

Gorphwysfa Journal

John Shipley Rowlinson, 1926 – 2018

2018 Vol. 43, November





Looking at the Matterhorn, July 2015, 150 years after it was first climbed.



In the Zermatt Art Gallery, remembering....

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EDITORIAL

How sad it is to say goodbye to someone like John. Wherever you fit into the Gorphwysfa Club, if you were interested, had been a member for a few years, and were involved in club meets, then John would have appeared on your agenda. First impressions of the Professor of physical chemistry at Oxford University were not always the best – but then the title certainly was! Academics can be so deeply immersed in their subject that life outside it is not of material importance. But John was different – he had other interests, one of which was mountaineering and certainly knew that subject, a few words to him were all that was needed to open up the adventures of that day, and any reserve you or he may have had was a thing of the past.

For the person in the street (I am a good example of the person in the back alley) his academic standing needs unravelling, (pages 11 and 12 of this Journal may help!) and by turning to the Royal Society web site (he was a Fellow) a little is revealed, ‘John was a physical chemist with distinguished research into cohesion and capillary action — **two key ways in which matter ‘sticks together’**’¹. For the lowly peasant the statement loses some of its comprehension when it continues ‘John discovered the wide existence of lower critical solution temperatures below which two or more substances will mix completely in all proportions. John made significant contributions to the theoretical description of intermolecular forces, such as his temperature-dependent hard sphere model of repulsive components of intermolecular forces’.¹ It really would be lovely if, the next time I am struggling with some delicate ‘sticking together’ operation, using Araldite, then John’s research will be helping the competed job!

Now that we all fully understand John’s contribution to science (?), both this editorial and the journal will mainly concentrate on his outstanding contribution to the Gorphwysfa Club and mountaineering!

However before we turn to his mountaineer exploits it should be noted that as well as being a scientist he was also a historian and politician, if only, as related to the latter in the lower echelons of politics. The Royal Society tells us that he was ‘passionate about the **history** of physical chemistry and understanding the development of the field’. This rather narrowly describes his interest in history, for it extended outside the field of science to a general interest in things historical, his article published on page 26, unfolds this; who else, would read and be able to quote from Thomas Love Peacock’s book *Headlong Hall* other than a historian?

Turning the clock further back to the 1950s we learn more of John’s involvement in local politics. In the early days of his club membership he did not come through as a political animal although later it was a surprise to learn that he was a staunch Liberal party supporter, and vocal about his beliefs as an election time grew close². Page 3 of this Journal reveals a great deal. In 1956 at the age of 29 years he was elected as a Liberal councillor for the St Anne’s ward in the municipal election for Sale Borough Council, and the leaflet reveals that by 1959 he was very much involved in the local community, living in Brooklands Road, Sale. His involvement as a school manager for three primary schools, meant that he would have to attend many meetings. He was also the vice-president of Sale Veterans, he had been a member of the National Trust for 12 years and was the Treasurer of the local Sale Liberal Association. Added to this he was a member of two advisory committees to the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research and was on the editorial board of two scientific journals. In later years in Oxford, although I am sure he was a Liberal Party member, I did not manage to extract from him his level of involvement in Oxford.

His political involvement in St Anne’s Ward included diverse debate on the fixing of local county and council rates, smoke control, when smog was a growing problem, ensuring that all houses had efficient grates together with preparing the councils case with the problems of sulphur pollution. Fair rents and rates for council houses also concerned him. He saw his duty as being a go between the ratepayer

¹ He has written many books, *Cohesion*, (2002) is his most acclaimed. He was also part of the editorial team who published *Chemistry at Oxford: a History from 1600 – 2005*, published by The Royal Society of Chemists, 2008.

² Note page 6 of this Journal.

and local bureaucracy and followed through all complaints that came to him – attending 85% of the Council and committee meeting to which he was eligible.



Interestingly the Gorphwysfa Club opened the door for him to venture into the hills with a group, when he and Nancy became members in the mid-70s. I am sure the family structure of the Gorphwysfa and the convivial atmosphere generated by the group on meets in Pen y Pass and elsewhere would have helped in his family involvement on the hills. The picture shows him with Brian Smith, both looking very young, with a group of undergraduates outside the Barn at Pen y Pass in 1975.

The first club journal appeared in 1976 and he clearly took an interest in the publication, retaining a full set of the Journals through into the twenty first century. This Journal contains copies of some of his articles. The second issue, Volume 2 number 2, 1977 sees him contributing a crossword, headed 'Gorphwysfa New Year Crossword'; obviously all the clues relate to the hills. This was the first of many contributions to the Journal, John's articles are now part of the history of the club.

John's interest in history would have ensured that he was well briefed on the background that Pen y Pass, Geoffrey Winthrop Young and Lliwedd played in the history of mountaineering, before being involved in the club. My contact with John on the hills, at the time (40 or so years ago) is largely forgotten, but I do have memories about a trip on Lliwedd in January 1983. Brian had come up with the good idea (?) of repeating the first ascent by Stoker and wall of the West Buttress. There were to be two ropes, I think they were Brian and Harvey and John and Howard Coates. There was, of course other problems, as well as it being the 2nd January. The route that they took in 1883 was largely unknown, although a few clues did exist. I think the exciting day is written up in one of the early Journals, but at this stage 35 years later, it is worth quoting a few words from I think, Brian's write up of the day, 'after about 100 feet of awkward moves on greasy rock, desperate measures were required; knees, slings, fixed ropes were all brought into play, with a particular emphasis on the first mentioned. In fact our feet seemed redundant...' Of course it turned out a great day (were not all Lliwedd days great?) But in those days, this was a day that John would have lapped up, everything was right, including the greasy rock!

The installation of Nancy's seat at the Pen y Gwryd by the club, in remembrance of Nancy was very much appreciated by John. The unveiling of it in June 2013, following the making, installing and contributing to it, John considered it a very splendid occasion, with his family and friends around him, a permanent tribute to Nancy, for all that she contributed.

There is much more to be written about John; fortunately a great deal of this is in the following pages. Can I sincerely thank those that have provided such interesting material for this Journal and for Kate Williams and Brian for bringing it all together.



John serving the Mummy's blood at the second Gorphwysfa dinner at the Pen y Gwryd, 1976. John Middleton eagerly awaits his portion! Eleanor Winthrop Young attended this dinner.

JOHN ROWLINSON, 1926 – 2018, BRIAN SMITH

The very sad news of John's death reached me as I was sitting at the edge of the Pacific Ocean. This gave me time to reflect on the exciting adventures I'd shared with him in mountains all over the world.

John provided so many Gorphwysfa members with their first experience of climbing both in this country and the Alps. His friendship enriched our lives in many ways. He had two distinct personas: the scientist and the adventurer. I knew him well in both his worlds. He had a lifelong interest in mountaineering. He was a determined and daring mountaineer who was a committed traditionalist. He started climbing after the second world war when all that was required to climb was a strong rope to tie around one's waist, well-nailed boots and, if appropriate, a long ice axe - the same equipment that had been used by the pioneers of the sport. John was from Manchester and in Katherine Chorley's book about the diverse character of the Manchester men in her successful family at the turn-of-the-century, she wrote;

They were distinguished professional men. They admired brains and hard work – they returned home punctually and dressed for dinner – they lived entirely orderly and responsible professional and domestic lives. Yet, she wrote that it was these same men who were leading pioneers of British mountaineering; ...relaxed at mountain inns in their most disreputable clothes... Their days were given to muscular and often reckless attacks on the rock faces of the Lakeland hills. What a perfect description of John . The adventurous side of John's character was exemplified by his enthusiasm for motorbikes – some time ago he raced his daughter Stella's motorbike around the streets of Headington late at night. Lucky perhaps not be arrested as a joyrider!

During the years that John climbed, mountaineers became increasingly laden with carabiners, metal wedges and camming devices to provide greater safety. This definitely was not John's way. With the simple tools of yore he continued to climb mountains all over the world. He was exceptionally fit. All too often he would find his companions struggling to keep up with him as he raced across difficult mountainsides. He tackled most of the big mountain ranges of the world. Himalayas ,Tien Shen, New Zealand , the Alps and more. He was always the first man out of his tent on a freezing Himalayan morning or the first man to rise from his bunk in the unwelcoming cold and darkness for an Alpine start. He was the man who climbed the Finsterahorn in very bad weather, when all other parties turned back, saying; the importance of good weather on Alpine ascents is in my view greatly exaggerated. A boldness that only mountaineers will comprehend. He was struck by lightning, fell down many crevasses (once dislocating his shoulder), and as always, he just dusted himself down and continued to his next challenge. His only rule was to always stop at exactly 1 o'clock for lunch – even if hanging on a cliff face.

The Alps were his greatest love and he would spend many Alpine summer seasons based in Zermatt climbing the surrounding mountains. I was privileged to be his companion on many of these adventures. At the age of 55 he took part in an expedition to the Himalayas. Though the expedition suffered from adverse weather with dangerous snowstorms, he was one of only two members to reach a summit- Berthatoli South, 20,700ft (6300m). He climbed his last 4000 m peak in the Swiss Pennine Alps, the Weissmies, at the age of 74. He continued to climb in the Eastern Alps, Austria and finally in the Dolomites where he struggled to accept that his ascents of Via Ferratas were true mountaineering. In his 80th year, his friends thinking he might be near retirement, arranged a celebratory occasion for him in Zermatt. That was not to be his last visit to the Alps! At the age of 89 he returned to Zermatt to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the first ascent of the Matterhorn.



Exeter College

John Rowlinson was born in Manchester in 1926 and was to become a most distinguished scientist who made important contributions to the study of thermodynamics and statistical mechanics. His outstanding abilities were recognised when he was very young. At the age of 33 he was elected to the chair of Chemical Technology at Imperial College London. He was appointed to the Dr Lee's chair of Physical Chemistry at Oxford University in 1974, attached to Exeter College.

Soon after moving to Oxford he joined the newly formed Gorphwysfa mountaineering club and became one of its most active members. He was elected to Honorary Life Membership and was the first recipient of the Distant White Domes Award for climbs in the greater mountain ranges.

His academic career was distinguished by the very special attributes he brought to it. He exemplified a dedication to scholarship. His integrity was absolute and he exhibited a total lack of pretension or affectation. I first became aware of John's scholarship almost 65 years ago when I was a student in the chemistry department at Liverpool University. John, then a lecturer at Manchester University, came to give a seminar. We were told that this was a most important lecture to attend – as the speaker was one of the country's leading young physical chemists. Although he talked on a subject which was a particular interest of mine, I must confess I remember little of the talk. However, when later he returned to give a further lecture on thermodynamics he made a great impression. I used the lecture notes I took that day over the next six decades – and they still often sit on my desk! He was elected Fellow of the Royal Society and later became a Vice-President. In 2000 he was knighted for his services to science. After his retirement he wrote a number of scholarly works on the history of science. Every morning he went to his office in the physical chemistry laboratory and then on to lunch at Exeter College - a routine that he continued with his boundless dogged determination until his death.



