

OBITUARY



Mr. PERCY EVANS
1892-1974

In the passing away of Mr. Percy Evans on the 14th December 1974, we have lost an eminent Geologist and a friend whose cordiality towards Indians in general and Indian Geologists in particular was remarkable.

Percy Evans was born on 2nd December 1892 at Kettering in the Midlands of England. He studied at Laxton and Oundle Schools and entered Trinity College, Cambridge. He passed B.A. in 1914 and obtained Natural Science Tripos in 1915. Later in 1938 he obtained the M.A. Degree.

Soon after graduation in 1915, Mr. Evans joined the staff of the Burmah Oil Company and was posted to Burma where he carried out geological survey work for nearly two years. In 1918 he was posted to Assam and for a period of about 20 years in North East India he was engaged very actively in geological mapping, intensive stratigraphic and petrographic studies and also interpretation of geophysical anomaly maps. Before Mr. Evans and his associates started their surveys in 1918, the geological map of Assam available was rather sketchy and related to a few widely scattered areas. Mr. Evans personally carried out geological mapping of considerable portions of Assam and trained a band of several young Indian assistants, chief amongst whom may be mentioned the late Mr. W. B. Metre. Mr. Evans was an indefatigable worker. In spite of the thick jungle and difficult terrain and lack of communications and hot humid climate, reliable geological maps were

prepared for almost the entire area of what was then known as the Province of Assam, and gradually a large volume of stratigraphic and structural data were obtained. In accomplishing this task, Mr. Evans resourcefully improvised new methods and techniques for geological surveying. His reputation rose high and he was elected President of the Geology Section of the Indian Science Congress in 1932. This session held at Bangalore was memorable especially for the lively manner in which Mr. Evans conducted the proceedings. Mr. Evans' presidential address on Geological Surveying methods in the jungle areas of Assam was highly instructive and informative. The rigours of geologising in thick forest and hilly areas cannot perhaps be easily visualised by the younger geologists in modern times when communications and transport facilities of various types are so much in evidence.

Mr. Evans visited Mysore State again a few years later. In the company of the late Sri B. Rama Rao he toured some parts of Shimoga District to study ripple marks, current bedding and other evidences of sedimentation in the Dharwars.

By 1936 Mr. Evans rose to the position of Senior Geologist in the B. O. C. and had also the charge of the Attock Oil Field in the Punjab (in undivided India). Earlier, the development of the Digboi Field had made little progress. In 1918 the yield of oil was hardly 350 barrels per day. In 1921 the technical directions of the Assam Oil Company were taken over by the B. O. C. and under the geological guidance of Mr. Evans at this field, the development work continued on sound lines, stepping up the production gradually to 4,500 b.p.d. in 1937. Mr. Evans made valuable investigations into the drilling mud used in the rotary drills and his special design (Evans inclinometer) made it possible to measure the deviations of the wells from the vertical.

Mr. Evans introduced heavy mineral analyses for petrographic and correlation studies. His pioneering efforts in interpretation of aerial photographs aided tectonic studies. In interpretation of gravity anomaly maps Mr. Evans evinced great interest. He not only put it to useful purpose in prospecting for petroleum but also made valuable contributions in the broader aspects of study of gravity data. His renowned Paper in collaboration with Mr. W. Crompton on the Geological factors in gravity interpretation (published in the *Quart. Jour. Geol. Soc. Lond.* Vol. 102, No. 3, 1946) was one of the most thought provoking contributions on the subject of Isostatic compensation in India and elicited a remark from the late Sir Thomas Holland that Isostasy is after all a 'Coarse grained truth' (op. cit.).

