**The Ludlow Natural History Society Collection 1833-1941**

> *'No other area of comparable size in Britain displays such a variety of geology as Shropshire, with rocks representative of ten of the twelve recognised periods of geological time ranging from about 700 million years old to those formed in the last Ice Age, a few thousand years ago.'*

Peter Toghill opens his Introduction to the '*Geology of Shropshire*' with these words. It follows therefore that the fossils found in Shropshire cover much of geological time. This is especially so in South Shropshire (and in overlapping North Herefordshire), an area where Roderick Impey Murchison found much evidence to support his findings as published in *The Silurian System.* His work led to the naming of internationally recognised geological series such as the Ludlow Series and the Wenlock Series. It was from Murchison's contacts with local fossil hunters that the Ludlow Natural History Society was founded and a first collection of fossils was gathered for public viewing by its members. Many fossil hunters have followed in their footsteps, both amateur and professional, some residents of the county many from elsewhere. In order to limit the number of lives researched the following texts include only collections donated to and held by the Shropshire museums - this includes the first phase of collection at Ludlow now largely held by the Natural History Museum.

The 'history' of the fossil collections previously and currently held at the Ludlow Museum Resource Centre – and of the collectors of these fossils - must surely begin with the journey undertaken by Murchison in 1831. The aim of this journey was to gather evidence by which Murchison could elaborate on the secession of rocks lying below what was then called the Old Red Sandstone which would become the basis on which he could develop his 'Silurian System'.

Starting from Oxford and progressing through the Cotswolds before passing through South Wales he then travelled northwards towards Ludlow. His somewhat leisurely journey was made in company with his wife and included calls on both Conybeare and Buckland. On arrival in Mid Wales, Murchison stopped at Kington and made the following note in his field *book 'Mr Mitchell, Surgeon, of Kington first shewed me Pentameri & told me of Mr Lewis of Aymestry'*. Murchison arranged to meet with Lewis and the latter referred to this initial visit as follows:

> *…. In our descent into Aymestry we took the path of an old road, up which I had the honour of conducting Mr Murchison (now Sir Roderick), in his first visit to Herefordshire, in July, 1831, presenting in itself a continuous section from the Lower Ludlow rock to the Old Red Sandstone. I had at this time very fairly developed the structure of the surrounding country. My own researches in this district commenced with my residence at Aymestry, in 1827. I had unknowingly discovered the key, and made some progress.*

Murchison also met with Dr Thomas Lloyd, the discoverer of the Ludlow Bone Bed, and with William Jones both of Ludlow.

The Reverend Lewis and Dr Lloyd were members of a group of naturalists who had been interested in the study of local geology prior to Murchison's visit in 1831. Murchison helped them in their research and channelled their enthusiasm within his own work. The outcome of the stimulus given by Murchison was the founding of the Ludlow Natural History Society and the establishment of a museum in Ludlow. The Society held its first meeting on the 12th October 1833. It was attended by Dr Lloyd, the Reverend T. Wellings, Mr Clark, Mr G Morris, Mr H. Salwey and Mr Marston. Thomas Taylor Lewis was appointed to the first committee. Of the above Lloyd, Taylor and Salwey can be counted as fossil hunters. A dedicated museum building was opened in September 1840 – an account of the first 150 years of the museum is outlined in David Lloyd's *The History of Ludlow Museum 1833-1974*.