Nancy with John in the background

Throughout his eventful life he was indeed fortunate to have Nancy as his partner. They met through a mutual friend when on a climbing trip in Glencoe. Living with John required very special qualities – such as being prepared for wedding anniversaries spent scanning the upper slopes of the Matterhorn for a signalled greeting from John. Nancy, with her great wit, humour and strength of character tempered with warm tolerance, was to prove more than equal to that role. John was accompanied by Nancy and his children, Paul and Stella on many of his Alpine adventures. He was very proud of his family and the accomplishments of his children, his six grandchildren and one great-grandson.

JOHN THE LIBERAL CANDIDATE

FACTS ABOUT YOUR CANDIDATE

Dr. J. S. Rowlinson is 32. He was educated at Rossall School and Trinity College, Oxford, where he was Millard Scholar. He graduated with first-class honours in chemistry in 1948 and took his doctorate two years later. He then spent a year doing research in the United States before returning to Manchester in 1951, where he is now a senior lecturer at the University. He has been awarded the Meldola Medal of the Royal Institute of Chemistry and the Marlow Medal of the Faraday Society for his work. He is a member of two advisory committees to the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, and is on the editorial board of two scientific journals.

He is keenly interested in education at all levels and is a School Manager for Worthington Road, Lime Tree and the Beeches Primary Schools. He is a vice-president of Sale Veterans, and treasurer of Sale Liberal Association. He has been a member of the National Trust for twelve years.

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A MESSAGE FROM COUNCILLOR F. PARKER

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be invited to act as Agent for Dr. John Rowlinson for the forthcoming Municipal Election. Here is a man who, during his three years of office as your Liberal Councillor has always given of his best for all who live in St. Anne's Ward.

He has from time to time, as the occasion demanded, paid visits to people in the Ward who had problems to discuss and those who have taken advantage of Dr. Rowlinson's help, will recall the invaluable advice and assistance he has given them.

We, as Liberals, have always pledged ourselves to serve YOU, the community, and we have never deviated from that promise. Evidence of this has already been felt throughout the Ward in all sorts of ways.

Dr. Rowlinson invites YOUR support on May 7th. He invites YOU to VOTE LIBERAL, the commonsense way, so that the progress which the Liberals have made on your behalf in this Ward will not be broken.

I am,

Yours sincerely,

FRED PARKER.

11 Lynn Avenue,
Sale.

Tel.: SALE 6140.

INDIVIDUAL POLLING CARDS
WILL BE DELIVERED LATER

SALE BOROUGH COUNCIL ELECTION

St. Anne's Ward

THURSDAY, MAY 7th, 1959

Polling 8 a.m. to 9 p.m.



Dr. John Rowlinson

THE
LIBERAL CANDIDATE

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Three years ago you elected me the first Liberal councillor for this Ward. In 1957 and 1958, Liberals were again returned — Councillors Tovey and Parker. This year I ask again for your support, and put before you the course I have followed.

As a Liberal member I have been free to use my own judgment of how best to serve you. No member of any other party has this freedom, for he must follow the decisions of his Party Caucus, which meets in private on the Monday before each Council meeting. Twice we have even seen the humiliating spectacle of Conservatives speaking and voting in favour of important resolutions on the Finance Committee, only to vote the other way when the matter comes before the whole Council for confirmation.

RATES

Again our rates have gone up by 1/-. Why? Most of our rates go to the County Council, and of this shilling

10½d. is an increase by Cheshire County Council.

1½d. is an increase by Sale Borough Council.

(after allowance for a re-allocation of Government grants).

Liberals have maintained consistently that we could run our own affairs more efficiently if we combined with some of

our equally small neighbours to form one self-contained authority. I am glad that we are now beginning to get the support of the more progressive Conservatives. There are, however, still a few who support the inefficient link with distant Chester.

SMOG

Three years ago I put smoke control as one of my principal objects on Sale Council. It was a Liberal motion which led to a new bye-law to ensure that all new houses have efficient grates. I have been a leading supporter of the smoke control area that is now planned for the west side of Sale, and, as a chemist, I was able to play a part in preparing the town's case at a recent inquiry into sulphur pollution from Partington. However, last winter has emphasised that there is still much to do.

COUNCIL HOUSES

I have supported consistently fair rents and rates for council houses. By **fair rents** I mean that no tenant should have a subsidy unless he really needs one. This is now the case in Sale, for there is **no subsidy from the rates** except for that on old people's dwellings. By **fair rates** I mean that all tenants who accepted without demur the increase in valuations in 1956—1957 should not be faced with an increase that is to be back-dated three years. There has recently been a move, which has had the tacit support of most Con-

servative members, to force Sale Council to raise rates retrospectively. I have opposed this most strongly. The matter is now before the Courts.

PERSONAL SERVICE

A duty of a councillor is to be a buffer between a ratepayer and local bureaucracy. I have followed up, as well as I could, every complaint that has come to me, and have appeared frequently and publicly on platforms in Sale to answer your questions.

I have attended 85% of the meetings of the Council and its committees for which I have been eligible.

If my efforts to represent you faithfully on Sale Council have your support, may I ask again for your vote on May 7th?

Yours very sincerely,

JOHN S. ROWLINSON.

154 Brooklands Road,
Sale.

Tel.: SALE 9935.

JOHN ROWLINSON – “BERGFÜHRER”, RICHARD SILLS

John was a remarkable mountaineer – not a rock gymnast in the modern style but a competent all-round mountaineer on mixed routes, in the old tradition. He kept a sound background level of fitness by walking up and downhill to and from work every day – and sometimes prepared for Alpine trips by arranging to attend conferences in mainland Europe, then getting in some acclimatisation in the Alps before the serious business started.



We enjoyed many fine days with John on British mountains: scrambles on Crib Goch and Aonach Eagach, rock climbs on the east face of Tryfan, and snow climbs in the Lake District and in Glencoe - such as Boomerang Gully on Stob Coire nan Lochan and Central Gully on Bidean nam Bian; and others in Lochaber – including a memorable 2000-foot ascent of Tower Gully on Ben Nevis.

John in Boomerang Gully, Stob Coire nan Lochan, Glencoe

But it was in the Alps that John really came into his own.

Geoff Pocock's affectionate reference to John Rowlinson as “Bergführer” was well merited. Before meeting John, Gilliane and I had ventured to such mid-height mainland European ranges as the Pyrenees and the Oetztal. But it was only under John's leadership that we had the confidence to tackle the high peaks of the Pennine Alps. Our first stay in Zermatt – without John – was a bit of a washout, thanks to changeable weather and a lack of awareness of what could be achieved in iffy conditions.

The next year (1978) changed everything. The southern skyline from Zermatt is dominated by a wonderful range of peaks, from the Breithorn, to Castor and Pollux (the heavenly twins), to Lyskamm to Monte Rosa. These look to be not easily accessible from the Swiss side; but John was aware of the options that are opened up by use of the huts on the Italian flanks. Thus it was that – after suitable acclimatisation on the Unterrothorn, Oberrothorn, and Riffelhorn – we set off with John and Geoffrey Pocock for a night at the Gandegg Hut, below the Theodul Pass.



Next day brought a tiresome plod through fairly deep snow to the summit of the Breithorn, the easiest and most accessible of Zermatt's "Viertausender" peaks; followed by a descent to the Mezzalama Hut on the Italian side. The weather was fine next day, though deep snow made it hard work to reach the top of Castor; from which the descent was a minor epic. Contouring round the foot of Pollux brings you to the Schwartztor pass and John was aware that this offered a possible descent on the Swiss side to the Monte Rosa Hut.

John leading the descent from the Schwartztor

The descent started with a traverse in thigh-deep soft snow, with a menacing cliff below. Because a slip would be fatal, we had to use belays and move one at a time, and this meant digging deep through the soft snow to reach firm snow-ice. The traverse and descent passed without mishap – but the conditions meant that we had endured a 13-hour day. Gilliane and I were sufficiently exhausted to abandon any thoughts of further exertions – yet next day, Geoffrey and John set out in the still deep snow to essay the ascent of Monte Rosa, reaching high on the mountain before being turned back by the conditions.

The following year (1979) Gilliane was otherwise engaged; but the rest of the usual suspects were again in Zermatt – and this time John had in mind a really ambitious plan – a traverse of almost the whole of Zermatt's southern skyline peaks, with intervening nights spent in huts on the Italian side. After an acclimatisation stay in the Zinal valley, the party (Geoffrey Pocock, Howard Coates, John Rowlinson and I) walked up to the Theodul Hut, at the foot of the Furggen ridge of the Matterhorn.

Next day, we traversed the south flank of the Breithorn and climbed the south west ridge of Pollux; then descended steep snow gullies to reach the track down to the Mezzalama Hut. Back up to the Zwillingsjoch next day (the same route as in 1978), intending this time to traverse Castor, descend to the Quintino Sella Hut, traverse Lyskamm, descend to the Gnifetti Hut, climb Monte Rosa then descend to Zermatt. What a wonderful expedition that would have been! But the snow was soft, crampons were balling up, and a retreat seemed the only prudent course. The retreat in soft snow across the sunny south flank of the Breithorn was particularly arduous.



John on the summit of the Strahlhorn

After a brief recuperation, we were at the Fluhalp Hut two days later. Geoffrey and Howard were feeling below par, so John and I set off for a two-man ascent of the Strahlhorn. Soft snow was again a problem, this time on a badly crevassed glacier, and we had one or two minor excursions into crevasses. Nevertheless, the summit of the Strahlhorn was reached – though in two hours longer than the guide-book time. Again John had an ambitious plan – this time for a traverse to the Britannia Hut above Saas. But other parties advised us that the snow was waist deep, so we opted for a prudent return to Fluhalp.

In 1981 (after Gilliane and I had enjoyed a few days in the Oetztal), I joined Geoffrey and John for a brief stay in Zermatt. We reached the summit ridge of the Zinalrothorn but, frustratingly, couldn't find the key move to reach the summit itself. Nevertheless, it was satisfying to have crossed and recrossed the Biner Slab without mishap. Next target was the Allalinhorn. This is arguably the second easiest of the Pennine "Viertausender" peaks, regularly climbed nowadays, starting from Metro Allalin, by Uncle Tom Cobley and all. But crowds were not to John's taste, so he came up with a novel route, starting at the Täsch hut and traversing the Alphubel Glacier to reach the Mellich Glacier, and so onto the not so frequented south ridge. From the summit, the return route was via the delightful Feechopf traverse, a rocky scramble reminiscent of Crib Goch, and so back to the Täsch hut.

