

## An exciting new project at Somerset Earth Science Centre

by Simon Carpenter

I have recently started volunteering at Somerset Earth Science Centre [www.earthsciencecentre.org.uk](http://www.earthsciencecentre.org.uk), to help them repurpose an old geological collection formerly belonging to Kingswood School, Bath. This is an exciting opportunity to examine an important historic collection, containing some exceptional fossils and minerals, many found over a century ago.

Kingswood School, Bath was founded in 1748 by John Wesley, who with his brother Charles, started the Methodist movement in the Church of England.

Sir Arthur Dixon (1867- 1955), an accomplished mathematician and Fellow of the Royal Society as well as a former pupil of the school, donated a substantial geological collection to Kingswood School. His collection, as well as many other fossils and minerals added by former pupils and staff, were used by generations of children studying GCSE and A level geology. With the introduction of the National Curriculum in the late 1980s, a steady decline in the teaching of geology in schools began. These collections, once an important teaching and learning resource, were now no longer needed and often abandoned. Some like the Kingswood School Collection were rescued early on, before serious neglect took hold, but many other teaching collections faced a much bleaker future and were simply discarded.

The Kingswood School Collection is an important, relatively intact, early example of a school fossil and mineral reference collection. It includes many fine examples of invertebrates and some vertebrate fossils. These were collected at a time when there were many more active quarries to collect from, with fewer access restrictions and without the intensity of fossil collecting we see today.

The collection is also associated with a number of prominent and famous geologists including William Jocelyn Arkell (1904 – 1958) who was regarded as the leading authority on the Jurassic Period during the middle part of the 20th century and was friends with Alfred Barrett Sackett (1895 – 1977), the headmaster of Kingswood School between 1928 – 1959. Towards the end of Arkell's short life he had been working on Bathonian ammonites discovered during the excavation of a new hockey pitch on land below Kingswood School.

Somerset Earth Science Centre is rescuing as much of the collection as possible to repurpose it as a reference collection for the Centre, with some of the more interesting and important fossils and minerals put on display for visitors. An immediate priority has been the careful

cleaning of fossils, the rescue of specimen labels and tackling conservation issues such as pyrite decay. At the time of writing, only about 20% of the fossil collection has been processed. The Centre have approached the Russell Society to help sort through the minerals.

It has been immensely satisfying to see this old collection rescued and revitalized and a real delight to handle so many fascinating fossils. I hope to bring you updates as the project progresses.



Fig. 1: provided by Adel Avery. Adel Avery, Centre Manager and Simon Carpenter with some of the Kingswood School collection

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## Life forms in the Torridonian Group of North West Scotland

By Phil Burge

### Introduction

As discussed in the first Newsletter of the Society in April 2020, my undergraduate mapping exercise was completed in an area around Diabaig and Upper Diabaig, north of Loch Torridon. I still have the map and write up and, as I still have an interest in the area, the time spent in this area must have had a deep and lasting impact, as I expect each undergraduate geologist experiences. As such, my newsfeed occasionally throws interesting research on the geology of the North West Highlands, one of which described a possible billion year old holozoan with differentiated multicellularity (Strother et al 2021).

The consensus view is that all the Torridonian Group was deposited in fluvial/lacustrine/playa type environments. The finding of multicellular structures in a non-marine environment of this age revises our understanding of the evolution of multicellular life and holozoans.

### Torridonian Supergroup Stratigraphy

The North West Highlands have a particular and impressive geography with high hills and mountains of Torridonian age lying uncomfortably on Palaeoproterozoic Lewisian gneiss. The Torridonian Supergroup comprises the Stoer, Sleat and Torridon groups (Fig. 1).