



Cambridgeshire Geological Society

Newsletter

April 2026

Cambridgeshire Geological Society



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Chair Report: by Penny Coggill

The committee and I need to say a big thankyou to all of you for your continued support throughout the year. Our membership now stands at a very healthy 69, which I hope is a reflection on the activities we are providing. This means that more than half of you have joined the society in the last three years, so no-one can claim to be too new to be of any help.

Apart from our monthly talks which I try to determine to be as diverse and challenging as appropriate, we aim to make the most of our local geology such that all of you are aware of what lies under your feet in all parts of this county, eg by visiting quarries, pits, kilns etc This will also encompass the industrial heritage of the county. As a complement to these two aspects, under our Geosite team's keen and

dedicated work, they are spear -heading the recognition of these sites by designating them as Local Geological Sites so that they are recognised in the Planning system to encourage their conservation for the future . Quite a number of you are already involved in helping her with this, with or without local knowledge, and I would encourage more of you to come forward

Another of our projects is the producing of Walk Guides for the Fen Edge Trail, for c.5 mile (average) walks along the Fen Edge which equates pretty much to the 5m contour around the fenland of the county. Several of you have become enthusiastically involved with this, choosing sections from village to village, finding out about their history, biology, culture and geodiversity. Have a look at

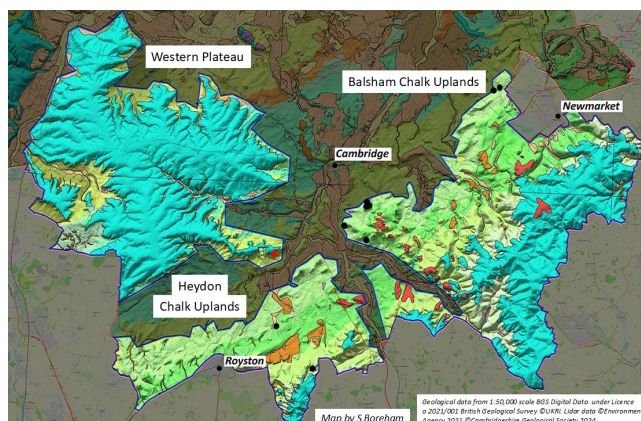
the Fen Edge Trail Website, www.fenedgetrail.org or click through from our main website, to see how far we have got with this - we would love more help particularly with putting the finished Guides together.

From a landscape perspective Dr Steve Boreham (with help from Chris and Reg) has divided the county into 26 landscape areas of differing topography, geology and other characteristics, and these are being examined on the ground one by one to find and identify sites that need conservation; exciting Landscape visit days.

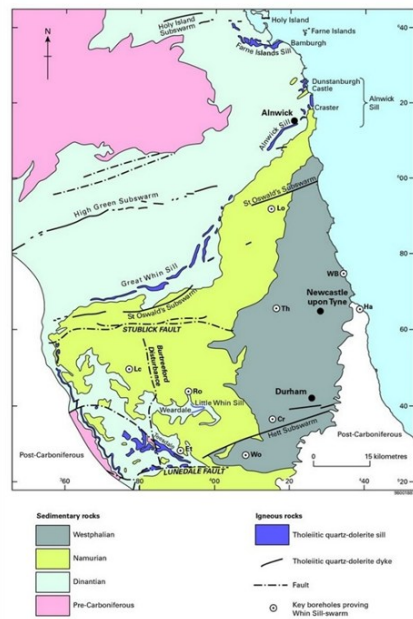
A healthy and busy society is only as good as its helpers, and the committee is feeling the pressure at the moment to keep up the visits and expeditions to your expectations. So if you have even a little spare time please consider how you might be able to help in even small ways to keep us a thriving group.

Website revamp

Our website has recently had an upgrade to both its technology and its styling – have a look and see what you think!



Copy of a Landscape image from our website



The Great Whin Sill -landscape maker! By Reg Nicholls

When travelling in Northumbria, Teesdale or the western part of County Durham, you cannot escape the effect of the end Carboniferous Tholeiitic Dolerite intrusions have on the landscape. More accurately named the 'Great Whin Dolerite Complex' this was a series of related sill and dyke swarm intrusions that took place in post Variscan crustal extension episodes approximately 295MYA.

"Whin" is an old term for dark hard rock – the hardness and massive habit makes it ideal for roadstone or for buildings.

