



HERBERT ERNEST BALCH

Mr. H.E. Balch, President of the Wessex Cave, died on the 27th May, 1958, at the age of 88. So closely was he associated with Mendip caves and caving, that his biography would be a caving history of that area.

He began caving and the pursuit of archaeology in the early '80s and within a few years had amassed a collection which formed the nucleus of the Wells Museum. By 1944 this had grown to such a size that accommodation had to be found for it in a larger building. He remained Honorary Curator for over 60 years until 1954, when he retired.

The first archaeological work for which he became famous was that at Wookey Hole; his book on "Wookey Hole, its caves and cave dwellers" was published in 1914. He extended his work to the caves of Ebbor in 1912 and above all in the years following 1922, and published the first of his three books on Mendip in 1929 with accounts of the Wookey and Ebbor caves. His work in Badger started in 1938.

He began the opening of Swildon's hole in 1901 and 1904 and of Eastwater Cavern in 1902-3. Accounts of the early exploration of these caves were published by him in collaboration with Dr. E.A. Baker in 1907 ("The Netherworld of Mendip"). Though the 40 ft. pot in Swildon's was first descended in 1914 it was not until 1921 and the part of the cave now known as Swildon's I was fully explored, and it was Balch that led the exploration.

Of his two other Mendip books, "Cheddar, its gorge and caves" was published in 1935 and "Mendip; its swallet caves and rock shelters" in 1937. The three books with many additions were republished in one volume, "The Mendip Caves", in 1948, and this is undoubtedly Balch's most famous work and the one by which all cavers will remember him. His infectious enthusiasm and lively style shine through all its pages, and though some of it is by now out of date it still remains the best book of its kind.

Starting as a Post Office messenger boy he rose to become Head Postmaster, retiring in 1931. So valuable had his services become to the citizens of Wells that by their special request he was not transferred from their city on promotion. In 1944 he was made an honorary freeman of the city, while in 1927 he was awarded the degree of Master of Arts honoris causa by the University of Bristol. He was a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries.

His funeral at St. Cuthbert's Church was attended by about 200 people, including the Mayor of Wells and other city dignitaries, and his coffin was borne by four members of the Wessex Cave Club.

RECOLLECTIONS OF MR. BALCH

As most members will have heard with great regret, H.E. Balch, our President since the Club was started, died at the end of May. Much has already been written about his long life, but in writing of him now I am writing of the Balch I knew - drawing on my memory. The memories which each of us will have of him must be different. To those of us who were caving between the wars he gave much practical help and encouragement, while to some post-war cavers he will chiefly be known as the author of books on the caves and archaeological finds of Mendip.

Amongst the most vivid memories are, perhaps, his habit, when Ruth and I made one of our visits to the Museum, of seating himself in the high backed armchair in the entrance hall with his arms stretched along the arms, listening to our news and telling us of his own activities; of his dining with me in Hall at Oxford when he came to address the Archaeological Society; of his joy in finding fossil evidence of his "little horse"; of his introduction of the wrong opener of the M.N.R.C Photographic Exhibition (he was then 86) and then opening the exhibition himself; these and many others make up the man for whom so many felt a deep affection.

I first met him in 1924 when he lectured on caves at Sidcot where I was a scholar, and although I have now only a very vague picture of what he was like then he wove a spell which caught my imagination and profoundly affected my subsequent life. I started caving a year later and soon was able to write to Mr. Balch and report the discovery of Sidcot Swallet. He took a great interest in it and I made several visits to him to show him photographs and give him descriptions. He never

actually entered the cave, so far as I know, as his visits underground had by then almost ceased, but he seemed to have the facility of building up, by question and answer, a very clear picture of what was there and an uncanny ability of seeing a solution to problems - an ability which he retained to the last years of his life. Thus started a habit which was shared with many others, of reporting immediately to Mr. Balch every new move made towards discovery on Mendip. He was always most insistent that where ever one dug a very careful watch should be kept for anything of antiquarian value "Practically every hollow and recess in Mendip has something worth finding in it".

