

# GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



## HISTORY OF GEOLOGY GROUP NEWSLETTER

No.8

July 1998

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### Some important dates

1998 September 24th, Thursday. Has the Past a Future? a one-day meeting at Burlington House, London

1999 March 3, Wednesday. A history of mineral collectors and collections, a one-day meeting at Burlington House, London, to be held jointly with The Russell Society.

1999 September. A meeting on the history of geochronology and the geological timescale.

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### The next HOGG meeting...

“Has the Past a Future?”

A one-day meeting on the conservation of historic geological sites and collections, organized by the History of Geology Group, the Geological Curators Group and the GeoConservation Commission, to be held at the Geological Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly, on Thursday 24th September 1998.

## Programme

10.30 Coffee

11.00 Session 1

- \* Museum Geology then and now: collection developments since 1981. Philip Doughty (Ulster Museum, Belfast)
- \* Rescuing an orphan mineral collection: the Newcastle University mineral collection at the Hancock Museum. Steve McLean (Hancock Museum, Newcastle-upon-Tyne)
- \* A task of dinosaur proportions: collecting, conserving and exhibiting the Rutland dinosaur. John Martin (Leicestershire Museums)

12.30 Lunch

2.00 Session 2

- \* Site conservation and the history of geology. Colin Prosser (English Nature, Peterborough)
- \* The work of the Curry Fund in the conservation of historic sites and collections. Chris Green (Royal Holloway, Egham)
- \* Evidence that disappears: J E Marr and Lake District field sites. David Oldroyd (University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia)

3.30 Tea

4.00 Session 3

- \* Some geological archives in the North of Scotland. Michael Collie (Nottingham)
- \* Archives of the electronic age - what will survive? John Thackray (The Natural History Museum, London)

5.00 Wine and Savouries

Convenor: J C Thackray, The Natural History Museum, SW7 5BD

Registration : Advance registration is not necessary. A fee of £5 will be payable on the door, together with £2 for wine and savouries.

## ... and Spring 1999

### A History of Mineral Collecting and Collections

The Spring meeting will be held jointly with the Russell Society on the theme of mineral collecting and collections. It will be a one-day meeting, to be held in Burlington House, Piccadilly, London, on Wednesday 3rd March. The meeting will include the group's AGM, and there will be a display of books and manuscripts relating to minerals, and other attractions. The convenor is John Martin, The Hall, Roudham, East Harling, Norfolk NR16 2RL (fax: 01953-717444), and he would be glad of offers of papers.

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## And a Report on the Ludlow Trip....

The HOGG Ludlow Fieldtrip was a great success, enjoyed by all who took part. Things went well right from the start: the sun shone, the trains got us to Ludlow on time, the bus was there to pick us up, and John Fuller was a knowledgeable and confident guide. Friday afternoon was devoted to Arthur Aikin and his Mineralogical Plan and Section across the South Shropshire greywacke, published in 1810, with a postscript by Hugh Torrens on the work of Robert Townson. We tried to expunge all thoughts of Murchison's Silurian System from our minds and to see the country with fresh, early nineteenth century eyes. On Saturday we moved forward a few years and south a few miles, to reconstruct Murchison's first visit to the Welsh Borders in 1831. We visited a number of his localities, including Cavansham Ferry, holding copies of his own field notes in our hands, and comparing the illustrations published in Silurian System with 'the real thing'. We compared what he actually did that first year with what he later claimed to have done, and agreed that there was a great difference between the two. This day we were allowed to talk in terms of Ludlow, Wenlock and Caradoc, but all mention of Ordovician was, of course, strictly forbidden. Murchison sank even further in our estimation when, on Sunday, we considered the role of the Rev T T Lewis of Aymestrey, who freely gave Murchison the benefit of his considerable local knowledge, and received scant acknowledgment either in Silurian System (1839) or in Siluria (1854). We all agreed that, although Lewis was no Murchison, he deserved more than he received.

The Feathers Hotel provided a splendid base for such a fieldtrip, providing the group with a comfortable meeting room for lectures, discussion and the AGM (see below).

The only sad thing was that so few members of the Group signed up for the trip (although those present all agreed that small fieldtrips are the best). The Committee would welcome any comments about future fieldtrips: will you support them? was this one to the wrong place? at the wrong time? too expensive? or what? Comments to me at the Museum please.

## The AGM ...

was held in The Feathers Hotel, and minutes will be circulated in time for the 1999 AGM. It is sufficient to note that the reports of both Secretary and Treasurer were discussed and approved, and that Richard Wilding was elected a member of the Committee. A useful discussion on publicity for the Group and its events followed the formal business. The two reports are appended to this newsletter.

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## Other forthcoming attractions ...

