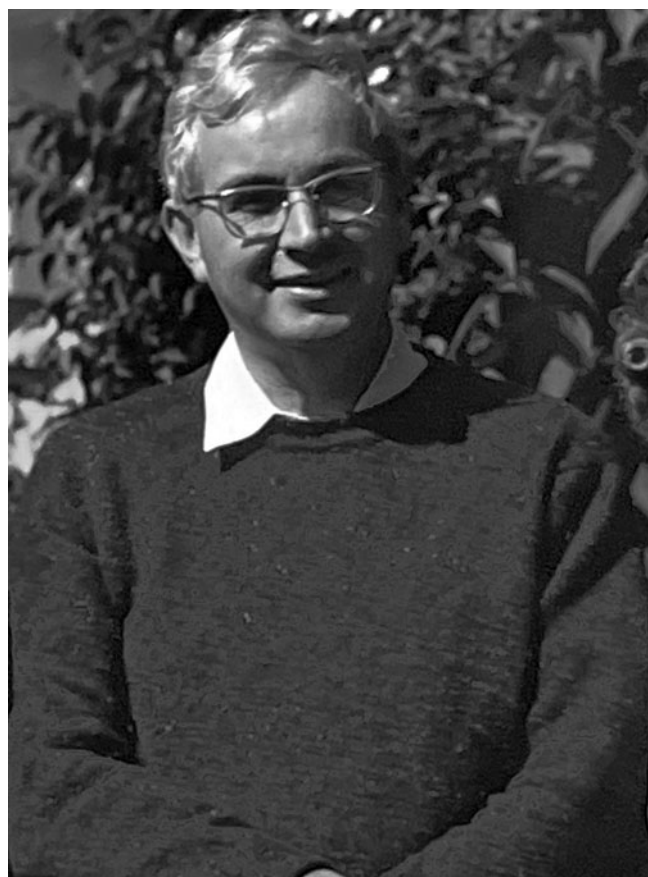


## Obituary

# RONALD KEITH HARRISON (1927–2022)

Richard J. Merriman\*



Ron Harrison was born in Bradford, Yorkshire, UK and attended Aylesbury Grammar School from 1937 to 1945. When school ended he was conscripted into the RAF and later promoted to a Sergeant instructor preparing other conscripts for demob and civilian life. After his own demob he gained a place at Exeter College (later University) where he took an Honours and Special Degree in Geology. Here Ron met June Alexander, and they married in 1954. He successfully applied for the post of Geologist with the Geological Survey of GB in 1952, and was attached to the Atomic Energy Division based in the Geological Museum, South Kensington. Ron's early work led to the discovery of coffinite in Cornwall, and his first published paper, a letter in *Nature*. Subsequently, he discovered pitchblende near Tyndrum, and his samples were displayed at a Mineralogical Society

Meeting in 1957, and some were presented to the Natural History Museum. After submitting a thesis to Reading University on 'The Petrography and Mineralogy of Sedimentary Nodule Structure'. Ron was awarded an MSc in 1962. Later that year he was transferred to the Leeds Office of the Survey as a Petrographer supporting field surveys and the mapping of northern England and Wales. Having settled into the Leeds Office, Ron recruited help with thin section making and eventually acquired XRD equipment. With this set-up he was able to make numerous contributions to Survey Memoirs. Recognition of his work came from the Geological Society of London with the award of the Murchison Medal in 1968. The following year he had a surprise visit from the Director, Sir Kingsley Dunham, who subsequently promoted him to Chief Petrographer in 1970. This entailed a move back to the Geological Museum, the BGS HQ at that time, as a head of department with 15 staff in London and a further 4 staff in Edinburgh and Leeds.

Once familiar with his new responsibilities, Ron was able to turn his attention to something that had long held his interest: the evidence for volcanism and hydrothermal activity in British Mesozoic rocks, spanning some 165 Ma. To this end he initiated a series of 'Island Hopping' investigations in the early 1970s, visiting various remote islands renowned for their unusual igneous geology. These included Rockall, St Kilda, Wolf Rock and Ailsa Craig. On his visit to Rockall in 1972, Ron took a miniature petrographic laboratory that provided on-board identification of rocks collected by divers on Helen's Reef. He spent several days on St Kilda in 1979, having crossed the Atlantic in a small fishing boat from the Outer Hebrides. I shall never forget drilling rock cores from the Wolf Rock phonolite on a rising tide, while Ron was shouting to me – "get up the ladder into the lighthouse". Ron rarely raised his voice. He brought his interest in Mesozoic volcanism to fruition when in 1976 he organised a symposium with the Volcanic Studies Group of the Geological Society, to mark the dedication of the John Smith Flett Lecture Theatre at the Geological Museum. Ron's interest in Mesozoic volcanism took him into volcanogenic clays, and he was heavily involved in organising field excursions for the International Clay Conference at Oxford in 1978. He edited *Clay Minerals*, from 1969–1972, and also in 1986 acted as guest editor for a special publication of the journal devoted to features of mineral diagenesis in hydrocarbon reservoirs.

Following rapid expansion in BGS staff numbers in the early 1970s and recommendations from a number of government working groups, BGS moved its centre of operations to Keyworth, Nottingham. When BGS finally left its London HQ at the Geological Museum in 1985, the mineral and gemstone collections, together with a comprehensive collection of building

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stones, were transferred to the Natural History Museum. Ron Harrison was totally opposed to the loss of these collections to BGS, and chose to take early retirement. His position as Chief Petrographer was subsequently abolished. In retirement, Ron was recruited by Prof. R.A. Howie as an abstractor and editor of *Mineralogical Abstracts*. He abstracted well over 12,600 articles until the journal ceased publication in 2008. Ron's wife June died in 2003 but with the support of his son and family he was able to renew his interest in geology. This entailed visits to

Devon, looking for concentrations of metallic and other elements in nodules, and also to the Isle of Wight, where he became interested in flints and their coatings.

Throughout his time as Chief Petrographer, Ron took a keen interest in his junior staff, encouraging them wherever possible to move into new areas of research or develop new techniques in the geosciences. In all his dealings with staff he was kind, thoughtful and well-mannered, and retained these virtues even as they became unfashionable.