

“GEOLOGY IS AN OPAQUE SUBJECT TO MANY. WE MUST PERSIST IN CLARIFYING ITS SIGNIFICANCE TO SOCIETY”

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK:

Geology the Obscure

People are fascinated by geology. But few *really* know what geology is. At least, that's been my general impression from chatting with friends and non-geologist colleagues over the years. People are enthralled by volcanoes and earthquakes—understandably so—but I'm not sure many grasp exactly what the study and practise of geology involves, beyond identifying rock types.

At times I've even found that many scientists trained in the broader Earth and atmospheric science disciplines have only a little awareness of the close links between geology, climate science, sustainability, energy, ecology and the like.

In conversations with non-Earth scientists, I've noticed that few fully appreciate the geologist's part in creating the climate crisis or the essential role we have in attempting to fix it. As Mike Stephenson writes on page 24, when it comes to decarbonisation “geoscience has a lot to offer, but we as a community need to better organise and influence—to make sure the voice of geoscience is heard”. Many also seem unaware of the importance of geology for sourcing the raw materials needed to supply our infrastructure and technologies, or the geologist's role in waste management, land contamination or water security.

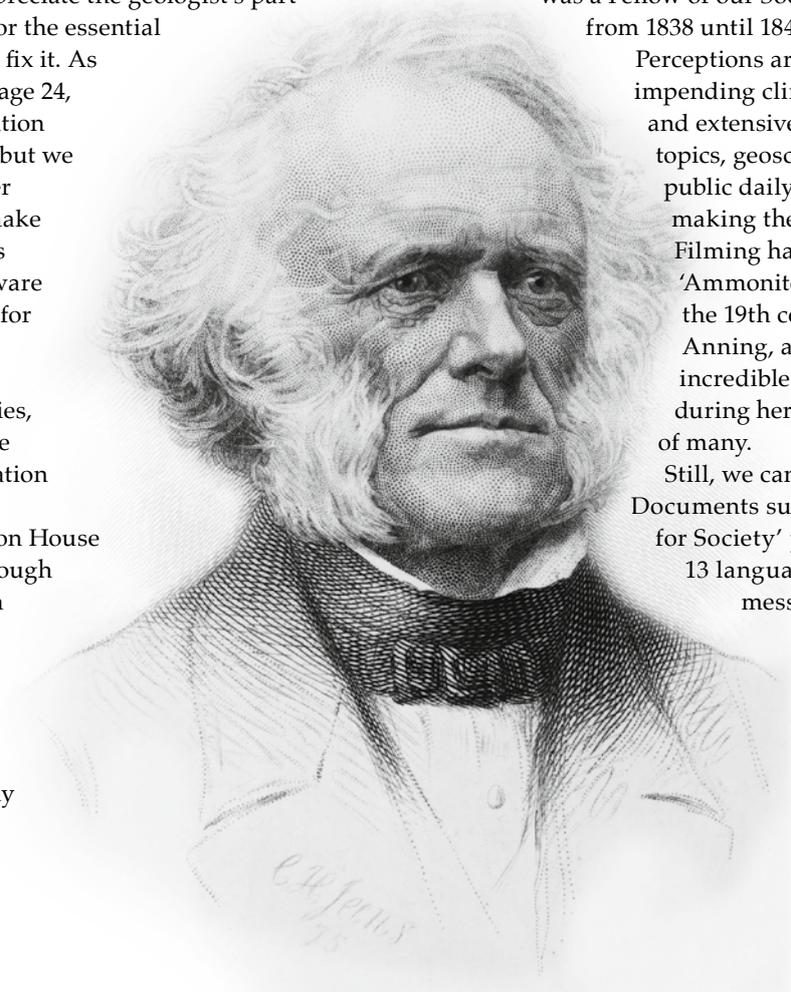
In a recent visit to Burlington House (page 27), Sir David Attenborough noted that the average person on the street has likely never heard of William Smith, ‘Father of English Geology’. Yet, Smith's fossil collection, which sits in a somewhat understated display in London's Natural History

Museum, represents the very foundation stones of stratigraphy—a science that has helped revolutionise our understanding of this planet's workings.

It was recently announced that notebooks belonging to Sir Charles Lyell have been consigned for sale. This heftily priced (over £1.4 million) collection could be sold to an overseas buyer. Thankfully, Arts Minister, Michael Ellis, has put a hold on the sale of the notebooks in a bid to keep this important archive in the UK. But, I wonder how many in the general public are familiar with Lyell? He was a huge inspiration and mentor to Sir Charles Darwin, and the notebooks apparently contain transcribed correspondence between the two, yet I've found that few people realise Darwin was a geologist (and, indeed, was a Fellow of our Society, serving as Secretary from 1838 until 1841).

Perceptions are shifting. In light of the impending climate and biodiversity crises, and extensive media coverage of these topics, geoscience is communicated to the public daily. Historical figures are even making their way onto the silver screen. Filming has begun on the movie ‘Ammonite’, which stars Kate Winslet as the 19th century fossil hunter, Mary Anning, and will bring the tale of an incredible palaeontologist, undervalued during her own life, into the homes of many.

Still, we can't rely on the media alone. Documents such as the Society's ‘Geology for Society’ paper (now translated into 13 languages) help disseminate the message to a broader population, but also as individuals we must not miss opportunities to extol the benefits and importance of our science to society at large.



Sir Charles Lyell (1797-1875)