It was about this time that he arranged for a party of us from Sidcot to explore the "New Grotto" at Wookey Hole (which was not then a Show cave.) I still have his postcard in which he adjured us to "be very careful to keep your heads and shoulders down so that you do not damage the stalactites" and gave detailed instructions on the method of climbing up - ending with "Be careful or someone will fall". No one did fall and we were able to report a most successful trip. Later the same year he lent me his slides for a lecture I gave at Sidcot and I remember taking them back to him at his house in Priest Row.

Thus it was that I experienced his great kindness to young people which was one of his endearing characteristics and which I saw again when he spent hours showing my own young daughters the treasures of the museum. They found him an enthralling guide, who while he never "talked down" to them made his explanations very clear.

In most of the letters which I had from him he

always mentioned his current archaeological work and I suspect that in spite of his reputation as a Caver his first love was for the hidden things of Mendip - the flints, the bones and the pottery from which he could reconstruct the past. When we visited the museum we were always led first to the latest find from the Badger Hole which was displayed with loving care.

In the early '30s when I returned, after several years away from Mendip, I went straight to see Mr. Balch and he introduced me to "Digger" Harris. At that time there were no Clubs operating on Mendip which were open to all and sundry; the U.B.S.S. was confined to the University and the M.N.R.C. was really a Committee on which people were invited to serve on the basis of achievement: it was quite an honour in those days to be a member of the M.N.R.C. Such caving as was done was in small groups supplemented by an annual camp organized by Bob Watson, a Padre from Toc H in London. In much of this period Mr. Balch acted as a catalyst. Introducing one to another, getting the lone would-be caver linked up with others and encouraging work. I attached myself to the group with which Digger was associated and also attended some of Bob Watson's camps. It was from these camps in particular that the idea of forming a club came and when Digger, Jack Duck and I took the initiative, it was felt that the only person we could approach as our President was Mr. Balch. We had some trepidation about this, however; the new Club was to be sporting not scientific and we were not sure what his attitude would be. We need not have worried; he welcomed the idea, gave us every encouragement and help and remained our President for 23 years.

The period which followed was one of remarkable development, the reopening and surveying of Lamb

Leer was followed by the discovery of Cow Hole and Windsor Hill. The Swildon's sump was dived and so was Wookey Hole and parties started to visit South Wales (hitherto unexplored). Ships ladders (rungs through 4 strand ropes) gave way to lighter and smaller wooden ladders and they in turn to metal. The miners' helmets and acetylene lamps (then new) superceded candles and in turn were challenged by electrics. And at the centre of it all was Mr. Balch encouraging and exhorting and keeping abreast of events in a way remarkable for a man approaching 70. In my position as Secretary I often had to consult him and there were many times when we leaned heavily on his judgement.

During the war years I saw nothing of him. But when visits were resumed they had quite a different quality. I was no longer the Secretary and our conversation became more reminiscent and less spelaeological. It was only then that we got to know about his great interest in beekeeping and in his garden. For years we cherished some Cheddar Pinks from his cuttings, moving them from Surrey to the Midlands and back to Somerset only for them to be accidentally buried under some builders rubble when the Miners' Arms was being enlarged. After he left the Museum he continued to care for his plants so long as he could get about.

Many will remember the presentation made by the Club on his 80th birthday - a painting of the Beehive in Lamb Leer. He was tremendously pleased with it and often referred to it even though latterly he attributed it to an artist who had died many years before it was painted. Our last long visit with him was two years ago when he lunched with us. We collected him and drove him across Mendip, to his great joy. He brought with

him a portfolio of drawings by John Hassell, of which he was very proud, and his scrap books in which each day he put cuttings relating to current affairs in which he still showed a lively interest, and we spent a long afternoon talking back and forth over 75 years of Mendip history, hearing stories of events of long ago which had stuck in his memory, like the men who bored for coal near Bridgwater and found only salt, only to be dispossessed of their borehole because salt had not been mentioned in their agreement, but the land-owner in turn was prevented from working the salt because he was polluting the drinking water!

Although he had earned his reputation as an antiquary the hard way, Mr. Balch did not allow his success to spoil him, though he was justly very proud of what he had achieved. But it was not because of his knowledge or achievements that he will be missed by so many. Originally one might go to him for help but one went back again and again because it was such a pleasure to meet and talk to him. He was essentially gentle and very kind and thoughtful especially to the young. If he got impatient with the stupid, I never saw him show it. His going will leave a gap for many of us, which is not made any the less because we knew it had to come.

