



Ussher Society

Newsletter – Late Summer

2017



From the Secretary

Dear Membership,

I hope this mid-year communication finds you well, and that the recent period of warm and dry(ish) weather has been conducive to some enjoyable days out in the field for some of you! It is surprising how quickly the summer passes; already we are only a short time away from the First Circular being distributed for the 2018 Ussher Society Conference which will be held in the lovely environment of Falmouth. Watch this space for details...!

The Editor of *Geoscience in South West England*, Prof. Malcolm Hart, has asked me to let you know that it is very unlikely that the next Volume of the Journal will be able to be produced in this calendar year – as he hoped – due to the low volume of papers submitted so far. **As of the middle of August, only 3 papers had been received** by the Editor, and this is evidently well below the number needed for the Journal to go to press. *Geoscience in South West England* is an important part of our Society: please support the Journal and get in touch with Malcolm (m.hart@plymouth.ac.uk) if you have a paper for inclusion.

I will be standing down from my role as Secretary at the AGM in January 2018; if any Member would like to consider taking up this role from this time onwards, please get in touch (secretary@ussher.org.uk); I have a short job description that I can send you for your consideration.

With best wishes,

Louise

Louise Hollick PhD CGeol

Secretary for the Ussher Society

Online magazine – Earth Heritage

Members may be interested to take a look at the new issue of *Earth Heritage*, an online-only magazine which spans a wide range of topics relating to aspects of conservation in the geodiversity sector. It can be viewed for free, or downloaded as a pdf at: www.earthheritage.org.uk

----- Ussher Fieldwork Bursary Scheme -----

The response to the field work bursary scheme this year was excellent, with seven applicants - six students and one member. Applications were of a high standard so selection was not easy! Four bursaries were awarded and we look forward to hearing about the projects at the conference in January 2018.

Future of Geoscience in South West England

At the Spring Committee meeting in late-March, following on from the discussion at the AGM in January, there was extensive discussion about the format that GiSWE should take in the future. Options ranging from online-only Journal access, through to continuing with paper-only formats were considered and discussed at some length.

Three main factors were identified: (1) providing scientific output in a format that the majority of the Membership is happy with; (2) being more visible to (potential) younger Members; and (3) promoting the submission of copy for publication, with this latter point being an ongoing point of concern (see note from the Editor above!).

Various issues relating to online publication were raised, specifically whether the ability to publish papers online during the year could promote the submission of papers for publication, and that it was felt to be very important that the appearance of Journal papers online should be comparable in quality to those published in hard-copy. Some existing Journals straddled both formats, with papers being published online throughout the year and then, when there was sufficient content, the papers would be printed, bound and sent to members. There was a suggestion that this approach could provide an advantage to institutional and paid-up Members of accessing the papers first.

It was concluded that the best approach for now was to **continue to generate the Journal in printed format**, as now, but to **also put the content online**, in a Members' area protected by a password on a revised website. The proposal was that the online papers would become open access after a period of three years. It is envisaged that this scenario will continue for the foreseeable future, but that if in several years' time, demand for the print-copy reduces, a solid foundation for the Journal as an on-line only resource in the long-term would have been laid.

Mid-year Ussher field trip to Dartmoor

Tim Harrod's field trip to look at the soils of Dartmoor in May went very well and his work in preparing pits and organising the trip was very much appreciated. This trip was administered by the Geology Section of the Devonshire Association, so thanks are due to Mike Barr for this and his report, part of which follows: *This is a very much reduced version of Mike's report – a fuller version will appear in the DA geology Section annual report.*

Soils of Dartmoor Dr Tim Harrod, 20th May 2017

Tim Harrod was in the process of mapping Dartmoor when the Soil Survey of England and Wales was disbanded in 1987 with some of his work unpublished. He has subsequently completed the soils map of Dartmoor and is in the process of completing the companion report. The Devonshire Association and Ussher Society were privileged to gain an insight into this work through being shown round some of the critical localities by Tim on a cool but only intermittently wet Saturday.

After an overview, of the soil types that would be seen, a view across the Dartmoor landscape, taking in Moretonhampstead and the hills beyond showed the town lying in the lower ground defined by the northwest-trending Sticklepath Fault. There is a sharp contrast in the relief which is subdued on the shattered granite along the fault compared to the unfractured granite lying to the northwest and a corresponding change in the drainage pattern visible on the map.

After a couple of stops to see different soil types, the group went on to the Langaford Farm (Charitable Trust) where Tim had prepared a number of pits to examine the soils, drawing our attention in passing to the match between the distribution of soil types and the field boundaries, emphasising the influence of soil type on land use. The lowest part of the locality is permanently wet with a sharp boundary and is likely the site of tinning in former times.

