

OBITUARY



BRIAN BIRLEY ROBERTS, C.M.G., 1912–1978

BRIAN BIRLEY ROBERTS, who died on 9 October 1978, was one of the founder editors of the *Journal of Glaciology* and played a major role in its launching and in the form it took. He was an active member of the Committee of the British Glaciological Society for many years from its formation in 1945 and was one of those who worked for its transformation into the international society it is today. The Society and the *Journal* thus owe Brian Roberts a very great deal.

Brian Roberts was born on 23 October 1912 and read Geography, followed by Archaeology and Anthropology at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. While an undergraduate he led or organized expeditions to Vatnajökull, Iceland, and to East Greenland, and after graduating went to the Antarctic with the British Graham Land Expedition, 1934–37, where he studied the biology of Antarctic birds, the subject of his Ph.D. thesis. He spent the war years 1939–45 on a number of projects associated with polar regions including clothing and equipment for the War Office and geographical handbooks for the Admiralty. When the war was over, Brian was appointed to the Research Department of the Foreign Office and also to a Research Fellowship at the Scott Polar Research Institute, and he continued to hold part-time appointments in these two organizations for the rest of his working life, an unusual arrangement which however allowed Brian Roberts to develop his varied skills as a polar scientist and documentalist and also as a skilled diplomat. In this way he played a major role in the negotiating of the Antarctic Treaty which still regulates national behaviour in the Antarctic and is a model which other international negotiations would benefit from following.

Brian Roberts' contributions to glaciology were important but largely unseen, consisting as they did of advocating forward-looking ideas to those bodies that were in a position to develop them. He was involved in the planning of joint expeditions such as the Norwegian–British–Swedish Antarctic Expedition, 1949–52, and in pushing the Society into an international position. He was also deeply interested in the correct usage of terminology and place names, contributing to many debates on these topics, and compiling, with Terence Armstrong

and Charles Swithinbank, the *Illustrated glossary of snow and ice* (Scott Polar Research Institute Special Publication No. 4)—a project which sprang from difficulties encountered in indexing the first volume of the *Journal of Glaciology*. He was also a keen supporter of developing the Universal Decimal Classification and then using it in polar libraries. Together with the present writer he prepared and then piloted through the Fédération Internationale de Documentation the glaciological sections of U.D.C.

To those who met Brian in these connections, he will be remembered as charming but unyielding, and he pressed points he felt to be right to the exasperation of many of his colleagues. He was however surprisingly prepared to compromise to achieve a major agreement—such as was necessary in international treaty negotiations—and could foresee which seminal changes or agreements were needed to allow enormous future developments. The scientific research following the Antarctic Treaty, the great use made of the Scott Polar Research Institute Library, and the leading position of the *Journal of Glaciology* in the publication of glaciological research are but three examples of this. With his passing the International Glaciological Society mourns one of those whose vision made it what it is.

J. W. GLEN