There are 4 main associated intrusion "complexes"

1. The Farne Islands Sill & dykes
2. The Alnwick Sill and dykes
3. The Great Whin Sill at Hadrian's Wall, The Great Whin Sill on the Pennine escarpment and in Teesdale (e.g. High Force and High Force Quarry)
4. The Little Whin Sill in Weardale

The last, The Little Whin, is of different petrology – Olivine bearing rather than quartz bearing for the other 3.

The whole complex is thought to cover approx.. 4,500 Km² and a max thickness of over 90 m: it is

estimated to have taken over 60MY to cool and caused widespread contact metamorphism in the country rocks. Where a thick profile is visible, the clear columnar jointing is displayed.

The sill is responsible for some of the most iconic scenery in the area – the most famous being the Hadrian Wall section and the rocky mounts that Lindisfarne (and many other castles) have been built upon.

On a recent visit to the "North" I was lucky enough to get close-up and personal with the whin – some of my images of the sill are shown.



View of columnar jointing and lower contact with sediments near Craster

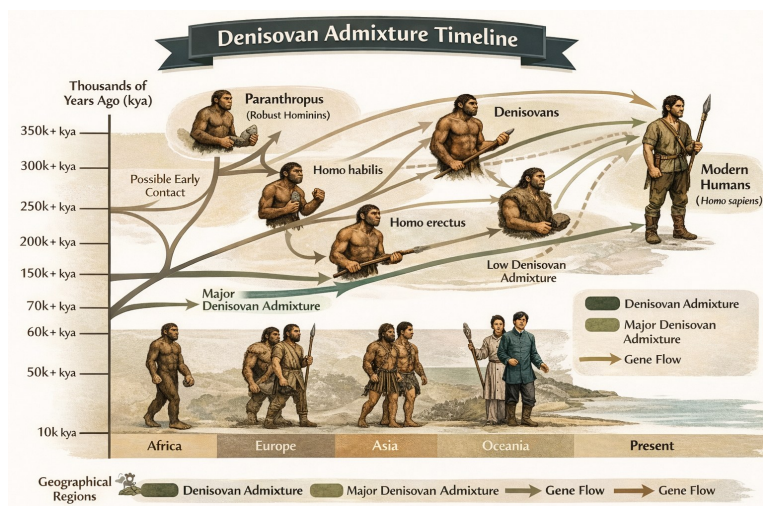


Lindisfarne Castle on top of sill



Whin Sill forming High Force in Co. Durham

ChatGPT Review: by Reg Nicholls



Over the years that free access AI tools have been available, I have been using ChatGPT © for digging out some background on various of my projects. The article above was the outcome of my own knowledge, research and AI. What is clear is that these tools are becoming more useful, but still need to be checked as they do make mistakes! Recently, I have become

interested in the Hominid evolution through some archaeogenetics articles (I blame Alice Roberts for this) and I posed ChatGPT a series of questions, drawing it to delve deeper in to the internet for information. I had it distil its answers into an evolutionary tree for Denisovans, which is actually pretty good, but cannot take in all the opposing ideas of researchers.

James Hutton Tercentenary by Marian Mair

*Memorial Stone in Hutton's Garden
(Edinburgh Geological Society)*



Siccar Point seen from above (EGS)

It is nearly three hundred years since James Hutton was born, on the 3rd June 1726. North of the border events have been organised to celebrate this pioneering geologist and stalwart of the Scottish

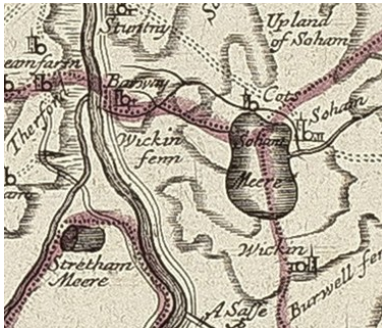
Enlightenment. Projects include efforts to improve access to Siccar Point, one of the world's most important geological sites, which Hutton used to exemplify his theories of deep time. I have just attended one of the events, a visit to Glen Tilt to view the rocks which Hutton realised proved his theory

that granite was formed in a molten, liquid state. Apparently he became so excited when he saw the formation that estate workers thought he'd found gold!

The Hutton Memorial Garden, Edinburgh (from Edinburgh Geological Society website)

This garden marks the exact site of Hutton's house and garden at the original 3 St John's Hill. The garden was created in 1997. It contains examples of important rock

types associated with Hutton's life. Two boulders showing granitic veins came from Glen Tilt which John Clerk of Eldin visited with James Hutton and illustrate Hutton's work on the origin of granite from September 1785. The other three boulders are of conglomerate carried by ice and water which probably came from Barbush on the edge of Dunblane.

