

worked for a short time as G.P. with a cousin in South Africa, then as ship's doctor on several cruises, the final one ending in disaster when the ship went on fire resulting in the deaths of a number of the crew, which affected him deeply. Since 1972 he had been with the R.F.A. At the time of his death John was eagerly waiting to substantiate the fact that he was the only holder of both the Burma Star and the Falkland Islands Medal.

On first acquaintance, John gave the impression of being a jovial, ebullient figure with a never-ending fund of stories and ceaseless chatter, the life and soul of any gathering, which indeed he was, but underneath there lay an entirely different personality — one of deep religious conviction, who showed great consideration for and kindness to those less fortunate than himself.

To those of us who knew John best, the Club will never be the same again, for a unique and colourful personality has gone from our midst.

S.M.

WILLIAM A. EWEN

Hon. Mem. 1966. Com. 1931-34, 1954-56, 1958-60. Vice Pr. 1947-49
Editor 1934-53.

A Club excursion to Lochnagar via the Danzig Shiel provided an early memory of Bill Ewen. I had hacked my amateurish way up the shallow gully which runs out on the plateau just NE of the summit and stopped to have a look down and around. I saw a small group headed by Bill coming over the ridge and into the gully. He was using his axe single handed, cutting a groove one way and cutting another on the way back. His steps synchronised with his cutting as he strolled casually up and along. I watched for some time fascinated by the precision and artistry of the performance.

Later on, as I came to know him better, I realised that his combination of precision and artistry was evident in everything that he did, said or wrote. It was not cultivated or deliberate; it just happened. It was just Bill and he could not have done anything any other way.

As a young man of enquiring mind growing up in Ballater, it was inevitable that he should explore the surrounding hills and streams and graduate to stiffer problems. Over the years there had been sporadic interest in rock climbing in the NE corrie of Lochnagar but it took the exploits of Bill Ewen and his partners to really open the eyes of the climbing world to the possibilities there. In the short space of four years he was involved in nine 'first ascents' and besides putting Lochnagar on the map, put himself into the climbing elite.

I did not know him then but I cannot help feeling that the precision and artistry to which I have already referred, played a considerable part in his success.

In the mid thirties the pen became mightier than the axe as he set about editing his first Club *Journal*, No. 76. He retired after No. 88 in 1953 having produced a *Journal* annually except during the war years when it came out bi-annually. This was really a tremendous and sustained effort on his part. In those days it was customary to record the activities of members on Club outings. Bill introduced his own brand of subtle humour into these reports and transformed otherwise dull records into fascinating stories enjoyed by all. Circumstances now make it impossible for editors to continue with this section of the *Journal* so Bill's retirement meant the end of an era, an era noted for the production of uniformly excellent Journals. Around this time, no doubt because of the reputation he had acquired as a Climber and an Editor, he was invited by The Scottish Mountaineering Club to revise the third Edition of Sir Henry Alexander's 'Guide to the Cairngorms'.

This involved the visitation of areas where the existing information seemed scanty, the introduction of fresh photographs where this seemed desirable and much checking and cross-checking. No-one I know had the knowledge, the ability and the stamina to do this with the precision he always demanded.

Much has been written about developments at Muir Cottage, at Derry Lodge, at the Parker Memorial Bridge and at Corrou Bothy but there has been very little mention of the part played by Bill Ewen in these enterprises, mostly perhaps because of his own policy of self effacement. It should be stated however that Bill was a full partner in that particular construction firm.

He and George Taylor lived almost opposite each other. George was basically a lonely man who needed companionship and this resulted in close discussion, argument and collaboration in whatever project was on hand. This prior planning ensured that work in the field was almost automatic. George on occasion became a bit depressed over what he regarded as slow progress and it was Bill who took him in hand, sometimes bullying, sometimes comforting and cajoling, so that he gradually got his batteries recharged and his enthusiasm renewed. There were other occasions when this enthusiasm threatened to run riot and then Bill had to restrain him.

He was therefore so essential to the organisation and development of the various enterprises that I sometimes speculated on how George would have managed without him.

More than once his friends tried to persuade him to allow himself to be proposed for the Club Presidency but he always declined. His reasons were his own and not for speculation but his refusal was a great pity. Bill would have had the knowledge that he had the admiration and support of his many friends while the Club itself would surely have derived some associated kudos by having such a renowned rock climber as its President.

In due course his elevation to Honorary Membership went some way towards easing our disappointment.

On a more personal note we exchanged an irregular correspondence after I had retired to my native Perthshire. His letters contained the same enthusiasms, the same subtle humour which characterised his 'editorial notes' in the Club *Journals*. Each was a literary gem to be read, and laid aside to be read and re-read over and over again.

I had been speaking to him by telephone on the occasion of the birth of another grandson. He was happy and jovial and seemed to me to be better in health than on previous occasions so it was a very great shock and sense of loss to learn of his passing so soon afterwards. It is a loss which will be felt by many.

R.B.