HYWEL MURRELL

We welcome the following new members

G.M. BOND.

S.G. WYNNE-ROBERTS.

M.B.J. WILLIAMS.

M.A. YATES.

(Addresses included in the membership list).

Forthcoming events

G.B. Guest Days are as follows:-

August 16th or 17th.

October 4th or 5th.

November 22nd or 23rd.

It will be noticed that the U.B.S.S. has greatly reduced the number of times in a given period that members may visit the cave, and we hear that in the future there may be even less Wessex 'Guest days'. Previously it was a five weekly period, now it is once every eight weeks. The last time members visited the cave was on Whit Sunday, and we have to report a serious departure from the conditions of entry laid down by the U.B.S.S. as more than half the party were non-members of the Club. It must be clearly understood that only members (and affiliated members) of Wessex Cave Club can visit the cave on a Wessex Guest day, plus the very occasional visitor for whom official permission has previously been obtained. The excuse has been offered that other clubs do not strictly abide by the rules, but that surely is a matter for the U.B.S.S. to deal with. Having agreed to the conditions of entry it is up to us to keep our word. We have also to call members attention to the following letter that has been received from the Hon. Secretary of the U.B.S.S.

"The attention of all clubs is drawn to the rules for entry (the G.B.) which have been circulated, particularly the one stating that the inner door and the outer door shall be properly secured when a club party leaves the cave. It has been noted that on a number of occasions in the past only the outer door has been closed and locked while the inner door has been left open. This has coincided with the contrivance of a means of passing the outer door without unlocking the padlock. Around the New Year, the inner door was broken in with the use of a heavy iron bar. Repairs to both doors have been made, the cost to the U.B.S.S. being roughly equivalent to six months tackle fees.

It is obvious that some members of a club or clubs have

- (a) failed to replace the inner door
- (b) some knowledge of the manner in which entrance through the outer door was contrived.

Member clubs are reminded that it is solely through the representations of the U.B.S.S. that access to the cave was made after the owners closed it. The listed clubs are privileged in this respect, and it is hoped that for their own sakes they will see that the rules are obeyed.

The cave is now the property of the Bristol Waterworks Company. It is expected that arrangements for entry will be much the same as those under the A.R.D.C, though some modifications favourable to all may be made. It is not expected that there will be any reductions in the privileges at present enjoyed by the clubs".

Mendip Cave Registry

We have received a circular letter from the secretary, Mrs. Brenda Willis, asking us to publish a request for assistance with the work of compiling the register. She invites anyone willing to help with the work to write to a C.H. Kenney, Tudor Cottage, Beryl Lane, Wells.

(If our membership does in fact contain those seemingly rare creatures, people with spare time, we too would very much like to hear from them as there will be plenty of work for members to do during the next couple of months).

Hon. Sec.

Headquarters.

The new extension has now been placed in position on the end of the hut, and six bunks are being erected. By the time this issue of the Journal is in the hands of members the extra bunks should be available for use. There is still a lot of work to do to bring the Headquarters up to a reasonable standard. O.C.L's "cave gods" (they are rather shockers and do not deserve capital letters) seem to be in league with the Weather Gods who caused the Heavens to open and 'let us have it'. But in spite of the rain and thunderstorm we, thanks to our gallant helpers, succeeded in getting the extension up, the roof on and the windows fitted. In fact it was rather fun. To enable the work to continue we have had to close the hut to caving parties for a couple of weekends.

Hon. Sec.

Hawk's Hole - A new Cave.

Members of a Scout troop in the Taunton area have during the past year, discovered a new cave in East Devon which they have named "Hawk's Hole". The cave is 100 ft long by 50 ft high, and contains 12 small chambers filled with dripstone formations. The discoverers do not intend divulging the whereabouts of the cave until they have completed a photographic survey. I have not visited the cave myself so cannot give any more details.

Jack Waddon.

(A newspaper cutting gives the length of the cave as 210 ft. Editor).

Hon. Sec. F. Frost. 22 Wolseley Rd., Bishopston, Bristol 7-.
Phone Bristol 44221.