The initial collection to be housed in the new museum was supplied by William Jones (1765-1839) a retired excise officer who *'having little to do took to geology as an amusement and collected a good quantity of Silurian fossils…..'* The two members who had substantial contact with Murchison, the Reverend Lewis and Dr Lloyd, were both Ludlow born but had left the area by about 1840. **Thomas Taylor Lewis (1801-1858)** was the son of a Ludlow butcher who obtained his MA degree at St John's Cambridge – he there attended a series of lectures by Adam Sedgewick, no doubt the spur to his interest in fossils. He was appointed curate at Aymestry in 1826 where he '*zealously collected fossils which were everywhere in abundance strewn over the roads and fields'* these, together with fossils from the local quarries and cliff sections, were arranged in his cabinet *'according to the strata in which he had found them'*. Thus was the genesis of Murchison's *Siluran System*. Taylor supplied Murchison with many fossils but only a few found their way into the Ludlow Museum. Lewis left Aymestry to take up a living at Bridstow in 1841 where he became a member of the Woolhope Club. **Dr Thomas Lloyd (1802-1849)** obtained his medical qualifications at Edinburgh and, after a short period of employment in India, set up practice in Ludlow. He had also moved from the centre of Ludlow by the 1840s and eventually lived in Aberystwyth where he died in 1849.

The museum was in financial difficulties by 1840 but was rescued at a 'Resuscitating Meeting' held in January 1844 with support from Powis and Clive. The report given at the AGM of the 24th January 1845 noted that:

> *Most of you are aware that "The Ludlow Natural History Society" was called into existence in the year 1833 and it may be sufficient merely to remind you that the very extensive and valuable collection of objects which surround us in this museum was the result of the labours of this Society during a period of ten years. At the expiration of that time, the society was deprived of the services of their late Honorary Secretary, by his sudden decease, which, together with a removal from the neighbourhood of many of the parties who had originated and managed the Institution, caused a suspension of the labours of the Society; and indeed it was talked of as a thing likely to cease to exist. On the 20th January 1844, however, the Lord Powis, the Hon. R. H. Clive and other gentlemen connected with the neighbourhood were in Ludlow attending the business of meetings that are usually held in the early part of each year, and a meeting (which may most properly be called its Resuscitating Meeting) was held for the purpose of enquiring into the condition of the Natural History Society, which, if it could be said to exist, was certainly without a Committee or any properly constituted executive whatever. A Committee was appointed at this meeting, and the members of it, took steps for holding another meeting on the 17th of February, but they found it was necessary so as to secure to it legitimate power, that the Committee should be elected by the Subscribers at large, and in consequence called a general meeting for the 2nd March 1844.*

This meeting was adjourned to the 30th March and a committee was appointed. The fossil collection was added to, catalogued and reorganised over the next 30 years under the overall direction of Colonel John Colvin (1794-1871).

Three fossil hunters were prominent at the museum over this period. **Humphry Salwey (1803-1877)** was a member of the extended Salwey family of North Herefordshire. Born in Orleton and articled in Leominster he became Attorney at Law and Clerk of the Peace for the Borough of Ludlow. Given the responsibility of persuading local collectors to donate fossils to fill in the gaps in the Ludlow Museum collection he added over 100 specimens of his own to the collection. **George Cocking (1808-1888)** was born in Sandwich, Kent. He married into a Ludlow family and established a chemists shop at 45 The Bull Ring. A prominent member of the Congregational church he fully immersed himself in Ludlow town matters. He was also responsible for the first catalogue made of the museum fossils produced in 1867. **Robert Lightbody (1802-1874)** was born in Liverpool. Having trained but not practiced as a lawyer he moved to Ludlow where he leased Castle House in 1852. He was the most prolific of the Ludlow fossil hunters having donated over 300 fossils to the museum. He was also a member of the Woolhope and Caradoc clubs.

Lightbody was the first of Ludlow's fossil hunters to publish this to be compared to Humphry Salwey where his obituarist noted that:

> *'… he was not a writer, and excepting a few addresses to the Field Clubs of neighbouring counties, his extensive knowledge of the geology of the district now, alas! lives only in the memory of those to whom he was ready to impart it, or is diffused in their writings.'*

A stepwise change occurred with the arrival of **James Digues la Touche (1826-1899)** not only were papers published in the academic journals but la Touche also published a book on Shropshire's geology and fossils. Again referring to an obituary:

> *' … Surviving his fellow workers for more than twenty years, the late Vicar of Stokesay is the best known of the present generation of geologists, and moreover, while all were equally willing to impart to others their intimate knowledge of the geology of their neighbourhood, he did not share his friend's reluctance to commit to writing the information which they had acquired.'*

His 1884 *Handbook of the Geology of Shropshire* was suggested by his obituarist to be *'a succinct but not very full account of the geological formations, from the Pre-Cambrian to Lias'*, the remainder of the book consisted mainly of descriptions of fossils.

