

‘A great scientific department must not be without a head, even when class-rooms are empty’ⁱ – 100 years since John E Marr elected Woodwardian Professor.

On 30th October 1917 John Edward Marr succeeded to the Woodwardian Chair four months after the death of Professor Thomas McKenny Hughes, who had ‘raised the Geological School at Cambridge to a position second to none in the world’ⁱⁱ

To mark 100 years since Marr became Woodwardian Professor, a selection of documents have been digitized and will be available to view on the Sedgwick Museum website on 30th October. There will also be a small facsimile display at the A.G Brighton Building, where the Archive is stored.

Professorship:

By 1917 Cambridge had been transformed from a ‘seat of learning to a military training camp’ⁱⁱⁱ so the election of a new professor had, unsurprisingly, not been a priority. Undergraduate numbers had dropped – 3,263 in 1913 to 575 by 1916^{iv}, and Marr’s only son, Francis Alleyne, a student at St John’s College when the First World War started, would not ‘arrive home for tea [until] the afternoon of June 20th [1919]’^v

However, academic life continued and Marr’s ‘long apprenticeship’^{vi}- (he had been a lecturer since 1886, responsible for teaching all of stratigraphy and physical geology with Hughes, Alfred Harker and Henry Wood) - ensured he was the perfect candidate. His ‘keen and boyish enthusiasm was most infectious’^{vii} although he would only serve 13 years as the Woodwardian Professor of Geology – which was “not merely a geological lectureship, but a handsome estate to ensure generous support to the holder, and what was probably the finest scientific collection of minerals and fossils in the country”^{viii}

Brief Biography:

Marr was born at Morecambe, Poulton-le-Sands, Lancashire June 14th 1857, the youngest of 9 children born to John Marr, a Lancaster merchant trader and partner in a silk mill at Wray, and his wife Mary (nee Simpson). Marr entered St Johns College, Cambridge and obtained a first class degree in the Natural Sciences in 1878. He was elected a fellow of his college in 1881 which he retained until his death.

In 1893 Marr married Amy Birkett Stubbs (1873-1933), the daughter of a hotel proprietor, and they had one son, Francis Alleyne (named after Marr’s older brother Francis, and Henry Alleyne Nicholson, 1844-1899) who would assist his father’s fieldwork in the Lakes.

Marr served on the council of the Geological Society for almost 40 years, acting as secretary for 10, and president 1904-1906. He was awarded both the Lyell Medal (1900) and Wollaston medal (1914). In 1896 he was president of section C (geology) of the British Association, and became a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1891. He was awarded a Royal Medal in 1930.

Marr retired from the Woodwardian Professorship in 1930 due to failing eyesight and ill health. He died after suffering from a stroke on the 1st October 1933 and is buried in Cambridge City Cemetery.

Marr's geological interests:

In his early years Marr studied the lower Palaeozoic rocks of Bohemia and Scandinavia and he published his findings in 1880. According to Nature 'This was one of Marr's most important contributions to science' ^{ix}.

Most of his career was however, spent exploring the stratigraphy of the Lake District. His first paper on the older rocks of the Lake District was published in 1878, and he subsequently published on the Skiddaw slates, Borrowdale Volcanic series, Coniston Limestone, Dufton Shales, Coniston Grits and many more. 'He gave particular attention to the effects of earth movements and glaciation on topography and scenery, considering their roles in the formation of lakes and drainage patterns' ^x

In later life Marr studied the Pleistocene deposits around Cambridgeshire and 'did much to advance our knowledge of the late-glacial gravels and post-glacial deposits of Cambridgeshire' ^{xi}

The Sedgwick Museum:

Over 5000 new objects were accessioned 1917-1930. Marr was assisted during the 1920s by the likes of William Bernard Robinson King (1889-1963) who would become the 11th Woodwardian Professor (succeeding O.T Jones), and Gertrude Elles (1872-1960) who received an MBE for her work as a nurse during the First World War. They catalogued Cambrian fossils, whilst A.G Brighton (1900-1988) organized chalk fossils and the Jukes-Brown Collection, and Dorothy Hill (1907-1997) worked on the Carboniferous fossils. At the same time Alfred Harker (1859-1939) worked on and built up the petrological collection, which at that time was still part of the Geological department^{xii}. A year after Marr's retirement, Brighton would be appointed as the museum's first full-time curator.

The Archive:

Marr's Archive, which consists predominantly of geological field notebooks (totaling 65 consecutively numbered items, and a further 4 miscellaneous ones) spans his entire geological career from 1875 to 1931.

In 2012 Dr Lyall Anderson made comprehensive notes about some of the field notebooks (numbers 24 to 65), so it is possible to get a comprehensive picture of where Marr's interests took him, details of the examinations he undertook, as well as the people he worked with or just merely encountered. Several notebooks have fragile bindings so one of the Museum Archive volunteers, Cherry Booth, used acid-free board to repackage them.

