



# COPROLITE

No. 100  
Spring  
2022

*Coprolite* is the newsletter of the Geological Curators' Group, compiled and produced by Lu Allington-Jones, Senior Conservator at the Natural History Museum, London. Contributions from everyone are welcomed, and should be sent to the Newsletter Editor ([coprolite@geocurator.org](mailto:coprolite@geocurator.org)) by the appropriate deadline:

Spring edition issued in March - Deadline 15<sup>th</sup> February. Summer edition issued in June - Deadline 15<sup>th</sup> May. Autumn edition issued in September - Deadline 15<sup>th</sup> August. Winter edition issued in December - Deadline 15<sup>th</sup> November.

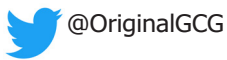
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Please log into our website and check that your contact details and preferences are correct and check whether you need to pay your subs (due from January 1st).



## Events

The Geological Society of London is hosting 2022: The Year of Sustainability. Please see their website for a full list of events <https://www.geol Soc.org.uk/sustainability22>

Creswell Crags is hosting a few special events to complement their current Ice Age exhibition. The talk Environments and Climates of Ice Age Britain, by David Anderson, will be 17th March 2022 in person.

The London Open University Geological Society is hosting an online talk called Antarctica, by James Cresswell, on 24 March 2022. <https://ougs.org/events/?branchcode=lon>

Whilst we (eagerly) wait for the in-person Marine Reptile Conference to take place at The Etches Collection in May 2023, the MRC committee and GCG are hosting a mini Marine Reptile Conference online to keep us going – hoorah! It will take place 4th May 2022, and will comprise posters and platform presentations. Please see their website for announcements. <https://marinereptiles.org/dtb.php?pageID=00000000014>

The London Geodiversity Partnership and London Natural History Society are holding the Putney Heath and Wimbledon Common Geotrail. Due to take place 7th May 2022. Booking is free but must be done in advance. <https://londongeopartnership.org.uk/putney-heath-and-wimbledon-common-geotrail/>

The Natural History Museum in London will be hosting Fossils, Phylogenies, Genomes, Embryos and the Evolution of the Deuterostomes in-person, on the 12th May 2022. Deadline for registration is the 12th April. <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/fossils-phylogenies-genomes-embryos-the-evolution-of-the-deuterostomes-tickets-228801691017>

The Visitor Studies Group Conference 2022 will be Evaluation Challenges: From Troubles to Triumphs and Everything in Between. Due to take place 12th – 13th May 2022 both in-person and online <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1U-Oe-v6qXlyHiFG4Jw5RhJVxN8hjAHlw/view>

A joint meeting of Geological Association of Canada (GAC), Mineralogical Association of Canada (MAC), the International Association of Hydrogeologists – Canadian National Committee (IAH-CNC), and the Canadian Society of Petroleum Geologists (CSPG) will take place in Halifax, Canada, hosted by Atlantic Geoscience Society, May 15 – 18 2022. Abstract submission closes 1st March 2022. <https://halifax2022.atlanticgeosciencesociety.ca/about-halifax-2022-2/>

The Open University Geological Society is hosting an online lecture: Geology of London Underground, by Jon Gammon, May 19th 2022. <https://ougs.org/events/?branchcode=lon>

The Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections are hosting this year's conference in collaboration with Biodiversity Heritage Library and Natural Sciences Collections Association. It will take place in-person, in Edinburgh, 5th – 10th June 2022. "Through the door and through the web: releasing the power of natural history collections onsite and online". Early Bird Registration is open until the 8th April 2022. <https://spnhc2022.com/registration/>

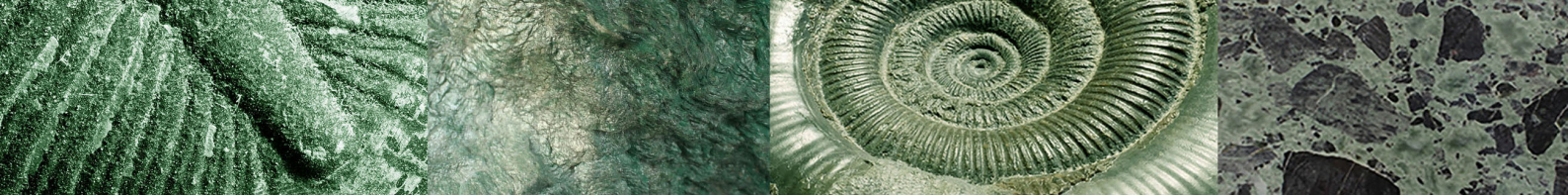
TAPHOS and the Taphonomy Working Group (TWG) of the ICAZ – are holding a joint meeting to commemorate the 80th anniversary of Efremov's Taphonomy proposal as a scientific discipline. "Science Fiction of Taphonomy." Due to take place in Alcalá de Henares, Madrid, Spain, between 5th – 12th June 2022. <https://taphostwg.es/home/>

