

OBITUARY



VALTER SCHYTT
1920–1985

Valter Schytt, President of the Society 1969–72 and Sweden's leading glaciologist, died in Tarfaladalen, Kebnekaise, on 30 March 1985 at the age of 65. His interest in glaciology began at Stockholm University, where he was inspired by Professor Hans Ahlmann. Ahlmann had pioneered studies of glacier mass balance in Norway, Iceland, Svalbard, and Greenland, and turned to Valter to initiate a long-term monitoring programme on a representative Swedish glacier. Valter chose Storglaciären in Kebnekaise in 1945 and shortly afterwards built a small hut at the foot of the glacier. This was the beginning of Tarfala research station. Ahlmann remained Valter's teacher, friend, and mentor until his own death in 1974. When, mainly through Ahlmann's initiative, the Norwegian–British–Swedish Antarctic Expedition was being planned for work in Dronning Maud Land in the years 1949–52, Valter was the natural choice for the post of glaciologist and second-in-command to John Giaever, the expedition's Norwegian leader. In addition to meteorology, geology, and topographic survey, the expedition had an eight-point glaciological programme which included mass balance, ice movement, ice temperature, ice-core drilling, seismic sounding, and glacier-fluctuation studies. We were intimately involved with parts of this programme and can bear witness to the energy and care with which Valter planned, thought through, and pursued these objectives. We remember his cheerful leadership through long hours of ice-core drilling, the longer hours he spent on crystallographic examination of thin sections in a snow-hole laboratory at -20°C , and the hectic days of dog-sledge training throughout the first winter.

Valter led exploratory parties inland during each of the two field seasons, returning with a rich harvest of data. Indeed, so rich was the harvest that some years later, on publishing the results, all three of us earned higher degrees.

Valter's own principal achievements included the first convincing identification of annual snow strata in the Antarctic ice sheet, studies of ice temperature, density, and crystal fabric to 100 m depth in an ice shelf, this being deeper than any early expedition, and his realization that extensive areas of supraglacial moraine found inland were not due to contemporary retreat of the ice sheet and could well be consistent with a steady-state regime.

Valter returned to Stockholm in 1952 and in 1954 was invited to spend a year at Northwestern University at Evanston. While there, he was able to visit glaciers in Arctic Canada and in north-west Greenland. In 1956, he was invited by Soviet glaciologists to accompany their ship *Ob'* to Nordaustlandet, where they were beginning a series of glaciological studies. This was followed the next year by further work in Nordaustlandet as part of the Swedish contribution to the International Geophysical Year, 1957–58. In 1958, he was made Fil. dr. and Docent in the Department of Physical Geography. The most important long-term result of his Svalbard work was recognition of the great extent of Pleistocene glaciation in the Barents Sea; this led directly to his understanding, with co-workers, of the concept and former extent of marine ice sheets in both Hemispheres.

In 1955 he married Anna Nora (née Mannerfelt) and, over the years, Tarfala research station became a family affair as their three daughters Helena, Erika, and Anna grew up to serve, in one way or another, the family "business" of glaciological teaching and research. Today, Tarfala is an elaborate and well-equipped field station with laboratories, classrooms, bunkrooms, and messing facilities all painstakingly planned by Valter and Anna Nora. Generations of physicists, geologists, meteorologists, and geographers owe their introduction to glaciology to field courses run at the station and on the glaciers of Kebnekaise. Few glaciers in the world have been so exhaustively watched, probed,

sounded, and investigated as Storglaciären, and few if any can match its 40-year unbroken series of careful observations.

Valter Schytt was intimately involved in the evolution of the Society from its British origins to a truly international fraternity. He founded the Nordic Branch which serves as an important link in the activities of Scandinavian glaciologists. As the first non-British President of the Glaciological Society (1969–72), he along with Hilda Richardson perceived wider horizons for its future. This led to a new constitution and the change of name to make the international status beyond all question. Valter's judgement, tact, and close collaboration with our Secretary General were prime factors in creating the Society that today effectively steers progress in glaciology at an international level. Few disciplines with a relatively small and widely scattered membership benefit from such a well-run organization.

In later years, Valter Schytt became the voice of Sweden in all matters concerning polar research. He represented the International Geographical Union on the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research of ICSU. He was Chairman of the Swedish Travellers' Club (1976–85) and Chairman of the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography (1977–79). The Natural Science Research Council awarded an *ad hominem* Professorship at Stockholm University which he held until he died. His list of publications includes more than 70 scientific papers.

As a member of the Swedish Academy of Sciences, he was prominent in fostering polar research in Sweden, including the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Nordenskjöld's voyage through the North East Passage. He was Scientific Expedition Leader of the *Ymer* 1980 expedition to the Arctic, the success of which marked a resurgence in Sweden's long-standing interest in polar research. This led to the establishment of a Polar Research Committee of the Swedish Academy of Sciences, to a national Polar Research Secretariat, and finally to Sweden's accession to the Antarctic Treaty in 1984.

The international standing and the respect in which Valter Schytt was held in Stockholm culminated in his appointment to the Court of King Carl Gustav to take up the post of Lord Chamberlain in Waiting. As a recognition of his distinguished career, Valter's ceremonial duties at Court gave him much pleasure and tested to the full his direct and easy manner in dealing with people whatever their station.

He will be missed in the Society for his wise counsel, in Stockholm for his role as leader in polar research, and in many lands for his warm, considerate, and generous relations with colleagues.

CHARLES SWITHINBANK

GORDON ROBIN