

Closing Address: the Banks family and their support for geological studies in the Marches

Lawrence Banks¹

BANKS, L. (2008). Closing Address: the Banks family and their support for geological studies in the Marches. *Proceedings of the Shropshire Geological Society*, **13**, 121–122. The Banks family forbears include Richard William Banks and Sir Charles Lyell. No fewer than four of Banks' forbears and kinsmen were amongst the twelve who signed the petition to Murchison in 1833 asking him to publish his work on *The Silurian System*.

Today the huge need is to proselytise the relevance of geology. It is clear that it is relevant to some, but the need is to get the message out to the young that this is not only a fascinating but also an important and relevant science.

¹*Hergest Croft, Radnorshire, UK. E-mail: lawrence@hergest.co.uk*

BACKGROUND

Delivering the Closing Address for the one-day symposium at Ludlow, on 13th September 2007, Lawrence Banks said: "I am honoured and delighted to be asked to close today's proceedings but I fear my qualifications are a little thin. In fact I might fairly be called an impostor, and a Herefordshire impostor at that so I am sorry to disappoint Harriett Baldwin. I noticed with some interest that David Schofield's Sheet 197 that covers my land appeared to be generally blank. I am also not sure that I can match Margaret Thatcher whom I watched write an after lunch speech at the Chelsea Flower Show during the meal and while in animated conversation with me and her other neighbour.

"When my Father took the chair at The Annual General Meeting of Scottish Agricultural industries in the early 1960's he opened by saying, "I am half a Scot (loud cheers), married to a Scot (louder cheers), and I farm on the borders (Ecstatic applause) of England and Wales (Loud boos).

"I can start in the same vein, I have geology in my blood, my forbears include Richard William Banks, of whom more later, and Sir Charles Lyell. No fewer than four of my forbears and kinsmen were amongst the twelve who signed the petition to Murchison in 1833 asking him to publish his work on *The Silurian System* and they all paid up despite the fact that it cost eight guineas instead of the maximum of five guineas specified. Incidentally I could not find any of the copies in our Library and had to buy one at a cost 100 times greater than they paid! Murchison read RW

Banks' paper at The Geological Society, an honour accorded to few if any others (Banks, 1856).

"I am the custodian of a fine collection of geological specimens, both fossils and minerals, collected by RW Banks, and my grandparents William and Dorothy Banks. The Hergest Estate contains many features of geological importance including Silurian collecting sites, numerous quarries ("build a house dig a hole") that I now know need recording and, as I learned only a few weeks ago from Andy Richards of the Hereford and Worcester Earth Heritage Trust, one of the finest examples of a glacial drain in Britain: a canyon in which I once nearly lost my dog.

"Yet I am no geologist though I have inherited some scientific genes from Sir Joseph Banks and, as I say later, there are some strange links between botany and geology. I am deeply indebted for all this store of knowledge to the Archivist of the Hergest Trust, The Revd Dr Roy Fenn who, with his colleague Jim Sinclair, published "Geology and the Border Squires" in *The Transactions of the Radnorshire Society* which I urge you to read if you are interested in History and especially geological history (Sinclair & Fenn, 1999).

"The mid Wales borders were the centre of Geology more than one hundred and fifty years ago when Murchison attended the meeting of the Cambrian Archaeological Association in Ludlow in 1852 "to explain his views of the Structure of the region", a meeting at which RW Banks was present. It is exciting to know, as we have heard today, that we are back at the heart of geological science especially with the work of the Siveter brothers on the Herefordshire Lagerstätten with its wealth of soft tissue structures including the fossil

displaying the earliest known penis that even made it into the national press.

“Much of the relevance of geology round here 150 years ago was economic, often revolving around the search for coal, which my ancestors were corresponding with James Watt about from 1810 onwards as Roy Fenn relates in his *Linnean* article. No one doubted its relevance then and indeed it was at the core of scientific enquiry. It was also interdisciplinary; those involved believed that they belonged to the wider class of “Natural historians” as well as being geologists and amateurs of science in the proper meaning of amateur. One illustration of this is the fact that you could have heard the names of Sedgwick and Sowerby being quoted with equal reverence in a botanical conference as in a geological one. I would only add the name of Henslow who started as the Professor of Geology at Cambridge and then became the creator of the university botanical garden. Incidentally he, as Darwin’s teacher, has a fair claim to be the origin of Charles Darwin’s evolutionary theory with his fascination for variation inside plant species. I was greatly encouraged today to see the keenness of so many of our speakers to avoid the silo mentality but to seek to reach across the man-made boundaries between the sciences.

“However the vital message that I take away from this exciting and stimulating day is the huge need to proselytise the relevance of geology today. It is clear that it is relevant to us but, we are a small and I am afraid, largely, an aging audience. We need to get the message out to the young that this is not only a fascinating but also an important and relevant science. We owe it to those giants of whom we have been speaking to do so.

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