Gilliane and I had developed an aversion to crossing snow-covered, crevassed glaciers, and didn't return to the high Alps until the 1990s, thus missing out on John's Alpine exploits in that period. But we then had the privilege of accompanying him on a couple of Alpine trips, at a time when his previous Alpine companions were no longer available. A 1995 trip to Chamonix started in the Val Montjoie, with an acclimatisation walk along the skyline ridge between that valley and St Gervais, then an ascent of Mont Tondou – which offers stunning views of the south west flanks of Mont Blanc.



John and Gilliane on the Dômes de Miage

A descent to the Conscrits Hut was followed by an ascent of the Dômes de Miage – a wonderfully scenic skywalk over a delightful snow ridge. Descending to the col between the Dômes de Miage and the Aiguille de la Bérangère, we had planned to descend a snow gully to regain the hut. But climate change had taken its toll, and the snow gully had retreated by several dozen metres down the cliffs. So there was nothing for it but to continue up the next section of the ridge to the summit of the Aiguille de la Bérangère, and descend from there.

Next target was to climb La Tour Ronde, starting at the Torino hut on the French-Italian border. This hut is accessible by cable car from Chamonix or Courmayeur, but John had a better idea. So we took the cable car only as far as the Aiguille du Midi, above Chamonix; then traversed the snow slopes of the upper Glacier du Géant to reach the Torino Hut. The attempt on the peak next day was abortive, thanks to the difficulties of climbing mixed terrain, and we then decided that we'd run out of time. Our consolation was to descend the whole length of the Glacier du Géant, Glacier du Tacul and the Mer de Glace – and John was pleased to have the chance to walk the length of the only one of the long Alpine glaciers that he hadn't yet traversed.



Two days later we again took the lift to the Aiguille du Midi for a night at the Cosmiques Hut. After a 1.00am call, we set out in the dark for the long climb up the flank of Mont Blanc du Tacul – a route that has since become very risky owing to increased avalanche danger. A traverse to the Col Maudit was followed by an ascending traverse across the flank of Mont Maudit to the Col du Mont Maudit, and thence to the Col de la Brenva. A long trudge up the Mur de la Côte landed us on the summit of Mont Blanc, in guide book time.

John and Gilliane on the summit of Mont Blanc

A descent of the spectacular Bosses ridge brought us to the Vallot hut and the Col du Dôme. The plan had been to descend to the Grand Plateau and so down to the Grands Mulets hut. But that route is no longer well used, and there was no sign of a track. John was in general not averse to crossing trackless glaciers; but this one was known to be quite hazardous, so discretion prevailed. The only sensible option was to descend to the Goûter hut. This hut, offering the shortest approach to *John and Gilliane on the summit of Mont Blanc*, is always fully booked, so, as expected, the warden said we couldn't stay and would have to continue to the Tête Rousse hut, some considerable distance away. We were able to plead that our party included a weary 69-year old, and that we'd have to stay on grounds of safety; so we ended up sleeping on the kitchen floor. A great consolation was the scenic descent to the Nid d'Aigle next morning, followed by a ride on the Tramway du Mont Blanc.



Our last trip to Zermatt with John was in 1999, when many Gorphwysfans assembled in Zermatt for a Club meet in honour of John. Various members climbed various peaks over a period of two weeks or so. The highlight for us came at the end of the meet, when we headed off to Saas with John and Janice and Stephen Simpson. After a stormy night at the Hohsaas Haus, we set off in light rain for the Weissmies Glacier. The weather cleared before long, so we enjoyed a splendid climb through spectacular glacier scenery.

Gilliane, John, Janice, Stephen ascending the Weissmies

Looking down from a great height on those who had waited at the hut for the weather to improve, we reflected on the motto “Ascendentes respicere iuvat” – which in this context meant that it’s great to look back on those still climbing! At the summit of the Weissmies, John commented that it was no doubt his last “Viertausender”. He had undoubtedly climbed a great many of them! We descended the far side of the mountain to the Zwischbergen Pass, and thence to Saas Almagell to conclude a thoroughly satisfactory traverse.

There was an Alpine postscript – a brief trip to the Oberland the following year, when ambitions were limited by a problem with my knee. Even so, we did climb Ebene Fluh (3962 metres) with John – so he was only 38 metres short of yet another “Viertausender”; and we had the pleasure of beholding the fabulous glacier scenery of the Konkordiaplatz, and descending the Grosser Aletschgletscher - yet another of the great Alpine Glaciers – in the company of Gorphwysfa’s very own “Bergführer”.

PROFESSOR SIR JOHN SHIPLEY ROWLINSON: AN ACADEMIC OBITUARY, GUS HANCOCK, EMERITUS FELLOW, TRINITY COLLEGE OXFORD

John Rowlinson was born on May 12th 1926 in Handforth, Cheshire. He was a Scholar at Rossall School in Fleetwood, and entered Trinity College in 1944 as a Millard Scholar to read Chemistry. He gained a first class degree (then a B.A.) in 1947, continued with his Part II and D. Phil. working with James Lambert, the Tutor in Chemistry at Trinity, in the newly constructed Physical Chemistry Laboratory in South Parks Road. His B.Sc. was awarded after four years undergraduate study, and his M.A. and D. Phil. in 1950. With Lambert he worked on ultrasonic dispersion to measure the heat capacity of gases, and this was to form the basis of much of his intellectual interest over the next seventy years – the study of the properties of liquids and gases from the point of view of their intermolecular forces both in the pure form, at interfaces and in confinement in lattices and capillaries.



Trinity College, Oxford.

John left the UK after his D.Phil. and with the help of a Fulbright travel scholarship he spent a year at the Naval Research Laboratory in the University of Wisconsin in Madison. He then spent ten years at the University of Manchester, where he was ICI Fellow, Lecturer and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Chemistry³. His career then took a change of title if not of intellectual interest: in 1961 he was elected to the Chair of Chemical Technology at Imperial College London, an institute with a long history of experimental physical chemistry which was augmented by John's experimental and theoretical work. In 1974 he returned to Oxford as Dr Lee's Professor of Chemistry, a post he held within the same building as he had done his Doctorate until his retirement in 1993. During his academic career he published over 200 papers and book chapters and eight monographs in the field of Physical Chemistry, including books on Liquids and Liquid Mixtures and The Molecular Theory of Capillarity.

His work soon resulted in a multitude of awards, prizes and named lectureships at Universities in Britain and abroad. Examples include the Meldola medal of the Royal Institute of Chemistry in 1954, the Marlow Medal of the Faraday Society in 1956 (he was the first recipient of this still extant award), the von Hofmann prize of the Gesellschaft Deutsche Chemiker in 1970, and the Leverhulme Medal of the Royal Society in 1993. In 1970 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society, and became its Physical Secretary and a vice President from 1994-99; 1994 also saw his election as Honorary Foreign Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He was made Knight Bachelor in 2000 "for services to chemistry, chemical engineering and to education."

³ John was awarded the Meldola medal of the Royal Institute of Chemistry and the Marlow medal of the Faraday Society for his work in Manchester.

When John was at school he insisted (much to the annoyance his teachers arranging his timetable) that he should take History as well as the traditional Maths, Physics and Chemistry in the Higher Schools Certificate Examination. The History of Science was to be an abiding passion, especially in retirement. He was particularly interested in the work of a pioneer in the area of gaseous intermolecular forces, J.D. van der Waals (a familiar name to all science undergraduates for his work on the modification of the ideal gas laws) and authored a book on the translation of van der Waals 1873 thesis (with the comment that “the original version must be the most cited and least read of any thesis in physical science”), together with a translation from French and German of van der Waals’ first seminal paper on surface structure and surface tension. John’s interests ranged from Priestley to Dewar, from Kelvin to Einstein. More recent history included a description of Hinshelwood’s war work in Oxford on the properties of charcoal for use in respirators: Hinshelwood was one of his predecessors as Dr Lee’s Professor in Oxford and a former Fellow of Trinity (and proudly claimed as one of our Nobel Laureates). For his work on the History of Science John received the Edelstein Award of the American Chemical Society, showing the heights he achieved in both the History of Science and in Physical and Theoretical Chemistry.

John was made an Honorary Fellow of Trinity in 1992, and formally retired after nineteen years as the Dr Lee’s Professor and Head of the Department of Physical Chemistry in 1993. His tenure as Head marked a period of expansion of Physical Chemistry, and John succeeded in keeping a wide range of sometimes strong minded individuals in harmony and cooperation. He did this simply through example, not only in his own academic achievement, but also in his sincerity and integrity as a Departmental Head. I was his second appointment to a Lecturership (with Fellowship at Trinity) in 1976, and came to Oxford (from Germany, via California, Cambridge and Dublin) having had no experience of the place. I was warmly and generously welcomed by John, the intricacies of Oxford life were explained, and it was clear to me that he was very much appreciated by all the staff in the PCL. John’s Professorship in Oxford was linked to Exeter College, and he was a Fellow and Emeritus Fellow there from 1974. The College connection was important to him, and he continued to lunch regularly in Exeter until the end of his life. He felt he had come full circle – he initially applied to Exeter to read Chemistry, was taken instead by Trinity, but finally returned as a Professorial Fellow.

John died on 15th August 2018. Nancy had predeceased him in January 2012. He is survived by his children Paul and Stella, six grandchildren and one great grandson. He felt great pride when one of his grandsons was admitted to read Mathematics in Trinity College Oxford.

THE SNOWDON HORSESHOE WITH JOHN, LUCY NORTON

New Year's Day 1985 (my second New Year Meet) and at Pen-y-Pass the majority of the people at the Youth Hostel were involved with the Llydaw Race. I would probably have ended up helping, but I heard that John Rowlinson and Stephen Simpson were planning to go around the Snowdon Horseshoe, and they said I was welcome to join them. I jumped at the opportunity to walk with two such experienced mountaineers, though little did I realize quite what I was saying "Yes" to as it was a much longer and harder day than I had ever imagined!



Details of the walk are rather hazy but odd moments linger in my memory, starting with the pace at which they set off. The clamber up onto Crib Goch was extremely scary and John and Stephen's encouragement was very reassuring... I remember the elongated ice crystals in places and the obligatory lunch stop with freezing hands at 1.00 o'clock on one of the summits. When we finally descended to the hostel many hours later, I was physically exhausted but had a huge sense of achievement.

