

OBITUARY

KAY DIXON

1927 – 2008



*At the South Wales caving Club c.1950. Left to right:
Kay Dixon, Joan Light, Robin Bendall and John Pitts.
Photographer unknown*

Kay was one of the 1940's generation of UBSS members. He came up to the University in 1945 to read physics and played an active role in the Society during his student years. It was probably inevitable that he would become a member of the 'speleos'. He had attended Sidcot School, which had a thriving caving club and on arriving at Wills Hall when he came up to Bristol he found himself in the same hall of residence as Arthur Apsimon. It was a period characterised by the transition from wartime conditions to those of peace. The Society was beginning to return to the range of activities that it had engaged in before the war. In particular, travel had become easier. We were no longer restricted to activities within walking distance of the hut. The traditional digging continued however. Long wet muddy hours were spent at the bottoms of GB and Rhino Rift but opportunities presented themselves for visits to more distant caving areas. Kay played a part in the digs but also visited other caving areas.

South Wales was particularly attractive to Mendip cavers. The great river caves of Dan-yr-Ogof and Ffynnon Ddu were larger and more complex than anything on Mendip. Kay enjoyed his trips to them, and the hospitality of the South Wales Caving Club. The Society had by then found a large river cave of its own, in Co. Clare and Kay soon joined the team surveying the Coolagh River Cave. He had taken up cave photography and contributed to the

recording of features of the cave. He used an old glass plate camera. On one occasion he became worried about the possible quality of a picture he had taken. While there was still time to retake it before we left he extemporised a darkroom in a hotel bathroom and developed the plate. Unfortunately at the end of that expedition, we became trapped by floods and had to leave all our equipment, including his camera, behind in order to escape. When we next returned to the cave there was no trace of any of it.

Kay also did some caving in Yorkshire. A number of UBSS members worked in the north after leaving Bristol. Charles Barker was in Hull, Bernard Dembo and I were in Manchester and Ray Wallis, a Wessex member who caved with the UBSS whilst at Bristol, was in Warrington. I had a colleague at work who was a BSA member so there were plenty of opportunities for some rather ecumenical caving in Yorkshire and Derbyshire. Kay joined us for trips to Gaping Ghyll and Lancaster Hole.

Kay lived in Berkhamsted. After graduating he joined a company there making agricultural chemicals. Spray cans using aerosol propellants had recently been invented and he went to work in the laboratory pursuing their development. He was an eminently practical physicist and at times became involved in somewhat bizarre experiments. He devised and made equipment which involved fastening flies to harnesses like a flea circus and then filming them with high speed cameras while applying insecticide spray. An experiment on Berkhamsted Common to investigate fire hazards led to a huge conflagration visible for miles accompanied by a series of explosions. The 'speleos' would have been proud of him!

Kay was married twice, first to Adeline in 1958, who died of cancer in 1965 leaving him with two young children to bring up which he did superbly, and then to Maria in 1976. He leaves her and the children of his first marriage Hugh and Roland.

JKP