

OBITUARY



JOHN CHALLINOR (1894-1990)
Honorary Member of the
East Midlands Geological Society

When the Council of the East Midlands Geological Society inaugurated its Honorary Memberships, the principal criterion for selection for this honour was that the person concerned should have contributed significantly to knowledge of the geology of midland England. Two names came immediately to mind; those of Leonard Johnston Wills and John Challinor. Both gentlemen were elected, as our first Honorary Members, at the Annual Meeting on 4th February 1967. Both, by coincidence, were known to their intimates as "Jack". Both lived long enough to enjoy the benefits of Honorary Membership for a substantial time. Professor Wills died in 1979, at the age of 95; and we must now mourn John Challinor also, following his death on 26th August 1990 at the age of 95.

John was born a Midlander, on 30th November 1894 at Leek in Staffordshire. His family was distinguished enough to figure in *Burke's Landed Gentry* (1954 edition). His father was a pottery manufacturer and a collector of fossils, which were kept carefully in their own cabinet; and John was soon also collecting fossils, notably from the banks of the River Avon near Malvern. This growing interest in the Earth's past history was encouraged in his schooldays at Wellington College, where the principal science master, Mr. Blundell, gave

a two-term course in Geology — a subject which, at that time, figured even more rarely in school curricula than it does today.

Consequently, when John went as a student to Trinity College, Cambridge, he was already bent upon a geological career. Though the Woodwardian Professor at the Sedgwick Museum, the stratigrapher and structural geologist Thomas McKenny Hughes, was by then over 80 and lectured only rarely, John was taught by a truly distinguished roster of geologists. The igneous and metamorphic petrologists Alfred Harker and Robert H. Rastall, the stratigrapher and sedimentologist John E. Marr and the palaeontologist Henry Woods were most prominent among the geologists whose lectures he attended, but he received valuable instruction also from the venerable petrologist and geomorphologist Thomas G. Bonney, the palaeobotanists E. A. Newell Arber and Albert C. Seward, "graptolite queen" Gertrude Elles and the Museum's Curator, F. R. Cowper Reed. In particular he benefited from the enthusiasm of his youthful tutor at Trinity, T. C. Nicholas, with whom he was to develop a warm personal friendship. It was Nicholas who, on an excursion to Caernarvonshire, introduced John to the geology of Wales, destined to be a major future concern. When John graduated, he had acquired an unusually wide range of geological knowledge, equipping him admirably for the wide range of courses he was to be required to present during his career.

The beginning of that career was delayed by two years of army service (1917-1918). After discharge, he gave some classes at Cambridge while seeking a permanent position. In October 1919 he was appointed probationary Assistant Lecturer and Demonstrator in Geology at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth.

At the time of John's appointment — and indeed, until postwar expansion began in the 1950's — this was a small department with only three members of faculty. Its Professor was the Welsh stratigrapher William J. Pugh, destined ultimately to direct H.M. Geological Survey of Great Britain and to receive a knighthood; his particular interest was in the stratigraphy and structure of Wales. Palaeontology was taught by Stanley Smith; and John's initial task was to teach petrology. However, when Smith left in 1920 to an appointment at Bedford College, London, John was able to take over his responsibilities, petrology being taught thereafter by Smith's successor J. I. Platt, with whom John was to co-author his first book *Simple geological structures: a series of notes and exercises* (1930 and three later editions).

John was to spend the rest of his working career at Aberystwyth, serving also under Herbert P. Lewis and Alan Wood and being in due course appointed Senior Lecturer. With a teaching staff so small, however, John's lecturing and administrative duties remained heavy; on several occasions, he was required to serve as acting Head of Department during the professor's absence. He retired from teaching, though by no means from research, in 1960.

The facilities for geology at Aberystwyth were initially

very poor. As A. R. Wyatt (1991), has described them:

Even the professor had no room entirely to himself, and it was only by rearranging some of the specimens that Challinor managed to secure himself a drawer to keep his personal possessions!