The 11th European Palaeobotany and Palynology Conference will be held as an in-person meeting in Stockholm, 19th – 22nd June 2022. Deadline for registration, abstract submission, and fieldtrip bookings is 1st April, 2022. <https://jirango.com/cms/web/4b67cbd5?lang=eng>

A Call for Papers has been issued for the Western Society of Malacologists 55th Annual Meeting – Fossil Molluscan Papers in Memory of Louella R. Saul, due to take place at Pasadena City College, Pasadena, California, between 23rd and 26th June 2022. <http://westernsocietymalacology.org/>



Many thanks to Emma Nicholls, GCG Blog Editor, for collating this information.



# News Feature

## Unlocking Lapworth's Legacy

In August 2021 the Lapworth Museum of Geology, based in the University of Birmingham, began an 18-month Archives Revealed funded project to catalogue and promote access to the archive of the Museum's namesake, Professor Charles Lapworth, a prominent geologist in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the first Professor of Geology at Mason College (forerunner to the University of Birmingham).

Lapworth's archive contains a variety of records including correspondence, research notes, lecture attendance registers, beautifully drawn maps and illustrations, photographs and drafts of published works, making up approximately 180 boxes, 90 map tubes, two plan chests and around 8,000 lantern slides. Most of the material spans from the mid-1860s through to Lapworth's death in 1920 and covers many aspects of his research, teaching and personal life, including his involvement in geological controversies, changes in the geology department of Mason College, advocating for women in science and his own physical and mental health struggles.



*One example of a plan chest drawer containing sketches and maps by Lapworth.*

As Project Archivist it's my job to arrange, catalogue and repackage the collection with the help of a small team of volunteers. Handwritten box lists were compiled in the 1980s and early 2000s for most of the collection and the Museum team frequently highlights the archive on tours. However, the finished online catalogue will be more searchable, organised and detailed, allowing the collection to be used as an interdisciplinary research, learning and teaching resource for various audiences.

Coming from an archive background rather than a geological one, I am enjoying learning about Charles Lapworth and his contributions to geology. He was born in Faringdon, Oxfordshire, in 1842 and trained as a schoolteacher at Culham College, his main interests at that time being literature, history, art and music. His first teaching post was in Galashiels, Scotland, in 1864 and it was after moving here that Lapworth became interested in geology. Largely self-taught in the subject, he soon began to make significant contributions towards unravelling the geology of the Southern Uplands through large scale mapping and studying

graptolite fossils. In 1879 his research in this area culminated in him proposing a new geological period, the Ordovician, sandwiched between Adam Sedgwick's Cambrian period and Roderick Murchison's Silurian period. It took some time for the Ordovician to be accepted by the scientific community, as an 1885 letter from Lapworth's friend, John E. Marr, demonstrates, 'I think Hughes might accept Ordovician with a little pressure, if the D. G. [Director-General of the Geological Survey, Archibald Geikie] would only do the same. I am sick of the whole business' (pictured right, ref B3).

This wasn't the only time Lapworth came up against Archibald Geikie or the Geological Survey. After becoming Professor of Geology at Mason College in 1881, Lapworth's research interest continued in Scotland, this time turning to the North-West Highlands. His research in the Durness and Eriboll districts led him to believe that the strata of the Highlands had been subject to excessive folding, crumpling and inversion, meaning that Murchison's interpretation of the area was over-simplified, and he began to publish his findings in 1883.

*I want Hughes to get him an honorary D. D. at Cambridge, & to settle the Cambro-Sil. controversy on a bottle of port. I think Hughes might accept Ordovician with a little pressure, if the D. G. would only do the same. I am sick of the whole business. We had one day at Prague, & Hughes came to see a colony, but did not appear much interested.*  
*Yours very truly*  
*John E. Marr*

Q25  
 48, FREDERICK ROAD,  
 EDGBASTON,  
 BIRMINGHAM.  
 July 4<sup>th</sup> 1904.  
 Professor Lapworth has not yet recovered from his ~~severe~~ recent severe illness & nervous breakdown. & has already seriously overtaxed his returning strength by the work he has been doing during the last two months. It is imperative that he should take two clear months complete rest at once & must not attempt

