

The Institution of Geologists - A Brief History

Rick Brassington gives a personal view of a momentous change in the history of the geological profession in the UK

In 1972, the Geological Society Council set in train a series of events that saw the formation of the Institution of Geologists and ultimately, the creation of the Chartered Geologist title. The development of the Society to encompass the regulation of the geological profession was made possible almost two decades later by the reunification between the Institution and the Society. During its comparatively brief existence, the IG was able to claim many achievements with the most notable being: a process for the professional validation of geologists; a system of regional groups; external relations with government, industry and other professional bodies; being a founder member of the European Federation of Geologists; and the publication of a house magazine and The Geologist's Directory. All of these are now important features of the new Geological Society created by the reunification in 1991, which also started a process of continuing modernization within the changed Society. The history of the Institution is therefore an important part of the Society's recent history that has resulted in the modern, high-profile organisation the Society has now become.

This account has been written from a personal point of view and does not form an official history. I have included lists of the Presidents and officers of the IG council etc, but these are only a few of the many geologists who made the creation of IG possible. Large numbers contributed by serving on council, on committees, and forming the regional groups, and who supported the IG development through continued membership, attending group meetings and in making their opinions heard. There are too many to list them all by name although many deserve to be recognised for significant individual contributions. Two people however, warrant special mention: these are Professor Sir John Knill and John Shanklin who both provided sustained leadership throughout the whole period of the development of the IG organisation. John Knill was the Chairman of the original Society's Working Party and served as General Secretary of APIPG, as Chairman of the IG council and in other roles including being the second President of IG. John Shanklin served on the Society's Working Party, the APIPG committee, on IG Council including being Chairman and was the fifth and final President of IG. John Shanklin also played a leading role in the formation of the European Federation of Geologists and was its first President.

First steps

At the Geological Society's Council meeting on 1 November 1972 it was decided to set up a working party to "study the feasibility of maintaining a professional register of geologists". Council established a 14-strong Working Party on Professional Recognition that first met on 2 January 1973 and reported to Council in March 1974. Their report recognised that professional bodies carry out important functions in regulating the professions. However, no existing professional body such as the Institution of Mining and Metallurgy or the Institution of Civil Engineers, was an appropriate body for all geologists to become members. Consequently, the Working Party recommended that a professional body should be established for all geologists.

The Working Party considered a number of ways that this could be achieved ranging from the Society modifying its rules to include a professional grade of membership, to a body being established completely independent of the Society. Legal advice at that time was that if the Geological Society used its resources to establish a professional body for geologists it would risk being in violation of its Royal Charter, and it was thought that this might lose the use of the grace and favour apartments in Burlington House. The recommended route, which in the event was followed, was for the new body to be established by independent sponsorship with the Society providing as much support as allowed by the Royal Charter.

The Working Party suggested that the first step should be to test the extent of support amongst the Society's membership for the establishment of a professional body and a meeting was held at Burlington House in 1974 where overwhelming support was given to the concept of forming a regulatory body for the geological profession. Following the Burlington House meeting members of the Working Party set about establishing an organisation to develop into the professional body for geologists.

AIPG

The body set up to generate support and to establish a professional institution for geologists gloried in the name the Association for the Promotion of an Institution of Professional Geologists, more usually known by its initial letters AIPG (pronounced separately). This group was established by the members of the Working Party, by now acting independently of the Society's Council but with its support.

The first meeting of AIPG was a regional meeting held in Plymouth on 3 January 1975. It was followed by a series of eight more regional meetings held in locations as far north as Aberdeen. The formal Inaugural Meeting of the Association took place on 24 March 1975 at the Scientific Society's Lecture Theatre in Savile Row, London. At this meeting, a Committee was formally elected to serve for two years with the sole objective of forming an Institution for Professional Geologists. In the event the process took a little longer with the new professional body being created 35 months after the Savile Row meeting. Over that period support from the geological community grew steadily from 620 members in mid-1975 to 963 in mid-1976, and by the end of AIPG's existence there were 1146 members.

Over the three years following the inaugural meeting the AIPG Committee were very busy consulting with the members about the detail of how the new Institution should be organized. The many issues that needed to be resolved included the size of Council and whether its members should represent different aspects of professional geology; the membership classification; the standards and method of validation; the number and size of the standing committees needed to run the organisation; and of course, the name of the Institution.

The first edition of *British Geologist* appeared to coincide with the inaugural meeting in Savile Row and formed a useful means of communicating progress to the members. Members were invited to write to the Committee to give their opinions on the issues

being discussed and many people contributed to the debate. APIPG members were also active in spontaneously establishing the regional groups, starting with the East Midlands Group in September 1976. When APIPG converted to the Institution of Geologists, eleven groups had been established. Another significant publication by APIPG was a booklet called Careers for Geologists. It was aimed at providing useful advice to young people, mainly school children who were planning their careers. Later editions of the booklet were published by IG.

