

Ron J. Cleevely

20/6/1934–26/2/2017



Ron Cleevely, former Senior Scientific Officer in the Department of Palaeontology, has died after a short illness, aged 82. For 30 years between 1961 and 1991, Ron was a stalwart of the Fossil Mollusca section, curating and advancing the taxonomy of Cretaceous gastropods and bivalves. He published extensively on Cretaceous molluscan faunas, for example, the Blackdown Greensand gastropods (with Noel Morris and John Taylor in *Palaeontology*) and made a considerable contribution to the Palaeontological Association Guide to Chalk fossils. His fame in palaeontological circles, however, lay more in his exceptional knowledge of 18th and 19th century collectors, their specimens and associated natural history works. His publications included several on the Sowerby family, beginning with a bibliography of their publications in 1974, and a biography of the famous Scottish collector, Elizabeth Gray, with details of her extensive collections held here in the Natural History Museum (1989). Amongst palaeontologists, he is perhaps best known for his encyclopaedic guide *World Palaeontological Collections* (1983), which has become the standard reference to fossil collectors and their collections. Unfortunately, as part of the major restructuring of 1990, Ron lost his job in 1991. He set up a consultancy, 'RonCAIRS' (Ron Cleevely Archive & Information Research Services), "providing assistance with natural history bibliography, biography and history, especially of 19th century geology and palaeontology, the curation of fossil collections, and the identification of fossil mollusca". After retirement to Devon he continued his research, which resulted in "Collecting the New, Rare and Curious – Letters selected from the Correspondence of the Cornish Mineralogists Philip Rasleigh, John Hawkins & William Gregor" (2009).

Colleagues last saw Ron on December 8th 2016 at a commemorative meeting to celebrate the life and work of Robert 'Bob' F. Symes OBE (1939–2016). Concerned about preserving historic data, Ron gave a talk entitled, "The use of archiving material to enhance our knowledge of mineral collecting in the past". His presentation, which generated good discussion, was about the changing nature of records and the ephemeral nature of electronic media, and its potential loss in the future. He made a tremendous effort to travel up from Devon to contribute to this meeting, because of the support and encouragement that he had received from Bob for his work on mineral collectors and dealers.

Ron will be missed – colleagues have fond memories of field trips with him and he was a kind and thoughtful person, always willing to impart some of his immense knowledge about collections and collectors.

- 1) Taylor, J. D., Cleevely, R. J. & Morris, N. J. 1983. Predatory gastropods and their activities in the Blackdown Greensand (Albian) of England, *Palaeontology*, 26, 521–553.
- 2) Owen, E. & Smith, A. B. (eds) 1988. *Fossils of the Chalk*. Palaeontological Association Field Guide to Fossils, 2, 306 pp.
- 3) Cleevely, R. J. 1974. A provisional bibliography of natural history works by the Sowerby family. *Journal of the Society for the History of Natural History*, 6, 482–559.
- 4) Cleevely, R. J. 1974. The Sowerbys, the Mineral Conchology and their fossil collection. *Journal of the Society for the History of Natural History*, 6, 418–481.
- 5) Cleevely, R. J., Tripp, R. P. & Howells, Y. 1989. Mrs Elizabeth Gray (1831–1924): a passion for fossils. *Bulletin of the British Museum (Natural History), History Series*, 17, 167–258
- 6) Cleevely, R.J. 1983. *World Palaeontological Collections*. British Museum (Natural History/Mansell Publishing, 365 pp.
- 7) Cleevely, R. J. (Ed.) 2009. Collecting the New, Rare and Curious: Letters selected from the Correspondence of the Cornish Mineralogists Philip Rashleigh, John Hawkins & William Gregor, 1755-1822 (2009). *Publications of the Devon and Cornwall Record Society, New Series*, Vol. 52.