A feature of note was the presence of numerous narrow pipes of the top layer let down into the subsoil, interpreted by Darwin (no less) as the infilled burrows of earth worms. The topsoil is rich in carbon and virtually grit-free at least in the top part, formed by the rotting of the surface vegetation in an oxygen-poor environment. Some have asserted that it has accumulated since the last ice age allowing estimates of the rate of accumulation to be made. A lively discussion followed, mainly centred around the likelihood (or otherwise) of the “burrows” representing the former homes of earthworms.

Then, on into a plantation to see an example of moorland podsol in the trackside, and increasing in elevation all the time, to the former Princetown Prison dump surrounded by permanently waterlogged soils of the Princetown soil series consisting of a mineral soil (growan) overlain by a thin peaty topsoil merging downwards into rotted granite. The final locality was exposed in a gully in an area covered by blanket peat. The visible profile consisted of a relatively thin layer of brown fibrous peat underlain by 1m of “proper” (humified) peat. The peat on Dartmoor is known to exceed 10m in thickness in places – a vast reserve of fixed carbon. The peat was exploited in medieval times and workings are still visible in places on the moor and was used among other things for making charcoal for smelting tin, both here and in Cornwall.

Many thanks to Tim Harrod for all the effort put into this trip.

Dr. Deryck Laming

Following the sad death of Dr Deryck Laming at the end of January, his partner, Margaret Dobson, has produced a list of some of his geological books and journals which she thought may be of interest to others in the geological community. A list of the items is given below. If anyone has an interest in any of the items – or knows of someone who may be interested outside the Society - please make contact with Dr. David Roche (drgeo@drgeo.co.uk) in the first instance. Thank you.

Industrial Minerals in Developing Countries	Devonshire Association – 1983-2015	Longitude – Dava Sobel
The making of Mankind – Richard Leakey	Outlines of Paleontology – Swinnerton	Outlines of structural geology – Sherbon and Hills
Whatever is under the Earth	Rutley’s Mineralogy – Rutley	Geohazards – McCall, Laming and Scott
Cornwall’s geology and scenery 1st edition (2 hardback and 1 softback)	Non-marine Permian biostratigraphy and biochronology – Lucas, Cassinis and Schneider	Studies in Asian tectonics and resources (1986)
Cornwall’s geology and scenery 2nd edition	The Earth – Richard Fortey	Tectonic evolution of SE Asia
Geology and Landscape of Taunton Deane	The Map that changed the world – Simon Winchester	Geoscience in urban development AG11
Homo Britannicus – Chris Stringer	Field guide for Mortimer Forest	Sedimentary rocks (2nd edition, 1957) – Pettijohn
Earth Science Pioneers in Science (no. 8 only) – Kathleen Cullen	Stratigraphic geology	The periglacial environment – H M French
The role of women in the history of geology – C V Buick and B Higgs	Deryck’s PhD thesis from 1954 – 2 copies	The Little Ice Age – Brian Fagan
Memoirs of William Smith – John Phillips (his nephew)	BRG local Memoirs	The Dinosaur Hunters – Deborah Cadbury
Oil and Arab co-operation	The blind watchmaker – Richard Dawkins	Time, life and Man – Ruben Arthur Stirton (1960)
Edinburgh Rock	The voyage of the Beagle – Charles Darwin	The making of the English Landscape – W G Hoskins
The evolution of clastic sedimentology	Origin of Species – Charles Darwin	

Guide to the Geology of the south Devon coast – just published!

One of our Members, Prof. John Cope (based at the Department of Natural Sciences at the National Museum Wales in Cardiff) has recently authored GA Guide no. 73, a guide to South Devon. This is available via the GA website at a price of £12 for non-GA members, or £9 for GA Members.

www.geologistsassociation.org.uk/guidesales.html

Events of interest to members

- 12 October **‘Are we using Dartmoor’s Stone Resources Wisely?’**
Dartmoor Society Public Debate at Meldon Village Hall (£20 non-members)
<https://www.dartmoorsociety.com/events> for online bookings (book by 12 October)
- 19 October **Malcolm Brown, President of the Geological Society**
Malcolm will give an overview of his career and his objectives for whilst he is President of the Geological Society. University of Plymouth. 6.30pm for 7pm start.
- 20-22 October **Geologists’ Association Conference at the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff.**
Climate Change theme; details and booking form on:
www.geologistsassociation.org.uk/conferences
- 23 November **AGM of the South West Regional Group of the Geological Society**
6.30pm for 7pm.
- 3 – 6 January 2018 **Ussher Society Conference in Falmouth.**
First Circular due later in the autumn.

I may produce another newsletter **late October 2017**. If you have any knowledge of events which you think may be of interest to your fellow Ussher Members, please send them to me for inclusion in the next newsletter by the **middle of October at the latest**. Thank you. secretary@ussher.org.uk