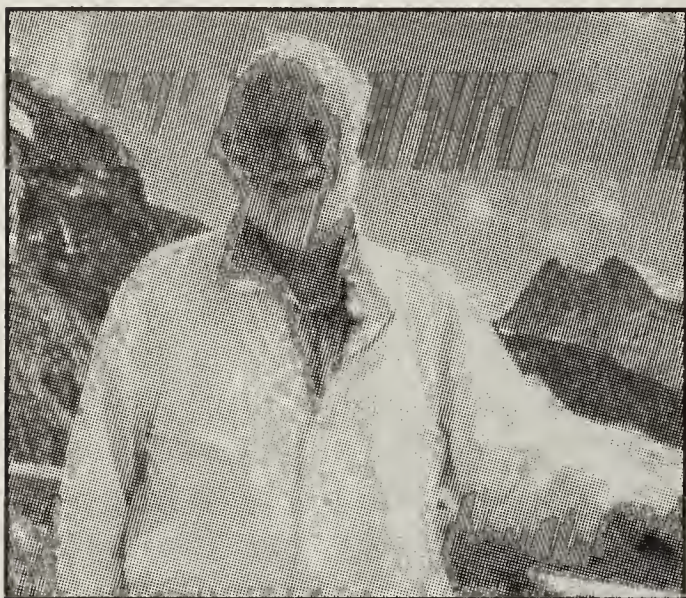

IN MEMORIAM

WILLIAM ANTONY SWITHIN SARJEANT, 1935-2002

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It is possible that the complex, interactive linkages of the natural environment pose an inherent attraction for the Renaissance mind, a mind that is capable of ranging beyond the conventional to explore the issues that bind us together as human beings; a mind that can bridge the divide that sometimes occurs between science and the humanities, between technology and nature, and between gown and town, and one that does not lose sight of the fact that we are a product of that natural environment no matter how much our modern lifestyle appears to distance us from it. It may be true of Nature Societies everywhere, but certainly Natural History groups in Saskatchewan attract a high complement of such people. My familiarity lies with the Saskatoon chapter, and recently the death of a society member caused me to pause and think about past and present high-achievers who walk, or have walked, among us as friends and mentors. For as well as we think we know them, it may not be until that time of final reckoning that we come to realize just how wide-ranging their interests were, and how great their contribution was. Certainly that was the circumstance I found

myself in as I tried to condense the life of Bill Sarjeant to the confines of a memorial article.

Bill Sarjeant was born July 15th, 1935, to humble beginnings in the industrial city of Sheffield, England. At a time when the lives of millions were about to be plunged into the horror of another world war, it is unlikely that anyone would have predicted the success he would achieve. He became a distinguished academic geologist, a naturalist, an advocate for heritage preservation and the environment, and an authority on traditional folk music, as well as a performer. He was a respected author, publishing extensively in academic and non-academic fields, an inveterate collector of incredible diversity, and a noted bibliophile with a personal library that exceeded 85,000 volumes.

Bill's geology career owed its origins to the childhood discovery of beautifully preserved fossils unearthed during excavations for an air-raid shelter in the backyard of his home. After attending a local grammar school and being advised to abandon thoughts of a career in science, he entered the University of Sheffield where he persisted in studying geology. He graduated with a B.Sc. Honours degree in 1956, followed by a Ph.D. in 1959, and in 1972 the University of Nottingham awarded him a D.Sc. for distinguished scientific research.

Bill grew to love teaching. A brief period as a high school teacher led to a posting as Assistant Lecturer at the University of Keele, followed by a similar position at the

University of Nottingham before being appointed a full-time lecturer. He spent a year as Visiting Professor at the University of Oklahoma, and then a chance meeting with a Canadian colleague resulted in an invitation to join the geology faculty at the University of Saskatchewan in 1972. Bill's major research emphasis was connected with fossil microplankton and the history of geology but branched also into the investigation of other trace fossils, marine paleontology, topographical minerology and dinosaur extinction. He was also a leader in the study of vertebrate footprints, and his expertise proved invaluable when dinosaur tracks were discovered in the Peace River Canyon just prior to the area being flooded by a hydro project. Bill's work gained distinction among the international geology and paleontology community, and he was a member of the Jurassic Sub-Commission of the International Union of Geological Sciences. He published over 350 articles on geological topics, co-authored a book on fossil footprints, *The Tracks of Triassic Vertebrates: Fossil Evidence From North-West England*, and, over a period of several years, compiled a ten-volume bibliography, *Geologists and the History of Geology*, which in 1990 garnered him the prestigious Sue Tyler Friedman Medal from the Geological Society of London, England. In 1991, he won the Founders Medal awarded by the London Society for the History of Natural History, and in 1995 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada.

Bill's passion for geology was paralleled by an abiding interest in all forms of plant and animal life, particularly butterflies, which he delighted in photographing. Over the years he assembled and catalogued an impressive set of butterfly slides photographed in Canada and the 45 countries he visited while participating in conferences and conducting research. Each new country meant a search for new field guides. His library may contain as many as 150 guides to the planet's flora and fauna, and a considerable portion of his extensive stamp collection was dedicated to

philatelic commemorations related to world-wide flora and fauna.

In 1958, while still a graduate student in England, Bill joined the Sorby Natural History Society and convinced the members to begin recording and publishing nature articles. He contributed to, and edited, the first edition of *Sorby Record*, which continues to flourish in much the same manner as *Blue Jay*, to which Bill was also a contributor. On arrival in Saskatoon, Bill became a member of both the Saskatoon and the Saskatchewan nature societies. He rarely missed a meeting and served as president of the Saskatoon Natural History Society in 1979 and 1980, acted as 2nd Vice President with Nature Saskatchewan from 1998 until 2000 before transferring to the board of SaskCulture in order to represent the concerns of conservationists. He was deeply touched when made a Fellow of Nature Saskatchewan in September 2001.

