VALE

Alan Dawn 1923–2010

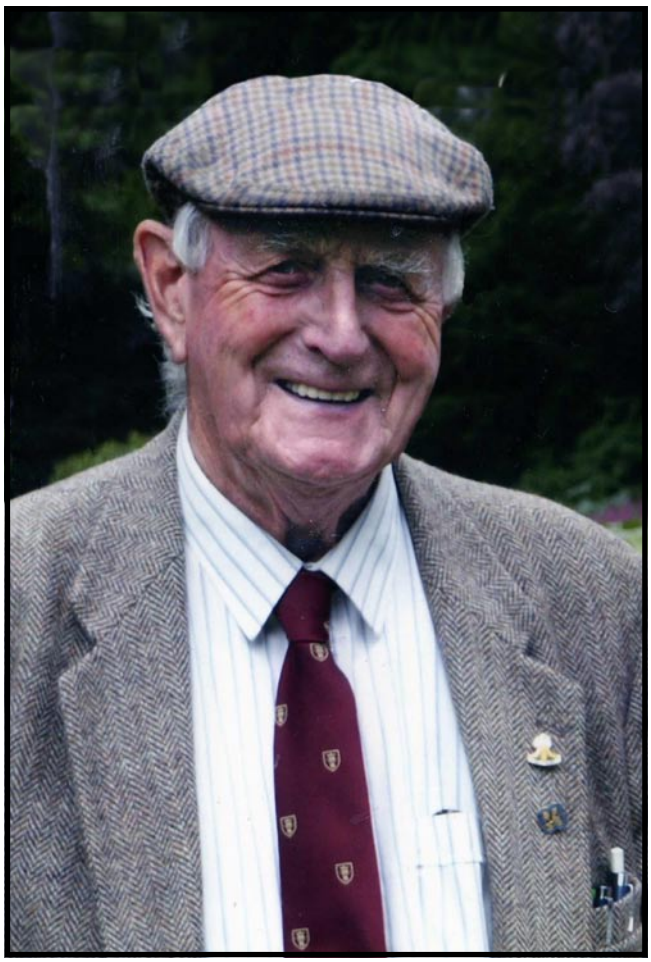
Born into a farming family near Sheffield, Alan was educated at the local school and gained a degree in geography at Sheffield University after an interruption to serve in the Royal Navy during the war. He went into teaching, with his first post in Stamford and then in Bourne. Alan Dawn was a great teacher, a gifted artist, a dedicated geologist and an enthusiastic orchid grower.

I first met Alan on a bus entering Monument Valley, Arizona. This was on the pioneering 1980 University of Nottingham geological field trip to Western USA. Alan was sitting across the aisle, and while most people were attempting to photograph though the tinted bus windows Alan was sketching. I was amazed how he could capture the essence of the mesas and buttes with a few strokes of his pencil.

The last field trip we both went on was much more recently, and was to the Isle of Eigg. Alan's legs were giving him problems so on the last stage of climbs he would sit down and take out his sketch pad until we returned. The end result was twelve views of Eigg on a calendar that was sold for a good cause.

Another chance meeting occurred at a British Orchid Society show where Alan was exhibiting. "Come to Stamford and see my collection" he said. When I did, I found him painting water-colours of geological exposures. These were preparation for the evening class that he taught. Rather than make sketches on the chalk board Alan would paint watercolours, photograph them and project the images for his students to see. I left with an orchid plant that still survives.

Although a member of the East Midlands Geological Society for many years, a regular contributor to the *Mercian Geologist*, a field trip leader and a speaker at Member's Evenings, Alan's geological legacy will be remembered through the Stamford Geological Society. He founded this thriving society with his wife Pauline, and was President for many years, inspiring so many with his hands-on, fieldwork-driven approach. With a small band of Stamford members, he was responsible for the creation of the Ketton Geological Reserve, and for the finding, excavating, recovery, conservation and presentation of numerous very large fossils, particularly ichthyosaurs, plesiosaurs and pliosaurs, from the Oxford Clay in the Peterborough brick pits. One of these projects, undertaken in conjunction with Portsmouth University, was the recovery of the enormous fish, *Leedsichthys problematicus* (Mercian, 16, 43) Another find was *Pachycostasuarus dawni*, a new species (Mercian, 14, 93). Much of the work was done at the Peterborough Museum where Alan was a volunteer and where the finds and replicas built by Alan and the group are now on display. Many of these feature backdrops painted by Alan. The group also unearthed



the Deeping Elephant from Pleistocene deposits and replicated it at the Museum; one tusk was 3 m long.

Alan's work has been recognized nationally. In 1990, he became the first recipient of the Palaeontological Association's Award for Amateur Palaeontologists, and in 1994 he was awarded the Foulton Medal from the Geologists' Association. Not one to specialize, Alan's last talk to the EMGS was on Member's Evening 2008, when he talked about zeolites in Icelandic basalts. He delivered the talk with his usual aplomb while separated from the audience by a table on which there was a very large mysterious object hidden under a cloth. A true showman to the end, on completing the talk he removed the cloth to reveal the largest plesiosaur skull I have even seen. It was his latest find. As someone said: *They don't make them like that any more*.

Alan Dawn will be greatly missed, and is affectionately remembered by many.