A distant view of Snowdon

With my lack of experience it felt like an epic walk and one I would never forget for lots of reasons. Now of course I realize how lucky I was to have walked that classic route with such an eminent mountaineer as John.

JOHN ROWLINSON, SOME MEMORIES, NICOLA JACKSON

I was first introduced to John when I arrived in Oxford to take my D. Phil. in 1976. I may have met the Rawlinsons earlier through my brother-in-law Geoffrey Pocock, who was taking a postdoctoral year in Oxford a year or so before.



Early memories of John are of a day with myself on Lliwedd around 1978 or 1979, attempting - I think - Avalanche and Red Wall at VDiff+. I remain hazy as to the route, as was the case on the day, as in thick mist we wandered ever higher across grassy ledges and up grass and boulder-filled gullies attempting to find the way.

It may have been on the Great Terrace that I asked to be - or stay - roped. "Why" said John, "What on earth could there be to worry about"? My head for heights is not good now, but even then, as I peered down the plunging cliffs into the murk, I knew full well the reasons for my feelings and my words! John was entirely at ease on the steeply sloping ledge and clearly could not imagine falling. We had a pleasant day and did emerge on the summit but were never quite sure what we had climbed - the least line of resistance I think!

Grassy ledges/terraces on Lliwedd



Lliwedd, the arrow indicates the Great Terrace

I also recall John's slightly eccentric driving style when Nancy and he kindly offered Roland and myself - fairly recently married - a lift to North Wales from Oxford. John seemed to accelerate into each corner and trundle slowly out of it in a counter-intuitive style while we all chatted merrily away. It was all very charming - as was Nancy and John's kind wedding present of six bottles of Exeter St Emilion Chateau Pavie when we were wed in Exeter Chapel - Roland by then holding the Exeter Usher Cunningham Scholarship during his D. Phil.

More recently Roland was grateful for John's involvement in his project to write the biography of Victorian mountaineer and scientist John Tyndall. John advised Roland on an initial paper on the fiendishly complex topic of diamagnetism which Roland published in Notes and Records with the Royal Society, and acted as a peer reviewer for the relevant chapter in Roland's biography - now published with Oxford University Press.⁴

When Roland sent John a newly-published copy, he received a delightful letter from John which expressed enormous appreciation - Roland was very touched, and John was clearly glad to be involved. John had hoped to attend the book launch at the Royal Institution in London, but it was sadly not to be. We shall miss our distinguished, courteous and kind friend greatly.

⁴ <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-ascent-of-john-tyndall-9780198788959?cc=gb&lang=en&>

HAPPY DAYS ON THE HILLS WITH JOHN, HOWARD COATES

John was a wonderful climbing companion and I remember many happy days together with him in North Wales and Zermatt. He loved mountaineering routes and, with others, we did The Grooved Arete and North Buttress on the East Face of Tryfan, Great Slab in Cwm Silin and other classics.

Perhaps because he was a scientist, there was a strong logical thread which ran through much of his approach to the crags. For example, John seemed to me to place great faith in guide books. If they had been written by an established name and published by a reputable house, then they could be trusted. If the grade was VD+, then it would certainly go, whatever the reputation of the route and, pretty much, whatever the weather conditions. This enhanced his companions' confidence and made for better days.

However, there were times when the scientific approach appeared to desert him and this was most in evidence when it came to belaying. Inexplicably, John appeared to be almost disinterested in placing nuts securely or checking slings carefully. I could never quite understand why this was unless he believed that there was nothing better than the old fashioned technique of a firm stance with the rope around your shoulders. This feature of John's climbing could be terrifying and made for exciting days.

I will never forget an occasion in Zermatt when these qualities combined to make a memorable day in the mountains. We were climbing on the smaller peaks, partly because the weather forecast was not good. With this in mind, I was keen to get up and down quickly. John, however, would not alter his alpine rhythm and we made steady progress. Then, at 1 o'clock precisely, he decreed it was time for lunch. The suggestion that we might press on under the circumstances – rapidly deteriorating conditions - was dismissed. We were not in the most comfortable of positions but he nonchalantly threw a sling over an adjacent block and proceeded to eat his sandwiches. I pointed out that his boulder moved to the touch and was poised to plummet into the abyss taking him with it but he thought I was fussing unnecessarily. I also drew his attention to the black clouds racing up the valley from Randa but his view was that mountains attracted storms and that they were no cause for concern. Lightning flashes illuminated the sky and the snow started to fall. I wondered whether we would ever make it. But, unhurried John finished his sandwiches and on we went with electricity buzzing around the hoods of our cags and our ice axes saved us from being lethal weapons only by their hickory shafts.

How we survived I do not know, but all John's fine qualities played a part; his logical approach, his steadiness, his confidence and his determination to go on.

THE MATTERHORN 1980, BRIAN SMITH

John had long wanted to climb the Matterhorn but had been thwarted on earlier occasions and it seemed likely that he would be equally frustrated again this year. Mike Leask, John and I had spent two weeks climbing the surrounding spectacular 4000m peaks from our Zermatt base and our holiday was coming to an end. It was Mike's first visit to the high mountains and he more than anyone was captivated by the sight of the Matterhorn towering above the village. He wrote:

*".....the first sight of the Matterhorn was enough; everything else we climbed here would be no more than a rehearsal for **the** attempt. You can't get away from the Matterhorn; walk down the main street in Zermatt with it behind you and you feel its presence boring into your back."*



A fine view of the Matterhorn

Unfortunately, as on all the previous days that we had enquired, the guide's bureau reported the mountain was out of condition and was not "open". However, it was the very end of our holiday and we felt nothing was to be lost by trying. We found the Hornli hut surrounded by ice and snow and as we looked up at the snow plastered peak we wondered if we were doing the right thing. John never wavered - we would give it our best! We spent the afternoon of our arrival exploring the lower complex gullies that lead to the south-east ridge. John was a good tutor. He made us practice moving quickly together with just a short rope between us. This was his skill - moving fast over difficult ground.

We rose at 3 am and made a prompt start following the gentle snow ridge that linked the Hornli hut with the mountain. Our afternoons exploration paid off and we had no difficulty finding our way through the gullies. We were not the only ones to reject the official advice. There was one guided party with a husband and wife but they set off so early we never saw them again until they were descending. Throughout the day we met a scattering of individuals from different countries on the mountain. We overtook a German party who said *"English always hurry and hurry. No need. We all get to the top."* Unfortunately, they were not to make it past the Solvay Hut. The east face was a delight; crisp hard snow up which we could make rapid progress kicking steps. The Mosley slab was clear of snow and led us to the Solvay hut for a leisurely second breakfast. Straightforward scrambling took us to the summit with just one steep section with a fixed rope. Sadly, though having the pitch to ourselves, we did not think to climb it without using the fixed rope. Something we were later to regret.



John cresting the summit of the Matterhorn

We shared the summit with four Yugoslav climbers and after enjoying the splendid view and taking a few photographs we returned easily to the Solvay hut. We enjoyed an early lunch in its dark interior. We wondered why a mountain in such pleasant and undemanding conditions should not be considered "open". It all had seemed so straightforward. When we stepped from the Mosley slab into the wet snow at its base we found out!

The rest of the descent was, as Mike wrote later:

"a mixture of epic and nightmare. All the snow was slush, and desperately treacherous and we were correspondingly careful. John dropped his axe - and we got it back, a splendid omen..."

However, after another slip John lost his axe again but this time we could not recover it. He took the event calmly and never for one moment lost his composure and resilience. The descent was unnerving and took a very long time and dusk was gathering by the time we reached the Hornli hut. There was no chance of making it down and we telephoned Nancy to say we would not be back in Zermatt until

the following morning. This caused problems as Mike and I had to get the train to go home the next day.



However, it was all very worthwhile and when we reached the valley next morning we had someone take a photograph of the three of us, totally bedraggled and battered but triumphant - a photograph that brings fond memories of an exciting day spent with Mike and John. We caught the train home later that afternoon and it was the most crowded and unpleasant journey I have ever taken but we were not complaining.

Conquerors!

MEMORIES OF JOHN

Paul Barczak

I have always been grateful to John for introducing me to the joys of alpine mountaineering. As a student I would crowd into the university minibus for a weekend of scrambling around North Wales but John and Nancy very kindly and generously invited me to climb with the family and members of the Gorphwysfa in Zermatt.

I was never particularly fit or able as a climber but having been on a few walks with John in rural Oxfordshire didn't have any reason to think that I wouldn't be able to keep up with him. He said he didn't train for the Alps but reality soon kicked in when relentless day by day we went scrambling and climbing over rocks and glaciers to tackle what would for him, I'm sure, have been some of the gentler 4000 mt peaks. I was left puffing and panting at the back whilst John kept going and going at a never decreasing pace. I later learnt that he would usually do some sneaky pre alpine training by accepting a lecture invitation near a convenient mountain range that offered this opportunity.

He was most generous and whilst in his party, would insist on paying for all the expenses of the trip down to his standard self-catering mountain fare-'all together'-pasta, sauce and some sort of dried meat. Even 'rest days' were an opportunity for John to tick off the miles and were sometimes more exhausting than the climbs.

If it hadn't been for John I would never have had the chance to climb in the Himalayas on the Gorphwysfas 1981 expedition. Whilst spending my time attending to the dental needs of the porters and one member who chipped his tooth on a stone on his morning chapatti just being in such wonderful surroundings was a privilege. This was I think the only time that I had ever seen John truly exhausted when returning from an extended route finding day.

With advancing age John did eventually slow down but still maintained the ability to surprise as Heather once noted to her cost.

On the day that I heard of John's death I was in North Wales with Oliver his great grandson, age 8, at the top of Snowdon. He would have been very pleased to see the photograph.



Oliver on Snowdon

Heather Barczak

It was New Years Eve, another meet at Pen y Pass in North Wales. John was standing by the entrance as we arrived, tweed jacket, shirt and tie, a smile.

'How are you?' I ask, he was recovering from serious surgery and I was surprised to see him there. 'Fine' he said 'I'm looking for someone to join me on a gentle walk tomorrow'. 'My luck was in', I thought. This would 'tick all the boxes', justifying my position as an associate member of the British Mountaineering Council, actually going out, I had intended to avoid this and being with my extended family. Great!

Even better, John suggested to the boys, a later start, and that 'clinched the deal', they were coming as well.

9 am: Paul drove us to a car park to make it easier to walk. Ben, Thomas, John and I chatted all the way. It was great to catch up. Spirits were high.

Outside the rain was setting in and it was fairly grey and a bit misty. Once out of the car, John led the way, striding at quite a pace through mud and rocky terrain. No-one else seemed to notice that this did not seem gentle, in fact the opposite. I kept quiet, quite a feat for me.

