



EDINBURGH GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Promoting public interest in geology and the advancement of geological knowledge

Autumn Newsletter 2026

A busy year celebrating the Hutton Tercentenary

It has been an exciting year with a wide range of projects and events to celebrate the tercentenary of James Hutton's birth. Our flagship project has been the development of the interpretive 'Deep Time Trail' at Siccar Point. This involved, with our partners, raising and spending over £170,000: the largest project, certainly from a financial perspective, that EGS has ever undertaken. Siccar Point is now easier to access, view and appreciate, not just for geologists, but for a wider audience, and the feedback has been wholeheartedly positive. Grateful thanks go to everyone involved, including donors, and the volunteers who, for example, distributed the Lost Drawings and helped organise events. The official opening of the trail on 29th May drew a good crowd and positive media coverage on the radio, national and local press and BBC Travel.

There is still work to be done – anyone who has attempted the steep grassy slope leading to the rocks of Siccar Point knows that a decent footpath would be make



this much safer. This will need considerable funds to construct, and great care taken to protect the Site of Special Scientific Interest that extends across the rock platform and the slope. However, as a university lecturer who has taken large parties of students down to the rocks, sometimes in wet and muddy conditions, I'd welcome a decent path that's not too visually intrusive.

EGS also hosted a major Hutton-themed concert at Greyfriars Kirk, organised by EGS member Steve Garrett. The headline act, Karine Polwart and Dave Milligan, wowed a sell-out crowd with a set that included their song, Siccar Point. Attendees were delighted to also have the opportunity to view Hutton's grave site in the kirkyard.

One of James Hutton's unfinished manuscripts, the *Elements of Agriculture*, was donated to EGS in 1887 and is in the care of the National Library of Scotland. Following some repairs by the library, the manuscript has been lent to the Earth Matters exhibition and is on display at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh until 1st November. The text with an extensive commentary by Alan Werrity will be published later this year.

With all these Hutton-related events, let's not forget all the people working away on our normal business including lectures and fieldtrips, so I'll round off by thanking them too.

Professor Mark Wilkinson,
EGS President,
president@edinburghgeolsoc.org



Tribute to Mike Browne

EGS members were saddened by Mike's sudden death on 24 August, less than a week after he contributed to a Council meeting. He had, in this stint, been a Council member since 2012 and made substantial contributions to EGS and Scottish geology over many decades. Mike was awarded our Clough Medal in 2024. Among the many strands of his work, Mike has been a central figure in geoconservation in Scotland and the UK for 30 years. In typical fashion, this included at a strategic level, leading committees and attending meetings across the country, but also tireless work on the ground, supporting local groups and contributing to events. He has been chair of Lothian and Borders GeoConservation since 1998, overseeing the publication of more than 30 local geology leaflets and the creation of 165 Local Geodiversity Sites. In recognition of this work, the group is organising an evening of appreciation on Wednesday 21 October at 7pm at the Grant Institute.



Lecture Programme 2026-27

Our varied lecture programme runs from October to Easter, usually on Wednesday evenings. The lectures are open to all and there is no charge.

The lectures usually take place in the Hutton Lecture Theatre of the Grant Institute, The King's Buildings, James Hutton Road, Edinburgh EH9 3FE. We broadcast our lectures online via Zoom and also, if speakers agree, record them for our YouTube channel.

Contact Angus Miller for details of how to access the lectures online: promotion@edinburghgeolsoc.org.

For information about each lecture, including more detailed abstracts where available, visit www.edinburghgeolsoc.org/lectures/.

If you have suggestions or offers of lectures for future seasons please contact Alastair Milne: lectures@edinburghgeolsoc.org.

2026

Wednesday 14 October, 7pm

Ian Molnar, University of Edinburgh

Re-imagining legacy mineworkings as a Geobattery: How Scotland's flooded coal mines can provide low-carbon cooling for datacentres and heat homes

Minewater offers an incredible thermal resource for ground-source heat pumps. However abstraction must be managed to not outpace the rate of natural heat recharge. The Geobattery concept addresses this heat mining effect by utilising minewaters to cool heat-generating industries and then recycling that heat back into the flooded mines for other users. This circular heat economy decarbonises both heating and cooling. We will discuss the Geobattery pilot site at Easter Bush, providing an overview of preliminary characterisation, drilling and coring work, and lessons learned for other minewater geothermal schemes.

This lecture will be preceded by an informal 'pizza and pop' session, from 6pm in the Grant Museum. All welcome: please book on the EGS website.

