

# CHARNIA



**The summit of Bardon Hill, hanging on – just!**

**The newsletter of the Geology Section (C) of  
the Leicester Literary & Philosophical Society**

**[www.charnia.org.uk](http://www.charnia.org.uk)**

**May 2009**

## Editorial May 2009

Glancing across at the Chairman's relieved expression as she completed her Address at the AGM, it was clear that the Winter Programme was over again for another year. It isn't always apparent, but a lot of work and not a little exasperation are involved in keeping that particular ship on course from early October to late March. We depend an awful lot on the goodwill of our speakers in turning out to travel often some distance to lecture to us, usually after a preceding working day. In the ever more frenetic 2000's fewer and fewer people are prepared to sacrifice what little free time they have to give what are effectively free talks, although of course we pay travelling expenses and entertain our speakers to a meal. It is becoming increasingly hard to persuade quality speakers to say yes to us, but it is a battle we continue to win, as the quality of last season's talks testified. And I am convinced that it is because we continue to be served by first rate officers and committee who make our guests welcome, and perhaps even more is owed to you, the members, for the friendly atmosphere you generate at the meetings. It is quite usual to hear our speakers remark that they really enjoyed their time with us, often expressing a hope that they might lecture to us again sometime. It also helps being in a fine lecture theatre.

It is always invidious to pick out highlights from the programme, and I can truly say that I enjoyed all the talks. However, top of the pops again has to be the Saturday Seminar. It is difficult to credit that only a few days before the event, the sub-committee was still running around adding the finishing touches to the programme, getting the abstracts booklet completed and printed, finalising numbers for lunch, and all that to a background of what was at that stage a disappointing take up regarding tickets. But, as ever, we had a late flurry (the very last enquiry came in on the Saturday morning of the seminar!) and in the end we had a very respectable audience. It was a treat to hear well researched insights into the life and work of some of the greatest names in geology. I know that we were celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Darwin, but for me it was the talks on the other 'greats' that gave most enjoyment. I managed to persuade some old friends of mine to speak to us, and it was an added pleasure to see them again in such good form.

As to the rest of the programme, personal bias notwithstanding, Jim Rose's early hominids and landscape talk in November stood out for me, also Gerry Slavin's Geology and Disease talk in January. Sadly, a spell in hospital meant that I missed another of the ones I particularly wanted to see, the

Parent Body lecture by Phil Manning, also in January. However, reports indicate that it was excellent, which is as it should be, we have a standard to maintain for the PB talk! I also missed the Member's Evening, much to my disappointment. And I know it wasn't one of ours, but I have to mention David Attenborough's talk to the Parent Body in March, arranged by the Natural History Section. It wasn't so much the content or the delivery of the talk that mattered, it was the sheer pleasure of being in the same room as the person who is arguably the greatest living natural history communicator. Sir David is now in his 80's but the infectious enthusiasm remains undiminished, and his schedule is as punishing as ever. We managed to persuade him to pose next to a portrait of his brother, Sir Richard, and I've included that shot in this Charnia.



Question time at the conclusion of a talk at the Saturday Seminar

Unusually, there is a field excursion report in this, the May edition of Charnia. That was because we began the summer programme early this season, in April. Well, I say field excursion, but it was more in the way of a visit, and no-one touched a rock in anger all day. The trip was to an exhibition and public open day at Bardon Hill Quarry, to view their plans for



a new big hole. They were very welcoming to us and the exhibition was cleverly mounted to show off all the advantages of the new quarry (after all, it was a public relations exercise), but I found myself in some confusion over exactly what I thought about it all. I probably wasn't the only one, although others of us were more outspoken in their approval for the venture. My dilemma comes as a result of considering myself to be a natural historian (in the loosest sense of the term), not simply a geologist. I enjoy the whole of the natural world, with its flowers, insects, fungi, birds, etc etc and of course these organisms require suitable habitat in which to thrive. Digging a whacking great hole tends to destroy large tracts of the countryside (not to mention impacting deleteriously on the surrounding area), and much of the wildlife is perforce driven out. And it so happens that the area earmarked for opening up is a bit of 'real' Charnwood, or at least what we think of as authentic terrain, with a complex ecosystem that has grown up over centuries. I am not comfortable with losing that. Yet, another side of me can conjure up a vision 30 - 50 years hence when the workings have closed down and restoration and rehabilitation have taken place, and another ecosystem has built up, perhaps not quite the same as the one that was lost, but a varied natural system nonetheless. We all know what natural diversity can be found in old quarries. In a way then, quarrying allows us to have the best of both worlds (if we live long enough!), we get to see and study the rocks and then, later, we can enjoy the recolonisation and new natural systems that develop after extraction has ceased. So that's where it has to stop then, for me, and I will always be left with my dilemma. Let me know your thoughts on this thorny question.