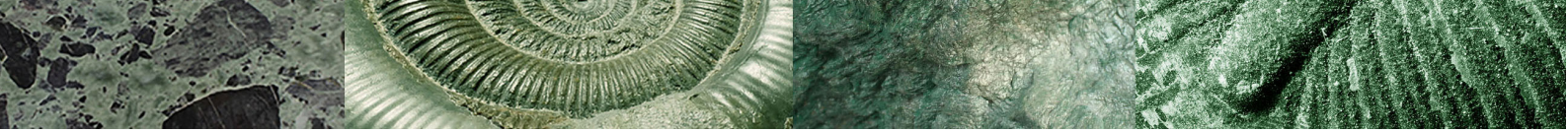
Geikie, having been a friend and mentee of Murchison, disputed or ignored Lapworth and a host of other geologists' findings relating to the Highlands, until two of the Geological Survey's own men came to the same conclusions. Ben Peach and John Horne were tasked with resurveying the area, and their findings echoed that of Lapworth. Rather than publishing these findings in an official Survey publication, Geikie opted to publish them in 'Nature' magazine and did not reference any other geologists in the article.

In 1883 Lapworth had some sort of physical and mental breakdown, and it's thought that the physical, strenuous nature of his Highlands research and the stress of opposing the theories supported by the Geological Survey played a part in this. He was given three months paid leave from his duties at Mason College as a result of this illness and an assistant was employed to carry on the work of the department. A doctor's note (pictured left, ref Q25) from 1904 citing Lapworth's 'severe illness and nervous breakdown' tells us he continued to struggle with his health later in life.

There is much more to discover in the collection and we're posting highlights on our social media pages and project updates via our blog, <https://lapworthmuseum.wordpress.com/>, with the aim of sharing Charles Lapworth's story and archive collection with as many people as possible. #LapworthsArchive

*by Rachel Brown, Project Archivist, Lapworth Museum of Geology*





# Lost, Stolen, and Strayed

## A New Feature on the Geological Curators Group Website

It is a fundamental principle of science that results should be repeatable, and in geological research, that generally means that the original samples should be accessible and available for restudy. Unique systems of museum registration numbers have been in use since at least the middle of the nineteenth century, but they were not universally accepted until the twentieth century. The concept of designating a single fossil specimen as the holotype for a species by citing its collection registration number did not receive universal acceptance until the twentieth century, and in the nineteenth century literature, there are numerous references to specimens being in the collections of named individuals. Many of these were subsequently donated to museums, but without the necessary cross-referencing.

Specimens loaned to geoscientists for restudy do not always make it back to the original collections. There are numerous stories of loans being lost following the death, retirement or career move of the borrower, or the transfer to another institution without notifying the owner.

This section highlights specimens or groups of specimens that have been:

- Loaned and lost
- Lost or stolen
- Specimens found in collections where the true owner is unknown.
- Specimens earmarked for disposal and where a new home is sought
- Cited in historic literature, but without enough information to locate their current whereabouts, or newly recognised historic collections

How does LSS work?

The Lost, Stolen, and Strayed database is a file repository hosted in GoogleDrive. It has been populated initially from the 'Lost and Found' articles in the Geological Curator. Everyone is encouraged to submit new entries, some of which may, with permission, be included in future issues of the Geological Curator.

Entries should consist of one or more files, typically in the following formats:

JPG; DOCX; XLS; PDF; PNG; TXT

They should describe the missing, found, sought after, or disposal items in as much detail as possible. Ideally, images of the specimens, register entries, and citing literature should be included. We may edit your submission before placing it on the website; please also ensure that there is no sensitive information included, for example storage locations, names and contact details (which would be covered by GDPR), or material that is not within your copyright.

Please email the files as attachments to [collections@geocurator.org](mailto:collections@geocurator.org). Entries will be initially labelled as ACTIVE. Please notify [collections@geocurator.org](mailto:collections@geocurator.org) if there is any change; hopefully we will be able to list a growing number as FOUND.

To see a typical example, please go to the site and scroll down the table to Lost and Found 199.

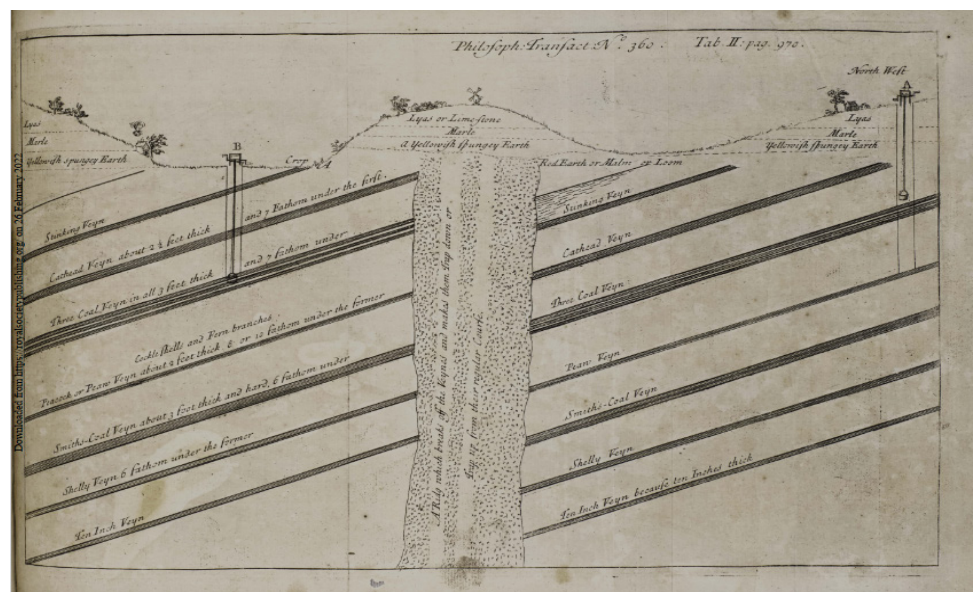
<https://www.geocurator.org/collections/148-lost-stolen-and-strayed/553-welcome-to-lost-stolen-and-strayed>

