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# The History of Geoconservation

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## Preface

The idea of a conference on The History of Geoconservation was first aired at a History of Geology Group of the Geological Society, London (HOGG) committee meeting on 14 January 2004 by Cynthia Burek (O'Connor, A. 2004. HOGG committee Minutes (36,2). HOGG is an affiliated group of the Geological Society of London. It was inaugurated on 4th October 1994 to encourage interest in the lives and work of those scientists and philosophers who influenced both the study and practice of geology. The first chairman was John Thackray, secretary John Martin and treasurer John Fuller. It is run by a small committee that meets regularly in the Geological Society of London to plan conferences and other activities. Having attended a Geoconservation Commission meeting in late 2003 followed shortly by the January HOGG meeting, the timeliness of linking the two subjects through a conference became apparent. The HOGG committee agreed that a proposal to hold a conference should be taken to the next meeting of the Geoconservation Commission (GCC). This GCC meeting included a standing item on 'Conferences involving the Commission', and the idea of a History of Geoconservation conference was warmly welcomed. In order to take the conference forward, Colin Prosser (now of Natural England) offered to represent the GCC and Natural England whilst Cynthia Burek agreed to represent HOGG and UKRIGS.

Negotiations with HOGG, GCC and other interested parties led to a decision to hold the conference in Dudley, a town with a long association with geology and geoconservation, and to include the Black Country Geological Society (BCGS) alongside the HOGG and the GCC as organizers. An added benefit of Dudley as a venue was the opportunity to link the event with a series of other events celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the declaration of Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve, one of the oldest and best known geological reserves in the UK.

An organizing committee consisting of Alan Cutler (BCGS), Graham Worton (Dudley Museum and Art Gallery), as well as Cynthia Burek and Colin Prosser was set up with additional occasional input from Jonathan Larwood on behalf of the Geologists' Association and Hannah Townley (Natural England). Enthusiasm for the conference was high amongst all partners with the conference being seen as chance both to learn from the past and to celebrate achievements to date. Key questions that the conference hoped to address included: what is geoconservation, when did it start, and how did we get to where we are today? The conference aimed to answer these questions within three themes:

- The origins of geoconservation;
- Geoconservation in the British Isles; and
- Geoconservation on an international scale.

The conference was held in Dudley Museum on 24–25 November 2006, with a conference dinner in the limestone caverns beneath Dudley (that were once visited by Roderick Murchison) which included an address from a modern 'Dr William Buckland' (Patrick Boylan in disguise). The following day Graham Worton led an excursion to the Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve.

The first theme of the conference, 'The origins of geoconservation', included four read papers by Phil Doughty, Barry Thomas, Tom Hose and Murray Gray. The second theme, 'Geoconservation in the British Isles' comprised papers from Cynthia Burek, Chris Green, Neil Ellis, Colin Prosser and Graham Worton, whilst Cheryl Jones, Lars Erikstad and Patrick Boylan presented against the third theme, 'Geoconservation on an international scale'. The success of this conference demonstrated a strong interest in the history of geoconservation and enhanced by additional papers developing the local and international angle, has led to this publication. Although focused on the UK and Europe it also includes papers exploring the history of geoconservation in the USA, Australia and all parts of the world engaged with World Heritage sites and Geoparks. The book demonstrates the importance of looking backwards in order to push forward with the conservation and promotion of features, processes, sites and specimens needed to contribute to the sustainable development of our natural environment. After all we are only the custodians of the Earth for future generations.

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## Reference

O'CONNOR, A. 2004. Minutes of the HOGG Committee, 36, 2.

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