

## The Shrewsbury Museum Collection 1835-2008

The Shrewsbury Museum Geological Collection contained, at the time of a survey completed in 1991, some 4700 specimens of which about one third was displayed in Rowley's House. The fossil collection contained some 3200 specimens. The Shrewsbury collection is more widely based than that of the contemporary Ludlow collection and the donors were mainly 'expert amateur' and professional geologists.

The collection's origins date back to 1835 with the formation of the Shropshire and North Wales History Society:

*At a meeting held at Shrewsbury on the 26<sup>th</sup> June, 1835, it was resolved to establish a Natural History Society for the County of Salop and North Wales and to found a Central Museum and Scientific library – and in pursuance of an object so important to the promotion of science within this extensive District, it was resolved to solicit the concurrence and co-operation of the Nobility, Clergy, Gentry, and Inhabitants generally of Shropshire and North Wales.'*

Items donated in the first few days of the Society's formation included specimens of minerals and fossils from Dr Thomas du Gard and Dr Henry Johnson. A listing of the donations made to the Shropshire and North Wales Society covering the years 1835-1884 is available but none of the names given are to be found in the current lists and vice versa (Brian Page, Geological Curators Group 1979 2(6) 357-368).

The collections were first housed in a museum located on College Hill. The Society merged with the Shropshire Archaeological and Natural History Society in 1877 and, in 1884, the collections were moved to the vacated Shrewsbury School Building and ownership was passed on to the Corporation of Shrewsbury. Following the 1974 local government re-organisation the collection passed into the hands of the Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council, and then in 2008 to Shropshire Council.

The museum has been fortunate in its curators and advisors. The first curator, **Charles Callaway BA MA DSc FGS (1838-1915)** donated only a few fossils to the museum but, due to his work on early Cambrian fossils, he is an important link, via Charles Lapworth, to the work of civil engineer **Edgar Sterling Cobbold DSc AMICE FGS (1851-1936)**. Cobbold, born in St Albans, was educated at Owens College (now the University of Manchester) and joined the firm of Mansergh & Co. His interest in fossils was initiated during his supervision of excavation work in Oxford, this led to a first publication in the Quarterly Journal. Cobbold retired to All Stretton in the 1880s where he joined Lapworth in the study of the fossils of Comley Quarry - this relationship led to the publication of many papers on the Lower Cambrian which outcrops both at Comley and in the Wrekin area.

Cobbold was also supported by Shropshire born **William Whitehead Watts LLD MA MSc DSc FRS (1860-1947)**. Watts and Charles Lapworth were the pre-eminent British geologists of the late Victorian/early twentieth century period; Lapworth held the chair of geology at the University of Birmingham and Watts that at Imperial College. Watts donated some 300 Wenlock Edge brachiopod specimens to the Ludlow Natural History Society at an unknown date (they are included in the la Touche catalogue of 1928). These were mostly passed on to the Natural History Museum in the 1940s. Watts also donated some twenty fossils directly to the Shrewsbury Museum - these are now held at Ludlow.

Callaway was succeeded as curator by **Robert Arthur Buddicom BA FGS (1874-1951)** who was born at Ticklerton near Church Stretton. Buddicom led a varied life and, following separation from his first family, a change of name to Bedford and emigration to Australia, gained international recognition through his work on fossils of the Lower Cambrian in Australia focusing on the

Archaeocyatha. Buddicom donated some 60 local fossils to the Shrewsbury Museum probably collected during his student days while living at Ticklerton.

In 1928 **Walter Frederick Whittard PhD FRS (1902-1966)**, professor of geology at Bristol University, was enlisted as advisor to the museum. He, and his contemporary **Sir Cyril James Stubblefield (1901-1999)** Director of the British Geological Survey, were fellow students at the Chelsea College and at Cambridge. Both worked in Shropshire and both aided Cobbold in his work, Whittard co-authored a paper on the Helmath Grits and Stubblefield gave assistance in the identification of fossil specimens. Both also donated fossils to the Shrewsbury Museum.

Finally the museum enlisted the help as honorary advisor of amateur geologist **John Thomas Wattison (1884-1974)**. Wattison, a potter by trade, worked in Portugal prior to 1939 and co-authored the standard book on Portugal's lepidoptera. On his return to the UK he lived in Shrewsbury and was prominent in the Caradoc and Severn Valley Field Club leading many field excursions focused on both butterflies and fossils before moving back to his home town of Stoke. He built up a major collection of fossils now mostly held at Birmingham but a substantial number of his local Shropshire fossils were held at Shrewsbury. Wattison was also responsible for the identification of 'lost' fossils from the Reynolds-Anstice Collection. These were found within a donation from the Walker College but were transferred to the Natural History Museum.

A very substantial and wide ranging collection, the property of Shropshire born **Canon William Kiteley Wyley MA 1868-1952**, was also donated to the museum. Canon Wyley was educated at Shrewsbury School and Trinity College, Cambridge. He was ordained curate in 1891, priest in 1892 and took up livings in Durham, at Helions Bumpstead in Hertfordshire and at Aysgarth in Yorkshire prior to becoming an honorary canon at Ripon and Rural Dean of Wensleydale. He then returned to Shropshire as vicar of Bridgnorth before retiring to Malvern. His fossil collection reflects this wide range of locations.

Three other academic collectors are mentioned in the 1991 assessment document. **John Francis Walker FGS FLS (1839-1907)** was raised and died in York and was educated at Cambridge. He initially taught at Cambridge prior to becoming a barrister. He donated some 20 fossils to the Shrewsbury museum but there is no evidence of any connection to Shropshire. **Arthur Morley Davies FGS (1869-1959)** was a palaeontologist, teacher and author of standard text books including an *Introduction to Palaeontology*. He was born in Swansea and taught at Imperial College. The assessment document mentions him helping with the identification of fossils at Shrewsbury and donating Ordovician fossils from Shropshire. These are yet to be traced. **Leonard Johnston Wills DSc FGS (1884-1979)**, Professor of Geology at Birmingham University 1932-1949, also helped in the identification of fossils at the museum. He made the one donation to the museum, a specimen of *Anglaspis macculloughi*, an example of a primitive jawless fish.

Finally mentioned must be made of two small but interesting 'amateur' collections. That of **Alexander Charles Nicholson FGS (1856-1950)**, an Oswestry accountant, is based on one quarry located within the Old Race Course some 2 miles west of Oswestry. It is a high level (ca 1100ft) glacial deposit of Pleistocene bivalves and gastropods. Nicholson's sole paper, read to the Geological Society in 1891, added to the information available on the debate as to the origin of these high-level deposits. Secondly the collection of **Henry Ikin (born 1864)** is again uniquely focused this time on the Middle Jurassic deposit on Prees Hill. Ikin's father farmed the Manor Farm at Prees village on the top of the hill, his son's small collection is probably the most relevant Jurassic collection from Shropshire's regarding the very limited presence of the Jurassic in the county. The Ikins emigrated to Canada in 1903.

The original Shrewsbury collection donated to the museum over the years 1835-1884 partly mirrored the Ludlow collection but had an emphasis in central and northern Shropshire. As mentioned above this collection seems to have been lost. The more recent collection was removed to Rowley's House in the late 1940s where it was re-organised for display by John Thomas Wattison, it was later moved to the basement where it lapsed until a new gallery was opened in 1982 where it was displayed until it was removed from Shrewsbury and incorporated into the collections at the Ludlow Museum Resource Centre.

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