

Memorial to Peter Colley Sylvester-Bradley 1913–1978

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Peter Colley Sylvester-Bradley, educator, administrator, and humanitarian, died 17 April 1978. He had just finished leading an undergraduate field course when he suffered a stroke from which he never regained consciousness. Peter was born at Pinhoe, Devon, England, on 21 May 1913, the second of six children.

He entered the University of Reading where he decided to read geology after being influenced by Herbert Hawkins, one of the most brilliant lecturers of his day, and Phoebe Walder. After graduation he began his research on the stratigraphy and paleontology of the Purbeck beds (Jurassic) of Dorset, near his new family home. He was excited by the great variety of numerous ostracods they contained and

he subsequently became one of the world's authorities on the group.

World War II interrupted his appointment as lecturer at an agricultural college in Devon. After serving with the Royal Navy and British Intelligence—his “cloak and dagger years”—he obtained a post as lecturer in paleontology at Sheffield University. His interest in paleontology led to an association with Raymond C. Moore and resulted in his contributions to the *Treatise on Invertebrate Paleontology*. In 1955–1956 he was named Rose Morgan Distinguished Visiting Professor of Geology at The University of Kansas. On return to Britain he accepted the post of first F. W. Bennett Professor of Geology at the University of Leicester.

His thirteen years as professor and head of department at Leicester were some of his most challenging years, but he met them with vigor and enthusiasm. Under his leadership the department expanded to thirteen faculty and eight technical staff members, with modern equipment and quarters in a new building. In 1972 he stepped down as head of the department to devote more time to his teaching and research.

He was looking forward to his “retirement” so he could spend more time on his research of oysters and ostracods while pursuing his innumerable other interests as well. He had just accepted a three-year appointment with the Open University to prepare a course on the “Origin of Life and the General Theory of Evolution” in collaboration with the University of California at Berkeley. It was just five weeks before his retirement dinner at Leicester that tragedy struck.

Peter was a geologist first, last, and always. He enjoyed the outdoors and spent time in the field even when administrative duties were pressing. Although he had a problem with the muscles in his legs (originating from an attack of polio in his youth) he never let this difficulty interfere with his walking or field excursions. An insatiable curiosity and desire for knowledge made him a top-notch researcher. His interests were broad and varied, and his understanding extended from paleontology and the origin of

life, to taxonomy, plate tectonics, and astronomy. One of his most popular lectures was on fossil sex, a lecture in which he explained the habits of fossil ostracods and ammonites.

He was an able administrator. He served not only the department but the entire university. His keen insight into problems and his ability to solve them were attributes appreciated by many. He served the scientific community admirably through his activities in twenty different organizations and societies. He had served as chairman of the British Micropalaeontological Association, treasurer of the Paleontological Association, and member of council of the Geological Society of London. He was editor of a number of journals at different times and served on the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature.

He also was active in the city of Leicester where recently he was president of the Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society; he was chairman for some years of the Leicestershire Trust for Nature Conservation.

Peter was unequalled as a teacher. He gave stimulating lectures and challenged students to do their best. He perhaps was happiest with a group of students, often at his home, discussing geology.

Although Peter's professional activities were intense, his family came first. A loving husband and devoted father and grandfather, he was big enough to combine a successful career in both areas. Among his many activities was participation in the local parish church at Stoughton. He was a conservationist and an environmentalist—believing that the world should be lived in but also be preserved for future generations.

He shared his personal life at Christmas with his many friends throughout the world with an informal and inspiring Christmas card and letter. All of his friends—but most of all his wife Joan and children Rowan, Roger, Rosemary, and Benjamin, and his five grandchildren—will miss a true giant among men. Those who had the good fortune to know him were indeed privileged.

The P. C. Sylvester-Bradley Award fund for the attendance at international conferences by research students has been established at the University of Leicester by friends and former students as a living tribute to his memory.

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