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Mr. Bryan Ruxton, an honorary life member of the GSHK passed away in July this year. He was one of the pioneer Geologists who established the fundamental theory of weathering processes for Hong Kong's case.

The obituary of Mr. Ruxton shown in this issue is contributed by Prof. Wyss Yim with the assistance of several colleagues.

**Dr. Margie Chen
President
GSHK**

Obituary

Bryan Paul Ruxton MA Cantab; FGS 1929 – 2008

Bryan Ruxton was born in Birmingham into a devout Methodist family of modest means. He was evacuated due to wartime bombing and he liked to reminisce that his love of geology started as he collected rocks and fossils in the English countryside. His school's honours list for 1947 shows that he matriculated with distinction and he won a scholarship in natural sciences to Clare College, Cambridge. He had to defer this scholarship to do National Service in the Army. Over the subsequent three years at Cambridge he excelled, winning a prestigious prize in geology.

He claimed he did not get on well with his tutors at Clare College, but nevertheless he learned a great deal about mineralogy and petrology, which he kept in touch with all his life. It remains a mystery to his colleagues where he developed his interest and skill in geomorphology.

In 1950 he married Catherine (Kay) Hainworth. This was a brave step for a penniless undergraduate as she had three young daughters. The birth of a son soon followed and the need to provide for his new family made the decision between remaining in academia or going into the field an easy one. He left England in 1952 and for the next nine years the family, either in part or

whole, was to accompany him on postings in Sudan (twice), Hong Kong and Ghana.

After his first posting to Sudan Bryan left for Hong Kong to serve as a lecturer in the Department of Geography and Geology, the University of Hong Kong from October 1954 to August 1956.

The time spent in Hong Kong was a very rewarding time in Bryan's professional career. Based on the bibliography of the Civil Engineering and Development Department of the Hong Kong SAR Government, he published no less than 25 papers and articles including seven with Leonard Berry. An outcome of this time was his classical paper on the weathering of granite, a world leading paper for the time and one that is still widely quoted, particularly in the engineering geology literature. Andrew Malone (2008) said of this work 'Bryan worked on rock mass weathering in Hong Kong with Leonard Berry in the 1950s. Their results have stood the test of time. It is classic work in use throughout the world.' In 2007 the journal *Progress in Physical Geography* had an article devoted to this paper in its regular feature Classic Papers Revisited.



Mr. Ruxton with HK students in 1950s

For his contribution towards the understanding of the geology of Hong Kong, in 1982 Bryan was awarded honorary life membership by the Geological Society of

Hong Kong. He was a consultant to Binnie and Partners and the Geotechnical Control Office. In 1988 he returned to the University of Hong Kong as a visiting Senior Lecturer.

In September 1956, Bryan returned to Sudan to serve as Government Geologist for two years. He produced valuable papers on weathering, unloading, and pediment formation, as well as basic papers on Precambrian Basement rocks and a geomorphic history of Central Sudan. He was clearly laying a foundation for the work that would interest him for the rest of his life. An amusing tale told against himself by Bryan concerned his safaris in the Sudan. The carriers would set his tent up first, and then make the main camp 150 m away. At first he thought this was in deference to his position as the leader, who needed some privacy and space, but he later found out he was to be the leopard bait!

After a term as an academic at the University of Ghana, Bryan settled down with his family in Australia in the early sixties. He joined the Bureau of Mineral Resources in Australia. He became Party Leader of the Darwin Group, and his early work was on uranium deposits in the Northern Territory, including the clean-up of Rum Jungle. He later joined CSIRO, in the Division of Land Resources, in the golden days of that organization. He worked first in Papua New Guinea on the Land Resources projects there. These were pioneering days in New Guinea, with lots of country unexplored and new tribes being discovered regularly. Bryan was ideally suited for the tough physical life involved and was a fine leader. He continued to work on varied topics of geology and geomorphology including sedimentary petrology, weathering indices and erosion rates. His work on lavas and tephras of different ages around Mount Lamington is another classic. So is his paper on erosion under tropical rain forest, which was counter-intuitive. Later he moved to Canberra and amongst other things produced, with Ernst Loffler, a

Landform Map of Australia. At his peak Bryan was probably the best leader the Division of Land Resources ever had. He retired from CSIRO for health reasons, but recovered in a while and for the next twenty years taught geology as an Honorary Fellow at the University of Canberra. The students voted him best lecturer on at least one occasion. During his retirement Bryan went to as many conferences as he could and always presented a paper, mostly full of novel ideas, one of his hallmark traits. He was a true lateral thinker.

Bryan always had time for his life-long love – geology. He might well have obtained his Sc. D. degree from the University of Cambridge if he had gone for it using his numerous papers published in journals of international standing. It was not surprising to hear he passed away while pursuing his continuous quest for knowledge at a geological conference. He died peacefully in his sleep on the last day of a conference where he had presented a well received talk and was happy to be among friends and colleagues.

Bryan Ruxton will be missed by all who knew him or his work; we have indeed lost a geological pioneer and thinker.

Wyss Yim
(12/10/2008)

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The Society is concerned with the advancement of geological sciences and the dissemination of geological knowledge in Hong Kong and the surrounding regions. *Hong Kong Geologist*, which is the Journal of the Geological Society of Hong Kong, is aimed to publish research articles, short communications and reviews related to Hong Kong, Macau and the South China region.

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