The early notebooks document his studies in Bohemia. They even include brief notes he made in 1870, aged just 22, about meeting Joachim Barrande, who was by then in his 80s^{xiii},

who 'gave (him) interesting details regarding his work'^{xiv}. Barrande's theory on fossil 'colonies'^{xv} was well documented, but would be eventually dismissed by Marr and others.

His interest in the stratigraphy of the Lake District and Wales is well documented in the field notebooks, and the later ones chart his examinations of gravel pits and quarries long since abandoned (including Travellers rest and Milton Road pits in Cambridge). They also document his excursions with the Geological Survey, the Sedgwick Club, and at the International Geological Congress. We learn that he also visited many museums – Stockholm and Copenhagen in 1880, Keswick in 1890, Jermyn Street Museum in 1914/1915, Prague Museum in 1921 and the Natural History Museum in Brussels in 1926.

Sketches of waterfalls, sea-caves, skylines, glaciers, and flints can be found in many of the notebooks, as can many detailed cross-sections. There is even a smattering of photographs too (including one of Marr crossing Maize Beck, taken by Edmund Garwood (1864-1949)). In most cases there are also supplementary papers tantalizingly tucked inside - business cards, hotel pamphlets, notes, and postcards - and several still have the pencil used to make notes.

The archive needs to be catalogued in accordance with international archival standards but a brief summary is available on the Archives Hub.

<https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/data/gb590-marr>

Other records of interest

The Sedgwick Club Archive (see <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/data/gb590-sgwc>) includes minute books and excursion scrapbooks. From the records we can see that as a student Marr attended at least 5 excursions - Appleby 1882, Portmadoc 1885, Ilfracombe 1886, Torquay 1888 and Plas Tan-Y-Bwlch in 1891 - and as Professor he held at least 3 meetings in his own home - 13th February 1919 (381st), 10th February 1920 (388th) both at 1 Huntingdon Road, and 6th March 1923 (423rd) at 29 Grange Road.^{xvi}

At the 500th meeting of the Club it was minuted that Marr's '...deep interest in the club and all that concerned its welfare was well known'^{xvii} and includes a letter from him sending his apologies for not being well enough to attend the celebrations as well as stressing its importance in 'promoting geological teaching'^{xviii}.

Marr's son fought in the First World War (Ypres and Somme) and was awarded the Military cross in 1916 and Distinguished Service order in 1918. His archive (ephemera, clippings and letters sent to family during WW1) are at McMaster University, Ontario. The records have been digitized (access by subscription only).

http://www.firstworldwar.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/SearchDetails/MILLS_Albums%2011a-e#SectionsSearch

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ⁱ 'University Intelligence' *Cambridge Daily News*, 1st November 1917 [Accessed 20th September 2017 <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>]

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- ii "The Late Prof T. McKenny Hughes M.A, F.R.S" *Cambridge Daily News*, 11th June 1918 [Accessed 20th September 2017: <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>]
- iii BBC World War One at Home [Accessed 9th October 2017: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01rjwrz>]
- iv British History Online <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/cambs/vol3/pp266-306> Accessed 9th October 2017
- v Francis Alleyne Marr Archive [Accessed 10th October 2017 http://www.firstworldwar.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Images/MILLS_Albums%2011a-e/399#Sections]
- vi John Edward Marr. 1857-1933 *Obituary Notices of Fellows of the Royal Society* Vol. 1, No. 3 (Dec., 1934), page 256 [Accessed 3rd October 2017 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/768826>]
- vii *Ibid.*, p256.
- viii Porter, R. "John Woodward: A Droll Sort of Philosopher" *Geological Magazine*, Vol. 116, No. 5, September 1979, p335
- ix Thomas, H.H., "Prof. J. E. Marr, F.R.S" *Nature*, Vol 132, No. 3342 (1933): p773
- x Oldroyd, D. "John Edward Marr" *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, DATE [Accessed 03 October 2017: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34886>]
- xi *Ibid.* viii, 773
- xii In 1931 the petrological section was severed from the geological department and combined with the Department of Mineralogy to form a separate department in a new building adjacent to the Sedgwick Museum.
- xiii Sedgwick Museum Archives, The papers of John Edward Marr, Reference MARR 01/01/06
- xiv *Ibid.*
- xv Colonies- assemblages of fossils could become locally extinct in a region and replaced by another, but then return when conditions changed again.
- xvi Sedgwick Museum Archives, Sedgwick Club Archive, Reference SGWC 01/01/11, page 170
- xvii *Ibid.*
- xviii *Ibid.*