# Lost, Stolen, and Strayed

## John Strachey's Missing Collection

John Strachey wrote a letter which described the geology of a number of small coalfields near his home in Bishop Sutton, North East Somerset. This was read at a meeting of the Royal Society on 6 November 1718 and published in its Philosophical Transactions in the following year. It was accompanied by what is considered to be the first geological cross section to be published in the country. Strachey also donated a small number of geological specimens to the Society at a meeting on 7 May 1719 which were related to his section. This must be one of the first stratigraphic donations to a scientific body in the country, but unfortunately their present whereabouts are unknown. They are no longer in the possession of the Royal Society and are thought to have been passed to a museum in 1780.

*Left: Strachey's 1719 cross section reproduced with the permission of the Royal Society, which helps put the samples into their stratigraphic context and shows Strachey's main claim to geological fame.*



The geological specimens were described in the minutes of the Society meeting as follows:

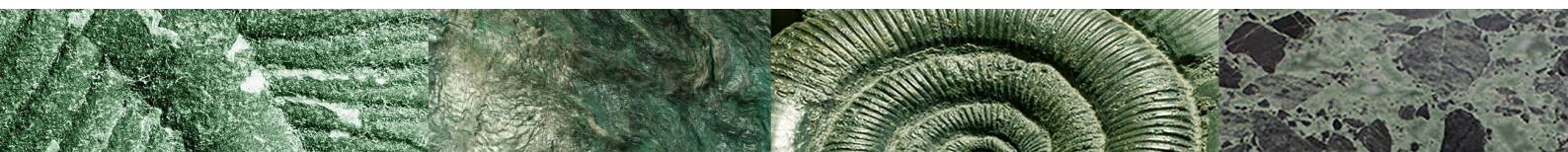
“Dr. Welsted presented the Society four samples of several layers of Earth found in digging coal pits near Sutton in Somersetshire sent up by Mr. Strachey according to his letter to the Society. The 1st was a hard loam or malm under the uppermost turf of a brick colour friable and and arid. The 2nd The uppermost coal clives very soft when dug this is something paler than the other and sticks more to ... (illeg) The 3rd Deeper and good clives being hard and black The 4th Whale bone and Fern Branches indications of the peau vein. The print of the fern and whalebone are very conspicuous besides he presented a piece of a sulphurous Stone which is often found between beds of Marl near Sutton and is sometimes a foot in thickness”

(Dr. Sloane observed at the meeting that the latter was common pyrites or yellow marchasite)

N.B. The spelling and punctuation are as written, the name “Clives” was used by the local miners for shale, “Peau” was a local name for Peacock and vein was used for a coal seam.

Any advice or information about this collection would be most welcome.

Andrew Mathieson - [andrew@mathiesons.org.uk](mailto:andrew@mathiesons.org.uk)



# Coprolite of the Quarter

Answer to last quarter's mystery coprolite:

*Megabeast communal latrine*

Stratigraphy:  
Middle-Late Triassic of the  
Chañares Formation

Location:  
Argentina

Likely culprit:  
Kannemeyeriiform dicynodonts



Fiorelli, L. E., Ezcurra, M. D., Hechenleitner, E. M., Argañaraz, E., Taborda, J. R., Trotteyn, M. J., von Baczko, M. B. and Desojo, J. B. 2013. The oldest known communal latrines provide evidence of gregarism in Triassic megaherbivores. *Scientific Reports* 3(1): 1-7

## Guess the Coprolite

Please send guesses to  
[coprolite@geocurator.org](mailto:coprolite@geocurator.org)  
The answer and winner will be  
announced in the next quarterly  
newsletter. The winner will also  
receive a small prize.  
If there are several correct answers,  
one winner will be selected at  
random.



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<https://www.geocurator.org/coprolite>