By the end of 1977 the IG organisation was fully established in an embryonic form. The Institution of Geologists was a company limited by guarantee and not having share capital, a form of organisation shared by a number of other professional institutions. It was incorporated in August 1977 with the subscribers being the APIPG Committee. A Memorandum and Articles of Association for IG was published that gave the purpose of the new body, the structure of its organisation and how it would conduct its business. Applications for membership of the new body were already being received and the new IG committees had started work. The final meeting of the APIPG Committee was held together with a meeting of the IG Council one week before the inaugural meeting of the Institution. The APIPG Committee approved motions to allow the APIPG organisation to "self-destruct" and transfer its assets to the Institution. The IG Council meeting elected a further 44 new members of the Institution bringing the total membership of the new body to 169, and all was set for the big change scheduled for the following week.

The Institution of Geologists

The membership of APIPG voted for the organisation to be disbanded and replaced by the Institution of Geologists at a meeting held in the Midland Hotel Birmingham on 24 February 1978 and attended by about 240 geologists. The organizers had hoped for about 150 attendees and were delighted with the packed meeting and level of enthusiastic support it showed. This first IG AGM established the Institution, installed its first President, elected its first Council and set the new organisation on its way. Three guest speakers were Dr W.E. Duckworth the Chairman of CSTI, eminent geologist Sir Kingsley Dunham former Director of the Geological Survey and Lord Aberconway the Chairman of English China Clays.

Lord Aberconway has always been a firm supporter of the concept of a professional body for geologists and later made a gift to IG for the establishment of the Aberconway Medal with the first one being awarded in 1980.

The new Institution then started the process of establishing itself and demonstrating that it was the type of body that professional geologists would want to support. This involved many levels of activities including establishing a validation process that would run efficiently and objectively; encouraging the regional groups to continue to develop, both in terms of new groups being established and in terms of holding worthwhile meetings; developing relationships with other organisations ranging from government departments to the Geological Society, and from universities to large industrialists. The range of publications was extended by pamphlets about the Institution, membership lists and the like and The Geologist's Directory, which was first published by IG in 1980 as a service to its members.

IG also ran training courses on topics such as drilling techniques, the role of the expert witness and hydrogeology for non-expert, with such courses often being organized by individual regional groups. Other visual growing signs included the acquisition of a number of artefacts. The President's Badge of Office was presented to the Institution by John Knill on his retirement as President at the AGM in March 1984. Dan Ion (the third President) was the first to wear the badge of office. Since the reunification between IG and the Society the Badge of Office has been on display in the Council room. Another gift to IG, that of a hand-turned wooden gavel was made by Colin Knipe on the occasion of his retirement as Chairman of Council on 8 March 1986. This gavel is kept in a cupboard in Burlington House.*[note: not extant]*

The highest grade of membership in most professional institutions is termed "Fellow". Initially, IG had only one grade of corporate member (that of Member). By June 1985 however, Council decided to initiate a higher grade of corporate and nominated the former Presidents and Chairmen of Council as six Founding Fellows. A further fourteen members of IG were nominated by this group to form a Founding Fellows "college" of twenty.

A Trust Fund was established in 1986 to commemorate the memory of three distinguished geologists who were also Founding Fellows of the Institution and died within a relatively short time of each other. The fund was known as the Distinguished Fellows Memorial Trust was used to assist young geologists, particularly those in industrial employment, in their professional development by contributing towards travel costs to attend conferences or to gain experience in other appropriate ways.

In 1983, Council decided to enquire from the members of IG what they expected from the Institution in order to establish priorities in planning the development of IG. A questionnaire was sent to the regional groups to ask them to canvas opinion and provide a response to Council. The unanimous answer was that the prime objective should be the acquisition of a Royal Charter which would bestow on the Institution the ability to create the title Chartered Geologist. In January 1984 a committee was established under the chairmanship of Howard Headworth as Chairman of Council, to investigate how this goal could be achieved. The options appeared to be obtaining chartered status through the Council of Science and Technology Institutes (CSTI), now called the "Science Council" the Geological Society seeking a Supplemental Charter that would allow the Society to grant the title Chartered Geologist, or petitioning the Privy Council for a Royal Charter for IG.

The first option arose out of IG being a member of CSTI and the fact that CSTI had a declared aim of eventually obtaining a Royal Charter. This was considered unrealistic, as IG was not able to influence the slow timetable for CSTI to make its application. The second course was similar to one of the options considered by the Geological Society Working Party on Professional Recognition ten years earlier. This route was not followed because it required the co-operation of the Society, which had much to lose in the process. It was certain that being granted a Supplemental Charter would require the Society to give up a great deal of the freedom given it under its 1825 Charter, and which

are not allowed in modern Royal Charters. In essence these are the right to set and alter byelaws without reference to the Privy Council, an onerous and expensive condition laid on all bodies that operate under a modern charter. As a result, the new Charter Committee started an informal dialogue with officials working for the Privy Council in order to plan an application for a Royal Charter by the Institution itself.