We started to ascend and ascend, 'Is this gentle?', no reply, not even as John stopped to get the ropes out. 'Er, where are we going?' this timid voice said, 'A gully on the ridge' came back the strong immediate response... 'mmm not so gentle then!' I thought.

Dripping wet and weary we stopped in a sheltered spot for lunch. Everyone was sharing sandwiches, when John quietly said 'I'm cold', he took his gloves off to show blue fingers. Here was my big moment, 'I'm not', I said and pulled my extremely warm hands from my incredibly hot gloves and exchanged them. 'Lovely, he said...

It was about 1.30, 'Another 3 hours I think', he said as he got the maps out and discussions began.

There was no turning back.

It was past 5 o'clock when we arrived safely back from the 'Gentle Walk'.

Vicky Archard

We first attended a meeting of the Gorphwysfa Club for New Year at Aberglaslyn Hall, in December 1998 I believe, where I was completely outclassed at table tennis by a tall smiling gentleman (Brian) who received a knighthood 2 days later. A quiet gentleman in a sports jacket just happened to have a supply of champagne in the car to toast this great achievement. This of course was our introduction to John who always came well equipped for any possible activities.

I had no idea for many many years of his and Nancy's exploits in the Alps but I do remember him often suggesting I should get hold of a certain dictionary for travellers (the name escapes me) which would enable me to understand foreign guidebooks and to ask for directions, food and lodgings in a variety of suitable languages when travelling in Europe. He was not impressed by my suggestions that 'aqua' and 'voda' (or similar) would suffice for obtaining water in a large number of countries as he wanted to be accurate rather than make a stab at the language.

He and Nancy (with whom I shared a bond as a fellow Somervillian) were very welcoming to us and we had a couple of enjoyable stays in their house and lovely garden down what seemed like the last un-tarmacked road in Oxford. As the years rolled by we were very impressed that John kept on going to the labs – walking there and back through the woods, until this really became impossible. Of course, he had a great incentive as Nancy had told him on retirement that she 'had married him for life but not for lunch' so he availed himself of the Exeter lunches (and company) until the last possible moment. I spoke to Andrew Allen who led John's funeral service who said he had enjoyed many lunch-time conversations with John on wide ranging topics – as I could well imagine.

Unfortunately my walking memories with John are fewer but I do remember that he had also arrived early at Llandeusan hostel in the western Brecon Beacons so we dragged him off to some boggy moorland east of Usk Reservoir. He took, with only mild complaints, my insistence that we went searching for a stone circle that was marked on the map. We did eventually find a few stones which were, as usual, rather unconvincing but we all enjoyed the beautiful views across the reservoir (the photo is beside me) on the way back. I believe I had the privilege of witnessing and photographing his last ascent to the trig point of Snowdon on 30 December 2004. A few of the party decided to walk up separately and 'meet at the top' so I set off alone up the Pyg track. After some distance I spotted John proceeding rather slowly in front of me and decided to alert him to my presence by warbling 'Deck the Halls..' at the top of my (unmelodic) voice. To my surprise, there was no reaction – even when I got quite close. On reaching him, I enquired why he hadn't realised it was a fellow member who was behind and was 'singing' our anthem. The quiet reply 'I didn't recognise the tune' possibly summed up his ever-present politeness but also his concern for accuracy at all times! Somewhat deflated, I promised to meet him up at the top and plodded on. On reaching the summit ridge I met a few others and we went up to the trig point and waited for John and waited and waited. We retreated to the base of the cairn to get out of the wind but still he didn't come. Some left but I had promised to see him there so I hung on. Eventually he turned up saying that he had been waiting below the rocks as he never bothered to do the last bit but he had eventually realised that I was waiting for him at the very top so had, protestingly, climbed a bit higher. We went up to the trig point together and I photographed him there to prove that he had made it – and surprised him by showing that I hadn't yet progressed to a digital camera so couldn't show him the result. This is the photograph that Kate used (slightly enhanced and coloured!) for a celebration portrait on his 90th birthday and is now hanging in Bethesda I believe.

I have very fond memories of both John and Nancy and I much enjoyed their company at Pen y Pass and elsewhere. It won't seem the same without John sitting in the corner reading the paper, demolishing the Sudoku and ready for a conversation with anyone who sat down. It was obvious that the stairs were becoming more and more difficult for him each year and it was only determination that was keeping him going. We will miss him.

Nicolette Winterbottom

I have had the greatest admiration for John over the years and his continuing to support for the Gorphwysfa, and coming up to Pen y Pass for the New Year proved to me the depth of his loyalty and support for us all. Although, as he was able to do less and less I was surprised, as at the end he didn't go out at all; I decided that he came to see Snowdonia again and to see his family, but he was there, socially, one of the old guard, I know we shall all miss him this next year. The same is true of his regular attendance at the dinner, an important meet for the Gorphwysfa Club.

Last New Year everyone was packing up to go and John was sitting near the stairs waiting to leave. Along came Stella and then her son and John's very lively great grandson. Four generations! They got together, and I think a photo may have been taken I do hope so; John really and truly smiled at his great grandson's chatter.

At an earlier New Year Meet he wanted to walk up to the Green hut and he asked me to go with him; going up was fine, coming down was not; he needed repeated and lengthening rests, just saying it was not serious it was just his balance. I longed to see a supportive Gorphwysfan face coming along but none came. Luckily helpful walkers did, and we got back safely by dusk. John appeared quite unworried, he had got to the green hut as he wanted. I resolved to have help with us if we went out again but I was very happy that he had his walk to the Green Hut.

John was not a naturally smiling man although I am fairly sure he was glad that we gave a party for his 90th birthday, but he really did smile when he was given the book of photos, of I think his mountaineering exploits in the past that meant so much to him.

Much longer ago, when on one of the winter walks the Oxford group did for several years, I saw him looking at his map and rashly asked him where we were.

He looked at me over his glasses and said, 'where is your map?' his standards demanded that walkers carried maps, he did not at all approve of me drifting happily along map-less!! I regret when with friends I continued to walk map-less but keep quiet about it.

For a year or so I was unable to come up to Pen y Pass and when I did I had been very stressed. I wanted the reassurance of everything being exactly the same; we were a very small group then. I was quite upset to see two strangers in the kitchen; breaking the ice with John was not easy but Nancy was different. I think you needed to be a Chemist or 'real' mountaineer to really be able to talk to John and interest him; it wasn't until Nancy died that I began to feel at ease with him chatting when he asked me to the house to advise on gardening books and talk of the past a little.

Finally, Michael has reminded me of one Rowlinson command we have never ever forgotten; it is 'when on a walk you should stop for lunch at 1pm precisely'.



New Year at Pen y Pass

JOHN, YOU'RE 70! AN APPRECIATION, NICOLETTE WINTERBOTTOM

This verse was written by Nicolette for John's seventieth birthday. She writes 'It was a lovely sunny day and some of the family were there, we were in the garden, and I read it to them all'.

John, John,
Rowlinson, Rowlinson,
You are seventy
But your legs are strong
Your brain acute
You walk acidulously
John, John
Happy birthday
Your friends all hope that we
May walk with you and talk with you
At least until you are ninety-three!

John, John,
Rowlinson, Rowlinson,
Walks much faster than me
When I sit down to eat my lunch
He could be at home for his tea
John, John,
Leader of walks
Map reads easily
And wherever we are, whatever the weather
Lunch will be punctual-ly.

John, John,
Rowlinson, Rowlinson,
Mountaineer is he
Your climbing trews
In pink or mauve
Are a sight to see.
John, John,
Himalayan trekker
Russia, the Sates, no mountain spurned
And the Alps each year get better.

John, John,
Rowlinson, Rowlinson,
Husband of Nancy is he,
With stalwart stick
Uphill and down
She follows gallantly.
To Stella and Paul
He's proud papa
And grandpapa to four.
But Paul makes haste, good grief, good lord
Quite soon there will be two more!

John, John,
Rowlinson, Rowlinson,
Good Gorphwysfan is he
You love the meets
You love the hills.
At New Year party
John, John,
Happy Birthday
And Harvey begs me to say
All of the club raise your glasses to you
On this auspicious day!

A WEEKEND OF GULLIES, JOHN ROWLINSON

Before I set out to bring together material for this Journal, I did not believe that John had ever contributed an article to the Gorphwysfa Journal. How wrong assumptions can be! Volume Four, Number one, 1979, pages 10 and 11, produced the above. Many Thanks John! Ed.

All Thursday in snowed, slowly but persistently. That evening Geoff Pocock rang to say that the central heating at the Pen y Gwryd had broken down and that he and Anne might not be able to leave Salisbury. We heard on Friday morning that the A34 was impassable; lab staff were taking two hours to do five miles.

I packed my gear with less enthusiasm than I can remember, and as Nancy and I carried it to the top of our icy road I thought I was going to spend the night back in Oxford – or in the car in a snowdrift. However, Mike was waiting there, and we agreed to try it.

No problems to Banbury – or to Warwick - round Birmingham on the motorway - and by Shrewsbury there was less snow than in Oxford. Surely the Welsh hills would be worse; but no, the road was open right through to Pen y Gwryd, and indeed to Pen y Pass had the hostel been open.

Downstairs the hotel was tolerable, but the bedrooms were uninviting, for now the plumbing had gone the way of the central heating. However we cheered when Richard and Gill came in from Abingdon, via Cheltenham, followed by Geoff and Anne and then by Howard and Sue who had followed us up the A5.

Disaster came in the night. The pipes finally gave way and brought down part of the ceiling in the flood. The kitchen managed coffee and some rather lumpy porridge in the morning, but then the management politely asked us to take our custom elsewhere. Some frantic telephoning round the hotels in north Wales eventually produced rooms at the Royal Goat, so, our base secure, we turned at last to the hills. Glyder Fach was the choice, after the usual incoherent discussion of what would or would not go.

The first ice-fall was five yards from the Ogwen car park, but we hadn't the nerve to put on the crampons it amply justified. Skirting the frozen Llyn Bochlywd we made our way to the face of Glyder Fach. Richard and Gill left us for main gully (and a descent by the side of Bristly Ridge) whilst we moved across to Central Gully, where we formed two ropes, Geoff and Howard and Mike and I. The snow was excellent, the two ice pitches interesting but protected, and the final arete an exhilarating scramble on snow-plastered rock.