Fen Edge Trail team news 'Exploring a mysterious fenland mere' by Chris Donnelly

*Map showing Soham Mere
(1689 Jonas Moore)*



From the light-coloured, glacial till and sandy soils looking down towards the peat

Our next Walk Guide, due to be published this month (April), describes the section of the Trail that takes you from the village of Wicken, around the bed of what was an extensive fen edge mere and along Soham Lode to Soham itself. A large area of calcareous Lake Marl still remains covering the peat in a small basin that lies to the north east of the Upware-Wicken ridge. Intriguingly, although the bedrock under part of the basin is Gault clay, the rest is the permeable Woburn Sands; just a thin layer of clay that lies over the bedrock seems to provide a perched water table allowing the growth of peat above it. The famous 'fen clay' deposits from the

Bronze Age marine incursion are not known to have reached this far into the south eastern fens, so is the clay from an earlier Holocene lake or channel, or is it a periglacial feature?

This walk, and the previous one, from Burwell to Wicken, are the only two walks on the Trail that take you across both sandstone (of the Woburn Sands) and limestone. The Upware limestone, known for its corals, can be seen (albeit at a distance) by making a short, and very worthwhile detour to Kingfisher Bridge Nature Reserve and Dimmock's Cote Quarry. The latter is a geological SSSI, one of only a few in Cambridgeshire, and still

active; there is a viewing point over the disused part (sadly the exposures are somewhat overgrown now). The next walk from Soham to Fordham, following more of Soham Lode and with an option to explore its source, the River Snail, will be published soon. These two upcoming walks, the information for which has mostly been put together by Ian, will complete the Trail across the south east of the Fens from Stow-cum-Quy to the Suffolk border, the other walks having been compiled by Reg.

Geosites team news - Chris Donnelly



Chatteris Museum Fossils

The Geosites team had a very busy year in 2025 and this has continued into 2026! Steve and Chris worked on the geodiversity content that has been included in the published Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Cambridgeshire, liaison has continued with Natural England on SSSI geoconservation (particularly by Martin W and Steve), several planning responses have been made (Martin E and Chris) and site management advice given (Steve and Reg). Chris and Kevin have reviewed our Local Geological Site

designation process and Kevin has taken on producing the draft Site Selection Strategy; this is a very important document that will include a summary of all of the county's geological formations and associated features with guidance on their evaluation for the assessment of sites. Various members of the team have continued their research on sites and geological features (particularly Lee and Roger) and Steve, Reg and Andy have continued to develop our map work. Plans are

now underway for this year's Geodiversity Landscape visits – the first being on 30th April, when we will dive into the fossil collection held by the museum on the fen island of Chatteris, have lunch in a room with a well in it and then travel into the depths of the surrounding fens in search of ancient and mystifying rivers. If you want to join in the fun, let us know!

Get to know your fossils - Chris Donnelly



Paddle of 'the Stretham Pliosaur'! (Sedgwick Museum)

Another ask – this time for fossil enthusiasts (who isn't!). We'd like to get a better understanding and a basic record of fossils that have been found in the

county, whereabouts and in what geological formation. Over the years, many local fossils have gone into both private and public collections and we would like to be able to steer people in the direction of what can still be seen, and where. We are particularly interested in knowing of any fossils that have been collected from local sites that we know are still of geological interest, whether a

designated site or a potentially significant site. We'd like a team of people to take this forward – could you be one of them? Even a few notes on a handful of fossils from each collection would be a start – local museums have indicated they would be happy to liaise with us. Again, this is a good way to learn about local geology and improve your fossil knowledge! Let us know!



Orwell Pit LGS – could you be our site monitor?

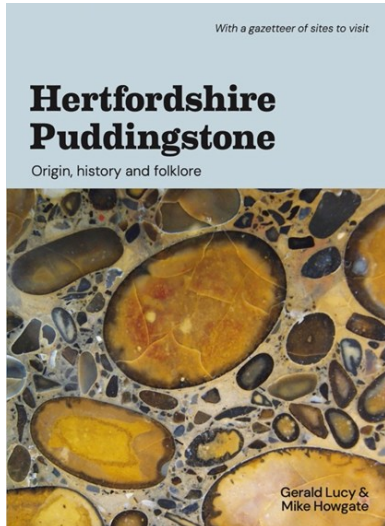
Geological Site Monitors

Could you be one of our team of monitors who get to know one of our Cambridgeshire geological sites (no previous geological knowledge is needed) and 'keep an occasional eye' on it so that we can be aware of

any significant changes. This really is just a 'watching brief' and no responsibility is inferred nor physical work required, and it is a great way to get to know our local geology. Ideally, we would like one or two people to

cover each site (all of our SSSIs and LGSs). Let us know if you would like more information or talk to one of our Geosites team.