It was not until the 20th Century that a professional geologist was involved with the Ludlow Natural History Society when **Thomas Henry Digges la Touche (1855-1938)**, the son of James Digues la Touche, undertook the cataloguing of the fossil collection. Thomas Henry was a member of the Geological Survey of India. He retired to Cambridge in 1910 and completed the above task at Ludlow in 1928. Some 1900 fossils are recorded in the catalogue many of prime importance to the development of knowledge of early fossil history.

Also to be mentioned in this period of the museum's history are the brothers **George Pardoe (1810-1854)** and **Henry Pardoe (1817-1961)**, sons of the Reverend Pardoe of Hopton Castle. Both were in turn honorary curators and donors of some 50/80 fossils respectively. **Alfred Marston (1834-1896)**, another chemist, donated over 100 specimens to the Museum collection. The Swainson vicars of Wistanstow, father **Christopher Swainson (1775-1854)** and son **Edward Christopher Swainson (1811-1874)** were also fossil hunting members of the Society. One must also add the name of **Mrs Frances Stackhouse Acton (1794-1881)** of Acton Scott Hall, a noted botanist, archaeologist, writer and artist – and donor of fossils.

Of interest over this period is the gradual increase in geological knowledge and the desire to disseminate this knowledge by way of guided tours and written offerings. The Reverend Lewis and Dr Lloyd were obviously more than dilettante collectors of fossils – the former, as a member of the Woolhope Club, led excursions into Hereford and South Shropshire and described the geology of the area in his presidential address. Robert Lightbody did the same but also ventured into 'academia' with some offerings to the Geologist viz. *Remarks on Mr Robert's Paper on Cephalapsis* (The Geologist 1860), *Notice of a Section at Mocktree* (QJGS 1863) and *Notes on the Geology of Ludlow* (The Geological Magazine 1869).

**Doctor John Harley (1833-1921)** was an apprentice to George Cocking who became a doctor in London - he donated his geological collection to the museum. He also contributed to the Quarterly Journal – his note *Description of Two Species of Cephalapsis* (QJGS 1859) refers to Humphry Salwey's *Cephalapsis Salweyii*, named by Sir Phillip Egerton, brother to William Egerton a donor of a shell collection to the Museum. Egerton at the same also named two of Lightbody's specimens – a veritable 'Ludlow Compendium'.

Mention must be made of the two men who were responsible for the smooth running of the Society from its 'resuscitation' to its decline post World War One. **John Colvin (1794-1871)** served as an engineer soldier in India with the Honourable East India Company. On retirement he settled initially in Ludlow and then moved to Leintwardine House. He was a fossil collector in India together with fellow soldier Erskine William Baker – they donated a collection of Sulawik fossils to the Society. Colvin was secretary for the administration of the Society during its prime period from 1846 to his death in 1871.

Secondly, Aymestry born but much travelled **Charles Fortey (1831-1915)** acted as curator of the museum from 1888 to 1907. He is described by David Lloyd as *'The most important influence during the last years of the century'* and it was noted in his obituary *that 'his careful oversight of the Museum and many of his meticulously written records and labels survive to this day'*.

Finally the name **John William Salter (1820-1869)** must be added to the list of personages associated with the Ludlow Natural History Society. Salter was a noted Victorian palaeolontologist working for the Geological Survey. He visited Ludlow in 1855 and examined the cabinets of many of the above named collectors. He also described and rearranged the Society's fossil collection. But, more importantly, he discovered on the Longmynd in 1855 the first evidence of fossil life in the Pre-Cambrian.