Andrew Swift

## **Summer Programme**

### **Saturday April 4<sup>th</sup> Bardon Quarry** Public Exhibition/Consultation Day

A public exhibition and open day to allow members of the public to view Bardon Quarry's extension plans. The staff will provide a virtual tour of the quarry but we will not be allowed into the quarry.

### **Saturday May 9<sup>th</sup> Clipsham and Castle Bytham quarries. Tickencote and Exton churches**

Middle Jurassic Lincolnshire Limestone Formation and Tertiary Bytham River environments. Two famous Rutland churches if time permits. Leaders Andrew Swift and Professor Jim Rose

### **Friday June 5<sup>th</sup> – Sunday June 7<sup>th</sup> Llangollen and the Cheshire Basin**

Ordovician to Triassic localities. Leaders Drs Hilary Davies and Cynthia Burek.

### **Saturday July 11<sup>th</sup> Kirtlington Quarry** (Great Oolite Group), **Churchill** (birthplace of Wm Smith), **Headington Quarry/Magdalen Quarry** (Oxfordian, Upper Jurassic)

Leader Owen Green

### **Wednesday July 29<sup>th</sup> Tilton Railway Cutting**

Evening visit to one of our local geological highlights. Children welcome. Leader Andrew Swift

### **Saturday August 8<sup>th</sup> Bradley Fen pit near Whittlesey**

Oxford Clay. Leader Bill Learoyd or Cliff Nicklin

### **Saturday September 5<sup>th</sup> Whitmans Hill Quarry, Storridge, Malvern and the Abberley & Malvern European Geopark**

Mostly Wenlockian (Silurian). Children welcome. Leader Sue Edwards

### **Saturday September 26<sup>th</sup> Boon's Quarry, Hartshill, Warks**

Joint excursion with the Warwickshire Geological Conservation Group to view the Precambrian /Cambrian unconformity. Leaders Martyn Bradley and John Crossling.

### **Saturday October 10<sup>th</sup> National Coal Mining Museum, Wakefield**

A chance to descend to depths of 140 metres to explore one of Britain's oldest working mines and also to inspect the restored colliery complex of Hope Pit. Children welcome.



Sir David Attenborough (flesh) and Sir Richard Attenborough (paint)

### **Provisional Winter Programme 2009/10**

All meetings begin at 7.30pm in Lecture Theatre 3, Ken Edwards Building, main University of Leicester campus, except where stated. Refreshments served from 7.00pm.

Details: Chairman Dr. Joanne E. Norris or Editor Andrew Swift, 0116 2833127, j.e.norris@ntlworld.com, swifta@digit-image.co.uk

**2009**

**Wednesday October 7<sup>th</sup>**

Dr Lynden Cooper (Dept. of Archaeology, University of Leicester):  
**Glimpses of the Palaeolithic in the Midlands**

**Wednesday October 21<sup>st</sup>**

Professor Peter Rawson (Scarborough Museums Trust): TBC

**Wednesday November 4<sup>th</sup>**

Professor Mike Petterson (Dept. of Geology, University of Leicester):  
**Rebuilding Afghanistan through Geoscience**

**Wednesday November 18<sup>th</sup>**

Professor Paul Wignall (School of Earth and Environment, University of Leeds): **Theme: Permian extinctions**

**Monday November 30<sup>th</sup>**

Parent Body Lecture, **New Walk Museum, Leicester**

Professor Aubrey Manning (University of Edinburgh): **Life and the Earth: interlocking histories**

**Wednesday December 2<sup>nd</sup>**

Professor Brian Windley (Dept. of Geology, University of Leicester): Title TBC

**Wednesday December 17<sup>th</sup>**

Christmas Meeting, **New Walk Museum, Leicester.**

**2010**

**Wednesday January 13<sup>th</sup>**

Dr Jan Zalasiewicz (Dept. of Geology, University of Leicester). **The Earth after us**

**Wednesday January 27<sup>th</sup>**

Professor Duncan Wingham (Dept. of Earth Sciences, University College, London): **Bubbling Under – an accidental look at Antarctic sub-glacial drainage**

**Wednesday February 10<sup>th</sup>**

Dr Noel Worley (British Gypsum, East Leake): TBC



**Wednesday February 24<sup>th</sup>**

Members Evening, New Walk Museum, Leicester.

