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## Obituary

### Dr. Christopher King (5th December 1943–5th January 2015)



Chris was born to a family living in West End, a village on the outskirts of Southampton, Hampshire. He attended West End Junior School, he passed his eleven plus and progressed to Barton Peveril Grammar School in Eastleigh until he was 16. At Barton Peveril he successfully achieved passes at 'A level' which enabled him to be accepted at Kingston College of Technology for a degree course in Geology.

During his teenage years Chris had two main interests, which occupied most of his time. The first was astronomy and the second was fossils of all types, right through to dinosaurs. The latter is reflected in the fact that he was already a member of the Geologists' Association by 1958, at the age of 15 and remained so throughout his life.

Astronomy was his initial main interest and he would spend hours studying the evening sky. Then the fossils took over as the family went on trips to places like Lyme Regis, where he could explore for fossils instead of just reading about them. He was a meticulous collector who taught himself the skills that would result in him becoming an internationally recognised geologist and specialist stratigrapher.

He lodged away from home during his years at Kingston, lodging with Tony and Sheila King in New Malden. Both Tony and Chris (no relation despite frequently being referred to as the "King twins") were able to study macrofossils (gastropods and bivalves) under Professor Derek Ager at Imperial College in the late 1960s providing them both with firm stratigraphic foundations.

Whilst he was at Kingston he went home on most weekends to fossil hunt and collect specimens in any excavation or location he

could find and this practice of returning home carried on until he was in his sixties. He was renowned for the enamel bathtub and spade in the back of his car which were put to good use removing large amounts of sediment from holes in the road where they provided good sample material, particularly from the London Clay, his chosen focus of interest. Chris was notorious for collecting anything that involved the London Clay Formation and was often tipped off by the Imperial College engineers about the 'latest hole' from which he could grab samples. The most notorious event was driving along Oxford Street (when that was possible) and a lump of London Clay 'fell off a lorry' coming from the Victoria Line excavations. Out Chris jumped to grab this block of clay in the middle of moving traffic.

During his visits home he assembled many samples that used to fill the attic and garage at his mother's house. The cleaning of these samples in the sink would frequently lead to the waste pipe being blocked from waste material surrounding the fossils to the consternation of all. This problem was also a familiar event at Montem Road in New Malden where more and more samples were being processed for the growing consulting company Paleoservices Ltd., marking the success of the company which both Tony and Chris had got themselves associated.

Chris joined Paleoservices Ltd., based in Watford in 1971 alongside Tony both as stratigraphers and micropalaeontologists. This was in spite of the fact that both Kings were definitely colour blind. Chris never found this a problem as one colleague recalled how this caused serious concerns when approaching traffic lights. He once mentioned in passing that he could recognise fifteen varieties of glauconite on surface texture alone. Perhaps he was aided by a remarkable photographic memory. On one occasion when one of the authors (HB) was trying to track down a species of foraminifera. Chris assisted by saying "I don't know what it is, but you'll find it in the 1957 Journal of Paleontology, about half way through, top right hand corner." Species identified!

During the 1970s Paleoservices was a growing company under the direction of the charismatic Italian micropalaeontologist, Dr. Vittorio Roveda. By the time HB joined the company in 1976, in addition to Chris and Tony King other Kingston graduates including Lynn Allen (palynologist) and Bob Meyrick (ostracod specialist) were already well established there. To share a room with this level of expertise was a special experience only fully appreciated later when we'd gone our separate ways. On arrival Chris asked me "What do you do?" and following my answer of "Chalk forams" he rapidly responded "Okay, you can have Denmark!"

I shared a room with Chris for almost twelve years and I have to mention his incessant puns; anyone close to him will remember

the groans that followed his word play and ability to twist anything said into an amusing alternative. Again his colour blindness provided a target for his colleagues. He compiled a remarkable (almost one man) petroleum evaluation report on the English Channel and adjacent onshore areas of southern England. This comprised a series of A1 sized maps representing numerous stratigraphic time slices. Chris hand coloured the initial copies of all these and Bob Meyrick considered that it might prove interesting if the names of the various coloured pencils were shaved off the pencil ends. This resulted in some of the more garish colour combinations ever used adjacently for geological maps of the region. They were unlikely to enhance the exploration for hydrocarbons in the area.

