

OBITUARY
WILLIAM ANDERSON MITCHELL
(1918–1970)

The death of William Anderson Mitchell, who was editor of this journal from 1966 to 1969, on 15th May, 1970, at the early age of 51 is a tragedy not only to his family, friends and colleagues but also to our scientific community.

W. A. Mitchell, one of a family of eight, was born at Inverugie, Aberdeenshire, on 6th September, 1918, was educated at Peterhead Academy and joined the staff of the Macaulay Institute for Soil Research, Aberdeen, as a scientific assistant in 1936. In 1939 he enlisted in the Royal Air Force with which he saw service in Sierra Leone. Discharged on health grounds in 1943, he matriculated at the University of Aberdeen where he graduated B.Sc. with first class honours in geology in 1947. As a member of staff of the Soil Survey of England and Wales he gained considerable experience of soils in the field, especially in Yorkshire, and also of clay mineralogical techniques, particularly X-ray diffraction. He was appointed to take charge of the then section of Soil Mineralogy at the Macaulay Institute in 1951. Under his guidance this section grew in size and stature and, although incorporated with other related sections in the department of Pedology in 1959, Bill Mitchell was responsible for all the X-ray diffraction and optical mineralogical investigations at the Institute until his death.

He early showed an interest in and aptitude for mineralogy, concentrating on this subject during his honours course. He had a particularly extensive knowledge of X-ray crystallography which he put to good use in his later studies, when he developed several techniques using the X-ray diffraction powder camera method; these enabled more accurate and rapid determinations of the mineralogy of soil clays. Because of his geological and mineralogical background he maintained a particular interest in the relationship between the mineralogy of the parent rock and the clay mineralogy of soils derived therefrom. His field experience gave rise also to an interest in the reactions between clays and fertilizers. He had a wide knowledge of the mineralogy not only of Scottish soils but also of those of many overseas countries, including Italy, Ceylon and Turkey, and this knowledge, together with his competence in X-ray diffraction and optical mineralogical techniques, was of particular value to the many overseas scientists who came to study under his guidance. His publications were of a high standard and his wide understanding

of his subject was invaluable in his capacity as editor of *Clay Minerals*, a post that he had recently to relinquish because of increasing ill-health.

As a man, Bill Mitchell was universally liked and respected. By nature he was friendly and gentle, but underneath his gentleness was a determination which was never better expressed than during his last illness. It was indeed a privilege to know him as a friend.

R. C. MacKENZIE



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