



OBITUARY

PROF. DR. EHRHARD VOIGT—THE LEGENDARY PALAEOLOGIST



Professor Dr. Ehrhard Voigt (1905–2004)

Very few men of science have ever been so active for so long in pursuit of research in Earth Science as had been Prof. Dr. Ehrhard Voigt (July 2005– November 2004), Hamburg, Germany. Voigt was a remarkable scientist, unique in his achievement of publishing continuously over eight decades.

As a schoolboy, Ehrhard was already enthusiastic about collecting and studying fossils, especially those of the Bryozoa, an uncommon group of fossils among palaeontologists. In order to study his collection in a professional way, he corresponded with F. Canu of Versailles (France) and R. S. Bassler of Washington D.C. (USA), two eminent bryozoologists. Bassler visited his parent's home in Dessau to study 'schoolboy' Ehrhard's first collection of fossil Bryozoa. That his efforts were professional indeed right from the beginning, is evident from the publications, under single authorship, on systematics of these fossils in a series of five articles (a total of 127 printed pages) in professional journals; one in 1923 and four (three in *Paläontologische Zeitschrift*, a journal issued at Berlin) in 1924. In this first series of his publications, one article concerns ctenostome bryozoans, a group rarely handled by bryozoologists.

Prof. Voigt's passion for collection of bryozoan colonies remained with him as his avocation of walking and travelling. He reminisces (pers. comm., 2000), "*During my time as an army geologist (2nd World War) in Czechoslovakia, I discovered a rich Cenomanian bryozoan fauna at Preboj near Prague (Praha), consisting of very thin and small fragments. Two years later, after my transfer to the Russian front and after the capitulation of the German army (1945), I was interned by Russians as POW (prisoner of war). In order to save the collected bryozoans, I had put the delicate material in a small cellophane bag, which I concealed into the lining of my boots. I closed the slits with sodden bread. Once, after my capture, the Russian guards in the camp took my boots away but I was able to steal them back. It is true that I found in this camp of Morchansk an encrusting Cretaceous "Membranipora" at a heap of white chalk at a construction site. After my release in 1946, I was able to take*

the specimens back in Germany."

Prof. J. M. Hancock of Imperial College (London), a good friend of Prof. Voigt, informs that Voigt collected bryozoan specimens from rock surfaces even when he was temporarily released for attending to nature's call from the prison van that was bringing the POWs from Russia at the end of the 2nd World War. He used to fill the empty rooms of his house in Hamburg with his collections of bryozoans, as and when his sons vacated them.

P. D. Taylor of Natural History Museum, London remembers (pers. comm., 2002) "I have known him since 1980 and have many memories of visiting his flat in Hamburg to work with him and to study his magnificent collection of Cretaceous bryozoans... When I first visited him, he would expect me to arrive no later than 9.00 am and to leave for my hotel no earlier than 9.00 pm, and even then he would supply me with a batch of research papers to be read overnight while he himself worked long past midnight preparing specimens and his famous photocards for my visit the next day... I remember taking him to do fieldwork in the mid Cretaceous of east Devon in about 1985, accompanied by Gisela Illies, a former student of his. We stayed in a hotel in Sidmouth where Voigt was delighted to find that the sieve over the outlet of the washbasin in his bedroom had perforations of exactly the right size to retain the bryozoans he had collected during the day while letting the sandy matrix pass into the drain. Each morning he would appear at breakfast with his washed bryozoans so that we could study them as we ate our cornflakes... Even when I first knew him I was struck by how tormented he was by the fact that he would not live long enough to publish all of the vast bryozoological knowledge 'stored' in his brain; I'm sure that the problems caused by his failing eyesight and lack of a research assistant will have exasperated this frustration."

In 1929, Ehrhard Voigt received Dr. rer. nat. from the University of Halle. Between 1929 and 1936, he worked as the Assistant to the Geological Institute of that University; and became the curator of the museum of the University. In 1939, he joined Hamburg University, Germany, and served there as