Editorial

Welcome to the third Centre for Palynology Newsletter. We aim to keep you updated on events following another action-packed year. This included the eagerly anticipated Geology Centenary Reunion that many of you attended, and there is much more on that to follow. Also, Duncan McLean reports on a reunion of the M.Sc. class of 82. In the meantime we hope you enjoy the newsletter and find it informative.

Current Sheffield palynologists. From left to right: Rob Keen, Sam Slater, Charles Wellman, Steph Wood, Jenny Morris (David Carpenter and Bernard Owens were not available for the photo shoot)

Graduating Ph.D.s

Faisal Abuhmida was awarded a Ph.D. following his viva voce exam in June. Faisal’s thesis was entitled “Palynological analysis of the Ordovician to Lower Silurian sediments from the Murzuq Basin, southwest Libya”. Faisal was supervised by Charles Wellman. Bernard Owens was internal examiner and John Marshall (University of Southampton) the external examiner. Faisal has now returned to Libya and is working for the Libyan Petroleum Institute.
**Simon Wallace** was awarded a Ph.D. following his viva voce exam in August. Simon’s thesis was entitled “Evolutionary development of the plant spore and pollen wall”. Simon’s research was funded by a NERC research studentship. He was jointly supervised by David Beerling, Andy Fleming and Charles Wellman who are all staff at the Dept. of Animal & Plant Sciences. Julie Gray (Dept. of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology) was internal examiner and Zoe Wilson (University of Nottingham) the external examiner. Simon has recently left for the USA to take up a postdoctoral position with Joe Williams in the Dept. of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Tennessee.

**Current Ph.D. students**

*Ph.D. students in palynology 2013: Steph Wood and Sam Slater in the Alfred Denny Museum (David Carpenter was unavailable for the photo shoot)*

**Sam Slater** is in the third year of his Ph.D. research project. Sam is working on Middle Jurassic terrestrial palynology based on a mixture of classic UK sites, offshore North Sea Basin material and comparative material from the Southern Hemisphere. Sam’s Ph.D. is a NERC CASE award with Shell and is jointly supervised by Charles Wellman and Iain Prince, Daniel Hanna and Katrin Ruckwied of Shell.
**Steph Wood** is in the second year of her Ph.D. research project. She is working on Jurassic-Cretaceous palynology of the Gulf of Mexico. Steph’s Ph.D. is a NERC Open CASE award with Shell and is jointly supervised by Charles Wellman and Iain Prince and Katrin Ruckwied of Shell.

**David Carpenter** commenced his Ph.D. research in September. David is working on a project entitled “Charcoal, forests and Earth’s Palaeozoic geochemical oxygen-cycle”. David is based at the University of Southampton where he is supervised by John Marshall, but is a regular visitor to Sheffield where his co-supervisors are David Beerling and Charles Wellman.

**Current post docs**

**Dr Jenny Morris** has just commenced the second year of a three-year post. doc. Jenny is working on a NERC standard grant “Evolutionary rise of deep-rooting forests and enhanced chemical weathering: quantitative investigations into the current paradigm”. Jenny’s work continues to progress well as she continues analysis of boreholes drilled through Middle Devonian palaeosols from New York State and outcrop sampled palaeosols from Gaspé, Quebec.

![Jenny Morris logging a Lower Devonian palaeosol in Gaspé, Quebec, Canada](image)
Undergraduate teaching

This year four undergraduate students selected palaeontology for their Level 3 project topic. They analysed megaspores from the Carboniferous Coal Measure deposits from the Bristol Coalfield in a palaeoecological analysis of the thin coals in the upper sandy units of the coalfield.

There are three Level 4 masters student studying palaeontology this year: two supervised by Charles Wellman (Alexander Askew and Jamie Brown) and one supervised by Jenny Morris (Owen Hayman). All three are incorporating palynological analysis in their investigations. Alexander is working on the palaeoenvironments and biota of the basal Permian deposits of Nottinghamshire. Jamie is studying the palaeoecology of rare arthropod specimens recovered from the Somerset coalfield. Owen is researching unusual bryophyte accumulations in the Middle Devonian of New York State.

The 2013 Palaeontological Association undergraduate prize was awarded to Daniel Delbarre. Daniel performed well in all of his undergraduate palaeontology modules, but particularly well in his Level 3 project and dissertation on fish evolution. His project with Gareth Fraser was on “A reaction-diffusion mechanism for dermal denticle patterning in the lesser spotted dogfish” and his dissertation with Charles Wellman was on “Establishing the cause of agnathan-gnathostome succession: a palaeoecological approach”.