Despite these disadvantages and his heavy teaching and administrative commitments, John contrived to find both time and energy for a wide range of researches. He concerned himself with the stratigraphy and geomorphology of two particular regions: Wales in general (and Cardiganshire in particular) and his native region, north Staffordshire. His earliest paper (1921) was on the geology of the Roches district, as were two later notices (1924, 1930b); he also mapped the Mixon district (1928d) and assembled a valuable series of bibliographies of north Staffordshire geology (1946a, 1949d, 1950, 1951a, 1957, 1978e). For this work, the North Staffordshire Field Club awarded him their Gardner Medal in 1946.

His other researches ranged widely. John examined the vexed questions of the Longmyndian (Precambrian) rocks of Shropshire (1948a) and the "Red Rock Fault" of Cheshire (1965, 1978b). His geomorphological writings began with an account of river features near Rushton in Staffordshire, but extended to embrace many aspects of coastal and riverine erosion (1929b, 1930a, 1930c, 1931, 1932, 1933a, 1946a, 1947c, 1948c, 1949a, b, 1966b, 1968c). He had a profound concern with structural geology, writing on the detailed structure of faults (1933b, 1946b) and folds (1944, 1945a, 1947d), investigating the origin of problematic structures (1926, 1949b) and striving to account for curious marks in rocks (1928a, 1929b). His palaeontological writings included the reporting of a shelly band in graptolitic shales (1928b), the study of a graptolite lineage (1945b), considerations of the usage of the terms "cast" and "mould" (1978a) and of approaches to naming fossils (1966), and a popular account of "Fossils in Wales" (1955b). He wrote also on techniques of geological photography (1968d). His book *Geology Explained in North Wales*, written jointly with Dennis Bates (1973), outlined entertainingly the principal features of the area he had come to know so well.

Yet it is not for any of these above concerns that John Challinor will be most remembered. Instead, it is through his work on the history of geology and its lexicography. This began fittingly with two studies of the work in Staffordshire of Dr. Robert Plot, one of England's earliest students of fossils (1945c, 1947f). As John's personal collection of works on the history of geology grew, however, his interests widened: a long sequence of studies resulted, the most important of which were his examinations of the work and correspondence of geologist Thomas Webster (1949c, 1961-1964), his studies of the history of British palaeontology (1948d, 1955a, 1967b) and of Johnathan Otley's work in the Lake District (1951c), his examination of Darwin's palaeontological researches (1959) and his series of studies of the early development of geology in Britain (1947c, 1953, 1954a, b, 1970c), culminating in *The History of British Geology, A Bibliographical Study* (1971b). His *A Dictionary of*

Geology appeared first in 1961 and, in retirement, he was to see it through five further editions, the latest (1986) being edited by A. R. Wyatt. In addition, he contributed many brief biographies of distinguished geologists to other dictionaries (1969a, 1971a, 1972a, 1973a, 1974a, b, 1975a, b, 1976a). His last works were a history of the study of the Precambrian in Wales (1979a), and a last bibliography of north Staffordshire geology (1979b).

In 1928, John married Mary Winnifred Atkins, daughter of the Professor of English at Aberystwyth. They had no children, but their marriage was a long and happy one. They shared a strong interest in classical music. In an anonymous obituary (1990), it was noted that:

In their middle years, the couple were renowned for the musical evenings that they gave at their home. One visitor recalled that excellent gramophone concerts would accompany dinner: an overture before the soup, a major work with the main course and popular items with the pudding. A passable pianist himself, Challinor had a wide collection of records, from which he would make selections for his guests.

The couple also collected paintings and John, always a keen and highly competent photographer, had assembled a fine collection of prints mostly with geological themes. He was also an able and knowledgeable botanist.

Winnifred's death in 1979, and a mild heart attack that followed (John was by then in his mid-eighties) brought John's geological and historical researches to an end. Their paintings, and many of John's photographic prints, were presented to the National Library of Wales. John's library, which contained many rare geological works, was given to the Hugh Owen Library of the University College of Wales.

John Challinor's diverse contributions to our science, in research, through his students and through his writings, will not be forgotten.

Acknowledgements

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Photograph

The portrait photograph is from the collection of the East Midland Geological Society and was taken at the time of his election as Honorary Member of the Society.

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JOHN CHALLINOR (1894-1990)

(Photograph taken at the time of his election as Honorary Member of the East Midlands Geological Society.)

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