Hertfordshire Puddingstone: Origin, history and folklore By Gerald Lucy and Mike Howgate

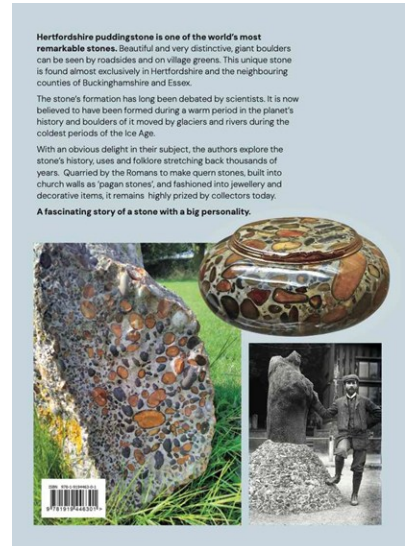


Hertfordshire Puddingstone is one of the world's most remarkable stones. Beautiful and very distinctive, giant boulders of it can be seen in Hertfordshire and the adjoining counties of Buckinghamshire and Essex.

This new book explores the stone's origin 56 million years ago, and its history, uses and folklore stretching back thousands of years. Written with the minimum of technical jargon and packed with colour photos, it has been supported by the

Hertfordshire Geological Society and the Geologists' Association.

It is available from www.therockgallery.co.uk for £12 plus £2.50 postage.



Rear cover of the book

Our May Meeting: 11th May @ 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm

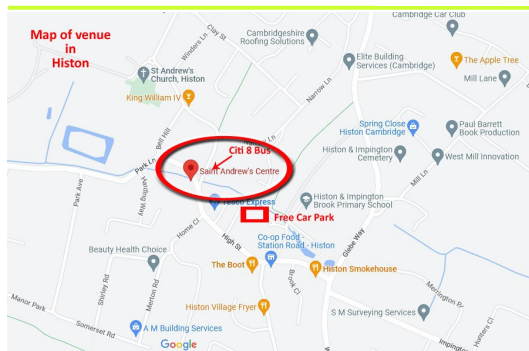
*Ruth Siddall – The Geology of Roman Wall
Painting: pigments and plasters*



Dr Siddall was a lecturer in Earth Science at UCL for many years. During extended field work at Corinth, she became interested in the ancient pigments used. She then developed a deep interest in Roman pigments from their wall paintings.

She has been a collaborator on "The Pigment Compendium: A Dictionary of Historical Pigments,"

She is a Research Fellow at Trinity College, Dublin and is also well known for her Building Stone tours of various cities.



Monthly Society Meetings

All talks are at 7.30 pm (doors open 7.00 pm). Everyone welcome, free to CGS members, small charge for non members. Refreshments available

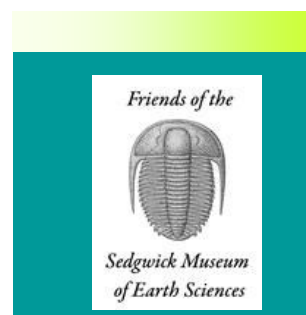
Hall 1, St Andrew's Centre, School Hill, Histon, CB24 9JE

Other Society Meetings

Friends of the Sedgwick

For information on the FoS,

<https://sedgwickmuseum.cam.ac.uk/support-us/friends-sedgwick-museum>



CNHS lecture meetings

The CNHS lectures can be found on their "Events" website page and start at 6:45 pm prompt, usually in the David Attenborough Building CB2 3QZ. Some events, including talks, **take place online**. It may be necessary to book in advance, including for outdoor events. **We advise checking with organisers.**

<http://www.cnhs.org.uk/>



Cambridge Natural History Society

Local Fen Edge / Cambridgeshire museums

There are several museums with interesting fenland exhibits. Two that are now involved in the Fen Edge Trail are Burwell Museum www.burwellmuseum.ork.uk and Ramsey Rural Museum www.ramseyruralmuseum.co.uk.

Out in the Fen Basin, are a number of other collections including those at Wisbech Museum www.wisbechmuseum.org.uk which has numerous natural history specimens including local fossils. Also Chatteris Museum www.chatterismuseum.org.uk, Peterborough Museum www.peterboroughmuseum.org.uk, and Ely Museum www.elymuseum.org.uk