Starting in 1973, Bill expended a great deal of time and energy lobbying for the idea of salvaging and recycling historic buildings, a concept now adopted by most urban centres. For five years he chaired the Saskatoon City Council's Special Committee for the Identification and Listing of Historic Buildings in Saskatoon. He was a member of the Saskatchewan Heritage Advisory Board and the Saskatchewan Archives Board, and became a major force behind the drafting of the Saskatchewan Heritage Property Act. He also chaired the Saskatchewan History Advisory Board and for the past thirteen years, edited the Saskatchewan History Review. Between 1973 and 1982 he co-authored three publications: *Saskatoon's Historic Buildings and Sites*, *Saskatoon: The Growth of a City*, and *Saskatoon: A Century in Pictures*. This last book became the official souvenir of Century Saskatoon for which he received a medal and scroll from the city, to add to a Saskatoon City Council Public Service Award, and a provincial award for his contributions to heritage preservation.

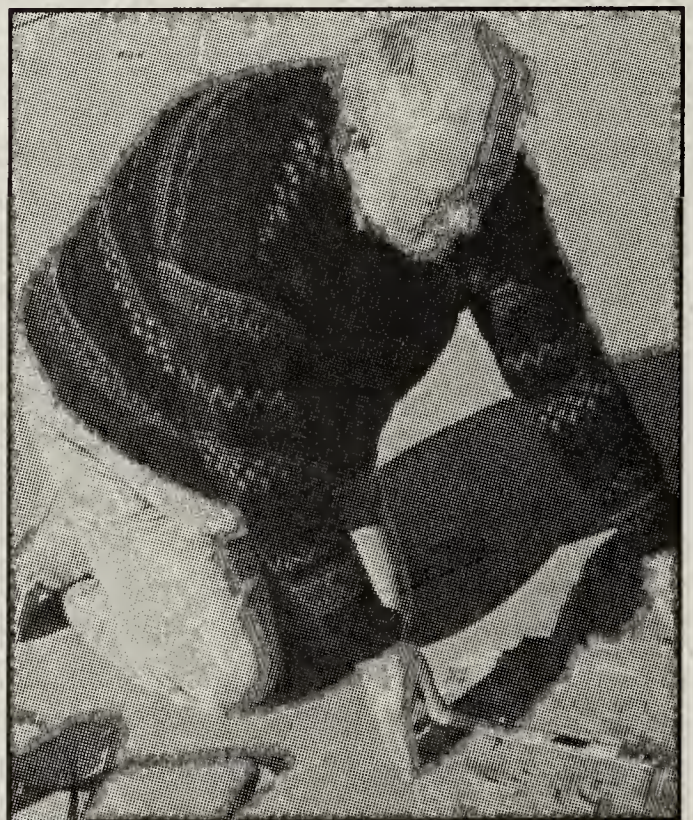
An acknowledged Sherlockian scholar, Bill co-authored a book that attracted Canadian and international interest, *Ms. Holmes of Baker Street*, an audacious, tongue-in-cheek thesis suggesting that Sherlock Holmes was in fact a woman. He became a co-founder of The Casebook of Saskatoon, a group that studies Holmesian fiction in particular, but has gradually expanded its investigations to include detective fiction of all kinds. Bill's vast collection of detective fiction novels contains many valuable first editions, and he lectured and published widely on many aspects of the detective fiction genre.

In 1972, along with two other Geology Department faculty members, he formed the Traditional Folk Trio, the nucleus for what was to become The Prairie Higglers, a folk group that has performed in Saskatoon for the past twenty-two years. Bill performed on and co-produced a double tape cassette and two CD's recorded by the group. Between 1977-1982, drawing on his formidable collection of records, tapes and books, Bill produced and broadcast a series of radio shows on CJUS-FM that involved 112 hours of air time devoted to folk music and folk musicians. He was also Vice President, then President, of the Canadian Folk Music Society, and from 1989 until his death remained the Archivist for the Canadian Society for Traditional Music.

Bill's academic and non-academic endeavours had a way of intersecting though a commonality with nature, perhaps the best example being Bill's nine-volume fantasy, science-fiction series entitled *The Perilous Quest for Lyonesse* published under the pen-name of Antony Swithin. The idea for this mythical country, which he called Rockall after a rocky outcrop in the North Atlantic Ocean, began in childhood and grew in tandem with his ever-expanding knowledge of the life-forms that called the earth home. By the time he began to write about Rockall, Bill had compiled detailed geological and topographical maps, invented a unique flora and fauna, written a complete language,

completed an ethnography, designed stamps and musical instruments, and constructed a socio-political structure through which he began to explore ideas on politics and the environment. Sadly the "quest" was never completed, but the first four volumes were well received. In 2000, Bill was delighted to learn that place names taken from his books, as well as his own name Swithin, had been used to name geological seabed features surrounding the real island of Rockall, and as if this was not enough, he then discovered that these formations were adjacent to features named from the works of one of his literary heroes, J.R.R. Tolkien.

Bill never watched television and never brought work home from the office. He was a dedicated family man deeply grateful to his loving wife Peggy, who was his greatest support, and he delighted in the exploits of his three daughters, and more recently, his two grandsons. The term "Renaissance Man" has appeared frequently in memorials and I can find no better appellation. His principles, scholarship, humour and philosophy were inspiring, and the memory of Bill's sheer zest for life will continue to sustain and motivate those who knew him.



Bill Sarjeant measuring Permian reptile prints in Argentinian in 1993.