

An Appreciation of the late Doctor Roy Piggott

Roy Piggott was someone whose memory I'll always cherish. He was one of the kindest men I've known, and I don't believe he could hold malice towards anyone. He was a devoted family man and cared lovingly for his Alli in her final years. She referred to him as 'Piggott' and so shall I.

I got to know him in 1960 when I joined the Radio Research Station at Ditton Park, Slough. It wasn't long before I was on the receiving end of his expositions, mostly about Halley Bay. He had a lab full of Halley Bay data from the International Geophysical Year and frequently bounced in and treated anyone within earshot, from the Director to the office cleaners, to a memorable experience. His analysis of Arctic and Antarctic ionospheric data led him nearly – but not quite – to delineating the auroral ovals which play a major role in high-latitude ionospheric science.

e greatly impressed the ionospheric pioneer Edward Appleton. The Appleton and Piggott papers on ionospheric radio absorption and ionospheric storms were landmarks of the early fifties and probably owed more to Piggott than to Appleton. The occurrence of 'Part I' papers with no subsequent 'Part II' was a symptom of his perfectionism and consequent difficulty in finishing off pieces of work. But with Karl Rawer he did complete the detailed 'Handbook of Ionogram Reduction' which brought much-needed order to a very complex subject, and provided the international model for organizing the data from ionospheric radio soundings which stands to this day.

For a few years around 1970, before his move to the British Antarctic Survey, he motivated an enthusiastic team of young scientists at Ditton Park to analyse data from the British satellite Ariel III. They discovered intriguing north-south 'ridges' in the ionosphere, which were displayed in his lab as colourful 'wallpaper' but never received the verification and writing-up they so badly needed.

Piggott's exploits in continental Europe, immediately after the war, have been recounted elsewhere. Suffice it here to say that his German colleagues were immensely grateful for his rescue of radar equipment that could be used to set up the famous ionospheric laboratory at Lindau, just west of the 'Iron Curtain'.

Finding anything in his office required an archaeological excavation, which might take one back to early ionospheric prehistory – as my American colleague Owen Garriott discovered in 1961 on taking over Piggott's office for a few months while Piggott was away. Owen accidentally knocked over one of the high piles when trying to clear a small space to work.

Piggott was apt to bellow on the telephone, particularly during international calls, evidently believing the further away his correspondent, the louder he should speak. Once I was in the office next to Piggott's when a colleague remarked "I think Dieminger could hear him without a telephone". Just then, Piggott yelled "CONFIDENTIALLY ...". The windows rattled.

I will miss him and so will many, many others.

HENRY RISHBETH