A Conference entitled "John Ray and his Successors: the clergyman as biologist", to be held on 18-22 March 1999 at Braintree, Essex, UK. Organized by the John Ray Trust, the Institute of Biology's History Committee, and the Society for the History of Natural History.

Keynote speakers: John Brooke "Wise men nowadays think otherwise", Michael Reiss "On being a biologist and a cleric", plus others, including profs Paul Foster, Chris Smith, Sandy Baker, David Knight, Mark Seaward, Edward Larson, Peter Bowler.

Registration before Jan 1st is £90 (f/t students £30), accommodation etc extra.

Bookings and details from Janet Turner, John Ray Trust, Town Hall Centre, Braintree, Essex, CM7 3YG. Tel (+44) 1376-557776; Fax -344345.

A conference entitled *Mary Anning and her Times: The Discovery of British Palaeontology, 1820-1850*

This bicentennial celebration honouring the first woman palaeontologist will be held on June 2-4, 1999, Lyme Regis, England. Convenor: Sir Crispin Tickell, Patron of the Lyme Regis Museum. Its purpose is to commemorate Mary Anning's influence on a developing field of science, and to explore new discoveries and new readings of the knowledge of her times.

Session Themes will include 1. Mary Anning: her life, times, and contributions; 2. Fossils and the emerging picture of life's history; and 3. Paleontology and the emergence of cultural understanding of Earth and life history. There will also be a geological walk.

Further information is available from Professor Kevin Padian, Department of Integrative Biology and Museum of Paleontology, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720-3140 USA; Phone 510-642-7434 // Fax 510-642-1822  
email [kpadian@socrates.berkeley.edu](mailto:kpadian@socrates.berkeley.edu)

And finally, an international symposium on "Abraham Gottlob Werner (1749-1817) and his time(s)" is scheduled for September 1999 at Freiberg, Saxony, Germany. The meeting will commemorate the 250th anniversary of Werner's birth, and will focus on the history of geology in Werner's time. Proposed themes include 1. Knowledge of the earth (c 1750-1820) and the geological ideas of Werner; 2. Developments and communications, theoretical concepts and academic controversies; 3. Werner and his collections in relation to contemporary private libraries and natural history and coin collections; 4. The history of the influence and reception of Werner's work.

For further information contact Dr Peter Schmidt, Universitätsbibliothek Georgius Agricola, TU Bergakademie Freiberg, Germany. e-mail [pschmidt@ub.tu-freiberg.de](mailto:pschmidt@ub.tu-freiberg.de)

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## We Regret ...

To announce the death of Professor Bob Savage on 9th May 1998, at the age of seventy. Bob was a founder member of the Group and the organizer of the very successful meeting held in Bristol in September 1996. Bob had a long-term interest in the history of geology, and had made a particular study of the use of geological materials in eighteenth century garden grottos. He will be greatly missed.

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## At The Geological Society ...

A generous grant from the Dennis Curry Charitable Trust has made it possible to scan and digitize the correspondence of Sir Roderick Impey Murchison. This huge task will involve capturing at least 5,000 images of pages of letters, together with a hundred or more portraits to give added interest. The process used will give a colour image which, with the possibility of considerable magnification, will be at least as legible as the original. A database will allow retrieval of letters by date, place of origin and recipient, as well as by writer. More details will follow as the project proceeds.

John Thackray, Hon Archivist, Geological Society.

## What's in a Name? ...

Some distinguished 19th century geologists managed to get their undoubted immortality an extra plug by having various Earth features - topographical, geographical and geological - named after them. For instance, there are two towns named Darwin - one in Australia, another in the U.S. There is also Mount Darwin and a Darwin River. Lyell has a town, an island, a range of mountains, an oil field and a stratigraphical formation named after him. perhaps Murchison tops the list with a count of more than 25 places bearing his name. His score includes two capes, a sound, a promontory, an island, a falls, a stream, a bay, a cataract, two glaciers, four rivers, eight mountains and three mountain ranges named after him. Only Queen Victoria's name appeared more often on maps.

I know of only one geologist who is, in part, topographically remembered by a very close encounter he once had with death. Dr James Hector was involved as a geologist in helping to survey the possible routes that the necessary railway could take through the Canadian Rockies, as part of the 1857-1860 Palliser Expedition, set up by the British Government to assess the Central and Western Canada and look at its possibilities for settlement, its resources and probable transportation routes. the Expedition was fortunate in having this talented 23 year-old amongst its numbers, for he did some excellent work. Near the Wapta Falls, on one of the possible routes he was following, when crossing a river he was violently kicked in the chest by his horse and rendered unconscious. His men, including his Indian guides, seriously thought he was dead and dug a grave for him. They were preparing to bury him when he revived, and when fully conscious again was more than a little annoyed to discover that his final



resting place had been so prematurely prepared. His companions from that time named that particular river the "Kicking Horse". The name survives to this day. There is also a Kicking Horse Pass.

