
CAMQUA

The newsletter of the
GODWIN INSTITUTE FOR QUATERNARY RESEARCH

ISSUE 28

EASTER TERM 2004

W(h)ither...the Godwin Institute?

"Don't it always seem to go that you don't know what you've got till it's gone?" - as Joni Mitchell, Canada's greatest singer/songwriter, once said in 'Big yellow taxi'. How appropriate this seems to the situation the Cambridge Quaternary community finds itself in at present, awaiting the apparent demise by neglect of our small but truly envied asset - the Godwin Institute of Quaternary Research. But how did we get here and why have we let this happen?

As everyone knows, Nick Shackleton retires this year at the end of September. It will be an important event, not only because we lose our leading colleague, but also because Nick is the Director of the Godwin Institute (GIQR) - our umbrella institute that even locals confuse with the Godwin Laboratory which is part of the Earth Sciences Department.

The GIQR was established in 1995 as an overarching multidisciplinary structure to provide a focus for the Quaternary community in the University following the demise of the Subdepartment of Quaternary Research. It was established semi-formally by the General Board (CU Reporter 14 December 1994, p.309), with Nick Shackleton as Director and overseen by an Advisory Committee, chaired by Tj. van Andel and including the GIQR Director, the Heads of the departments of Archaeology, Earth Sciences, Geography and Plant Sciences, and the Director of the McDonald Institute.

Today, 9 years on, our broad if loose grouping of Quaternary workers in Cambridge, although scattered across 5 or

more departments, share a common purpose. This is fostered by being linked through the GIQR structure. However, the GIQR Advisory Board last met in 1998, a fact that is considered by some to show that the organisation is effectively dead, but revival remains a possibility.

Although the organisation has arguably been less active of late, it is worth remembering its successes, such as the Stage Three Project, led by Tjeerd van Andel, the Volcanology symposium organised by David Pyle and Clive Oppenheimer and most recently, last

year's Mid-Pleistocene transition meeting, organised by Martin Head and myself. The continuing success of the Quaternary Discussion Group (QDG), the CAMQUA newsletter, the establishment of shared facilities and a very popular, well-used website (<http://www.giqr.group.cam.ac.uk/>) together emphasise the enduring strength of the GIQR as an entity. The M.Phil in Quaternary Science, to which many members contribute, is further evidence that the GIQR still thrives. The GIQR provides an internationally-recognised face for the largest community of Quaternary workers in one institution in the country, built on over 50 years' experience. There is also no doubt that it remains the envy of others outside, and has provided the model for



GIQR IN THE SOUP?

research centres in many other Universities both in Britain and abroad. And it costs the University nothing.

However, with Nick's retirement the GIQR's continuation is in doubt. All of us know that Nick is a major figurehead for our Institute but the GIQR is more than just one person. A consultation exercise in February clearly demonstrated that there is undeniably a desire among Cambridge Quaternary workers to maintain a structure that links researchers and provides an identity beyond that of the individual departmental research group, both locally and internationally. Yet consultation with the professoriat has shown that there is no strong feeling for continuing the GIQR structure and the Advisory Board have still yet to meet, in spite of our pleas and the proposal for a series of measures that could be instated to develop the Quaternary structure. These suggestions were sent to the Advisory Board members on 21.2.04 and to Faculty Boards but have solicited no reaction from all but two people. The proposals highlighted:

1. The need to identify potential projects that could exploit the expertise in terrestrial, marine and glacial geology, and volcanology. Possible examples include, the highly-topical onshore-offshore correlation of sequences in sensitive regions, the investigation of the rate of operation of physical and biological processes, the early Middle Pleistocene, the Pliocene-Pleistocene of NW Europe, the timing of early glaciation in the northern Hemisphere, the rate of evolution and migration, to name but a few.

2. Possibly as a spin-off from the former, either to initiate research, or to publicise research achievement of major projects, it would be appropriate to organise a symposium series. Such symposia should be held in inter-INQUA Congress periods on key topics of the day. The results could be published through Quaternary International or a similar series. The success of last year's Mid-Pleistocene Transition meeting emphasises the potential such meetings hold for both strengthening the institute's external reputation, but at the same time focussing members on key issues, from which we will all benefit.

