

*Jubilee Contribution*  
*University of Bristol Speleological Society*

## FOREWORD

A series of articles in this *Proceedings* sets out the achievements of the society during its fifty years of life. Within that period there have been major changes in the world and, it follows, in spelæology and in the society. There is still, though, the connecting thread of team effort. The members, generation by generation, have co-operated with each other in the varied activities of the society to the mutual benefit of all concerned.

Cave exploring has completely changed from being the esoteric sport of the few with very primitive equipment to become the major sport of many and equipment has improved very greatly. Items in regular ordinary use today had not even been thought of in the early days. But the sport of cave exploring is only one aspect of caving. There is the "study of caves and their contents" which is set out as one of the aims of the society. From this has arisen that series of studies of cave archæology and the archæology of associated surface sites which have been a major feature in the life of the society since its inception. More recently and particularly in the last decade this aim has led to the inclusion of cave morphology and hydrology and allied studies of karst amongst the close interest of members. The same aim also covers cave ecology and it is significant that one of the earliest, if not the earliest, study of the living organisms in British caves was made by one of our members, in Read's Cavern.

Looking back it will be seen that the society has achieved a number of "firsts" in many aspects of spelæology including cave archæology. These have been the outcome of team effort concentrated on particular problems over a number of years and major contributions to knowledge have been made by those who did so and enjoyed the doing. There is always the lure of the unknown to stimulate search at likely places for new caves. There is that indescribable itch to explore, to climb, to take risks and generally to endure that is so essential to caving. It seems to meet perennially some psychological need in the individual. The lure of the unknown encourages people to excavate archæological sites in caves and on the surface, and from the discoveries made to prove or disprove theories and to evolve new ideas from the results.

In cave discovery there has been, amongst others, the finding of Read's Cavern as the fruit of an intensive effort extending over several months. G. B. Cave was found at the fifth attempt, after many years of effort, and this cave still seems reluctant to yield the rest of its secrets,

In Ireland effort concentrated over more than fifteen years on a single caving area in North West Clare has allowed us to publish a book on the area and its caves, of which there are more than 30 miles mostly discovered and explored by the members of this society. The opening of the Severn Bridge has enabled more frequent visits to be paid to South Wales and one of the first fruits of this has been the discovery of the large system of the Little Neath River Cave.

On the archæological side continued interest was responsible for the complete excavation of Aveline's Hole and Read's Cavern and major excavations at such rites as Rowberrow Cavern and Sun Hole, also in the Mendips, and King Arthur's and Merlin's caves in the Wye Valley. Surface sites such as Gorsey Bigbury, various Mendip barrows and the Priddy Circles have been tackled on this basis of excavations covering several to many years. Into this category fits the 20 years of study of the Sand Cliff site at Brean Down and the three seasons work on the Roman Temple on the top of the same Down.

The museum was set up originally to house the finds from Aveline's Hole and Read's Cavern. It has been extended and maintained so that it now includes a major number of important objects from prehistoric sites on Mendip and the Wye Valley. The collection has been catalogued and the catalogues are kept up to date. This has been and still is the work of members. There has never been any paid staff. The collections are so important that they are a "must" for anyone interested in the prehistory of the Mendip zone. It was sad that so much was destroyed in the war but it is a tribute to the energy and enthusiasm of members that the museum now again contains so much material and so well displayed.

The library, with all its records, was destroyed in the war. This did not daunt members who gave books and journals liberally towards its re-establishment. A succession of enthusiastic librarians has enabled an even larger library to be built up. The collection of Spelæological journals is unrivalled for the range of British and overseas journals which it receives in exchange for the Society's *Proceedings*. Copies of the *Proceedings* even go to several countries behind the Iron Curtain. On the same basis an appreciable number of archæological journals are received. Books have presented a more difficult problem because the funds available for purchasing books are strictly limited. Nevertheless there is a good nucleus of the more important books on caving and archæology.

The library facilities of the society are likely to be used more and more not only by our own members but by research students in various University departments. This should be of benefit to all. It is fair to say that already University departments have found our large range of journals essential for their work.

The society issued the first number of its printed *Proceedings* in 1920. Eleven volumes have now been published and for the last 15 years one issue per year has appeared. References to papers printed are frequently found in both caving and archæological journals and books. The standard of production and of contents has always been high. The list of contributors is a long one. The varying trends of the society's endeavours over the years is reflected in the varying contents of the *Proceedings*. It is still one of the very few printed journals by a caving society.

In the future we can look forward to active and continuous interest in cave exploring, which will obviously have to include the discovery of new caves. Modern transport facilities have greatly extended the areas in which members can be active and this can be expected to continue. Such extensions of activity need not necessarily be confined to Britain.

Archæology has become more complicated and the help of specialists has to be enlisted much more frequently than ever before. But there is still room for the amateur and the embryo specialist. Major excavations may be beyond our means to conduct but not impossibly so. The selection of a limited number of sites to be tackled in a series of excavations over a number of years would seem in the future, as in the past, the way in which the society can best interest itself in archæology. It is to be hoped that in the future the policy of the University will change from one of almost total neglect of the extremely rich archæological field in which it is situated to one of active research in it. If so, then mutually fruitful co-operation between the society and the University in this work should be possible. For the past fifty years, almost without exception, the contributions to knowledge of the prehistory of the Bristol region have been made by members of this society. These contributions have been very notable. Surely it is not unreasonable to hope that University departments will begin to take an active interest in this vast field of regional prehistory and that it will not be left indefinitely and entirely to an undergraduate society.

The museum provides a considerable collection of material mainly devoted to archæology. It is a collection that could well be used more extensively both by members and University departments. Specialist sections could and should be set up particularly in relation to karst studies, the nucleus for which already exists. The largest gap is that relating to the ecology of caves. It is to be hoped that a start may be made on one or more of the many problems of this aspect of spelæology.

So there is no derth of things that the members may do in the foreseeable future. It is up to the future members to see to it that the heritage they have is improved.

E. K. TRATMAN, *President.*

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