The Canadian Rockies, as memorials to that geologist, have a Mount Hector and a Hector Lake. But Hector himself gave the Rockies many of their place-names. Among these is Mount Murchison (3333m), not the highest of that Range, but one of the biggest, with ten summits spread over 30 square kilometers. It was Sir Roderick Murchison who had recommended James Hector to the Palliser Expedition. Perhaps it is a pity that Mount Murchison owes much of its appearance to the Pleistocene glaciation when Sir Roderick was an early implacable opponent of the Agassiz theory of Ice Ages. He later was forced to change his mind as observations and evidence grew. It is probable that Hector was one of the geologists who assisted that mind change. In 1860 Murchison recommended Hector for a job of geological surveyor in New Zealand. Here again he did excellent work and directed the first complete geological survey of that country.

For further reading on Hector see Robert Stafford's *Scientist of Empire* Cambridge University Press (1989).

Richard Wilding, 175 Whitton Road, Twickenham, Middlesex TW2 7QZ

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## Recent Publications ...

Jodanova and Porter (eds), 1998. *Images of the Earth, essays in the history of the environmental sciences*. British Society for the History of Science. New and improved edition.

Keller, S B, 1998. Sections and views: visual representation in eighteenth century earthquake studies. *British Journal for the History of Science* 31: 129-159

Roberts, M B, 1998. Darwin's dog-leg: the last stage of Darwin's Welsh field trip of 1831. *Archives of Natural History* 12: 59-73

Rupke, N A, 1998. 'The end of history' in the early picturing of geological time. *History of Science* 36: 61-90

Taylor, M A, 1997. Before the dinosaur: the historical significance of the fossil marine reptiles in Callaway and Nicholls (eds) *Ancient marine reptiles*. Academic Press. pp xix-xlvi.

Thackray, J C, 1998. A guide to the official archives of The Natural History Museum. Society for the History of Natural History. Pp 174, ill. £25.

Wallace, S, 1998. James Nicol and Sir Roderick Murchison: 'Jeames' and 'The King of Siluria'. *Aberdeen University Review*, vol 57, 221-232.

## HISTORY OF GEOLOGY GROUP

### SECRETARY'S REPORT 1997

The Group maintained its policy of holding two main meetings a year, which seems to be the level at which good attendances can be assured. Also the practice of organizing the meetings jointly with other organizations undoubtedly helps to ensure support and to promote an interest in the history of the earth sciences to a wider audience than perhaps would otherwise have been the case.

The Spring 1997 meeting, with Publishing and the World of Print in the Making of Geology as its theme, convened by Dr. J. Secord, was attended by over 40 members. The Autumn 1997 was held at the Sedgwick Museum, Cambridge jointly with the Palaeontographical Society to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Society's foundation. This very well attended meeting, with over 60 present, was convened by Mr. S.A. Baldwin and was followed in the evening by a dinner at Emmanuel College.

A visit to Kensal Green cemetery was also arranged in July, lead by Dr. J. E. Robinson, but was marked by a disappointingly small attendance.

Two Newsletters were published and distributed during the year and The Geological Society published a coloured poster of William Smith's cross-sections, covering East Anglia to the South of England.

Membership remained at about 100 and the annual subscription was maintained at £7.

Prof. R. Howarth and Dr. J. Secord, both founding members of The Group, retired from the committee at the AGM and the Chairman expressed his thanks for all they had done to help establish HOGG. They were replaced on the committee by Prof. M.J. Rudwick and Dr. S. J. Knell.



A. J. Martin

## HISTORY OF GEOLOGY GROUP

### Details of Receipts and Expenditures January 1, 1997 to December 31, 1997

Jan.1	Opening balance (Statement dated Jan.6, 1997) Cash in hand	942.97
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INCOME	TOTAL	VAT	
Membership fees	553.00	-	79 members paid
Courses	-	-	
Bank interest	-	-	
Investment income	-	-	
Geol.Soc. grant	-	-	

#### EXPENDITURE

Newsletter costs	248.86	-	
Administration	46.06	-	
Operating costs			
March 19 Meeting	49.94	-	World of Print
July 19 Meeting	40.00	-	Kensal Green
Sept.24 Meeting	504.59	88.30	Cambridge

SURPLUS / (DEFICIT)            553.00 - 977.75 = (£424.75)

For year, 1997                    (424.75)

Surplus from last year        942.97

Accumulated surplus  
December 31, 1997            518.22

#### REPRESENTED BY

Bank	493.42
Petty cash	16.80