The undergraduate Level 3 project students picking Carboniferous megaspores
Outreach

Following on from the 2012 annual Christmas lecture for Sheffield schools “Dinosaurs are dynamite”, Charles was persuaded to present the interactive talk again at Sheffield Science Week in June. This once again provided the opportunity for Steph to dress in a dinosaur suite.

*Children enjoying themselves at the ‘Dinosaurs are Dynamite’ event*

We were also interviewed and filmed by a consultancy hired by the university to make a documentary on ‘impact’ in the university. They were interested in our activities within the oil industry and interviewed and filmed us preparing samples in the lab.

*Steph explaining how we dissolve up rocks*
Laboratory, Collections and Library News

Unfortunately Steve Ellin has been on long term leave due to illness. Fortunately the department understands the importance of the lab and have provided long term Animal & Plant Sciences technician Rob Keen for one day per week to keep things ticking over. Rob has settled in well, is keeping the lab in good order, and quickly picking up the ‘dark art’ of palynological processing.

We continue with the long term project of assembling an electronic catalogue of all the stored materials (slides, residues and rocks). This year we have concentrated on the rather dusty task of ordering the rocks stored in the rock storage room beneath the palynology lab.

Congratulations to:-

Janine Pendleton was Awarded the Linnean Society of London Irene Manton Prize for the best thesis in botany from a UK university for her thesis “Palynological and palaeobotanical investigation of the Carboniferous deposits of the Bristol Coalfield, UK”. This is the first time this highly prestigious award has gone to a palaeontological thesis and is a huge honour. Many congratulations Janine.

Janine being presented with the Irene Manton Award by President of the Linnean Society of London Professor Dianne Edwards.

Brian Pedder secured a position as a palynologist with Robertson and has moved to join them in Llandudno.

Mike Stephenson who was a Centre for Palynology M.Sc. (1996) and Ph.D. (1998) has been appointed Director of Science and Technology at the British Geological Survey.
Charles Wellman was awarded the Palaeontology Association President’s Prize at the Palaeontological Association Annual Meeting in Zurich, Switzerland in December.

Publications 2013


Meetings attended 2013

Members of the Centre for Palynology have attended a number of meetings this year and presented a variety of talks and posters (many of you will have witnessed these). These are listed below:-

- Microfossils III. Houston, Texas, USA [Slater, Wood]
- Linnean Society Palaeobotany Specialist Group, London [Morris, Slater, Wellman]
- TPS-AASP Annual Meeting San Francisco, USA [Slater, Wood, Wellman]
- TMS AGM British Geological Survey, Nottingham [Slater, Wood]
- Palaeontological Association Annual Meeting, Zurich, Switzerland [Morris, Slater, Wood, Wellman]
Fieldwork 2013

There were a number of interesting field trips this year. In January Charles Wellman was challenged by the cold of Patagonia and the heat of the Atacama on a trip to Chile collecting living representatives of extremophile bacteria/protists. He was joined by Patricia Arancibia-Avila (Chillan University, Chile), Linda Graham (University of Wisconsin Madison), Louise Lewis (University of Connecticut Storrs) and Willy Taylor (University of Wisconsin Eau Claire) in a continuation of their NERC-funded project examining terrestrial algae.

Compare and contrast: the cold of the Patagonian Andes and the heat of the Atacama desert.

Dave Carpenter, Sam Slater and Steph Wood continued their Ph.D. fieldwork with Dave visiting Bolivia (in the company of John Marshall) to collect Devonian charcoal samples, Sam undertaking a number of excursions to the Yorkshire coast and Steph sampling outcrops around the Gulf of Mexico. Jenny Morris visited New York State to drill more boreholes at her Middle Devonian palaeosol sites, and in July visited Gaspé, Quebec, Canada to collect Lower Devonian paleosols with Charles Wellman. Charles also undertook his usual May visit to Scotland to continue work on the Torridonian and Old Red Sandstone.

Later in the year Charles and John Marshall travelled to Kazakhstan to examine some of the Silurian-Devonian sections in this vast country.

The vast Kazakhstan steppe—is there any outcrop out there?
Visitors

As usual we have had numerous visitors over the year. Amalia Spina (University of Perugia, Italy) spent several days examining our thesis collection. Elliott Burden (Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada) and Wilson Taylor (University of Wisconsin Eau Claire) visited for collaborative projects on the Devonian. We also had social visits from numerous former students including Issam Al-Barram (PDO, Oman) and Awad Ibrahim (Ministry of Energy & Mining, Republic of Sudan). Mike Newman and Jan Den Blaauwen visited, on their way up to Scotland for a Devonian fish collecting expedition, to examine the extensive Alex Ritchie fish collections housed by the university. This was extremely timely as they were being curated at the time by Summer placement student Will Siva-Jothy who is studying geology A-level at King Edward VII School.

