

Book review

Rudolph Glossop and the rise of geotechnology. *Ronald E. Williams (editor). Dunbeath: Whittles, 2011. 285 pp. ISBN 978-184995-021-3. £50.00*

Not many people are aware of the fact that the University of Sheffield houses an historic archive containing many personal works documenting the life of Rudolph Glossop. This reviewer having met Ron Williams during one of his many trips to the archive, it seems fitting that the book review should emanate from Sheffield.

In Williams' own words, 'The aim of this volume is to present the personal perspective of Rudolph Glossop on the emergence of ground engineering and engineering geology within the UK during the middle decades of the 20th century.' In this respect the book was never intended to be a biography; it presents a selection of journal writings, diary entries and letters that give a detailed insight into the type of man Glossop was, along with a selection of technical papers that demonstrate his practical expertise and the state of the profession at that time.

Whereas technical journals document the history of knowledge, what makes this book so interesting is that it has been painstakingly pieced together by Williams from varying sources to paint a vivid picture both of Glossop and of the evolution of geotechnical engineering in its own right, including the events that resulted in the establishment of this very journal, in which Glossop played a key role.

The book is split into sections, each documenting a period in Glossop's life. When reading the selected journal entries, I was strongly reminded of other determined char-

acters of the same generation who went on to complete other lofty adventures, such as climbing the north face of the Eiger, for instance. Glossop's narrative in his journal entries has the same compelling elements as the classic mountaineering texts that draw the reader in, making you immediately empathise with the situation he is faced with. His descriptions are vivid, and the many anecdotes add to give a sense of Glossop's character. The journals document Glossop's exploits, from his initial mining experiences in Cornwall, to the development of a disused mine in Ghana to facilitate the Allied war effort in the Second World War through the construction of components for the Mulberry harbours.

The selected diary entries document a difficult period for Glossop during the construction of the Derwent Dam in north-east England, when an erroneous site investigation led to problems during construction. Williams includes only the most relevant diary entries, with welcome added annotations to explain relevant details, which are complemented by a directory of all the names mentioned.

The book concludes with a series of Glossop's published writings, including two of his early technical papers: on the construction of pavements on clay (which stemmed from his wartime work on runways), and on particle size in silts and sands. Although the book lacks an overall narrative, the generally chronological structure means that it succeeds in presenting the life of Glossop in an easy-to-follow manner, and it is a fascinating read. Williams should be congratulated for placing what could have been lost writings back in the public domain for our benefit and enjoyment.

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