A series of discussions led to IG preparing a draft Charter to be submitted to the Privy Council as the first step in applying to be granted a Royal Charter. This involved a huge amount of careful work from the various IG committees and Council. By January 1986 the draft had been printed and bound and was sent to the Privy Council for informal comment. The document referred to the possibility of a future unification between the IG and the Geological Society. The Privy Council said that they would be unable to consider a petition for a Royal Charter while there remained the possibility of a merger with a body that already held a Royal Charter. They suggested that any petition should be placed on hold until the possibility of any merger between the two organisations was resolved once and for all.

As a result, the Institution approached the Society requesting that the possibility of a possible merger should be explored. After some preliminary discussion it was agreed to establish a joint Co-operation Committee comprising three senior members of each organisation and chaired by Professor Howel Francis as someone seen as neutral by both sides.

Reunification

The first meeting of the joint Co-operation Committee was held in January 1987 and agreed that the unification of the Geological Society and the Institution of Geologists was the proper goal for the two organisations, both in their own interests and that of the geological community in Britain.

It took some time for the Committee to gain each other's trust and for meaningful discussions to take place. It was recognised on both sides that merger would mean significant changes to both bodies and this complex process took four years to achieve.

Negotiations between the IG and GS even included the concept that the new body should have a new name but that was not possible without changing the Society's Royal Charter with all the disadvantages discussed above. In the end, the Institution's organisation was merged into that of the Society losing some of its identity in the process and with the Institution's name disappearing altogether. The decision whether to merge was made by the members of both bodies. The majority of the IG membership willingly gave up IG's treasured separate identity in the greater interests of the geological community.

With the reunification 259 members of the Institution who had not been Fellows of the Society applied for and were granted fellowship, and some 586 corporate members of the Institution became the first Chartered Geologists even before the reunification process was completed. The total membership of IG at the time of the reunification was

1745, comprising 32 Fellows, 731 Corporate Members, 674 Associate Members, 9 Technician Geologists, 6 Technical Associates, 42 Affiliates and 251 Students.

Just as a vote at an AGM had seen the APIPG self-destruct and the birth of the Institution, so a vote at IG's AGM on 10 March 1990 at the University of Birmingham decided the demise of IG as a separate organisation. At the meeting the President, John Shanklin read out a letter he had received from the Geological Society's President, Professor Derek Blundell inviting the membership of the Institution of Geologists to join a unified Society. The meeting voted to accept the invitation and an earlier postal ballot voted in favour with a large majority.

As the New Year of 1991 dawned, it saw the demise of the Institution of Geologists and the creation of a new unified Geological Society. The process of change started by the reunification has seen a fundamental restructuring of the Society with continuing evolution during the succeeding decade to meet the changing needs of the geological sciences, the geological profession and society at large.

Personal postscript

"Was it all worth it?" is a question that many of the large number of geologists who freely gave so much of their time to create the Institution, must have asked of themselves. Not a surprising question; after all, apart from the IG President's Badge of Office that hangs in a far corner of the Council room and a few copies of the proceedings of the 1983 Extractive Industries Conference (organized by IG) for sale in the library, there are few physical reminders in Burlington House that IG ever existed. Such personal questions can really only be answered by the questioners themselves, but I feel sure that most will answer "Yes", albeit with qualifications.

All the main objectives that APIPG and IG set for themselves - the Chartered Geologist title, the strict validation process, external relations, the regional groups and the various publications - have been met, even though it is the Society that manages them now. This perhaps, is a detail that should not really matter; the fact that they exist is what is important. The greatest of IG's achievements however, is that the re-unification process has brought about the Society's modernization and has enabled the energy that created IG to be used to develop the Society into an organisation with a real presence across the whole country and with a voice listened to more readily by international geology.

It should not be thought however, that the evolutionary process of either the geological profession, or the Society as its regulator is yet complete. In almost all other professions in Britain and other western countries, the attainment of professional qualifications rather than academic ones is accepted by all members of that profession as being a prerequisite to practice. However, even a decade after reunification and the creation of the Chartered Geologist qualification by the Society only a minority of professional geologists are Chartered Geologists and many have no membership of the Society at all. In my view, the British geological profession will not have reached maturity until the concept of a regulated geological profession is recognised as essential by all practising professional geologists and successive generations of new geologists alike, and that an aspiration to become a Chartered Geologist is shared by them all.