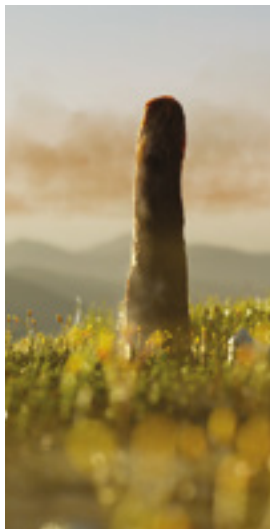
Wednesday 28 October, 7pm

Laura Cooper, University of Edinburgh

Prototaxites: a unique and extinct lineage of life from Scotland's Rhynie chert

The Rhynie chert in Aberdeenshire is a 400 million year old fossil site that preserves, in exquisite detail, the first known complex terrestrial ecosystem. The species found here include early land plants and arthropods, but also a species that has been a paleontological mystery for over 160 years, *Prototaxites*. This talk will cover the longstanding debate over what *Prototaxites* was, and how the exceptionally preserved fossils of the Rhynie chert has helped us reach a solution to this mystery: that *Prototaxites* belonged to a distinct lineage of complex life that has no living descendants today.

Artists impression of living *Prototaxites*. Artwork: Matt Humpage.



Wednesday 11 November, 7pm

Ian Jackson, BGS (retired)

The influence of geology on prehistoric and Roman societies in the north of England

What did rocks ever do for our ancestors? Pretty much everything. From giving shelter, to defining the positions of their defences and infrastructure, to providing the materials, implements and ritual objects that sustained them. For the prehistoric and Roman inhabitants of the north an understanding of the landscape, its rocks and their resources was not just desirable, it was essential; and their knowledge of these things was intimate. The connections between rocks, the physical landscape and archaeology are persistent and pervasive. Can a better understanding of geology enrich and improve the effectiveness of archaeological research? This geologist emphatically believes it can and should.



Castlerigg stone circle, Keswick, Cumbria, at dawn.

Photo: Ian Jackson.

Monday 16 November, 7pm

Tim Fedak, Nova Scotia Museum

Retracing the Footprints and Notebooks of Charles Lyell in Nova Scotia's Geoheritage

In the summer of 1842, Charles and Mary Lyell spent one month travelling across Nova Scotia. Charles surveyed the region's gypsum and coal seams, saw the famous Joggins fossil forest, and collected bird tracks from the Bay of Fundy mud flats. Today, Nova Scotia's rich geoheritage is celebrated at the Joggins Fossil Cliffs UNESCO World Heritage Site and across the Cliffs of Fundy UNESCO Global Geopark. This talk will explain why Lyell thought Nova Scotia was so important and highlight the geologists he inspired.

Please note this is a joint lecture together with the Edinburgh u3a Geology Group, and will be held at Paterson's Land, Holyrood Road: please book on the EGS website.

Wednesday 25 November, 7pm

Early career researchers

We are inviting a selection of early career researchers from Scottish universities to share their geoscience research in a series of short talks. The programme will be published on our website in advance.

This lecture will be preceded by an informal 'pizza and pop' session, from 6pm in the Grant Museum. All welcome: please book on the EGS website.

Wednesday 9 December, 7pm

Fellows' Night

This meeting, close to the anniversary of the foundation of the Society, is a chance to meet other members informally, with refreshments served from 6.30pm, followed by a series of short talks given by members. If you would like to speak, please email Alastair Milne lectures@edinburghgeolsoc.org.

2027

Wednesday 13 January, 7pm

Alex Brasier, Aberdeen University

Searching for (and not always finding) fossil life on Earth: lessons for the study of Mars

If fossil life is found beyond Earth, then it will be microscopic. Identifying rocks built by microbes is not easy. On Earth we look for stromatolites, but microscopy and geochemistry show that not all such layered rocks are products of living organisms. In Scotland there are some nice examples of genuine microbial stromatolites, including some living examples not far from Edinburgh. But there are also many rocks which have been interpreted as microbial stromatolites that aren't, including the billion-year-old lake deposits of the NW highlands. Examples of stromatolites and imposters from across Scotland will be shown, with discussion of how to tell them apart.

Wednesday 27 January, 7pm

Steve Garrett, Geoscientist, guitarist and author
A Suitable Stone: How geology has shaped British stones used for letter cutting and fine carving

A talk based on an inspiring book where Steve (the geologist) and Lida Lopes Cardozo Kindersley (the stone carver and letter cutter) look at a material in common: ancient rock. The talk explores connections

between a geologist's scientific perspective and a stone carver's artistic vision. The key examples illustrate distinctive geological settings: Welsh Slates (deep water deposition), Lake District Slates (volcanism), sandstones (rivers and lakes) and limestones (shallow water deposition). The talk will also include PermoTriassic sandstones (desert dunes) as part of the Deep Time Trail, and diverse Scottish examples from the Canongate Wall.

This lecture will be preceded by an informal 'pizza and pop' session, from 6pm in the Grant Museum. All welcome: please book on the EGS website.



Vincent Kindersley testing a stone in a quarry.
Photo: Cardozo Kindersley Workshop.

Wednesday 10 February, 7pm

Philippe Mongeau, University of Edinburgh
MIS/EGS Joint lecture: Sulphide trace-element signatures of mineralization styles in County Tyrone, Northern Ireland

The Caledonian-Appalachian orogenic belt hosts a large number of mineralised occurrences in arc and ophiolite sequences of varying type, age, host stratigraphy, magmatic affinity, and tectonic setting. The Tyrone Igneous Complex (TIC) of Northern Ireland is an arc-ophiolite system formed in the Ordovician. It correlates to the VMS-rich Anniesburg Accretionary Tract of Newfoundland, host to the world-class Buchan's deposits. We present new data from the TIC showing the mineralisation is more diverse than previously thought. Contrasting mineralisation styles help to improve the targeting of prospective lithologies and structures.

