

JAMES PHEMISTER

James was born in Glasgow on April 3, 1893 and educated there. He graduated at Glasgow University with the degrees of M.A. and B.Sc., both with distinction. He had two brothers, one of them Thomas C. being latterly Professor of Geology and Mineralogy in the University of Aberdeen. Service in the armed forces during the 1914-1918 war ended in 1917 after he was severely wounded.

He joined the Geological Survey in 1921, and was engaged in mapping in the Northern Highlands. He became particularly interested in the Loch Ailsh igneous complex, which he described in great detail in the memoir on "The Geology of Strath Oykell and Lower Loch Shin" (1926). This interest naturally spread to include the adjacent Loch Borrolan complex. For a thesis entitled "A petrological study of the composite alkaline intrusions of north-west Sutherlandshire" he received the degree of D.Sc. from Glasgow University in 1928. He was author of all three editions of the British Regional Geology on the Northern Highlands, the first edition of which is dated 1936. In the following year he and his great friend Dr. Murray Macgregor were joint authors of the highly successful "Geological Excursion Guide to the Assynt District of Sutherlandshire", published by the Edinburgh Geological Society. His first contribution to the Transactions of our Society was a paper "Note: on a fused spent shale from a retort at Pumpherston, Midlothian," (vol.20 (2), 1942). He was one of the six eminent geologists invited to contribute to the Society's Centenary Volume of the Transactions (vol.23). His choice of topic was "Summary of Recent Research on the Pre-Tertiary Geology of the Northern Highlands".

James moved to London in 1935 having been appointed Petrographer to the Survey. During the next 18 years he was engaged in a wide spectrum of duties, including that of Curator. In 1946 he was promoted to Assistant Director. In 1953 he relinquished this post at his own request and returned to Edinburgh in order to work on the Shetland maps and memoirs. This involved a massive amount of microscope work. The writer well remembers his slight figure occupying a corner of the "Rock Room" in the Grange Terrace office, with his Swift microscope surrounded by boxes of thin sections and sheaves of "Petrographical Notes" forms. A cup of tea, if not something stronger, was always offered. His Shetland work culminated in the production of the quarter inch geological map of the Shetland group, the one-inch map of North Shetland and, with Dr. W. Mykura, the Western Shetland memoir (1976).

Dr. Phemister was president of the Mineralogical Society of Great Britain 1951-54, editor of the Mineralogical Abstracts 1953-60, and president of this society 1961-64. He was an honorary Fellow and an Honorary Life Member of the Edinburgh and Glasgow Societies respectively. From the former he received the Clough Medal for 1971-72. A fellow of the Geological Society, he was awarded their Murchison Medal in 1948. He was a long-standing Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, elected in 1931. The Mineralogical Society of America elected him to Life Membership in 1959. For further information regarding Dr. Phemister's professional and scientific work, the reader is referred to the obituary notice published by the Geological Society (Annual Report 1986, pp.31 -32), or to that of the Royal Society of Edinburgh (Year Book 1987, pp.63-66).

James is remembered with affection and gratitude by those surviving members who were fortunate enough to attend the long excursions led by him: to Assynt in 1958 (the Society's Centenary Year); to Shetland in 1960 (when the writer was instructed to hand-pick a party of 15 enthusiasts!); to Northern Ireland in 1963 and the return visit by members of the Belfast Geological Society. His leadership was impeccable.

He died in Edinburgh on May 18, 1986, aged 93, survived by a daughter and two sons.
Mrs. Phemister died in 1982.

A.H.

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