



NEWSLETTER

Winter 2010/11

Geology on your doorstep

By Martin Whiteley

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Did you know that there is an important geological site not far from where you live? If you live near Biddenham, north of Bedford you may have noticed a belt of scrubland and trees next to the footpath that connects Fleming Close and Malcote Close, at the northern boundary of the Deep Spinney housing estate. Tucked away in there, largely hidden by the undergrowth, is the remnant of an old gravel pit that once extended over most of the area now occupied by houses.

For more than a century sand and gravel was taken from this pit and, during the course of digging, fossilised remains of extinct mammals and flint artefacts were occasionally discovered. This association of sediment, fossils and archaeological remains indicates that the ancestral River Great Ouse once meandered across this area, depositing sand and gravel on its flood plain and providing a suitable location for animals and humans to occupy. The deposits probably accumulated during one of the relatively warm climatic periods that occurred between the prolonged cold phases of the Ice Age. We don't know precisely how old they are, but Palaeolithic man was probably the first Biddenham resident about 300,000 years ago!

The geological and archaeological significance of Biddenham Pit led to its designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest by Natural England in 1988. Since then the exposure of sand and gravel has become overgrown and its scientific and educational value has been lost. However, there is now renewed interest and commitment to reinstate the site for the benefit of all.

The land owners, Persimmon Homes & Kier Homes, are working alongside Bedfordshire Wildlife Trust and ourselves, with support from Natural England, to tidy up the area and selectively expose the sand and gravels. This work will continue in phases over several years and an information board will be erected to explain the national significance of the site.

The initial clearance phase took place on 16th December 2010. Several volunteers, including one local resident, spent the morning cutting back the hedge that runs alongside the footpath, improving the access to the old quarry face and exposing some fresh sand and gravel. None of the mature trees were removed and all of the undergrowth that was cut down has been stacked in order to create new wildlife habitats. Several large sacks of rubbish were removed from the site, but larger scale fly-tipping has been taking place at the eastern end of the scrubland and this will need to be removed by professional contractors.

Some concern has been expressed about whether the regeneration of this site will attract increased numbers of visitors and perhaps exacerbate parking congestion in Fleming Close and Malcote Close. Whilst we certainly hope that our efforts will enhance the scientific value of this geological site, we don't anticipate that this will result in a significant increase in visitors. Those that cannot access the site by walking or cycling are being advised to park their cars safely in Deep Spinney and walk to the exposure.



Biddenham Pit before clearance
in December 2010.



As local residents we thought you might be interested to know what is going on to improve this long forgotten site which serves to remind us of our ancestral past. For more information please contact Martin Whiteley on mjwhiteley@yahoo.co.uk

Biddenham Pit after clearance
in December 2010.

Event reviews

A Living from the Landscape Day By Jan Munro

Back in October, at Harrold Odell Country Park, I put together a joint event with the Education Service Team from Bedford Museum.

The aim was to make people think about how dependent we are on the underlying geology for everyday raw materials, a link that has been in place for thousands of years.

BGG put together a stall with an exhibition of the products gleaned from Bedfordshire's rocks. Bricks from the clay pits, pottery, lime & cement from the chalk, fuller's earth, coprolites and Totternhoe Stone to name but a few. All this was bound together with posters and literature and my colleague at the park, Richard Dowsett was duly press ganged into manning it. He also led a guided walk in the afternoon which was very well attended.

Other attractions included a Victorian Blacksmith, Tudor leatherworker, a dyer who specialised in the use of wild plants, wood turners, bee keepers and a traditional skep (straw beehive) maker. My boss, Ed Burnett was dragged in to demonstrate his pole lathe and basket making skills and one of my volunteers, who used to work with Ray Mears teaching survival skills set up a camp and demonstrated fire by friction and how to clean animal hides for curing.

We must have had at least a thousand extra visitors on the day and had some wonderful feedback. It seemed people liked the fact that they learned something as well as enjoying the spectacle. Susannah Oliver's museum team manned a marquee providing family activities like glass painting and they were busy the whole time.

We had so many requests for us to repeat the experience that I am trying to organise another one, depending on the availability of the Blacksmith. Watch this space.



Some of the activities at Harrold-Odell Country Park's Landscape Day:

Ed working his pole lathe with Richard Dowsett looking on.

Victorian blacksmith at work.

Traditional skep making.

For more detailed reports on recently held events, go to the Events page on the website at <http://www.bedfordshiregeologygroup.org.uk/reports.html>

You can see written reports and images of some of our past events.

Review of the BGG Annual Social Evening

By Bev Fowlston

Image by Peter Lally

On 9 December 2010, BGG held our annual social evening, we had the pleasure of many members who watched and listened to a fascinating slide show given by Peter Lally about the upcoming Derbyshire Trip. Some lovely views of the Peaks that may be visited were shown along with some wonderful outcrops of luscious limestone!



