

Fred Levett ~ 40 at 60

We recently learnt that our President was approaching not only 60 years on this planet, but also 40 years treading the stairs of the Club and the passages of OFD. It took only a little persuasion to get him to eloquate on his times thus far

"I was introduced to the Club by Gary Jones and John Stevens (Barbara Hall's brother) in 1970. I was coming over from Brighton with Sussex University Caving Club. We had some epic drives in whatever transport we could get our hands on, all of which would be sought after classics now. On one night the heavily loaded ex post office van I was driving failed to climb a hill on the back road near Coelbren, unfortunately it then rolled backwards down the hill despite my best effort with the brakes. We were only saved from a long drop by a tree as a back wheel went over the edge. My co-pilot, Frank Honey, had to climb out of the passenger window and sit on the front wing to stabilise it while the other 4 got out. It all seemed part of the deal though, travel could be unpredictable

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On the limestone pavement 1983 North York Moors 2006

At the Club an air of excitement pervaded the atmosphere. There had been major finds in OFD and DYO in recent years and the link between OFD 1 and 2 was still a dream. We drank, caved and drank some more. Equipment was what you could make or scrounge and a light that lasted a trip was to be cherished. My landlord couldn't understand why the curtains where I rented a room had rotted through. I knew though and always kept the lead acid cells and charger hidden from view.



North Wales c1971. Dave Mullin, Fred Levett, Gary Jones

I travelled to other caving regions doing the classic trips but somehow SWCC always felt like home. That's not to say it was always a friendly place. Tough cavers are highly strung and sparks could fly for pretty much no reason. I stuck with it though and was delighted to get a letter from the Secretary, Mary Galpin, in 1972. I had been accepted as a member! I still have the letter. Names that are just memories today actually strode the corridors and it was vital to learn the unwritten rules. It was easy to lose food inadvertently put down for minute, offend a legendary Cottage Warden by leaving dirty kit in almost any place or get mixed up with dubious Marmite jar practices. The upside was that I learned to cave with the best. This stood me in good stead as I branched out to cave in other countries.



Liz Levett and Liz Jones No5 Powell Street, July 1987



Rachel Stuart (née Jones), Nicky and Duncan Levett, Rowan Jones, outside No 10, July 1987.

I've been watched by bears while waiting at the top of a pot in Yugoslavia, threatened in County Clare during the troubles, sat on a rock for 13 hours in Yorkshire waiting for the water to go down and nearly been, but not quite, winged by falling rocks on too many occasions to count. All these things and many more I've done with friends because I'm a member of SWCC. Ask any member and they will recount similar tales.



Sima del Cueto - Cueva Coventosa through trip August 1997
photo Tony Baker



Preparing to cycle St Davids to Swansea. Gary Jones, Fred Levett, Bob Radcliffe. June 2010

As time went by I plucked up enough courage to put my hand up at meetings which nearly always ending up in me getting stuck with some desperate job. You would think I might have learned and just kept my mouth shut. Eventually the hand went up one time too many and so I guess to try and keep me quite and to my amazement I was elected an Honorary Member. The Queen could not offer me any greater honour. As they say the rest is history.



North Wales Mines trip. May 2009. Bill Buxton, Fred Levett, Sam Moore, Clark Friend, Andy Dobson, Brian Clipstone, Dave Dobson.

60 now, 40 of those years spent with SWCC. I wouldn't want it any other way. I've had the privilege of seeing another couple of generations come along and take up caving."

As told to PCW 18th November 2010 [back to History](#)