**Wednesday March 10<sup>th</sup>**

To be arranged

**Saturday in March**

Annual Saturday Seminar, University of Leicester, 9.30 am – 5.00 pm Theme to be decided

**Wednesday March 25<sup>th</sup>**

Annual General Meeting, and Chairman's Address

Dr Joanne Norris (Halcrow Group Ltd., Peterborough): Title TBC



**The Chairman steadies herself with a few before her Address at the AGM**

### **Excursion to Bardon Hill Quarry April 4<sup>th</sup> 2009**

This was not a typical Geology Section excursion, as we weren't actually going to be looking at any rocks. The genesis of the trip was fairly complex and came out of a request for a conventional visit to see and study the rocks

in the huge quarry. For rather nebulous reasons the quarry refused our request, but we were told about a public open day when Aggregate Industries were putting on an exhibition to promote their plans for a major new quarry about a mile from the existing one. It was decided that we would go for that, with the ulterior motive of ingratiating ourselves with the management we would meet at the exhibition, with a view to persuading them of our worthiness to be granted a proper field visit. That aside, it was also thought that we would like to know what Bardon were planning, for future reference.



**The Bardon party with the quarry in the background**

Thus, on a bright, generally sunny morning, 13 stalwarts assembled at the plant and were shuttled by landrover to the marquee erected especially for the exhibition. That short journey in itself was beneficial, as our drivers were happy to give a running commentary on operations as we drove through the quarry complex to access the tent. The view from the marquee was very impressive and gave a high overview of the quarry. Phone calls to senior management prior to our visit meant that we were expected, and indeed the party was granted personal attention by two 'high-ups', Graham King and Hugh Lucas. They were only too aware of the benefits of winning over



interested groups, so we got the full treatment. They had gone to considerable trouble to assemble a battery of modern media tools, with several computer gizmos giving 'virtual' flyovers and other impressive presentations of data. Graham and Hugh couldn't have been more accommodating and were only too pleased to offer their services in facilitating a visit to the nitty-gritty part of the quarry in the future, as well as offering trips to other Aggregate Industries sites.



A section of the Section watch the gizmos

So, all-in-all it was a very useful and informative visit. Afterwards, a few of us retired to the nearby Charnwood Arms for lunch.

Andrew Swift

### Chairman's Report for 2008/9

Given at the AGM, March 25<sup>th</sup> 2009

This year has maintained the standards that you have come to expect from the Geology Section, and as in previous years has been another exceedingly

busy one. We not only had our usual indoor meetings and field excursions but we also ventured to pastures new and exhibited at the Geologists' Association Festival of Geology on November 1<sup>st</sup>, which was held at University College, London. This is an annual event for the GA but it was the first time the Section had attended. We were invited to apply for a small grant from the GA's Curry Fund to enable us to attend and to also update our publicity material. As a result, we produced our new roller banner, posters and membership leaflets, for which we thank the Curry Fund and our designers Andrew Swift and David Baines. We also sold a few copies of our Building Stones of Leicester books and previous years Seminar booklets. Members of the public from the East Midlands area were also interested in the Section.



GA 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary lecture organisers and Reception Committee

The summer field programme, organised by our Field Secretary Helen Jones, ran smoothly. Unfortunately I was unable to attend two thirds of it due to my summer secondment to Ipswich. However, we had a fascinating day out at Chatsworth House on May 17<sup>th</sup>, viewing the hidden wonders of the Duchess of Devonshire's mineral collection, followed by a superb



midsummer's weekend in the Cotswolds exploring the delightful localities of Oathill Quarry, Snowhill Quarry, Leckhampton Hill, Hock Cliff and much more. We had the now traditional Section dinner on the Saturday evening at the White Lion in Winchcombe. You also visited various localities around Castleton in July, and our old favourite 'fossiling' grounds of Blockley Quarry in August and Ketton Quarry in September. Our annual museum trip concluded the summer programme, which saw us return to the Lapworth Museum in Birmingham.



Photo: Ron Johnson

**Curator Jon Clatworthy addresses the group at the Lapworth Museum**

We had another most excellent season of lectures, with again one last minute change in proceedings for which we were extremely grateful to Dr Carl Stevenson from Birmingham University for stepping in as a replacement on November 19<sup>th</sup>. Our Parent Body talk, given by Dr Phillip Manning on January 26<sup>th</sup> on 'Grave Secrets of Dinosaurs', once again attracted a large audience which filled the Main Gallery at the Museum. Our Christmas and Member's Evenings were both well supported, and we must thank Andrew Swift (10 years of weekend field trips), Trevor Ford (Castleton Caves), John Dickinson (Coal mining and Bardon quarry extension plans) and Bruce

Smith (Mongolia: a steppe into the unknown) for their presentations at these two events, and also to the members who brought along displays and collections for us to peruse.