A brief burst of sun, and then cloud came in over Glyder Fawr, and down to the foot of the Devil's Kitchen. It was an impressive sight; the stream was frozen and deep snow was banked over all the lower pitches. Surely it could not go right to the top? We knew that the first ascent in 1895 had taken eight hours in conditions like these, and it could not be more than a few times each century that the chasm was wholly choked with snow. It was quite like that now. Over the capstone a forty-foot cone of snow and ice had poured into the bed of the gully. It was easy to scramble to its apex, but then we were separated from the vertical ice-wall at the back by a bergschrund. We roped up again, Howard led with a long stride over the gap on to the wall, traversed left, and then up six feet to steep but easier snow. Geoff, Mike and I followed.

Back at the Royal Goat we elected the Kitchen an honorary member of the Alpine class of "Viertausender", and so a route that justified our wine with our dinner.

The Sunday saw more fun on Craig y Isfa, Carnedd Llewellyn, and the Gribin – not quite up to the standard of Saturday, but a week-end of gullies that we shall long remember.

HEADLONG HALL, JOHN ROWLINSON

In the December 1980 Journal (Volume 5, Numbers One and Two) John turns back today's clock for 38 or so years when he again took up the pen and in bringing together the article headed 'Headlong Hall' reveals his interest in matters historical, later developed when he wrote about the history of early chemists.

As we enjoy Harvey and Rosie's hospitality at New Year we certainly remember all we have read of the Christmas meets at Pen y Pass held by Geoffrey Winthrop Young in the early years of this century. What we may not know is that there was a similar gathering here (at least in fiction) a hundred years before that.

The English novelist, Thomas Love Peacock came often to North Wales and eventually married the daughter of the rector from Maentwrog. In 1816 he published the novel "Headlong Hall" which describes "the seat of the ancient and honourable family of the Headlongs, in the vale of Llanberis". In it we read of how "Harry Headlong", esquire, a man of taste" wishes to invite some like-minded friends to spend their Christmas with him. He therefore "set off on an expedition to Oxford to enquire for some men of taste and philosophy; but, being assured by a learned professor that there were no no such things in the university, he proceeded to London". There he had better luck.

His men of taste included "Mr Middleton – a picturesque landscape gardener" who thought that "there were great capabilities in the scenery, but it wanted shaving and polishing", and "Mr Panscope, the chemical, botanical, anatomical musical philosopher" who sounds like a model for the whole of the Gorphwysfa Club.

Of Mountaineering there was scarcely any in 1816, but they were great walkers – three of them walked to Tremadog and back in a day – whilst we can see in Squire Headlong not only the progenitor of our host in Pen y Pass, but also the founding father of orienteering. "Rocks, streams, hedges, gates and ditches were objects of no account in his estimation – though two or three narrow escapes for his neck might have been expected to teach him caution". He was "singularly adept in climbing precipices" and was "sure to dash up and down some perpendicular path where no-one else has either the ability or inclination to follow".

As we thank our present Squire Headlong and his wife we can, like Peacock's guests of long ago, "form a correct judgement of Cambrian hospitality", and let us, like them, end with a Ball of "tipsy dance and jollity" at which "the cork-screw grew so hot under the perpetual friction that it actually set fire to the cork".

THE ASCENT OF BERTHARTOLI SOUTH, JOHN ROWLINSON

The Gorphwysfa Himalaya Expedition 1981

The tales, adventures and excitement that was the Club's first expedition to the Himalayas unfold in the club's sixth journal, dated November 1981. The full story is written up in a supplement to this Journal, written by the expedition members and published February 1982. The expedition was led by the distinguished Himalayan mountaineer, John Jackson, who was on the expedition that made the first ascent of Kanchenjunga.

Two years preparation, organisation and fund-raising saw eight club members and three guests, all but two, leaving London on 4th September 1981 for Delhi, one of whom was John, his first visit. Also Stella, John's daughter and Paul her husband, was part of the team.

They were away for 44 days, (six weeks). The expedition had originally set out to make the first ascent of Devistan South, 21,810 ft. Through an organisational mistake, outside the expedition's control, plans had to be changed and they initially set out to climb Mrigthuni 1, 22,490ft. Although high camp was situated at about 20,000 ft by John and Stephen Simpson, on 23 September a heavy snow fall caused them to retire to base camp. Further attempts failed through heavy snow falls. A substitute peak was the selected, Berthartoli Himal south Peak and 7th October John and Stephen reached the summit. The below successful summit account is written by John and was published in the expedition journal report. Ed.



The range of mountains to the west of the Trisul glacier form a high ridge running north from Trisul (7120m, 23, 360 ft) over to its outlier, Anand's Peak (c 6550m, 21,500ft) to Berthartoli South (6318m, 20,730ft) and Berthartoli Himal (6352m, 20,840ft). The first two were out of bounds, committed first to a Japanese and then to a French-Italian attempt to climb them by ski. The northernmost peak, Berthartoli Himal, was first climbed in 1977 by an Italian party, after numerous failures by Indians, Austrians and others, and not a few casualties. Its companion, Berthartoli South, was first climbed in 1956 by a German called Hieber, and has been climbed several times since by parties who failed on Himal. Our map showed that there was a broad glacier, about a mile wide, that flowed north into a high basin to the east of these mountains and drained into the Trisul glacier near the Berthartoli campsite. Its lower reaches formed, as we had seen from there, a magnificent but quite impractical ice-fall.

John in serious high level goggles

On 27 September, during the week of bad weather, Brian, John and Eileen Jackson were walking high up on a lateral (ie E - W) ridge behind the base camp when they caught a glimpse of Berthartoli South and realised it might prove to be a useful reserve should Mrigthuni prove impossible. A few days later, Brian, Stephen Simpson and I followed this lateral ridge to attend and found that it finished at the glacier that presumably separated it from the peak, and that there was a convenient gap between the rock and the ice where a tent could be pitched. But although we sat there shivering

for an hour, the cloud never lifted sufficiently for us to see the peak, or even to see if it was the right glacier.



Mrigthuni, camp II, 18,600 ft.

After the repulse from, Stephen and I repeated the walk and had a better view - it was not the right glacier- or, rather, it was only a branch from it was that highly crevassed, and certainly not promising way onto the main glacier. However, the next lateral ridge to the north, which sprang from the Trisul moraine about half a mile below the base camp, looked much more useful. It rose higher and promised to give access to the main glacier just opposite to the east ridge of the mountain. The next day Stephen alone walked up the ridge, and found this was so, for it ended in a small snow dome and a rock ledge from which an easy decent of about a hundred feet led to the main glacier at the right point. He saw, however that the east ridge of the mountain was impracticable, with a vertical step of what looked like rotten rock near its foot. It would be necessary to cross the glacier to a broad col on the main ridge between Anand's Peak and Berthartoli South, and hope that the south-west of the latter, which was invisible from the east face, would prove kinder. The obvious signs of old tent sites near the small snow dome suggested this was the right route.

The next day, 6th October, Stephen and I arranged to set up a camp just below the snow dome. Narayan Singh was to carry the tent and the food, but was not to stay overnight. In the event, he only got about two thirds of the way when he complained of a headache, dropped his load, and was off down the mountain. However, the lateral ridge was not long and we had time to carry our loads, return to his, and still cook a meal in daylight.



High camp

The night was fine and cold, but we took boots, water bottles, and butane cylinders to bed in our bags, and so were reasonably well placed for a quick start. Unfortunately we had forgotten to include the chapattis, and they froze hard. Nevertheless they were all we had, so we breakfasted off these, marmalade, and as warm a cup of coffee as one can boil at 5700m. Stephen unfortunately broke a front tooth on a stone in one of the chapattis. We were away by 7:30 am. We were on the glacier within half an hour and found that it was the same breaking crust over unconsolidated powder that had defeated us on Mrigthuni. It was not perhaps quite so bad, but nevertheless it took us four hours of very hard work to make a trail across the 1½ miles that separated us from the broad col. Moreover the glacier was unpleasantly, and unpredictably crevassed - both of us when leading put our feet through into hidden holes. At noon we were on the main ridge and could see most of the south-west face. It was icy and more complex than we had expected, but at least the snow had either blown away, or consolidated well. Occasional clouds were now blowing in from the south-west (as happened on most afternoons) but we could see enough to go on, and to be fairly sure that we were making for the highest point of the long ridge that formed the summit.

We traversed left under some ice cliffs on steep but good snow, then back right above the cliffs until we were stopped by a bergschrund that cut us off from the final (700 feet?) slope. The bergschrund was choked to the left of us, so I crossed it to the upper slope. It was smooth blue ice at about 45°. I went up on front points for about 10 feet, when I thought - this is silly; fine stuff for a gully on Snowdon, but no way to start a long slope at over 20,000 feet. So I came down. A foray to the right was no more successful; the bridge fell tinkling away into the crevasse under each prod with the axe. In the centre was another bridge that led to a curious ledge in the upper lip of the crevasse. Stephen led across this and I found that it took him onto the upper slope at a point where it was more tractable snow-ice, again at about 45°. I followed and from there on it was just a matter of careful cramponing moving together, Stephen leading, till eventually the angle eased and we were on the summit ridge, at (we think) its highest point. But by then the clouds had closed in and the snow flurries were blowing around us. Moreover we stopped some 50 feet from the top since we'd seen the day before that the summit ridge carried immense cornices on its north side. It was 3 pm.



A welcome cup of coffee

The descent was no problem, but it was after six, and getting dark when we were back at the tent, where Mike and Brian (who had moved up during the day) had seen us coming, and greeted us with warm coffee. The final descent down the lateral ridge, was made by moonlight, the way being eased by the light fall of snow which picked out the rocks. At 7.30 we were met on the moraine below by the welcoming flashlight of John, Jim Murray and Jeremy Naish who escorted us back to soup and supper.

“FIVE DAYS LAST SUMMER”, JOHN ROWLINSON

(reprint from *Gorphwysfa Journal*, Volume 8, December 1983).

On Friday the 18th February I reached the small township of Fox Glacier on the west coast of New Zealand with five free days before having to catch the plane back home to England. The chain of the southern alps is only fifteen miles from the sea, but to walk in to the Pioneer Hut would take two days, and to walk out a further day. Mike Browne, the only guide on this coast, said that if we were to climb anything worthwhile we should have to take a helicopter to the hut, so this was booked for Saturday morning. The weather decided otherwise; a succession of thick clouds at about 2000 ft came scudding in from the Tasman sea, making it impossible to take off. Sunday looked little better, but at 9 30 we could see through breaks in the clouds that the peaks were clearing, and the pilot said he was willing to try. Fifteen minutes later he put us down in glaring sun at 8500 ft on the Fox neve just below the Pioneer Hut, the highest building in New Zealand.