Issam and Amalia on their visit to Sheffield examining theses and slides in the microscope room.

Geology Centenary Reunion

The centenary of geology at Sheffield University reunion was held on 21st September 2013. This was a huge success and attended by numerous Sheffield palynology students. Alison has established a website [http://www.geologyatsheffield.co.uk] and published a book “Sorby’s Legacy: Geology at the University of Sheffield”. The website is well worth a visit with wonderful images of Sheffield geology fieldtrips past. The book is a highly interesting account of the history of geology at the University of Sheffield that will be of interest to all those who studied here. There are a few copies left for anyone who would like to order one through the website at a cost of £10.
The Geology Centenary Reunion

“Sorby’s Legacy: Geology at the University of Sheffield” by R. Alison Hunter
Alumni Fund

We are extremely grateful to Alison Hunter who has donated all profits from the sales of her book “Sorby’s Legacy: Geology at the University of Sheffield” to the University of Sheffield Alumni Fund specifically to fund fieldwork by students of the Centre for Palynology. This generous donation will help undergraduate and postgraduate students researching aspects of palynology to undertake the necessary field work and is very much appreciated.

M.Sc. Class of 1982-1983 Reunion

Duncan McLean reports that in September last year some of the Palynology M.Sc. year for 1982-1983 managed to get together in Sheffield for the first time in thirty years. Ours was possibly the largest cohort of M.Sc. students – there were thirteen of us. Between us we managed to get in contact with all but one of our colleagues and six of us made it to the reunion: Pamela Alexander (independent coal petrologist and IT consultant), Martin Lester (palynologist and manager at RPS), Duncan McLean (palynologist at MB Stratigraphy), Barbara Rich (palynologist at Robertsons), Mairead Rutherford (independent palynologist) and Andrea Taylor (Postgraduate Director at the University of Bath). Pam admits to occasionally looking at Carboniferous miospores, and of our seven contemporaries who could not get to Sheffield on the day Tony Loy still works in Jurassic palynology (but was offshore at the time) and Meyrick Quincey is eager to get back to his studies of Cretaceous palynology (I have his samples in the lab!). That’s half of us still active in palynology after thirty years.

We met at the Midland rail station to get re-acquainted and swap thirty-year-old photographs. These seemed to be mainly of the men of our group dressed as women and the women dressed as men, but that was the Pyjama Jump for you. We walked out of the “other” side of the station to the new amphitheatre in South Street Park. From here there is a panoramic view of the city centre and the suburbs to the South and West. The centre has changed remarkably over thirty years: “So where was the Hole-in-the Road?”; “Where is the Frog and Parrot?” Then through the Millennium Galleries, Winter Gardens (neither of these existed in the 1980s) and Peace Gardens (substantially remodelled since), up Division Street past the Frog and Parrot (“There it is!”) to Mappin Street where we stopped for photos and toured the corridors of the old Department of Geology. Some slightly bijou student accommodation in Ruth Square inhabited by Andrea and Mairead for a year was the next stop before lunch at an old haunt, the Nottingham House at Broomhill. Pies and beer – very Yorkshire! On the way back to the station we called in at Weston Park Museum for a tour of the galleries and tea. We paid homage at the approximate position of the entrance to the Limit Club on West Street, and then made for trains back home. Martin and I stayed on to visit the (you guessed it) Frog and Parrot and then to the Red Deer off Mappin Street where we met up with a few palynological stragglers from the Geology Centenary Reunion (Jim Fenton, Alyson Harding, Rex Harland, Gareth Hughes, Janine Pendleton, Mike Snape and Kevin Toobey).
The day proved two things: that the sun always shines in Sheffield, and that the year we spent together back in the 80s helped forge a great bond between us. We plan to do something similar again, but maybe before September, 2043!

Outside the old Department of Geology on Mappin Street. Left to right: Martin Lester; Duncan McLean; Barbara Rich; Mairead Rutherford; Andrea Turner. Photo by Pamela Alexander.

Christmas party

The 2013 Christmas party was held on Saturday 8th December. Sandwiched between visits to the Red Deer was a visit to Tropeiro—a Brazilian churrascaria in Leopold Square. Copious quantities of meat was consumed as we prepared for IPC 2016 to be held in Salvador, Brazil. Fourteen palynologists attended including the MB Stratigraphy crew, Rex Harland, Barry Lomax, Brian Pedder, Janine Pendleton and Meyrick Quincey.
A plea for information and to keep in touch...

Please keep in touch (e-mail c.wellman@sheffield.ac.uk) and keep us updated with respect to your contact details. And most importantly--please send in your alumni news for the next newsletter.