Hon. Treas. G. Williams. Cedarwood, Cadbury Camp Lane, Clapton-in-Gordano, Bristol.

THE REWARD OF FOLLY

OR

HOW STUPID CAN ONE BE.

Read's Cavern, Burrington, has always had a reputation for being an unsafe cave since its discovery by the University of Bristol Spelaeological Society in 1919. About 5 years ago a stone slipped out of the entrance shaft and lodged in the bottom part of the concrete frame of the former gate. About 3 years ago some nit wit, finding the entrance a little constricted, decided to remedy the matter by smashing up with a sledge hammer the upper part of the concrete frame instead of doing the obvious and sensible thing of removing the fallen stone. Subsequently the same nit wit or another, broke up the lower part of the concrete frame. The result of these stupid actions has been to allow a series of slides of boulders and rubble to take place at the entrance, which had remained stable for over 35 years with the frame in position. Either at Whitsun or the week before a further slide took place including one large boulder. The latter is at present precariously wedged a few feet above the small opening that leads to the lower part of the entrance shaft. Its position is such that it threatens to close the way down completely. It is a pity that there is no clue to the identity of the stupid person(s) as it would be pleasant to "make the punishment fit the crime" and your ideas of a suitable punishment are probably the same as mine.

E.K. TRATMAN.

CAVING IN PORTUGAL

Part II

This is is Pena, the Geysir Cave!

Georgio was standing at the foot of a low cliff near the valley floor, in what appeared to be a dried up river bed. The vertical shaft was in the centre of a saucer-like depression lined with smooth stones.

"In the winter, the water comes out in a 30ft. gusher to flood the entire valley" our Portuguese friend explained, "and in the spring, the water disappears just as quickly as it arrived."

Georgio then took Nick further down the valley and started to prod behind a bramble bush. This concealed the entrance to Contenda, another major resurgence. Georgio then produced a box of matches and poked one casually in the middle of the bush. The effect removed most of the dry leaves, and Nick! While beating the inferno out, it was decided to explore Pena first.

Reg was the first man down. He disappeared from sight into what SOUNDED like a very loose boulder ruckle. After a 60ft. climb the cave opened out into a large gravel floored cavern, which soon narrowed to a high vadose trench terminating in a stalagmite grill. This could be passed through a rough crawl which wrote off the party's first sets of overalls. The passage meandered horizontally between walls sculptured into modernistic gargoyles. The packs began to weigh heavy, and to add to the difficulty the roof came low, when a short climb brought us to a T. Junction.

The right side was an unattractive mud choke, and the left zig-zagged steeply down to a stinking, sulphurous foul sump. Charles immediately threw a stone in: the thin crust of solid sulphur broke, and from the black syrupy liquid, streams of stinking bubbles rose, forcing us to retire up the passage. In retreat, Georgio explained that this was caused by the bacterial action on the effluent of a Tannery ½ mile away.

While Bob took half the party out to explore Contenda, Reg started to mark out a survey.

Contehda was very different.

Once through the burnt and smouldering bush a horizontal tunnel led into a small domed chamber. It took a few minutes to find the way on through a tight angled squeeze in the bottom of a boulder funnel. Bob was the first through and found a smoke-filled crawl. After 10 minutes of this he saw daylight coming through the roof. A 30 ft. aven ascended to a fist-sized hole. This would obviously be an easier entrance if it could-be opened, so a surface party scoured the area, while those underneath blew whistles, shouted and waved hands through the opening - all to no avail. It wasn't until a rapid survey was made that we were able to locate the entrance. A crowbar soon removed the blockage, and with a ladder in position, exploration continued.

Now the cave sloped downwards through twisting passages of comfortable height to a big chamber. Here there were mud stalagmites 1'6" high in great profusion, which contrasted sharply with the glittering "starlight" flowstone of the earlier part of the cave. Zig-zagging steeply

the passage continued over a 10ft. drop where the ways divided. The lower route was explored first and meandered down for 400 ft. to a sump. Mike Woods made two unsuccessful attempts to dive this so we turned our attention to the other route.