3. It is essential to strengthen the shared-equipment and laboratory facilities available to us all here in the University. All would

surely acknowledge the success of the installation of Archaeology's Thin Section Facility in the Geography Department. Such co-operation opens the possibility of other shared facilities. This makes sense in reducing duplication across the University and at the same time ensures that scarce finances can be put to best use.

4. In view of the constant confusion between the Godwin Institute and the Godwin Laboratory, I propose that the institute be renamed. The precise form of the new name should be one that emphasises the continuation from the previous structure but clearly distinguishes the grouping as a vibrant, forward-looking centre. Various names have been proposed. I favour Cambridge Institute of Quaternary Research (CIQR) since this is closest to the GIQR, or variations on that theme, such as Cambridge Quaternary Research Institute (CQRI). Another possibility is to drop the term institute and use centre, e.g. Cambridge Centre for Quaternary Research (CCQR) or Cambridge Quaternary Research Centre (CQRC).

5. Social interaction should be seen as profoundly important for group integration. At least once a year the Director or the group leaders should organise a group social activity, such as a reception, garden party or social excursion.

Finally, I requested that the board consider the status of the D.E.B. Souby Fund. This

fund was originally set-up for research into geology, botany and zoology when the Subdepartment was in the Botany Department. When the Subdepartment was suppressed, management of the fund passed to the Heads of Botany and Earth Sciences. In view of the changes that have taken place since it would seem appropriate to include the Heads of Zoology and Geography as managers of the fund.

At present then it looks as though the Godwin Institute will wither through the lack of nurturing in spite of efforts to demonstrate to the administration that there is a real desire by the Cambridge community for its continuation. Those who see no use for it comment that we will work together without a formal structure. This is true of course, but what do we lose by keeping a research focus that has existed for 55 years and is as relevant today as it was when it was originally established by Harry Godwin in 1948?

We will have plenty of time to reflect on Joni Mitchell's prophetic words after 30 September.

P.L.Gibbard
27.4.04

The relevant documents and correspondence mentioned in this article are available on the GIQR website at: <http://www.giqr.group.cam.ac.uk/>

"There's life in the old girl yet!"



Dancing girls and the merry Magdalenian

Archaeologists believe that 13,000-year-old cave paintings in Nottinghamshire were part of a continent-wide culture.

The people who created the first surviving art in Britain were committed Europeans, belonging to a common culture spanning France, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, according to the man who discovered the cave art in Creswell Crags, Nottinghamshire. And the essential preoccupations of this single market in ice-age art, it seems, were hunting and naked dancing girls.

The discovery of 13,000-year-old rock paintings in Nottinghamshire last year rewrote ice-age history in Britain. Today, archaeologists from all over Europe are in Creswell to discuss how the finds form part of a continent-wide culture known as the Magdalenian.

Paul Pettitt, of Sheffield University's archaeology department, said: "The Magdalenian era was the last time that Europe was unified in a real sense and on a grand scale."

According to Mr Pettitt, the artists behind the Creswell paintings would have spent summers in the area feasting on migrating reindeer, but the winters on lowlands which now form the North Sea or in the Netherlands or central Rhine areas.

They would have kept in close contact, possibly through yearly meetings, with people in the middle Rhine, the Ardennes forest and the Dordogne. At the time it was possible to walk from

Nottinghamshire to the Dordogne.

"The importance of art for the Magdalenians is clear," said Mr Pettitt. "It helped to reaffirm their common cultural affiliation."

The Creswell paintings share characteristics with contemporary art at sites such as Altamira in Spain and Lascaux in France. Of particular interest is a depiction of an ibex, an animal now only to be found in Europe in the Pyrenees. "Not one ice-age ibex bone has been found in Britain. The nearest ibex remains [from the period] were found in Belgium and mid-Germany," said Mr Pettitt. He said the most likely explanation is that Magdalenians saw ibexes elsewhere and painted them in Creswell as a reminder.

Other shapes found at Creswell were initially thought to be long-necked birds. "Looked at another way," said Mr Pettitt, "You see a naked women in profile, with jutting out buttocks and raised arms. It appears to be a picture of women doing a dance in which they thrust out their derrières. It's stylistically very similar to continental examples, and seems to demonstrate that Creswellians are singing and dancing in the same way as on the continent."