Mount Cook

Mt. Cook (12349ft) and Mt Tasman (11475 ft) are the two principle peaks on the main divide and are comparable in size with the major peaks of the European Alps since their snow line is much lower. Cook is too far south to be reached from the Fox basin, and Tasman is not easily accessible, but it is the biggest peak in sight and the obvious choice. Mike said that the route had not been tried that year and if we were to have a go then we ought to spend the rest of Sunday reconnoitring the route up to Marcel Col which we should have to do in the dark on Monday. So we dropped our food in the hut and set off to find a way through the crevasses and seracs below the col. From here the route lay over Mt. Lendenfeld (10503 ft., the sixth highest in New Zealand), down to Engineers Col, up a steep ridge to the north Peak of Tasman, down to a small col, and up the final North Peak of Tasman, and up the final 300 ft. to the main peak. On the Sunday Mike found a way up to Marcel Col and we then kicked steps up the soft snow on the north ridge of Lendenfeld. We were back in the hut by 6 in the evening, to find that two other climbers had flown in – a young Australian climber and an instructor from the climbing school Mike runs.

Monday saw the familiar Alpine routine – up at 1 15am, coffee and cornflakes, crampons and rope on in the entrance to the hut and off at 2. Thanks to Sunday's work we were back on the top of Lendenfeld by 5am but it was still too dark to start the new part of the route, so we sat and shivered there for nearly an hour. The decent to Engineers Col was steep and exposed, but on good snow. Coming down backwards Mike swung his axe injudiciously and gashed his forehead, but fortunately the cut was more spectacular than serious. More worrying was the loss of his second axe while hammering in a snow stake for a belay. We now had three between us but only one of these had a hammer for driving stakes; we guarded it very carefully for the rest of the day.

It was 8 before we reached the col and started up the ridge of Tasman. After three rope lengths the way was blocked by an ice cliff and we had to make an excursion down the east face to get around it, only to find that our way back to the upper ridge was blocked by a crevasse. Crossing this and climbing the two very steep pitches above it was the hardest part of the climb. It was nearly 1 pm before we were on the relatively flat top of the north peak of Tasman and could take off our sacks for the first time. After a quick bite and a drink we started down what should have been an easy ridge (there was a photo of it in the guide book) to the small col that separated the two peaks. Alas, there had been a catastrophic collapse on the west side, leaving a gruesome array of fluted ice-gendarmes. Mike estimated it would take him two hours to protect this section with ice-screws, and we clearly had not the time for that. So it was the North Peak only for us, and we started the long route back, reversing each pitch of the morning. The way down was quicker because we now knew the best route, but it was no easier – every pitch was belayed for each of us. It was 9pm and just getting dark before we struggled up the last 400 ft to the pinnacle on which the hut is perched, so ending a day of 19 hours, certainly the longest and, I think, the hardest I have ever had.

The next day we did a third peak on the main divide, but only a small one – Governors Col and Grey Peak (9500 ft), chosen for its value as a view point down the Tasman Glacier to the east of the divide. Wednesday was my last day and we walked out through gathering clouds; with map and compass across the Fox neve until Mike picked up a track on Chancellor Ridge, down from the snow, then rock, grass, scrub, and into semi-tropical rain forest at sea level. We reached the village of Fox Glacier at 4pm and Mike confidently led the way to the bar – “Won't it be closed at this hour?” I asked, “Not likely, with the nearest police station over a hundred miles away!”

ON BEING STRUCK BY LIGHTNING, JOHN ROWLINSON

The weather was fine when we left the Koncordia hut, but a few hours later dark squalls were blowing in from the north-west as we climbed the shoulder of the Grunegghorn, each squall brought some thunder clouds and we sheltered beneath the ridge whenever the lightning seemed closer, or the smell of ozone stronger, or the hissing of the ice axes louder. It all blew over after an hour or so and we traversed the Grunegghorn and climbed the Gross Grunhorn (4043m) by its west ridge. The weather was not good, but we thought the thunder had passed.

We had scarcely left the summit when the lightning struck. Jeremy (Naish) was in the front, his axe on the back of his sack, and I followed with my axe stowed, point downwards, between my left shoulder and the strap of my sack. There was about 30 ft of rope between us. I saw clearly the long white stroke hit the point of his axe; it seemed to be about an inch broad. Simultaneously I felt a blow on my left (axe) shoulder and was deafened by the explosion. Our feet were knocked from under us and we collapsed on the rocks. Jeremy, who received the heavier shock, was stunned for about 5 seconds. I remained conscious and my only feeling was one of outrage that such a thing had happened to us. I never thought he was seriously hurt because I could see him moving, even though he was semi-conscious. Within a minute we were on our feet again and safely (?) below the crest of the ridge.

All we had to show for it was a hefty bruise on the back-side (Jeremy) and a sore left arm (me). Clearly the 'strike' was not as strong as it might have been, but what probably saved us from real harm was, first, that we both had fibre-glass helmets which must have insulated our heads from the shock, and, secondly, that we were wearing full bad-weather gear which was wet and snow-covered, and so no doubt conducted much of the charge safely to earth. But I don't propose to test these hypotheses in the future.

PEAKS, PASSES AND GLACIERS, THE GORPHWYSFA ALPS 1981 AND 1982, JOHN ROWLINSON

The below listing is an example of the effort, resource, care and attention that John contributed to the Alpine Meets in the 1970s and 80s. The list appears in the Gorphwysfa Journal Vol. Eight, December 1983.

1981: - a short visit by Geoffrey (Pocock), John and Nancy, and Richard Sills did three peaks and a pass.

Bishorn (4159m) Geoffrey and John

Allalinhorn (4027m) (traverse) and Feekopf (3888m traverse) Geoffrey, John and Richard.

Col de Tracuit (3228m) Geoffrey, John and Nancy.

1982: - We had a mixed season in Zermatt, with a bad spell of weather in the middle week that deprived us of three mountains. However things improved towards the end and the sum total was not too bad. Below is the record for posterity.

Matterhorn (4478m) Jeremy Naish and Richard.

Zinalrohrt (4221m) Jeremy, John and Richard.

Rimpfischorn (4199m) Gillian Naish and Katy McColl.⁵

Allalinhorn (4027m, traverse) and Freekopf (3888m, traverse) Brian, Geoffrey, Howard Coates, Jeremy, John, Katy, Richard and Steve Ogden.

Feekopf (3888m) Brian, Gillian, Regina Smith.

Pointe de Zinal (3791m) Geoffrey, Jeremy, John, Richard and Steve.

Triffthorn (3728m, traverse) Jeremy, John and Richard.

Unter Aeschhorn (3619m) Brian, Geoffrey, Gillian and Katy.

Mettelhorn (3406m) Brian, Gillian, Katy, Nancy, Regina and Steve.

⁵ Actually, Gillian and I did the Breithorn, not the Rimpfischorn! Kate

A TRIBUTE TO JOHN ROWLINSON, GEOFFREY POCOCK

John and I walked, scrambled and climbed together in the UK and the Alps for twenty five years; sometimes just the two of us but often with a party of Gorphwysfa members. Our first outing was in 1975 with John's daughter Stella, and John and Chris Shorter when we made an ascent of the Unter Gabelhorn; and our last in 2000 when just the pair of us climbed the Plathorn, above Zermatt.

Our most active period together was 1975 to 1985 when we climbed extensively in the Alps, doing the Haute Route with my wife Anne Davis and ascending fifteen 4000m peaks as well as many lesser summits.

John was first to acknowledge that he was no rock tiger, nor a fierce climber of snow and ice, nor did he aspire to be a hard man; but he had, in abundance, the most important skills for an Alpine climber: fitness, leadership and companionship. I frequently slaved up a steep glacier behind him, mesmerised by his powerful, long, gait, not fast but never stopping. Many of his companions have been on the brink of calling a halt in the face of bad weather or fatigue only to be gently urged on a little further ... "just to the next ridge" ... "if it's no better we haven't committed ourselves" ... until the climb has been completed. As for companionship, I can think of few people with whom I could spend three days in a hut in terrible weather who could still offer thought-provoking conversation and amusement by way of a mathematical puzzle or some such diversion.

I have a wealth of memories, all very happy, of climbing with John mostly in good weather but I have chosen two ascents we made in less than ideal conditions as examples of the very best times with him.

THE FINSTERAARHORN

1980 was a special year for John because on the first of August, together with Brian Smith and Mike Leask, he had climbed the Matterhorn. After this, Brian and Mike had to return home and John set about devising a programme for their replacements: Anne and me. For five days we worked our way along the Italian frontier from the Theodul Pass to the Lisjoch and down to the Monte Rosa Hut, climbing Castor and the very icy Naso Dome. Then Anne had to leave and John and I decided to go to the Bernese Oberland to climb the Finsteraarhorn. This would take us three days from the Grimsel Pass by way of two huts and a couple of passes.



View from the Oberaarjoch Hut

We made very good time on the glacier, overtaking a group of German-Swiss, and reached the Oberaarjoch Hut well inside the guidebook time. There was no warden and we got the stove going to brew tea and to get plenty of hot water for our pasta supper. John was rather concerned about cooking in the absence of Nancy so I took over. Not long after we arrived the large party we had passed on the glacier joined us and together we settled down into the hut. There were some splendid views especially of the Finsteraarhorn, although not the route we intended to take which was on the other side of the mountain.



Early the next morning we climbed the Oberaarhorn which turned out to be an excellent viewpoint. Although an easy climb it had a steep little finish to a small summit plateau with a deceptively large cornice. I spent some time taking photographs of the stunning views.

Studerhorn, Finsteraarhorn and Agassizhorn from the Oberaarhorn

When we returned to the hut everyone else had gone. Just as we were setting out for the Finsteraarhorn Hut the telephone rang. John answered it but could barely understand a very strong German-Swiss accent. The purpose of the call was not clear and after attempting to make some sense of what was being said, John simply asked in very clear German "is anybody hurt?". The answer was a rather puzzled sounding "Nein", and John put the telephone down.

It was hot as we struggled up the Gemslücke where we saw the remains of a slab avalanche and two chamois. As we approached the hut there was no flag visible which would mean no warden. But when we arrived on the terrace the hut was clearly fully staffed so we could look forward to a good dinner. After lunch in the hut we sat in the sunshine watching gliders swoop overhead in the clear blue sky.



Early the next morning it was misty and a guide, who was taking two clients back down, suggested it would not be a good day to climb the mountain. We stayed in the hut and spent the rest of day champing at the bit as the weather remained fair but the barometer gradually fell. The hut filled up during the day and space became difficult to find but the warden was calm and well-organised. We fell in with a Swiss family with four children and had an enjoyable time chatting to them. So our day was not without pleasure; but we would have sooner been on the mountain.

John looking for better weather

The following morning was not just misty but very windy as well. We set off with most of the other people in the hut; before long nearly everyone had given up and we were left in the company of two other parties of two.