A corkscrew-type squeeze opened out into a series of ascending 5 ft. steps, difficult to climb on account of thick layers of glutinous mud. Occasionally huge avens went up in the roof, and further on the passage apparently ended in another sump. At the expense of a stalagmite dipping into the water, this obstruction was passed, to find the cave going on as before. It was obvious that this was an unexplored series, which carried on for a considerable way until a large chamber with a 90ft. trap in the floor. Here our exploration was terminated owing to shortage of time.

This investigation and survey took several days, and with only a week left we turned our attentions to Moinhos Velhos, the largest known cave system in Portugal.

Nick and Georgio led a party to ladder the preliminary pitches. A short entrance passage ended in a 55ft. drop into a Lamb Leer sized chamber with a steeply sloping floor. In the lower part, Georgio made a very tricky climb to a 'key-hole' passage - the Pulpit. He lowered a 20ft. ladder for the rest. From here a series of steps similar to the 10ft's. in Longwood descended for 150 ft. These were negotiated with the aid of a 2" diameter rope, commando fashion. The last step brought us to a stalagmite platform over a 65ft. drop rather similar to the 100 ft. in Bar Pot. From the bottom a cinema sized passage, richly decorated

with flowstone disappeared into the distance. This proved well worth close examination, as everywhere there were coloured stalagmites of large size, and in one corner a collection of alabaster straws nearly 5 ft. long. We scrambled over a floor of cottage sized boulders until a sandy beach was reached which we nick-named the 'Dining Room': this formed our base for further exploration.

Beyond this, the character of the passage changed again, this time to mountains of glutinous mud. After several hundred feet of precarious climbs along the slippery slopes, the mud suddenly completely disappeared to be replaced by a massive sand choke blocking the entire passage.

On the second trip Georgio and Nick had a bash at digging this with the help of several Portuguese. The mountain ascended for 45ft., and after several hours digging in the shifting morass the block was passed. Unfortunately after a short scalloped passage, a high level sump barred further progress, although a concerted attempt was made to bale it. The passage beyond is known to continue for over 2000yds.

During the initial exploration, two large side galleries were discovered on the left. The first of these ran parallel with the main passage for some distance before closing down. The second, "The Black River" was a rough unfriendly route. Some way down a squeeze over a boulder revealed a 90ft drop in the floor up which howled a terrific draught. The bottom broke up into a 'rabbit warren' which became impassable after a very short distance.

During six days work in the Great Cave we were able to make a survey of all the Main Gallery passages, and to carry out tests on

air-flow and carbon dioxide content of the air.

When eventually we had to leave Mira d'Aire, the whole party drove to Lisbon where we stayed with Joyce and Georgio in their four-roomed flat. Besides the 14 of us, many Portuguese friends arrived for a party, so there was skiffle in the sitting room, classical music in the living room and part song singing in the hall. On the following day we were taken round the Estoril coast by members of the Geological Service to see the more unusual features of Boca d'Inferno, Lumas Langosteras (a fault cave now used as a restaurant) and Sintra.

It was with regret that the party left the warm sun and friendship of Portugal for the colder caves of England once more.

N. BARRINGTON.

FILMING UNDERGROUND

Some years ago I came across the programme of a meeting of the British Spelaeological Association which was held at Giggleswick some time before the war. One of the items was the screening of a film made in Lamb Leer by members of the Wessex Cave Club and U.B.S.S.

As I had recently bought a cine camera and was also an enthusiastic caver I decided to see what I could do. I wrote to various people and although I received a letter from a firm of manufacturers of photographic material, which informed me that the idea was quite impossible, I eventually learned that the Lamb Leer film had been shot with the aid of paraffin pressure lamps which had given some trouble.

These seemed to be rather too unwieldy as well as being too expensive for me, so I decided to use car headlamps and a twelve volt battery. After a considerable amount of calculation, rendered unnecessarily agonizing by the fact that I had given up maths, after taking my School Certificate I arrived at the conclusion that provided I used my largest aperture and the fastest film available, shot at half speed in order to double the exposure and arranged my lights not more than three feet from the subject I might expect some reasonable results. In the event these conclusions proved unduly pessimistic as the laboratories compensate for underexposure during processing.

