

## **F.I.S.H. and the Fossil Hunters**

### **Introduction: The F.I.S.H. Project**

The project 'Fossils in Shropshire' (F.I.S.H.) involves the digitisation of the geological collections held at the Ludlow Museum Resource Centre. It is supported by the Friends of Ludlow Museum who were instrumental in securing a substantial grant award in 2016.

- see [friends-of-ludlow-museum.com/Projects/FISH.html](http://friends-of-ludlow-museum.com/Projects/FISH.html).

The aim of the project is to update the Museum's database and to display the resulting images and information on the Natural History Museum's Data Portal. Type fossils are to be added to the GB3D database.

As a part of the project, research has been undertaken on the lives of those who have collected and donated fossils to the museum – the '*Fossil Hunters*' to purloin a heading from the world of the botanical collectors. The resulting brief biographies are appended here to cover four distinct stages in the development of the fossil collections now held at the Ludlow Museum Resource Centre.

#### **1. The Ludlow Natural History Society Collection 1833-1947**

This period runs from the setting up of the Ludlow Natural History Society in 1833 to the substantial transfer of the Ludlow fossil collection to the London Natural History Museum. The geological and fossil collections were initially held in a purpose built museum opened in September 1840 adjacent to the Ludlow Assembly Rooms. With the advent of war - and a decreasing interest in the museum and its contents - Shropshire County Council became the owner of the exhibits in 1940 and also took over the lease of the building. The Ludlow Natural History Society was wound up a year later. A first transfer of fossils to the Natural History Museum was made in 1946. Further transfers were made in 1953/54 leaving only the Sewalik fossils at Ludlow plus about 100 specimens of rocks, minerals and fossils.

#### **2. The Shrewsbury Museum Collection 1835-2008**

The origins of the Shrewsbury Museum Geological Collection rest on the gift of a collection of plant fossils from Thomas du Gard to the Shropshire and North Wales History Society, a gift made on the day of the Society's formation on the 26<sup>th</sup> June 1835. The Society was later amalgamated with the Shropshire Archaeological Society to form the Shropshire Archaeological and North Wales History Society. The new Society's collection was first displayed in a museum on College Hill, Shrewsbury. The collection was transferred to the Old Grammar School Buildings on Castlegate in 1895 and ownership was later transferred to the Shrewsbury Corporation. Its final resting place was in Rowley's House where a new gallery was opened in November 1982. The geological collection of some 4700 specimens was re-assessed in 1991 and was removed to Ludlow in 2013/14.

#### **3. The New Ludlow Collections 1955-2003**

A move was made to reopen a museum in Ludlow in the 1950s leading to the presentation of limited displays at the Buttercross in 1955. The realisation of a properly functioning museum came about with the appointment of John Norton as curator in 1959 who oversaw the rebuilding of the Ludlow Museum collections - as a fossil hunter his attention was focussed strongly on the mineral and fossil collections. The collections were later returned to the ground floor of the Assembly Rooms but the bulk of the new fossil collection was held in storage in Old Street until they were transferred to their new home on the opening of the Ludlow Museum Resource Centre in 2003.

#### **4. The Ludlow Museum Resource Centre 2003-**

The Ludlow Museum Resource Centre was formally opened by the Queen in 2003. It provides a modern climate controlled location for all of Shropshire's collections both social and scientific. The Shropshire fossil collections were amalgamated in 2008 and all are now held at the one location in the

Hanson Room at the Museum Resource Centre where it is available for inspection apart from selected specimens held on display at the Music Hall in Shrewsbury and at the new Ludlow Town Museum at the Buttercross.

### **Cataloguing**

Over the years the method of cataloguing and the numbering of the fossils in the collection has been updated such that some duplication has occurred. This applies mainly to the Shrewsbury collection where initially a so-called 'Regular' inventory number was placed on the fossil base card in red ink. This was later converted into the reference series SHYMS: G/1977.xxxx and entered into the Adlib management software system. This label yields a reasonably detailed and possibly complete tool for the identification of fossils held in the Shrewsbury collection in 1977 and has been used where appropriate in the 'Lives'. Later attempts to catalogue the Shrewsbury collection are limited in the information contained, for example the series SHYMS: G/1994.xxxx a series that appears on fossils entered into the National History Museum database when the older 1977 series number cannot be established or was never assigned.

For the Ludlow collection, John Norton opened a hard copy *Inventory of Geological Specimens at the Ludlow Museum* in April 1963. The inventory started at G.00001 and closed at G.14500 in 2008. The G.xxxxx series continues in use within Adlib. All fossils in the collection are being re-entered into the Adlib system such that all the various reference numbers attached to a fossil are included plus the location of the fossil in the Hanson store in the format LMRC/GS/shelf tier/shelf number.