Wednesday 24 February, 7pm

Professor John Parnell, Aberdeen University
Clough Medal Lecture: From Millport to Mars: Interpreting chemical reduction in Scotland's sandstones

Red sandstone in Scotland, from Torridonian to Triassic, all contain reduction fronts, in common with continental sequences globally. Reduction spots have also been seen on Mars, where a possible biological role in their formation makes these highly significant. One intriguing characteristic is the range of elements concentrated in the reduction spheroid cores. Sometimes this composition may reflect the chemistry of the source rocks of the sand, including two occurrences of spheroid-bound gold in Scotland. But not all spheroid cores are diagenetic element concentrations. Current research focuses on the timing of the reduction, controls on their metal chemistry and metal exploration potential.



Reduction spheroids with metalliferous cores in Devonian sandstone, Aberdeenshire. *Photo: John Parnell.*

Wednesday 10 March, 7pm

David McInroy, BGS
Scientific ocean drilling: highlights and examples of recent projects

Scientific ocean drilling has explored Earth's history and dynamics using marine research platforms since the 1960s. Various ocean drilling projects have cored below the sea floor to collect data and samples of sediment, rock, fluid and living organisms. Since 2003, BGS has operated mission-specific platforms to tackle niche and hard-to-reach geological targets, implementing 11 projects in 7 different ocean areas. Diverse coring technologies were deployed in environments ranging from the Arctic Ocean to the Great Barrier Reef; and from shallow waters of the Yucatan shelf to the depths of the Japan Trench. We will consider the history of scientific ocean drilling, and highlight some BGS projects in the IODP and its predecessors.

Wednesday 24 March, AGM 7pm, Lecture 7.30pm
Professor Murray Gray, Queen Margaret University, London

Geodiversity: redundant term or significant geological paradigm?

It has recently been suggested that "the term geodiversity should not be used to mean 'diversity of all things geological' because the term geology is broad enough in scope and scale". This posits that geodiversity is a redundant term, separate from the other 'Gs' (geoheritage, geoconservation, geotourism, etc.), related (only) to biodiversity, and regional or local in scale. This talk will argue that instead geodiversity is absolutely central to all the 'Gs', related to much more than biodiversity, and global as well as regional or local in scale. I will demonstrate that geodiversity should be regarded as a significant geological paradigm rather than a redundant term.

This lecture will be preceded by an informal 'pizza and pop' session, from 6pm in the Grant Museum. All welcome: please book on the EGS website.

Improvements to Hutton's grave site

For many years, the site of James Hutton's grave in the Covenanters' prison section of Greyfriars Kirkyard has been in a poor state of repair. A drainage pipe from a neighbouring University of Edinburgh property discharged significant amounts of water over the Balfour family gravestone. Finally, after years of pressure, the university was spurred into action this year and the pipe has been removed. We are very grateful to the Friends of Greyfriars Kirkyard, and especially their chair Mark Hatton, for tidying up the grave site, organising maintenance of the stone wall adjacent to the grave, and spreading new gravel. The grave is now in a suitable condition to welcome geo-pilgrims from across the globe, and the Friends are happy to facilitate access and organise tours.

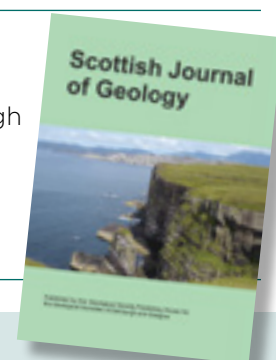
Friends of Greyfriars Kirkyard – fogk.org



Scottish Journal of Geology

The journal is available as a full-colour, printed, annual publication to members of Edinburgh and Glasgow Geological Societies at the subsidised cost of £10 including postage. Volume 62 will contain at least 9 articles covering a wide range of topics in Scottish geology.

Order by 30 November for delivery in January, from webcollect.org.uk/edinburghgeolsoc/event/sjg-vol-62.



The Clough Medal and Clough Memorial Award

The Society recognises excellence in geology by making two prestigious awards, the Clough Medal and the Clough Memorial Award. The Clough Medal for 2026-27 Professor John Parnell in recognition of his work that has encompassed the Permo-Triassic, Carboniferous, Old Red Sandstone and most recently the Proterozoic and Archaean. He has made an outstanding contribution to planetary geology and also given talks to local societies, worked with a UK mineral company and even trained lunar astronauts. His 400 published papers and 50 PhD students, half of which have included Scottish geology, bear witness to his contribution and make him a worthy recipient of the Clough Medal.



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The Edinburgh Geological Society is a friendly and informal organisation with a wide range of members of varied backgrounds and interests, united in an interest in rocks and the science of the Earth. This newsletter is published in September and March, with details of our lectures and excursions programme. ISSN 2399-7001

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