My first filming session was in Baker's Pit, Buckfastleigh, in the autumn of 1955. I had two six-volt batteries and a motley assortment of lights totalling, (it was hoped) 156 watts. The first thing that happened was that on my way down the quarry I slipped and fell backwards on to the

rucksack which contained my batteries and lights. I succeeded in saving the camera from damage but soon afterwards I noticed a strong smell of acid and found that the batteries were on their sides. A little later inside the cave I made the discovery that one of my lights was out of action (this was not surprising as it had a large dent in the side and has never been quite the same since). However, with the aid of the remaining two I was able to film Win Hooper wriggling in some discomfort in and out of a variety of small holes; in view of her comments at the time I have always regretted that a tape recorder was not available.

The results of this first film considerably exceeded my expectations, and encouraged by this I continued operations whenever I was in Devon.

A film was made at Easter 1956 in Radford Gave: this was subsequently shown at a C.R.G. meeting at Buckfastleigh, and a later film made in Read's was entered for the Amateur Cine World's "Ten Best" competition of 1956, where it gained a minor award.

John Hooper, not to be undone, had joined me by this time and with the assistance of various other members of D.S.S. we have continued to film various aspects of caving.

John's major work to date is a documentary on "How to Explore a Cave" which runs for about twenty minutes. Both of us have done a certain amount of filming of the bat ringing activities of the D.S.S., including a series of close-ups of Greater Horseshoes at ranges of as little as 6½ inches by means of a portrait attachment.

We have made some films using "Cinephoto" flares; these are a kind of firework which on igniting give off a very bright light together with a vast quantity of smoke, speedily rendering any cave uninhabitable. They burn for some two minutes and as there is no chance of a retake the scene has to be carefully rehearsed beforehand. All unwanted equipment is removed to a place of safety, the flare is set off and the sequence filmed. All then retire immediately to the open air. Delay is fatal; it has not been unknown for the cameraman to be discovered on hands and knees some twenty feet outside the cave entrance labouring under the fond impression that he will bang his head if he attempts to stand up. However the manufacturers now produce shorter flares with proportionately less smoke and are experimenting with a "Minimum smoke" variety. Incidentally these flares may well prove useful in making smoke tests to discover new connections in caves. I am informed that they are also used for fog effects in television studios.

Future prospects are somewhat uncertain.

I would like to do a film on cave rescue but have not yet got round to writing a script.

The trouble in all caving films is the preservation of continuity; cavers can seldom be trusted to wear the same clothes twice running and I have a film in which a party emerges from a particularly wet and muddy session wearing clean dry overalls.

I am attempting to form a Cave Cine Group in order to get in touch with other cine-splaeologists (Splaeo-cinematographers?) and compare notes. Response has been fairly

encouraging so far and I would be pleased to hear of any others who might be interested, whether they have done any filming or not.

In conclusion here are a few details of my equipment for the technically minded.

Camera Kodak BB Junior with f 1.9 lens; this is only available second-hand but is the cheapest 16 mm camera available and is extremely strong and reliable.

Film Stock Kodak Super XX reversal (no longer manufactured.)

 Kodak Tri-X reversal (twice as fast as Super XX but no compensation is given during processing for underexposure)

 Ilford HP3 negative (more expensive in the long run but probably the most suitable)

 (Ilford HPS is unfortunately only available in 100 ft reels.)

Lighting Two 12 V 60 Watt headlamp bulbs off a pair of 6 V motor cycle batteries in Series.

 Wells Cinephoto Flares.

T.E. MORLAND.

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by H. Trimmel

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(Obtainable from the publishers of Die Höhle; Verband Österreichischer Höhlenforscher, Wien II, Obere Donaustrasse 99/ Stiege 7/1/3, Austria.)

Until now there has been no comprehensive primary cave bibliography published since 1906 when Martel's "La Speleologie au XX^{me} Siècle" appeared. For the last few years Professor Trimmel has undertaken this gigantic task, publishing annual volumes each dealing with the publications of a single year and containing about 1000 entries. Papers are listed from some 66 Spelaeological journals in many languages and separate books are described when they deal almost exclusively with caves. Those on travel or topography which contain shorter references are not given.

T.R.S.
1.7.58

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