

## **Dr. Ellis Owen - President of HGFC - an appreciation.**

Ellis died on Oct.28<sup>th</sup> 2012 after an extended spell of pain and increasing immobility, which has prevented him from attending the Club's activities. He had expressed a wish to attend Chris Stringer's lecture but it was not to be.

Soon after leaving school he joined the Navy and at the end of the war he was in Australia and helped to repatriate Japanese prisoners of war, some of whom died on the way home, leaving him with an acute awareness of man's inhumanity to man.

Soon after he left the Navy he joined the Natural History Museum in the Geology Dept. under Dr.Helen Muir-Wood and it was here that he found his niche in Cretaceous Brachiopods.

The Club sprang directly from a series of lectures on Geology and Fossils he gave under the aegis of the WEA and I was the class secretary. We met at the Forest School, where the Club now holds its meetings. His desire to take us into the great outdoors soon showed itself and most of the class assembled in Eastbourne for an assault on the chalk. It was a day in November, fossils were found, lunch was taken under the cliffs with the sun shining and it was obviously an occasion worth repeating.

### The first weekend Field Trip

Having established a genuine rapport with the Class Ellis decided to run a second series of lectures and it was at the end of this course that it was decided to have a weekend away. As friends of Millie's and mine from Wallington had just purchased a hotel in Lyme Regis what better venue could be found? Their intention was to open at Whitsun but if we could fill the hotel they would open up earlier for us. This was a challenge, which we thought we could rise to. Two girls from Millais School, who were members of the class, thought Mr.Webster would be interested and Millie and I thought that some of our friends could be persuaded to come. With our children the numbers were easily met and we assembled at the hotel on Friday evening and after supper and a briefing from Ellis on plans for Saturday we retired.

In the morning we made a prompt start, the sun was shining and we set out along the beach towards Seatown, crossing the streams. By the time we reached the mudslide it was clear that the gap between the sea and the mud was shrinking fast. Nothing daunted, Ellis decided that the way forward was over the mudslide, over Golden Cap and thus to Seatown. The lesser spirits among us had already decided that discretion was the better part of valour and retreated to the hotel; the rest of us made it to Seatown.

I don't recall too much of the rest of the weekend but the journey home proved to be quite memorable when we encountered a new road cutting, which provided us with some rather good ammonites. Collecting was proceeding happily until the Police appeared on the scene and suggested that we were trespassing. So, reluctantly we made our way home after a memorable weekend.

## Horsham Geological Field Club

The Club had been founded about this time with Ellis as Chairman and Eddie Davidge as Secretary and we had invited Alan Charig, Curator of Palaeontology at the Natural History Museum to be our President. We met at the Veterinary Practice in Farthings Hill where Eddie was one of the vets and this continued until Eddie left the practice, at which time he resigned as secretary and Ellis gave up the chairmanship as he was standing as a Lib Dem councillor to pursue good work on behalf of his constituents.

We continued to meet in members' houses with members in turn expected to provide the topic of the evening and a post meeting repast.

### Activities

We held weekend and longer camping trips all led by Ellis which took us to many of the fossiliferous locations, Symonds Yat, the Isle of Wight, Shropshire, Yorkshire etc each of which was memorable in some way but it is true to say that camping was not one of his greatest talents with his tent blowing down on the Isle of Wight and finding ducks swimming in the tent beside the River Wye.

We decided to hold an annual public meeting to make ourselves known. Who better to call upon than Alan Charig who spoke on the subject of "Dinosaurs - Myths and Misconceptions" Ellis chaired the meeting which was held in the Methodist Hall and attracted an audience of about 50. I'm not sure that it had much effect on our membership but it did seem to bring us to the public's attention. Growing numbers eventually led to our needing to find alternatives to members' houses, so we tried various meeting places finally settling on Forest School where we currently meet.

### Change of President

When Alan Charig died it seemed obvious that the Presidency should be offered to Ellis, which he willingly accepted, and he has fulfilled the role in admirable fashion. We did not always agree but he always had the best interests of the club at heart and his knowledge and wisdom will be greatly missed.

We express our condolences to his family and to Jan Clayden who has been a great support during his later years.

Frank Diggon. Chairman