We were privileged to take part in the Geologists' Association 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations as they kindly sponsored one of our lectures held on November 5<sup>th</sup>, when Professor Jim Rose enlightened us about the landscape, environment and climate of the earliest humans in northern Europe. Our March 11<sup>th</sup> lecture was dedicated as the Baldwin Lecture when Drs Williams and Edwards explained the process of replicating fossils.

Our Saturday Seminar on 'Charles Darwin and the Great Pioneers of Geology' was held on March 7<sup>th</sup>. The day was again another big success with excellent speakers and memorable presentations. The day was enjoyed by over 80 participants. A big thank you goes to the sub-committee (Mark Evans, Joanne Norris, Kay Hawkins, Andrew Swift, David Baines and Richard Aldridge) and reception committee (Fiona Barnaby, Margaret East and Dennis Gamble) for all their hard work in organising this year's event.

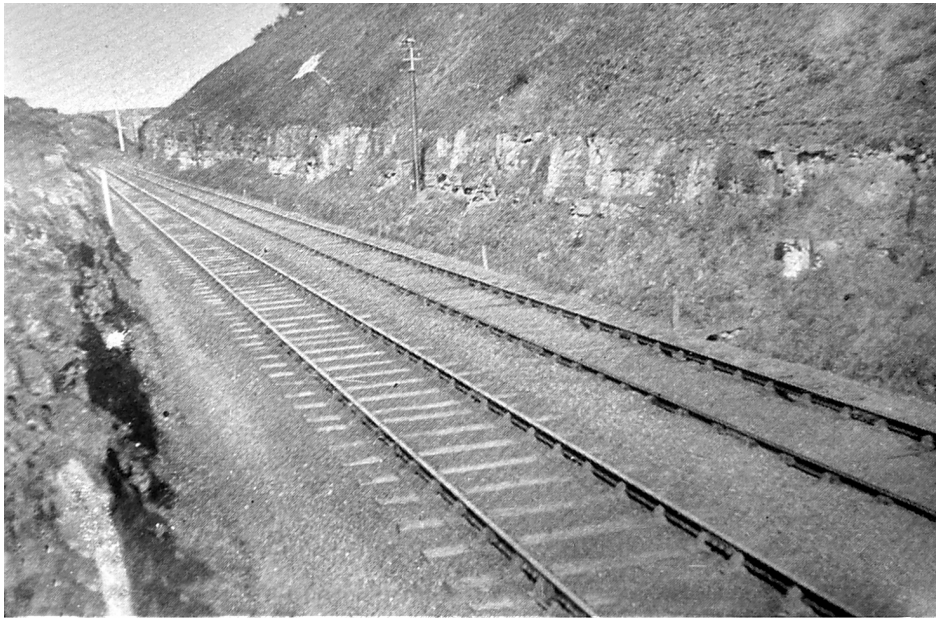
Attendance during the winter programme has been generally good. We had an average of 43 (members and visitors) although this was slightly down on last year (48). I put this slight drop in numbers down to the car parking ban on campus which was enforced by the university, with no prior warning to us, for our December 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting and to the extremely icy and snowy weather we had in January and February. Overall, we have seen an increase in visitor numbers this year so we must encourage these people to become members in the long term.

We are continuing to maintain a healthy membership base, with a steady number of new members coming in to replace those that have declined to renew or moved out of the area. Numbers are 2 Life members, 14 Student or Parent Body members, 51 Ordinary members and 21 Joint/Family members. Our student representative Rhian Llewellyn also boosted student membership numbers with a half price deal in early 2009.

Finally, I must thank Andrew Swift and Dennis McVey for keeping us up to date with the Section's activities via our newsletter Charnia, and our website, respectively. Special thanks go to Margaret East for providing us with the tea and coffee, and to all the other Officers and Committee for efficiently running the Section's business.

Dr Joanne Norris





RAILWAY CUTTING, TILTON.

Section showing Upper Lias Shales resting on the Rock-bed of the Middle Lias.

*From a Photograph by A. W. Searley.*

**We visit Tilton on July 29<sup>th</sup>. This is what it used to look like. From Browne, M. 1893. A contribution to the geology of the Borough of Leicester. *Transactions of the Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society*, Vol. 3, 123-140.**



**This was the scene in the cutting in November 2005**



**After the Chatsworth excursion in May 2008, in the Devonshire Arms at Baslow**



**Bradley Fen, August 2003. How many will make the return trip this August?**



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