Chris had such an intimate knowledge of the London Clay that during 1980 he wrote virtually all of a manuscript for what became a 158 page Tertiary Research Group publication entitled "The Stratigraphy of the London Clay and associated deposits" during what he described as a "period of enforced inactivity" sitting in the middle of the North Sea on the oil rig Deep Sea Saga.

Throughout his time at Paleoservices, which lasted until 1992, Chris was still using the bathtub out of the back of his Citroen estate car to collect inordinate amounts of London Clay and associated sediments. He managed with the amazing assistance of his research supervisor, Prof. Dick Moody, by now at the University of Kingston, to maintain his registration for his PhD at the university over an estimated period of twenty two years (three seven year registration periods plus). Finally, in 1991, his thesis entitled "*The Stratigraphy of the London Clay Formation in the Hampshire Basin*" was accepted and he was duly acknowledged for all the time, in depth research and sink blockages which had gone into this excellent study.

Completion of this work and his parting from Paleoservices, which had been taken over by a totally new management and lacked the ethos that had served it so well for twenty years, marked a new phase of Chris's career. First he moved to Bridport and from here he spent some years working as a wellsite biostratigrapher working in the North Sea, North Africa, Venezuela and the UK onshore. He frequently worked on the South Arne field in offshore Denmark. This included numerous travel escapades including at least one journey via Hamburg where he rented a taxi and had to direct the driver how to drive to Esbjerg. When Network Stratigraphic negotiated the wellsite contract for this field then we asked how they would man the increased work load. The response was that they had additional staff involved, one of whom was Dr. Chris King. At this point there was a sharp intake of breath from one of the junior geologists who queried "*The Chris King*"? When they gave her a positive response her awe was maintained and she said "In Aarhus where I come from, Chris King is a God".

His research on Tertiary stratigraphy, biostratigraphy and depositional environments across Europe, the USA, Egypt, Israel, the Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan attracted hundreds of online followers through *ResearchGate* and *Academia*. He also worked on the Jurassic stratigraphy of the UK and the Cretaceous in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. He collaborated with colleagues in the UK, Belgium, Denmark, Egypt, France, Israel, Netherlands, Norway, Russia and the USA. He was a former Chairman of the IGCP Regional Committee on Northern Paleogene Stratigraphy and a Member of the IGCP Paleocene-Eocene Boundary Working Group. Perhaps some of his greatest geomemories were generated on joint expeditions to Niger with colleagues from Kingston University and the Natural History Museum.

By 2000 he was moving into the world of engineering geology due to his expertise in the London Clay. He started to teach courses covering the London Clay and the Harwich Formation to engineering geologists through the Natural History Museum with Jackie Skipper. These courses soon became proscribed for staff

working on Crossrail and the Thames Tideway projects, and in some years the courses were repeated several times, often followed by days of checking delegate's logging abilities and the subsequent borehole logs produced. Chris had endless patience and quiet enthusiasm for explaining the subtle variations in London Clay cores and the seemingly bizarre variations in the Harwich Formation.

Hundreds of people have attended the courses since they started and they have fundamentally changed and improved how the London Clay and Harwich Formation are logged in site investigations across southeast England. Chris also collaborated with other workers, particularly back at his old stamping ground of Imperial College, but now in Civil Engineering with Jamie Standing and David Hight. They had been researching the behaviour of the London Clay and had noted how engineering properties changed consistently with Chris's stratigraphic boundaries. Chris's input into the interpretation of the ground around tunnelling projects has subsequently greatly increased the understanding of how London Clay behaves and how it can be engineered.

Chris was a key member of the London Basin Forum which was a group of geologists brought together by Mike de Freitas and working towards the production of an Atlas of London Geology for use in future projects around the capitol. He published over 70 research papers and a list of the more important of these is provided at the end of this text.

Chris will be sorely missed by all those people his life has touched; he is survived by his wife Pat, three younger brothers David, Robert and Raymond and his mother Joan, who is 95 and in care.

C. King papers (updated January 2015)

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