The evening was enhanced by the lovely buffet and drinks provided by members and the committee. There was an interesting competition given by Martin Whiteley when the audience arranged themselves into groups of 4 or 5 to answer both pictorial and written questions about geology in general. In addition, the usual caption competition brought some funny responses as usual.

Here's to 2012!

February's Talk on Shenley Limestone

By Bev Fowlston

In February, BGG were honoured to be given a talk by member Richard Hogg. Richard collected Shenley Limestone fossils from local quarries around Leighton Buzzard. He talked about he became interested in fossil collecting and geology in general. Some of the specimens he and his fellow collectors found during the 1970's have been donated to the Natural History Museum but he has also generously donated some fine pieces to BGG. These specimens were available to view on the evening.

The evening was enhanced by refreshments provided by Lindsay Hiles. A wonderful relaxing evening of excellent presentation was had by those who attended which included a number of guests.

Members' Page

Dear Editor,

There is a one day seminar on the Geology of Cambridgeshire by Cambridgeshire Geology Club 10th September (£35) with interesting lectures and a lunchtime building stones walk, if you are interested. I have flier, or check the website cambridgeshiregeologyclub.org.uk.

Cheerio,
Anne Williams
via email

Dear Anne,

Thank you for this information. I hope many members take you up on this fascinating invitation.

Bev Fowlston
Editor

Dear Editor,

This may be of interest – the Cambs, Beds, Notts and Peterborough WT are doing a short training course on the links between Wildlife, Landscape and Geology. See 'Beginning with Landscape' in the pdf link below: <http://www.wildlifebcnp.org/documents/WTTrainingInsert2011correctedsingles.pdf>

Jonathon Larwood
Natural England
via email

Dear Jonathon,

Thank you for this information and I will certainly be looking at attending.

Bev Fowlston
Editor

If you have any interesting images or just want to voice your opinion on a geological issue, events or how the group is run then this is your page. Just send your images, in jpeg format, or any letters or comments as a Word .doc document via email to the editor at bev.fowlston@gmail.com

Forthcoming Events and Contacts

Don't miss the next event
Sat 12th March
Sandhouse Pits Walk at Heath and Reach

Dates for your diary

- Mar** - Walk around Sandhouse Pits, near Leighton Buzzard
- Apr** - 30th - Kensworth clearance and chalk downland walk
- May** - 13th to 15th - Weekend trip to Derbyshire
- 30th - Landscape Day at Harrold-Odell
- Jun** - 19th - Seeking the Jurassic Walk
- Jul** - 17th - The Making of Bedford Day at Priory Country Park
- Aug** - *no event due to holidays*
- Sep** - 11th - AGM and Walk
- Oct** - 15th - Visit to Sedgwick Museum, Cambridge
- Nov** - Site clearance (Potton or chalk site, t.b.c.)
- Dec** - Annual Social Eve

A 12-month rolling programme of events is being organised - check the website for further details. Further events will be confirmed via email and in the next newsletter. Watch this space!

If there is an event you would like to see then please let Bev Fowlston know and she will aim to organise it.

For more information on any of the events, please contact Bev Fowlston at the details below.

Membership information

Individual membership is £7.50 per annum.
Group membership is £25.00 per annum
(Available to organisations that have 4 or more employees or members wishing to join B&LGG)

To continue to receive this newsletter by email or post then you must renew your membership. This newsletter is not the only benefit of remaining a member of the B&LGG; all our events for members are **free of charge**, non-members must pay £2.00 to attend.

You can renew now by either:

1. Sending a cheque made payable to BGG
2. Requesting and completing a Standing Order form

Both available through contacting:
Lindsay Hiles BGG Secretary, 4 Phoenix Close
Leighton Buzzard, Beds LU7 3YW

Remember without you - the members - this Group does not exist.

We need you!

Edited by Bev Fowlston.

If you have any comment or wish to include an article in the next issue of this newsletter then please contact me on 01525 375353 or by email bev.fowlston@gmail.com
Deadline for next issue is 25th May 2011.
I hope you enjoyed reading.

Committee Members 2010 - 11

Chairperson
Secretary
Treasurer/Membership Secretary
RIGS Manager & BNHS representative
Events Coordinator
Chalk Downs rep/Events Organiser
Beds CC & Biodiversity Forum rep
Events Organiser
The Greensand Trust representative
PR/Promotions/Fundraising Officer
Committee member

Peter Lally
Vacant
Lindsay Hiles
Dr Martin Whiteley
Bev Fowlston
Janet Munro
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