

SIR JAMES CYRIL STUBBLEFIELD

BSc PhD DSc FRS

(1901-1999)



Baptised Cambridge, 29 September 1901

Died Cambridge 1999

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1. Introduction



Cyril James Stubblefield, the only son of a gardener, was born in Cambridge and baptised on the 29th January 1901. He initially worked as a factory chemist prior to moving to London and studying at the South-Western Polytechnic (later Chelsea College). He then completed his PhD at Imperial College and was appointed as a demonstrator. His thesis was based on the Palaeozoic rocks of Shropshire. He co-authored a *Handbook of the Geology of Great Britain* together with J. W. Evans in 1929.

Stubblefield joined the Geological Survey in 1928 becoming the lead in palaeontology where he worked on the evolution of trilobites and the classification of graptolites prior to becoming Director of the Survey in 1960.

Photograph British Geological Survey

The full extent of his professional work is best illustrated by the obituary penned in the Independent on the 4th November 1999.

In 1960 James Stubblefield became Director of the Geological Survey of Great Britain and of the Museum of Practical Geology (now the Earth Science wing of the Natural History Museum). During his directorship the Survey, the Museum, and the Overseas Geological Surveys were united into the Institute of Geological Sciences (now the British Geological Survey in Keyworth, Nottingham, to which the collections of fossils have been removed).

Stubblefield was born in Cambridge in 1901. He was a pupil at the Perse School, and went on to Chelsea Polytechnic and the Royal College of Science for his geological education. Here he had the stimulating company of two other promising students. One was O. M. B. Bulman, who became his lifelong friend, and with whom he worked on the early Palaeozoic rocks of Shropshire, collecting fossils and mapping the distribution of the rocks. A second was W. F. Whittard, also a great student of Shropshire fossils, who became Professor of Geology in Bristol University, and a pioneer in promoting the value of offshore geological mapping.

Stubblefield joined the Geological Survey of Great Britain in 1928, after five years teaching geology at the Imperial College of Science and Technology. Because of his expertise as a palaeontologist, the then Director of the Survey gave Stubblefield work in the field: identifying specimens collected by officers mapping rocks in different areas. Stubblefield became in due course leader of the Palaeontological Department, and was much concerned in preparations for the opening of the Geological Museum in South Kensington in 1935. In 1953 he became Assistant Director of the Survey and Director in 1960.

As Director he remained much devoted to palaeontology: his work was characterised by thoroughness, acute observation, and the introduction of novel ideas. As a research worker in 1926 he had described a series of growth stages of a trilobite (a fossil arthropod) that he had collected, and shown unequivocally how the new segments of the body grew forward from the rearmost, settling a hitherto controversial matter.

In 1929 he had observed, in the colonial group of fossils the graptolites, that there were two distinct types of individuals, not a single type. His 1936 essay on how trilobites were classified was a penetrating and challenging masterpiece, containing the idea that a new group might arise from the arrested development of an ancestor. This was one of the early applications of such ideas to the evolution of invertebrate animals, and has since been widely followed.

The distribution and migrations of trilobite faunas in Lower Palaeozoic rocks were the subject of a 1939 essay, a pointer to the study of fossil faunas and their distribution in time and space which have followed, and helped to modify or support physical evidence for the reconstructing of the geography of past worlds.

In 1959, as President of the Geological Society of London, he gave an address to the evolution of trilobites. This work included a graph showing the great number of trilobites that had evolved in early Palaeozoic time, and their decline to extinction at the end of that era. Since then details of this curve, and its fluctuations, have been greatly elaborated by more precise data, but the basic shape remains.

Much of Stubblefield's earlier palaeontological work is contained in official reports and summaries of progress in the Survey's work. Especially significant was his recognition of new fossil bearing horizons in the coal measures, which greatly aided the search for additional coal resources during and after the Second World War, and the early stages of exploration for resources of gas and oil. His curation and rearrangement of the Survey's collections of fossils was accompanied by much annotation of specimens, and the recognition of type specimens used in early, first descriptions of faunas.

In addition to such official work Stubblefield served his fellow palaeontologists in many unsung but necessary ways in which his authority and meticulous care were so valuable. For many years he served as editor, and subsequently, from 1966 to 1971, as President, of the Palaeontological Society, an organisation which has provided monographs on British fossils for over a hundred years. Stubblefield put much time and effort in to organising the British contribution to the first international treatise on trilobites, published in 1959. For many years prior to, and for ten years after his retirement, Stubblefield compiled the Zoological Record section on trilobites, an invaluable index and comment on the world-wide literature.

Stubblefield's career was exemplary in its devotion to pure science, with ever an eye on its practical application to the search for mineral resources. His wise counsel and guidance on the preparation of work for publication, the necessity for accuracy and the need for caution in expressing opinions based on inadequate evidence, were salutary guidance for palaeontologists at home and abroad.

