

OBITUARY

DR. BERTRAM AUSTIN CROOK

1899-1973

It is with great regret that the death of Dr. B. A. Crook is recorded. He died on October 13th after a short illness. With Bertie we have lost a founder member, an honorary member and a Vice-President of our society.

At the end of World War I, in which he saw active service in the infantry, he came up to the University of Bristol to read Medicine. Early in 1919 he attended the meeting at which it was decided to found the University of Bristol Spelaeological Society. In our society he played a very active part in the discovery and exploration of caves in the Mendips. Those were the days of push-bikes, walking and heavy equipment with candles for lights. He was always a member of 'away' parties to Derbyshire, Yorkshire and the Dordogne. His interests included archaeology and he shared in the work of excavating Read's Cavern, Aveline's Hole and Rowberrow Cavern.

It was Bertie who first introduced miner's carbide lamps into Mendip caving, a very big step forward in cave lighting. The difficulty was to find a satisfactory means of keeping the headlamp firmly fixed to one's head gear, which, in those days, was usually either a battered Homberg hat or a cap. (Helmets came in much later).

Probably his most exciting experience was to be the leader of the first party to enter The Gorge of G.B. Cave via the Wet Way, then always wet. He has described how he fell out of the Wet Way into the Gorge, picked himself up and then found he could see nothing as the place was, by his feeble light, too big to see the far wall and roof. All was black. It was an unforgettable experience. In G.B. on another occasion in the Devil's Elbow the top of his spare tin of carbide came off, the carbide was spilled into the water and the acetylene ignited with a bang. It was a matter of a quick exit from the surrounding flames. His comment: "It was a sure fire way of getting out of a tight spot quickly."

To Bertie also, due honour must be paid for originating the Mendip Rescue Organisation, the prototype of many other such organisations that have developed throughout Britain. He applied his medical knowledge to caving accidents and evolved new techniques for rescues. Amongst his achievements was the introduction of plaster bandages for immobilising fractured limbs temporarily till the casualty was out of the cave. It was first used in Rod's Pot for an injury that involved a compound fracture of a tibia and fibula.

Through all the years from 1919 to 1973 he has helped the society unobtrusively both as an officer—he was treasurer for many years—and as a friend to the younger members. His workshop at his home at Timsbury was always available for such things as ladder making and the like. For all these things we are very grateful.

After qualifying he did the usual series of house jobs and then went into private practice and specialised in surgery at the local hospital at Paulton. He always put his patients first and nothing was too much trouble. He was very well liked for his kindness, skill and integrity. This liking was well demonstrated on his retirement this year when he received many presentations from so many groups, the members of which had good reasons to be grateful to him.

With his death we have all lost a good friend and a good man. Our sympathy goes out to his wife Marjorie and to their three sons and their children and indeed to all those closely associated with him over the years. Such men as Bertie are all too few so our loss is grievous.

E. K. Tratman.