



Buckinghamshire Earth Heritage Group Newsletter July 2009

Victorian Fossil Collections in the County Museum

Mike Palmer lunch time talk - May 20th 2009

This talk was given to link in with the 'Scenes of Victorian Life' exhibition at the County Museum. Fossils have always attracted the attention of man, even before their true nature was understood. Such as at a Bronze Age burial near Dunstable where around a hundred *Micraster* and *Echinocorys* fossil sea urchins were found arranged around the skeletons of a woman and infant.

In the 1800's palaeontology came into its own as the true nature of fossils became understood. In Buckinghamshire, Dr John Lee was an avid collector of a wide range of objects, including fossils such as the *Ichthyosaurus* shown below.



His standing in geological circles can be seen from the people he entertained such as the famous geologist Rev. William Buckland. In 1833 Dr. Lee inherited Hartwell House and proceeded to set up his own Museum.

In 1918 what remained of John Lee's geological collection came to the County Museum. While some specimens were later given to the Natural History Museum, some 300 specimens still remain at the County Museum including Type specimens (i.e. the fossil on which the species' description is based).

Mike went on to describe 3 other Victorian collectors whose finds are now held at the Museum; Zacharias Hunt, F.H. Parrott and F. Codrington.



The photo above shows a collection of crinoid stems that F.H. Parrott collected in the 1880's, probably as a hobby, on family holidays.

A selection of specimens from all four collectors can be seen in Collections Showcase at the County Museum for the remainder of the year.

Mike Palmer

Burnham Beeches Geological Walk – June 20th 2009

This walk was part of the Burnham Beeches summer walks programme and was very popular with nearly 30 people participating. Graham Hickman led the walk and with the help of Helen Read, Ecologist from Burnham Beeches, the links between flora and geology were well described. The ever changing face of the quarry revealed some great sedimentary features of the Palaeo-Thames.



Photo above: Winters Hill Gravel - narrow lens of tabular cross-bedded sand showing a palaeocurrent direction to the east.

A walk in Jurassic Park – around Coombs and the quarry – July 4th 2009

Jill Eyers lead a very enjoyable and interesting walk around Thornborough looking at the link between the underlying geology, landscape and settlement.

We began by looking at the two Romano-British burial mounds located on the high ground north side of the A421. We learnt how these mounds were excavated in 1839 by the Duke of Buckingham and about the treasures discovered inside. This area has had a long history of occupation and the source of water and good agricultural lands is directly attributable to the underlying



2nd Century burial mounds. Thornborough.



We got our first glimpse at the underlying rocks at the old Thornborough bridge. Built from the local limestones, we were able to see many examples of current bedding, enhanced by weathering. This bridge dates from the medieval period but was still in use to road traffic until 1974 when it was replaced by the modern concrete bridge.

After a pleasant stroll along side the Padbury Brook, we came to the Coombs Quarry. This has been designated a RIGS site for Bucks as it is currently the best exposure of the Blisworth Limestone in the County. Fossils abound here and much evidence of the tropical Jurassic seas were uncovered in the form of shells, gastropods, sea urchin spines.



Jill identifying fossils at Coombs Quarry

The walk details can be downloaded from the website:

http://www.bucksgeology.org.uk/pdf_files/Walk1_Coombs_Thornboro.pdf

Editorial / Questions & Answers

Question: A member of the public was recently asking about the location of Niplands or Bourne End Brick kilns. His interest was not so much in the kilns but rather the chalk mines he believes exist under them. If such 'mines' exist I think it would be good for the Group to know about them so I thought I'd start by asking members of the Group if they had ever heard of such a thing.

Answer: Niplands brickworks was located on a site above Cores End (Grid Ref SU 907870) near Bourne End. On the south side of Kiln Lane and to the west of The Chequers Inn Public House. Bricks and tiles were made there and lime was also burnt in the kilns. During the 19th Century Chalk was dug from shafts sunk into the hill side, records suggest they were 5 dene holes, one up to 80ft (24m) deep but it appears that the site has been levelled and filled.

2009 Future Programme

JULY 18th 11.00 – 3.00 Fossil & Archaeology Day at the County Museum, Aylesbury. Discover the world beneath your feet. Hands-on displays, meet the expert and bring in your mystery find for identification. Admission free. No need to book, just turn up. Contact Mike Palmer at mpalmer@buckscc.gov.uk or call 01296 624519 for more information.

AUGUST 27th. 10am- 4pm BEHG at the Bucks County Show: displays, activities and hands-on workshops. Just turn up and enjoy (note there is an entrance cost for the show from the organisers). We do need volunteers to help on our stand and activities.

AUGUST 30th. 10am. Ivinghoe to College Lake - A walk on the wild side. Contact Jill Evers at j.evers@btopenworld.com or call 01494 881325 (mornings only) to reserve a place. This walk involves a lot of nature and a little geology. Suitable for all ages as long as they can walk a couple of miles. (Sorry no dogs allowed in College Lake).

SEPTEMBER 26th. 10:30am-12noon. The Ice Age in Bucks - a visit to Buckingham Sand Pit. 10.30 to 12noon on 10th October: Just turn up. Contact Jill Evers at j.evers@btopenworld.com or call 01494-881325 (mornings only) for more information

SEPTEMBER –Conservation work at Froghall SSSI – Chalfont – This is a rare opportunity to see the Westland Green Gravels and Reading Beds in part of a privately owned brick pit. Date to be confirmed.

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER : Quarry visit with Michael Oates: Joint meeting with the BAS Natural History Section. Date and venue to be confirmed.

OCTOBER 14th. 12.30-1.00. Buckinghamshire's Jurassic Sea. A lunchtime talk at Bucks County Museum, Aylesbury. Admission free. No need to book, just turn up. Contact Mike Palmer at mpalmer@buckscc.gov.uk or call 01296 624519 for more information.

OCTOBER 17th. 10:30am. West Wycombe to Bradenham circular walk. showing the link between geology, landscape and archaeology. Pub lunch. Contact Jill at j.evers@btopenworld.com or call 01494-881325 (mornings only) to reserve a place.

NOVEMBER 21st. 2.30 – 4.00: Charles Darwin and the tree of life. A talk by Dr Peter Skelton (Open University) in Learning Zone 2, Bucks County Museum, Aylesbury. Admission free. Contact Mike Palmer at mpalmer@buckscc.gov.uk or call 01296 624519 for more information.

The Buckinghamshire Earth Heritage Group aims to record, conserve and promote the geology of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. Membership is free and open to beginners and experts alike. If you would like to join the free mailing list please send your address, phone number and email address to:

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Visit our website: www.bucksgeology.org.uk