In 1938 Mr. Evans was elevated to the post of Chief Geologist of B. O. C.—a post he held up to 1955, stationed at the headquarters of the Company in London. Apart from his several other important contributions during this period, he was chiefly responsible for the two outstanding discoveries of large hydrocarbon deposits in the Indian subcontinent—the Sui gas field in Pakistan in 1952 and the Nahorkatiya oil field in Assam in 1953. The former was the result of geological mapping and the latter, of geophysical surveys—in the planning and general direction of which Mr. Evans played the leading role. The oil discovery in the alluvial plains of the Brahmaputra valley indeed dispelled the pessimism which had been prevailing then for a long time about the prospects of finding any sizeable oil fields in India, and provided the impetus for carrying out extensive geophysical surveys and drilling in the country. The Nahorkatiya field is being exploited by Oil India Ltd.,—a joint concern of the B. O. C. and the Government of India, during the past two decades, producing some 50,000 to 60,000 b.p.d (about 3 million tons of oil per annum) and

considerable quantities of gas. Grateful Oil India Ltd., honoured Mr. Evans by naming the main Road in Duliajan oil town after him in 1962.

Mr. Evans had the gift of a rare geological insight and acumen to integrate geological and geophysical results. His name has been inscribed indelibly in the history of oil exploration in India, and in the outstanding contributions he made expounding the complicated Tertiary geology of North East India. Generations of Assam geologists revere him as their '*Guru*'.

From 1955 Mr. Evans became Consultant to B. O. C and other companies, and eventually retired in 1970 after putting in 55 years of dedicated service to the B. O. C and indeed to the advancement of geological knowledge. He wore age lightly and remained active almost to the very end of his life. In his seventy-second year he led two geological excursion parties to Assam before and after the International Geological Congress held in New Delhi in 1964. Besides, he was mainly responsible for the publication '*Oil in India*' issued on the occasion of this I. G. C session. In his eightieth year he presented a paper on Pleistocene Chronology to the International Geological Congress at Montreal in 1972.

Mr. Evans had the rare capacity of moving freely and frankly with his subordinates, making them feel equal but always maintaining untarnished their esteem and regard. It is said he was a hard task master, but exceedingly sympathetic and ever ready to guide and help his assistants along. To him goes the credit for induction of a large number of Indian personnel in the affairs of a foreign company. To Mr. Evans distinctions of colour, caste or race were meaningless, and he did his best to promote the interests of those whom he considered deserving. He named his home '*Tipam*'* epitomising his abiding attachment to India.

Mr. Evans was essentially a happy man, happy in his work, happy in his home, happy with his friends, and above all very humane and noble. His popularity was high and he had endeared himself to his subordinates and a large number of colleagues and friends. He had a fine sense of humour. Even when he was critical of some one, he could bring home a point by subtle humour, without offending the person concerned. Mr. Evans had a flair for correct expression. His technical papers are in lucid style with proper sequence and logical conclusion.

Mr. Evans was awarded the Gold Medal of the Mining Geological and Metallurgical Institute of India in 1932. He was also honoured by the award of the Murchison Medal by the Geological Society of London in 1947.

Mr. Evans was a Fellow of many learned societies both in England and India. He was President of the Geological Section of the Indian Science Congress in 1932 as previously mentioned. He was a Life Member of the Indian Science Congress Association and of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. He was a Fellow of the Mining, Geological and Metallurgical Institute of India, and elected an Honorary Fellow in 1964. He was a foundation Fellow of the National Institute of Sciences in India (now known as the Indian National Science Academy). Mr. Evans was a Fellow of the Geological Society of London, of which he held office as Hon. Treasurer 1947-63. He was Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, Member of the Royal Institution, Member of the Geologists' Association, and for some time Member of the Institute of Petroleum. Mr. Evans was a Fellow of the Geological Society of India from its

*Tipam series of rock formations (Middle Miocene) extend from Arakan coast to Surma valley and upper Assam. The productive oil sands in the Digboi oil field belong to Tipam series.

inception in 1958, and continued to evince interest in the progress of this Society until his passing away. Mr. Evans was Member of the Hertfordshire Natural History Society from 1941 holding office as Secretary 1945-52 and President 1956-57. He was also a founding member of the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Trust for Nature conservation. Among his other interests may be mentioned Pleistocene geology and chronology, mountaineering, gardening and music.

In 1929 Mr. Evans married Kathleen Newman, who died the same year. Later, in 1949 he married Enid Mary Smedley, who survives him. Mrs. Enid Evans is a Geologist and shared many of his interests and was his constant companion till the end. Our heartfelt sympathies go to her in this bereavement.

M. B. R. RAO