Modern Europeans do not normally have access to Creswell's Church Hole cave, partly in an effort to protect a colony of bats which lives there. Modern Creswellians, though, have special reason to thank their arty predecessors. The cave complex and attendant museum - where visitors can see iron-age stone tools found in the caves - now attract 28,000 visitors a year, bringing much needed income to the former mining village. The museum trust has submitted a £4m bid to the lottery heritage fund to improve access to the site.

Jon Humble, inspector of ancient monuments for English Heritage, called it "the best and most successful example of an archaeology-led project for social and economic regeneration anywhere in the UK".

For Mr Pettitt, its significance is simpler. "It settles an old argument about whether ice-age Britons were isolated on the periphery or in contact with the rest of Europe," he said.

Sean Clarke

Thursday April 15, 2004

The Guardian

More images of the cave art in Creswell can be seen at www.creswell-crags.org.uk

PbD students should check this out...

QRA Annual Postgraduate Symposium

15th-17th September 2004

Royal Belgium Institute for Natural Sciences
Organisers: Vanessa Heyvaert and Laetitia Dupin.
E-mail: QRA2004@naturalsciences.be

The 2004 postgraduate symposium will be held this year in Brussels at the Royal Belgian Institute for Natural Sciences. The symposium will provide the opportunity for postgraduates to discuss aspects of their research in a relaxed environment.

The themes include: Paleoclimate and Paleo-ecology, Quaternary fluvial and coastal systems, Geographical Information systems and remote sensing, Geoarchaeology and techniques in reconstructing Quaternary environments, Past and present glacial environments, others themes can be added to this list, it just depends on you...

Two days of oral and poster presentations will be followed by a full day field trip to the Belgian coastal plain.

Further details, costs and registration form can be found online at: <http://www.naturalsciences.be/geology/QRA/>



Diary Dates, Easter Term 2004

May

SPRI Wednesday, May 5, 4.00pm. "Glacier hydrology and hydrochemistry in the Dry Valleys, Antarctica" *Martyn Tranter (University of Bristol)*.

ARCH Friday, May 7, 1.15pm. "Coastal Change and the Historic Environment." *Peter Murphy (English Heritage)*.

QDG Friday, May 7, 8.30pm. "The use of allochthonous palynomorphs for deriving the provenance of Quaternary sediments" *Jim Riding (BGS)*.

SPRI Wednesday, May 12, 4.30pm. "Heinrich events: ice-ocean-climate dynamics in the NE Atlantic" *James Scourse (University of Bangor)*.

ARCH Friday, May 14, 1.15pm. "Archaeobotany and the longue duree in Nubia." *Dorian Fuller, University College London*.

SPRI Wednesday, May 19, 4.30pm. "Autosub goes south: Using a robot to measure sea ice in the Southern Ocean" *Mark Brandon (Open University)*.

QDG Friday, May 28, 8.30pm. "Calibrating the age scale of rapid climate variations during Marine Isotope Stage 3" *Nick Shackleton (Cambridge)*.

June

CAMBRIDGE DISCOVERY SERIES Thursday, June 10, 7.00pm. Meet in the Sedgwick Museum of Earth Sciences from 6.00pm. "Unseen Cambridge – the Geology Beneath our Feet (Palaeoenvironmental Reconstructions from the Cambridge District)" *Steve Boreham (Dept. of Geography, Cambridge)*.

QDG talks to be held in West Court, Clare Hall, Hershel Road.
Enquiries contact: R.C. Preece, (3)36666, (r.c.preece@zoo.cam.ac.uk)

SPRI seminars to be held in the Scott Polar Research Institute Lecture theatre.
Enquiries contact: Colm Ó Cofaigh, (3)36563, (co232@cam.ac.uk)

ARCH Lunchtime talks of the George Pitt-Rivers bioarchaeology laboratory are held in the McDonald Institute lecture room (ground floor) at 1:15pm.
Enquiries contact: Rachel Ballantyne, (3)33537

Deadlines: Copy for the next issue of CAMQUA should be submitted before the start of next term.

**Editors: Stijn De Schepper (smad2@cam.ac.uk),
William Fletcher (emeritus, wjf20@cam.ac.uk)**

Department of Geography, University of Cambridge