The wind on the Hugiattel was tremendous and it was as much as we could do to organise ourselves for the final rock ridge with gloves, goggles and so on all threatening to blow away. Eventually after much struggling we started on the rock. Good firm stuff but icy; narrow couloirs where we front-pointed; small rock towers and some belaying. We reached the summit plastered in ice, eyelashes frozen, noses numb, no goggles - they had frozen over long ago - but the worst was yet to come. The descent was a white out; the wind strong enough to fling ten metres of rope into the air in an arc above our heads; our axes had a sheath of ice and our anorak draw-cords were a centimetre in diameter with ice. We could only find our way back to the hut by careful map and compass work and we were both relieved when at last we could see our way to safe ground and we could stop to get rid of some of our icy covering.

We swaggered back into the hut to be faced by tens of already slightly drunk people and could only think to tell them that it was a typical Welsh day in the mountains. At dinner that evening the warden gave us special treatment, producing a tube of splendid mustard to go with the boiled ham. I'm not sure if he thought we deserved this because we were intrepid mountaineers or we needed looking after because we were stupid.

Of course, it was perfect weather the next day as we took our leave of the warden and his wife; we had warmed to their kindness in the course of three nights in the hut. We made our way back to the Grimsel Pass and after re-packing our gear and drinking a few beers started on our journey home.

THE WEISSHORN

Four years after our ascent of the Finsteraarhorn, John and I with Jeremy Naish crossed to the Saas Valley by way of the Ulrichshorn. We had poor weather and were trapped by deep snow in the Mischabel Hut where Jeremy discovered an entry in the hut book for 1953 from the OUMC by Blackshaw and himself - Jeremy had no recollection of this whatsoever. But the most amusing entry was in the 1912 - 1923 book from A M Carr-Saunders with H Truffer:

"We had hoped to climb the Sudlenzspitze. With the present weather we shall be content to reach the Zermatt valley by any means".

Eventually we made our way to the Saas valley and climbed the Lagginhorn and Weissmies before returning to Zermatt by bus and train. John felt we were sufficiently fit to tackle something more serious and suggested the Weisshorn, so we took the train to Randa where we started walking to the Weisshorn hut. This is a notorious slog but with a long lunch break we managed to enjoy it and got to the hut before two o'clock. Although the weather was unsettled, eleven people had climbed the east ridge that day and the warden assured us that it would be fine the next day for us.

Jeremy packed and re-packed his rucksack; the large table in the Weisshorn Hut was ideal to spread out all one's gear. The hut itself was very pleasant and the warden a gentle and kindly fellow. We were perhaps a little unkind when we likened him to the AC guidebook description of the hut: small and simple.

We discussed the route with the other climbers in the hut. Collomb's guide suggested a snow and rock couloir as the approach to the ridge at about 3300m; only as an alternative was the rocky buttress to the left suggested. Those who had climbed that day had taken the latter approach and told us there was a cairn at the top of the first few pitches. It snowed a little in the evening but we went to bed with the warden's confident words that it would be fine in the morning.

We all slept well and got up at twenty past two to see his prediction fulfilled by a clear sky and no wind. We left just after three o'clock, behind a German pair. A delightful glacier crossing led to a rock band giving us some pleasant scrambling. After crossing more glacier we reached the massive bulk of the mountain. The couloir described in the guide book was obvious and the German pair went

that way. Jeremy was sold on the good rock and made a bold lead up an icy gully to reach the cairn. From the top of the gully we had an enjoyable time working through snow-covered rocks and ledges to the crest of the ridge close by the top of the couloir the other two were climbing.



The gendarme on the east ridge of the Weisshorn

The first gendarme posed a few problems but there was a good hand hold in the form of a memorial plaque to Franz Lochmatter who fell from the gendarme in 1933. Once we got back on to snow we hoped to make faster progress but we found six inches of unconsolidated snow on top of poor ice and had to belay many of the steeper sections. Eventually, we reached the summit after nearly eleven hours of climbing. We had lunch on the top, sharing the metal cross as a belay with our two German friends, then started to descend. This was no easier than the ascent and we began to think that we would be lucky to get back to the glacier before dark.



Jeremy Naish on the summit of the Weisshorn

When Jeremy got to the bottom of the steep rock he had so boldly led on the way up he stopped to comment on some delightful alpine flowers. John who was rightly concerned about the fading light urged Jeremy on and I followed. As I passed the patch of flowers, I couldn't help commenting on how attractive they were; "get on with it" John growled from above so I belayed on a good stance and John started down. By now it was almost dark and I expected John to be fairly quick in descending, but he suddenly stopped and said apologetically, "they are rather pretty aren't they? Nancy would like to see these". I suspect that Nancy would have liked to see the plants but not from the tiny stance on which we found ourselves.

We crossed the glacier in the dark very excited at having got to the top of the Weisshorn and not really feeling tired, although I am sure that we were. When we arrived at the hut, just before midnight, a sleepy warden welcomed us back and we crept upstairs to the dormitory to go to bed. We tried not to disturb the sleeping inmates but some woke and, thinking we were getting up to climb, were well on the way to getting dressed before they realised what was going on.

We slept late the following morning and had a slow and relaxed breakfast with some Schnapps that we had carried up with us just in case. The warden produced the proper glasses without us having to ask; what a pleasant fellow. Then we descended to Randa and took the train back to Zermatt.

ASCENDENTES RESPICERE IU VAT

Looking back to my earliest climbs with John my thoughts go back even further to 1971 when he was the external examiner for my PhD. He was a thorough examiner and I left the room feeling that I had been properly tested. Little did I think that we should become such good friends; joined by a common love of the mountains and so often by the thin thread of a rope. I know that I will never find a climbing partner like him again but I rest in the happiness of all that we did together.

OLD MEN OF THE MOUNTAINS, *GEOFFREY WINTHROP YOUNG*

If it's the truth that we feel our limbs older;
If, in good sooth, we find Easter climbs colder;
Is it for old mountaineers to explain
Why we return here, again and again?

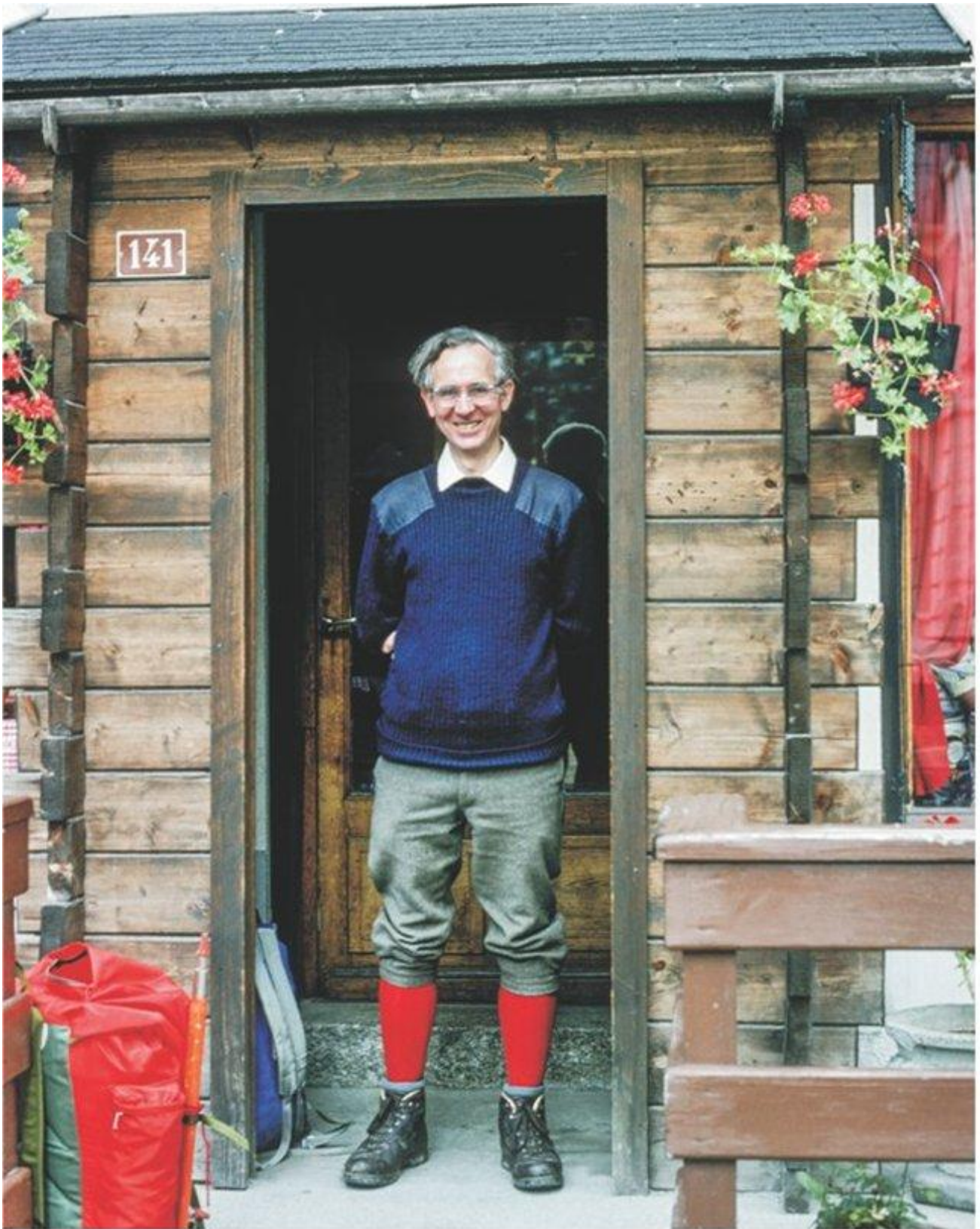
What though we stroll a bunch up the track;
What though we so soon after lunch we turn back;
What though we linger, and yarn in the porch;
How would you have us else, "hand on the torch"?

What though we seem to smile less in the slack times;
What though we dream awhile over our crack climbs;
What though we like a long snooze on the top;
Is that a reason for shutting up shop?

Granted we write less of "pitches" than strata";
Granted our "new climbs" are mostly errata;
Someone must keep up the Great Mountain Bluff,
Go on producing our "Classical Stuff"!

If our old frames can't do one "Pen y Pass trick;
If our old chief interests seem epigastric;
Label us "fogies" but let us be seen!
Surely, it's something to be a "has been"?

Life has no bogies, but patience will mend them;
Hills have no "fogies" but nature must end them;
Bear with us kindly when we're on the shelves,
Children, why you'll be the old bores yourselves!



John outside the Hotel Mont Blanc in Argentière at the start of the Haute Route in 1977