

Obituary

MURRAY MITCHELL (1933–2012)

Murray Mitchell, perhaps Britain's leading researcher on British Carboniferous corals in the latter half of the 20th century, died in Leeds, 26th March 2012.

He was born on 15th June, 1933, in Upper Poppleton, near York, into a geological hotbed. At the time, his father, G.H. Mitchell, a distinguished field geologist with the Geological Survey, was posted to the York Office. Two years later, Mitchell senior was transferred to London and the family moved to Reading. During family holidays in the Duddon Valley, the elder Mitchell mapped large areas of the Lake District, contributing much to knowledge of the Borrowdale Volcanic Group. It was probably at this time that Murray himself developed a love for the southern Lake District, an area he was to return to on retirement. His brother must have been similarly influenced, becoming a farmer near Ennerdale.

After attending Reading School, Murray did National Service with the Royal Signals during which he marched in the 1953 Coronation Procession (and got thoroughly soaked for his pains). He later graduated from Magdalene College, Cambridge, and then, following in his father's footsteps, he joined the Geological Survey in 1956. He was assigned to the Palaeontological Department firstly in London, later transferring to Leeds in 1967. Murray very quickly acquired a reputation as a leading figure in the study of the macrofauna of the Carboniferous Limestone, most particularly specializing in the stratigraphical and geographical distribution of corals. His investigations were constrained in part by the requirement to support the Survey mapping programme in England and Wales, notably in the Mendips, South Wales, NW England and the Pennines. He was also fully cognizant of the contemporaneous Scottish and Irish coral faunas. Much of his core work was published in Survey Memoirs, but some seminal papers also appeared in several journals including our own *Proceedings*. In much of this work, he collaborated closely with W.H.C. (Bill) Ramsbottom (obituary 2006, *Proceedings of the Yorkshire Geological Society*, 56, 55–56). Murray's contribution to their joint studies, which led to the definition and establishment of the substages (Courseyan to Brigantian) of the Tournaisian and Viséan stages, now in common usage in the UK and Ireland, was crucial and perhaps has not received the recognition that it deserves.

Murray succeeded Ramsbottom as Manager of the Survey's Biostratigraphy Department in 1983, prior to his own early retirement in 1986. He then became a visiting Research Fellow in the Department of Earth Sciences at the University of Leeds.

Here he participated in a range of projects, several of which involved southern Lakeland. For many years he was closely associated with the field activities of the Castle Field Centre near Grange-over-Sands, close to which his mother had retired. Together with Frank Dimes, the former Curator of Building Stones at the Geological Museum in South Kensington, Murray wrote *Building Stone Heritage of Leeds*, a comprehensive survey of the city's stone buildings, published under the auspices of The Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society in 1996 (2nd edition, 2006). From 1995–2001, he worked on a report on the building stones of National Trust buildings in the Lake District. In 2004, he wrote with Michael Dewey *Geology, Scenery and History: a walk in Yewdale, Northeast of Conistone*. Perhaps the most unusual of his investigations was the Yorkshire Quarry Arts Project (2003–2011), an interdisciplinary initiative involving artists, scientists, industrial organisations and educational institutions. He realized that the geology around Ingleton had similarities with that in the Lake District and helped find numerous sites of different ringed rocks which helped in the creation of the Brantwood Musical Stones, an instrument (a lithophone) made from musical stones, based at Brantwood, the former home of John Ruskin, near Conistone in the Lake District, which were launched by Dame Evelyn Glennie in August 2010.

As a boy, his family was active in several geological Societies, including the Yorkshire, being frequent participants and contributors at our meetings. His father had been President of the Yorkshire Geological Society in 1955–1956, and was awarded the Sorby Medal in 1965. Murray himself joined the Society in 1957. He was a major participant in Council affairs for many years where his quiet, thoughtful common-sense approach was much appreciated. He also led several field excursions in addition to his *Proceedings* contributions. His research work was appropriately rewarded by the Society in 1992 by the award of the John Phillips Medal, itself named after an early distinguished student of Carboniferous Limestone faunas. He was also active in several other societies, including serving as Presidents of the Westmorland Geological Society and the Leeds Geologist's Association. Murray also served on the Council of the Palaeontological Association and on the Council of the Palaeontographical Society, including six years as an Editor of the latter society's monographs. He was President of the Palaeontographical Society from 1984 to 1989.

Murray is survived by his wife, Lesley, and by his son and three grandchildren.

Douglas Holliday