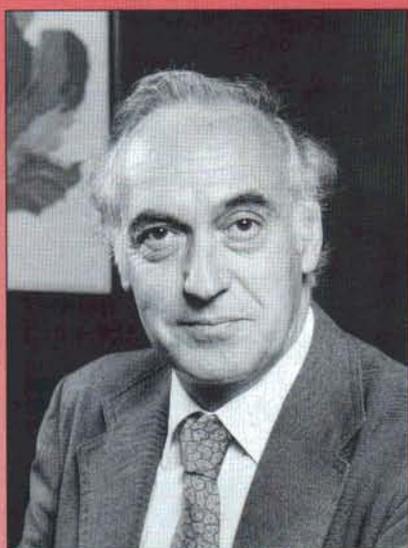


Sir Malcolm Brown



Sir Malcolm Brown, Director of the British Geological Survey from 1979 to 1985, died in early April 1997. Formal obituaries appeared in the Guardian, Times, Independent and Daily Telegraph. What follows is a personal appreciation by Dennis Hackett, Secretary of the BGS, given at the funeral at St Andrews Church, Old Headington, Oxford on 10 April 1997.

I feel honoured to be asked to give this tribute to Malcolm's directorship of the British Geological Survey, 1979-1985. I am the only member of Malcolm's management team still with the organisation, but in this church today are former Directors, Deputy Directors and Assistant Directors of the Survey.

Malcolm became Director of the former Institute of Geological Sciences following his distinguished career in academia. He took over an organisation of 1150 staff with a reasonably stable budget, but with a major relocation under way. What was to follow was one of the severest tests any Director could be asked to undertake. A Conservative Government took office in 1979 and attitudes towards public sector science were about to change. Cuts to funding in subsequent years had to be accompanied by internal constraints in manpower and budgets, and these created tensions and frictions in an organisation which had grown dramatically in the preceding 12 years. The relocation to Keyworth, Not-

tingham, with the closure of offices in London and Leeds was creating huge difficulties among staff and trade unions. Moreover, relations with our parent organisation in Swindon were strained where a centralist approach was the policy of the day.

I know that Malcolm found his early years as Director difficult, frustrating, and at times, quite draining. He was one of the most caring individuals one could wish to meet and he was characterised by great integrity. The necessary reductions in staff numbers and upheaval of families did not rest easily with him. He was an opponent of any form of injustice. The strong sensitive side of his personality was evident to those around him when he felt that he was being misunderstood or that he was being treated unjustly. His sense of humour, much of it irreverent, was a great ally and he often used it to good effect. Nor could he stand pomposity and there was nobody better at puncturing it.

A major external review of the BGS commencing in 1982, together with events in his first three years, convinced Malcolm to set out on a major restructuring. He felt that symbolically, this review, which was to break down traditional barriers in the BGS, would be best achieved if he transferred to the new offices in Keyworth where he would be able to shed the rather conservative cloak and inhibitions of the Exhibition Road building. I should add the important point that Malcolm undertook this fresh and formidable challenge after major surgery when he was sidelined for three months.

A new, innovative matrix management structure was introduced in 1983 giving more flexibility to the way in which the BGS's research and work was conducted, recognising the importance of the massive data holdings of the organisation and the key requirement to manage the careers of individual scientists. It would be foolish to say that the new structure was supported by everyone, however, I suspect even its critics would now accept that it was a key factor in the evolution of the Survey during the past 30 years.

Malcolm earned the gratitude of his staff and his senior management team the following year when he secured the

change of name from the Institute of Geological Sciences to the British Geological Survey. This was one of his proudest moments and again it was a key event in the Survey's history. The BGS's success in meeting the demands of numerous reviews since then has been greatly assisted by its name, with the emphasis on Survey. The development of a strategic plan in 1985 was another key milestone for it helped to establish a framework for the modern BGS through the Butler Review.

Undoubtedly, the greatest importance of the BGS to Malcolm was that it brought Sally and him together, thus providing the basis for one of the happiest times of his life. Malcolm's knighthood in the 1985 Honours List was the source of great pride, not only to himself but to the BGS. Malcolm's directorship of the Survey reached a fitting conclusion in October 1985, his last month of office, when the BGS celebrated its 150th anniversary. A series of open days took place when an estimated 20,000 people flocked through the gates of our offices. This was indeed a forerunner to the public understanding of science. Sally and Malcolm hosted a staff ball in the opulent surroundings of Belvoir Castle, sadly the last such event in the social life of the BGS.

The formal celebration of the 150th anniversary was a memorable event presided over by Malcolm. It was on this occasion attended by many UK and overseas guests that he made a superb speech about the BGS and the place of geology in the life of the nation.

I consider myself to have been very fortunate to have spoken with Malcolm just four weeks ago. He was by that time already in pain, but he was showing characteristic courage in facing that pain and his future. His sole concern was for Sally. He also showed his usual irrepressible wry humour that was such a delight.

In conclusion, Malcolm's directorship of the BGS should not be seen within a timespan of six years, but as the platform for a continuous period of change. The success of the BGS in the 1990s rests to a considerable degree on his legacy. Malcolm would take great pleasure from being remembered as a moderniser of the British Geological Survey.