Despite all the calls on his time, he was always willing to help and advise a colleague, young or old, and was a devoted family man and gardener.

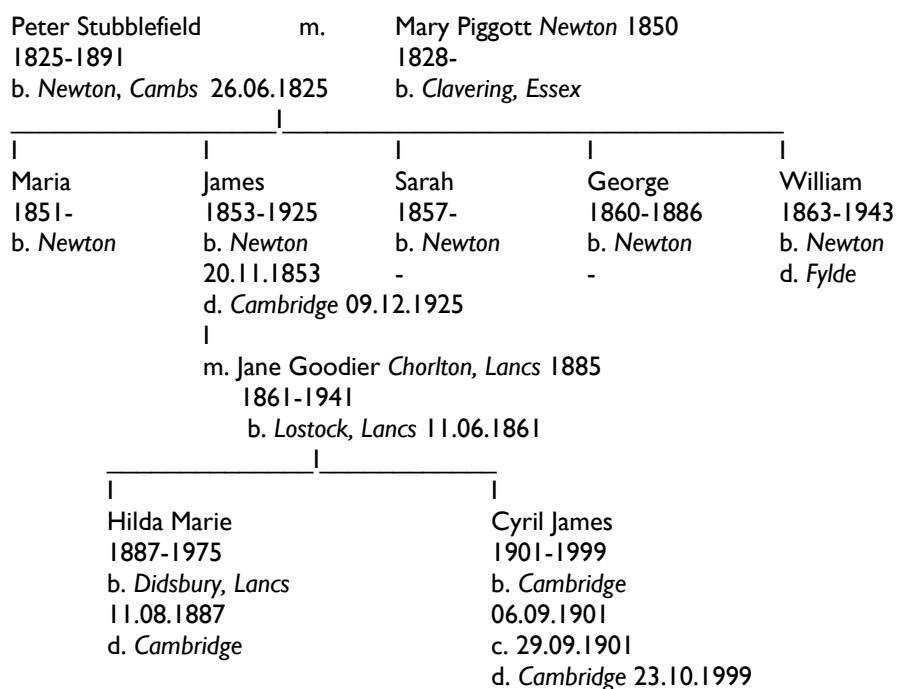
H B Whittington *The Independent* 4 November 1999

There follows an account of his meeting with the MP Tam Dalyell.

Stubblefield received his London DSc in 1942 and was elected FRS in 1944. He received the Bigsby Medal in 1945 and the Murchison Medal in 1951. He was President of the Geological Society 1958-1960. Stubblefield was knighted in the 1965 New Years Honours and invested Knight Bachelor at Buckingham Palace.

2. The Stubblefield Family

As noted above, Cyril James Stubblefield was born in Cambridge and baptised at All Saints, Cambridge on the 29th September 1901. The Stubblefield family's roots are in the villages of Newton and Thriplow just to the south of Cambridge. His father, James Stubblefield (1853-1925) was a gardener and he was also the sexton at All Saints. He married Lancashire born Jane Goodier in Chorlton, Lancashire in 1885 – they had two children, Cyril James and first-born Hilda Marie both born in Didsbury, Chorlton - James Stubblefield was then working as a gardener in Chorlton. Hilda Marie died unmarried in 1975. Stubblefield married Muriel Yakchee in 1932, they had two sons. He died in 1999 and was cremated in Ruislip, Middlesex.



3. Stubblefield Fossils held at Ludlow Museum Resource Centre

Stubblefield's donations to the Shrewsbury Museum are limited to two trilobites and a rock sample plus four fossils from the Whittard collection.

shyms: G.1977/xxxx

0076		Core in core nodule	Shinerton Shales nr. Wrekin
0091	Tr.	<i>Parabolina spinulosa</i> (Wahl.)	Comley Brook Ex. 59
0092	Tr.	<i>Beltella</i> cf <i>Bucephala</i> (Balt.)	Comley Brook

Fossils from the Whittard Collection

0081/82	Mal.	<i>Spaerophthalmus parabola</i>	Dryton Brook nr Wrekin
0093	Tr.	<i>Beltella</i> cf <i>Bucephala</i> (Balt.)	Comley Brook Ex. 59
0094	Tr.	<i>Ctenopyge flagellifera</i> (Angelin)	Dryton Brook, nr Wrekin
0095-97		<i>Eurycore angustatum</i>	Dryton Brook, nr Wrekin

Dr J. A. Gosling
October 2018

Sources

Whittington H B, Dalyell Tam (1999) *Obituary: Sir James Stubblefield* Independent 4 November.
Wikipedia Cyril James Stubblefield.

Whittington H B (2001) *Sir (Cyril) James Stubblefield Elected F.R.S 1944*. Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society **47** 453.