two sumps in Cnoc nam Uamh and discovering over 60 m of passage. Much of his diving at this time was as part of the Society's exploration of the Little Neath River Cave. He was also involved in discoveries made by cave diving in Morocco, in the company of Peter Glanvill and the late Ray Stead.

On graduation, Tony took a series of hospital jobs in Cornwall and then in Swindon. He moved back to Bristol to join a GP practice in Bedminster, eventually becoming senior partner, but disliked the administrative side of the job and so became a full-time locum in Bristol, able to step into surgeries anywhere in the city with ease. This change allowed him the freedom to spend more time caving abroad. He was an active member of Mendip Cave Rescue and was regularly called on for incidents in South Wales, including the two day rescue of an injured caver from the far end of Southern Stream Passage in Agen Allwedd. Tony's competent pragmatism meant that he was always in demand as an expedition doctor, going on many trips to places like Megalaya in India and the Blue Holes of the Bahamas. Charlie Self nicknamed him AB(Dr) and that stuck, as can be seen from his helmet in the photo above. Mark Lumley

has said that his combination of skills as a rescue doctor and the holder of an explosives licence made him the ideal companion on long digging trips in Ogof Daren Cilau.

Tony was appointed UBSS Librarian when he returned to Bristol and worked tirelessly for many years in that role and as Sales Manager and Archivist. He was made an Honorary Member of the Society in 2014. Tony was an extremely competent and thorough researcher as is shown in the many contributions he has made to these *Proceedings*, the last of which appears in this issue.

Tony had a long association with caving in Ireland, particularly Co. Clare, and he visited there as often as he could, exploring, diving, surveying and documenting the caves. He made enormous contributions to all the guides that the Society produced from 1981 onwards. In later years he spent much time digging in Co. Clare, often with Pat Cronin who nicknamed him 'Popeye' owing to his strength and skill in manoeuvring heavy objects in and out of cave digs.

Tony's caving logs run to several volumes in which he recorded all his underground trips, many of which involved the use of explosives in search of new cave passage. He was involved in numerous breakthroughs, including to the Frozen Deep in Reservoir Hole on Mendip and he made significant contributions to exploration under Llangattock in South Wales. Tony remained an enthusiastic digger throughout his caving career. Away from Britain and Ireland, he caved and dived in Morocco, India, Greece, Slovenia, France, Romania, Sulawesi, America, Thailand, Pakistan, the Maldives, Malta, Patagonia, Egypt, the Galapagos and Madagascar.

Tony caught covid early in the pandemic, which led to considerable physical and mental fatigue, now recognized as long covid. This exhaustion unfortunately passed into the symptoms of his brain tumour, a diagnosis in April 2022 that came as a shock to everyone, although perhaps not so much to Tony himself. He faced the knowledge of an incurable cancer with the same calm pragmatism that he brought to all medical matters. As far as his condition would allow, he continued to be an active caver and digger even after his surgery to remove the tumour, followed by radiotherapy and eight months of chemotherapy. On Tony's last caving trip in June 2023 down Upper Canada Cave on Mendip, he enthusiastically pointed out the entrance scaffolding that he had worked on, describing it as his 'favourite scaffolding' a phrase that few cavers could lay claim to with such ease. He insisted on crawling and wriggling almost to the end of the cave, whilst effusively describing its geology and mineralogy as well as insisting that the squeeze wasn't really worthy of the name.

The treatment gave him two valuable years that he otherwise would not have had and he remained free of the cancer at the time of his death from an infection, although he had become increasingly tired as time wore on. Tony was admitted to the Garden House at St. Monica's Care Home in May 2024 and died peacefully there.

Tony was one of the kindest, nicest people anyone could wish to meet. He was an excellent caving companion, a good friend to everyone who knew him and he will be missed by many. Tony was, in the words of one of the lively songs played at his funeral, a 'caver to the core'. His legacy will live on through a very generous bequest in his will to the Oliver Lloyd Memorial Fund.