

MEMORIES OF WALTER KEGEL CHRISTENSEN

(25 May 1942 – 18 October 2002)



June 2001

One of the most depressing experiences of my advancing age is the loss of dear and familiar companions with whom I have been closely connected - often for several decades - and with whom I shared so many memories and experiences.

One such grievous loss was the death of my Danish colleague Walter Kegel Christensen on 18 October 2002, after a short and severe illness.

I saw Walter for the last time in June 2002 on the occasion of his 60th birthday. We enjoyed a wonderfully lively party among relatives, friends and colleagues in the familiar surroundings of the Geologisk Museum in Copenhagen. Walter encountered a lot of goodwill and appreciation that evening. As always, he was vigorous and vital, but somehow I thought he seemed rather tense.

I had no idea that this was the last time I would see Walter.

Tributes have already been paid elsewhere to Walter Kegel Christensen's extensive scientific activities and so on this occasion I shall mostly confine myself to some very personal memories.

Our last joint project was to conclude a study of belemnites from the Upper Maastrichtian at Hemmoor. Originally I had begun this work with my colleague from Kiel, Max-Gotthard Schulz, but it remained unfinished owing to his death in January 2000. Walter helped me to complete this work, but tragically he too will no longer experience its publication.

Walter was always a very reliable and cooperative co-worker. His approach was effective and hands-on. When joint publications with other authors were under way, he was usually one of the first to submit his paper and then waited impatiently for publication. Otherwise a friendly person, he could be quite contentious in scientific matters.

My memories of Walter go back to 1973, when I founded a committee to select and define a neotype for the long-known species "*Belemnites mucronatus* LINK, 1807". Besides Walter, the members were Gundolf Ernst (†25 April 2002), Max-Gotthard Schulz (†24 January 2000), Christopher John Wood and I (photo). Two years later, the results were published in the *Geologisches Jahrbuch Hannover*. This collaboration led to ties of work and friendship that our group enjoyed over many years; I remember them with pleasure and now also with great sorrow.

Walter was not only a busy and communicative colleague but also a great friend. We often visited him privately in Nivå, where we were always welcomed hospitably by Walter and his wife Vibeke Haarup. Walter was a real gourmet who relished excellent food, a good beer and, in his later years, a full-bodied red wine.

On such occasions we always had much to tell, discuss and remember, especially about our fieldwork together on Bornholm. There, the three of us – Walter, Max and Fidde II, as Walter used to call me – shared accommodation at the

Geologisk Institute's field station at Gravgærde near Åkirkeby. Even the most dismal weather didn't stop us from excavating "our belemnites" at the coast near Bavnodde and elsewhere.

In the evenings we took turns to prepare our well-earned meal. Afterwards, Walter, who usually preferred to speak to us in English, would give his stomach a satisfied pat and say in German "Nun sind wir rundherum satt."

Stocky and powerful in build, Walter was an unconventional person. He wore a tie only on the most formal occasions; otherwise he liked ordinary jeans and even strode up to the conference platform in clogs, delivering his presentations in his inimitable English, the phrase "It's a matter of fact" being one of his favourites.

An important aspect of Walter's private life was his long-standing love of jazz. He was well-known as an accomplished banjo-player in a New Orleans jazz band in Copenhagen. In fact, on one occasion, he convinced me of his musical talents in a pub there until late in the night.

In the earth sciences, Upper Cretaceous and belemnite research will find it almost impossible to fill the void left by Walter Kegel Christensen.

I think with affection and gratitude of a lovable person who will always have a lasting and very special place in my memories.

Fidde II = Friedrich Schmid

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Gundolf Ernst (†25 April 2002), Friedrich Schmid, Walter Kegel Christensen (†18 October 2002), Max-Gotthard Schulz (†24 January 2000) and Christopher John Wood. Hannover March 1973